

## **The Causes of Ineffectiveness of US Sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran based on the Political, Economic and Geopolitical Components**

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### **Abstract**

Sanctions have been used as a foreign policy tool since the post-World War II as an alternative means to war, to change governments or switch their behavior. From that period until now, the methods of imposing sanctions have become distinctive and complicated. Additionally, sanctions have become increasingly smarter day by day. The history of sanctions imposed by the United States of America against the Islamic Republic of Iran dates back to the first year after the victory of the Islamic Revolution (1980). The sanctions imposed against Iran are among the most durable and at the same time the most extensive ones imposed against the government and people of any country in terms of duration, scope and methods of application. The general conclusions are that the application of sanctions against Iran, even with different goals, produced sufficient impact during the long time of their application, resulting in economic losses, great people's suffering and relative isolation of Iran.

However, it did not achieve the intended goals previously defined as basis for their application. In this article, assuming the ineffectiveness of the sanctions (considering the failure to change of change in the government/behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the main goals of the United States, we seek to investigate the reasons for this ineffectiveness. In this article, by introducing the components and examples of political, economic, technological factors and geopolitical advantages the arguments for the ineffectiveness of the American sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran have been presented. Qualitative document analysis constitutes the research method applied in this article.

**Keywords:** Sanctions, Iran, America, Effectiveness, Geopolitics, Economy.

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## **1. Introduction**

US sanctions against Iran are among the oldest sanctions in the world. These sanctions started in 1979 at the same time as the issue of the hostage taking of the American Embassy employees in Tehran with executive order 4702 and 12170 by Jimmy Carter and gradually increased in its dimensions. Numerous executive orders and various laws are the result of the hostile actions of the United States in the past years. Executive orders 12613, 12957 and 12959, 13382, 13553, 13574, 13590, 13599, etc. are examples of the extensive measures taken by the US in the past years to institutionalize and structure the sanctions against Iran. Actions that reached their peak during the Obama and Trump eras.

By examining the series of US sanctions against Iran, it can be concluded that the US sanctions have not been effective due to the failure to achieve the set goals. The total sanctions in the last 40 years have been carried out against Iran with two main goals: one is to change the Iranian regime and the other is to change Iran's behavior. The studies conducted indicate that despite the fact that the sanctions have caused many problems for Iran, it has not been able to fulfill the main demands of the authors of the sanctions. More precisely, from the point of view of evaluating the effectiveness, considering that the original intentions of the innovative actor and designer have not been fulfilled, it can be concluded that despite the fact that the sanctions have created problems for the economy and society of Iran, but for the United States, it lacked the element of effectiveness because his ultimate goals have not been achieved; There has been neither a change in diet nor a change in behavior on a macro level. According to experts, Iran's influence in the Middle East region is increasing and Iran currently has reliable strategic allies in the region. The Atlantic Council think tank in a report entitled "Revolution Unveiled: A Closer Look at Iran's Presence and Influence in the Middle East" points to new and less known aspects of Iran's power in the Middle East. According to the authors of this report, the four levers of "supporting Shia proxy forces", "issuing ideology", "providing weapons" and "establishing transnational networks" are effective in Iran's regional success against the United States and its allies (Smyth and et al, 2017). In theory, the logic of forty-year sanctions should prevent the increase of Iran's regional power and influence, but in practice, this has not been the case. It seems that the sanctions have not been effective on Iran and

this has various reasons, including political issues, fate, paradoxical sanctions in the international political economy, the internal situation of Iran, i.e. the behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the people of Iran, and finally the limited ability of sanctions. in playing the role of an independent and determining variable (violation of ability). This article tries to evaluate the effectiveness of US sanctions against Iran and its reasons in several parts: In the first part, the nature, goals and reasons of the use of sanctions in the international system will be discussed. In the second part, it will be devoted to the objectives of sanctions imposed by the United States. The next section will examine the reasons for the lack of effectiveness of sanctions, and finally, the conclusion of the report will be presented.

## **2.Methodology**

In this paper, descriptive-analytic research method is used. Data gathering procedure is also based on library methods and the use of Internet resources.

## **3.Research Literature**

Jones and Portela in the article “Evaluating the success of international sanctions: a new research agenda” It takes a critical look at the previous researches in evaluating the success of economic sanctions and expresses the shortcomings of existing studies on sanctions. In this article, it also evaluates the effectiveness of the sanction in the point of view of the Sanctioning country, the country that has been sanctioned and the international system and the mutual nature of these three components in the sanction.

Makkonen and Mitze in The Article “Geo-political conflicts, economic sanctions and international knowledge flows” It examines the impact of geopolitical conflicts and sanctions on the publication of scientific works, which means that sanctions are no longer just a tool of foreign policy, but also affect other social and economic spheres.

