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**THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEAL:
THE PROCESS OF INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT
IN THE CONTEXT OF SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA**

The goal of this paper is to examine and analyze historical background, evolution and settlement of the Iranian nuclear program as well as the Iranian nuclear deal that was concluded in July 2015 and its implications for Central Asia. It is well-known that the proliferation and the spread of nuclear weapons and technologies is one of the main concerns of international community. From this perspective since the beginning Iran has been perceived as a source of possible proliferation of nuclear technologies and a threat that would put regional and global stability and security in jeopardy. Simultaneously the Iranian and western diplomats began conducting negotiations in order to settle deep disagreements and misunderstandings over the Iranian nuclear program. In spite of deep suspicions and difficulties, Iran and so-called P5+1 group of countries reached the needed deal in July of 2015. This huge achievement became possible due to wise policy of the new Iranian president Hassan Rouhani on the one hand, and Barack Obama's sincere willingness to bring peace to the whole world and to prevent another war in the Middle East from happening on the other. As a result of this deal, all sanctions on Iran gradually began to be lifted. It is undeniable that the successful Iranian deal has been significant and beneficial for Central Asia first and foremost in terms of security issues. Since then the Central Asian countries have begun to cooperate with Iran, which is truly beneficial for both sides.

Key words: nuclear program, Iran, P5+1, Central Asia, nuclear deal, Middle East.

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**Иран ядролық бағдарламасы жөніндегі келісім:
Орталық Азия қауіпсіздігі контекстіндегі халықаралық реттеу үрдісі**

Бұл мақала Иранның ядролық бағдарламасының басталуы, тарихи эволюциясы мен шешілуі, сонымен қатар 2015 жылы шілдеде қол қойылған Иранның ядролық бағдарламасы жөніндегі келісім мен оның Орталық Азия аймағына ықпалы секілді іргелі мәселелерді зерттеп, талдауды мақсат етеді. Қазіргі кезеңде ядролық қару мен технологиялардың таралу үрдісі халықаралық қауымдастық үшін басты проблемалардың бірі болып отыр. Осы тұрғыдан келгенде бастапқы кезден-ақ Иран ядролық технологиялардың таралауына түрткі болуы мүмкін, тиісінше осы әрекеті арқылы аймақтық және жаһандық қауіпсіздікке қатер ретінде қарастырылды. Дегенмен бір мезетте ирандық және батыс дипломаттары Иранның ядролық бағдарламасы төңірегінде келіссөздерді жүргізе бастады. Күдіктер мен түсініспеушіліктерге қарамастан, Иран мен P5+1 елдері

2015 жылдың шілдесінде ақтық келісімге қол жеткізді. Бұл тарихи келісім бір жағынан Ираның жаңа президенті Хасан Руханидің көреген саясаты мен АҚШ президенті Барак Обаманың бүкіл әлем мен Таяу Шығыста бейбітшілік орнату бағытындағы шынайы ұмтылысы нәтижесінде мүмкін болды. Осы келісім арқасында Иранға салынған ауыр санкциялар біртіндеп алына бастады. Жалпы алғанда Иранмен арадағы бұл келісім ең алдымен Орталық Азия елдері үшін қауіпсіздікті қамтамасыз етуде үлкен маңызға ие болды. Сол кезден бастап Орталық Азия елдері мен Иран арасындағы ынтымақтастық жаңа белестерге көтеріліп, өркендей бастады.

Түйін сөздер: ядролық бағдарлама, Иран, P5 + 1, Орталық Азия, ядролық келісім, Таяу Шығыс.

