

## INTERNATIONAL LAW AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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### IRAN-IAEA COOPERATION AND ITS IMPACT ON IRAN'S FOREIGN AND NUCLEAR POLICY

The article considers the problems and prospects of cooperation between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The article explains that IAEA plays an important political role in dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue because the IAEA's reports and statements influence the positions of the key actors of international relations regarding Tehran's nuclear and foreign policy. The article also reveals that IAEA's technical activities and diplomatic talks influence Iran's behaviour in the international arena and its nuclear program's development. The objective of the article is to define the impact of the IAEA's monitoring and diplomatic activities on Iran's nuclear and foreign policy. The article applied the research methods of content analysis, comparative analysis, and system analysis. The hypothesis of the article is that the IAEA had an important positive impact on Iran's nuclear and foreign policy. The article reveals that this hypothesis was confirmed in general during the research because IAEA played a constructive role during negotiations over the Iranian nuclear issue, especially in 2021, when the IAEA's temporarily technical agreement with Iran helped to save the nuclear deal with Tehran or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The article also discovers that the IAEA's pressure on Iran in the 2000s helped to convince Iran to sign JCPOA later. Moreover, as the article reminds, IAEA played a positive role in monitoring and verifying Iran's nuclear activities after signing JCPOA in 2015. The article compares different stages of relations between Iran and IAEA since 2003 and states that even the difficult problems in cooperation between both sides could be overcome after the negotiations. The article considers IAEA's research of the intelligence data of Israel and the United States about the Iranian nuclear program and discusses the disagreements between the Agency and Tehran over the Iranian Nuclear Archive that was found by Israel in 2018. The article considers the lack of a common approach between the IAEA and P5+1 countries that participated in the nuclear negotiations with Iran. The article concludes that IAEA is one of the key actors of international relations that take efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear issue but the Agency's political role should not be overestimated, because sometimes it could damage the negotiation process with Iran. The article mentions that its research findings could be used for a better understanding of the problems and prospects of the IAEA – Iran cooperation.

**Keywords:** International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran's nuclear program, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, Additional Protocol, verification and monitoring.

**Defining the problem.** The cooperation between Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is crucial for preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Since 2003, after the Iranian nuclear program became an issue of the serious international concern, IAEA plays an important role in defining the policy of other countries toward Iran. Due to IAEA efforts and reports, imposing of the United Nations (UN) sanctions on Iran became possible in 2006 – 2010. After Iran signed a so-called nuclear deal or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, the IAEA played again an important political role because the Agency was responsible for checking whether Iran fulfills that deal. In 2021, the IAEA diplomacy helped to save the nuclear deal and continue direct and indirect negotiations on its revival between Iran and P5+1 countries (China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States). However, the lack of cooperation between Iran and IAEA in 2021 could lead to escalation of the crisis around

the Iranian nuclear program like it had already happened before. Therefore, it is important to study the problems and prospects of cooperation between Iran and IAEA, because this cooperation influences the Iranian foreign and nuclear policy in particular, and the international security in general.

The problem of studying Iran-IAEA cooperation is connected with the following **research tasks**:

- Analyse the reaction of the international community to the IAEA reports and other documents related to the Iranian nuclear program
- Study how the IAEA activities influence the development of the Iranian nuclear program
- Research the diplomatic communication between Iran and IAEA and its influence on the Iranian nuclear and foreign policy.

**Analysis of the previous publications.** The technical aspects of Iran-IAEA relations are considered in the analytical reports of David Albright, Sarah Burkhard, and Andrea Sticker<sup>1</sup> who are the scientists from the US Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS).

The IAEA analytical reports about verification and monitoring of the Iranian nuclear activities<sup>2</sup> were also used as an important source of information in this article.

The research papers of the US analyst Mark Fitzpatrick also provide a good explanation of the relations between Iran and IAEA<sup>3</sup>. The British expert Patrick Wintour considered the relations between IAEA and Iran in the context of negotiations between Tehran and P5+1 countries in 2021<sup>4</sup>.

