THE US-IRAN RAPPROCHEMENT
REAL OR DREAM?

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The initial settlement that Iran and 5+1 countries reached during the nuclear talks has broad repercussions in the international community as it presents a possibility of a new dimension in the US-Iran affairs, 35 years of which were problematic. Bilateral relations have turned quite sour especially after George W. Bush in the US and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran acceded. However, the government changes in both countries provided an opportunity for dialogue. The said agreement has remained on the agenda for a while due to global and regional implications of a possibility of moderation today.
INTRODUCTION
Following the presidential elections in Iran, expectations for a new beginning in the West-Iran relations yielded exciting news although not even a hundred days passed since Hassan Rouhani was elected president. The parties reached a settlement on the nuclear energy dispute concerning Iran, which had become a very delicate issue between Iran and the West for a long time, and this signaled possible rapprochements.

After this agreement, a spate of analyses have been made about the Iran-the West relations, although bilateral relations have been problematic between Iran and the West in general since the 1979 revolution, and hostile between Iran and the US in particular. The analyses focus on the beginning of a new term in bilateral relations and on the new dimension of the relations, which may lead to new alliances and the birth of new discords in the region.

Some of these analyses were well-balanced and prudent, yet others were exaggerated expectations, either in the negative or positive sense. The accumulating issues between the two countries throughout the history, cracked voices in their national policies and the reflexes of global and regional players in case of a rapprochement are some of the many determining factors in the US-Iranian relations. Therefore, in order to read the US-Iranian relations accurately and make a sound analysis, the data in hand should be processed accurately. This is the purpose of this study.

In line with this objective, the study will seek answers to the following questions:

- How has the course of history in the US-Iranian relations been?
- Were there any unofficial, indirectly official and directly official talks previously?
- What are the main issues and perspectives of the parties in regard to these issues?
- How real is the said rapprochement, and is it possible to transform this into cooperation?
- What are the needs of the parties so that they have an urge for a rapprochement?
- What are the possible implications of a possible rapprochement with regard to the parties, the region and Turkey?

THE COURSE OF HISTORY IN THE US-IRANIAN RELATIONS
First contacts between Iran and the US took place in the early 19th century. Prior to the official contact, the US made contact with the Persian literature and Iranians heard of a country named “America”. Americans traveled to Iran for the first time through missionary activities in the second quarter of the 19th century.

Official interactions between the two countries began during the period of Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir, one of the prime ministers of the Kajar era and the first Iranian statesman who realized that the US would be a global power soon. Amir Kabir made efforts to improve relations with the US based on friendship while he was in search of a third power trying to liberate Iran from the Russian and British
authority and help the country to become an independent state.

For this purpose, in Istanbul in 1850, Amir Kabir ordered the Iranian ambassador to the Ottoman, Mirza Mohammed Khan to meet the US charge d'affairs to the Ottoman, George Marsh, and have contacts for an agreement. The talks between the sides resulted in an agreement on friendship and maritime relations. The agreement would go into effect within a year at the latest and the parties would establish mutual consulary offices and free-trade via maritime lines.

Shortly after, Amir Kabir paid a heavy price for his attempt. He was dismissed from the office a month after the agreement and then executed. Mirza Aga Khan Nouri succeeding Amir Kabir acted upon the British request and terminated the agreement.\(^1\)

As the relations between Iran and the Britain strained five years later due to the Afghanistan issue and a British fleet was deployed in the Persian Gulf, it was concluded that Amir Kabir had indeed followed a correct policy; therefore, attempts were made for the renewal of the terminated agreement.

These attempts and talks resulted in an agreement signed and formalized between the US President Franklin Pierce and the Iranian Shah Naser o-Din Shah in 1857. However, the agreement could not be implemented for a long time due to the British pressure and its entry into force was postponed continuously.

The US President of the period, Chester Alan Arthur, dispatched the veteran diplomat Samuel Benjamin to Iran in 1883. Benjamin prepared myriads of projects, starting with the construction of a railway in the three years he stayed in the Iranian capital Tehran. However, all these efforts remained inconclusive because of the pressure exerted by the Russians and the British.

The period of the third US Ambassador to Iran Edward Spencer Pratt is one of the turning points in the US-Iranian relations. In this period, an American missioner W.W. Torrence was granted permission to dig an artesian well in Iran, to sign an agreement to set up a bank, to construct railways and build a dam along with the signing of agreements with a US company for joint exploration and extraction of minerals.

