

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) and Common notions of the US and its Strategic Allies in Explaining Islamic Republic of Iran's Threats

Mohammadali Aghamolaei¹, Abdolreza Alishahi^{2*}, Majid Refiei³

¹Graduate student of international relations, university of Tehran

²PhD Political Science at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran,

³Graduate Master of International Relations at Isfahan University, Isfahan, Iran

***Corresponding Author:** Abdolreza Alishahi, PhD Political Science at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran, Email: AbdolrezaAlishahi@atu.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

The US effort to pull out of the nuclear agreement, called JCPA, was a plan Donald Trump has had since participating in the US presidential election. Finally, the US state officially announced its withdrawal from JCPA, the return of sanctions as in the past, and also readiness to resume negotiations if Iran wished. The main question in this article is what factors have influenced the US withdrawal from JCPA. The hypothesis of the article is: Trump's foreign policy foundations, threatening nature of Iran after JCPA, creation of a common understanding and notion between the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia about the threat of Iran, their interpretation of JCPA role in strengthening regional presence of Iran and its ignorance in the context of JCPA and from the internal point of view, the Islamic Republic of Iran's action after JCPA should be regarded as some of the key variables in Donald Trump's decision to leave the JCPA agreement.

Keywords: Threat Balance, Common Notion, Common Interests, Trump's Foreign Policy, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA)

INTRODUCTION

Confronting Iran and the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region have been one of the key issues of Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East. In his election campaigns, Trump had repeatedly criticized Barack Obama for saying that his policies have made Iran stronger in the region and threatened US. He has cited as his main policies the opposition to Iranian troops in the Persian Gulf and the intensification of pressure on Iran to withdraw from regional policies. However, the axis of Trump's policy on Iran can be seen as Iran's nuclear agreement and opposing it. Like many Republicans, Trump strongly opposed Iran's nuclear agreement, calling it a challenge for the United States and its allies. He has strongly criticized the US diplomatic apparatus for its nuclear agreement with Iran (Tabyin Center, 9: 2016). Donald Trump is from the American Republican party and belongs to the Christian Right. With an ideological, yet power-driven attitude, it is about returning America to its era of authority and American exceptionalism. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Trump has interest-

oriented policies; he believes in countering Iran's regional influence and dealing with Iran's military adventure in the region, and calls for a revision of JCPA through re-negotiation, using multilateral economic pressures. This was considered to be a kind of US withdrawal from JCPA or a challenge by the Islamic Republic of Iran. For the United States and its regional allies (Saudi Arabia and Israel) after the JCPA, the Islamic Republic of Iran has also been portrayed as a permanent threat to international stability and order (based on a common understanding of Iran's threat and in line with their common interests of challenging the regional hegemony of the Islamic Republic of Iran, these countries have forced the United States along with other secondary variables to withdraw JCPA). In other words, the notion of threat and security-oriented activism remained as before. However, the threat content in the name of the Islamic Republic was constant and its form was changed. Before the JCPA was implemented, the Islamic Republic of Iran was a terrorist threat, a human rights threat and a nuclear threat, and after the nuclear agreement, the JCPA threat became the basis of

regional hegemony threat, and then the missile threat and the chain will continue. After the United States' leave from JCPA, it seeks to accompany, with the compulsion, a large number of international actors and Iran's trading partners and threaten its economic interests and in fact engage Iran in a repetitive or repeated play of sanction. Slowly, through which the targeted country is surrendered, changes its behavior or resists against the will of the sanctioning country; this cycle continues until one of the parties decides to end the play. The nature of the play of sanction is repetitive and very erosive. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been embroiled in a vicious circle of security activist-play of sanction-negotiations.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Given the short timeframe for the US withdrawal from JCPA, there is no domestic scientific article (other than journalistic writings) addressing this issue.

A translation of the article "The US Withdrawal from Vienna Agreement on Iran's Nuclear Program. A Contradictory Legal Status", which is articulated by a number of French jurists, is considerable. The importance of the article is to outline the legal framework in which Vienna Agreement was concluded, and propose a set of possible legal working procedures in response to the withdrawal from this agreement and to counter US unilateralism. According to the authors, these working procedures can be in the form of a referral to the International Court of Justice, the World Trade Organization or the use of the European Union blockade law (Perbin & Dogol, 2018).

In international published articles, we can refer to Mohammed Cherkaoui's article "The American Withdrawal from JCPA, Political or Security-oriented." The author considers the extraterritorial law adopted after the US Withdrawal from JCPA to be to the detriment of the balance of power on both sides of the Atlantic, and regards the US Withdrawal from JCPA that was an international agreement and had the UN Security Council approval a new heresy in the international system. For him since the European authority is at stake, more than ever it is time for Europe to re-balance its power relations with the United States and be equipped with the tools necessary to exercise its full authority (Cherkaoui, 2018).

Ariel Leviet discusses the consequences of the US withdrawal from JCPA in the article "Nuclear Accord with Iran is bad and

withdrawal from JCPA is worse". He states that this is a vague and long-term project, lacking the cooperation of European partners and global competitors, Russia and China. If America's goal is to change the regime, it will lead Iran to a more radical position and nuclear weapon for its survival (Leviet, 2018).

