

نُكْلِير بِير إِرَان؟ رِيَالِيسْت بِير اَكْتُورُنْ إِنْشَاحِي بَاكِشْ أَچِيسِنْدَان تِيورِيكْ اُولَارَاكْ إِنْجِلِنْمَيسِي

ÖZ

Yaptırımlar ve tartışmalar ile dolu uzunca bir maratonun sonunda 6 Nisan 2015 tarihinde İran be 5+1 ülkeleri arasında prensip anlaşmasına varıldı. Bu anlaşma İran rejimi ve Batı arasındaki 35 yıllık ilişkiye yeni boyutlar getireceğinden tarihi bir anlaşma olarak nitelenmeyi hak etmektedir. Bu makale hem realist hem de inşacı modelleri kullanarak bu anlaşmayı teorik arka plandan hareketle analiz etmeye girişmektedir. Bu amaçla, makalenin iddiası şudur: konu sadece güvenlik kaygıları ile bağlantılı bir nükleer mesele değildir, dolayısıyla anlaşmanın arka planını aydınlatmak için değerlerin, kimliklerin, düşünceler ve söylemlerin tarihsel bağlamda konuya dâhil edilmesi gerekmektedir. İran bölgesinin realist bir aktörü olarak tartışıldıktan sonra, makale karşılıklı geliştirilen söylem ve tutumların son on yıl boyunca devlet başkanlarının elinde nasıl şekillenip değiştiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Amerika, nükleer program, realizm, inşacılık, söylemler

ایران النوویة؟ بحث نظري حول وجهة نظر فاعل واقعي نجم الدين اوزدان خلاصة:

بعد سباق طويل مليء بالعقوبات والجدل، ويتاريخ 6 نيسان/ ابريل 2015 تم الاتفاق المبدئي بين إيران والدول 5 + 1. ويستحق هذا الاتفاق ان يطلق عليه وصف "الاتفاق التاريخي" باعتبار انه سينقل العلاقات بين النظام الإيراني وبين الغرب الى ابعاد جديدة. ويتولى هذا المقال، عن طريق استعماله الأسلوبين الواقعي والنظري في آن واحد، تحليل هذا الاتفاق منطلقاً من خلفيته النظرية. وفي هذا الاطار، فان ما يقف عنده هذا المقال هو: ان الموضوع ليس مجرد قضية نووية نابعة من المخاوف الأمنية، ولذا فانه من اجل القاء الضوء على خلفية هذا الاتفاق، يتحتم تضمين الاتفاق قضايا مثل القيم والهويات والافكار والاقوال بما لها من ارتباطات تاريخية. وبعد ان يتناول المقال بالنقاش إيران باعتباره لاعبا واقعيا في المنطقة، يقوم باظهار كيفية تشكيل وتغيير المقولات والمواقف التي جرى تطويرها بشكل متقابل طيلة العشرة سنوات الاخيرة على يد رؤساء الدول.

الكلمات الدالة: إيران، امريكا، البرنامج النووي، الواقعية، المقولات النظرية، الاقوال.

A NUCLEAR IRAN? A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS ON A REALIST ACTOR THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVIST LENS

ABSTRACT

As a result of long marathon of sanctions and discussions, a framework agreement between Iranian regime and 5+1 countries was reached on April 6, 2015. It deserves to be called as a historical deal since it will absolutely bring new dimensions to the 35 years relationship between Iranian regime and the West. This article attempts to analyze the framework deal from the theoretical background especially by using both realist and constructivist models. To that end, this article suggests that this is not only about the nuclear issue as a result of security concern; rather there are some other crucial factors such as values, identities, ideas, and discourses which have to be included into the subject in order to highlight the background of the deal in a historical context. After arguing Iran as a realist actor in the region, this article shows how the bilateral discourses and attitudes shaped and changed in the hands of the Presidents during the last decades.

