

Iran in Transatlantic Interactions

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Abstract

The way to interact with Iran has always been a controversial issue in transatlantic relations. The American and European positions towards Iran has witnessed many ups and downs in the past three decades and based on different developments, both sides have had different stances. The main question of this article is that "what has been the dominant model in the transatlantic positions regarding Iran in the past three decades"? Comparing American and European positions' towards Iran, the level of convergence and divergence of these actors will be scrutinized. Our findings indicate that the trend of transatlantic positions could be divided in to three stages. In the first stage which starts from the victory of the Islamic Revolution till the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the United States and the European countries share common concerns and try to contain the Revolutionary Iran. The second stage is coincided with some major international developments such as the end of Cold War, the Persian Gulf War (1991) and Iran's domestic developments including the end of imposed war and Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency. In this period, there could be seen apparent gaps and differences in transatlantic policies. The third stage, up on which we mainly focus, begins with the introduction of Iran's nuclear file and the American attempts to convince the Europeans to limit and to contain Iran's nuclear program which finally led to a sharp convergence in these countries' positions. What is of great significance in this stage is a shift in European Union's policies (negotiation and interaction) in comparison with those of America's Approach (imposing sanctions and containment).

Keywords: Transatlantic Relations, Iran, Convergence, Divergence, European Union

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Introduction

American-European relations have always played a significant role in the international developments. Despite the fact that the end of the Cold War somehow intensified the relations, however, we witness some differences between transatlantic relations in some areas. Although both sides have no strategic differences, the collapse of bipolar system and the shift in these countries' priorities and interests sometimes have led to some notable differences. These differences range from economic issues to security affairs and the role of international organizations. How to deal with Iran has always been a controversial issue among the United States and European countries. Transatlantic positions towards Iran have witnessed fluctuations in the past three decades. However, the exaggeration of Iran's nuclear activities has overshadowed all dimensions of Western-Iranian relations which have in turn significantly influenced the transatlantic positions towards Iran.

The main question of this article is that which model dominates the transatlantic powers' positions regarding Iran in the past three decades. However, much emphasis will be put on the developments in the past decade. Our hypothesis is that the transatlantic powers' positions towards Iran in the past three decades have not been constant and the convergence and divergence between the United States and the Europeans have always been a function of the United States' success in introducing Iran as a global security threat and Iran's external and internal situation as well. This article is organized in three parts. In the first part, we will examine the conceptual framework of



the transatlantic relations. The second part is devoted to Iran's standing in the Western countries' relations. In the last part which is the most important one, the convergence and the divergence of European Union and the United States' positions towards Iran in three different stages will be examined.

I- Transatlantic Relations: Obligations and Dimensions

After the Second World War, in order to counter the Soviet Union's threats, the European countries expanded their economic, military and security cooperation with the United States. On the one hand, the European countries had lost their power in international arena and could not act as an independent player in the international arena. On the other hand, the attempts of some European countries in the framework of the European Community could not give them an independent international role. Since the end of World War II, the American – European countries' relations have developed in a unique way. On the one hand, sharing some common liberal values including free trade, rule of law and on the other hand, the Soviet Union's security threats have paved the way for closer transatlantic relations. In the second half of the 20th century, the relations expanded with the establishment of various security and economic organizations and agreements such as NATO and Marshall Plan. Despite the fact that with the end of the Cold War no serious security threat was posed by Russia, the common values were still the driving force behind the continuation of the European – American relations. (Rees, 2006:21)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, some analysts maintained that there will be an increase in the transatlantic relations especially in the area of economic issues. On the contrary, some others argued that the United States and the European countries could cooperate in the security areas within NATO in order to counter new challenges (Duffield, 2001:93-96). In practice, the end of Cold War created a kind of divergence in the both sides' positions regarding international issues, since the European countries sought



for pursuing an independent foreign and security policy. It's worth noting that Britain was an exception on many issues. Some crises like Bosnian war, the fragile Middle East peace process, the threat of proliferation of WMD persuaded them to adopt common policies which led to more collaborations in different areas including combating against terrorism, establishment of democracy, the promotion of peace and economic growth as well (Transatlantic Declaration on EC-US Relations, 1990). In the late 1990s, the United States and the EU were strategic partners, however in the 21st century in different issues such as the different perception of threats and challenges, the way to devise and to implement defense and foreign policy raised differences (Kagan, 2003:11-12). Dispute over the deployment of missile defense system, Kyoto Protocol and the jurisdiction of International Criminal Court were among the most important issues the two sides did not agree on. The US' invasion to Iraq made these differences even deeper since France and Germany opposed American policies. Although the transatlantic Relations improved in the President George Bush's second term, Obama's victory paved the way for more cooperation. Under President Obama, American foreign policy changed in some very noticeable ways. His emphasis on multilateralism let the Europeans play a more active role in international arena (De Vasconcelos and Zaborowski, 2009: 11). Obama's administration Policy towards the most significant international challenges was the revival of transatlantic cooperation. In this regard, American Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton Stated that the United States has no closer partner than Europe in many global affairs (Clinton, 2009). In sum, Under President Obama, the transatlantic gap was narrowed and the American and European stances towards many issues became closer comparing his predecessor.