In the article "Dangerous Realities", G. Blanc describes the agreement with Iran as practically lost and refers to it as a new dangerous reality. He believes that the agreement with Iran has been successful because Iran's nuclear program has been controlled and is not a threat to stability of the region. According to the author, Iran will return to its nuclear program, and with the onset of the industrial enrichment process, the regional competitiveness will be enhanced by the shadow of fear and doubt. This will deepen the Atlantic alliance between the US and Europe and challenge the future leadership of the United States in resolving future international conflicts (Blanc, 2018).

Perry Cammak argues in the article "What Happens Now" that sanctions are a tool, not necessarily a cure for all international disputes. The sanctions worked well at a specific juncture with Europe, Russia, China, and the United Nations, bringing Iran to the negotiating table and JCPA was concluded; he continued to question the similar Trump-North Korean behavioral model and stated that Iran has lost 98 percent of its uranium reserves and two-thirds of its centrifuges. North Korea has ten to twenty atomic bombs, and Iran has been restrained, not a potential nuclear threat to the international community, and therefore US sanctions policy does not have the international consensus, solidarity and legitimacy and will fail (Cammak, 2018).

The articles summarized above have either addressed the legal and technical aspects of US withdrawal from JCPA, or have examined the success or failure of this withdrawal in the light of futurology. But our article is to explain why the United States withdrawal, and to use the theory of defensive realism under the influence of the common understanding of the threat of Iran and the shared interests between the countries involved.

Theoretical Framework of the Research

Understanding the behavior of the state in the anarchic conditions or providing a proper theory for the foreign policy remains the most

important goal of knowledge of international relations. The macro theory of realism is one of the paradigms in international relations that has undergone inter-paradigm debate in the process of analyzing and explaining the developments of the international system, and the result has been the emergence of numerous sub-theories (Shipping, 2008). In the defensive realism, the security concern is the most important problem; in other words, the defensive realists are purely security-oriented, and along with aggressive realism, it has led international relations studies to be oriented to the security. These two approaches seek to answer the security puzzle in the international anarchic system. The key question for this group of realists is how much power is necessary or sufficient for the states? Or when will states begin to back the power? The answers to this question have distinguished the two realistic schools (Kirshner, 2010).

Stephen Walt is one of the best-known defensive realist thinkers who has worked hard to recognize the main and central propositions of balance-of-power theory. The failure of the hypothesis of power against the potential post-Cold War US hegemony led Stephen Walt to shift the focus of realism from the balance of power to the threat balance so as to strive for the Gordian knot of neorealism (Little, 31: 2009). Walt's critique of the principle of balance of powers and the theory of threat balance states that what drives countries to the balance is the degree of threat they perceive (Moshirzadeh, 135: 2007).

In his view, the states unite against the most threatening countries. In this case, the threatening state or states are not necessarily the strongest states. He sees the threat in addition to power as a combination of other factors such as offensive capability, military might, geographic proximity, and in particular potential aggressive intentions. His point is not just about the power of states, but about how states perceive threat in their relationships. When states feel that their very existence and interests are threatened by other states, they unite against them and strive for balance (Walt, 1987: 28).

According to Walt, therefore, the element of power alone does not lead to a balancing act, and the threat balance is a more comprehensive concept with a higher explanatory power and is the main rule of balancing foreign policy (Asadi 237: 2007). The subject of perception and sense of threat in Walt's theory is preceded by another

part of his theory, the Coalition for Balance Against Threats, in which this part of Walt's theory distances it from materialistic dimensions and leads it to the constructivist and idealistic approaches (Little, 36: 2010). For example, based on the constructivist aspect of the threat balance theory, the security dilemma does not only arise from the fact that both countries possess nuclear weapons but also how they view each other (Sajjadpour & Ijtihadi, 53: 2009). The attitude of the main actors of the international system towards the revolutionary countries is not only threatening because of their possession of nuclear technology or possessing nuclear weapons but also because of their demands for change in the status quo of the international system. From Walt's point of view, any actor seeks to develop approaches to change the status quo, and then pave the way for counteraction pacts within the balance of threat. Thus, what is considered to be a revolutionary approach will be accompanied by the complex and diverse reactionary reactions of regional and international actors (Walt, 1987: 26).