Some researchers, by examining the sanctions imposed by the United Nations and some countries, believe that these sanctions have not weakened the sovereignty of the sanctioned countries, but instead have strengthened the power of the sovereignty in these countries, and therefore they believe that The sanction has been ineffective in achieving its goals because the economy of the sanctioned countries adapts to the conditions of the sanction, and the rulers of these countries strengthen the national solidarity

among the people of their country to counter the sanction by emphasizing the oppressive actions of the sanctioning countries (Galtung,1967). (Doxy, 1980, Tsebelis,1990; Pape,1997) Some also believe that sanctions cannot be successful without other tools, and sanctions, contrary to their original purpose, cannot prevent military conflict (Smeet, 2018). Some other researchers on the effectiveness of sanctions They emphasize as a tool in international politics (Cortright and Lopez,2000; Baldwin,2020).

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

One of the concepts that can be used to explain the theoretical foundations of this article is "Geopolitics of Resistance". Resistance has been a topic of discussion for a long time, and in a practical and informal way, it can be said that since oppression in society has become objective, naturally, the topic of resistance has also become a topic. But in the past years, the discussion of resistance has been theoretically formulated by various thinkers and various literatures that have been presented in a scientific manner. The idea of resistance, especially in the last two decades, has become practical in different regions, especially in the Middle East. The resistance of Shiites in different countries against internal arrogance or tyranny are concrete examples of this issue.

One of the thinkers who formulated the topic of "Geopolitics of Resistance" theoretically in the past years is Paul Routledge. In a book entitled *Geopolitical thoughts in the 20th Century*, which he co-authored with Dolby and Auto tile, this thinker has well raised the issue of geopolitics of resistance and discussed the angles of the resistance debate as well as the effect of geopolitics on the issue of resistance. "Thousands of stories can be counted that narrate history from the point of view of those who have been involved in resistance against governments and geopolitical actions. These stories keep people's memories of resistance alive and at the same time provide new definitions of power that are not attributed to military power, wealth, official command and cultural control. These stories of resistance can be described as geopolitics from below that follows from the subjugated. As a result, situations that challenge the dominance of the military, politics, state culture and dominant classes from within societies are called geopolitics from below, according to Paul Routledge (Routledge and et al,2008:557 quoted by Ezzati and et al.,2014:41).

Another thinker who developed ideas about resistance is Michel Foucault. Foucault talks about power as something in circulation and believes that resistance cannot be independent of power. According to Foucault, the characteristic of power relations is that it relies on multiple points of resistance. These points play the role of enemy, target, support or achieving power relations. These resistance points can be anywhere in the power network. What Foucault brought is a modern concept of resistance at the level of micropolitics that is used against centralized power. (Hosseinzadeh Rad,2009:121-122 quoted by Ezzati and et al.,2014:42) Best and Kellner also believe that Foucault's postmodern policies are trying to destroy totalitarian strategies and create various forms of resistance, such as destruction of identity prisons, exclusionary discourses and encouraging the increase of differences in all its types. Since de-subjectification or the negation of the subject is the focus of the discussion of resistance in Foucault's thought, resistance, like the subject, is based on the three axes of truth, power, and morality. Resistance, like the use of force, is against power and its truth regime, and like power, it has two forms, positive and negative. The positive form of resistance, which emerges from the framework of domination, emerges from Foucault's view in its aesthetic form. But the essence of negative resistance is the negation and refusal of subjugation resulting from the regime of truth-power and the limitations that create it, in order to achieve liberation and freedom, which itself can be divided into two theoretical and practical forms (Parsania and et al.,2015:47). Therefore, Michel Foucault believes that power relations do not exist without resistance, and resistance, like power, has diversity and can be completed in the form of regional and global strategies (Yazdani and et al.,2016:130). In addition, the geopolitical concept of modern Shiism can strengthen the theoretical foundations of this research along with the geopolitical concept of resistance. The geopolitics of Shiism has been given too much attention in Middle east in the past years. In such a way that in the geopolitics of domination, the formation and representation of the identity and politicization of Shiites and the emergence of the new geopolitics of Shiism in the Middle East as an active and reciprocal relationship between power, politics and geography and a project in line with the interests of regional and extra-regional actors. Interpreted and in the form of geopolitics of resistance, the revival of Shiites is explained in the context of a social

movement of the isolated and deprived forces of the Middle East societies in order to transition to favorable conditions (Javadani Moghadam,2012:33).