Keywords: Iran, the U.S., nuclear program, realism, constructivism, discourses

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1. Introduction

A nuclear deal with Iranian regime has been one of the Obama administration's essential policy targets. Following a long marathon of discussions, tactics, sanctions, and negotiations a framework agreement between Iranian regime and 5+1 countries (the US, UK, France, China, and Russia plus Germany) was reached on April 6, 2015. The recent agreement on Iran's nuclear program was not only a surprising, but also a historical deal with the international community for it has a potential for a new dimension considering the 35 years of non-relationship between Iran and the U.S. As the President Obama declared on the agreement that: "I am convinced that if this framework leads to a final, comprehensive deal, it will make our country, our allies, and our world safer."¹ It might be too early to assert something on the whole picture, such a crucial agreement between Iran and the US however highlights the historical significance both for the regional and global balance of power. By the way, the Iranian president said that "If there is no end to sanctions, there will not be an agreement" and continued as follows: "The end of these negotiations and a signed deal must include a declaration of cancelling the oppressive sanctions on the great nation of Iran."²

Should Iran get the Bomb? According to Kenneth N. Waltz, a founding figure in International Relations theory - called as neo-Realism or "structural realism", yes it should. In his essay published in *Foreign Affairs* in 2012 Waltz argued that "a nuclear-armed Iran ... would probably be the best possible result: the one most likely to restore stability to the Middle East."³ Waltz also argues that Iran can rarely be dissuaded from the pursuit of acquiring nuclear weapons through economic sanctions as the historical record indicates. North Korea is the best case in his argument indicating that if Tehran considers its security dependent highly to the possessing nuclear weapons, sanctions as in the North Korea case – succeeded to get weapons regardless of sanctions and UN Security Council resolutions – will not work as intended. Security is the key concept in this argument and Israel's regional nuclear monopoly was regarded as the main cause behind the instability in the Middle East.

However, is it all about the security concerns especially against Israel's nuclear capability for the Iranian regime? In this article, I argue that the arguments on nuclear deterrence have some limitations in understanding the

1 "Statement by the President on the Framework to Prevent Iran from Obtaining a Nuclear Weapon", *The White House*, 02 April 2015. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/02/statement-president-framework-prevent-iran-obtaining-nuclear-weapon>

2 Ali Akbar Dareini, "Iran's President Rouhani Says Nuke Deal Depends On Lifting Sanctions", *The Huffington Post*, 15.04.2015. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/15/rouhani-nuke-deal-sanctions_n_7069532.html

3 Kenneth N. Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2012. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2012-06-15/why-iran-should-get-bomb>

dynamics of the relations between Obama administration and Iranian regime and also their priorities. Iran with its historical identity from Persians to Sasanians is neither North Korea nor some other actor in the International Politics. When it comes to Iran and the Middle East as a whole, there raises some other crucial factors designing the way of politics such as Persian nationalism and historical sense of regional leadership with its sectarian identity and hegemonic challenges of the Iranian regime since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. At this point, constructivist model can offer an additional comprehensive view of states and their preferences, interests and priorities through their identical codes. As Alexander Wendt, a prominent figure in constructivism, argued that “if the United States and the Soviet Union decide they are no longer enemies, the cold war is over”.⁴ From this point of view, this article seeks to understand the issue of nuclear deal between the Obama administration and Iranian regime through constructivist lens with its basic assumptions on the role of identity, values, ideas of the states and discourses developed bilaterally.

As Waltz argued, “International politics is the realm of power, of struggle and of accommodation... the international realm is variously described as being anarchic, horizontal, decentralized, homogenous, undirected and mutually adaptive”.⁵ While (neo) realism highly focuses on understanding the running of the international system at the structural level, it might ignore the central determinant components such as the role of ideology, norms, values and ideas. From the standpoint of constructivism, perceptions, ideas and discourses are the fundamental forces that shape the logic of International Politics. The values or perceptions of states and their citizens come into being by societal interaction. Thus, the conflict or cooperation among states largely depends on the bilateral perceptions. As Alexander Wendt asserted that *anarchy is what states make of it*, it is also possible to re-develop the argument by contextualizing that cooperation, enemies or alliances are what states make of it. In this sense, two states, as in the case of the U.S. and Iran, can start to negotiate and re-establish their understanding and bilateral relations as the identities and interests behind the states never remain static and unchanged, but are always in a constructive process by the mutual discourses.

A realist approach for the Iranian nuclear program is based on the assumption that Iran as a rational actor in the region would seek the pursuit of nuclear arms as a means of deterrence against Israel. Touching the significance of the security concerns, realist approach can help us to understand how the state of Iran behave under some certain conditions despite its lack on the role of ideas and norms behind the state attitudes and foreign policy approach. In addition to the basic assumptions of realism that states are motivated through

4 Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No.2 (Spring 1992), p.397.

