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SANCTIONING INTO DEFIANCE? THE USE OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF IRANIAN NUCLEAR CRISIS

Dominika Kaščáková – Marek Vallo*

Abstract

The use of economic sanctions has become increasingly popular and used tool of statecraft in the 21st Century. Most prominently, they have been applied to address prolonged nuclear crises in Iran and North Korea, albeit with a mixed track of results. The use of sanctions, however, has been quite inconsistent throughout its application, raising thus several important questions as to their efficacy, as well as real intent behind their employment. This contribution enquires into the dynamics of application of the sanctions regime imposed by the United States and its allies against Tehran in the context of the development of its nuclear program, allegedly aimed at acquiring nuclear weapons. From the historical perspective we examine mutual perceptions of US and Iranian intentions vis-à-vis each other, focusing on the supposed and actual goals of US-imposed sanctions regime.

Key words: economic sanctions, coercion, Iranian nuclear crisis, Iran, the United States

Coercive Diplomacy and Economic Sanctions

Conceptually, economic sanctions are a tool of coercive diplomacy, which may be defined as “any efforts by one international actor to get another international actor to act in a way that the second international actor would not otherwise choose to act.” (Feaver, Lorber, 2010, p. 9) Coercive diplomacy has two core characteristics: first, it is meant to change objectionable target’s behavior, and second, it does so by threatening pain (including the threat of limited force, but not requiring its actual use). (Feaver, Lorber, 2010) Coercion, essentially, is conceived as an alternative to the use of military force and, as **Thomas Schelling** pointed out, it differs from the brute force for it does not aim at destroying the adversary, but rather at compelling him to adjust his behavior.

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(Schelling, 1966) It is premised on strategic importance of pain and damage, carefully calibrated and imposed in limited and incremental amounts to achieve compliance of the target (Art, Cronin, 2003; Schelling, 1966) and, as opposed to deterrence, is a strategic response to encroachments by adversaries (George, 1997; Levy, 2008). Use of economic sanctions has become the most important tool of coercion short of military force. Despite their increasing usage and popularity in contemporary era, however, they remain to be not only controversial, but also contested tool for their mixed record of success and inconsistent application.

There are essentially three approaches to the use of sanctions. First line of scholarship considers sanctions to be unworkable instruments of statecraft; second line believes them to have rather symbolic than instrumental value; and, finally, “sanctions can work” line of thinking, espousing view that sanctions may be effective and instrumental if applied appropriately.¹ “Sanctions don’t work” approach draws on **Johann Galtung’s** study of UN-mandated sanctions against Rhodesia in 1965, in which he concluded that “the probable effectiveness of economic sanctions is, generally, negative”, because it tends to produce rather integrative function internally, known as the “rally round the flag effect”. (Galtung, 1967, p. 409) Contrary to expected and desired effects, therefore, economic sanctions may strengthen the leadership of the target state backed by the population, causing it less likely to compromise and surrender to pressure.² Despite being skeptical about the instrumental value of sanctions, **Galtung** acknowledged their symbolic value, for the capacity to “express morality [sic] as a clear signal to everyone that what the receiving nation has done is disapproved of” (Galtung, 1967, pp. 411-412) when use of the military force is not plausible and doing nothing is unacceptable. In their symbolic capacity, sanctions may convey international or domestic symbolism. Whereby the first dimension concerns the international audience and is associated mainly with the normative duties of great-powerhood, the domestic dimension is often used to placate relevant domestic constituencies and their expectations. (Taylor, 2010) Finally, the “sanctions can work” approach challenges the dominant “sanctions don’t work” body of scholarship by developing the concept of

¹ For coherent and concise summary of the respective schools see Taylor, 2010, pp. 17-24.

² Galtung individuates further shortcomings to the use of sanctions, such as difficulties associated with obtaining their universal application, capacity of the target state to circumvent sanctions by diversifying its trading partners and economy, relying on the black market or third-party suppliers for imports of certain goods or strive for autarky. For details see Galtung, 1967.

targeted or “smart” sanctions as opposed to comprehensive sanctions and their possible negative effects as described by **Galtung** and others. The concept of smart sanctions has been developed as a response to the shortcomings of comprehensive sanctions, their perceived ineffectiveness and negative humanitarian fallout they had on civilian populations in target countries. Most notable case was Iraq during 1990s, when near-total trade embargo imposed by UN resolutions and lasting for almost thirteen years had devastating effects on economy and the entire population, causing hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths, mainly among children population. Regardless of their supposed failure or effectiveness³, sanctions against Iraq and the ensuing humanitarian crisis following their imposition prompted the United States to craft sanctions that would entail lesser costs to civilian populations while increasing their impact and coercive potential towards political elites. According to the “smart sanctions” proponents, this targeted approach may be instrumentally effective, because it applies “maximum pressure on the culpable actors while at the same time minimizing the adverse humanitarian impacts.” (Tostensen, Bull, 2002, p. 380)

Sanctioning Iran

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979 the United States confronted Iranian regime, most prominently by imposing economic sanctions against Tehran for its support for terrorism⁴ and development of – according to official Iranian statements – nuclear energy program suspected to be a disguise for the nuclear weapons program. Administrations from **Jimmy Carter** to **Barack Obama** have pressed Tehran with mainly unilaterally imposed sanctions, occasionally followed by multilateral sanctions imposed through the UN or by the European Union. However, these sanctions have been considerably weaker than the measures sought by Washington, and considered by the US administrations largely ineffective per se or ineffectively implemented. Given the special

³ Although sanctions imposed against Iraq have been largely viewed as either weak and unable to coerce **Saddam’s** regime to give up its nuclear weapons program or, given their enormous impact on the civilians, as a humanitarian catastrophe, provoking an outcry of the international community, some authors contend that they have been, in fact, quite effective in forcing Iraq to make significant concession on disarmament. For the argument see Lopez and Cortright, *Containing Iraq: Sanctions Worked*, 2004.

⁴ For the purpose of this article the term “support for terrorism” is used to describe Iranian actions in support of organizations considered terrorist by the United States.

importance of Iran and its alleged nuclear weapons program and the centrality of this theme for the US foreign policy in the Middle East it is no surprise that Washington took lead in the effort to coerce Iran to change what it considered to be a defiant international behavior.