Both before and after the Islamic Revolution, Iran has been of paramount importance to the United States and Europe. Iran's historical and geographical context and its natural resources have



caused this country to be, all during past decades, addressed as a leading regional power. Firstly, Iran's role in the Persian Gulf is more than pivotal. For example, it has a joint frontier with Pakistan and Afghanistan from the east, Turkmenistan from north-east, Caspian Sea from north, Azerbaijan and Armenia from north-west, Turkey and Iraq from west, and Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman from south. Iran's strategic location is not thus easy for great powers like the US and EU to neglect. Added to all these is Iran's enormous natural resources: British Petroleum Co., in its statistical survey of the world's energy, has announced that Iran possesses 9 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and 15 percent of its proven natural gas reserves (Tzogopoulos, 2004: 11).

The advent of the Cold War brought forth the Western countries' concerns about Iran's attachment to the Soviet Union, the fact which has constituted the strongest fears of the Western countries of Iran during the previous centuries. In its "Great Game," the British government endeavored to barricade the Russia's infiltration to Iran up to the World War II, after which, as for Iran-US relation developments on the one hand and US-Soviet Cold War struggles on the other, it was the US which exerted the most powerful pressures to cut Russia's footholds in Iran. Iran's then officials were ardently in favor of the US which was regarded as a third power supporting them against the world's tough powers. The threats coming from the Soviet were another source of the Second Pahlavi regime's anxieties. It was, therefore, not unwise for the Iranian government to strengthen its alliance with the US so as to mitigate the dangers issued by the Soviet. 1953 Iranian coup d'état marks the starting point after which political, economic, and military Iran-US relations witnessed a rise, practically adjoining Iran to the American Block. In accord with its security belt plan and to connect NATO and CITO in order for holding in check the Soviet, the US government paved the way for concluding Baghdad Pact (or Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) among Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, and



England in 1955. To make this security-pact a center of attention for Iran was an American initiative which increased US supremacy over Iran (Feizollahi, 1388:69-70).

Generally speaking, the US and the European states were in extensive and fervent bonds with Iran in the second Pahlavi administration. Mutual economic, political, and military collaborations were on a peak at this time, whose existence can largely be attributed to the Cold War rationale. In the framework delineated hereinabove, no difference between their positions toward Iran may be observed as both sides were in want of a relationship development with Iran, having in mind the intention of reducing the Soviet's access to Iran (Tzogopoulos, 2004: 14-15).

II- Transatlantic Positions toward Iran

The victory of Islamic Revolution and agitated huge transformations in both sides of the ocean. Although, both U.S and European countries were, at the beginning, of almost identical viewpoints about new-fangled regime of Iran, intense divergences on how to interact with Iran gradually emerged. On the one hand, the Iranian Revolution was less an anti-European reaction than an anti-American one and, on the other, due to some factors the European countries seemed to be more eager for making cooperation with Iran rather than the US. For example, the European countries needed Iran for securing their energy demands and wanted to play a more significant role in the Middle East and especially in the Persian Gulf. Since then, the problem how to interact with Iran changed to become one of the most polemic issues in transatlantic relationships, causing wide rifts in both sides of the Atlantic Ocean from time to time. For example, the American officials opposed any attempt by the European countries to launch negotiations with Iranian Counterparts. In return, the Europeans rejected the unilateral sanctions imposed by Americans including Iranian-Libya Sanction Act (ILSA) or D'Amato Bill. A failure to make drastic, stable changes in Iran's behavior has



constituted a deep-seated suffering to the US and Europe in both national and international arenas. As for their cognitive divides and differences in their priorities and methodologies, Washington and Brussels have not managed to offer a common coherent strategy to deal with Iran – the country which has always presented a key source of disparity in transatlantic union as well as within the European Union (Calabrese, 2004: 2).

Although, much less than a fully united entity is the EU and the foreign policy area is one of those areas in which member states have the most heated controversies, EU members, in their interaction with Iran, have over time acted as an entirely coordinate body, among whose harmonized initiatives are the following: the calling-up of ambassadors in Salman Rushdie case, opening of critical dialogue, gathering of the ambassadors following the well-known writ issued by the Mykonos Court, opening of constructive negotiations, nuclear negotiations, and recently several sanctions imposed by EU institutions.

As a matter of fact, transatlantic positions toward Iran have not followed an unchanging pattern in recent three decades and various factors have been influencing thereupon both in international and national levels. American and European positions toward Iran may be, generally, studied in three time spans: (a) Islamic Revolution to Soviet Union Dissolution and conclusion of the Cold War, in which period the common US and European concern was to be in full command of the Islamic Republic of Iran; (b) a synchronism of international upheavals like Cold War conclusion and Persian Gulf War and Iranian domestic developments which reflects a transatlantic split in dealing with Iran. These developments include Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency whose administration with adopting a pragmatic approach strived to offset Iran's foreign policy and to expand relations with neighboring countries and the other countries; and (c) the period starting with Iran's nuclear program, which constitutes the main focus of the present article. The latter phase



marks an apex of US-EU unease on Iran, which secured attempts to bridle Iran's nuclear program and, in the fullness of time, rendered a convergent transatlantic position. We shall start with the first two time spans, proceeding with some details to the third one which encloses the present time.

