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PEDAGOGICKÁ FAKULTA

Ústav cizích jazyků

The development of the Iran - United States foreign relations after the Islamic revolution and the impacts on the contemporary global geopolitical situation

Bakalářská práce

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Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedených pramenů literatury.

V Olomouci dne:

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Contents

- 1. Introduction.....6
- 2. Persia before 1979 Revolution.....7
 - 2.1. Medieval Persia.....7
 - 2.2. Modern age.....8
 - 2.3. Iran during the twentieth century.....9
- 3. The American foreign policy in the twentieth century.....12
 - 3.1. The United States of America during the World Wars.....12
 - 3.2. The Cold War.....13
 - 3.3. The United States of America and the Middle East.....15
- 4. The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution.....17
 - 4.1. The reasons behind the revolution.....17
 - 4.2. The procedure of the revolution.....19
 - 4.3. The Iran hostage crisis.....21
- 5. The era of the political alienation between Iran and the United States.....24
 - 5.1. Ronald Reagan and the Iran-Iraq War.....24
 - 5.2. George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and the unfulfilled expectations.....27
 - 5.3. George W. Bush, “Axis of Evil” and a shadow of the Iranian nuclear programme.....32
 - 5.4. Barack Obama, Hassan Rouhani and a hope in the form of a nuclear deal.....35
 - 5.5. Donald Trump, a withdrawal from the agreement, the strike on Soleimani, Joe Biden and the way forward.....39
- 6. The influence of the Iran – United States foreign relations on the contemporary global affairs.....44
 - 6.1. The issue of Iran divides the United States from its European allies.....44
 - 6.2. The Iran - United States relations destabilize the Middle Eastern affairs.....46
 - 6.3. The relations between Iran and the United States result in the growing influence of China and Russia.....49

7. Conclusion.....51

Abstract/Annotation

The bachelor thesis will be focusing on the development of the mutual relations between Iran and the United States. The work is divided into five parts. The first three chapters of the thesis provide the reader with a basic knowledge regarding the Iranian historical development, the American foreign policy during the twentieth century and the period that is specifically associated with the Islamic revolution. The two remaining chapters represent the main part of the thesis. The fourth chapter specifically describes, analyses and evaluates the major events that have shaped the development of the relations between Iran and the United States during the era since the Islamic revolution, whereas the fifth chapter concentrates on depicting, specifying and analysing the most significant impacts of the mutual relations between Iran and the United States on the contemporary global affairs. Thus, the primary objective of the thesis will be to provide a critical analysis of the major events associated with the mutual relations between Iran and the United States during the period after the Islamic Revolution. Another objective will be to depict, assess and analyse the most visible influences of the mutual relations between these two countries on the current global geopolitical situation.

Keywords: Iran, United States, Islamic Revolution, foreign relations, global affairs, diplomacy, negotiations, foreign policy, regime, relationship, development, Western world, Middle East, presidential administration, mutual relations.

Number of pages: 47.

Abstrakt/Anotace

Bakalářská práce se zaměří na vývoj vzájemných vztahů mezi Íránem a Spojenými státy. Práce je rozdělena do pěti částí. První tři kapitoly práce poskytují čtenáři základní informace a znalosti týkající se íránského historického vývoje, americké zahraniční politiky během dvacátého století a období, které je konkrétně spojeno s Islámskou revolucí. Zbývající dvě kapitoly představují hlavní část práce. Čtvrtá kapitola konkrétně popisuje, analyzuje a hodnotí hlavní události, které formovaly vývoj vztahů mezi Íránem a Spojenými státy v průběhu éry od časů Islámské revoluce, zatímco pátá kapitola se zaměřuje na znázornění, specifikaci a analýzu nejvýznamnějších a nejcitelnějších dopadů vztahů mezi Íránem a Spojenými státy na současné globální geopolitické dění. Primárním cílem této práce tedy bude poskytnout kritickou analýzu hlavních událostí souvisejících se vzájemnými vztahy mezi Íránem a Spojenými státy v období po Islámské revoluci. Dalším cílem bude popsat, posoudit a analyzovat nejviditelnější a nejcitelnější vlivy vzájemných vztahů mezi těmito dvěma zeměmi na současnou globální geopolitickou situaci.

Klíčová slova: Írán, Spojené státy, Islámská revoluce, zahraniční vztahy, globální záležitosti, diplomacie, vyjednávání, zahraniční politika, režim, vztah, vývoj, Západní svět, Střední východ, prezidentská administrativa, vzájemné vztahy.

Počet stran: 47.

List of abbreviations

AD – Anno Domini

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CNN – Cable News Network

EU – European Union

IAEA – International Atomic Energy Agency

JCPOA – Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

MI6 – Military Intelligence, Section 6

RMS Lusitania – Royal Mail Ship Lusitania

SAVAK – Sazamane Etelaat Va Amniate Kechvar, (Iranian Security and Intelligence Service)

UN Security Council – United Nations Security Council

U.S. – United States

USA – United States of America

1. Introduction

As the title of the bachelor thesis suggests, this work concentrates on the development of the relations between Iran and the United States. The basic aim of the thesis is to examine, assess and critically analyse the most significant events of the mutual relations between Iran and the United States especially during the period after the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. Another aim of the thesis is to evaluate the influences of the modern relations between Iran and the United States on the contemporary global affairs. The thesis also offers a brief description of the historical development of Iran and provides a concise insight into the American foreign policy of the twentieth century. The specific methods that were used for the finalisation of the thesis include books, journal articles and other documents.

The first chapter, “Persia before 1979 Revolution”, offers a brief summary of the Iranian historical development until the year of 1979.

The following chapter, “The American foreign policy in the twentieth century”, provides the reader with some crucial information regarding the American involvement in the global affairs during the last century.

The next chapter, “The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution”, focuses on the particular description of the procedure of the Islamic Revolution.

The chapter titled “The era of the political alienation between Iran and the United States” represents the main chapter that analyses and evaluates the most significant events of the relations between Iran and the USA in the era after the revolution. The chapter is further divided into individual subchapters.

The last chapter, “The influence of the Iran – United States foreign relations on the contemporary global affairs”, concentrates on the depiction and analysis of the most visible impacts of the mutual relations between Iran and the USA on the contemporary global geopolitical situation.

2. Persia before 1979 Revolution

Modern-day Iran lies inside of the region that historically shaped an essential part of once the great, prosperous and dominant Persian Empire. Hence, contemporary Persia or Iran is home to one of the oldest civilizations that have ever been recorded worldwide. Geographic location of modern-day Iran is associated with numerous ancient influential kingdoms and empires (Mark, 2019).

As Joshua J. Mark mentions in his article *Ancient Persia* (2019), Persia represented an important strategic region especially with regard to the major development of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, which is considered and often portrayed as one of the most powerful and greatest ancient geopolitical units. Following Alexander the Great's invasion to Persia, the Achaemenid Empire lost its dominant position and was further divided into other empires including the Sassanian Empire. As far as the Sassanian Empire is concerned, it is generally described as the last great empire that was ruled by the ethnic Persians. The collapse of the empire was strongly related to the Muslim conquest of the region during the seventh century AD (Mark, 2019).

2.1. Medieval Persia

Throughout its history, Iran has experienced several invasions from various directions. During the past eras it was attacked by both the Arabs and Mongols as well as by the Turks and Macedonians (Morgan, 2015, 2). The Muslim conquest of Persia in the seventh century was undoubtedly a crucial milestone in relation to the future development of the whole region. The so-called Islamization of Iran symbolized a process when Persia has been transformed from the empire that was originally based on the religious concept of Zoroastrianism into a society that fully adapted to Muslim customs and traditions (Morgan, 2015, 16-18).

In general, the middle ages were not the most positive times for Iran in terms of the social, political and cultural development. Most of the Persian kingdoms and empires were attacked, invaded or even partially destroyed by various nomadic tribes that later seized the power over the region (Morgan, 2015, 37).

One of the most crucial events of Persian historical development is associated with the rise of the Safavid dynasty at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth century (Morgan, 2015, 100). The Safavid dynasty managed to successfully reunify Iran. It established a monarchy and officially declared Shia Islam as a dominant religion of a newly formed empire. Since the establishment of a monarchy by the Safavid dynasty, Iran was generally respected as a major power of the Middle Eastern region (Morgan, 2015, 118-120).

2.2. Modern age

From a global perspective, the Safavid Empire represented one of the most prosperous times in relation to the development of modern-day Iran. The empire's policy set the original borders of the Persian Empire similar to those of contemporary Iran (Matthee, 2008).

The collapse of the Safavid Empire is related to the series of wars and conflicts between Persia and Imperial Russia during the first half of the eighteenth century. After the end of the wars, the empire was not able to recover from the war losses. These events marked the collapse of the Safavid Empire (Morgan, 2015, 149-150).

During the second half of the eighteenth century Persia participated in several armed conflicts that usually involved wars with its traditional rival, the Ottoman Empire (Morgan, 2015, 151). At the end of the eighteenth century, another wave of conflicts between Persia and Russia emerged. The so-called Russo-Persian Wars proceeded for a significant portion of the nineteenth century. The conflicts were marked by a mass exodus of thousands of ethnic Persians from the areas that were conquered by the Russians. The Russo-Persian Wars resulted in the Russian conquest of some of the original Persian territories including the regions of Azerbaijan, Dagestan and Georgia (Benjamin, 2018, 16-17).

2.3. Iran during the twentieth century

The beginning of the twentieth century found Iran in a complicated situation. Not only was Persia struggling with the inner policy issues regarding the Constitutional Revolution, but it also played a pivotal role in the so-called “Great Game” process that specifically included the colonial division of influence between the two major powers, Great Britain and Russia. Both of these entities regarded Iran as a significant and strategic geopolitical unit considering its unique and dominant position in the Middle Eastern region. Russia and Great Britain, as the emerging major powers, agreed to divide Persia into two spheres of influence (Benjamin, 2018, 16-17). As Shiva Balaghi mentions in the article *A Brief History of 20th-Century Iran*. “Ultimately, in August 1907, the two great powers decided to carve Iran up into spheres of influence, the agreement sealed Russian supremacy in the north and British supremacy in the south of Iran” (Balaghi, 2015). Iranian neutrality and independence were greatly diminished by these events. Until the beginning of World War I and the following rise of the Pahlavi Dynasty, Persia remained a vassal and satellite state of both Russia and Great Britain (Balaghi, 2015).

During World War I Iran was used mostly as a source of supplies for the British army. Rich oil refineries in the Persian Gulf provided the Royal Navy with fuel. Even though Persia remained officially neutral during the war, it was treated as a territory completely dependent on the British Empire. The crucial milestone in relation to the Iranian historical development is associated with the year of 1925. The ruling shah from a dominant Qajar dynasty was overthrown by an Iranian officer called Reza Khan. This event marked the beginning of the Pahlavi dynasty (Little, 2011).

In 1925, Iran entered a new era under the governance of Reza Shah and the Pahlavi dynasty. The new shah established various significant reforms that included a strong emphasis on national identity, strict censorship, national propaganda, militarism or anti-communist belief. Under the reign of Reza Shah, Persia became a strongly authoritarian regime with limited freedom. During this era, suppression of basic human rights was on daily basis. People were denied access to active participation in the political structure, numerous religious as well as social institutions were closed. Activities that criticized the regime were strictly forbidden. The regime of Reza Shah managed to significantly reduce the power of Muslim institutions.

The partial prohibition of the religious activities went hand in hand with the shah's aim to secularize Iran and bring the country closer to the European values and standards (Bashiriyeh, 2011, 10). Nevertheless, these procedures were disapproved by the majority of the Iranian citizens as Shia Islam played a major role in the Persian society. Despite all the factors mentioned above, Reza Shah began the campaign of extreme modernization of Iran (Benjamin, 2018, 20-21).