#### **4-1.The Nature, Goals and Reasons of Sanctions in the International System**

Sanctions, both economic and non-economic, are an important issue in international relations after the Second World War and especially in the post-Cold War era and the beginning of the 21st century (Nephew,2017: 11). The fact that should be considered about sanctions is that no two sanctions regimes are the same and the complexities and differences of the cases of each country and each part of the sanctions make it difficult to draw the same conclusions about the sanctions. Depending on the purpose of the embargo (concerns related to human rights, democratization, extradition of criminal suspects, supporting regional and global efforts to create peace, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, countering terrorism), the regime used in the embargo is also different. In fact, sanctions are sometimes used as an independent diplomatic tool and sometimes as an auxiliary tool to achieve regional and global goals (Biersteker,2015:172). Sanctions pursue a different set of goals; Sometimes sanctions are used in order to force or change the behavior of a government, sometimes in order to access the resources needed to participate in certain activities or to prevent a country from participating in certain activities, and finally in order to humiliate, or discrediting a government is used in domestic and foreign public opinion Sanctions are either economic or non-economic. Military sanctions (prohibition of buying and selling military weapons), political sanctions (not issuing visas to officials of the sanctioned government in an international organization, opposing the proposal of the sanctioned country or cutting ties or sanctioning officials of the sanctioned country) and cultural sanctions (restriction to participate in gatherings or cultural and sports events and hosting important international events such as the World Cup, Olympics, etc.) are included in the category of non-economic sanctions (Ilieva and et al,2018:202).

#### **4-2. Objectives of Sanctions**

##### **4-2-1. Sanctions Pursue the Following Goals**

1. Forcing the target country to change unfavorable policies, using economic restrictions for a sufficient period of time in order to change the regime;
- 2.Preventing a country that is suspected of adopting an undesirable policy in the future;
3. Denying the target country access to financial resources used

to promote an undesirable policy; 4. Denying the target country access to its assets as compensation; 5. Diplomatic isolation of the target country to influence the sanctions on the undesirable policies of the target country (Forrer,2017:2-3) 6. Geopolitical isolation, which means that the country applying sanctions intends to deprive the target country of its geopolitical benefits by imposing sanctions. By adopting various sanctions, the sanctioning country can exclude the target country from energy plans, corridors and transit routes and practically isolate the target country geopolitically. This case is important because it leaves strategic and long-term effects. It is also worth mentioning that sanctions may be applied with the aim of achieving a combination of the above goals.

#### **4-3 .Reasons for Sanctions**

Economic sanctions are a popular tool for great powers for some reason. Some of the reasons for this attraction and application are: 1. Sanctions can be designed and implemented quickly; 2. their primary consequences and effects are tangible and immediate; 3. It is easy to justify their use as a response to adverse international actions that are sensitive to them by everyone; 4. The economic penalties for responding and actually reacting to an international incident, no matter how big or small, can be measured. 5. Sanctions provide an aggressive and yet non-military response in foreign policy (Forrer,2017:2). 6. Sixth, the negative consequences of the application of sanctions for the applying country are extremely low and controllable compared to other options such as war. 7- The last point is that the sensitivity of other government actors, non-government activists and also public opinion towards sanctions is extremely low and sometimes even neutral. This insensitivity shows itself well in addition to high sensitivities against the option of war, coup, color revolution, etc.

#### **4-4 .Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Sanctions**

Evaluation of the effectiveness of sanctions should be done with a realistic view. It is not the case that the application of sanctions always achieves the results desired by its policy makers (whether it is the ability to change behavior or the imposition of behavior change or the ability to limit the target actors). Because many factors are effective in this field. The sanctions process is a dynamic process. Applying sanctions along with internal factors such as the country's management and the country's potential ability to deal with sanctions can have different effects. Based on this, the same sanction

will have different effects in different countries and in different contexts (Mohabati,2018:48). Many believe that the use of sanctions as a pressure tool is not very effective, and although sanctions, especially economic sanctions, are used a lot, they often fail (Hakimian,2019) and for this reason, the sanctioning countries They take several strategies to succeed in applying sanctions; For example, countries applying sanctions try to apply sanctions multilaterally and with the participation of all countries in order to increase the possibility of their success, because they have learned from experience that sanctions can only be successful if they are socially inclusive; and be used continuously and have the necessary legitimacy and credibility among other powers (Manzoor and Mostafapour,2013:23) On the other hand, sanctions can be effective if a detailed assessment and comprehensive information about the vulnerable points of the target country is available; Because when this information is not available, the design of sanctions will be weakened, and on the other hand, any sanctions will face unpredictable consequences and damages (Forrer,2017:7). For the success of sanctions, the sanctioning countries try to apply "smart" sanctions that target specific sectors and specific individuals of the sanctioned countries. After experts criticized the application of all-round sanctions and its negative effects on the life and well-being of the general public, since the second half of the 1990s, a review of the use of sanctions tools and the use of targeted and smart sanctions instead of all-round sanctions has been considered. (Manzoor and Mostafapour,2013:23) even though these sanctions are called smart and purposeful; Collective sanctions are in practice, which are more than effective in changing the behavior of governments ; they cause pressure on the people and ordinary citizens of the countries. Especially vulnerable groups such as the middle and lower classes and patients are more harmed by sanctions (Manzoor and Mostafapour,2013:23). In the following, some features, components, and consequences of sanctions will be examined in general.

