



The Turkish role in the US-Iran Crisis (2017-2020)

Asst. Dr. Awrad Mohammed Malik Kamona

Summary

New developments imposed different patterns of interactions between major international powers and Iran during 2018, ranging to varying degrees between cooperation and tension, the most important of which is the new measures taken by the United States to withdraw from the nuclear agreement and impose new US sanctions on Iran, which in turn insisted on not responding to pressure to which they are exposed to make changes in their policies and to negotiate again about the main contentious files, especially the nuclear program and ballistic missiles, and the roles they play for crisis countries, especially supporting some armed organizations in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. These differences have put the international forces before difficult choices, especially maintaining the nuclear agreement and confronting Iran's interventions.

Keywords: Crisis, Turkish Role, Nuclear Program, America and Iran, tense relations.

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New developments imposed different patterns of interactions between major international powers and Iran during 2018, ranging to varying degrees between cooperation and tension, the most important of which is the new measures taken by the United States to withdraw from the nuclear agreement and impose new US sanctions on Iran, which in turn insisted on not responding to pressure to which they are exposed to make changes in their policies and to negotiate again about the main contentious files, especially the nuclear program and ballistic missiles, and the roles they play for crisis countries, especially supporting some armed organizations in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. These differences have put the international forces before difficult choices, especially maintaining the nuclear agreement and confronting Iran's interventions.

Introduction

The 2015 Iranian nuclear agreement, which provided for the partial lifting of the international sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran in exchange for ensuring that it does not possess nuclear weapons, was concluded on (July 14, 2015) in Vienna between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States of America, China, Russia, France, Britain and Germany), but on (May 8, 2018), US President Trump announced that his country would unilaterally withdraw from the agreement, which he considered disastrous, and re-impose US sanctions on Iran. Months later, Iran exceeded the limits imposed on its reserves of weakly enriched uranium and began the phase of gradually abandoning its international obligations to force the Europeans to help it to circumvent the US sanctions, and



despite its repeated denials, Israel and the United States still accuse Iran of seeking to build a nuclear bomb.

On (January 16, 2016), the agreement entered into force, noting that the UN Security Council approved it on (July 20, 2015), which paved the way for the partial lifting of international sanctions on Iran, and the international embargo on conventional weapons and ballistic missiles remained in place until 2020 and 2023, respectively, with the Security Council granting the possibility of introducing amendments according to each case, and on (August 7, 2018) the United States re-imposed economic sanctions on Iran targeting financial operations and imports of raw materials. Sanctions also include punitive measures for sales that take place in the auto and commercial aviation sector. The US sanctions on the Iranian oil and financial sectors came into effect on (November 5, 2018), and additional sanctions were re-imposed in 2019.

On (May 8, 2019) Iran announced that it had decided to abandon some of its obligations contained in the agreement by stopping setting a ceiling on its reserves of heavy water with enriched uranium, in response to the US sanctions that weaken its economy, and then Iran gradually stopped implementing other obligations it had taken in Vienna with the aim of forcing the Europeans to help it circumvent the US sanctions, especially the export of its oil, on (January 5, 2020), Iran revealed the fifth and final stage of its program to withdraw from its international obligations, confirming the abandonment of all restrictions related to the number of centrifuges.

The discussion stems from the problem of the Iranian nuclear agreement containing loopholes that the previous US administration believed would allow Iran to develop nuclear programs for non-peaceful purposes, in addition to the fact that the agreement does not contain other provisions regarding Iran's regional policies, and if that agreement is flawed then why did the Obama administration agree to it? What are the Trump administration's arguments to cancel the nuclear deal and its future options for dealing with this file? The United States has worked to employ its energies to limit and eliminate the Iranian nuclear program, and for this the importance of the research came to be based on following developments of the US-Iran crisis and the Turkish role for this crisis since the advent of the Trump administration after the United States turned a blind eye to Iranian nuclear activities for a decade and then began The American interest in the Iranian nuclear file, especially during Trump's term, and fears of using it in the production of nuclear weapons against Israel and the United States began, and an attempt to monitor some of the expected developments and repercussions on the countries of the region. Therefore, from this assumption, the following questions arise: What is the reason for the escalation and tension of relations between the two countries and the US punitive measures against Iran, then the Turkish and Arab position on the crisis, and what are the causes and repercussions of the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement in 2018, and perception and the Turkish role in the crisis between the two countries.

Therefore, this research consists of two topics as well as claims, namely:

The first topic: the Turkish position on the strained relations between the United States and Iran

The first claim - escalation of tension between the two countries

The second claim - US punitive measures against Iran

The third claim - the Turkish and Arab position on the crisis

The second topic: Turkey's role towards the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran



The first claim - the reasons for the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement

The second claim - brinkmanship

The third claim - the repercussions of the crisis on the Arab Gulf region and its environs

The fourth claim - Turkish awareness of the crisis

The first topic: the Turkish position on the strained relations between the United States and Iran

"The agreement with Iran is the worst deal in American history," a phrase that former US President Trump repeated during his presidential election campaign (the Republican Party), stressing that he would cancel that agreement if he wins the elections, while former US President Barack Obama (the Democratic Party) said a few days before his departure from the White House, directing his speech to Trump, "The nuclear agreement between the six major powers and Iran cannot be canceled easily, and the aforementioned agreement is better than the war option."

