

The Future Of Nuclear Negotiations With Iran (2015-2023)

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Abstract

The study aimed to shed light on the Iranian nuclear program, its objectives, and the circumstances that led to the signing of a nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015 and the unilateral US withdrawal from it in 2018. Then the recent Vienna negotiations (2021 and 2022) to try to revive the agreement again and the scenarios of the nuclear negotiations with Iran. The study used the descriptive approach, the analytical approach, and the inductive approach. The study hypothesized that there is a correlation between the difficulty of nuclear negotiations in reaching a permanent and acceptable nuclear agreement for all international and regional parties, and Iran's adherence to its nuclear program, which reflects its aspirations to possess a deterrent force to protect its political system, impose its regional and international prestige, and play a dominant regional role in the Gulf region in particular and the Middle East in general. The study suggested a scenario of delaying reaching an agreement on reviving the nuclear agreement signed in 2015 until after the upcoming US presidential elections in 2024.

Keywords: the Iranian nuclear program, nuclear agreement, a nuclear brink state, US sanctions, Vienna negotiations, 5+1 countries

Introduction

The Iranian nuclear program has been a concern for the countries of the Middle East region and for the United States of America, since the success of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. In addition to the doubts that the objectives of the nuclear program is Iran's pursuit of military nuclear

capabilities. Relations between Iran and the United States were severed, and relations between the two parties were characterized in different periods by the policy of carrots and sticks, tension, escalation, negotiations and diplomacy, so that the world finally witnessed in 2015 the signing of the Iranian nuclear agreement with a group of countries (5 + 1), during the administration of Barack Obama, which entered into force in 2016

The Obama administration tried to contain Iran and integrate it into the regional system in the Gulf by signing the nuclear agreement with it. But, suspicions about Iran's intentions to try to obtain a nuclear weapon in addition to its missile program and its destabilizing role in regional security and stability, prompted the administration of Donald Trump to withdraw from the nuclear agreement in 2018 and re-impose sanctions on Iran to pressure it to renegotiate the file again, fill gaps in it, and include other issues. (Al-Dasouki, 2018, 73-75)

However, after Joe Biden came to the presidency, the US policy towards Iran changed and there was an attempt to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement within new conditions to address the gaps in it and give diplomacy priority to achieve this, as America conducted indirect negotiations with Iran in Vienna in 2021 and 2022, within the group of countries (5 + 1). (Atrophy, 2019)

The topics that will be addressed in this study include: Iranian motives for the nuclear program, the nuclear agreement in 2015, the positions of regional and international countries, the Vienna negotiations in 2021 and 2022, scenarios and the future of the negotiations.

The Importance of the Study

Theoretical Importance: Enriching the Arab library with a modern scientific study on a topic of interest to many Arab and foreign scholars and researchers, research centers, intelligence agencies and international bodies concerned with nuclear energy.

Practical Importance: presenting a modern forward-looking analytical study on the future of the Iranian nuclear file to

assist the Jordanian and Arab decision-makers in dealing with Iran.

Problem Statement

The study deals with the Iranian nuclear program and the ambiguity surrounding its military objectives, which has become a matter of interest to the whole world. This concern represents a great obsession to the countries of the region and the world because of their suspicions that Iran's goals are to possess nuclear weapons. This prompted us to raise a question about the future of the Iranian nuclear program in a dynamic regional and international environment, ambiguous American positions and complex regional relations.

Objectives of the Study

Anticipating the future of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program and its impact on the security and stability of the region and Arab national security, and making proposals to confront it in a way that serves Arab national security.

Study Hypothesis

There is a correlation between the difficulty of the nuclear negotiations to reach a permanent nuclear agreement acceptable to all international and regional parties, and Iran's adherence to its nuclear program, which reflects its ambitions to possess a deterrent force to protect its political system, impose its regional and international prestige, and play a dominant regional role in the Gulf region in particular and the Middle East in general.

Study Questions:

1. What are the goals and motives of the Iranian nuclear program?
2. What are the most prominent contents of the nuclear agreement that was signed in 2015?
3. What are the results of the Vienna negotiations (2021 and 2022) and the positions of the regional and international parties on the Iranian nuclear program?
4. What is the future and scenarios of the nuclear negotiations with Iran?

Study Methodology

More than one research methodology were used in this study, most notably: the descriptive approach to describe the situation and circumstances that led to the signing of the 2015 nuclear agreement, withdrawal from it, and the attempt to return to it. In addition to the analytical approach, which aims to analyze the Iranian facts, events, and motives of the program, and to assess the positions of the countries involved in the program in light of a dynamic regional and international environment. As well as the probabilistic inductive approach to anticipate the future of the program.

Limitations of the Study

Spatial Limitations: the Gulf region and the Middle East.

Temporal Limitations: 2015-2023, with the beginning of the signing of the Iranian agreement in 2015, America's unilateral withdrawal in 2018, and the Vienna talks in 2021 and 2022 to try to revive the agreement.

