



The Iranian nuclear issue between the West and East.

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Abstract

Nowadays, Iranian foreign policy is developing following a defensive line along three axes: nuclear energy, respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Peace in the Middle East. This paper analyzes the strategical role of Iran in reaction to the new Trump policies. There is international apprehension about the issue of nuclear weapons, a matter that reflects an alarming situation that could lead to the opening of a new war front.

Key words: *Iran, Nuclear, international policies.*

1. Introduction

At the end of the 1970s, Iran underwent a great historical change that ended on February 1st 1979 when, after a 15-year exile, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to the country; this, in fact, coincides with the fall of the monarchy.

On April the 1st of the same year, a referendum gave permission to proceed to the creation of the Islamic Republic, led by the same Khomeini, with a drastic internal political transformation, and with a different structuring of foreign policy. It was mainly in comparison to the policy followed for many years toward the West and all other countries, Arab ones included, by young Shah Reza Pahlevi. Therefore, Iran's foreign policy gains a defensive position along three axes: nuclear energy, the respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the peace in the Middle East. A big change and a very distant position from the one assumed by the Shah, most of all as regards the relationships with the United States¹.

¹ See World Report 2018 Human Rights Organisation Watch on <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2018>.

On November 4th, 1979, the situation comes to a head. The deposed Shah seeks refuge in the United States to receive medical care and, taking advantage of the widespread dissatisfaction, a group of students, ayatollah Khomeini's followers, occupies the American embassy in Teheran taking 90 people hostage². The students threatened to kill the hostages in case of attempts to free them. As a result, also of these critical circumstances, some days after the Iranian provincial governor resigns and Khomeini takes advantage of it to take the total control of the country, deciding the fate of the hostages³. Two weeks after the attack, Khomeini begins to release all non-American prisoners and the American ones belonging to minorities. Until the American government decided to unfreeze approximately \$8 billion worth of Iranian goods previously confiscated, 52 hostages stayed at the mercy of Khomeini. Only on January 20th, 1981, they were all freed, exactly 14 months after the attack to the embassy.

The scenario had quickly changed, the "Carter administration" had interrupted the diplomatic relationships with Iran and on April 7th, 1980, it imposed hard economic sanctions.

On September 22nd, 1980, taking advantage of the weakness of the Iranian armed forces, Iraq invaded Iran. American policy aimed at isolating Iran. Iraq became the first beneficiary of this policy; its leader, Saddam Hussein, accepted American help in order to strengthen his influence in Khuzestan, an Iranian region where Arabs are a majority. Since Shah's times the Arabic minority of Ahwaz, that counts today around 6 million inhabitants (according to UNPO estimates), had lost its independence. With the Islamic revolution, the regime had intensified the forced "Persianification" of this strategic region on the border with Iraq, rich in oil layers. Khomeini's innovative revolution takes place, therefore, in complete contrast with the Shiite tradition, whose symbols he reinvents and updates. Also, the eschatological component, contained in the already mentioned Article 5 of the Constitution, takes on a new meaning. Although the final "complete" redemption will only take place at the end of time, when the Mahdi will return to restore Islam and justice, Khomeini has ensured that human action, albeit in a perspective that also remains eschatological, assumes a fundamental importance and that thanks to that action, under the guidance of the jurisconsult and in a state such as Iran, Islam, and justice can triumph here and now, in the present time, which becomes in a sense, the concretization of the sacred time.

² See Sabahi F., *Storia dell'Iran*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2006.

³ See Guolo R., *La via dell'Imam. L'Iran da Khomeini e Ahmadinejad*, Laterza, Bari, 2007.

The consequences of Ayatollahs' choices in foreign policy are apparent: on one side the detachment from the United States and from the west, on the other one a frontal clash with Iraq and a separation from the Arab world. The intifada in Ahwaz, both for reformist Khatami and for conservative Rafsanjani, testifies a breakup between Iran and the Arab world.

In 1997 Khatami rises to power as the fifth President of Iran, raising hopes for reforms in the country and for the revival of a global dialogue with the Western world and with Europe. The foreign policy of Iran moves to a new phase, from the logic of confrontation to that of conciliation. Khatami signed commercial and cooperation agreements with the European Union, as well as an agreement on political dialogue and the fight to terrorism. The Western world is under the illusion that Iran is going to normalize its politics and improving international relationships.

