



The Limits of Coercion: Evaluating the Trump Administration's Maximum-Pressure Campaign against Iran, 2018–2021

Mohammad Javad Zarif^{1*}, Mohammad Reza Jamali²

1. Corresponding Author, Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: jzarif@ut.ac.ir

2. Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: mrjamali@ut.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article History:
Received 06 August 2026
Revised 11 August 2026
Accepted 18 September 2026
Published Online 18 September 2026

Keywords:
Iran,
United States,
Maximum Pressure,
U.S. Foreign Policy,
Coercion.

ABSTRACT

The United States has long relied on coercive measures, particularly economic sanctions, to influence Iran's political demeanor. This study examines the effectiveness of the "Maximum Pressure" campaign (2018–2021), launched after the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The campaign aimed to alter Iran's strategic behavior by compelling Tehran to accept U.S. demands regarding its nuclear program, regional policies, and missile development. Drawing on Phil Haun's Asymmetric Coercion theory and using Process Tracing, the study answers this research question: how and through what mechanisms did the campaign affect Iran's strategic behavior? This study finds that the campaign failed to achieve its main objectives for three reasons: U.S. demands were perceived in Tehran as existential threats to the state or its political survival, second Tehran did not perceive threats and punishments would end upon making concessions, and finally the credibility of certain U.S. threats was limited. Hence, the perceived cost of resistance remained lower than that of compliance, leading Iran to resist U.S. coercive pressure.

Cite this article: Zarif, M. J., & Jamali, M. R. (2026). The Limits of Coercion: Evaluating the Trump Administration's Maximum-Pressure Campaign against Iran, 2018–2021. *Journal of Iran and Regional Studies*, 9 (1), 67-100. <http://doi.org/10.22059/jices.2026.420267.1119>



© The Author(s) retain the copyright.

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jices.2026.420267.1119>

Introduction

Since the 1979 Revolution, the United States and Iran relations have generally been defined by hostility, ideological conflict, and persistent strategic mistrust. The origins of U.S.–Iran hostility reach deeper than the 1979 Revolution, tracing back to the 1953 coup, which many Iranians regard as a profound violation of national sovereignty. For the United States, however, the 1979 hostage crisis became the defining moment that cemented perceptions of Iran as volatile and adversarial. Subsequent episodes—most notably the 1988 downing of Iran Air Flight 655 and Iran’s continued support for regional non-state actors—further entrenched mutual suspicion and hardened threat perceptions on both sides. Over the following decades, U.S. sanctions expanded from narrowly targeted measures into a comprehensive and highly institutionalized system of economic and financial pressure. After the 2002 disclosure of Iran’s undeclared nuclear activities, European diplomacy led by the E3 produced the 2003 Tehran Declaration and the 2004 Paris Agreement, under which Iran agreed to suspend enrichment (Ghazvinian, 2021). As Iran resumed enrichment activities in 2005, the UN Security Council responded by adopting a series of resolutions that steadily broadened multilateral sanctions. In parallel, the United States intensified its own “pressure track,” expanding unilateral and extraterritorial sanctions to target Iran’s energy, financial, and military sectors. The cumulative effect of these measures—combined with the election of a new Iranian president—created conditions conducive to renewed diplomacy, ultimately producing the 2013 Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) and, two years later, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Under the JCPOA, Iran accepted extensive restrictions and intrusive monitoring of its nuclear program in exchange for phased sanctions relief and reintegration into the global economy.

This trajectory shifted sharply with the election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th U.S. president. Beginning immediately after his inauguration, the administration sought to renegotiate the JCPOA’s terms by exerting pressure not only on Iran but also on European partners. In May 2018, after months of escalating demands, Trump announced the unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA and reinstated sweeping economic sanctions. This decision inaugurated a new coercive strategy—branded the “Maximum Pressure” campaign—designed to compel Iran to accept far-reaching U.S. demands across the nuclear, regional, and missile domains.

Coercion and sanctions occupy a central place in statecraft, particularly in asymmetrical relationships where powerful states attempt to shape the behavior of weaker ones. Schelling’s distinction between deterrence and compellence underscores how the timing, structure, and credibility of threats determine their effectiveness. For Schelling, influence derives not from the use of force but from the ability to signal credible future harm. Successful coercion therefore hinges on clear communication and believable follow-through.

Since 1979, sanctions have become the dominant U.S. instrument for influencing Iran, evolving into a dense architecture targeting energy exports, financial networks, arms procurement, and political elites. Scholars such as Kerr, Torbat, and Vakil argue that sanctions often reflect Washington’s strategic preferences but also its diplomatic constraints. Kerr and Katzman (2018) describe sanctions as the default U.S. policy in the absence of consensus on

engagement; Torbat (2005) criticizes their overuse as a substitute for diplomacy; and Vakil (2017) contends that under Trump, sanctions displaced dialogue entirely, marginalizing multilateral negotiation. Over time, sanctions have become embedded in the identity politics of U.S.–Iran relations, reinforcing cycles of mistrust and functioning as symbolic punishments rather than tools of calibrated bargaining.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the dynamics and outcomes of the Trump administration's Maximum Pressure campaign (2018–2021), asking:

How, and through what mechanisms, did the campaign affect Iran's strategic behavior?

Although the empirical focus is limited to this period, the subsequent escalation into open conflict between the United States and Iran in 2025–2026 illustrates the grave consequences of misjudging the structural limits of asymmetric coercion. In Haun's framework, when a challenger's demands exceed the target's threshold for strategic survival—falling outside the coercion range—coercion collapses. The challenger must then either absorb reputational costs or escalate from compellence to brute force, a transition that is both destabilizing and costly (Haun, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

For an interstate confrontation to qualify as asymmetric coercion, three core conditions must be met. (Haun, 2015) First, there must be significant disparities in national power, with the challenger holding a clear, sustained advantage in economic resources, military capabilities, and global influence. This imbalance must allow the challenger to credibly threaten the target's survival, while the target can only inflict limited harm and lacks the means for an existential retaliation. Typically, the US acts as the archetypal great power, while the target is often a regional or middle power with fewer capabilities and limited strategic depth. Second, the confrontation must focus on specific issues under the target's control (such as policies, behaviors, or strategic capabilities) that the challenger seeks to change. Third, the more powerful state must deliberately choose coercion as its strategy.

Phil Haun (2015) develops his theory of asymmetric coercion using a game-theoretical framework to model the strategic interactions between a powerful challenger and a weaker target state. There are several assumptions for the model: 1) Neo-Realist structure, 2) states as unitary actors, and 3) rational actors. The coercion begins when the great power chooses it over accommodation and uses brute force to alter the situation around the issue. For each decision, whether made by the challenger or the target, there are payoffs for both parties.

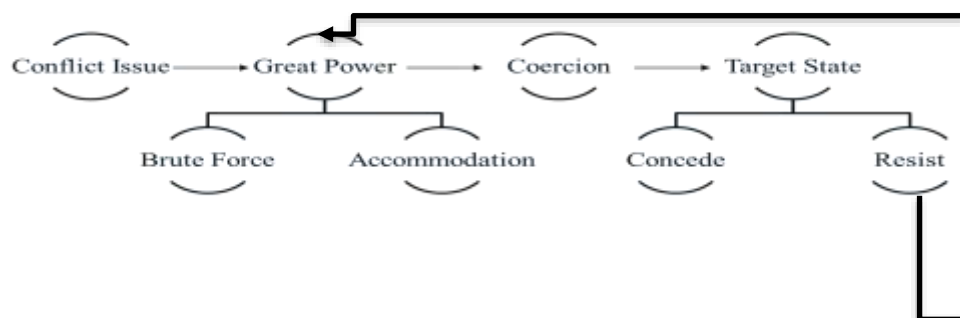


Figure 1. The Model of Asymmetric Coercion (Haun, 2015)

Coercion Range

The coercion range emerges from the equilibrium conditions of Haun's asymmetric coercion model. The model assumes rational actors and evaluates whether a powerful state should adopt coercion instead of brute force or accommodation. Coercion becomes a viable and potentially effective strategy only when this strategic range exists, indicating the presence of mutually acceptable outcomes that avoid the high costs of war. This range is strictly bound by two critical points: The lower bound represents the minimum concession a challenger is willing to accept instead of initiating brute force/war; the upper bound marks the maximum demand the target is willing to concede, where the target is indifferent between conceding and resisting. In theory, if such a coercion range exists, coercion should succeed: both actors, acting rationally, would prefer a settlement to the costs and risks of war.

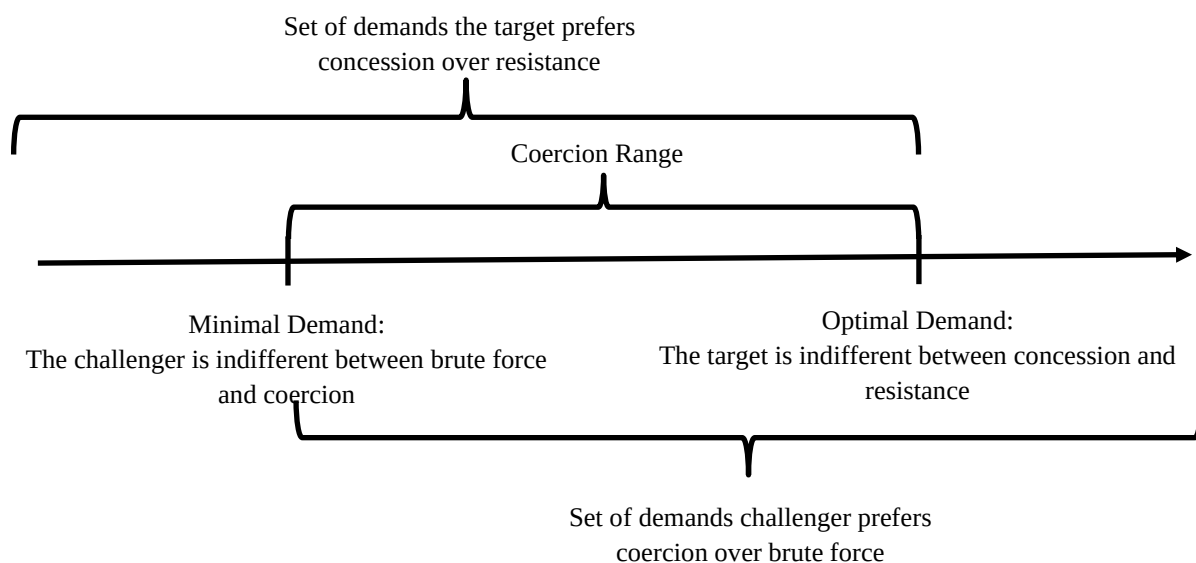


Figure 2. Coercion Axis (Haun, 2015)

Coercion Success or Failure

Coercion only works when the target complies with the challenger's demands. If the target resists or the challenger uses brute force, coercion fails. Since the model is based on game theory, decisions and the result of coercion depend on perceived payoffs. If threats, demands, and the issue fall within the coercion range, it succeeds; otherwise, it fails. (Haun 2015) However, Haun argues that coercion mainly fails for two reasons: either the challenger intentionally wants it to fail, or the target perceives its survival to be at risk. Haun argues that a state like the U.S. may intentionally pursue coercion, expecting, or even wanting, it to fail. This choice is driven by two incentives: coercion as a low-cost interim to brute force and reducing the diplomatic and political costs of war. On the other hand, the target resists because State survival involves both homeland territorial integrity and international sovereignty, which can undermine a state's existence if lost. Externally imposed regime change is like "state death": even weak states may fight rather than accept political annihilation, as Saddam Hussein of Iraq did before the 2003 invasion (Haun, 2015, pp. 83, 144–148). Furthermore, although not explicitly mentioned by Haun, to be convinced to make concessions, the weaker state must

perceive that once it complies, punishment will end, assuming there is no reward afterward. Following the same logic, if the threats are not credible, they cannot impose costs on the target or worsen its payoff if the latter chooses to resist. Therefore, if the threats lack credibility, they fail to intimidate the weaker state.