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Договор об Иранской ядерной программе: процесс международного урегулирования в контексте безопасности Центральной Азии

Цель данной статьи – изучить и проанализировать исторические предпосылки, эволюцию и урегулирование ядерной программы Ирана, а также иранскую ядерную сделку, которая была завершена в июле 2015 года и ее последствия для Центральной Азии. Хорошо известно, что распространение ядерного оружия и технологий является одной из основных проблем международного сообщества. По мере того, как великие державы пришли к выводу, что Иран строит ядерное оружие, ведущие страны, такие как США, члены ЕС, Канада и Австралия, решили навязать Тегерану жесткие экономические санкции, которые нанесли большой ущерб иранской экономике. Все это пришлось на период правления президента страны, придерживающегося жесткой линии. Одновременно иранские и западные дипломаты начали переговоры, чтобы урегулировать разногласия в отношении иранской ядерной программы. Несмотря на трудности, Иран и так называемая группа стран P5 + 1 достигли необходимой сделки в июле 2015 года. Это огромное достижение стало возможным благодаря разумной политике нового иранского президента Хасана Рухани и Барака Обамы. Нельзя отрицать, что успешная иранская сделка была значимой и выгодной для Центральной Азии с точки зрения вопросов безопасности. С самого начала все страны ЦАР выступали за мир и геополитическую стабильность в регионе.

Ключевые слова: ядерная программа, Иран, P5 + 1, Центральная Азия, ядерная сделка, Ближний Восток.

Introduction

John Kerry, Secretary of State of the US, in his interview with the MSNBC on January 18, 2016 pointed out that «thanks to the US-Iran nuclear deal the world is safer today now» [1]. Why has John Kerry been so certain that this deal has brought peace and stability to the world? Has really our planet become a much safer place to live owing to this deal? And what does this deal represent itself, and what might the implications of this deal for separate regions especially for Central Asia be in terms of implementation of this agreement? One thing is obvious that without reaching this deal, the world could have seen another regional war that would easily transform into the third World War since many world and regional powers have actively been involved in this tough process. During the course of negotiations over the Iran nuclear deal, all involved sides have expressed their willingness to make the world safer by reaching mutual understanding with

each other. It should be acknowledged that not only involved parts, but as well as other countries including those in Central Asia have deeply been interested in making this deal possible due to which not only the Middle Eastern but Central Asian security and stability would be ensured. As the Central Asian countries are generally vulnerable to external threats, especially coming from the war-torn Middle East, they have become excited when the nuclear deal between Iran and great powers was finally reached.

The methods of research paper: a brief overview of the background of the Iranian nuclear program

This research paper is mainly based on method of conflict resolution, which aims at facilitating peace and mutual understanding in order to make peaceful ending of conflict possible and reachable. Conflict resolution first and foremost

means cooperation and making concessions when they are needed, engagement and negotiations. Without above-mentioned diplomatic and political techniques and means, it is unlikely to get all adversaries into peaceful talks. Besides the method of conflict resolution, well-known methods such as comparative analysis, historical review method, and critical analysis, political and geopolitical analysis have been used to investigate and assess this issue.

Besides energy purposes, nuclear power might be used for making nuclear weapons and might lead to the proliferation of dangerous weapons that could easily have been a serious cause for nuclear war. Although there are a bunch of countries such as the US, Russia, France, China, Great Britain, Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea that are considered nuclear powers, many of them do not wish others to develop their nuclear program because they are certain that such a case might lead to the spread of nuclear weapons. From this perspective since the beginning, the Islamic Republic of Iran has constantly been prevented from developing its nuclear program that has pursued only peaceful purposes and has always been carried out under supervision of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), according to the government of Iran [2].

Reaching this deal with Iran has not been easy at all, which required an effective and sincere engagement of almost all leading powers, as well as active and tense diplomatic efforts by everyone involved in this protracted process. Looking at the background of this issue, one might notice that the Iranian nuclear program had been launched long before the Islamic Revolution took place in the country, which means current regime in Iran inherited this legacy from the previous one that is from the Shah's regime. Sam Roe, a Chicago Tribune journalist, argues that it was the United States that directly made its contributions to the inception and development of the Iranian nuclear program at the beginning of the Cold War [3]. It has already been proven that in the 1950s when the global rivalry between the West and East became aggravated, the Shah of Iran began receiving assistance through the US Atoms for Peace. During the 1960s and 1970s Iran had joined some International agreements that prevent countries from making nuclear weapons and spreading nuclear technologies such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). According to article III of the treaty, non-nuclear-weapon states-parties are required to accept comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, and accordingly Tehran

concluded a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA in 1974 [4].