In order to place current tense relations between United States and Iran into certain historic perspective, it is worth noting brief development of their mutual relations. History of interactions between Iran and United States can be described as relatively short but intense. Prior to the Second World War relations between these two countries were practically non-existent. This situation has changed in the early 1950s as a result of two phenomena occurring in international politics at that time. The first one was the gradual replacement of British influence in the Greater Middle East with the influence of the United States, and the second one was the rise of nationalism in this region, which in Iran was represented by Prime Minister **Mohammad Mossadegh**. In 1953 the United States has orchestrated *coup d'état* that deposed **Mossadegh** and instated the staunch supporter of the United States, Shah **Mohammad Pahlavi** in the position of increasingly autocratic ruler⁵. Bearing in mind this radical beginning of the relationship between United States and Iran is particularly important as it had direct influence on the later hostage crisis (which in turn defined the beginning of relations between United States and the Islamic Republic) and the precedent of regime change orchestrated by the United States still remains one of crucial factors influencing Iranian perception of the United States.

Placing the power in the hands of the Shah marked the beginning of a close U.S. – Iran alignment in the anti-Soviet alliance and has provided the United States with strategic ally in the region for two and a half decades. It also initiated the “modernization” of the country along the Western, or more precisely, American lines. During the **Nixon** Administration the military capabilities of Iran undertook a major buildup, as **Nixon** under the effects of the Vietnam War preferred regional allies to take more active security role. This period is particularly interesting with regards to current dispute centered on Iranian nuclear program. The nuclear program has started in late 1950s with strong support from the United States. However, unlike in later years at that period the question whether the purpose of the program is purely civilian or it has military dimension as well was not seriously considered (Linzer, 2005).

⁵ For detailed account of the 1953 coup codenamed Operation Ajax see Kinzer, 2008.

The Islamic revolution of 1979 has brought a radical change not only to Iranian domestic system but also to relationship between Iran and its former strategic partner, the United States. The ascendancy of the clerical regime that took power rode the wave of ferocious anti-Americanism, and the Iranian leaders stuck to this sentiment as a principle of their rule. Moreover, Iran vowed to export its revolution, thus arousing fear of destabilization in the neighboring countries, and precipitating the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine that explicitly provided the security guarantees of the United States to the Arab Gulf States. Despite this explicit U.S. commitment, Iran undertook a series of actions to spread the Islamic revolution and gain strategic advantages for the regime, using various “terrorist proxies” (most notably the Lebanese Hezbollah) as an extension to its foreign policy. Massive US support to Shah has been thus quickly replaced by growing sanctions imposed against the Islamic Republic. The first sanctions had the form of freezing of Iranian assets in the amount of \$12 billion and they have been a direct response to the 1979 hostage crisis.

During the 1980s decade sanctions against Iran focused on two dimensions: Tehran’s support for terrorist groups and activities,⁶ and the war between Iran and Iraq. Consequently, they have been mostly centered on prohibition of arms sales to Iran. Just as a hostage crisis is well remembered in Washington, America’s leaning on the Iraqi side in the Iran–Iraq war is well remembered in Tehran. During this conflict Washington stood clearly on the side of Iraq, providing it with intelligence on the stationing and movement of the Iranian troops, denying U.S. military shipments to Iran⁷, and even overlooking the use of chemical weapons by the **Saddam Hussein’s** regime against Iran. As a result, “Iranians viewed the indirect American support provided to Iraq

⁶ Iran has been placed on the US State Department’s “state sponsors of terrorism” list and has not been removed ever since. Terrorism-related sanction enacted during 1980s included, for instance, ban on most forms of economic assistance whether provided by the United States or through the international financial institutions, export of arms-related and dual-use items. In 1987 Reagan’s Administration banned all US imports from Iran.

⁷ With an important exception of the Iran-Contras affair that almost brought down the **Reagan’s** presidency. In 1985-1986 the **Reagan’s** National Security Council undertook a covert operation against the official policy line to deny the shipments of arms to Iran. Iran was in desperate need of spare parts and other military equipment, since all its military capabilities were of U.S. origin. National Security Advisor **Robert MacFarlane** and NCS aide **Oliver North** wanted to use this Iran’s need to obtain its help in releasing of American hostages in Lebanon. Moreover, the funds from the covert sales would then be used to circumvent congressional restrictions on U.S. assistance to the Contra guerillas in Nicaragua, trying to overthrow a pro-Soviet Sandinista regime.

during the eight-year war as evidence of Washington's implacable hostility toward the Tehran regime." (Litwak, 2002, p. 163)

At the beginning of 1990s the United States started to focus more attention on the problem of Iran's nuclear program and its supposed pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. Then Director of the CIA **Robert Gates** told a congressional committee in March 1992 that Iran could develop nuclear weapons by 2000. Accordingly, sanctions have been strongly expanded under the Clinton Administration, which assumed an even tougher line on Iran when it started to be referred to as an "international outlaw" by Secretary of State **Warren Christopher**, and in 1994 put into "backlash states" category by National Security Advisor **Anthony Lake**. The following year the United States broadened the limited trade ban on Iran and introduced a complete ban on the American trade and investment with Iran, including purchases of Iranian oil by American companies. (Purdum, 1995) In 1995 President **Clinton** prohibited any trade with Iran.⁸ **Clinton's** sanctions have culminated in 1996 with signing into force of the controversial Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), constituting an extraterritorial application of US law in the form of penalties on foreign firms investing more than \$20 million in Iran's oil and gas industry. Rather than provoking change in Tehran, ILSA provoked an outcry from US European allies, issuing an official demarche to the Clinton Administration upon its enactment.⁹ In this period also a new element on the U.S. political scene surfaced. Previously all administrations tried to deal with what they regarded to be manifestations of Iranian's regime hostile and unlawful behavior; now some Republican Congressmen started to argue that the regime itself was the problem.

When after death of **Khomeini**, who was an opponent of nuclear weapons, Iran resumed endeavors in nuclear program, the United States were initially left with few options how to expand their sanctions regime against Tehran in response to its nuclear activities. In addition to the above mentioned unilateral measures the United States tried to persuade its allies and partners to tighten

⁸ The prohibition of sales of goods from the United States remains particularly significant to Iranian airlines which have been prevented from acquiring spare parts and this situation has resulted extremely bad record of accidents.