Methodology

Process tracing is a qualitative research method aimed at elucidating the causal mechanisms linking independent variables to specific outcomes within individual cases. Unlike large-N statistical approaches that primarily identify correlations, process tracing provides a nuanced understanding of causality by examining the intricate social and political processes that give rise to outcomes. This method serves not only as a descriptive tool but also as a mode of causal inference, emphasizing internal logic, theoretical specificity, and empirical validation within limited case studies. Rooted in historical institutionalism, comparative case study research, and realist epistemology, process tracing achieves its most systematic articulation through George and Bennett's seminal work (George & Bennett, 2005). They assert that process tracing is essential for within-case causal inference, particularly in exploring complex political phenomena where variables are highly contextual and interactive. Defined by George and Bennett in 2005 as a systematic examination of evidence aligned with research questions and hypotheses, process tracing seeks to uncover the intervening mechanisms that connect independent variables to outcomes. Three primary functions of process tracing are identified: theory testing, theory building, and explanation. In theory testing, researchers assess the alignment of empirical sequences with theoretical predictions; in theory building, they identify previously untheorized variables or mechanisms; and in explanation, they elucidate how context and mechanisms interact to produce outcomes. These functions often overlap, reflecting the iterative and reflexive nature of process tracing, which contrasts with the linear hypothesis-testing models prevalent in positivist research.

In process-tracing methodology, different forms of evidence do not contribute equally to evaluating causal claims. To clarify how individual observations support or weaken a hypothesis, scholars building on Stephen Van Evera—and later systematized by George and Bennett—developed a typology of inferential tests: Straw-in-the-Wind, Hoop, Smoking-Gun, **and** Doubly-Decisive (George & Bennett, 2005; Van Evera, 1997). These tests function as heuristic tools that help researchers assess the probative value of causal-process observations (CPOs) relative to theoretical expectations.

- 1. Straw-in-the-Wind** — This test provides only weak inferential leverage. Passing it modestly increases the plausibility of a hypothesis, while failing it modestly decreases plausibility. It neither confirms nor falsifies the hypothesis. The metaphor reflects its diagnostic limits: like a straw blown by the wind, the evidence suggests a direction without offering firm proof. For instance, in a study of democratic backsliding in Eastern Europe, a researcher might examine whether leaders adopt sovereignty-focused rhetoric when economically dependent on external actors. Observing such rhetoric offers weak support for the hypothesis; its absence does not disprove it, as other mechanisms—such as judicial restructuring—may drive autocratic drift.

2. **Hoop Test** — A hypothesis must pass a hoop test to remain viable. Failure disqualifies the hypothesis outright, but passing the test does not confirm it. It is necessary but not sufficient. Consider an inquiry into whether civil society actors shaped Tunisia's constitutional reform. Evidence that these actors participated in elite consultations allows the hypothesis to "jump through the hoop." If no such participation occurred, the hypothesis is decisively weakened. Yet even when participation is confirmed, it may have been merely symbolic, leaving the hypothesis unproven.
3. **Smoking-Gun** — Passing a smoking-gun test strongly supports a hypothesis, offering high diagnostic value. However, failing to find a smoking gun does not necessarily falsify the hypothesis. The metaphor—direct evidence linking a suspect to a crime—captures the test's confirmatory power. In research on the 2003 Iraq War, a declassified memorandum explicitly tying policy decisions to neoconservative ideological aims would constitute a smoking gun. Its presence would strongly confirm the hypothesis; its absence might simply reflect archival gaps rather than disconfirmation.
4. **Doubly-Decisive** — This is the most powerful test. Passing it both confirms the focal hypothesis and eliminates plausible alternatives. For example, in a study of a failed international negotiation, a verified recording in which a key actor admits to intentionally sabotaging the talks for strategic gain would be doubly decisive. Such evidence would validate the sabotage hypothesis while ruling out miscommunication, institutional dysfunction, or unintended escalation as primary causes.

Empirical Case Study Stage I: January 2017 to April 2018

U.S. Measures towards Iran

Although Trump's Maximum Pressure policy was officially launched in May 2018, his aggressive rhetoric towards Iran started well before he assumed office. During his 2015–2016 presidential campaign, he repeatedly criticized the negotiation and content of the JCPOA. In his June 2015 campaign announcement, he warned that Obama's pending agreement could threaten Israel's security, claiming that "Israel maybe won't exist very long" if the deal was finalized and arguing that Iran was already "taking over Iraq" (Trump, 2015a). Following the JCPOA agreement in July 2015, he issued a statement calling the deal "very dangerous," warning it could spark a regional arms race, and labeling it "a bad deal." He also criticized U.S. negotiators as incompetent and argued that Iran gained major concessions without making meaningful reciprocal actions." (Trump, 2015b). Later in an interview, he described the JCPOA as both "bad" and "badly negotiated," calling it "one of the worst deals ever made" (Trump, 2016).

Following his assumption of office in January 2017, Trump issued Executive Order 13769 within his first week, widely known as the "Muslim Ban," which temporarily suspended visa issuance to several groups, including Iranian nationals, for 90 days (Woodward, 2020). He continued his critical stance toward the JCPOA and Iran. Consistent with his campaign rhetoric, Trump's initial presidential statements were characterized not only by skepticism but also by implicit threats indicating a potential withdrawal from the JCPOA and the reimposition of sanctions. During his first address to the United Nations General Assembly on September 19,

2017, he denounced the JCPOA as “one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into” and described it as “an embarrassment to the United States” (Trump, 2017b). Earlier that year, following an Iranian test-launch of a medium-range ballistic missile, National Security Advisor Michael Flynn issued a warning that Iran was “on notice” (Flynn, 2017). This was followed by a post from President Trump on X (formerly known as Twitter) the next day, stating: “Iran is playing with fire... they don’t appreciate how ‘kind’ President Obama was to them. Not me!” (Ghasemi, 2017).

On October 13, 2017, Trump articulated a strategic framework towards Iran, emphasizing the historical and ongoing tensions, including the U.S. Embassy seizure and regional conflicts in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria. He characterized the JCPOA as “one-sided,” accusing Iran of violations and intimidation of inspectors. The proposed four-component strategy comprised regional containment of Iran, targeted sanctions against its “terrorism” financing, countering missile proliferation, and denying Iran nuclear weapons capabilities. The initial action identified was imposing sanctions on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) (Trump, 2017a).

On August 2, 2017, the United States Congress enacted the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), a comprehensive bipartisan sanctions law targeting Iran, Russia, and North Korea. Concerning Iran, CAATSA formalized and broadened existing sanctions related to Iran’s ballistic missile program, support for “terrorism,” “human rights abuses,” and IRGC activities. Notably, the law mandated sanctions on individuals and entities involved in Iran’s missile development, restricted the executive branch’s ability to waive sanctions, and authorized secondary sanctions against foreign companies engaging with Iranian designated actors (Rep. Royce, 2017).

On January 12, 2018, Trump characterized Iran as “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism,” citing its influence in West Asia (or the Middle East), threats to regional and maritime security through ballistic missile proliferation, and “internal repression via torture and mass arrests.” He announced targeted sanctions against entities linked to Iran’s missile program and publicly endorsed the aspirations seeking change from what he termed a “corrupt regime.” Turning to the JCPOA, Trump reiterated that the accord was fatally flawed and warned that the United States would withdraw unless those flaws were remedied. He identified three principal deficiencies: sunset clauses, the lack of a permanent nuclear guarantee, and insufficient constraints on Iran’s missile capabilities. He set four conditions for revised agreements: unrestricted inspection rights, a permanent ban on nuclear weapon development, an indefinite extension of restrictions, and explicit linkage of missile testing to nuclear pursuits, with severe sanctions for violations. While renewing some nuclear sanctions waivers temporarily, Trump emphasized this as conditional and only a temporary measure, contingent on negotiating improvements. He warned that failure to agree would result in withdrawal from the JCPOA (Trump, 2018b).

In March 2018, Trump appointed John Bolton as National Security Advisor. Bolton, linked to a hawkish stance on Tehran since his time in the George W. Bush administration, played a key role in the 2002 “Axis of Evil” framing, labeling Iran a threat alongside Iraq and North

Korea (Bush, 2002). Before his appointment, Bolton wrote an August 2017 op-ed in *National Review* titled “How to Get Out of the Iran Nuclear Deal,” claiming the JCPOA was flawed and beyond repair. He argued Iran’s behavior and objectives wouldn’t change, implying regime change was the only lasting solution (Bolton, 2017b). In July 2017, Bolton spoke at the Free Iran Gathering organized by the MEK, an Iranian opposition group that the U.S. State Department had labeled a terrorist group until 2012 (U.S. Department of State, 2012). Bolton urged the U.S. to adopt a policy of “overthrow of the mullahs’ regime in Tehran,” predicting that “before 2019 ... we here will celebrate in Tehran” (Bolton, 2017a).

Analysis: U.S. Side

Throughout 2017 to early 2018, the Trump administration employed a steady stream of public statements, executive actions, and legislative initiatives to portray Iran as an acute security threat and to build domestic and international consensus for a harder line. During this period, Trump pursued what Haun would classify as a denial strategy: each major policy move was explicitly designed to block Tehran from acquiring or advancing specific capabilities, most notably a nuclear weapon and long-range ballistic missiles. The centerpiece of this effort was a sustained rhetorical assault on the JCPOA a deal that had de-securitized Iran's nuclear program. Trump repeatedly labeled the agreement “one-sided” and “terrible,” arguing that the concessions granted to Tehran far exceeded the restrictions imposed on its nuclear activities (Trump, 2018c). In doing so, he aimed both to re-securitize the Iranian issue within the U.S., framing the deal as contrary to core U.S. interests, and to convince America’s allies that Iran posed threats to regional stability, maritime commerce, and the security of its neighbors (Zarif & Afjehi, 2023).

Beyond rhetoric, the American administration introduced coercive measures aimed at altering three pillars of Iranian power: the nuclear program, the ballistic-missile portfolio, and regional influence. The threats included National Security Advisor Michael Flynn’s warning that Iran was “on notice,” as well as Trump’s repeated pledge to withdraw from the JCPOA and snap back sanctions unless the agreement was “fixed” (Flynn, 2017). Punishments followed suit. The January 2017 “Muslim Ban” restricted the entry of Iranian nationals (Woodward, 2020); Treasury designations targeted dozens of Iranian individuals and firms; and CAATSA codified mandatory primary and secondary sanctions on the IRGC, missile suppliers, and “human-rights violators” (Rep. Royce, 2017). These moves served as signals of Washington’s willingness to incur economic and diplomatic friction to raise the price of Tehran’s defiance.

Furthermore, several administration statements and appointments in the U.S. pointed to a latent willingness to pursue ‘regime change’. Trump’s characterization of ordinary Iranians as victims of a “corrupt” and “oppressive” government, combined with the March 2018 appointment of Bolton (who had openly called for the “overthrow of the mullahs’ regime” [Bolton, 2017a]) to National Security Advisor, and the April confirmation of Mike Pompeo (a well-known Iran hawk) to replace Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State, reinforced perceptions in Tehran that U.S. policy aimed not merely to modify Iranian behavior but to transform the Islamic Republic itself (Pompeo, 2018a). It is important to emphasize that throughout this period, the Trump administration did not pursue any formal diplomatic engagement or

negotiations with Iran. Instead, the administration's posture was grounded in coercive conditionality—a binary framing that implied: either Iran complies with U.S. demands or faces punitive consequences.

When a challenger initiates a coercive strategy, the target faces a binary decision set: comply or resist (Haun, 2015). The preceding discussion surveyed the full range of the Trump administration's coercive measures directed at Iran through April 2018. The following section turns to the other side of the interaction, analyzing how Tehran responded to these pressures over the same period.