Convergence to Deal with the Revolutionary System: Both US interests being endangered and regional US advocates being threatened are the results of the Islamic Revolution and the collapse of the Pahlavi Regime. This, moreover, strengthened Soviet's presence over the region. When in 1979 the Interim Government of Iran was instituted, President Jimmy Carter, in his desperation and on the basis of his interests, recognized the Islamic Republic of Iran, declaring that US government is willing to make collaborations with Iran with Mehdi Bazergan as its head of state. Although the European Community member states did not take a different path, the course of action they adhered to was referred to as "patience and forethought" policy – an apparent indication of EC members' bafflement. Worries about the revolutionary Regime of Iran gradually started to mount on the rise. Western version of these concerns emphasized on the fear lest Iran's newly-established regime shall give birth to both regional and international Islamic revolutions that could result in an Islamic—Sunni or Shiite—coalition which would endanger oil production and exportation. Islam was thus regarded by EC as a potential political power which could put subject to serious jeopardy its interests (Aghaee, 1386:86).

During and after the Revolution, Iranian politicians and European observers were on the belief that, unlike US and the Soviet Union, Western Europe may acquire a superior and more stable position in its relations with Tehran. It should be noted that the European countries were the main buyer of Iran's oil and in comparison with Americans; they had adopted soft positions toward the Islamic Revolution. European states were the most significant customers of Iran's oil, taking therefore more lenient positions,



compared with those of the United States, toward Iran. However, Iran hostage crisis emerged as a turning point to transfigure views toward Iran, only to intersect European and American behaviors in the direction of Iran (Aghaee, 1386:87-88). In line with Iran taking a stand against the US, the EC criticized Iran's position.

All through Iran-Iraq War, while the United States of America officially pretended to be taking an impartial stance, it encouraged its allies to sell armaments to Iraq de facto. With the circumstances turning in favor of Iran, US began to defend Iraq in a straightforward manner, implementing Staunch Operation to impede any weapons being sold to Tehran. In early 1984, the US government announced to its Persian Gulf allies that Iraq's defeat from Iran is discordant with US's interests and it shall take some measures to prevent it from happening: supporting Iraq directly and indirectly and holding back armaments from being transferred to Iran. In Jan. 1984, Iran was pinned by Reagan Administration to the list of the countries which promote terrorism. With the story of McFarlin being posed, together with the negotiation method terminated, the US filed "the threat element" in its policies against Iran: intensification of US military forces in the region paved the way for a limited war between US and Iran in late-Iran-Iraq War period. (Yazdanfam,1389:118).

Iran-EC relations were, in this time span, much similar to a cold peace: although European countries pressed on with their relationships with Iran, they were not in favor of their further development, for which there are some reasons numerated: firstly, European countries worried that Iran's efforts to propagate its Islamic Revolution ideologies in the Middle East and, especially, Persian Gulf would balk energy transfer to Europe; secondly, US, thanks to its historical and strategic relationships with the Europeans, demanded them to consider inserting some speed-bumps in their mutual relations with Iran. In its harmonization with the US policies, EC imposed armament sanctions against Iran after the hostage crisis; thirdly, although EC was impartial during Iran-Iraq War, some



member states patently supported Iraq; fourthly, Iran was more inclined to make collaborations with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union rather than Western Europe; fifthly, Iran supported some Shi'ite resistance groups in Lebanon, which were regarded as terrorists by the European countries (Bergens, 2010: 500). In war period, European Economic Community (EEC) considered Iran as a radical, expansionist country. The verdict issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in 14 February 1989 calling for death of Salman Rushdie culminated in the harsh reactions made by the EC, which then recalled its ambassadors from Tehran, who, one month later, unilaterally decided to come back to Iran, resuming their ordinary businesses with Iran (Tzogopoulos, 2004: 15).

Generally, transatlantic positions toward Iran came in this period with a convergence of one sort or another. Although the Soviet Union constituted the main concern of the US and European countries, they were incessantly expressive of major worries about Islamic Republic of Iran, largely in energy security terms. US put an end to its relationships with Iran, blocked Iranian assets, and imposed sanctions against this country. Moreover, reducing its diplomatic and economic relationships with Iran, Europe imposed limited sanctions against this country and regarded it as a potential threat.

Divergence in US and Europe Positions: Conclusion of Iran-Iraq War, Iraq's attack to Kuwait, and termination of Cold War by and large changed transatlantic views toward Iran: after the first decade of the Islamic Revolution, European Union member states abandoned the transatlantic common ground. Although the US struggled to conjoin European countries with it in secluding and imposing sanctions against Iran, this country's commercial magnetism seemed to be of stronger appeal to EU and its oil companies. Iran, consequently, changed to be a source of discrepancy between US and EU and an indissoluble hindrance in transatlantic political convergence (Ünever Noi, 2005:79).

Far from being formed in the vacuum, this transatlantic split



was a repercussion of dissolution of the Soviet Union and bipolar system of international relations, followed by a redefinition of interests, roles, and responsibilities of transatlantic actors. This was efflorescing in the middle-way of a particular stage of EU evolution, i.e. Maastricht Treaty, which ensured an independent European defensive and security identity (Calabrese, 2004: 2). Since that time, U.S and EU chose to drive on two different roads toward Iran: whereas US holds tightly its “Sanction and Containment” policy, EU tries to enlarge its relations with Iran. Shortly after Persian Gulf War (1990-91), George H. W. Bush administration, being afraid of Iran turning into the dominant power of the Persian Gulf in the absence of a powerful Iraqi government, resolved to be in command of Iraq, ratifying in 3 October 1992 the “Iran-Iraq Non-Proliferation Act,” which formed the cornerstone of the policies to enforce constraints against Iran (Khosravi,1389:138). Afterwards, in Clinton administration, the containment policy was followed even stronger.