Before the start of World War II, Reza Shah tried to establish a closer cooperation with Nazi Germany. During World War II, Persia declared itself as a neutral country. Nevertheless, relatively close ties between Reza Shah and Nazi Germany were seen as rather problematic by the Allies (Balaghi, 2015). As a result, Great Britain and Soviet Union signed a secret contract that enabled the British and Soviet troops to invade Iran and remove Reza Shah from power. In 1941, the British and Soviets managed to do so and replaced Reza Shah with his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Little, 2011).

After the end of the war, the United States of America became one of the major partners in relation to the post-war and post-colonial development of Iran. The young shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi received a strong support from the Americans in terms of technological, political and ideological knowledge. In exchange, the United States regarded Iran as a gateway to the specific environment of the Middle Eastern region. Furthermore, president Truman supported the American involvement in the Iranian affairs in order to weaken the influence of the other major powers in the region, specifically the Soviet Union. The United States gained popularity even among the Persian citizens, as the USA was seen as a strategic and stable partner that guaranteed a free development of Iran as opposed to the times when Persia was under the strong influence of both the Soviet Union and Great Britain (Little, 2011). Generally speaking, the early post-war cooperation between Iran and the United States may be understood as the first major encounter of these two countries. The other events were about to follow soon.

In 1951, a leader of the Iranian newly formed leftist National Front, Mohammad Mossadeq, was elected by the Persian citizens to position of the prime minister. Mossadeq was critical towards the policy of the ruling shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. As the time progressed, Mossadeq announced and later approved some unprecedented steps. He decided to nationalize the British and Iranian petrol holdings. In other words, he decided to return the Iranian oil to the people of Iran. In 1953, as a reaction to the Mossadeq's decisions and steps,

the British MI6 and the American CIA organized a coup d'état that deposed Mossadeq (Bashiriyeh, 2011, 17-19). According to Little (2011), The U.S. representatives specifically feared that Iran could potentially fall into communism under the Mossadeq's leadership (Little, 2011). Later, with the support of the United States, the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi restored his power and position (Bashiriyeh, 2011, 19).

During the following decades, the United States of America built a strong alliance with the Iranian regime. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi began the process of the so-called "Westernization of Iran". The ruling shah was extremely inspired by the economic, cultural and social environment of the influential western European countries, the United States and Turkey. His aim was to reorganize Iran into a society based on the western European, capitalist model (Bashiriyeh, 2011, 33). The private sector began to grow in Iran. Pahlavi introduced various reforms that had enormous impacts on the Iranian society. The shah set laws and policies that significantly reduced the power of the Muslim religious institutions. Pahlavi's primary aim was to create Iran that would become a purely secular state. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the shah's decisions was strongly opposed, criticized and rejected by the Iranian public as the Muslim believers represented a dominant part of the Persian population and traditional Shia Islam played a significant role in the Iranian society. In order to keep the control over the citizens, the shah organized a secret police service called the SAVAK (Benjamin, 2018, 26-29).

During the 1970's, the Iranian population's growing dissatisfaction with the Pahlavi's regime was becoming stronger and stronger. Despite a significant pressure from the Iranian society, Pahlavi received a considerable support from the U.S. government and enjoyed an enormous popularity among the U.S. political representatives. The shah remained loyal to his partner, the United States of America (Little, 2011). However, the anti-regime atmosphere inside of the Iranian society became dramatic and radical. The Iranian spiritual leader Ruhollah Khomeini, who gained a significant popularity among the Iranian citizens, was extremely critical towards the policy of the shah (Benjamin, 2018, 30). According to Little (2011), Khomeini openly described Pahlavi as the "American puppet" (Little, 2011). Despite a permanent tension in Iran, president Carter met with the shah in Tehran in 1977. As it is mentioned by Little (2011), Iran under the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was described by president Carter as "an island of stability in one of the most troubled areas of the world." (Little, 2011). Nevertheless, the unexpected and unprecedented events of the upcoming years proved a complete opposite for Iran, the United States and the society across the globe.

3. The American foreign policy in the twentieth century

From a global perspective, the twentieth century is widely regarded as the American century. This statement is supported by Dunne (2000) who offers the proclamation made by the British journalist William T. Stead at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the series of essays with a title “*The Americanisation of the world*”, Stead used the term “The American Century” at the very beginning of the new era (Dunne, 2000, 25). As Dunne further mentions, The United States of America underwent a major development in relation to the global geopolitical position, role and standings throughout the twentieth century. One of the most significant changes is associated with the American rise from world power to global hegemony (Dunne, 2000). The United States of America established itself as a dominant entity that has had an enormous influence on the majority of the global issues and conflicts. The unique position in regards to the global foreign affairs enabled the United States to have a casting vote in relation to numerous geopolitical issues.

3.1. The United States of America during the World Wars

As described by Dunne (2000), the Americans were involved in the European affairs throughout a significant portion of the nineteenth century. The primary reasons were related to the establishment of the official boundaries of the United States of America (Dunne, 2000, 29). The crucial question regarding the American foreign policy emerged during the first decades of the twentieth century. According to Dunne, the United States had to face a hard decision whether to participate in the European internal conflicts and maintain the European and global balance of power or to refuse the participation and stay completely neutral (Dunne, 2000, 29).

At the beginning of World War I, the United States of America declared itself as a neutral entity. This perspective naturally changed in 1915 when the British civilian ship called RMS Lusitania was attacked by a German submarine. In 1917, as a reaction to various German attacks against the American trading ships, the United States finally declared war on Germany (Ayers, 2008, 638-651). With a significant support of the American army, the Allies

dominated the conflict and forced Germany to surrender in 1918 (Ayers, 2008, 657). One of the major outcomes of the post-World War I negotiations is associated with the introduction of a concept titled the League of Nations by president Woodrow Wilson. Despite the fact that president Wilson officially introduced and presented the idea of the League of Nations, the United States of America did not become a member of the newly formed organization. As a result, the United States cooperated with countries individually and signed numerous treaties with various, especially European countries, on the individual basis. The primary aim of the League of Nations was to maintain a global peace and insist on the strategy that there would be no other major conflict any time soon (Ayers, 2008, 660-664).

The interwar period found the United States in a relatively comfortable diplomatic position. An enormous economic, political and financial power of the United States enabled the country to confidently spread its influence across various regions and to fully satisfy its political and economic interests. Nevertheless, the Americans did not show a major interest in cooperating with the League of Nations (Combs, 2012, 122-126). According to Combs (2012), during the interwar period, the United States avoided any political alliances with anyone else (Combs, 2012, 124).

Since the beginning of World War II, the United States of America established a close cooperation with the Allies. The Americans officially supported the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, France, China as well as other Allied nations. However, it was not until the year of 1941 when the United States officially entered the war after the country had been attacked by the Japanese armed forces (Ayers, 2008, 759-763). The Allies, together with the United States, created a strong alliance that eventually dominated the rest of the war and became the winning side in 1945 (Ayers, 2008, 786). To a certain degree, the procedure of the American involvement in World War II can be compared to the U.S. strategy during World War I. After the end of World War II, the United States of America moved to an exclusive position in relation to the international policy.

3.2. The Cold War

The era after World War II is generally associated with a major change regarding the global geopolitical affairs. Soon after the end of the war, the global society witnessed the

emergence of the two superpowers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The two geopolitical entities dominated the international policy during the upcoming decades. Both the United States and the Soviet Union did the absolute maximum in order to spread their influence across the globe. The growing pressure between the two superpowers and their allied nations resulted in various regional conflicts that included the Korean War, the Vietnam War and many others (Brown, 2020, 381-389).

One of the most significant periods in relation to the Cold War times is associated with the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. As Ayers mention (2008), it was arguably a moment when the potential outbreak of an enormous nuclear conflict between the two geopolitical giants was not far from becoming a reality (Ayers, 2008, 854). The soviet delivery of nuclear weapons to Cuba was strongly opposed and criticized by the Americans. Eventually, president Kennedy negotiated a compromise with a soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (Ayers, 2008, 854-855).

During the Cold War, the primary aim and strategy of the United States was to prevent the spread of communism to as many countries as possible. However, the particular procedures and strategies of the American presidential administrations towards the issue of the Cold War usually differed from one another (Ayers, 2008, 805).

During the presidency of Jimmy Carter, various new challenges, issues and conflicts emerged on the global geopolitical stage. The Carter's administration had to deal with the growing tension in Afghanistan where the United States and the Soviet Union participated in the conflict that involved a collision between the ruling regime of Afghanistan with the support of the Soviet army and the separatist, rebel, anti-government groups with the support of the United States. Furthermore, the issues related to the Iranian Islamic revolution, the collapse of the Iranian regime, the American hostage crisis in Iran and the era of the political alienation between the United States and Iran became a dominant part of the president's Carter foreign policy (Combs, 2012, 346-351).

The administration of president Reagan declared the final solution to the issue of the Cold War as one of the administration's major priorities. As it is mentioned by Ayers, president Reagan openly described the Soviet Union with its communist regime as the "Evil Empire" (Ayers, 2008, 922). The significant American military power combined with the political, economic and social instability inside of the Soviet Union are believed to be the decisive factors in relation to the fall of communism in the eastern European countries in 1989

(Ayers, 2008, 935). According to Dunne (2000), “The Reagan presidency will be remembered for beginning the final endgame of the Cold War” (Dunne, 2000, 39). The following collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the fall of communism confirmed the American victory in the Cold War (Kaufman, 2017, 125-126). As Kaufman (2017) mentions, after the end of the Cold War, the United States of America established itself as the only remaining superpower in the world (Kaufman, 2017, 128).

From a global perspective, the Cold War represented an era filled with political uncertainty, international scepticism and constant pressure on both sides of the conflict. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism in the Soviet Empire and many other countries, there has been a certain sense of positivity among the world leaders in relation to the future development of a global society. Nevertheless, it would be naive to believe that all the global challenges and issues disappeared with the end of the Cold War. In fact, the new world order brought various issues regarding the international policy and cooperation. The global society has faced numerous emerging challenges including the war with international terrorism, migration crisis, climate change difficulties and many others. However, from the American perspective, the end of the Cold War established the United States as the global hegemony. According to Dunne (2000), “The American Dream will only be likely to fade over many decades when a rival world power comes to challenge the third millennium’s first hegemon” (Dunne, 2000, 40).

3.3. The United States of America and the Middle East

As far as the American foreign policy in the Middle Eastern region is concerned, it is necessary to note, the United States did not show a great interest in the Middle Eastern affairs until World War II. This perspective changed during the war as the U.S. representatives started regarding the Middle East as a crucial and highly strategic region in relation to its geopolitical location and wide reserves of natural resources (Hahn, 2006, 5). According to Hahn (2006), the reason for a greater involvement of the United States in the region of the Middle East appeared after World War II with the outbreak of the Cold War era. The American and Soviet influence collided in the region. As a result, both of the superpowers

aimed to build alliances with dominant countries of the Middle East in order to spread the influence and power across the region more easily (Hahn, 2006, 5).

The United States supported the establishment of Israel. The newly formed country remained officially unrecognized by a majority of the Arab countries. The Soviet influence and interests in the region were supposed to be weakened by the American cooperation and close relations and negotiations with dominant powers of the Middle Eastern region that specifically included Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia (Hahn, 2006, 5). The United States considered an intervention into the Middle Eastern affairs during any time when there was a threat related to the potential spread of communism or anti-American regime in any country of the region (Kaufman, 2017, 93).

One of the major American interventions against the ruling government is associated with the year of 1953, when the United States in cooperation with the United Kingdom intervened in the Iranian political affairs when a democratically elected prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq approved a nationalization of the British and Iranian petrol holdings (Kaufman, 2017, 93).

From a global perspective, the role of the United States regarding the Middle Eastern affairs changed during the 1960s and 1970s when the USA replaced the United Kingdom and became a major external influential force in relation to the future development of the region (Zunes, 1999).