Anyway, the change that brings back in time Iran is Rafsanjani's defeat in the second turn of the presidential elections. On August 3rd, 2005, Mahmud Ahmadinejad becomes president of the Iranian Islamic republic. It is the victory of a lifestyle, of the defender of the lower classes, of the model of religious integrity not contaminated by power.

Exactly the opposite of how Rafsanjani had appeared lately.

Iran with Ahmadinejad changes the course of action in internal and foreign politic, distinguishing himself for an unusual line based on his attitudes and his provocative speeches, in which Iran is presented as a country in "permanent revolution", promoting aggressive politics threatening the regional and international stability⁴. The relationship with western countries, particularly with the United States and Israel, becomes very difficult.

In addition to this, there is the international apprehension about the issue of nuclear weapons, a matter that reflects an alarming situation that could lead to the opening of a new war front, an inaccessible war of vast proportions. Several times the United States warned Iran about the risk represented by its will to endow itself with nuclear weapons. The United States followed attentively the March 2009 elections and the consolidation of the relationships between Iran and terrorist groups such as Hamas in Palestine. The sanctions imposed by the United States fostering a deep internal crisis. The anti-Semitic declarations of the president Ahmadinejad contributed to accelerating the processes of international political

⁴ see Figus A. *Politica estera dell'Iran tra Occidente e crisi nucleare*, Eurilink, Roma, 2013.

weakening. The Arab world was not trusting him and did not want to follow his revolutionary politics.

In the last 30 years, the idea of development in a bipolar world, despite the end of the cold war, is an unmutated formulation: Iran hopes to be the anti-imperialist alternative to the east-west dualism. From a geopolitical point of view, Iran is instead linked to four regional systems, strongly connected to the Mediterranean area: Central Asia and Southeastern Asia, Caucasus, Persian Gulf, and the Middle East. After the success of the 1979 revolution, the leaders still believe they can promote Islam in Muslim countries. They think they will be able to solve at once the middle-eastern and Israeli crises. It is not Israel who is attacking Iran, but Islamic Iraq instead. Revolutionary Iran, unprepared and alone, was confronted with an unexpected reality: a failure. The countries of the former Soviet Union dissociated themselves from the fundamentalist ideas encouraged by Iran, so much so that it was the secular diplomacy of Armenia that prevailed on the Muslims of near Azerbaijan in the Caucasus region. Baku dissociated itself from Teheran strengthening an increasing bond with the United States. In addition to this, there was an international accusation to protect terrorism. The true allies of Iran are Syrians and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Iran was supporting Americans in Afghanistan and in Iraq, but only to get rid of those neighboring enemies; in fact, there was not any approach to the West. In Iraq, Iran played the Shi'ite card to draw its maximum benefits, and it helped Hezbollah against the politics of Israel willing to limit the use of nuclear energy in Iran.

There was no ideological position if not connected to the maintenance of internal power, and there was not the necessity to manifest the religious hegemony, but a feeling of insecurity that has its origin in the struggle against the United States and Israel. The Arab-Israeli crisis is another sensitive subject for Iranian diplomacy. It is tied up its regional politics and to its international politics, clearly assuming, in front of the international public opinion, a defensive position, focused on three points: human rights, peace in the Middle East and nuclear energy.

The situation radically changed with the war in Iraq, through which the Shi'ites increased their power. Ahmadinejad decided to strengthen the relationships with the Islamic Sunni movements, such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihads in Palestine, that were not opposed to the schism. We are in front of the direct clash against Israel. On 25th October 2005, Ahmadinejad proposed in a conference, "The world without the Zionism", the destruction of the state of Israel.

However, the real objective is to endow Iran with nuclear weapons. This is an old problem started with the coup d'état set up by the CIA in favor of the young Shah raised by his position of a constitutional monarchy to that of absolute governor. In turn, the Shah allowed American companies to share with Americans and Europeans the exploitation of Iran's oil reserves and to launch a nuclear program thanks to the bilateral agreement with the United States (civil nuclear cooperation program, 1957). After the 1950s, the Iranian government assured that the only objective of the program was to produce nuclear energy with the purpose of providing electricity at a good price. They plan to produce 6.000 MW starting from 2010.

The program of the change of the political scenario continued. In 1983, the *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA) planned to lend technical support to Iran. The American pressure was growing stronger and the IAEA desisted from its intervention; this signed the end of the western aids in the sector.

