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**THE EVOLUTION OF BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN
THE US AND IRAN DURING IRAN-IRAQ WAR (1980-1988)**

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The author explores the evolution of the methods of the US influence to the Islamic Republic of Iran during the Gulf War 1980-1988. Algerian agreement in 1981 did not become the basis for the settlement of US-Iranian relations in the early 1980s, because the Iranian government continued to sponsor terroristic radical extremist organizations in the Middle East, thereby causing harm to the US interests. Therefore, the administration of R. Reagan prolongs the effect of emergency economic measures against Iran and introduces additional sanctions. After reviewing its neutrality, the US prefers a more predictable Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war and announces Operation Staunch, aimed to cooperate with other countries to refuse to supply weapons in Iran. Promoting greater weakening of rivals of each other was considered as the greatest interest of the US in the war where no country could become the leader in the region and prevent the spread of the American influence in the Middle East.

Keywords: bilateral relations of US with Iran, Reagan administration, the Iran-Iraq war, the Near and Middle East, Operation “Staunch”, Operation “Earnest Will”, Irangate scandal.

**ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ДВУСТОРОННИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ США И ИРАНА
ВО ВРЕМЯ ИРАНО-ИРАКСКОЙ ВОЙНЫ (1980-1988 ГГ.)**

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Автор исследует эволюцию методов влияния США на Исламскую Республику Иран в период войны в Персидском заливе 1980-1988 гг. Алжирские соглашения 1981 г. не стали основой для урегулирования американо-иранских отношений в начале 1980-х гг., поскольку иранское правительство продолжало спонсировать террористические действия радикальных экстремистских организаций на Ближнем Востоке, нанося тем самым вред американским интересам. Поэтому администрация Р. Рейгана

продлевает действие чрезвычайных экономических мер в отношении Ирана и вводит дополнительные санкции. Пересмотрев свой нейтралитет, США предпочитает более прогнозируемому Ираке в ирано-иракской войне и объявляет операцию «Непоколебимость», направленную на сотрудничество с другими странами в связи с эмбарго на поставки оружия в Иран. Содействие как можно большему ослаблению соперниками друг друга считалось наибольшим интересом США в ходе войны, чтобы ни одна из стран не смогла стать гегемоном в регионе и помешать распространению американского влияния на Среднем Востоке.

Ключевые слова: двусторонние отношения США с Ираном, администрация Р. Рейгана, ирано-иракская война, Ближний и Средний Восток, операция «Непоколебимость», операция «Истинные намерения», скандал Ирангейт.

The beginning of Iran-Iraq war was the result of striking contradictions between key regional leaders in the Middle East. In fact, since the early 1980s. this military confrontation substantially affect the US relationship with Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). In this context, the key point was the US support of Iraq party and its government.

United States failed to fulfill fully its obligations to IRI under the Algiers agreement in 1981. Abolishing the sanctions imposed toward Tehran by President J. Carter, Washington did not unfreeze Iranian assets located in the US financial institutions [7, p. 105]. In turn, during the rule President R. Reagan extended the effect of emergency economic measures against Iran imposed by J. Carter, of the fact that bilateral relations between countries were not normalized.

Thus, this agreement did not become the basis for the settlement of US-Iranian relations in the early 1980s. The Iranian government continued to sponsor radical extremist organizations in the Middle East to strengthen its foreign policy positions, but causing harm to US interests.

While the rapid influence of the USSR in the Near and Middle East Reagan administration developed the concept of “strategic consensus” which main purpose was to convince countries of the region to postpone the second local security issues and join the US to combat the Soviet Union and countries of the region that support it. However, it took at odds with the strategic interests of the Gulf countries. Regional and domestic problems were much more important than the external threat from the Soviet Union.

Feeling the power of US influence on international relations, the president declares February 16, 1985 the Reagan Doctrine, which declared the administration support of anticommunist movements in the Third World. The doctrine also called “neoglobalism” because its aim was to achieve global impact of the US.

The most fragile period in relations between the United States and Iran were the 1980s. US Relations with the Islamic Republic during the administration of R. Reagan, according to the director of Nixon Centre’s regional strategic programs G. Kemp went through four stages: indifference, hostility, cooperation and finally confrontation that even included some limited combat [10, p. 135].