One of the most crucial events that shaped the American foreign policy in the Middle East is associated with the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1978 and 1979 and the following change of regime in Iran. Barely has any other event related to the Middle East had such an enormous impact on the American foreign policy and the future development of the international relations and cooperation of the United States. Together with the American intervention in Afghanistan that aimed to significantly weaken the Soviet's expansion in the region of the Middle East, the Islamic Revolution in Iran undoubtedly represents one of the most notable periods of the American foreign policy whose impacts are clearly visible in the contemporary global society. These two events dramatically influenced a development of the international relations and cooperation between the Middle Eastern countries and the Western world. The issue of international terrorism, the Arab scepticism and suspicion towards the foreign policy of the United States, the Iran-Iraq War, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and many other conflicts are all believed to have roots in the previously mentioned events.

4. The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution

The Iranian Islamic Revolution represented a period of dramatic social, political and economic changes in the Iranian policy and society whose aftermaths severely affected a future development of the relations between Iran and the Western world with the United States. As Suzanne Maloney and Keian Razipour mention in the article *The Iranian revolution - A timeline of events* (2019), the outcomes of the revolution continue to be felt today (Maloney, Razipour, 2019). The revolution brought a major change to the global geopolitical order as once a strongly pro-Western Iranian authoritarian regime ruled by the Pahlavi dynasty was replaced with an anti-Western theocratic government and the Iranian Islamic Republic (Guerrero, 2016).

4.1. The reasons behind the revolution

The Islamic Revolution in Iran is believed to have its roots in various events that negatively affected the Iranian public's attitude towards the ruling regime of the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

It all started with the coup against a democratically elected Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953. The coup was organized and initiated by the American CIA in cooperation with the British MI6. The coup was successful. It deposed the prime minister Mossadeq and helped the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to fully restore his power over the government. However, this event also marked a slow but visible beginning of the Iranian citizen's and public's scepticism towards the foreign policy of the western powers, specifically the United States of America and the United Kingdom. A majority of the Iranian public regarded the coup as a form of an inappropriate foreign intervention into the Iranian domestic affairs (Bashiriyeh, 2011, 17-19).

During the following years, Iran entered an era filled with massive waves of foreign investments. Although the shah's primary aim was to catch the attention of foreign investors and persuade them to invest their funds in Iran, he was unable to defend the Iranian national

interests. The investors mostly took the advantage of the shah's inability to negotiate mutually beneficial contracts. As a result, the foreign influence and investment functioned more as a plunder of the country's economic wealth rather than as a welcome foreign financial support. Furthermore, the country was facing enormous difficulties related to the corruption among the highest political representatives (Puri, 2005, 103).

One of the most crucial milestones in relation to the outbreak of the Iranian Islamic Revolution is associated with the process of the so-called White Revolution that began in 1963. During this process, the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi introduced various reforms and policies that significantly changed lives of ordinary Iranians. The shah began a process of an unprecedented and radical secularization and extreme "westernization" of Iran (Eisenstadt, 2011). The reforms and policies dramatically reduced the power of the Muslim religious institutions. The shah intended to reorganize Iran into a society based on the western European, capitalist model (Bashiriyeh, 2011, 33). Despite relative economic growth of the 1960's, the vast majority of the reforms was strongly opposed and criticized by the Iranian public as the newly implemented laws and policies significantly collided with the traditional, conservative and religious elements of the Iranian society. Furthermore, the shah organized a secret police called the SAVAK that violently suppressed any signs of rebellions and revolutionary or anti-regime movements (Benjamin, 2018, 26-29).

In addition to the previously mentioned factors, the shah's domestic policy severely affected the Iranian public's opinion, perspectives and attitudes towards the major western powers, especially the United States of America. As Puri mentions (2005), since the beginning of the White Revolution, the United States was regarded by the Iranian public as one of the most visible and closest allies of the Iranian ruling regime, the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in particular (Puri, 2005, 104). The shah was receiving a considerable support from the American political representatives. The United States supplied the Iranian regime with expensive military equipment. As a result, the shah was strongly criticized by the Iranian public for pleasing and prioritising his own ally instead of concentrating on the social, political and economic issues and development in his country (Little, 2011).

One of the most vocal critics of the Pahlavi's regime was the Iranian spiritual leader Ruhollah Khomeini who led a strong campaign against the shah's regime since the beginning of the White Revolution in 1963. Khomeini gained an enormous popularity among the Iranian citizens during the 1960's and 1970's (Eisenstadt, 2011). According to Little (2011),

Khomeini openly described the shah as the “American puppet” (Little, 2011). As mentioned by Puri (2005), Khomeini repeatedly described the shah and his governance as a form of “Westernising puppet regime”. Khomeini also compared the policy of the shah to the process of “Westoxification” and emphasized the necessity to re-establish a conservative and religious society, based on the traditional theocratic and Islamic order (Puri, 2005, 101-104).

Throughout the 1970’s, the Iranian public’s animosity, frustration and dissatisfaction with the regime of the shah was becoming stronger. The Iranian economic stagnation of the mid-1970’s further increased the growing pressure, frustration and nervousness among the Iranian citizens. The escalating process of modernization and “westernization” of the country supported by the shah did not match the public’s expectations. The event that is widely regarded as the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution is associated with the series of protests, demonstrations and rebellions in the Iranian holy city of Qom in January 1978. The protests reacted to the government propaganda article that seriously slandered and insulted the spiritual leader Ruhollah Khomeini. The spread of the article provoked mass demonstrations that resulted in violent clashes between the protesters and the government troops (Eisenstadt, 2011). According to Puri (2005), this event marked the beginning of the revolution (Puri, 2005, 102).

4.2. The procedure of the revolution

The waves of massive protests soon spread across the whole country. During February 1978, another mass demonstration took place in the city of Tabriz. This time, it involved members of various generations and social classes. Students, scholars, academics as well as other citizens were involved in the protests (Puri, 2005, 102). The government under the shah’s leadership sent the army to Tabriz in order to calm the situation. Nevertheless, the military troops used a hard force against the protesters. At least six participants of the demonstration were killed and hundreds of other protesters were seriously wounded (Eisenstadt, 2011). As mentioned by Eisenstadt (2011), the demonstration in Tabriz established a pattern that proceeded during the upcoming months. The massive protests were frequently suppressed by the army with the use of extreme violence (Eisenstadt, 2011).

In September 1978, one of the most decisive events regarding the Islamic Revolution took place in the capital city of Tehran. During a mass demonstration, the government troops massacred various protesters. The event known as “Black Friday” resulted in at least one hundred victims (Eisenstadt, 2011). As mentioned by Eisenstadt (2011), the shah as well as the government strongly criticized the army for an extremely violent intervention (Eisenstadt, 2011). However, it seems that the shah and his regime’s reputation were fundamentally bruised by all the previous actions and decisions.

During the two remaining months of the year of 1978, the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi took the last desperate steps in order to comfort the Iranian public. In November, the shah appeared on the live television broadcast. He promised the Iranian public that he would not repeat the mistakes that he had made in the past. The shah also commented on the procedure of the revolution. “I heard the voice of your revolution... As Shah of Iran as well as an Iranian citizen, I cannot but approve your revolution” (Maloney, Razipour, 2019). In December, the mass protests against the regime of the shah proceeded across the whole country. The protesters demanded the removal of the shah as well as the return of the spiritual leader Ruhollah Khomeini from exile to Iran (Maloney, Razipour, 2019). According to Maloney and Razipour (2019), as a reaction to the demonstrations, the shah repeatedly assured the Iranian public that his ruling regime had a full and stable support of the United States government (Maloney, Razipour, 2019).

In January 1979, the position of the Pahlavi’s regime became unsustainable in relation to the permanent anti-government atmosphere in Iran. Under an extreme pressure, the shah decided to leave Iran in the middle of January, officially for the reasons of a vacation. Before the departure, the shah told his former prime minister, “I give Iran into your care, yours and God’s.” (Maloney, Razipour, 2019). The departure of the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from Iran is generally associated with the end of the Pahlavi dynasty and with the beginning of a new era. The spiritual leader Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran at the beginning of February 1979. Thousands of Iranians celebrated the arrival of Khomeini in the capital of Tehran (Maloney, Razipour, 2019).

Few days after the arrival, Ruhollah Khomeini formed a provisional revolutionary government. The Iranian armed forces, that were originally loyal to the shah’s regime, did not take any action against Khomeini’s initiated policies, steps and decisions. Furthermore, as a result of a fragility of the shah’s regime and an absence of the leader, the Iranian military

troops officially declared neutrality in reaction to the formation of the provisional government by Khomeini. The army's decision enabled Khomeini to effectively seize a full control over the government as well as over the military troops. Since taking control over the army, Khomeini became an unofficial leader of Iran with unlimited powers (Eisenstadt, 2011).

During the year of 1979, the Khomeini's revolutionary government fully concentrated on the process of a transformation of the Iranian constitution. The new constitution was eventually approved by the government in October 1979. It officially established the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on the theocratic model, with Ruhollah Khomeini becoming a supreme leader and head of the Iranian parliament as well as a commander-in-chief of the Iranian armed forces (Eisenstadt, 2011).

4.3. The Iran hostage crisis

The U.S. Embassy in Tehran came under an extreme pressure immediately after the Khomeini's arrival to Iran. With the departure of the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from the country, the United States lost its vital ally in the Middle Eastern region. Furthermore, an enormous popularity, influence and power of the spiritual leader Ruhollah Khomeini and a fast emergence of the Khomeini's revolutionary government signaled a beginning of difficult times for the United States regarding its foreign policy in Iran. The United States of America was widely regarded as a crucial ally of the former shah's regime by the majority of the Iranian public. Therefore, the strongly anti-American atmosphere in Iran quickly became much more noticeable after the shah's departure (Puri, 2005, 101-104). The American embassy experienced a first major attack in the middle of February 1979, when the protesters and Khomeini's supporters attacked the area of the embassy but they were stopped by the order of a newly established Iranian provisional government (Maloney, Razipour, 2019).

The growing pressure between the United States and the new Iranian regime under the Khomeini's leadership escalated in November 1979. At the end of October, the deposed Iranian shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was given an asylum in the United States in order to undergo a cancer treatment. The American decision of allowing the shah to enter the United States was strongly criticized by Khomeini (Maloney, Razipour, 2019). According to Benjamin (2018), the Iranian public feared that the shah, in cooperation with the United

States, could potentially interfere in the Iranian domestic affairs in a similar manner as it had occurred in the past (Benjamin, 2018, 36).

On November 4, the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was attacked by the crowd featuring at least two thousand people. As described in the article *Iran hostage crisis* from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the protesters were persuaded that the shah, together with the American CIA, was planning a coup against the Khomeini's government through the U.S. Embassy in Tehran (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The demonstrators demanded the extradition of the shah from the United States to Iran as well as the complete withdrawal of the U.S. military forces from Iran. During the demonstration, the protesters violently entered the building of the embassy and captured the staff as hostages (Maloney, Razipour, 2019).

The occupation of the American embassy by the Iranian civilians and the following detention of the hostages shook the United States as well as the whole international community. According to Guerrero (2016), the Iran hostage crisis is often regarded as one of the most crucial events that shaped the future diplomatic and political alienation between Iran and the United States of America (Guerrero, 2016, 192).

During November and December 1979, president Carter aimed to peacefully negotiate the release of the hostages. The United States cooperated with diplomats from various countries in order to resolve the issue. Nevertheless, the American diplomatic efforts were unsuccessful (Encyclopaedia Britannica). As a result of the ongoing conflict, the USA froze all the property and interests of the government of Iran and the Central Bank of Iran in the United States. The Americans also set an embargo on the Iranian oil (Maloney, Razipour, 2019).

Following the United Nations Security Council's resolution that called for the release of the hostages, the negotiations with Iran proceeded. However, there were no signs that Iran would be willing to release the hostages any time soon. After months filled with hesitation and empty expectations, the United States initiated unprecedented steps (Maloney, Razipour, 2019). As described by Maloney and Razipour (2019), first of all, the United States of America officially severed its diplomatic relations with Iran at the beginning of April 1980. As the next step, the United States organized a military rescue of the hostages. However, the rescue mission resulted in a disaster. The so-called "Operation Eagle Claw" ended in a crash of one of the helicopters and led to the deaths of eight American soldiers (Maloney, Razipour, 2019).

