Transatlantic Towards Iran Nuclear Program: Convergence or Divergence?

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Abstract—How to interact with Islamic Republic of Iran has always been one of the challenging issues in transatlantic relations. In the past three decades, the American and European positions toward Iran have witnessed many ups and downs, and both parties (U.S & EU) have divergent and convergent stances depending on the developments. Generally, the divergent and convergent trend toward Iran could be examined in three stages: After the Islamic revolution, both side anxiously interacted with the new administration. Of course, they increased their cooperation to contain Iran after some unpleasant happenings. Then, in 1990s, some developments like the end of Cold war, the EU progress on different areas and Iran’s internal developments, brought about some different and gaps in the EU-American stances toward Iran. The EU opposed the American approach to impose sanctions on and to confront with Iran had sought to expand its relations with Iran. The third stage is marked with the introduction of Iran’s nuclear program. In this period, the both parties’ stances gradually become convergent. In fact, the European Union and the United states, considered Iran as a security threat which requires their close collaboration to deal with Iran. What is of great significance to mention is that the EU’s positions have become close to the United States’ approach and have shifted from negotiation and interaction to confrontation and sanction.

Keywords—Transatlantic, European Union, America, Iran Nuclear program, Sanction.

I. INTRODUCTION

The relations between Europe and the United States have always played a major role in international developments. These relations, especially after the end of the Cold War gained a particular importance, because U.S with the end of the Cold War, the common threat (Soviet Union) was vanished and the disagreements between Europe and the United States were gradually revealed in regard with various subjects. The procedures and means of any relationship with Iran has always been one of the controversial subjects between the United States and European Countries.

The main question in this article is to know which kind of procedures and patterns Trans-Atlantic Powers have followed toward the Islamic Republic of Iran during the last three decades, as well as which factors have influenced and affected them? The current article’s question is that the positions of trans-Atlantic Powers have not been the same towards the Islamic Republic of Iran for the last three decades and any kind of divergence and convergence of the European Union with the United States in this matter was under the influence of the measure of the success of the United States’ propagandistic politics in its effort to present and name Iran as a serious security threat to regional and global levels in various periods of time. Thus, in order to answer the main question, this article is divided into three parts: in the first part, the conceptual and applicability framework of Trans-Atlantic relations will be examined thoroughly. The second part is the main section of the present article, which is the divergence and convergence process in the respected United States and European positions, towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. And ultimately, in the third and final part will be to the article’s conclusion.

II. TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS; OBLIGATIONS AND DIMENSIONS

The relation between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean that is the United States and Europe is called Trans-Atlantic Relations. In addition to its cultural and historical roots, these relations were strengthened during the Cold War. In order to remain in security from the Soviet Union’s threat, Europe expanded its cooperation and economic and security ties with the United States, to be able to keep itself safe and secure from the serious threats of the Soviet Union by benefiting from the United States’ Protection.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, different points of view in regard with the ways and manners of future transatlantic relations were discussed. Some realists believed that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the basis of transatlantic cooperation had collapsed as well, and that NATO has lost its existential Philosophy, and thus, its continuity does not seem logical at all. But the advocates of Liberalism approach were optimistic toward the continuity of transatlantic cooperation after the Cold War period. Therefore, by considering it in this angle, the collapse of the Soviet Union does not necessarily result in the dissolution of transatlantic convergence, and the cooperation should be increased in NATO’s framework; in like manner, the members of NATO should also use this organization to confront new challenges ahead of them [1].

In practice, we are now witnessing the realization of certain views and opinions in both these two approaches; that is, with the reduction and decrease of the common threat of the Soviet...
Union, a divergence in some positions, was somewhat created in the both side and most particularly, the European Union sought to act with more autonomy in regard with the United States in its foreign and defense policies. But the reality is that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relations between the United States and the European Union have not only become completely inexisten, but instead, they experienced major transformation, in accordance with new worldwide changes.

III. THE TRANSATLANTIC POSITIONS TOWARD IRAN

Before and after the Islamic Revolution, and due to many reasons, Iran has been of major importance to the United States in recent years. Primarily, Iran has an essential position in the Persian Gulf; this country shares its borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan in East, with Turkmenistan in Northeast, with the Caspian Sea in North, with Azerbaijan and Armenia in Northwest, with Turkey and Iraq in West, and it has access to Persian Gulf and The gulf of Oman in its South. Therefore, the strategic position of Iran cannot be ignored by the major Powers, such as the United States and European Union [2].