The **objective** of this article is to define the role of the IAEA's monitoring and diplomatic activities in Iran's nuclear and foreign policy decision-making process.

The article applied the research **methods** of content analysis, comparative analysis, and system analysis. The method of content analysis was used to study the IAEA official documents in order to clarify IAEA's position on the Iranian nuclear matters. The method of comparative analysis was applied to compare the relations between the IAEA and Iran during different periods. The method of the system analysis was used to define the impact of the IAEA-Iran cooperation on international relations system.

The **hypothesis** of this article is that the IAEA had an important positive impact on Iran's nuclear and foreign policy.

**The main material.** The Iran – IAEA cooperation began in 1974, when the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSU) between both sides was signed<sup>5</sup>. IAEA has signed CSU's with most countries of the world to guarantee the peaceful development of their nuclear programs.

In 2003, Iran failed to adequately report to the IAEA its nuclear materials and activities for the first time. Since 2003, the IAEA regularly published quarterly reports on verification and monitoring of the nuclear activities in Iran.

2002-2003 was a turning point in the history of the Iranian nuclear program, and therefore, the IAEA started to pay particular attention to Iran at that time. In 2002, the Iranian nuclear program became an issue of the real international concern after the Iranian opposition groups revealed the secret information about Iran's clandestine nuclear activities<sup>6</sup>. The IAEA analysed this information and came to conclusion that it should be verified. The further IAEA research as well as the intelligence reports confirmed that until 2003, Iran developed a nuclear weapons project that had a code name "Amad". Under international pressure,

<sup>1</sup> Albright, D., Burkhard, S., Stricker, A. (2021). The IAEA's Latest Iran NPT Safeguards Report: No Progress, No Accountability? *The Institute for Science and International Security, June, 4*. <<https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/the-iaeas-latest-iran-npt-safeguards-report-no-progress-no-accountability/8>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>2</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency (2021). *IAEA Board Report: Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231, 2015* <<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/21/06/gov2021-28.pdf>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>3</sup> Fitzpatrick, M. (2019, March 20). *The IAEA's diligent investigation of Iran's 'atomic archive'* <<https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/03/the-iaeas-diligent-investigation-of-irans-atomic-archive>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>4</sup> Wintour, P. (2021, May 26). Iran's failure to explain uranium traces is 'big problem', says IAEA chief. *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/iran-failure-explain-uranium-traces-big-problem-iaea-un>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>5</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency (1974). *The Text of the Agreement Between Iran and the Agency for the Application of Safeguards in Connection with the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*. <<https://www.iaea.org/publications/documents/infcircs/text-agreement-between-iran-and-agency-application-safeguards-connection-treaty-non-proliferation-nuclear-weapons>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>6</sup> CNN (2002). *U.S.: Iran working on nuclear weapons*. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/meast/12/13/iran.nuclear/>> (2021, July, 01).

Iran signed the Additional Protocol (AP) to the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with IAEA in December 2003<sup>1</sup>. AP is a typical agreement, which IAEA signed with many countries of the world and which provides to the IAEA inspectors additional access to the countries' nuclear facilities. After Iran signed and started to fulfill the Additional Protocol in 2003, its nuclear program became much more transparent and controlled by the IAEA, and this temporarily reduced the international concerns about the Iranian nuclear program.

In 2004, Iran signed a nuclear deal with the European Union and E3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom), and the IAEA played an important role in verifying Iran's nuclear compromises<sup>2</sup>. Iran agreed to suspend the uranium enrichment and even demonstrated its readiness to improve its relations with the United States<sup>3</sup>, which remained very bad after Iran kept the US diplomats as hostages in 1979 – 1981. However, the administration of the US president George W. Bush rejected to negotiate with Iran in 2003 – 2005 because Iran did not want to accept the US demand to completely stop uranium enrichment<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps, Iran's failure to reach an agreement with the United States led to the change of Tehran's policy that was followed by the decrease of cooperation with the IAEA.