Terminology of Study

Nuclear Program

Refers to the Iranian nuclear ambitions and efforts to possess nuclear capabilities, which began in Iran during the monarchy era in 1957 and were completed by Iran during the republican era in 1979 until now. (Sheikh, 2019)

5 + 1 Countries

A modern concept in international politics that refers to the permanent members of the Security Council (America, Britain, Russia, China, and France) and Germany, which took over negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program. (Al-Moussawi, 2017)

Nuclear Agreement in 2015

It is the agreement that Iran reached on its nuclear program on 14/7/2015 with the group of countries (5 + 1), and it was called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The UN Security Council unanimously approved it by Resolution No. (2231) on 20/7/2015, with the aim of containing the Iranian nuclear program and limiting it to peaceful purposes. (Al-Zayyat, 2015)

Vienna Negotiations (2021 and 2022)

The negotiations that took place in Vienna between the 5 + 1 countries and Iran to try to revive the nuclear agreement signed in 2015, and the United States participated in the negotiations indirectly (Roinso (2021)

Brink State or Nuclear Threshold

In technical terms, it refers to the time when a country achieves the ability to produce nuclear weapons and that becomes a fait accompli before it can be stopped by diplomatic pressure or military operations. (Harel, 2021)

Ballistic Missile Program

Refers to the Iranian long-range offensive missile program that covers the Middle East and Europe, which is feared that it will be designed to carry nuclear warheads. (Al-Rawi, 2008)

Previous Studies

Studies in Arabic Language

1. A study (Marzouk, 2020), titled **The Iranian Nuclear Agreement between the Obama and Trump eras**. The study reviewed the development of the Iranian program from 1957 to 2020. The study concluded that the US policy in essence towards the Iranian nuclear program does not differ according to different governments and administrations, but in the way of handling and dealing.
2. A study (Al-Hafyan, 2019), titled **Paths of the American Position on the Iranian Nuclear File**. The study indicated that the Iranian nuclear file is one of the most controversial topics on the international scene, and the study concluded that all parties concerned with the file wish to return to negotiations in order to avoid any tension that could lead to a war between the United States and Iran.
3. A study (Odeh, 2017), titled **The Bumpy Road: Obama and Bush's Policy Towards the "Iranian Nuclear Program"**. The study showed that the goals of all US administrations towards Iran were to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons, and the study concluded that the personal will of Obama and Rouhani was behind reaching the nuclear agreement in 2015, but they failed to change the political conditions that would constitute a safe incubator for the continuation of the agreement.

4. A study (Katea Ali, 2016), titled: **The Iranian Nuclear Program and its Impact on the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries**. The study indicated that Iran is an important regional country in the Arabian Gulf region by virtue of its geopolitical location. Iran's quest to possess nuclear weapons contradicts the US directions in the region, which aim to prevent the emergence of any regional power in the region that could limit or threaten its interests and strategic goals.
5. A study (Ibrahim and Abdul Majeed, 2015), titled **Iranian Nuclear Program and the Conflict in the Middle East**. The study touched on: the origins of the Iranian nuclear program, objectives and justifications. The study concluded that there is a relationship between the conflict in the Middle East region and the Iranian nuclear challenge, and they are negatively and positively linked to the stability and the instability of the region.
6. A study (Zahra, 2015), titled **The Iranian Nuclear Program**. The study touched on the nature and objectives of the Iranian nuclear program. The study concluded that its objectives are to support the national economy, contribute to the scientific renaissance, protect the Islamic system, confront external challenges, and strengthen Iran's international standing.
7. A study (Morsi, 2011), titled **The Iranian nuclear program crisis in the light of the recent International Agency report**. The study reviewed the beginnings of the Iranian nuclear program since the Shah's era in the seventies of the last century. The study concluded that Iran currently has an advanced nuclear program, where Iran announced in December 2010 the possession of a complete nuclear fuel cycle.
8. A study (AlSmadi and Melhem, 2009), titled **The Iranian Nuclear Program and Gulf Security (Analytical Study)**. The study hypothesized that the Iranian nuclear program plays a major role in threatening security and stability in the Arab Gulf region. The study recommended building a security strategy in line with the regional and international conditions and the security requirements of the countries of the region, to avoid a new devastating war in the region.
9. A study (Russell, 2008), titled **The Iranian Nuclear Program: Security Implications on the UAE and the Arabian Gulf Region**. The study showed that Iran

practices procrastination and ambiguity about its nuclear program. The study concluded that Iran is proceeding with its nuclear program without recklessness and step by step without giving the West a justification for launching a military strike against it.

10. A study (AlRawi, 2008), entitled **The Iranian Nuclear Program and its Impact on the Middle East**. The study examined the international positions on the nuclear program and its impact on the Middle East region. The study concluded that Iran seeks to possess the maximum levels of various powers and nuclear technology to enhance its regional and international standing and to possess a deterrent force against its regional and international enemies.

Foreign Studies

1. A Study (Katzman and Rennack and Kerr and Thomas and Elsea, 2021), titled: **Possible United States Return to the Iranian Nuclear Agreement: Frequently Asked Questions**. The study addressed the attempt of the Joe Biden administration to revive the nuclear agreement in 2015 as it is, if Iran abides by its provisions in full. The Biden administration also expressed a desire to add new topics to the negotiations: the ballistic missile program, Iran's regional behavior. The study concluded that the efforts of the Biden administration to succeed need the support of Congress.
2. A study (Jovan, 2021), entitled **Unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the restrictions of the Iranian Nuclear Program in accordance with the international law**. The study showed that the nuclear agreement in 2015 was controversial, especially after the United States withdrew from it in 2018. The study aimed to determine whether the agreement is an international treaty in accordance with the international law.
3. A study (International Crisis Group, 2021), entitled **Five Years after the Nuclear Agreement: A New Resurgence**. It touched on the nuclear agreement in 2015, the Trump administration's withdrawal from it in 2018, and the imposition of maximum economic sanctions on Iran. The study recommended that the Biden administration move quickly to revive the nuclear agreement with Iran as it is to reduce nuclear and regional escalation, and this may open the way for a US-Iranian diplomatic dialogue to address all points.

