

Dialogue Or Destruction: A Vision For A New Civilizational Alliance With Tehran

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ABSTRACT

The USA-Israel-Iran conflict has reached a dangerous point where the sides are not satisfied with symmetric strikes, and strikes on nuclear objects erase "red lines". Iran counters the technological advantages of the USA and Israel with its cheap technologies and geographical advantages—Strategic Depth, as well as an ideologized social structure. The "maximum pressure strategy" by the USA has forced Iranians to adopt a strategy of facing an "existential threat," which comes down to the principle: "if we are destroyed, you too with us". Sanctions applied by the USA against Iran have hardened the country's foreign policy, as well as internal narratives, which is a dangerous reality. US "smart power" should lead not to a "clash of civilizations," but to a "dialogue of civilizations," so that the USA establishes itself in the Eurasian Heartland not as a destructive force, but as a constructive force.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Iran, USA, Heartland, Rimland, Samson Option, Strategic Depth, Eurasian Architecture, smart strategy, nuclear diplomacy, Middle East

INTRODUCTION

The USA-Israel-Iran conflict, turning from a closed conflict into an open conflict, has not only regional but also global influence on the financial, economic, as well as global security environment. The conflict continues not only with strikes on each other's territories, but also has included the Persian Gulf countries, as well as other states of the region. For Iran, the war has turned into an existential issue, which forces Iran to turn to risk, considering the high price that is placed before Iran. The unpredictability of the conflict and the maximalist goals of the sides suggest that without a diplomatic alternative, as well as strategic transformations, the region will sink into an endless wave of conflicts, which can turn into "war of all against all" actions.

The goal of our article is to bring out the features that separate Iran from other Arab states, which means that the same formula, if it brought success in the past, is not applicable in this case. Besides, we justify that the strategic interests of the USA require a USA-Iran civilizational dialogue and a new regional power formula, where the USA will not be a destructive force, but a legitimate global arbiter. At the same time, we put forward a hypothesis that for the end of Iran's nuclear program and the current conflict, the best option is the strategy of solving the problem of Palestine, Lebanon, and the "Axis of Islamic Resistance" and the cancellation of sanctions applied against Iran in a unified package. The regulation of these three problems will lead to the meaninglessness of the necessity of establishing a nuclear balance, as well as the transformation of anti-American foreign policy with a cooperative foreign policy.

Geography against Technology: H. Mackinder with the Heartland theory and Spykman with his Rimland theory confirm not only the position and meaning of Eurasia for global hegemony, but also define those geographical lines that pave the road toward global dominance. It is not accidental that Z. Brzezinski, Mackinder, Spykman, and others value the dominant role of Eurasia on the "grand chessboard" so much. Mackinder said that whoever rules the Eurasian Heartland will rule Eurasia, and whoever rules Eurasia will rule the world. However, the roads leading toward the Heartland pass through Eurasian fracture zones, which Spykman called Rimland (Spykman, 1943).

In the modern balancing formula of the region, Iran occupies not only the role of a natural balancer, which does not allow other regional powers to take sole hegemony, but is also in a unique civilizational transition zone, where the ancient Persian civilization is combined with modern Islamic civilization on one hand, and on the other hand, an environment of Christian and Islamic dialogue is created.

Iran's geographical position, in its turn, draws a full natural defense system intertwined with Strategic Depth, which gives an opportunity, especially in the case of land operations, for retreat, rearrangements, strategic traps, and long-term guerrilla struggle through mountain relief. Such features make Iran more combat-ready in case of external attacks, applying also the features of an ideologized society, where the image of Imam Hussein plays a central role, who is the symbol of martyrdom for faith, and a unique *idée-fixe* for the followers of the Shiite teaching.

The economic and technological sanctions applied by the USA and allies against Iran have limited the country's technological development opportunities; however, despite that, Iran was able to get such military technologies that are more affordable compared to Western technologies. This provides Iran the opportunity to compensate for the limited opportunities for high-precision strikes with the intensity and financial affordability of mass strikes. Meanwhile, the weaponry of Israel and the USA is hundreds of times more expensive, although effective. On the other hand, Iran has a strategic advantage: large Strategic Depth and mountain landscape, which becomes a natural defense system for Iran. The presence of Strategic Depth gives Iran the opportunity to organize effective land defense, as well as withstand missile strikes, considering also the dispersion of strategic objects in a huge geographical area, network structures, and underground strategic objects that are secret even for locals.

Considering that the USA-China confrontation not only continues through various transformations but can also turn into open confrontation, the USA, to conduct an effective policy of containment against China, needs the balancing role of the most important actor of the Eurasian Heartland—Russia, the other three most important actors of the Rimland—Japan, India, and the state having the most natural borders and most favorable geographical position in the Middle East—Iran, without which the American containment policy cannot be effective.

