

CHINA'S SITUATION ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM UNTIL 1997

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Abstract

China emerged as a major nuclear supplier to the Iranian nuclear program during the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, from the researchers' point of view, China's position has been linked to economic and political motives. China-Iran nuclear cooperation has infuriated the United States, it started putting pressure on China until the latter was forced to announce that it would stop supporting the Iranian nuclear program in 1997.

Keywords: Nuclear program, Iran, China international relations.

Introduction

Iran's efforts to develop nuclear energy date back to 1957, when the administration of US President Eisenhower provided military, economic and civilian aid to Iran. On the fifth of March of that year, the two countries announced a "proposed agreement for cooperation in researching the peaceful uses of atomic energy.". Sponsored by the Eisenhower Atoms for Peace Program, two years after the agreement was announced, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi ordered the establishment of an institute at the University of Tehran (Tehran Nuclear Research Center), negotiate with the United States to supply a 5 megawatt reactor. In the following decade, the United States supplied the nuclear fuel and equipment that Iran used to begin its research. On July 1, 1968, Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on the day it was opened for signature. Six years later, Iran completed its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, by the 1970s, France and Germany had joined the United States in providing assistance to Iran's nuclear program. However, the strained relations after the Islamic Revolution and the hostage-taking in 1979 effectively ended foreign aid, after the termination of diplomatic relations in 1980, US opposition to Iran's nuclear efforts increased during the 1980s and 1990s (1).

First: Iran's interest in reviving the nuclear program and China's position on it

The developments of the Iran-Iraq war, or what is known as the first Gulf War, led to radical changes in Iranian strategic thinking in general. In the nuclear field in particular, the Iranian leadership found it necessary to be interested in reviving the Iranian nuclear program, and began seeking external support from several sources (2). In light of the military sanctions imposed on it by the United States of America, it sought to obtain aid from Western Europe, but failed. As a result of the pressure exerted by the United States of America on those countries, the latter also has reasons behind this refusal, especially her fear of using nuclear fuel to generate

electricity, by which plutonium can be produced, which is used for military purposes, in addition to its hostility to the new Iranian regime (3).

That is why Iran resorted to China and Russia, despite the fact that China was not a strong nuclear country at that time, like Russia and the United States of America, however, it has been a nuclear state since the mid-sixties. Iran's need came in line with China's policy of seeking hard currency to advance reform and modernization, it saw that the sale of Chinese nuclear goods and services would generate the required currency that could be used to develop and advance the technical level of the Chinese nuclear industry. Here, China emerged as a major nuclear supplier to third world markets during the 1980s and 1990s (4). China helped Iran expand the Isfahan Nuclear Technology Center and equip the center with a small nuclear reactor for nuclear research, in June 1985, during Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit to Beijing, a secret protocol called a Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation Agreement for the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy was signed between the two countries.

Under this memorandum, China pledged to ensure the training of Iranian engineers and technicians, as well as exchanging information in the design and construction of the nuclear facility, intended for use in the field of uranium enrichment (5).

Under the 1985 agreement, China provided Iran with four small reactors for teaching and research for the Isfahan Nuclear Research Center, which are (6):

1. A semi-sensitive complex that uses natural uranium fuel softened with light water.
2. A semi-sensitive complex that uses natural uranium fuel dried with graphite.
3. A zero reactor that uses uranium fuel diluted with heavy water.
4. A small source reactor with a capacity of 27 kilowatts uses less than a kilowatt of highly enriched uranium.

In 1986, Western newspapers published about China's cooperation with Iran in its nuclear program, however, the Chinese government denied the existence of any nuclear cooperation with Iran, it also stated that nothing violates the provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Nevertheless, it continued its cooperation with Iran in January 1988 at the first nuclear reactor in Bushehr. In early 1989, Chinese geologists began helping the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran in the search for uranium. Iranian-Chinese teams have been formed to explore for uranium (7).

According to observers, China was the main supplier to Iran in the field of nuclear technology, as this technology is one of the small electro-magnetic isotope isolation machines, one of the thermal reactors with a capacity of 30 kilowatts, that is why the United States of America stated that China helped Iran build capacity to enrich uranium, and to manufacture and purify uranium, as well as the production of zirconium tubes. China also provided Iran with assistance to build the facility and research centers, especially in Isfahan, and to train a number of scientists in China based on a secret nuclear cooperation agreement (8).

