

**THE PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES AND US-IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL:
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND JOHN F. KENNEDY PRECEPTS ON
FREEDOM, DIGNITY, AND INDEPENDENCE^{©Σ}**

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ABSTRACT

The US-Iran nuclear deal offers a unique opportunity that could potentially change the course of international relations ending decades of offensive yet ineffective foreign policies toward states' harmony. By rebuilding the security in the Middle East as we enter a new multipolar era, the US-Iran nuclear deal will likely determine the future of the world balance of power, in which Iran could tilt the scales. A successful outcome will ensure Iran exits forty-three years of financial, political, military, and technological isolation, consolidating its status as a regional influencer. On the other hand, the US will have the chance to manoeuvre its survival as a superpower despite the gradual expansion control of Russia and China in the Middle East and further afield. Given the continued hiatus of the US's selective memory of what is deemed reasonable and harmful moral judgement when justifying sanctions, we need to consider a more harmonious and diversified worldview paradigm in the international nuclear deal and peace process. Concentration upon current news developments in Vienna and Tehran and, in conjunction with the analogy of the two famous speeches of Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, this article seeks to demonstrate how these universal principles of freedom, dignity and independence are the underlying factors for the US to remain good moral power but not implemented in the current negotiation with Iran.

Keywords: The US-Iran relations, nuclear, peace negotiation, multipolarity

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**UCAPAN PRESIDEN DAN PERJANJIAN NUKLEAR AMERIKA SYARIKAT-
IRAN: PERSEPSI FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT DAN JOHN F. KENNEDY
TENTANG KEBEBASAN, KEMULIAAN DAN KEMERDEKAAN**

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ABSTRAK

Perjanjian nuklear AS-Iran menawarkan peluang unik yang berpotensi mengubah hala tuju hubungan antarabangsa dan mengakhiri dasar luar yang bersifat mengancam serta kurang berkesan dalam menjamin keharmonian sesebuah negara. Dengan pembinaan semula keselamatan di Timur Tengah pada era multipolar, perjanjian nuklear AS-Iran berkemungkinan menentukan masa depan perimbangan kuasa dunia, serta menunjukkan potensi Iran boleh untuk memainkan peranan strategik. Natijah rundingan yang terhasil dapat memastikan Iran berupaya mengakhiri penderitaan akibat daripada sekatan kewangan, politik, ketenteraan dan teknologi yang mencecah tempoh empat puluh tiga tahun. Hal ini, sekali gus memperkukuhkan statusnya sebagai sebuah negara yang berpengaruh di rantau tersebut. Pada masa yang sama, AS beroleh manfaat dan berpeluang menjamin kelangsungannya sebagai kuasa besar walaupun pada ketika ini, kebangkitan Rusia dan China mulai meluaskan pengaruh masing-masing di Timur Tengah. Akibat selektif memori AS tentang apa yang dianggap munasabah dan pertimbangan moral yang berbahaya apabila mewajarkan sekatan, penganalisis perlu mempertimbangkan perubahan pandangan semesta yang lebih harmoni dan pelbagai dalam soal perjanjian nuklear antarabangsa dan proses damai. Denegan menumpukan analisis kepada perkembangan berita semasa di Vienna dan Tehran dan, bersempena dengan analogi dua ucapan terkenal Franklin D. Roosevelt dan John F. Kennedy, artikel ini cuba menunjukkan bagaimana prinsip universal seperti kebebasan, kemuliaan dan kemerdekaan ini menjadi antara asas serta faktor untuk AS kekal sebagai contoh adia kuasa bermoral tetapi tidak berjaya dilaksanakan dalam rundingan semasa dengan Iran.

Kata kunci: hubungan US-Iran, nuklear, rundingan keamanan, multipolariti,

Introduction

Every February, thousands of Iranians rally across the main cities of Teheran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz and Mashhad to commemorate the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) and the establishment of the post-Islamic revolution of Iran (Editors 2014; Abrahmian 2008; Ahmadi 2020; Amanat 2019). Prior to the Islamic Revolution (1979), Iran was under the rule of a secular and absolute monarch of, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who resorted to extreme political oppression while favouring United States (US) military and financial protection against the enemy of the West during the Cold War (Abrahmian 2015; Axworthy 2016; Bayandor 2018, Matin-Asgari 2012).

Back then, by taking advantage of the existing US-Soviet Union (USSR) armed race and ideological proxies in international politics, the secular monarch that intended to modernise Iran through its oil revenues vacillated in crisis (Takehy 2020; Kinzer 2008; Ismael 2006; Hunter 2020; Bahgat, 2020). The state's wealth remained in the hands of the privileged few; domestic dissatisfaction intensified, and political and religious forces eventually engaged in confrontation (Abrahamian 2008). This pushed the country to the eventual 1979 revolution and the founding of the first Islamic theocracy, which initiated the absolutist rule of the Unitary Khomeinist regime (Byrad 2011; Louise 2019; Gause III 2009; Golkar 2020; Mir-Hosseini 2006).

Nonetheless, throughout modern history and contemporary politics in Iran, several internal and external factors such as financial crisis, tribal power, the imperialist treaty of 1907, disillusionment of political elites, the formation of centrifugal forces, insecurity and global chaos and the development of neighbouring countries, diversity of ideological in line with geopolitical points of view have been the most critical factors in the transition to the authoritarian, bureaucratic state wherein the incomplete search of durable state-formation and nation building process of Iran are exacerbated by the US's assertive foreign policy options and frequently used of sanctions against the Iranian rights of sovereignty and peaceful coexistence (Karimi 2002; Sabet and Safshekan 2019; Ewan 2021;).