October 23, 1983 a truck with explosives, the driver of which was Iranian broke through a protective fence and exploded in the center of the US Marines barracks in Beirut. 241 US military died, many were wounded. A few weeks after the terrorist attacks in Beirut another car exploded near the US embassy in Kuwait. Four attacks were made in different areas in Kuwait. Six people died and 80 were injured. Responsibility for the attacks took the Islamic Jihad Organization, which was sponsored by Iran [11].

After this, a number of US citizens were kidnapped in Beirut. To force the United States to cease its military presence in Lebanon, “Hezbollah” began to kidnap Americans from 1982. Among Lebanese hostages was CIA station Chief W. Buckley, who was tortured and killed in 1984. During the 1980’s. “Hezbollah” with the support of IRI seized 17 Americans and 70 citizens of Western European countries. Iran considered its support for extremist radical organizations in the Middle East as a mean to affect American and Israeli interests [1].

In the annual report of the US State Department “Patterns of global terrorism” in 1983 was reported that responsible for the attacks of suicide bombers to the US embassy, barracks of American and French forces in Beirut are the radical Lebanese Shiite organization and Islamic Jihad Organization, which are not provided without Iranian support. Thus, in 1983 the Islamic Republic of Iran began to appear in the list of countries that support international terrorism, which was made by the US State Department.

At the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980 the US did not have an explicit position to support the pro-Soviet Iraq or anti-American Iran. Reagan administration declared neutrality at the beginning of the war, which reflects the strategic, economic and political interests of the United States, including the rejection of selling weapons to both sides; support international efforts for mediation in resolving the conflict; support the Gulf security and position against the proliferation of military operations.

However, the Iranian theocratic elite concentrated its forces near the river Shatt al-Arab – the waterway on the border with Iraq. Fearing the Iranian attack, which could threaten the weak oil-monarchies of the Persian Gulf, Jordan and even Israel, the United States revised its neutrality, preferring a more predictable Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war. Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency helped S. Hussein in combat planning, tactical planning for air attacks, as well as gave information about the deployment of Iranian troops and satellite images [12].

Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran several times during the war and in 1988 used the poison gas against the Kurdish population in northern Iraq. Reagan administration condemned the actions of Baghdad, demanding from S. Hussein promises to give up usage of chemical weapons. However, the administration opposed the act of Congress, which supposed to impose economic sanctions on Iraq, considering it counterproductive in terms of the ability of US influence on Baghdad [4, p. 54].

The conflict between Iran and Iraq eventually turned into a bloody and protracted war. Vice President of Cato Institute G. Healy considers the US

relationship with Iraq as ruthless realpolitik: Reagan administration viewed S. Hussein as the main counterweight to Iran and supported dictator in his bloody eight-year war with the Islamic republic. During Reagan administration, Iraq was expelled from the State Department list of states supporting terrorism, diplomatic relations were restored and granted assistance for Iraqi intelligence. According to scientists T. Carpenter and M. Innocent, promoting the most possible weakening of rivals of each other considered as the biggest US interest in the war that neither of them has become the leader in the region to prevent the spread of American influence in the Persian Gulf [2, p. 68].

At the beginning of 1983 the United States also initiated the Operation Staunch – an official plan aimed at cooperation with other countries refusing the supply of weapons to Iran, including equipment from the US to the Iranian soldiers who were trained and armed by the United States during their close cooperation with the Shah. For January 14, 1983 State Department instructed US embassies in the countries that could export arms to Tehran to warn the governments to stop arms deliveries to IRI because of the great interest of the international community in achieving negotiations on ending the Iran-Iraq war [6, p. 159].

However, during his second term, Reagan administration has secret contacts with the Iranian elite. This initiative, according to J. Kemp, based on the mistaken belief that the Iranian regime included some “moderate” politicians who were ready to cooperate with the United States [10, p. 135].

Considering the futility in implementing the policy of isolation regarding IRI in 1984, the administration of R. Reagan decided to review its foreign policy strategy towards Tehran. Thus Reagan suggested the establishment of political and economic relations with the “moderate” representatives of the Iranian government, which, in his view, could affect the softening of anti-American political line in Tehran; stop providing support by Iran to terrorist organizations in the Middle East; promote the cessation of Iran -Iraq war and ensure that the IRI does not become under Soviet influence [13].