### The US and the Iranian (Constitutional-Parliamentary) Monarchy Movement

During the period when a pro-(constitutional-parliamentary) monarchy movement began, gradually gained strength and procured the declaration of the Monarchy in Iran, the US foreign policy in Iran had its ups and downs. Although the US charge d'affairs to Iran, Richmond Pearson, delivered the opinion to the US administration that the Monarchy movement in Iran must be supported, the US President Theodore Roosevelt instructed to remain neutral between the Monarchy supporters and the State.

Nonetheless, the US officially recognized the Monarchy movement as it succeeded. Even more so, Pearson, comparing the Monarchy in Iran with the US revolution, expressed that the Monarchy in Iran would influence all freedom movements in other Asian countries.

After a while, however, the US instructed the ambassador not to get involved in the Iranian national affairs as the Monarchy movement was suppressed. Interestingly, some Americans living in Iran participated in the popular uprising and some of them who died during the hot encounters were called martyrs of the Monarchy.

As the 2nd Monarchy Majlis (Parliament) launched activities in Iran, parliamentary representatives decided to employ an American undersecretary in order to remedy the economic situation. Accordingly, W. Morgan Shuster arrived in Iran in 1911. Russians and the British who perceived the works of Shuster regarding

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customs as a threat to their activities and interests objected to this. Ultimately, Russia sent a diplomatic note to Iran for the dismissal of Shuster. Iran with fear of occupation accepted the note and discharged Shuster.

In fact, Russia and Britain had made a plan and a deal in 1907 for partaking Iran. However, Iran was saved by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Afterwards, Britain prepared a plan to take Iran under control, but the US gaining strength in time thwarted the idea and hampered the implementation of the plan. However, Britain was still more powerful in Iran and around the globe and would not let the US create an influence over Iran.

The Shah owing his comeback to the US and reascending the throne followed a foreign policy always in accordance with the US directives from the day of his comeback until the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

The situation did not change until Prime Minister of Iran Mohammed Mosaddegh was overthrown by a US-backed coup on August 19, 1953. Until then, the US acknowledged the British hegemony on Iran, but politically supported Reza Khan, and in the meantime tried to draw the attention of the influential Iranian intellectuals and statesmen.

On the one hand, the US was strengthening its position in Iran while trying to fence off the influence of its rivals, Russia and the Britain. To this end, the US State Department developed a new policy on Iran. It was articulated in a classified document presented to top US authorities that the British and Russian involvement in the Iranian national affairs must be prevented, territorial integrity of Iran must be protected and the US influence over the Iranian internal affairs must be increased.

On the other hand, the US believed that Iran must not become an independent and powerful state. In fact, then the US Secretary of State Cordell Hull said in a letter he wrote to the US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that on the other side of the Persian Gulf, the existence of a strong (governmental) structure in countries such as Iran against the oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia is against the US long term interests. In the same letter, Hull also said that increasing national power of Iran harms the US, so the formation of a strong and independent government in Iran must not be allowed. In the Truman Period, the US foreign policy in Iran was mainly to prevent communist Russia from having an influence over Iran. In the Dwight Eisenhower period, however, the US planned to have Iran as an “iron country” against the Soviet Union.

But then, the movement of nationalist and pious Iranians who were reacting against the takeover of the Iranian resources by foreigners and aiming to take the resources back was gaining momentum. Eventually, Mosaddegh decided for the nationalization of the oil after he became the prime minister in 1951.

The move by Mosaddegh meant that no country can have privileges over the Iranian oil. In fact, Mosaddegh was planning to avert the influence of the Soviet Union on Iran and feeling close to the US. However, the US doctrine had no place for a powerful and independent Iran; therefore, the US and Britain orchestrated a coup to dismiss Mosaddegh on August 19, 1953. The CIA had organized the coup which is one of the turning points in the US-Iranian relations and also one of the most critical events in the modern

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history of Iran, for it led up to the Iran Islamic Revolution in 1979.

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Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi who had to leave the country as a result of the steps Mosaddegh had taken returned to Iran after Mosaddegh was overthrown by the coup. The Shah owing his comeback to the US and reascending the throne followed a foreign policy always in accordance with the US directives from the day of his comeback until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The Shah practically acted as a US military police force on national politics and foreign affairs.

This being the case, people opposing the Shah's policies were also opposing to the US as the center of the popular reaction for its role in the coup resulted in Mosaddegh's overthrow. Thereafter, the US gradually became more of an enemy for the Iranians. This hostility made a peak with the Revolution in 1979. The US had the right to interfere in all of the Iranian relations in the period of time between the coup and the revolution.