Drawing historical parallels from the Great Depression (1929-1939) during the US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (hereafter known as President Roosevelt) administration (1933-1945), as well as the short-lived of John Fitzgerald Kennedy (hereafter known as President Kennedy) administration (1961-1963) during the recession crisis (1960-1961), and the armed race with the Soviet Union (USSR) during the Cold War, this article seeks to demonstrate how both president, Roosevelt and Kennedy projected the *American Exceptionalism* through the universal value of *independence, freedom, and dignity* to transform these critical and decisive periods (Deudney and Meiser 2018; Schmidt 2018; Parsi 2007). Arguably, in both political deals and in dealing with global political crisis, the US under Roosevelt and Kennedy was looking for survival and, most importantly, hope and a better position of the US in the global system (Schmidt 2018; Saull 2018; Galvin 2017).

While Iran is not comparable to the power capability and already privileged superpower status of the US, the imperfections of the Iranian state and its leaders under the present Vienna talks and compromised nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action: JCPOA) are wishing for peaceful relations and mutual coexistence (Javed and Ismail 2021; IAEA 2022; Giles 2018; Ghazvinian 2021). Though the rights of sovereign states are guaranteed by the UN charter and prevailing norms of the international system, persisted sanctions and crippled post-corona economic development in Tehran only reaffirmed Iranian public opinions about negative peace and insincerity of the US policymakers thought present Biden administration decided to reverse some worse immigration policies against Iran (Kyriakidis 2021; Lawson 2020; Lewicka and Dahl 2021). Past failed Obama and zealous' Trump administrations only confirmed limited nuclear deal options and negative peace if Biden opted for more restrained sanctions against the Iranian nuclear deal (Lewicka and Dahl 2021; Mearsheimer 2017; Mount 2022; Cavari 2022). It will be argued that in times of trouble, the American precepts of freedom, dignity, and independence (as rhetorically preached by Roosevelt and Kennedy) should be the immediate reference of inspiration for the US to embrace and consider an alternative and more harmonious framework when dealing with differences and resilient of Iran (see also Crist 2018; Seaton and Dennis Wu 2021).

Therefore, this article demonstrates how these universal values of independence, freedom and dignity are the same underlying factors dominating the US-Iran nuclear deal - economic devastation and nuclear race (see also Tabatabai 2020; Roosevelt 1933; Kennedy 1960; Opperman and Spencer 2018; Maltazahn 2013). This time, the difference is that the implications of this deal, whether it succeeds or fails, will have a global security impact. The article also seeks to establish evidence that the new multipolar system will be forced to investigate alternative policies incorporating a diversified and harmonious international system (Mahiet 2019; Li, During and Kwok 2021; Nordin 2016; Halliday 2005). The discussions of this article unfold in several sections, which ultimately highlight two central themes: the concurrent deadlocks within US-Iranian relations and the unrealistic prospect of harmonious and positive peace deals if wisdom of Roosevelt and Kennedy do not inspire present US leaderships. It will also be shown how excerpt speeches from the present Iranian leaders' rhetoric of peace and hope for better deals are relatively similar to Roosevelt and Kennedy's precepts of freedom, dignity and independence.

Persisted Deadlock and Inharmonious Worldview of Nuclear Negotiation

Inadvertently, there is no doubt that the domestic quality of democracy and freedom of speech under the present clerical rulers derailed the organic formation of a liberal political process to accelerate political reforms and peaceful foreign policy options for Iran with the US (Mahdavi 2020; Behrooz 2012; Borojerdi and Rahimkhani. 2018). Additionally, the increased gun-based violence, Islamophobic and racial bigotry incidences of domestic politics in the US have not shown a reversion of the *American*

Dream and liberal peace (Dodge 2018; Cox 2018; Deudney and Meiser 2018). Simultaneously, however, it is a logical fallacy to subscribe to the US's unilateral worldview about protracted sanctions and nuclear peace prescription as the only viable option against the Iranian state of suffering and limited options of overcoming domestic underdevelopment due to limited foreign relations (Gartner 2020; Gracia 2021; Fayazmanesh 2008; Fawcett and Payne 200).

While nuclear weapons may seem the only survival instrument for Iran to defy sanctions of the US, fallacies of forced imposition of liberal democracy since the recent withdrawal of the Biden administration and the return of the Taliban to ruling Afghanistan. Inadvertently, current sceptic views confirmed further illusion of Iran and others deemed as "a pariah state" against the US' declined leadership and its decaying supremacy of sustaining post-Cold War liberal order (Ewers, Goldenberg, and Thomas 2020; Freilich 2022; Hunt 2017). As a custodian of the post-1945 international system, it will be tautologically impossible for the US to preach and compel others to embrace freedom, democracy, and dignity when negative peace and victor's justice have prevailed when negotiating with Iran.

At present and in terms of domestic political practices, both US and Iran are not comparable. Nevertheless, neither are eligible to fulfil threshold requirements of sustainable liberal and healthy peaceful democratic order (Herberg-Rother and Son 2019; Louise 2019; Fakhro 2022; Keddie 2006). However, the burden of demonstrating more nuanced sincerity in accommodating differences in the nuclear deal confirmed that the current Biden administration could no longer sustain a negative peace deal with Iran if a more harmonious worldview of peace negotiation were not initiated (Ewers, Goldenberg, and Thomas 2020; Kamel and Lewis 2019). Thus, a more harmonious model of embracing different political systems and cultural views of Iranian policymakers within the present context of Vienna's nuclear deal must be considered (Kenkel 2021; Hussain 2022; Mousavian and Shahidsaless. 2014).

