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THE POLICY OF CONTAINING IRAN BY THE ADMINISTRATION OF DONALD TRUMP (2017–2021)

ABSTRACT

Since President Donald Trump assumed his constitutional duties in January 2017 and ended his term in January 2021, he adopted strategic goals that were generally characterized by hardening towards Iran, which did not differ from the majority of previous administrations, even the administration of president Barack Obama, who agreed with his predecessors on the goals, but differed in his ways to reach them.

In the same context, the national security document, which was approved by the us administration, in December 2017, did not depart from the previous framework. Iran was present within its content, which reflected a hard-line image of Iran by focusing on what the latter poses as an increasing threat to American interests, as well as to its allies and the security and stability of the Middle East region in general. The document outlined the Iranian danger, describing it as “a dictatorial regime that seeks to undermine the region and destabilize its security, threaten the allies of the united states, and commit brutal acts against its people.”

This strategy was, in terms of form, closer in many of its elements to what is generally accepted than the outcomes of successive administrations towards Iran. These were the same goals that the majority of US administrations had long been striving for, especially since the beginning of the new millennium and the exposure of the Iranian nuclear program, but the difference, as well as in the details and implementation mechanisms, are the paths and steps taken to achieve the goals.

Keywords: the policy of containing Iran, the Trump administration, negotiations, economic blockades, the strengths and weaknesses of the Trump administration towards Iran

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1. INTRODUCTION

The American-Iranian relations were affected after the Islamists took over the reins of power after the overthrow of the Shah's rule, the detention of the American embassy employees in Tehran in 1981, the Iranian regime's outspoken hostility to the United States, and Washington's adoption of a hard-line policy towards Tehran which reached the actual use of military force against it in the failed hostage rescue operation, the ban on arms exports to it, the policy of "dual containment" adopted by President Bill Clinton against Iran and Iraq, and then the policy of George Bush Jr. In it, he relied on classifying Iran among the rogue countries, under the pretext of Iran's support for terrorist groups and its suppression of its people, leading to President Barack Obama's policy based on the "outstretched hand," and the start of negotiations between the five major countries, as well as Germany and Iran, which have continued since 2006 until the conclusion of the nuclear agreement called the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement," and the subsequent lifting of US and European sanctions imposed on Iran in December 2016.

Finally, with President Donald Trump assuming the presidency in the United States, a new era of relations with Iran began, after the unilateral American withdrawal from the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement" on May 8, 2019, which was signed in 2015 between Iran and a group of countries (5 + 1).

1.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of studying the topic (The Policy of Containing Iran by the Administration of Donald Trump 2017–2021) lies in the fact that it deals with an important issue related to international relations, which is to research the nature of US-Iranian relations and their repercussions on the regional system in the Middle East, and its importance is due to the importance of the Middle East region, in particular related to oil and location. Therefore, we find the West's acceleration towards containing it, which made it one of the most sensitive spots in the world, and what increased its sensitivity is the issue of the Iranian nuclear file and Iran's dominant ambitions towards regionalism.

1.2. THE HYPOTHESIS OF STUDY

The study of the issue of the policy of containing Iran by the administration of Donald Trump (2017–2021) is based on the premise that: "The relationship between the United States and Iran changes directions according to what the American president and his administration believe in, and thus their view of the concept of "American national interest," which conflicts with "Iran's national interest," which reflects, positively or negatively, on the Middle East region.

2. THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND IRAN: FROM NEGOTIATIONS TO ECONOMIC BLOCKADES

Since 1980, the United States has imposed sanctions on Iran against the backdrop of the “American hostage-taking crisis in the American embassy in Iran,” and cut diplomatic relations with it, accusing Iran of supporting and practicing international terrorism (Ganji, 2006).