In confirmation of the above, Iranian Defense Minister Ali Akbar Turkan signed an agreement with the Deputy Director of the Committee for Science, Technology and Defense Industries, General Jiang Hua, on January 21, 1990, for a period of ten years. megawatts, but this agreement did not enter into force (9). However, earlier, the Xinhua News Agency announced the signing of the agreement, noting that China is rich in uranium, and the export of nuclear fuel and nuclear fuel technology brings it foreign currency, and that nuclear technology is very attractive to developing countries. That is why China began to defend its nuclear cooperation internationally instead of hiding and denying it (10). This defense came in order to develop bilateral interests

and mutual benefit between Beijing and Tehran. For this reason, China described its nuclear cooperation with Iran as a program aimed at achieving economic gains through the export of fuel and nuclear technology (11). In June 1990, China signed a contract with the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization to export to Iran a semi-sensitive neutron source reactor with a capacity of 27 megawatts. Western countries described the reactor as for the production of plutonium, it can be extracted through chemical processes to obtain the fissile material from which bombs are made (12).

In 1991, China supplied Iran with (1000) kg of uranium hexafluoride gas, (400) kg of uranium polytetrafluoride, in addition to (400) kg of uranium dioxide without informing the IAEA of this (13). In January of the same year, Iran signed an agreement with the Chinese Commission for Science, Technology and National Defense Industries to build a 27 kilowatt plutonium research reactor at an Iranian nuclear weapons research facility in Isfahan (14). On the sixth of July, Chinese Prime Minister Li Ping visited Iran, as this visit came as a step in the course of Chinese-Iranian cooperation in the nuclear field, and after discussions, the two parties reached (15):

1. China's readiness to complete the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, which was built by the French and Germans in 1975.
2. Preparing the technical committees, in the fields of trade, technology, military and scientific cooperation, draft specific agreements.
3. China pledged to help complete the Bushehr reactor.

In 1991, Beijing and Tehran also agreed to sell Beijing to Tehran a magnetic electromagnetic isotope separator (Calytron), and a smaller nuclear reactor for peaceful and commercial purposes. China has also shown cooperation in the field of nuclear research activities, providing Iran with information on chemical separation, other enrichment technology and the design of uranium into uranium hexafluoride, for the manufacture of reactor fuel (16).

Second: The development of Chinese-Iranian nuclear cooperation and the US position on it

Western media accused China of being aware of Iran's secret nuclear program, to stave off confrontation with the West and their skepticism, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman stated in early November 1991 that the Chinese government cooperated with Iran in the nuclear field, but its cooperation was for peaceful purposes. A few days later, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement explaining the broad lines of that cooperation. It announced that it had supplied Iran for the first time with (Kaltotron) in 1989, and a 27-kilowatt reactor. It also clarified in its statement that the transfer process came in accordance with internationally accepted regulations, and indicated that the Chinese government demanded the International Atomic Energy Agency to impose safeguards before shipping it to the facility (17).

In the early 1990s, the issue of the Iranian nuclear program became a constraint on Sino-US relations. The United States promised that Iran aimed to develop nuclear weapons and received China's support in technology and intelligence. Since then, the Iran nuclear problem has become an influential factor in Sino-US relations. In November 1991, China visited former US Secretary of State James A. Baker (James A. Baker) 1989-1992, calling on China to stop nuclear cooperation with Iran, a fierce battle of words took place between China and the United States over Iran's nuclear program during the fruitless negotiations (18).

This position at the time did not affect the continuity of Chinese-Iranian cooperation in the nuclear field. During Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit to Beijing in September 1992, the two sides signed an agreement on

cooperation in the joint nuclear energy field (19), and the agreement stipulated (20):

1. Cooperation in the design, construction and operation of nuclear power plants.
2. Cooperation in the fields of reactor research, exploration and mining in search of uranium ore.
3. Cooperation in the field of radiation safeguards and ecological protection.
4. Helping Tehran to build nuclear power plants with a capacity of 300 megawatts on the model of the Kenshan plant in Shijiang Province.