According to Walt's theory, to understand why states conflict or cooperate with one another, one has to see what these states imagine of their interests and the environment in which they live. How they acquire these perceptions and how they become a part of specific political-defense policies (Haji Yousefi, 2003: 53). Identities affect the security of states and humans by directly interfering with identity boundaries to shape agents' perceptions of the threat and the creation of identities that are threatening in the others' view. In addition, the states are through the process of securitization that make other states the source of threat or enemy. That is, by identifying them as 'the dangerous other', they require specific actions outside routine practice and define exceptional situations (Moshirzadeh and Masoodi, 261: 2009). Because every state is a social code that shows its particular identities and reinforces its political actions and reflects the value preferences of the state. Therefore, the strategy of threatening the countries of the region against Iran is in line with maximizing these values and value preferences. Some countries in the region regard the Islamic Republic of Iran as a threat and a source of insecurity and are operating their strategies by identifying it as an enemy seeking to destroy them. External threats are therefore a major factor in the formation of alliances and the threats that affect the existence or interests of

states, especially those that have shared security, political and economic concerns. Therefore, for the formation of a unity, there must be two factors: common threat and common interest (Qawam and Imani 38: 2011).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Foundations Of Trump's Foreign Policy

Donald Trump seems to be a phenomenon in the American political structure. With no background in state or government affairs, Trump won the election despite opposition to the American political structure and accordingly took control of the world's largest power. Trump does not believe neither in the American political structures, nor does he value the accepted principles of foreign policy. Trump does not consult with US political, intelligence, and intellectual structures, and is extremely anti-structured and self-centered. In this regard, at least the 45th President of the United States is an exceptional person in the White House. This has made the main lines of foreign policy extremely vague (MaAdams, 2016).

The Trump cabinet has been the most radical American cabinet in at least two decades, gathering the Republican Party's most militant and extremist people. They are far more ideological than the Obama cabinet. In this group, the majority is the generals, and in their mental background, most of whom have a prominent military option on any issue. Another feature of the Trump cabinet is that they have a hostile view on the IRI. Most of the generals who have been effective in Trump's foreign policy have been in Iran's strategic environment, including Iraq and Afghanistan; they believe that Iran's policies and actions are one of the main causes of America's failure in these two countries. They have considerable animosity towards Iran. At the forefront was Michael Flynn, whose period was short-lived and had to resign because of his relationship with the Russian embassy.

First Vice President Mike Pence, Rex Tillerson, who was later replaced by CIA Chief Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of Defense Gen. James Matthews, General McMaster later replaced by John Bolton, and Secretary of Treasury Steven Mnuchin and Nikki Haley representative of this country at the United Nations, are among the most important individuals who are very influential in shaping US foreign policy and national security strategy against Iran (Berman, 2017). From this point of view, the logic of US

foreign policy approaches realism. Logic of realism is very militaristic and attributes military power and the use of force to the inevitable consequences of the nature of world politics (Callahan, 238: 2008).

By examining Trump's proclaimed policies and practices, it can be argued that he is at best in favor of new isolationism. New isolationism wants to end some of its foreign policy commitments but at the same time agrees with the continuation of some of them and suggests accepting some new ones (Smith et al, 2016: 216). New isolationism is a choice, not absolute isolationism (Callahan, 129: 2008).

According to this policy, New isolationism is a profit-oriented foreign policy with a kind of self-centered strategy and is highly capable of adapting to realism. On the other hand, New isolationism, by pursuing some form of non-binding diplomacy in the field of foreign policy, drives the United States out of a series of troublesome international organizations, treaties, and pacts, and restores American sovereignty; on the other hand, realism provides greater freedom of action for the United States with action in sensitive conditions. Because of Trump's approach to the instrumental calculations about US national interests, his state often assesses the costs of a committed foreign policy and isolationist policies and then designs a foreign policy that serves national and international interests (Soleymanzadeh; Omidi; Barati, 15: 2018).

In the Trump's state, political cooperation will be entirely selective and based on American national interest. Trump believes the US should be ready to cut off its interaction with anyone and any country that needs it (Yazdan Fam, 152: 2016). He is also clearly opposed to America's global leadership role and clearly questions US international commitments (Hass.2016). Trump's disregard for American values is rooted in Trump's commercialism and pragmatism, which is one of the pillars of the Trump administration, what Farnes Pulsey calls "immoral trans-pragmatism" (Kahl and Brands, 2017). Speaking before Congress, Trump said, "My task is not to represent the world, my task is to represent the United States of America" (Whitehouse.gov, 2017).

Based on this view, on the JCPA Donald Trump believes that this agreement is not in the best interest of the United States. Trump called it "a very bad agreement" and "embarrassing" for his

country, and repeated a sentence in his selection campaign saying: "We gave \$ 150 billion and got nothing." Trump's main complaint was that the US spent a great deal of money on a "one-way deal" and failed to achieve anything significant. "We gave them (Iranians) billions of dollars in the deal that we shouldn't have given," he said in an interview with The New York Times. Because our country is a bankrupt country with over \$ 19 trillion in debt, we had to keep this money (Vatanka, 2016). In fact, Trump's approach to international trade treaties aims at revising and re-negotiating treaties to achieve a better and more favorable deal for the United States. Donald Trump's view of international treaties is based on the relative gains (that is, how much do I benefit from you compared to you?). Accordingly, he has always emphasized JCPA's one-sidedness, citing repeatedly issues such as "Iran came to the money", " JCPA does not hinder Iran's missile tests", "the supervisory power of international inspectors is limited", "some sections of the agreement are not permanent", Iran does not commit to the spirit of agreement"; that is rooted in the US president's view of the international agreements.