Two statements on opposite sides reflect a different reality regarding the US strategic decisions, as successive US administrations have always defined strategic goals for the United States and not changed them, rather each administration dealt with it with a different perspective. After a period of improvement in Iran-US relations in reaching the nuclear agreement, tension returned once again, to represent the main feature of the interactions between the two parties with the Trump administration assuming power on January 20, 2017, and then it developed into an unprecedented escalation that became open to more than one possibility after the measures taken by the US administration in 2018.

The first claim - escalation of tension between the two countries

Although the administration of US President Trump⁽¹⁾ has sought more than once to exert pressure on Iran and the other five countries documented in the agreement in order to satisfy new negotiations to reach another agreement that includes the nuclear and regional contentious issues, it has not succeeded in achieving its goal at the end of 2018, the American administration has already started sending messages stating that it will implement its threat to withdraw from the agreement, which prompted some European countries to intervene in order to persuade it to back down from that or at least postpone it for a period in which it may be able to prepare the atmosphere for

new negotiations, France, Germany and Britain - specifically - led this trend, as Iran sought to persuade it to stop some of the escalatory steps it is constantly taking, such as threatening to withdraw from the nuclear agreement, launch ballistic missiles, and continue providing support to the Syrian regime and some armed organizations in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon. However, Iran's insistence on moving forward with these steps, and its refusal to conduct new negotiations to reach a more comprehensive agreement, prompted President Donald Trump on (May 8, 2018) to announce withdrawal from the nuclear agreement and impose new US sanctions on Iran⁽²⁾.

¹ Donald John Trump was born in 1946 and is the forty-fifth president of the United States of America. He is also a businessman, billionaire, television personality, American author and president of the Trump Organization, which is based in the United States. For more details, see: Michael Wolf, Fire and Fury: The White House in the Trump Era, Publications Company for Distribution and Publishing, First Edition, Beirut, 2018, p. 198-207 (Adapted).

² The Arab Strategic Report 2018, Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Al-Ahram, First Edition, Cairo, 2019, p. 58



The reasons for reaching a direct clash and the escalation of tensions and threats between the two countries, which have dominated the Gulf region's airspace since the United States announced in 2018 its withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement, which aims to curb Iran's nuclear activities, and accused Iran of talking about the peaceful use of nuclear energy, while the activities indicate the pursuit of Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, and this American withdrawal from the agreement, which was not surprising despite the reservations of President Donald Trump's advisers and the pressure of his European allies, was a spark to ignite tension and the return of statements of threat, blockade and sanctions between Iran and the United States⁽³⁾.

The United States began new sanctions against Iran, which led to the mutual escalation between the two parties, and the first wave of sanctions against Iran came into action and focused on the financial, commercial and industrial sectors. Then the second wave of sanctions came into action and included the energy sector and imposed sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran and its financial dealings, then The United States moved to a more escalating path when it placed the Iranian Revolutionary Guard on the list of terrorist organizations, then canceled the exemptions that it had granted to countries importing Iranian oil in an attempt to zero in these exports that form the backbone of the Iranian economy, and imposed sanctions on the iron, steel, aluminum and copper sectors of Iran, which could finance Iran's nuclear weapons program,

In a way that may result in negative economic repercussions, including depriving Iran of the most important sources of non-oil export revenues and slowing its expansion program for the sector, in addition to cutting supplies of mineral products to the civilian military sectors, which may ultimately lead to an increase in economic pressure in order to push it to accept the option of negotiating with the United States⁽⁴⁾.

There are a number of reasons behind the strained relations between Iran and the United States, and they revolve around the following three issues⁽⁵⁾:

1- The nuclear file agreement: This agreement was among a group of other policies that were approved during the era of US President Barack Obama and which were attacked by Trump. He promised during his election campaign to tear up this agreement and continued to attack it after he took office because Obama, in his view, granted Iran great gains without limiting its desire to possess nuclear weapons, and that the agreement contained a great leniency as it allowed Iran to exceed the specified quantities of heavy water, and prevented international inspectors from accessing secret places.

2- Iranian ballistic missile system: Despite the US warnings, Iran continued to announce missile tests to test the continuous development of its missile system, the latest of which was the announcement of its new missile (Khorramshahr) in 2017, which represents the latest model of the Iranian ballistic missile system, and it is now able to target US military in the waters of the Arabian Gulf. Most importantly, it became able to reach Israel and the threat that this poses

³ Sharif Shaaban Mabrouk, American-Iranian Tension: Escalating Pressures and an Excluded War, Shu'un Arabia Magazine, General Secretariat of the Arab League, Issue 178 - Summer 2019, p. 38

⁴ Sharif Shaaban Mabrouk, previously cited source, p. 39

⁵ Trump's strategy toward Iran ... Motives and Directions, Strategic Fiker Center for Studies, 18/10/2017, www.fikercenter.com



to its security, and the latter is the most important constant of American policy in the region, especially during the era of President Trump, who showed enthusiasm in commitment to protecting the security of Israel during his election campaign and after his accession to power.