The events that fundamentally affected the final resolution of the hostage crisis took place during the second half of the year of 1980. A death of the former Iranian shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi on July 27 partially reduced the tension (Maloney, Razipour, 2019). Nevertheless, the crucial milestone regarding the resolution of the crisis is associated with the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980. The Iranians were forced to fully concentrate on the newly emerging conflict. Moreover, the United Nations, together with the majority of the world leaders, announced to the Iranians that the global society would not support Iran during the war with Iraq unless Iran releases all the American hostages (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

On January 20, 1981, as an outcome of the Algiers Accords, a deal that was signed between Iran and the United States, the hostages were finally released after spending 444 days in captivity (Maloney, Razipour, 2019).

The Iran hostage crisis has severely affected the relations between Iran and the United States for decades to come. It represents an event whose aftermaths continue to be felt today. The Islamic Revolution in Iran and the following hostage crisis are believed to be the basic roots of the complicated relationship between Iran and the United States that we know today. During these events, the United States completely cut its diplomatic ties with Iran and lost the original allied pillar of its foreign policy in the Middle Eastern region. Nevertheless, these events also had an enormous impact on the domestic policy of the United States. As stated in the article *Iran hostage crisis* from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, an extremely demanding period of the hostage crisis was believed to have played a pivotal role in the Reagan victory over Carter in the 1980 American presidential election (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

5. The era of the political alienation between Iran and the United States

As it has been already stated, the Islamic Revolution and its aftermaths have had a severe impact on the future development of the foreign relations between Iran and the United States. The revolution shaped the course of the American foreign policy towards the issue of Iran for many decades to come. Even the contemporary portrayal of a tense relations and hidden conflicts between Iran and the USA that is provided by the media coverage has its roots in the Islamic Revolution, at least to a certain extent. A complicated relationship between Iran and the United States does not end with the severed diplomatic ties. In fact, a frozen diplomacy between Iran and the United States represents only the beginning of a long and complicated encounter between these two countries that we know today. This chapter will aim to critically assess some of the most crucial events that dominated the relationship between Iran and the United States since the time of the Islamic Revolution. It will also analyse, evaluate and compare the approaches, methods and different strategies of the American presidential administrations towards the issue of Iran.

5.1. Ronald Reagan and the Iran-Iraq War

With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, it became more than obvious that if the United States decided to support one particular side of the conflict, the Americans would stand along the regime that fought against a newly established Iranian Islamic Republic. Given the traumatic circumstances related to the Iran hostage crisis and a chaotic relationship with the new Iranian regime, a decision to support Iraq during the conflict would appear as a reasonable solution for the Americans. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Benjamin (2018), the Americans, specifically the administration of president Reagan, did not favour Iraq until the year of 1983. Instead, the Americans concentrated on stabilizing the situation in the rich oil refineries area that was essential for both sides of the conflict as well as for the USA. During the first years of the dispute between Iraq and Iran, the United States remained officially neutral. However, since 1983, the United States started dominantly supporting the Iraqi

regime of Saddam Hussein. The support included a delivery of sophisticated weapons including the chemical and biological weapons to the Iraqi regime (Benjamin, 2018, 114). The American strategy during the conflict between Iran and Iraq clearly illustrates the U.S. aim to significantly weaken the influence and power of the new Iranian regime under the leadership of a supreme leader Ruhollah Khomeini. It also describes the American willingness to participate in an armed dispute when the conflict appears to be profitable for the United States.

The administration of president Reagan faced various challenging difficulties during the time of the Iran-Iraq War. According to Riedel (2008), “Dealing with the war, and especially with Khomeini’s Iran, would almost destroy the presidency of Ronald Reagan” (Riedel, 2008, 104).

One of the major issues that required a strong leadership is associated with the event similar to the Iran hostage crisis during the Islamic Revolution. As stated in the article *Timeline - U.S. Relations With Iran* from *Council on Foreign Relations* (2021), in 1983, there was an attack in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, that resulted in the killings of more than two hundred members of the U.S. military and proceeded with the seizure of several Americans that were captured as hostages (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Barely did any American citizen or the U.S. political representative want to see and experience a similar feeling of fear, hopelessness, isolation and frustration as it had occurred merely few years before the event in Beirut during the capture of the American hostages in the Iranian capital of Tehran. As described by Riedel (2008), the attack in Beirut was caused by the terrorist organization of Hezbollah. The Hezbollah group was believed to follow direct instructions from the Iranian ruling regime (Riedel, 2008, 104).

In 1984, mainly as a reaction to the attack in Beirut, which was organized through the Iranian support by the group of Hezbollah, the United States officially declared Iran as the sponsor of terrorism (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). This American reaction undoubtedly represents a crucial milestone in relation to the future development of the relationship between the United States and Iran. Once a country appears on the American dark list of entities, groups and organizations that are accused of sponsoring terrorism, it creates a strong symbol of mutual hostility and sends a clear message to the international community. From this moment on, it becomes very difficult for both sides of the conflict to restore any types of diplomatic ties.

As far as the presidency of Ronald Reagan is concerned, one of the most critical events associated with the issue of Iran was still about to come. In 1985, the administration of president Reagan participated in the scandal known today as the Iran-Contra Affair. According to Benjamin (2018), the scandal included a secret delivery of weapons to the Iranian ruling regime during the war with Iraq. In other words, the United States was caught selling weapons to Iran despite the fact that there was an embargo initiated by the U.S. on selling arms to Iran. The president's administration hoped to exchange the delivery of the weapons for the release of the American hostages who were kept in Lebanon by Hezbollah since the attack in 1983 (Benjamin, 2018, 116). The Iran-Contra Affair may be understood as a symbol of certain fragility of the administration of president Reagan with regards to the issue of negotiating with the Iranians. In time of an emergency, the United States did not hesitate to break the rules that were set by their own political representatives. On the other hand, when lives of ordinary citizens are at risk, even the greatest superpower may have the right to use an unusual approach in order to manage the situation.

During the last months of the war between Iran and Iraq, the world witnessed one of the last major tragic events that shaped the relationship between the administration of Ronald Reagan and the Iranian regime of Ruhollah Khomeini. This time, the event included personal losses of numerous civilians and ordinary citizens. As described by Benjamin (2018), in 1988, the U.S. troops on a military vessel in the Persian Gulf accidentally shot down a civilian commercial plane that was flying on a regular line from Tehran to Dubai. None of the passengers or the crew members survived the attack. There were nearly three hundred people on board the aircraft of the Iran Air Flight 655. According to the government of the United States, the incident was a result of a serious misunderstanding as the U.S. military mistakenly identified the plane as an Iranian fighting jet. However, from the Iranian perspective, the event was a representation of a brutal, deliberate, careless attack on the Iranian public from the United States. There was no official apology from the United States to the government of Iran for this incident. Nevertheless, it should also be emphasized that the United States agreed to pay financial reparations to victims of the accident as a result of the proceedings of the International Court of Justice that took place in 1996. Despite the factors mentioned above, some Iranians still consider the attack to be a symbol of the American cruelty (Benjamin, 2018, 114-115). Generally speaking, shooting down a civilian aircraft should always be considered a failure of a particular army. In this specific case, a reaction of the Iranian public is rather understandable. During a complicated time of the war, the Iranians experienced

another disastrous event. If the foreign military troops are responsible for a catastrophe that led to deaths of hundreds of innocent people, it naturally has a negative influence on the public's opinion about a country where these army troops originate from. Therefore, the event may also be understood as an explanation and one of the reasons of the Iranian growing animosity, frustration, scepticism and negative attitude towards the foreign policy of the United States and towards the United States of America in general. It is also necessary to mention a certain parallel between this specific accident from the year of 1988 and a similar event that occurred near the Iranian capital of Tehran in the year of 2020 when the Ukrainian passenger jet was a victim of the Iranian strike (see Chapter 5.5.).

From a global perspective, the procedure and strategy of the presidential administration of Ronald Reagan in relation to the issue of Iran may be assessed with mixed outcomes. President Reagan entered the office of president in an extremely turbulent and highly uncertain period when Iran was not a close American ally any more. In fact, Iran had become a complete opposite of what could be called the "American ally". Thus, it was necessary to adapt the American foreign policy towards Iran to the new standards. It could be argued, the mission was not completely successful as it was demonstrated in the previous passages and paragraphs of the chapter. Nevertheless, the presidency of Ronald Reagan should not be measured only by its foreign policy's efficiency towards Iran but rather by strengthening the U.S. position on the global geopolitical stage. As mentioned by Dunne (2000), it is important to note, it was the administration of president Reagan that began "the final endgame of the Cold War" (Dunne, 2000, 39).

5.2. George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and the unfulfilled expectations

The beginnings of the 1990s promised a potential change in a positive direction regarding the development of the relations between Iran and the United States. The bipolar world order was slowly coming to the end. Furthermore, as stated by Benjamin (2018), the Iranian regime underwent a change in leadership as a new supreme leader Ali Khamenei replaced a former leader and a founder of the Islamic Republic Ruhollah Khomeini (Benjamin, 2018, 117). As Saidabadi mentions, in addition to the previously stated facts, the Iranian neutral role during the Gulf War signaled to the international community that the

real “evil regime” was in fact represented by Iraq with its leader Saddam Hussein rather than by Iran. The Iranian declaration of neutrality during the Gulf War enabled various countries to fully restore diplomatic ties with Iran and to respect the country as a stable and reliable negotiating partner in the region of the Middle East (Saidabadi, 1998, 123). Considering the factors mentioned above, the era during and after the Gulf War appeared as a unique opportunity for the United States to significantly improve its relations with Iran. Unfortunately, as it will be analysed in the following passages, the United States decided to select quite a different direction especially if compared to the strategy of some of the European allies of the United States.

It all started with the post-Gulf War negotiations in 1991. According to Benjamin (2018), the administration of president Bush did not invite Iran to a conference where the future of the region was supposed to be discussed despite the fact that the Iranians offered their own plan of stabilizing the geopolitical situation in the region of the Middle East (Benjamin, 2018, 118). The decision of the Bush administration may be understood as a symbol of distrust or even disrespect towards a country that was willing to share a recovery plan with its neighbouring countries and contribute to the process of a peaceful arrangement of the region.

The following years were marked by a visible difference in the American and European approaches and strategies towards the issue of Iran. It became obvious that the common political line of the Western world towards dealing with Iran became perceptibly disturbed. As described by Saidabadi (1998), since 1992, the European Union initiated a policy of the so-called “critical dialogue” in relation to Iran. The closer diplomatic ties and series of negotiations between Iran and the EU members became a regular business. Even an increased trade between Iran and European countries was not considered to be an unusual affair. However, this European approach strongly collided with the American strategy with regards to Iran. While the EU aimed to establish a closer cooperation with the Iranians, the United States still emphasized the importance of a tough and uncompromising approach in relation to Iran. The United States called for the policy of “containment” towards Iran. The administration of president Bush stressed the necessity to isolate Iran and to impose another sanctions on the Iranian regime (Saidabadi, 1998, 124). Therefore, based on the information stated above, it could be argued, the United States did not even provide Iran with an opportunity to improve the mutual relations and to at least partially restore diplomatic ties between the two countries.

As stated by Balkan-Şahin (2020), the first example that signaled a deepening political alienation between the United States and Iran may be associated with the signature of the Iran-Iraq Arms Non-Proliferation Act by president George H.W. Bush in 1992 (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 67). The document was supposed to intensify the sanctions imposed on Iran in terms of making the supply of material that could be used for weaponry purposes more difficult (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). In this case, there was no evidence of the U.S. willingness to initiate any form of diplomatic negotiations with the Iranians.