After the Revolution

The US still had high hopes for Iran as Mahde Bazergan with liberal tendencies formed the government after the 1979 revolution. However, when university students occupied the US Embassy in Tehran on November 4 and the leader of the revolution, Imam Khomeini, terming the incident as a second revolution supported it, bilateral relations were officially ended. Following the 444-day occupation, the US-Iran relations were suspended for a while. The US mainly did not want to lose Iran to the Soviet Union due to the country’s geopolitical position.

For this reason, the US President of the period Ronald Reagan battled out to mend the ties with Iran. On the one hand, the US supported Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war; but on the other hand, attempted to sell military equipments to Iran that it needed. The US asked of Iran to use its influence over the release of the American hostages held by the Hezbollah of Lebanon in 1986, and in return, weapons were sold to Iran. According to the agreement, Reagan’s special envoy to Iran, Robert Macfarlane, personally delivered the weapons.

McFarlane's real intention was to resume the US-Iranian relations. As the secret exchange of weapons and McFarlane's visit were revealed, this created a great deal of impact around the world, and hopes for the US-Iranian rapprochement faded away until the accession of reformist Mohammed Khatemi took the lead in 1977.

The US-Iranian relations had ups and downs during the Khatemi period. Then the US President Bill Clinton read the election of Khatemi as a hopeful sign about the Iranian politics, but stressed that the US-Iranian relations will not be normalized unless Iran confronts terrorism. Notwithstanding, Khatemi and then the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright exchanged warm messages.

Although Clinton sent a secret letter to the Iranian President Khatemi, the letter including friendly messages was exposed. In the same year, the US Secretary of State apologized for the past US foreign policy in Iran. Afterwards, Clinton issued statements in this direction. Following these mellowing statements, the US eased off the economic sanction against Iran.

Once again, Albright apologized in a message to celebrate the Iranian New Year, Nawrouz, in March 2000 for the support that the US provided to the late Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war and for the CIA’s role in the coup to topple the prime minister of the period Mosaddegh in 1953. However, none of these attempts were sufficient to make solid official contacts.4

As the Republican George W. Bush became the president-elect in the US after Clinton, the

US-Iranian relations tensed up but followed an interesting course. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the US invaded Afghanistan and Iraq with the claim of fight against terrorism. Iran; on the one hand, condemned these invasions but supported the newly formed governments in these countries; and, on the other hand, held direct contacts with the US concerning these two countries.

As the number one global enemy of Iran besieging the country through invasions of peripheral countries, it was also saving Iran from its regional enemies, the Taliban and Saddam Hussein regimes. The US, on the other hand, was trying to bring law-and-order into Afghanistan and Iraq; but, on the other hand, was placing Iran on the “axis of evil”. The main reason for this placement was the nuclear activities of Iran.

The nuclear crisis between Iran and the West has deepened after 2002. In August of 2002, the People’s Mujahideen of Iran fighting against the regime exposed the documents on nuclear works of Iran to the world public opinion. Towards the end of the same year, the US accused Iran of violating the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and producing nuclear weapons. Iran denied these claims and asserted that the International Atomic Energy Agency is the interlocutor of the issue. However, Iran held nuclear talks with the West during the Khatemi period and suspended the nuclear works. With the accession of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the presidency, Iran announced that the nuclear works will be resumed.

Ahmedinejad carried his aggressive attitude in foreign policy into domestic policy during his second term in presidency. He began to have problems with the Ayetollah although they were close in his previous term. Therefore, the Iranians facing aggressiveness both inside and outside needed understanding of a more moderate policy. Rouhani is a name who emerged and won the election as a result of this need. A balanced policy discourse inside and outside was a promise that the Iranian people needed to hear, and Rouhani pledged just that.

Of course it is important that Rouhani was the one who conducted nuclear talks on behalf of Iran with the West during the Khatemi period. It is also critical that a quite positive atmosphere was created with the West in the same period. However, considering the fact that before being elected president Rouhani was the representative of the Ayetollah at the Supreme National Security Council, the current Iranian approach may be interpreted as an indicator of a political tactic, and the change of policy is a new decision of the system rather than a difference of opinion between the two presidents. This is because the political landscape of the country was as follows when

Rouhani became the president: The US had failed to prevent Iran from nuclear activities through sanctions and Iran had been suffocated due to the sanctions. In a period where both sides could not reach their objectives, the process headed to a dead-end; Rouhani was elected president. He was, in fact, an opportunity for both parties, and they were willing to benefit from this opportunity.