3- Iran's role in destabilizing the region: Iran has a presence and influence in a number of important issues in the region through its affiliated forces, which represent an intellectual, political and sometimes military extension of it, as is the case with Hezbollah in Lebanon and The Houthi group in Yemen and the Shiite groups in Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and Iran has become able to employ these groups to destabilize these countries, in addition to the direct and extensive military participation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard forces in both Iraq and Syria. In creating and feeding unrest and stirring up conflicts in the region, and even threatening peace and security in the region and the world, through its threat to international navigation in very important international waterways, such as the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Strait of Hormuz.

The third reason is one of the most important reasons for the Trump administration's move towards Iran. US and Iranian policies have often been complementary towards hotbeds of conflict in the region, and the US President's accusation of Iran of causing destruction and chaos comes in the context of gathering evidence to condemn Iranian policy and push regional parties, especially Arab countries, to line up behind the United States versus Iran.

The second claim - US punitive measures against Iran

In confronting the US strategy of maximum pressure, Iran adopted a similar strategy through which it sought to achieve two main goals: The first goal is to raise the cost of US punitive measures against it, and to send a message to the powers concerned with the nuclear agreement that the US withdrawal and the sanctions imposed by the United States will have dire consequences for the future of security and stability in the region, which enjoys special importance on its part. As for the second goal, it will focus on improving the terms of negotiations with the United States, and although negotiations between the United States and Iran are still a postponed possibility, at least at the current stage, they remain open, especially since it is not known to what extent Iran can bear the consequences of US sanctions. In other words, Iran's insistence on escalation in the face of the increasing American pressure aims to invoke the option of negotiation and push the other party to show greater flexibility before sitting at the negotiating table again to reach an agreement that is acceptable to both sides, and there is still a desire within some

Iranian institutions to negotiate with the United States, although the Supreme Leader (Ali Khamenei) announced on (September 17, 2019) his refusal to conduct any negotiations with the United States of America at any level on the fortieth anniversary of the storming of the US embassy in Iran on (November 4, 2019) ⁽⁶⁾, However, Iranian President (Hassan Rouhani) has returned and confirmed that the negotiation option still exists even with the United States, he said on (December 4, 2019) (that Iran has not closed the door to negotiations, and if they are ready to lift the embargo, then we are ready to hold negotiations even at the level of heads of state of group "5 + 1") ⁽⁷⁾.

⁶ Mohammad Abbas Naji, Iranian policies to deal with the US strategy of "maximum pressure", Al-Ahram Center, Al-Siyasa Al-Dawlia Journal, Issue 219, Cairo, January 2020, p. 234

⁷ Hassan Rouhan: Iran is ready to negotiate with the United States on the condition that sanctions are lifted, Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, December 16, 2019, at: <http://bit.ly/2qvovto>



The US sanctions have been applied in two phases: the first phase / on (August 7, 2018), focused on Iran's purchases of US dollars, trade in gold and precious metals, the auto industry, coal, and software related to the industry and carpets. The second phase / was implemented on (November 5, 2018) and included the energy sector, especially oil, transport and shipping companies, and ports, in addition to the financial transactions of the Central Bank of Iran.

The American administration is seeking what can be called "zeroing" Iranian oil exports on the basis that Iran is using the revenues of its oil exports to develop its nuclear and missile program and to continue its regional role in the region by providing financial and military support to its regional allies. Therefore, the new sanctions were paralleled with American moves on the ground aimed at achieving reducing Iran's influence, and if it lacks the same level of power and influence imposed by sanctions, as the United States announced that the goal of its military presence in Syria is no longer confined to ensuring that ISIS does not return again to the areas it previously controlled, but rather to work to confront the continued Iranian military presence inside Syria⁽⁸⁾.

In this context, US National Security Adviser John Bolton said on (September 27, 2018), "US forces will remain in Syria as long as the Iranian forces remain outside their borders, and this includes Iran's allies and armed militias" before the US President announced his intention to withdraw these

Forces but it is noticeable that this American move to confront Iran's influence does not extend to other files in which the latter has turned into a major party, especially in Yemen, as the United States has not taken strict measures to deal with Iranian support for the Houthis "Ansar Allah" militia. An exception may be made from this the warnings that the United States sent to Iran on September 28, 2018 against targeting its interests in Iraq after the missile attacks that were launched on the US Consulate in Basra and witnessed widespread protests during that period, the US warnings are an indication of the link between these attacks and two major developments, the first of which is / the tension that escalated between them and some Iraqi militias such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq after the US Congress voted in June 2018 on legislation obliging the president to impose sanctions on them, and the second is / Iran directed two new missile strikes inside Iraq and Syria, as it targeted in the first one of the meetings of leaders of the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party in the Koy Sanjag area in the Kurdistan region on (September 8, 2018), the second focused on the ISIS headquarters in the city of Albu Kamal on October 1, 2018, in response to the attack on the military parade in the city of Ahwaz.

Iran's keenness to launch these two strikes at the time was partly aimed at sending a message that it has the ability not only to enter an open confrontation with the United States, but also to raise the cost of any military action that the American administration might undertake in the event of the escalation reaching unprecedented levels or in the event that Iran refuses to continue abiding by the nuclear agreement due to its weak economic returns after the US withdrawal from it and the new sanctions and its tendency to reactivate its nuclear program again⁽⁹⁾.