The first American embargo on Iran covered many sectors, including oil exports, trade exchanges, asset freezes, travel bans, and preventing Iranian exports from entering the United States. US sanctions on Iran were strengthened during the era of President Bill Clinton, who accused Iran of obstructing peace efforts in the Middle East and supporting movements opposed to the peace process between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization sponsored by the United States during the Clinton era and the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. Successive American administrations continued to pursue the “ban policy against Iran,” and these sanctions reached their climax during the era of President Barack Obama, who passed a comprehensive law on sanctions against Iran in 2010. These sanctions remained in place until the signing of the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement” between Iran and the major countries, and this embargo might have played a role in carrying Iran negotiations on its nuclear program and then signing the agreement under the weight of sanctions (Al-Moussawi, 2018).

After President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of the United States from the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement,” and as we will see later, the sanctions that had existed before the signing of the agreement returned, and this time the stated goal of the sanctions was not related to the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement” as it was the usual practice of previous sanctions, but the goal, according to President Donald Trump, is to push Iran to change its political behavior in the region, which he described as malign, as well as to put an end to its ballistic missile programs. President Donald Trump’s talk was not limited to restoring previous sanctions, Rather, it went beyond it to threatening “Shalla” penalties, which were to be applied in two phases. The first started on August 6, 2018, and included the following:

- a. Prohibiting the exchange of dollars with the Iranian government, as well as prohibiting commercial transactions related to precious metals, especially gold, and imposing sanctions on institutions and governments that deal in Iranian riyals or Iranian government bonds.
- b. Banning the import or purchase of a list of metals, most notably (aluminum, iron and steel), and imposing restrictions on the automotive sector and carpets in Iran.
- c. Prohibiting the import or export of technology associated with dual-use industrial technology programs (civilian and military).

As for the second stage of sanctions, it included:

- a. Imposing sanctions against companies operating Iranian ports, as well as companies involved in shipping and shipbuilding.
- b. Imposing comprehensive sanctions on the Iranian energy sector, especially the oil sector.
- c. Imposing sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran and its financial dealings (The White House, 2018).

By reviewing the US sanctions policy on Iran, we find that the goals put forward by successive US administrations centered on “getting Iran to stop its nuclear program,” but the goal of the recent sanctions is: changing Iran’s behavior in the Middle East; restricting its ballistic missile program; and forcing it to renegotiate again.

Thus, we find that the administration of President Donald Trump adopted a severe policy towards Iran, withdrew from the nuclear agreement on (May 8, 2018), followed the policy of “maximum pressure,” and re-imposed the old sanctions, in addition to imposing unprecedented new sanctions on Iran.

Trump considered that his policy would force Iran to renegotiate a new nuclear agreement, in addition to depriving Iran of revenue to continue developing its missile capabilities or interfering in the countries of the region. For its part, Iran has doubled its uranium enrichment, exceeding the levels established under the nuclear agreement.

With the increase in tension between the two countries in the Gulf waters since mid-2019, the United States claimed that the military build-up of its forces in the Gulf aims to deter Iranian provocative actions.

With the withdrawal of the United States from the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement” and the start of the implementation of sanctions against Iran in its two phases (the first and the second), Iran faces a number of pressing and critical challenges, including:

- a. The already deteriorating economic conditions before the start of the sanctions, and what will happen to them as a result of the entry into force of these sanctions. It seems that the problems of the Iranian economy are not caused by the American sanctions only, but that there is an imbalance in the management of the Iranian economy, as some official reports indicated that two thirds of the problems that the Iranian economy faces were due to poor management of the economic files, and that only one third of the economic problems resulted from the application of previous sanctions, and the “nominal GDP” amounted to about 430 billion dollars in 2017, the “unemployment rate” reached about 12.5%, the “inflation rate” reached about 10.5%, the “poverty rate” reached about 18.7%, and the “volume of foreign trade” amounted to about 162 billion dollars, of which about 92 billion dollars of exports, and the “value of the local currency” decreased by 28.5% during the period 2013–2020.
- b. Israel and other regional parties seek to provoke feelings of hostility against Iran among the countries and peoples of the region and the world public opinion, incite the Iranian interior, and use the difficult economic conditions to mobilize the Iranian street from time to time.
- c. The increasing American pressure through tightening the economic blockade, which is not limited to Iran, but affects many countries, companies and bodies that are not committed to implementing the embargo and its requirements. Creating a state of internal turmoil that destabilizes the political system, and ultimately leads to its overthrow, or at least to confuse and weaken it, hence focusing its attention on the internal situation, and limiting its regional role.
- d. The popular protests that the country is witnessing from time to time, even during the lifting of the siege. Usually these protests adopt demands of a subsistence and economic nature, but these protests sometimes demand to stop the regime’s interference in regional affairs, and to invest money in improving the living conditions of citizens (Al-Smadi, 2018).