**Rapprochement Attempts**

Albeit the US-Iranian relations retrogressed and official relations were terminated completely after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, this does not mean that the parties have had never communicated. First of all, it may be said that the sides continued informal contacts. The incident known as the “Irangate,” during which the secret talks between the sides were exposed to the public, is an indicator of this.

In addition, indirect contacts of the parties are already known. Besides, Iran and the US had direct official talks regarding third parties. Direct contacts between the two following the US invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq are an example of this. The state of no-official-contact between Iran and the US implies only the issues concerning the two countries.

Moreover, several attempts of rapprochement were made in this regard in almost all of the different Iranian government periods. The most critical of these attempts are as follows:

1. Immediately after the revolution, Prime Minister of the interim government, Mahdi Bazargan, met the US officials in Algeria; however, the meeting triggered the US Embassy occupation in Tehran and eliminated the possibility of rapprochement.
2. During President Abdulhassan Banisadr period, a rapprochement possibility occurred through a US offer, but the US operation (Eagle Clay) in Tabas Desert to end the hostage crisis at the US Embassy prevented this attempt.
3. Another attempt took place during the McFarlane incident; however, it was disrupted when an Iranian group leaked the talks.
4. During Hashemi Rafsanjani period, the sides came quite close to a negotiation process owing to third party countries, but the attempts remained inconclusive due to the internal reactions in Iran.
5. In the Khatemi period, the US positively received the discourse of the Dialogue Among Civilizations introduced by Khatemi and the parties made a rapprochement attempt. However, the possibility of rapprochement faded away when conservatives in Iran severely opposed the attempt and the People’s Mujahideen leaked the documents about the Iranian nuclear program to the world’s public opinion in the same period.⁶

There have always been mutual efforts for a rapprochement, but each time the attempts remained inconclusive for various reasons.

As it is seen, there have always been mutual efforts for a rapprochement, but each time the attempts remained inconclusive for various reasons; in fact the parties did not consider a rapprochement either appropriate or necessary. While the parties have been assessing another possibility of rapprochement owing to Rouhani’s presidency, they should bear this experience in mind. Besides, a holistic approach was at issue in the previous attempts, but now the talks concentrate only on the Iranian nuclear program and easing up the relevant sanctions.

In fact, signs of possible efforts for talks in the subject matter appeared way before the presi-
dential elections in Iran. A few months before the elections, the supreme religious leader of the country Ayetollah Khamanei signaled that he was not against the talks with the US “although he is not optimistic about the consequences”. Following this, Rouhani’s promises during the election campaign were another signal that he would make efforts to restore the relations. This is because he promised to work hard to lift the sanctions and to save the Iranians from the economic dire strait.

Shortly after Rouhani became the president, first steps were taken in this direction. He gave a message of moderation by freeing 80 political prisoners kept in Iran before he departed for New York for a UN conference. The US responded to this message by a phone call from the US President Barack Obama to Rouhani on his return home. The Foreign Ministers’ meeting between the two countries in New York was the first direct top level official contact in the last 30 years.

Accelerated by these moves, the rapprochement process resulted in an interim-agreement between Iran and the 5+1 countries during the talks that have continued for a long time. According to this, Iran is to lower the uranium enrichment level as the sanctions are to be eased up in exchange. Although some terms and conceptions are unclear and the sides have different and contradictory interpretations about some provisions, a part of the world public opinion were in fact excited about the agreement and rapprochement scenarios are exaggerated almost to the level of a strategic partnership between the US and Iran.

As regards to the US-Iranian relations, it should not be forgotten that this is not an issue involving these two countries alone, but rather it is a multi-actor game involving many regional and international actors.

**How Realistic is the Possibility of Rapprochement?**

As it is mentioned above, some politicians and commentators have made quite positive assertions regarding the US-Iran rapprochement due to the interim-agreement reached between Iran and the 5+1 countries. On the other hand, some others believe that this agreement does not mean anything and in the final analysis there will be no change in the US-Iran relations.

According to the first perspective, the sanction period has ended. As a new term begins between Iran and the US, all problems will be solved. This approach is the result of hopes and anxieties being superior to political analyses. Although it is true that there is a new situation, the real issue is how the situation will evolve and what it will face in the future stages.

As regards to the US-Iranian relations, it should not be forgotten that this is not an issue involving these two countries alone, but rather it is a multi-actor game involving many regional and international actors.

Even if we presume that the parties have decided to have close ties, the existence of other actors carries the issue to different levels. It should not be ignored that some of these regional and global actors permeate into both countries. For instance, any evaluation on the US politics deserves questioning if it leaves out of the account the Jewish lobby which is quite influential over the US politics.