In 2006, Iran and IAEA experienced the new crisis in their relations. During this time, the positions of the hardliners strengthened in Iran, and the Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad, supported by the Iranian Supreme Leader ayatollah Ali Khamenei, decided to intensify the provocative nuclear program. In 2006, Iran resumed its uranium enrichment and stopped its voluntary fulfilling of the Additional Protocol<sup>5</sup>, which was signed but never ratified by Iran. The IAEA inspectors lost a possibility to control the Iranian nuclear program and confirm Iran's compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The failure to cooperate with the IAEA in 2006 had severe political consequences for Iran because the IAEA Board of Governors reported about Iran's failure to explain properly its suspicious nuclear activities to the United Nations (UN) despite Iran's threats to stop cooperation with the IAEA or even to withdraw from the NPT<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, in 2006, the UN Security Council (SC) considered the Iranian nuclear issue and approved the resolution that condemned the Iranian nuclear program.

Between 2006 and 2013, the IAEA had a limited access to the Iranian nuclear facilities and raised alarm about this issue in its reports about Iran. Only after arrival to the presidential office of President Hassan Rohani in 2013, the relations between Iran and IAEA improved. In 2013, Iran and IAEA signed Framework of Cooperation agreement. In the same year, Iran signed a temporarily nuclear deal or Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) with EU/E3+3 or P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), and the IAEA was responsible to verify and control the fulfilment of this deal by Iran<sup>7</sup>.

In July 2015, Iran and P5+1 signed the Joined Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which reduced the scope of the Iranian nuclear program and obliged Iran to make its nuclear facilities much more open for the IAEA inspectors. The IAEA again played an important political role in implementation of this historic deal, because the JCPOA's entry into force depended on the IAEA reports and conclusion about Iran's compliance with its obligation to make its nuclear program more transparent<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency (2003). *Iran Signs Additional Protocol on Nuclear Safeguards*.

<<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/iran-signs-additional-protocol-nuclear-safeguards>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>2</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency (2004). Communication dated 26 November 2004 received from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Kingdom concerning the agreement signed in Paris on 15 November 2004. *Information Circular INFCIRC/637*.

<<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infcircs/2004/infcirc637.pdf>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>3</sup> Kessler, G. (2013). Kerry's claim that Iran offered Bush a nuclear deal in 2003. *Washington Post*.

<<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2013/12/09/kerrys-claim-that-iran-offered-bush-a-nuclear-deal-in-2003/>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>4</sup> Rodgers, J. (2015). Enriching History: Bush to Obama on Iran's Enrichment. *Arms Control Today*.

<<https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2015-04-09/enriching-history-bush-obama-irans-enrichment>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>5</sup> Al Jazeera (2006). *Iran orders end to UN inspections*

<<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/2/5/iran-orders-end-to-un-inspections>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>6</sup> Fathi, N. (2006). Bracing for Penalties, Iran Threatens to Withdraw from Nuclear Treaty. *The New York Times*, February 12. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/12/world/middleeast/bracing-for-penalties-iran-threatens-to-withdraw-from.html>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>7</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency (2021). *Verification and Monitoring in Iran*.

<<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>8</sup> Amano, Y. (2017, May 11). Reflections on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. *International Atomic Energy Agency*. <<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/reflections-on-the-joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action>> (2021, July, 01).

In 2014 – 2015, the IAEA had still some unanswered questions about the past developments of the Iranian nuclear program<sup>1</sup>, but at the end, the Agency decided to admit that Iran fulfils its obligations, and after this, the JCPOA's entry into force became possible on 1 January 2016. The IAEA continued to monitor Iran's nuclear program and check whether Iran fulfils the JCPOA. According to the IAEA, until May 2019, Iran followed the JCPOA's provisions and did not create any reasons to worry about its nuclear program<sup>2</sup>.

