

# SECURITY INDEX №8 (23) | 2021

OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

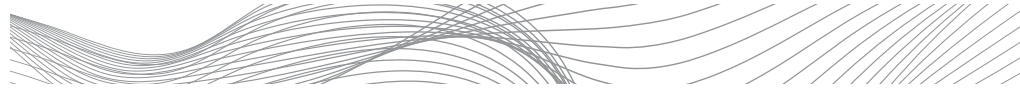
Global Edition

**Adlan Margojev**

## RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM: LESSONS LEARNED AND IGNORED



MOSCOW, 2021



Editor-in-Chief: Vladimir Orlov

Editor: Egor Chobanian

Russian-U.S. dialogue on the Iranian nuclear program: lessons learned and ignored / Ed. Egor Chobanian. M.: PIR Press, 2021. – 43 p. – (*Security Index Occasional Paper Series*).

Iran's nuclear program has been extensively debated over the past few decades and has incited so much controversy among several nations. However, there are hardly any countries like the United States and Russia whose bilateral agenda consistently featured this matter. This paper is not in any degree diminishing the contribution of other actors to resolving the crisis over Iran's nuclear program but aimed at highlighting the role that the two countries played in this process. The timeline of this research stretches from 1992, when Russia and Iran signed a memorandum on cooperation in the nuclear field, to 2020, when the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action concluded by the P5+1 and Iran in 2015 is at risk of collapse. It is divided into five stages based on the development of Iran's nuclear program, U.S. and Russian approaches to dealing with Iran, and the pattern of the interface between the two countries. At each stage, it discusses the results of U.S. and Russian policies on this issue as well as the lessons that the leadership of the countries could learn from this experience and consider when formulating their strategies on the Iranian nuclear program and issues alike.

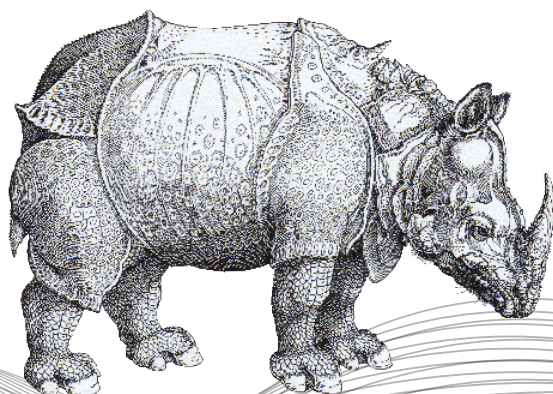
This occasional paper and other materials are available at:  
<http://www.pircenter.org/en/articles>

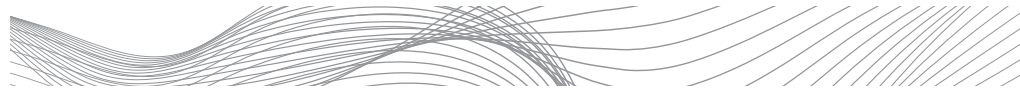
## AUTHOR

### **MARGOEV, Adlan**

Analyst with the Institute of International Studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), PhD Candidate. In 2017-2019, Mr. Margoev was the «Russia and Nuclear Nonproliferation» Program Director at PIR Center. He is a graduate of the M.A. Dual Degree Program in Nonproliferation Studies established by PIR Center, MGIMO University, and Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (2018). Mr. Margoev holds a B.A. degree in International Relations from MGIMO University with major in Iranian Studies (2016).

His research interests include Iran's nuclear program, the NPT review process, Russian arms control and nonproliferation policies, and U.S.-Russia dialogue on nuclear issues.





# Contents

Highlights	5
Policy Foundations	6
1992-2000. The United States Adjusts Russian Policy	8
2001-2010. Russia Balances Out U.S. Policy on Iran	13
2011-2016. Russia Facilitates Negotiations	20
2017-2021. The U.S. Unravels the Deal	26
Conclusions	32
Chronology of U.S.-Russian Dialogue on Iran’s Nuclear Program 1992-2021	33

## Highlights

- The general perception of Iran and different threat perceptions heavily influenced the U.S. and Russian attitudes towards Iran's nuclear program.
- The U.S. insisted rigid limits on Iran's nuclear program and interpreted any uncertainty with respect to and lack of transparency of the Iranian nuclear program as part of the alleged nuclear weapons program.
- Russia would not accept a nuclear-armed Iran either, but Moscow championed Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy since Teheran complied with the NPT, and Russia believed the U.S. politicized the issue of the Iranian nuclear program to put pressure on Iran.
- Moscow did not consider abandoning its cooperation with Iran in past, even if compensated for that. The reason for that was a lack of confidence in American conduct and promises to compensate for losses.
- When harsh sanctions are imposed for policies that the other side cannot change, e.g. for strong domestic political reasons, one should not expect to build a partnership on this ground even if they inform the sanctioned country of their own intentions and motivation to act so.
- Developments regarding the Iranian nuclear program and the revelations of the undeclared nuclear activities did not change the overall Russian strategy on Iran; however, they exposed the red lines for and limitations to such policy.
- Demanding everything from a counterpart is counterproductive for Russian-U.S. dialogue on Iran's nuclear program. Instead, one should set feasible goals, focus on the main ones, and be ready to invest time and effort to achieve them.
- Productive Russian-U.S. dialogue on Iran's nuclear program should include a dialogue without preconditions and threats, interested parties and carefully exchange information, low pressure, technical cooperation for verification, step-by-step and reciprocal basis, consistency and predictability.



# RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM: LESSONS LEARNED AND IGNORED<sup>1</sup>

Adlan Margojev

Iran's nuclear program has been extensively debated over the past few decades and has incited so much controversy among several nations. However, there are hardly any countries like the United States and Russia whose bilateral agenda consistently featured this matter. This paper is not in any degree diminishing the contribution of other actors to resolving the crisis over Iran's nuclear program but aimed at highlighting the role that the two countries played in this process.

The timeline of this research stretches from 1992, when Russia and Iran signed a memorandum on cooperation in the nuclear field<sup>2</sup>, to 2020, when the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)<sup>3</sup> concluded by the P5+1 and Iran in 2015 is at risk of collapse. It is divided into five stages based on the development of Iran's nuclear program, U.S. and Russian approaches to dealing with Iran, and the pattern of the interface between the two countries. At each stage, it discusses the results of U.S. and Russian policies on this issue as well as the lessons that the leadership of the countries could learn from this experience and consider when formulating their strategies on the Iranian nuclear program and issues alike.

## Policy Foundations

The United States and Russia have historically disagreed over their policies on the Iranian nuclear program. The reason for that lies in the broader context of their relationship with Iran. The United States, whose grave diplomatic conflict with Iran dates back to the Islamic Revolution and the hostage crisis, has perceived Iran as a threat to U.S. interests and its allies in the Middle East<sup>4</sup> – hence its intent and attempts are to confront, suppress, and isolate Iran. On the contrary, Russia views Iran as a neighbor in three regions: the Caucasus,

<sup>1</sup> The author expresses gratitude to Hon. Robert Einhorn, Amb. Mikhail Lysenko, Mr. Sergey Ponamarev, and Mr. Roman Ustinov for sharing their ideas and thoughts on the topic. He also acknowledges substantial research conducted by Mr. Anton Khlopkov in this field, which is in line with many findings contained in the article.

<sup>2</sup> The Government of The Russian Federation (1992) Decree 'On Signing Agreements Between the Government of The Russian Federation and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Use of Atomic Energy and Construction of a Nuclear Power Plant in Iran,' available at [http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody&nd=102017974&rdk&link\\_id=19](http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody&nd=102017974&rdk&link_id=19) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> European Union External Action (2015) Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/8710/joint-comprehensive-plan-action\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/8710/joint-comprehensive-plan-action_en) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Jordet, Nils (2000) Explaining the Long-term Hostility between the United States and Iran: A Historical, Theoretical and Methodological Framework. The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, 2000. P. 9-11, available at <https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/98-00/jordet.pdf> (17 May, 2021).



the Caspian Sea, and Central Asia, and the key objective of Russia's Iran policy is to ensure peace and stability across its vast borders.<sup>5</sup>

The general perception of Iran heavily influenced U.S. and Russian attitudes towards Iran's nuclear program. The United States has been concerned about Iran achieving a capacity to develop a nuclear weapon because in that case, Iran could use it as leverage against Israel, Saudi Arabia as well as other U.S. allies in the region. Even though Iran could not pose a direct threat to the U.S. mainland, Iran's means of delivery could target U.S. forces and counterbalance the U.S. interests in the region. Hence, the United States preferred to impose rigid limits on Iran's nuclear program as well as interpreted any uncertainty with respect to and lack of transparency of the Iranian nuclear program, e.g. undeclared activities, as part of Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program.

Not that Russia would accept a nuclear-armed Iran, but Moscow championed Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy since this country complied with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and largely with the Safeguards Agreement concluded with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Russia believed the United States politicized the issue of the Iranian nuclear program to put pressure on Iran. Not having clear evidence that Iran was pursuing a military nuclear program,<sup>6</sup> Russia did not accuse Iran of pursuing a nuclear weapons program; however, the scale of its cooperation with Iran depended on the level of Iran's transparency in its cooperation with the IAEA.<sup>7</sup> When the IAEA was clarifying certain aspects of Iran's nuclear program which raised doubts about its peaceful nature, Russia kept the slow pace of the Bushehr nuclear power plant (NPP) construction notwithstanding the delays in the construction schedule.<sup>8</sup>

Another factor to consider is the significant potential of Russian-Iranian cooperation on a broad spectrum of areas ranging from oil and gas industries, nuclear energy, and agriculture, to fighting terrorism and drug trafficking, as well as ensuring security in the Middle East and Afghanistan. The motivation to cooperate was strong enough, and Russia always had to consider its economic interests when defining its policy on Iran. These differences should be taken into account to understand the U.S. and Russian stances on the Iranian nuclear program. Nevertheless, U.S. and Russian approaches to this issue would evolve and take a different shape at each of the proposed stages of the bilateral dialogue, which would either provide an incentive for resolving the crisis or block any path to a successful agreement.

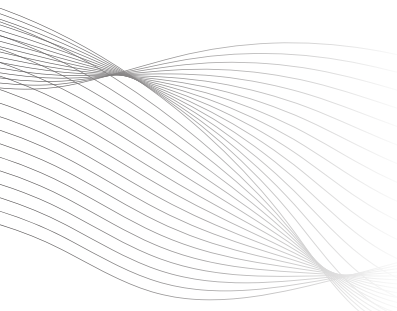
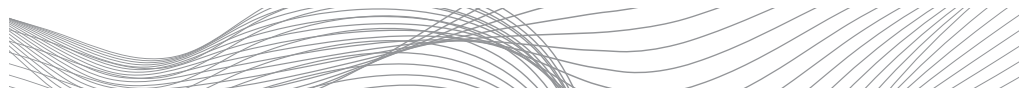
The United States perceives any uncertainty and lack of transparency of the Iranian nuclear program as the development of a nuclear weapon and puts pressure on Iran

<sup>5</sup> Trenin, Dmitry (2016) *Rossiya i Iran: Nedoveriye v Proshlom i Sotrudnichestvo v Nastoyashchem* [Russia and Iran: Mistrust in the Past and Current Cooperation]. Carnegie Moscow Center, available at <http://carnegie.ru/2016/09/08/ru-pub-64508> (17 May, 2021).

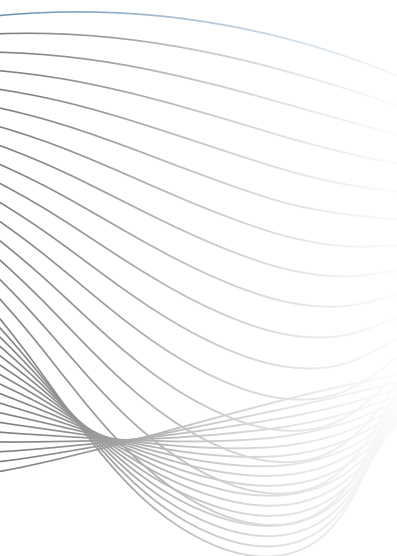
<sup>6</sup> Foreign Intelligence Service (1995) 'The Treaty of the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Issues of Prolongations. An Open Report by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)', available at <http://svr.gov.ru/material/4-iran.htm> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Regnum (2004) 'Rossiysko-Iranskoye Sotrudnichestvo v Sfere Mirnogo Atoma Budet Zaviset ot MAGATE' [Russian-Iranian Cooperation in Peaceful Atom will Depend on the IAEA], available at <https://regnum.ru/news/361546.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Lutkova, Anna; Khlopkov, Anton (2010) 'Pochemu Tak Dolgo Stroilas Busherskaya AES' [Why Did it Take so Long to Build the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant]. CENESS. P. 12, available at <https://docplayer.ru/141360-Pochemu-tak-dolgo-stroilas-busherskaya-aes.html> (17 May, 2021).



Russia, on the contrary, defends Iran's right to develop peaceful nuclear energy, accusing the USA of politicization of the issue



### 1992-2000. The United States Adjusts Russian Policy

**Political background.** The 1990s observed a major reconsideration of policy priorities by the Russian Federation. Rethinking the previous ideas and approaches did not necessarily result in a significant change compared to the policies of the Soviet Union after 1985, but developing a new Russian foreign policy required time and effort.