Iran's Response

In February 2017, following Trump's executive order restricting entry from Iran and six other majority-Muslim countries, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs retaliated by barring the U.S. freestyle wrestling team from competing in the 2017 Freestyle World Cup in Kermanshah. Tehran's decision, reported via state-run media, was described as a proportional response to the travel ban: "The visa policy of the new American administration gave us no other option but to ban the wrestlers," stated Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi, citing a Tehran committee's decision to oppose the team's visit (Reuters, 2017).

Within hours of Trump's post that Iran was "playing with fire," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif dismissed the message, asserting that Iran was "unmoved by threats," would "never initiate war," and would rely solely on its own defensive capabilities (Zarif, 2016). The Foreign Ministry reinforced that posture the next day, with spokesman Ghasemi labeling U.S. allegations over the missile test "baseless, repetitive, and provocative" and insisting the launch violated neither the JCPOA nor U.N. Resolution 2231 (Ghasemi, 2017). Moreover, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei responded forcefully to Trump's recent travel ban and missile warnings, stating that he was grateful to Trump for revealing what Iran had long characterized as the true character of U.S. policy. He declared: "We thank this new president ... he showed the real face of America." He framed this revelation as confirmation of his decades-long criticism of systemic political, economic, moral, and social corruption in the U.S. establishment. The Supreme Leader also dismissed Trump's threats, such as Flynn's declaration that Iran was "on notice" and tweets branding Iran as "playing with fire." He added that the Iranian people would soon demonstrate their collective resolve, thereby signaling that external intimidation would unify rather than fracture national solidarity (Khamenei, 2017a). After the House of Representatives passed CAATSA, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi strongly condemned the newly enacted U.S. sanctions, describing them as a "completely clear hostile act" that violated both diplomatic norms and Washington's commitments under the JCPOA. Araghchi characterized the sanctions as a breach of the nuclear deal's terms, asserting that the United States had undermined an agreement it had itself negotiated. He pledged that Iran would respond "intelligently but firmly," signaling that Tehran viewed the escalation as coercive and unacceptable, and would not leave it unanswered (Araghchi, 2017).

A few hours after the White House unveiled its Iran strategy, the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, appeared on national television to denounce it as illegitimate, historically uninformed,

and counterproductive, calling the U.S. president's remarks "insults" and "false accusations" against the Iranian nation. He argued that Washington had misread international law and the JCPOA's multilateral character, insisting the agreement was "more solid" than U.S. officials assumed and that the United States now stood more isolated than ever on the nuclear file. Rouhani paired this legal-diplomatic defense with rally-around-the-flag messaging: he urged domestic unity, recounted decades of perceived U.S. hostility from the 1953 coup to support for Saddam and subsequent regional wars, and asserted that external pressure would only stiffen Iranian resolve. Available in bibliography under Rouhani 2017b. <https://president.ir/en/101131> Substantively, he cast Iran's missile program as defensive and pledged conditional adherence to the JCPOA so long as Iranian interests were protected, warning that Tehran would respond without hesitation to any breach by other parties (Rouhani, 2017b). Moreover, in October 2017, IRGC Commander Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari warned that if Washington implements CAATSA, the United States will have to relocate its regional bases beyond the 2,000-km range of Iran's missiles and that doing so would be tantamount to a U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA. He added that if the U.S. were to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization, the Guards would in turn treat U.S. forces like ISIS. Jafari also said the Trump administration's approach would prompt Iran to expand its missile program and conventional defense plans (Jafari, 2017).

Analysis: Iranian Perspective

Iran's response throughout this period followed a coherent threat-rejection strategy that blends symbolic reciprocity, legal counter-framing, and calibrated deterrent signaling. Tehran answered early U.S. moves with measured, tit-for-tat reprisals, notably barring the U.S. freestyle wrestling team after the travel ban, to impose visible political costs without military escalation. Senior Iranian diplomats mounted a legalistic defense: they dismissed Washington's warnings as "baseless, repetitive, and provocative," insisted the missile test violated neither the JCPOA nor UNSCR 2231, and emphasized that Iran was "unmoved by threats," thereby challenging the legitimacy and credibility of U.S. coercion (Ghasemi, 2017; Zarif, 2016). Elite messaging also converged at the top, as the Supreme Leader portrayed Trump's rhetoric as revealing America's "real face," using it to mobilize domestic unity and delegitimize U.S. claims (Khamenei, 2017a). At the same time, Rouhani reinforced this by arguing for the JCPOA's multilateral solidity and the U.S. diplomatic isolation, pledging a conditional commitment to the deal so long as Iran's interests were protected and vowing to respond without hesitation to breaches (Rouhani, 2017b). In parallel, the IRGC's deterrent signals raised the prospective costs of further U.S. escalation and advertised Iran's willingness to undertake proportional retaliation. Overall, Tehran not only refused concessions under threat but also warned the United States of reprisal measures should those threats be implemented (Jafari, 2017).

Stage I Discussion

To evaluate the U.S.–Iran interaction through the analytical lens of Haun's asymmetric coercion theory, it is first essential to establish that the case meets the definitional criteria of an

asymmetric coercive relationship. This section subsequently addresses two central inquiries. First, it evaluates whether the U.S. coercive measures implemented during Stage I produced the intended behavioral changes in Iran. Second, it explores the causal factors underlying the outcome, examining why the strategy ultimately proved successful or unsuccessful.

Is it Asymmetric Coercion?

To demonstrate that the case qualifies as asymmetric coercion through process tracing, four conditions must be met. First, power asymmetry: there must be a substantial and enduring gap in capabilities between the challenger (the United States) and the target (Iran), with the United States clearly dominant across economic, military, and diplomatic dimensions. Second, one-sided existential leverage: the challenger must possess a credible ability to threaten the continuity of the target's governing authority, while the target can impose only limited costs in return. Third, the issue: the confrontation must revolve around specific behaviors, policies, or strategic capabilities under the target's control that the challenger seeks to alter. Fourth, choosing to coerce: the challenger must be shown to have selected coercion—rather than accommodation or immediate brute force—as its preferred strategy for addressing the issue.

For the first condition, rival hypotheses are specified to assess whether the observed power imbalance genuinely reflects the structural requirements of asymmetric coercion. These hypotheses help determine whether the United States' dominance was sufficiently clear and durable to shape Iran's strategic calculus, or whether alternative explanations—such as regional balancing, domestic constraints, or issue-specific capabilities—might account for the interaction instead. Establishing the validity of this condition is therefore foundational to evaluating whether the subsequent dynamics can be meaningfully interpreted through the lens of asymmetric coercion.

For the first condition, rival hypotheses are specified:

H1a: The United States is materially and operationally much stronger than Iran.

H1b: The two states are roughly equal, or Iran is stronger.

The U.S. has overwhelming power across measures like GDP, defense, military presence, and alliances. Iran, though influential in the Middle East, has limited economic resources, a smaller, less advanced military, and fewer security partners. In 2017, the U.S. GDP was about \$19.61 trillion, nearly forty times Iran's \$489 billion (World Bank Open Data, 2025). This asymmetry is more pronounced in defense spending. SIPRI data show that in 2017, the U.S. allocated about \$650 billion to its military, roughly 1.3 times Iran's entire GDP. Iran's military spending was estimated at \$14 billion, making U.S. defense spending nearly fifty times larger (SIPRI, 2024).

If the necessary indicators of asymmetry are present, H1b is falsified and H1a remains viable; if absent, H1a is falsified. On the available evidence, as U.S. GDP and military expenditure in 2017 exceeded Iran's by very large margins, the Hoop test for H1b is failed; therefore, H1a is corroborated. Eventually, Condition 1 is met. Condition 2 requires demonstrating two clauses: The challenger (U.S.) possesses a credible capacity to compromise the continuity of the target's governing authority.

The target (Iran) can impose only limited costs on the challenger. Two paired hypothesis sets are therefore specified and evaluated with hoop tests: H2.1a: The United States possesses a credible capacity to compromise the continuity of Iran's governing authority.

H2.1b: (rival): The United States does not possess such a capacity.

H2.2a: Iran can only impose limited costs on the United States.

H2.2b: Iran possesses sufficient means to threaten the survival of the U.S. regime.

In 2017, the U.S. maintained numerous bases near Iran and the Persian Gulf, spanning from Naval Support Activity Bahrain to sites in Iraq and Afghanistan such as Al Asad and Bagram/Kandahar. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, over 63,000 personnel were in the region (Department of Defense, 2017). These bases provided strike and surveillance capabilities: Al Udeid's Combined Air Operations Center directed airpower across CENTCOM, while Al Dhafra hosted assets like F-22s, U-2s, E-3 AWACS, and KC-10 tankers. Bagram's 455th Wing had over 2,100 Airmen. By 2017, U.S. forces near Iran had the command, ISR, refueling, and strike infrastructure for operations against Iranian targets. Additionally, the U.S. had invaded two of Iran's neighbors post-9/11, showing its ability to conduct regional attacks.

Given the dense U.S. regional posture (forward bases, sizable personnel, C2/ISR, refueling, and strike assets) and demonstrated ability to execute large regional campaigns (e.g., prior invasions of two neighboring states), the necessary indicators are present; H2.1b fails the hoop and is rejected, thereby corroborating H2.1a. Conversely, Iran's ability to threaten the U.S. mainland was limited; distances from Tehran to New York (~9,880–10,230 km) exceeded Iran's missile range (Distance from Tehran to New York, 2025). U.S. and IISS assessments in 2017–2018 found Iran had primarily short- and medium-range ballistic missiles with ranges around 2,000 km and no ICBM capability, limiting Iran to regional threats (Elleman, 2017; IISS, 2021). Iran could threaten U.S. forces and shipping in the Persian Gulf with mines, anti-ship missiles, and fast boats, but posed no direct threat to the U.S. mainland. Therefore, in 2017, the U.S. could threaten Iran's survival, while Iran's threats were mainly regional (IISS, 2021).

With Tehran–U.S. homeland distances on the order of ~10,000 km and no operational Iranian ICBMs or other intercontinental-range systems in 2017 (practical missile ranges $\sim \leq 2,000$ km), the necessary indicators for H2.2b are absent; H2.2b fails the Hoop and is rejected, thereby corroborating H2.2a. Accordingly, Condition 2 is satisfied. For Conditions 3 and 4, the following hypotheses are specified: H3: The confrontation centered on an issue controlled by the target.

H4: The stronger side (U.S.) chose coercion over accommodation or immediate brute force.

Trump's 2017 and 2018 policy statements explicitly identified Iran's strategic capabilities targeted for change, including ballistic missile testing, permanent nuclear restrictions beyond JCPOA's sunset clauses, and regional activities, and broader inspections. These clearly articulated demands by the head of state highlight the confrontation's focus on target-controlled issues. Furthermore, these statements indicate that the U.S. deliberately adopted coercion, rejecting ongoing diplomacy while avoiding military force by imposing sanctions, economic

pressure, and conditional threats to compel Iran. The direct linkage between U.S. demands and coercive measures substantiates that H3 and H4 meet the Smoking-Gun test, confirming the confrontation as asymmetric coercion.

Was Coercion Successful?

To determine if U.S. coercive measures against Iran during Stage I achieved their intended outcome, it is first necessary to identify the challenger's goals. Haun's framework states coercion is successful only if the target complies with demands in material and substantive terms. If the target resists or coercion is replaced by force, it's a failure. During Stage I, U.S. policy revealed four main demands: (1) curb Iran's "destabilizing activities" and proxies; (2) stop long-range missile development and testing, linking missile activity to the nuclear issue; (3) allow unrestricted inspections, eliminate sunset clauses, enable automatic "snap-back" provisions, and deny pathways to nuclear weapons; (4) require Iran to "fix" the JCPOA or face expanded sanctions. Hypotheses H5, H6, and H7 are as follows:

H5: The United States succeeded in making its desired adjustments to the JCPOA.