With the change of the U.S. presidential administrations in 1993, there might have been a certain sense of determination, hope, desire and confidence that the relationship between the United States and Iran could finally experience a major positive turnover after years of negative and highly tense relations. The new Democratic administration of president Bill Clinton generated a strong and promising impression even with regards to the international policy. Unfortunately, as mentioned by Balkan-Şahin (2020), the high expectations faded away rather quickly. In May 1993, only few months after entering the office of the American president, Bill Clinton introduced a policy of “dual containment” towards both Iraq and Iran. Moreover, the administration of president Clinton accused Iran of the sponsorship of terrorism (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 67). On top of that, president Clinton approved a trade embargo on Iran in 1995 (Saidabadi, 1998, 124). Based on the facts mentioned above, it may be argued, the first years of the president Clinton’s foreign policy towards Iran did not bring any major change in willingness to cooperate with the Iranians in comparison with the policy of his predecessor, president George H.W. Bush.

In actual fact, in some of the aspects, president Clinton selected even a harder approach towards the issue of Iran than the administration of his predecessor. According to Saidabadi (1998), the administration of president Clinton even persuaded some of its European allies to follow the strategy of the United States towards Iran. However, the European Union as well as other European countries remained more or less loyal and supportive to its independent foreign policy towards Iran that specifically included an emphasis on “critical dialogue” and closer negotiations (Saidabadi, 1998, 124). These facts illustrate the strong determination of the United States to dominate the conflict with Iran. The administration of president Clinton probably realized, it was essential to build a strong coalition with the vital allies of the United States that could support the USA in a potential open conflict with Iran.

Based on the information stated in the previous passages, it may be claimed, the Iranian economy must have been dramatically affected by the increasing amount of the American sanctions that were targeted specifically at the Iranian regime. As a consequence of various trade restrictions and severe and exhausting business limitations including hard sanctions and embargos, it would be rather understandable if the Iranian government decided to search for its partners and allies in another place. This hypothesis is supported in this case by Balkan-Şahin (2020), who offers a theory that the close ties that were built between Iran and the group of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the militant group of Hamas in Palestine may be in fact understood as a result of years of the American sanctions imposed on the Iranian regime (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 67). Even though this proclamation may appear as a strong criticism of the foreign policy of the United States, on the basis of the above, it seems partially relevant, at least to some extent.

The following event that had an extremely negative effect on the relationship between Iran and the United States is associated with a terrorist attack on the Khobar Tower in Saudi Arabia in 1996. As described by Murray (2009), the strike killed nineteen members of the American army and wounded numerous other people (Murray, 2009, 101). According to Riedel (2008), immediately after the incident, the United States had serious suspicion about Iran playing a pivotal role in the attack. During months after the attack, a direct strike on Iran was seriously considered as a realistic option among the highest representatives of the United States (Riedel, 2008, 105). Although a terrorist attack always represents a very sensitive issue regarding a question of the national security and usually requires a straight response, it may be argued, the American decision not to launch a direct attack on Iran could be assessed as an appropriate solution, especially if there was no clear evidence that the Iranians would be in charge of the attack.

As far as the administration of president Clinton is concerned, one of the most crucial milestones in relation to the issue of Iran may be traced to the rise of a new Iranian president Mohammad Khatami in the year of 1997. As Murray states, the victory of Mohammad Khatami in the Iranian presidential election surprised the international community as well as the American political experts. The new Iranian president was a reformist politician who showed an open willingness to negotiate and cooperate with the Western world. Khatami was not critical towards the values and habits of the Western civilization but rather emphasized the necessity of mutual understanding (Murray, 2009, 104). According to Balkan-Şahin (2020), Khatami even appeared on a live CNN interview, where he stressed the importance of a

“dialogue of civilizations” and expressed regret in relation to the process of the Iran hostage crisis that had taken place more than fifteen years ago (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 67). Considering the facts stated above, it seemed as the United States and Iran were finally offered a unique opportunity to find a path to a better mutual understanding that could have had a major impact on the future development of the relations between Iran and the USA.

Still, the process of convergence between the two countries faced difficulties and found various opponents. It was not realistically possible to simply ignore, dismiss and forget all the issues and tragic events of the recent past. The critical viewpoints towards a convergence between Iran and the United States were found on both sides of the barricade. As demonstrated in the examples provided by Riedel (2008), the administration of president Clinton still remembered all the issues related to the Khobar Tower attack in 1996. On the Iranian side, President Khatami received a strong criticism from a conservative wing of the government representatives. His reforms were considered as being “too far” and “too fast” (Riedel, 2008, 106). Thus, it may be argued, a temporary process of a peaceful transformation of the relations between Iran and the United States was not supported by a sufficient amount of politicians on both sides of the conflict. However, the willingness and openness of both the administration of president Clinton and president Khatami undoubtedly signaled a promising turnover regarding the mutual relations.

The last year of the Clinton’s presidency witnessed an event that could have represented a major positive turnover regarding the future development of the relations between the two countries. As mentioned by Murray (2009), the event is generally associated with the speech given by the former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in March 2000. During the speech, Albright admitted that the United States played a dominant role in the coup against the former Iranian prime minister Mossadeq in 1953. Albright also mentioned that the regime of the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was extremely repressive towards political dissent and opposition circles and called the American policy towards Iran as “regrettably short-sighted” (Murray, 2009, 113).

Based on the information above, it could be stated, the United States of America received an extraordinary chance to completely restore its relations with Iran at the turn of the centuries. In its final months, the administration of president Clinton proved a strong determination to finally normalize the relationship with this influential country of the Middle East. As a result of the president Clinton’s policy towards Iran, specifically of its very last

months, the United States could have welcomed the new century with a hope that the relations with Iran could become stable at last. As mentioned by Riedel (2008), “The new millennium seemed to promise much” (Riedel, 2008, 106).

5.3. George W. Bush, “Axis of Evil” and a shadow of the Iranian nuclear programme

The new administration of president George W. Bush certainly could not have imagined a more difficult beginning of its term. Only few months after entering the office, president Bush was forced to solve the outcomes of the tragic events related to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. However, According to Riedel (2008), the era after the attacks provided both the United States and Iran with an opportunity to cooperate on the issue of international terrorism. Iran expressed its solidarity with the United States immediately after the incidents. Moreover, an important and highly successful cooperation between the Americans and Iranians really took place in Afghanistan, where Iran more than willingly assisted and supported the United States in the war against the Taliban as the Iranians had almost entered the war with the regime of Taliban in 1998 (Riedel, 2008, 107). Based on the information stated above, a close cooperation between Iran and the USA in Afghanistan could have made a serious impression that the relations between the two were finally heading a right direction despite the fact that the cooperation was more or less a result of a fight against a common enemy of both Iran and the United States. As Riedel further mentions, “The common mission in Afghanistan began the only sustained period of U.S.-Iranian diplomatic communication and cooperation in 30 years” (Riedel, 2008, 107).

Unfortunately, as it will be closely analysed in the following paragraphs, the illusion of improved relations, brighter future and promising tomorrow did not last for a significant period of time. As described in the article *Timeline - U.S. Relations With Iran* from *Council on Foreign Relations* (2021), president Bush declared Iran as a part of the so-called “Axis of Evil”, together with the countries such as North Korea and Iraq, during his first State of the Union address in 2002 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Bush accused these countries of seriously threatening the international piece (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 68). According to Riedel (2008), the speech of president Bush was “very unfortunate” and “absolutely ill-timed”

(Riedel, 2008, 107). The Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei responded with a proclamation where he labelled the United States as being the world's greatest Satan (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 68). Given these pieces of information, it could be argued, the United States, precisely president George W. Bush, incomprehensibly, undeservedly and without an obvious reason verbally attacked a country that had served as a major ally of the U.S. during its war against international terrorism. It may be understood as just another example of the American provocative tone towards Iran. In this case, the Iranian irritated reaction was more than understandable.

In the year of 2002, another event that further increased a mutual mistrust and animosity between Iran and the United States took place. As stated by Murray (2009), this time, it was discovered that the Iranians were secretly developing their own nuclear programme (Murray, 2009, 125). As Balkan-Şahin further explains (2020), while the Iranians claimed that the nuclear programme was being developed for energy purposes only, the Americans were persuaded that the basic reasons for a development of the programme were associated with the purposes of the military usage (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 68). In this case, a certain American concern, scepticism and suspicion towards the Iranian nuclear programme could be seen as an adequate stance. Considering the fact that the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme is unclear and rather sensitive even during contemporary period, as it will be described in the following passages, some degree of caution and providence is undoubtedly appropriate.

The relationship between Iran and the United States entered a next phase in the year of 2003. As described by Benjamin (2018), the United States led the invasion to Iraq in order to destroy the regime of Saddam Hussein (Benjamin, 2018, 121). The Iranian government as well as a vast majority of the Iranian public were pleased to witness a collapse of the regime that had caused deaths of numerous Iranians (Riedel, 2008, 107). As further specified by Benjamin (2018), even though Iran participated only as an observer in this conflict, it still played a significant role (Benjamin, 2018, 121).

Following an overthrow of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein, Tehran provided Washington with a generous offer regarding a proposal for a diplomatic encounter where all the past and recent issues and disagreements between the United States and Iran would have been discussed. The Iranian willingness to negotiate with the United States was believed to have its partial roots in the fear coming from the persuasion that the Americans might have

potentially decided to continue with the invasion from Baghdad all the way to Iran. The topics of the negotiations were supposed to include even the most sensitive questions including the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme, the Iranian support of the militant groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas and many others. There was no response from the administration of president Bush to the Iranian proposal (Benjamin, 2018, 121). The decision of president Bush not to even respond to the Iranian negotiating proposal may be understood as a complete failure of the American diplomatic policy towards the issue of Iran. Hardly the United States could imagine receiving a more tolerant, willing and open request from the Iranians regarding the improvements in the mutual relations between the two countries. As it will be analysed in the following passages, this event represented one of the last chances for a serious diplomatic talk between the USA and Iran for some time to come.

The Iranian openness to cooperate came to the end with the election in 2005 when a former Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad replaced Mohammad Khatami in the office of the Iranian president. The opportunity for another “dialogue of civilizations” was lost as the new Iranian president represented a strongly conservative, anti-Western wing of the government (Riedel, 2008, 108). As stated by Benjamin (2018), during the first months of the Ahmadinejad’s presidency, Iran put its partially suspended nuclear programme back into operation (Benjamin, 2018, 122).

Based on the facts mentioned above, it could be argued that after years of missed opportunities and unfulfilled expectations, the vision of a positive turnover regarding the mutual relations between Iran and the United States completely disappeared with the rise of president Ahmadinejad. This hypothesis is confirmed by Riedel (2008) who offers examples of the events that fundamentally increased the tension between Iran and the USA with the Western world. During the last two years of the president Bush’s term, the Iranian president Ahmadinejad shocked the international community with his highly inappropriate remarks about the Holocaust. He called for a destruction of the country of Israel. In exchange, president Bush responded with a statement, mentioning that the Iranian nuclear programme represented a key to the outbreak of World War III (Riedel, 2008, 108).

As far as the administration of president Bush is concerned, it should be stated, president Bush did not seem to fully use the potential for a significant improvement of the relations between Iran and the United States that had been left by the administration of his predecessor, president Clinton. In fact, the administration of president George W. Bush

preferred using a hard approach towards Iran. In other words, there were no negotiating attempts from president Bush except for a short period of time when the United States was in a need of assistance during the fight with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Americans could have benefited fundamentally from a closer cooperation with the Iranians, especially between the years of 2001 and 2005 when a progressive, reformist president Mohammad Khatami was still in power. Unfortunately, the opportunities and expectations remained missed and unfulfilled.