That deal has been held up because China's nuclear power industry has agreed to sell Iran a facility to convert uranium ore into uranium hexafluoride gas, which can be enriched to weapons level. In this regard, the Washington Times reported that Chinese technicians have built an electromagnetic isotope separation system to enrich uranium at the Garage nuclear research facility(21).

In response, the United States decided in November 1992 to sell 150 F-16s to Taiwan(22).

In 1992, Chinese nuclear companies began negotiations with Iran for the construction of a heavy water reactor with a capacity of 25-30 megawatts, and this reactor is known to be rich in deuterium, the radioactive isotope of hydrogen when it emits radiation from a reactor that produces plutonium, but this deal was not completed due to the objection of the United States United States of America (23).

As a result of China's emergence as a major nuclear supplier to third world markets during that era, the United States of America tended to focus on the importance of China's entry into the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In the same year, China signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, for several reasons (24):

1. China's desire to acquire US civilian nuclear technology.
2. The development of Chinese scientists specialized in nuclear affairs.
3. Continuous US pressure, which coincided with China's desire to stabilize relations between Washington and Beijing.
4. China's desire to be known to the world as a moderate and responsible country and one of the polar powers of the new regime.
5. Recognizing China as a nuclear signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, while limiting the number of countries that possess nuclear weapons, and that serves its interests.

In February 1993, both Beijing and Tehran signed the Song Amrallah Agreement, and as a result of this agreement, the Chinese Academy of Sciences provided Iran with a laser-operated nuclear research device, a type Tcomak HT-6B. It is an electromagnetic containment device used to generate heat and concentrate the plasma of hydrogen isotopes deuterium and tritium, in an attempt to achieve controlled nuclear fusion. This device was supplied to Iran in 1994, which is the first Chinese international transfer of nuclear fusion research technology (25).

As a result, the administration of US President Bill Clinton (1993-2001) continued to exert pressure on China, asking it to stop its assistance to Iran in building a nuclear power plant, while China raised the issue of US arms sales to Taiwan in response (26).

In March 1994, the two countries agreed to supply China to Iran with unknown quantities of triphyl phosphate, a chemical used to extract plutonium (27). In July of the same year, a new agreement was signed between China and Iran, stipulating the construction of the first reactor in an area near Tehran, and that Iran would pay \$900 million to implement the deal (28). The agreement also provided for the provision of precise and huge technological assistance in the field of ballistic missile warheads in order to be qualified to supply nuclear

warheads, which are difficult for Iran to conduct and obtained ready-made from China. In addition, Chinese cooperation with Iran focused on the peaceful uses of energy in accordance with the legislation and regulations set by the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as providing Iran with electromagnetic separation devices, especially for the purpose of producing radioactive isotopes, as well as a nuclear reactor. The two parties also agreed to export devices for nuclear medical diagnostics (29).

In June 1994, Western reports emerged indicating that the Chinese nuclear engineers who were providing assistance to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, to build a small-scale plant to convert uranium into a substance called Rodan in the city of Shiraz, had been kidnapped from unknown destinations, but this incident did not effect On the relations between China and Iran, the cooperation between them continued(30).

In 1995, Chinese experts resumed work at the Kharg complex to install the uranium enrichment system (31), and both Beijing and Tehran agreed to provide Beijing and Tehran with two nuclear power plants in the field of electricity, and China stated that the use of the two plants is for peaceful purposes (32).

China also sent teams of Chinese scientists to Iran to help install and adjust the laser instrument at Azad University in the Plasma Physics Research Center. In February, the tool was successfully tested (33). In a press statement, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qian indicated in May that China had not violated any international prohibition law regarding its cooperation in the nuclear field for the peaceful use of nuclear energy. In November, the Chinese ambassador to Iran confirmed his country's contribution to the completion of the Esti Jalal reactor, which had been agreed upon since 1992 (34). In March 1996, China, Iran, India and Russia signed a protocol in Moscow to establish an Asian Foundation for Fusion Research to cooperate in the study of fusion, in addition to Beijing providing assistance to Tehran in the atomic laser technology, which is a nuclear technology. China has also transferred to Iran a copper vapor laser that Beijing had obtained earlier from "Israel", and it was installed at the Nuclear Research Center in Tehran (35).