The 1991 journey of the “troika” of European foreign ministers (Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) to Iran was a starting point for further maturity of Iran-EU relations, during which Europe declared its willingness to expand its politico-economic relations with Iran (Aghaee, 1386:38-39). Iran’s 1990s reformations, release of European hostages in Lebanon, and Iran’s increasing importance in the region in post-Persian Gulf War period caused a convergence of the interests of three chief European states—Germany, France, and England. This contributed to a common European position toward Iran being created referred to as “the Critical Dialogue.” In this period, European states considered Iran as moving toward modification, a stride to the right path which could help, as they believed, Iran modify its positions (Ünever Noi, 2005: 85).

The focus of Critical Dialogue was on soft security issues such as immigration, drug trafficking, and organized crimes, with other subjects like human rights, terrorism, the Middle East so-called peace process, and Salman Rushdie issue being top on the list (Rahmani and



Taeb, 1375). In Dialogues, two sides tried to find a key to the problems, settling the misunderstandings. That was why no major step to conclude mutual politico-commercial agreements was taken. Confronting the launch of the Dialogues, US took a converse stand, imposing huge pressures to EU to slide Iran into detachment even more. Clinton Administration, revealing its dual containment policy, demanded the European states to help the US put into practice the policy. Talking in the occasion of June 1993 EU Foreign Ministers Conference held in Luxembourg, the US Department of State Secretary Warren Christopher wanted the member states to maintain their foreign policies in line with those of Washington's. Unlike US, although, Europe did not bear in mind a desire to isolate Iran and went on with its Dialogues (Aghaee, 1386:40).

Like-minded over such issues as Middle East Peace Process, weapons of mass destruction, and human rights, the US and the EU nevertheless were not taking advantage of an identical demarche in their confrontation with Iran: the EU argued that political dialogues are more profitable an instrument than economic sanctions. Concomitant with Iran-Europe Critical Dialogue, the US dual containment policy was in Feb. 1994 implemented, in the framework of which economic sanctions against Iran were imposed. Clinton administration, firstly, prohibited any American oil collaboration with Iran in two executive directives. The D'Amato-Kennedy bill (Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) was ultimately approved in US Congress in late-July 1996 (Dehghani,1388:416), to which European countries-either in the EU framework or individually-opposed and fashioned one of their most significant conflicting points with the US; European Commission, immediately after approval of the Act, lodged official complaint against US to the World Trade Organization. After frowning objections were made by Europe, Clinton administration finally decided to renounce the sanctions against those European companies which foster business collaborations with Iran (Pinto, 2001: 104,105).



Despite Iran-EU relations being on the increase, another sudden crisis discouraged the hopes. Subsequent to Mykonos Court order in April 1997, IRI leaders were, for the first time, pinpointed as culprits in killing those Iranians adversary to the Regime. This happened to be a matter of dispute for a while. EU suspended the Dialogues and recalled its ambassadors from Tehran. Taking the unique opportunity, US once again launched some efforts to get Europe along with it against Iran. Having been recommended by the US officials in Oct. 1997 to build a common front against Iran, the EU although, at the end of the year, took the amicable path toward Iran. Whilst Berlin Court order was regarded by Washington politicians as an affirmative answer to the isolation policy offered by the US, EU officials were still reluctant to consider the sanction approach. In general, although Mykonos case could make bold the necessity of EU drawing upon Iran's issues with a more meticulous eye, the EU's central strategy, i.e. a preference of interaction to isolation, was not seriously challenged and member states said yes to the prolongation of EU-Iran relations (Calabrese, 2004: 3).

Khatami's coming into the office revolutionized the EU-Iran relationships. With additional respect paid by the new administration to the détente policy, European countries determined to expand their mutual relations with Iran. Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi visited Tehran in June 1998 and, one month later, troika members came to Tehran to hold Comprehensive Dialogues. How to interact with Iran was the subject of that time's EU discussions. Whereas Germany and England inclined vigilant and gradual progresses, France and Italy installed pressures to normalize the relations. Included in the framework compiled by the European Commission were three main parts: (a) Comprehensive Dialogue; (b) Human Rights Dialogue; and (c) negotiations to conclude Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Comprehensive Dialogue came with major differences to prior Dialogue, that is, Critical Dialogue, with regard to its name, content, and venue at which the sessions were to be held.



Moreover, Tehran and other presidents' capitals were chosen for the first time to host the sessions, which contain not only political but also tangible commercial and economic collaborations.