5 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (New York: Waveland Press, Inc. 2010), p.113.

the concerns such as power-seeking and security issue, constructivist model includes the ideas, values and identities of the actors developing their discourses and attitudes with the others into the scope. To this end, by utilizing both constructivist and realist approaches this article aims to put that Iran's nuclear pursuit can be regarded as an outcome of both security concerns mostly affected by the historical and geographical realities and ideological/identical considerations shaped by the discourses in both state's foreign policy approaches. When considering the latest discourses developed by the President Obama and Rouhani, a deal can be seen as an ultimate and much possible target for both side: an "ultimate" legacy for the Obama administration, living under the "non-sanctions" for the Iranian regime.

2. Identifying Iran: A Pure Realist Actor in the Region

The Islamic Republic of Iran is based on an extremist interpretation of Shia Islam that demands clerical governance of the State. Iranian elites/Islamists reject the idea that religion and politics can be separated and have designed their state institutions accordingly. In the words of regime's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, "In Islam the legislative power and competence to establish laws belongs exclusively to God Almighty. The Sacred Legislator of Islam is the sole legislative power. No one has the right to legislate and no law may be executed except the ... ruling of the [Divine] Legislator." In this sense, the Islamist clerical elites have secured power to their class while justifying their autocratic rule by attributing it to the will of Allah. With this ideological base, the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution established parallel lines of authority: one a formal governmental bureaucracy responsible for the administration of government and the other a series of clerical bodies deciding policies. The president serving as the nominal head of government takes direction from and reports to the Supreme Leader, an appointed ayatollah.⁶

The power structure of the Iranian regime lies in the hands of two key figures: The president, as chief executive, is responsible for the daily running of the country, but does not determine the general guidelines of Iranian domestic and foreign policy alone, and command the armed forces and security organs. This authority lies in the hands of the "supreme leader" – the strongest figure in the Iranian politics. The supreme leader is not much interested and intervenes in the issues of the state executive. This structure behind the Iranian regime highlights the vital importance of cooperation between the President and the supreme leader so that the stability of the state could be maintained.⁷

6 Clifton W. Sherrill, "Why Iran wants the bomb and what it means for US policy", *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol.19, No.1, March 2012, p.32.

7 Wifried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, A Joint Publication of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000, p.XI.

Iranian both socially constructed national identity and realist attitudes which has been based on the distrust with the western world have been institutionalized within the Iranian Constitution, as written in the chapter of foreign policy under Article 152: “The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defence of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States”. Post-revolutionary Iran is a state whose main goals was established as “the complete elimination of imperialism and the prevention of foreign influence” in the Constitution (Chapter 1, Article 3, No.5).⁸

Iranian realist perspective toward the regional issues is primarily shaped by the strategic loneliness leading Iran’s rulers to see their country as surrounded by rival powers and mistrusts the international and regional systems due to its inherently vulnerable position and regional competitive environment. Iranian geography is also influential in shaping its foreign policy approach – to adapt certain courses of action. This geography designs the parameters in the Iranian power relations and tends to isolate itself from its neighbors – including land borders with seven states (Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan) and maritime borders with six Persian Gulf States (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman) and, indirectly, with Russia and Kazakhstan through the Caspian Sea. In the North, Iran almost shares a maritime border with Russia. To the Northwest is Turkey, a country for centuries one of the Iran’s regional rivals from the Ottoman period, and today as a NATO member. To the West is Iraq, and to the south is the Saudi Arabia. In addition to these geographic parameters, it is worth noting that Iran is not a member of any significant regional organization or security arrangement unlike two of its main rivals, Turkey as a NATO member, and Saudi Arabia as a member of the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).⁹ Geopolitics, therefore, continues to play a key item in the Iranian foreign policy. Over time, a combination of factors such as geography, the need to secure the country’s territorial integrity, adverse historical experiences, competition with other empires and the country’s resource endowment have come together and determine Iranian foreign policy.¹⁰

8 “The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran”, *Iran Chamber Society*. Available at: <http://www.iran-chamber.com/government/laws/>

9 Thomas Juneau, “Iran under Rouhani: Still Alone in the World”, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 21, No.4 (Winter 2014), pp.92-95.