The third claim - the Turkish and Arab position on the crisis

Turkey follows a pragmatic principle in its foreign policies in general and towards neighboring countries in particular, and this principle has been closely linked to Turkey's relationship with

⁸ The Arab Strategic Report 2018, previously cited source, p. 59

⁹ The Arab Strategic Report 2018, previously cited source, p. 60

Iran since the success of the Iranian revolution in 1979, when the hostage crisis occurred in the US embassy in Iran, Turkey declared that this matter is contrary to International laws, at the same time, it refused to allow the United States to use its bases to carry out the operation to free the hostages, or even to provide American aircraft with fuel or to cross over its territory⁽¹⁰⁾.

When the United States signed the second package of sanctions on Iran related to banning oil dealings with it in order to bring Iran's energy exports to zero, eight countries were excluded from those sanctions, one of which was Turkey, and what this means is that the United States wanted to postpone Turkey's dealings with Iran in the field of oil and gas for (6) months until it manages its position and searches for an alternative oil market, and chooses its total biases towards the US-Iran tension. However, Turkish President Erdogan confirmed two positions, the first of which is / his country's rejection of US sanctions on Iran and its administration's announcement that it will not respond to US demands to stop oil and commercial dealings with Iran, and the second is / responding to the sanctions policy and coping with it, what is understood is that Turkey has two positions, one of which is idealistic – informational with propaganda aspects and the other is political – realistic with pragmatic aspects⁽¹¹⁾.

Turkey does not support, nor is it in its interest, a war or military escalation against Iran, because the collapse of the central government in Iran is arranging two very dangerous matters for Turkey on the one hand, which will lead to the displacement of a large wave of refugees with Iran towards Turkey, which will deepen its economic crisis. On the other hand, giving the Iranian Kurds an opportunity to demand and strive to establish self-rule in a way that encourages and revives the hopes of the Kurds in Turkey and Syria again, after the losses they suffered in the region at the hands of Turkey. By virtue of Turkey's membership in NATO, the latter is obliged to support the American position, even if it is minimal, and on the one hand it will eliminate the budgetary policy that Turkey pursues in its foreign policy towards regional and international actors, and this bias may entail security risks for it, as Iran will respond to it inside Turkey, and in the Syrian arena, on the security and military front⁽¹²⁾.

Turkey also opposes US sanctions on Iran in general and the oil sector in particular, and considers them unilateral decisions that are not based on international law or Security Council resolutions. The objection is based on:

- 1- Turkey fears that Iran's dissolution of the nuclear agreement and its nuclear obligations, especially with regard to raising the level of uranium enrichment to more than 3.67%, which is the ceiling set by the agreement for its possession of nuclear weapons, and Iran needs, in order to produce a nuclear bomb, to reach the enrichment rate of 90%. Iran's possession of this weapon may change the balance of regional powers in favor of Iran in the face of its regional opponents and competitors, especially Turkey.
- 2- The Turkish and Iranian economic relations are good to a large extent, as the two countries have common land borders of up to 600 km and three official customs gates between them. Turkey is a corridor for Iran and its goods towards Europe, and Iran is a corridor for Turkey

¹⁰ Manhal Elham Abdulakrawi and two others, Turkish and Iranian relations. A study in political and economic relations, Ghaidaa Publishing and Distribution House, First Edition, Amman / Jordan, 2015, p. 191

¹¹ Mohammed Mohsen Abu Al-Noor, Turkey's position on US sanctions on Iran, Arab Forum for Iranian Policy Analysis, April 12, 2020, at www.afaip.com

¹² Tariq Diab, the Turkish position on the US-Iran escalation, Egyptian Institute for Studies, 2019, at: www.eipss-eg.org.com



towards Asia. Trade exchange between the two countries in 2018 amounted to about 12 billion dollars

- 3- Turkey obtains Iranian oil at a low symbolic price due to the geographical proximity between the two countries, and the cost of transporting oil is very low.
- 4- The tensions in the Libyan and Venezuelan arena, along with the US-Iran escalation and the sanctions imposed on Iran, have led to an increase in the price of oil, reaching \$ 74 per barrel in 2018, and with the commitment of the eight countries that were exempted from US sanctions after importing Iranian oil, however Turkey is fully aware that the Islamic Republic of Iran has dozens of different stances in different files, including, for example, relations with Israel, the Syrian and Iraqi issues, and the international coalition to fight ISIS. Therefore, its positions will not be principled and fixed in these matters, but rather with a benefit in line with its interests whenever necessity and fluctuating situations arise.

The second topic: Turkey's role towards the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran

On May 8, 2018, US President Trump announced that the United States had formally withdrawn from the nuclear agreement with Iran. Perhaps Iran has not been exposed to this level of international and regional pressure over the past four decades as it has been exposed to in recent years. The pressure started with the United States withdrawing from the nuclear agreement to the point that Iran's exports decreased from about 2.6 million barrels per day in May 2018 to less than 200,000 barrels per day in September 2019 according to some estimates. This resulted in a significant decline in the sources of national income on which Iran relied, and this was reflected in the draft budget, which Iranian President (Hassan Rouhani) submitted to the Islamic Consultative Assembly for approval on (December 8, 2019), as the value of the budget amounted to about (36 billion dollars) by calculating the exchange rate of the dollar in Iran, and although Iran still believes that it has succeeded in obstructing the efforts made by the United States to neutralize its exports, the current level of those exports does not in fact represent any real value for the Iranian economy, which means that it is almost equal to the level of zero. In some way, the government has relied in the new budget on other sources of revenue, such as raising taxes and selling some assets, and others.