The situation changed in 2019, when Iran started to gradually withdraw from the JCPOA, following the US president Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from this nuclear deal in 2018<sup>3</sup>. During 2019 – 2021, Iran was increasing the quantity of its enriched uranium and the level of its enrichment<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, until February 2021, Iran continued to voluntarily fulfil the Additional Protocol and cooperate with the IAEA<sup>5</sup>. This gave the impression that despite the violation of many provisions of the JCPOA, the Iranian program remained rather transparent and controlled by the IAEA, which reduces the possibility of obtaining nuclear weapons by Iran.

Nevertheless, already during 2019 and 2020, the IAEA had some concerns about the lack of cooperation with Iran. Iran did not want to give more details about its past nuclear activities, and the IAEA wanted to visit and inspect some facilities where these activities had been performed to make sure that they are not resumed. However, Iran did not provide the access to the requested facilities immediately. Only after few months of delay and after the IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi visited Tehran in August 2020, Iran finally provided access to the IAEA inspectors to the two of its questionable nuclear facilities near Karaj and Isfahan<sup>6</sup>. The inspectors revealed that Iran cleaned the traces of the past nuclear activities but still managed to find the uranium particles of the anthropogenic origin (artificially made). Iran failed to give a clear explanation of why these particles were present, and that raised concerns that Iran still tries to hide some nuclear activities<sup>7</sup>.

The level of the Iran-IAEA cooperation further reduced in February 2021, when Iran decided to suspend its fulfilment of the Additional Protocol to press the United States to come back to the compliance with the JCPOA and lift sanctions. For the same reason, Iran also increased the level of uranium enrichment from 4,5% to 20%<sup>8</sup>. In April 2021, Iran reacted on the sabotage on its nuclear facility in Natanz by further increasing of enrichment level to 60%, which is rather close to the weapons grade level of the 90%. According to the IAEA, the uranium enriched to the level of 20% and higher can potentially be used to produce the nuclear bomb, and therefore, the fact that Iran has accumulated few kilograms of uranium enriched to 63%, worries the IAEA and international community<sup>9</sup>. These new developments of the Iranian nuclear program raised concerns that the nuclear deal with Iran may be never revived even despite US President Joe Biden's proclaimed intention to resume the JCPOA.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC News (2014). *Iran failing to answer nuclear questions, says IAEA*.

<<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29957334>> (2014, July, 01).

<sup>2</sup> Davenport, K. (2019). IAEA Says Iran Abiding by Nuclear Deal. *Arms Control Today*.

<<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-04/news/iaea-says-iran-abiding-nuclear-deal>> (2019, July, 01).

<sup>3</sup> Wintour, P. (2019). Iran announces partial withdrawal from nuclear deal. *The Guardian*, May, 8.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/07/iran-to-announces-partial-withdrawal-from-nuclear-deal>>

(2019, July, 01).

<sup>4</sup> Iran International (2021). *IAEA: Iran's Enriched Uranium Stockpile 14 Times the Nuclear Deal Limit*.

<<https://iranintl.com/en/iran-in-brief/iaea-iran%E2%80%99s-enriched-uranium-stockpile-14-times-nuclear-deal-limit>>

(2021, July, 01).

<sup>5</sup> CTGN News (2021). *Iran tells IAEA voluntary implementation Additional Protocol ends on Feb. 23*

<<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-02-16/Iran-to-IAEA-Voluntary-implementation-Additional-Protocol-ends-Feb-23-XV08E9jHGM/index.html>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>6</sup> Wintour, P. (2020). Iran grants UN nuclear watchdog access to two key sites. *The Guardian*, August 26.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/26/iran-grants-un-nuclear-watchdog-access-two-key-sites>>

(2020, July, 01).

<sup>7</sup> Grossi, R. (2021). IAEA Director General's Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors. *International Atomic Energy Agency*. <<https://www.iaea.org/iaea-director-generals-introductory-statement-to-the-board-of-governors-1-march-2021>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>8</sup> BBC News (2021). *Iran resumes enriching uranium to 20% purity at Fordo facility*.