4. A study (Roinson, 2021) entitled **What is the Iranian Nuclear Deal?**The study touched on the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran. One of its objectives was to place significant restrictions on Iran's nuclear program to prevent it from turning into a military program. But the Trump administration withdrew from the agreement in 2018. With the Biden administration handover, it announced its willingness to revive the nuclear agreement and discuss other issues. The study concluded that it is not certain that a revival of the nuclear agreement will be reached in light of the insistence of the two parties to set new conditions.
5. A study (Motamed, 2021), entitled **The Iranian Nuclear Deal Six Years Later**. The study reviewed the conditions for signing the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran. The study concluded that despite the assumption of the hardline Iranian president, a deal will be reached to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement for the need of all signatory parties.
6. A study (International Crisis Group, 2020), entitled **Four years have passed since the Iranian nuclear agreement: a farewell tune?**The study showed that the Iranian nuclear agreement has entered the fifth year of implementation, with Iran announcing that it has stopped adhering to all the restrictions imposed by the nuclear agreement and the escalating risks of a clash between the United States and Iran. The study concluded that Trump's policy of "maximum pressure" did not lead to any of these results. It did not lead to a better deal, nor did it change Iran's regional policies.
7. A study (International Crisis Group, 2019), entitled **On Fragile Ice: Three Years into the Iran Nuclear Deal**. It indicated that the Iranian nuclear agreement entered its fourth year of implementation, with Iran continuing to fully fulfill its obligations. On the other hand, the Trump administration imposed harsh economic sanctions that affected the economic conditions in Iran. The study concluded that the ultimate goals of the United States are not entirely clear, but the goals may be: to completely strangle the Iranian economy, push international investors and traders out of the country, push the Iranian people to the streets and destabilize the regime or even overthrow it.
8. A study (Katzman and Kerr and Heitshusen, 2018), entitled **The decision of the United States to stop**

implementing the nuclear agreement with Iran. The study reviewed the signing of the nuclear agreement with Iran by the 5+1 countries, and the Trump administration's withdrawal from it in 2018 and the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran under the pretext that the agreement does not prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. This agreement also gave Iran more money, which Iran exploited by developing ballistic missiles and providing support to armed militias in the region.

9. A study (Kerr and Katzman, 2018), entitled **The Iran Nuclear Agreement and the Exit of the United States.** The study dealt with the signing of the nuclear agreement in 2015 with Iran by the 5 + 1 group. One of the objectives of the agreement was to restrict the Iranian nuclear program for peaceful purposes only, while Iran's goal was to lift the sanctions. The study indicated that after the advent of the Trump administration, the US withdrew from the agreement and re-imposed maximum sanctions on Iran under the pretext that the agreement was bad and threatened US interests.

What distinguishes this study from other previous studies

It establishes future studies through the findings and recommendations it will present that may arouse the interests of researchers to benefit from and build on them, as well as provide political decision makers with a recent study, bearing in mind that the nuclear program crisis is still ongoing until the preparation of this study.

Iranian Nuclear Motives and Ambitions

Iran, whether during the monarchy era or the current republican era, has shown interest in obtaining nuclear capabilities, and in 1968 it signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which gives Iran the right to obtain nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes. The nuclear trend during the Shah's era was part of building a comprehensive process that the Shah was seeking to achieve in Iran, at all levels, to enable Iran to maximize its

comprehensive power assets in various fields, allowing it to play the role of the super-regional power in the Gulf region, and enabling Iran to playing a bigger role in the international arena. . During the era of the Iranian revolution, the positions of Iranian leaders varied regarding the nuclear program, from reservation at the beginning to intense interest in the program. (Al-Sheikh, 2019).

The following are Iran's motives and ambitions for the nuclear program:

1. The dream of acquiring nuclear weapons and entering the nuclear club in order to enhance Iran's role and its regional and international standing. (Chopin, 2007, 84)
2. Enhancing Iran's regional and international status and prestige, and confronting any external threats. (Sheikh, 2019)
3. Achieving deterrence and facing any regional and international threats (Al-Rawi, 2008, 230-231)
4. Enhancing Iran's regional strategic role, whether in the Gulf region, the Middle East, the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, or Southwest Asia. (Zahra, 2015, 7-16)
5. Protecting the Islamic regime from being targeted by the United States, which seeks to change the regime. (Ibrahim and Abdel Majeed, 2015)
6. Access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes (Russell, 2008).
7. Developing economic capacities: providing oil and gas for export purposes, obtaining additional funds, and relying on nuclear energy to generate electricity.
8. Possessing nuclear scientific and technological capabilities and benefiting from them in all industrial, medical, pharmaceutical, agricultural fields...etc
9. Achieving strategic self-sufficiency. (Sheikh, 2019)
10. Iran's desire to reach the nuclear brink state. (Harel, 2021)

Iran Nuclear Agreement/2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

After long negotiations between Iran and the (5 + 1) countries, which included the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany, and China, which extended between (2002-2015), in which secret negotiations between Iran and the United States took place through the Sultanate of Oman,

an agreement was reached called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on 14/7/2015. The agreement was ratified by the UN Security Council unanimously in accordance with Resolution No. (2231) of 7/20/2015, according to which the international sanctions that were imposed on Iran in mid-January 2016 were lifted (Kishk, 2018, 80-82).