The first claim - the reasons for the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement

In the context of confronting the US strategy of maximum pressure, Iran adopted a similar strategy through which it sought to achieve two main goals: the first goal, to raise the cost of US punitive measures against it, and to send a message to the powers concerned with the nuclear agreement that the American withdrawal and the sanctions imposed by the United States will have dire consequences on the future of security and stability in the region that enjoys special importance on its part. As for the second goal, it focuses on improving the conditions for negotiations with the United States. Although negotiations between the United States and Iran are still a postponed possibility - at least for the current stage - they remain on the table.

Especially since it is not known to what extent Iran can bear the consequences of the US sanctions, and Iran's insistence on escalation in the face of the increasing American pressure aims to invoke the option of negotiation and push the other party to show greater flexibility



before sitting at the negotiating table again to reach an agreement that is acceptable to the two parties⁽¹³⁾.

Trump specified the reasons for the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with the following points⁽¹⁴⁾:

1. The agreement does not stipulate real sanctions if Iran violates its obligations within the nuclear agreement other than the mechanism for imposing sanctions, and Nikki Haley - the US ambassador to the United Nations - referred to this by saying, "Whether Iran commits a major or small violation, the agreement only provides for one punishment." It is to re-impose sanctions, and if they are imposed, Iran will be exempted from all its obligations. "Instead of the agreement reducing Iran's ambitions to possess a nuclear weapon, it allowed it to continue enriching uranium and with the passage of time it reached a "nuclear penetration distance" meaning approaching the ability to produce a nuclear bomb.
2. The economic sanctions that were lifted against Iran as a result of this agreement in return for weak restrictions on its nuclear activity did not place restrictions on its activities towards Syria, Yemen and other places, which made the United States lose a major pressure card on Iran.
3. The evidence presented by Israel from intelligence documents shows Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons.
4. Since the agreement was signed, the Iranian military budget has doubled by 40%, while Iran is still in a poor economic situation after the lifting of sanctions, as the Iranian government used the money to build missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.
5. The agreement is so modest, to the point that even if Iran fully complies with its provisions, it will still be possible for the regime to be on the brink of a nuclear breakthrough in a short period of time. Therefore, the specified period of time for the agreement on uranium enrichment is never acceptable.
6. The survival of the agreement on its previous status means that the Middle East will soon know a nuclear arms race if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, and the US administration believes that the restrictions imposed on Iran to prevent the resumption of its nuclear programs are of a temporary nature, as the restrictions will expire by the end of 2030. Thus, Iran will be able to resume its nuclear programs, and perhaps it has secret nuclear programs of a military nature, which is the most dangerous.
7. The agreement lacks strict inspection mechanisms to prevent, detect, and punish Iran, and the inspectors do not have the right to unconditionally inspect many important sites, including military facilities, and the agreement failed to address Iran's development of ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.
8. The nuclear agreement does not have the ability to restrict Iran's alleged activities for stability, including its support for terrorism, because of what the agreement enabled Iran to provide in large amounts of money as a result of the lifting of sanctions, which exceeded \$ 100 billion, and Trump referred more than once during his meeting with his European counterparts. By saying, "Iran used that money to finance terrorism."

¹³ Mohammed Abbas Naji, Iranian policies for dealing with the US strategy of "maximum pressure", Al-Siyasa Al-Dawlia Journal, Al-Ahram Center, Cairo, Issue 219, 2020, p. 234.

¹⁴ Ashraf Mohammed Kishk, A Political and Legal Reading of the Nuclear Agreement, Al-Siyasa Al-Dawlia, Al-Ahram Center, Cairo, Issue 214, 2018, p. 81, also see: Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action at www.dohainainstitute.org



9. The failure of the European mediators' efforts to reach a formula that satisfies the Iranian and American parties despite reaching a tacit agreement with European companies to exclude them from possible sanctions and allow them within a specific ceiling to continue investing in the Iranian market.

The second claim - brinkmanship

The brinkmanship policy pursued by the United States and Iran is simply based on a combination of strong threats and practical preparations that suggest a decision to war or a significant military confrontation, which creates tremendous pressure on the other party targeted by these measures, and then there is a gradual retreat from the war decision and entering into negotiations or appeasement that will pave the way for political settlements to the problems

that separate between the two concerned parties. With regard to the United States, it has strengthened its military presence in the region, and its military and political officials talk a lot about Iranian threats to US interests in the region and the interests of allies as well, but they link these reinforcements to preventing Iranian threats, which documented information has gathered about according to their estimates, and thus to prevent the war and not to fight it. At the same time, they affirm that all the sanctions and stifling siege that the United States is doing on Iran is aimed at modifying its political behavior and the outcome of all this, and withdrawing from the nuclear agreement with Iran, all lead to negotiations in which Iran is in its weakest state and thus accepts the American conditions⁽¹⁵⁾.

The United States imposed the harshest economic sanctions in Iran's history, and it was subject to sanctions before the nuclear agreement was concluded. The sanctions aim at making oil and gas exports "zero", which is the main nerve of the economy, prohibiting dealings with the Central Bank and other banks, prohibiting arms sales to them, designating the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization, as well as other financial sources⁽¹⁶⁾.