Watered-Down US-Iran Relation and Negative Nuclear Peace

Undoubtedly, past colonial injustice and present Western sanctions against Iran undermined the sacred Westphalian order of non-interference. It underlined the systemic structural violence that prevents the current compromised nuclear deal from shifting from negative to positive Peace (Evand 2015; 2008; Aziz 2020; *CFR* 2022; Entessar 2020; Hunter 2020). Since the nineteenth century, Iranians had continuously depended on the imperial powers of Russia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the US (Begie 2021; Bock 2020; Ismael 2016; Kamel and Lewis 2019). They experienced detrimental consequences as Iran's natural resources remained under the control of foreign forces (Tierney 2022; Choksy and 2021). The existing literature on the US-Iran nuclear deal highlights trouble forming a durable peace from international negotiations with Iran (Pop and Silber 2021; Bahgat 2021; Bock 2020; Fettweis 2019; Louer 2020; Kesharvazian 2009; Lewis 1994). Despite the long duree of political encounters, both Washington and Tehran have not been able to overcome individual

differences and imaginary views of threats and enemies (Parsi 2007; Murray 2013; Mottahedeh 2008).

Meanwhile, literature about the effectiveness of sanction as a foreign policy instrument, albeit its facade and intention, have not shown credible evidence of changing political attitudes and positions of targeted states (Sabtan, Kilgour, and Mulder 2022; Citasazian, 2022; Cohen 2019). While recent evidence of worsening livelihood and deteriorating wellbeing of the ordinary populace, selective unilateral and multipronged economic sanctions remained a popular option, especially for Washington when dealing with Tehran (Dizaji 2021; Arena 2021). Some argue that this new era of suppressing Iran's development was to last for over four decades and proven flawed the policy, while others advised more extreme and extended versions of existing sanctions against Tehran (*Iran International* 2021; Dudley 2017; Katzman 2021b).

However, all along, Iran was not only barely immune and survived the hostilities but magnified its narratives of the Islamic Revolution by staunchly defending the universal principles of freedom, dignity and independence against Western dominance (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014; Katzman 2021a; Bahgat 2021). Inadvertently, the quality of domestic democracy and freedom of speech under the absolutist rule of the incumbent Unitary Iranian regime is a paradox with the Roosevelt and Kennedy precepts of freedom, dignity, and independence. Nevertheless, the international behaviour of the US against Iran violates these cardinal principles when ensuring peaceful inter-state relations (Shumilina 202; Simbar 2006; Solhdost 2021).

This year marked the forty-third anniversary of the victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution (*France24* 2022). National and international news agencies reported large gatherings across the streets of Iran expressing their support for the ideals and aspirations of the Islamic Revolution. According to the *Teheran Times* (2022b), the prevalence of the theocratic, democratic model ala Iran was also world widely recognised as congratulatory messages from foreign leaders in Central Asia (leaders of Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia), as well as the Gulf Region (Qatar and Oman) were sent to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi (*Teheran Times* 2022a). What is truly remarkable is that the 2022's anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Republic coincides with the US-Iran nuclear negotiations.¹ Thus, we should acknowledge the insidious reality of dying nuclear deals if harmony is not the shared worldview in watered-down US-Iranian relations. A harmonious international relations worldview does not naively assume the heavenly realm of Kantian ideals of Peace in managing earthly chaotic foreign relations among different civilisational views (see also Tazmini 2020; Urbain 2008; Richmond 2021, 2008, 2005; Khatami 2012). The durability of the nuclear peace deal requires critical challenges to unpack epistemological positivist and Realist assumptions in the current flawed pacemaking and deal processes (Richmond 2021; Mansell and Openshaw 2019; Mahiet 2019). Since the bad JCPOA deal and peacemaking unravel limited negative Peace, more harmonious Western worldviews against Iran can only be materialised by harmonising the state's differences and thus, maximising the peace

dividend in sustaining durable nuclear deals (MEHR 2022; Hippel and Kurokawa 2020).

Harmony in International Relations: Envisioning Freedom, Dignity, and Independence in Managing Precarious Nuclear Turbulence

This section briefly explored the universal conceptualisation of Freedom, Dignity and Independence, as they served as pillars for envisioning harmonious international relations (IR) that seek not to expel and replace but to create spaces for states with different power capabilities (Dingli 2020; Mahiet 2019; Richmond 2021; Galtung 1964). Understanding harmonious IR to celebrate individual state hardships and suffering enriches our worldviews of universal shared values and ideals that policymakers often cherry-picked not to materialise but deny realisations of positive Peace.

Freedom

For example, Brown (1916) referred to Persia as "a dysfunctional state incapable of politically organising itself" (1916, 86). After the Bolshevik Revolution (1917), the new Soviet government relinquished the Northern provinces of Persia², as a rejection of Tsarist imperialism. Back then, Britain, as the only remaining world power, made Persia one of its protectorates under the Anglo-Persian Agreement (1919). The vision of British Foreign Minister Lord Curzon was:

"..to create a chain of vassal states stretching from the Mediterranean to the Pamirs³ and protecting not the Indian frontiers merely, but our communications with our further Empire." (Begie 2001).

In a legal context, states have no "absolute right" to exist or maintain their established order. However, as per international law, the right to exist is the tendency to group themselves in separate national communities following their different preferences and interests (Scharf 2003). National interests are protected when they are identified as usual, logical, and worthy of protection endorsing the right to exist as a state. It is essentially the basic foundation of a national legal system. If a state can maintain its existence, it must, therefore, have the right of freedom to govern itself without the subjugation of another sovereign state (Berlin 2002; Mansell and Openshaw 2019). Judged by these criteria, Persia became the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, setting forward, through the theocratic-republican constitution, the state's cultural, social, political, and economic institution of the Iranian people, under the Shi'ia political interpretations of the Islamic state or polity (Louer 2020). Furthermore, over the past four decades, Iran has managed to maintain an established order, safeguard its geo-economic interests, and become a sphere of influence in the Middle East and Central Asia. On this premise, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Iran, under international law, has earned its right of freedom of will (Gartner 2020; McCrudden 2008).

