Iran and the United States used to be the closest allies before the 1979 Iranian revolution, but now they are uncompromising enemies. Quite a peculiar political metamorphosis. Makes one wonder how former close friends turned into such enemies in just over forty years? And why it is the US who is still full of such violent hatred towards the Iranian people and tries to suffocate them in a deadly embrace?

Everything began with the taking of hostages at the US Embassy in 1979. It was the time of free expression of the Iranians’ will and their fear that the Shah, supported by the West, may return to power, as he did in 1953 when the CIA and MI-6 organized a coup d’etat by grossly interfering with Iran’s domestic affairs. Therefore, the taking of hostages was a clear message to Washington to warn it against meddling in internal affairs of the Iranian people who had chosen their own independent way of development. Quite obviously, if it wasn’t for the 1953 intervention, the grievous events of 1979 would not have happened. And it was US with its poorly targeted and insolent policy that caused a drastic worsening of the Iran-US relations. No one but Washington is guilty of the developments where the holding of hostages at the Embassy went on or 444 days of late-night news reminders to the Americans. And every time when Iran was mentioned in the news there appeared images of hostages and the chanting “death to America”, in order to remind the Americans about their numerous crimes committed in Iran and the spiteful messages of the vile politicians from the Department of State. For the first time in many years, the Americans felt helpless and
At the same time, Iran was building on its peaceful nuclear research, adding more and more centrifuges and economically efficient weapons. They were cheap and offered to Iran both offensive and defensive opportunities. The main factor nourishing and prolonging Iran's isolation is the anti-Iranian lobbying on the part of Israel and its American allies and - however to a lesser extent - on the part of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and their corporate patrons in the West. By that time, Iran understood that cooperation with the US would not lead to mutual benefits and that it must work with the US only when it is directly related to its own interests and survival. Iran employed more concerted efforts to develop its defense industry. Missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles became the most important weapons, including the chemical weapons prohibited by international law, while simultaneously introducing the embargo for deliveries of weapons to Iran. The all-penetrating sanctions are equal to an act of war as even trade embargoes were historically regarded as such.

Thus, the war continued for over eight years. During the war, over 1.5 million people from both sides were killed, and even more people were wounded, and thousands of Iranians poisoned with gas have survived only thanks to the oxygen flasks. America spitefully and vilely enjoyed its triumph, it showed little compassion to the Iranians’ pain and deaths, the memories of which will be hard to forget for the world and which have placed a heavy burden on the shoulders of all American people who had failed to curb their presumptuous leaders.

Though the war between Iran and Iraq ended in August of 1988, the hostilities between the US and Iran continued. America proceeded with introducing its vast sanctions and Iran strengthened its defense and supported - to the best of its powers and capabilities - its allies in the region. After the Iraqi intrusion to Kuwait, engineered by Washington, Tehran provided support to the fleeing Kuwaiti and made an attempt to improve its relations with the US and Saudi Arabia. However the Iranian rapprochement envoy was rudely renounced by the Department of State, while the Saudi waived their promises given to the mediator whom they had chosen together with the Iranians. Iran tried to attract American companies and was near to concluding an important agreement with Conoco on the new oil field development. Iran also invited Bechtel to discuss a number of projects, including the huge Iranian gas reservoir used jointly with Qatar. But in 1996 President Clinton adopted the malevolent ILSA (Iran and Libya Sanctions Act) limiting any major investments in Iran and closed a number of loopholes in the sanctions, including in respect of imports of Iranian refined petroleum.

The American bases and military power in the Gulf region threatened Iran, but much was still ahead. After 9/11, the United States, aggressively and in violation of all international laws, invaded Afghanistan and later Iraq. Afghanistan provided to Iran yet another opportunity to overcome the gap in the relations with the United States. Iran worked with its ally, Ahmad Shah Massoud, and with the Northern Alliance that actively attacked the Taliban (the movement is banned in the RF) in ground combats. Iran believed that this cooperation would open a more fruitful way towards making peace with the US. Though there appeared a flash of hope, as soon as the US won the war in Afghanistan the ungrateful American politicians grossly renounced the Iranian hand stretched out for peace.

It was followed by the invasion to Iraq when the former Secretary of State Colin Powell, acting like an unlucky beginner juggler from a burnt-down circus, grossly and insolently deceived the international community, “informing” about the existence of chemical and biological weapons in Baghdad and about Saddam Hussein’s close ties with international terrorists, first of all, with al-Qaida (banned in the territory of Russia). Nevertheless, it is common knowledge that Al-Qaeda was created by the US with the funds of the Gulf monarchies against the USSR, whose army at that time was fighting against international terrorists in Afghanistan. Thereafter, Iran was surrounded by the US troops in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. All these, along with the accumulated American political and economic abuse, boxed Iran into a corner. Tehran had to strengthen its defense and support its regional allies - Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Shia Muslims everywhere, especially in Iraq. Such allies would provide to Iran offensive opportunities in their fight against what they perceived as the American threat to the survival of the regime.