⁹ The demarche stated that "the EU does not believe that the Iran/Libya Act is either an appropriate or an effective means of combating international terrorism. We also told the US administration of our intention to defend our rights and interests if these are jeopardized by the Act and that we reserve the right to challenge it or any measures taken under it in the appropriate international fora."

the international sanctions regime, resulting in several UN resolutions and their subsequent European “gold-plating”. These measures, however, turned to be rather disappointing for Washington, and from approximately mid-2005 onwards the United States decided to proceed with further unilateral, but this time much more targeted sanctions that “sought to deny Iran’s access to the international business sector by exploiting the advantages deriving from America’s position as the world’s leading financial centre.” (Taylor, 2010, p. 68) This new approach focused specifically on two types of targets: (1) Iranian entities and individuals connected with Iran’s nuclear and/or ballistic missile programs, and those involved in terrorist-related activities; and (2) foreign companies, especially banks, helping Iran to circumvent already imposed sanctions by financing exports or processing dollar transactions. (Taylor, 2010) In 2010 Congress passed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, which in fact represents extension of Iran Sanctions Act of 1996.¹⁰ The latest sanctions were signed into force on December 31, 2011, as a part of US National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, which in Section 1245 imposes further sanctions against Iran’s financial sector.

Albeit the vast majority of sanctions are imposed unilaterally by the United States, other major powers are increasingly inclined to use sanctions against Tehran as well. Most importantly, on 23rd of January 2012 representatives of the EU have joined the mounting pressure on Tehran by agreeing to ban all imports of petroleum products from Iran. This ban represents the major and by far most sweeping action taken by the EU in the context of Iranian nuclear crisis, and is scheduled to come into force in July 2012.

Despite the fact that the complex sanctions regime is in place against Tehran upheld by various UN resolution, vigorously advocated and prompted by the United States and its allies (mostly the EU, but also Japan) and to a certain degree supported also by Russia and China, more than three decades of imposing sanctions against the Islamic Republic the international community has failed to achieve what it sought and expected. The overwhelming strength of the “coercers” compared to relative weakness and isolation of the target – Iran, leads us to question what the underlying motives of apparent failure of

¹⁰ Previously ILSA targeted both Iran and Libya, on September 30, 2006 the Act has been changed into Iran Sanctions Act following lifting of sanctions on Libya due to its improved international behavior. The 2010 legislation increased financial penalties to be imposed against companies engaging in business with Iran, but also increased liability of parent US companies for their subsidiaries.

sanctions against Tehran are, or, more accurately, to enquire in what precise dimensions they have been or have been not successful in their crafting and implementation.

As we have already suggested, coercive diplomacy represents a “forceful persuasion”, (George, 1991) “the attempt to get a target – a state, a group (or groups) within a state, or a non-state actor – to change its objectionable behavior through either the threat to use force or the actual use of limited force.” (Art, 2003, p. 163) Coercive diplomacy, including economic sanctions, is essentially an instrument of compellence and differs from the concept of deterrence by what it actually seeks to accomplish. **Thomas Schelling**, who coined the term compellence to distinguish it from the concept of deterrence which is “intended to keep [an adversary] from starting something”, understood it as a course of action “intended to make an adversary to do something”. Coercive diplomacy as a form of compellence tries not to deter an opponent, i.e. to make him abstain from some activities or behavior, but rather to compel him to act in a certain manner.¹¹ As **Alexander George** pointed out, “the general idea of coercive diplomacy is to back one’s demand on an adversary with a threat of punishment for non-compliance that he will consider credible and potent enough to persuade him to comply with the demand”, or, in other words, “to create in the opponent the expectation of costs of sufficient magnitude to erode his motivation to continue what he is doing.” (George, 1991, p.4, 11) The change in behavior sought by compellence, as **Robert J. Art** notes, may come in two forms: either the target develops a pattern of behavior which is not currently manifesting or starts doing something it is not or it stops doing something it is now doing. (Art, 2003)

In order to function, coercive diplomacy has to be tailored with three elements in mind: (1) a demand; (2) a threat; and finally (3) time pressure. (George, 1997, p. 7)

First and most importantly, a demand has to be formulated vis-à-vis adversary so as it is clearly understandable by the opponent. Unambiguously formulated demand, however, does not have to necessarily translate into correct evaluation of the stakes for both target and coercer, for the value that

¹¹ In this regard **Schelling** argues that compellence is harder to pull out than deterrence, for it is more difficult to bring about visible changes in behavior of the target, especially if the stakes involved are high, than to keep his behavior unchanged and stable, which is the primary goal of deterrence. See Schelling, 1966.

respective actors ascribe to them may be subject to misunderstanding and miscalculation. Success of the coercive effort does not lie only in the demand sought, but also in calculating how likely is it to be successful, i.e. being able to assess the value that the adversary on one hand ascribes to the value/thing that would be compromised by a successful coercion, and on the other how what is the value for the coercer and how far is he willing and able to push with coercive effort.

Second, demand is to be accompanied by a credible threat. As **George** and **Art** suggest, compellence may be induced essentially in three forms: (1) diplomatic use, denoting threats of the use of force if demands are not met; (2) demonstrative use, entailing demonstrative and limited uses of force; and finally (3) full-scale use, or war, which denoted using all necessary means to induce target to acquiesce to the demands. (George, 1991; Art, 2003) Last form, albeit being a form of coercion, by definition does not fall into the category of coercive diplomacy whose main purpose it to achieve given set of demands by other means than full-scale war.