Director of the Department for the Middle East in National Security Council G. Kamp in a memorandum addressed to National Security Advisor R. McFarlane suggested, on the one hand, to intensify the activities of US agents in Iran, on the other – to establish contacts with Iranian government. According to R. McFarlane, the restoration of US-Iranian dialogue was an important event for the national interests of the United States. The importance of US interests toward the Islamic Republic came from Tehran's geographical and geopolitical disposition, between the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf. Therefore, by improving relations with Iran, the Soviet Union could have expanded its presence in the Gulf region, thereby controlled the transit of hydrocarbon resources to the world market [13].

Washington was also concerned about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. If such a scenario US interests could be significantly weakened in the Middle East. This consequently contributing to the weakening of the economic potential of the Western powers. Having launched relations with IRI, the National Security Council and the CIA relied, among other things, to find intermediaries to negotiate for the release of American citizens taken hostage by terrorist organizations in the Middle East. In 1984 the CIA attempted to make contact with Iranian “moderates” and with the help of Israel as mediator to sell American missile, fulfilling the strategy “arms-for-hostages”.

January 24, 1986 American plan of operation was designed. It was assumed that at the beginning US would provide Iran with the intelligence information about Iraqi armed forces. After that, United States Department of Defense had to transfer 1000 anti-tank missiles TOW to Israel and from there to Iran. The next day the Iranians had to facilitate the release of US citizens seized in Beirut, after which Washington supposed to transport another 3,000 missiles TOW to the IRI. The first batch of 500 missiles TOW was delivered February 18, 1986, and the second – 27 February 1986 but none of the hostages had not been released.

November 3, 1986 about US-Iranian illegal relations became aware to international community. Information about the visit of the US delegation to the IRI was published this day in the Lebanese magazine “Al-Shira”. The source of

sensational news “leak” may have been Iranian “moderates” who understood that leaders in Tehran will not forgive them the negotiations with the “Great Satan” and hastened to divert the blow from themselves. In the United States, the message caused great resentment as a secret program of arms supply to Iran, which was first carried out by Israel, was performed contrary to official policy of prohibition of weapons and Operation Staunch. Money received from the sale of weapons to Iran, secretly kept in Swiss banks to finance the Contras, anti-communist group in Nicaragua. Details of the Iran-Contra affair – Irangate were discovered in 1987 and became one of the biggest political scandals in US history [8, p. 31].

Director of the Center for Transatlantic Security R. Hunter considers that the strategy of changing “arms-for-hostages” was important because of its influence for the Gulf region and US policy in strategically considerable region [5, p. 49]. According to Lieutenant Colonel US Marine Corps R. Bell, the supply of arms to Iran can be explained by two strategic considerations. First of Israel, according to sources Israel first pointed to the US government about the importance of the supply of arms to Iran, apparently acting on the basis of its long-standing “periphery policy”, when was trying to maintain good relations with the Iranian leadership. Secondly, it was strategically important for the US to improve relations with the Islamic Republic. Like his predecessors, President R. Reagan was concerned about the attack of the Soviet Union on American interests in the Middle East, and after the invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet Union could take a course on Iran, and eventually control of the Gulf region.

Later, after the scandal concerning the case “Irangate” in 1986 economic relations between the United States and IRI in 1987-1988 were significantly complicated. October 29, 1987, President R. Reagan signed Executive Order 12613: Prohibiting Imports from Iran, which stressed that Iran, has supported international terrorist organizations at the national level [3]. Based on this Executive Order, the United States introduced a ban on the import of Iranian production. Washington ultimate goal was to reduce Iranian financial aid that it provided to international terrorist organizations at the expense of export revenues [13, p. 6]. The White House

has banned the import of Iranian goods to a total value of \$ 1 billion. American oil companies were also not allowed to import Iranian oil to the United States for consumption, but they were allowed to continue to buy Iranian oil for non-US markets through their foreign subsidiaries. Imposed American sanctions forced IRI to seek new economic partners. However, Iran has deliberately avoided the traditional, pre-revolutionary suppliers from Western Europe and Japan. Government of IRI at that time thought that the American political influence can hinder free trade between Iran and Japan or Western Europe. Thus, Iranian economic ties with the United States significantly reduced, and trade and economic relations with Eastern Europe and Islamic countries came to the fore.