H6: Iran complied with U.S. demands regarding its regional activities.

H7: Iran complied with U.S. demands regarding its missile program.

During the April 26, 2018, Senate Armed Services hearing, Secretary Mattis said no decision had been made on leaving the JCPOA. He explained the administration was working with European allies to find "fixes" to the deal, and whether to stay depended on "meaningful improvements." Mattis called the verification regime "pretty robust" and designed to prevent Iran from cheating, citing intrusive IAEA inspections, but acknowledged whether these provisions are enough remains a "valid question" (U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, 2018). Overall, by late April 2018, the U.S. had not secured the additional constraints it wanted, so the desired JCPOA adjustments remained unrealized.

Therefore, H5 fails the Hoop test, falsifying the hypothesis that the U.S. had succeeded in altering the agreement. General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified in the same hearing that "Iran continues to spread malign influence and create instability across the Middle East." Mattis echoed this assessment, noting that escalation in Syria was likely "because Iran continues to do its proxy work [in Syria] through Lebanese Hezbollah" (U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, 2018, p. 34). These senior-level, contemporaneous evaluations strongly suggest that Iran had not altered its regional behavior in line with U.S. demands.

Given the directness and probative value of these statements, H6 fails the Hoop test, leading to the conclusion that Iran did not comply with U.S. objectives regarding its regional activities. Moreover, in this hearing, Dunford identified Iran's "missile threat" as a core challenge, and the Department of Defense characterized the environment as an "increasingly complex missile threat" requiring expanded U.S. missile-defense capacity to "keep pace with advancing threats" (U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, 2018). These contemporaneous assessments are incompatible with a finding of Iranian compliance.

Accordingly, H7 fails the hoop test and is rejected; the necessary condition for a compliance claim is not met. Given that H5, H6, and H7 are each falsified, it follows that none of the United States' principal objectives were achieved through its coercive strategy. Consequently, the U.S. coercion effort during this stage failed.

Why?

As Haun identifies the target's survival concerns and the challenger's intentional desire for coercion to fail as the two primary reasons for coercion failure, it is necessary to determine which applied during Stage I. For this purpose, the following hypothesis is considered: H8: The United States intentionally sought coercion to fail. A hoop test applies: if the U.S. aimed to provoke failure, it would escalate with brute force after unmet demands. But after failing in Stage I, the U.S. did not escalate, so H8 fails the hoop test, and the argument is falsified. Therefore, the U.S. did not want the coercion to fail.

Since the coercion did not fail due to the challenger's willingness for it to fail, it is necessary to examine the extent to which the challenger's objectives were tied to the target's survival concerns. Therefore, hypotheses of H9, H10, and H11 are proposed:

H9: Iran's missile development program was intrinsically linked to its survival.

H10: The United States maintained a willingness to pursue regime change in Iran.

H11: Iran's regional activities (e.g., in Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon) constitute a crucial matter of security and survival.

Assessment: The substance of U.S. demands rendered them effectively non-negotiable from Tehran's perspective. One key point of contention was Iran's missile program, which Iranian officials consistently framed as essential to national defense. Zarif underscored this point by recalling the Iran–Iraq War of the 1980s, when Iran lacked missile capabilities and, as he put it, officials were forced to “beg” for a single missile to defend the country (Zarif, 2016). This memory reinforced the leadership's view that missile development was a survival necessity, not just policy. The Supreme Leader emphasized missile capabilities as vital to Iran's deterrence, warning that limiting the program would risk strategic vulnerability and aggression, given Iran's history and regional security (Khamenei, 2018).

Regarding Iranian officials' statements underscoring the centrality of missile development to Iran's security and survival, H9 meets the conditions of the Smoking-Gun test. Consequently, the necessary evidentiary threshold for confirming H9 is satisfied. Several indicators show U.S. officials' strong desire for regime change in Iran. Trump called Iran a “corrupt regime” that “represses its own people,” echoing delegitimization themes linked to regime change. His appointment of Bolton as National Security Advisor also signaled tacit alignment with Bolton's long-standing advocacy for regime change in Iran. This appointment drew strong reactions in Tehran; Iran's then-Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, described it as “a matter of shame” (Shamkhani, 2018).

Taken together, Bolton's appointment and the statements provide sufficient grounds for H10 to pass the Straw-in-the-Wind test, offering at least weak confirmation of a U.S. inclination toward pursuing regime change in Iran. On the issue of Iran's regional activities, a report by

the International Crisis Group underscores that Iran's influence across the region functions as a form of deterrence rooted in the trauma of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s (Crisis Group, 2018). This logic is echoed in the Supreme Leader's 2017 statement: "If we weren't in Syria, we would be fighting in Tehran" (Khamenei, 2017b). Similarly, then-Deputy Commander of the IRGC, General Hossein Salami, emphasized that "the Syrian and Iraqi armies are the strategic defensive depth of Iran, and the best strategy to engage with the enemy is in areas far from Iran" (Salami, 2018). These statements highlight how Iran's forward defense posture is framed not as opportunistic expansion but as existential protection, particularly in the wake of ISIS's rise and ongoing regional instability.

Based on this evidence, H11 passes the Smoking-Gun test, indicating that Iran's regional activities were perceived or portrayed by parts of its leadership as vital to state survival. Hypothesis H12 is assumed to be: In Tehran's view, the punishment would not conclude with concession.

The Supreme Leader repeatedly warned that any concession under external pressure would embolden the adversary to escalate its demands. As he stated, "If we compromise with [the enemy], he will advance," and "If you give ground under pressure, the enemy will advance" (Khamenei, 2017c). According to Haun's framework, if costs are not reduced after concessions, the target has no incentive to comply, which can lead to coercion failure. Consequently, H12 passes the Smoking-Gun test, and its argument is strongly approved.

Beyond the challenger's objectives, Haun identifies the credibility of threats as a critical component of coercion. If a threat is not perceived as credible, it will not register as a potential cost for the target and thus will have little to no coercive effect. Haun explicitly ties outcomes to whether the coercer can sustain a credible threat (e.g., he notes the Reagan administration's failure to "maintain the credible threat" against Libya, linking failure to a mismatch between demands and threats) (Haun, 2015). To evaluate why U.S. threats failed to compel Iran to comply with its nuclear demands, hypothesis H13 is proposed: U.S. threats to reimpose United Nations sanctions lifted under the JCPOA were credible.

The JCPOA, as a multilateral deal between Iran and the P5+1, endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution, offered a strong framework for resolving Iran's nuclear disputes. Iran's compliance was regularly verified by the IAEA and even acknowledged by senior officials in the Trump administration (Amano, 2017; DeYoung, 2017; Tillerson, 2017; U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, 2018). Moreover, the EU's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, explicitly stated that the U.S. had no right to unilaterally terminate the deal (Mogherini, 2017). She called the agreement "effective" and said there had been "no violations of any of the commitments" in the deal. Additionally, the other five signatories to the JCPOA were broadly satisfied with the agreement's implementation. Trump's insistence on making significant adjustments to the deal was therefore met with resistance from U.S. partners; notably, following his "new Iran strategy" speech, the E3 explicitly rejected his criticisms of the agreement (E3 Leaders, 2017). From Tehran, it was believed that this division undermined Washington's credibility as Rouhani warned that the U.S. quitting the JCPOA would "carry a high cost" by eroding international trust. He noted Iran could quickly revert to pre-deal

conditions if others failed to meet commitments (Rouhani, 2017a). He also explicitly claimed that the U.S. failed to undermine the JCPOA (Rouhani, 2018).

Since the other JCPOA members explicitly reaffirmed their support for the agreement and rejected the U.S.-proposed adjustments, H13 fails the Hoop test. Consequently, U.S. threats to reimpose UN Security Council sanctions are deemed non-credible.

Stage I Wrap-Up

Across Stage I, Washington articulated clear, target-controlled demands of: tightening nuclear restrictions beyond the JCPOA; halting long-range missile development and testing with legal linkage to the nuclear file.

The Trump administration designated them with sanctions threats and designations rather than immediate brute force. The structural conditions for asymmetric coercion were present: a marked U.S.–Iran power imbalance, one-sided existential leverage favoring the United States, issue salience squarely under Tehran’s control, and an explicit choice of coercion over accommodation or invasion. Iran’s responses, however, combined legal counter-framing, refusal to renegotiate core JCPOA terms, continued missile signaling, and deterrent rhetoric tied to “forward defense,” indicating resistance rather than concession.

Outcome tests show that U.S. aims were not achieved in Stage I: sought JCPOA adjustments were unrealized; senior U.S. defense leaders continued to describe Iranian regional behavior as malign and ongoing; and Iran’s missile program was still characterized as a threat. The U.S.’s inability to implement coercive measures during Stage I can be attributed to three primary factors. This failure should not be interpreted as a strategic choice by Washington as the design of coercion was not intentionally aimed at failure. Firstly, U.S. demands posed direct threats to Iran’s fundamental security and survival interests. Secondly, Tehran perceived that the post-concession period would involve ongoing punishment with no subsequent improvement in payoffs. Thirdly, U.S. threats to reimpose UN sanctions lacked credibility; therefore, they could not impose costs on the target, and Iran had little motivation to compromise. Taken together, the challenger’s demands and threats were not within the “coercion range” and were beyond the “optimal demand” (Haun, 2015).

Empirical Case Study Stage II: May 2018 to January 2021

Following Bolton’s appointment as National Security Advisor, further administrative alignment was necessary to pursue a coercive Iran strategy. A significant shift occurred when Rex Tillerson was replaced by Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State in March 2018. A key disagreement between Trump and Tillerson centered on Iran policy particularly the future of the JCPOA. Trump opposed the agreement, whereas Tillerson advocated maintaining transatlantic consensus and the accord (Stelzenmüller, 2019). However, Pompeo’s appointment indicated a much more hawkish stance, as he had already authorized expanded operations targeting senior figures in Iran’s IRGC during his time as CIA director. His appointment, therefore, signaled a decisive shift toward confrontation and further reduced the chances of maintaining the nuclear deal (Wintour, 2018).

Maximum Pressure Begins

Ultimately, Trump fulfilled one of his key threats by announcing the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018. He argued that Iran negotiated in bad faith and that the deal failed to protect U.S. interests, reaffirming his commitment to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon (Trump, 2018a). Two weeks later, Pompeo delivered an address at the Heritage Foundation, in which he set forth twelve demands that Iran would be required to meet as preconditions for any lifting of sanctions or renewed diplomatic engagement. The 12 demands were (Pompeo, 2018b):

- D1:** Declare to the IAEA a full account of the prior military dimensions of its nuclear program and permanently and verifiably abandon such work.
- D2:** Stop enrichment and never pursue plutonium reprocessing, including closing its heavy water reactor.
- D3:** Provide the IAEA with unqualified access to all sites throughout the country.
- D4:** End its proliferation of ballistic missiles and halt further launching or development of nuclear-capable missile systems.
- D5:** Release all U.S. citizens and citizens of U.S. partners and allies detained on spurious charges.
- D6:** End support to Middle Eastern “terrorist” groups, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.
- D7:** Respect the sovereignty of the Iraqi government and permit the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of Shia militias.
- D8:** End military support for the Houthis in Yemen and work toward a peaceful political settlement.
- D9:** Withdraw all forces under Iranian command from Syria.
- D10:** End support for the Taliban and other “terrorists” in Afghanistan and the region and cease harboring senior al-Qaida leaders.
- D11:** End the IRGC’s support for “terrorism” and militant partners.
- D12:** Cease threatening behavior against neighbors, many of whom are U.S. allies, including threats to destroy Israel and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA triggered a gradual reimposition of sanctions over approximately 12 months. Executive Order 13846 reinstated and broadened the legal framework for Iran sanctions, restoring measures that had been lifted under the JCPOA (Trump, 2018c). The first sanctions tranche in August targeted Iran’s automotive industry, gold and precious metals trade, transactions in the Iranian Rial, and sales of graphite, aluminum, steel, coal, and certain industrial software. It also revoked aircraft licenses that had previously been issued under the JCPOA (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2018b).