#### **4-4-1. Paradoxical Situation of Sanctions in the International Political Economy**

The creators, designers and enforcers of sanctions state that the most important reason for imposing sanctions is to maintain international peace, stability and security; However, the reality is that sanctions challenge international trade and economy rather than serving international peace and stability. From the point of view of the international economy, bilateral or

multilateral commercial and economic relations are mostly a win-win game, and creating any kind of restrictions and obstacles on the way of commercial activities through sanctions causes the vulnerability of both the sanctioning and the sanctioned parties. Because the process of trade, investment and financial interactions of the parties is affected and leads to a decrease in income, an increase in costs, an increase in financial rates and the slowness of the technology development process (Manzoor and Mostafapour,2013: 23) Researchers believe that imposing sanctions is a very costly and difficult process, whose effectiveness and value are often ambiguous and questionable (Ilieva and et al,2018:202). Sanctions have destructive economic effects; It weakens economic growth, disrupts production and causes the loss of jobs and as a result more unemployment, and also sanctions can stimulate inflation by limiting imports and creating a currency crisis (Hakimian,2019). They can be effective by breaking trade ties, imposing economic costs, and fulfilling their punitive role, but in practice they often fail to achieve their stated political goals.

#### **4-4-2. The Status of the Effectiveness of Sanctions in the World Economy**

In today's world, where countries are operating in an increasingly integrated and interwoven global economy, sanctions cannot easily be considered successful. The globalized economy presents the greatest challenge to the design and implementation of successful economic sanctions, as the interconnectedness of countries has increased, countries are connected and integrated through a complex network of trade and investment laws and regulations. This global economy has caused the mutual dependence of countries on each other for economic growth. (Forrer,2017:7). For example, after the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and imposed new financial and trade sanctions against Iran, instead of using the usual mechanisms in global financial exchanges, Iranians started bilateral and multilateral trade and financial exchanges with their economic partners. Studies and statistics show that in the face of sanctions, Russians have made changes and economic developments in order to be able to face the future sanctions of the United States and the West. Among them, Moscow has strengthened its foreign exchange reserves and assets, has reduced its external debt, and has changed the stock of US Treasury securities in favor of the euro, yen, and yuan, and on the other hand, economic relations. It has expanded itself with non-western countries such as China and India. Russia

has also reduced the share of the dollar in its transactions with many of its main trading partners and, while supporting its domestic agricultural sector, has limited the import of agricultural products from Europe and the United States (Feoktistov,2019). This can lead to the fragility of US economic sanctions against other countries.

#### **4-4-3. The Negative Impact of Sanctions on the Global Economy**

Economists believe that in the process of regulating sanctions, the effects of sanctions on global markets and the costs imposed on economic and commercial enterprises and global financial affairs should also be taken into account. Something that is less considered in sanctions. This issue is especially important in unilateral sanctions, because without the presence of accompanying governments in the field of international politics, the application of sanctions will be disrupted (Kahn,2017). Studies have shown that US sanctions, which have been imposed unilaterally against countries under the pretext of countering terrorism or drug trafficking, have had little impact on the global economy due to the existence of alternative markets. Also, studies have shown that sanctions are a tool with limited effectiveness to change the behavior of target governments. Research by the Institute for International Economics has shown that US sanctions in the 1970s and 1980s were successful only one out of five times (Hufbauer and et al,1997). On the other hand, it should be noted that the sanctions have a very negative effect on the American economy, and this has caused a lot of criticism from domestic economists and businessmen of the United States of America against the sanctions imposed by this country against other countries, and many experts consider sanctions as a tool in international politics, they consider it a tool for success in the American election campaign (Kahn, 2017). Sanctions, in addition to affecting the markets and businesses and industry of the target countries, can have deep effects beyond the economy of the target countries and also affect the countries and companies related to the sanctioning or sanctioned country. The experience of US sanctions against North Korea, Russia, Venezuela, and Iran has shown that these sanctions have negatively affected the economic relations of the United States with the world's major economies, such as China, and do not necessarily lead to these economies' cooperation with the United States. Therefore, they are not very efficient. The dependence of some countries,

such as China and India, on Iranian oil caused the Trump administration to challenge Iran's oil embargo in recent years (Pant and Anwer,2018:2).