5.4. Barack Obama, Hassan Rouhani and a hope in the form of a nuclear deal

Considering the extremely tense relations between Iran and the U.S., specifically the exhaustive verbal confrontations between the administration of president Bush and the Iranian president Ahmadinejad, the election of Barack Obama to the office of president of the United States undoubtedly symbolized another opportunity for a significant improvement of the mutual relations between the two countries. The society across the globe welcomed the victory of a Democrat Barack Obama with cautious optimism and believed in a slow but visible change of direction with regards to the international policy including a different U.S. approach towards the issue of Iran. As specified by Nazir Hussain (2015), the new American president declared a full willingness to negotiate with the Iranians immediately during his first months in the office. Not only did president Obama openly call for a process of stabilizing and normalizing the relations with Iran, but he also congratulated the Iranians during a celebration of the Persian national day at the very beginning of the year of 2009 (Nazir Hussain, 2015, 33). As further explained by Nazareth (2019), president Obama aimed to refine the U.S. relations not only with Iran, but also with other regimes such as North Korea. Before winning the election in 2008, Barack Obama stated, “We will pursue this diplomacy with no illusions about the Iranian regime ... the Iranians should negotiate now as by waiting they will only face mounting pressure” (Nazareth, 2019, 23). It could be argued that the first moments of the administration of president Obama signaled more than a promising attitude in relation to the issue of Iran especially if compared to the strategy of the previous U.S. presidential administration. Though, the challenges and hard work were about to come soon.

In the 2009 Iranian election, a conservative, anti-Western figure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected to the position of the Iranian president. This event signaled a certain complication for the United States and its new presidential administration as the past and recent remarks and comments of president Ahmadinejad regarding the Western world, Israel and the Holocaust could not be easily forgotten. Nevertheless, president Obama did not stop with his efforts for a diplomatic solution to the issues between the United States and Iran despite the fact that president Ahmadinejad remained in power. Unfortunately, the Iranians blocked the diplomatic attempts this time. The Obama's open diplomatic policy was basically ignored by president Ahmadinejad who proceeded with the expansion of the Iranian nuclear infrastructure. Ahmadinejad also sent a clear message to the international community that Iran had a full right to enrich uranium and to improve its nuclear programme without allowing the international experts and observers to examine the procedure. (Simpson, 2015, 97-99). Based on the facts mentioned above, it could be stated, the Americans and Iranians exchanged positions completely at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. While the United States basically refused any diplomatic confrontation with the Iranians during the presidency of George W. Bush, the proposals for a diplomatic encounter from the administration of president Obama were more or less rejected by the Iranian president Ahmadinejad.

As a result of the Iranian constant refusal to cooperate even with the international institutions on the issue of its nuclear programme, the administration of president Obama decided to significantly increase the pressure on the Iranian regime by imposing strict sanctions in cooperation with the UN Security Council. The sanctions were supposed to weaken the Iranian economy but mostly to persuade the Iranian regime to finally cooperate with the demands of the international community (Simpson, 2015, 99). However, as stated by Nazareth (2019), the United States still remained open to diplomacy. The U.S. policy with regards to Iran included two main strategies. The first one focused on sanctions, the second one concentrated on negotiations (Nazareth, 2019, 23). Though, especially because of the Iranian negative attitude towards negotiations with the United States, the initial four years of the Obama administration were marked by favouring the strategy that represented sanctions rather than diplomatic negotiations (Simpson, 2015, 99). Generally speaking, this American strategy may be assessed as a reasonable approach towards the issue of Iran. The Obama administration repeatedly offered the opportunity to negotiate, but the Iranians refused to accept it. As a result, the sanctions appear to represent a very last but inevitable solution.

A major milestone in relation to the development of the mutual relations between Iran and the USA is associated with the Iranian presidential election in 2013 in which a pragmatic politician Hassan Rouhani was elected. As described by Nazir Hussain (2015), president Rouhani advocated for a close cooperation with the international community including the United States and supported a negotiating strategy regarding the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme in exchange for the easing of sanctions imposed on the Iranian regime. Hassan Rouhani became known for his policy of the so-called “prudent moderation”, “heroic flexibility” and “constructive engagement” (Nazir Hussain, 2015, 34). As further specified by Balkan-Şahin (2020), “Rouhani, a former nuclear negotiator, was committed to change the trajectory of Iran’s foreign policy from confrontation to cooperation” (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 69). With the rise of president Rouhani, it seemed as the United States received just another unique opportunity to finally stabilize, normalize and significantly improve its relationship with Iran. The Americans seemed to have to make only one crucial decision. Not to waste another chance as it had occurred many times in the past.

An extraordinary, historic and highly symbolic moment took place in September 2013. As described by Nazir Hussain (2015), a direct phone call was realized between president Obama and president Rouhani (Nazir Hussain, 2015, 35). The event represented the most direct contact between the highest representatives of Iran and the United States since the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). The phone call paved the way for an even more epic event that took place few months after the first direct conversation between Obama and Rouhani (Nazir Hussain, 2015, 35-36). These facts clearly demonstrate both the American and Iranian willingness to finally come to the negotiating table and cooperate on the major issues that divided Iran and the United States. After decades full of mistrust and prejudices, it appeared as the Americans and Iranians were able to directly communicate with each other at last.

In November 2013, an interim nuclear deal was finalised between Iran and the United States. The so-called “Joint Plan of Action” or the “Geneva Interim Agreement” confirmed the suspension of the Iranian nuclear enrichment and partially relieved the sanctions imposed on Iran. Nevertheless, the negotiating processes regarding the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme did not end with an interim nuclear deal but proceeded throughout the years of 2014 and 2015 (Nazir Hussain, 2015, 36). The interim agreement between Iran and the United States may be understood as a spectacular victory of diplomacy. Hardly anyone could imagine the deal being finalised without an effort, openness and willingness of both sides to negotiate

with one another. Thus, it may be argued, the American diplomatic strategy towards the issue of Iran, initiated by president Obama, seemed to deliver a first visible success. However, it should also be stated, the agreement would probably never have been signed without an open approach from president Rouhani.

As a result of the ongoing negotiations with regards to the Iranian nuclear programme, a historic agreement known as “The Comprehensive Joint Plan of Action” or “JCPOA” was signed by Iran and the members of the P5+1 in Switzerland during July 2015 (Simpson, 2015, 132). According to Nazir Hussain (2015), the agreement was expected to end the Iranian nuclear issue (Nazir Hussain, 2015, 36). In order to clearly explain the purposes of the agreement and for a better understanding of the main content of the deal, I will quote a specific passage from the article *Tracing Discursive Strategies to Understand the U.S. Withdrawal from the Iranian Nuclear Deal* (2020), written by Sevgi Balkan-Şahin. “In exchange for sanctions relief, the deal urged Iran to reduce its low-enriched uranium stockpile by 98 percent and not to construct new uranium-enrichment facilities for fifteen years, abolish its capacity to produce weapons-usable plutonium, and allow prompt and comprehensive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA)” (Balkan-Şahin, 2020, 69). As described by Nazareth (2019), the Iranian nuclear deal or “JCPOA” had both its supporters and opponents. While the representatives who were in favour of the deal argued that it was more beneficial to have some nuclear agreement with Iran than to have no deal at all despite the fact that there was a general consensus that the deal was imperfect, the opposing representatives claimed that the agreement was not going to block the Iranians from continuing with the process of the uranium’s enrichment. In the United States, the Iranian nuclear deal was extremely criticized especially by the members of the Republican Party (Nazareth, 2019, 24-25). From a global perspective, an international deal always appears to represent a positive change of direction in relation to a specific geopolitical issue. Even though an agreement may not always be respected, it ensures a degree of stability and balance and contributes to the maintenance of international piece. As far as the “JCPOA” is concerned, it could be argued, the agreement might help to significantly stabilize the global geopolitical situation regarding the nuclear resources and a development of nuclear weapons. Last but not least, an agreement signed by the countries with the most powerful militaries may represent a crucial factor in relation to the maintenance of international piece.

Based on the facts stated above, the Obama administration will be forever remembered for beginning the era of a direct talks and negotiations with the post-revolution

Iranian regime. President Obama showed an enormous determination to solve the long-lasting issues between Iran and the United States with the use of diplomacy. By signing the treaties with Iran, the United States undoubtedly reduced the risks of a potential nuclear threat that could have an enormous impact on the whole world. Despite the remarks and comments that undermine the practical implementation of the Iranian nuclear deal, it should still be reminded that having a deal always appears to be a better solution than having no deal.

5.5. Donald Trump, a withdrawal from the agreement, the strike on Soleimani, Joe Biden and the way forward

The U.S. presidential election of 2016 symbolized an extremely significant event not only in relation to the future development of the relationship between Iran and the United States. America stood at the crossroad of its foreign policy. There were two radically different paths. The victory of a Democrat Hillary Clinton basically promised a continuation of the foreign policy initiated by former president Barack Obama. On the contrary, the victory of an “outsider” Donald Trump, who was nominated by the Republican Party, promised more or less anything except the continuing process of the Obama’s policy.

As far as the issue of Iran is concerned, it became more than obvious, the Republican Party’s nominee and the future president Donald Trump favoured a completely different approach towards Iran than his predecessor Barack Obama. As stated by Nazareth (2019), Donald Trump called for imposing the new sanctions on the Iranian regime and attacked the purposes of the Iranian nuclear deal during the presidential campaign. Before the election, Trump even labelled the Iranian deal as being “the worst deal ever” (Nazareth, 2019, 26-27). As further explained by Benjamin (2018), with the departure of president Obama from the Oval Office, there were high hopes that the relations between Iran and the USA were finally heading a prosperous direction. However, neither of the two countries counted with the option of Donald Trump becoming the next president of the United States (Benjamin, 2018, 125). Based on the facts mentioned above, the unexpected victory of Donald Trump in the election appeared as an unwanted option for the Iranians and anyone who supported the process of a political rapprochement between the U.S. and Iran. Considering the unpredictability, political and diplomatic inexperience of Donald Trump and rather negative statements of the new

American president with regards to Iran, the future of the mutual relations seemed to be quite uncertain.

Nevertheless, as described by Nazareth (2019), the first months of the Donald Trump's presidency did not bring any major differences regarding the American foreign policy towards Iran. President Trump remained critical toward the "JCPOA", but his administration also lifted some of the sanctions, specifically the ones that were imposed on a sector of the oil and banking industry (Nazareth, 2019, 27-28). Therefore, one could easily believe, the administration of Donald Trump fortunately decided to use a more pragmatic approach rather than a hostile strategy with regards to Iran.

Unfortunately, the hopes did not last for a long time. Until 8 May, 2018, there was still a certain potential of keeping the relations between Iran and the United States on a relatively prosperous and stable level despite the president Trump's harsh rhetoric in relation to Iran. Nevertheless, all the potential and hopes disappeared soon. As further stated by Nazareth (2019), president Trump announced the complete U.S. withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal or the "JCPOA" on 8 May, 2018. By doing so, Donald Trump kept one of the promises he gave during his presidential campaign. While the other signatories of the deal including the American allies such as Germany, France or the United Kingdom were shocked, the Trump's decision was praised and celebrated by the Middle Eastern allies of the United States including the countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia which are also the main regional rivals of Iran (Nazareth, 2019, 28).

As far as the justification of the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement is concerned, the administration of president Trump officially posted the following statement. "The Iran Deal was one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into" (Trump, 2018). Some of the factors that supported the American withdrawal from the deal included the protection of the America's national security interests, the past secret efforts of the Iranians to develop nuclear weapons and a constant Iranian support of the terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah (Trump, 2018). The opposing viewpoint with regards to the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement is provided by the report called *2019 HOT TOPICS IN NATIONAL SECURITY* (2019), stating that, "The Iran deal was not perfect, but it was successful in freezing Iran's nuclear programme and provided the foundation to address the country's other malign activities" (Eoyang, Peters, Mehta and Gaskew, 2019, 23). Furthermore, the United States alienated its major allies by deciding to withdraw from the

agreement. Last but not least, the United States lost the opportunity to renegotiate the agreement or negotiate another deal with the Iranians as the mutual trust between Iran and the USA was greatly damaged (Eoyang, Peters, Mehta and Gaskew, 2019, 23-24).