The main factor nourishing and prolonging Iran’s isolation is the anti-Iranian lobbying on the part of Israel and its American allies and - however to a lesser extent - on the part of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and their corporate patrons in the West. By that time, Iran understood that cooperation with the US would not lead to mutual benefits and that it must work with the US only when it is directly related to its own interests and survival. Iran employed more concerted efforts to develop its defense industry. Missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles became the most economically efficient weapons. They were cheap and offered to Iran both offensive and defensive opportunities.

At the same time, Iran was building on its peaceful nuclear research, adding more and more centrifuges and
increasing the enrichment levels. Though the conscientious Iran, as different from Israel, has signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) if has not received all the peaceful assistance in the nuclear technologies area promised pursuant to the Treaty. Having received insignificant assistance or having received no assistance at all for their nuclear program, being under the strenuous sanctions, isolated and surrounded by the US, the Iranian officials believed that anticipatory disclosure of the information would lead to attack on their facilities.

The Israeli and Saudi Arabian anti-Iranian lobbying has enhanced. As far as Israel is concerned, it was lobbying its allies in the US Congress and media in order to isolate Iran, have the sanctions strengthened, engage in subversive activities in the territory of Iran and adopt the policy of changing the regime as the sole long-term acceptable solution. Some politicians gave it away that the ultimate goal consisted in breaking Iran into four or five parts, they all being too weak to pose any problem for Israel, the Arabs and the US.

Obama’s administration feared activation of Iran’s nuclear efforts but did not wish to attack Iran as suggested by Israel and some Gulf Arabs. The US began secret negotiations with Iran under the auspices of the Sultanate of Oman. The discussions resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that was also ratified by the UN Security Council. This was by no means an ideal agreement. This provided for the most obtrusive nuclear activity program of Iran for the US and its allies, though with a reservation regarding termination for ten years, conservation of the Iranian heavy water reactor, transfer of the most part of the Iranian enriched fuel (far from military quality) and restriction of the Iranian enrichment program. For Iran, the lifting of the sanction had to take place - de-freezing the Iranian assets, unimpeded direct foreign investments, access to the global financial markets and a flow of imports (with the exception of some nuclear and military goods) and exports of goods and services. Iran was naive in one very important aspect - the American compromise was reversible while much of the Iranian compromise was irreversible.

Trump’s new administration threw everything overboard. He had close relations with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and rich Gulf Arabs, and Saudi Arabia was the first country that he visited and concluded huge military contracts in favor of the US. Trump requested restriction of the Iranian missile programs of unmanned aerial vehicles, introduced new sanctions against Iran, he was also involved in the Israeli sabotage of the Iranian facilities and killings of Iranian scientists, in the first turn of the leading Iranian nuclear scientist. Then the US withdrew from the JCPOA. And, most notoriously, the United States killed General Soleimani with complicity of Israel in Iraq. In order to save its face, Iran had to strike a counterblow, and so it did launching missiles at the American base. Iran still could choose proportional revenge for a person whom many Iranians - both the supporters and adversaries of the Tehran regime - considered a national hero who had dedicated his life to defending Iran at its most gloomy hours.

President Biden began restoration of the JCPOA. Iran, who had been complying with its part of the deal during one year even after Trump’s leaving, was ready to join the JCPOA if all the sanctions that had been eliminated at signing of the JCPOA, as well as the other ones introduced by Trump, would be lifted, and if the US provided the guarantees that they would not withdraw while Iran was in compliance with its obligations. The US do not wish to lift all these sanctions, can not provide the guarantees sought by Iran but wish to discuss its missile program and its regional activities in support of its allies. The discussions in Vienna continue, with no end to be seen.

Though the US had been more popular in Iran than in any other Arabic country during many years, Trump’s actions in respect of Iran and the sufferings of ordinary Iranians caused irreparable damage to these relations. The US did not demonstrate and are not demonstrating any compassion whatsoever towards the Iranian people, and the sanctions in addition to the new severe restrictions lead to impoverishment of ordinary Iranians. The main factor nourishing and prolonging Iran’s isolation was the anti-Iranian lobbying on the part of Israel and its American “yeasayers” and - however to a lesser extent - on the part of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and their corporate patrons in the West. This lobbying so strongly turned the US Congress against Iran that a whole change of generations might be needed to change the US policy. Spreading anti-Iran attitudes in all US media “made” Iran enemy number one in the eyes of ordinary Americans.

The ruthless Israeli and Arab lobbying in its turn forced Iran into a corner. The Arab lobbying complicated the business relations while the Israeli lobbying poisoned Iran’s political relations with the US. Tehran feels a threat posed by the American troops and the Israeli adventurism that will be most possibly supported by the US military. The all-penetrating sanctions are equal to an act of war as even trade embargoes were historically regarded as such.

These hostile relations continue for over forty years and no signs to end them can be seen. The future of the Iran-US
relations is not rose-colored, whatever happens at the JCPOA negotiations in Vienna. American presidents and other politicians do not dare to oppose the Israeli and Arab lobby. The only flash of hope for improvement of the relations between the two states is the renewed US. The President should firmly and unequivocally say to Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to stop their interference with the American foreign policy and that the US must adopt a policy representing its long-term national interests. Extensive business relations with Iran that may be better achieved without other countries’ interference would definitely serve the interests of the US and improve the situation in this region.

_Viktor Mikhin, corresponding member of RANS, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”._