10 Anoushiravan Ehteshami, “The Foreign Policy of Iran” in *The Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern States* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002), Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Eds. pp.284-285

A realist approach intended to understand the Iranian nuclear program would be based on an assumption that Iran as a rational actor in the international system would seek the pursuit of nuclear arms as a means of deterrence against Israel. As Ray Takeyh argued that “Iran’s nuclear calculations... are not derived from an irrational ideology, rather than a judicious attempt to craft a viable deterrent capability against an evolving range of threats”. When coupling with the discourse of the Bush administration positioning Iran as a part of ‘axis of evil’, the threats and pressures from the western world have pushed Iran to pursue nuclear program and develop such a risky strategy.¹¹ An undisputable fact on Iran is that the country has the security concerns in the region, but the truth, as Nasser Saghafi-Ameri, a former senior Iranian diplomat emphasized, is not about seeking nuclear weapons. This can be verified by looking at the “Twenty Year Vision Document”, a document considered in Iran as a secondary importance after its Constitution, in which it is asserted that Iran by 2025 should be the leading nation in the region in terms of economic, scientific and technological achievements. There is no place in the document to the Iranian ambitions for the military power in the region.¹²

As Scott D. Sagan argued that nuclear weapons are more than tools of national security, and can serve as international normative symbols of modernity and identity as well. Under the *Norms Model* his argument focuses on the norms concerning weapon acquisition –both shaping and reflecting a state’s identity.¹³ From this point of view, realist approach may argue that Iran does not only think of nuclear forces as necessary for fighting in future conflicts, but it is also possible for Iran to seek a legitimacy and respect through the nuclear agenda. This is called as “prestige effect” described as any situation in which the possession of an arsenal legitimizes the central state authority in dealing with the outsiders.¹⁴ International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Muhammad el-Baradei said “Iran’s program is an effort to force recognition of its role as a regional power,” and continued “In my view Iran’s nuclear program is a means to an end: it wants to be recognized as a regional power, they believe that the nuclear know-how brings prestige, brings power, and they would like to see the U.S. engaging them.” To be honest, it is the fact that Iran has been taken more seriously by the West since developing a nuclear program.¹⁵

11 Ray Takeyh, “Iran’s Nuclear Calculations”, *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 20, No.2 (Summer 2003), pp.21-28.

12 Nasser Saghafi-Ameri, “Iran-US Reconciliation: Overcoming Challenges and Setbacks”, *Institute for Strategic Research Journal*, 09 January 2013. Available at: <http://www.isrjournals.ir/en/essay/1307-iran-us-reconciliation-overcoming-challenges-and-setbacks.html>

13 Scott D. Sagan, “Why Do States build Weapons? Three Model in Search of a Bomb”, *International Security*, Vol.21, No.3 (Winter, 1996-1997).

14 Christopher Whyte, “Why Israel Fears a Nuclear Iran: Realism, Constructivism & Iran’s Dual-National Identity”, *The Central European Journal of International and Security Studies (CEJISS)*, Issue 5:3, 2011, pp.149-150.

15 Nikola Krastev, “IAEA Chief: Iran’s Nuclear Program About Winning Recognition, Prestige,” *Radio*

It might provide a number of advantages to pursuit of nuclear program, on the other hand, being a nuclear power in the region would ultimately bring some disadvantages to the Iranian regime as well. If the Iran becomes a nuclear power in the region, it is most likely that Turkey, Saudi Arabia and even Egypt as the regional states would target to build a nuclear program to balance the Iranian regime. In addition to the regional aspect, international community with its main body –the UN will continue to press through several sanctions in order to abandon the nuclear program. It is easy to monitor that these sanctions have been and still continue to contribute the economic outcomes which have highly devastating socio-economic outcomes and are undermining the survival of the regime.¹⁶ “We prefer a region without nuclear weapons. But if Iran does it, nothing can prevent us from doing it too, not even the international community,” said Abdullah al Askar, a member and former chairman of the foreign affairs committee of Saudi Arabia’s advisory legislature. Saudi Arabia has already launched a civilian nuclear program, signing agreements this year on technology sharing and training with South Korea and France.¹⁷

3. Constructing a Deal between Rational Actors

Whereas realism tends to focus on material factors such as power and security, constructivist model however highlights the impact of values, ideas and identities. In constructivism, states are not assumed as an actor only seeking to survive; rather, they are the product of specific historical processes with their interests and identities. Discourses deserve to be taken consideration since they reflect and shape beliefs and interests, and establish accepted norms of behavior.¹⁸ In addition to the basic assumptions of realism that states are motivated through the concerns such as power-seeking and security issue, constructivist model includes the ideas, values and identities of the actors developing their discourses and attitudes with the others into the scope.