The United States continues its policy of pressure on Iran to force it to conclude a new and broader agreement than the previous one that includes, in addition to the nuclear agreement, the ballistic missile program and Iran's policy in the region as a whole. It asked Iran to make radical changes in its foreign policy in the Middle East and a complete withdrawal from Syria, in addition to revealing all its military and security capabilities and preventing it from obtaining the nuclear bomb forever, not for only ten years as is the nuclear agreement, and with the escalation of US sanctions against Iran and Trump cancellation of Temporary exemptions granted to some countries to buy Iranian oil and the failure of European, Chinese and Russian efforts to save the nuclear agreement and find an alternative mechanism (for Trump's foreign policy)⁽¹⁷⁾ against Iran. Therefore, a number of Iranian officials threatened to

¹⁵ Sharif Shaaban Mabrouk, previously cited source, p. 46

¹⁶ Ali Badrakhan, Tehran challenges Washington, brinkmanship in focus, 2020, at: www.ar.qantara.de.

¹⁷ Trump is the most disturbing in American history, as the president's views on foreign policy and the world as a whole were among the most random and not based on information and seem volatile, and his advisers did not know whether he was isolationist, military, or able to distinguish between the two. He was fascinated by the generals and decided that those who have experience in Military leadership should take the lead in foreign policy, but he hated telling him what to do, he was against nation-building, but he thought there were a few cases in which he personally could not do a better job in which he could not stand his inexperience on foreign policy, but he had no respect for the experts either. For more, see: Michael Wolf, Fire and Fury: The White House in the Trump Era, previously cited source, p. 236



Close the Strait of Hormuz and preventing the export of oil in the event of continuing to prevent the export of Iranian oil, and attacking US interests and their allies in the region⁽¹⁸⁾.

The third claim - the repercussions of the crisis on the Arab Gulf region and its environs

The Arab Gulf region, in particular, lived on the impact of escalating tension with Iran, in light of mutual threats between Iran and the United States, and with the increase in tension and warnings of a war, Saudi Arabia called two Arab and Gulf emergency summits on May 30, 2019, and the 14th Ordinary Islamic Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was held in Makkah on May 31, 2019. Saudi Arabia sought to mobilize Gulf, Arab and Islamic political support in the face of Iranian threats and intensify pressure on Iran in an attempt to ward off potential Iranian dangers after the attacks that targeted the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The latter accused Iran of issuing orders to the Ansar Allah group (Houthi) to direct strikes by drones, for which the group officially claimed responsibility. On the other hand, Iran has intensified its diplomatic efforts before the three summits, by passing positive messages in several directions, perhaps helping it to: **first** / alleviating US pressure, **second** / avoiding condemning decisions issued through these three summits, Iran fears that it will increase its Gulf, Arab and Islamic isolation. During his visit to Iraq, the Iranian Foreign Minister announced that his country had offered to sign a non-aggression contract with its neighbors in the Gulf region⁽¹⁹⁾.

On the Arab level in general, many Arabs at the official and elite level believe that Iran's nuclear program is a source of the strategic threat, and there are clear divisions about

The limits of this perception in terms of generalization on one hand and in terms of details on the other hand. This perception is doubtful among large sectors of Arab public opinion and among the educated elites. The official Arab position is divided about it in terms of its seriousness among those who see that this program does not represent a threat to the Arabs, even if it is nuclear. Here, it is possible to understand the effect of Israel having nuclear weapons on forming such awareness, and among those who see that the program represents no threat because it is a peaceful program, and there is no serious evidence so far proving the opposite, except for intelligence reports and Israeli and American accusations. However, there are those who believe that Iran's possession of a military or even peaceful nuclear program constitutes a danger to the Arabs, an environmental and political danger, based on the Iranian tendency to employ superior capabilities to gain political positions or to exert pressure or deterrence policies against some Arab countries⁽²⁰⁾.

This dichotomy in the Arab perception of the danger of the Iranian program as a source of threat is witnessing related changes and developments, **first** / to the decline or escalation of the American crisis with Iran, **second** / to the possibility of the Americans or Israelis resort to a military solution and the risks that may result from that to Arab security and interests, and **third** / to the development of Arab-Iranian relations, negatively and positively, and it also has a relationship with the level of Arab-American relations. Countries close to Iran and that are at a distance from the United States adopt a moderate stance towards this program, unlike the countries that are engaged in a series of disagreements with Iran and are closer to the United

¹⁸ Abdulrahman Al-Rashid, What If Trump Betrayed Us, Al-Bayan Newspaper, 2019, at: www.albayan.ae/opinions/artic.

¹⁹ Sharif Shaaban Mabrouk, previously cited source, p. 48.

²⁰ Mohammad Al-Saeed Idris, where is Iran located in the Arab political perception? Iranian Anthology Magazine, Issue 207, 2018, p. 10



States, as their stance appears to be more severe and suspicious of this program. The positions of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries are the most sensitive regarding the Iranian nuclear program, and Iraq distances itself from dealing with this crisis, the Egyptian position comes in a middle ground between the Gulf position and the Syrian position, while the Arab Maghreb countries do not find themselves directly involved in this issue. But in general there is support for Iran's right to possess a peaceful nuclear program and rejection of a military solution to deal with the crisis raised over this program, and more importantly, these differing Arab positions regarding the Iranian nuclear program crisis, is

It a source of threat to Arab security and interests or not, whether it is evolving or changing and not fixed, and it is governed by the developments that are taking place in the crisis between the United States and Iran⁽²¹⁾.