With the start of the Cold War, the importance of Iran for West, and their fear of the Soviet domination over this most strategic country were discussed more than before. During this period, the Iranians had a positive attitude towards the United States and due to the fact that one of the security concerns and worries of the second Pahlavi Regime was in fact, the threat from the Soviet Union, therefore the Iranian Government had a strong tendency to develop its relationships with the United States, in order to protect itself from the threats of the Soviet Union [3]. Generally, the United States, and the European countries had extensive ties with Iran, during the second period of the Pahlavi Regime. The economic, political, and military cooperation between both sides was extensive during that period and Iran was of great importance to the West [2].

The Islamic Revolution and consequently, the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran created a transition in the understanding in both sides of the Atlantic Ocean towards Iran, and gave a significant impact on their relations [4]. In fact, the transatlantic Positions towards Iran during the past three decades have not been following the same pattern and have been influenced, by various factors in the International Scale or within Iran itself, which has also experienced many ups and downs in recent years. Generally speaking, the positions of the United States and the European countries towards the Islamic Republic of Iran could be studied and examined in three different timescales:

In the first period, which includes the time of the Islamic Revolution until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, we are witnessing the common concern of the Europe and the United Sates and their common effort of wanting to take control of Iran. In the second period, which is contemporary to the international changes, such as the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Gulf War from one side, and the internal changes in Iran itself, on the other side, show the disagreements and gaps in the transatlantic Positions towards Iran. The third period, which is further emphasized in this article, begins with the discussion of Iran’s Nuclear Program. In this period, we are witnessing an increasing concern in Europe and the United States towards Iran; these concerns ultimately resulted in the effort to curb Iran’s Nuclear Program and then the converging of transatlantic Positions in regard with Iran. As we proceed further in the article, the third period, which also includes the recent decade, will be studied with more details.

IV. CURBING IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAM; THE RE-CONVERGENCE IN TRANSATLANTIC POSITIONS

Before the Iranian nuclear dispute, started in the spring and summer of 2003, the United States and the European Union had different approaches and behaviors, in regard with Iran; the European Union was opposed to the United States over sanctioning Iran, and was attempting to expand its relations with Iran, by doing extensive negotiations in various fields such as commerce, energy, politics, and human rights. But unlike its European partners, the United States has always continued its pressure and sanctions policy against Iran. Bill Clinton announced the policy of containment towards Iran and enacted the D’Amato Sanctions in regard with Iran to ban capital investments in this country. George. W. Bush [junior] also went so far as to increase the American wickedness and threatened Iran of a military invasion [5]. But with the discussion of Iranian nuclear program, the framework of transatlantic position in regard with Iran moved toward convergence.

Two weeks after Mohammed Al-Baradei, the director general of International Atomic Energy Agency, visited Iran in 2003, and confirmed the rumors regarding the Iranian nuclear program, Anna Lindh, the prime minister of Sweden, at the European Union council of foreign relations suggested a European policy to confront the expansion of the weapons for mass destruction. In fact, most experts considered this initiative, due to the war with Iraq, and the disagreement among the EU members towards that matter [6]. However, after the initial disagreement between U.S and EU on how to interact with Iran, and after Iran’s nuclear program discussion in 2003, we are gradually witnessing the convergence and proximity of both sides’ in the transatlantic positions, in regard with Iran. But the important point is that in this process, we are witnessing a change in the EU approach towards Iran and the gradual proximity of its positions to U.S policies. In regard with Iran, the approaches of the EU’s stances to U.S in recent years, has taken place in several steps which will be examined further in the article:

A. Setting conditions on Iran’s talks

After the nuclear issue was proposed, the EU’s approach toward Iran changed to Conditional Engagement. Henceforth, the EU officials repeatedly emphasized that the negotiations
on the political and economic subjects are quite connected, anyhow. For instance, Chris Patten, the EU Commissioner for External Affairs, announced that any progress in any matter with Iran could not be separated from other matters, whatsoever. Also in February 2004, in a speech to the European parliament, he stated that “Iranians are well-aware that all of their topics (political, nuclear, commercial, human rights) are closely related to each other; we cannot easily ignore the issues of one field and think that we could move forward in all the other fields as well” [7].

On the other side, with new leaders coming into power, in many European countries, it made them do everything in their power to provide the means to strengthen and reinforce any possible transatlantic convergence of ideals and goals in regard with Iran. Germany, being the main opposition party in regard with U.S, in the war with Iraq made it so that politicians such as Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy come into power and in contrast with their respected predecessors, they were much inclined to develop and expand their relations with U.S.