However, the efficacy of the sanctions and the economic blockade is related to the “amount of international support” for them, and in the Iranian case, we find that imposing the latest sanctions does not enjoy the support of the active forces in the international community, especially since reports and indicators point to Iran’s commitment to the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement” with the major countries, and this means that the United States is isolated from the embargo on Iran. The European Union announced its adherence to the agreement with Iran and adopted providing support to European companies that may be subject to US sanctions if they refuse to abide by the embargo. The European Investment Bank has authorized the financing of trade exchanges between Europe and Iran. Also, China announced a non-commitment to reducing the quantities of oil imported from Iran, as well as India, which announced that it did not abide by the embargo unless approved by the United Nations, and Turkey rejected the American sanctions announcing its non-compliance with them, but rather condemned them, and these international positions weaken the impact of sanctions on the Iranian economy, and hence on Iranian political positions.

One of the factors affecting the success of the blockade is the “volume of trade exchange” between the country that is subject to the sanctions and the country that imposes them. The turbulence of political relations between the two sides over the past decades has been mentioned in relation to Iran. Additionally, Iran has strengthened its economic relationships with countries that reject sanctions. Furthermore, Iran’s presence as an observer in some economic blocs weakens the impact of sanctions. However, the sanctions still have a significant impact on Iranian society, leading to a decline in the standard of living, a low level of services provided to citizens, and a decrease in purchasing power (Al-Smadi, 2018).

3. THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION TOWARDS IRAN

US President Donald Trump’s policies toward Iran have sparked controversy, especially with regard to the nuclear agreement with Iran, which the United States signed under President Barack Obama in 2015.

In November 2018, new US sanctions came into effect, targeting various economic sectors of one of the world’s largest oil exporters. Those sanctions, which the US administration considered the most severe of their kind, until that time were mainly designed to prevent Iran from exporting oil, depriving it of the most important source of hard currency and one of its most prominent economic returns. Iran’s crude oil exports decreased to below half a million barrels in the middle of 2019. According to Iranian official statements in September 2020, these exports did not exceed 700 thousand barrels per day. Prior to that, Iran had been exporting more than 2.5 million barrels per day in 2018, before the US President withdrew from the nuclear agreement in May of the same year (Taqieh, 2010).

The major buyers of Iranian oil were forced to find alternative energy sources due to the sanctions. Six months after the sanctions were implemented in November 2019, Iranian oil exports reached their lowest levels in years. This decline occurred at a time when the official budget projected the export of one million barrels of oil per day, resulting in a deficit. The budgetary impact significantly affected the economic capabilities of the Iranian state (al-Din Laila, 2020).

Then, the turmoil in the oil markets during the spring of 2020 had a very negative impact on Iran's ability to export its oil to buyers who desired cheap prices despite the danger of sanctions, as the collapse in global oil markets led, as a result of the filling of American stocks of oil in April 2020, to a decline in the global oil market and with it any real opportunity for Iran to bypass the strict US sanctions on it at that time (Abu Al-Qasim, 2017).

After the significant decline in the numbers of Iran's oil exports, the United States focused during the year 2020 on the financial and banking sectors, which were among the first sanctions packages. This led to a collapse in the Iranian currency exchange rates to levels considered the worst in its history (Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020).

