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THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR THREAT: NIGHTMARE OR REALITY



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ABSTRACT

The relationship US and Iran has been a difficult one ever since the Islamic Revolution took place in 1979 and the Shah, a friend to the US in the region, was forced to flee. Although this was a typically confrontational relationship, the US never considered Iran as an existential threat until the 1990's when Israel started objecting to Iran's ongoing nuclear efforts. This thesis examines the US' characterization of Iran as a nuclear threat, which will be placed within social constructivist framework of International Relations theory, with a particular emphasis on the way this characterization came about. It critically analyzes the claims put forth by the United States to argue this threat and what these have been based on. In addition, it examines the way in which a 'paradigm of enmity' between these two countries has contributed to a legacy of animosity and distrust which in turn has fostered the idea of an Iranian threat. Finally, takes a closer look at the role Israel and the Israel lobby have played in characterizing Iran as a threat.

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Introduction

“Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous and Iran will be dangerous if they have the know-how necessary to make a nuclear weapon”.¹ – Former President George Bush (2007)

These words reflect the way in which Iran and its nuclear program are viewed by the US and its allies. This “Iranian threat” and the ideas associated with it have become part of the main discourse on this issue, reflecting an almost built-in suspicion of Iran’s nuclear program and its intentions in the region. Reports in the media about belligerent and anti-Israeli statements by the Iranian President, Iran’s sponsoring of terrorist groups and covert nuclear activities have shaped a particular perception of Iran, giving credence to the idea that

¹ Neuman, Johanna. “Iran continues to be a threat, Bush says”. 5 December, 2007. Los Angeles Times. <<http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/la-na-bush5dec05,0,1189992.story>> par. 2

Iran's nuclear program is a grave threat that must be dealt with soon before Iran has been able to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran's relations with the West have been strained ever since its Islamic Revolution in 1979, after which direct diplomatic relations between the new government in Tehran and Washington were cut, and have not normalized since. The US has taken a very forceful stance towards Iran since then, while designating it as the "axis of evil" and calling it a grave threat to the region and the world, which have had a great impact on the way the world thinks about Iran.

Instead of focusing on US-Iranian relations or on geo-political explanations of the US policy towards Iran, this research specifically focuses on the "Iranian threat" and the understanding that the US has of this threat. Using a Social Constructivist framework, I will analyze how this threat was socially constructed, and examine the most important factors that have been constitutive of the idea of Iran as a threat. This research aims to answer the following question:

How has the US' characterization of Iran as a nuclear threat come about?

In answering this question, I will start by analyzing what the United States has based the "Iranian nuclear threat" on, thereby closely examining the claim that Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons and the arguments the US has put forward in this respect, which will cover Chapter I. Subsequently, Chapter II will focus on the social construction of Iran as a threat, employing a constructivist approach to better understand this concept. The first section will deal with how the US interprets Iran's actions through a paradigm of enmity and how historical forces have affected the US' characterization of the threat and its policy towards the Islamic Republic. The way that this paradigm of enmity is defined will be explained at the outset of Chapter II. The second part of this chapter goes into the concept of securitization and outlines the way in which the US has actively contributed to the notion of Iran as a threat and examines the related claims and assumptions. Finally, Chapter III deals with the influence of Israel and the Israel lobby on this characterization of the Iranian threat.

Chapter I specifically deal with the claim that Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons, while Chapter II concerns the claim that Iran's nuclear program (therefore) constitutes a threat. In clarification of the research question: the use of the word "nuclear" is used to denote the fact that this research focuses specifically on the threat that Iran's nuclear program is said to pose. Other aspects of the Iranian threat, such as its support for terrorism,

are discussed to the extent that they affect the nuclear dimension of this threat. In some instances, I may refer to the “Iranian nuclear threat” in order to emphasize that I am referring to the nuclear aspect in particular, whereas otherwise I will refer to the “Iranian threat”. Furthermore, although the analysis of this research is strongly connected to *explaining why* the US argues Iran is a threat if there is a lack of evidence, and why it conducts such a policy, this falls outside of the scope of this research. This research aims to *understand how* this threat was constructed and what it constitutes, which is also typical of a constructivist approach. I would like to stress that this research does not attempt to make any assessment about Iran’s intentions.

At the outset, I would like to put to the attention of the reader that this research is based only on open-source material as a large portion of the information regarding this topic is classified. I can therefore not be certain that there is no classified information with regard to Iran’s nuclear program that could affect the conclusions of my arguments or conclusions. Furthermore, regarding Chapter III, I have chosen to use the term “Israel lobby” instead of “Jewish lobby” (for example), as these interest groups are defined by their political agenda rather than their religion or ethnicity. Also, even though the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a relevant issue in relation to US-Iranian relations, I will only focus on this aspect as far as it has an impact on the construction of Iran as a threat.

Chapter I - The US and the Iranian Nuclear Threat

“It is very important for the world to take the Iranian threat seriously, which the United States does.” – Former President George Bush (2008)²

Before I start analyzing what the United States has based the “Iranian nuclear threat” on, I will first discuss what US policy towards Iran has been in general and towards the nuclear issue in particular. In Chapter II, I will elaborate further on some of the historic events that are mentioned below.

Introduction

Since the Islamic Revolution and the ousting of the US-supported Shah in 1979, who came to power by a CIA and MI-6 staged coup in 1953, US policy towards Iran took a dramatic shift. From close cooperation and friendship, it soon became a relationship of hostility and confrontation. Now, Iran no longer followed the course that the US wanted it to be on and became an anti-American state. During the hostage crisis, the US decided to cut off all diplomatic relations with the Republic. In 1980, matters worsened as the US decided to support Saddam Hussein in his military invasion of Iran with vast economic and military resources and intelligence, and continued to do so throughout the eight-year Iran-Iraq war.³

² Spetalnik, Matt. “Bush: world must take Iranian threat seriously”. 4 June, 2008. [Reuters](http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN0425258120080604). <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN0425258120080604>> par. 1

³ “Focus: Iran After the Revolution. Timeline: Iran-US Relations”. June 25, 2009. [Al Jazeera](http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/iranaftertherevolution/2009/02/2009249123962551.html). <<http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/iranaftertherevolution/2009/02/2009249123962551.html>> par. 15

The US government wanted to contain the threat of Iran's revolution and ideology being exported to other countries in the Middle East, but at the same time wanted to limit the power of Iraq. To do so, it secretly engaged in a balancing act.⁴ In the mid 80's it became known that the US had made a deal with Iran, selling them arms and providing them with intelligence in exchange for the release of American hostages kidnapped by Hezbollah. The funds were used to support Nicaraguan rebels. This scandal became known as the "Iran-Contra Affair".⁵

US relations and its policy towards Iran

In its engagement with Iran, sanctions have been the main US policy tool. The US started with economic sanctions against Iran by freezing 12 billion dollars in Iranian assets after the hostage crisis began. Though a small part of these assets had later been released, the US has only tightened and expanded economic sanctions since then, especially during the Clinton administration. It was the concern over Iran's nuclear program that had triggered these sanctions; an issue that began to raise concern in the US since the beginning of the '90s, leading President Bill Clinton to sign the Iran-Iraq Arms Non-Proliferation Act in 1992. One year later, Martin Indyk, the special assistant to the President for Near East and South Asian affairs at the National Security Council, formulated the "Dual Containment" policy in order to deal with the threats that Iran and Iraq posed to American interests in the Gulf. He said that the US would no longer "need to depend on one to counter the other" to contain these regimes.⁶ It would now isolate both these countries politically, economically and militarily.

To do so, the US increased and tightened the sanctions on Iran. Clinton issued two Executive Orders in 1995, imposing a trade embargo on Iran, prohibiting all commercial and financial transactions, explaining these were, "(...) additional measures to respond to Iran's continuing support for international terrorism, including support for acts that undermine the Middle East peace process, as well as its intensified efforts to acquire weapons of mass

⁴ Crile, George. "Charlie Wilson's War". 2003. Grove Press, p. 275

⁵ "Focus: Iran After the Revolution. Timeline: Iran-US Relations". June 25, 2009. Al Jazeera. <<http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/iranaftertherevolution/2009/02/2009249123962551.html>> par. 17

⁶ F. Gregory Gause III. "The Illogic of Dual Containment." March/April 1994. Foreign Affairs. Published by the Council on Foreign Relations. <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/49686/f-gregory-gause-iii/the-illogic-of-dual-containment>> par. 3

destruction.”⁷ These matters have since been repeatedly stated as being the main reasons for imposing such sanctions.

The US has also tried to pressure other states in applying the same sanctions to make its measures more effective. After Russia signed a deal with Iran to complete the construction of a nuclear reactor in Bushehr, including training and the delivery of nuclear fuel, the US President tried to convince Russia to cancel the deal.⁸ He was unsuccessful in doing so, as Russia argued that the US was selling similar reactors to North Korea.⁹ In 1996, Clinton attempted to make this a legal obligation, by introducing the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act, which prohibited other states from investing in these countries’ energy sectors. This was later extended by President George W. Bush until 2006. It led the EU and some other states to heavily oppose it as this was an illegal extraterritorial application of US law.¹⁰

One prominent case was when Europe threatened to file a formal complaint at the WTO when the US wanted the \$2 billion dollar deal with the French company Total cancelled in 1997.¹¹ Nonetheless, the US has been relatively successful in pressuring states to withdraw from or not to enter into the business of Iran’s oil and gas sector.¹² In relation to the nuclear issue and the resolutions made by the Security Council more recently, the US has also sought support from the international community to back up the sanctions that these resolutions impose.

Furthermore, the US shows signs of fear that Iran may receive sympathy of other states or align itself with others, undermining its isolation policies; especially if this is in their own hemisphere. A recent example of this is the rapprochement between Iran and Venezuela in recent years. In 2008, the White House responded to this warming of ties, saying that: “Recent attempts by Iran to form loose alliances with anti-U.S. governments in the Western Hemisphere, such as the Venezuelan Government, have further heightened concern about Iran's support for terrorism and nuclear ambitions.”¹³ The US has however not been able to

⁷ Clinton Executive Order Banning Trade with Iran Issued." Executive Order, Letter to Congress, 5 August, 1995. Global Security. <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/1995/950508-390469.htm>> par. 6. Accessed 11 June 2009.

⁸ Blagov, Sergei. “Russia Plays the Iran Card”. 27 February, 2009. ISN, Center for Security Studies (CSS), Zurich. <<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?lng=en&id=97039>> Par 5.