France refused to provide Iran with enriched uranium. The United States began a diplomatic and commercial war, stopping the supplies necessary to the development of the nuclear project and even not paying back the millions of dollars that Iran had already paid in advance. Germany refused to export pieces of equipment necessary to the construction of the two installations in Bushehr and froze the anticipated sums (the contract with the German company Kraftwerk Union for the construction of a nuclear central with two pressurized water reactors dates back to 1975).

Nowadays, in spite of the delay, the works are almost completed even though production is continually postponed. Putin is prudent about Russian intentions regarding the Bushehr plant. The problem involves the nuclear combustible, enriched uranium to be more precise, from this it is possible to get to the production of plutonium for war uses. A new convergence is born between Iran and Russia through an agreement with which the Russian atomic agency takes back the fuel used in the Iranian plant at the same time assuring the non-proliferation for war use; for Russia, and Iran endowed with atomic weapons cannot be opportune.

In the meantime Russia was taking time, continuing to appeal to a pacific and diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear problem and using Bushehr as a card in its international political game; what the agreement on Bushehr is still not completely clear today. However, Bushehr was not the only site under observation. In 2002, an Iranian dissident revealed the existence of two unknown nuclear sites in Natanz and Arak in violation of the *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty*

(TNP). Ahmadinejad took advantage of this new scenario for internal use, counting on a great consensus on this theme. Iranian thought it was fair to be endowed with nuclear weapons in a regional context where Pakistan, India, and Israel have them. Ahmadinejad believes that time is on his side, taking into account the problems in the post-war management in Iraq, reducing the risks of an attack on Iran⁵.

The geopolitical strategy of Ahmadinejad was only apparent: regionalization of the crisis in order to get out of the confrontation with Western powers. The solution to the problem laid in the hands of Washington and not elsewhere, and it needed to pass through direct negotiation with the United States, especially after the election of the new president Barack Obama.

There was the necessity to bring Iran back to the international life and to normalize diplomatic relationships with the Western world, naturally in exchange for the prosecution of the nuclear activities, in spite of the doubts that these activities were for military use. Obama did not seem inclined to make any discounts. Actually, Iranian support could have become precious for the stabilization of the region.

Contemporarily in Iran, the anti-western feelings were growing mostly for fear of military intervention. Ahmadinejad uses this internal situation to justify the nuclear rush and, meanwhile, on the international front continued making statements against Israel; at the same time he tightened alliance with Lebanese Hezbollah and Syria.

In this scenario, Russia and China were trying to tighten alliances with Iran, the first one for its search for oil and the second for it is attracted by possible orders in the nuclear sector. A different role was played by the European Union. After 1998, the dialogue started again, as a consequence of the decision by Iran not to apply the fatwa against Salman Rushdie.

The dialogue consisted of scheduled meetings on subjects of common interest. Since 2003, the negotiation process has also regarded the nuclear issue. Today the collaboration with Ahmadinejad is blocked. True, Ahmadinejad won the elections, but he does not represent the whole of Iran. In Iran, it is the Shiite religious leadership to take decisions and to command the armed forces; it is not used to raise the tone, neither to cause scandal, preferring to always appear

⁵ See Figus A. *Politica estera dell'Iran tra Occidente e crisi nucleare*, Eurilink, Roma, 2013.

extremely cautious⁶. If indeed Iran wanted a nuclear bomb, it would have acted in the maximum discretion and held the lowest possible profile.

Meanwhile, the European Union was worrying not only about the nuclear problem but most of all about the safeguard of human rights, freedom of thought and the press. Another problem was the safeguard of ethnic and religious minorities, particularly as regards the fate of Bahais religious movement, not tolerated by the regime and subject to discriminations.

Americans were actively engaged in the control of activities in the nuclear sector while Europeans are engaged in trying to ensure human rights and freedom of expression are respected.

The balance of power that has reigned in the international system since the end of the cold war is undergoing intense shifts. In fact, we observe with interest on May 2010 the agreement between Iran, Brazil, and Turkey over the treatment of its enriched uranium, and the sanctions that the United States requests with the United Nations resolution to impose on the Tehran government over the Iran nuclear program make known this system's deep cracks. It may not resolve all the tensions surrounding Iran, the agreement with Turkey and the crisis with Israel, removes the problem of Iran in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Turkey played its role and it aimed to show the EU it was an asset. Turkey is a key geopolitical partner for NATO in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is the consequence of the internal Turkish politic. Under a different government with an Islamic orientation, Turkey has turned away from the West, but for Europe, the most important problem in Iran is not the nuclear crisis but the political rights. Especially after the post-election demonstrations, writers and journalists have been sentenced to long periods of isolation and tortured. Many of them have fled the country or are in jail; those who remained to censor themselves not to risk sanctions. The Obama administration will have to put human rights at the center of his politics.