Emphasizing the significance of the security concerns, realist approach can help us to understand how the state of Iran behave under some certain conditions despite its lack on the role of ideas and norms behind the state attitudes and foreign policy approach. When (neo) realism highly focuses on understanding the running of the international system at the structural level, it might ignore the central determinant components such as the role of ideology, norms, values and ideas. As Alexander Wendt argued that “the fundamen-

Free Europe, November 5, 2009.

16 Clifton W. Sherrill, “Why Iran wants...” pp.33-34

17 Yaroslav Trofimov, “Saudi Arabia Considers Nuclear Weapons to offset Iran”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 07 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-considers-nuclear-weapons-to-off-set-iran-1430999409>

18 Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories”, *Foreign Policy*, No.110 (Spring 1998).

tal structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material... and these structures shape actors' identities and interests, rather than just their behavior."¹⁹ From the standpoint of constructivism, perceptions and ideas are the fundamental forces that shape the logic of international politics. The values or perceptions of states and their citizens come into being by societal interaction. Thus, the conflict or cooperation among states largely depends on the bilateral perceptions. In this regards, a constructivist model offers an analytical framework from normative, ideational and ideological background in order to see how the Iranian-American discourses and relations shaped and altered in the course of time.

Despite the Iran and US disputes during the past 30 years, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of each country's domestic politics and the role of diverse political forces in the decision-making process. The western perspectives lack an understanding of Iran's complex power structure. Their narrative is mostly based on a simplistic analysis in order to justify the policy approach toward Iran's nuclear program. This discourse evolves on the role of the Supreme Leader and his authority on the issues related to nuclear question which makes any negotiation futile. This kind of discourse ultimately neglects the complex procedure of consensus building among different power centers in Iran, ignoring the fact that the Supreme Leader takes into account all those factors in the making of his final decision on any strategic issue as nuclear program. It can be asserted that in the process of decision making in such a strategic issue the President of Iran and his Foreign Minister will have a great role to play.²⁰

A fundamental principle in constructivist model is the people's attitudes towards objects on the basis of their meanings. As Alexander Wendt puts: "States act differently toward enemies than they do toward friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not. Anarchy and the distribution of power are insufficient to tell us which is which. U.S. military power has a different significance for Canada than for Cuba, despite their similar "structural" positions, just as British missiles have a different significance for the United States than do Soviet missiles. The distribution of power may always affect states' calculations, but how it does so depends on the intersubjective understandings and expectations, on the "distribution of knowledge," that constitute their conceptions of self and other...[I]f the United States and Soviet Union decide that they are no longer enemies, "the cold war is over." It is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions."²¹

19 Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics" *International Security*, Vol.20, No.1. (Summer 1995), 75.

20 Nasser Saghafi-Ameri, "Rouhani, Obama Meeting Significant for Iran-US Rapprochement", *Iran Review*, 22 August 2013. Available at: <http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Rouhani-Obama-Meeting-Significant-for-Iran-US-Rapprochement.htm>

21 Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What...", pp.396-397.

It is worth noting here that the initiation of Iran's nuclear program dates back to 1956, when Mohammed Reza Shah administration started a series of talks with the US and signed the first agreement (Atom for Peace program announced by Eisenhower administration) between two countries in 1957.²² However, since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the positive western attitude toward Iran was reversed and Iran is being marginalized. As Ahmadinejad, in 2006, also told *Der Spiegel*, "It's interesting to note that European nations wanted to allow the shah's dictatorship the use of nuclear technology. That was a dangerous regime. Yet those nations were willing to supply it with nuclear technology. Ever since the Islamic Republic has existed, however, these powers have opposed it. I stress once again, we don't need any nuclear weapons."²³ Takeyh and Maloney note that the essential framework for US policy toward Tehran was established with the hostage crisis in 1979 and pursued the strategy of "dual track" relied heavily on economic pressure: prohibition of Iranian oil imports to the US, a freeze of all Iranian state assets held by US institutions, and eventually a travel ban and comprehensive embargo on nearly all forms of trade with Iran. All the discourses accompanied with the strategy of "dual track" as a foreign policy approach toward Iranian regime began with the Carter administration and continued with the President Reagan, President Bush senior, President Clinton, and President George W. Bush.²⁴