Finally, time pressure on the target is required in order to make the threat credible. As **Peter Jakobsen** notes, "opponents will simply not perceive a threat of force as credible unless it is accompanied by a deadline for compliance."¹² (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 29)

As **Robert P. Pape** argues, there are three broad forms of coercion: denial, punishment and risk fashion. (Pape, 1996) Denial strategies are essentially designed to thwart opponent's military strategy, prevent him from achieving his political objectives by military strategy and thus change his behavior. Punishment strategies seek to change the behavior of the target by raising the costs of its continued defiance, inflicting pain on either the population or specific and strategic assets of the adversary. Change in behavior, therefore, comes as a result of costs to the population becoming too high to sustain further pressure. Third, risk strategy seeks change in behavior by raising the probability of further and greater punishment in the future if target fails or refuses to comply with demands put forth by the coercer. (Pape, 1996, pp. 18-19) Building on the works of **George**, **Art** and **Pape**, **Feaver** and **Lorber** sum up that in researching

¹² George in his book on coercive diplomacy identifies four categories of time pressure: (1) explicit (setting a deadline); (2) a tacit ultimatum (stressing the sense of urgency); (3) a "gradual turning-on-the-screws" approach; and (4) a try-and-see approach (without outlining further steps or threatening with escalation). (George, 1991)

the effectiveness of coercion on the sender – target level the sanctions scholars focus mainly on three key points: (1) the demands or the stakes involved in the dispute; (2) the clarity and perception of the signal communicated by the coercion effort; and (3) the pain tolerance and mitigation strategies available to participants.¹³ (Feaver, Lorber, 2010, p. 10) To the evaluation of these three key points we shall now turn in the context of Iranian nuclear crisis and related sanctions regime and explore them from the US as well as Iranian perspective.

The US Perspective

What sometimes goes unnoticed in all the above-mentioned forms of coercion is precisely the demands side of the effort, i.e. clear communication of the desired end-state sought by coercion to its target. Achieving successful compellence is indeed problematic due to various factors, even more so when efforts at compellence are combined with poor articulation or outright indecision regarding the change in behavior sought and demands to be met and, consequently, lack of clarity of the signal sent to the target. Indeed, as the history of U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic demonstrates, identifying or indeed formulating demands that are to be achieved by coercion and met by the target is not always as straightforward as one might expect it to be. As evidenced by the short historic account of U.S. sanctions against Iran in the preceding section of the paper, the United States sanctions regime against Tehran has started off as a response to Iranian hostage crisis in 1979 with a clear demand of releasing U.S. nationals held by Iranian students at U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Eventually, after unsuccessful rescue mission and lengthy bargaining Iran complied in 1981 and released all hostages held at the U.S. Embassy. Lifting of the sanctions, however, did not occur; quite to the contrary. The sanctions regime has been progressively tightened, with relinquishing Iranian support for terrorism, most notably for the Lebanese Hezbollah being

¹³ It is important to note that in the sanctions debate not only sender-target level of relations is important. Increasingly attention is being paid also to the sender-sender level and its strategic importance, i.e. imposing, implementing or easing of economic sanctions against a target as a part of broader strategy or “bargaining chip” between major powers. **Taylor** suggests that, in fact, economic sanctions are more of a tool of foreign policy and “grand strategy” of major powers than effective way of coercing the target. In fact, Iran is a notable case on which this sender-sender level of interaction mainly between the United States, Russian Federation and China may be illustrated. It is, however, beyond the scope of this article to examine the argument in detail. For more information see Taylor, 2010.

the only publicly communicated request from all U.S. administrations.

Rationale behind U.S. sanctions against Tehran has been questionable for the most time they have been employed. As a result, sanctions remained unilateral to a great extent. Notably, the United States continue to be the only state of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council applying constant pressure and sanctions against Tehran (Taylor, 2010) since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Constantly changing and adjusting U.S. demands leave lingering the question what is the real goal of the United States pursued by the sanctions regime. Officially, the sanctions regime imposed against Tehran is aimed at altering its nuclear policies, comprising the disclosure of all facilities and research initiatives undertaken in the realm of nuclear program. With this rather general, although far-reaching and paramount demand, however, the essential problem of US approach to solving Iranian nuclear crisis persists; it continues to lack precisely formulated demands and, at the same time, it does not make clear and explicit the threat if the demands are not met. Despite the fact that compelling Iran to alter its nuclear policies is extremely difficult task to accomplish, these problems are not insurmountable per se.¹⁴ In fact, it is plausible to say that if the nuclear program was the only stake involved, the resolution of the crisis would not be as lengthy and complicated, and the bargain accommodating demands of both sides would be much easier to strike. However, the US stakes in the dispute definitely go beyond the mere – albeit important – demand to alter Tehran’s nuclear policies, which, in fact, translates into abandonment of indigenous Iranian nuclear program. Generally, the US stakes in the Iranian nuclear crisis may be perceived at two levels: regional and global.¹⁵

As for the regional level, the apparent lack of clearly stated objectives, inability to win broad international support and hesitation to make adequate

¹⁴ Supporting this hypothesis are US reactions to Iranian offers for negotiations and willingness to make a deal on the nuclear issue. Most prominent examples include the Iranian offer sent to **George W. Bush** via Swiss embassy, but more importantly and recently (in 2010) Brazil – Turkey brokered deal in which Iran consented to US demands only to be swiftly rejected and followed by next round of sanctions proposed in the UN Security Council.

¹⁵ Possible domestic fallouts are also important in the case of the United States, not only due to the influence of (according to some analysis overestimated) Israeli lobby, but foremost because of the decade-long depicting of Iranian regime as inherently hostile to the United States, un-deterrable, and, in fact, irrational. Given the historical experience enshrined in the US political culture, striking deal with Ayatollahs’ would amount to “appeasement” and “sacrificing” everything that “the United States stand for”.

concessions or lift sanctions once the set demands have been met by Iranians lead to an assumption that the objective of sanctions, at already during the period following the Islamic revolution in 1979 until 2002, when Iranian nuclear program started to figure prominently on Washington's radar, was to punish Iran for upsetting the regional balance of power, challenging regional status quo and, most importantly, attempt to restrain or limit the dominance and power projection of the United States in the Middle East. These reasons, essentially, have not changed ever since, only got further complicated by the problematic involvement of the United States in the region following the **George W. Bush's** declaration of the "war on terrorism" in 2001, and ensuing military campaign in Afghanistan and 2003 war in Iraq.