Human Rights Watch at the beginning of 2009 presented his report about human rights, expressing great worry for the worsening in the respect of fundamental rights in Iran. Iran has freely undersigned the Convention of the United Nations and an international Pact related to the civil and political rights; political pressures are still in progress; we are faced with a break-up of the moratory on the executions of lesser crimes⁷.

⁶ See Figus A. *Politica estera dell'Iran tra Occidente e crisi nucleare*, Eurilink, Roma, 2013.

⁷ See World Report 2010 Human Rights Organisation Watch on

Tortures and death sentences are in fact often performed after summary trials. Not to mention children, with executions that constitute a violation of the obligations that Iran had promised to honor in the very respect of their rights; on these issues too, and not only on Iranian nuclear ambitions, but the Arab world is also splitting up.

2. Iran strategies: between the United States, the international community and the European Union.

The dialogue between Iran and the United States - but also with the European Union - appears on the razor's edge. A harmless and docile Iran without a nuclear weapon is certainly preferable to Iran pursuing its program to acquire nuclear weapons. Yet Iran has never officially declared to possess a nuclear arsenal, indeed Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has always declared to be able and entitled to produce nuclear power for peaceful purposes, but had always denied the carrying out of activities aimed at a non-peaceful in the country's territory. As evidence of this, Iranians have always claimed that the IAEA has never been able to present evidence of uranium enrichment. It must be noted, however, that experts did not have the opportunity to visit Iran in its entirety, as the country refused to sign the additional protocol known as "93+2"⁸. The aim of this protocol is to guarantee stronger control by the IAEA, enabling it to verify all the nuclear materials produced, but it does not allow to carry out a search for hidden sites. In fact, full trust was given to the signing countries by not allowing free movement inside their territory. This was also the case with Iraq when, for example, United States were looking for evidence that Saddam Hussein was about to produce weapons of mass destruction. Khatami had not opposed to the signing of this protocol, as his aim was to lift the embargo that was strangling the country and to succeed in continuing undisturbed his nuclear policy.

<http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2010>.

⁸ This protocol was adopted in 1993 when the Western world thought that Saddam Hussein had launched a nuclear weapons program. It was decided to propose to the 131 signatories of the NPT (The Treaty of nuclear non-proliferation treaty international on nuclear weapons which is based on three principles: disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful use of nuclear power and must take place under the control of the IAEA) to ratify in two years a new inspection protocol hence the name 1993+ 2 years i.e, 93 + 2.

Subsequently, before Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power, the representatives of the EU3⁹ obtained an agreement on "93+2" which provided for the suspension of uranium enrichment operations, which can only be resumed under the direct control of the IAEA. The agreement was not ratified by the Iranian Parliament and, in reality, it was not supported by the United States or by certain Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, which has always been hostile to Iranian politics in the region. There had been a threat of recourse to the UN Security Council, which took place on the 23 of December 2006 with the unanimously adopted vote on Resolution 1737, which called on Iran to respect the demands of the IAEA. Successive Resolution 1747 reinforced trade and financial sanctions and blocked all arms exports, which Russia immediately used to avoid complying with the purchase of S-300 missiles which had requested. Ahmadinejad advocates the existence of double standards and that Iran has been strongly discriminated; in addition to this, he also added to the national festivities the "National Nuclear Technology Day". The president wanted to present himself to his people as the savior of the nuclear development program, the only way to give future and prosperity to the country in full opposition to his rivals Rafsanjani and Khatami; it also seemed to make him forget that his role, compared to the "Supreme Leader" Ayatollah Khamenei, was only secondary. This act of presumption de facto weakened him before Iranian public opinion.