1. Iran's Balancing "Samson Option": On November 16, 1963, "The New York Times" columnist S. L. Sulzberger, publishing an interview taken from Ben-Gurion, had written: "As a result, he [Ben-Gurion] gloomily hints that in Israel's own nearby reactor in Dimona, Israel itself may conduct experiments in the direction of the military atom" (Hersh, 1991, p. 133). Although Ben-Gurion later denied it, from this point one can consider the announcement of the Israeli nuclear program. The interesting thing is that Israel explained the necessity of having its nuclear program by Egypt's aspirations to get nuclear weapons. To put it another way, Israel was trying to insure its security through creating a nuclear balance. Iran also, considering the Iranian nuclear program its right in the context of "peaceful atom development," simultaneously has obvious insecurity toward nuclear-armed opponents.

Israel's nuclear doctrine is known as the "Samson Option," the basis of the conceptual philosophy of which is the biblical story of Samson. For Israeli nuclear supporters, the "Samson Option" became another formulation of the "Never Again" slogan (Hersh, 1991).

On the morning of March 21, 2026, the USA and Israel attacked Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment facility (Al Jazeera, 2026). In response, Iran started a missile assault on the Israeli city of Dimona, which can be called Israel's nuclear capital (The Guardian, 2026). Strikes on nuclear objects increase nuclear explosion risks on one hand, and on the other hand, push Iran—not having nuclear weapons as a means of global deterrence—to critical steps. Particularly, the attack on Israel's nuclear "capital" by Iran as such has the goal of conveying symbolic messages:

1. Iran can overcome Israeli air defense systems and strike any of its targets.
2. Iran will counter any "global disarming strike" with a "global disarming strike" and that is thanks to the Strategic Depth that Iran has.
3. Iran is ready and has technologies to make the "either I will be, or no one will be" formula applicable.

By the way, this third message is similar to the Israeli "Samson Option". The more the circle around Iran tightens, the more the existential fight for Iran will turn into the "either I will be, or no one will be" concept. Although Iran is technologically inferior to its opponents, it excels in capabilities of persistence and centralized power, which gives an opportunity to mobilize ideologically. In this conflict, the USA made the mistake: it was not possible to impose its will on Iran through internal unrest or aerial targeting, and a land assault will be a long-term and exhausting war, maybe more cruel than in Vietnam, considering the ideologized nature of Iranian society and the institutional memory of the imperial past.

With Iran, the USA should have started a dialogue through long-term "soft power," preparing civilizational dialogue and economic, cultural, educational, and scientific interconnectedness, which in the long-term perspective would change the "Death to America" principle that has become traditional.

Ray Takeyh rightly notes that the resumption of diplomatic and economic interaction between the USA and Iran could predict the achievement of an agreement on the limitation of Iran's nuclear program—within the framework of its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Takeyh, 2009). Simultaneously, speaking about nuclear balancing, it is appropriate to mention that the nuclear program for Iran—as we already mentioned—also solves a problem of strategic balancing and deterrence; therefore, for the final regulation of Iran's nuclear program, a comprehensive solution to regional conflicts and the USA-Iran conflict is necessary. Considering the ideologized nature of Iran's society and state system, it is obvious that it is not possible to dictate behavior to Iran through military and capitulation ways. In this sense, Ray Takeyh's thought is appropriate, that for the "Revolutionary Guards," ideological survival is primary, and the remaining factors in this case become surmountable (Takeyh, 2009).

The peculiarity of Iran's Shiite teaching has also, in its turn, formed a unique psychological defense mechanism. For the Shiite teaching, the image of Imam Hussein, as a message of being ready for martyrdom for faith, has in its turn formed a unique ideological axis. Consequently, the USA, as a leading responsible "grand power," should put into action its smart power strategy, transforming confrontational policy into cooperative policy, which will ensure the transformation of hard formulas of Iranian foreign policy into soft formulas.

Kenneth Waltz also rightly noted that if Tehran aims to get nuclear weapons, then sanctions and the iron curtain cannot break its will (Waltz, 2012). In this sense, we think that the "iron curtain" policy toward Tehran pushes Tehran toward actions and alliances contradicting Washington's Eurasian interests, which in the long-term perspective will weaken Washington's influence in the Middle East. On the contrary, the use of a "smart strategy" by Washington in this matter could create not only an opportunity for civilizational dialogue, but also economic and logistic interconnectedness, which would balance the chain of USA-Iran-Middle East relations, creating an opportunity for the modernization of Iranian foreign policy and the transformation of the anti-American foreign policy principle with the discourse of cooperation and dialogue.