The Islamic revolution of 1979 and the lingering and costly war with Iraq in 1980-1988 temporarily interrupted the further development of the nuclear program in Iran. On the other hand, bilateral relations between Washington and Tehran became strained and complicated because of the revolution. Despite the end of the Cold War, at the end of 1980s with the demise of the Soviet Union, the Cold War between Washington and Tehran was not over due to a deep and mutual hatred and suspicion. All these unexpected circumstances could not stop Iran from developing its nuclear program; furthermore, the Iranian government did not hide its intentions that it was going to continue to advance its nuclear program. In 1989-1997, when Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was the president, Tehran revived its nuclear program during which Iran got assistance from other countries such as China, Russia and Pakistan thanks to which a protocol of the construction of the reactor at Bushehr and possibly supply a uranium enrichment plan were concluded with Moscow [5].

After the inception of Global War on terror by Washington in 2001, an international situation over the Iran's nuclear program was getting tense enough due to the revelation of an Iranian opposition group in exile. As a consequence of this revelation, the world community became aware of the fact that besides peaceful and energy purposes, Tehran could have pursued a military goal since members of above-mentioned opposition declared that Iran was developing to produce enriched uranium, which could fuel nuclear weapons [5]. In 2003, it was reported that Tehran had not declared its sensitive enrichment activities, after which the IAEA announced that Iran had not complied with its safeguards agreement with the IAEA [6], and subsequently the UN Security Council required from Iran to halt its nuclear enrichment activities [7]. (Security Council Demands Iran Suspend Uranium Enrichment, 2006) As a result of this process, the Bush administration declared that it would not tolerate so-called Iran's enrichment activity and accused Tehran of seeking to reach a nuclear weapon [8].

Results: sanctions and a long way to the deal

Despite suspicions, allegations and a strong international pressure, since the beginning Iran has emphasized that its nuclear program has always been peaceful and only for energy purposes. Consequently, Tehran has been trying to persuade the world community and international

organizations such as the IAEA that there has not been any military purpose at all. Although there was not enough evidence that Iran had launched its nuclear enrichment activities, the international community became more suspicious of Tehran's real intentions. In September 2005, the IAEA Board of Governors declared that «there is not any confidence that Tehran's nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes» [8]. Due to such allegations against Iran, the international community continued accusing Tehran of violation of the NPT and a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA. Simultaneously, in accordance with the report by the IAEA the UN Security Council decided to impose tough sanctions on Tehran.

Basically, Iran had been under pressure of harsh sanctions long before the UN Security Council issued its punitive measures against Tehran, especially because of complicated relations with Washington. Iran has suffered from unilateral economic sanctions by the US since 1979. It was actually the US that in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution and the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran began to impose some restrictions and sanctions on bilateral activities with Tehran [9], and as a result, they have gradually become broader. Things grew tense when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an Iranian politician, was elected president in 2005. However, it should be noted that bilateral and multilateral relations between Iran and other countries grew worse not only thanks to the Iran's controversial nuclear program, but as well as because of Ahmadinejad's open hostility towards some countries such as the US, Israel, Britain, and Arab nations. Although, Ahmadinejad permanently insisted that Iran's nuclear program was always for peaceful purposes and building a nuclear weapon was never his policy, an international pressure on Iran grew stronger [10].

At the same time, Iranian and leading powers' diplomats negotiated consistently to achieve a deal so that all sanctions imposed on Iran would be lifted as well as world powers wanted to make sure that Iran was not really building a nuclear weapon. As diplomatic efforts failed, Western leaders came to the conclusion that all punitive measures needed so that they would be able to have Tehran to comply with its international obligations [11]. Therefore, not only the US but as well as the EU, Australia, Canada and many other countries began to be involved in an international sanctions regime against Iran, as a result of which the additional sanctions and restrictions were issued by them. A constant international pressure and economic sanctions caused huge problems for Iranian economy, as a

consequence of which Iranian people were suffering greatly.