The US-Iran relationship development proved to be likely at this time span. In spite of some optimistic initiatives taken by two sides, however, no relation improvement was witnessed. Although, in April 2001, Clinton administration evaluated Iran's infringements as relatively negligible, the US State Department once again put IRI on 'State Sponsors of Terrorism' List. IRI was put on the US terrorism list in president Regan Administration in 1985. In expanding its relationships with the US, Iran was facing another difficulty: internal obstacles. Once George W. Bush was elected as the American president, continued "Sanction and Containment" policy, renewing in July 2001 the ILSA Act for another five years (Dehghani, 1388:471)

Incidents on 9/11, together with antagonism to Taliban, came to form a US-Iran intersection: Iran condemned the attacks and requested the United Nations to lead the international fight against terrorism. Here, an improvement of the mutual relationships was a possible interpretation of the incident. With Taliban being collapsed, a normalization of two-way diplomatic relations grew more likely: U.S and Iran officials reached an agreement to establish a Kabuli transitional government. The change of American approaches tightened US positions toward Iran. Having been on the winning side of the Afghanistan War, the US officials misconceived that they shall individually, and with no recourse to international consensus and their time-honored ally, i.e., Europe, be able to surmount terrorism. A transition from defensive strategy to preemptive war strategy is observed in US modus operandi, therefore. On the threshold of 2002, the US-Iran relations entered into a new phase: the Israeli forces seized the *Karine-A* vessel, which, according to IDF, was a freighter purchased surreptitiously by Palestinian officials from Iranian government only to carry 50 tons of weapons and explosives from Kish Port to Palestine. The affair was attributed to be an indication of



an Iranian act of supporting terrorism. Although Iran publicly denied the accusation, the whole story was taken advantage by US so as to let it revise its approaches toward Iran (Tzogopoulos, 2004: 30). In his first annual State of the Union Speech in 29 Jan. 2002, US President George W. Bush labeled Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the axis of evil (Bush, 2002).

9/11 attacks strengthened the US-European relations. Promulgating its coordination with the US government and stressing on global war against terrorism, EU then supported the military attacks commenced in 7 Oct. 2001 on Afghanistan as per the UN Security Council Resolution 1368. The Bush's "Axis of Evil" drama was not, however, warmly received by the EU, whose leaders largely announced their opposition to military initiatives against the aforementioned countries. "While the European leaders share many of the major concerns of Bush administration, they are counter to putting Iran, Iraq, and North Korea along one another" declared the then European Commission President Romano Prodi (Brumberg, 2002: 2). On the whole, the US and Europe failed to assume a coherent approach toward Iran in this time span. Whereas US leaders were steadfast in their "Sanction and Containment" policy, imposing severe D'Amato sanctions and pinning Iran to the "Axis of Evil" list, EU, which was severely opposed to both, followed keenly its own economic interests won through making relations with Iran. Even 9/11 attacks were not significant enough for the EU to allow for a change in its approach to Iran.

Followed by the EU-Iran agreement over reframing negotiations every other month, the related dialogues finally arrived. In their first round of negotiations being held in Brussels in Dec. 2002, the two sides decided on the rubrics to be discussed in the subsequent sessions: taking anti-terrorism measures, engaging actively in unraveling regional disputes, holding anti-torture campaigns, respecting to the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Treaty, and observing human rights. A coordination of IRI's and



WTO's rules and regulations was another element on whose discussion the sides agreed. Areas of common interest were energy, transportation, environment, drugs, and immigration areas. Gradually, however, Iran's nuclear program appeared as an obstacle transmuting the relationships (Sauer, 2008: 275).

Re-convergence in Transatlantic Positions: Prior to the beginning of the crisis over Iran's nuclear energy program in the spring and summer of 2003, the US and the EU contrasted in their approaches toward Iran. While the EU tried to, as President Mohammad Khatami came into presidential office in 1997, expand its relations with Iran in the areas of commerce, energy, politics, and human rights, the US clung to its "Sanctions and Containment" policy. Ronald Reagan, during whose administration some limited clashes between Iran and US took place, overtly supported Iraq throughout the Iran-Iraq War. Pressing on with sanctions against Iran, Clinton signed the D'Amato bill into law to disallow investments from being made in Iran. George W. Bush, in addition, put Iran on the "Axis of Evil", threatening it with military attacks (Alcaro, 2011:117). Iran's nuclear program, however, served as a convergence point in transatlantic relations.

The emphasis on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and concerns about the nuclear programs of developing countries was not a new thing in US foreign policy. Before 2003, however, what was lacking was a common and active policy on WMD among EU member states, which from 2003 progressively started to attach more importance to the subject. This drew the positions of the two sides with regard to WMD even closer (Christer, 2005: 29,30). The 9/11 attacks, Iraq War, European rift on whether or not to attack Iraq so as to find weapons of mass destruction, and compilation of 2003 European Security Strategy caused the matter to be energetically highlighted in EU strategies and its foreign relations. European politicians were considering WMD as a threat not only to the European states but also to world security. In the Security Strategy



Document, it is visibly noted that this threat is “the biggest potential threat to our community” (European Security Strategy, 2003:3). Undoubtedly, the increasing attention of the EU paid to the issue of weapons of mass destruction was of the greatest influence upon the EU’s mutual relations and dialogues with Iran, the subject which shall hereunder be discussed with some detail.

Two weeks after the then International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Mohamed ElBaradei’s 2003 visit to Iran and his confirming of the rumors concerning Iran’s nuclear program, Sweden’s Foreign Minister Anna Lindh suggested a European policy to deal with the weapons of mass destruction allegedly being composed. While many experts attributed this initiative to the Iraq War and the EU member states’ quarrel over the issue, Iran’s and North Korea’s nuclear programs did play a leading role therein (Sauer, 2008: 274).