To coordinate this escalating strategy across various U.S. government agencies, Pompeo announced the establishment of the Iran Action Group. Led by Brian Hook, the group was tasked with “managing, coordinating, and reviewing” U.S. actions on Iran while maintaining international attention on Tehran’s activities (Pompeo, 2018a). Hook described the emerging

policy as one of maximum pressure, with the explicit goal of isolating Iran in order to advance Pompeo's twelve demands and compel changes in Iranian behavior (Hook, 2018).

The second and more consequential tranche of sanctions was reimposed in November 2018. This round targeted Iran's energy, shipping, shipbuilding, and financial sectors. Treasury and State re-listed over 700 individuals, entities, aircraft, and vessels, calling it their "largest ever single-day action" against Iran (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2018b). Officials framed this as part of an "unprecedented U.S. economic pressure campaign" and a "campaign of maximum financial pressure." By 2019, the State Department formally branded the policy as the Maximum Pressure campaign (U.S. Department of State, 2019). In April 2019, Trump and Pompeo announced the U.S. would list Iran's IRGC as a "foreign terrorist organization," claiming it runs Iran's foreign military, supports regional militant groups, and engages in "terrorism." This was the first time the U.S. designated part of another government as a "terrorist" group (Katzman, 2019). Alongside his coercive measures, Trump began signaling a willingness to engage in formal negotiations with Iran in 2019. For instance, during an interview, he said that Iranians should "call me" (Borger & Wintour, 2019). Likewise, in June 2019, Pompeo said Washington was prepared to talk to Iran without preconditions (Pompeo, 2019). Despite these overtures, Iran did not agree to negotiate. In September 2019 at the UN General Assembly, French President Macron tried to arrange a meeting between Trump and Rouhani, but Rouhani declined (Wright, 2019).

U.S. Efforts to Re-Securitize Iran in the UN

During Trump's presidency, the U.S. repeatedly failed to build UN consensus against Iran, notably in September 2018 when Trump led a Security Council session aimed at criticizing Iran's compliance with the JCPOA. The meeting, intended to rally support for U.S. claims of Iranian violations, instead highlighted international backing for the deal. Thirteen of fourteen speakers supported the JCPOA, with no endorsement for U.S. withdrawal, exposing Washington's diplomatic isolation and the failure of its efforts to reframe Iran as a threat (Zarif & Afjehi, 2023).

In June 2020, the U.S. circulated a draft resolution among UN Security Council members to extend the arms embargo on Iran, expiring on October 18, 2020, under Resolution 2231. The initiative faced strong opposition, with Russia supporting the JCPOA and criticizing Washington's 2018 withdrawal. The draft resolution was voted on in August and failed, with only the U.S. and Dominican Republic in favor, Russia and China against, and the E3 and others abstaining (UN Security Council, 2020).

In August 2020, the U.S. submitted a letter to the UN Security Council President asserting that European efforts to restore Iran's compliance with the JCPOA had failed. Consequently, Washington declared Iran in "significant non-compliance" and re-imposed the UN sanctions. Thirteen of the fifteen Council members immediately rejected the U.S. attempt to invoke the snapback mechanism, emphasizing that Washington had forfeited its standing by withdrawing from the JCPOA in 2018. The August President reported a lack of consensus, and his September successor maintained this position. The UN Secretary-General also distanced himself, stating the matter fell solely within the Security Council's authority (Weller, 2020).

In December 2020, the U.S. proposed an oral amendment in the UN General Assembly's Fifth Committee to reduce funding for the 2231 Team, re-establish the previous Committee under previous resolutions, and to reinforce Washington's claim that UN sanctions had "snapped back" after its August 2020 declaration. The proposal aimed to enforce sanctions via budgetary means after failing to secure them through the Security Council. However, the committee rejected it overwhelmingly: 110 against, 10 in favor, and 32 abstentions. Many states, including the EU, Russia, China, and Cuba, argued the proposal lacked legal basis since the U.S. had forfeited its rights under the JCPOA after leaving in 2018, and others noted the Fifth Committee was not suitable for political disputes. The rejection marked a major diplomatic setback for Trump, highlighting U.S. isolation on the Iran issue (Zarif & Afjehi, 2023).

U.S. Allies' Reactions to the Strategy

Most close U.S. allies opposed Washington's withdrawal from the JCPOA and aimed to preserve it, but many firms still complied with U.S. secondary sanctions. The E3 issued a joint statement expressing "regret" and pledged to continue implementing the accord (E3 Leaders, 2018). The European Union subsequently updated and activated its Blocking Statute to shield European trade from extraterritorial U.S. measures (European Commission, 2018). In early 2019, the E3 launched INSTEX as a special-purpose vehicle designed to facilitate limited humanitarian transactions with Iran (E3 Foreign Ministers, 2019). When the U.S. later attempted to invoke the UN sanctions snapback in 2020, the EU publicly rejected the move, arguing that Washington was no longer a JCPOA participant (E3 Foreign Ministers, 2020). Nevertheless, major European multinationals such as Total (France) and Maersk/MSC (Denmark) announced their exit from the Iranian market, underscoring the deterrent effect of U.S. secondary sanctions despite formal European opposition (Reuters, 2018a, 2018b, 2018d).

Other close partners struck a similar tone. Canada and Australia both voiced regret and disappointment at the U.S. withdrawal and reaffirmed their continued support for the JCPOA and the IAEA's verification mechanisms (Bishop, 2018; Freeland, 2018). Japan likewise expressed regret, worked within the U.S. waiver framework, and ultimately ceased imports of Iranian crude oil once the waivers were terminated (Kono, 2018). South Korea initially sought waivers but similarly ended oil imports after U.S. exemptions expired (Tsukimori & Chung, 2018). By contrast, key U.S. Middle Eastern partners (Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) welcomed the U.S. withdrawal and endorsed renewed sanctions (Netanyahu, 2018; Reuters, 2018c, 2018e). Parallel to European initiatives such as INSTEX, some allies also developed humanitarian channels; Switzerland, with U.S. support, later established a dedicated mechanism to facilitate trade in food and medicine (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2020).

Iran's Responses

Iran responded forcefully to Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA. Iran's responses to the U.S. Maximum Pressure campaign combined rhetorical rejection with calibrated countermeasures. In response to Pompeo's 12 demands, Zarif authored an article for Iran Daily, characterizing the U.S. stance as fundamentally delusional, as it imposed preconditions on Iran despite Washington itself having just broken an international accord, the JCPOA. Zarif

presented a parallel set of “Rightful Demands from the US,” including respect for Iran’s sovereignty under the Algiers Accords, cessation of threats and coercive measures, and compliance with international legal obligations. He contextualized these demands within a broader critique of U.S. conduct towards Iran, both historical and ongoing, which he argued contributes to Iranian mistrust. Accordingly, Zarif noted that substantial change in U.S. policy is improbable, leading Iran to focus on multilateralism, regional dialogue, and cooperation with remaining JCPOA signatories. He closed by emphasizing that Iran’s security depends on domestic legitimacy rather than external support and proposed a Persian Gulf “Regional Dialogue Forum” to foster confidence and promote non-aggression (Zarif, 2018).

Rouhani condemned the move, asserting Iran fully honored IAEA obligations and criticizing Washington for unreliability and disregard for international agreements. He reminded that the JCPOA is a UN-endorsed multilateral treaty, not a bilateral deal, and that U.S. withdrawal showed indifference to legal obligations. Zarif echoed this, calling the U.S. departure a unilateral, illegal breach of UN Resolution 2231 that threatens multilateralism. Iran dismissed Pompeo’s “12 demands” as unfounded and interventionist. Zarif listed Iran’s legitimate demands, highlighting U.S. law violations. Officials used social media campaigns with hashtags like #B_Team and #EconomicTerrorism to counter Washington’s narrative, denounce sanctions, and rally global support (Zarif & Afjehi, 2023).

For the first year after the U.S. withdrawal, Tehran tried to uphold the JCPOA while pursuing alternative economic measures. When those efforts failed, Tehran began to use the deal’s provisions for responding to non-performance. Starting in May 2019, it announced incremental countermeasures, each reversible and based on articles 26 and 36 of the accord. On May 8, 2019, Rouhani unveiled the first step: Iran would exceed JCPOA limits on enriched uranium and heavy water since the U.S. violated the agreement and waged an “economic war.” He emphasized Iran was not leaving the deal, would resist bullying, and would restore full compliance if sanctions were lifted. Subsequent steps increased enrichment and R&D, but officials stressed the actions were calibrated and reversible if economic benefits resumed (Davenport, 2019).

The IAEA’s safeguards reports show that from May 2018 until mid-2019, Iran complied with the JCPOA. Its low-enriched uranium stockpile remained well below the 300 kg cap, and enrichment never exceeded 3.67%. Heavy water inventories were also within limits. After the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and reimposed sanctions, Tehran began a calibrated strategy of reducing compliance. By July 2019, it exceeded the stockpile cap, and by November 2019, it was enriching uranium to about 4.5%, slightly above the JCPOA limit. The stockpile then grew rapidly: from roughly 372 kg in late 2019 to over 1,000 kg in March 2020 and about 1,571 kg by June 2020. The November 2020 report recorded a stockpile of 3,613.8 kg of UF₆ (about 2,442.9 kg of uranium), roughly twelve times the JCPOA limit. Most of this material was enriched between 2-4.5%, but Iran had also begun operating more advanced centrifuge cascades (Albright et al., 2020; Masterson, 2020). A couple of months after the end of Stage II, in early 2021, Iran escalated further by resuming enrichment to 20% U-235, producing around 17.6 kg of 20% LEU by mid-February. This marks a significant departure from JCPOA

restrictions, although enrichment remained far below weapons-grade levels. By May 2021, Iran announced it had started enriching up to 60% and had a stockpile of over 3,000 kg of LEU and around 2.4 kg of 60% enriched Uranium (IAEA, 2021).

Tehran's refusal to engage in face-to-face talks with the Trump administration was rooted in distrust, domestic constraints, and the perception that any summit would serve U.S. optics more than substance. After the United States withdrew from the JCPOA, Ayatollah Khamenei declared there would be "no negotiations with the US at any level" unless Washington returned to the deal (Khamenei, 2019), and commentaries note that Trump's unpredictable style and his meetings with Kim Jong Un, which yielded little beyond photo-ops, hardened Iranian skepticism. Trump's offer to meet Rouhani without preconditions was undermined by his refusal to ease sanctions (Sher & Cohen, 2019). In other words, Trump's bellicose rhetoric discouraged engagement. These dynamics were evident during the September 2019 UN General Assembly, when French President Emmanuel Macron arranged a secure phone line for a three-way call with Trump, only for Rouhani to refuse to take the call. According to Rouhani's memoir, the Iranian delegation insisted that the meeting not be publicized in advance because they distrusted Trump, whom Rouhani described as an "actor", and feared it would become a domestic publicity stunt; U.S. officials rejected this condition. Iranian officials also cited Trump's summit with Kim as a mere "photo opportunity" and were determined not to provide a similar victory (Davar, 2022).

Military Confrontation

The U.S.–Iran confrontation in Stage II went beyond diplomatic tensions, with Washington sending costly signals of its resolve. Iran responded strategically, not passively. On June 20, 2019, Iran's IRGC shot down a U.S. RQ-4A drone over the Strait of Hormuz, claiming it violated Iranian airspace, while the Pentagon said it was in international airspace. The IRGC called it a defensive act and a message that Iran would defend its borders (Al Jazeera, 2019).