Having made this point clear, the international situation appears to be very complex. In fact, countries like Israel, Pakistan, and India have not signed the NPT protocol, while there is concern that North Korea has been carrying out nuclear tests: 4000 cubic meters of earth and rock have jumped into the explosion and a 4 km mushroom cloud has reached the Chinese border. In any case, there is no concrete evidence about Iran's closeness to achieving its objective. By August 2004 the relationship between Iran and North Korea had already been strengthening, with the Asian country using Iranian territory as a test-base for new missiles capable of carrying a nuclear head. Today, the two countries are intensifying scientific cooperation in a way that may be useful to Iran. There is no evidence that the incontestable joint venture on ballistic missiles is also operational on nuclear power. Yet, as for North Korea, concerns of the international community are strong also for Iran, and many countries have also invited Iran not to take any risk of further isolation.

Iran is indeed a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and therefore accepts, albeit not enthusiastically, inspections at its main sites by the International

⁹ France, Germany, Great Britain.

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However, there are signs that Iran could be more flexible on inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, on the limit of five percent enrichment and on the renunciation of holding excessive quantities of enriched uranium on Iranian soil. In return, the United States and its allies should recognize Iran's right to enrichment technology, a right that is one of the key points of the non-proliferation treaty. Consequently, the United States and the European Union should progressively reduce the imposed sanctions.

It is clear that after 1979 the dialogue between the United States and Iran is extremely complicated. At the time of the Bush presidency, the Americans defined Iran and North Korea as members of the "axis of the devil" - as Bush himself called them - along with Iraq. The same Iraq with which he later entered the war, confirming an interventionist attitude through numerous military operations conducted in the international arena and which are not very reassuring. Only now lack of determined leadership in the US is facing enemies is opening up spaces for nuclear proliferation among its allies, who feel less guaranteed by its shield. From South Korea to Japan, from Saudi Arabia to the Arab Emirates, from Turkey to Egypt, many feel challenged by the new "axis of evil" Pyongyang-Tehran that sees North Korea prevail as capable - according to experts American intelligence - of nuclear miniaturization, a necessary step in placing an atomic warhead on a ballistic missile.

According to Ahmadinejad, however, Americans want to involve the whole world because they are seen as evil, the enemy, and want to conquer the whole world and therefore Iran. Hence another area of cooperation emerge the defense axis with South America, an intertwining of religion, politics, and economy. Even though in March Ahmadinejad was immediately rebuked by the Shia clergy for kissing Chávez's coffin. He was accused of having "excessively celebrated the deceased president" as reported by the Iranian newspaper Digarban. Below, there would be the struggle between the Iranian president and the Supreme Guide Ali Khamenei, together with the conservative ayatollahs, to discredit him in the eyes of public opinion in order to stop him from getting a great consensus in the presidential elections in June. In fact, Khamenei would like Ali Larijani, president of the Parliament and his protégé, to prevail.

In his message of condolences, Ahmadinejad defined Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as "a symbol of resistance to imperialism and an exceptional personality destined, at the end of time, to rise again together with the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi". Ahmadinejad has been strongly criticized because it is not within his competences to make statements on religious issues. By doing this he also aroused the anger of the ultra-conservative Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi against the mystification of Chavez, a simple foreign head of state who was unfairly placed on the same level with the Iranian Supreme Guide. From here we can understand

how central is the role of religion in the country's affairs, and how its leaders, from Ahmadinejad to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, albeit on different levels, proclaim every day that the acquisition and manufacture or use of weapons of this nature are contrary to the Muslim religion and Islam. The United States, but also Europe, believes that the Middle East must be nuclear-free.

There is still no certainty about whether or not the Islamic Republic has started to build a nuclear bomb, but the West does not believe Ahmadinejad's words and suspicion reigns. This may just be a problem of leadership, and the question arises as to when the course will change and when Tehran will decide to change its leadership. First Clinton, then George W. Bush and finally Barack Obama have pursued the same strategy, but the same reticence also arrives from the European Countries, starting from France and Great Britain, advocating for strong sanctions against Iran. Another entanglement between religion and economy. Iran has always been a Shiite country and its Islamism is alarming since it is inlaid within an Islamic republic. This frightened especially its old neighbors such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and still today Bashar al-Assad in Syria; many others in the Arab-Islamic world, have never been afraid of Teheran because it is Shiite or far from democracy, but because it tried to be a republic, and because within this it could and could build a strong and stable system, setting itself as a guide for many other countries, even if today this does not appear to be its priority. Yet Ahmadinejad shows his Sunni Arab neighbors how incapable they are of resolving the Palestinian issue and declares himself ready to find solutions by not losing an opportunity to intervene against the United States and Israel, which would strengthen him internally and also allow him to safeguard his border with Iraq. The cultural change and the eventual change of a regime in Iran would be capable of upsetting the political and economic scenario of the Middle East, a real earthquake, stronger than the "Arab Spring" and from here we can understand how irrelevant Israel or the nuclear issue is. Let's not forget that Iran has always had a rudimentary nuclear program, not capable of achieving uranium enrichment on its own, despite the fact that the IAEA currently states that the country has a significant program, with two sites working to achieve the result of obtaining enriched uranium. It appears to be just a matter of time also because it seems that Russians have been helping by speeding up the process and favoring the result. In addition to this, the country is searching for new radioactive materials that could replace its uranium. The objective remains to punish Iran while avoiding wars, which does not eliminate the nuclear threat; on the contrary, it reinforces the extremist wing, which is nourished by the rejection of dialogue by the international community.