The 1993 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation was the first document that outlined the new Russian vision of its role in international affairs. Its part on the Islamic Republic of Iran is of special interest: Russia claimed that Iran was a source of uncertainty for the region because after this country ceased to be an ally of the United States, it did not become closer to the Russian Federation. Such uncertainty was deemed dangerous, especially because the region had a direct influence on the conflicts in the post-Soviet space. Russia also maintained that it needed to balance its relations with Israel and the region in general.<sup>9</sup>

However, the major factor that shaped Russian policy on Iran was Russia's large nuclear and military industry: it strongly needed financial support to run the facilities and maintain employment.<sup>10</sup> Iran turned out to be one of the few countries ready to pay money to Russia for constructing the Bushehr NPP, educating its personnel, etc.<sup>11</sup> Even though the domestic discussion in Russia was initially diverse regarding the NPP in Iran, e.g. Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian State Duma Vladimir Lukin contemplated the possibility of abandoning the deal for compensation, later the Russian establishment got convinced of the necessity of delivering on the agreement with Iran.<sup>12</sup> Many nuclear industry employees in Russia had to quit their jobs because they were long unpaid and therefore had to move to other countries, often to some threshold states, to sustain their families. From the nonproliferation standpoint, it was far wiser for Russia to employ them legally and channel technical support to those countries through the legal framework, involving cooperation with the IAEA.

The United States intended to minimize, if not totally prohibit, Russian-Iranian cooperation in nuclear and military fields.<sup>13</sup> The U.S. administra-

<sup>9</sup> Kontseptsiya Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii [The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation] (1993). P. 41

<sup>10</sup> This could in part explain why the Ministry of Atomic Energy happened to play the leading role in the interagency process on Iran, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and the Security Council seemingly being less active, at least in public. See: Melnikov, Yury; Frolov, Vladimir (1995) 'Moskva i Vashington Mogut Possoritsya iz-za Tegerana' [Moscow and Washington Can Quarrel because of Tehran]. Kommersant, Issue 74, available at <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/107286> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Interview with a Russian expert on nonproliferation and Iran's nuclear program. August 14, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Tsekhmistrenko, Sergey (1995) 'Russkiye Ne Slushayutsya Amerikantsev', [Russians Disobey Americans]. Kommersant Vlast, Issue 13, available at <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/10986> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> The 1994 and 1995 National Security Strategies of the United States maintained that its leadership would "continue to prevent Iran from advancing its weapons of mass destruction objectives," yet remain "willing to enter into an authoritative dialogue with Iran to discuss the differences" between the two countries See: 'A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement' (1995), available at <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=444939> (17 May, 2021). The 2000 National Security Strategy for a Global Age had more serious claims on the Iran dossier: "We continue efforts to thwart and roll back both Iran's development of NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) weap-



tion was unwilling to discuss such cooperation in detail and wanted to stop it altogether. Congress threatened to decrease help for Russia provided under the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program and implicitly link Russian membership in G7 with halting Russia's cooperation with Iran.<sup>14</sup>

The Clinton administration was pragmatic and refused to cut funding: without financial support, Russia's nuclear industry would raise even more proliferation and nuclear security-related concerns;<sup>15</sup> but it continued to put pressure on Russia for its cooperation with Iran.

The United States was unwilling yet ready to minimally compromise with Russia. The communication with Russian counterparts was conducted on three levels – between the Presidents, between the respective ministries and departments, and between partnering entities and labs. This kind of approach did not enable the U.S. administration to reach some of its unrealistic goals,<sup>16</sup> but it had to admit the United States managed to secure significant progress with Russia.<sup>17</sup>

In the absence of an elaborate foreign policy strategy, Russia took an issue-by-issue approach to its relationships with the United States and Iran. Russian officials were extremely flexible in their decision-making and ready to accept certain U.S. requests with respect to Russia's cooperation with Iran even if they sometimes damaged the Russian interests. However, the 1990s were marked by poor policy coordination among Russian governmental bodies which was of vital importance for export control. In 1995, a protocol on negotiations between the Minister of Atomic Energy Viktor Mikhaylov and his Iranian counterpart Reza Amrollahi was made public before this document was discussed by other departments in Moscow under inter-agency coordination. The sides discussed the possibility of Russia supplying Iran with a centrifuge technology that could potentially produce weapon-grade uranium. This raised a grave suspicion and concern in the U.S. administration, and the United States demanded that Russia stop any further negotiations on this topic with the

---

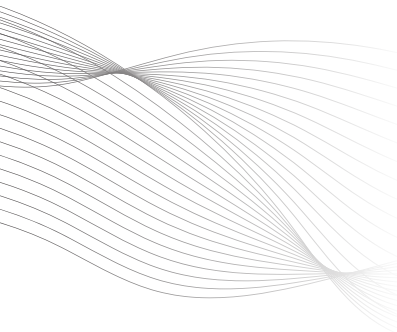
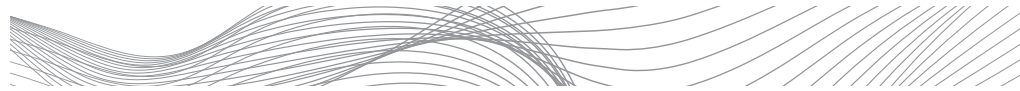
ons and long-range missiles," but still kept the dialogue option open: "If a government-to-government dialogue can be initiated and sustained in a way that addresses the concerns of both sides, then the United States would be willing to develop with the Islamic Republic a road map leading to normal relations. It could be useful to begin a dialogue without preconditions." See: A National Security Strategy for a Global Age, 2000. URL: <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2000.pdf> (17 May, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Orlov, Vladimir; Timerbaev, Roland; Khlopkov, Anton (2001) Problemy Yadernogo Nerasprostraneniya v Rossiysko-Amerikanskikh Otnosheniyakh: Istoriya, Vozmoshnosti i Perspektivy Dalneyshego Vzaimodeystviya [Nuclear Nonproliferation Problems in Russia-U.S. Relations: History, Opportunities, and Prospects for Further Cooperation]. Moscow, PIR Center. P. 131-132, available at <http://pircenter.org/media/content/files/9/13464044500.pdf> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Khlopkov, Anton (2001) Iranskaya Yadernaya Programma v Rossiysko-Amerikanskikh Otnosheniyakh [Iran's Nuclear Program in Russia-U.S. Relations]. PIR Center, Moscow. P. 28 URL: <http://xn----jtbhwghdp7a.xn--p1ai/data/publications/nz18.pdf> (17 May, 2021).

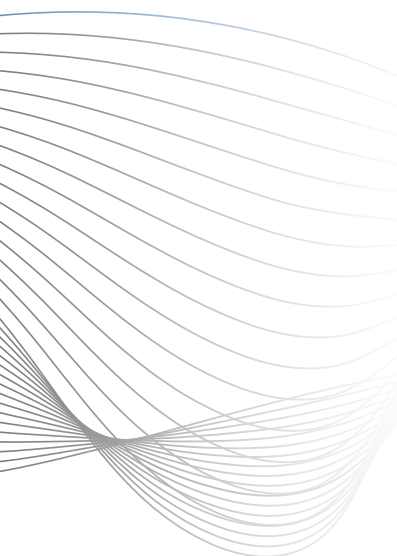
<sup>16</sup> Einhorn, Robert; Samore, Gary (2002) 'Neobkhodimost Vozobnovleniya Amerikano-Rossiyskogo Sotrudnichestva s Tselyu Predotvrashcheniya Sozdaniya Iranskoy Bomby' [The Need to Resume Russia-U.S. Cooperation to Prevent the Creation of an Iranian Nuclear Bomb]. Yaderny Kontrol, Issue 4. P. 39, available at: <http://pircenter.org/media/content/files/10/13561862720.pdf> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Press Briefing by Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin, and National Security Advisor Anthony Lake (1995) The American Presidency Project, available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=59468> (17 May, 2021).



President Rouhani during a visit to the Bushehr nuclear power plant, 2012

Source: www.tasnimnews.com



Iranians. Of notice, even without the U.S. involvement, Russia was unlikely to ship such centrifuges to Iran because other agencies opposed this deal. The Federal Agency of Nuclear and Radiological Security (Gosatomnadzor), the Interagency Commission on Ecological Security, as well as a group of governmental experts, recommended that the Russian government not ship any centrifuges to Iran.<sup>18</sup>

In this environment, the exchange of information became a contentious issue. If used properly, Russia was interested in sharing information with the United States to convince the U.S. administration that no threat emanated from the Russian-Iranian cooperation per se in order to continue working with Iran without obstacles.<sup>19</sup> The United States did share intelligence with Russia, but with reluctance. Washington claimed that intelligence sharing could compromise sources and did not trust the Russian authorities who were believed to be hiding their cooperation with Iran in the nuclear field. The Russian leadership found such reasoning ridiculous. General Evstafiev, former Head of the Arms Control Division of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Russia (SVR), once stated that 'there was no such a price... that would not worth paying for any threshold state to forgo the capacity to produce a nuclear weapon'.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it seems more likely that the U.S. reluctance to share information resulted from the fact that it had little impact on Russia's Iran policy: Moscow believed the U.S. intelligence was in many cases inaccurate or unconvincing to declare that Iran was developing technologies to produce nuclear weapons.<sup>21</sup>

**Results.** The set of policies and approaches of both sides in those conditions brought about controversial but also positive results. First, the United States and Russia agreed upon Russia's construction of the Bushehr NPP, and Russian companies involved in that process were not placed under U.S. sanctions.<sup>22</sup> Russia remained Iran's only partner in the field of nuclear energy; all the rest halted their cooperation with Iran in this area under U.S. pressure.<sup>23</sup>

Second, under U.S. pressure and to the detriment of its economic interests, Russia agreed to stop its military trade with Iran which had nothing to do with Iran's nuclear program. In 1995, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin promised U.S. Vice President Al Gore that Russia would fulfill all of its obligations under the active military trade contracts with Iran by the end of 1999 and would not conclude any new deals with this country. The agreement was kept secret until it was leaked right before the 2000 U.S. presidential election. This destroyed the Russian image of a reliable partner and caused harm to both Russian-Iranian relations and Russian economic interests. The Russian leadership regretted having signed that deal and following the disclosure of the contents of the agreement informed their American counterparts that

<sup>18</sup> Khlopkov, Anton, Op. cit. P. 25-26.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with a Russian expert on nonproliferation and Iran's nuclear program. August 14, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Zobov, Andrey (2002) 'Nerazprostraneniye Oruzhiya Massovogo Unichtozheniya kak Aktualnaya Problema Nachala tretiego Tysyacheletiya: Regionalnye i Globalnye Aspekty' [WMD Nonproliferation as a Relevant Problem of the Early Third Millennium: Regional and Global Aspects] Moscow, available at [https://www.armscontrol.ru/course/lectures02b/aiz\\_021011.htm](https://www.armscontrol.ru/course/lectures02b/aiz_021011.htm) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with a Russian expert on nonproliferation and U.S.-Russian relations. August 3, 2017

<sup>22</sup> Interview with a Russian expert on nonproliferation and peaceful use of atomic energy. July 26, 2017

<sup>23</sup> Safranchuk, Ivan (1998), *Yadernye i Raketnye Programmy Irana i Bezopasnost Rossii: Ramki Rossiysko-Iranskogo Sotrudnichestva* [Iran's Nuclear and Missile Programs and Russian Security: Framework for Russian-Iranian Cooperation]. Nauchnye Zapiski, Issue 8. Moscow, PIR Center. P. 8. URL: <http://ns2.pircenter.org/media/content/files/9/13464245790.pdf> (17 May, 2021).

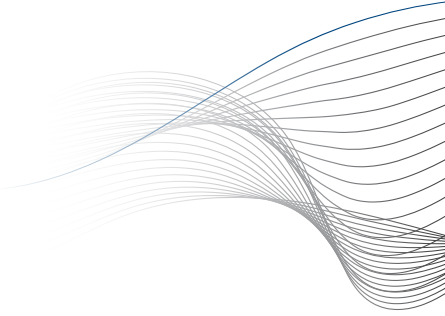
## RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Russia was no longer obliged by the terms of the agreement.<sup>24</sup>

Third, the United States imposed sanctions on certain Russian entities, which, due to the relatively poor export control regime in Russia, turned out to be cooperating with Iran in nuclear and missile technology fields. They did so without notifying the Russian government, but in a very limited way which would not help Iran develop a military nuclear program. They did not breach international norms, yet contradicting U.S. expectations about Russian-Iranian cooperation in the sensitive areas. Considering that the United States also had problems with technology leaks contributing to Iran's nuclear and missile programs, this move was generally perceived in Moscow with irritation as an attempt to put pressure on Russia.