Richard Hass, chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations and one of America's foremost foreign policy advisers and thinkers, wrote on his Twitter page: "Trump's foreign policy has found its content and that is the doctrine of withdrawal." America has abandoned the important international treaties or threatened to exit from them, including the "Trans-Pacific Treaty, the Paris Climate Agreements, Naphtha, UNESCO and JCPA" (Hass, 2017). All of which are diplomatic achievements of the Obama era. Trump is trying to prove that the Obama is misguided in its administration and decisions and is trying to provide the previous administration to the American public with new and sometimes completely disagreeable decisions.

Earlier, Donald Trump's Vice President Mike Pence had emphasized in the election campaign that Trump would tear JCPA entering the White House by failing to adhere to it (CBSNews, 2016). Trump was also influenced by the same doctrine after repeatedly approving the JCPA in October and November 2017, eventually leaving it on May 18, 2018.

Common Notion and Understanding of Iran's Threat

Similar to any other international agreement in the international anarchic world that relies on

the comparative advantage of nations, JCPA has had undesirable consequences, so that the "logic of undesirable consequences" explains that no form of contract - compulsory or voluntary - in international politics cannot be free from weaknesses; in addition, the logic of adverse consequences is so strong that even the most definitive results, such as unilateral contracts after victories and military conquests to defeat enemies, cannot be considered as absolute advantages for the conqueror country (Mousavi & Hosseini, 2: 2016). On this basis, it seems that Trump's role in the Middle East approach and the formation of a kind of triangle alliance between the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia may be seen as a key factor in the US withdrawal from JCPA. Iran has achieved opportunities and benefits since its inception, it has increased its influence and power in the region. Removing Iran's economic obstacles and agreeing to its official presence in the regional crises increased Iran's position and power in the region. This is a threat to other countries, especially Iran's regional rivals (Israel and Saudi Arabia) and the trans-regional hegemony of the United States. The reason for these countries being ignorant of the intentions of their regional rival that is now becoming a bit stronger and increasing its military might in the future that could pose a serious threat to the influence and power of Iran's regional competitors (Faramarzi & Salehi Manesh, 4: 2016). So it seems natural to take countermeasures to counteract this, and that was to persuade the trans-regional hegemon to exit the winning card of Iran, JCPA.

It should be noted that what forms the main framework of Trump's Middle East policy is his understanding of the increasing power of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region after JCPA. Such an approach can also be found well among Trump's regional allies, so that Saudi Arabia and Israel do not see JCPA as a factor in enhancing regional stability through war risk mitigation, but as a factor in enhancing Iran's power factors in the region and as its threat. Thus, the formation of a shared understanding between Saudi Arabia, Israel and the United States about the threat of Iran, their interpretation of the role of the JCPA in enhancing Iran's regional presence, and ignoring the issue in the JCPA context should be among the key factors driving the US out of the nuclear agreement (Souri, 2: 2018).

From the perspective of American critics, according to JCPA, Iran's enrichment

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) and Common notions of the US and its Strategic Allies in Explaining Islamic Republic of Iran's Threats

establishments will continue to operate; the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to research and develop new generation centrifuges, and at the end of 15 to 25 years and the end of an important part of the commitments, it can apply these new technologies to enhance the nuclear industry. The nuclear agreement recognizes Iran as a country on the brink of nuclear power. Some countries in the region are concerned that the success of the Islamic Republic of Iran in resolving the nuclear issue in negotiations with major world powers will strengthen this country and strengthen its role and influence in the region (Nawazani & Qasemi & Farsai, 13: 2015).

That is why the global opposition of JCPA has become very angry about it. They argue that since a significant portion of Iran's commitments will be completed shortly and the restrictions on Iran's nuclear activities will be lifted, the United States will be in a worse position in the coming years by disrupting the sanctions regime. Contrary to initial expectations, not only did JCPA fail to ease regional competition, it also intensified tensions between Iran and regional competitors. The nuclear agreement is a form of contradictory restriction in a way that Iran maintains its weapons capability; in contrast, the United States and its partners are trying to prevent Iran from using that capacity (Singh, 2015). Eventually, alongside the extensive lobby, other secondary variables paved the way of the United States to withdraw from JCPA. We discuss them in the following:

First, according to the agreement, the infrastructure of Iran's nuclear activities will not be dismantled. So those regional competitors who are concerned about Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons should be concerned about the possibility of Iran cheating, withdrawing from the agreement, and reducing its nuclear breakout time. Because with the termination of the term of JCPA life, most of the restrictions on Iran's nuclear activities as well as international supervision will be lifted. From the neighbors' point of view, Iran will be able to provide technical preparations for the acquisition of nuclear weapons in a short period of time. As long as these countries are skeptical of Iran's hegemonic intentions, they cannot be indifferent to the consequences of Iran's acquiring a nuclear weapon, although the possibility is delayed.

Second, if the United States could stand as a reliable ally for the weaker actors alongside these countries against nuclear Iran, the fear of

these countries would be greatly reduced on Iran's chance of acquiring a nuclear weapon; but from the perspective of these countries, the nuclear agreement showed that the United States, in the wake of the request (under the Obama administration) that Iran cease all its nuclear activities, has in practice shown a willingness to compromise with Iran at the expense of neglecting the demands of its allies (Sick, 2016).