Power projection and maintaining the dominance in the region remains a key objective of the United States virtually ever since the proclamation of the Carter Doctrine, declaring Persian Gulf to be a "vital interest" of the United States to be protected by the military force if necessary.¹⁶ Furthermore, as the actual US Ministry of Defense Strategic Guidance "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century" issued in January 2012 states, the United States will "preserve our ability to conduct the missions we judge the most important to protecting core national interests: [sic] deterring and defeating aggression by adversaries, including those seeking to deny our power

¹⁶ The Carter Doctrine explicitly states that „The region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan is of great strategic importance: It contains more than two-thirds of the world's exportable oil. The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil. This situation demands careful thought, steady nerves, and resolute action, not only for this year but for many years to come. It demands collective efforts to meet this new threat to security in the Persian Gulf and in Southwest Asia. It demands the participation of all those who rely on oil from the Middle East and who are concerned with global peace and stability. And it demands consultation and close cooperation with countries in the area which might be threatened. Meeting this challenge will take national will, diplomatic and political wisdom, economic sacrifice, and, of course, military capability. We must call on the best that is in us to preserve the security of this crucial region. Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” Albeit the wording of Carter Doctrine has been directed specifically against the outside threat to the Persian Gulf region, i.e. against the encroachments of the Soviet Union, the approach it outlined holds in case of Iran as well. Recent threats to close the Strait of Hormuz made by the Islamic Republic in the event that Washington presses for further sanctions, are the case in point.

projection.” (Sustaining US Global Leadership..., 2012) In the light of its previous and also recent actions Iran, clearly, is that kind of adversary, and does not seem to be inclined to bow to Washington’s wishes without reasonable *quid pro quo*.

As **George Friedman** notes, “since the decline of British power after World War II, the United States has been the guarantor of the Arabian Peninsula’s elites and therefore of the flow of oil from the region.” Nowadays, however, there is a shift in the balance of power to be observed, with “the United States growing weaker and less predictable in the region and Iran becoming stronger.” (Friedman, 2012, pp. 1-2) Compounded by the events of Arab Spring as well as continuing ‘Arab Winter’ in Syria, the rulers of Persian Gulf have to get used to the new realities both regionally and domestically, and Iran is bound to figure prominently in their calculations. Three main reasons account for that: rise of the Shia’ political assertiveness as well as influence in the region following the Arab Spring in general. Secondly, it is the situation in Syria and the not-so-smooth anticipated fall of **Bashar al Assad** regime. In response to events in Syria, West together with other Arab countries continue to isolate and ostracize **Assad’s** regime, leaving it with no other option than to rely ever more on its long-term regional ally – Iran, further enhancing its dependency on Tehran and allowing it to strengthen its sphere of influence. Third, and most importantly, it is Tehran’s ever deepening relations with Bagdad.

Iraq represents a specific reason for its enormous importance for both the United States and Iran. Close connection and cooperation between Iran and Iraq is unprecedented development when we take into consideration recent history and bloody war between these two countries, and offers many economic opportunities to both countries, obviously favoring Iran. More importantly, however, it highlights two problems related to US presence in the region and the security guarantees it offers to the rulers of Arab countries in the Persian Gulf. Gaining a dominant influence in Iraq would considerably expand Iranian sphere of influence, (Friedman, 2012) making Iran even more likely successful competitor in the contest for regional pre-eminence. Combined with its strategic position in the Strait of Hormuz and improved economic opportunities at Iraqi markets its capacity to shape the regional order would rise considerably. Furthermore, it would deal a considerable blow to the United States to find its “first Islamic democracy-to be” in the Middle East, i.e. Iraq, firmly under influence and closely cooperating with its arch-enemy in the region, i.e. Iran. It is already happening, and certainly scorned upon in Washington.

These regional stakes, moreover, may have serious repercussions at the global level as well. Despite regular claims about its “international isolation”, Iran is quite successful in fostering ties and relations with numerous members of the international community. Most notably, they do not account for “rogue” or other “isolated” regimes, but include BRIC countries, until recently EU member states, not to speak about African and Latin American countries. What many of these countries have in common is the fact that they offer different ordering principles as well as functioning guidelines in the realm of international relations. Albeit not being the only or even the most important source, Iran with its continuously and successfully defiant behavior highlights and exacerbates the problem of the United States to create, maintain, and, most importantly, enforce the rules of international behavior (what might be termed the ordering capacity of a superpower) at times when these are increasingly being called into question by chief US peer competitors, most notably Russia and China. They both offer different models of international relations order (in this regard China to much significant degree than Russia), more pragmatic and based on different set of values (not the absence of thereof, as often being claimed).

Secondly, Iranian actions, largely undertaken as a response to sanctions imposed on its oil exports, pose threat and exert mounting pressure on the petrodollar as the chief trading currency in oil business and on dollar more generally.¹⁷ In reaction to the phased ban on Iranian crude (to be fully implemented by July), Tehran announced that it will take payment from its trading partners in gold. (Iran to accept payment..., 2012) Furthermore, Reuters reported the Iranian central bank governor **Mahmoud Bahmani** as saying that “in its trade transactions with other countries, Iran does not limit itself to the U.S. dollar, and the country can pay using its own currency. [sic] If a country should so choose, it can pay in gold and we would accept that without any reservation.” (Iran to accept payment..., 2012)

As we have already pointed out, lack of clarity of the signal sent to the target regarding the threat or the costs of defiance exacerbates the issue of sanctions regime. This problem has been accentuated from 2001 onwards in

¹⁷ In 1973, US President **Richard Nixon** and **King Faisal** of Saudi Arabia agreed that the United States would provide protection to the Saudi oilfields from the Soviet Union, Iran, Iraq and other interested parties; in exchange, Saudi Arabia and by extension OPEC (by 1975) vowed to use the US dollar as the exclusive trading currency for all their oil exchanges. This strengthened the US dollar, contributed to US economic growth in the ensuing decades, and advanced US dollar to the position of the currency of choice in almost all commodities and goods on global market.

connection to the “war on terrorism” declared by the Bush Administration.

