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CHANGES IN US POLICY ON THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

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The Iran Nuclear Deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is a political agreement concluded in Vienna on July 14, 2015 between the Islamic Republic of Iran on the one side and «the six» of negotiators (the United States, Russia, China, France, Great Britain and Germany) on the other. According to deal, «the six» offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for agreeing to limit its nuclear program [1].

But even after the conclusion, the agreement remained the subject of sharp disputes and caused fierce criticism. The US withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 provoked a new round of international conflict related to the Iranian nuclear program, and coming to power of the new US presidential administration in early 2021, on the contrary, for a number of reasons, allows us to hope for the return of the parties to the terms of the deal.

The purpose of the work is to analyse the changes in American policy towards the JCPOA, as well as the prospects for the full resumption of the treaty.

Though some say a good agreement is one with which no party is entirely happy, in this case the reality was different: President Obama was very pleased with the deal. It was considered one of the main foreign policy achievements of Barack Obama's presidency. Indeed, Obama has repeatedly defended the need for an Iranian nuclear deal. For the remaining time of his presidency he actively advocated the preservation of the agreement [2].

Democratic party frontrunner for presidential election in 2016 Hillary Clinton was also in favour of the treaty. Though maintaining her distrust for Iranian regime she said the deal «blocks every pathway for Iran to get a bomb» and that it was «unrealistic» to get a better deal, as some opponents claimed was possible [3]. Taking into account opinion polls before 2016 Election may suppose that the President was quite sure that his legacy will stay untouched.

But everything has changed when Donald Trump had suddenly won the presidency in 2016. His approach to the deal was completely different. During his campaign Donald Trump called the Iran nuclear deal «terrible», saying in an interview that Obama negotiated the agreement «from desperation». In 8th March 2018 Donald Trump announced US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran. Calling it «decaying and rotten», he said the deal was «an embarrassment» to him «as a citizen». After announcing the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA, President Trump ordered the Department of Treasury to re-impose sanctions on Iran related to its nuclear program. The overwhelming majority of these sanctions were «secondary sanctions» to prevent non-US companies and individuals from doing business with Iran [4].

Joseph Biden was a Vice President when the deal was completed, that's why he was involved in concluding of JCPOA and strongly supported the agreement. He called President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal «a profound mistake» [5].

Biden being the Democratic Party nominee, has stated that as president he will re-enter the nuclear deal and try to defuse tension with Iran. However, there are signs that not only difference between US and Iran will resurface but change in US policy will be limited, experts claimed. US is under tremendous pressure from its allies in the region (such as Saudi Arabia and Israel), not only to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions, but curb its regional influence – a proposition that Tehran has refused to even consider [6].

In mid-November Biden promised to move quickly to re-join the nuclear deal with Iran so long as Iran also comes back into compliance. But experts are sceptical: Iran, where President Hassan Rouhani faces strong opposition from conservatives in elections set for June 2021, is expected to demand a high price to return to the deal, including the immediate lifting of the punishing sanctions imposed by the Trump administration and billions of dollars in compensation for them. Those are demands that Mr. Biden is highly unlikely to meet [7].

Another interesting fact: Biden's running mate Kamala Harris opposed the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. But then like many Democrats, publicly supported re-entering the Iran Deal after Trump jettisoned it (though she has repeatedly said she'd like to «strengthen» the deal further) [8]. So this point could also raise a divisive point in presidential tandem.

As of February 2021 Iranians announced they are not willing to attend EU-brokered talks with the US over the future of the Iran nuclear deal because Washington has not done enough to lift sanctions against Tehran. This clearly shows that window of opportunity for reviving the deal is quite narrow and it will take a lot of diplomatic effort to reach an agreement. Recently US proposed to attend international talks on the agreement in April. Although no direct talks between officials from Washington and Tehran are anticipated the US seems ready to tone down the rhetoric. But the future of the deal still remains unclear.

In conclusion, a nuclear-armed Iran is considered in Washington as an unacceptable threat to America and its allies by both US parties.

On contrary with Obama's peaceful negotiation approach, Donald Trump chose a bellicose, chaotic, go-it-alone strategy toward Iran. Maybe, the Iran deal was not perfect, but it was successful in freezing Iran's nuclear program and provided the foundation to address the country's other malign activities. However, now the deal is on the brink of its death.

Though Biden many times pledged to re-enter the treaty, it doesn't seem so easy to be done. Anti-Iranian block allied with US, stricter requirements by Tehran, controversies in the White House – all this will make process of reviving JCPOA very difficult and seems to be even harder than the signing of the agreement was.

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