⁹ Tarock, Adam. “US-Iran Relations: heading for confrontation?” 1996. Vol. 17, No. 1. Third World Quarterly, p. 149-150

¹⁰ Katzman, Kenneth. “The Iran-Lybia Sanctions Act” (ILSA). Congressional Research Service (CRS), Library of Congress. <<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/74902.pdf>> p. 3

¹¹ “Shell secures Iranian oil deal.” November 14, 1999. BBC. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/519688.stm>>

¹² “After Total pulls out of Iran gas, Eyes on India.” 25 July 2008. Businessworld. <<http://www.businessworld.in/index.php/Energy-Power/After-Total-Pulls-Out-Of-Iran.html>> par. 3

¹³ “Background Note: Iran.” September 2009. US Department of State. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm>> Last accessed: 3 August 2009. par. 53.

prevent other states, especially anti American ones, from engaging in friendly relations with the Islamic Republic.

When Mohammad Khatami became the President of Iran in 1997, he was willing to engage and improve relations with the US. In response to his more moderate policies, the Clinton administration decided to ease the trade ban on Iran during 1999 and 2000.¹⁴ In the invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11, Iran offered to help the US in their fight against the Taliban, who they had already been fighting for many years. It was in the interest of both countries to have stability there. When the US accepted, Iran provided them with crucial intelligence and funds that helped them overthrow the Taliban. Soon after that, instead of taking this chance to improve relations further, President George W. Bush called Iran part of an “axis of evil”, in his State of the Union Address in 2002, signaling the US had no intention of doing so. He also said that “Iran aggressively pursues these weapons [of mass destruction]”.¹⁵

In addition to that, in 2003, President Bush Jr. declared he would support the Iranian people in their fight against their own Islamic regime.¹⁶ Some have suggested that the US’ ultimate goal was or is regime change in Iran. There is much debate as to whether this is indeed the case, and as this is still unclear, this research will not speculate on the issue. In any case, such comments suggesting regime change were damaging to US-Iran relations and antagonized them further, and as a consequence Khatami’s rapprochement failed.

More recently, particularly since the Bush administration, halting Iran’s nuclear program has become a cornerstone of US foreign policy towards Islamic Republic. After the existence of uranium facilities at Natanz and Arak were confirmed in 2002, the US immediately accused Iran of “across-the-board pursuit of weapons of mass destruction”. Iran then agreed to allow inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).¹⁷ In 2005, the US and several other countries demanded Iran to stop its enrichment activities indefinitely out of concern that Iran had a nuclear weapons program. After the case was referred to the UN in 2006, the US has pushed for several Security Council (SC) resolutions,

¹⁴ Katzman, Kenneth. “The Iran-Lybia Sanctions Act” (ILSA). Congressional Research Service (CRS), Library of Congress. <<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/74902.pdf>> p. 2

¹⁵ “Bush State of the Union address”. January 29, 2002. CNN. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/>> par. 25.

¹⁶ “Bush State of the Union Speech.” January 29, 2003. CNN. <<http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/01/28/sotu.transcript/>>

¹⁷ “Timeline: US-Iran Ties”. Last updated 16 January, 2009. BBC. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3362443.stm> par. 10

demanding that Iran suspends its uranium enrichment.¹⁸ Iran has claimed its program is exclusively for peaceful purposes and that it does not intend to develop nuclear weapons. It has refused to comply with the SC resolutions and points to its legal right to enrich for peaceful purposes under the NPT, of which it is a signatory.¹⁹ This has caused a crisis over how to resolve this issue.

Another important aspect of US policy is its rhetoric towards Iran. It is a very important aspect of its foreign relations, and is a significant indicator of the way it perceives Iran. It could be called rhetoric of exclusion, purposefully painting a picture of Iran as an aggressive, rogue, evil state. It tries to emphasize that Iran is not part of the international community, but an outlaw or “pariah” state. The animosity between them has continuously been fed by hostile and aggressive rhetoric towards one another, going back as far as 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini (then Supreme Leader of Iran) first dubbed the US as the “Great Satan”.²⁰ However, since Bush’ “axis of evil” speech and the heightened tensions surrounding Iran’s program, it has become an increasingly prominent feature of the US attitude towards Iran. The Iranian Foreign Ministry referred to the speech as part of an ongoing psychological and propaganda war.²¹ This rhetoric has only recently changed, for the first time in the history of their relations, with the Presidency of Barack Obama. His *Newroz*²² message delivered at the end of March 2009 was a critical turning point in the rhetoric used by the US in its engagement with Iran.

On the other hand, the recent change in US policy towards Iran since Obama should not be overestimated. Though Obama is at least willing to engage and negotiate with Iran, the actual policy towards Iran so far has not changed much from what it has been for the past 30 years. He said: “If Iran abandons its nuclear program and support for terrorism, we will offer incentives like membership in the World Trade Organization, economic investments, and a move toward normal diplomatic relations. If Iran continues its troubling behavior, we will step up our economic pressure and political isolation.”²³ This refers to the “dual track” approach of both dialogue and sanctions they have now taken towards Iran.

¹⁸ “Q&A: Iran and the Nuclear Issue.” 22 May 2009. BBC.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4031603.stm> par 14.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Haynes, Deborah. “Great Satan sits down with the Axis of Evil.” May 29 2007. The Times.
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article1851791.ece> par. 16

²¹ Shuja, Sharif. “America’s confrontation with Iran”. Summer 2007/ 2008. No. 75. National Observer (Council for the National Interest, Melbourne). p. 58

²² Newroz is the Persian New Year, which is marked on the 21st of March.

²³ “United States policy toward Iran: a Dossier.” US Embassy Brussels.
<<http://www.uspolicy.be/issues/iran/iran.asp>> par. 2

The State Department currently indicates the following to be the main issues between Iran and the US:

Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction;
Its support for and involvement in international terrorism;
Its support for violent opposition to the Middle East peace process, as well as its harmful activities particularly in Lebanon, as well as in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the region;
And its dismal human rights record and lack of respect for its own people.²⁴

The US has alleged that Iran is supporting insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, though Iran has denied these claims and several Afghan government officials, including President Karzai, have stated that Iran plays a positive role in the region.²⁵ In addition, the US refers to Iran as a terrorist sponsor due to its support for Hamas and Hezbollah, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The US' policy towards Iran since the Islamic Revolution has been characterized by the use of sanctions in order to achieve economic, political and military isolation, meant to hurt Iran's economy, weaken its strength and influence in the region, and to put political pressure on the regime. The rhetoric of exclusion has been used as a tool to politically isolate Iran by labeling it as an outlaw and rogue state. Its policies of containment and isolation also aim to punish Iran for its behavior on the aforementioned issues as identified by the State Department, most importantly as far as the nuclear issue is concerned. In 2007, former Vice President Dick Cheney promised "serious consequences" if the government in Tehran did not abandon its nuclear program.²⁶

Since the 1990's, the US has warned of the "Iranian threat". It was referred to increasingly and became a priority issue in US policy particularly after President Bush took office. The US believes that Iran is intent on building nuclear weapons and sees this as not only a threat to itself or the region, but to the entire world. President Bush went as far as

²⁴ "Cheney: Iran faces 'serious consequences' over nuclear drive". 21 October, 2007. AFP. <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5heE937QM6QzE9T5U7wFrft0XfTmA> par. 54.

²⁵ Shuja, Sharif. "America's confrontation with Iran". Summer 2007/ 2008. No. 75. National Observer (Council for the National Interest, Melbourne). p. 58

²⁶ "Cheney: Iran faces 'serious consequences' over nuclear drive". 21 October, 2007. AFP. <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5heE937QM6QzE9T5U7wFrft0XfTmA>

saying: “I’ve told people that, if you’re interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing [Iran] from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon”, suggesting that merely having the knowledge would lead to such an outcome.²⁷

The US has gone even further by considering the use of military force against Iran, with many within the US government such as Dick Cheney advocating this option, giving rise to many questions and debates about the potential consequences.²⁸ When asked whether this was a possibility, the US government officials repeatedly responded by saying that “all options are on the table”, though denying they are planning such an attack.²⁹ Israel has also stated the former quote and made clear it would not rule out the option of attacking Iran preemptively to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons. On this last point I will elaborate further in Chapter 3.

Moreover, the US has been willing to put its relations with Russia on the line to counter this Iranian threat. Its consideration of a military option and its plans to station a missile defense system in Eastern Europe to counter Iranian ballistic missiles and a possible nuclear threat, significantly soured relations with Russia.³⁰ Russia’s leaders have continued to warn the US not to consider this military strike and have said they have seen no “objective data” to prove Western claims that Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons.³¹ Yet, the US maintains that Iran continues to endanger the security of the world.³² In order to understand the “Iranian nuclear threat” it is important to analyze how the US sees this threat and on what it has based this characterization on.

²⁷ Spetalnick, Matt. “Bush: Threat of World War III If Iran goes Nuclear.” 17 October, 2007. Reuters. <<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N17329743.htm>>

²⁸ Shuja, Sharif. “America’s confrontation with Iran”. Summer 2007/ 2008. No. 75. National Observer (Council for the National Interest, Melbourne). p. 54

²⁹ “Bush warns Iran of all options.” 11 June, 2008. BBC. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE50S7DI20090129>> par. 1

³⁰ “Q&A: US Missile Defense.” 20 September, 2009. BBC. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6720153.stm>> par. 2-3

³¹ Isachenkov, Vladimir. “Putin shrugs off ‘death plot’ reports to visit Iran.” 16 October, 2007. The Independent. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/putin-shrugs-off-death-plot-reports-to-visit-iran-396973.html>> par. 11

³² Montopoli, Brian. “Obama: World is United over Iran Threat.” 25 September, 2009. CBS News. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2009/09/25/politics/politicalhotsheet/entry5340628.shtml>> par. 6

The Nature of Iran's Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear program has been labeled as a threat by the United States because those in power are convinced Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons, often even referring to Iran's nuclear *weapons* program. To achieve a better understanding of this claim, I will first discuss in depth what the US has so far asserted about Iran's nuclear program and what it argues leads it to draw the conclusion that Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons.

In order to examine these claims, they will be compared and supplemented with all the available and dependable information on Iran's nuclear program. This means the majority of references will be made to the IAEA, as it is the highest authority and relatively the most trustworthy source for information on Iran's nuclear program. I do not attempt to assess Iran's true intentions, but instead try to understand what has made the US come to the conclusion that its intentions are to obtain nuclear weapons. To do so, I will first focus on US intelligence concerning Iran's nuclear program, and subsequently critically examine the arguments it has made in support of its claim.

First, it is important to note that statements on the status of Iran's nuclear program have not been consistent, with significant discrepancies in the views expressed by US government officials and also in comparison with the assessments made by its intelligence agencies. Opinions differ on whether Iran currently has a nuclear weapons program or is developing nuclear weapons, and these opinions have also changed over time. Yet despite these differences, they all seem to agree that Iran has the intention to develop nuclear weapons. Therefore this will be the central claim I will be examining.