Third, for Saudi Arabia, Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons cannot be measured without the competition of these powers for leadership in the Muslim world and, in the geopolitical terms, the Hartland of Islamic powers in Asia and Africa. Putting Iran on the brink of nuclear weapons production and its success in the multilateral talks with major powers has made Iran a worthy leader of the Muslim world and placed Iran in a position that the West has accepted implicitly its disruptive role in the vast area from Lebanon to Yemen (Barnaby: 1989).

Fourth, Israel considers some of Iran's restrictions in the coming years to be a disadvantage of this agreement and has repeatedly called for their permanence. They refer to these clauses in the JCPA that its restrictions will be removed in the coming years as the "sunset of the JCPA". According to the clause, Iran could increase the number of uranium enrichment centrifuges to more than the current ceiling (5,060) after ten years of implementing the nuclear deal. However, after 15 years it can increase its current ceiling of storage of less enriched uranium (300 kg). Netanyahu claims that lifting the restriction is in fact returning to zero.

Israel, by its magnification, conceived the Islamic Republic of Iran as a threat and the source of its insecurity, and by identifying it as an enemy seeking to destroy Israel (dangerous other), took specific measures and defined one exceptional case, found JCPA against its existence and its control of Iran's nuclear program ineffective, and sought to dismantle and persuade the United States to withdraw. Therefore, Israel seeks to increase regional power and achieve regional hegemony to ensure its survival. Therefore, the further weakening and isolation of Iran in the region is entirely in line with Israeli security objectives (Qawam / Imani, 90, 2011). The Israeli effort with the US to do so is rooted in a theoretical and important logic in the international politics that avoids the

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) and Common notions of the US and its Strategic Allies in Explaining Islamic Republic of Iran's Threats

emergence of regional hegemony (Hass, 2006 and (Nasr, 2006 and Clinton, 2010).

Post-JCPA Action of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Although JCPA not aimed at resolving regional issues, it has created the opportunity for the two sides to come to terms with each other on other tensions, through the opportunity to bring Iran back to the international community and open the way for interaction between Iran and the West. But for reasons that are not the subject of discussion, it failed to open the way for Iran and the West to do so; in a situation where Iran itself could take the initiative and win in the regional crises in his talks on the tense issues with the West, this golden opportunity was lost due to the Islamic Republic's performance after JCPA.

Accordingly, if JCPA is not a prelude to resolving regional disputes, it would be of no use. The US and Iran's regional rivals hoped that the Iranian government's conservative tendencies and Saudi's strongly anti-Iranian tendencies would be able to drive Iran to the regional JCPA if managed wisely and systematically (Zarate: 2015). The nuclear agreement in the calculations of some foreign policy officials should improve Iran's relations with regional actors and countries. Some international experts and analysts believe that there has been no change in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although the tone of Iran's foreign policy has changed after JCPA, it was expected that Iran's foreign policy after JCPA would change, but is more similar to its before (Sick, 2016).

In other words, although its potential could open regionally the ways, it failed to meet its expected goals and was ineffective due to Iran's dual and inconsistent performance after JCPA. By its very essence, JCPA was a messenger of peace and friendship agreement, and by giving negative pulses to the West and the countries of the region, the Islamic Republic's performance in the regional dimension has intensified the perception of the threat of the Islamic Republic and rendered it ineffective. Reports from Western and regional countries have confirmed this; we refer to parts of it.

The most notable of these analyzes is the report of the US Congressional Research Center on June 7, 2016 entitled "Iranian Foreign Policy" written by Kenneth Katzman in response to the question of whether JCPA has made any changes to Iranian policy. He reports, "the

Iranian leader, on various occasions, has stated that the nuclear agreement in Iran's foreign policy will not change relations with the United States, while the Iranian president considers that JCPA is about establishing an atmosphere of friendship and interaction with the world." The report emphasizes that there has been no sign of a change in Iranian foreign policy since JCPA. This report refers to Iran's support for Bashar al-Assad, continued ballistic missile tests, acquisition of new military systems from Russia, turning Iran into a regional challenger, Iran's quest for modern missile technology and its delivery to its regional allies, Iranian Navy's more active patrolling and provocative measures in the Persian Gulf. The report also notes that Iran could use its financial resources to recruit Shiite Muslim fighters to fight in Syria and support Bashar al-Assad, as well as to support opposition groups in Bahrain, and could also be turned to the regional energy and trade pole, in a way that weakens the US's ability to exert economic pressure if the nuclear agreement is not implemented (Katzman: 2016).

Sima Shine, an Israeli National Security Intelligence researcher, writes an article in the journal National Interest, asking if JCPA has changed Iran's foreign policy. In response, he says the Iranian government wants to open the doors of the Iranian economy to foreign investors, but the conservatives are worried about the Iranian economy opening to the west. They believe that this in the long run will lead to the cultural influence and to the detriment of the system. Maintaining the regime has been and remains the ultimate goal of the Iranian government. The government wing believes in implementing the Chinese model, ie, openness of the economy despite political flexibility, while the opposition camp says it will be similar to Gorbachev's action in the former Soviet Union and may pose a threat to the overall system (Shine, 2016).