In Thessaloniki, the EU ratified its new strategic doctrine referred to as the “Basic Principles for an EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction,” which emphasized on the fact that proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery are an increasing threat to international peace and stability. The document held that the EU shall not turn a blind eye to such threats and that it must strive to find a desirable and multilateral solution to the problem (www.europa.eu.org, 16 June 2003). Afterwards, EU-Iran relations were confined only to the EU’s strategy of fighting proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Ironically enough, as Iran was losing the EU’s reliance on its process of political reforms, Europe was escalating its concerns about Iran’s nuclear energy and ballistic programs. That the issue of weapons of mass destruction was occupying a top spot on the European security agenda was partly due to the EU’s geopolitical changes and its imminent expansion: the EU’s movement toward the East could draw it nearer to the Persian Gulf and Iran. It is believed that in spite of the US and the EU being incongruous in their ways to deal with Iran in



principio, after the row over Iran's nuclear program started in 2003, a gradual convergence in transatlantic positions toward Iran was witnessed. The process of the EU's viewpoints tilting toward those of the US has evolved over several stages.

Conditionalizing the Dialogues with Iran: US-Iran relations were not well-built enough that Iran's nuclear program could be estimated as exerting any special effect on the mutual relations. American concerns about Iran's programs were much more incensed in 2003 compared to the 1990s. What prepared for a transatlantic convergence of attitudes toward Iran was the EU's gradual turnabout away from Iran. Europe, after Iran's nuclear program surfaced as an issue, replaced its former approach with a "conditional engagement" one. It was not before this that repeated proclamations of European officials were heard that: "political and economic issues are interchangeably connected." The EU Commissioner for External Affairs Chris Patten, for instance, declared that advancement in one area of the EU-Iran mutual relations cannot be regarded as detached from other areas. In his February 2004 speech before the European Parliament, Patten said: "Iran is well aware that all such issues as political, nuclear, business, human rights, etc., are closely interrelated; we may not simply disregard the issues of one side, thinking that we can make major progresses in the other" (Patten, 2004).

Time was ripe for EU opposition to the continuation of talks on business collaboration agreement with Iran, with some European states including France and the UK requesting Iran to sign the Additional Protocol – a request which was rejected by Iran, followed by the dialogues to sign the said agreement in June 2003 being suspended by the EU, all despite the European Commission's opposition.

There were, at first, some disparities between Europe and the United States on how to deal with Iran's nuclear program. Although the European countries, very much like the US, deemed Iran's program as implying violations of the Treaty on the Non-



Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and a threat to regional security, they, unlike the US, could not disregard their huge interests ensuing from the mutual relationships. The Europeans, therefore, endeavored to convince Iran to drop its nuclear activities through a bargaining process that involved rewarding Tehran with some advantages. This was unlike the US which wanted to send the Iranian case to the UN Security Council and, even harsher, a full-scale onslaught on Iran's nuclear sites (Alcaro, 2011:118).

While different in their means, the US and Europe were following the same end: to thwart Iran's nuclear program. In fact, they prefer Iran to import enriched uranium than to pursue its uranium enrichment program independently (Moshaver, 2003: 300). An essential issue during all these years has been Iran's enrichment program in transatlantic policies. As perceived by the Western countries, the Iranian government's abolishment of its uranium enrichment program is the only way to assure Iran's disinclination to acquire nuclear weapons (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 321).

The US and the European states believe that in case Iran is permitted to expand its enrichment and atomic capabilities, even under IAEA surveillance, the following is inevitable: (a) main technical obstacles to getting access to an atomic bomb are obliterated; (b) other regional countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey would take steps to build atomic bombs; (c) the NPT would lose its credibility; (d) atomic Iran may implement more aggressive policies in the region; and (e) the nuclearization of Iran would mean terrorists getting hold of atomic weapons (Gordon, 2007: 2). The two sides, therefore, made their best efforts to thwart Iran's nuclear program even if it was proven to be peaceful. The first step was to offer the negotiation method accompanied by various incentives and occasional threats.

Abreast with the US being assertively resistant to changing its 1979 sanctions policy against Iran, and China and Russia willing to recede into the background, the EU grasped the opportunity to



become the leading actor in the row over Iran's nuclear program. Potential military conflict between Iran and the US was one of the factors that laid the groundwork for the Europeans to grow actively involved in Iran's nuclear affairs. Confronted with the US invasion of Iraq, the Europeans desired to prevent the Middle East from becoming the scene of another harsh war. Yet another cause was Europe's resolve to fight against the proliferation of WMD, as outlined in its European Strategy, whose Article II reads: "the EU shall not turn a blind eye to the extinctions brought about by weapons of mass destruction, which, accompanied by missile programs, put in a full-size danger the governmental and civil security as well as our interests." The third driving force was that Iran's file could enable the Europeans to find a key to their disagreements regarding the Iraq War, taking a common position on Iran's nuclear program (Bergen's, 2010: 503,504).