Second, it is important to briefly mention a few technical matters to understand some of the information and discussions below. There are two materials with which you can make a nuclear weapon: uranium and plutonium. In the case of Iran, the US is most concerned about its uranium enrichment. That would need to be enriched to about 90% in order to be usable for a weapon; this is Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU). For nuclear energy purposes, uranium needs to be enriched only to around 3 or 4%, being Low Enriched Uranium (LEU).³³

³³ Kemp, R. Scott, and Glaser, Alexander. "Statement on Iran's ability to make a nuclear weapon and the significance of the 19 February 2009 IAEA report on Iran's uranium enrichment program". 2 March, 2002. Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University. <<http://www.princeton.edu/~rskemp/can-iran-make-a-bomb.pdf>> p. 1

The US intelligence community

Already in 1995, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said that the US knew that since the 1980's, Iran had an "organized structure dedicated to acquiring and developing nuclear weapons", and said this was based simply on "a wide variety of data".³⁴ In the 1990's, the IAEA, which was already conducting inspections in Iran, called on the USA to share its intelligence in order for its officials to be able to visit those areas in Iran claimed by Washington to harbor a covert operation, but the latter did not do so.³⁵

After undeclared enrichment facilities were found in 2003, it significantly raised concerns on Iran's nuclear program. It was up to the IAEA to inspect and verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material at these facilities.³⁶ There were several matters of concern, the first of which being that Iran had not reported these facilities and their related programs to the IAEA, finding them in breach of the NPT Safeguards Agreement. Second, the IAEA expressed grave concern over the fact that Iran had enriched uranium and separated plutonium in these undeclared facilities.³⁷ Iran's response was positive, granting the IAEA access to these sites, deciding "voluntarily to suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities", and voluntarily signing the Additional Protocol of the NPT to allow for a stricter verification system.³⁸ Yet the matter was enough for the US to step up its rhetoric on Iran.

In 2005, the US claimed it had found evidence of military studies conducted by Iran on a laptop computer, and briefed the IAEA and several other countries on the contents. However, Iran claimed these studies were fake, as they had no markings or seals. Due to the dispute over the authenticity of these documents, the DG asked for the supposed originals to be given to the IAEA to resolve the matter, but the US has not done so (while one would expect otherwise). The IAEA has refrained from making any judgment on whether Iran had

³⁴ "Press Briefing by Secretary of State Warren Christopher on the President's Executive Order on Iran". 1 May, 1995. Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State.

<<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/briefing/dossec/1995/9505/950501dossec.html>> par. 14

³⁵ Tarock, Adam. "US-Iran Relations: heading for confrontation?" 1996. Vol. 17, No. 1. *Third World Quarterly*. p. 150

³⁶ Director General of the IAEA. "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran". 19 November, 2008. *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*. p. 4

³⁷ Board of Governors. "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran". Resolution by IAEA board 26 Nov 2003. *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*. p. 2

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 3

actually done these studies or not as they remained disputed, but has made clear that in any case there had been no use of nuclear material in connection with these alleged studies.³⁹

The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of 2005, which is made by the National Intelligence Council and represents the consensus among the US' intelligence agencies, judged with high confidence that "Iran currently is determined to develop nuclear weapons".⁴⁰ Moreover, the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) concluded that Iran was "devoting significant resources to its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs" and was likely to continue these programs.⁴¹ Yet, this contradicted the findings of the IAEA, which disagreed with the contents of these reports and stated it had not yet found any evidence of a nuclear weapon program.

The latest NIE report (of 2007) was a surprise to many, as on the matter of Iran having a nuclear weapons program, it basically concluded the opposite from the previous US intelligence assessment, stating that: "We assess with high confidence that *until fall 2003*, Iranian military entities were working under government direction to develop nuclear weapons" [emphasis mine].⁴² It suggested that the US had now found evidence for such a program, but that Iran did not pursue these weapons as aggressively as the Bush administration had claimed. Furthermore, it also changed the assessment on the matter of Tehran's intentions. Whereas in 2005 US intelligence agencies judged Tehran to be determined to develop such weapons, they now assessed that they "do not know whether it *currently* intends to develop nuclear weapons"[emphasis mine].⁴³

However, it is crucial to be highly critical of the 2007 NIE and the US intelligence reports in general for several reasons. First, one should be careful about drawing further conclusions from the 2007 NIE, because its conclusions provide no solid basis for an argument and can be interpreted in many different ways. Its judgment that Iran had a nuclear weapons program until 2003 has been used by people with opposite views on Iran and its nuclear program to back up their arguments. Senator Harry Reid described the assessment as "directly challenging some of this administration's alarming rhetoric about the threat posed

³⁹ Varadarajan, Siddharth. "Language of Force is Not Helpful on Iran Issue." 3 October, 2009. The Hindu. <<http://www.hindu.com/2009/10/03/stories/2009100355310900.htm>> par. 9

Office of the Director of National Intelligence. "National Intelligence Estimate - Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities". November 2007. National Intelligence Council. p. 9

⁴¹ Vice Admiral Lowell E. Jacoby (U.S. Navy Director). "Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States". Statement For the Record Senate Armed Services Committee 17 March 2005. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). <<http://www.dia.mil/publicaffairs/Testimonies/statement17.html>> p. 9

⁴² Office of the Director of National Intelligence. "National Intelligence Estimate - Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities". November 2007. National Intelligence Council. p. 6

⁴³ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. "National Intelligence Estimate - Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities". November 2007. National Intelligence Council. p. 6

by Iran”, immediately urging the administration to adjust its policies and rhetoric accordingly.⁴⁴ On the other hand, some people, including the National Security Advisor, Mr. Hadley, have interpreted the report as a confirmation the US was right to be concerned about Iran wanting to develop nuclear weapons, seeing it as an affirmation of the claims the US had previously made.⁴⁵

Second, the 2007 estimate seems to have tried to mislead people by defining Iran’s “nuclear weapons program” in the following way in the footnotes of the report: “For the purposes of this Estimate, by ‘nuclear weapons program’ we mean Iran’s nuclear weapon design and weaponization work and covert uranium conversion-related and uranium enrichment-related work; we do not mean Iran’s declared civil work related to uranium conversion and enrichment.”⁴⁶ The phrasing strongly suggests that the first point refers to the alleged military studies the US presented to the IAEA in 2005 (of which the authenticity is seriously disputed), and that the second point pertains to the undeclared uranium related activities discovered in 2003, which have all been clarified by the IAEA (and the Agency has verified no diversion for military purposes related to these activities).⁴⁷

This means that the US bases its claim of Iran having had a nuclear weapons program until 2003 on matters that in fact do not constitute proof of such a program. It misled people to believe that this new judgment of the NIE was founded on new, reliable intelligence information that for the first time constituted proof of such a program ever existing; yet this definition reveals the contrary. US intelligence was also presented misleadingly in the case of Iraq. It is also worth mentioning that the stated definition was placed in the footnotes instead of in the main text. When stating this claim or quoting this latest report, it is obvious that others (states, media, academics, public opinion) will understand “nuclear weapons program” as something completely different than the way it was defined in the NIE.

Moreover, the IAEA has been critical of US intelligence reports’ claims that Iran had or has a nuclear weapons program, *including* the judgments of the 2007 NIE, as it has seen no proof that Iran had a nuclear weapons program at any time. It has caused the IAEA, and its DG in particular, to be pressured and criticized for this by the US. He was also DG during the Iraq case, when the IAEA found no evidence of weapons of mass destruction there either. In

⁴⁴ Mazetti, Mark. “US says Iran Ended Atomic Arms Work”. 3 December, 2007. New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/03/world/middleeast/03cnd-iran.html>

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. “National Intelligence Estimate - Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities”. November 2007. National Intelligence Council. p. 6

⁴⁷ Varadarajan, Siddharth. “Language of Force is Not Helpful on Iran Issue.” Oct 03, 2009. The Hindu. <http://www.hindu.com/2009/10/03/stories/2009100355310900.htm> par 6-7

an interview in February 2009, El-Baradei warned that the Agency should not be regarded as a broker for one country, and the interviewer asked him whether he thought this was what the US wanted it to do, to which he responded:

“They did not like that we said we haven’t seen Iran developing nuclear weapons in 2003. (...) We have been vindicated in Iran, we have been vindicated in Iraq before. We are not beating our chests and saying, ‘We were right, and they were wrong.’ They need to understand that we have to continue to report on what we see.”⁴⁸

Here, the Director General indicates that even though it has been under a great amount of pressure from the US, it has not succumbed to this pressure, but has tried to remain impartial, at the cost of running counter to the point of view taken by the White House. As the latter put it: “What they don’t like is they say I speak outside of the box”.⁴⁹

As a result, the US has been critical of El-Baradei and often disregarded the IAEA’s findings. What is more, former US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, who was of the opinion that the latest NIE has given Iran free reign to proceed unmolested towards a nuclear weapons capability, organized a campaign against El-Baradei’s reelection in 2004. He failed as no country was willing to stand against him.⁵⁰

Lastly, previous US intelligence assessments on Iran’s nuclear capabilities have shown to be incorrect before. There has been a long history of the United States assessing Iran’s capabilities to produce a nuclear weapon to be very near in the future. Since 1995, US officials continuously judged Iran to be “within five years” of acquiring the fissile material to make a nuclear weapon. So far, this has proven not to be the case. The assessment only changed in 2005, when they estimated it unlikely that Iran would reach this capability “before early to mid-next decade”, 10 years from then.⁵¹ The latest NIE of 2007 judged that Iran probably would be able of producing enough HEU for a weapon sometime between 2010 and 2015.

⁴⁸ Weymouth, Lally. “A Conversation with Mohamed El-Baradei”. 1 February, 2009. Transcripts of Interviews (original from Washington Post), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). <<http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Transcripts/2009/wp010209.html>> par 28-33

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Levy, Daniel. “John Bolton Compares Israel to North Korea”. 25 January, 2008. *Prospects for Peace*. <http://www.prospectsforpeace.com/2008/01/john_bolton_compares_israel_to.html> par. 9

⁵¹ Linzer, Dafna. “Iran Is Judged 10 Years From Nuclear Bomb: U.S. Intelligence Review Contrasts With Administration Statements”. 2 August, 2005. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/01/AR2005080101453_pf.html>

All the above estimates pertain to assessing when Iran would have a sufficient amount of enriched uranium necessary for an atomic weapon (also referred to as fissile material), and not to when it would actually have such a weapon, or be able to produce these on an industrial scale. Also, these estimates do not refer to the amount of plutonium, which can also be used to make nuclear weapons. On that, the latest NIE has stated with high confidence that Iran will not be able to produce enough plutonium for a weapon before 2015.⁵² The DG of the IAEA said that he believes “they are still far away” from acquiring enough fissile material for a bomb (thus even further from achieving an industrial production capacity). Theoretically, if 3000 centrifuges would be running smoothly for about a year, it could reach this capability, yet he stressed that “we need to remember [that] as long as (...) they have 3,000 [centrifuges], as long as these 3,000 are under [NPT] safeguards, they cannot go beyond five per cent [enrichment], people forget that... it’s really a risk assessment more of tomorrow more than it is of today.”⁵³ This is why he believes it is difficult to judge when Iran would have sufficient material in any case.

