

members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany (P5+1) in implementing gradual sanctions against Iran. Thus, while China delayed the imposition of sanctions, it was also fundamentally opposed to Tehran's acquisition of nuclear weapons due to its potential negative impacts for China's economic well-being. In fact, some Chinese analysts argue that allowing Iran to obtain nuclear weapons would make several other states of the Middle East more likely to obtain their own arsenals. This would then weaken China's status as a major nuclear power. Proliferation of nuclear weapons could also lead to political instability in the region, which would be disruptive for Chinese business⁸⁴. Consequently, the Iranian nuclear issue provides a good example of Beijing's attempts to balance its policy of cooperation with the U.S. and with the Middle East, especially with oil-rich states such as Iran.

For a long time, China had been concerned about the tension between Iran and the West and had opposed a military strike against Iran⁸⁵. These fears were mollified in 2015 when Iran and the P5+1 reached a landmark deal over the nuclear program of Iran. Accordingly, Iran agreed to reduce its nuclear capabilities and provide greater access to the International Atomic Energy Agency in exchange for the removal of the sanctions⁸⁶. This agreement is likely to have substantial implications for the relations between China and Iran.

From the Iranian perspective, it is obvious that during the long period of sanctions, China replaced the West as a source of investment and support. In fact Sino-Iranian relations

had worried the United States as it made total isolation of Iran unattainable. These relations allowed Iran to survive from the economic sanctions imposed on its nuclear program and kept Iran "independent."⁸⁷ Furthermore, Iran certainly had political goals in maintaining strong ties with China. According to Chubin, Iran wished "to use China as a balancer against the U.S., to use it as a source of technology in defence and energy fields, and to create a deep and reliable commercial relationship which can translate into a more substantial strategic relationship."⁸⁸ Thus, Iran's focus had been on short-term relations while China focused on long-term. Whereas Iran may wish to use its natural resources as a political instrument, China's foreign policy is primarily focused on economic relations.

Overall, the end of the sanctions creates several opportunities and challenges for Chinese influence in Iran. Firstly, it is clear that Iran would start enjoying the sudden increase in investments and commerce with the United States and the EU. However, with Donald Trump as president of the United States in office, circumstances may be different as he pursues his presidential promise to put "America First" policies that are critical of world liberal order. Donald Trump's conservative nationalist approach to foreign policy, no matter how skillfully presented, has been noted to be flawed. The U.S. cannot be strengthened through a process of even partial withdrawal from the vicissitudes of international politics and trade⁸⁹. Meanwhile China would benefit from the increase in the production of oil and gas in Iran. On the other hand, Chinese companies would now have to compete with their Western counterparts. Particularly, various Eastern

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Feng 2010..Pp 47

⁸⁶ BBC News. "Iran's Nuclear Deal: Key Details." January 16, 2016. URL: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33521655>

⁸⁷ Chubin .2010. pp. 64-65.

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 67.

⁸⁹ Thompson Jack. American Affairs and U.S. Foreign Policy, *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 5/3, June, 2017. Pp 2