Comprised of France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, the so-called EU-3 took the function of effectuating the EU-Iran negotiations, which ultimately resulted in Tehran the (Saadabad) Declaration. It obliged Iran to accede to IAEA programs and communicate transparent accounts of its past, present, and future nuclear activities to the Agency. Iran, moreover, announced that it will temporarily stop its uranium enrichment procedures (Aghaee, 1386:158). On November 14th 2004, another treaty was drafted in Paris between the European troika and Iran. According to this treaty, Iran voluntarily agreed to put a stop to all activities relevant to uranium enrichment and reprocessing such as construction, manufacturing, installation, experimentation, assembly, operation of gas centrifuges, and plutonium separation activities in order to build reciprocal confidence. Europe would, in turn, try to admit Iran into the WTO. In December 2004, the EU-Iran working groups were convened to negotiate on the transfer of peaceful nuclear technology to Iran and conclude business, collaboration, and security agreements which were resumed in January 2005. While Iran expected the



negotiations to be rounded off within some weeks or months, the EU wanted them to be running for one or two years. That is, the European troika was determined to lengthen the negotiation period so that Iran's freeze on uranium enrichment would change to a permanent one. That was why Iran in February 2005 warned that the negotiations should not be lengthened any longer than the coming March (Dominguez, 2007: 3).

Finally, several meetings were proven to be a failure, as the sides were intending to follow contrasting purposes. While Iran wanted to utilize the negotiations as an instrument to close its nuclear case and lessen the international pressures, the Europeans desired to convince Iran to wholly abandon its nuclear project by offering advantages such as WTO membership. Frustrated with provoking Iran by means of negotiations to conclude its nuclear program, EU paced closer to the US approach in sending Iran's case to the UN Security Council. Furthermore, a replacement of some European leaders realized the hopes to converge transatlantic positions even more: in Germany and France- major opponents of the Iraq War-Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy-fierce advocates of fostering close bonds with the US-came into office.

The Security Council Case: Iran was labeled by US and Europe to be "crossing the red line" when in the summer of 2005, it decided to resume its uranium enrichment program. Their main concern was the fear that Iran's activities may enter into a military phase, especially when Iran's activities would become so advanced that they would arrive at the point of no return, in which Iran would technically be independent of all countries. This made the US and the EU decide to send Iran's nuclear case to the UN Security Council. A draft of the plan was prepared by the EU and, after the IAEA Board held a Special Meeting on the 2nd and 3rd of February 2006, Iran's case was referred to the Security Council. In return, Iran suspended its voluntary cooperation with the IAEA and stepped up its enrichment program (Hamilton, 2009: 16).



What followed was a further convergence between the US and the EU, whose initial disagreements on how to deal with Iran seemed to have evaporated. The outcome of the June 12th 2008 meeting held in Slovenia between EU and US officials was a common statement in which the sides, as desired by Washington, tried to compel Iran to entirely abandon its enrichment activities by increasing the pressure. The EU and the US declared that sanctions would be entirely and effectively actualized and may be completed by “additional decisions” (Khaloozadeh and Afzali, 1390:30). Although the US and, particularly, the EU have always been emphasizing upon a supplement of sanctions with negotiations and tried in 2008 to encourage Iran to wash its hands of the enrichment activities through offering some incentives, Iran’s stress on its undeniable right to enrichment, on the one hand, and the West’s focus on enrichment suspension, on the other, obstructed the road to concurrence. Broad sanctions against Iran were the only way to convince Tehran to abandon its nuclear activities, according to the Western powers.

Enthusiastically backed by the US and the EU, five resolutions were issued by the UN Security Council in the 2006-2010 time interval to halt Iran’s nuclear programs, the first of which was UN Security Council Resolution 1696 (31 July 2006) that expressed concern about Iran’s uranium reprocessing, demanding a cease of all Iranian activities related to enrichment. In Resolution 1737 (23 Dec. 2006) a request of nuclear activities stoppage was repeated and some institutions and organizations having a hand in Iranian activities were sanctioned. In this vein, 10 institutions and 12 persons were put on the blacklist, whose assets were urged to be blocked by all countries. The latter Resolution prevented all countries from contributing any facilities and/or knowhow to Iran to assist it with its nuclear experiments. Additionally, it obliged the state officials to report journeys of any Iranian representative involved in the nuclear case to their country to the UN Security Council. Resolution 1747 (24 Mar. 2007) sanctioned a number of institutions and organizations affiliated



to the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards, imposing a unilateral artillery sanction through banning Iranian weaponry exports. Expanding the blacklist even more, Resolution 1803 (3 Mar. 2008) went further and forbade the sale of dual-use equipment to Iran. It demanded that UN member states watchfully scrutinize Iranian shipments entering their maritime territory. The domain of Iranian sanctioned persons, institutions, and organizations was bulged once again in Resolution 1929 (9 June 2010) and IRI shipping companies were boycotted (<http://www.un.org>). Fully concordant with the US and the EU consensus were all above-mentioned Resolutions in order to halt Iran's nuclear program. Largely, it was European countries which compiled the drafts of the Resolutions. As the sanctions set by UN Security Council were not regarded as sufficient by the US and the EU, they began to impose sanctions even beyond those punitive measures.