The US line of Argument

US officials have not only based their assessment of Iran being a threat on their intelligence, they often also refer to other factors to argue this case. These arguments stem from the US’ interpretation of Iran’s actions through a paradigm of enmity and have become part of the prevailing discourse on Iran, which will be examined more closely in Chapter II. The main argument that US government officials have brought up in light of supporting the Iranian threat is that Iran intends to acquire nuclear weapons.

It argues that it is suspicious that an oil-rich country such as Iran would need nuclear energy, and that it must therefore be pursuing nuclear weapons. This is a particularly interesting point, as the US had a completely different opinion on this matter before 1979.⁵⁴ Henry Kissinger, who now uses the same argument when asked about Iran, said in 1975: “Of course Iran has to develop nuclear energy. It cannot rely upon its oil resources.”⁵⁵ When

⁵² Office of the Director of National Intelligence. “National Intelligence Estimate - Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities”. November 2007. [National Intelligence Council](#). p. 8

⁵³ Dombey, Daniel. “FT interview: Mohamed ElBaradei”. 19 February, 2009. [Financial Times](#). <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d229a13c-c056-11db-995a-000b5df10621.html?nclick_check=1> par. 52

⁵⁴ Kissinger, Henry. A. “National Security Decision Memorandum 292”. 22 April, 1975. National Security Decision Memoranda and Study Memoranda, [Gerald R. Ford Library](#). Last Updated: Monday, August 31, 1998. <<http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/DOCUMENT/NSDMNSSM/nsdm292a.htm>> p. 1

⁵⁵ Ghoshroy, Subrata. “Chomsky: The majority of the world supports Iran”. 3 October, 2008. <http://www.alternet.org/world/101290/chomsky:_%22the_majority_of_the_world_supports_iran%22/> par 6

asked about his drastic change of opinion, he explained: “They were an ally then (...). We didn't address the question of them one day moving toward nuclear weapons”.⁵⁶ Iran has crude oil but no refineries (these were destroyed during the Iran-Iraq war) and the sanctions have prevented investments in Iran's oil and gas sector, resulting in the need for them to import their own oil for domestic consumption. It would be much more profitable for Iran to export its oil and gas, especially considering its immense population growth.

At the time of the Shah, US experts advised Iran that it needed to diversify its energy resources to meet the demands of its growing population.⁵⁷ Moreover, when Iran's atomic energy program was launched in 1976 under the Shah, Iran had major contracts with Western companies such as the Kraftwerk Union, a German company, to build nuclear power plants in Iran.”⁵⁸ It is also ironic that the US is now making so much noise over issues concerning uranium enrichment, while in 1974, Iran signed provisional contracts with the United States to provide for enriched fuel for eight reactors as it planned to build a uranium enrichment plant.⁵⁹ Moreover, the two countries were negotiating an agreement to permit the sale of enriched fuel at levels desired by the Shah.⁶⁰

This leads to another argument that the US often bases its claim on, which is that Iran had a covert nuclear program for 18 years, indicating they were engaging in suspicious activities to cover up their ambitions for nuclear weapons. However, the implicit suggestion that the world was unaware of Iran's pursuit to acquire uranium enrichment technology for its nuclear energy program is incorrect. To be precise, the IAEA found in 2003 that Iran had not disclosed significant parts of its nuclear program relating to uranium enrichment. It did not discover that Iran was seeking to acquire and apply these technologies (as this was already known), but found that Iran had already engaged in certain activities related to enrichment at facilities without declaring them to the IAEA.

Iran had overtly been seeking to acquire these technologies for many years, of which the US and other countries were well aware. One example of this is when in 1985, Iran

⁵⁶ Linzer, Dafna. “Past Arguments Don't Square With Current Iran Policy.” March 27, 2005. Washington Post. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A3983-2005Mar26.html>> par. 24

⁵⁷ Ibid, par. 17

⁵⁸ Tarock, Adam. “US-Iran Relations: heading for confrontation?” 1996. Vol. 17, No. 1. Third World Quarterly. p. 157

⁵⁹ “US-Iran Joint Statement,” Unclassified Briefing Paper. 3 November 1974. Digital National Security Archive. <<http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com>>.

⁶⁰ Alfred L. Atherton, “Strategy for your visit to Iran”. Confidential Department of State Briefing Memorandum. 20 October, 1974. Digital National Security Archive. <<http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com>>

signed a deal with Argentina which would supply Iran with 20% enriched uranium (HEU), which was permitted by the IAEA at the time.⁶¹

The US was first of all aware not only because it was actually prepared to provide Iran with enriched uranium and build its facilities as previously mentioned, but also because after 1979 it has put a considerable effort into preventing other countries from dealing with Iran in relation to such matters. It has done so by putting significant pressure on countries whenever Iran legally tried to purchase items such as centrifuges (as in one case was for medical use). Iran explained that it was the US pressure on foreign companies, the sanctions it imposed and the threats it exerted that eventually caused them to buy the centrifuges and technology on the black market.⁶²

Lastly, the assumption that Iran's nuclear program was completely covert for 18 years would suggest that the information of the US intelligence on Iran's nuclear program is truly limited as the US would have been unaware of it all this time. Moreover, it would also suggest that its judgments of Iran pursuing nuclear weapons prior to the IAEA discovery were founded on something completely different in any case.

Furthermore, in arguing that Iran pursues nuclear weapons, the US has suggested that Iran is interested in doing so because it is surrounded by nuclear weapon states (Israel, Pakistan, Russia), and feels the need to deter Israel in order to secure itself. However, this actually runs counter to Iranian interests, as explained by the former Iranian ambassador to the UN, Javad Zarif. He said that Iran realizes that possessing nuclear weapons would create an arms-race in the region, which would in turn deplete Iran's already very limited economic resources and enable its neighbors in the region to acquire "more sophisticated weapons from far better sources" (obviously referring to Israel's nuclear weapons arsenal and its military support from the US).⁶³

Iran knows this would alienate its Arab neighbors, who might feel threatened and align with US as a consequence, and it would increase the chance of more permanent US bases in the region, strengthening the US' regional position and undermining Iranian influence. These outcomes would not make Iran feel more secure, and render a possible

⁶¹Walrond, Christina. "Timeline 1967-1993: Argentine Low-Enriched Uranium at Tehran Research Reactor". 7 October, 2009. [Institute for Science and International Security \(ISIS\)](http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Tehran_reactor_timeline.pdf).

<http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Tehran_reactor_timeline.pdf> p. 1

⁶²Zarif, Javad. "Iran, the West, and the Nuclear Issue". 17 October, 2005. Online video clip. Youtube. Lecture at Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs. Ambassadors Forum series. Accessed on December 12 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQEHVxduEIM&feature=Playlist&p=C7D50668B6237CBC&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=40>

⁶³Ibid

attempt to secure its position in the region as counterproductive, leading Iran to conclude that the costs are higher than the benefits.

Moreover, he argues that even if it possessed nuclear weapons, there is no reason to believe that Iran would use them, as it has no reason to attack another country, with either conventional or nuclear weapons, because it has no aggressive ambitions.⁶⁴ It has not initiated a war or threatened another country with the use of force for several hundred years. This contradicts the US' argument that Iran "aggressively pursues these weapons" and seeks to destabilize the region.⁶⁵

He also pointed out that if Iran ever decided to develop nuclear weapons, it would expose itself to military intervention, and like any other country, Iran is not interested in inviting such an attack, nor mutual assured destruction.⁶⁶ It not only demonstrates that Iran's leaders are rational (although both the US and Israel have argued the opposite), but also shows that there are many reasons to believe that Iran does not intend to develop nuclear weapons. This puts significant question marks behind the key US' assumption that Iran is seeking to obtain these weapons.

Another argument the US has put forth with regard to Iran's program is that it is breaching its international obligations. The DG said in October 2009 that "the only time we found Iran in breach of its obligations not to use undeclared nuclear material was when they had experimented in 2003 and 2004 at Kalaye". He added that these were experiments, and that all these outstanding issues have since been clarified, having achieved considerable progress.⁶⁷ Furthermore, while the US keeps pressing Iran to abide by the SC resolutions (to end enrichment), it is important to keep in mind that the Security Council referral was based on these very issues that have since been settled.

In September 2009, another previously unknown nuclear enrichment facility, the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant, was revealed, located near the Iranian city of Qom. It was

⁶⁴ Zarif, Javad. "Iran, the West, and the Nuclear Issue". 17 October, 2005. Online video clip. Youtube. Lecture at Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs. Ambassadors Forum series. Accessed on December 12 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQEHVxduEIM&feature=PlayList&p=C7D50668B6237CBC&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=40>

⁶⁵ "Bush State of the Union address". January 29, 2002. CNN.
<<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/>> par. 25

⁶⁶ Zarif, Javad. "Iran, the West, and the Nuclear Issue". 17 October, 2005. Online video clip. Youtube. Lecture at Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs. Ambassadors Forum series. Accessed on December 12 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQEHVxduEIM&feature=PlayList&p=C7D50668B6237CBC&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=40>

⁶⁷ Varadarajan, Siddharth. "Language of Force is Not Helpful on Iran Issue." 3 October, 2009. The Hindu.
<<http://www.hindu.com/2009/10/03/stories/2009100355310900.htm>> par 6-7

declared by Iran to the IAEA a few days before the US was reportedly going to present this at the G8 summit. El-Baradei said Iran violated its obligations under the NPT by not reporting the existence of the facility to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the international community, which it should have done as soon as it planned the construction.⁶⁸ Yet immediately after its disclosure, Iran cooperated extensively with the IAEA, letting inspectors visit the site within a few weeks, and offering detailed design information, which revealed the facility to be in its early stages of construction. “There is no equipment, there is no nuclear material,” El-Baradei said.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the concerns over its nuclear program increased and the nuclear row intensified. The IAEA soon after issued a report stating that “Iran's declaration of the new facility reduces the level of confidence in the absence of other nuclear facilities under construction and gives rise to questions about whether there were any other nuclear facilities in Iran which had not been declared to the agency”, although after inspecting the facility, it was able to verify that all the information provided by Iran on the facility was correct and that no nuclear material had been introduced.⁷⁰ Iran claims it kept the facility a secret because it was meant as a defense to protect their technology in case its other facilities were bombed, after the threats of military strikes against its nuclear facilities by Israel and the US started to increase, explaining the relatively small size of the facility.⁷¹