The Obama administration adopted a new strategy by heading towards East Asia to confront the Chinese challenge, with the possibility of achieving security and stability in the Gulf through the possibility of containing Iran and integrating it into the regional system through the signing of the nuclear agreement with it. (Abdel Ati, 2018, 87)

The nuclear agreement with Iran came within this framework, and it is an acknowledgment by the Obama administration of a regional role for Iran, as Obama stressed on the eve of the signing of the agreement that Iran should be a regional power as it is a large and developed country and does not need to be hostile to its neighbors (Mukhaimer, 2015).

The most important contents of the agreement:

-Reducing the number of centrifuges by two-thirds over a period of 10 years, from 19,000 to 6,104, and only 5,060 of them will have the right to produce enriched uranium at a rate not exceeding 3.67% over a period of 15 years. All centrifuges that Iran will use during this period will be of the first generation. The International Atomic Energy Agency will monitor all Iranian nuclear sites on a regular basis, and IAEA inspectors have the right to monitor all of Iran's nuclear network for 25 years. Iran also agreed on: Limited access for IAEA inspectors to non-nuclear sites, especially military ones, in case they had doubts within the framework of the Additional Protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Iran committed to implementing and ratifying. Turning the Fordow reactor into a research center, refraining from building heavy water reactors for 15 years, and banning the import of parts that could be used in Iran's ballistic missile program for a period of 8 years. (Al-Zayyat, 2015).

- Lifting the international sanctions imposed on 800 Iranian institutions and individuals, including the Central Bank of Iran and the National Iranian Oil Corporation, and lifting the sanctions on frozen Iranian funds. In addition to lifting the US

and European sanctions and the sanctions imposed according to resolutions issued by the UN Security Council as soon as the International Atomic Energy Agency confirms that Iran respects its commitments, and these sanctions are quickly reimposed if the agreement is not implemented within 65 days. (Hilal, 2015)

Iranian Gains from Signing the Agreement

The nuclear agreement achieved for Iran a number of political, strategic and economic gains, most notably: (Sayed, 2013)

-International recognition of Iran's regional role in the Gulf and the Middle East region.

-Recognizing Iran as a peaceful nuclear power, while preserving its nuclear program and its right to enrich uranium, and keeping the option of developing nuclear weapons open, albeit deferred for several years.

- Lifting international economic sanctions.

-International recognition of the legitimacy of the Iranian Islamic regime, which the regime has lacked since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

- Providing an opportunity to modernize the Iranian economy and to integrate into the global economy.

- Achieving significant financial gains in excess of \$150 billion from frozen oil revenues.

Unilateral US Withdrawal from the Nuclear Deal in 2018

The Trump administration decided to unilaterally withdraw from the nuclear agreement with Iran on 8/5/2018 and re-impose sanctions on it. (Marzouk, 2020). Doubts about Iran's intentions to try to obtain a nuclear weapon, in addition to its missile program and its destabilizing role in regional security and stability, played a role in the Trump administration's decision. (Al-Dasouki, 2018, 75). There are other driving factors for the Trump administration's stances towards Iran, which are Israel and the right-wing pressure groups loyal to it in the United States, as well as the oil and gas lobby that represents major American companies that aspire to overthrow the Iranian regime in order to acquire Iranian oil and gas fields. (Al Budoor, 2019)

President Trump's administration has sensed the dangers of Iranian threats and its expansion in the region against its interests and the interests of its allies (Israel and the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia). (Abdel Aal, 2018)

The Trump administration saw that the nuclear agreement with Iran is full of many loopholes that Iran could exploit by developing its nuclear program for military purposes, the most prominent of these loopholes are: (Al-Damour, 2019)

- It includes many loose phrases that bear more than one explanation.
- The agreement froze Iran's nuclear activities for a specified period of 15 years from the signing of the agreement, and thus Iran will be able in 2030 to resume its nuclear activities, perhaps for military purposes.
- The international inspection mechanism by the International Atomic Energy Agency is ineffective, as it requires Iran's approval of the agency's work, and the agreement also included Iran's right to postpone inspection for a period of 24 days, which is sufficient time to hide or transfer nuclear equipment.
- The lack of clarity of the mechanism on how to get rid of Iran's nuclear fuel stockpile.
- The agreement did not address the Iranian missile programs and interference in the region's crises, which is a major reason for the continuation of these crises.
- The agreement allowed Iran to save huge amounts of money as a result of lifting the sanctions, and these funds were used to support terrorism and expand Iran's interventionist activities in the region.
- The absence of a mechanism to force Iran to abide by and implement the agreement other than diplomatic action and the imposition of sanctions, which allows Iran a strategy of negotiation and buying time.

The Trump administration also saw that the nuclear agreement encouraged Iran to play a destabilizing regional role in the region that threatened American interests and its regional partners in the Gulf and Israel. (Abu al-Qasim and al-Ghunaimi, 2021)

The Iranian position on the American withdrawal from the nuclear agreement

Iranian officials initially threatened to withdraw from the nuclear agreement and resume the nuclear program and uranium enrichment, then retracted this option and announced that the nuclear agreement is not bilateral with the United States, but rather an international agreement reinforced by a resolution of the UN Security Council. There are several factors that prevented Iran from withdrawing from the agreement, namely: (Massad, 10, 2018)

- The high political and economic cost for Iran.
- Iran's entry into a confrontation with the international community and the major countries that declared their commitment to the agreement (Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany), and this is what the US administration is seeking to try to cancel the agreement completely.
- Iran's loss of Russia, which supports Iran's nuclear program and provides it with equipment, in addition to the existence of common interests between Russia and Iran in other regional files, most notably the Syrian file.