Although in his 2002 ‘Axis of Evil’ speech President **George W. Bush** indicted Iran of a ‘rogue behavior’ together with Iraq and North Korea, prior to 9/11 his administration paid relatively small attention to the Iranian issue, and some of the key figures of **Bush’s** team were even divided on how to treat the Islamic Republic.¹⁸ After 9/11 **Khatami** has openly condemned the attacks and engaged to a limited extent in US-led operations against the Taliban regime. However, fundamental restraints remained on both sides impeding an open, pragmatic and substantial cooperation: Iran’s domestic realities required careful and limited engagement since cooperation with the United State has been a highly sensitive issue, even more given the controversial context of the “war on terrorism” campaign.¹⁹ Conversely, for Washington hard-liners anything short of regime change has been rejected as unreciprocated, therefore inherently wrong unilateral concessions to Iran, reminiscent of pre-World War II appeasement of Nazi Germany. Consequently, during his two presidencies, **Bush’s** policy on Iran has become even more rigid and ideologically driven, continually shifting focus from requirement of a *change in behavior* towards *regime change* in Iran.²⁰ Bush was trying to gather international support to create an international

¹⁸ For example, Vice President **Dick Cheney** before assuming the office and while serving as chief executive of Halliburton, major multinational energy company, advocated the lifting of unilateral U.S. sanctions on Iran, banning companies from investing in Iran’s oil and gas industry. **Condoleezza Rice**, National Security Advisor in Bush’s first administration (then an advisor to presidential candidate **Bush**) in her article in Foreign Affairs showed essential distrust that later prevailed in Bush administration as to the possibility of a rapprochement with the *regime* in Tehran, stating that “**Khatami’s** election as president has given some hope of a new course [in Iran]...though there are questions about how much authority he exercises. Moreover, **Khatami’s** more moderate domestic view may not translate into more acceptable behavior abroad. All in all, changes in U.S. policy toward Iran would require changes in Iranian behavior”, because “Iran’s motivation is not to disrupt simply the development of an international system based on markets and democracy, but to replace it with an alternative: fundamentalist Islam.”

¹⁹ President **Bush’s** statements “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” has brought to the fore the ever-present bone of contention not just between the United States and Iran, but between Western and Islamic countries in general: what *is* terrorism, who *is* a terrorist, and who *defines* it. Not surprisingly, Tehran pointed to the fact that in his view both Hezbollah and Hamas (just as various other Palestinian militant groups) are not terrorists, but legitimate freedom fighters – a position steadily rejected by Washington.

²⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that after the initial belief that **Khatami**-like reformers might bring about the change in Iran from within, largely championed during the **Clinton** era, **Bush** and his team have gradually rejected this idea of a reformist political current bringing about a fundamental change, and rather favored the concept of a ‘societal change’ coming from large portions of disillusioned Iranians.

sanctions regime to isolate Iran – a terrorist regime of his Axis of Evil – that is an aberration to the principles the United States represents and stands for; a regime unable to play a positive role in the designs for peaceful and stable Middle East, envisaged by Washington. To deal with an aberration, “every option is on the table”, as President **Bush** often reminded. Despite somehow softening its rhetoric, the Obama Administration essentially follows the “every option” course set by its predecessor and continues to struggle over deciding what outcome it is actually seeking by imposing harsh sanctions against Iran; significantly limited objective of delaying the successful completion of the nuclear program, its complete abandonment by the Islamic Republic (both considered unsatisfactory and not ambitious enough by significant portions of the U.S. Congress, by some members of Obama’s Administration as well as majority of the Republicans), or is the ultimate goal the regime change, to which the imposition of the sanctions represents inevitable and convenient prequel. As the Washington’s intentions remain unclear (to a great extent due to these internal tensions and disagreements over the goals pursued), the response from Tehran logically tends to stick to the worst-case scenario, i.e. to the regime change option sought by Washington, to be most plausible, and behaves accordingly.

Iranian Perspective

As has been previously mentioned, especially in 1980s and 1990s sanctions imposed against Iran by the United States lacked clearly stated objective, which would have been a pre-requisite for any response from Iran leading to resolution of the situation. However, the prominence of the nuclear issue in the last decade seems to provide us with identifiable demands on the part of United States and therefore enables us also to examine Iranian stakes involved in the current dispute.

These stakes or demands on the Iranian side can be in general described in three areas: (1) economy, (2) security, and in the question of (3) internal popular support.

In case of Iranian stakes in the area of its economy, these are closely tied to the civilian nuclear program. Iran’s economy has been steadily on the rise in past two decades and this rise has also manifested itself in increasing energy

demand²¹. Even though Iran is a net exporter of electrical energy, it often experiences shortages of supply of electricity. The nuclear program could be an answer to increasing consumption of electrical energy. Furthermore, it is worth noting that at the moment major part of Iranian electricity productions is generated by gas-powered plants. Nuclear program could therefore not only help meet the rising energy demand, but it could also free natural gas reserves that are currently used for domestic production of electricity and enable increase in export of this energy source.

On the other hand, mounting sanctions (especially ones that target the oil exports) have a potential of seriously affecting Iran's economic development, the development which is the rationale behind the nuclear program in the first place. Therefore, in the economic area Iranian stakes are centered on ensuring improvement of its energy supply that is required for its economic growth and in the meantime avoiding or mitigating the negative impact of sanctions on its economy.

Iranian stakes in the security area stem from the extremely difficult security situation in which Iran finds itself. Even though the United States has recalled most of its troops from Iraq, Iran is still surrounded by forces that often express hostile attitude towards Iran and that are immensely superior to Iran's own military might. Greatest portion of these forces is of course constituted by United States troops in Afghanistan and the Fifth Fleet based in Bahrain. However, the Israeli military is equally important in many ways especially when we consider its repeatedly proclaimed readiness to conduct air strikes against Iran. Last part of forces potentially hostile to Iran is constituted by military of Saudi Arabia, which is inferior to military of Iran in numbers of personnel but equal or superior in the power of its air force²². Considering this disadvantageous situation, Iranian stake in the security area is its protection from direct military assault by external forces.

Acquiring such protection might have various forms. During the course of negotiations with Western powers, Iran has repeatedly expressed its interest in security guarantees from the United States in exchange for concessions on the nuclear issue. Apart from security guarantees provided by the United States it is worth noting the other potential source of protection for Iran, which could be the

²¹ According to various sources Iran's demand for electrical energy is expected to rise at rate of proximately 8 percent per year in the next decade.

²² Strength of military forces of individual states can be compared on <http://www.globalfirepower.com/>

alleged military nuclear program. Even though that such program has not been proven we can assume that failing to achieve security guarantees by diplomatic means would force Iranians to seek these guarantees in other forms, possibly in form of a deterrent provided by nuclear weapons or nuclear capabilities.

Lastly, the third aspect of Iranian stakes involved in the nuclear dispute is the matter of internal popular support. Over the past decades the nuclear program and resistance to pressure from Western powers has become a matter of national pride to significant portions of Iranian population. This is a fact which needs to be considered by every political faction in Iran and, indeed, it can be seen that all actors on Iranian political scene are quite aware of that, as despite the rising pressure of sanctions no important political force has attempted to gain support by opposing continuation of the nuclear program so far. Therefore in resolving the nuclear dispute the Iranian leadership must not only consider the economic and security aspects of any resolution of the dispute but also the impact that such resolution would have on the support for the regime by the population that largely stands behind its nuclear program and this puts important limits on concessions that can be offered by Iranian leadership.