However, some of the entities which also received funding through cooperation with U.S. counterparts violated Russian export control regulations. The U.S. sanctions made these entities more selective in their cooperation with the Iranians and improved their discipline.<sup>25</sup> This corresponded with the efforts of the Russian government to improve the efficiency and standards of the Russian export control system, which took nearly 10 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> The measures included the establishment of a comprehensive export control regime that was supposed to block any shipment of materials and technologies that could be used in WMD and missile programs. In 1999, a law on export control was passed by the State Duma; in 2000-2001, newly elected President Putin reorganized the institutional design of the export control system to make the interagency process in this field more robust and efficient.<sup>27</sup>

Over the decade, the United States and Russia maintained a robust, yet difficult dialogue on the Iranian nuclear program. For Moscow, the dialogue was difficult because of high demands on the U.S. side regarding Russia's cooperation with Iran. For Washington, engaging Russia was a challenging task because of the differences in threat perception that influenced Russian and U.S. assessments of the development of Iran's nuclear program, and because of poor policy coordination and implementation in Russia which was natural for this country following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although the interaction between



While Russia was eager to share information, including intelligence, the U.S. was reluctant to do so due to its mistrust of the Russian side

<sup>24</sup> Kozyulin, Vadim (2001) Rossiya-Iran: Chto Stoit za Novym Startom Voennno-Tekhnicheskogo Sotrudnichestva? [Russia and Iran: What Lies Behind the new Beginning of Military and Technical Cooperation]. Voprosy Bezopasnosti, Issue 5 (95), available at <http://pircenter.org/articles/1428-rossiya-iran-chto-stoit-za-novym-startom-voennotehnicheskogo-sotrudnichestva> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> Khlopkov, Anton, Op. cit. P. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with a Russian expert on nonproliferation and U.S.-Russian relations. August 3, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Putin, Vladimir (2001) Vstupitel'noye Slovo na Zasedanii Soveta Bezopasnosti, Posvyashchenom Ukrepleniyu Sistemy Eksportnogo Kontrolya [Introductory Statement at the Meeting of the Security Council on Strengthening Export Controls]. Kremlin, Moscow, available at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22322> (17 May, 2021).





the countries resembled coordination rather than cooperation on Iran, given the differences between them, this experience was overall effective.

**Lessons.** The analysis of the bilateral cooperation suggests four lessons for future U.S.-Russian dialogue on Iran's nuclear program:

1. Demanding everything from a counterpart is counterproductive. Instead, one should set feasible goals, focus on the main ones, and be ready to invest time and effort to achieve them.

The Clinton administration put too much effort into trying to discourage Russia from any cooperation with Iran. It was naturally impossible to reach that goal; Russia would never forgo cooperation with a neighboring country that did not violate international law. So, demanding that was obviously futile, and the Clinton administration should not have insisted on halting Russian-Iranian cooperation, for instance, on the construction of the Bushehr NPP.<sup>28</sup> Instead, it should have invested all its efforts into increasing the transparency of such cooperation, as well as in finding ways to benefit from that by exchanging relevant information.

2. Watchful cooperation is the best leverage against a counterpart.

Being the most significant partner of Iran in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, in 1995, Russia worked closely with the Iranian delegation at the NPT Review and Extension Conference to secure Iran's support for the indefinite extension of the Treaty.<sup>29</sup> Some experts even claim that Russia linked the construction of the Bushehr NPP to Iran's acquiescence to the indefinite extension of the NPT.<sup>30</sup> Had Russia abandoned the deal under U.S. pressure, there would have been no such leverage to apply.

3. Abusing power via imposing sanctions against one's own partners may lead to their irritation and lack of will to cooperate in resolving the problems that both partners face.

If both sides agree that certain policies should be adjusted, there might be no need to resort to sanctions: the bilateral relationship will be too damaged to provide any foundation for future cooperation. When harsh sanctions are imposed for policies that the other side cannot change, e.g. for strong domestic political reasons, one should not expect to build a partnership on this ground even if they inform the sanctioned country of their own intentions and motivation to act so.

4. Exchange of information is necessary for cooperation and should be valued by the recipients. Abusing this opportunity may lead to a lack of confidence.

Despite the concerns about the confidentiality of sources, the United States and Russia exchanged information to a relatively significant degree. However, after 1998, when based on the disclosed information the United States imposed sanctions on Russian entities, Russia became less confident in the United States and more cautious about sharing sensitive intelligence with this country.

<sup>28</sup> Einhorn, Robert; Samore, Gary. Op. cit. P. 47.

<sup>29</sup> Orlov, Vladimir (1999) Konferentsia 1995 goda po Rassmotreniyu i Prodleniyu Sroka Deystviya Dogovora o Nerasprostraneni Yadernogo Oruzhiya: Osobennosti, Rezultaty, Uroki [1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference: Features, Results, Lessons]. Nauchnye Zapiski, 11. PIR Center. Moscow. P. 10, available at <http://pircenter.org/media/content/files/9/13464238930.pdf> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> Khlopkov, Anton; Lata, Vasily. Op. cit. P. 12.

## 2001-2010. Russia Balances Out U.S. Policy on Iran

**Political background.** By the early 2000s, Russia had elaborated its general foreign policy strategy, in which it decidedly placed its own interests before any other considerations. For its Iran policy, it meant broader engagement with this country both in economic and political domains.<sup>31</sup> Russia oriented itself towards a more pragmatic and flexible posture. The Russian government continued its nuclear cooperation and military trade with Iran, which was important to Russia; however, by limiting the number of options for this country, Moscow addressed the American concerns. Russia refrained from supplying certain sensitive equipment and technologies to Iran and sold arms in small quantities.<sup>32</sup>

Still, Russia's motivation to cooperate with the Iranians was so strong that Moscow would not even consider abandoning its cooperation with this country, even if compensated for that. The reason for that was a lack of confidence in American conduct and promises to compensate for losses. A case in point, in 1998, the United States convinced a Ukrainian company not to build turbines for the Bushehr NPP and promised to establish cooperation with the facility to recompense for the losses. Four years later Ukraine had to reaffirm its commitments on the NPP because Kyiv had lost more than 5 million dollars and had received no assistance from the United States in exchange.<sup>33</sup>

The U.S. stance on Iran faced a dramatic shift with the election of George W. Bush. In his State of Union Address on January 29, 2002, President Bush announced Iran to be part of an “axis of evil,”<sup>34</sup> which implied the United States would apply extreme pressure against Iran's leadership and could attempt to change its political regime.

The 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States mentioned Iran only once, but it was clear that this country fell under the category of “rogue states,” those who “brutalize their own people,” “display no regard for international law,” are “determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction,” “sponsor terrorism around the globe,” as well as “reject basic human values and hate the United States and everything for which it stands”. The key message to rogue states was in the following line, “The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place



President Bush makes a statement about the axis of evil countries during his State of the Union speech, January 29, 2002.

Source: [www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com)

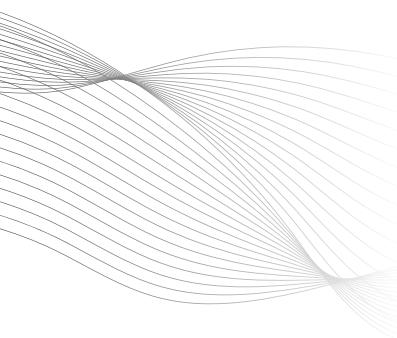
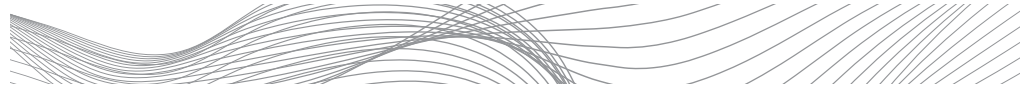
<sup>31</sup> The 2000 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation had a small, yet clear paragraph on Iran: “It is important to further develop relations with Iran.” See: Kontseptsiya Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii [The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation] (2000), available at [http://www.ng.ru/world/2000-07-11/1\\_1\\_concept.html](http://www.ng.ru/world/2000-07-11/1_1_concept.html) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>32</sup> Khlopkov, Anton; Lata, Vasily. Op. cit. P. 15.

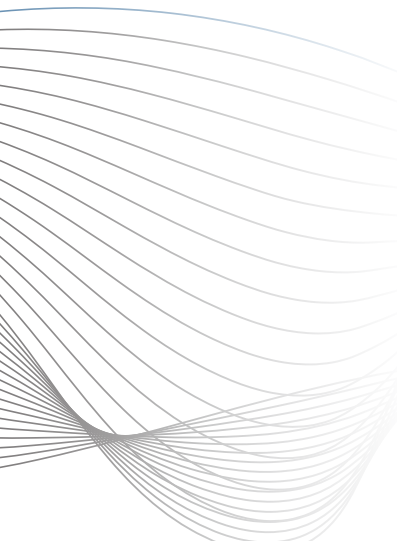
<sup>33</sup> Khlopkov, Anton; Lata, Vasily. Op. cit. P. 14.

<sup>34</sup> The President's State of the Union Address (2002) The United States Capitol, Washington, D.C., available at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> (17 May, 2021).





The United States offers cooperation and compensation when it asks to stop cooperation with a threshold state, but later the United States can forgo its promises to compensate for losses



of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.<sup>35</sup> The 2006 version of the document also claimed that the United States “may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran”.<sup>36</sup>

The new U.S. administration demanded that Russia halt all military trade with Iran, as well as nuclear cooperation, which included the construction of the Bushehr NPP. To address the U.S. concerns regarding the Bushehr NPP, Russian officials even suggested the United States and Russia build the NPP together,<sup>37</sup> but this offer, unsurprisingly, led to no cooperation – neither the United States nor Iran would be interested in seeing that happen.

The United States expected that Russia would by default accept the U.S. policies on Iran and follow its guidance. The United States strongly opposed Iran’s obtaining of any uranium enrichment technology. “In light of the serious unresolved issues posed by Iran’s nuclear program, we strongly disagree with Iran’s assertion that it has an inherent “right” under Article IV to its program or to receive foreign assistance or cooperation with it,” said the U.S. statement at the 2003 NPT Preparatory Committee Session.<sup>38</sup> Russia, on the other hand, recognized Iran’s right to a peaceful nuclear program, including enrichment capabilities, provided Iran is an NPT Member-State “in good standing”.

In 2008, there seemed to open new opportunities for a dialogue on Iran. There was little change in Russia’s position,<sup>39</sup> but the newly-elected President Obama demonstrated his readiness to engage in diplomacy with the Iranians. He congratulated the Iranians on Nowruz (Persian New Year) in 2009, which was an exceptional move by the President and helped him deliver a message of peace and constructive bilateral relations directly to the Iranians.<sup>40</sup> The 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy proved the U.S. desire for diplomacy with Iran.<sup>41</sup> However, the controversial re-

<sup>35</sup> The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2002), available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2006), available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Rossiya Predlozila SShA Vmeste Stroit Atomnuyu Stantsiyu v Irane [Russia suggested building the NPP in Iran Together with the U.S.] (2003). Vesti.Ru, available at <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=27218> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>38</sup> Statement by Dr. Andrew K. Semmel Alternative Representative of the United States of America to the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for The 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (2003) Reaching Critical Will, available at [http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prep-com03/2003statements/7May\\_US.pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prep-com03/2003statements/7May_US.pdf) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>39</sup> The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation named Iran among the countries whom Russia was determined to further develop relations with, committed to the resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue through diplomacy and warned against unilateral use of force that could destabilize the Russian neighborhood. See: Kontseptsiya Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii [The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation] (2008), available at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/785> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>40</sup> “In this season of new beginnings I would like to speak clearly to Iran’s leaders. We have serious differences that have grown over time. My administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community. This process will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect.” See: Videotaped Remarks by The President in Celebration of Nowruz (2009). The White House, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/videotaped-remarks-president-celebration-nowruz> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>41</sup> “The United States seeks a future in which Iran meets its international responsibilities, takes its rightful place in the community of nations, and enjoys the political and economic opportunities that its people deserve. Yet if the Iranian Government continues to refuse to live up to its international obligations, it will face greater isolation.” See: The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2010), available at <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=24251> (17 May, 2021).

election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the revelation of the Fordow facility made it clear to the Obama administration that they would not be able to move forward with Iran under the Ahmadinejad administration to an extent President Obama had hoped for.<sup>42</sup>

**Results.** Iran's safeguards implementation record was far from being perfect, yet it was in large part due to the U.S. denial of Iran's right to enrichment that made the negotiations futile. Under the 2003 Paris Agreement, the E3 recognized Iran's right to enrich on a small scale; however, under U.S. pressure, the E3 included in its final proposal to Iran a provision that would make it forgo any enrichment capacity for 10 years. This caused significant discord between the parties and undermined the negotiations.<sup>43</sup>

Then Director-General of the IAEA Mohamed ElBaradei commented on this decision the following way:

*"The West's insistence on taking a hard line – refusing Iran's request to retain some small element of their nuclear program – achieved nothing. The most amorphous of principles trumped pragmatism. Had the E3 offered Iran a reasonable package, with concrete benefits, the Iranians, I believe, would have been willing to suspend their enrichment program, or at least to limit it to a small R&D operation while negotiations toward a grand bargain continued. Iran's requirement was access to Western technology – both nuclear technology and other technology they had been denied under U.S. sanctions. Because of U.S. opposition, such an offer did not materialize."*<sup>44</sup>

To overcome this impasse, in October 2005, Russia offered Iran a share in an enrichment facility located in Russian city Angarsk, which would guarantee Tehran a continuous fuel supply. Earlier in September, both Russia and China abstained from referring the Iran dossier to the UN Security Council to buy more time for diplomacy.<sup>45</sup> The painstaking negotiations between Russia and Iran were conducted with delays, and the latter, according to a senior Russian lawmaker, "did not demonstrate enough goodwill," which made him think that Iran could follow the North Korean scenario, "isolate itself, withdraw from the NPT and cut its cooperation with the IAEA."<sup>46</sup> Although shortly before the Iranian nuclear dossier was raised at the UN Security Council the Iranians demonstrated their willingness to reconsider and accept the Russian proposal, it was quite late. At this stage, resolving the issue was not enough for the overall success of the negotiations.<sup>47</sup> Later the Iranians indicated that the proposal was off the table.<sup>48</sup>

The United States advocated for the immediate transfer



Meeting of the sixth President of Iran, M. Ahmadinejad, with the Director of the IAEA, ElBaradei, 2008

Source: [www.gettyimages.ie](http://www.gettyimages.ie)

