

US STRATEGIC THINKING ABOUT IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM DURING DONALD TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY

СТРАТЕГІЯ США ЩОДО ЯДЕРНОЇ ПРОГРАМИ ІРАНУ ПІД ЧАС ПРЕЗИДЕНТСТВА ДОНАЛЬДА ТРАМПА

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The article is devoted to the analysis of US strategic approaches to the problem of Iran's nuclear program during the presidency of Donald Trump in 2017 – 2021. In particular, the article considers the provisions related to the US policy towards Iran, which are listed in such US strategic documents of Donald Trump's presidency as the Nuclear Policy Review of 2018, the National Security Strategy of 2017 and the National Defense Strategy of 2018. A content analysis of these documents was conducted to reveal how often and in what context they mention Iran and its nuclear program. It is analyzed which strategic goals of the US policy on solving the Iranian nuclear program, proclaimed in these documents, have been realized and which have not been achieved. The reasons why the US strategy on Iran's nuclear program was not entirely successful have been clarified.

The article discusses what new Donald Trump's administration has brought to the US strategy toward Iran compared to his predecessor, Barack Obama. A comparative analysis of strategic documents (Nuclear Policy Reviews, National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy) during the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump was done. It was revealed that at the beginning of his presidency, Barack Obama followed strategic approaches to Iran's nuclear program that were similar to Donald Trump's strategy toward that issue. However, it is revealed that even while pursuing a policy of sanctions and pressure on Iran, similar to the policy of maximum pressure of Donald Trump, Barack Obama left for Iran more options to choose from than his successor. Therefore, after the start of constructive talks with Iran in 2013, Barack Obama's strategy toward Iran was completely different from the corresponding policy of Donald Trump, and this is reflected in the official texts of the National Security Strategies 2015 and 2017.

The article concludes that, in general, Donald Trump's administration has failed to achieve the goals of changing Iran's nuclear and regional policy, which were announced in the strategic documents of 2017–2018. It has been suggested that one of the main reasons of the weakness of Trump's strategy toward Iran's nuclear program was the application of the same approach to threat assessment of Iran and North Korea, despite the fact that the nuclear policies of these two countries differed significantly in the second half of 2010s.

Key words: Iranian nuclear program, US strategy, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), "policy of maximum pressure", economic sanctions.

Стаття присвячена аналізу стратегічних підходів США до проблеми іранської ядерної програми під час президентства Дональда Трампа у 2017–2021 роках. Зокрема, розглянуті положення, які стосуються американської політики щодо Ірану і які містяться в таких стратегічних документах США часів президентства Дональда Трампа, як Огляд ядерної політики 2018 року, Стратегія національної безпеки 2017 року та Стратегія національної оборони 2018 року. Проведено контент-аналіз цих документів на предмет того, наскільки часто і в якому контексті вони згадують Іран та його ядерну програму. Проаналізовано, які проголошені у цих документах стратегічні цілі політики США щодо врегулювання іранської ядерної програми були реалізовані, а яких не вдалося досягти. З'ясовано причини, з яких стратегія США щодо іранської ядерної програми виявилася не зовсім вдалою.

У статті розглянуто, що нового принесла адміністрація Дональда Трампа в американську стратегію щодо Ірану у порівнянні з його попередником Бараком Обамою. Здійснено порівняльний аналіз стратегічних документів (Огляди ядерної політики, Стратегії національної безпеки та Стратегії національної оборони) часів президентства Барака Обама та Дональда Трампа. Виявлено, що на початку свого президентства Барак Обама дотримувався таких стратегічних підходів до іранської ядерної програми, які були схожими зі стратегією Дональда Трампа щодо цієї проблеми. Водночас розкрито, що навіть проводячи політику санкцій та тиску на Іран, подібну до політики максимального тиску Дональда Трампа, Барак Обама залишав Ірану більше варіантів для вибору, ніж його наступник. Тому після початку конструктивних переговорів з Іраном у 2013 році стратегія Барака Обама щодо Ірану повністю відрізнялася від відповідної політики Дональда Трампа, що і відображають офіційні тексти Стратегій національної безпеки 2015 та 2017 років.