#### **4-4-4. Sanction breaking Prevents the Sanctions from being Effective**

The purpose of trade sanctions is to reduce trade, including exports and imports, or both. Financial sanctions reduce trade by reducing investment, currency or credit to the sanctioned country or by raising the cost of credit. Statistical studies have shown that in trade sanctions that include exports and imports, sanctions limit the exports of the sanctioned country, while imports to the sanctioned country are less affected by sanctions. Because the mercantile tendencies of governments make them see their interests in preventing imports and exporting to embargoed countries (Hufbauer and et al,1997).

On the other hand, the embargo increases bilateral trade relations between the embargoed country and the third countries and economic competitors of the embargoing country. In the meantime, studies have shown that when the sanctions are multilateral, they have a negative effect on the flow of trade at the world level. (Petrescu,2016:629) Van Bergijk's studies in 1995 have shown that after the imposition of sanctions, economic opportunities are provided for countries that are not involved in this tension in any way (Caruso,2003:15). The report of the Trade Development Organization in 2018 emphasizes that, in total, Iran's trade balance with 25 target countries is positive 9 billion 416 million dollars and the volume of trade with them reaches 72 billion 735 million dollars. Out of these 25 countries, Iran's trade balance is positive with 15 countries and negative with 10 countries. In the meantime, Iran's exports have grown with the member countries of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the largest import to Iran has been from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). China is Iran's largest trading partner with 19 billion and 533 million dollars in trade (exports and imports). Iran's trade balance with this country is one billion and 98 million dollars negative. This is while the US government withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018 and approved a new round of sanctions against Iran.

Studies show that another challenge created by sanctions is the creation of informal markets and underground and secret transactions by the sanctioned countries, which try to use the black market, money laundering, smuggling of sanctioned goods for export, and other such things. By bypassing the sanctions, they should reduce the pressure of the sanctions on their country's

economy. Also, sanctions increase corruption, bribery, theft and other crimes related to informal activities to circumvent sanctions. Informal activities that are affected by economic sanctions; They are divided into two categories: criminal (such as smuggling, forgery and narcotics) and illegal activities such as not declaring wages, not reporting self-employment income or informal production of legal goods (Petrescu,2016). The Islamic Republic has also taken several solutions to circumvent the sanctions. In an article in Foreign Policy, Mark Dubowitz pointed out 16/16 ways and methods that Iran and its trading partners use to violate and break sanctions, and he does not consider circumventing sanctions to be a difficult task in these circumstances (Dubowitz,2012).

#### **4-5. Reasons for Ineffectiveness of Sanctions against Islamic Republic Iran**

##### **A- Political Reasons**

##### **- People's Support of the System and Political Participation**

The participation of people in the elections of different periods of the Islamic Council, the presidency and the city and village councils has been remarkable despite the sanctions and difficult economic conditions and even with the presence of the Corona virus. The participation rate in the presidential elections of 2021 despite the Corona conditions was 48.8% (Mehr News Agency,2021), and the parliamentary elections was 42.57% despite the spread of Corona (irna.ir,2020). The presence of millions of people at the funeral of Sardar Soleimani, who were martyred by the order of Trump and the planning of the United States, and the condemnation of this action by the people and cases like this are among the most important symptoms of the people's support for the regime.

##### **-Political Countermeasure**

On December 11, 2019, Parliament members approved a plan entitled "Strategic action to lift sanctions and protect the rights of the Iranian nation", according to which the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran was obliged to produce uranium with 20% enrichment immediately after the approval of this law (the full text of the resolution of the Parliament in the plan of strategic action for the cancellation of sanctions,2020).

##### **-Cooperation with Regional and International Allies (China and Russia)**

After the withdrawal of the United States of America from the JCPOA and the tightening of sanctions against Iran, which caused the termination of cooperation between Western countries and America's allies with Iran, Iran

expanded its diplomatic relations with the countries of the East (China and Russia) and the policy of increasing cooperation with the countries of the region. Undertook Both China and Russia are considered international rivals of the United States, which are increasingly reducing their distance from American power in all technical, political, economic, commercial, scientific and technological fields. On the other hand, both countries have been under sanctions or pressure from the United States of America and European countries in recent decades, and therefore they can form the club of sanctioned countries together with Iran and other sanctioned countries. Using the successful experience of China and Russia to neutralize the sanctions can be a good example for Iran to deal with the sanctions of the United States and its global allies. The cooperation between Iran and China in the post JCPOA period was a 25-year agreement that provides comprehensive and economic cooperation between the two countries. Considering the history of Iran's cooperation with Western countries, both before and after the revolution, this move by Iran was a big turn in the direction of dealing with sanctions and disconnection, which the West itself was the main cause of. This contract and measures like this provide the basis for attracting investment in various industries that were vulnerable during the sanctions period and due to the sanctions and non-entry of parts and equipment to Iran; Including oil, telecommunications, cars, as well as infrastructural measures in the development of ports and infrastructures, which in turn will lead to the growth and development of the country. It should be noted that, as we have already mentioned, cooperation among embargoed countries is one of the most effective measures in dealing with embargo. Before Iran and China, we have seen a successful example of this cooperation in the gas contract between China and Russia. This agreement also includes benefits for Russia, therefore, Iran simultaneously has two main members of the Security Council who have the right of veto. On the other hand, oil and gas production will increase in three main fields of Iran as a result of this contract. Also, China's oil imports from Iran will increase (Qazlo,2021). Iran has a special view on the great powers of the East, namely China and Russia, as the main global powers in the economic, military, and security fields, and sees cooperation with them as a shortcut to prosperity after several decades of stagnation and sanctions. In fact, these countries are considered as a historical opportunity for the independence of