<sup>42</sup> Doran, Michael (2015) 'Obama's Secret Iran Strategy' Hudson Institute, available at <https://www.hudson.org/research/10989-obama-s-secret-iran-strategy> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Charbonneau, Louis (2013) 'A Decade of Failure; Missed Opportunities and the Escalating Crisis over Iran's Nuclear Program.' City College of New York. P. 20, available at [http://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1203&context=cc\\_etds\\_theses](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1203&context=cc_etds_theses) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>44</sup> ElBaradei Mohamed (2011) *The Age of Deception*. New York: Picador, pp. 146-147. Cited at: Charbonneau, Louis (2013) *A Decade of Failure...* P. 34, available at [http://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1203&context=cc\\_etds\\_theses](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1203&context=cc_etds_theses) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>45</sup> Kerr, Paul (2005) IAEA Unlikely to Refer Iran to Security Council. *Arms Control Today*, available at [https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005\\_11/NOV-Iran](https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005_11/NOV-Iran) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>46</sup> Polit.Ru (2006) Iran Perenosit Peregovory Na Svoyu Territoriyu [Iran Moves Negotiations to Its Own Territory], available at <http://polit.ru/news/2006/02/21/irantalks/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>47</sup> Iskenderov, Petr (2006) *Obogascheniye Usloviy [The Enrichment of Conditions]*. Vremya, available at <http://www.vremya.ru/2006/34/5/146447.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>48</sup> Katz, Mark N. (2006) 'Putin, Ahmadinejad and the Iranian Nuclear Crisis.' Middle East Policy Council, available at <https://mars.gmu.edu/jspui/bitstream/handle/1920/3020/Putin%20Ahmadinejad%20and%20Iranian%20Nuclear%20Crisis.pdf> (17 May, 2021).



of Iran's nuclear dossier to the UN Security Council and the imposition of harsh sanctions against Iran, something that Russia and China were opposed to since it would further complicate the situation.<sup>49</sup> However, Tehran's continuous defiance of the IAEA Board of Governors and the consequent UN Security Council resolutions, reluctance to engage in productive negotiations, as well as the rejection of a number of initiatives, including those proposed by Moscow, made the Russian leadership cooperate with the rest of the P5 in imposing of the UN Security Council resolutions on Iran.<sup>50</sup>

Still, Russia always called for exercising restraint in the adoption of tough measures and opposed antagonizing of the Iranian leadership. Moscow insisted that the discussion on Iran's nuclear program be held in conjunction with Article 41 of the UN Charter, which excluded the use of military force to compel Iran to fulfill the provisions of the resolution.<sup>51</sup>

When drafting the UN sanctions against Iran, the P5, especially the United States, had to take into account another two issues – (1) they had to allow for certain Russian weapons sale to Iran, and (2) the construction of the Bushehr NPP could not be delegitimized or in any way affected.<sup>52</sup> Russia had a firm intention to complete the project, as long as it was under the IAEA safeguards, and envisaged further plans for nuclear cooperation with Iran.

To that end, in 2001 – even before the crisis around Iran's nuclear program took place and despite the domestic opposition to the bill – Russia adopted a new law allowing for the import of spent nuclear fuel (SNF). The rationale behind this move was two-fold: Russia would manage both to bring back the SNF from the Bushehr NPP to address the long-time U.S. proliferation-related concerns, and to create the legal basis for the construction of an international SNF storage under the auspices of the IAEA, something that could help Russia join a potentially beneficial market.<sup>53</sup> Securing a bilateral agreement with Iran

<sup>49</sup> Suponina, Elena (2006) 'Sanktsii Protiv Iran Otkladyvayutsya' [Sanctions Against Iran are Postponed]. *Vremya*, available at <http://www.vremya.ru/2006/15/5/144335.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>50</sup> The 2010 NPT RevCon statement by P5, delivered by the Russian delegation, was in a striking contrast to what the Russian delegation had ever stated on Iran: "The proliferation risks presented by the Iranian nuclear programme remain of serious concern to us. We underscore the importance of Iran's full and immediate compliance with its international obligations. We urge Iran to respond to the concerns of the international community by complying promptly and fully with the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and with the requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)." See: Statement by the People's Republic of China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America to the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference (2010). United Nations, available at [http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2010/statements/pdf/russia5\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2010/statements/pdf/russia5_en.pdf) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>51</sup> RIA Novosti (2008) 'Rezolyutsiya OON i Zayavleniye "Shesterki" Dolzhny Povliyat na Iran – Churkin' [Churkin: The UN Resolution and the P5+1 Statement Must Influence Iran], available at <https://ria.ru/world/20080304/100550871.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> Gornostayev, Dmitry (2007) 'Rossiya Vyshla iz-pod Sanktsiy OON' [Russia is not Sanctioned by the UN Anymore]. *Kommersant*, available at <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/753194> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>53</sup> Melikova, Natalya; Samarina, Aleksandra; Vaganov, Andrey (2004) 'Moskva i MAGATE Dovolny Drug Drugom' [Moscow and the IAEA are Happy with Each Other]. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at [http://www.ng.ru/politics/2004-06-30/1\\_magate.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/2004-06-30/1_magate.html) (17 May, 2021).



on SNF turned out to be extremely difficult (the Iranians required Russia to pay them for taking the SNF back to Russia);<sup>54</sup> however, by 2005, the Russian officials completed the negotiations on terms acceptable to Russia.<sup>55</sup> The first delivery of nuclear fuel and the subsequent physical startup of the Bushehr NPP helped restore Iran's confidence in Russia as a reliable partner in the nuclear field that had eroded due to Moscow's support for the UN sanctions against Tehran. This maintained the Russian presence in Iran which, in the Russian view, was critical for further negotiations on Iran's nuclear program.

In 2009, Iran happened to run out of fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor that was shipped to Iran before the Islamic Revolution by the United States and informed the IAEA about this issue. By that time, the election of President Obama instilled hope in many countries, including Russia, that the long-standing deadlock over Iran's nuclear program could be overcome.

According to Hon. Robert Einhorn,

*"The U.S. came up with the idea that [the United States] could cooperate to supply fuel for that reactor. In exchange, the Iranians would ship out of the country enough uranium so that it wouldn't have enough enriched uranium for a single bomb for a substantial period of time. The idea was to buy some time and space for more comprehensive negotiation. The U.S. delegation, which I happened to have led, went to Moscow. We met with senior Russian experts, and we agreed that this would be a U.S.-Russian initiative. A couple of weeks later, we met in Vienna with Mohamed ElBaradei – then director of the IAEA – and jointly presented this proposal, which the IAEA accepted and proposed to the Iranians. The Iranians accepted it on October 1, 2009, and less than three weeks later, when the time came to draw up the details in Vienna, the Iranians walked away from it".<sup>56</sup>*

Even though President Ahmadinejad was believed to be supporting the agreement, the domestic considerations in Iran, which took place against the background of the controversial re-election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad ruined this so-called fuel-swap deal. Conservative officials defended Iran's right to enrich, doubted the necessity of any cooperation with the West, and portrayed the deal as a defeat of Iran.<sup>57</sup> The Tehran declaration adopted later by Brazil, Turkey, and Iran was of no help. Iran possessed more LEU and could produce 20%-enriched uranium, and that declaration was subsequently rejected by the P5+1 negotiators.<sup>58</sup> Further escalation was inevitable – on June 9, 2010, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1929 (2010), which imposed the harshest sanctions, including an embargo on heavy arms sales to Iran.

To sum up, the developments regarding the Iranian nuclear program and the revelations of the undeclared nuclear activities did not change the overall Russian strategy on Iran; however, they exposed the red lines for and limitations to such policy, i.e. the transpar-



In 2005, Russia and China gave Iran a chance for a diplomatic solution by blocking the referral of the Iranian dossier to the UN Security Council and initiating talks with the Islamic Republic, but Iran did not ultimately seize the opportunity

<sup>54</sup> Kornysheva, Alena (2004) 'Aleksandr Rummyantsev ne Poyedet v Iran' [Aleksandr Rummyantsev Will not Go to Iran]. Kommersant, available at <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/449573> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>55</sup> Vesti.Ru (2005) Rossiya i Iran Podpisali Dokument o Vozvrate OYaT s AES v Bushere [Russia and Iran Signed a Document on the Return of Spent Nuclear Fuel from the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant], available at <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=60811> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>56</sup> Einhorn, Robert (2017) Interview on the margins of the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference. Washington, D.C.

<sup>57</sup> Benari, Elad (2011) 'WikiLeaks: Ahmadinejad Wanted Fuel Swap Deal.' Israel National News, available at <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/141550> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>58</sup> Arms Control Association (2014) History of Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue, available at [https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran\\_Nuclear\\_Proposals](https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran_Nuclear_Proposals) (17 May, 2021).



The U.S. saw the solution as international cooperation to maintain the Tehran Research Reactor in exchange for Iran not having enough enriched uranium to produce a single war-head

ency of Tehran’s nuclear activities, its full adherence to the IAEA safeguards and cooperation with the Agency. Lack of such cooperation provided for more cooperation between Moscow and Washington on tailoring the UN Security Council sanctions on Iran. Russia was ready to engage in diplomatic efforts that would ease the tensions over the nuclear issue; however, there happened to be no case in which both the U.S. and Iranian leaders were ready to negotiate: Barack Obama and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were a no better match for a successful negotiation than George Bush and Mohammad Khatami.

**Lessons.** We can draw four more lessons from the experience of U.S.-Russian dialogue on Iran between 2001 and 2010:

1. Since international agreements are vulnerable to domestic political pressures, continuity and predictability of national policies are key to confidence<sup>59</sup>.

U.S., Russian, and Iranian administrations changed at least once over this period. The Bush administration pursued an extremely tough policy on Iran, which made it more difficult for President Khatami to promote open dialogue. Iran also dismissed the “Bushehr-only” informal agreement with Russia in a way that Russia walked out of the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement. The election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad had a negative impact on the E3 negotiations with Iran. However, both the U.S. and Iranian administrations were relatively upfront and predictable, while Russia often was not.

On the one hand, Russia repeatedly declared its policy on Iran’s nuclear program mostly depended on that country’s cooperation with the IAEA, and would not affect other areas. On the other hand, in 2010, the Medvedev government supported the imposition of an arms trade embargo on Iran under UN Security Council Resolution 1929. Furthermore, Russia imposed additional unilateral sanctions on Iran prohibiting the sale of Russian the SA-20 (C-300) surface-to-air missile system to Iran, though the contract had been already signed and was legitimate under international law. Tehran’s confidence in Moscow was so low that Iran would rather reach an agreement with the United States than with Russia.<sup>60</sup>

2. Stigmatizing one’s counterpart prevents one from beginning negotiations.

In 2003, Iran suggested bilateral negotiations with the United States on a variety of issues including its nuclear program.<sup>61</sup> At

<sup>59</sup> Lavrov, Sergei (2016) Interview for the “V Krughe Sveta”. Echo Moskvyy Radio Station, available at <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/sorokina/41143/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> Benari, Elad. Op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> Roadmap for US-Iranian Negotiations (2003), available at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/documents/us\\_iran\\_1roadmap.pdf](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/documents/us_iran_1roadmap.pdf) (17 May, 2021).



that time, Iran had as few as 164 centrifuges<sup>62</sup>, and its relatively moderate leadership under President Khatami was ready to engage with the country they have officially deemed 'evil' since 1979. Iran might have been either worried about the possibility of an overwhelming U.S. air attack after the display of U.S. airpower during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, or willing to build on the success of its modest cooperation with the United States on Afghanistan. However, the U.S. leadership thought of Iran as part of the notorious 'axis of evil' and rejected any dialogue with the 'rogue' state.

This demonstrated to Iran that the U.S. leadership was not interested in resolving the problems with Iran's nuclear program collaboratively, rather the goal was suppression by any means. Had the United States not pursued such a policy, it would have been easier for the Bush administration to begin negotiations with Iran (at least secretly) at a time, when Iran made the first step. Instead, the United States wasted this opportunity.

3. Interpersonal relations matter; the higher the level of communication is, the better.

Good working relations with one's counterparts help understand each other and address the most important issues in a delicate manner. However, without clear high-level leadership, it is almost impossible to translate ideas into reality. The political environment, to a large extent, depends on functional relations between heads of states; if the heads of state cannot stand each other then diplomats find it hard to resolve the situation.<sup>63</sup>

Then-Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation Igor Ivanov claims that in 2006 he paid a visit to Washington and managed to convince President Bush to join the emerging P5+1 format.<sup>64</sup> Just three years after rejecting any negotiations with Iran, the U.S. joined talks structured such as there would be no incentive to move forward. Clearly, that would be nearly impossible to achieve without good communication.

4. Isolation is not the best strategy to deal with threshold states because it leads to a lack of credible information on those countries. That requires confidence-building and economic cooperation, as well as expert-level knowledge exchange.

During this period, all the negotiators – the E3, Russia, and the United States, as well as the IAEA, suffered from information shortfalls on Iran's nuclear program. Besides, the Bush administration suspended the practice of occasional consulta-

<sup>62</sup> Lewis, Jeffrey (2015) 'Heading off an even bigger problem in Iran.' The Boston Globe, available at <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2015/07/18/heading-off-even-bigger-problem-iran/JoNSCMQMMuBJUrm8KbxAjM/story.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>63</sup> This lesson would have worked in the normal state of the U.S.-Russia dialogue. However, as the experience of the Trump administration has demonstrated, the absence of working-level contacts may undermine the agreements arrived at in the highest spheres. Given that bureaucracies have the agency to sabotage the outcomes of whatever summit, it is advisable that the higher level encounters be preceded by working-level engagements.