Dignity

In international human rights law, human dignity is considered the most *pervasive concept* (Le Moli, 2019;), as it raises opposing opinions over its true meaning and fundamental purpose. According to Friedrich Hayek (1960, 15), dignity is a mere emotion that "can have no place in an attempt at rational persuasion" and therefore, it lacks legal practicality to protect human rights in a legal framework. Others like McCrudden (2008) appeal to the human core in which:

"...every human being possesses an intrinsic worth [...] that [...] should be recognised and respected by others, and [that] some forms of treatment by others are inconsistent with, or required by, respect for this intrinsic worth." (McCrudden 2008, 666).

All contrasting reflections considered, it is hard to view human or state dignity with a single ontology. On the one hand, the concept of dignity manifests itself as a moral value without practical usefulness in judicial decision-making. On the other hand, it is considered an ethical principle as the basis of legal practices. As Le Moli suggests, the doctrine and practice of dignity are in *the very substratum of international law*. Iran, however, reflects a clear case of international distribution of power and how the interests of powerful states are served by international law under the veil of political neutrality (Mansel and Openshaw 2019).

Independence

Stephen Krasner (1999, 16) described state sovereignty as a "ticket of general admission to the international arena", meaning a state is entitled to territorial integrity and political independence when it is juridically accepted. Only then the state is free to engage in agreements with other nation-states. Some states might cede their juridical autonomy in exchange for socio-economic and military gains, such as the European Union, where its member states are regarded as quasi-sovereign (Scharf, 2003). The European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice hold total supremacy over its geographic limitations. They are conditioned to the terms issued by international financial institutions. The same can be said for states credited by the World Bank or International Monetary Fund (IMF).

While ideals are well rehearsed by state actors with various power capabilities and aggregations within the international system, they are not well aligned when viewing paradoxes and differences in peace negotiations and deals. Additionally, when both Roosevelt and Kennedy preached them in different temporal and spatial settings of American politics and society, these precepts and ideals' inherent and intrinsic universal features were not abolished or became timelessly irrelevant. No doubt, poor Iranian records of liberal policy and illiberal treatments of political differences within its domestic political sphere do not entitle the rights and privileges of its leaders to use these precepts in defying the aggressive hypocrisy of the US's deals (see Mahdavi

2020). However, the *prima facie* burden for the US to set an example is higher and more nuanced. Thus, provide more moral and political incentives for the Iranian leaders and negotiators to claim these precepts when showcasing negotiations of the US from truly universal ideals and not so harmonious intentions and actions of the US when ensuring peace and a less hostile formula of meaningful and positive peace.

As in the case of Iran, its juridical autonomy has been dismissed by the US global financial power on the grounds of initially political regime change and, most recently, on the grounds of financing and proliferation of terrorism (FATF 2020). It is only through the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement with China (*President of Iran* 2021), as we will see later, that Iran has exercised its complete state independence for the first time in four decades.

Iran's Nuclear Program Alters the Balance of Power?

The negotiations between Iran and European powers of France, Germany and the United Kingdom became public in 2003 as the proliferation of nuclear weapons became a grave concern in the international community. Iranian President Mohammad Khatami negotiated the limits of the nuclear enrichment program. The US, on the other hand, under the leadership of Republican G.W. Bush, opposed any consideration to entertain Iran's enrichment program and, as a result, declined to join the negotiations (Hippel and Kurokawa 2020).

A group of American scientists led by Frank Von Hippel made a proposal to limit Iran's nuclear R&D program with one hundred operating test centrifuges. Iran challenged the Europeans with three thousand operating centrifuges. Negotiations came to a standstill until 2015, when the US, under the democratic administration of Barack Obama, agreed to resume negotiations. This time the United Nations Security Council, including Germany, joined the discussions. By then, Iran had installed more than twenty thousand centrifuges. However, they were to be reduced per the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to five thousand operating centrifuges (Hippel and Kurokawa 2020). During these negotiations, two main challenges concerned the US. First, the Arak water reactor, with a similar rating as the Indian counterpart, allowed India to generate its first plutonium nuclear-weapon program. Potentially, it could be used to generate plutonium bombs. This was resolved by switching to low-enriched uranium (LEU) fuel instead of natural uranium. LEU contains low U-238, which is needed to produce plutonium. Fuel enrichment became a crucial point in the final negotiations of the JCPOA (Javed and Ismail 2021).

The second challenge was related to the number of centrifuges Iran was willing to accept. According to scientist Frank Von Hippel, the US envisaged that if Iran was loaded with LEU at five thousand centrifuges, they might generate *enough weapon-grade uranium for a few bombs* in just one year. Von Hippel and his scientific team suggested limiting the LEU to only two hundred kilograms whilst compromising Iran's five thousand centrifuges (Gartner 2020).

The JCPOA deal aimed to limit Iran's nuclear enrichment capability in exchange for lifting US and UN sanctions. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA, 2021), Iran had fully complied with its obligations. The Arms Control Association also confirmed that the IAEA certified Iran's compliance by taking the

required steps to restrict the state's nuclear program (Davenport 2022). The implementation report triggered the international sanctions relief, US, UN, and EU. However, negotiations with Iran have halted again as the American republican administration assumed the White House in 2018. The decisive turning point was when the US revoked the JCPOA in May 2018, increased sanctions and escalated US-Iranian tensions forcing Iran to turn to the East, Russia, and China as reliable partners (Editors 2022).

Western powers have hardly challenged Israel's nuclear domination in the Middle East or even Iran's neighbouring state, Pakistan. On the contrary, the United Kingdom, America, and France (Parsi 2007) have fully supported Israel's nuclear program. According to Kristensen and Norris (2014), Israel holds eighty nuclear missiles and warheads. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has contemplated starting its program and entering a nuclear race with Iran (Black, 2010). Countering the Iranian nuclear proliferation would inevitably intensify tensions with Saudi Arabia and its allies. Bahrain-United Arab Emirates-Israel, in turn, poses a threat to the security of the entire region and, indeed, a danger to global security (Bazzar 2020).