In sum, the severe US sanctions led to a significant decline in the indicators of the Iranian economy to extremely difficult levels, as the inflation rate in the country rose in the fiscal years 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 to 26.9% and 34.8%, respectively (Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2019), after the rate was 9.6% in the fiscal year 2017–2018, while a decline by 7.6% in Iranian GDP was recorded during the first nine months of the fiscal year 2019–2020 (Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020).

The Iranian response to these measures was to unleash dangerous military and security harassment in the Arab Gulf region, targeting ships and oil tankers through sabotage and bombing operations, which led to the tension of the atmosphere to dangerous levels. Then, strikes by Iranian drones caused great damage to Saudi oil facilities, and this harassment continued until the attempt to storm the American embassy in Baghdad by those affiliated with Iran, which was followed by Washington's famous response to the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, which put the region on the brink of a military confrontation (Jervis, 2018).

The war did not break out in the Gulf, but Iran also did not get what it wanted, as President Trump did not return to the negotiating table, and the Gulf states did not help it with the sanctions file as it had hoped.

In terms of its regional influence, it became evident that the pressures exerted by American sanctions compelled Iran to make compromises that were previously inconceivable. One such compromise was the appointment of Mustafa Al-Kazemi, who does not belong to the pro-Iranian political frameworks, as the Iraqi Prime Minister. However, it is important to note that these compromises were not solely a result of the sanctions but were influenced by other factors as well. In conjunction with a popular atmosphere against it, especially in Iraq, and with regard to Syria, it was clear how Iran began to leave the political file of Russian President Vladimir Putin, which was represented by bilateral agreements between Russia and Turkey, the latest of which was the Russian agreement in March 2020, which stopped the fighting in the Syrian city of Idlib (Strategic Fiker Center for Studies, 2017).

In 2021, Iran started to take a step back from the forefront of regional issues it had been leading. However, this does not necessarily indicate a significant decline in Iranian influence in the region. Militias and armed groups affiliated with Iran continue to maintain substantial influence in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. And if its ability to move large forces and engage in large-scale battles declines, the response represented by political retreat gives an indication of what severe US sanctions can lead to, on a regime that previously refused to back down in many political files, especially the Iraqi file, despite all the hardships and political pressures it faced (Deutsche Welle, 2020).

As a result, the severe sanctions on Iran have led to a "significant decline in its economic capabilities, a noticeable decline in its military effectiveness, and political influence in the

region.” Politically, Iran experienced a notable shift or reversal, similar to what occurred in 2015 after the nuclear agreement. This agreement presented Iran with a significant opportunity to expand its influence in the region during that period.

4. SANCTIONS WERE A STEP TO CONTAIN IRAN’S INFLUENCE AND HEGEMONY AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

In October 2017, President Trump initiated his strategy towards Iran, which, according to its provisions, reaffirmed a return to a state of conflict between the two parties. This state of conflict had somewhat subsided during the Obama administration, but was now characterized by the adoption of policies centered around conflict and confrontation. The strategy aimed to achieve several goals: preventing the Iranian regime from obtaining nuclear weapons through all possible means, countering the Iranian government’s influence in the region, curtailing its destabilizing aggression, cutting off sources of funding for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, rallying the international community to condemn Iran for human rights violations against both its citizens and foreigners, restraining Iran’s support for terrorism through the imposition of additional economic sanctions, reconfiguring traditional alliances and regional partnerships to counter Iranian subversion, and addressing the threats posed by Iran’s ballistic missile system and other weapons (Bakeer, 2018).

The topic of President Donald Trump’s administration’s policy toward Iran will be divided into three topics that will include President Trump, the containment of Iran, the realistic theory, President Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement, and the results of President Donald Trump’s policy toward Iran, as follows:

- a. The field of international relations is full of intellectual theorizing and the scramble of opinions among the various and different schools of thought in their interpretation of the behavior of international actors. “Political realism” with philosophical roots and historical extension in its various branches and currents, which for decades dominated the international arena in terms of theorizing and impact, through its pioneers’ contribution to enriching the field of international relations with inspiring and explanatory ideas of international politics.
- b. With Trump’s election as President of the United States of America, the neo-realists were optimistic about his electoral promises in which he pledged to develop American foreign policy. We find that John Mearsheimer agrees with Trump in criticizing the foreign policy of former American presidents and then he confronts his electoral promises with the proposals of political realism. He wonders whether Trump will abandon the policy of his predecessors and adopt a realistic foreign policy, or whether he will remain confined to the political orientation of his predecessors, which was characterized by liberalism (Mearsheimer, 2016).
- c. Mearsheimer offers him a scathing critique of previous presidents whose policies were dominated by liberal hegemony that does not set clear priorities. One of its features is to intervene by force to change regimes under the pretext of spreading democracy, which led to the presence of the US military in all parts of the world, but this hegemony, from Mearsheimer’s point of view “it has proven its abject failure,” so he calls it the bankrupt strategy because it has plunged the United States of America into an

open war since the Cold War, from one state of war to two every three years. This is why he insists on the need to abandon this strategy and adopt a realistic foreign policy, the basis of which is to focus on containing the rise of China and preventing it from becoming a dominant regional power in Asia and the Pacific, because China is more likely to try to dominate the Asia-Pacific region than the United States of America dominated the Western sphere of the globe (Khasheeb, 2019).

- d. This approach requires, from Mearsheimer's point of view, a reconsideration of US foreign policy in relation to many international issues, the first of which is respect for the sovereignty of countries even for those whose domestic policy the United States of America does not agree with, and the withdrawal of its forces from many countries of the world or reducing its size while encouraging the Europeans to take responsibility for their security. Then Mearsheimer adds that the Trump administration should improve relations with Russia because this does not pose a threat to the interests of the United States of America, but rather requires that they be allies to contain the rise of China, in addition to the necessity of their cooperation on many international issues such as the nuclear file, confronting terrorism and allowing Russia to end the Syrian conflict (Mearsheimer, 2016).

Is Trump's policy trending in the same way as the neo-realists? Or is his policy no different from liberal hegemony? In other words, where is Trump's policy located? According to many experts interested in the "Trumpist phenomenon," it is difficult to classify Trump's policy in view of the volatility and instability of his decisions on a fixed position. Rather, it is a self-contained political phenomenon that requires investigation of its hidden motives, theoretical backgrounds and prospects. Along the lines of international relations (Cherkaoui, n.d.), as for the manifestations of this, they are clearly evident in his volatile personality and his vacillating foreign policy, which poses a challenge to the new realists (Walt, 2018).

The pioneers of neo-realism criticize all the decisions taken by Trump during the period in which he took office in the administration of the White House, as they are inconsistent with the perceptions of political realism in the field of international relations. President Barack Obama signed it or gave him freedom for Israeli expansion, including his abandonment of the two-state solution rhetoric that was supported by Bill Clinton, George Bush Jr., and Barack Obama. This criticism anticipates the future of American foreign policy beyond Trump or after the "tragedy" of Trumpian politics, according to Stephen Walt, including the restoration of what his misaligned policy will destroy, which will require bearing the consequences that may result from it (Walt, 2018).

Accordingly, Stephen Walt attacks President Trump's foreign policy on more than one international issue (the Iranian nuclear file, the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, climate change, trade agreements). For example, in the Middle East, Trump's policy was far from what "realism" might dictate; perhaps, one of its manifestations is the handing over of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process to his unqualified son-in-law, Jared Corey Kushner, according to Stephen Walt (Walt, 2019).

Since President Donald Trump assumed his constitutional duties in January 2017, he has been adopting strategic goals that have been generally hard-line towards Iran, which did not differ from most previous US administrations, even President Barack Obama, who agreed With his predecessors in the goals, but differed in the ways to reach them.