Iran's political economy from the West dominated by America (Ehtashami and Behjat,2021).

**-The Continuation of Iran's Regional Policies**

After the withdrawal of the Trump administration from the JCPOA, although the sanctions applied against Iran returned and large companies left Iran, Iran's oil sales suffered and Iran's economy suffered a widespread recession. However, there was no change in Iran's behavior. Building military weapons, supporting resistance groups in the region (Lebanon Hezbollah, Kataib Hezbollah, Asaib Ahl Haq, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Battalion, Al-Ashtar Battalion Bahrain, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), confronting and opposing the Zionist regime, opposition to the presence of the United States in the region (Kaltman,2022:3), all show that Iran's behavior has not changed. According to US officials, the purpose of the sanctions was to force Iran to stop acquiring weapons of mass destruction, end support for terrorist groups, end opposition to Israel, and end human rights violations. The sanctions of the United States of America limited all political, economic and diplomatic interactions of Iran and it has been one of the most severe punishment regimes so far. Nevertheless, and according to experts and also the report of the American Congress (Katzman,2022:2), the unilateral sanctions of the United States have not been very successful in curbing Iran, especially since it did not have the necessary support of other countries (O' Sullivan,2010: 10).

**-Lack of Political Support of other Countries with Trump's Move to Withdraw from JCPOA:**

Another reason that can be put forward as the reason for the ineffectiveness of sanctions against Iran is that with Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA, although the countries actually supported this action, at least at the political level and in practical policies, they are against this action. This is important because the countries' political opposition to Trump's action disturbed the necessary preparations for a political consensus against Tehran. The difference that highlights the policies of Obama and Trump regarding the confrontation with Iran is this element of consensus. This means that Obama, with his series of measures, was able to attract their political support in addition to supporting the actions of countries to sanction Iran

and prepare the foundations for a political consensus against J.A. Iran, but Trump could not achieve success in the political support of other countries.

### **B. Economic Reason**

After the harsh sanctions of 1384 to 1392 and after the withdrawal of the United States of America from the JCPOA, Iran tried to think of a strategic plan to eliminate the economic structural weaknesses left over from the Iraq war against Iran. One path was the "resistance economy" strategy, which is actually import substitution in order to reduce external pressures on Iran's economy. The emphasis of resistance economy is on economic self-sufficiency and strengthening the national economy. In this direction, after the smart sanctions of the United States of America, the Iranian government took a step in the direction of domestic investment and export diversification. After the intensification of sanctions, the Iranian government, by turning towards Asian countries and especially trying to strengthen economic cooperation with its neighbors, tried to greatly reduce the power and pressure of sanctions and at the same time provide the ground for the globalization of Iran's economy. Gasoline export to Venezuela, economic cooperation with neighboring countries, proximity to the economic powers of the East, including China and Russia, restrictions on the import of non-essential goods, strengthening the production of petroleum products and preventing the sale of crude oil, building and selling oil in a mixed manner, targeting imports and strengthening non-oil exports was one of these measures. At the same time, Iran has been trying to de-escalate and build trust in its relations with the European Union and international organizations so that through these diplomatic measures, economic pressures will be reduced and the United States of America will not accompany other countries in imposing sanctions. Also, during this period, the Islamic Republic of Iran tried to have a more active presence in regional agreements such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union, which is led by Russia. 2018 (Ehtashami and Behjat, Asianization in direct connection with resistance economy, 2021).

Iran has also turned to strengthening its economic cooperation with neighboring countries after the tightening of sanctions. For example, in connection with the countries of Central Asia, it has strengthened the sale of its manufactured goods, and in the field of energy, based on common interests, it has provided the fields of cooperation with the countries of this

region more than in the past. Iran's security cooperation with neighboring countries in the north and west of the country has also strengthened the confidence of these countries and encouraged them to expand cooperation to the economic field. In addition to neighboring countries, Iran has also been able to take small but effective steps in the field of cooperation with distant neighbors. Among them, the cooperation between Iran and India both in the field of energy and in the development of Chabahar port as an access route to Central Asia is an example of this. It should be mentioned that Iran is trying to take advantage of the competition between China and India in advancing its economic goals. Considering India's positive view of Iran as a reliable economic partner for the supply of Indian goods and services, in West Asia, strengthening cooperation with India can act as a balancing factor in economic cooperation between Iran, Russia and China (Ehtashami and Behjat, *Asianization in direct connection with resistance economy*, 2021).