With the developments in the Iranian nuclear program, a differentiation or difference in positions has been revealed, not only at the level of the ruling elites, but also at the level of the educated elites between those who announce their concerns about the Iranian nuclear program, whether military or peaceful, and those keen to dispel these fears, especially after the American withdrawal from The international agreement signed between the (5 + 1) group and Iran, which is a withdrawal where potential military and economic repercussions have imposed themselves strongly, and these repercussions have led to a clear separation of the positions of the six Gulf states, while Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain support efforts aimed at confronting Iran's attempts to circumvent the nuclear agreement and its regional policies towards many neighboring countries, there are other contrasting positions for the other three Gulf states, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait, which differ among themselves in terms of bias towards the Iranian vision or US policy. The same applies to most Arab countries, between those who see Iran's nuclear capabilities as a source of threat and those who do not⁽²²⁾.

The fourth claim - Turkish awareness of the crisis

Turkish foreign policy, which has a good relationship from time to time with Iran and the United States, realizes that the latter under the Trump administration does not seek war, but rather seeks negotiation. In view of its interests, this realization encourages it to play the role of mediation to bring the two parties closer to the negotiating table, especially since there is a division within the American administration about what should be the escalation against Iran and between those who push Trump and his administration to adopt the overthrow of the regime and those who are content to pressure Iran to reach a serious agreement on its nuclear program. As the official line of the American administration calculates the estimates of the American research and studies centers is that regime change is not on Trump's agenda and that it means returning Iran to the negotiating table in order to sign an agreement that includes its regional role, especially in Syria and Yemen, in addition to the nuclear and missile programs obviously⁽²³⁾.

On the day immediately following the signing of the sanctions, i.e. November 6, 2018, Turkish President Erdogan went out and announced that his country would not abide by the sanctions that the United States had reimposed on the oil and shipping sectors in Iran. He even supported the Iranian position propaganda by describing these US sanctions as aimed at "disturbing the

²¹ Mohammad Al-Saeed Idris, previously cited source, p. 10-11

²² same source, p. 11

²³ Mohammed Mohsen Abu Al-Noor, The limits of tension between Washington and Tehran, Al-Siyasa Al-Dawlia, Al-Ahram Center, Issue 217, 2019, p. 185



balance in the world." Then he announced in a joint press conference with Iranian President Rouhani in December 2018 that Turkey would continue trade with Iran and said that the US sanctions against Iran are illegal, he affirmed his position on the American move, "I do not want to live in an imperialist world," describing its policy (expansion that dominates peoples' capabilities). He said: Certainly, we will not abide by such sanctions. We buy ten billion cubic meters of natural gas, and we cannot allow these sanctions to freeze our people from the cold because they depend on energy from Iran."⁽²⁴⁾

There are several results in Turkish foreign policy towards the US sanctions on Iran, through:⁽²⁵⁾

- 1- Turkey has adopted pragmatic policies in its relationship with countries, and made clear its position on sanctions by studying field developments and managing its interests from the conflict of the two parties, regardless of principle and ideological considerations.
- 2- The Turkish position on the US sanctions ranged from strict rejection to cautious calm, and then a full response to those sanctions, through a series of Turkish descending stances that ended

The oil dealings with Iran and refused to receive its tanker in dispute with Britain and the United States.

- 3- The United States realized the nature of Turkish policies and worked to separate the Turkish response to sanctions from the military armament relations between Turkey and Russia. This led to tension in US-Turkish relations.
- 4- Turkey has tried to exploit the US-Iran dispute over the nuclear program and use it as a bargaining chip for its growing military relationship with Russia. Perhaps the United States will turn a blind eye to Turkey's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system.
- 5- From the perspective, Turkey would welcome any mediation or negotiation efforts between Iran and the United States on the media level, but at the political level it will not be happy with any calm between the two sides because every US-Iran tension means easing pressure on the Turkish front, with Erdogan realizing that the US-Iran consensus only means Trump is dedicated to resolve his differences with Turkey regarding relations with Russia.

Future Options

The US have three main options in this regard as follows:

- 1- Confronting Iran by establishing an "Arab NATO" to confront Iran. Among the options that the United States is studying is the formation of what is called an Arab NATO to confront Iran by strengthening cooperation with the Gulf countries, Egypt and Jordan, as the US administration will work to strengthen cooperation with those countries on missile defense, military training, combating terrorism and other issues such as supporting regional, economic and diplomatic relations.
- 2- Concluding a new agreement with Iran or a supplementary agreement, but that remains dependent on Iran's response to the twelve requirements set by the US Secretary of State, which are: disclosure of the full military aspects of its nuclear system, permitting the IAEA to inspect it on an ongoing basis, stopping uranium enrichment, abandoning attempts to treat plutonium,

²⁴ Turkey announces that it adheres to the US sanctions, Deutsche Welle, November 9, 2018, at <http://bit.ly/2kwsKF7>