<sup>64</sup> Ivanov, Igor (2017) Speech at the Conference "25 Years of US-Russia Relations: From Cold War to New Cold War?" Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjaKkfchV3M> (17 May, 2021).



tions with Iran<sup>65</sup>, which aggravated the situation.<sup>66,67</sup> In the absence of economic interaction or business-like exchanges between the two countries, it should not be surprising that the two countries had a distorted image of each other. One cannot forcefully make a country more transparent, it can become so only voluntarily, which requires confidence-building through expert-level dialogue and economic cooperation.

## 2011-2016. Russia Facilitates Negotiations

**Political background.** The absence of progress with Iran at the very beginning of Obama's presidency maintained the key elements of the U.S. policy on Iran – designating Iranian entities and individuals under the counter-proliferation and counter-terrorism statutes, as well as building an international coalition to support more and more stringent sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially in the energy and banking sectors.<sup>68</sup>

In 2012, Ben Rhodes, U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications, admitted that:

*“From the beginning of the administration we have steadily built the most comprehensive and biting sanctions regime that the Iranian government has ever faced. We have taken the view that Iran has an opportunity, through diplomacy, to come in line with their international obligations with respect to their nuclear program. However, we've also made it clear that if Iran fails to meet its obligations, we will steadily ratchet up the pressure. And indeed, we have done so over the course of the last several years, such that we now have sanctions that are deeply impacting and biting upon the Iranian economy and the Iranian government's ability to access revenue.”<sup>69</sup>*

Meanwhile, the third term of President Putin observed a gradual improvement of Russia-Iran relations.<sup>70</sup> In part, the shared

<sup>65</sup> Burns, Nicholas (2008) 'We Should Talk to Our Enemies,' Newsweek.

<sup>66</sup> Khlopov, Anton; Lata, Vasily. Op. cit. P. 13

<sup>67</sup> There is evidence, though, that some factions within the Bush administration wanted to continue Clinton's policy of engaging the Khatami government. See: Slavina, Barbara (2009) *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, pp. 197-198.

<sup>68</sup> Maloney, Suzanne (2011) 'Progress of the Obama Administration's Policy Toward Iran.' The Brookings Institution, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/progress-of-the-obama-administrations-policy-toward-iran/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>69</sup> The White House (2012) On-the-Record Conference Call on Iran Sanctions, available at <https://www.hsd.org/?view&did=737829> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>70</sup> The 2013 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation mentioned Iran in the context of the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program. Russia called for a conducting the dialogue on step-by-step and reciprocity principle. See: 'Kontseptsiya Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii' [The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation] (2013), available at [http://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186](http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186) (17 May, 2021). The 2016 version of the document mentioned “all-encompassing development of Russia's cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran” and the implementation of the JCPOA among its goals. See: 'Kontseptsiya Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii' [The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation] (2016), available at [http://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2542248) (17 May, 2021).

## RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

suspicious outlook on the West, although of a different scale and nature, provided some base for political cooperation. Iran had to diversify its economic activities and partners to compensate for the crippling effect of the U.S. as well as the EU sanctions.<sup>71</sup>

It was clear to the Russian leadership that the P5+1 strategy on Iran yielded hardly any results. Russia believed that UNSC sanctions exhausted their potential, but the U.S. and EU unilateral sanctions could undermine any positive dynamics and threatened to stir political turmoil in Iran. At a certain point, Russia doubted whether the primary goal of its Western counterparts was to bring back Iran to the table or to change the regime by putting as much pressure on it as they could.

In 2012, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stated in his interview to the Editor-in-Chief of *Security Index Journal*:

*“When it all began, and the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1696 requiring that [Iran – A.M.] takes certain steps, or otherwise sanctions would be imposed, there was a firm agreement (and we still adhere to this agreement) that sanctions should pursue the only objective – to strengthen the nonproliferation regime. And a series of the subsequent [UN SC – A.M.] resolutions – 1737, 1747, 1803, 1929 – exhausted the capacity of such measures that pursue this objective, meaning there is no room for the UN Security Council to strengthen the nonproliferation regime. By saying so, I don’t say that there could be no other sanctions. One could suggest whatever they want. [...] However, does it have anything to do with the nonproliferation regime? These are the measures that aim at correcting the behavior of the government of another country, creating domestic tensions [in that country – A.M.], and ideally changing this government.”<sup>72</sup>*

Russia wanted to avoid another major crisis in the region, already suffering from the Syrian crisis. As in many other cases, Russia considered a political solution the only acceptable. However, the U.S. approach, which was to a certain extent shared by its European allies, was centered around sanctions. Furthermore, the U.S. leadership initially considered both political and military ways of resolving the crisis; however, later they resorted to negotiations as their main strategy.

As with all the diplomats who negotiated the agreement on Iran’s nuclear program, Russians were innovative and strongly oriented on results. In 2011, while paying a visit to Washington, D.C., Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov suggested a ‘step-by-step’ plan of reciprocal measures from the P5+1 countries and Iran.<sup>73</sup>



Lavrov offers a plan for a gradual settlement of the crisis over the Iranian nuclear program during a visit to Washington, 2011

Source: [www.afp.com](http://www.afp.com)

<sup>71</sup> Kozhanov Nikolay (2015) Understanding the Revitalization of Russian-Iranian Relations. Carnegie Moscow Center, 2015, available at <https://carnegie.ru/2015/06/15/ru-pub-60391> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>72</sup> Ryabkov, Sergei (2012) ‘Sanktsii Protiv Irana: Resurs Ischerpan’ [Sanctions Against Iran: Resource Depleted]. *Index Bezopasnosti (Security Index Journal)*, available at [http://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/169622](http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/169622) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>73</sup> Arms Control Association (2014) History of Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue, avail-





Any sanctions on Iran, whether imposed under UN Security Council resolutions or by individual states, should at all times be aimed at strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov described the logic behind that plan:

“We elaborated this plan based on the fact that the level of trust between the P5+1 and Iran was not even at point zero, it was below that figure. To begin restoring trust and then move towards a mutually acceptable resolution, we had to start from something relatively easy. [...] In our view, the first small step from the Iranian side could be freezing the number of operating centrifuges, refraining from launching new centrifuges within the existing cascades, refraining from developing new cascades, refraining from feeding [UF6 - A.M.] gas into the cascade of already spinning centrifuges, etc. In return, the P5+1 could – after the verification by the IAEA, which is very important, refrain from imposing new sanctions – first, the unilateral ones. Then, while moving towards more complicated measures [...] the international community could even address Iran’s concerns in the field of security, including confidence-building measures at sea. Respective steps were put into four stages which shaped the core of our plan. We believe such a scheme could be well efficient”.<sup>74</sup>

However, it was difficult for the U.S. diplomats to compromise with the Iranians, considering domestic pressure by Congress, which was inclined to maximize gains and minimize responsibilities of the U.S., with a significant fraction of Congress being ideologically opposed to any deal with Iran. However, the Obama administration, which engaged in secret bilateral negotiations with Iran in 2013, did its best to pave the road for such an agreement. Both the U.S. and Iranian leadership displayed a strong willingness to pursue the path of negotiations.

Shortly before the JCPOA was concluded, the Obama administration issued its 2015 National Security Strategy, in which it stated:

Having reached a first step arrangement that stops the progress of Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for limited relief, our preference is to achieve a comprehensive and verifiable deal that assures Iran’s nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes. This is the best way to advance our interests, strengthen the global nonproliferation regime, and enable Iran to access peaceful nuclear energy. However, we retain all options to achieve the objective of preventing Iran from producing a nuclear weapon.<sup>75</sup>

**Results.** The most significant achievement of this period is that two options were swept off the table: a nuclear-armed Iran and a war against Iran.<sup>76</sup> Notably, the framework for the negotiations between P5+1 and Iran was suggested by the Russians. However, the American side believes that the Russian ‘step by step’ initiative initially had no impact on the course of negotiations. Hon. Robert Einhorn opines this initiative was not important as it went beyond what the American side was ready to accept:

“At times, the Russians did a number of things that the Americans didn’t regard as terribly helpful. At one time, Putin said that he recognized that Iran had a right to an enrichment program. That was before the U.S. was prepared to grant a limited enrichment program to Iran. There was a step-by-step approach which the Russian Federation put forward, we weren’t happy with that”.

able at [https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran\\_Nuclear\\_Proposals](https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran_Nuclear_Proposals) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>74</sup> Ryabkov, Sergei. Op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2015), available at [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy\\_2.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>76</sup> Parsi, Trita (2017) ‘Behind the Scenes of the Iran Nuclear Deal,’ Interview for The Leonard Lopate Show, available at <http://www.wnyc.org/story/inside-story-iran-nuclear-deal/> (17 May, 2021).

However, it is important to underline two facts: (1) Iran would not agree on anything even under sanctions had the United States continued its efforts to deprive Iran of its enrichment program; and (2) in 2013, the P5+1 and Iran each suggested a modified version of the Russian plan, and after the election of President Hassan Rouhani, the parties managed to hammer out the Joint Plan of Action – the first diplomatic document in many years endorsed both in Washington and Tehran.

Further negotiations led to the conclusion of the JCPOA, which placed Iran under an unprecedentedly intrusive inspections regime trusted by all parties to the agreement and the international community. IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said in May 2017, after 16 months of carrying out monitoring under the JCPOA in Iran:

*“Iran is now subject to the world’s most robust nuclear verification regime. Our inspectors are on the ground 24/7. We monitor nuclear facilities remotely, using permanently installed cameras and other sensors. We have expanded access to sites, and have more information about Iran’s nuclear program. [...] Iran is implementing its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, including what is known as modified Code 3.1. This requires countries to report a new nuclear facility to the Agency as soon as a decision is taken to build it or to authorize construction. [...] The JCPOA represents a significant gain for nuclear verification.”<sup>77</sup>*

Hon. Robert Einhorn said:

*“In terms of U.S. engagement in Iran, I don’t have any regrets. I think the JCPOA is a good nuclear deal, I think our cooperation with Russia on Iran was very positive. I think Russia played a critical role in getting this agreement. [...] Russia has the influence with Iran to be very helpful. It has the technical expertise, and it has influence by virtue of the commercial relationship. The initial Bushehr reactor, the negotiations for subsequent sales of the VVER reactors – so Russia is in a critical place, and the U.S. found cooperation with Russia critical to a successful negotiation. It’s going to remain critical in the future.”<sup>78</sup>*

Russia is believed to have found the ways to resolve some of the most contentious issues in the JCPOA such as setting the 300-kg threshold for LEU stockpile, inventing the mechanism to snap back sanctions on Iran, and converting the Fordow facility. Hon. Robert Einhorn said in an interview with the author:

*“Perhaps the biggest breakthrough was Iranian agreement to cap its stock of enriched uranium to 300 kg. It was the Russian side which played the critical role in persuading them. What was so critical about that was if you reduce the uranium stockpile to a low level, that allows you to increase the number of operating centrifuges while still keeping breakout time to at least one year. So, the 300 kg was absolutely critical, and I believe the Russians*

The 2015 National Security Strategy contained the goal of reaching a compromise agreement between the US and Iran to guarantee the peaceful use of Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for easing sanctions pressure on the country

<sup>77</sup> Amano, Yukiya (2017) Reflections on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Speech at Danish Institute for International Studies, available at <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/reflections-on-the-joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>78</sup> Einhorn, Robert. Op. cit.





were instrumental in getting the Iranians to agree to that”.<sup>79</sup>

Russia could also be credited for inventing a ‘snap-back’ sanctions mechanism wherein punitive sanctions against Iran are automatically invoked in case of non-compliance unless the UNSC, subject to its own veto power, votes to cancel. As explained by Amb. Wendy Sherman:

“Minister Lavrov, of course, always had very strong views and knew the U.N. system extremely well and in the provision for the snapback at the United Nations, he was actually quite central for figuring out how to do that so that the U.S. could maintain its veto. And it was very helpful that he did that. [...] The U.S. wanted to be able to snap back sanctions. We wanted to make sure that our veto was intact. And so the mechanism that we came up with is a sort of inverted vote. As I said, Lavrov was very instrumental in that and it preserved the U.S. ability to snap back multilateral sanctions on our own. And that was critical to the U.S. that we be able to do that”.<sup>80</sup>

However, Russians do not take pride in these ‘so-called achievements’ and consider these provisions unnecessary. They believe these provisions derive from American phobias that Iran would all of a sudden walk out of the deal or cheat on the IAEA. However, it is not the break-out potential, but the IAEA verification regime that is of vital importance, and the parties to the JCPOA should therefore ensure that Iran abides by IAEA regulations. Russia had to address these concerns: diplomats formulated the ‘snap-back’ mechanism according to the UN procedures, and nuclear physicists from Rosatom suggested the 300-kg threshold. What Russians are proud of is the conversion of the Fordow facility to the production of stable isotopes for medical purposes, instead of removing the centrifuges.<sup>81</sup>

Another contentious issue in the negotiations was the imposition of restrictions on conventional arms and missile technology trade with Iran for five and eight years respectively. Russia and China opposed such measures at the very early stage of the JCPOA negotiations; however, the P5+1 and Iran eventually addressed the U.S. concerns regarding arms trade with Iran and managed to reach a compromise on the duration of these restrictions.<sup>82</sup>

When the JCPOA was concluded, its implementation was yet another challenge. All the excessive enriched uranium and certain types of Iran’s equipment had to be transported to the Russian Federation by the end of 2015. Such a limited time frame imposed logistical difficulties and required collaborative actions. Vladimir Kuchinov, Advisor to the Rosatom Director General, said:

“A close cooperation on this issue with the U.S. colleagues should be noted since in exchange for the uranium products, they delivered, as a guarantee, natural uranium from Kazakhstan to Iran. The day when the plane with uranium landed in Iran, the remaining part of the materials were placed on Mikhail Dudin ship, and on December 28, 2015, the ship left for Saint Petersburg, where it got in February. This helped the IAEA to confirm the implementation of the JCPOA”.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Einhorn, Robert. Op. cit.