Furthermore, past experiences, hostilities and mutual distrust will be very effective in the next stage of the process. Besides, even the technical and legal complications in the blueprint of the interim agreement are sufficient to make the process difficult.
The second perspective gets caught in details, to the contrary of the first group, scrutinizes word-by-word the agreement document and interprets it according to their own political and psychological state while believing that a truce between Iran and the West, the US in particular, is impossible. The parties in this group overlook the current situation and miss the fact that the reality imposes itself and the sides ought to reach an agreement on some issues.

It should also be considered that the Iranian economy has weakened already as a result of the sanctions, and on the other side, the US should come up with a new strategy in the Middle East. As regards to the US-Iranian relations, it should not be forgotten that this is not an issue involving the two countries; but it is rather a multi-actor game involving many other regional and international players.

Both approaches are problematic as they refuse to look at the big picture. What needs to be done is to consider the other international or regional players based on both historic and social data, and handle the issue by taking into account the current realities of the two countries and the urge they have for a rapprochement.

WHY DID THE US AND IRAN HAVE AN URGE FOR SETTLEMENT?

Despite the deep ideological differences and political enmity towards each other, the two countries seek a ground for settlement; this is both nothing but a strike of reality and due to the fact that their old attitudes did not help them reach their goals.

The political pressure has pushed Iran outside the international political system and it has been perceived - by the West in particular - as an organization rather than a State. Due to this negative impression, Iran faces difficulties with its regional assertions and efforts to become a political power. This has been a critical problem for the country since it has adopted a policy to deal with the Governments rather than political movements (in other countries) after losing the first flush of passion about the Revolution in particular.

More importantly, however, the damages caused by the economic sanctions applied against Iran. Although the country sits on significant crude oil and natural gas reserves, Iran is suffocated while trying to deal with the supply-demand issues in the international arena.

The Iranian economy has already been in a quite critical condition. The country faces severe financial pressures, suffers a damaged industry as inflation and unemployment percentages are sky-rocketing. Therefore, lifting sanctions becomes Iran's priority. Moreover, if the US and Iran fail to reach an agreement, the US Congress may decide for more embargos and render the situation for Iran 'unable to carry through'.

It is also necessary for the US to find a settlement ground. First of all, the sanctions that have been applied so far against Iran do not prevent the Iranian nuclear activities but rather encourage Iran to work harder on its nuclear program. It is unclear whether or not increasing the sanctions will work from now on.

In this case, it should be either tried to settle the issue or to consider other options which would have bad consequences such as war. Considering that the US invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which were the last two wars of the US in the Middle East, did not obviously create desirable results for the US, and that pivotal developments took place in the Middle East in recent years, it does not seem easy for the US to venture into a new war.

On top of all these, it seems that the US has decided not to consume its energy to put itself in a difficult position in the Middle East as other areas of interest have already emerged for the US outside the Middle East - such as China. Let
alone, lifting economic embargos against Iran will help not only Iran but also the US. For instance, if sanctions are lifted and Iran restarts to export crude oil, the oil prices are expected to drop about 10 percent. Even this is sufficient for the US to save about 80 billion dollars annually.\(^7\)

**Obstacles to Rapprochement**

The answer to why Iran and the US have failed to build good relations so far is critical with regard to showing us the possible future obstacles between the two countries. As it was aforementioned briefly, part of these obstacles is related to third parties, as other parts stem from Iran and the US. This section will touch on these obstacles.

Possible amelioration of the US-Iran relations will have a negative impact on some regional and global powers; therefore, they try to prevent a US-Iran rapprochement. More clearly, the US-Iran relations are multi-faceted and complicated in nature. Numerous variables and actors play a role in these relations. For that matter, internal, regional and global real obstacles and problems await for the parties involved in negotiations.

In terms of the region, some countries neighboring Iran via the Persian Gulf see themselves as geopolitical contenders of Iran and oppose the normalization in the US-Iran relations. The countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar have built their geopolitical positions based on competition with Iran. As a consequence, they have won the guardianship of the US and its support for the region beyond national boundaries.

Under the circumstances, it may not be necessary for the US to support these countries against Iran in case of a US-Iran rapprochement although the US geopolitical and energy interests require for the US to stick around. If a possible close-up between Iran and the US takes place, the said countries may no longer be able to remain in the game as opposed to Iran, which may play a bigger part in the play. This is a serious problem to bother the forenamed countries.\(^8\)

Without doubt, the state that sternly objects, and will object in the future, to a US-Iran rapprochement is Israel. Israel has always felt threatened in the region since the day one of its establishment, and constructed such a discourse mainly based on the Iranian threat in particular after the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution. Owing to this perception of threat, Israel has remarkably had US financial, military and intelligence assistance for years.