²⁵ Mohammed Mohsen Abu Al-Noor, Turkey's position on US sanctions on Iran, Arab Forum for Iranian Policy Analysis, 12/4/2020, at www.afaip.com



and shutting down the heavy water reactor, and Iran would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency full access to all

Military and non-military nuclear stations, and that Iran put an end to the proliferation of ballistic missiles, the launch of missiles that can carry nuclear warheads, the release of American citizens and all citizens of allied countries, and stop Iran's support for terrorist groups in the Middle East such as Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and respect the Iraqi government, allow the disarming of Shiite militias, stop support for Houthi militias in Yemen, work to reach a political solution in it, withdraw all forces affiliated with Iran from Syria, stop support for the Taliban and all terrorist elements, do not harbor Al-Qaeda elements and stop support for Al-Quds Force in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and its partners from terrorist groups, and stopping the Iranian threat to its neighbors from neighboring countries, allies of the United States, these conditions reflect the fact that the previous US administration led by Trump tried to correct the strategic mistake of the Obama administration, which tried to strip the nuclear file of its regional aspects.

- 3- Military confrontation: It is noted that within crises, wars of words break out over the military capabilities of each side. On the Iranian side, it suffices to refer to two statements: first / what the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Brigadier General Hossein Salami referred to, saying: "His country has missile technology that neither America nor Russia possess" Speaking of supersonic missiles and capabilities related to hitting mobile marine targets, as for the second statement / it was made by General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, who said: "Iran has reached its peak of power, and let us wait for permission to achieve its local and regional interests." On the American side, despite the contents of the report issued by the Preventive Action Center of the US Council on Foreign Relations, which classified the risks that the United States would face into three levels topped by the conflict with Iran, but it does not necessarily mean that the scenario of military confrontation is on the table, due to many factors, not the least of which are the complexities of military action in light of a highly complex and transformative regional and international environment, in addition to what this strike will require in terms of an increase in the size of US military spending, which is not easy, in addition to the results of that strike regionally, but more importantly, its aim will be to destroy nuclear sites or topple the Iranian regime.

The foregoing means that if the first option succeeds with what this means in terms of activating the effect of sanctions, especially as they will affect the energy sector and the financial sector, this may lead to the second option, which is the possibility of thinking about concluding a new agreement or perhaps a complementary agreement in a way that spares the region a new military confrontation, its objectives may be known, while its results may add a new crisis to a region that has been witnessing a chronic crisis that extends over the past decades. It can be said that regardless of the future scenarios for the Iranian nuclear file, we are facing an unconventional regional-international conflict, as its parties are no longer only states, but groups without states. This led to the emergence of what is known as asymmetric wars, and therefore the settlement of the Iranian nuclear file will remain closely related to developments in regional security, which greatly overlap with its global counterpart.

Outcome:



After the tension in relations between the United States and Iran before and after the American withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement in 2018, the causes of escalation and tension between the two parties, the US punitive measures against Iran, the causes and repercussions of the withdrawal, as well as the Turkish, Gulf and Arab position on the crisis between the two countries, were presented, the United States still possesses international pressure cards through which it can impose real and effective challenges in Iran, although some countries show positions that differ from the American position, such as Turkey, specifically with regard to adhering to sanctions and putting more pressure on Iran. Moreover, the United States possesses the tools of intervention and capabilities that enable it to reduce and eliminate Iran's nuclear program through the size of sanctions affecting Iran, which thus leads to the American focus on the Iranian internal arena as an entry point and means to influence the behavior of the Iranian regime. However, the issue of negotiation over the nuclear program is always on the table between the two countries, regardless of the positions of the neighboring countries, especially the State of Turkey.

Conclusions:

On this, the researcher concludes a set of points from all of the above, which are:

- 1- After the improvement in Iran-US relations in reaching the nuclear agreement in 2015, tension has returned again to represent the main feature of the interactions between the two parties with the Trump administration assuming power on January 20, 2017, and then it developed into an unprecedented escalation after the measures taken by the US administration in 2018.
- 2- The reasons for the escalation of tensions and threats between the two countries since the United States announced its withdrawal from the nuclear agreement in 2018, which aims to curb Iran's nuclear activities, and accused Iran of talking about the peaceful use of nuclear energy, while the activities refer to Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.
- 3- To confront the US pressure, Iran adopted two goals, the first / raising the cost of US punitive measures against it, and the second / improving the conditions for negotiations with the United States, although it is still a postponed possibility at the current stage.
- 4- Turkey, which has a good relationship from time to time with Iran and the United States, realizes that the latter under the Trump administration does not seek war, but rather seeks negotiations.
- 5- Turkey has two positions regarding the American withdrawal, one of which is idealistic – informational with propaganda aspects and the other is political – realistic with pragmatic aspects.
- 6- Turkey opposes US sanctions on Iran in general and the oil sector in particular, and considers them unilateral decisions that are not based on international law or Security Council resolutions.
- 7- The Turkish position on the US sanctions ranged from strict rejection to cautious calm, and then a full response to those sanctions, through a series of Turkish descending stances.
- 8- Turkey has adopted pragmatic policies in its relationship with the United States and Iran, and it manages its interests from the conflict of the two parties regardless of ideological and principle considerations.

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