У статті зроблено висновок, що загалом адміністрації Дональда Трампа не вдалося досягти тих цілей щодо зміни ядерної та регіональної політики Ірану, які були проголошені у стратегічних документах 2017–2018 років. Зроблено припущення, що однією з головних причин слабкості стратегії Д. Трампа щодо іранської ядерної програми стало застосування однакового підходу до оцінки загроз з боку Ірану та Північної Кореї, попри те, що у другій половині 2010-х років ядерна політика цих двох країн суттєво відрізнялася.

Ключові слова: іранська ядерна програма, стратегія США, Спільний всеосяжний план дій (СВПД), «політика максимального тиску», економічні санкції.

Defining the problem of the article. The end of the presidential term of Donald Trump is a good moment to assess the achievements and failures of his policy, in particular, his strategy to resolve the problem of the Iranian nuclear program. The United States is sometimes criticized for the absence of the clear strategy toward the Middle East, and that could be one of the reasons why the US policy in this region is not very successful. Nevertheless, the US strategic documents describe the presidential administrations' vision of the situation in the Middle East. Such strategic documents like "Nuclear Policy Review" (NPR) of 2018, National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2017, and National Defense Strategy (NDS) of 2018 describe Trump administration's strategic approaches toward Iran, which is the strongest US adversary in the Middle East. Thus, the US strategy toward the Iranian nuclear program may be weak, but at least an attempt to create it was done. This article focuses on analysis of the recent US strategy toward the Iranian nuclear program because it is important to understand the Donald Trump administration's strategic thinking to reveal the goals of its policy towards the Iranian nuclear program. Comparing US strategic goals with their practical implementation is also relevant for understanding the efficiency of the US policy toward Iran and its nuclear program.

Thus, studying the problem of creating clear and effective US strategy toward Iran's nuclear program during Trump's presidency is connected with the following research and practical **tasks**:

- Analyze the US strategic documents that contain description of the US policy toward the Iranian nuclear program (2017 National Security Strategy, 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, 2018 National Defense Strategy)

- Compare the strategic guidelines of the US policy toward Iran with their practical implementation

- Reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the US strategy toward Iran during Trump's presidency.

The objective of this article is to consider US strategy during Donald Trump's presidency toward solving the problem of the Iranian nuclear program.

The research methods of content analysis and comparative analysis were used in the article.

Analysis of the recent publications. Trump's policy toward Iran was studied in the numerous publications. The famous US analyst M. Fitzpatrick analyzes the US policy toward the Iranian nuclear program and discusses how killing the Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhriade in November 2020 may further deteriorate US-Iranian relations [1]. Another prominent American researcher David Albright analyzes different aspects of the Iranian nuclear program, in particular, assesses the IAEA reports about the Iranian nuclear program [2].

The Brookings Institution in Washington, DC gathered valuable publications of its authors who

analyze the Trump's National Security Strategy, and their analysis also contains the thoughts about US policy toward the Iranian nuclear program [3].

The Ukrainian researchers P. Sinovets and V. Gergiieva compared Trump's "policy of maximum pressure" on Iran with the EU's approach to this problem [4]. E. Geranmaye prepared an interesting analytical report for the European Council for Foreign Affairs [5], which analyzes the implications of the Trump's strategy to solve the problem of Iran's nuclear program for the Iranian domestic and external policy and discusses how to overcome the negative impact of the Trump's administration on the Iranian nuclear program's development. The Russian scientist V. Sazhin also provides a detailed analysis of Donald Trump's policy toward the Iranian nuclear program. In contrary to the Russian officials, who do not believe that Iran will go nuclear, V. Sazhin expresses concern that Trump's policy could push Iran to recovering the clandestine nuclear activities even despite the efforts of Joe Biden's administration to recover the nuclear deal with Iran [6].

The previously published research papers and other publications give a detailed analysis of Donald Trump's policy toward Iran. However, the analysts have not yet considered in detail the origins of the strategic thinking of the Trump's administration about the Iranian nuclear program. Thus, the previous researchers give a detailed analysis of the Trump's tactic toward Iran, but they have not made a detailed analysis of the US strategic documents' provisions that are related to dealing with Iran's nuclear program. Those analysts who assessed the US strategic documents in general did not study the place of the Iranian nuclear program in these documents.

The main part of the article.

1. The 2017 National Security Strategy's Assessment of the Iranian Threat

After coming to the White House, the Trump administration needed a little bit more time than the other presidential administrations to prepare the key strategic documents. The National Security Strategy (NSS) was published only at the end of the first year of Donald Trump's presidency while other strategic documents were issued even later – in 2018.