Another point that was very effective in the ineffectiveness of the sanctions was the improved capability of Iran in evading the sanctions. Taking advantage of the sanctions experience of the past years, as well as taking into account its acquired and inherent abilities, J.A. Iran made the most efforts in circumventing the sanctions and achieved many successes in this field as well. The sign of this can be seen by comparing Iran's economic situation with other countries under sanctions.

### **C. Technology Development and Nuclear Program**

The Islamic Republic of Iran, despite all the restrictions and sanctions imposed against the development of Iran's nuclear industry by Western countries and international organizations, has been able to make significant progress in this field in the past two decades. Construction of advanced centrifuges, enrichment of three percent, twenty percent and with higher enrichment potentially, increasing the speed of enrichment, building the necessary equipment for enrichment, Iran's scientific progress in the field of heavy water production as well as the production of radiopharmaceuticals, the use of nuclear technology in agriculture and other peaceful cases are all examples of progress in this field despite restrictions and sanctions. This process did not stop even after Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA and the tightening of sanctions, and according to experts, this shows that these restrictions have not been able to affect Iran (irna.ir,2019). Since 2005,

several resolutions against Iran have been approved in the Security Council, in which more and more severe sanctions against Iran have been approved and applied. Despite all these resolutions and numerous external pressures, the Islamic Republic of Iran, by relying on domestic experts, was able to localize the nuclear industry and become one of the 13 countries that have the knowledge of the complete nuclear cycle, including uranium exploration, extraction and production of yellow cake and its conversion into gas.

#### **D. Geopolitical Reasons and Benefits**

In addition to the political, economic and technological reasons that were mentioned earlier, geopolitical reasons should be mentioned as an effective and even sometimes decisive factor. Without exaggeration, it should be said that Iran's geopolitical position has brought undeniable advantages. Neighboring with 15 countries, wide water borders, vast and uncontrollable land borders, location in the Souq al-Jishi region, happening in the center of concentration of energy and other natural resources and reserves. The sharp edge of the executive orders and sanctions laws of the US Congress against Iran slows down and is less effective. Undoubtedly, if this number of sanctions were applied to a country without these geopolitical advantages, it could have much more destructive effects.

Considering its special position, Iran is considered one of the unique countries from the point of view of geopolitical and geoeconomic advantages. Some of these advantages include: Iran's location next to the Persian Gulf, which is considered the heartland of the world's fossil energy. The location of the Caspian Sea in the north of Iran, which is the second priority of the world's energy. The geopolitical and geoeconomic connection of Iran in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia with its location in the Persian Gulf has given Iran an unmatched role. On the other hand, the growing need of countries, especially in East Asia, for the energy of this region has doubled the importance of Iran. This is more apparent in the continuation of Iran's oil sales to East Asian countries even after the reimposition of sanctions on May 8, 2018.

The use of this situation to evade sanctions has been cited and pointed out many times by experts. In the latest example, Bloomberg refers to the cooperation between Iran and Russia using the geopolitical capacity of the two countries in a report. According to this report, Iran and Russia are

building a passage of 1860 miles that extends from Eastern Europe to the Indian Ocean. Bloomberg admits that Russia and Iran, both of which are under pressure from Western sanctions, are cooperating with an eastward-looking policy. The Sea of Azov is located on the northern bank of this route, which is located between the Crimean Peninsula and the mouth of the Don River. In addition to reducing the transportation route, the proposed route will create a new development in the region (<https://www.bloomberg.com>).

Referring to the number of exports and imports of the country in the past years under sanctions also proves that Iran has always experienced the most economic transactions with neighboring countries. Due to the wide land and water borders, the countries can stay away from OFAC observers who are in charge of sanctions against Iran. For example, according to the Trading economics report in 2018, which was the beginning of western sanctions against Iran, Iran's most exports were to China, Iraq, UAE, Afghanistan, South Korea, and Turkey, respectively (<https://tradingeconomics.com/iran/exports-by-country>). Also, most of Iran's imports were from China, UAE, India and Turkey (<https://tradingeconomics.com/iran/imports-by-country>).