Following the 1990s, a new narrative on security threat has emerged to replace the collapsed Soviet threat in the US foreign policy approach. While the American officials worried about the potential threat of nuclear attack from Moscow during the Cold-War years, they now faces with another threat of nuclear/biological/chemical/terrorist attack from anywhere such as Baghdad and Pyongyang. This has been reflected in the American strategic thinking as follows: the "Rogues" have replaced the "Reds".²⁵ On the other hand, both Presidents Obama and Rouhani have started to replace hostilities with respectful language. A month after his inauguration in September 2013, President Rouhani surprised everyone by holding a brief telephone conversation with President Obama. This was the highest level of contact between the two countries since the 1979 Revolution. The historic telephone call was the climax of a dramatic shift in tone between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Realizing the significance of public symbolism, both Washington and Tehran have engaged each other at the highest levels, with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and Secretary of State John Kerry holding dozens of meetings and

22 Nader Entessar, "Iran's Nuclear Decision-Making Calculus", *Middle East Policy*, Vol.16, No.2 (Summer 2009). Available at: <http://www.mepec.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/irans-nuclear-decision-making-calculus>

23 "Interview with Iran's President Ahmadinejad: 'We Are Determined'", *Der Spiegel*, 30 May 2006.

24 Ray Takeyh and Suzanne Maloney, "The Self-Limiting Success of Iran Sanctions", *International Affairs*, 87 (6), 2011, pp.1297-1312.

25 Paul D. Hoyt, "The 'Rogue State' Image in American Foreign Policy", *Global Society*, Vol. 14, No.2. (April 2000), p.297.

appearing next to each other in front of flags of the United States and Iran. Rouhani's administration has also engaged in a reconstruction of the United States' image inside Iran.²⁶

4. New Discourses and New Attitudes

Rouhani in his first year in the office began to improve the Iranian image in the international community and to portray himself and his government as being ready to deal with the West. His cabinet is full of ministers with advanced degrees from Western universities. Even his foreign policy approach differs in practice from Ahmadinejad's, the aim of both has been to maximize Iranian influence in the region that has been a core foreign policy target of the Islamic Republic's since 1979. A great degree of the continuity in Iranian policy despite the changes in government stems from the centrality of the Supreme Leader in the foreign policy issues. Rouhani considers the economy essential not only for maintaining domestic support for his government, but also for increasing Iranian influence in regional and global affairs. That's why, coming to a deal on nuclear issue for Rouhani is so crucial to recover Iran's economy by ending international isolation.²⁷ During the last years of the Cold-War, the relationships between both American and Soviet leaders made it easier for Gorbachev to pursue the policies of glasnost and perestroika that ultimately led to the liberation of Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. From this point of view, Peter Beinart argues that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, like Gorbachev, wants to end his country's cold war with the United States due to its devastating economic consequences.²⁸

Despite the Obama's way of politics with Iran which is based on negotiations and mutual understanding, some analysts asserted that diplomacy and economic sanctions are unlikely to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Thus, the United States should continue to apply diplomatic and economic pressure on Iran both to raise the costs of the capability for nuclear weapons and to isolate the country from the international community. In addition to these limited policies, the United States should also bolster its military capabilities in and around the Persian Gulf in order to expand Washington's options for countering the Iranian nuclear program if the diplomacy

26 Bahman Baktiari, How Can Iran and the United States Normalize Their Relationship After 36 Years of Mutual Satanization? *The World Post*, 05.04.2015. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bahman-baktiari/unmaking-of-an-adversaria_b_7199432.html

27 Rodger Shanahan, "Iranian foreign Policy under Rouhani", *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, 11 February 2015. Available at: <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/iranian-foreign-policy-under-rouhani>

28 Peter Beinart, "The Real Achievement of the Iran Nuclear Deal", *The Atlantic*, 03 April 2015. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/the-real-achievement-of-the-iran-nuclear-deal/389628/>

option applied by the Obama administration fails.²⁹ Unlike Obama, Hillary Clinton has a little hope that Iranian behavior will change anytime soon. “[E]ven if the nuclear issue was eventually settled by an enforceable agreement, Iran’s support for terrorism and its aggressive behavior in the region would remain a threat” to the U.S. and its allies, Clinton wrote in her 2014 memoir that “I had seen too many false hopes dashed over the years [by Iran] to allow myself to get too optimistic now.”³⁰