<<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55530366>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>9</sup> *The Times of Israel* (2021). *Iran now enriching uranium to 63% purity – UN watchdog*

<<https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-now-enriching-uranium-to-63-purity-un-watchdog/>> (2021, July, 01).

In this complicated situation around Iran, the IAEA played again a very important political role because this international organization helped to save nuclear negotiations with Tehran. In February 2021, the IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi visited Iran and convinced its leadership to approve a temporarily technical agreement with the IAEA<sup>1</sup>. This agreement allowed to the IAEA to get access to the cameras in the nuclear facilities in Iran after the sanctions are lifted. The agreement created a possibility to keep the Iranian nuclear program under international control, although the physical access of the IAEA inspectors to the Iranian nuclear facilities was limited comparing with the period when Iran complied with the Additional Protocol.

The Iran-IAEA technical agreement expired in May 2021, but the two sides agreed to extend it until 24 June 2021<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the IAEA's diplomacy toward Iran helped to further continue the nuclear negotiations between Iran and P4+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom), which continued since April 2021 to agree on the terms of the US and Iran's returning to the JCPOA<sup>3</sup>.

Nevertheless, despite these positive developments, the IAEA started to express serious concerns about the Iranian nuclear program in May – June 2021. The IAEA again requested additional information about the past nuclear activities at some Iranian nuclear facilities, but Iran did not give that information and refused to cooperate with the IAEA<sup>4</sup>. It should be noted that even after suspension of the Additional Protocol, Iran remains a participant of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSU) with IAEA, and according to this legally binding agreement, Iran must provide clear answers to the IAEA questions, but Iran does not do this. Considering the increasing level of the uranium enrichment and lack of transparency of the Iranian nuclear program, the IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi expressed concerns although he admitted that by June 2021 there were no signs that Iran tries to develop nuclear weapons<sup>5</sup>. However, if the IAEA does not control the Iranian nuclear facilities, it cannot be guaranteed that the Iranian path to the nuclear weapons acquisition will be discovered in time. Further concerns were caused by Iran's refusal to extend again its technical agreement with the IAEA in June 2021<sup>6</sup>.

Some analysts think that the nuclear negotiations with Iran should be suspended until Tehran renews the full cooperation with the IAEA<sup>7</sup>. However, it seems that the political role of Iran-IAEA cooperation should be also not overestimated because the previous history of this cooperation shows that it depends on the development of Iran's talks with the international community. In a similar way, Iran experienced serious problems in relations with the IAEA in 2002-2003 and 2006-2013, but the negotiators did not stop talks with Iran for this reason. As a result, after reaching nuclear deals in 2004 and 2015, Iran resumed its cooperation with the IAEA. Thus, it can be expected that reviving of the JCPOA in 2021 could also lead to increasing level of trust in relations between Iran and IAEA.

The IAEA's increasing concerns about the Iranian nuclear program are also connected with the so-called Nuclear Archive that was seized by the Israeli intelligence service in 2018. The seized Iranian materials were analysed by the IAEA, which concluded that most of the received information can be trusted. The Nuclear Archive provided to the IAEA an additional information about the Iranian past nuclear activities and