<sup>80</sup> Sherman, Wendi (2017) “Top Iran Deal Negotiator Sees Limits to US-Russian Cooperation”. Russia Matters, available at <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/top-iran-deal-negotiator-sees-limits-us-russian-cooperation> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>81</sup> Interview with a Russian expert on nonproliferation and Iran’s nuclear program (2017).

<sup>82</sup> Einhorn, Robert (2015) ‘Debating the Iran nuclear deal: A former American negotiator outlines the battleground issues.’ The Brookings Institution, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/debating-the-iran-nuclear-deal-a-former-american-negotiator-outlines-the-battle-ground-issues/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>83</sup> Kuchinov Vladislav (2017) ‘SVPD i Razvitiye Sotrudnichestva s Iranom v Oblasti Mirnogo Ispolzovaniya Atomnoy Energii’ [JCPOA and the Development of Cooperation with Iran in Peaceful

## RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Both, Russia and the United States, along with the rest of the JCPOA members, also took other efforts to implement the JCPOA, which involved their cooperation with Iran. Shipping out the excessive heavy water from Iran to Russia and the United States are among such efforts.<sup>84</sup>

All in all, this period of the U.S.-Russian dialogue on the Iranian nuclear program, as much as the broader multilateral effort that brought about the JCPOA, could be called exemplary. Even amid the spiraling tensions between Russia and the United States over Ukraine and Syria could not derail the negotiations, which is indicative of the parties' commitment to diplomacy. The negotiators of both the United States and Russia invested the maximum of their creativity and knowledge to find a balanced agreement rich with technical details that helped the sides to compromise.

**Lessons.** Here are a few final lessons that the U.S.-Russian cooperation on Iran yielded over the period concerned:

1. Pressure and sanctions in themselves cannot resolve an issue, there must be incentives as well.

U.S. foreign policy is largely associated with sanctions and pressure. However, it seems to yield modest results. By applying too much pressure and offering few incentives, even the most powerful country cannot achieve a reliable, working, and stable agreement. Sanctions can have their effect, but only with corresponding incentives, otherwise one is causing harm to people without offering a way out.

2. There should be no preconditions to start negotiations on a complex issue. It is more effective to begin from small steps.

There is value in isolating certain issues and making progress where progress is possible even if all the sources of friction in a relationship cannot be addressed. Although many critics of the JCPOA claimed that the agreement did not address the broader U.S. concerns related to Iran's regional policies, ballistic missile program, among others, it is the separation of the nuclear issue from the rest of the contentious items on agenda that helped to reach the agreement.<sup>85</sup>

3. Multilateral negotiations are difficult, but could eventually be more successful than bilateral.

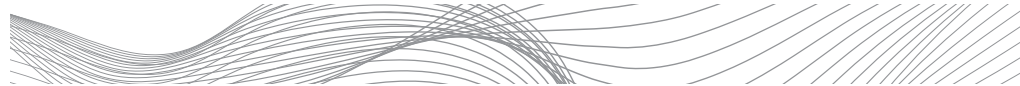
As the IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano believed, 'even complex and challenging issues can be tackled effectively if all parties are committed to dialogue – not dialogue for its own sake, but dialogue aimed at achieving results.'<sup>86</sup> Apart

Atom]. CENESS, available at <http://ceness-russia.org/rus/conf2017/materials/2063/2138/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>84</sup> Sputnik News (2016) 'Iran Delivers 38 Tonnes of Heavy Water to Russia in September,' available at <https://sputniknews.com/business/201609261045699559-iran-russia-heavy-water/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>85</sup> Einhorn, Robert, Op. cit., 2015.

<sup>86</sup> Amano, Yukiya. Op. cit.



Officials announce Iran Nuclear Deal, 2015

Source: www.flickr.com

from that, it is not that easy to quit an agreement negotiated multilaterally, making it more sustainable.

4. Nonpolitical technical cooperation is the key to successful negotiations.

Unbiased, nonpartisan, nonpolitical, and technical – all these adjectives match the description of IAEA activities. The ‘twin-track’ approach ensured the political environment of the nuclear talks did not influence the technical dialogue between Iran and the IAEA. ‘The IAEA was able to make a vital contribution, and maintain the confidence of all sides, by sticking to its technical mandate and not straying into politics. Virtually every political breakthrough in recent years was preceded by a technical agreement between the IAEA and Iran. This objective and factual approach will continue to characterize our work in the coming years.’<sup>87</sup>

### 2017-2021. The U.S. Unravels the Deal

Since the beginning of his campaign, Donald Trump has called the JCPOA ‘the worst deal ever negotiated’,<sup>88</sup> but it took the Trump administration more than a year to review the legacy of President Obama. Days after Trump took office, his first National Security Adviser, Michael Flynn, announced that the United States is ‘officially putting Iran on notice’ in connection with its missile launches.<sup>89</sup>

Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and the second National Security Adviser in the Trump Administration Herbert McMaster had a stabilizing influence on the President for which they were called ‘Axis of Adults’. Despite the critical attitude towards Iran in general, the senior officials believed the Iran deal met the U.S. national interests. It was more difficult though to convince President Trump of this.

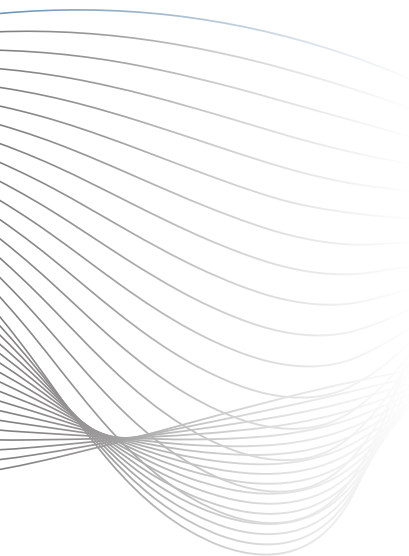
The need for a so-called certification of the JCPOA was an expected problem. According to the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA), every 90 days the U.S. President should inform Congress that Tehran is fulfilling its obligations and that removing sanctions from this country is in the interests of Washington. During the JCPOA negotiations, although this is a legally-non-binding agreement, the Congress wanted to have leverage and oversight with respect to lifting of the U.S. sanctions against Iran, a power that had been delegated to the President.<sup>90</sup> This relic of the relationship between the Republican Congress and the Democratic President during the Obama presidency threatened to derail the JCPOA certification under the new circumstances when the primary threat to the agreement was coming from the White House.

<sup>87</sup> Amano, Yukiya. Op. cit.

<sup>88</sup> Torbati, Yeganeh (2016) ‘Trump election puts Iran nuclear deal on shaky ground.’ Reuters, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump-iran/trump-election-puts-iran-nuclear-deal-on-shaky-ground-idUSKBN13427E> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>89</sup> ‘Trump White House says it’s “putting Iran on notice.” (2017). CNBC, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/01/trump-white-house-says-its-putting-iran-on-notice.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>90</sup> Goldsmith, Jack L. (2015) Why Congress is effectively powerless to stop the Iran deal. The Brookings Institution, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2015/07/21/why-congress-is-effectively-powerless-to-stop-the-iran-deal/> (17 May, 2021).





In April 2016, the Trump administration conducted its first certification of the JCPOA; however, the U.S. adopted new sanctions against the Iranian missile program and launched a full review of the U.S. strategy on Iran. Even the declaration on certification of the JCPOA, published on the State Department's website, was entitled 'Iran Continues To Sponsor Terrorism'.<sup>91</sup>

By July's deadline for certification, a new strategy on Iran was not ready, and the President spent an hour telling his advisors how he did not want to confirm the implementation of the agreement.<sup>92</sup> Eventually, Trump agreed to do this but told the Wall Street Journal that the Iranians were not in compliance with the JCPOA: 'They don't comply. And so we'll see what happens. I mean, we'll talk about this subject in 90 days. But, yeah, I would be – I would be surprised if they were in compliance.' Another remark in this interview made his intentions regarding the JCPOA crystal clear: 'We've been extremely nice to them in saying they were compliant, OK? We've given them the benefit of every doubt. But we're doing very detailed studies. And personally, I have great respect for my people. If it was up to me, I would have had them noncompliant 180 days ago'.<sup>93</sup>

In his speech on October 13, 2017, Trump refused to certify Iran's compliance with the JCPOA. He claimed that Iran had committed numerous violations of the agreement but mentioned only three relatively minor issues: the excess of the agreed level of heavy water, disagreement on the use of advanced types of centrifuges which arose because of the vague language of the agreement, and intimidation of international inspectors who allegedly could not fully exercise their mandate, an incident that had never been reflected in public documents.

President Trump referenced the so-called sunset provisions – temporary restrictions under the JCPOA that, once exhausted, were believed to allow for a rapid nuclear break-out of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Another critical point for the administration was the absence of any limitations to Iran's ballistic missile program. However, the President's speech was not about these drawbacks of the JCPOA; it was about the current political regime in Iran that had to be countered through a comprehensive strategy.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Tillerson, Rex W. (2017) Iran Continues To Sponsor Terrorism. Department of State, available at <https://ru.usembassy.gov/iran-continues-sponsor-terrorism-press-statement-rex-w-tillerson-secretary-state/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>92</sup> Baker, Peter (2017) Trump Recertifies Iran Nuclear Deal, but Only Reluctantly. The New York Times, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/17/us/politics/trump-iran-nuclear-deal-recertify.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>93</sup> Dawsey, Josh; Gold, Hadas (2017) Full transcript: Trump's Wall Street Journal interview. Politico, available at <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/01/trump-wall-street-journal-interview-full-transcript-241214> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>94</sup> "Our policy is based on a clear-eyed assessment of the Iranian dictatorship, its sponsorship of terrorism, and its continuing aggression in the Middle East and all around the world. Iran is under the control of a fanatical regime that seized power in 1979 and forced a proud people to submit to its extremist rule. This radical regime has raided the wealth of one of the world's oldest and most vibrant nations, and spread death, destruction, and chaos all around the globe," said Trump and mentioned the seizure of the U.S. diplomats in 1979, multiple bombings of American embassies and military objects, support for Hezbollah and al Qaeda, as well as sectarian violence and civil wars across the Middle East, among others. See: The White House (2017) Remarks by President Trump on Iran Strategy, available at <https://ru.usembassy.gov/remarks-presi->

The JCPOA certification process introduced by INARA, which was essentially a relic of the political landscape of the previous administration, could have jeopardised the agreement



Setting the non-nuclear part of the new Iran strategy aside, it is important to mention that President Trump instructed his administration to work closely with Congress and allies to address the flaws of the agreement and threatened to cancel U.S. participation in the JCPOA in case no solution was found. On January 12, 2018, Donald Trump refused to certify Iran's compliance with the JCPOA and made a last warning on the deal:

*"Despite my strong inclination, I have not yet withdrawn the United States from the Iran nuclear deal. Instead, I have outlined two possible paths forward: either fix the deal's disastrous flaws, or the United States will withdraw... I am waiving the application of certain nuclear sanctions, but only in order to secure our European allies' agreement to fix the terrible flaws of the Iran nuclear deal. This is the last chance. In the absence of such an agreement, the United States will not again waive sanctions in order to stay in the Iran nuclear deal. And if at any time I judge that such an agreement is not within reach, I will withdraw from the deal immediately".<sup>95</sup>*

Amid the European efforts to negotiate a follow-on agreement or fix the JCPOA, President Trump sent a clear signal on the JCPOA by replacing two of the three top advisors in his administration by those who are believed to share his hawkish outlook on foreign affairs and specifically the Iran deal. On March 13, 2018, Donald Trump fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and referred to the disagreements, mainly over the JCPOA, as the key reason:

*"Rex and I have been talking about this for a long time. We – we got along actually quite well, but we disagreed on things. When you look at the Iran deal, I think it's terrible. I guess he thought it was OK. I wanted to either break it or do something, and he felt a little bit differently. So, we were not really thinking the same. With Mike, Mike Pompeo, we have a very similar thought process. I think it's going to go very well".<sup>96</sup>*

Tillerson was replaced by Mike Pompeo, who fiercely opposed the nuclear accord with Iran as a Republican Representative.<sup>97</sup>

Nearly ten days later, on March 22, 2018, President Trump named John Bolton, former U.S. envoy to the United Nations, an advocate of the invasion of Iran in 2003, as his new National Security Adviser.<sup>98</sup> Needless to recall his op-ed published in the New York Times a few months before the JCPOA was concluded that clearly conveyed his message in the title 'To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran'.<sup>99</sup> The appointment of the two individuals left no chance for the survival of the nuclear deal. John Bolton got fired in September 2019, but that did not make a difference in the U.S. policy on Iran.

---

dent-trump-iran-strategy/ (17 May, 2021).