The two competing discourses—one was the former Iranian president Khatami’s discourse of “dialogue among civilization” on the basis of the adaptation of detente policy; and the other was George W. Bush’s discourse of “axis of evil” developed in the post 9/11 period in order to extend the scope of “war on terrorism”—clearly indicated how the use of language properly or improperly can promote cooperation or competition among states³¹. In his State of the Union Address to Congress on January 29, 2002, President Bush used the expression, the Axis of Evil, to include Iraq, Iran, and North Korea: “States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an Axis of Evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.” On the one hand the Axis of Evil metaphor may re-structure the way the West views Iran; on the other hand, it also re-structures the way the Iranians view the World and, more importantly, themselves.³²

Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer explained the background of challenges, policies and attitudes towards Iran by saying that Iran is widely portrayed as Israel’s most dangerous enemy and existential threat since it is the most likely to acquire nuclear weapons. Ariel Sharon began publicly pushing the US so that the Bush administration would put strong arm on Iran “the day after” it conquered Iraq. It was a call, began in April 2003, for a regime change in Iran as Iraq was “not enough”. The authors came to conclusion that Iran’s nuclear ambitions never became a direct and existential threat to the US. It is the same America that could live with a nuclear Soviet Union, a nuclear China or even North Korea; then it can also live with a nuclear Iran. “Iran and the United States would hardly be allies” they said “if the lobby did not exist”.³³

29 Eric S. Edelman, Andrew F. Krepinevich, and Evan Braden Montgomery, “The Dangers of a Nuclear Iran”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90 (1), 2011, pp.66-81.

30 Michael Crowley, “A Changed Iran? Obama aides divided”, *Politico*, 04.03.2015. Available at: <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/04/obama-aides-doubt-iran-regime-116661.html>

31 Mahdi Mohammed Nia, “Discourse and Identity in Iran’s Foreign Policy”, *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, Vol.3, No.3 (Fall 2012), p.33

32 Daniel Heradstveit and G. Matthew Bonham, “What the Axis of Evil Metaphor did to Iran”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol.61, No.3 (Summer 2007), pp.422-426.

33 John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Policy*, Vol.13, No.3 (Fall 2006), pp.60-61.

The attitudes of Iranian public toward the nuclear program have not been clear exactly in accordance with some outcomes of the surveys. For instance, according to a survey, conducted in 2008 by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland and by WorldPublicOpinion: 66 percent of Iranian respondents supported Iran having “a full fuel cycle nuclear energy program” but thought that Iran “should not develop nuclear weapons”. However, a June 2007 survey by Terror Free Tomorrow claims that “a majority of Iranians (52%) . . . favor the development of nuclear weapons and believe that the people of Iran would live in a safer world if Iran possessed nuclear weapons. RAND Corporation’s survey indicated that most respondents favored the nuclear program for civilian use and that a plurality opposed the development of nuclear weapons. However, support for actual nuclear weapons was, somewhat surprisingly, stronger than previously assumed: 87 percent strongly favored Iranian development of nuclear energy for civilian use. Only 3 percent of respondents strongly opposed developing nuclear energy for civilian use. In addition, 98 percent believed that the possession of nuclear energy is a national right. This finding suggests there may be widespread support for the civilian aspect of the nuclear program.”³⁴

Sanctions may have induced Iranian regime to enter negotiations, but they have not persuaded it to abandon its pursuit of nuclear program.³⁵ Despite the Iranian leaders’ self-confidence, the economic situation in the Islamic Republic is highly vulnerable. Economic frustration feeds social problems. The Iranian government acknowledged in 2007 that two million people—or 2.9 percent of the population—use narcotics; other estimates place the number at five to six million. Divorce is also on the rise within the Iranian society.³⁶ As Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor of the President Jimmy Carter, in an interview by Benjamin Lansy, also asserted that “the intelligent elements of Iranian public opinion [...] are eager for change in their overall situation. They are tired of extremism; they are tired of fanaticism... [T]here is a yearning in Iran [...] for a normal status quo.”³⁷

5. Conclusion

“Make bread while the oven is hot” says an Iranian proverb. A deal between the U.S. and Iran removing sanctions would recover Iran’s economy and let

34 Sara Belt Elson and Alireza Nader, “What Do Iranians Think? A Survey of Attitudes on the United States, the Nuclear Program, and the Economy”, *RAND Corporation*, Technical Report, p.11.