With mounting pressure of sanctions, Iran is trying to implement strategies that would mitigate the impact of sanctions and help achieve its goals outside of relations with Western powers. In the economic area sanctions has practically severed trade between Iran and European countries. Iran has been trying to offset this disruption of trade by improving its trade relations with various countries around the world. Initially its focus was aimed at improving economic relations with countries of the Persian Gulf. These relations, however, has also suffered serious decline related to sanctions and Iran is now concentrated on expanding its trade with growing powers around the world, particularly with BRIC countries.

In the security area Iran is mainly focused on acquiring alternative sources of guarantees, which would be achieved by deeper security cooperation with Russia and China. Even though these countries are rather reluctant to agree to any binding commitments to Iran's security, the important cooperation between Russia, China and Iran in the field of security can be seen for example on the case of the United States spy drone which was recently hacked by Iranians and subsequently offered to Russians and Chinese for examination.

With regards to the security aspect of the current dispute between Iran and the United States, Iran possesses one more alternative deterrent which needs to be taken into account. Apart from posing a danger to Iran's security the

encirclement of Iran by hostile forces has also another side of the coin. This situation enables Iran to potentially disrupt the influence of the United States and its allies in the region. Iran itself has significant influence in Iraq and Afghanistan which allows it to target interests of the United States in these countries. Additionally, Iran's cooperation with Hamas and Hezbollah could result in counter-attacks against Israel in case Iran would be attacked by the United States or Israel.

Conclusions

For decades, the United States had tried to isolate and punish the Islamic Republic with various, mostly unilateral sanctions for its support of terrorism and more recently its nuclear program, allegedly aimed at developing nuclear weapons capabilities. Despite the fact that the complex sanctions regime is in place against Tehran upheld by various UN resolution, vigorously advocated and prompted by the United States and its allies (mostly the EU, but also Japan) and to a certain degree supported also by the Russia and China, more than three decades of imposing sanctions against the Islamic Republic the international community has failed to achieve what it sought and expected. Currently new sanctions are being imposed by Washington, continuously stirred by Israel calling for "sanctions with teeth" to tighten the isolation of Iranian regime, but their viability is highly contestable.

Sanctions imposed against Tehran are only one among numerous manifestations of enmity between the two countries persisting since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Domestically, the political culture in the United States as well as the climate aroused by the demonization of Iran has effectively prevented any kind of rapprochement between the two countries. In Iran, the support for the regime continues to be strong despite recent upheavals, and an "inside" democratic opposition in the Western meaning of the word is still practically non-existent; therefore, the classical concept of pouring U.S. money into the hands of "future democratic rulers" is hard to pursue. All U.S. administrations since **Carter's** presidency tried basically the same approach: to contain Iran, isolate it and put it into a position of an international pariah; this, according to the United States, should have led to its accommodation to the international system.

Iran, however, found the way to circumvent all these initiatives. Economic sanctions were countered by the differentiation of the trading partners (relying

increasingly on trade relations with China and Russia) and softened by the “critical dialogue” with the Europeans; moreover, oil and gas, which are the main sources of Iranian income, are by definition a worldwide commodity – if they cannot be sold in the United States, they will be sold somewhere else.²³ According to its latest statements, Russian Federation seems not to be ready to change radically its policy on Iran and enforce “crippling sanctions” damaging Iran’s bank and energy sector, a position accentuated also by its actions, such as deals in arms sales of advanced weapons systems to Tehran²⁴; support of China for tougher sanctions is even more unlikely, as it is now Iran’s most important trading partner, replacing the European Union in this position, and has enormous interest in securing long-term oil- and gas- deals with the Islamic Republic.

It has not been purpose of this paper to assess whether the threat of nuclear-armed Iran is plausible, neither to examine the real scope and intent of its nuclear program. However, even if we admit that Tehran is indeed seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, their direct impact as a threat to the United States or its allies is limited. Limited nuclear capabilities that Iran might acquire would suffice to guarantee a deterrent against potential US or even more likely Israeli attack; it would, however, not suffice to attack in any plausible manner either directly the United States or its allies. What it would certainly do, is to significantly limit the possibilities of action and the power projection of the United States in the region, and further exacerbate the sense of danger of its regional allies (including Israel and Persian Gulf monarchies).

Contrary to what is commonly suggested, supposed proclaimed goal of erasing the state of Israel from the map is actually just often repeated misquotation of **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s** statement. Second, Iranian leadership is often described as irrational due to its religious basis, however there were no information provided to support this claim and Iranian policies

²³ In 2009 Iran sealed a deal worth USD 4,7 billion with China’s CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) on gas and oil imports. Tehran has replaced France’s Total with CNPC to develop phase 11 of Iran’s South Pars gas field, making CNPC a major partner in Iran’s energy projects. Moreover, in 2010 China was to import oil from Iran amounting to approximately 440,000 barrels per day, making Iran the third largest source of its oil imports.

²⁴ Especially the agreed delivery of S-300 air defense missiles to Tehran from Russian Federation is of great importance and also great concern of the international community. According to various analysts, S-300s could greatly complicate potential air strikes against Iran and its nuclear capabilities (neither the United States nor Israel have ruled out such air strikes in order to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons).

indicates great deal of pragmatism unbound by any religious constraints. Third, in our opinion the claim that Iran could provide nuclear weapons to terrorist groups does not stand, because it would require Iranian leadership to behave absolutely irrationally since a) Iran cannot produce large stockpile of such weapons and therefore every warhead would be vital to ensure its own deterrent; and b) it is quite clear that supplying nuclear weapons to terrorist groups would not absolve the Iran of blame for their potential use in the eyes of the United States or the wider international community. Moreover, the stakes and possible benefits that might ensue from the transfer of non-conventional weapons to its proxies or other terrorist groups are not high enough for Iran to take a risk of direct American attack. Iran is by no means an un-deterrable state not understanding or ignoring the classical concepts of power politics; it recognizes that providing terrorist groups with such weapons would mean to cross the red line drawn by Washington and other powers, and would not resort to it. It is also important to understand the fact that such reasoning is more the result of strategic calculations in Tehran than of the US pressure.