B. Transatlantic Engagement Turning Over Iran’s Case to the Security Council

In January 2006, when Iran started Uranium enrichment, the United States and Europe considered this move as “crossing the red line”. Their major concern was Iran’s nuclear program’s potential militarization, Particularly when it reaches to “the point of no return”, in spite of their effort; a condition where Iran would not be technologically dependent on any country anymore. Therefore, the EU and U.S decided to turn over Iran’s case to the Security Council. The EU prepared the draft plan and following the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency meeting on 2 and 3 February 2006, the IAEA turned Iran’s case to the Security Council. Against this move, Iran seized its volunteer cooperation with the IAEA and advanced its uranium enrichment program [8]. Henceforth, the convergence between EU and U.S in regard with Iran gradually strengthened more so and the initial disagreements in regard with the manner of confrontation towards Iran’s nuclear program which existed before, disappeared. At the end of the meeting of EU and U.S Leaders held in Slovenia, a common statement was published on 12 June 2008; in this statement, the emphasis was put more on the alignment between EU and U.S and by a request from Washington, both sides announced their intention to increase their respective pressures on Iran, in order to force it to abandon its uranium enrichment program [9].

With the support and effort of EU and U.S from 2006 to 2010, five resolutions were adopted consequently, by the United Nations Security Council to restrain Iran’s nuclear program. All the resolutions mentioned above, were carried out with the leadership and the cooperation of EU and U.S to confront and restrain Iran’s nuclear program and mainly the European Countries prepared the resolution drafts.

C. The U.S-EU Alignment on Applying Sanctions Beyond the Security Council

The United States and the European Union, who made great effort in regard with Iran’s sanctions, through the United Nations Security Council, did not consider these sanctions adequate enough and attempted to increase the pressure on Iran, by expanding and intensifying the sanctions, in order to urge the country to submit itself to their demands. In this regard, both sides attempted to initiate synchronized, parallel, and similar sanctions against Iran.

On July 1, 2010, the U.S enacted “The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment” Act. This Act targeted non-American companies that were trading with Iran, and forced these companies to choose either between trading with Iran’s energy sector and remaining in the U.S market [10]. But the significant matter is the broad sanctions, initiated by the EU Union against the Islamic Republic of Iran, which are the most intense sanctions, ever to be made by the European Union against a foreign country. On 16 June 2010, the members of the EU made harsher sanctions against Iran, and reached to an agreement. The made Iran return to the negotiations, by preventing Israel from attacking Iran’s nuclear facilities, and ensuring Arabic countries, which are allied with the U.S that their confrontation with Iran’s nuclear program are considered as the main goals of these sanctions[9].

V. Conclusion

In regard with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Transatlantic stances have not followed a uniform and consistent framework, and during the past three decades, these stances have possessed a most changeable and variable nature. Various convergences and divergences in the U.S and the EU stances have been formed, proportional to conditions and changes towards Iran. After the Islamic Revolution, the U.S and the European countries had common concerns over the occurrence of the Islamic revolution and its spread in the region. Although, their level of hostility was not equal against Iran, however they all shared the same comprehension in their concern about the eventual threats, caused by the Islamic revolution. The United States imposed extensive sanctions against Iran, and cut off their relations with Iran, as well. They (U.S) also openly supported Iraq during the Iraq invasion to Iran. The European society also greatly reduced its ties with Iran, and imposed numerous sanctions on Iran. The end of the Cold War and the revolutions, which had taken place in Iran, caused the signs of disagreement and divergence to be gradually appearing in the transatlantic stances towards Iran. However, unlike the U.S, who was willing to restrain and boycott Iran, the EU increased and expanded its relations with Iran. Disagreeing with the D’Amato act, performing critical and positive negotiations with Iran and opposing the project of behaving with hostility and enmity are among the examples of the disagreements, existing between U.S and EU. But the discussion of Iran’s nuclear program resulted in taking precedence security considerations over all kinds of economic
benefits. In general, it can be said that, whenever Iran has been portrayed as a common “nuclear threat” (during the Iran-Iraq war and Iran’s nuclear program), their stances shifted to convergence; and, whenever they (U.S and EU) have different interests and understandings (during the 1990’s), a form of divergence and disagreement in their stance have been subsequently witnessed. The sanctions of the security of council, the United States, and the EU targeting the common fields (banks, shipping and transportation, oil and gas, Iranian Revolutionary Guards) seek to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear program. This process will probably expand its dimensions with the cooperation of U.S and EU, and West will attempt to prevent Iran from advancing its nuclear program, by various means.

In this framework, it appears that by using and employing clever diplomacy, the Islamic Republic of Iran’s foreign policy apparatus which tries to defeat the Western attempts, is an inevitable necessity. The Islamic Republic of Iran should neutralize the attempts of the West to displaying Iran’s nuclear program as military purposes by emphasizing on the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

REFERENCES


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