In fact, in recent years the international community has not been just watching, but actively controlling, and at the same time sanctioning and prohibiting Iran

from selling its oil products, which already greatly penalize the country's economy. With the full support of the European Union, all the governments of the United States, which have followed one another in recent years, have implemented a policy of sanctions against Iran that are increasingly paralyzing the country, in the conviction that this is the only way to prevent the Iranian government from acquiring nuclear weapons. This is another geopolitical entanglement, from which nobody that counts wants to remain outside. This is compounded by the military blockade of Iranian oil ports, imposed as an act of war, transforming the sanctions into pure economic war. This, combined with a boycott of Iranian banks and oil, involves not only the United States but also the European Union that on March 11, 2013, established that the EU member countries will no longer import Iranian oil, in protest against Tehran's attitude on the nuclear issue. These sanctions were decided in January, anticipated by some countries and accompanied by a series of financial restrictions.

Iran points out that its export to Europe is only one-fifth of the total, and that it can easily find other customers. This is true, but there are at least three problems: the first concerns transport because European carriers can no longer transport Iranian unrefined oil. For Iran this might not be a problem as many of them are registered outside the EU, but they're still conducting businesses in Europe, they would still be forced to obey the embargo. The insurance issue sees ninety percent of the world's oil shipments covered by European insurance, which as a result of the embargo would be forced to refuse to protect the currency, linked to the financial embargo: Iran can not be paid in euros and especially not in dollars; this would affect both import and export in general, and therefore domestic consumption. This embargo will surely have a direct impact on the population. Added to this is not only the nuclear issue but also the protection of human rights. In this regard, again on 11 March 2013, a specific provision of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the European Union extended until 13 April 2014 the sanctions against Iran for human rights violations. The sanctions have also been strengthened by adding 9 people to the list of individuals (now 87 in total, a sort of list of unwanted) whose assets have been frozen and who are prohibited from traveling. According to the Council of the European Union, the assets of "an entity responsible for human rights violations" in Iran have also been frozen.

Europe made a move, through the embargo it tries to block trade with Iran, while at the same time weighing political and economic reasons. In fact, it is a measure of constraints on Iran's freedom of decision, which can be overcome through triangulation, i.e. buying and selling through an intermediary third country not adhering to the treaties, and acts as an intermediary for the exchange of goods and payments between the manufacturing country and Iran. The European move appears more as a warning to its pursuit of the nuclear program and its

provocations than a real economic war. The EU wants to be able to rely on the world political scene, but it cannot fully assert itself, highlighting all its limits, including that of the obsessive search for eternal peace, sometimes far from the pragmatic confrontation. In anticipation of this in recent years, Russian public monopolies such as Gazprom and Gazprom Neft have done more than Europeans by signing agreements on agreements, including one with the Iranian National Oil Company NIOC, in order to develop two oil fields in Iran, while Europeans and other Western countries have decided to withdraw. New Euro-Asian strategies, through which Europe becomes a spectator, even in second place to new relations with the African continent.

Europe lost power in Africa and Iran tried to take advantage of this opportunity to strengthen its diplomatic relations with African countries. In spring 2013, Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, visited Niger, Benin, and Ghana. Iran has been investing in the African continent for several years now. His visit attracted media attention; in particular, Ahmadinejad said that Iran "does not need the nuclear bomb", reaffirming the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. Ahmadinejad stressed that nuclear energy "is a divine gift" that "provides electricity at affordable prices, it is not the atomic bomb that threatens the world, but the moral and cultural decline of the West... Africa is paying on its own skin the moralism of Western countries that "export democracy" by the sound of bombs and impose "laws" that are the first to break¹⁰.