In order to decrease suspicion and mistrust and ease the environment, the Director-General came up with a proposal low-enriched uranium from Iran to be shipped outside the country, to Russia and France, to be converted into fuel rods, after which the fuel would return to Iran for use at the Tehran research reactor that produces isotopes for medical treatments.⁷² However, after seriously considering the deal, Iran decided to reject it as it did not agree with the fact that the fuel would only be returned by the end of 2010. Rather than signing this draft agreement, Iran has rejected it in November and proposed a counter offer a month later for the deal to be a simultaneous swap, shipping out low-enriched uranium for a simultaneous return of more enriched material from Russia and France. In December 2009,

⁶⁸ Amanpour, Christiane. “U.N. head: Timing Key to Nuclear Deal”. 5 November, 2009. CNN. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/05/un.iaea/index.html>> par. 21-22

⁶⁹ *Ibid*

⁷⁰ El-Baradei. Report by the Director General: “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran.” 27 November 2009. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). p. 4

⁷¹ Amanpour, Christiane. “U.N. head: Timing Key to Nuclear Deal”. 5 November, 2009. CNN. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/05/un.iaea/index.html>> par. 23-24

⁷² “Report: Iran will not ship uranium out of the country”. 7 November, 2009. CNN. <<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/07/iran.uranium.shipment/index.html>> par 1-5

the spokesman for Barack Obama, Robert Gibbs, said that Iran would face further sanctions if it does not abandon its enrichment activities and forsake its “nuclear weapons program”.⁷³

Conclusion

Considering the above examination of US arguments it can be concluded that the US has based its claim that Iran pursues nuclear weapons (or has a nuclear weapons program) on disputed intelligence and assumptions. Several critical issues were discussed which have cast serious doubts on the intelligence assessments of the United States. Disagreement with the IAEA over the nature of Iran’s program is also a serious issue and strongly reminiscent to the case of Iraq. In hindsight, it seems US intelligence on Iraq was either wrong or was abused to mislead for political purposes. Though still lacking a clear answer on this point, it also casts doubt on the reliability of US intelligence as a source in the Iran case.

Furthermore, many arguments used in the case against Iran clearly appear to be based on ill-founded assumptions. Commenting on the US intelligence reports and the criticism of the US that he was being too soft on Iran, Dr. El-Baradei was critical of the arguments the US has put forward, saying: “If you look at their intelligence, they are all over the place, right now. I mean, the US says Iran did some weaponization studies, they stopped in 2003. Other are saying ‘Iran never stopped’, others are saying ‘Iran has resumed weaponization’. Well, that does not give me trust (...). I don’t go on the basis of assumptions or jumping the gun. I go on the basis of facts”.⁷⁴

In addition, there has also been a switch of the burden of proof. Iran has to prove it does not have nuclear weapons, while the actual burden should be on the US, which has claimed Iran had such a program in the first place. It is an almost impossible task to provide evidence of something if it is not there; especially in this case. Susan Rice, the American ambassador to the UN, said that Iran had to “prove to our satisfaction that their program is for peaceful purposes and open up their facilities to inspections, [and] freeze their uranium enrichment program (...) or face real pressure and consequences.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Dougherty, Jill. “Iran ‘ready to swap uranium for fuel’”. 13 December, 2009. CNN. <<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/12/13/iran.nuclear/index.html>>

⁷⁴ “IAEA Director General Mohammed El Baradei talks with Eugen Freund”. 15 October, 2009. Online video clip. Youtube. ORF, Austrian TV. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQ8q532CszY>>

⁷⁵ Sanger, David. E. and Nazila Fathi. “Iran agrees to allow inspectors on Oct. 25.” 4 October, 2009. The New York Times. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/05/world/middleeast/05nuke.html>> par. 13

Notwithstanding that the US claims about Iran's nuclear program were not found to be based on evidence, it is important to recognize that it is very difficult and highly unlikely that the IAEA will find evidence if it exists. Experts say that uranium or plutonium hemispheres are the only two unambiguous objects that present unquestionable proof of a nuclear weapons program, and that these are small and easily hidden.⁷⁶

With the unlikelihood of finding evidence (and the lack of evidence until now), this means that it largely comes down to assessing Iran's intentions. Such an assessment is inherently subject to interpretations, which are often motivated by the political interests of the states concerned. The way a state interprets another state's actions is also highly dependent of the way it perceives that state. Therefore, the way the US perceives Iran through a paradigm of enmity resulting from a legacy of animosity and distrust will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁷⁶ James M. Acton. "Nuclear Mind Reading." Lecture at New America Foundation. 9 April, 2008. Online video clip. Youtube, New America Foundation Channel. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zN5aA-i4nXU>> Last accessed on: 12 December, 2009.

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Chapter II - The US and the Construction of the Iranian Threat

“(...) [H]ave no doubt: Iran possessing nuclear weapons will be a major threat to us and to the region. (...) they're in the process of developing it. And I don't think that's disputed by any expert. They are the largest state sponsor of terrorism. (...) I think it is important for us to (...) recognize that if we have nuclear proliferators around the world that potentially can place a nuclear weapon into the hands of terrorists, that is a profound security threat for America, and one that we have to take seriously.”⁷⁷ – Presidential Candidate Barack Obama (2007)

Introduction

As the previous chapter has shown, the claims and arguments that the US has presented as rational and truthful appear to be ill-founded and at times even in contradiction with history. Yet, its insistence on these claims raises the question of why it continues to do so despite a lack of (factual) foundation. To shed more light on this the matter of assessing Iran's intentions or the threat it poses, it is necessary to take a critical and interpretative approach towards the problem. Therefore, I will use a Social Constructivist approach to explore the significance of the way the US perceives Iran and subsequently how the concept of an “Iranian (nuclear) threat” has been constructed. To do so I will discuss the effect of the

⁷⁷ Shields, Mark and David Brooks. “Democratic Presidential Candidates Debate War, Terrorism”. 27 April, 2007. PBS. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june07/demdebate_04-27.html> par. 12-18

grievances of the US towards Iran, the way the US has securitized the issue, and the distrust and animosity that have ensued.

One of the main assumptions of constructivism is that the structure of international politics is defined by both material and normative elements, with the latter pertaining to ideas, norms and rules that are socially and culturally produced.⁷⁸ Such an international normative structure or environment also shapes the identities and interests of states, which are the agents that through their practices and interactions re-create that very structure. Essentially, agents and structures are mutually constitutive.⁷⁹ Sometimes, actors will reproduce these ideas, norms and practices without thought, but other times they self-consciously try to construct new ones that can change the very structure itself.⁸⁰ Through these two processes and in interaction with other actors, the reproduction of the structure can also be self-reinforcing. The first dynamic, in which the structure is unconsciously reproduced, will come to the fore when discussing the *paradigm of enmity*, and the second dynamic, in which the agent consciously changes the structure, will be explained through the *securitization* of Iran by the US.

Paradigm of Enmity

A state defines its national interest through the way it identifies itself and others, on what it believes is appropriate action, and the way it interprets other states' actions. As constructivist scholars Jepperson, Katzenstein and Wendt describe it,

The concept of “identity” (...) functions as a crucial link between environmental structures and interests. (...) [i]t refers to the images of individuality and distinctiveness (...) held and projected by an actor and formed (and modified over time) through relations with significant “others”. Thus the term (...) [refers to] mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Baylis, John and Steven Smith. “The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations”. 2006, 3rd ed. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 254-260

⁷⁹ Bretherton, Charlotte and John Vogler. “The European Union as a Global Actor”. 2006. 2nd ed. 1999. Routledge. p. 21-22

⁸⁰ Baylis, John and Steven Smith. “The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations”. 2006, 3rd ed. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 255-260

⁸¹ Katzenstein, Peter J. ed. “The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics”. 1996. Columbia University Press. p. 59

The US interprets Iran's actions and behavior in a particular way due to the way it perceives Iran in relation to itself. Even though the US perception of Iran is constantly changing and flexible, there are several elements that can be said to characterize this perception, some of which were discussed in Chapter I. The US perceives Iran to be a hostile, radical Islamist, undemocratic country that is not part of the international community and has a repressive theocratic regime of irrational mullahs that aim to export their ideology and obstruct the interests of the US and its allies in the region. Iran is seen to hold norms and values contrary to those of the United States, leading the latter to view Iran as "other" in relation to its identity of "self". This exclusive identity is also reflected by America's rhetoric of exclusion, describing Iran as a rogue, pariah, or outlaw state.

Similarly, Iran views the United States as a belligerent imperialist power that aims to exploit and dominate Iran and the world, which has brought nothing but instability to the region by its interference.⁸² Both the representations by the US and Iran of each other are embedded in a "**paradigm of enmity**",⁸³ in which each identifies the other as its evil adversary. The inter-subjective perceptions in this paradigm have been strengthened and reproduced over time and have contributed considerably to the growing animosity and distrust between the two countries. Due to this perception and through this paradigm, the US has interpreted Iran's behavior in a particular way; usually as hostile, suspicious, or of bad intentions.

As pointed out by constructivist scholar Jutta Weldes⁸⁴, there is indeed often only one interpretation or characterization that prevails in the assessment of a state's actions, even though there may be alternative competing constructions, examples of which will be given below.⁸⁵ The prevailing construction or narrative on Iran's nuclear program is that Iran is secretly trying to build nuclear weapons and that Ahmadinejad's anti-Israel statements (among others) make it too dangerous to allow this to happen, seeing it as an imminent threat

⁸² Sharifi, Majid. "Imagined enemies: US-Iran Relations." 17-22 March, 2008. University of Florida Department of Political Science.

<http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/2/0/3/pages252035/p252035-4.php> p.5

⁸³ Although it is used and defined differently in this research, the term "paradigm of enmity" was inspired by the words of Dr. Trita Parsi, which he used (among others) in the following article: Parsi, Trita. "Long Division". 10 September, 2007. The American Conservative. <<http://www.amconmag.com/article/2007/sep/10/00015/>> par. 6. Dr. Trita Parsi is founder and president of the National Iranian American Council and an expert on US-Iranian relations, Iranian politics, and the balance of power in the Middle East. He is the author of *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States* (Yale University Press 2007).

⁸⁴ Constructivist scholar; one of her most prominent works: Weldes, Jutta, Laffey, Mark, et al (eds). "Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger." This work looks at how the construction of discourses of insecurity produce the identities of political actors and vice versa.

