



Section 4. Regional economy

DOI:10.29013/EJEMS-26-3-40-42



PERSPECTIVE ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE IN US-PRC RELATIONS

*Khayyam Ismailzadeh*¹

¹ Baku State University, Department of International Relations, Doctor
of Philosophy in Political Science, Acting Associate Professor

Cite: Ismailzadeh Kh. (2026). *Perspective on the nuclear issue in US-PRC relations*. *European Journal of Economics and Management Sciences* 2026, No 3. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJEMS-26-3-40-42>

Abstract

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the development of science and technology in the world and the research conducted in the atomic industry have led to advances in nuclear weapons technology, which has caused the destruction of large areas and the death of millions of people. The damage and power of nuclear weapons to humanity was first seen by the whole world with the atomic bombs dropped by the United States on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The development of nuclear weapons in order to prove their power during the Cold War led to an arms race between countries. Iran, in turn, has been one of the countries that entered this race since the late 1950s.

Keywords: *US, PRC, Islamic Republic of Iran, UN General Assembly, resolution, sanctions*

In 1946, the UN General Assembly adopted important resolutions to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and established a Commission to work in this direction. As a result of the work done, many treaties were signed as a result of the UN's activities in the field of nuclear non-proliferation, the most important of which is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. The purpose of the treaty is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology among the countries of the world, to develop cooperation for the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to ensure nuclear disarmament in the future (Zhu Feng. 2012).

This UN treaty has been signed by a total of 191 countries, including the five nuclear-weapon states (the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia). Iran signed the treaty in 1968 and ratified it in 1970. It is useful to briefly examine Iran's development of nuclear weapons technology long before that.

In 1953, US President Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his speech to the UN General Assembly, mentioned the Atoms for Peace (AFP) program for the peaceful use of nuclear technology. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which had close relations with the US during the Cold War, accepted this program in 1957

and pledged not to produce nuclear weapons but to conduct only “peaceful” nuclear research, and the US, in turn, provided Iran with fuel to be used in its nuclear reactor as part of the program (Paul K. Kerr. 2012).

As noted, after Iran signed the UN Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1968, it approached the UN in 1974 with a proposal to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Nevertheless, in the mid-1970s, US intelligence reports expressed concerns about Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapons program.

The Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 marked a new turning point in nuclear weapons cooperation. US assistance to Iran in the field of nuclear energy continued from the 1950s until 1979, but this cooperation was suspended after the Islamic Revolution. Iran, which announced the suspension of its nuclear projects in 1979, announced the resumption of its nuclear program in 1982.

A 1985 US National Intelligence Council report noted Iran’s interest in producing materials that could be used in nuclear weapons, and a report from the following decade stated that Iran would produce nuclear weapons within about ten years, provided it received foreign support.

In the mid-1980s, the United States began to impose economic sanctions on Iran, including it as a terrorist state. These sanctions began in 1987 with a ban on the purchase of oil from Iran and were later extended to other products (Aylin Unver Noi. 2005).

Iran, which restarted its nuclear program in 1982, turned to China, Russia, and North Korea for support after failing to secure support from Western powers. During the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988, Iran increased its cooperation with China in the field of nuclear energy, while also acquiring missile technology from North Korea to develop its military power.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the Russian Federation began cooperating with Iran in the nuclear field, assisting in the construction of a nuclear reactor and providing technical support (Elliot Friedland. 2006).

The reason for the rapprochement of the PRC and the IRI was the distrust of both countries towards the USA and the Soviet Union. Along with these factors, the solidar-

ity against world hegemony, the formation of a multipolar world order and support for developing countries also brought the two countries closer. In addition, the PRC intended to develop comprehensive relations with Iran and strengthen its influence in the region more than the USA from a geostrategic point of view. At the same time, Iran played an important role in the direction of arms exports for the PRC.

The fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran has the second largest oil reserves in the world, and China’s transformation into a developing country with increasing energy needs, inevitably made the PRC even more strategically important for Iran. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1971, China was one of Iran’s largest arms suppliers during the Iran-Iraq War (Brandon Fite. 2012).

In 2002, after the US declared Iran part of the “axis of evil”, Chinese President Jiang Zemin responded by paying an official visit to Tehran two months after the US President’s speech to show solidarity with Iran. In July of that year, after Iran’s uranium enrichment program was revealed, the US and other Western countries suspended many projects with Iran, which created ample opportunities for Chinese companies to further strengthen their ties with Iran. In 2004, the PRC and Arab countries established the China-Arab Cooperation Forum. Since then, China-Iran relations have continued to develop steadily.

In 2004, the US imposed sanctions on some Chinese companies for providing nuclear technology to Iran. Not content with this, sanctions were also imposed on Chinese firms for supplying chemical weapons to Iran and making secret transfers. These sanctions, imposed in 2007 and 2008, were mainly aimed at preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Within the framework of the sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran, China operated in two directions. On the one hand, it supported the sanctions imposed on Iran’s clandestine nuclear activities, and on the other hand, it further developed economic relations with Iran and tried to create a balance between these two policies.

In June 2010, US President B. Obama and Chinese leader Hu Jintao met at the

Nuclear Security Summit in Washington. During the meeting, it was expressed that they shared a common position with the US on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, but it was especially emphasized that they were against strict sanctions applied in the energy sector.

As can be seen, as a result of the strengthening and development of PRC–IRI relations, China has sold weapons to Iran, assisted in the development of nuclear energy,

and continued to purchase oil from Iran. As a result, despite the sanctions imposed by the UN, the strengthening of relations between the PRC and the IRI and its growing influence in the Middle East cannot but concern the United States. That is why, although the PRC supports the UN resolutions and sanctions prohibiting Iran's nuclear weapons program, it has stated that it is in favor of resolving the problem only through negotiations, not through sanctions.

References

- Zhu Feng. *Shifting Tides and China's Nuclear Policy*, 2012. – 41 p.
Paul K. Kerr. *Iran's Nuclear Program: Status*, CRS Report for Congress, 2012.
Aylin Unver Noi. "Iran's Nuclear Program: The EU Approach to Iran in Comparison to the US Approach", *Perceptions*, – Vol. 10. – No. 1. 2005. – 80 p.
Elliot Friedland. "Fact Sheet: The Iranian Nuclear Program," The Clarion Project, 2006.
Brandon Fite. "US and Iranian Strategic Competition: The Impact of China", CSIS, 2012. – 23 p.

submitted 26.05.2026;
accepted for publication 10.06.2026;
published 31.07.2026
© Ismailzadeh Kh.
Contact: Ekonika22@yahoo.com