The Iranian argument is that its nuclear program has never been intended to create weapons of mass destruction. One of the many uses of nuclear energy is in the production of nuclear medicine which will align Iran with the world's standards in the field of radiopharmaceuticals (*The Iran Project 2022a*). Mohamed Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) reassures that “[o]ne of the most important parts of the industry is the production of diagnostic and therapeutic radiopharmaceuticals” (*The Iran Project 2022a*). Whether Iran hides future intentions to develop nuclear weapons remains unclear despite the current narrative. In the meantime, it can hardly be argued that Iran has shown flexibility and pragmatism by accepting to resume talks with the US (Katzman 2021a; Kristensen and Norris 2014).

Admittedly, Iran's domestic political drivers remain divided⁴ on the utility of the nuclear program and the approach with global powers. However, they remain united in maintaining consistent policymaking for the legitimacy and survival of the regime (Hussain 2022, 2020). The common distrust of Western powers, based on the lessons of the past where Iran has been continuously pushed into the corner, makes it easier for the Iranian national factions to reach a united consensus and engage in negotiations with Western forces.

The problem is the opposing views of American domestic political parties, Republicans and Democrats, which could derail future diplomatic relations with Iran (Duedney and Meiser 2018). The US economic power exercised by the Republican administration has harmed Iran's sphere of influence (Cox 2018). Now, as the White House returns to the control of the Democrat administration, the quest to engage in diplomacy with Iran returns to the US foreign policy agenda (Garcia 2021). In the meantime, in just three years, Iran has advanced its R&D nuclear program and strengthened its financial, military, political and technology transfer through its committed alliance with Russia and China (*The Iran Project 2022b*). Thus, US's legitimacy and survival as an undisputed unipolar superpower are questioned. The international balance of power begins to alter, and Iran could tilt the scales (al-Husseini 2022). This argument will meet with a tremendous amount of disapproval, but it has been overlooked in the international discourse, so it deserves further study (Shumilina 2021; Bock 2020; Tabtabai 2020; Tazmini 2020; Tierney 2020; Cox 2018; Giles 2018; Hunt 2017).

All Roads Lead to Rome, Except the Path to Nuclear Peace

In October 1929, the US stock market crashed, leading to the worst economic downturn in the history of industrialisation. The Great Depression (1929-1933) experienced a trend of foreclosures and repossessions that lasted almost a decade. Consumer confidence waned, production slowed, wages fell, and unemployment rose. By 1932, fifteen million Americans, over twenty per cent of the US population, were unemployed (see Gellman and Rung 2018). Homeless people and food lines became a regular occurrence in towns and cities across the country. Farmers could not harvest, and severe droughts in the Southern Plains contributed to the loss of human lives, cattle and crops. By March 1933, the US Treasury lacked the funds to pay civil servants (Gellman and Rung 2018). Amid these extreme circumstances, the newly elected president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, FDR, unlike the previous administration of Herbert Hoover, was eager to reverse the economic devastation. In the inaugural address to the nation, at a point where the US economic recovery was bleak and far from promising, FDR delivered a speech that gave hope to the nation. To this day, Roosevelt's famous words resonate across borders as he stated:

"...first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself - nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyses needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigour has met with the understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory." (Roosevelt 1933, 5).

One hundred years later, in 2019, the Ministry of Labour in Iran reported that poverty had increased by thirty-eight per cent due to high inflation and increasing food and real estate prices. In 2020, inflation continued to rise, the national currency halved in value, and the absolute poverty line was well above fifty per cent, according to Iran's leading economic daily, Donyaye Eqtesad (*Iran International* 2021). The Iranian people have endured not four years, like the US Great Depression, but over four decades of economic frustration justified by US sanctions. The international isolation, not the emotion of fear, has paralysed the efforts to convert the state's wealth of natural resources into an advanced economy (Dizaji 2021).

Over the years, the Iranians have learnt to live without fear of international restrictions but with pride over its Islamic Revolution. In a speech over the Nowruz (Persian New Year) 2021, Khamenei recalled with a sense of outstanding achievement wherein through the unity of the Iranians that safeguarded the current sovereignty of Iran, preventing the past where Persia had succumbed to British rule through the Anglo-Persian Agreement (1919) as discussed earlier.

This essentially implied that the Iranian people had not failed by choosing a disciplined and moral action type of leadership under the theocratic democratic model of Khomeinism, just as FDR expressed in his inaugural speech:

"The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of their gift, I take it." (Roosevelt 1933, 7).

Roosevelt continued: "Compared with the perils which our forefathers conquered because they believed and were not afraid, we have still much to be thankful for" (1933,11). Like Iran, one of the most ancient world civilisations, where their forefathers suffered the perils of Mongol and Arab invasions, they believed in the Persian spirit, which to this day remains manifested in the wealth of the Iranian culture and long history. An overwhelming legacy bestowed by the Persian forefathers for which Iranian people are proud and thankful, as Roosevelt highlighted (Ahamadi 2020). A legacy that has been sustained for more than two thousand years, a time when Persia was feared by the Greeks, and revered in the Middle East, Central Asia and as far as China and Korea⁵ in Eastern Asia (Bahgat 2020). The Persian forefathers installed great pride and dignity in the nation, yet its people have suffered great humiliation under the rule of Western powers.

Nevertheless, the primary task now is to maximise the potential of Iran's young human capital by reviving a shattered economy, and if necessary, at the cost of engaging in offensive behaviour (Mearsheimer, 2001). Like FDR envisioned for America:

"Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously...treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time through this employment accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganise the use of our natural resources." (Roosevelt 1933, 6).