Sanctions: The US and the EU, for whom UN Security Council sanctions seemed to be inadequate, tried to exacerbate the sanctions and pressures to bring on an Iranian surrender. In doing so, the two sides imposed coordinated, parallel, and similar sanctions against Iran. The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act (CISADA) was enacted by the US on 1 July 2010. Targeting non-American companies which had commercial relations with Iran, this Act argued that companies must either trade with Iran's energy section or remain in the US marketplace (Jenkins, Hazemi Jebelli and Lamy, 2010: 134). Most of all, the EU's sanctions against Iran are considered to be the most stringent ever imposed against a foreign country. On June 16th 2010, EU officials agreed to impose harsher sanctions against Iran in order to return Iran to the negotiating table, to stop Israel from carrying out military attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities, and assure the US-allied Arab states that the West is containing Iran's nuclear program (Khaloozadeh and Afzali, 1390:39).

The EU's sanctions against Iran during the past years may be divided into two categories: first, the sanctions within the UN



Security Council framework and, second, the unilateral sanctions beyond those of the UNSC. Aligned with Resolution 1737, the European Council took a common position on February 27th 2007. In April 2007, it ratified Directive 432, according to which sale and/or transmission of weapons to Iran were banned and European financial institutions were obliged to exert stricter controls in their exchanges with Iran. On July 26th 2010, the EU broadened its sanctions even further: (a) exerting limits in the energy sector including investment, technical support, technology transfer, and related equipment; (b) exerting limits in the financial sector including blocking the assets of some banks and institutions; (c) exerting commercial restrictions over those commodities which have dual-use; (d) exerting limits in the transportation sector especially IRI shipping organization; and (e) prohibiting issuance of visa and blocking the assets of some persons especially Revolutionary Guards personnel (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu>)

Despite their destructive effects, these sanctions have not been able to convince Iran to retreat from its nuclear activities. That is to say, the sanctions policy has turned out to be a failure (Maloney, 2010: 139-143). As a matter of fact, a huge number of Iranians are advocates of Iran's peaceful nuclear capabilities. Interestingly enough, there are some American and European groups which, given Iran's geopolitically strategic location and the threats thereto, give rationales for Iranian efforts to attain nuclear energy (Hadian, 1389:357-360). The EU and the US, as members of the 5+1 Group, failed to attract Iran's confidence in that it will be guaranteed nuclear energy. The fact that presently Iran cannot lean upon the West has its roots in Iran's historical experiences which is teeming with foreign conspiracies, on the one hand, and abundant contemporary foreign threats intensified by the US attack on Iraq in 2003 and Israel's occasional threats against Iran's nuclear facilities, on the other. Moreover, even though the US leaders claim the fears of an atomic Iran as the reason why they are worried about Iran's nuclear program, during the 1990s, they made their best shots to thwart Iran's efforts thereof through both



unilateral sanctions and barring foreign companies from investing in Iran's energy sector. The double-faced and prejudiced approach of the IAEA and Western countries has additionally added fuel to the fire.

Conclusion

Transatlantic positions toward the Islamic Republic of Iran have not been following an identical, coherent pattern in the past three decades. Proportionate with fluctuations and circumstances, the US and the EU have held out some convergences and divergences. In the post-Islamic Revolution period, the US and the European Community adopted common concerns about the Revolution and its expansion over the region; their hostility was different in extent but founded on belief in the existence of threats emanated by the Revolution. Imposing various sanctions against Iran, the US slashed its relations with this country and publicly supported Iraq in its war against Iran. The EC, as well, reduced its relationships, imposing some sanctions against Iran. The end of the Cold War and Iranian reforms came as the symptoms of a debut of the transatlantic disagreements over Iran except for when it came to the issue of human rights. In this time span, the EU, unlike the US which vindicated a sanctions policy, expanded its relations with Iran. Significant among divergent American and European viewpoints are the EU's opposition to the D'Amato Act, lack of American engagement in constructive and critical dialogue with Iran, and Washington's branding of Iran as a member of the "Axis of Evil." Iran's nuclear program, however, caused the EU to prioritize security considerations over economic interests. It, as the first step, struggled to convince Iran through negotiations to put an end to its uranium enrichment processes. But then, Iran's emphasis upon enrichment as its indisputable right led the EU to approach the American position: the EU tried to refer Iran's nuclear case to the UN Security Council and ratify sanctions both within and beyond the UNSC framework.



Realistically speaking, the US and the European states have moved toward convergence whenever Iran is perceived by them to be a common “security threat” (during the Iran-Iraq War or when it comes to Iran’s nuclear program); and, on the contrary, a divergence between the two has been observed whenever their interests in and insight into the IRI have been poles apart (such as in the 1990s). Fixated on Iran’s nuclear program and broad areas (banking, shipping, transportation, oil and gas, Revolutionary Guards, etc.), the sanctions imposed by the Security Council, the US, and the EU intend to convince Iran to thwart its nuclear initiatives. Almost certainly, these sanctions appear to be moving towards a more extended scale in the future, with a more unified West trying to take advantage of various instruments to put an end to Iran’s advancement in the nuclear arena.

Beyond question is the necessity of an intelligent diplomacy to be taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s foreign policy-making system to discourage foregoing efforts. Actively emphasizing that its nuclear program is peaceful, the Islamic Republic must foil Western efforts aimed at branding its nuclear program as being military in nature.

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