Therefore, a possible US-Iran rapprochement will cause a decrease in the said US assistance to Israel in the first place, and then again will weaken Israel’s hand in the play as Iran’s regional power increases in a way not to disturb the US.

Therefore, Israel – particularly the Jewish lobby in the US - exerts efforts with all its power to curb a possible rapprochement between the US and Iran. Interestingly, Israel is not interested in the fact that Iran as a country having nuclear weapons will be contained by the said agreement, although the Israeli perception of threat has seemed to mainly focus on a nuclear Iran so far. This conjures up the question whether Israel is really concerned about the nuclear Iran or tries to secure its position. If the latter is the case, then it is necessary to be prepared for a process that will also affect Israel’s attitude.\(^9\)

The US-Iran rapprochement has also global opponents. Big global powers, such as Russia and China, have benefited from no relation between the US and Iran for the last 30 years. For instance, Russians built the Bushehr nuclear plant for a very high price. Again, the procurement of S-300 missiles is a sign of how much Russia takes advantage of the current state of affairs between the US and Iran.

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7. http://goo.gl/c7HkM
Russia regarded Iran as a regional competitor in the field of energy, and it was predicted that the competition between the two will continue in any case. With the lifting of the sanctions, Iran will be stronger and a bigger competitor of Russia in energy. The increase in Iranian oil supply in the market will negatively affect the Russian Gazprom.

China, on the other hand, has turned out as the number one address of the Iranian imports owing to the sanctions applied by the West against Iran. Even more so, this trade relation seems to be almost unilateral and for the benefit of Chinese interests only. China sells low quality goods to Iran in exchange for oil instead of paying in cash. On the other hand, Russia and China use the Iran card against the West as needed. In this way, Russia and China gain some privileges from both the West and the US; therefore, promote their national interests.

Lastly, administrators of both countries will face serious internal opposition about improving bilateral relations. Those against the rapprochement in Iran are in two groups:

The first group, for the most part, consisting of individuals and institutions that refuse to have relations with the US in principle, have absolute loyalty to their ideological approaches; therefore, do not care about economic and political interests as they stand against any kind of settlement with the US because of its imperialist character.

The second group are those individuals and institutions that make big profits by transforming the sanctions into opportunities; therefore, they have tremendous benefits. Besides, in this subject matter there is no unanimity among the State institutions. However, the Supreme Religious Leader, Ayetollah, Ali Khamanei has taken the initiative and overtly supports the talks. With this, he seems to prevent differences of opinions to be voiced.

On the other hand, the Barack Obama administration faces a serious internal opposition due to a possible close-up between the two countries. Many American politicians and writers will stand against a possible rapprochement because of their personal views or the influence of pressure groups. As one of the strongest pressure groups in the US, the Jewish lobby in particular may undertake a vital role on this issue.

Besides, past experiences of both countries create a great deal of distrust; therefore, it may be anticipated that both parties may overreact against any negativity to rise.

The US-Iran relations are multi-faceted and complicated in nature. Numerous variables and actors play a role in these relations. For that matter, internal, regional and global real obstacles and problems await for the parties involved in negotiations.

A good example for this psychological barrier is that shortly after the 5+1 countries and Iran signed the interim-agreement, the US Department of Treasury added 16 companies and private individuals to the sanction list for violating the embargo rules that the US applies against Iran.

In response, Iran voiced at a louder pitch that the US unilaterally annulled the agreement and the negotiation team left the talks in Vienna and returned to Iran. The supporters of the talks and conciliation were accused by the internal politics, the dissidents attacked those who are in favor of the deal, starting with the Iranian foreign minister. Political and official authorities were able to express their views only a couple days later that the negotiations must be resumed.
Consequently, the said agreement will face plenty of issues at internal, regional and global levels although both countries as well as some individuals and groups say that a new exciting term has started in the US-Iran relations. The attitudes that the US and Iran will adopt in the face of these problems and the players will determine the future of the relations.

PROBABLE IMPLICATIONS OF THE POSSIBLE RAPPROCHEMENT

There have been no diplomatic ties between the US and Iran since 1979. If the ties are mended many stones will be moved at the regional level in particular; and within the order of the new game, new fronts may emerge. This section concentrates on how some countries in the region will be affected by a possible US-Iran rapprochement.