The turning point of the international contradictions over the Iranian nuclear program came when Hassan Rouhani, a moderate politician, was elected as president of the country in 2013. As soon as he got elected, Hassan Rouhani began to fix aggravated diplomatic relations with other countries. Due to these diplomatic efforts, Tehran expressed its willingness to settle mutual misunderstandings and conflicts through diplomacy and negotiations. At the end of 2013, Iran and so-called P5+1 consisting of the US, China, France, Russia, Britain, and plus Germany, announced the Joint Plan of Action, an agreement in accordance with which Iran's nuclear program would be limited [12].

At the same time the US side also began to demonstrate their eagerness for the achievement of a deal with Iran predominantly in order not to let Tehran to acquire weapons of mass destruction. If happened it would be a great threat not only to the US interests in the Middle East, but first and foremost Washington's close allies in the region like Israel, and the Gulf countries would allegedly be threatened, according to the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Michael Mullen [13]. In spite of having such kinds of trouble and predictions regarding over Iran's nuclear strategy, it is clear that from the beginning all these predictions have always been exaggerated and mainly based on either false or misleading information. Basically, Iran has no intentions to destabilize the region because its leaders have always noted that Iran has no intention to acquire a nuclear weapon since such an attempt would be against the will of Islamic religion. Although Tehran has been trying to persuade others that its nuclear program is purely peaceful, the US and its allies in the Middle East and beyond have mainly been doubtful of Tehran's true intentions, and openly accused Iran of attempting to acquire weapons of mass destruction. From the West's point of view, a nuclear Iran would undermine the stability of a region that is already highly unstable. American policymakers, however, were sure that a strike on Iran, going into a conflict like it happened with Iraq, would be incredibly destabilizing.

Consequently, all sides, including Washington and Tehran concluded that it was time to settle all conflicts over the Iranian nuclear deal. Thus both sides actively demonstrated their readiness to talk, and in September 2013 Barak Obama telephoned Hassan Rouhani, which was the first contact between leaders of the US and Iran since 1979. Besides a relatively kind conversation between

the presidents, simultaneously there was a meeting between the US secretary of state, John Kerry, and Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, which was assessed as the beginning of a new era of cooperation between the countries [14]. One has to acknowledge, however, that these rapprochements and warm talks between the two sides did not mean that Washington and Tehran were not going to be close friends at all. Quite opposite, even if a deal with Iran was reached, Washington and Tehran would not be ready to overcome their misunderstandings, especially with regard to the Middle East.

Besides the US, all major powers and permanent members of the UN Security Council such as Russia, China, Britain, and France have been involved in talks, as well as one of the Tehran's key trading partners, Germany has been included as a key player. Negotiations between Iran and P5+1 group of countries in 2013-2014 were tough enough, during which they could not reach a final deal, but participants were able to achieve an interim agreement, known as the Joint Plan of Action, which was to limit Tehran's nuclear program, and at the same time, those international sanctions that had been imposed either unilaterally by Washington or multilaterally by the EU and other countries on Iran were to be lifted and Iranian assets abroad were to be unfrozen [14].

Finally, 2015 became as the final period for reaching a deal with Iran, and on April 2, 2015 Iran and P5+1 announced a preliminary framework deal, in accordance with which Iran's nuclear program was to be restricted in return for sanctions relief. In June 2015, Iran and world powers resumed their talks in the Austrian capital of Vienna, which finally brought a historic deal into existence. The agreement was going to end decades of economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for restrictions on its nuclear program. Accordingly, the deal was recognized as the biggest and the most important diplomatic achievement of Barak Obama's presidency. Therefore, during live broadcast from the White House Barak Obama proudly announced that «this deal is not built on trust, but it is built on verification.» Moreover, by emphasizing that this deal will overcome all obstacles and criticisms with which it would certainly face, he let his critics and opponents especially those in Congress know that he was going to veto any legislation that prevents the successful implementation of this deal [15].