President Roosevelt stated: "The basic thought that guides these specific means of national recovery is not narrowly nationalistic". Iran's national recovery urgency is treated as an *emergency of war*. Therefore, the significance of the new US-Iran 2022 nuclear deal lies in reducing the risk of financial, military, political and technology sanctions and achieving the current US administration objectives of establishing a "longer and stronger" agreement (Choksy and Choksy 2021). The key to the success of the US-Iran nuclear agreement will lie in the projection of future engagements, whereby both state actors can maximise their potential and harmonise their differences through peaceful means. In other words, it would be harmony⁶ rather than "negative peace" (Galtung, 1964) that will ensure the end of offensive foreign policies.

Iranian neighbouring rivals have dismissed an initiative that, although favourable, boosts the economies of all three regions. In the case of Iran, it is about boosting its national security to defend its borders, as Mearsheimer (2017) advised. Furthermore, Iran is currently a gas provider to Central Asia and could quickly become the new gas provider to the European market via the natural gas pipes of North Field and South Pars, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian/Arab Gulf (Dudley 2017). In effect, Iran could bridge Europe with Asia and Central Asia with the Persian/Arab Gulf broadening the benefits of intercontinental commercial trade.

The controversial Qatar-Iran trading relations sparked the Saudi-led coalition (Bahrain-Emirates-Egypt) against Qatar, forcing the Qataris to break diplomatic relations with Iran (Dudley 2017). It could be argued that the Saudi coalition remains an influential element which might hinder the US-Iran negotiations. That is precisely why geopolitical gains rather than military concessions (Fawcett and Payne 2022) will assure that the US-Iran deal will endure.

One way this problem can be tackled is through the recognition of the good neighbour policy and avoiding another conflict similar to the Iraqi invasion of Iran (1980). Roosevelt suggested:

"In the field of world policy, FDR asserted himself, I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbour -- the neighbour who resolutely respects himself and because he does so, respects the rights to others -- the neighbour who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbours." (Roosevelt 1933, 9).

Internationally, unless the US can respect its self-proclaimed moral obligations by adhering to its foreign agreements⁷, and respect the right of others to be different, Iran's suspicion of the reliance on the US nuclear deal will be significantly justified (Choksy and Choksy 2021). Iran has good reasons to be cautious when negotiating with global players, not only as, noted earlier, Iranians have a long history of colonial exploitation, but most recently, they have learned to live with how the US effortlessly revoked their agreement during the 2018-2021 Republican administration.

President Ebrahim Raisi seeks reassurances that successful negotiations will be respected, mainly when the Republicans assume power as early as 2024 (Cole 2022). Raisi favours a harmonious foreign policy, but he is also aware that a 'big step' would be necessary to attain economic independence:

"We never pinned hopes to Vienna and New York about reviving a big power nuclear agreement that the United States quit under then-president Donald Trump." (Karimi 2022).

We put our hopes in the east, west, north, south of our country and never have hope in Vienna and New York.' Raisi said in a televised speech commemorating the revolution (*Tehran Times* 2022a), underlying the destabilising policies of almost all congressional Republicans, the Gulf States and Israel as they aggressively oppose the new negotiations (Ewers, Goldenberg, and Thomas 2020).

The same can be said about the Iranian Chinese partnership. The US financial pressure during the administration of Trump (2018) opened a window of opportunity for China to gain forty-eight point three per cent of Iran's exports and twenty-seven point five per cent of the country's imports by 2019. It was a good reason for the Iranian industries to exercise caution against China gaining domestic control, so they opposed the \$400 billion Chinese investment in the twenty-five Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Tehran and Beijing (Choksy and Choksy 2021). Farooq Alikhani, Iranian National Oil Company envoy member deputy, also showed reassurance that:

"If US sanctions on Iranian oil exports were lifted, we will become capable of raising our productivity back to their 2018 levels which reached 4 million barrels per day, and this is the aim we are seriously seeking to achieve by 2022 to 2023." (*SHANA* 2020)

Iran is expected to invest up to forty billion dollars in developing its oil and gas fields with Chinese and Russian foreign investment (al-Husseini 2022).

This is perhaps the most crucial reason for Iran to revive the nuclear deal with the US, as it will counterbalance the influence of the main superpowers on Iranian soil. So long as the state interdependence strikes balanced relations, the Iranian political leadership will be better positioned to achieve the common good instead of sacrificing the masses in poverty. Roosevelt was also apparent on the sacrifices for the good of the nation:

“If I read the temper of our people correctly, we now realise as we have never realised before our interdependence on each other: that we cannot merely take but we must give as well; that if we are to go forward, we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice father good of a common discipline, because without such discipline no progress made, no leadership becomes effective. We are, I know, ready and willing to submit our lives and property to such discipline because it makes possible a leadership which aims at a larger good.” (Roosevelt 1933, 13).

Indeed, it can hardly be argued that it is the recognition of Iran's sovereignty and its long-overdue recovery as an independent state that can guarantee the state's financial freedom. As he stated:

“It is the way to recovery. It is the immediate way. It is the strongest assurance that the recovery will endure.” (Roosevelt 1933, 9).

Roosevelt kept asserting. Iranians have faced forty-three years of disciplined to survive as a nation. Their recovery will endure through harmonious relations with Western and Eastern partners.