The European Parliament has released a report entitled "The European Union's Strategy on Relations with Iran After the Nuclear Agreement", stating that "although Iran pretends to work to repair existing gaps in its relations with regional countries, it has not abandoned its destructive activities. Countries in the region are concerned about Iran's expansionist policies. This could fuel sectarian flames in the near future and lead to inter-regional Cold War (Eunion, 2016).

Iran's regional disruptions will be interpreted as disrupting the implementation of the JCPA, reflecting that if Iran continues to engage in provocative and dangerous activities in the region and does not show clearly that it can interact as a reliable and transparent actor in the global financial system, it will not be in a position to expect foreign investment in that country, even though there are attractive opportunities for foreign investment there (Zarate, 2015).

Lack of proper understanding of the structure of government and the status and function of each of these agencies in the decision-making hierarchy and understanding of their role in relation to other institutions and organizations, as well as structural inconsistency in the Iranian foreign policy have imposed irreparable damages to the national interests. So each of the various decision-making centers has created many structures that do not interact with each other without the necessary and sufficient coordination with others; in addition to forming parallel structures to the formal decision-making structure in the constitution, we are seeing the emergence of ultrastructural actors that are autonomous and without the formal structure interfere with the process of decision making and policy making.

These numerous decision-making centers not only render the country's diplomatic apparatus inefficient, but by producing and sending conflicting messages from the country, also dislocate the opposite actors. This difference in goals, when approaching specific foreign policy decisions, leads to disagreement or misconduct by the various units involved in foreign policy. Non-harmonization in its foreign policy will have serious consequences for reducing the efficiency and diminishing credibility of a country globally. This becomes more serious when the opposite goals are being implemented at the same time. The Revolutionary Leader has stated on various occasions that "the nuclear agreement in Iran's foreign policy will not change in its relations with the United States". Following same policy, after JCPA we witness intense anti-JCPA speeches, setting the Saudi Arabi's embassy on fire, continuation of ballistic missile test and missile icon with the slogan Israeli vanishing, Iranian support for Bashar al-Assad, purchase of new military systems from Russia, turning Iran into a regional challenger, Iran's quest for modern missile technology and its delivery to the

regional allies and provocative acts in the Gulf. These are the chain rings that have greatly reduced the chances of lifting sanctions and the confidence of foreign companies to invest in Iran, and this is only in conditions where it is very difficult to gain confidence in the economic circles, and this is in stark contrast to the opinion of the Iranian president who believes that "JCPA will create an atmosphere of friendship and interaction between Iran and the world." This has led to a "duality in Iranian foreign policy": engagement with the West in the context of nuclear and face-to-face negotiations and Iran's hegemonic superiority in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain (Chathamhouse, 2016).

Wise actor theory may not reflect the decision-making process, but the countries prefer to engage with a single actor in foreign policy rather than multiple uncoordinated actors. The comments of foreign policy makers on the foreign policy reveal how other countries' decision makers have been affected by this lack of coordination and the multiplicity of decision-making centers in foreign policy. The process of conflicting decision-making in Iranian foreign policy, rather than being the result of previous and targeted strategy, is the product of multiple structural inconsistencies and incoherent decision-making (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 31: 2002). At least some behaviors such as the Comprehensive Nuclear Agreement called JCPA and its aftermath expresses this discordance.

CONCLUSION

Stephen Walt criticized the principle of balance of power and proposed the theory of the balance of threat that states what makes countries to move towards balance is the amount of threat they perceive. In his view, the states unite against the most threatening countries. His point is not just about the power of states, but about how they perceive it in their relationships. When the states feel that their very existence and interests are threatened by other states, they all unite against them. External threats are therefore a major factor in the formation of alliances, and the threats that affect the very existence or interests of the states, are especially those that have shared security, political, and economic concerns. Therefore, for the creation of alliance two factors need to be formed; common threat and common interests. It seems that the feeling and notion of common threat of the Islamic republic of Iran became in existence in the

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) and Common notions of the US and its Strategic Allies in Explaining Islamic Republic of Iran's Threats

environment after JCPA among the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and each with its own reasons.

In other words, what constitutes the main framework of Trump's Middle East policy is his understanding of the increasing power of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region in the post- JCPA space. Such an approach can also be found well among Trump's regional allies, so that Saudi Arabia and Israel see JCPA as a factor not in enhancing regional stability through war risk mitigation, but as a factor in enhancing Iran's power factors in the region and increasing threat of Iran. Thus, the formation of a common understanding between Saudi Arabia, Israel and the United States on the threat of Iran, their interpretation of the role of the JCPA in enhancing Iran's regional presence and missile capability and ignoring this issue in the JCPA context should be among the key factors driving the US withdrawal of the nuclear agreement. From the perspective of these countries and the United States, Iran after JCPA has achieved opportunities and benefits which have been followed by its increased influence and power in the region. Removing Iran's economic hurdles and agreeing to its official presence in the regional crises increased Iran's position and power in the region. This was perceived as a threat to other countries, especially Iran's regional rivals (Israel and Saudi Arabia) and the trans-regional hegemon namely the United States. The reason is that these countries are unaware of their regional rival's intentions that are now becoming a bit stronger and that its military might increase in the future can pose a serious threat to the influence and power of Iran's regional competitors. So it would seem natural, according to Stephen Walt's theory, they take countermeasures to counteract this, and to persuade the trans-regional hegemon to leave Iran's winning card, JCPA.