One of the leading negotiators who made a huge contribution to the achievement of this accord was undoubtedly the US Secretary of State John Kerry who assessed it as truly historic, thanks to which «Iran will not produce or acquire highly enriched

uranium» or plutonium for at least 15 years, during which verification measures will stay in place permanently.» Furthermore, he stated that Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency had «entered into an agreement to address all questions» about Iran's past actions within three months, and that completing this task was «fundamental for sanctions relief» [16].

It was obvious that this deal was a triumph not only for American diplomacy, but as well as it was a great success of the Iranian government. One the other hand, it is undeniable that this deal came true due to Hassan Rouhani's personal charisma and persistent aspirations for the end of international isolation of his country. His flexibility and willingness made this deal possible, and as soon as the deal was announced in a televised address he declared: «Today is the end to acts of tyranny against our nation and the start of cooperation with the world. This is a reciprocal deal. If they stick to it, we will. The Iranian nation has always observed its promises and treaties» [17]. The Iranian chief negotiator with great powers, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif also called it a historic deal.

Despite dubious and malevolent attitudes towards the ratification and implementation of the deal, it could withstand the test of time. Having gone through many difficulties and obstacles, finally the deal has been proven to be viable and durable. In the end, on January 16, 2016, the International Atomic Energy Agency after thorough verifications announced that Tehran has completed the necessary steps under the Iran deal that will ensure Iran's nuclear program is and remains exclusively peaceful [18]. Due to the official confirmation of the IEAE, not only Tehran's goodwill intention has been proven, but as well as Iran officially reentered the global economy getting rid of crippling international sanctions. All leading politicians and diplomats such as the US Secretary of State John Kerry, Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, and the Britain's foreign secretary Philip Hammond emphasized that «The nuclear deal with Iran ... makes the Middle East and the wider world a safer place» [19]. Additionally, in his final State of the Union the US president, Barak Obama rightly pointed out that thanks to the deal «the world has avoided another war» [20]. Indeed, by having made enormous diplomatic attempts and tremendous contributions, Iran and P5+1 group of countries, successfully succeeded in preventing another horrible war in the Middle East from happening, which would undoubtedly have an adverse impact on the whole world and on Central Asia as well.

Discussion: the Iran nuclear deal and Central Asia

Strengthening regional as well as international security has always been one of the most significant priorities of all five Central Asian republics. There is no doubt that reaching the Iranian deal and its successful implementation have been in national interests of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. To begin with, all Central Asian nations, especially Kazakhstan had directly dealt with the Soviet nuclear policy and had suffered greatly the consequences of nuclear tests on its territory during the Soviet era. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan inherited a solid arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear facilities, technologies and testing sites, if had the leaders of the country wished Kazakhstan might easily have become a nuclear power. However, as soon as Kazakhstan got its independence, its president N.A. Nazarbayev solemnly declared that the Kazakh people did not need to have nuclear weapons and Kazakhstan would never be a nuclear power. It is worth noting that there was some pressure by international community especially overwhelmingly it came from the West. Washington and other leading powers were actually afraid that Kazakhstan could have triggered the spread of nuclear technologies throughout the world; especially they could have been handed over terrorists.

Accordingly, Kazakhstan's nuclear legacy was immediately considered a great threat to the international community, which needed to be resolved. It is worth mentioning that Kazakhstan itself was never interested in maintaining its nuclear capability since it was seen as a heavy burden for the further development of the country. One has to acknowledge the fact that, from the beginning the leaders of Kazakhstan led by N.A. Nazarbayev expressed their readiness to get rid of nuclear legacy of the Soviet Union and make Kazakhstan as well as the whole Central Asia a nuclear free zone. To have things done, it was necessary that world powers be engaged in helping Kazakhstan in this issue. By 1996, Kazakhstan had already joined all major international agreements on the proliferation, including the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a country not possessing the nuclear weapon; in addition to that Kazakhstan had become a member of the IAEA. Thus, nuclear disarmament of Kazakhstan had been carried out successfully, which resulted in adopting the Memorandum of Security Assurances by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, according to which the

independence and territorial integrity of Kazakhstan was internationally guaranteed [21].