⁸⁵ Collins, Alan. "Contemporary Security Studies". 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 137

to Israel and the US.⁸⁶ As Weldes explains it, “Rather than being self-evident, (...) threats and states’ national interests in the face of threats, are fundamentally matters of interpretation.”⁸⁷ It has become clear in Chapter I that this dominant interpretation of Iran’s behavior and its underlying assumptions were not supported by facts. From a constructivist perspective, these have been shaped by the US’ subjective ideas about Iran which have created the paradigm of enmity through which these ideas and the dominant narrative have been reinforced over time. Alternative interpretations have been marginalized by these prior inter-subjective constructions and ideas, and they are important in order to put the US’ claims in perspective.⁸⁸

One example which has been mentioned in Chapter I is the US’ interpretation that Iran’s pursuit of nuclear energy, whilst having vast oil reserves, indicates that it is pursuing nuclear weapons because it lacks a legitimate reason for nuclear energy. An alternative narrative of Iran’s pursuit for nuclear energy is that it does have legitimate reasons because it needs nuclear energy to address its concerns over rising domestic energy consumption, and can make more profit from exporting all its oil and gas as it lacks refineries at home; both of which are supported by facts.⁸⁹

Another example is the US’ interpretation of Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric as an indication that Iran seeks to destroy Israel, making it large risk if it were to possess nuclear weapons.⁹⁰ Another very credible interpretation of Ahmadinejad’s statements is that these are mere rhetoric for domestic and regional consumption and not an indicator of Iranian intentions to destroy Israel. This matter will be discussed further in the latter part of this chapter.

The perception that the US has of Iran and the dominant discourse have marginalized such alternative interpretations or any narratives that could explain Iran’s actions as benign or possibly contradict the idea that it pursues nuclear weapons. It is therefore very important to examine where this perception came from and how it was reconstructed and strengthened over time through the paradigm of enmity.

⁸⁶ Collins, Alan. “Contemporary Security Studies”. 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 138

⁸⁷ Weldes, Jutta. “Constructing National Interests”. European Journal of International Relations. 1996. Volume 2(3):275-318. Sage Publications, London. p. 279

⁸⁸ Collins, Alan. “Contemporary Security Studies”. 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 138

⁸⁹ Squassoni, Sharon. “Iran’s Nuclear Program: Recent Developments.” 6 September, 2006. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service (CRS). <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RS21592.pdf>> p. 2

⁹⁰ Collins, Alan. “Contemporary Security Studies”. 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 138

The Legacy of Animosity and Distrust

One of the main reasons the US views Iran as an evil enemy is the mutual resentment and grievances that have accumulated over the last 56 years between Iran and the US. After the Islamic Revolution took place in 1979, the Iranian government stopped to abide by American dictates and became hostile towards the United States in its behavior and rhetoric, calling it “the Great Satan”, and chanting on “Death to America” on the streets. This hostile attitude was the result of a great sense of resentment against the United States for staging a coup in 1953 against the democratically elected Mr. Mossadeq, and replacing him with the Shah, seen as a puppet of the US, to be able to profit from Iran’s oil without the Iranian people ever seeing any returns. Many Iranian officials have demanded an apology and continue to refer to the coup as one of the main sources of their resentment and distrust towards the US. As Madeleine Albright acknowledged in 2000, “the coup was clearly a setback for Iran’s political development and it is easy to see why so many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affair.”⁹¹ The matter has made Iran allergic to and fearful of foreign intervention or meddling in its internal affairs, to that of the United States in particular.

On the other hand, Iran’s hostile attitude towards the US and its assertion of a radical Islamic identity helped create the image that the US has of Iran today. The event that most significantly contributed to the creation of this perception was the hostage crisis. It left a scar on the American national consciousness and continues to have ramifications in Washington today.⁹² In November 1979, out of resentment for letting the deposed Shah enter the US, Iranian students stormed the American embassy in Tehran and took 63 people hostage, demanding the return of the Shah to face trial by his own people.⁹³

Although it started out as a student protest, Imam Khomeini soon endorsed the move. This way it actually became an act of the Iranian government, causing it to be drawn out longer and escalating the situation further than the participants expected. The White House was unsure how to deal with the situation and felt humiliated by this act.⁹⁴

⁹¹ “U.S. Comes Clean About The Coup In Iran”. Transcript of program ‘CNN Insight’, 19 April, 2000. [CNN](http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0004/19/i_ins.00.html). <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0004/19/i_ins.00.html> par. 15

⁹² Amanpour, Christiane. “1979 hostage crisis still casts pall on U.S.-Iran relations”. 4 November, 2009. [CNN](http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/04/iran.hostage.anniversary/index.html) <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/04/iran.hostage.anniversary/index.html>> par. 28

⁹³ “The Hostage Crisis in Iran”. Last updated: 6 February, 2006. [Jimmy Carter Library & Museum](http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/hostages.phtml). <<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/hostages.phtml>> par 7

⁹⁴ Amanpour, Christiane. “1979 hostage crisis still casts pall on U.S.-Iran relations”. 4 November, 2009. [CNN](http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/04/iran.hostage.anniversary/index.html) <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/04/iran.hostage.anniversary/index.html>> par. 20-23

The crisis was the root cause for the US to end all diplomatic relations and impose sanctions on Iran.⁹⁵ There were some efforts to negotiate a deal between the two governments but they failed. President Jimmy Carter decided to send an American strike-force to rescue the American hostages in April 1980 in an attempt to save face. However, this rescue mission was ill-prepared and failed miserably as eight Americans died and three helicopters went down in the desert. It was yet another terrible humiliation for the US. As Ayatollah Khomeini pointed out, it was humiliating that the most powerful country in the world was not even capable of conducting such a rescue operation in Iran to save its citizens. It was only after Jimmy Carter left office in January 1981 that the last 52 hostages were released after being held for 444 days.⁹⁶

The humiliation that the US suffered in the hostage crisis caused a great rift between the two countries and was fundamental in shaping the “evil” image that the US has of Iran today. According to Gary Sick, Carter’s point man on Iran at the time and now a Columbia University Professor, the event “(...) is a legacy that we live with and even people who don't remember the hostage crisis at all still have that image of Iran that was created in those days that has not gone away”.⁹⁷ Gary Sick says the hostage crisis has left the impression that Iran negotiates in bad faith and that it cannot be trusted, which partly explains why US policy has concentrated on isolation instead of negotiation with regards to Iran since then. Such impressions have been reinforced over time through the paradigm of enmity, showing how historical events and ensuing grievances can have a major effect on the way a state assesses another state’s behavior.

Many other events have also contributed to a relationship of distrust and suspicion, such as the shooting down of an Iranian civilian airliner by the US Navy in 1988, killing all 290 passengers, which the US claimed it had done by mistake; as well as the US support of Saddam in the Iran-Iraq war.⁹⁸ In the same way, the US has alleged that Iran supported Hezbollah in the planning of several terrorist attacks against the US in the 1980’s, even though the involvement of either Hezbollah or Iran has been disputed as in many of these attacks other organizations such as the Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.⁹⁹ Events such as

⁹⁵ “Timeline: US-Iran Ties”. Last updated: 16 January, 2009. BBC.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3362443.stm> par. 4

⁹⁶ Ibid, par. 8

⁹⁷ Amanpour, Christiane. “1979 hostage crisis still casts pall on U.S.-Iran relations”. 4 November, 2009. CNN
<<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/04/iran.hostage.anniversary/index.html>> par 32

⁹⁸ Wilson, George, C. “Navy Missile Downs Iranian Jetliner”. 4 July, 1988. Washington Post.
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/flight801/stories/july88crash.htm>> par. 1-12

⁹⁹ Hamzeh, Ahmad Nizar. “In The Path of Hizbullah”. 2004. Syracuse University Press. p. 83

these have been the (/a direct) source of mutual distrust and suspicion, which have become central elements embedded in the dominant discourse on Iran's nuclear program. As Frank G. Wisner, former U.S. Ambassador, pointed out in a testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March 2009: "The airwaves are filled with charges and countercharges of subversion and interference (...) [and] there are no adequate mechanisms for managing misunderstandings and incidents."¹⁰⁰ It has largely come down to an assessment of intent, especially in the case of Iran's nuclear program. Both countries fear each other's intentions, but at the same time have done insufficient to alleviate the fears and suspicions of the other.

According to Iran, it is doing all it can to alleviate concerns over its nuclear program, but the US believes that these have been insufficient and that its actions have actually done the opposite. The IAEA has played a positive role in trying to facilitate a dialogue between the two countries to start getting past the animosity and distrust. As Dr. El-Baradei put it, "Regional security issues (...) will not move one iota until you sit around the table and discuss the grievances that have accumulated over the last 56 years, (...) from 1953, when the CIA and MI6 removed Mohammed Mossadeq, (...) to the hostage crisis in 1979."¹⁰¹

Yet it is hard to overcome these grievances when the animosity and distrust have become strengthened and kept in place by the dominant discourse, with offensive and demonizing rhetoric from both sides. The representations entrenched in the paradigm of enmity have to a large extent become a self-fulfilling prophecy, a problem exemplified by the latest nuclear deal. The US has said that Iran needs to take more confidence building measures to gain the trust of the international community, and has argued that Iran should accept the latest draft proposal of El-Baradei to do so or otherwise "consequences" would follow. This is characteristic of the dual track approach of both dialogue and sanctions against Iran. It may seem a diplomatic opening to some, yet it does not constitute negotiation on an equal level nor without preconditions, as this is more akin to a threat towards Iran if it does not make the decision the US would like it to make. The US warned of consequences before Iran had given a reply, saying that a refusal of this proposal would be interpreted as a sign of bad faith, and that it would not be open to any changes whatsoever and that "they

¹⁰⁰ Wisner, Frank, G. "The United States & Iran: Time for Diplomacy". 3 March, 2009. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. <<http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2009/WisnerTestimony090303a.pdf>> p. 2

¹⁰¹ Weymouth, Lally. "A Conversation with Mohamed El-Baradei". 1 February, 2009. Transcripts of Interviews (original from Washington Post), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). <<http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Transcripts/2009/wp010209.html>> par. 9-15

better accept this plan”.¹⁰² Even in the face of these threats, Iran decided to show its willingness to work on confidence building and accepted the draft proposal initially. Yet Iran feared that the West would not stick to their side of the bargain and may suddenly decide not to return the processed fuel to Iran, and thus sought to secure such guarantees. This stems from the experience it has had with the West in the past, when it had already signed agreements and paid for the construction of nuclear reactors or the delivery of other materials, and the Western countries refused to permit the delivery to Iran.

President Ahmadinejad referred to this issue specifically in October 2009 when the new proposal was discussed, saying that: “We have nuclear contracts. It has been 30 years. We have paid for them (...) [and] such agreements must be fulfilled (...) for technical activities, for reactors and power plants. If we intend to cooperate, such contracts must be addressed and the previous commitments must be fulfilled.”¹⁰³ Yet, regardless of these legitimate concerns, now that the proposal has been turned down, the US and the West have interpreted this as ill-will and as a confirmation of their ideas about Iran. The US has said this has given the impression that the Iranians are not serious about solving this problem or negotiating an agreement, increasing suspicions that Iran has malign intentions. The US and the media have presented it as if this was the “golden” proposal which would resolve all problems concerning the nuclear crisis, while it only would temporarily create a more relaxed atmosphere for negotiations; it did not have the potential of solving the issues between Iran and the West in relation to the former’s nuclear program.