<sup>95</sup> The White House (2018) Statement by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal, available at <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-iran-nuclear-deal/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>96</sup> Segarra, Lisa Marie (2018) 'We Disagreed on Things.' Read President Trump's Remarks After Firing Rex Tillerson.' Time, available at <https://time.com/5197334/we-disagreed-on-things-read-president-trumps-remarks-after-firing-rex-tillerson/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>97</sup> Costello, Ryan (2017) Trump CIA Pick Hyped Facts On Iran, Downplayed Costs Of War. Huffington Post, available at [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ryan-costello/trump-cia-pick-hyped-fact\\_b\\_13181260.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ryan-costello/trump-cia-pick-hyped-fact_b_13181260.html) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>98</sup> Financial Times (2018) Iran deal at risk due to John Bolton's extremism, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/a89388f8-422f-11e8-803a-295c97e6fd0b> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>99</sup> Bolton, John R. (2015) To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran. The New York Times, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/26/opinion/to-stop-irans-bomb-bomb-iran.html> (17 May, 2021).



Meanwhile, Russia, along with the rest of the JCPOA participants, continued to support the agreement. Russian officials delivered multiple public statements in support of the JCPOA.<sup>100, 101</sup> Moscow made it clear from the very beginning: the JCPOA should be preserved as it is since it was the result of a hard-achieved consensus, also backed by the UN Security Council resolution. Any renegotiation of the agreement would mean its violation.<sup>102</sup> In part due to this position, Russian diplomats did not join the EU-U.S. efforts to fix the JCPOA or to develop an add-on agreement so that it could address other issues and concerns related to the Iranian policies.

In May 2018, at the NPT PrepCom in Geneva, Russia and China proposed a joint statement in support of the JCPOA open to all the NPT Member-States.<sup>103</sup> Even though the text was politically neutral and avoided a blame-game, only around 25 countries supported it. Most of the other countries avoided publicly siding with Russia and China as they were concerned that this move would be perceived as one pursued against the United States. However, a vast majority of delegations expressed their support for the JCPOA in their national statements.

Russia continued to implement the JCPOA by redesigning the Fordow enrichment facility so that Iran could produce only stable isotopes useful for medical purposes. When Iran introduced uranium hexafluoride into 1044 centrifuges at Fordo, Rosatom paused the re-configuration project in December 2019 due to the fact that it is technically impossible to enrich uranium and produce stable isotopes at the same facility. However, Moscow remained committed to the project and is willing to continue its implementation once Tehran halts enrichment activities and cleans up the facility.<sup>104</sup> Beyond the JCPOA, Russia moved on with the Bushehr project. In November 2019, Rosatom launched the construction of the second unit of the NPP.<sup>105</sup>

**Results.** As of August 2020, the outcomes of the Trump ad-

Despite the predictability of Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA, such a move is a serious blow to US credibility as one of major players on the global political stage

<sup>100</sup> TASS (2017) Putin vows Russia will keep on backing Iran deal, available at <http://tass.com/politics/968914> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>101</sup> TASS (2018) Lavrov slams US statements on Iran nuclear deal, available at <http://tass.com/politics/985052> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>102</sup> Sputnik News (2018) Lavrov Props Iran Nuclear Deal, Laments Brash U.S. Policies at Annual Press Event, available at <https://sputniknews.com/world/201801151060766530-lavrov-annual-press-conference/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>103</sup> Joint Statement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China at the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (2018), available at [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3209161](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3209161) (17 May, 2021).

<sup>104</sup> RBC (2019) 'Rossiya Svernula Proekt na Iranskom Zavode v Fordo iz-za Deystviy Tegerana' [Russia Shut Down the Project at Fordow due to Tehran's Actions], available at <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfree-news/5dc2a3739a79473c79c891ec> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>105</sup> RIA Novosti (2019) 'Rossiya i Iran Nachali Stroitelstvo Vtorogo Energobloka AES Busera' [Russia and Iran Started Building the Second Unit of the Bushehr NPP], available at <https://ria.ru/20191110/1560774053.html> (17 May, 2021).



ministration's policies on Iran are purely negative because President Trump ignored the lessons learned by the previous U.S. administrations. First, his administration's foreign policy was inconsistent with the pledges previously made by the United States. On May 8, 2018, Donald Trump announced his decision to leave the JCPOA and said: 'Today's action sends a critical message: The United States no longer makes empty threats. When I make promises, I keep them.'<sup>106</sup> Trump was predictable in his approach to Iran and did deliver on his promises, but withdrawing from the hard-achieved agreement ruined the credibility of the U.S. leadership. Against the backdrop of Iran's continued commitment to the JCPOA, it is the United States – not 'just the Trump administration' – that poses as a deal-breaker.

Second, the Trump administration is trying to isolate Iran, with maximum pressure eventually leading to maximum resistance. Following several wind-down periods and having granted temporary waivers, President Trump restored sanctions against Iran in full and then introduced tougher measures. Many are concerned that the real U.S. strategy may be a regime change in Iran.<sup>107</sup> Hopeful about the E3 efforts to maintain economic cooperation with Iran, Tehran abstained from reacting to the new U.S. policies for a year. However, the lack of progress with the launching of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) resulted in growing frustration among the Iranian leaders.<sup>108</sup> Multiple incidents that took place in the region after May 2019 led to a military escalation, with Washington and Tehran stopping short of war in January 2020 when, in response to President Trump's order to kill General Qasem Soleimani, Iran attacked two U.S. military bases in Iraq with missiles.

Nevertheless, Iran maintained full cooperation with the IAEA – even the COVID-19 pandemic had no negative impact on the monitoring and verification in Iran.<sup>109</sup> In August 2020, during the visit of the IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi to Tehran, the Iranians committed to providing access to two facilities the IAEA inspectors suspected of having hosted nuclear material and previously undeclared activities carried out in the early 2000s.<sup>110</sup> However, the Iranians took five steps to reduce their commitments under the JCPOA and rejected any technical limitations to the enrichment and R&D program, effectively reducing the so-called break-out time from one year down to about four months.<sup>111</sup> In triggering the Iranians to retaliate in this manner, the Trump administration crossed out the key element of the nuclear deal.

Third, the Trump administration refused to compartmentalize the nuclear and non-nuclear issues with Iran, something that had made the nuclear deal possible. President Trump wants a

<sup>106</sup> The White House (2018) Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, available at <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>107</sup> Nasr, Vali (2018) 'The Iran Regime-Change Crew Is Back.' *The Atlantic*, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/iran-nuclear-deal-bolton-trump-regime-change/558785/> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>108</sup> Remarks by Abbas Araghchi, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Iran (2019). Moscow Nonproliferation Conference, available at <https://youtu.be/49H8oGYLW1M?t=1410> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>109</sup> IAEA (2020) Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015). Report by the Director General. IAEA, available at <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/20/06/gov2020-26.pdf> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>110</sup> Hafezi, Parisa; Murphy, Francois (2020) Iran relents on IAEA inspections at two sites, ending stand-off. Reuters, available at <https://reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSKBN25M1J7> (17 May 2021).

<sup>111</sup> Katzman, Kenneth (2020) What are the alternatives to the Iran nuclear deal? Atlantic Council, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/what-are-the-alternatives-to-the-iran-nuclear-deal/> (17 May, 2021).

## RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

comprehensive deal indefinitely limiting Iran's nuclear program, covering its regional policies and ballistic missile program, an idea abandoned by the Obama administration. President Obama preferred to set relatively achievable goals and seek compromise with the Iranians. While Donald Trump has made numerous never-accepted proposals on talks, phone calls, and meetings with the Iranian leaders, he is using ultimatums to force Iran to agree on all the unachievably high demands Mike Pompeo once voiced.<sup>112</sup> Signing up for such a deal would mean the capitulation of Tehran.

Fourth, by alienating and disregarding its closest partners, the United States has isolated itself in the international arena. U.S. allies, partners, and interlocutors – all but Israel and the monarchies of the Persian Gulf – defy the Trump administration's approach to Iran. When Donald Trump pulled the plug on the JCPOA, its administration had not even discussed Plan B with the European allies and counted on President Macron's Twitter post as a demonstration of the European will to work with the United States<sup>113</sup>. The European efforts to find a common ground and address the shared concerns turned out to be futile; President Trump required that all his demands must be met<sup>114</sup>.

By threatening other nations with secondary sanctions, the United States undermined the ability of the remaining participants of the JCPOA to implement the agreement and advance the cause of nonproliferation. Such policies backfired when the United States failed to extend the so-called arms embargo on Iran through the UN Security Council. The attempt to snap-back the UN sanctions against Iran lifted under the JCPOA may suffer the same fate.<sup>115</sup>

Regrettably, the U.S.-Russian framework is no longer valid for addressing Iran's nuclear issue, at least under the Trump administration. Although Russia still has leverage over Iran and can be instrumental in renewing cooperation, Moscow can in no way influence the U.S. position on the nuclear deal with Iran. With the leadership of the two countries holding fundamentally discording views on Iran, there is no prospect for the renewal of constructive engagement. Consequently, in the



The US withdrawal from  
the JCPOA, 2018

Source: Getty Images

<sup>112</sup> Pompeo, Michael R. (2018) Secretary of State. After the Deal: A New Iran Strategy. U.S. Department of State, available at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/after-the-deal-a-new-iran-strategy/index.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>113</sup> Department of State (2018) Background Briefing on President Trump's Decision To Withdraw From the JCPOA, available at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/background-briefing-on-u-s-withdrawal-from-the-joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action-jcpoa/index.html> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>114</sup> Lederman, Josh (2018) "Defective at its core": How Trump opted to scrap Iran deal' AP, available at <https://apnews.com/c8553592cda046238d9fa08273b102df> (17 May, 2021).

<sup>115</sup> Fitzpatrick, Mark (2020) Pompeo set to double down on failure to extend Iran arms embargo. Responsible Statecraft, available at <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/08/15/pompeo-set-to-double-down-on-failure-to-extend-iran-arms-embargo/> (17 May, 2020).



observable future the role of U.S.-Russian dialogue on Iran will be limited to contingency diplomacy between Washington and Tehran to avoid a new war in the region.

### Conclusions

Any way out? Evidently, the Iranian nuclear program and adjacent issues will remain on the international agenda for the foreseeable future. The lessons learned from the Russian-U.S. dialogue suggest a five-stage model for future negotiations with Iran as well as other countries that are engaged in activities raising proliferation concerns.

- Begin dialogue without setting preconditions, threatening, or stigmatizing the other side. Involve interested parties and carefully exchange information on all levels.

- Loosen pressure on and avoid isolating the other side, offer incentives as well.

- Do not demand much in the beginning. Reach the first agreeable, deliverable agreement.

- Adhere to the agreement, be consistent and predictable.

Add technical cooperation for verification.

- Work out further agreements on a step-by-step and reciprocal basis. Enhance cooperation in other areas.

Following these recommendations does not guarantee overall success. However, the U.S.-Russian dialogue on the Iranian nuclear program has historically proven this approach effective.



## CHRONOLOGY OF U.S.-RUSSIAN DIALOGUE ON IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM 1992-2021

### 1992-2000. The United States Adjusts Russian Policy

1992

**August, 24** - The governments of Russia and Iran signed an agreement on cooperation in peaceful uses of atomic energy.

**July, 2** - The US passed the Arms Nonproliferation Act against Iran and Iraq, which banned deliveries of dual-use and conventional weapons.

1993

**March** - Foreign policy Concept of the Russian Federation presents Iran as a source of uncertainty in the region.

1994

**July, 1** - The U.S. National Security Strategy aims at preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

1995

**January, 1** - A protocol on negotiations between Russian Minister of Atomic Energy Viktor Mikhailov and his Iranian counterpart Reza Amrollahi on the supply of Russian centrifuges to Iran was made public.

The US demanded that Russia stop negotiating with Iran. Information exchange between US and Russian agencies was hampered.

**January** - A contract was signed for the completion of the first unit of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. The US did not oppose or impose sanctions against Russian companies involved in the construction of the nuclear power plant.

**April, 17- May, 12** - NPT Review Conference, at which Russia pressured Iran to support an indefinite extension of the NPT.

**June** - Russia has pledged not to supply arms to Iran. Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin promised U.S. Vice President Gore that Russia would meet its supply obligations before 1999 and would not conclude new arms trade treaties with Iran.

1996

**September, 8** - The US passed the D'Amato Act, which imposed sanctions on third countries investing a certain amount in the oil industries of Iran and Libya.



1997

**October** - China announced a halt and freeze on all nuclear programs in Iran under US pressure.

1998

**February** - U.S. pressure forces the Ukrainian manufacturer of steam turbines Turboatom to abandon its \$45 million deal to supply turbines to Bushehr.

**April** - Russia proposed to build a research reactor in Iran fueled by 20%-enriched uranium.

1999

**April** - Meetings of the Russian government export control commission, timed to coincide with meetings between Gore and Chernomyrdin and Gore and Kirienko. Russian missile technology shipments to Iran through shell companies were discussed. All this took place during an IMF mission to Moscow, as Russia intended to use U.S. support to obtain IMF loans.

**July, 29** - Russia passed a law on export controls.

2000

**June, 28** - Russia's Foreign Policy Concept acknowledged the importance of cooperation with Iran.

**November, 23** - Russia notified Clinton administration of its withdrawal from Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement to halt arms trade between Russia and Iran.

### 2001-2010. Russia Balances Out U.S. Policy on Iran

2002

**January 29** - Elected president of the United States George W. Bush classified Iran as an 'axis of evil' in his speech to Congress.

**October, 1** - In U.S. National Security Strategy, Iran is designated as a rogue state.

**December, 13** - The administration of US President George W. Bush accused Iran of pursuing a secret nuclear weapons program.