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<sup>1</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency (2021). *Joint statement by the Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Head of the AEI and the Director General of the IAEA* <<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/joint-statement-by-the-vice-president-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-and-head-of-the-aeoi-and-the-director-general-of-the-iaea>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>2</sup> BBC News (2021). *Iran agrees to extend IAEA nuclear monitoring deal for one month* <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57229775>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>3</sup> Motamedi, M. (2021). *Vienna talks on Iran's nuclear deal conclude hopeful opening week*. *Al Jazeera*, April, 9 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/9/vienna-talks-on-irans-nuclear-deal-conclude-hopeful-first-week>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>4</sup> Gençtürk, A. (2021). *Iran not answering questions on its nuclear program: IAEA*. *Anadolu Agency*. <<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/iran-not-answering-questions-on-its-nuclear-program-iaea/2266702>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>5</sup> Wintour, P. (2021). *Iran's failure to explain uranium traces is 'big problem', says IAEA chief*. *The Guardian*, May, 26. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/iran-failure-explain-uranium-traces-big-problem-iaea-un>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>6</sup> Murphy, F., Irish, J., Pamuk, H. (2021). *IAEA demands Iran answer on monitoring, Iran says not obliged to reply*. *Reuters*, June 25. <<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-blinken-says-lack-iaea-iran-monitoring-deal-serious-concern-2021-06-25/>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>7</sup> Albright, D., Burkhard, S. (2021). *The International Inspectors Hold the Key to Truly Bringing Iran into Compliance with the Nuclear Deal's Key Peaceful Pledge*. *The Institute for Science and International Security*. <<https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/the-international-inspectors-hold-the-key/8>> (2021, July, 01).

the facilities, where these activities were done<sup>1</sup>. Based on this new information, the IAEA asked Iran to clarify some questions about its nuclear past, but Iran failed to do this<sup>2</sup>.

However, taking into account the tense relations between Iran and Israel, the information from the Israeli intelligence service about the Iranian nuclear issues should be assessed critically. It seems that the current problems of the IAEA-Iran relations are mostly caused by the past nuclear activities of Iran rather than its current attempts to go nuclear. As it was revealed by the IAEA and US intelligence, until 2003, Iran really conducted activities to produce the nuclear bomb, but after signing Additional Protocol in 2003 or a bit earlier, these activities were stopped<sup>3</sup>, and afterwards, Iran just worked on uranium enrichment, but not on the nuclear bomb's design. Iran's desire to cover the traces of the past nuclear weapons program could be understood, because the Iranian officials always repeat that the Iranian nuclear program is completely peaceful, and the nuclear weapon is even forbidden by the fetwa (religious order) of the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps, Iran does not wish to discover to the IAEA all the information related to its past nuclear program because it fears that its image and reputation could be damaged.

The IAEA also warned that during its activities to enrich uranium to 63% level, Iran obtained a valuable experience, which potentially could be used for the future nuclear weapons program and which Iran lacked before signing the JCPOA in 2015<sup>5</sup>. However, it seems that the international community cannot simply prohibit Iran to know something about the nuclear weapons. The problem of increased nuclear knowledge of Iran could be overcome by increased level of transparency of the Iranian nuclear program.

The political role of the IAEA in dealing with the Iranian nuclear program generally increased in 2021 because the IAEA's diplomacy with Tehran helped to save the JCPOA and nuclear negotiations with Iran in spring 2021. Perhaps, due to this increased role of the IAEA, the concerns about IAEA's reports on decreasing cooperation with Iran also grow. It seems that the IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi tried to decrease tension around the IAEA-Iran relations in June 2021 when he stated that the nuclear deal with Iran could be reached after the new Iranian president enters the presidential office in August 2021<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, although the IAEA played in general a constructive and positive role in solving the Iranian nuclear issue, overestimating of the political impact of the IAEA could hinder reaching agreement with Iran. However, the nuclear negotiators with Iran seem to adequately assess the situation. In June 2021, the P5+1 countries dismissed the IAEA warning about the questionable character of the Iranian nuclear activities and pushed for breakthrough in talks with Tehran.<sup>7</sup> It seems the negotiators chose the best approach toward the Iranian nuclear issue because if the talks with Iran succeed, the IAEA concerns would be settled, and if the negotiations fail there will be time to impose the new sanctions against Iran anyway. Thus, despite the lack of common approach toward the Iranian nuclear issue, the problems in the IAEA-Iran cooperation will unlikely prevent achieving the nuclear deal with Iran. If this deal collapses it will most likely be caused by other reasons but not by crisis in Iran-IAEA relations because the IAEA just fixes and reveals the nuclear crisis around Iran but not creates it. The future problems of Iran-IAEA cooperation might be caused by the provocative nuclear policy of the Iranian hardliners who dominate the Iranian political landscape now and who usually support more active development of the nuclear program despite the international pressure. The victory of ultraconservative politician Ebrahim Raisi at the Iranian