The visit to the African continent continued in Niger, one of the world's leading uranium producers. Iran needs uranium for its nuclear program and the local government has opened its doors to it, questioning the traditional exclusivity granted by Niger to European countries and in particular to France, which had a monopoly on Niger uranium.

Uranium is essential for Iran's nuclear strategies, even if Ahmadinejad wanted to reassure the international press that the relationship between nuclear power and his visit to African countries focused on agriculture, education, and energy, but no one trusts the Iranian president anymore.

3. Donald Trump and Iran

By 2015, everyone was convinced to be close to a deal. The nuclear agreement had to be concluded, with Iran having to stop the economic embargo that had blocked Tehran's development for decades. After more than a decade of crisis, the world leaders and Iran seemed close to a definitive agreement on Iran's

¹⁰ Speech held at the University of Cotonou, political capital of Benin

nuclear program, which would have finally guaranteed peace. The intention was to reach a final and verifiable agreement by the end of June 2015, reducing Tehran's nuclear capacity for at least 10 years. This would have prevented Iran from accumulating sufficient quantities of enriched uranium for the manufacturing of a nuclear bomb. The 2015 agreement was supposed to guarantee "Iran's full right to nuclear energy with peaceful objectives", in compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

On 16 January 2016 (date of implementation of the agreement), the Council lifted all EU economic and financial nuclear-related sanctions against Iran. However, some restrictions do remain in force, and it is known that, when it comes to Iran, anything can happen. Furthermore, the Trump Presidency has certainly not fostered a climate of reconciliation.

On the 14 of July 2015, the Iranian nuclear agreement was reached. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action required Iran to reduce the number of centrifuges by two-thirds and to limit research and development.

Nowadays the situation is more complex, with a wider scenario that includes not only Asia and Europe, but also two major actors, the United States, and Russia. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Iranian Supreme Guide, declared in February 2018 that he wanted the East to prevail over the West. The tension remains high, and Donald Trump strongly wants to impose secondary sanctions, especially after the withdrawal from the nuclear agreement in May 2018, in a context of crisis that has greatly deteriorated economic and trade relations between Iran and Europe. To some extent, Tehran has been forced to look to the East, to Asia and less to Europe. The objective is to escape the isolation imposed by the United States, a directive that Europe has followed without debating. At the moment, China, Russia, and India are strategic countries for Tehran, with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, has paid an official visit to all three countries, as well as to other Asian countries. Iran turns to Asia while Europe turns to the US.

Since the 8th of May 2018 -the official date of the United States' exit from the Iranian Nuclear Agreement (JCPOA)- there has been a succession of announcements, deadlines, and measures relating to the possibility of trading with Tehran. President Trump has announced the imposition of new U.S. sanctions against economic actors in the Iranian iron, steel, aluminum and copper sectors. The issue is becoming complex, and it is not clear who will benefit from it. Certainly not Europe.

Trump's idea of a return to sanctions has led Iran to a relaunch of the idea of a return to nuclear power, which represents a violation of the agreement and, at the same time, the intention to send a message to the European Union and the

United States: the JCPOA will collapse once and for all, with the reinstatement of a non-peaceful nuclear program. It is no coincidence that in the days following the Iranian announcement Washington responded by sending aircraft carriers to the Gulf, deploying B-52 bombers to the region and evacuating unnecessary personnel from US embassies in neighboring countries. A full-scale war plan.

4. Conclusion

It is necessary to return to diplomatic action, to negotiation. This seems to be an endless war, where Trump sees Iran as the US' permanent enemy. Switzerland and Oman -countries that since 1979 have played the role of mediators between Washington and Tehran- have been taking action. After all, on this occasion, Iran will ask for a reduction of the sanctions, in consideration of the fact that it was precisely Washington who violated the JCPOA¹¹.

Trump will, therefore, have to make concessions in this field in order to reach a compromise on the other dossiers and not risk the full resumption of the nuclear program. The situation is complex and there is no sign of a definitive solution. It would be convenient for the United States to have Iran as its enemy, but Washington must take into account the fact that geopolitics has changed, that Iran has found friends on the silk road -such as China and Russia- and that is not a marginal matter¹².