It is essential to recognise that President Roosevelt's words came when the US suffered from its most devastating economic crisis, the Great Depression, decades away from America becoming the world's hegemon. In the unipolar system, the meaning of freedom, dignity and independence have been interpreted slightly different from the words conveyed in the inaugural speech of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the early thirties. The notable difference has been evident in the negative impact on people's livelihoods in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Without going into too much detail, it is worth mentioning that Cuba is still enduring an even more extended period of isolation. Almost sixty years of acrimonious relations with the US without any signs on the horizon to renegotiate a “good neighbour policy”. The fundamental distinction is that Iran has emerged from its survival struggle⁸ forging solid alliances with Russia and China while expanding its military and nuclear capability. Admittedly, Iran's survival, considered by realist scholars (Mearsheimer 2001) the highest goal of all states, regardless of their ideology, prompted Iran to build its military and nuclear program, becoming a regional power and a strategic influencer in the world's powerful forces.

Envisioning a Free World and Harmonious IR

After World War II, Western-centric commentators and policymakers agreed with the theory that economic growth could transform totalitarian regimes into liberal democracies (Sartori 2008). John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK), who was to become the new optimism of America, and for that matter, the rest of the world, adhering to the same dogma – economic growth means strength and vitality.

In the US election of 1960, during the first presidential debate with Vice President Richard Nixon, Senator JFK debated whether the bipolar world would follow a vision

of freedom or would the international system adopt a narrow projection of domination and slavery:

"...and with the world around us, the question is whether the world will exist half-slave or half-free, whether it will move in the direction of freedom, in the direction of the road that we are taking, or whether it will move in the direction of slavery." (Kennedy 1960).

In the Cold War's heart, freedom was synonymous with economic power.

Many years later, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Iran had long been established as a Theocratic Democracy against American domination, Seyyed Mohammad Khatami proposed a "Dialogue of Civilisations" (see also Khatami 2012).⁹ The Iranian President was in search of a world order based on unity and diversity, as opposed to the monopoly of a single power proposed in the theory of "Clash of Civilisations" (Huntington 1996). Khatami envisioned a world that appeals to the *will for empathy* and *compassion* rather than the *will-to-power* formulated by Western Democratic Liberalism (Fukuyama 1992). This world continued to follow economic power.

Kennedy was hopeful that the grand vision of freedom depended on how the US fostered solid human values:

"I think it will depend in great measure upon what we do here in the United States, on the kind of society that we build on the kind of strength that we maintain." (Kennedy 1960).

Unfortunately, over time, the US derailed from the road to freedom and imposed its great economic, political, and military power by exerting an authoritative will. In the meantime, the entire Middle East, the world's most prosperous region of oil and gas resources, spiralled into constant warfare and political instability (see Dodge 2018). Conflicts escalated. However, with its authoritative might, the US proved ill-equipped to resolve the regional disputes peacefully.

If the 2022 US-Iran deal were to be the US chance to rebuild the level of trust pre-Islamic revolution, leaving behind the old policy of hard power and maximum pressure, it would undoubtedly regain the moral standing it once was recognised and respected for (Fakhro 2022). Alternatively, a new multipolar system driven by a policy of soft power and maximum resistance is likely to surface against the US geopolitical interests (Hunt 2017). In the long term, Iran could be a US applicable partner, a geopolitical strategy that should be taken seriously as China and Russia exert closer ties with the Islamic Republic. The question is, what sort of picture does this consideration allow to construct? There is enough evidence to suggest that a new emergence of Eastern influence in the Gulf region is rapidly expanding for reasons beyond this study's scope (Javed 2021). Still, many Western scholars encourage the US to engage with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi as peaceful diplomatic partners, Parsi (2021) explains. This analysis is erroneous. However, it signals a policy of stagnation which could be detrimental to the future of the US, asserting its economic and political position in a multipolar system (see also Hussain 2021).

Ultimately, the ingenuity of the US Democratic administration will shape the vision of a diversified and united world. According to the ancient Chinese philosopher and politician Yan Ying (see Li, Dascha, and Kwok 2021), diversity is the fundamental

prerequisite to building harmonious relations for people to flourish and prosper. In politics, prosperity is measured by the welfare of all people rather than the symbiosis of specific economic practices and political ideologies (Mahiet 2019). This is by no means a unique thought. However, as noted earlier, it challenges the post-World War II theory that postulates economic growth and transforms totalitarian regimes into liberal democracies (Richmond 2021, 2008).

Another important distinction of this theory is the association of liberal democracies with freedom. Are non-liberal democracies - social democracy in the case of China or theocratic democracy in the case of Iran - not free? What kind of society is considered free? JFK pointed out that the US obligation to the rest of the world is to defend freedom:

“...the kind of country we have here, the kind of society we have, the kind of strength we build in the United States will be the defence of freedom. If we do well here, if we meet our obligations, if we're moving ahead, then I think freedom will be secure around the world. If we fail, then freedom fails” (Kennedy 1960).

The essential point now, back to the US-Iran deal, draws attention to the type of freedom the US should be defended. Would it be positive or negative freedom? For Berlin (2002) and Li (2020), people need both types of freedom. Positive freedom is concerned with the ability to achieve self-mastery and self-rule. Negative freedom is *the absence of constraints* (Berlin, 2002; Li, Dascha, and Kwowk 2021) to act upon one wish.

Positive freedom (similar to positive peace of Galtung 1964) alone could pose a danger as it can be used as a powerful tool to justify totalitarian regimes like Nazism in the Second World War or USSR's Communism during the Cold War era. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the US should broaden its old fashion interpretation of freedom and embrace both positive and negative freedom (Richmond 2008, 2005). In this way, the US will reverse its ineffective foreign policy and respect Iran's ability to be ruled without the domination of foreign powers but under the universal principles of independence and dignity. The US would show its strength to assist those who, in the words of Kennedy, *"look to us for survival"*. Kennedy continued:

“I am not satisfied when we have over \$9 billion dollars' worth of food, some of it rotting even though there is a hungry world and even though 4 million Americans wait every month for a food package from the Government, which averages 5 cents a day per individual. I saw cases in West Virginia, here in the United States, where children took home part of their school lunch in order to feed their families because I do not think we are meeting our obligations toward these Americans.” (Kennedy 1960).