The Trump's NSS mentions Iran rather often (17 times), and this proves that the presidential administration considered Iran as a real danger. The Strategy's foreword, authored by President Donald Trump, mentions the Iranian regime as a "dictatorship" that posed "danger". In addition, President Trump called the nuclear deal with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) "flawed" [7, c. i].

This Trump's description of the nuclear deal was criticized by the expert of the Brookings Institution

Suzanne Maloney who reasonably stated that an assumption that “Washington would have been better equipped to confront Iran in the absence of a nuclear agreement” is a myth. In addition, the Brookings expert mentioned the example of North Korea and stresses that Iran could follow the North Korea’s nuclear path if the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) had not been signed in 2015 [8].

The main text of the 2017 NSS mentions again the “dictatorship” of Iran that is “determined to destabilize regions, threaten Americans and our allies, and brutalize their own people” [7, c. 2].

Also, the 2017 NSS mentioned Iran’s support of the “terrorist groups” [7, c. 7], in particular, “Iranian-backed groups such as Lebanese Hizballah” that “threaten the homeland” [7, c. 11]. In addition, Iran is labeled as “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism” [7, c. 49].

The NSS further describes Iran as one of the main threats to the US national security. According to the document, the United States and allies are facing three main sets of challenges, and the “rogue states” are one of these three key challenges alongside with the “transnational threat organizations” and “the revisionist powers of China and Russia.” Interestingly, only two countries of the world are considered as “rogue states” by Donald Trump’s administration, and Iran is one of them while North Korea is another one [7, c. 25].

This repeated empathizing on the danger of Iran and North Korea is criticized by the analysts. For example, the Brookings expert Suzanne Maloney states that the threats of Iran and North Korea are overestimated in the NSS, because they overwhelm other important national security challenges except Russia, China, and jihadist terrorists [3].

The National Security Strategy also criticizes the nuclear deal with Iran or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that was signed by Iran and P5+1 states (five permanent Security Council member states – China, France, Russia, United States, and United Kingdom – plus Germany) in 2015 [9]. According to the NSS, even after signing this deal, Iran continued “to perpetuate the cycle of violence in the region, causing grievous harm to civilian populations” [7, c. 49]. Other parts of the document clarify that Iran is “the greatest menace to those closest” [7, c. 45] to it and that the “Iranian expansion” is one of the main problems that “have convulsed the Middle East” [7, c. 48]. Iran’s continued developments of “more capable ballistic missiles and intelligence capabilities”, as well as Iranian “malicious cyber activities”, are also included by the NSS into the list of threats that are generated by Tehran even after signing the nuclear deal in 2015.

According to the National Security Strategy, the aforementioned threat of the Iranian ballistic missiles would be countered by further “deploying

a layered missile defense system” [7, c. 8]. In addition, the NSS promises to work further “to deny the Iranian regime all paths to a nuclear weapon” [7, c. 49].

These strategic goals to limit Iran’s nuclear and missile programs and change its regional behavior were not achieved by Trump’s administration despite its policy of maximum pressure on Iran and tough economic sanctions. Although the Iranian economy was badly damaged, Iran did not fulfill the Trump administration’s 12 demands to change its nuclear and regional policy that were listed in 2018 speech of the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [10].

Interestingly, one of the strategic goals proclaimed by the National Security Strategy is to “deepen collaboration with our European allies and partners to confront forces threatening to undermine our common values”, and Iran represents these “threatening forces” according to the document. Furthermore, the Strategy expresses the hope that “the United States and Europe will work together to counter ... the threats posed by ... Iran” [7, c. 48]. As it is well known, the Trump’s administration failed to practically implement this proclaimed intent to cooperate with Europe in dealing with Iran and its nuclear program, because the European countries refused to support Trump’s policy of maximum pressure on Iran and criticized the United States for withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018. This US failure to convince its allies to join the US sanctions against Iran was one more reason why Iran did not change its nuclear and regional policy according to Donald Trump’s expectations.