This judgment completely disregards the fact that their refusal was based on previous bad experiences with the same countries that were involved in setting up the new proposal, and that this was one of the proposals most seriously considered by the Iranians until now. The deeply rooted distrust caused by these past events also explains Iran’s desire to be in control of most of the fuel-cycle themselves, in order to keep dependence on Western countries at a minimum. However, such explanations have been marginalized in the dominant discourse, in which this has been presented as an indication of their malign intentions. This example demonstrates how the mutual distrust that already existed has deepened and reinforced itself over the years through the paradigm of enmity and has to a large extent become a self-fulfilling prophecy, making it difficult to get out of this deadlock.

¹⁰² “US hopes Iran accepts IAEA-backed proposal”. 21 November, 2009. [PressTV](http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=111807§ionid=351020104). <<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=111807§ionid=351020104>> par. 9

¹⁰³ “Iran Responds to Nuclear Proposal”. 29 October, 2009. [CNN](http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/10/29/iran.nuclear.ahmadinejad/index.html). <<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/10/29/iran.nuclear.ahmadinejad/index.html>> par .16

Different treatment

As discussed, the US' policy towards Iran is significantly influenced by its perception of Iran as an enemy. This becomes particularly apparent by its different treatment of Iran after the Islamic Revolution. After the Revolution took place and Iran was seen as an enemy with contrary ideals to those of the US, it treated Iran very differently from when the US-friendly Shah was in power. Nuclear energy suddenly became an issue, and Iran's intentions were from then on interpreted as malign. Conversely, during the time of the Shah, the US helped Iran set up its nuclear program, offered to deliver HEU, and argued Iran needed nuclear energy to meet future demands. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Kissinger explained this sudden 180° turn in very clear terms and ascribed it directly to the US' identification and construction of Iran as an enemy.

Another significant change that exemplifies the effect this had on American policy is the drastic change in its attitude towards human rights violations and lack of democracy in Iran. The US has frequently criticized Iran's human rights record, especially in the wake of the last elections in Iran, often referring to the lack of freedom of speech and the persecution of political dissidents. It also continuously refers to the undemocratic nature of Iran's political system, naming it as one of the characteristics that make it such an evil and horrible regime.

However, before the Islamic Revolution, the US did not criticize but supported the brutal dictatorial regime of the Shah and his security and intelligence service "SAVAK", which categorically oppressed, tortured and executed political dissidents. Moreover, the CIA and the Israeli Mossad cooperated extensively with the SAVAK, and it was trained in torture techniques by the CIA.¹⁰⁴ It was only once the US perceived Iran as a hostile country with values and ideas that fundamentally opposed its own that it started to criticize Iran for its human rights violations.

The representations of Iran as an evil, hostile, untrustworthy, radical Islamist, undemocratic country with irrational, repressive leaders, have become embedded in America's construction of Iran's identity, which has not helped to resolve the conflict nor alleviate tensions, but has rather affected the way Iran's actions are interpreted.¹⁰⁵ This has caused the official state discourse in the US to be based around the premise that Iran wants to acquire nuclear weapons and has a desire to destroy Israel. These ideas have reproduced

¹⁰⁴ Chambliss, William J., and Marjorie Sue Zatz. "Making law: the state, the law, and structural contradictions". 1993. Indiana University Press. p. 305

¹⁰⁵ Sharifi, Majid. "Imagined enemies: US-Iran Relations." 17-22 March, 2008. University of Florida Department of Political Science.

<http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/2/0/3/pages252035/p252035-4.php> p. 6

themselves, not only because of the mutual animosity and distrust but also through the active demonization on both sides, which have become self-fulfilling prophecies.

As constructivists have pointed out, security and threats are not objective and fixed, but they are socially constructed. As previously mentioned, actors at times reproduce ideas, norms and practices unconsciously, but other times they self-consciously try to construct new ones which can affect the very structure itself.¹⁰⁶ The “Iranian threat” is such a social concept, consciously constructed by the US and Israel, which has significantly influenced the discourse on Iran’s nuclear program.

In order to understand how this threat became such a fundamental element of US policy towards Iran, it is necessary to deconstruct the Iranian threat and examine how it became embedded in the dominant discourse, specifically focusing on the nuclear aspect of the threat.

Securitization

As constructivists such as Katzenstein et al. (1996) have pointed out, states can develop an interest in enacting, sustaining, or developing particular concepts, identities, ideas or roles.¹⁰⁷ Such concepts, (for instance: threats, national security, sovereignty, or power) are not objective facts, but are social constructions that have gained meaning through a realm of ideas, shared understandings and expectations.¹⁰⁸ Although they are social and thus inherently subjective, these concepts can appear to be an objective reality or truth as they are presented as such or deeply embedded in a particular dominant discourse, as is also the case in the discourse on Iran.

In this research I do not aim to prove, falsify, or verify the “trueness” of these realities, I rather aim to question, critically analyze and deconstruct them. Hereby I hope to achieve a better understanding of how the paradigm of enmity is reproduced, as the actors are by default also embedded in and driven by this structure. To that effect I will examine how the US has consciously constructed this threat and how this construct has become embedded

¹⁰⁶ Baylis, John and Steven Smith. “The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations”. 2006, 3rd ed. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 255-260

¹⁰⁷ Katzenstein, Peter J. ed. “The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics”. 1996. Columbia University Press. p. 60

¹⁰⁸ Houghton, David P. “Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach”. 2007. Foreign Policy Analysis, 3, 24-45, Blackwell Publishing, International Studies Association. p. 5-6

in the dominant discourse. The significant role Israel has played in these matters will be discussed in depth in Chapter III.

In order to deconstruct the “Iranian threat”, a more specific framework to analyze security within the constructivist approach will be used: “Securitization”. It is a concept that has been developed by the Copenhagen School, mainly represented by the work of Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver and Jaap de Wilde (1998), building on Buzan’s earlier work (1983, 1991).¹⁰⁹ It is a useful approach to analyze the process by which a threat is constructed and how it is reproduced in the prevailing discourse, which academics have also applied to the similar case of Iraq.¹¹⁰ This approach essentially argues that *securitization* of an already politicized issue takes place when a securitizing actor (usually a government) articulates this issue as posing an existential threat to a particular referent object. This referent object can be a state, but also national sovereignty, ideology, collective identities or even habitats.¹¹¹ The securitizing actor then claims that it needs to adopt extraordinary measures that go beyond the ordinary norms of the political domain to respond to this threat.¹¹²

Such a securitization act requires two steps in order for it to be successful: first, the securitizing actor needs to wield considerable power and influence in order to convincingly portray a particular issue, person, or entity to be an existential threat; and second, this actor needs to convince a relevant audience that this is indeed the case through a speech act: using language to articulate the issue in security terms.¹¹³ If the “audience” is convinced by this act, it gives the securitizing actor the legitimacy to act on this threat in a way that would normally not be politically acceptable or deemed appropriate under international norms, such as the use of force. This means that acceptance by the relevant audience is a crucial part of this process. Examples of such an audience are the media, public opinion and politicians.

This framework can be applied to the way Iran was constructed as a threat. The securitizing actor is the US government, which has tried to convince other governments, politicians, and the media (its audience) of the idea that a nuclear armed Iran poses an existential threat to its national security. The US has also specified the state of Israel and the rest of the world as referent objects. Although Israel is also a securitizing actor in this respect,

¹⁰⁹ Collins, Alan. “Contemporary Security Studies”. 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 134

¹¹⁰ For example: Baylis, John, and Steve Smith. “IR Theory in Practice Case Study: The Iraq War, 2003”. Baylis and Smith: The Globalization of World Politics: 3e - Case Study: The Iraq War, 2003. 2005. <<http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/0199271186/01student/zcases/03iraq/constructivist.pdf>>

¹¹¹ McDonald, Matt. “Securitization and the construction of security”. 2008. European Journal of International Relations. SAGE Publications and ECPR-European Consortium for Political Research, Vol. 14(4). p. 566

¹¹² Collins, Alan. “Contemporary Security Studies”. 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 111

¹¹³ Ibid, p.112

this will be the subject of Chapter III. After designating Iran as a threat, the US has argued that it needs to keep all options on the table, including the possibility of a military strike in order to confront this threat. It tried to create legitimacy for action which would normally not be accepted under international norms.

The Importance of Demonization

The similarities with the case of Iraq are striking. It is very similar to the way in which Saddam Hussein and his alleged weapons of mass destruction were constructed as threatening to the United States. The US wanted to create legitimacy and mobilize domestic and international support for the use of military force. For the US to be successful in doing so, it was not only necessary to present the other as a threat, but also to present it as an evil entity. In order to achieve the latter, the US actively engaged in the demonization of the country, and claimed that they had evidence of a nuclear weapons program. In both the cases of Iran and Iraq, the US government presented itself as relatively benign, while representing the leader of the country as a tyrant (good vs. evil).¹¹⁴ It emphasized the undemocratic nature of the state and the brutal oppression of the people by the regime. This demonization was a successful way to create an image of the country as “evil”, against which any action would be justified, making it a crucial part of the securitization process.

The US actually made this explicit by famously calling them both part of an “axis of evil”. In doing so, the US consciously reinforced the paradigm of enmity, while at the same time significantly constraining any possibility of a rapprochement (ending Khatami’s offer), and significantly straining relations further. As Dr. El- Baradei remarked, “these issues are not going to be resolved by calling each other names across the ocean. When you call Iran [part of] ‘an axis of evil,’ you do not expect them to say, ‘Well, we will give up our nuclear program.’” Instead, the rhetoric employed against Iran has often prompted Iran to show its defiance on the nuclear issue and has thereby proven to be counterproductive. Most of the elements that the US has used to demonize Iran are present in Bush’ State of the Union speech of 2002, in which he referred to the governments of Iran, Iraq and North Korea:

¹¹⁴ Baylis, John, and Steve Smith. “IR Theory in Practice Case Study: The Iraq War, 2003”. Baylis and Smith: The Globalization of World Politics: 3e - Case Study: The Iraq War, 2003. 2005. <<http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/0199271186/01student/zcases/03iraq/constructivist.pdf>> p. 4

“Our (...) goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September 11, but we know their true nature. (...) Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. (...) 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.* They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.”¹¹⁵ [emphasis mine]

This was a very significant speech and crucial in convincing others that Iran constituted a grave threat to the US, its allies (primarily Israel), and world peace with Iran's (assumed) aim to develop nuclear weapons. In addition, it linked security explicitly to the notion of “rogue states”, against which “traditional concepts of deterrence will not work” and stressed the unwillingness of these states to reliably operate by the democratic norms of the international community.¹¹⁶ Stressing that Iran did not share the same norms as nations in the West, it reinforced Iran's exclusive identity as “other”, and in a worldview of good vs. bad, Iran was to be categorized as the latter. This explains why the US has put so much emphasis on Iran having an undemocratic and repressive government, especially in the dominant discourse on Iran's nuclear program. It only does so to demonize Iran, as it did not mention it before the Revolution, nor currently criticizes all the countries that share these characteristics (Saudi Arabia for example).