Other sanctions report from the interior of America also prove that Iran is using its geopolitical opportunities to circumvent the sanctions. The use of the special position of the Persian Gulf, water and land borders are things that have been cited and mentioned many times in sanctions reports. Based on this, America's actions have also focused on curbing Iran's geopolitical opportunities. The attempt to establish maritime surveillance in the Persian Gulf in the past years to the attempt to threaten, entice or persuade Iran's neighbors, especially Turkey, Iraq and the UAE, to cooperate more with the US sanctions and prevent Iran from helping to evade the sanctions are among the things that It shows the importance of Iran's geopolitical position to avoid sanctions.

The economic statistics of the past years also support this hypothesis. For example, in 2020, Iran's largest exports were to China, Turkey, UAE, Pakistan, and India. Goods are imported mainly from China, UAE, India and Turkey. (<https://oec.world/en/profile/country/irn>) Domestic statistics regarding the latest export statistics in the past months also prove this hypothesis. For example, according to the announcement of the ixport website, the export of Iranian goods during one month of 1401 (2022) was

mostly to five countries: China, UAE, Iraq, Turkey and Afghanistan. (<https://ixport.ir/export/>).

#### **E. The Limited Ability of the Sanctions Tool**

Another factor that can be attributed to the failure of the United States to advance its goals through sanctions is the inherent limitation and low ability of sanctions as an independent and decisive variable. Therefore, it can be claimed that the tool of sanctions by itself cannot lead to a change in behavior/regime. This claim is proven by referring to the history of the past few decades. After the Second World War, the United States has embargoed various countries for various reasons and excuses. However, by examining the fate of those countries, it is clear that the United States has not been able to change the regime of the countries or force them to change their behavior simply through the tool of sanctions. Numerous examples such as Russia, China, North Korea, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Cuba, Venezuela and Yemen prove this hypothesis. In cases like Iraq and Afghanistan, finally, the US was able to change the ruling system of that country by using the military option, and sanctions could not play the role of an independent variable. Therefore, in this part, the discussion of the inherent and limited capability of the sanctions can be raised as one of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the US sanctions.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The use of embargo tool after World War II as an attractive and widely used tool was used by the United States of America. A tool that is considered to be the boundary between war and diplomatic measures, and for this reason, while hurting countries, it does not include the consequences and material and spiritual costs of war. The appeal of this tool has been increasing in the past years. After America's political defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan, the supporters of the military option are in a weak position and the supporters of sanctions find a stronger position. Because the critics believed that the US might be able to achieve a military victory by using the option of war, but experience has shown that it cannot turn a military victory into a political victory. The model of Iraq and Afghanistan is a concrete example of this failure. Therefore, sanctions in America will be on the agenda of the White House decision-makers with more intensity and strength in the coming years. But with all this, the collection of reviews carried out in the article

and Sadr al-Zekar's material shows that the tool of sanctions, while attractive in America, lacks a decisive element. America's failure in the past years to change the regime/behavior of its enemies only through sanctions proves this claim. Cases such as sanctions against Iran, Russia, China, North Korea, Syria, etc. are considered evidence for this claim.

Regarding Iran, America entered the phase of applying sanctions and maximum pressure policy with the minimum goal of behavior change or the maximum goal of regime change. But despite all the economic pressures and the imposition of many problems on the Iranian society, it could not achieve any of its minimum and maximum goals. The cause of such a situation, as it was mentioned, is not a single cause and is based on various conditions. The unique geopolitical position of Iran along with 15 neighboring countries, extensive land and water resources, being in the center of fossil energy on the one hand, and the need and desire of countries, especially the new actors of East Asia, for the oil of this region on the other hand, and the intelligence and initiative of the authorities in Bypassing the embargo, along with major political, economic and technological advantages, made America unable to achieve its goals. In addition to the mentioned factors, the inability to impose sanctions as an independent and determining variable is another factor that has played a role in the emergence of the current situation.

Also, from a broader perspective and based on the findings of this research, it was found that sanctions can potentially be considered a challenge for the international system and especially the international economy. Despite the fact that it is thought that only the sanctioned countries are harmed by the sanctions, studies and findings show that the sanctioning countries are not immune from the consequences of the sanctions and suffer damage. The important point is that among these, it is the rival countries (competitor countries applying sanctions) that benefit the most from the sanctions. Scholars in the fields of international relations and international economics have raised serious doubts about the effectiveness of sanctions. On this basis, Iran can also take advantage of the challenges that the sanctions create for the international economy to deal with the sanctions. However, the successful experience of other embargoed countries in this field shows that this issue is possible. On the other hand, it can deal with the sanctions by creating an alliance with other sanctioned countries in the region and the

world. It should be mentioned that strengthening and diversifying the domestic economy will further reduce the country's vulnerability to sanctions. Also, trying to neutralize the embargo while bypassing the embargo is an option that can further reduce the effect of the embargo and control its negative consequences.

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