2. The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review’s Vision of the Iranian Nuclear Program

The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is the main strategic document that determines the guidelines of the US policy in the nuclear deterrence and nuclear proliferation fields. The 2018 NPR, similarly to the 2017 NSS, pays a lot of attention to Iran and gives a more detailed explanation of why the Trump’s administration was disappointed by the nuclear deal with Iran. The document mentions Iran even more often than the 2017 NSS does – 39 times. According to the 2018 NPR, Iran “poses proliferation threats”. The document admits that “Iran has agreed to constraints on its nuclear program in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” but at the same time reminds that the many of the JCPOA’s “restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program will end by 2031” [11, c. 13]. Moreover, according to the document, “Iran retains the technological capability and much of the capacity necessary to develop a nuclear weapon within one year of a decision to do so” [11, c. 13].

The one-year breakout capability is considered as one of the strengths of the JCPOA by its supporters. Before signing the nuclear deal, Iran’s nuclear capabilities could let it to develop nuclear weapons during two or three months only [12]. After Iran started to fulfill the nuclear deal, this time was

extended until one year. This extension was positively assessed by the participants of the JCPOA. However, Trump's administration and the US allies and partners on the Middle East (Israel and Gulf monarchies) did not consider this extension of Iran's breakout capability as a tremendous success because they wanted to completely deny Iran's potential capacity of producing the nuclear weapons in the near future [13]. Therefore, the 2018 NPR insists that "Iran could achieve a nuclear weapon capability rapidly if it decides to do so" [11, c. xvi].

However, as a result of Trump's policy, at the end of 2020 Iran could achieve a nuclear weapon capability even more rapidly. According to the experts' assessments by the end of Trump's presidency in 2020, during approximately 3 months only, Iran could accumulate enough uranium to produce its first atomic bomb [14].

Similarly, to the 2017 NSS, the 2018 NPR mentions other threats from Iran like "development of increasingly long-range ballistic missile capabilities, and its aggressive strategy and activities to destabilize neighboring governments" [11, c. 13]. Also like the 2017 NSS, Trump's NPR mentions Iran in the context of the terroristic threat. Moreover, the NPR even stresses that the Iranian nuclear capabilities could be a source for the nuclear terrorism. According to the NPR, the potential risk of terrorist acquisition of nuclear weapon grows when more states possess the nuclear weapons or related materials, in particular, if these states are "rogue" like Iran [11, c. 13].

However, it appears that the United States did not really perceive Iran as a significant source of the nuclear terrorism. The National Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism, which was published in December 2018, does not even mention Iran, and only reminds "the Middle Eastern battlefields" in the context of using chemical weapons by the Islamic State [15].

In the context of US-Iranian relations, it is worth to mention another paragraph of the 2018 NPR that contains a promise to deter the potential adversaries from the "non-nuclear strategic attack" [11, c. vii] against the United States or its allies and partners. The further events clearly demonstrated that the Trump's administration failed to implement this strategic guideline of its policy toward Iran, similarly, like it failed to realize another promise from the National Security Strategy to work together with Europe to counter the Iranian threat. In 2019, the United States failed to deter Iran's attack against the oil facility in Saudi Arabia [16]. Of course, this failure of US deterrence could be justified by the fact that Saudi Arabia is not an official ally of the United States and it is not very clear if it is a real partner of Washington. However, Iran's attack on the American military base in Iraq in January 2020, which was done after killing the Iranian General Kasem Soleimani [17], could not

justify the failure of US deterrence, although, it could be still explained that that Iranian non-nuclear attack of US base was not "strategic" one. Thus, in this case, the United States was not obliged to fulfill the NPR's promise to "defeat non-nuclear strategic attacks" [11, c. vii]. The absence of a definition of the "non-nuclear strategic attack" in the 2018 NPR is reasonable because an ambiguity regarding understanding this term provided to the United States more options in the crisis like Iran's attack of the US military base.

3. *The 2018 National Defense Strategy's Approaches toward Iran's Nuclear Program*