35 Joshua Muravchik, “War with Iran is probably our best option”, *The Washington Post*, 13 March 2015. Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/war-with-iran-is-probably-our-best-option/2015/03/13/fb112eb0-c725-11e4-a199-6cb5e63819d2_story.html

36 Patrick Clawson, “Could Sanctions Work Against Tehran?” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (Winter 2007). Available at: http://www.meforum.org/1068/could-sanctions-work-against-tehran#_ftnref16

37 Benjamin Lansy, “Zbigniew Brzezinski: Alternative to Iran deal ‘a policy of self-destruction’”, *Msnbc*, 04/03/2015. Available at: <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/zbigniew-brzezinski-alternative-iran-deal-policy-self-destruction>

Iran to gain access to the international banking system. By reaching an agreement no one would expect that four decades of hostility between them will be evaporated overnight. Nor will Iran stop its expansionism across the region. Some will continue to follow the radical discourse since for the Iranian Islamist, America is treated as an idea rather than a state. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati of the Guardian Council expressed in 2009, "When all is said and done, we are an anti-American regime. America is our enemy and we are the enemies of America".³⁸ Iran's foreign minister, Javad Zarif, however said "serious differences" between Tehran and Washington remain. "I hope that at the end of this process, we will all show that through dialogue and engagement with dignity, we can in fact resolve problems, open new horizons, and move forward."³⁹ As Fareed Zakaria also said that Iranian regime is a rational actor contrary to what is believed which means that the regime wants to thrive and calculates costs and benefits, then acts accordingly.⁴⁰

Despite the loneliness in his foreign policy approach toward Iran, President Obama tries to do diplomatically what the Bush administration could not by military power under the discourse of "war on terrorism". *Forty-seven U.S. Senate Republicans signed an open letter to leaders in Iran regarding the talks on Iran's nuclear program. The letter states that any agreement reached must be approved by Congress and that Congress can overturn any agreement reached after President Obama leaves office.*⁴¹ *In such a scenario in which Congress votes against a comprehensive agreement, the possible outcome is that the U.S. would find itself back at the table in the coming one or two years, facing an Iran with a more advanced nuclear program and even less willing to accept any compromise.*⁴² Obama also said he did not believe that the 34 years of distrust between the U.S. and Iran could be erased overnight. "... I do believe that if we can resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear program that can serve as a major step down a long road towards a different relationship one based on mutual interests and mutual respect."

The western perspective towards Iran lacks an insight for Iranian internal political structure. The western discourse is mostly directed by an analysis

38 Clifton W. Sherrill, "Why Iran wants..." p.40.

39 Colum Lynch and John Hudson, "Iran, World Powers Strike Tentative Nuclear Accord", *Foreign Policy*, 02 April 2015. Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/02/world-readies-for-breakthrough-on-iran-nuclear-talks/>

40 Fareed Zakaria, "Is Iran rational?" *The Washington Post*, 09 April 2015. Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/is-iran-rational/2015/04/09/3c2cc5a8-def5-11e4-a500-1c5bb1d8ff6a_story.html

41 "U.S. Senate: Open Letter to the Leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 09 March 2015. Available at: <http://www.cfr.org/congresses-parliaments-national-legislatures/us-senate-open-letter-leaders-islamic-republic-iran/p36254>

42 Philip Gordon, "The Myth of a 'Better' Iran Deal", *Politico Magazine*, 11 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/05/the-myth-of-a-better-iran-deal-117834.htm> l#. VWtM-luJjIX

which only justifies their approach in which the Supreme Leader has the full authority on the nuclear issues. The reality seems highly different as the negotiations indicate that the President of Iran with his Foreign Minister might be influential and have a great role to play. "Dialogue among civilization" developed as a discourse by the former Iranian president Khatami on the one side, and the discourse of "axis of evil" used by the Bush administration on the other side, are the completely different and conflicting discourses indicating how the actors re-define and re-construct both itself and counter. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said "We believe there is a third option. We can cooperate with the world." Regarding the Iranian regime, what the President Obama's view is that the election of President Rouhani indicates that there was an appetite among the Iranian people for a rejoining with the international community, an emphasis on the economics and the desire to link up with a global economy"⁴³ Taking into account of the new discourses developed by both sides it seems that a deal would be much possible and the single policy choice: an ultimate "legacy" for the Obama administration and being a global actor without "sanctions" for the Iranian regime.

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43 "Iran Nuclear Plan: Tehran Reacts", *The Iran Primer*, 02 April 2015. Available at: <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/apr/02/iran-nuclear-plan-tehran-reacts>

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