Regarding the creation of Central Asia nuclear weapon free zone that became crucial not only for five nations, but for those countries beyond the region. In this case, it is worth pointing out to the fact that the very idea of a Central Asia nuclear weapon free zone, known as CANWFZ was actually initiated by Mongolia in 1992 declaring itself a nuclear-weapon-free zone [22]. At the same time, the president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov also became interested in launching this significant initiative. It took Central Asian countries a long time to harmonize their interests in this process. In September 2006, all five republics of Central Asia met in the Kazakh city of Semey, where they signed the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ) treaty, according to which manufacture, acquire, test, or possess nuclear weapons have strictly been banned [23]. Thus Central Asia has become free from nuclear weapons.

As all five Central Asian countries since independence have courageously and relentlessly objected to the possession of nuclear weapons; even the development of nuclear program for peaceful and energy purposes was out of question. Therefore, when the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers was finally reached, Central Asian countries became spirited because it meant that not only the Middle East but Central Asia would be a safer place. In general, the reasons why Central Asian countries have welcomed the Iran nuclear deal and its implementation can be referred to as the following main motivations:

First, all Central Asian countries are determined that not only the region but the whole world should be free from dangerous nuclear weapons. Moreover, as a region Central Asia is mainly surrounded by nuclear powers such as Russia, China, India, and Pakistan; in addition to that, the region is negatively influenced by political instability in war-torn Afghanistan. Even theoretically, had Iran been allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon, it would surely have had an adverse impact on the region. Therefore, after the deal began to be implemented, the president of Kazakhstan, N.A. Nazarbayev in his statement announced: «Taking into account that political and diplomatic solution is the only right way to resolve the situation around the Iranian nuclear program and considering historical significance of the adoption of the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), which will significantly strengthen regional and international security» [24].

Second, Iran is a key trading partner of the Central Asian countries. Indeed, although Central

Asia as a transit area is very crucial for trading, its geopolitical location makes things complicated. As a landlocked region, it is highly dependent on foreign countries particularly in terms of exporting their goods and commodities abroad. Absence of an advanced industry as well as domination of the oil-dependent economy makes the Central Asian countries search for promising markets and strong economic partners. In this perspective, Iran that is now free from international pressure and crippling sanctions is seen as a potential economic partner by all nations of Central Asia.

Third, Iran seems to have respected Russia's privileged interests in Central Asia, but the recent geopolitical shifts in the region might let Iran be actively involved in many fields, including economy, trade, culture, politics, and perhaps integration. Furthermore, being highly dependent on Russia and China in terms of economy, finance and the export of oil and other commodities would likely to push the Central Asians to cooperate with Iran. In this case, traditionally all major oil and gas resources of the Central Asian countries have been monopolized by Russia and China, which led to the Russian and Chinese domination. That is why, Alex Vatanka, a political analyst of the Washington-based Middle East Institute, stresses that «the Central Asians have wanted 'to break that geopolitical grip [of China and Russia],' but with the southern route closed off there were no other options. Now, you see from Astana to Ashgabat an interest in reconsidering what Iran can do for them geopolitically to lessen their reliance on countries like Russia and China» [25]. Consequently, N.A. Nazarbayev rightly points out that lifting international sanctions and the further implementation of the deal «will contribute to normalization of Iran's relations with the international community, positively impact the economic and social development of all countries in the region and improve Kazakh-Iranian relations» [26].

According to Catherine Putz, the Central Asian countries have huge energy interests in the normalization of Iran's relations with the world because Iran presents the shortest route for exporting gas to Europe [27]. As can be seen, a close cooperation with Iran can be a solution to the Central Asian's geopolitical and economic dependence on Moscow and Beijing, as a result of which the Central Asians will be able to trade with other countries and export their goods by bypassing Russia and China. In addition to that, besides Russia and China, the Central Asian gas and oil pipelines could be going to Iran.