Just as the US sought to meet its most pressing domestic obligations, Iran is also seeking to be allowed to lift its alarming levels of poverty as it looks at the US to end foreign policies based on political ideologies rather than practical pragmatism. As JFK concluded his speech:

“The reason Franklin Roosevelt was a good neighbour in Latin America was because he was a good neighbour in the United States, because they felt that the American society was moving again. I want us to recapture

that image. I want people in Latin America and Africa, and Asia to start to look to America to see how we are doing things, to wonder what the President of the United States is doing... That is the obligation upon our generation" (Kennedy 1960).

Thus, the US has a unique chance to turn the page in the Middle East and the rest of the world and set an example of a *good neighbour* for the same reasons JFK and FDR highlighted above. For the survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its political leaders will not be satisfied until the people they serve through their democratic rule enjoy international freedom, dignity, and independence.

The US and Iran: Durable Nuclear Deal?

In March 2021, Iran and China signed a cooperation agreement a year ago, otherwise known as the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The agreement consists of twenty articles shaping and strengthening the Beijing-Tehran alliance in politics, executive cooperation, culture, judiciary, security, and defence (*President of Iran* 2020). The strategic partnership is considered significant in regional and international relations and could potentially increase to US\$600 billion in less than ten years. As noted earlier, China committed to invest US\$400 billion in Iran's energy, infrastructure, economy, and military. Iran will supply its oil to China at a generous discount for the next twenty-five years.

The strategy comes as Iran's lifeline after its financial system was block-listed by the Financial Action Task Force on the charges of international money laundering, financing and proliferation of terrorism enforced by the US in 2018 (FCTF 2020). Currently, there are only two countries on the FCTF high-risk list: North Korea and Iran.

As reported by SHANA (2020), China-Iran's partnership is Eastern-centric and aims to be mutually beneficial, recognising cultural commonalities, encouraging multilateralism, supporting equal rights of the nations, and insisting on domestic developments the Iranian spokesperson said. On the other hand, China will be on target to expand its Belt and Road (BRI) initiative, increasing its foothold in the Middle East through Iran's strategic location (Fulton 2020).

At the time of authoring this article, the US-Iran talks have entered the eighth round, reaching the final stages of the agreement. Surprisingly, the principal criticism based on a sound argument has been raised not by Western forces but by China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who regarded the US approach to the Vienna talks as lacking initiative (cited in Solhdoost 2021, 63).

While sceptics say Iran may have conceded significant leverage to build its ties with China, negotiations with the US could still fail to conclude a deal, and a return to hostile tensions could again dominate Western-Iranian relations (Choksy and Choksy 2021). Furthermore, even if the US-Iran agreement succeeds after months of negotiations, the implementation phase will likely face robust opposition from regional neighbours and congressional republicans (al-Husseini 2022). The reassurances of achieving a strategic partnership on the same level of mutual understanding and cooperation with China remain vague (Cabrejas-Artola, 2019).

Conclusion

It is still too soon to anticipate the turn of events of the US-Iran nuclear deal as negotiations continue at the time of authoring this paper. Nevertheless, in general terms, the agreement's success will depend on the projection of future cooperation. Iran has the potential to bridge Eurasia through the Persian/Arab Gulf, thus broadening intercontinental trading. Both state actors can effectively maximise their influence to stabilise the Middle East and, for that matter, strengthen global security. Judged by these criteria, if the agreement focuses on harmonising the differences between the American hegemon and the Iranian regional influencer, it will encounter favourable outcomes as opposed to previous offensive and ineffective foreign policies detrimental to the welfare of the Iranian people.

On the other hand, the US could benefit from conceding Iran's geopolitical gains to counterbalance the increasing expansion of Russian and Chinese control in the Middle East. Irrespective of their political and moral ideologies, the US-Iran agreement offers a unique opportunity for Iran to exit a long-standing status of international isolation whilst maintaining its freedom, dignity, and independence and for the US to manoeuvre the new multipolar system with Iran tilting the balance of power in its favour. Alternatively, a failure to conclude the US-Iran deal without ensuring full compliance in its implementation will not only see a return to hostile tensions dominating Western-Iranian relations, but it will further jeopardise the Eastern-centric block with China leading as the new emerging power.

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Notes

¹ US leads negotiations with other world powers, including Russia, France, the UK, China, Germany, and the European Union. The revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

² The changed name from Persia to Iran in 1935, meaning the Land of Aryans in Persian.

³ It refers to the vast Pamir Mountain range in Asia.

⁴ Iran's political class is divided into two factions: pragmatists, who are open to nuclear options and principalists, the proponents of full nuclear development as Iran's sovereign right (Hussain 2020).

⁵ Persian merchants pronounced Corea or Korea instead of Goryeo (Seung 2016).

⁶ "The Deep Universal Harmony." is a documentary series of Peace and World History, Part I 1521-2021, produced by the Author under the sponsorship of International Peace Doctors. TM

⁷ The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was revoked by the turn of the new US administration. A financial and trade embargo was imposed in 2018, *which went so far as to stigmatize Iran's central bank as a terrorist organization* (Cole 2022).

⁸ See also Cabrejas-Artola, Cristina. 2019. "Iran: From Survival Struggle to Sphere of Influence." Transcend Media Service, *Transcend International*. Accessed September 30, 2019. <https://www.transcend.org/tms/2019/09/iran-from-survival-struggle-to-sphere-of-influence/>

⁹ The UN General Assembly designated the Year 2001 as the Year of the Dialogue among

Civilizations. See Khatami, Seyed Mohammad. 2012. "Dialogue Among Civilizations: Contexts and Perspectives." *UN Chronicles* 49, no. 3, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/dialogue-among-civilizations-contexts-and-perspectives>

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