Less than a month later, Trump announced that the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer had destroyed an Iranian drone in the Strait of Hormuz after it approached within 1,000 yards and ignored warnings (Reuters, 2019b). The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister immediately denied that Iran had lost any drone; he suggested that the USS Boxer might have shot down its own unmanned aircraft. These competing accounts underscored the mutual distrust that pervaded Persian Gulf waters (Reuters, 2019a).

On September 14, 2019, coordinated drone and missile strikes hit Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq plant and Khurais oil field, temporarily halting about 5.7 million barrels per day, over half of Saudi output (Hubbard et al., 2019). Although Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed responsibility, U.S. and Saudi officials blamed Iran and used the attack to justify more U.S. troops and sanctions. Iran denied involvement and warned of retaliation (Al Jazeera, News, 2019).

The assassination of General Qassem Soleimani on January 3, 2020 marked one of the most consequential escalatory steps of the Maximum Pressure campaign. By killing the commander of the Quds Force in a drone strike at Baghdad International Airport, the United States issued an exceptionally costly signal of resolve (Al Jazeera, 2020a). Although the Trump administration framed the operation as a preemptive counterterrorism measure, claiming

Soleimani was planning imminent attacks (Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2020), its strategic significance lay elsewhere. The strike crossed a long-standing red line by directly targeting a senior Iranian military official, thereby demonstrating Washington's willingness to escalate beyond economic pressure and risking a broader regional confrontation. Iran's immediate vow of retaliation underscored the gravity of the moment. On January 8, Tehran launched ballistic missiles at the Ain al-Asad airbase in Iraq, marking its first openly acknowledged strike on U.S. forces. While no deaths were initially reported, more than 100 American personnel were later diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries (Stewart & Ali, 2020). Iranian officials justified the attack as a proportionate act of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

The rhetorical escalation that followed reinforced the confrontational dynamic. President Trump threatened to strike 52 sites in Iran if Tehran retaliated, invoking the number as a symbolic reference to the 1979–1981 hostage crisis (Trump, 2020). President Rouhani responded by citing the number 290, recalling the victims of Iran Air Flight 655, shot down by the U.S. Navy in 1988 (Rouhani, 2020). Additional incidents deepened tensions. In July 2020, a U.S. F-15 conducted a close inspection of a Mahan Air passenger aircraft near al-Tanf, forcing the Iranian pilot to descend abruptly and injuring passengers. While U.S. Central Command described the maneuver as a standard visual check, Tehran condemned it as a violation of civil aviation norms and filed a complaint with the International Civil Aviation Organization (Al Jazeera, 2020b).

The economic consequences of the Maximum Pressure campaign were severe. According to World Bank data, Iran's exports fell from approximately US\$120 billion in 2018 to US\$70 billion in 2019 and US\$51 billion in 2020. The collapse of oil revenues triggered sharp currency depreciation, reduced household consumption, and increased poverty across income groups (Salehi-Isfahani, 2023). GDP contracted by -1.8 percent in 2018 and -3.1 percent in 2019, with only a modest rebound in 2020. Inflation surged from 8 percent in 2017 to 40 percent in 2019, and consumer prices more than doubled over three years (World Bank Open Data, 2025). Living standards deteriorated sharply: per capita household consumption fell by more than 20 percent between 2010 and 2020, returning to levels last seen in the early 2000s. Employment remained relatively stable, but real wages collapsed, and poverty increased from 22 percent in 2017 to 26.6 percent in 2019. Nutrition indicators worsened, particularly among the poorest households. By 2020, roughly 12 million Iranians were living in poverty, and the middle class had shrunk from 58 percent in 2011 to 47 percent, eroding support for reformist leaders and contributing to low voter turnout ahead of the 2021 election. Sanctions also weakened state capacity: cash transfers declined dramatically, and fiscal constraints hindered Iran's COVID-19 response, contributing to excess mortality. Rather than inducing compliance, the campaign reinforced conservative political tendencies, reduced incentives for compromise, and entrenched a doctrine of resistance (Salehi-Isfahani, 2020, 2023).

Stage II analysis shows that, following the ineffective threats of Stage I, Washington faced a strategic choice: retreat and accept reputational costs, or escalate by operationalizing its threats. It chose escalation. Withdrawal from the JCPOA was therefore a predictable outcome of the earlier dynamics. Pompeo's subsequent demands, though more explicit and detailed, fell

into three broad categories: Iran's nuclear program, its ballistic missile program, and its regional activities. To pursue these objectives, the United States deployed economic, diplomatic, and military instruments. Unilaterally, it reinstated primary and secondary sanctions that severely damaged Iran's economy (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2018b). Multilaterally, it attempted to build international consensus by portraying Iran as a threat (Trump, 2018b). Militarily, it issued costly signals, including the Soleimani strike, intended to demonstrate resolve and restore deterrence (Al Jazeera, 2020a). In this phase, Washington employed all tools identified in Haun's framework for coercion. The expectation was straightforward: if Iran complied, coercion would be deemed successful. Iran did not comply. Instead, it adopted a layered strategy of resistance across public messaging, diplomacy, domestic policy, and military signaling.

Punitive measures and costly signals defined Stage II. The downing of a U.S. surveillance drone by Iran illustrated Tehran's willingness to resist rather than concede (Al Jazeera, 2019). The United States reported further Iranian drone activity near American naval vessels (Reuters, 2019b). The 2019 attack on Saudi Arabia's ARAMCO facilities, attributed by Washington to Iran, intensified the confrontation (Hubbard et al., 2019). The Soleimani strike represented the most dramatic escalation, serving strategic, punitive, and signaling functions. Iran again refused to concede, retaliating with the Ain al-Asad strike (Al Jazeera, News, 2020). The subsequent F-15 incident near Mahan Air's aircraft added another costly signal, yet Iran continued to resist (Al Jazeera, 2020b).

In multilateral diplomacy, U.S. efforts largely failed. Attempts to securitize Iran internationally left Washington isolated, unable to leverage the JCPOA framework or mobilize the Security Council (Zarif & Afjehi, 2023). Iran, by contrast, maneuvered effectively. It avoided immediate escalation after the U.S. withdrawal, adhered to JCPOA dispute-resolution mechanisms, and implemented calibrated countermeasures by gradually reducing its commitments. By early 2021, Iran had increased enrichment to 60 percent—far above the JCPOA cap—yet remained formally recognized by the E3+2 as a participant (IAEA, 2021; E3 Foreign Ministers, 2020).

Assessing coercion requires determining whether the target conceded. Pompeo's demands provide a clear benchmark. Several demands rested on accusations Iran rejected, making compliance impossible to measure. Demands concerning nuclear activities already regulated under the JCPOA and UNSCR 2231 were similarly unassessable. Iran's missile development continued, falsifying hypothesis H14 and leaving demand D4 unmet (IISS, 2021). U.S. citizens remained detained through 2021, rejecting H15 and leaving D5 unfulfilled (Kwai et al., 2023; Shear & Fassihi, 2023). Iran continued supporting regional groups, strongly confirming H16 and leaving multiple demands unmet (Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2019, 2020, 2021). Allegations of Iranian support for al-Qaeda or the Taliban lacked credible evidence, rendering D10 unmeasurable (Walcott, 2019). The 2019 ARAMCO attack, attributed to Iran by U.S. officials, undermined H17 and left demand D12 unfulfilled (Hubbard et al., 2019). Collectively, these outcomes reject hypothesis H18 and demonstrate the failure of coercion.

The reasons for failure align with Haun's model. Coercion collapses when demands exceed the target's threshold for strategic survival or when threats lack credibility. Iran viewed its missile program and regional activities as essential to state security (Khamenei, 2018; Salami, 2018). The perceived lack of credibility in U.S. nuclear-related demands further reduced incentives to comply (Rouhani, 2018). The United States did not escalate to brute force, indicating it did not intend coercion to fail. Ultimately, Iran judged resistance less costly than compliance.

Stage II concludes with a clear outcome: Pompeo's twelve demands were either unmet or based on assumptions that could not be empirically validated. Coercion failed because Iran perceived the demands as existential threats or judged the associated U.S. threats to be non-credible (Haun, 2015; Pompeo, 2018b). With Trump's departure from office in January 2021, the Maximum Pressure campaign came to an end.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the effectiveness of coercion as a tool in the statecraft toolbox by studying the case of Trump's Maximum Pressure campaign against Iran (2018–2021) using Phil Haun's Asymmetric Coercion theory through the Process Tracing methodology. The timeline was divided into two periods. This division follows Haun's argument that the challenger begins with threats and, if these threats prove insufficient to compel the target to comply, then proceeds to carry them out. Accordingly, Stage I represents the period during which the United States primarily threatened Iran, while Stage II marks the point at which Washington began to execute those threats. Through Process Tracing, it was first demonstrated that the situation constituted a case of Asymmetric Coercion, thereby justifying the application of Haun's theory. It was then shown that during Stage I, Iran refused to satisfy U.S. demands and since U.S. threats failed to compel Iran to change its behavior, the coercion was ultimately unsuccessful. The analysis then investigated the reasons for this failure, which pointed to two main factors: U.S. demands were perceived by Tehran as threats to state or regime survival, and parts of the threats themselves lacked credibility. Moreover, although Haun downplays "commitment problems" as a reason for coercion failure, Tehran's calculations led to a perception that the punishments would not end had they complied. Consequently, in Tehran's view, the cost of resistance was lower than the cost of compliance.

In Stage II, the United States faced two options: either abandon its coercive strategy and accept the reputational costs or carry on with the threats to demonstrate determination and credibility. Washington chose the latter, thereby initiating the Maximum Pressure campaign. At both stages, the U.S. ultimatum and clear announcement of its demands, especially Pompeo's list, facilitated measuring the campaign's effectiveness, although it simultaneously increased the potential reputation cost for the U.S. The analysis showed that Iran nevertheless held firmly to its position, endured the pressure, and did not comply. Consequently, coercion failed in Stage II as well. The reasons behind Iran's choice of resistance over compliance were the same as in Stage I. Ultimately, as Trump failed to secure re-election in 2020, Trump officially failed to change Iran's behavior through the Maximum Pressure campaign.

Ultimately, the catastrophic conflicts of 2025–2026 during the Trump administration's second term offer a tragic validation of asymmetric coercion theory. They demonstrate that when a challenger's demands threaten the target's core state survival, even escalating from coercion to outright brute force—despite inflicting immense human and financial costs—cannot alter the target's fundamental payoff matrix. Because the perceived costs of compliance remained existential, the target's rational choice remained firm: the perceived cost of resistance was still lower than political annihilation. By resorting to brute force, the United States not only failed to secure its maximalist demands but also severely eroded its own global credibility, illustrating the profound limits of asymmetric statecraft when divorced from credible assurance and diplomatic flexibility.