Based on the facts stated above, I would argue, the U.S. withdrawal from the “JCPOA” represents a step in a negative direction. The agreement certainly possessed various imperfections including the difficulty to closely monitor its compliance. However, I still believe, the positives of having at least some nuclear agreement with Iran undoubtedly outweighs the negatives of having no nuclear deal. The agreement had a full potential of reducing the long-lasting tensions between Iran and the United States and minimalizing the risks of a potential nuclear catastrophe. Moreover, it concentrated on an extremely sensitive issue of the Iranian nuclear programme and required years of detailed negotiations prior to its finalisation. By withdrawing from the treaty, president Trump decided to disrespect numerous years of diplomatic and negotiating efforts of the Obama administration.

Another significant event regarding the mutual relations between Iran and the United States took place in April 2019. During this period, the U.S. officially declared the so-called “Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps”, a government group that functions as a part of the Iranian army, a foreign terrorist organization. This event represented the first time when an official governmental organization of a foreign country was listed as a terrorist group by the United States (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Unsurprisingly, the American decision must have been seen as an act of hostility in Iran. Considering the past events of the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal and the following designation of a part of the Iranian army as a terrorist group, it appeared that the process of the alienation between Iran and the United States gained strength again.

Nevertheless, one of the most notable milestones of the president Trump’s policy in relation to Iran was still about to come. This time, the event included a direct attack on one of the representatives of the Iranian regime. As explained by Rubin (2020), president Trump decided to launch a strike on the leading Iranian general Qassem Soleimani on January 3, 2020 (Rubin, 2020, 4). As further specified by the research report titled *Why Did the US Kill Qassem Soleimani?* (2020), the reasons of the attack were associated with the Iranian provocations throughout the year of 2019 that specifically included the attacks on the oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, the strike on the American drone and most importantly the attack on the U.S. military base in Baghdad (Frisch, Gilboa, Hacoen, Itzchakov and Joffe, 2020,

10). The American strike on the commander Soleimani was successful. The Iranians responded with the attacks on the two U.S. military bases five days after the incident. There were no American casualties in relation to the Iranian response. However, a large number of civilians died during a different incident. As a result of the military alert, the Iranians mistakenly shoot down the Ukrainian passenger jet. The tragedy resulted in the deaths of all the people on board (Rubin, 2020, 4-5). Generally speaking, it is extremely difficult to assess the U.S. approach regarding a direct attack on the general Qassem Soleimani. Surely there were obvious reasons for the unprecedented American response as a reaction to the Iranian attacks against the U.S. targets in the region. On the other hand, even the Iranian provocations seemed to be the result of the growing tensions and animosity between Iran and the United States that had been partially unleashed by president Trump himself. A withdrawal from the nuclear agreement, the inappropriate remarks about the Iranian regime or the president's refusal of any closer negotiations with the Iranians appear to represent a prelude to the following events. Therefore, I would argue, the Iranian provocations as well as the attack on Qassem Soleimani represent the unfortunate consequences of a failed foreign policy of president Trump towards Iran. In other words, if the Trump administration had proceeded with a diplomatic tone rather than using a hard force with regards to Iran, we would have barely witnessed the traumatic events of the recent years.

The remaining months of the president Trump's term were marked by the growing tension and antipathy between the Iranian regime and the Trump administration. The Iranians successfully tested the military satellite in April 2020. The Americans reacted with the statement by the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who proclaimed that the United States considered imposing another sanctions on Iran. By the time of the U.S. presidential election of 2020, president Trump imposed the final sanctions on Iran. This time, the sanctions targeted various sectors of the economy. The Trump administration stated that one of the reasons for the new imposition of sanctions was associated with the Iranian interference in the 2020 U.S. presidential election (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

The U.S. presidential election of 2020 represented another turning point regarding the mutual relations between the two countries. The victory of a Democratic candidate Joe Biden paved the way for the further attempts to stabilize and normalize the relationship between Iran and the United States. Hopefully, the stabilization and normalization of the mutual relations will be done through diplomacy and close negotiations.

In fact, the administration of president Joe Biden has already shown a strong determination to come back to the negotiating table with the Iranians. As specified by Al-Aloosy (2020), president Biden assured the international community that his ambition is to re-join the Iranian nuclear deal. Biden also stated that the agreement requires further improvements and the United States is willing to negotiate with anyone regarding this issue (Al-Aloosy, 2020, 1). According to the research report *Why Did the US Kill Qassem Soleimani?* (2020), it is not surprising that Iran wanted to see a Democrat winning the 2020 presidential election (Frisch, Gilboa, Hacoheh, Itzhakov and Joffe, 2020, 11). However, it should also be reminded that for the purposes of the close negotiations, it is necessary for both sides to willingly cooperate with one another. This aspect may represent a rather challenging issue as the Iranian presidential election is getting closer. In June 2021, the Iranians will head to the polls. President Rouhani will be leaving the office soon. Thus, we may only believe, the Iranians will select a politician who will not only protect the Iranian national interest but will also decide to cooperate openly with the Western world including the United States.

The Iranian optimism in relation to the victory of Joe Biden may be understood as a pragmatic approach. The recent history offers the examples that clearly demonstrate the crucial divisions between the approaches, methods and strategies of the Democratic and Republican presidents towards the issue of Iran. Since the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, the Democratic administrations have usually focused on diplomacy and negotiations. The Democratic presidents did use the harsh rhetoric and sanctions, but primarily when there was no other available solution. President Clinton faced challenges with the Khobar Tower bombings while president Obama had difficulties with president Ahmadinejad. Nevertheless, they still appeared to follow the slogan “Diplomacy First”. On the other hand, The Republican presidents have seemed to use the harsh rhetoric, sanctions, threats and even direct attacks much more often. They usually did not even provide the Iranians with the opportunity to discuss the major issues that divided Iran and the USA. The administration of president Reagan supported the regime of Saddam Hussein, president George W. Bush favoured cooperation with the Iranians only when it was beneficial for the U.S. army in Afghanistan and president Trump launched an attack on the leading general of the Iranian regime. Based on the facts stated in the previous passages and subchapters, we may only predict what the future development of the relations between Iran and the United States will look like. However, the history suggests certain options, scenarios and probabilities.

6. The influence of the Iran – United States foreign relations on the contemporary global affairs

The development of the relations between Iran and the United States, specifically its long-term unpredictability and inconsistency, undoubtedly has a major impact on the global geopolitical affairs. As far as the international policy is concerned, Iran and the United States do not appear to share the same goals. The United States as a major superpower intends to retain its sphere of influence in various regions of the world including the Middle East. On the contrary, Iran aims to remain in the position of one of the most influential and dominant entities of the Middle Eastern region. The following chapter will aim to depict and analyse the most significant impacts of the mutual relations between Iran and the United States on the balance and stability and division of power on the global geopolitical scene.

6.1. The issue of Iran divides the United States from its European allies

First of all, it appears that the relations between Iran and the United States have a major impact on the different methods, strategies and approaches used by the United States and Europe with regards to dealing with the Iranian issue. Therefore, the allied relationship between the United States and the European Union may be severely violated by the different approaches used by the U.S. and the EU towards Iran. This hypothesis is supported by Geranmayeh (2017), who states that there is a general consensus among the leaders of the European countries and the representatives of the United States on the concerns regarding Iran, but the proposed strategies, methods and approaches differ dramatically from one another. While the Americans and specifically the Republicans are in favour of the so-called “policy of isolation” and tend to use a hard approach including the threats and international sanctions towards Iran, the European leaders are generally much more supportive of diplomatic efforts and are willing to openly negotiate with the Iranians. The European perspective is based on the persuasion that “isolating Iran” will only lead to a further escalation and destabilization of the situation both internationally and regionally (Geranmayeh, 2017, 2). Regarding the above mentioned, I would argue, there is a serious

danger that the process of the allied cooperation between the European Union and the United States may be partially endangered in the future. The issue of Iran clearly demonstrates a certain fragility of the “Transatlantic Alliance”. Thus, it should still be reminded that the maintenance of the quality transatlantic cooperation between the United States and Europe represents vital interest for both the U.S. and Europe. In order to secure the safety, prosperity and protection of the values of the Western world, it is essential for the United States and Europe to insist on having the strongest possible ties.

In fact, the “JCPOA” or the so-called Iranian nuclear deal is probably the best demonstration of the deepening division between the United States and its European allies with regards to Iran. It shows how far the signatories are willing to go in order to ensure security and stability not only for themselves but also for their allies. In case of the United States and primarily president Trump, keeping a prosperous relationship with the European allies was not really worth it. As specifically explained by Belal (2019), under the administration of president Trump, the United States withdrew from the international nuclear agreement that had been signed not only by the United States and its allies such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom, but also by the traditional competitors of the U.S. such as Russia and China. (Belal, 2019, 23-24). In this case, it may be argued, the United States alienated its major allies by withdrawing from the agreement that had a potential of stabilizing the global situation with regards to the nuclear resources. However, it should also be stated, the era of president Trump is already over, at least for this moment. The administration of president Biden certainly deserves some time before it develops its own strategy towards Iran. Returning to the negotiating table with the Iranians and strengthening the mutual ties between Europe and the United States would represent the best scenario.

It is also necessary to mention, the Iranians as well as the main competitors of both the United States and the European Union seem to notice the certain disagreements and misunderstandings that divide the approaches of the U.S. and the EU with regards to Iran. Quite understandably, they might try to benefit from the American and European disunity. This statement is supported by Tabatabai and Tam (2020), who mention that the Iranian regime aims to create even more visible barriers between the United States and its European allies. The Iranians realize that confronting the U.S. and Europe individually provides their country with an enormous advantage as Iran does not have to face the demands of a stronger, united opponent (Tabatabai and Tam, 2020, 6). Another example of the European and American disunity is provided by Belal (2019), who offers a statement of a senior French

diplomat from the year of 2018, mentioning that, “The truth is that the Trump administration’s problem is not with the deal, it’s with the Islamic Republic of Iran. We are in 2018, but the U.S. is stuck in 1979” (Belal, 2019, 25). Last but not least, the examples of visible disunity in the cooperation between the United States and Europe may be demonstrated by the two relatively recent events. As described by Tabatabai and Tam (2020), the United States did not inform its European allies of the intention to launch a direct attack on the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani. The lack of warning regarding the event that could have signaled a beginning of an open conflict with Iran may be seen as a symbol of indifference and disregard towards the closest allies of the U.S. On the other hand, the leaders of the European countries provided the Iranians with a substantial medical and financial support during the period of the coronavirus pandemic without consulting the issue with the U.S. officials. In other words, the Europeans delivered financial and medical resources to Iran regardless of the fact that there were the applicable U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran. The Americans were informed of the Europe’s decision only when the transactions had been finalised (Tabatabai and Tam, 2020, 7-8).

These episodes certainly undermine the efficiency of the transatlantic cooperation. Even though the United States and its European allies appear to have the same basic viewpoint with regards to the Iranian issue as described in the previous paragraphs, it seems that they are not fully able to develop the approach and strategy that would be approved by both sides of the alliance. We may only hope, the division of approaches, strategies and methods between the U.S. and Europe in relation to Iran does not symbolize the future misunderstandings and disagreements within the “Transatlantic Alliance” that could have major negative impacts on the division of power of the contemporary world order.

6.2. The Iran - United States relations destabilize the Middle Eastern affairs

Generally speaking, it seems that the permanently tense and complicated relations between Iran and the United States have negative impacts on the stability and balance of the whole Middle Eastern region. In order to fully understand the complex geopolitical matters of the region, it is necessary to explain the basic alliances between the countries of the Middle

East. As mentioned by Nazareth (2019), the Middle East is a place of various issues where the interests of multiple different actors collide (Nazareth, 2019, 29). This statement is broadened by Aftandilian (2018), who states that the specific mixture of factors such as religion, nationalism and history makes the region difficult to understand even for the United States regardless of the fact that the U.S. have generally played a major role in the region since the half of the twentieth century (Aftandilian, 2018).