Israel: For Israel, the best option in Iran is a hard-liner government. Such a government will keep up the tension in the relations with the West; therefore, Israel will more easily sustain the Western support by keeping the fear of Iran alive. In this window of opinion, the weakening regional role of Israel since the Arab Spring has worsened when a moderate name Rouhani was elected president in Iran. Israel never accepts that nuclear activities of Iran are peaceful, and insists on that Iran aims to produce nuclear weapons, and that this must be stopped at all costs. With this view, Israel perceives the Iranian nuclear works as a threat against its own existence. Under these circumstances, Rouhani’s election and then the reached interim agreement with the West about the Iranian nuclear program have caused isolation of Israel in the international arena. The reason is that the West seems to have prioritized diplomacy, as Israel wishes to have stronger sanctions against Iran. As a result of these talks, Israel is concerned about the Iranian nuclear energy activities to gain international acceptance and worries about its own nuclear weapons to be brought up to the agenda by the international community.11

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia sees itself as the biggest regional rival of Iran. The regional rivalry between the two continues in a wide area covering from Iraq to Syria, from Lebanon to Yemen and Bahrain, in addition to some institutions such as the OPEC and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Saudi Arabia takes a counter position against Iran for not only regional and sectarian but also economic reasons. Easing up the sanctions will have a negative impact on the Saudi economy and trade starting with the oil export. It is foreseen that if the Iranian oil is put up for sale, the price of oil will drop about 10 percent. Considering that 90 percent of the Saudi income derives from oil export, the impact of such a price decrease will be understood better.

Qatar: Qatar as well benefits from sanctions against Iran. Iran and Qatar share the South Persian natural gas resource field. According to international agreements, partners are free to use the joint natural gas fields as much as needed and can produce any amount of gas from these resources. Owing to modern technology and the support of the international powers, Qatar has

It is not realistic to expect fundamental changes in the regional policies of the parties in the short-term just because they have reached a preliminary agreement about the nuclear program and the sanctions.

obtained and sold 20 times more gas than what Iran has produced. Iran, on the other hand, has very little benefit from this area due to the failure in the construction of the required infrastructure as a result of the sanctions and in signing agreements with international companies. For instance, Iran divided its natural gas activities into 28 phases in this particular region and planned progressive improvements, but was able to work on 10 phases only. For the 11th phase, Iran could not find a contractor company. If the embargos are lifted, Iran will not only have an opportunity to purchase modern technology but also have international agreements with contractor firms; therefore, will benefit more from this joint natural gas field.

Nonetheless, the Gulf countries do not wish severe sanctions against Iran. Otherwise, they will not be able to do business with Iran. In addition, a possible clash between the US and Iran will cause the desecuritization of the region for a long time to come and this will harm all the said countries. Therefore, the Gulf countries have a desire to maintain the status quo.

Turkey: In fact, Iran had agreed to sign an agreement prepared by Turkey and Brazil in 2010. It was almost identical to the current interim-agreement which is talked highly about and considered as an evidence for the birth of a new order. However, the US did not accept the agreement in 2010 although all of its demands were then met.

For that reason alone, the said agreement is a sign that it is acceptable by Turkey. Not to mention that by only looking at the course of relations between Turkey and Iran in the recent years, it is seen that the relations of the two countries may be easily influenced by the positions of third countries. As the relations between Turkey and Iran are going well, the UN resolution for sanctions negatively affected the trade cooperation, and politically speaking, the differences in the approaches of the two countries concerning the developments in Syria have a negative impact on the relations.

Another issue that has created a problem between the parties recently is the NATO defense system deployed in Turkey. If close attention is paid, it is seen that none of these problems is directly caused by the Turkish-Iranian relations.

This is a positive sign that a possible US-Iranian rapprochement will have positive implications for Turkey. If Iran is included in the international system and becomes a negotiable legitimate party, Turkey will be relieved. On the one hand, Turkey tries to have good relations with its neighbors and is, on the other hand, a member to NATO, and the UN. Therefore, Turkey will always experience discomfort as long as the international system sees Iran as a threat.

According to a view, an isolated Iran is more advantageous for Turkey from the point of regional competition. It must be noted, however, that this view is questionable. First of all, elimination of the possibility of a nuclear Iran will put Turkey at ease. Second of all, an Iran that solves its problems with the international system may be a good partner for Turkey in the region, and the two countries may turn into complementary powers for each other. If an Arab state also participates in such a cooperation, law and order in the Middle East may be achieved easily with the help of this cooperation.