Another strategic document that defined the US strategy toward Iran during Donald Trump's presidency was the National Defense Strategy of 2018. Only the summary [18] of this document was published, but even this short extract of the Strategy mentions Iran quite often (9 times). According to the summary of the National Defense Strategy (NDS), Iran "remains the most significant challenge to Middle East stability" [18, c. 1] because it "is competing with its neighbors, asserting an arc of influence and instability while vying for regional hegemony" [18, c. 2]. The document blames Iran of "using state-sponsored terrorist activities, a growing network of proxies, and its missile program to achieve its objectives" [18, c. 2]. Moreover, the Strategy's summary states that Iran proliferates ballistic missiles capabilities to the "malign actors" [18, c. 3]. In addition, the document even mentions Iran's "pursuit of nuclear weapons" [18, c. 2]. Even the previously mentioned 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 Nuclear Posture Review admit that Iran limited its nuclear program after signing JCPOA and mention that Iran would acquire nuclear weapon if only the appropriate decision is made. However, the United States does not have the confirmed information that Iran has made this decision, and the IAEA reports also clearly indicate that Iran did not try to produce the nuclear weapons during Donald Trump's presidency [19, c. 7] even after Tehran's complete withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2020 [20].

It appears that the National Defense Strategy exaggerates the Iranian nuclear ambitions and, like the previously mentioned 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, describes Iran as a country that is similar to North Korea. Both Iran and North Korea are described as the "rogue" countries in the US strategic documents that were published during Donald Trump's presidency, and both countries are blamed of attempts to develop the nuclear arsenals. However, it is evident that the nuclear policy of modern Iran and North Korea are rather different. While North Korea already possesses nuclear weapons Iran still cooperates with the IAEA to make its nuclear activities transparent. Therefore, the US strategic documents' attempt to refer Iran and North Korea to one category of the nuclear applicants shows

the weakness of Donald Trump's strategy toward these countries, in particular, regarding Iran.

4. Donald Trump's Strategy toward Iran: What's New Comparing to the Previous Strategic Documents

To complete the analysis of the strategy of Donald Trump's administration toward the Iranian nuclear program it is necessary to compare it with the Iran strategy of the previous presidential administration of Barak Obama.

In 2010, the Department of Defense published the Nuclear Posture Review. Unlike the strategic documents of the Trump era, the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review does not mention Iran very often (four times only) [21]. Obama's NPR was issued long before the productive nuclear negotiations with Iran started in 2013. At that time, the Iranian government of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad continued suspicious nuclear activities and refused to make any concessions to make its nuclear program more transparent. Therefore, the 2010 NPR described Iran in a similar way like the official documents of Trump's administration did and blamed Iran, as well as North Korea, of violating "nonproliferation obligations" [21, c. 3].

Interestingly, while referring Iran and North Korea to one group of countries whose "nuclear ambitions" should be reversed [21, c. 9], Obama's NPR never labeled these countries as "rogue states" as the Trump's documents did. It appears that the absence of such labels in the strategic documents is more reasonable because it opens more opportunities to the potential negotiations in the future.

In January 2012, Obama's administration issued the National Defense Strategy (NDS). At that time, the situation over the Iranian nuclear program was still very tense. Nevertheless, the published summary of Obama's NDS [22] mentioned Iran much less often than Trump's documents did (three times only). The 2012 NDS declares a strategic goal "to prevent Iran's development of a nuclear weapon capability and counter its destabilizing policies" [22, c. 2]. The US concerns over Iran's aggressive policy toward its regional neighbors were also mentioned in the 2012 NDS summary. Interestingly, in this context, the Strategy compares Iran with China (not with North Korea like the US official documents often do) because according to the NDS, both "Iran and China will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities" [22, c. 4].

The 2012 NDS also expresses the US readiness to cooperate with the Gulf monarchies in preventing "Iran's development of a nuclear weapon capability" "when appropriate" [22, c. 2]. It appears that this phrase "when appropriate" indicated that Obama's administration had a little bit different vision of the Iranian nuclear program's development than the Arabic monarchies of the Gulf region. That difference was clearly demonstrated during the nuclear

talks between Iran and the P5+1 states in 2013 – 2015, when the United States agreed to lift sanctions from Iran and save Iran's enrichment program although the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) monarchies sharply criticized this decision.

Donald Trump's administration maintained much closer relations with the Gulf monarchies than Obama's administration did. During Trump's presidency, the United States fully supported the GCC countries' attempts to isolate Iran, and the US policy regarding Iranian nuclear program matched the expectations of the Gulf monarchies [23]. Trump's National Security Strategy also reflects this closer relationship with the GCC states as it contains US promise to "remain committed to helping our partners achieve a stable and prosperous region, including through a strong and integrated Gulf Cooperation Council" [7, c. 49]. Thus, the Trump's official documents did not indicate any limitations of cooperation with the Gulf monarchies like Obama's NSS did using the cautious phrase "when appropriate".