Fourth, Iran is not only an integral part of the Middle East, but as well as the Caucasus and Central Asia. From this aspect, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan share common borders in the Caspian Sea. During his visit to the Kazakh capital of Astana in April 2015, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif stated that «The Caspian Sea is the sea of peace and friendship among littoral countries and should prepare grounds for trade and economic cooperation among them.» In his speech, he announced that Iran pursues negotiations to determine the legal regime of the Caspian Sea with seriousness and strong interest [28]. Like Iran, Kazakhstan is deeply interested in boosting trade and economic cooperation via the Caspian Sea.

Fifth, thanks to lifting sanctions Iran can be involved in integration processes not only in Central Asia but in the Post-Soviet space. Although it is unlikely that Iran will be a member of the Eurasian Customs Union or Eurasian Union, in terms of rapprochements between Tehran and Moscow particularly in fighting terrorism in the Middle East, Iran could be a potential candidate for membership in the Eurasian Union. Besides Eurasian Union, Iran was given an observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, but due to international sanctions, Tehran was not allowed to become a member of the SCO. Now Iran can apply for full membership. Tehran could also be engaged in integration process in Central Asia, in which the Central Asian countries would be interested. During his visit to Astana, Mohammad Javad Zarif stressed that «regional convergence» would be beneficial to all countries in the region and across the globe, noting that Iran and Kazakhstan hold common views on foreign policy issues and in cultural and economic fields and this would «strengthen stability in the region» [27].

Finally, an active involvement of Iran both in Central Asia and in the Post-Soviet space would directly lead to the close convergence of vast regions of Eurasia through Iran, which means Tehran would be capable of playing a significant role in incorporation them into a vast economic zone. Moreover, Mehdi Sanaie, an Iranian scholar, asserts that Iran is able to control religious extremism in the region, in which Tehran would be ready for a close cooperation with others [28]. As a powerful country and a part of Central Asia, Iran has all opportunities of becoming not only an active player, but an important bridge that would connect Central Asia with the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

Conclusion

Thus the Iranian nuclear deal and its effective implementation respectively led to lifting of international sanctions against Tehran, which allowed Iran to reenter the international and regional economy. As can be seen the process of reaching a viable deal between Tehran and P5+1 group of countries was not easy at all. In spite of many obstacles, Iran and world powers were able to finalize their talks by reaching a deal that restricted Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the removal of international sanctions. Under the agreement, nonetheless, the UN and leading powers have officially recognized Iran as a nuclear power, which is supposed to be only for peaceful, scientific and energy purposes as Tehran has been claiming for a long time. Undoubtedly, this has been a great diplomatic achievement of Iran as well as of the whole world because it has become a focal solution to prevention of another war in the Middle East. The deal proved that the US is able to settle its foreign policy issues through diplomatic efforts, instead of using its military power. It is obvious that there have been many serious attempts to undermine the talks and the deal itself both within the US and beyond. Although some forces like Republicans in the US, Israel and Arab nations openly objected to this

deal, in the end diplomacy and wisdom prevailed. Had enemies of the deal triumphed another war in the region would have been inevitable, as a consequence of which the world would be devastated. Under such circumstances, the US and Iran demonstrated their strengths and willingness to overcome their misunderstandings, due to which the Iranian nuclear deal came into life. One should recognize, however, that the Cold War between Washington and Tehran is not over yet; despite the deal, both the US and Iran keep seeing each other as rivals. One of the most important aspects of this deal is that, the world community finally understands that Iran is a key player not only in a regional level, but in international level because like the US, European countries and Russia, Tehran is actively involved in tackling terrorism in the Middle East, including fighting ISIS, known as the Islamic State. Instead of isolating Tehran, the West could battle terrorism in a close alliance with Iran, which would lead to the establishment of peace and stability in the region. In brief, the Iranian nuclear deal and lifting sanctions have had a favorable impact on Central Asia, from which both Iran and Central Asian nations are likely to benefit in the future. Consequently, in Central Asia the deal has been viewed as the beginning of a new era in relationship with Iran.

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