As far as the contemporary relationship between Iran and the United States is concerned, it is clearly visible that each one of these entities stands on the completely opposite side of the barricade with regards to the Middle Eastern affairs. As further explained by Lesch and Haas (2018), the United States support Saudi Arabia, Jordan and mainly the state of Israel that has always represented the closest ally of the U.S. in the region since the time of its establishment in 1948. It does not matter what party dominates the U.S. politics, there is one thing that never changes. The unlimited American support towards the state of Israel is a key pillar of a foreign policy of all the U.S. presidential administrations regardless of the political partisanship (Lesch and Haas, 2018, 1-8). The other regional partners of the United States include the countries such as Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (Nazareth, 2019, 31). On the contrary, Iran retains a strong sphere of influence in Iraq and Lebanon (Polk, 2009, 207). The Iranian regime is also believed to support radical groups including Hezbollah, Hamas and other predominantly Shia militant organizations. Last but not least, Iran keeps close relations with the Syrian ruling regime of Bashar al-Assad (Aftandilian, 2018, 34). These fundamental ideological and political differences illustrate the reasons why the United States and Iran are basically unable to achieve any compromise in relation to both regional and global geopolitical issues. Iran and the U.S. are members of the completely different alliances and partnerships that seem to compete with one another.

In order to further specify the main Middle Eastern core of conflicts, it is essential to analyse the relations between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel. As already mentioned, Saudi Arabia and Israel are the strategic allies of the United States. As further explained by Aftandilian (2018), Saudi Arabia and Iran are considered to be the two most dominant and influential powers of the Middle East. Though, they are also described as the two greatest rivals of the region. The Saudi-Iranian conflict takes place on various levels. While Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with a Sunni Muslim majority, Iran is an Islamic republic with a majority of Shia Muslims. Both countries accuse one another of mutual destabilization, stimulating tension, foreign intervention, support of radical terrorist groups and engagement

in the regional proxy wars. Saudi Arabia, as well as the United States, does not have any diplomatic ties with Iran (Aftandilian, 2018). The relations between Iran and Israel have been hostile for decades. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran and Israel have participated in several indirect conflicts, they were always standing on the opposite side of the barricade. The matter of Palestine may be regarded as the most sensitive issue that divides the two countries. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the state of Israel is yet to be officially recognized by the contemporary Iranian ruling regime (Hongda, 2021). Based on the facts stated above, it may be concluded, Iran is in a tense, hostile and extremely complicated relationship with both of the main regional allies of the United States. It serves as just another example of the difficulty for both Iran and the United States to cooperate with one another on the matter of any sensitive geopolitical issue.

In order to fully demonstrate the destabilizing effects of the relations between Iran and the United States with its regional allies on the Middle Eastern geopolitical affairs, it is beneficial to concentrate on the Iranian nuclear deal itself. According to Nazareth (2019), the European allies of the United States were highly disappointed with the American decision to withdraw from the agreement as they regarded the deal as the only way to ensure both regional and global stability in relation to the nuclear resources. On the other hand, the Middle Eastern partners of the U.S. including Saudi Arabia and Israel considered the American withdrawal as a domestic political victory and a step in the right direction. For both of these countries, any political negotiations with the Iranians represented completely useless efforts and a significant waste of time. Iran is generally seen by the Saudis and Israelis as an enemy that symbolizes a constant threat and does not deserve any opportunity in a form of diplomatic negotiations (Nazareth, 2019, 31).

Regarding the above mentioned, it appears that the process of a complete stabilization of the region of the Middle East is still far from being finalised. In order to avoid a further destabilization, a detailed cooperation of all the Middle Eastern countries regardless of their position, reputation or allied ties will be necessary. The question is whether the permanent political and military stabilization of the region is even feasible. In this case, one possible option is provided by Polk (2009), who states that the main goal should be to establish a nuclear-free Middle East. Nevertheless, this may be achieved only with the use of negotiations and diplomacy. The mutual threats do not represent a long-term solution. Let the Iranian issue be the example. "The more Iran feels threatened, the more incentive it has to push its nuclear programme toward the acquisition of a weapon." (Polk, 2009, 210-211).

6.3. The relations between Iran and the United States result in the growing influence of China and Russia

Last but not least, it seems that the contemporary state of the mutual relations between Iran and the United States represents a crucial factor that helps China and Russia to comfortably spread their influence in Iran and across the Middle Eastern region. This hypothesis is supported by Mead (2014), who states that the Iranian perspective of the world order differs dramatically from the viewpoints of China and Russia, but Iran strongly opposes the U.S. power in the Middle East. Therefore, the present Iranian strategic partnerships with China and Russia symbolize a logical and highly pragmatic solution in order to reduce the American influence in the region (Mead, 2014, 73-74). According to Belal (2020), the current close ties between Iran and the powers such as China and Russia represent the result of a long-term mutual mistrust and tense relations between Iran and the Western powers including the United States (Belal, 2020, 58). Regarding the above mentioned, it seems that Iran has selected to establish the close ties with Russia and China mainly because it had no other alternative as the Iranian relationship with the Western world has been complicated and hostile. Moreover, the Chinese and Russians appear to understand the advantage of a unique geopolitical position of Iran and try to benefit from it by establishing a closer contact with the Iranians.

The relationship between Iran and Russia was not always ideal. In fact, the modern partnership between Iran and Russia seems to have its roots in the contemporary common interests of the two countries rather than in the mutual historical cooperation. As explained by Benjamin (2018), the historical interactions between the Persians and Russians were marked by various military and ideological conflicts. However, both Russia and Iran currently experience the negative impacts of the so-called “policy of isolation” initiated by the West. Russia is also one of the signatories of the Iranian nuclear deal and functions as the main supplier of weapons to the Iranian regime. Furthermore, the trade between Iran and Russia has been growing steadily over the last decade (Benjamin, 2018, 144-145). Based on the facts stated above, it may be argued, the Iranian close cooperation with Russia appears to represent another outcome of the diplomatic, political and economic isolation of Iran. For the Russians, insisting on having the closest possible ties with Iran may be beneficial in terms of receiving

the opportunity to expand the sphere of influence not only in Iran but also throughout the whole Middle Eastern region.

The Iranian relationship with China, another great power of the contemporary world, seems to experience even a more significant development. As described by Belal (2020), the mutual relations between Iran and China experienced a major turnover after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. China was one of the first countries that officially recognized the regime of the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran. In exchange, Iran regarded China as a potential future strategic partner as the Iranians primarily intended to avoid any closer cooperation with the United States and Soviet Union due to the Iranian past unfortunate experience with both of the superpowers (Belal, 2020, 49). According to Benjamin (2018), the modern strategic partnership between Iran and China is specifically based on the massive Chinese investments in Iran. The Chinese consider Iran as a gateway to the region of the Middle East. China aims to significantly weaken the American influence in the Middle East as the Chinese basically do in any other region. The constantly growing influence of China in Iran is undoubtedly a result of the Western sanctions that prohibit the companies from the “West” from trading in Iran (Benjamin, 2018, 146). As stated by Belal (2020), the cooperation between China and Iran is estimated to grow even in the future as the Western world and primarily the United States follow the policy of isolation towards Iran and tend to impose harsh sanctions on the Iranian regime whenever it is possible. As a result, Iran seeks for partnerships and alliances with the powers such as Russia and China (Belal, 2020, 51). Based on the facts stated above, I would argue, the contemporary hostile relations between Iran and the United States with the Western world do represent a key to the growing influence of Russia and especially China in the region of the Middle East. Even if the Iranians decided to open their country to the western companies, they would not be allowed to do so because of the sanctions imposed on Iran especially by the “West”.

In the final analysis, it is clearly obvious that the tense and complicated mutual relations between Iran and the United States have enormous impacts on various aspects of the contemporary global affairs. Not only does the relationship between Iran and the U.S. threaten the unity of the “Transatlantic Alliance”, but it also further destabilizes the geopolitical issues of the Middle East and contributes to the growing influence of Russia and China.

7. Conclusion

The primary aim of the thesis was to depict, examine, evaluate and critically analyse the most significant events associated with the development of the relations between Iran and the United States during the period after the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. This aim was achieved by providing a detailed description of the major historical events that shaped the mutual relations between Iran and the USA and performing a critical analysis that evaluated these events and made a final conclusion.

Another aim of the work was to assess the influence of the relations between Iran and the United States on the contemporary global affairs. This aim was achieved by providing and analysing the specific examples that have demonstrated that the relations between Iran and the United States have had more than significant impacts on the current geopolitical situation.

Last but not least, the first part of the thesis aimed to provide the reader with a basic knowledge regarding the Iranian historical development and to briefly introduce a concept of the American foreign policy during the twentieth century.

The first chapters of the thesis, specifically the chapters titled “Persia before 1979 Revolution”, “The American foreign policy in the twentieth century” and “The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution” represented a theoretical part where a mixture of various sources was used. The first chapter depicted the historical development of the former Persian Empire until the beginning of the Islamic Revolution. The second chapter focused on the main features of the U.S. foreign policy during the twentieth century. It described the American roles in the World Wars and in the Cold War and provided the information regarding the American involvement in the Middle Eastern affairs. The third chapter concentrated on the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979. It depicted the reasons behind the revolution, the procedure of the revolution as well as the outcomes of the revolution. Therefore, the first three chapters of the work may be also understood as an opening to the following, main chapters of the thesis.

The main chapter titled “The era of the political alienation between Iran and the United States” described, examined, evaluated and analysed the development of the relations between Iran and the United States during the era since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The most significant events of the mutual relations were analysed in detail in this chapter. I also

compared and assessed the different methods, strategies and approaches used towards Iran by all the “post-revolutionary” American presidents, starting with the administration of president Reagan, followed by president George H. W. Bush, president Clinton, president George W. Bush, president Obama and the administration of president Trump. The administration of president Biden was also briefly included in the thesis. This chapter aimed to provide a detailed, critical analysis of the major events that shaped the course of the mutual relations between Iran and the United States. The chapter also concentrated on providing a quality chronological description of these events.

The second main chapter titled “The influence of the Iran – United States foreign relations on the contemporary global affairs” demonstrated, depicted and analysed some of the most visible influences of the mutual relations between Iran and the USA on the contemporary global geopolitical situation. It has been found that the current state of relations between Iran and the United States significantly affects the unified cooperation of the United States and its European allies, contributes to a further destabilization of the Middle Eastern affairs and represents a key to the growing influence of China and Russia in the region.

In conclusion, the relations between Iran and the United States have gone through many stages since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. There were the periods of a tension relief as well as the times of an extreme uncertainty and mutual animosity. With regard to the facts presented in the work, I would argue, the most crucial factor leading to the mutual misunderstanding and hostility appears to be a “lack of willingness” to negotiate, communicate and cooperate with one another. This “lack of willingness” seems to be shared by both sides of the conflict. In the United States, this strategy is represented especially by the conservative members of the Republican Party while the conservative, anti-Western and anti-American wing of the government represents this approach in Iran. Based on the facts stated in the previous chapters of the thesis, it is extremely difficult to prognosticate the future development of the mutual relations. Nevertheless, the history as well as the recent experience suggest, the use of diplomacy and negotiations represents the least bad option for both Iran and the United States.

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Resumé

Kvalifikační práce popisuje, analyzuje a hodnotí vývoj vztahů mezi Íránem a Spojenými státy, především v období po Islámské revoluci. Kromě detailního zhodnocení a analýzy klíčových událostí, které zásadně ovlivnily současnou podobu iránsko-amerických vztahů, nabízí práce také souhrn historických etap a milníků, na které komplikované období vztahů mezi Íránem a Spojenými státy přímo navazuje. Práce se primárně soustředí na poskytnutí detailního kritického náhledu, souvisejícího s mnoha zásadními událostmi, které formovaly vztah mezi Íránem a USA od roku 1979. V neposlední řadě se práce snaží upozornit na mnohé skryté, či opomíjené vlivy a dopady vzájemných vztahů mezi Íránem a Spojenými státy na současné globální geopolitické dění.