Tehran waited in vain for the European powers to salvage the agreement. In May 2019, however, as the Iranian economic situation worsened due to the harshness of the US economic sanctions, Iran took countermeasures by reducing compliance with the nuclear deal, and intensified its activities in its nuclear program at a faster pace. Iran was able since the date of the US withdrawal from the agreement in May 2018 to: (Nowar, 2021)

- Increasing the enriched uranium stockpile to 3241 kilograms, compared to 202.8 kilograms that Iran committed to, as stipulated in the agreement. This means that Iran has succeeded in less than 3 years in doubling the stock of enriched uranium 15 times.
- Raising the uranium enrichment rate, as Iran used to produce enriched uranium at a rate not exceeding 3.67%, but after withdrawal, it raised the enrichment rate to above 5%, then to 20%, then to 63%, according to the IAEA reports. Moreover, Iran announced that it now has the ability to enrich uranium to the degree of 90%, which is the level of enrichment required to produce a nuclear weapon.

The recent reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that Iran produced for the first time enriched metallic uranium at 20%, and also significantly doubled its capacity to produce enriched uranium, to the level of 60%, and that Iran has put in place a new mechanism to accelerate the production of enriched uranium by 60%. (AFP, 19/8/2021)

- Increasing the number of centrifuges and developing more than one new generation of devices. Each new generation is distinguished from the previous generation by the speed of uranium separation and the ability to enrich uranium to higher enrichment levels. Iran also began using more advanced centrifuges, such as the “IR2M” and “IR6” devices. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) warned of Tehran's failure to deal transparently with it.
- Iran's Guardian Council passed legislation banning inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency of Iran's nuclear sites, requiring the government to resume uranium enrichment at 20%, and threatening to raise it to 60%, much higher than the 3.67% agreed upon under the agreement (Marzouk, 2021)

US Sanctions on Iran

The sanctions imposed by the international community on Iran, whether political or economic, were a mainstay in the way European countries and the United States dealt with the Iranian file. (Abdul Sabour, 2018)

In this context, the Trump administration decided, after unilaterally withdrawing from the nuclear agreement with Iran on 8/5/2018, to re-impose sanctions (maximum penalties) on it in two batches, with the aim of pushing Iran to negotiate a new agreement that meets American interests, the most prominent of which are included in these sanctions: (Forrer,2018)

The first batch: Its implementation began on 6/8/2018, and was designed to have an integrated effect, as American and international companies were prohibited from dealing with Iranian oil companies, in addition to preventing international banks from dealing with Iranian banks and depriving Iranians of the advantages of global clearing companies. (Abdel Ati, 2018, 86)

The second batch: its implementation began on 5/11/2018, and it includes: imposing sanctions against companies that manage Iranian ports, ships and ship factories, imposing restrictions on financial transfers between foreign financial institutions and the Central Bank of Iran, imposing restrictions on underwriting, insurance and reinsurance services, imposing comprehensive sanctions on the Iranian energy sector, especially the oil sector, prohibiting the import or export of technology related to industrial technical programs, which have dual use: civilian and military. (The Future Center for Research and Advanced Studies, 2018)

Vienna Negotiations (2021/2022) to Revive the Nuclear Agreement

The administration of President Joe Biden adopted the strategy of former President Barack Obama to limit military involvement in the Middle East region, and reduce the military presence in the region in favor of strengthening the presence in East Asia to confront the Chinese challenge, and give priority to diplomacy in dealing with the Iranian file in an attempt to contain Iran. These challenges are as follows: (Katzman, Rennack, Kerr and Thomas and Elsea, 2021)

1. The Iranian nuclear program, given that Iran's possession of nuclear weapons leads to an imbalance in the existing regional balances, making Iran a dominant power in the region, which threatens the security of Israel and its allies, in addition to the region's slide towards a nuclear race.
2. The ballistic missile program, which has transformed from its defensive nature into an offensive tool that Iran exploits to threaten and target the interests of regional and international powers in the region, and even threaten the American presence itself.
3. The Iranian destabilizing role in the region, which uses spreading chaos and violence, provoking sectarian wars, and supporting armed militias against their governments, as a tool to assert influence and maximize interests.

In this context, the Biden administration declared its desire to revive the nuclear agreement with Iran if Iran complied and committed to all the terms of the agreement in exchange for lifting some sanctions on Iran. Biden set three conditions for returning to the

nuclear agreement with Iran and starting negotiations:
(Roinson, 2021)

- Extending restrictions on Iran's production of fissile material beyond the 15-year period that was in the original agreement.
- Iran stopping its destabilizing regional activities, through its proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and addressing its precision missile program that threatens Israel and its Arab neighborhood.
- Controlling the Iranian nuclear program and putting it under full control and inspection.