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We must admit, however, that the symbolic system on which the configuration of the Iranian Republic has to deal with pragmatic reality. In order to have a continuation in his revolutionary project, Khomeini used the "symbolic spring", but in order for Iran to be able to continue to exist in an "objective" international reality, its successors cannot but be pragmatic. Whether eschatology or not,

¹¹ See <https://www.cdt.ch/mondo/politica/iran-zarif-svizzera-e-oman-si-sono-offerti-come-mediatori-con-usa-LYCDT197158>

¹² See:

https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2019/07/08/news/iran_la_cina_si_schiera_il_bullismo_degli_usa_e_un_tumore_che_si_diffonde_-230691778/

whether the government of Islam or not, Iran's policy in recent years has demonstrated the need for realism¹³.

The comparison with the concept of agnosticism becomes thus natural, as opposed to theories that are often more subjective than objective. Agnostics, in fact, assert that they do not know the answer, often stating that it is not humanly possible to identify an answer or rather that there is no answer at all. Briefly, we can say that we cannot express ourselves with beliefs on the problem exposed. Specifically, this position is usually taken with respect to the problem of the knowledge of God or Allah, or in any case of a Supreme Being. In entirely complementary and obsolete forms, it can also concern ethics in the first place, but also politics and society. We thus fall on what the Catholic Church calls the evil of intelligence, that is agnosticism, where the transcendent can also exist, but it is difficult to identify and place. It becomes necessary, in this case, to use the formula of pragmatism, to rethink the realism of knowledge, even in Iran we suddenly had to deal with a world full of theory, ideological slogans. Even in Iran was essential to return to reality and stop an international game played on eschatological foundations, unique in this sense.

In that philosophical-religious game, the Americans have placed themselves laically, actively engaging in the control of activities in the nuclear sector, while Europeans have often engaged in trying to ensure respect for human rights and freedom of expression as if these were the issues on which to focus their strategies. Both did not want to address the central theme, the existential one of an eschatological model, which influences Iranian politics, which still remains to be defined today. Let us not forget that Iran is facing a rebalancing of regional equilibria following the wave of popular protests and a delicate international situation in the Syrian conflict. Iran continues to alternate its two faces, that of empty rhetoric and a more pragmatic second, that will remain halfway between tradition and future, between conservative and progressive. Nowadays, the Islamic Republic remains a place of great social and cultural ferment that is trying to secure political prestige; I am convinced that Iran has the potential to establish itself as a force for regional stability and not disorder. Yet Iran's history must also be judged in the long term¹⁴.

¹³ See Pejman Abdolmohammadi, "Il repubblicanesimo islamico dell'Ayatollah Khomeini", *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova serie, Anno 89, Nr. 1, 2009.

¹⁴ See Abdolmohammadi P., cit., 2009.

There are equally new facts that suggest a change, a projection into the future, a new way forward. Whatever the negotiations on nuclear power, the road is long and must necessarily go through diplomatic agreements and a path of consolidation, a delicate and risky game on which the fate of the Middle East will depend. The confrontation must be possible, there is no alternative. The exiting of Ahmadinejad marks the end of a difficult era for Iran, linked to the international tensions arising from the nuclear issue, the problematic relationship with the United States, the events of 2009 that led to an internal crisis, including the complex relations with Khamenei and the Parliament. All of this has contributed to fragmenting the already confused and conflictual internal landscape.

The election of Rohani has suddenly and paradoxically brought together the Western countries and Ali Khamenei, whose opinions are rarely converging. Rohani is precisely a fully internal figure in the Islamic revolution, and it is probable that at the moment, the theocratic summit will continue to consider him a reliable figure, who does not want or, in any case, cannot provide the radical change that many hope for. The changes that can realistically be expected to date are minimal, even if sometimes the historical crises are beyond the control of the figures of transition or the figures of transition themselves behave in an unexpected way. At stake is the theocratic model, which was actually a reason for attracting the Arab Spring.

Today, the time for change has come even if in a country like Iran; everything is proceeding slowly, the young Iranians will have to obtain a role, reorganize and restart from below. The involvement of the youth will increase hope in a process which is prefigured as complex and articulated, by contrasting the theocratic model with the model of Muslim politics in an eschatological context which appears anachronistic to the West, where there is no discussion on eschatological bases but only merely economic, namely an unparalleled fall in values and feelings.

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