Finally, the National Security Strategy is one more document that describes Obama's strategic approaches toward the Iranian nuclear program. During his presidency, Barak Obama issued two National Security Strategies. The first Strategy was issued in 2010 [24]. This document mentioned Iran 14 times, but this is still less than in Trump's NSS or NPR (17 and 39 times correspondingly). Like other Obama administration's documents, which were issued before achieving the nuclear deal with Iran, the 2010 National Security Strategy condemned Iran's nuclear activities and aggressive regional policy, and this makes a "pre-deal" Obama's strategy toward the Iranian nuclear program similar to Trump's approaches to this problem. For example, the 2010 NSS promised "to hold nations like Iran and North Korea accountable for their failure to meet international obligations" [24, c. 4]. However, unlike Trump administration's official documents, the 2010 NSS emphasizes on presenting a "clear choice to Iran" between peaceful negotiations and isolation [24, c. 23]. The Obama's strategy just demands from Iran to meet "its international obligations on its nuclear program" as a condition to get an opportunity "to proceed on a path to greater political and economic integration with the international community" [24, c. 23–24]. Later, during the nuclear negotiations with Iran in 2013–2015, the United States demonstrated what they meant under "international obligations on nuclear program": reducing the uranium enrichment capabilities, the full cooperation with the IAEA and some other limitations for the nuclear program's development that were acceptable for Iran.

Unlike his predecessor, Donald Trump was much more demanding to Iran. In 2018, the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued 12 demands of Trump's administration to Iran as a precondition to lift

the US sanctions. These demands included not only the complete dismantlement of the Iranian enrichment capabilities, but also huge concessions of Iran regarding its regional policy and ballistic missiles program [10]. These complicated issues were not negotiated by Obama's administration during the talks over JCPOA.

In 2015, Obama's administration issued the new National Security Strategy to update US strategic policy taking into account Russia's aggression against Ukraine, worsening situation in the Middle East and other new challenges [25]. The 2015 NSS mentions Iran 11 times and also promises "to hold Iran responsible for failing to meet its international obligations" [25, c. 1]. The Strategy was issued when the temporarily nuclear deal with Iran (Joint Plan of Action) was achieved but the final treaty (JCPOA) was still being negotiated. According to President Barack Obama's foreword to the 2015 NSS, the United States was testing "whether it is possible to achieve a comprehensive resolution to assure the international community that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful" [25, c. 1]. Therefore, the document contained cautious assessments of the Iranian nuclear policy although it admitted that "the Joint Plan of Action has halted the progress of Iran's program" [25, c. 1] and even declared intention to "enable Iran to access peaceful nuclear energy" [25, c. 11].

Thus, the strategic approaches toward Iran that were proclaimed in 2015 completely differed from Trump's strategy toward the Iranian nuclear program. It appears that the 2015 NSS approaches to Iran are relevant in the current situation when Iran also demonstrates its readiness to limit its nuclear

program, but it remains to be seen whether Iran fulfills its promises.

Conclusions. Donald Trump's strategy toward the Iranian nuclear program is a bit similar to the strategic approaches of his predecessor Barak Obama during his first presidential term. However, unlike Obama's administration, Trump's government left fewer options to choose for Iran, as Mike Pompeo 12 demands to Iran clearly demonstrated. Obama's strategy toward Iran after signing JPOA in 2013 and JCPOA in 2015 completely differed from Trump's policy because unlike his predecessor, Donald Trump sought to completely dismantle Iran's uranium enrichment program and radically change the Iranian behavior in the Middle East region.

Donald Trump's strategy of maximum pressure on Iran has much more weaknesses than strengths. As a result of Trump's strategy, Iran changed its breakout capability to produce nuclear weapons from 12 months in 2018 to about 2 – 3 months by the end of 2020. Moreover, Trump's administration failed to achieve its proclaimed strategic goals to deter attacks from Iran and cooperate with the European allies in dealing with the Iranian nuclear program. Iran's aggressive regional policy did not change as well, and the Iranian missile program further continued despite US attempts to stop it. The weakness of Trump's strategy toward Iran was also caused by the fact that his presidential administration conducted a similar policy toward Iran and North Korea although the strategic approaches of these two countries to the nuclear weapons were very different in the second half of 2010s.

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