The findings of this study offer critical lessons for both policymaking and international relations theory regarding the limits of asymmetric coercion in international statecraft. The Trump administration's "Maximum Pressure" campaign (2018–2021) demonstrated that even when a powerful challenger possesses overwhelming military and economic advantages and inflicts severe economic pain, coercion will fail if the strategic design ignores the fundamental incentives and threat perceptions of the target state. The unilateral application of ultimatums and punitive measures without credible, reciprocal assurances drives the target toward resistance rather than concession. Based on these findings, this study outlines five key strategic recommendations for policymakers and international relations scholars:

1. Relying exclusively on sanctions and military signaling communicates to the target state that its insecurity is permanent. This compels the target to adopt an endurance-oriented defensive posture, as compliance is perceived as a path to progressive vulnerability rather than safety. Therefore, policymakers must construct structured, reciprocal frameworks where incremental target flexibilities are met with immediate, legally binding, and verified removal of sanctions. Positive inducements must be integrated into the bargaining process to make compliance a rational, face-saving alternative to conflict.
2. Diplomatic success in complex disputes is often achieved by isolating highly sensitive issues into manageable, stand-alone negotiations, as demonstrated by the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The Trump administration's shift toward maximalist "issue entanglement"—explicitly linking nuclear compliance to separate strategic domains destroyed the diplomatic baseline. This strategy failed to compel Iran on non-nuclear matters, while simultaneously dismantling a functioning nonproliferation agreement. Thus, Coercers must resist the temptation to leverage compliance on one issue to force concessions on unrelated, highly sensitive domains. Compartmentalizing core security concerns prevents disputes from escalating into indivisible, existential standoffs.
3. The articulation of maximalist demands — most notably Secretary of State Pompeo's twelve conditions in May 2018 — represents a classic "hand-tying" dilemma in coercion theory. By establishing a rigid, all-or-nothing list of preconditions for diplomacy, the U.S. eliminated any space for incremental compliance. Because the demands were so expansive that they threatened the target's fundamental security and survival, Tehran viewed them as non-negotiable existential threats. Consequently, Washington faced severe reputational

costs when none of the demands were met, trapping U.S. policy in an unproductive cycle of compulsory escalation with diminishing strategic returns. Hence, Policymakers should avoid public, all-or-nothing ultimatums that restrict their own diplomatic room to maneuver. Instead, they should utilize calibrated "off-ramps," and establish modest, achievable goals that allow both sides to claim domestic political victories while lowering the overall temperature of the dispute.

4. From the target state's perspective, passive endurance can be a costly and self-defeating strategy. Tehran's inaction in the early months of the Trump administration (2017) missed critical windows for proactive diplomacy. Tehran failed to take the diplomatic initiative before hawkish personnel changes (such as the appointments of Bolton and Pompeo) solidified the U.S. national security apparatus into an unyielding confrontational stance. This indicates that the Target states in asymmetric disputes must recognize that waiting for pressure to mount reduces their bargaining leverage and narrows their political options. Proactive, early diplomatic engagement and backchannel signaling must be initiated before a challenger's political leadership hardens its domestic commitments and locks in a strategy of maximum pressure.
5. During the 2018–2021 case study period, Iran's regional isolation and poor relations with neighboring Arab states (notably Saudi Arabia) severely exacerbated its vulnerability. Washington exploited these regional fractures to build a regional coalition supporting its withdrawal from the JCPOA. For regional powers facing asymmetric pressure from a global superpower, regional diplomacy is not a luxury but an existential cushion. Cultivating stable, constructive relationships with neighboring states prevents the superpower from constructing a unified regional front and provides invaluable, third-party mediation channels that can de-escalate crises before they reach a flashpoint.

References

- Al Jazeera. (2019). *Iran's Revolutionary Guard shoots down US drone*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/20/irans-revolutionary-guard-shoots-down-us-drone>. (Accessed on: 2019, June 20).
- Al Jazeera. (2020a). *Iran's Qassem Soleimani killed in US air raid at Baghdad Airport*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/3/irans-qassem-soleimani-killed-in-us-air-raid-at-baghdad-airport>. (Accessed on: 2020, January 3).
- Al Jazeera. (2020b). *Passengers injured as US fighter jet comes close to Iranian plane*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/24/passengers-injured-as-us-fighter-jet-comes-close-to-iranian-plane> (Accessed on: 2020b, July 24).
- Al Jazeera News. (2019). *Iran rejects US accusation over drone attacks on Aramco plants*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/15/iran-rejects-us-accusation-over-drone-attacks-on-aramco-plants> (Accessed on: 2019, September 15).
- Al Jazeera News. (2020). *Iran launches missile attacks on US facilities in Iraq*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/8/iran-launches-missile-attacks-on-us-facilities-in-iraq>. (Accessed on: 2020, January 8).
- Albright, D., Burkhard, S., & Stricker, A. (2020). *Analysis of November 2020 IAEA Iran verification and monitoring report*. Institute for Science and International Security. Available at: <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/analysis-of-iaea-iran-verification-and-monitoring-report-November-2020>. (Accessed on: 2020, November).
- Amano, Y. (2017). *Statement by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano*. International Atomic Energy Agency. Available at: <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/statement-by-iaea-director-general-yukiya-amano-13-october-2017> . (Accessed on: 2017, October 13).
- Araghchi, A. (2017). Iran will respond to any new U.S. sanctions – Deputy Foreign Minister. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/iran-will-respond-to-any-new-us-sanctions-deputy-foreign-minister-idUSKBN1AB0VY/> . (Accessed on: 2017, July 26)
- Bishop, J. (2018). *US decision on Iran nuclear deal*. Australian Department of Foreign Affairs. Available at: <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/julie-bishop/media-release/us-decision-iran-nuclear-deal> (Accessed on: 2018, May 8).
- Bolton, J. R. (2017a). *John Bolton: Iran regime must not reach 40th birthday*. NCRI. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/freeiran2017/john-bolton-iran-regime-must-not-reach-40th-birthday/> . (Accessed on: 2017, July 3).
- Bolton, J. R. (2017b) *How to get out of the Iran nuclear deal*. *National Review*. Available at: <https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/08/iran-nuclear-deal-exit-strategy-john-bolton-memo-trump/>. (Accessed on: 2017b, August 28).
- Borger, J., & Wintour, P. (2019). Donald Trump tells Iran, “Call me” over lifting sanctions. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/09/eu-rejects-iran-two-month-ultimatum-on-nuclear-deal>. (Accessed on: 2019, May 9).
- Bureau of Counterterrorism. (2019). *Country reports on terrorism 2019: Iran*. U.S. Department of State. Available at: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/iran/>.
- Bureau of Counterterrorism. (2020). *Country reports on terrorism 2020: Iran*. U.S. Department of State. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/iran/>.
- Bureau of Counterterrorism. (2021). *Country reports on terrorism 2021: Iran*. U.S. Department of State. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/iran/> .

- Bush, G. W. (2002). *President delivers State of the Union Address*. Available at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> (Accessed on: 2002, January 29).
- Davar, F. (2022). *When Rouhani (almost) met Trump*. Iran Wire. Available at: <https://iranwire.com/en/politics/107253-when-rouhani-almost-met-trump/> (Accessed on: 2022, September 30).
- Davenport, K. (2019). Iran threatens to breach nuclear deal. *Arms Control Association*. Available at: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-06/news/iran-threatens-breach-nuclear-deal> (Accessed on: 2019, June).
- DeYoung, K. (2017). U.S. slaps new sanctions on Iran, after certifying its compliance with nuclear deal. *The Washington Post*. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-certifies-that-iran-is-meeting-terms-of-nuclear-deal/2017/07/17/58d0a362-6b4a-11e7-b9e2-2056e768a7e5_story.html (Accessed on: 2017, July 18)
- E3 Foreign Ministers. (2019). *Joint statement on the new mechanism to facilitate trade with Iran*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-the-new-mechanism-to-facilitate-trade-with-iran> (Accessed on: 2019, January).
- E3 Foreign Ministers. (2020). *E3 Foreign Ministers' statement on the JCPOA*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/e3-foreign-ministers-statement-on-the-jcpoa> (Accessed on: 2020, August 20).
- E3 Leaders. (2017). *Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of France, Germany and the United Kingdom*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/declaration-by-the-heads-of-state-and-government-of-france-germany-and-the-united-kingdom>. (Accessed on: 2017, October 13).
- E3 Leaders. (2018). *Joint statement following President Trump's announcement on Iran*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-from-prime-minister-may-chancellor-merkel-and-president-macron-following-president-trumps-statement-on-iran> (Accessed on: 2018, May 8).
- European Commission. (2018). *Updated Blocking Statute in support of Iran nuclear deal enters into force*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_18_4805 (Accessed on: 2018, August 7).
- Flynn, M. (2017). *CNN.com – Transcripts*. CNN. Available at: <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/cg/date/2017-02-01/segment/02>. (Accessed on: 2017, February 1).
- Freeland, C. (2018). *Canada reaffirms support for Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)*. Government of Canada. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2018/05/canada-reaffirms-support-for-joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action-jcpoa.html>. (Accessed on: 2018, May 8).
- George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. MIT Press.
- George, A. L., & Simons, W. E. (1994). *The limits of coercive diplomacy* (2nd ed.). Avalon Publishing.
- Ghasemi, B. (2017). Trump, Zarif spar on Twitter after missile test. *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/2/3/trump-iran-playing-with-fire-after-missile-test>. (Accessed on: 2017, February 3).
- Ghazvinian, J. (2021). *America and Iran: A history, 1720 to the present*. Alfred A. Knopf.

- Haun, P. (2015). *Coercion, survival, and war: Why weak states resist the United States*. Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvqsdv68>.
- Hook, B. (2018). *Briefing on the creation of the Iran Action Group*. U.S. Department of State. Available at: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/briefing-on-the-creation-of-the-iran-action-group/>. (Accessed on: 2018, August 16).
- Hubbard, B., Karasz, P., & Reed, S. (2019). Two major Saudi oil installations hit by drone strike, and U.S. blames Iran. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/14/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-refineries-drone-attack.html>. (Accessed on: 2019, September 14).
- IAEA. (2021). *IAEA and Iran – IAEA Board Reports*. Available at: <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/iaea-and-iran-iaea-board-reports>.
- IISS. (2021). *Open-source analysis of Iran's missile and UAV capabilities and proliferation*. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2021/04/iran-missiles-uavs-proliferation/>.
- International Crisis Group. (2018). *Iran's priorities in a turbulent Middle East* (Report No. 184). Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/184-irans-priorities-turbulent-middle-east>. (Accessed on: 2018, April 13).
- Jafari, M. A. (2017). IRGC warns US of risks of implementing CAATSA. *Tasnim News Agency*. Available at: <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2017/10/08/1539737/irgc-warns-us-of-risks-of-implementing-caatsa>. (Accessed on: 2017, October 8).
- Katzman, K. (2019). *Iran's Revolutionary Guard named a terrorist organization*. Congressional Research Service. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IN/PDF/IN11093/IN11093.2.pdf.
- Kerr, P. K., & Katzman, K. (2018). *Iran nuclear agreement and U.S. exit*. Congressional Research Service. Available at: <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1228581/>. (Accessed on: 2018, July 20)
- Khamenei, S. A. (2017a). Iran's Khamenei says Trump shows “the real face of US”. *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/2/7/ayatollah-khamenei-donald-trump-shows-real-face-of-us>. (Accessed on: 2017, February 7).
- Khamenei, S. A. (2017b). Leader hails defenders of holy shrine in Syria. *Mehr News Agency*. Available at: <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/122505/Leader-hails-Defenders-of-Holy-Shrine-in-Syria>. (Accessed on: 2017, January 5).
- Khamenei, S. A. (2017c). Regarding JCPOA: Every wrong move by the “dominating cabal” will be served with IR's response. Available at: <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/5133/Regarding-JCPOA-every-wrong-move-by-the-Dominating-Cabal-will>. (Accessed on: 2017, September 17).
- Khamenei, S. A. (2018). Why is the U.S. frightened of Iran's missile capabilities? Available at: <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/5421/Why-is-the-U-S-frightened-of-Iran-s-missile-capabilities>. (Accessed on: 2018, January 27).
- Khamenei, S. A. (2019). Iran Supreme Leader rules out negotiations with US. *France 24*. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20190917-iran-supreme-leader-rules-out-negotiations-with-us>. (Accessed on: 2019, September 17).
- Kono, T. (2018). *Statement by Foreign Minister Taro Kono on the JCPOA*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002027.html. (Accessed on: 2018, May 8).
- Kwai, I., Bubola, E., & Fassihi, F. (2023). Who are the prisoners released by the U.S. and Iran? *The New York Times*. Available at:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/18/world/middleeast/american-detainees-iran-us-swap.html>. (Accessed on: 2023, September 18).
- Masterson, J. (2020). Iran grows uranium stockpile. *Arms Control Association*. Available at: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-12/news/iran-grows-uranium-stockpile> ([armscontrol.org in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2020, December).
- Mogherini, F. (2017). EU: US has no right to terminate Iran accord. *Politico*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/federica-mogherini-donald-trump-iran-eu-us-has-no-right-to-terminate-iran-accord/> ([politico.eu in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2017, October 13).
- Netanyahu, B. (2018). WATCH: Netanyahu praises Trump for withdrawing from Iran nuclear deal. *PBS News*. Available at: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/watch-netanyahu-praises-trump-for-withdrawing-from-iran-nuclear-deal> ([pbs.org in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, May 8)
- Pompeo, M. (2018a). *Remarks on the creation of the Iran Action Group*. U.S. Department of State. Available at: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/remarks-on-the-creation-of-the-iran-action-group/> ([2017-2021.state.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, August 16).
- Pompeo, M. (2018b). *What are Pompeo's 12 demands for new Iran treaty?* *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/5/21/mike-pompeo-speech-what-are-the-12-demands-given-to-iran> ([aljazeera.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, May 21).
- Pompeo, M. (2019). Iran dismisses US readiness for talks as “wordplay”. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/2/us-says-ready-to-talk-but-iran-dismisses-the-offer-as-wordplay> ([aljazeera.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2019, June 2).
- Rep. Royce, E. R. (2017). *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (H.R. 3364)*. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3364> ([congress.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2017, August 2).
- Reuters. (2017). Iran bans U.S. wrestlers in retaliation to Trump's visa ban. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/iran-bans-us-wrestlers-in-retaliation-to-trumps-visa-ban-tv-idUSKBN15I1TB/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2017, February 3).
- Reuters. (2018a). Leading container shipping line MSC stops new bookings for Iran. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/leading-container-shipping-line-msc-stops-new-bookings-for-iran-idUSKCN1IH1IL/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, May 16).
- Reuters. (2018b). Maersk latest company to shun Iran as EU scrambles to save nuclear deal. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/maersk-latest-company-to-shun-iran-as-eu-scrambles-to-save-nuclear-deal-idUSKCN1II0YS/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, May 17).
- Reuters. (2018c). Saudi Arabia says backs U.S. decision to withdraw from Iran nuclear deal. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/saudi-arabia-says-backs-us-decision-to-withdraw-from-iran-nuclear-deal-idUSKBN1I92YZ/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, May 8).
- Reuters. (2018d). Total tells Iran it's quitting South Pars gas project. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/total-tells-iran-its-quitting-south-pars-gas-project-idUSKCN1L51M5/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, August 20).
- Reuters. (2018e). UAE supports U.S. withdrawal from Iran nuclear deal. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/uae-supports-us-withdrawal-from-iran-nuclear-deal-state-news-agency-idUSKBN1I92YY/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, May 8).