2003

**April, 28 - May, 9** - During the sessions of the NPT preparatory committees, the US said that Russia's assistance to Iran was contrary to the NPT and should be phased out, including the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant.

**May** - The Iran referred a proposal for negotiations on a wide range of issues, including phasing out its nuclear program, to United

# RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

States leaders. The United States refused to negotiate.

**May, 30** - Russia offered a compromise - the US and Russia jointly completed construction of the nuclear power plant, but the US refused. Then the Russian Foreign Ministry said there would be no stopping the construction of the atomic power station in Bushehr unless the UN Security Council demands it.

**Autumn** - According to US intelligence agencies, Iran halts its illegal nuclear activities.

**December, 18** - Iran signed an Additional Protocol to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement allowing the agency to conduct inspections throughout the country.

US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns warned that the construction of the plant could lead to a leakage of dual-use technology.

2004

**November** - The Paris Agreement signed between E3 and Iran: Iran was allowed to continue developing peaceful nuclear energy and receiving EU assistance, but suspended its own uranium enrichment activities during negotiations.

2005

**June, 24** - Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a conservative politician, was elected president of Iran.

**June, 28** - Bush signed Executive Order 13382 to impose sanctions on individuals and businesses that facilitate WMD proliferation. Four Iranian enterprises fell under the decree.

**August, 8** - Iran claimed to have resumed uranium enrichment at Esfahan, in violation of the Paris agreement with the E3.

2006

**February** - Iranian dossier were referred to the UN Security Council. Russia and China were against it; the E3 also sought a diplomatic solution without referral to the UN Security Council.

**January, 10** - Iran resumed uranium enrichment at Natanz and suspended implementation of the Additional Protocol.

After a visit of Russian Security Council Secretary Igor Ivanov to Washington, it was possible to get the US to join the P5+1 format.

**July, 31** - The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1696, which required Iran to halt all activities related to uranium enrichment within a month.

**August, 27** - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad inaugurated a heavy water plant in Arak.



**October, 2** - US President George W. Bush signed the 'Iran Freedom Support Act' passed by Congress, the law allowed economic sanctions to be imposed on countries and companies that helped Iran develop its nuclear program.

**December, 23** - The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1737 and imposed the first round of sanctions against Tehran.

2007

**March, 24** - These restrictions were supplemented by Resolution 1747, which banned Tehran from selling arms abroad.

**October, 24** - The US imposes new sanctions on Iran and accuses the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of distributing weapons of mass destruction. A month later, China, France, Russia, the UK, the US and Germany (P5+1, or 'the group of six') will agree to push ahead with a third round of tougher sanctions.

**December, 3** - A US National Intelligence Estimate says Iran halted its attempts to build a nuclear bomb in 2003. It also says with 'moderate confidence' that the program has not resumed as of mid-2007.

**Since 2007** The United States has implemented Operation Olympics, an attempt to neutralise Iran's nuclear program using cyber-weapons.

2008

**March, 3** - Security Council Resolution 1803, imposed another round of sanctions against Iran. At the same time, the P5+1 returned to the 2006 proposals with a view to resuming talks.

**September, 26** - Resolution 1835 was adopted, which reiterated the content of the three previous resolutions on Iran, without new sanctions due to resistance from China and Russia.

**Since 2008** US cyber-attacks have gradually rendered centrifuges at the Natanz enrichment complex unusable.

**November, 4** - The election of Barack Obama as US president has opened the door for a US-Russian dialogue on the Iranian nuclear program.

2009

**June, 5** - A quarterly IAEA report says Iran now has 7,231 centrifuge enrichment machines installed, a 25 percent increase in potential capacity since March. Two months later, the IAEA will say that Iran has slightly reduced the scale of its uranium enrichment, while also raising the number of installed centrifuge machines by some 1,000, to 8,308.

2010

**February** - Tehran increases its uranium enrichment level to 19.75%.



# RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

**June, 9** - The Security Council adopted Resolution 1929, which imposed a fourth set of sanctions against Iran, an arms embargo against it. The arms embargo directly affected the interests of Russia, one of Iran's main arms suppliers.

**June, 24** - Congress approved the imposition of unilateral sanctions by the US.

**July, 26** - The European Union joined the sanctions and a ban was imposed on technical assistance for the development of the Iranian oil and gas industry.

**Summer** - The massive use of the Stuxnet virus knocked out around 1,000 centrifuges, which at the time represented one-fifth of all Tehran's available centrifuges.

## 2011-2016. Russia Facilitates Negotiations

2011

**July** - During a visit to Washington, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov proposes a phased approach to resolving the Iranian issue through P5+1 efforts.

**September** - Bushehr NPP was connected to the national power grid.

2012

**January, 23** - The European Union imposed an oil embargo on Tehran and blocked Iran's Central Bank accounts in European banks.

**April, 14** - The six world powers - P5+1 - and Iran launched a new round of negotiations in Istanbul, with substantive meetings held **in May** in Baghdad.

**June, 18-19** - Meetings in Moscow, though the step-by-step approach proposed by Lavrov was adopted, the sides were unable to reach a consensus neither on the content of the steps nor on their sequence.

2013

**Winter and spring of 2013** (26-28 February - Alma Ata, 17-18 March - Istanbul, 5-6 April - Alma Ata) - A new round of talks between Tehran and the P6 also did not lead to a change in the status quo.

**June, 15** - Moderate candidate Hassan Rouhani wins Iranian presidential elections.

**September, 27** - Rouhani has an historic phone call with US President Barack Obama.

**November, 20-24** - Geneva talks. An interim agreement, the Joint Action Plan, is adopted, spelling out the parties' actions for a six-month period.



**November, 24** - Secret US-Iran talks were revealed. Iran agrees to curb certain nuclear activities and accept enhanced IAEA monitoring. In return, minor sanctions are lifted, and Iran is promised that no new sanctions will be imposed. The deal is considered temporary until a new, broader agreement is reached.

2014

**February, 17-20** - Iran and 5+1 begin talks in Vienna on a comprehensive agreement on Iran's nuclear program. The parties discuss the agenda and format of future talks.

**June, 9-10** - US and Iranian diplomats meet in Geneva for bilateral consultations.

**June, 11-12** - Diplomats from Russia and Iran met in Rome in bilateral consultations.

**June, 17** - The US, Iran, and the EU met in a trilateral consultation format.

2015

**March, 3** - Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launches a last-ditch effort to stop the Iran nuclear deal by delivering a speech before the US Congress.

**July, 14** - Iran and the six world powers sign the nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

**July, 20** - The UN Security Council unanimously adopts a resolution endorsing the JCPOA and lifting sanctions on Iran.

**December 28** - Iran announces the shipment of 8.5 tonnes of low-enriched uranium to Russia. In return, it receives 140 tonnes of uranium concentrate.

2016

**January, 15** - Iranian authorities report pouring concrete over the core of the heavy water reactor at Arak, as required by the JCPOA.

**January, 16** - International sanctions against Iran were lifted after the statement of the IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano that Tehran has complied with its side of the JCPOA agreement.

**November, 9** - Donald Trump wins the US presidential election. In his campaign, he calls the JCPOA the worst deal in history and promises to withdraw from it or renegotiate its terms.

**December, 1** - The US Congress decides to extend the Iran sanctions law for a ten-year period.

# RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

## 2017-2021. The U.S. Unravels the Deal

2017

**May, 19** - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is elected for a second term.

**October, 17** - Trump announced his decision to disavow the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, saying Tehran is not living up to the spirit of the accord.

2018

**January, 4** - US announces sanctions against five Iranian companies allegedly involved in developments on Iran's ballistic missile program.

**March** - Trump fires Secretary of State Rex Tillerson over disagreement over JCPOA and appoints militarist advocate John Bolton as national security adviser.

**May, 8** - Trump announces US withdrawal from the JCPOA.

**June** - Iran announced to the IAEA that it was resuming uranium enrichment, increasing its capacity to produce UF<sub>6</sub> and launching production of enrichment centrifuges. Iran also threatened to return to enriching uranium to 20% if European countries rejected the JCPOA.

**August, 7** - US President Donald Trump imposed the first round of sanctions against Iran, targeted aviation and auto industry, as well as Iranian currency and some other Iranian products.

**November, 5** - The second round of US sanctions against Iran. The sanctions list included over 700 individuals and entities in the oil, banking and transport sectors. The US refused to purchase oil from Iran.

The US removed from sanctions the Bushehr nuclear power plant, where Russia is building a second unit.

2019

**March** - US expands list of sanctioned companies, recognises Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as terrorist organisation.

**June, 20** - Trump approved a strike on Iran in response to a downed US drone, but reversed the decision at the last minute.

**December, 31** - The US accused Iran of attacking the US embassy in Iraq after the US struck three Hezbollah sites.

2020

**January, 3** - Major General Qasem Suleimani, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) elite al-Quds unit, is killed



in Baghdad in US strikes.

The US embassy has advised Americans to leave Iraq.

The U.S. began moving more than 4,000 troops to the Middle East.

**January, 5** - Iraq's parliament demanded the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

**January, 8** - An American airbase in Iraq came under fire from Iran.

**January, 14** - The euro-troika launches a snapback as part of a dispute resolution mechanism on the JCPOA and UNSCR 2231.

**January, 31** - US Treasury Department imposes sanctions on Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation.

**July** - An explosion and fire at the Natanz nuclear facility, for which Israel is blamed. There were also allegedly explosions at sites near Tehran.

**August, 6** - Elliot Abrams is appointed U.S. Special Representative for Iran.

**August, 14** - UN SC vote on the US resolution to extend arms embargo against Iran. Results: two votes against (Russia and China), 11 UN SC members abstained, and only the US and the Dominican Republic supported the resolution.

On the same day, Putin proposed an online summit on the problems of implementing the JCPOA, but his proposal was not supported by the US.

**August, 20** - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo wrote to the UN Security Council to initiate a dispute resolution mechanism under Resolution 2231 (in the absence of a decision to the contrary, sanctions against Iran were to be renewed after 30 days).

**September, 1** - Joint JCPOA Commission meeting in Vienna, initiated by Russia, to discuss legality of launching a US snapback mechanism.

**September, 19-21** - US threats to those who would lift sanctions against Iran and not support snapback.

**October, 18** - Arms embargo against Iran under JCPOA expires.

**November, 27** - Assassination of Iranian nuclear physicist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

**November, 28** - Iran blames Israel for the assassination.

**December, 1** - The Iran's Parliament approves the draft 'Strategic Measures to Remove Sanctions', which includes abandoning the IAEA Additional Protocol as well as increasing uranium enrichment levels.

**December, 9** - Iran's president reiterated that a return to the orig-



# RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

inal JCPOA was possible without any negotiations.

**December, 16** - Online meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission and discussion of ways to revive the nuclear deal.

2021

**January 5** - Iran has enriched uranium to 20% at the Fordow nuclear facility.

**February 18** - The United States has notified the United Nations that it is withdrawing a request from the administration of former President Donald Trump to renew sanctions against Iran.

**February 21** - The Biden administration announced its readiness to negotiate with Iran.

**February 22** - The IAEA and Iran have agreed to continue verification activities.

**February 23** Iran suspends the implementation of the Additional Protocol.

**March 5** Biden extended the sanctions regime against Iran for a year: restrictions are extended until March 15, 2022.

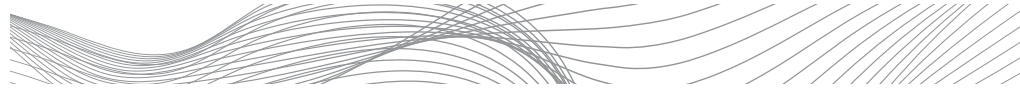
**March 9** Iran has started enriching uranium using new-generation IR-2M centrifuges.

**April 2** Meeting of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Commission

**April 11** In the Iranian city of Natanz, an accident occurred in the distribution grid at the Shahid Ahmadi Roshan nuclear facility.

**April 13** The Iranian Foreign Ministry announced the start of uranium enrichment to 60% from April 14. At the same time, Tehran plans to install 1 thousand new centrifuges. Iran called the enrichment of uranium to 60% in response to Israel's actions.

**May 24** Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have agreed to extend the temporary technical agreement on monitoring at the country's nuclear facilities until June 24.



*Security Index* Occasional Paper Series  
Global Edition

№8 (23), 2021

Russian-U.S. dialogue on the Iranian nuclear  
program: lessons learned and ignored

Editor-in-Chief: Vladimir Orlov

Editor: Egor Chobanian

Design and DTP: Egor Chobanian

The cover of this report uses elements of  
Albrech Dürer's Rhinoceros woodcut

The *Security Index* journal logo:  
© Vladimir Orlov

Editorial work on this issue  
was completed on June 22, 2021

© PIR Press, 2021



# RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

## SECURITY INDEX

*Security Index* Occasional Paper Series Global Edition - reports, analytical articles, comments and interviews that reflect the positions of Russian and foreign experts on the current challenges to global security and Russia's policy in this area. The aim of the series is to provide a clear analysis of international security problems and to offer specific and realistic solutions for them. The series replaced the *Security Index* journal published by PIR Center in 1994-2016. The authors and editors of the series welcome comments, questions and suggestions, which readers can email [inform@pircenter.org](mailto:inform@pircenter.org)

## RUSSIA AND NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION

This occasional paper was made within the framework of the project «Iran's Nuclear Program and Russia's Interests», which is part of the program «Russia and Nuclear Nonproliferation». In this project, the PIR Center monitors developments around the Iranian nuclear program and the JCPOA, preparing news digests, relevant expert materials and recommendations.