As to the question we were attempting to answer, i.e. what is the real rationale beyond the US-created and enforced sanctions regime against Tehran, we have to conclude that it is motivated by the development of indigenous nuclear program only to a limited extent. Iran has been subject to US sanctions (mostly unilateral) since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 for various reasons and with altering demands. With speeding up of its nuclear program at the beginning of the 21st Century, there is supposedly clearly articulated demand on US side – changing the Iranian nuclear policies. Closer examination of recent US – Iran interactions, however, shows that the United States have significant problem in articulating what it actually seeks to achieve by its policy and by imposing sanctions in relation to Iran. Despite official statements the abandonment of Iranian nuclear program might not be the primary objective of US policy, for opportunities to settle or at least alleviate the dispute have periodically appeared and have been turned down, mostly by the US side. As the nuclear issue does not seem to be the top priority for the United States there is another possible goal of US sanctions: regime change. Similarly to previous US administration, also the Obama Administration continues to struggle over deciding what outcome it is actually seeking by imposing harsh sanctions against Iran; significantly limited objective of delaying the successful completion of the nuclear program, its complete abandonment by the Islamic Republic (both considered unsatisfactory and not ambitious enough by significant

portions of the U.S. Congress, by some members of Obama's Administration as well as majority of the Republicans), or is the ultimate goal of the US policy the regime change, to which the imposition of sanctions represents inevitable and convenient prequel. As the Washington's intentions remain unclear (to a great extent due to these internal tensions and disagreements over the goals pursued), the response from Tehran logically tends to stick to the worst-case scenario, i.e. to the regime change option sought by Washington, to be most plausible, and behaves accordingly.

It is to be noted, however, that if regime change is really the ultimate option preferred and pursued by the US government, linking the sanctions to the nuclear program seem to be rather counter-productive. If one of the desired effects of sanctions is to stir domestic discontent and weaken populations' support for the regime, in case of Iran nuclear is the matter of national pride, and is more likely to generate the already mentioned rally around the flag effect. Therefore, apart from general confusion in regard to the real aims and purpose of the sanctions, the only other feature that consistently characterizes them is that they are successful in limiting Iran's economic growth and its power in the region.

The problem is, however, that Washington has not made clear whether by imposing sanctions and undertaking other measures (such as covert action and alleged assassinations of Iranian scientists participating at the nuclear program) aims at changing the behavior or changing the regime. Regime change is the ultimate goal sought by coercion, and, as it is widely acknowledged, despite positive effects they may (and, indeed, do) cause, sanctions are highly unlikely to achieve such ambitious foreign policy goals. As we have pointed out, Obama's administration has not moved away from the "all options are on the table" statements of the previous George W. Bush Administration. This leaves us (and foremost Iranians) with an unanswered question – is Washington contemplating "takin' 'em out", and this time literally?²⁵ Launching a preventive attack on Iran's nuclear facilities has been long contemplated not only in highest circles in Washington, but also in the scholarly community opinions abound that

²⁵ The phrase refers to the **George W. Bush's** statement during his first electoral campaign on the Iraq's program of the development of weapons of mass destruction. When asked how as president would he respond to the discovery of continuation of Iraq's WMD program, **Bush** appeared to answer "take him [**Saddam Hussein**] out", only later clarified that he in fact said "take them [the weapons] out" from **Saddam Hussein**, not him personally, and his statement has been misunderstood due to his peculiar Texan accent.

it is about time to take tougher stance on Tehran.

In our view, however, the only way to proceed with the Iranian nuclear issue is to acknowledge the necessity of the negotiated settlement. Sticks will hardly do well in Tehran, probably as well as carrots. As we have seen in the course of decades, implicit threat of US military action against Iran evidently does not work, not even combined with the extensive sanctions regime, just as do not work the opposite attempts to offer security guarantees to Iran as a silver bullet to all the problems of this troubled relation. What goes still largely unnoticed is the fact that Tehran is not anymore looking primarily and exclusively for security guarantees as it previously did, albeit they continue to figure prominently in Tehran's demands and calculations. The representatives of the theocratic regime do not fear the United States; they do not relate to the international community from a position of strategic vulnerability. More than anything else, Tehran seeks acknowledgment of its status and influence (Takeyh, 2007) in its quest for wider regional role, and an expansion of such a role. Iran's revolutionary days are long gone, and its internal as well as international behavior hints to the fact that despite common Western perceptions Ayatollahs understand the caveats of mundane politics fair enough. Currently, the highest bet has been placed on the nuclear program, and it will likely remain so in the foreseeable future. Given the historical experience, geopolitical realities of the Middle East, current US policy in the area and Iran's own projection of its role within this highly penetrated space it should come as no surprise that it is somewhat reluctant to bow to the Washington's dictum. That is why sanctions previously and also currently employed by the West will not induce compliance, but rather defiance from Tehran.

Besides many accurate and important suggestions on how the crisis should be handled, i.e. no preconditions to be set before actual negotiations; step-by-step incremental resolution of minor and partial problems etc., we are bound to say that any reasonable progress is to be expected, the Western countries, and the United States in primis, should contemplate acting more consistently on their own liberal democratic agenda, i.e. avoiding double standards – which are without a doubt being applied in case of Tehran. This will, however, prove to be very difficult, regardless of the current Obama Administration's call and promise of 'return of diplomacy' to the U.S. foreign policy, for it would on the part of the United States require stepping back from its ideational role of the leader of the free world against the "outlaw", "pariah", "rogue", reactionary and backward-looking foes poised to destroy "everything

the U.S. stands for”, and to accept more limited, mundane and pragmatic stance. But that translates into political suicide in Washington – an option that no politician would willingly risk. Moreover, after the stereotype of Iran as an evil regime has been progressively created over three decades, it will be hard – although by no means impossible – to overcome the popular sentiments stemming not only from the rallying domestic support by depicting an enemy in absolute terms, but from sentiments and attitudes deeply rooted in the US political culture and experience. The United States, who since its inception sees itself as the beacon of the mankind, profoundly believes that it is created to lead and to be followed, and continues to be unprepared to make compromises with what it believes to be the “forces of evil”.

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