Waltz rightly notes that "Power, after all, begs to be balanced" (Waltz, 2012) and the end of military operations started by the USA-Israel tandem toward Iran will face the region with new equations; Iran played a unique balancing role in the region between Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Considering modern geopolitical realities, it is obvious that Iran's role as a Middle Eastern balancer has vital meaning for the USA; therefore, Iran as a more predictable regional power,

as well as maintaining Iran's influence in the Islamic world, stems from the USA's strategic interests.

2. The Role of the USA and the Opportunity of "Smart Power": R. Kaplan, in his work "The Revenge of Geography," speaking about Iran, mentions that Iran is the "universal joint" of the Greater Middle East, which is firmly connected to all external cores. Then Kaplan, speaking about Iran's borders, writes that Iran's border repeats in rough lines the natural contours of the landscape—plateaus in the west, mountains and seas in the north and south, and desert spaces in the east toward Afghanistan (Kaplan, 2012). The important conclusion is that Kaplan, as well as Henry Kissinger, consider Iran a civilization-state. And what is most important, Kaplan, considering the borders of the countries of the adjacent region geographically illogical, mentions that in Iran there is nothing artificial (Kaplan, 2012).

These geographical and civilizational features create an invisible bridge for relating with the USA and expanding civilizational dialogue. This is the opportunity for the USA's "smart power" to build a "grand strategy" to relate two fundamental and complementary elements of legitimacy: Iran as a carrier of historical legitimacy and the USA as a carrier of international legitimacy. It is appropriate here to remember the speech sounded by the former president of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, in 1998 at the UN General Assembly, which outlined those civilizational pillars that are central for Iran and the basis for building civilizational dialogue upon them. We think the opportunity for the start of the civilizational dialogue proposed by Mohammad Khatami is enclosed in these lines: "On behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I would like to propose to the United Nations—as a first step—to declare the year 2001 the 'Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations' with the sincere hope that through such dialogue, a start will be given to the implementation of universal justice and freedom" (Khatami, 1998).

Suzanne Nossel, speaking about US "Smart Power," rightly notes that policymakers should pragmatically seek such opportunities for action to combine idealism and realism, and pursue their goals in ways that will not exhaust but strengthen US power (Nossel, 2004). In this sense, the use of US "**constructive power**" is more effective, which, as "smart power," will provide an opportunity to establish the legitimacy of US influence and the creation of a positive image. "Soft" influence, which creates influence not through coercion or confrontation but through persuasion and sympathy, will create for the USA the opportunity of a desired partner and strategic arbiter in the Middle East, which in the long-term perspective will provide the USA with competitive advantages for maintaining hegemony.

Although today the USA and Israel apply "destructive force" toward Iran, there is still an opportunity for the USA to transform its "destructive force" into "constructive power," applying the "smart power" strategy and the necessity of "strategic dialogue."

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

The "smart strategy" of the USA should propose a comprehensive end to the conflict with guarantees of its non-resumption through the establishment of civilizational dialogue. For Iran, for Israel, and for the USA, such a guarantee is the strategy of solving the issue of Palestine, Lebanon, and the "Axis of Islamic Resistance" and the cancellation of sanctions applied against Iran in a unified package. Subsequently, the use of "soft power" by the USA in the form of humanitarian support will bring forward a change in the image of the enemy.

These problems are the fundamental ones, without the comprehensive regulation of which Israel and Iran will constantly treat each other with suspicion, maintaining aggressive rhetoric toward each other; considering Israel's influence on US elites, it can be asserted that constant tension, provocations, and war-triggering phenomena will persist. Of course, a comprehensive solution to the problem will also make the "Death to America" principle meaningless, which will become the start of new power formulations for the region.

CONCLUSION

Thus, considering Iran's strategic and geographical opportunities and ethno-psychological features, the "maximum pressure" policy used against Iran is not effective, and the economic sanctions applied against Iran push Iran toward maximum rapprochement with Russia and China, which contradicts the strategic interests of the USA. Simultaneously, the more the pressure tends toward maximization, the more Iran's position toward existential self-defense will harden, thereby moving to the adoption of the "Samson Option." By pushing Iran into a corner, Iran's transition to the "either I will be, or no one will be" formula can become realistic, destroying not only the region but also the global economy and security.

Iran's Strategic Depth and geographical position, as well as civilizational depth, make it an insurmountable obstacle for destructive force. In this case, the only rational way for the USA is the exertion of "smart power," which implies the expansion of a new civilizational dialogue with Iran and the formation of an alliance in the long-term perspective. The arguments observed by us confirm that without Iran's civilizational and geographical role as a unified organism, the Middle East will remain a theater of constant wars, which will exhaust the global resources of the USA. Therefore, with this step, the USA will not concede, but will gain the restoration of American legitimacy in the Greater Middle East and the Eurasian Heartland through the establishment of global balance and the role of a global arbiter.

Therefore, the USA's 'smart strategy' should propose a comprehensive end to the conflict with guarantees of its non-resumption through the establishment of civilizational dialogue.

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