In October 2017, President Trump introduced his strategy towards Iran, which, according to its provisions, marked a return to a state of conflict between the two parties. This state of conflict had experienced a period of relative calm during the Obama administration. By adopting policies of conflict and confrontation, the strategy aimed to address the perceived threats posed by Iran to American interests, allies, and the overall security and stability of the Middle East region. In line with this, the National Security Document, approved by the US administration in December 2017, followed a similar framework and included references to Iran. It portrayed Iran as a dictatorial regime that aims to undermine regional stability, threaten American allies, and commit brutal acts against its own people, thus amplifying the perceived danger Iran posed (Bakeer, 2018).

In terms of form, this document and that strategy were closer in many of its elements to what is known than the outcomes of successive US administrations towards Iran. They are the same goals that the majority of US administrations have always been striving for, especially since the beginning of the new millennium and the exposure of the Iranian nuclear program, but the difference, which lies in the details and implementation mechanisms, is in the paths and steps taken to achieve the goals. Unlike President Obama, the Trump administration believed that adopting policies of confrontation, extremism, and imposing severe sanctions without limits could compel Iran to engage in new negotiations and sign a new agreement. However, this outcome did not materialize due to various factors. On one hand, the Western group's commitment to the nuclear agreement prevented them from aligning entirely with the United States in its approach towards Iran. On the other hand, Iran had gained certain advantages, albeit with limitations, as a result of the nuclear agreement. Iran pursued a strategy of resistance, which involved endurance and withstanding pressure, as demonstrated by its actions and policies.

The shift in US policy toward Iran, back to its pre-President Barack Obama era, was only the result of a number of factors that prompted a return to a state of conflict and an approach of hostile policies with Iran. Bearing on its importance, one of the keys to understanding the reasons behind following these policies can be stated as follows:

- a. Factors related to the perceptions and personal traits of President Trump and his convictions and beliefs, as he was closer to the ideological orientation of the hard right, which adopted the unilateralist exclusionary tendency, which was reflected in his foreign policy in general and towards Iran in particular, which was more individualistic, strict and inclined to impose its paths without considerations of partners' interests.
- b. Factors related to Iran's military development, especially its medium and long-range ballistic missile program, doubts about its ability to carry nuclear warheads, and concerns about its regional proliferation. With a range of 700 km in its strikes in 2017 and 2018 against the terrorist "ISIS" in Syria, and its testing in January 2017 of the "Khorramshahr" ballistic missile, which was announced for the first time in a military presentation in September 2017, it is believed that it is a missile with a range between average and above average, with a maximum range of 2,000 km (Jervis, 2018).
- c. There is the "Qassem Soleimani" missile that Iran launched in August 2020, with a range of 1,400 km, in addition to the reports that indicated that Iran is seeking to develop a missile with a range of up to 5,000 km, as well as to develop "Cruise" missiles, although the technology needed by these missiles may exceed Iran's capabilities at the present time (Qader, 2016).

- d. Factors associated with groups opposing the nuclear agreement, including the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), played a significant role. According to publicly available records from the US Senate, AIPAC allocated approximately 1.7 million dollars to directly advocate for the rejection of the nuclear agreement six months before it was passed by the US Congress (Ho, 2015).
- e. Furthermore, President Trump included a group of hardline Republican personalities in his team at the beginning of his presidency, many of whom adopted tough stances towards Iran. For instance, Michael Flynn, who served as National Security Adviser, resigned shortly after facing accusations of improper contact with Russians. Senator Jeff Sessions, a strong supporter of President Trump during his presidential campaign, resigned from his position at Trump's request due to his refusal to investigate allegations of Russian interference in the elections. Another notable figure is Mike Pompeo, who initially served as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and later became Secretary of State (April 2018).
- f. Factors related to the growing Iranian influence in the region, which has become clear in areas such as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen and others, although the factor of the rise of Iranian influence in the region is almost continuous, or rather a permanent issue. However, it may be more related to the administration of Trump in the contexts of justifying the policies of maximum pressure against Iran and mobilizing information and evidence against Iranian policy before the international community, and thus pushing international and regional parties, especially Arab ones, to line up behind the United States in the face of Iran (Strategic Fiker Center for Studies, 2017).
- g. Various factors are linked to Iran's regional opponents, including Saudi Arabia and its Gulf and Arab allies. They view Iran as an aggressive state that poses a threat to their interests in the region. Consequently, they supported the Trump administration's policies towards Iran, aiming to curtail its role and restrict its missile program, along with its growing influence in the region. These countries were among the first to welcome the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement and endorse the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran (Saudi Press Agency, 2018), in addition to Israel, which unlike the rest of the region's countries and its conflict premises with Iran, sees the Iranian regime as an existential threat to it. Thus, it categorically rejected the nuclear agreement and pushed to stop its passage in Congress, considering it a historical mistake that would enable Iran to possess the ability to produce nuclear weapons (Rafid, 2015) and continued pressure to push the Trump administration to withdraw from it, including, as an example, the televised speech of the President. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, accepted the US administration's decision to withdraw, which at its time carried indications of coordination between the two administrations, the American and the Israeli, in which Netanyahu presented what he described as evidence of Iran's secret nuclear weapons program, it is worth noting the Israeli support for the withdrawal and considering it a courageous decision by the United States. Israel has approached its conflict with Iran from an existential standpoint, which has led to significant pressure exerted to impose international restrictions on Iran (Bou Chaaya, 2021).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Through the foregoing, we reached a set of conclusions resulting from the study, as well as a set of proposals that would enrich future studies related to the topic, or complementing it, as follows:

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

The researcher reached a set of conclusions that discussed, through study and analysis, the position of US President Barack Obama and his administration toward Iran, compared to his successor, US President Donald Trump and his administration. The most important conclusions reached can be summarized as follows:

- a. US President Donald Trump believed that his policy will compel Iran to renegotiate a new nuclear agreement, in addition to depriving Iran of revenue to continue developing its missile capabilities, or interfering in the countries of the region.
- b. Iran perceives that allowing it to partially continue uranium enrichment within its territory and facilities is a significant concession by the Western nations. Iran believes that engaging in direct negotiations with major countries strengthens its regional influence and grants it international recognition on the global stage. These negotiations have reinforced the belief among major countries in Iran's adeptness at diplomatic negotiations, positioning Iran as an active participant in future discussions on significant regional matters. On the Iranian side, there is a growing conviction that Western countries recognize the importance of Iran's involvement in addressing common interests, no longer categorizing Iran solely as a source of threat, particularly in light of the rising influence of armed extremist groups.
- c. There is a set of objections to the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement," which later gave US President Donald Trump a set of justifications for withdrawing from the agreement, the most important of which is that the agreement did not address Iranian behavior in the Middle East, nor did any conditions related to the policies it pursues in the regional environment. These aim to extend its influence in neighboring countries, and realize the idea of spreading the Iranian revolution and exporting it abroad. Therefore, lifting economic sanctions against Iran could increase its ability to finance its activities in Yemen, Iraq and Syria, and support militias or armed groups linked to it, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon.
- d. The concerns of the Gulf states and the region about the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement" with Iran and its growing regional ambitions can only be dispelled by adopting strategies that lead to containing the repercussions of the agreement, if it continues, or renewing it, or replacing with any other formula, and adopting solidarity policies to limit Iranian expansionist project in the region.
- e. The decision of US President Donald Trump to withdraw from the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement" constituted a violent response to the "reformist current in the Iranian political system," and strengthened the position of "conservatives" who questioned the feasibility of signing the agreement from the beginning, and this decision constituted a step towards the unknown, especially since the US administration, at the time, did not set a clear vision for what will follow from this

agreement, and that this decision is based mainly on the president's assumptions that Iran will accept, under pressure and siege, to negotiate again to reach a new agreement that exceeds the reservations of President "Donald Trump. On the previous agreement, however, Iran insisted not to negotiate a new agreement, especially with the European countries, Russia, and China, rejecting the president's decision and these countries' adherence to the existing agreement, and this reinforces the Iranian refusal to enter into new negotiations.