- Reuters. (2019a). Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister says Tehran has not lost any drones. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/irans-deputy-foreign-minister-says-tehran-has-not-lost-any-drones-idUSKCN1UE0F6/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2019, July 19).
- Reuters. (2019b). Trump says U.S. ship destroyed Iranian drone in Strait of Hormuz. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/trump-says-us-ship-destroyed-iranian-drone-in-strait-of-hormuz-idUSKCN1UD2V7/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2019, July 18).
- Rouhani, H. (2017a). Iran's Rouhani warns Trump to not back out of nuke deal. *NBC News*. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/iran-nuclear-talks/no-one-will-trust-u-s-if-trump-ends-nuclear-n802611> ([nbcnews.com in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2017, September 19).
- Rouhani, H. (2017b). US President's remarks nothing but insults, false accusations against Iranian nation. Available at: <https://president.ir/en/101131> (Accessed on: 2017, October 13).
- Rouhani, H. (2018). Iran's Rouhani says U.S. has failed to undermine nuclear deal. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/irans-rouhani-says-us-has-failed-to-undermine-nuclear-deal-tv-idUSKBN1F306F/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2018, January 14).
- Rouhani, H. (2020). Tweet on Flight 655. Available at: <https://x.com/HassanRouhani/status/1214236608196685824> ([x.com in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2020, January 8).
- Salami, H. (2018). Iran considers Syria, Iraq as its "strategic depth". *Mehr News Agency*. Available at: <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/131868/Iran-considers-Syria-Iraq-as-its-strategic-depth-IRGC-deputy> ([en.mehrnews.com in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2018, February 4).
- Salehi-Isfahani, D. (2020). Iran: The double jeopardy of sanctions and COVID-19. *Brookings Institution*. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/iran-the-double-jeopardy-of-sanctions-and-covid-19/> ([brookings.edu in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2020, May).
- Salehi-Isfahani, D. (2023). The impact of sanctions on household welfare and employment in Iran. *Middle East Development Journal*, 15(2), 189–221. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17938120.2023.2248697>.
- Schelling, T. C. (2020). *Arms and influence*. Yale University Press. (Original work published 1966). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxkn7f8>.
- Shamkhani, A. (2018). Iran says Bolton pick as National Security Adviser a "matter of shame". *Fox News*. Available at: <https://www.foxnews.com/world/iran-says-bolton-pick-as-national-security-adviser-a-matter-of-shame> ([foxnews.com in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2018, March 23).
- Shear, M. D., & Fassihi, F. (2023). Iran releases 5 Americans as U.S. unfreezes billions in oil revenue for Tehran. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/18/us/politics/iran-us-prisoner-release.html> ([nytimes.com in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2023, September 18).
- Sher, G., & Cohen, D. (2019). *U.S.-Iran negotiations: A guide for the perplexed*. Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy. Available at: <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/us-iran-negotiations-guide-perplexed> ([bakerinstitute.org in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2019, December 10).
- SIPRI. (2024, April 22). *SIPRI Military Expenditure Database*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
- Stelzenmüller, C. (2019). Hostile ally: The Trump challenge and Europe's inadequate response. *Brookings Institution*. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hostile-ally-the-trump-challenge-and-europes-inadequate-response/> ([brookings.edu in Bing](#)) (Accessed on: 2019, May)
- Stewart, P., & Ali, I. (2020). "Hit with a truck" – How Iran's missiles inflicted brain injury on U.S. troops. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/hit-with-a-truck-how-irans-troops>

- missiles-inflicted-brain-injury-on-us-troops-idUSKBN20E17J/ ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2020, February 20).
- Tillerson, R. (2017). U.S. says Iran complies with nuke deal but orders review on lifting sanctions. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/u-s-says-iran-complies-with-uke-deal-but-orders-review-on-lifting-sanctions-idUSKBN17L08K/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2017, April 19).
- Torbat, A. E. (2005). Impacts of the U.S. trade and financial sanctions on Iran. *The World Economy*, 28(3), 407–434. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9701.2005.00671.x>.
- Trump, D. J. (2015a). Here's Donald Trump's presidential announcement speech. *TIME*. Available at: <https://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/> ([time.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2015, June 16).
- Trump, D. J. (2015b). Statement by Donald J. Trump on the Iran Agreement. *The American Presidency Project*. Available at: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-donald-j-trump-the-iran-agreement> ([presidency.ucsb.edu in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2015, July 14).
- Trump, D. J. (2016). Transcript: Donald Trump expounds on his foreign policy views. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html> ([nytimes.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2016, March 26).
- Trump, D. J. (2017a). Remarks by President Trump on Iran strategy. *The White House*. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-iran-strategy/> ([trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2017, October 13).
- Trump, D. J. (2017b). Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. *The White House*. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/> ([trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2017, September 19).
- Trump, D. J. (2018a). President Donald J. Trump is ending United States participation in an unacceptable Iran deal. *The White House*. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/> ([trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, May 8).
- Trump, D. J. (2018b). Statement by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal. *The White House*. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-iran-nuclear-deal/> ([trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, January 12).
- Trump, D. J. (2018c). Statement from the President on the reimposition of United States sanctions with respect to Iran. *The White House*. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-reimposition-united-states-sanctions-respect-iran/> ([trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, August 6).
- Trump, D. J. (2020). Tweet on 52 target sites. Available at: <https://x.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1213593975732527112> ([x.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2020, January 4).
- Tsukimori, O., & Chung, J. (2018). Japan, South Korea plan to resume Iran oil imports from January – Sources. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/japan-south-korea-plan-to-resume-iran-oil-imports-from-january-sources-idUSKCN1NO0R9/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, November 19).
- UN Security Council. (2020). *Letter dated 14 August 2020 from the President of the Security Council*. United Nations.

- U.S. Department of State. (2012). *Delisting of the Mujahedin-e Khalq*. Available at: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/09/198443.htm> ([2009-2017.state.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2012, September 28).
- U.S. Department of State. (2019). *Maximum Pressure campaign on the regime in Iran*. Available at: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/maximum-pressure-campaign-on-the-regime-in-iran/>.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2018a). *Revocation of JCPOA-related General Licenses*. Available at: <https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20180627>.(Accessed on: 2018, June 27).
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2018b). *U.S. government fully re-imposes sanctions on the Iranian regime*. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm541> ([home.treasury.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, November 5).
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2020). *United States and Switzerland finalize the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement*. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm919> ([home.treasury.gov in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2020, February 27).
- Vakil, S. (2017). Under pressure: US–Iranian relations in the age of Trump. In *Post-Vote Iran: Giving Engagement a Chance* (pp. 79–101). Available at: <https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/4229748>.
- Van Evera, S. (1997). *Guide to methods for students of political science*. Cornell University Press.
- Walcott, J. (2019). Officials dispute Mike Pompeo’s claim that Iran is collaborating with Al Qaeda. *TIME*. Available at: <https://time.com/5592889/mike-pompeo-iran-al-qaeda/> ([time.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2019, May 22).
- Weller, M. (2020). The controversy about the Iranian nuclear sanctions snapback. *American Society of International Law*, 24(27). Available at: <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/24/issue/27/controversy-about-iranian-nuclear-sanctions-snapback>.
- Wintour, P. (2018). Fears grow for future of Iran nuclear deal in wake of Tillerson’s removal. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/13/rex-tillerson-iran-nuclear-deal-us-eu> ([theguardian.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2018, March 13).
- Woodward, M. (2020). The Muslim ban and Trump’s war on immigration. *MERIP*. Available at: <https://merip.org/2020/06/the-muslim-ban-and-trumps-war-on-immigration-2/> ([merip.org in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2020, June 15).
- World Bank Open Data. (2025a). *World Bank Open Data (US–IR GDP indicator)*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2024&locations=US-IR&start=2015&view=chart> ([data.worldbank.org in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2025, September).
- World Bank Open Data. (2025b). *World Bank Open Data*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org>
- Wright, R. (2019). Trump’s close-call diplomacy with Iran’s president. *The New Yorker*. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/donald-trumps-close-call-diplomacy-with-irans-president-hassan-rouhani> ([newyorker.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2019, September 30).
- Wroughton, L. (2017). U.S. says Iran complies with nuke deal but orders review on lifting sanctions. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/u-s-says-iran-complies-with-nuke-deal-but-orders-review-on-lifting-sanctions-idUSKBN17L08K/> ([reuters.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2017, April 19).
- Zarif, M. J. (2016). Zarif’s response to a foreign journalist about the Iranian missile tests. *Tehran Times*. Available at: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/300706/Zarif-s-response-to-a-foreign-journalist-about-the-iranian-missile> ([tehrantimes.com in Bing](#))(Accessed on: 2016, April 18).
- Zarif, M. J. (2018). US foreign policy in crisis. *Iran Daily*.

Zarif, M. J., & Afjehi, S. J. A. (2023). Trump's campaign to re-securitize Iran. *International Studies Journal (ISJ)*, 20(2), 235–85. <https://doi.org/10.22034/isj.2023.431156.2114>.