Vienna Negotiations (2021/2022)

Since April 2021, negotiations in Vienna have been launched between the "4 + 1" group and Iran to revive the nuclear agreement signed in 2015. Representatives of Russia, China, Germany, Britain, France and Iran participated in these negotiations, while the United States participated indirectly after its withdrawal from the agreement. During August 2022, a draft agreement was reached to revive the nuclear agreement, but the American-Iranian differences on some issues prevented the signing of the agreement, and the nuclear talks have stopped since September 2022. (Salem, 2022)

Draft nuclear agreement with Iran

In August 2022, a draft agreement was reached with Iran. Its most prominent contents are: (Depetris.2022)

- Iran abandons its stock of enriched uranium, with the exception of (300) kilograms at lower levels.
- Cessation of all uranium enrichment operations above 3.67%.
- Removing thousands of advanced centrifuges from operation.
- Complete freedom for IAEA inspectors to work in Iran without restrictions.

Calculations of the Parties Involved

Iran

Iran sought to return to the original agreement (2015) as it is without modifications, and refused to make substantive concessions regarding its missile program and the issue of its regional behavior. (Abu Al-Qasim, 2021)

Iran did not change its regional behavior. Despite its participation in the nuclear negotiations, and instead of cooperating, it tended to escalate its threats, adopt a strategic option to remove US forces from the region, and target oil tankers in the Persian Gulf to influence it in response to US economic sanctions. In addition to the continued attacks of pro-Iranian militias against American targets in the Iraqi and Syrian arenas. (Mansi, 2021)

Iran believes that in light of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the global energy crisis, the West needs the agreement, not Iran. Therefore time works in its favor, and thus it is not in a hurry to sign a new agreement. Accordingly Iran continues to stick to its conditions to achieve more concessions from the West in order to reach a better agreement that would allow it to lift all sanctions. (Paris, 2022)

Iran believes that the deliberate expansion of nuclear activities is the best way to pressure the US administration to force it to make concessions and meet Iranian conditions. (Segall.2022)

In this context, Iran continues to maneuver and procrastinate to achieve more gains to revive the nuclear agreement, by announcing an increase in uranium enrichment to (60%), installation of advanced centrifuges, and non-cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (Geranmayh.2022).

USA

The US administration, headed by Joe Biden, aims to try to revive the nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015 with new conditions, which guarantee that Iran will not obtain nuclear weapons, as well as the US administration's endeavor to discuss other issues with Iran which are Iran's missile program and its destabilizing regional behavior. The US administration followed the path of diplomacy to return to the nuclear agreement as an incentive to encourage Iran to change its regional behavior, in consultation with America's allies in the region, while maintaining maximum pressure and sanctions, and maintaining other options,

including the military option and regime change. (Motamed (2021).

It seems that the Biden administration was not in a hurry to reach an agreement with Iran, given its internal political calculations and its unwillingness to open a political battle with the Republican Party in light of the midterm elections for Congress, which took place in November 2022, as well as the approaching presidential elections in 2024. (Depetris. 2022)

European Union

The European Union countries adhered to the nuclear agreement with Iran, to contain Iran's ambitions to develop its nuclear capabilities, and the European countries, especially France, Britain and Germany, refused to abide by the US sanctions on Iran because this affects their commercial interests with Iran, which were strengthened after the signing of the nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015. (Muhammad, 2021)

The European Union countries seek to revive the nuclear agreement with Iran for several goals: preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, the desire to strengthen investment and trade relations with Iran and the return of European companies to invest in Iranian oil and gas fields, and Europe's need for Iranian oil in light of the energy crisis caused by the Russian – Ukrainian war (Geranmayh, 2022)

It is worth noting that the European Union countries were importing 38% of Iranian oil before the imposition of US sanctions on Iranian oil in 2018, and the signing of a new agreement with Iran will allow Europe to import (800) thousand barrels of oil per day from Iran, which contributes to reducing Europe's dependence on Russian oil. (Ghassemijad, 2022)

Gulf States

Saudi-American relations during the Obama administration were characterized by tension and mistrust, as Saudi Arabia was not informed of the secret negotiations between Iran and the United States in the Sultanate of Oman, and Saudi fears of the possibility of a US-Iranian deal that includes Iran's integration into the regional security system at its expense. (Marzouk, 2021)

The signing of the nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015 sparked negative reactions from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, given that it includes many loopholes that Iran may exploit to obtain nuclear weapons, and that it enhances Iran's strength and position as a regional power and threatens the balance of power in the Middle East. Moreover, it did not include other files such as a ballistic missiles program, the Iranian interventions in the countries of the region and its support for terrorism. (Katea Ali, 2016)

The Gulf States fear Iran's achievement of military nuclear capabilities that threaten security in the Gulf region and open the way for a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. The Gulf States also express their concern about Iran's destabilizing policies in the region through their support for armed organizations in the Gulf States, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, in addition to Iran's missile program. The interests of many Gulf States and Israel converge on the need to dismantle the Iranian nuclear program (Dorsey.2022).

Israel

The signing of the nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015 sparked negative reactions from Israel, given that it includes many loopholes that Iran may exploit to obtain a nuclear weapon, and it also enhances the strength and position of Iran as a regional power recognized by the major powers in the world. Moreover, it did not include other files such as a ballistic missiles program, the Iranian interventions in the countries of the region and its support for terrorism. (Katea Ali, 2016)

Israel believes that Iran ranks first in the list of threats facing Israel, and believes that this threat is both strategic and existential. (Gusinsky, 2021)

Israel continues its threat to carry out a military operation against Iranian nuclear facilities. Israel has sought to abort the Iranian nuclear program through carrying out intelligence activities: kidnapping and assassinating Iranian scientists, cyber warfare against facilities, carrying out sabotage operations against nuclear facilities inside Iran through its agents. (Abu Amoud, 2018, 96-98)

Israeli officials also believe that Iran is seeking to reach the status of "anuclear brink state," shortening the period of time

required for “breakthrough,” and producing nuclear weapon itself (Harel, 2021).