The next important and influential variable is the personal characteristics of Donald Trump and his foreign policy foundations that as a catalyzer accelerated the United States' withdrawal from JCPA.

In the Trump's state, the full-blown political co-operations have been designed and based on US national interests. Trump believes the US should be ready to cut off its interaction with anyone and any country that needs it. He is also clearly opposed to America's global leadership role and clearly questions US international commitments.

Trump's disregard for American values is rooted in his commercialism and pragmatism. Trump has considered a commercial approach to the international treaties aimed at revising and renegotiating treaties in order to reach a better and more favorable agreement for the United States. Based on this view, Donald Trump believes that JCPA is not in the best interest of the United States. Trump called the agreement "a very bad deal" and "embarrassing" for his country, and repeated in the election campaign this sentence: Trump's foreign policy has found its content and that is the doctrine of withdrawal. The United States has abandoned or threatened to abandon important international treaties, including the "Trans-Pacific Treaty, the Paris Climate Agreements, Naphtha, UNESCO and JCPA", all of which are diplomatic achievements of the Obama era. On this basis, Trump is trying to prove that Obama's way of administrating the country and making decisions is wrong; he is trying to convey to the American public the work of the previous state with new, and sometimes completely opposite, decisions.

The third variable refers to the contradictory post-JCPA function and action of the Islamic Republic, so that the JCPA could be regional in scope, given its potential. But due to the post-JCPA double and inconsistent performance of Islamic Republic, it failed to meet its expected goals and proved ineffective. By its very essence, JCPA is a message of peace and friendship agreement, and the Islamic Republic's performance, by giving negative pulses to the West and the countries of the region, has regionally intensified the perception of the threat of Islamic Republic and reflected its further inefficiency to them. Wise actor theory may not reflect the decision-making process, but the countries prefer to interact with a single actor in the foreign policy sphere rather than multiple uncoordinated actors. The comments of other countries' decision makers on the foreign policy reveal how other countries' decision makers have been affected by this lack of coordination and the multiplicity of decision-making centers in foreign policy. The process of conflicting decision-making in the Iranian foreign policy, rather than being a result of previous and deliberate strategy, is the product of numerous structural inconsistencies and incoherent decisions. At least the behaviors in some specific cases, such as the Comprehensive Nuclear Agreement called JCPA, and the aftermath, illustrate this discordance. This has

given rise to "a duality in the Iranian foreign policy," the policy of engaging with the West in the context of nuclear negotiations, and Iran's hegemonic superiority in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain.