On a side note, Turkey is far more affected by the economic sanctions applied against Iran. If the embargos are lifted, economic relations between the two will go beyond the current state and this will be a very significant gain for Turkey. Turkey is located on the shipment route of the energy sources that will be supplied to the market by Iran’s solving its problems with the West. Therefore, Turkey will make a remarkable progress in many areas. With all of these considered,

it may be said that the US-Iranian rapprochement is in the interest of Turkey.

CONCLUSION

The US and Iran have a long history of relations. An important segment of this history passed with the US hegemony over Iran, and the remainder was a period of hostility and no-relation also affected by this hegemony. As the ideological and political stance of Iran following the 1979 Revolution was added on top of this long and bad history, the probability of having better relations dropped even more.

Although the interim-agreement signed between Iran and the 5+1 countries on November 24, 2012 in Geneva is crucial, it will be a hasty and unrealistic approach to read this deal as that the US-Iranian relations are, or will be, all ironed-out. Furthermore, it is early to talk about a US policy change in the Middle East. A step taken does not mean a total and permanent change. Even if the situation in the region and international circumstances make a dramatic change probable, it is necessary to wait a little longer to make a final judgment.

The emergence of a big economic power in Asia such as China and the efforts of Russia to reclaim its old regional and global power may cause the US to review and change its Middle East policy.

In addition, the role of Iran, the regional armed groups’ growing stronger, the situation in Europe, the Israeli-Palestinian question, the developments in Egypt, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria may also trigger this. Still, it is uncertain whether the visible changes in the US policy are for short-term or long-standing, or whether they are tactical or strategical.

It is not realistic to expect fundamental changes in the regional policies of the parties in the short-term just because they have reached a preliminary agreement about the nuclear program and the sanctions. For instance, it is less likely for Iran to change its policy in Syria for the sake of this agreement, because no one knows yet how certain the agreement will be. The reason is that the Syrian issue is a part of Iran’s defense doctrine; therefore, Iran will need assurances beyond an interim-agreement on a limited matter.

On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the US is willing to see Iran as an interlocutor, therefore as a power, on different regional issues. Nevertheless, the said preliminary deal is not a meaningful enough justification for Iran to seek changes in its regional policies in the short run. Possible changes in the Iranian attitude will be about other dynamics.

It is still difficult to say whether the negotiations were possible between Iran and the 5+1 countries because of a radical change in the US policies. There has not been yet a notable change in practice. It is necessary to have some patience about the talks and wait to see what will come through in practice. The developments such as the direct contacts between Iran and the US officials, an agreement about a joint calendar and a program, remarks of mutual respect, and contention of the parties about the dialogue and joint sessions are apparently the messenger of a new state of affairs.

This, however, does not mean that everything will turn out to be pinky rosy in a short time. Especially it is not realistic to claim today that the US and Iran have already started to close up and that they will be on good terms in the future. The current development between the US and Iran is nothing but an interim-agreement reached between Iran and the 5+1 countries and the talks about the Iranian nuclear program.

Multi-faceted relations have their own special terms and its realization depends on time, intentions of the involved parties and the regional and global circumstances. Nevertheless, a positive outcome in the talks about the Iranian
nuclear program may provide a suitable environment for a new stage in the US-Iranian relations - although it is early to say this today.

The interim-agreement in the nuclear talks had broad repercussions in the international community due to the possibility of a new dimension in the US-Iran relations which had been on rocky terms for the last 35 years. The tension in bilateral relations escalated after George W. Bush in the US and Ahmedinajad in Iran came to power, but the following government changes in both countries gave rise to an opportunity for dialogue.

Today, since a possible softening in the relations will have regional and global effects, the said agreement has occupied the agenda of the international community for a long while. To find a sound answer to the question of whether a new and friendly term begins in the US-Iranian relations or the developments so far will be limited with the talks over the Iranian nuclear energy and sanctions; the historic course of the bilateral relations, problems between the sides, how the nature of these relations has regional and global impacts, and why the parties have an urge for rapprochement must be examined.
The initial settlement that Iran and 5+1 countries reached during the nuclear talks has broad repercussions in the international community as it presents a possibility of a new dimension in the US-Iran affairs, 35 years of which were problematic. Bilateral relations have turned quite sour especially after George W. Bush in the US and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran acceded. However, the government changes in both countries provided an opportunity for dialogue. The said agreement has remained on the agenda for a while due to global and regional implications of a possibility of moderation today.