In early 1987, Iraq attacked Iranian oil vessels and terminals in order to reduce the possibility of Iran to finance the war. The United States did not oppose such actions as Iranian victory was not among the US interests. However, Iran began in response the “tanker war” against Iraq, threatening the GCC states, particularly Kuwait, which supported Iraq economically and politically. Bombing impacted on oil supplies from the Persian Gulf. Reagan administration understood that supporting the GCC states, it would distance itself from Iran. If US try to come to terms with the IRI, they cannot defend the Persian Gulf.

That’s why in mid-1987 the Reagan administration launched Operation Earnest Will of escorting Kuwaiti tankers in the Persian Gulf that have been re-registered under the US flag. October 16, 1987, the tanker Sea Isle City under the American flag was hit in Kuwaiti waters by Iranian anti-ship missile Silkworm, during which 18 people were injured [10, p. 135]. Reagan administration carried out an operation of escorting Kuwaiti tankers having more political than military motives: to block any benefits that Soviet Union could have from war in the Middle East: to support Iraq in conflict with the IRI and persuade Arab states in the Persian Gulf that arms sales to Iran was aberration [5, p. 51].

Although Washington did not want to exacerbate the conflict with Iran and did not intend to lose its influence in the Gulf, however, trembling began in Congress according the Operation Earnest Will and naval deployments. Congress has

repeatedly referred to the War Powers Act 1973, which limited the powers of the president and established a period of 60 days for the participation of US forces in military operations abroad, after which Congress could either sanction their continued presence or forces should be withdrawn from the region. However, R. Reagan defended his position by persuading Congress not changed the direction of US foreign policy.

This was the beginning of the constant presence of the naval forces of the United States in the Persian Gulf. US Warships escorted tankers and conducted search of mines in the Persian Gulf. As a result, fleets of Iran and the United States were dangerously close to each other. This could lead to clashes. In 1987 the Iranian military aircraft attacked, as Iranians claimed – wrongly, the American destroyer Stark, killing 37 American sailors. Later the Washington Navy destroyed Iranian oil platform in the Persian Gulf in response to a rocket attack by IRI of the tanker that went under the American flag from Kuwait.

In mid-April 1988 there was a real sea battle between the US Navy and Iran. This naval battle was the largest since World War II according to the number of ships. The purpose of the White House was the destruction of Iranian oil platforms in the Gulf as retribution for undermining on the Iranian mine laid down in international waters, the American frigate “Samuel”. During the operation, the warships and planes of Tehran and Washington have used rockets, but the advantage of US forces was noticeable. IRI has lost six missile boats and the United States only one helicopter, which crashed at the time of departure.

The last act of the US-Iranian military confrontation during the reign of R. Reagan was the hit in 1988 of the Iranian passenger airliner “Airbus” of airline “Iran Air”, shot down by a missile fired by the American cruiser “Vincennes”, killing 290 people. US later claimed that the team took the cruiser liner for an Iranian fighter [9]. This tragic event has affected pragmatically minded Iranians. Many Iranians and citizens of Middle Eastern countries believed that Washington deliberately shot down an airliner.

Thus, the R. Reagan administration began a long-term strategy of containment Iran, which continued the next administration. The eight years of the Iran-Iraq war ended with UN resolution 598 and the ceasefire in August 1988. Iran was weakened, military and politically destroyed, millions of dead, the spiritual leader R. Khomeini was ill, the Iranian people were deeply demoralized and economic losses amounted to \$ 350 billions. Also, it is clear that maintaining Iraq, Washington has significantly strengthened the hostility of the Iranian population. Iraq restored relatively quickly equipped with a strong, experienced and well-trained army of one million soldiers. American political analysts were increasingly expressing concern about the rising power of Saddam Hussein and in August 1990 they were confirmed, when Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait.

Consequently, the important interests of the United States in the region included securing access to oil and limitation of military and political control of Soviet Union over the Gulf. These interests had the crucial meaning to the promotion of American influence in the region. Foreign policy of the presidential administration in the 1980s. was formed in accordance with the internal and external threats to the political, economic and strategic interests of the United States in the Middle East.

According to the possibility of IRI to influence the anti-American policy of radical extremist organizations in the Middle East, Reagan administration attempted to establish an informal bilateral dialogue with moderate representatives of the Iranian government. After publication in the US these secret US-Iranian contacts exploded the internal political scandal according the illegal sale of American weapons to Iran. Thus, US-Iranian diplomatic relations were not reproached since their confrontation in 1979.

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