The Chinese-Iranian cooperation angered the United States of America, as it found Beijing's adherence to helping Tehran in the nuclear field. On May 6, 1995, the United States of America imposed economic sanctions on Iran. These sanctions also affected American companies. As it prevented these companies from marketing Iranian oil, or even participating in the development of Iranian fields, in addition to imposing a ban on any nuclear cooperation, and imposing sanctions on any country that sells or assists Iran in military technology or the development of its nuclear program, but China did not give in to the pressures and threats of the United States, at the time (36).

The impact of the normalization of Sino-US relations in the mid-nineties on China's position on the Iranian nuclear program. The Clinton administration urged China to cancel its cooperation with Iran's nuclear program. In the negotiations that preceded the US-China summit in 1997, China pledged to end nuclear cooperation with Iran. President Clinton promised to implement the 1985 Nuclear Cooperation Agreement between the United States and the People's Republic of China (for the sale of nuclear power reactors to China) (37).

Despite this, the Chinese were well aware that accommodation with Iran was an option for them if Sino-US relations worsened. Iran remains a card for the Chinese in the event of a future confrontation with the United States. Especially since Iran is one of the few countries that has the confidence and the audacity to consider war with the United States (38).

At the same time, China was keen not to worsen its relations with the United States, as Chinese economic growth was dependent on American support in international institutions, especially in the market, technology

and investment in the United States, and Beijing is fully aware of this. According to Chinese observers, "the United States is much more important to China than Iran, because China can achieve economic growth without Iran's oil, but not without American support," and therefore, "the more challenging Iran becomes" in pursuing its nuclear research program, the greater the pressures that will be imposed on Iran. exercised by Washington on Beijing (39).

On the basis of this, on October 30, 1997, the Chinese government sent a secret letter to the US administration, in which it pledged not to sign new deals in the nuclear field (40). In light of this, US National Security Adviser Sandy Berker pointed out in the October press briefing of the same year, to the Iranian nuclear program, saying, "We received assurances from China that it would not seek any new nuclear cooperation with Iran, and added that the existing cooperation between Beijing and Tehran included Create two projects, it will end, this is the reassurance we received" (41). However, other reports indicated that despite the Chinese government's commitment to its promise, there are private Chinese companies that have cooperated with Iran in this regard (42).

From the point of view of Western political analysts, China has stopped its cooperation with Iran due to reasons including (43):

1. The United States of America exerts pressure on China.
2. Beijing's desire to restore its good relations with Washington, because the relationship has become ambiguous about the Taiwan issue, the nature of Sino-Pakistani relations, and Sino-Iranian relations in the nuclear field.
3. China's need to be recognized as a responsible and moderate power.
4. China's desire to develop nuclear technology, and make it compatible with the nuclear technology of the great powers.
5. China calculates the harm that could be inflicted upon it in the event of the discovery of the Iranian secret nuclear program.
6. The decision made by China was to protect its relations with the United States of America, as the Chinese decision came to be an indication of the transformation that has occurred in the Chinese mentality regarding the global system to limit nuclear proliferation.
7. Iran announced in November 1996 its plans to build uranium conversion plants at the Isfahan Nuclear Research Center, and this announcement was during a visit by inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, as the plans included Chinese experts providing Iran with plants to convert uranium into uranium hexafluoride. However, China canceled this deal due to pressure from the United States of America.

The position of the United States of America on the Iranian nuclear program can also be returned to the following factors (44):

1. Once Iran obtains nuclear reactors, it will secure a nuclear technology base for it, which could allow Iran to build a secret facility for reactors, centrifugal force, and a chemical separation facility, even if it acquiesced to the rules of the International Atomic Energy Agency in operating its reactors.
2. Some Western reports have mentioned their fear that Iran might move towards refusing to submit to the control rules set by the International Atomic Energy Agency once it has completed the construction of reactors, thus being able to enrich uranium and use its nuclear reactors.
3. The accusations of the United States of America against Iran in the nuclear field are based on Iranian efforts

against the West, through several indicators. Most notably: Iran's continued support for terrorism from the American point of view, Iran's continued support for the opposition in allied countries of Western countries, Iran's rejection of the Arab "Israeli" settlement process, Iranian aggression on the three islands of the United Arab Emirates, and Iran's rearmament program. In this context, Western reports believe that there is no explanation for Iran's desire to build atomic energy plants in a country that suffers from a shortage of capital to build such plants, and is also rich in oil and natural gas that enables it to operate power plants at a cheap cost.