- f. One of the primary justifications provided by US President Donald Trump for his decision to withdraw from the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement" was the agreement's failure, in its current form, to effectively prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The agreement allowed Iran to continue its uranium enrichment activities, operating under the assumption that Iran's nuclear program was solely for peaceful purposes. This assumption was deemed to be a significant misconception. Additionally, the agreement resulted in the lifting of severe economic sanctions imposed on Iran in exchange for limited restrictions on its nuclear activities. However, the lifting of economic sanctions did not lead to improved economic conditions within Iran. Instead, the funds acquired from the sanctions relief were utilized to develop ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, support terrorist activities, and sow instability in the Middle East region.
- g. The administration of US President Donald Trump and its behavior towards the Iranian file, although it recorded an extension of the policies of confrontation, conflict and imposition of sanctions pursued by previous US administrations since the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, unlike the administration of President Barack Obama, which followed a path closer to diplomacy and dialogue, formed a peculiarity and a different model in the history of the conflict situation between the United States and Iran.
- h. The avoidance of the administration of US President Donald Trump from working in the contexts of international consensus and taking into account the interests of allies and joint action, compared to previous administrations such as the administration of President George Bush Senior and the administration of President Barack Obama, which adopted international consensus and joint action as an effective means to achieve the goals to be achieved. The first succeeded in transferring the Iranian nuclear file to the Security Council and starting the imposition of UN sanctions, and the second succeeded in mobilizing the Security Council countries towards Iran by passing Resolution No. 1929, achieving what it was aiming at by settling the Iranian nuclear file.
- i. The administration of US President Donald Trump has reached some areas where the previous US administrations have not set foot in, whether by imposing sanctions that affected many Iranian sectors, the most important of which are the oil and financial sector, or those that affected the Iranian head of state, Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, or by carrying out operations such as targeted assassinations of Iranian leaders or pro-Iranians of the highest ranks.
- j. The severe sanctions on Iran have led to a significant decline in its economic capabilities, a noticeable decline in its military effectiveness, and its political influence in the

region, and the strategy that the United States will adopt later will have a decisive and main role in continuing those pressures that may lead to political subjugation of Iran, or its reversal, as happened in 2015 after the nuclear agreement, which gave Iran at that time a great opportunity to significantly expand its influence in the region.

- k. The administration of US President Donald Trump, due to its strategy of maximum pressure against Iran and its foreign policy in general, made it difficult for President Joe Biden, which can be described as a task of double difficulty, as much as the size of the sanctions imposed on one side, and the changes that occurred on the international and regional arena on the other hand.

5.2. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the researcher's conclusions regarding the subject of the study, which entails an analytical comparison between the positions of former US President Barack Obama and his administration towards Iran and the positions of current US President Donald Trump and his administration, the following proposals are put forth to enhance the study:

- a. Increasing research on the issue of US foreign policy drivers, and how those directives push the ruling administration to take a decision based on the "political doctrine" of the US president and his administration in relation to the elements of "foreign policy."
- b. Expanding the conduct of specialized comparative political studies that would define the general frameworks of the "American foreign policy" according to the form of the ruling administration, whether Republican or Democratic, and clarify the elements of the impact of the difference in the partisan vision in building the "foreign policy."
- c. Deepening studies that would expand the identification of the elements of "foreign policy" and measure the size of those elements in influencing US decision-making, which is based on "the philosophies, political, economic, and military, adopted by the ruling US administration."
- d. Building a conceptual framework documenting the role of "foreign policy" in determining the strength, or decline, of American "dominance" over international decision-making, and thus determining its effectiveness in achieving the goals of the "national interest."
- e. Research treatment of the nature of US-Iranian relations, based on the political doctrines of both countries and on the potentials that both possess to influence the politics of the other country.
- f. Researching the nature of US-Iranian relations and their repercussions on the regional system in the Middle East and the world, during nearly four decades after the "Islamic Revolution" in Iran.
- g. Conducting forward-looking studies of the nature of the future relationship of the United States with Iran and measuring the extent of its impact on the Middle East, directly or indirectly, as well as its repercussions on the international community.

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