REFERENCES

- [1] Haji Yousefi, Amir Mohammad (2003). *Iran and the Zionist Regime: From cooperation to conflict*. Tehran: Imam Sadegh University Press.
- [2] Callahan, Patrick (2008). *"The logic of the US foreign policy", theories of American global role*. It was translated by Davood Gharaayaaq Zandi, Mahmoud Yazdan Faam, Nader Pour Aakhoundi. Tehran: Research Institute of Strategic Studies press.
- [3] Little, Richard (2010). *Theories of balance of power*. Gholaam Ali Chegni Zadeh translated it. Tehran: International Institute for Cultural Studies and Research Publications Abrar Moaser.
- [4] Moshir Zadeh, Homeyra (2007). *Transformation in international relations theories*. Tehran: Samt Publications.
- [5] Asadi, Ali Akbar (2007). "Realism and competing approaches to foreign policy". *Scientific Research Journal of Raahbord*, Vol.19, No.56.
- [6] Tabyin center for strategic studies (December 2016). "Donald Trump's foreign policy; possible frameworks and orientations". A group of research.
- [7] Purbin, Domenic & Douglas Louis (2018). "US withdraws from Vienna agreement on Iran's nuclear program: A paradoxical legal situation". Farsi version translated by lawyers. Iranian affairs commission association, legal analysis.
- [8] Dehghani Firouz Abadi, Seyed Jalal (Fall 2002). "The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, trends and reflections". *Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.9, No.3.
- [9] Sajjad Pour, Seyed Mohammad & Ejtehad, Saeedeh (Spring 2010). "Western security attitudes and post-Cold War international threats; A case study of the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran". *Journal of Political Science*, Vol.6, No.11.
- [10] Soleiman Zadeh, Saeed & Omidi, Ali & Barati, Sahar (2018). "Trump's foreign policy strategy; A new hybrid of isolationism and realism". *Journal of the Strategic Studies of Public Policy*, No.28.
- [11] Souri, Rouhollah (June 2018). "American's exit from JCPOA; Opportunities and obstacles ahead". International peace studies center.
- [12] Salehi, Seyed Hamzeh & Faramarz Manesh, Ehsaan (February 2017). "Role of JCPOA in intensifying divergence between Iran and Saudi Arabia". *International Journal of Nation Research*, Vol.2, No.14.
- [13] Qavam, Abdul Ali & Imani Hemmat. "Realistic theories in international relations". *Political and International Approaches*, No.30.
- [14] Moshir Zadeh, Homeyra & Masoudi, Heydar Ali (2009). "The identity and conceptual areas of international relations". *Public Quarterly*, Vol.39, No.4.
- [15] Mousavian, Seyed Hossein & Hosseini, Diako (2016). "The logic of desirable and undesirable outcomes". From the book: JCPOA achievement policies and requirements. Tehran: Research Institute of Strategic Studies Press.
- [16] Navaa Zani, Bahraam & Ghaasemi, Haakem & Farssae, Shahrām (Winter 2015). "The Western circles and evaluation of the Middle Eastern consequences of JCPA for Iran's foreign policy". *Journal of Foreign Policy*, Vol.29, No.4.
- [17] English Barnaby, Frank (1989), **The Invisible Bomb: The Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East**, London: I. B. Tauris, 1989, pp. 64-69.
- [18] Berman, Russell (2017), 'The Donald Trump Cabinet Tracker', The Atlantic, 2 March; Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/trump-cabinet-tracker/510527/>
- [19] CBS NEWS. 2016. "Pence goes farther than trump on Iran deal, says US will rip up". Available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/pence-goes-farther-thantrump-on-iran-deal-says-us-will-rip-up/>(accessed 2 December 2017).
- [20] Chathamhouse (2016), "Iran's Politics and Foreign Policy", Chatham House, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/iran-politics-and-foreign-policy>.
- [21] Clinton, Hilary. 2010. Clinton: U.S. Will Extend 'Defense Umbrella' Over Gulf if Iran Obtains Nuclear Weapons, from FOX NEWS: <http://www.foxnews.com/politics>.
- [22] European Union (2016), "An EU Strategy for Relations with Iran after the Nuclear Deal, available at: [http://www.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578005/EXPO_IDA\(2016\)578005_EN.pdf](http://www.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578005/EXPO_IDA(2016)578005_EN.pdf).
- [23] Haass R. 2017. "Trump foreign policy has found its theme: The Withdrawal Doctrine. US have left/threatening to leave TPP, Paris accord, UNESCO, NAFTA, JCPOA". Twitter. Available at: <https://twitter.com/RichardHaass/status/918471381511229440> (accessed 12 October 2017).

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) and Common notions of the US and its Strategic Allies in Explaining Islamic Republic of Iran's Threats

- [24] Haass, R. 2016. "The Isolationist Temptation". The Wall Street Journal. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-isolationist-temptation-1470411481>
- [25] Haass, Richard. N. (2006), "The New Middle East", **Foreign Affairs**, November/December.
- [26] Kahl, Colin and Hal Brands (2017) 'Trump's Grand Strategic Train Wreck', *Foreign Policy*, 31 January, Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/31/trumps-grand-strategic-train-wreck>
- [27] Katzman, Kenneth (2016), "Iran's Foreign Policy", Congressional Research Service, available at: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/Mideast/R44017.pdf>.
- [28] Kirshner, jonathan (2010), "the tragedy of offensive realism: classical realism and the rise of china", **European journal of international relations**.
- [29] McAdams, Dan (2016) 'The Mind of Donald Trump', *The Atlantic*, 16 June; Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/the-mind-of-donald-trump/480771/>
- [30] Nasr, Vali (2006), "When the Shiites Rise", **Foreign Affairs**.
- [31] Renshon, S. (2012), **Barack Obama and the Politics of Redemption**, New York: Routledge.
- [32] Shine, Sima (2016). "The Nuclear Deal is a Chance to Change Iran's Behavior", *National Interest*, available at: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-nuclear-deal-chance-change-irans-behavior-17250>.
- [33] Sick, Gary (2016), "Regional Implications of the JCPOA", *The Daily Journalist*, available at: <http://thedailyjournalist.com/the-strategist/regionalimplications-of-the-jcpoa/>.
- [34] Singh, Michael (2015), "Implications of the JCPOA for U.S. Policy in the Middle East", *Washington Institute*, available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/implications-of-the-jcpoa-for-u.s.-policy-in-the-middle-east>.
- [35] Smith, S. and Hadfield, A. and Dunne, T. 2016. *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [36] Vatanka, Alex; *U.S.-Iran Relations: Recommendations for the Next President*, see http://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF17_Vatanka_IranUS_web.pdf
- [37] Whitehouse.gov. 2017a. Remarks by President Trump in Joint Address to Congress, Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/28/remarks-president-trump-joint-address-congress> (accessed 1 December 2017). (accessed 1 November 2017).

Citation: Mohammadali Aghamolaei, Abdolreza Alishahi, Majid Refiei "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) and Common notions of the US and its Strategic Allies in Explaining Islamic Republic of Iran's Threats". (2019). *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 6(12), pp.19-29

Copyright: © 2019 Abdolreza Alishahi. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.