China's announcement to stop its nuclear cooperation with Iran in 1997 caused tension in the relations between the two sides, but despite that, Iran cannot deny the assistance provided by China for the development of its nuclear program, and it must be noted that the cooperation between the two countries has in their strong partnership, they focus on China's needs for Iran's energy and other resources. As for Iran, it was aware of China's position in the international system, as well as being one of the permanent members of the Security Council. That is why Iran has worked to keep China on its side in order to protect it in the Security Council from the international pressures exerted on it, especially the sanctions that were to be imposed by the major countries, just as Iran has begun to rely heavily on China economically, militarily and diplomatically (45).

China's goals can be determined from the nuclear aid it provided to Iran, in an attempt to divert the attention of the United States of America away from the East Asian region, so that China can strengthen its position, and the assistance in nuclear technology that China provided to the countries came from the premise that Islamic countries possess nuclear technology. It will limit the ability of the West to focus its attention on the East Asian region, and thus China will be in control of this region (46).

It is not known whether the aid provided by China to Iran was provided in order to develop Iran's capabilities to manufacture nuclear weapons or not, but it is certain that China was seeking profits in order to sustain economic development as well as to win an ally to it that opposes the hegemony of the United States American (47).

Iran was dissatisfied with the statement made by US President Clinton before Congress in January 1998, when he said, "The People's Republic of China made clear and unambiguous promises to the United States of America that it would not help any country possessing nuclear weapons, whether the cooperation was directly or indirectly, to obtain nuclear explosive devices or their materials or components," he added, adding, "China has concluded that it prefers working in the nuclear field with countries other than Iran, and it has canceled its contracts with them for political reasons." In the end, China abandoned its nuclear cooperation with Iran under American pressure (48).

Conclusion

China's foreign policy in support of the Iranian nuclear program has been linked to achieving the economic goals of obtaining the hard currency necessary to maintain the high level of economic development that it achieved through the reform and modernization program, as for the political goals, they were manifested in diverting the attention of the United States of America away from the East Asian region and arming Taiwan, in order to strengthen China's position there. China also aimed to make Iran a strong ally in the Persian Gulf region, which has large oil reserves. In a way that limits the hegemony of the United States of America. Despite this, the Chinese were well aware that accommodation with Iran was an option for them if Sino-US relations worsened. Iran remains a card in China's hands in the event of a future confrontation with the United States,

especially since Iran is one of the few countries that has the confidence and the courage to consider war with the United States.

Table (1) Sino-Iranian nuclear cooperation in the period 1990-1996(49).

History	The activities	Location
January 20, 1990	Secret agreement of cooperation for ten years	Took place in Beijing
June 1990, March 1994	Equipping a small neutron source reactor with a capacity of 27 megawatts	Isfahan Research Center
1991	Secret deal to sell 1.8 tons of uranium	Isfahan Research Center
The early nineties of the last century	Equipping a subcritical graphite tempered reactor	Isfahan research center
1991	Small capacity reactor equipment	Isfahan Research Center
1991	cyclotron operations	Iranian city of Karaj
May 1991	Nuclear medicine research center	Iranian city of Karaj
July 1991	Assistance in the field of atomic laser	Caspian
September 1992	Agreement to supply four reactors cooled with pressurized water with a capacity of 300 megawatts, in addition to a nuclear center	Tehran
1992	Equipping a reactor with a capacity of 27 megawatts	Isfahan Research Center
1992	Heavy water production facility	Arak city
February / 1993	Tokamak laser processing	Azad University Tehran
1994	A deal to supply facilities for the conversion of uranium	Rodin

1994	Copper steam laser processing	-
Mid-nineties	Preparing large quantities of heavy water	-
Mid-nineties	Zirconium tubes processing facility deal	Isfahan
1996	Deal to sell hydrogen fluoride to metal anhydrite	Isfahan research center

Margins

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