Israel considers Iran's possession of nuclear weapons the greatest existential threat to it, and thus threatens to use military force to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities, and puts pressure on the US administration to prevent reaching an agreement with Iran. Israel also fears the lifting of sanctions on Iran, because this will provide additional funds for Iran to support armed groups loyal to Iran in Syria, Lebanon and Gaza (Feldman.2022).

Russia

Russia adheres to the nuclear agreement with Iran and rejects sanctions against it, and considered the American withdrawal from the agreement to be unilateral and that it threatens international stability, security and peace. The Russian position stemmed from its rejection of the American hegemony over the international system and Russia's quest to transform the global system into a multipolar system, as well as Russia's description of the main operator of Iranian nuclear reactors. (Al Jazeera Net, 2018)

Although any new agreement with Iran will harm Russia's oil interests and affect Russia's influence in Europe, Russia will benefit from the signing of the agreement through: (Ghassemijad, 2022)

- Russia's access to the international financial network if banking sanctions on Iran are lifted
- Signing contracts worth billions of dollars to build new nuclear facilities in Iran
- Selling billions of dollars' worth of new weapons to Iran.
- An improvement in Iran's financial situation as a result of the lifting of sanctions will help Russia obtain Iranian aid in its war with Ukraine.

China

China adhered to the nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015. China proceeded from its position, like Russia, in the context of confronting the attempts of American hegemony over the international system, and seeking to transform the international system into a multipolar system. China also has political, economic, military and armament relations with Iran. China is the largest importer of Iranian oil (45%) of its oil imports, and the volume of trade exchange between the two

countries in 2017 amounted to (40) billion dollars. (Sputnik website, 2018)

There is a belief that the United States aims to reach an agreement with Iran to contain Iran and devote itself to confronting China in the Indian and Pacific oceans, but China will benefit from signing any agreement with Iran in the following areas: (Singleton, 2022)

- Intensifying Chinese investments in Iranian oil and gas fields.
- Intensification of trade relations and investments in infrastructure and arms cooperation with Iran.

Controversial issues between Iran and the United States

The points of contention between Iran and the United States were identified according to the statements of Kazem Gharibabadi / member of the Iranian negotiating team, as follows: (Middle East News, 29/7/2021)

- America linked the return to the nuclear agreement to a subsequent dialogue on Iran's regional behavior and the ballistic missile file.
- Refusing to lift the sanctions against more than 500 legal and real personalities (the Supreme Leader, the President of the Republic, and sovereign bodies such as the Revolutionary Guards), as well as refusing to cancel the CAATSA Penal Code.
- Refusal to provide guarantees that the withdrawal from the nuclear agreement would not be repeated, as happened with the Trump administration.
- Refusal to compensate Iran for losses as a result of withdrawal from the agreement.
- America's refusal to cancel the arms embargo on Iran.
- America does not agree to implement all commitments at once, but gradually, and in return, Iran insists on implementing its commitments after verifying the lifting of sanctions.

After the nuclear negotiations reached a dead end in September 2022, the contentious issues between Iran and the United States can be limited to the following: (Geranmayh, 2022)

- Iran's demands to lift all sanctions against it, and to re-link Iran to the SWIFT financial service.

- Iran's non-cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency's investigations regarding the discovery of suspicious nuclear effects in some Iranian nuclear facilities.

- The issue of including sovereign institutions (the Revolutionary Guard) and political figures in sanctions and terrorist lists.

- Iranian demands to obtain guarantees that America will not withdraw from the agreement in the future.

- Iran's refusal to discuss its regional policies and missile program.

On 30/5/2023, the Iranian Foreign Minister (Hussein Abdollahian) announced the existence of unofficial contacts between Iran and the United States through mediators regarding the nuclear file. (Le Figaro newspaper, 30-5-2023)

Scenarios and the Future of Nuclear Negotiations with Iran

In light of the failure to sign the draft nuclear agreement with Iran during the nuclear negotiations that took place in Vienna in 2021 and 2022, the future is still open to more than one scenario, most notably:

First: the Scenario of Delaying Reaching an Agreement:

All indications indicate that the nuclear negotiations with Iran have reached a dead end, and this was confirmed by the foreign policy official of the European Union (Joseph Borrell) due to the differences in the Iranian-American positions, the lack of trust between the two sides and the existence of issues that are still outstanding. (Depetris, 2022)

This scenario is reinforced by the fact that the Biden administration is not in a hurry to sign the agreement for considerations of domestic politics and unwillingness to engage in a political battle with the Republican Party in light of the approaching date of the upcoming presidential elections 2024. Therefore, reaching an agreement can be frozen until after the presidential elections. (Paris, 2022)

During this period, it is believed that the US administration will continue the policy of maximum pressure on Iran through: (Coffey, 2022)

- Intensifying sanctions on Iran.
- Undertaking covert operations by launching cyber-attacks on nuclear facilities.
- Opening secret channels with Iran to reach an agreement suitable for both parties.
- Continuing the policy of deterring Iran, threatening to use military force to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Second: Partial Agreement Scenario:

That an agreement be reached that includes first the revival of the nuclear agreement signed with Iran in 2015, which enjoys priority, and the gradual lifting of sanctions on Iran, and then an agreement to discuss issues of contention later (the missile program and Iranian regional interventions). (Al-Hafyan, 2019)

Given the depth of differences between Iran and the United States on some issues, and the desire of both parties to find a diplomatic solution, a partial agreement may be reached. This can be done through offering limited economic concessions by Washington to Tehran in return for Iran stopping, or perhaps retracting, its violations of the agreement, referring to what could be considered the "less for less" method, which eventually paves the way for a gradual return to the agreement, or the signing of a new agreement that is completely separate from that agreement that expires by the year 2030, in the event that the 2015 agreement is not revived. (Future Research Center, 11/9/2021)

Third: the Scenario of Failure of the Negotiations

For each party to tighten its conditions, and thus announce the failure of the negotiations. This will entail the imposition of more US sanctions on Iran in coordination with European allies, in return for Iran accelerating its nuclear activities and raising the rate of uranium enrichment to levels that bring it close to producing a nuclear weapon. Iran will also escalate its provocative activities in the waters of the Gulf and the Sea of Oman against international navigation, threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz, and mobilizing militias loyal to it in the region to intensify its military activities against the US presence in the region and against the allies of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel. (Marzouk, 2020)

Fourth: The Scenario of Using Military Force against Iran:

It is represented by the United States alone or jointly with Israel and some Gulf states directing a military strike against Iranian installations. The US President has emphasized that the United States has other options if diplomacy fails. The results of this scenario are not guaranteed and it faces many obstacles, most notably: the spread of Iranian nuclear sites and facilities on a wide geographical scale and the expected Iranian retaliatory reactions in the entire region. Therefore, the military strike will have no effect other than delaying Iran's acquisition of nuclear capabilities. (Nawar, 2021)

Fifth: The long Negotiation Diplomacy Scenario:

Iran insists on procrastinating and gaining time by imposing new conditions, in order to buy more time to possess nuclear expertise that makes it closer to being a nuclear state, and Iran has mastered the game and the art of stalling and prevarication to gain time and obtain more gains and concessions from the other party. The United States and other major powers will not allow the negotiations to continue indefinitely. (Al-Mahdawi, 2018)

Sixth: The Scenario of Israeli Secret Operations against the Nuclear Program:

Israel announced that the Israeli army is processing and preparing itself for military options to act against Iran, however, the possibility of Israel carrying out a unilateral military operation to attack Iran's nuclear facilities seems remote, and this means continuing efforts within the framework of covert operations. In addition to that, the operations against Iran continue in the near arenas, in the air, sea, and land. They are not necessarily military attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities and missile bases. Rather, they may be secret operations to impede the Iranian nuclear program: assassinations of scientists, cyber warfare and intelligence. (Abu Al-Qasim and Al-Ghunaimi, 2021)

Conclusion

This study aimed to shed light on the issue of the Iranian nuclear program, which is controversial regionally and internationally, and the circumstances that led to reaching an agreement in 2015. In addition to the unilateral American withdrawal from it in 2018, then the Vienna negotiations (2021 and 2022) to try to revive the agreement again, and the negotiation scenarios.

The study answered its questions. Moreover, it proved the validity of its central hypothesis that there is a correlation between the difficulty of the nuclear negotiations in reaching a permanent nuclear agreement that is acceptable to all international and regional parties, and Iran's adherence to its nuclear program, which reflects its ambitions to possess a deterrent force to protect its political system and impose its regional and international prestige and status and play a dominant regional role in the Gulf region in particular and the Middle East in general.

The study reached the following results:

- Iran, whether nuclear or non-nuclear, is an important regional power in the region and an important element in the regional security equation, and any attempts to exclude it from the regional security system in the Gulf will lead to the continuation of regional instability in the Middle East.

- One of the most important goals of the US strategy in the Middle East is to preserve Israel's security, and by doing so it does not allow any Arab or Islamic country in the Middle East to possess nuclear weapons. Nor will Israel accept the existence of a nuclear power in the region that would break Israel's monopoly as the dominant power in the region.

- The Iranian nuclear program is one of the most controversial issues on the international scene, as Iran insists on the peacefulness of its program, while the United States of America insists that it has secret military goals.

- Iran has mastered the art of negotiation, procrastination, and the long breath to buy time to preserve its nuclear program, which impedes reaching a nuclear agreement acceptable to all international and regional parties.

- The economic sanctions card is considered the main card in the battle between the United States and Iran, and the Biden administration employs it as a permanent pressure card in dealing with the Iranian file. While Iran realizes that the focus should be first on lifting the sanctions completely to save its deteriorating economy.

- The US military option towards Iran faces great difficulties, due to the spread of Iranian nuclear facilities over vast areas, some of which are underground. Therefore, the United States

focuses on the method of diplomacy, pressure and economic sanctions on Iran to contain its nuclear program and to influence the Iranian interior and incite citizens against the political system and destabilize it as a prelude to changing it with a pro-American regime. Despite this, the military option remains as a final solution if other methods fail, whether it is an American action alone or in partnership with Israel and allied countries, or by providing logistical support to Israel to do so.

-The study suggests a scenario of delaying reaching an agreement due to the conditions of American domestic politics and the developments of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The study recommended the following:

-The study recommends continuing the diplomatic option within the 5 + 1 group to contain the Iranian nuclear program peacefully, because the military solution is considered a disaster for the Gulf region and the Middle East.

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