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<sup>1</sup> Fitzpatrick, M. (2019). The IAEA's diligent investigation of Iran's 'atomic archive'. *The International Institute for Strategic Studies* <<https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/03/the-iaeas-diligent-investigation-of-irans-atomic-archive>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>2</sup> Reuters (2020). *Iran says IAEA case for inspecting sites based on fake Israeli intel* <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-sites-idUSKBN20S1M8>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>3</sup> Miller, G. (2007). Iran halted nuclear push in 2003, U.S. now says. *Los Angeles Times*, December 4 <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-dec-04-fg-iran4-story.html>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>4</sup> Dorel, D. (2013). Iran says nuclear fatwa exists; others don't buy it. *USA Today*, April 10. <<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/10/04/iran-fatwa-nuclear-weapons/2922517/>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>5</sup> Wintour, P. (2021). Iran's failure to explain uranium traces is 'big problem', says IAEA chief. *The Guardian*, May 26. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/iran-failure-explain-uranium-traces-big-problem-iaea-un>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>6</sup> Iran International (2021). *IAEA's Grossi Says Nuclear Deal Must Wait for New Iran Government*. <<https://iranintl.com/en/iran-in-brief/iaeas-grossi-says-nuclear-deal-must-wait-new-iran-government>> (2021, July, 01).

<sup>7</sup> Sydney News Today (2021). *US and Europe dismiss IAEA warnings in hopes of reviving Iran's nuclear deal*. <<https://sydneynewstoday.com/us-and-europe-dismiss-iaea-warnings-in-hopes-of-reviving-irans-nuclear-deal-irans-nuclear-deal/218446/>> (2021, July, 01).

presidential elections in June 2021 increased the concerns that Iran will further decrease its cooperation with IAEA and try to push forward its provocative nuclear program.<sup>1</sup> However, there is a hope that the international community will force the Iranian hardliners to be pragmatic and agree to limit the Iranian nuclear program to avoid the further sanctions.

Therefore, we can expect that the new elected president Ebrahim Raisi will find the way to cooperate with the IAEA and lift economic sanctions from Iran. In such a way, the Iranian hardliners could also receive an important advantage over their political rivals from the moderate and reformist camp because if the conservative government manages to lift sanctions, its popular support will increase.

**Conclusion.** We can conclude that the hypothesis of this research is generally confirmed because IAEA played a constructive role in dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue. In 2000s, the IAEA pressure on Iran finally helped to convince Tehran to sign the nuclear deal, and after signing JCPOA, IAEA did an important work to verify fulfilment of this agreement. In 2021, the IAEA's role in saving the nuclear negotiations with Iran was particularly important. Nevertheless, some alarmist statements of the IAEA in May – June 2021 could damage the negotiation process with Iran. Therefore, it can be concluded that although the IAEA plays an important political role in dealing with Iran, this role should not be overestimated by the P5+1 countries, which try to revive and save the nuclear deal with Iran.

The case of Iran also demonstrates that sometimes IAEA has an important political impact, because the international situation around the Iranian nuclear program depends on the IAEA reports and statements and on its direct talks with Tehran. Thus, the IAEA plays not only the technical role to monitor and verify Iran's nuclear program, but the Agency also remains one of the important actors of the international relations, which try to find a solution of the Iranian nuclear issue.

The research findings of the article could be used by diplomats, scholars, and students to understand better the problems and prospects of the cooperation between IAEA and Iran. The further research papers about Iran – IAEA cooperation could consider those aspects of this topic that were not discussed in detail in this article. For example, the future publications could discuss the role of personal relations between the IAEA officials and the Iranian leaders in the development of the IAEA – Iran cooperation or the impact of the US and Israeli intelligence reports on the IAEA official position regarding the Iranian nuclear program.

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