Another important element that the US refers to in demonizing Iran is its support for terrorism. The US' claim that Iran is “the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism” is again reminiscent of the case it made against Iraq. In this case, it is based on Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas.¹¹⁷ It describes Hezbollah as a mere proxy of Iran, taking orders from the leadership in Tehran. Iran does support Hezbollah with substantial military and financial

¹¹⁵ “Bush State of the Union address”. January 29, 2002. [CNN](http://edition.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/).
<<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/>> par. 24-26.

¹¹⁶ Collins, Alan. “The Iraq War 2003: US Strategy, Post-War Occupation and Future Prospects”. Collins, Alan. “Contemporary Security Studies”. 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. New York.
<http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199284696/01student/cases/case_study_iraq.pdf> p. 2

¹¹⁷ “Timeline: US-Iran Ties”. Last updated 16 January, 2009. [BBC](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3362443.stm).
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3362443.stm> par. 87

assistance in their opposition to Israel, and they are ideologically similar, as the latter was initially influenced by the Islamic Revolution in Iran.¹¹⁸ However, Hezbollah does not take “orders” from Iran. They have shown to pursue their own agenda, as they have done things which have not been ordered by Iran nor approved by it (comparable to the way that Israel does not take orders from the US, though still closely allied).¹¹⁹

One crucial example is that Iran had not given orders to Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah’s current leader) for the operation that was launched against Israel in July 2006.¹²⁰ Yet the US has tried to give the opposite impression, which is a clear example of the importance of demonizing Iran in order to securitize it, with Bush saying at the time that: “This summer’s crisis in Lebanon has made it clearer than ever that the world faces a grave threat from the radical regime in Iran. The Iranian regime arms, funds, and advises Hezbollah, which has killed more Americans than any terrorist network except al Qaeda.”¹²¹ It is ironic that the supposed “largest state sponsor of terrorism” fought terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and opposed Saddam Hussein long before 9/11 or the Second Gulf War even occurred, at a time when both were supported by the United States.

Furthermore, its support for Hamas is also not as extensive as the US suggests, and is quite limited in comparison with its support for Hezbollah.¹²² It also fundamentally ignores the fact that Iran supports Hamas mainly because it sees supporting the Palestinian cause as a way of gaining support in the Arab world and may discourage an alliance of Arab states against Persian Iran, while it also recognizes Hamas as the democratically elected leaders of the Palestinian people.¹²³ Furthermore, as Hamas is a Sunni-based organization, and the Shi’a establishment in Iran has never been particularly sympathetic to Sunni’s (especially not in Iran itself), Hamas and Iran are not as ideologically or religiously allied as the US suggests.

Moreover, even though Hamas may be an obvious national security threat to Israel, it does not present such a threat to the United States. Its main fear is that once Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it will provide them to anti-Israeli terrorists.¹²⁴ It is due to America’s

¹¹⁸ Hamzeh, Ahmad Nizar. “In The Path of Hizbullah”. 2004. Syracuse University Press. p. 18

¹¹⁹ Moaveni, Azadeh. “Meanwhile, the view from inside Iran.” 31 July 2006. Vol. 168, Issue 5. Time

¹²⁰ Schiff, Ze’ev. “Israel’s War With Iran.” November / December 2006. Vol. 85, Issue 6. Foreign Affairs

¹²¹ “Iran Looks to Increase Influence in Middle East, World Affairs”. 13 September, 2006. PBS.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/july-dec06/iran_09-13.html> par. 15

¹²² Parsi, Trita. “Traucherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States”. 2007. Yale University Press. p. 221-222

¹²³ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”. 2007. Penguin Books. p. 283

¹²⁴ Shuja, Sharif. “America’s confrontation with Iran”. Summer 2007/ 2008. No. 75. National Observer (Council for the National Interest, Melbourne). p. 54

equation of its national security with that of Israel that it perceives this highly unlikely phenomenon to be a threat, as will be explained further in Chapter 3.

In the following section I will deconstruct the assumptions that underlie the US' argument that Iran is a threat, focusing on the nuclear issue in particular.

Presenting Iran as a Threat

The claim that Iran poses a threat is clear, yet what this threat exactly constitutes is not, as the way the US has defined this threat has shifted throughout the years. After the Revolution, the threat coming from Iran was first identified as the spread of a certain kind of Islamic fundamentalism, and soon after, the threat of defeating Saddam Hussein (which threatened breaking the balance of power in the region). It then increasingly became a threat of terrorism, Shi'a ideology and nuclear proliferation in the 1990's.

The threat of Iran's nuclear program in particular has also shifted, beginning as Iran's intention to rebuild its nuclear power plants which were destroyed by Iraq in the war, and later changing to Iran's desire to import nuclear fuel from Russia. Around 2003, the threat coming from Iran constituted its uranium enrichment program, prompting the US to push for UN resolutions to demand Iran to stop its enrichment and reprocessing activities. Now that these attempts have failed, the threat has shifted to Iran merely having the knowledge to enrich uranium.¹²⁵ The content of the Iranian threat has shifted due to changes in the perception of Iran, and not because the material reality has changed, demonstrating how threats are socially constructed and are therefore flexible to changes over time.

This shows that the way the US has defined the Iranian nuclear threat has lowered the threshold for action considerably. While at first the US demanded action to prevent Iran from building its nuclear power plants and subsequently from enriching uranium, it now wants to prevent Iran from even having the knowledge to enrich uranium. This relates to the fact that once a country has mastered the technology to enrich it then (*if* it decides to do so) can convert its civilian program into a nuclear weapons program in a matter of months. The US is convinced that Iran has the intention to do so; a crucial assumption to its claim that Iran's nuclear program constitutes a threat. As George Bush expressed it, "(...) it is very important for the international community to recognize the fact that *if* Iran were to develop the

¹²⁵ Sharifi, Majid. "Imagined enemies: US-Iran Relations." 17-22 March, 2008. University of Florida Department of Political Science. http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/2/0/3/pages252035/p252035-4.php > p. 13-14

knowledge that they could transfer to a clandestine program, it would create a danger for the world.”¹²⁶

In presenting this threat, the US has frequently referred (at times implicitly) to several hypothetical doom-scenarios that could ensue from a nuclear armed Iran, in order to convince its audience. It has suggested that *if* Iran obtained nuclear weapons, one of the following scenarios would occur:

- 1) Iran would attack Israel with nuclear weapons
- 2) Terrorist groups (namely Hezbollah and Hamas) would have nuclear weapons and use them against the US and Israel, threatening world peace.

By referring to these possible catastrophic outcomes, the US tries to demonstrate the severity of the threat and thereby convince others that this threat should be taken seriously. This makes it necessary to prevent these outcomes from materializing and justifies all means to do so, including military force.

The idea that these catastrophic actions by Iran are a possibility is based on a particular set of assumptions about Iran. These assumptions are central to the US’ construction of Iran as a threat, and can be described as followed:

- 1) Iran is led by irrational radical Islamist leaders that pursue aggressive policies
- 2) Iran supports terrorism to the extent that they would give nuclear weapons to terrorist groups (Hezbollah and Hamas), if it possessed them.
- 3) Iran has called for the destruction of Israel, and is fundamentally anti-Zionist;

The US has used these as assumptions to support their claim that Iran is a threat, also referring to them to demonize Iran and sustain the idea that it is an evil enemy, thereby consciously reinforcing the paradigm of enmity. To understand the way the US has used these assumptions in constructing the Iranian nuclear threat, it is necessary to analyze each of them.

¹²⁶ Doyle, Leonard. “Iran still a danger to world peace”. 5 December, 2007. The Independent. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/iran-still-a-danger-to-world-peace-says-bush-762818.html>> par. 4

The first assumption, which has also been used as an underlying premise for the other two, relates to the irrationality and ideology of Iran's leaders. Hillary Clinton described this sentiment best: "(...) there's a great deal of concern that the Iranian government might be taken over if it were to have nuclear weapons by people who have no institutional sense of what would happen to their country. And I worry about (...) nuclear weapons (...) falling into the hands of those who might prefer to be martyrs instead of be responsible leaders. I think we have to start clearly and unequivocally saying to the Iranian people that there would be a very, very big price to pay."¹²⁷ The hypothetical scenario that Iran would use a nuclear weapon against Israel is based on the assumption that Iran's leaders would be irrational enough to sacrifice their own country to do so. However, as Hillary Mann Leverett and Flynt Leverett recently pointed out in *Foreign Policy*, "Even if Iran were to fabricate a nuclear weapon, it is not credible to describe that as an existential threat to Israel [or any other state], unless one has such a distorted view of Shiite Islam that one believes the Islamic Republic is so focused on damaging 'the Zionist entity' that it is collectively willing to become history's first 'suicide nation'." This suggestion is not analytically serious.¹²⁸ Nor is the assumption that Iran's leaders are irrational.

The fact that Iran makes harsh statements about Israel does not necessarily make them an irrational actor, nor do they reflect a deep anti-Israeli ideology. Such statements are intended to improve Iran's position in the region, and Iran's leaders have proven to be rational actors in the past.¹²⁹ As shown in Chapter I, Iran rationally calculated that possessing nuclear weapons would seriously jeopardize their interests and Iran's own security. As even the US' National Intelligence Estimate of 2007 stated, Iran's decisions "are guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic, and military costs."¹³⁰ Like any other country, Iran is not interested in inviting a pre-emptive military strike, or in mutual assured destruction.¹³¹

¹²⁷ "Presidential Candidates Campaign in Indiana and North Carolina". Transcript: American Morning. 5 May, 2008. CNN. <<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0805/05/lm.01.html>> par. 79

¹²⁸ Leverett, Hillary M., and Flynt Leverett. "Iran is no existential threat". 4 December, 2009. *Foreign Policy*. <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/04/iran_is_no_existential_threat?page=0.1&%24Version=0&%24Path=/&%24Domain=.foreignpolicy.com.%20%24Version%3D0> p. 2

¹²⁹ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy". 2007. *Penguin Books*. p. 283

¹³⁰ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. "National Intelligence Estimate - Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities". November 2007. *National Intelligence Council*.

¹³¹ Zarif, Javad. "Iran, the West, and the Nuclear Issue". 17 October, 2005. Online video clip. Youtube. Lecture at Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs. Ambassadors Forum series. Accessed on December 12 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQEHVxduEIM&feature=PlayList&p=C7D50668B6237CBC&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=40>

Moreover, the dominant narrative is based on the idea that the Iranian government is led by irrational religious leaders that pursue aggressive policies, willing to use such weapons irrespective of the cost. However, as it was shown in Chapter I, this is not supported by facts, and as Dr. El-Baradei has said, “[t]hey are not like the stereotyped fanatics bent on destroying everybody around them. They are not.”¹³²

It is not surprising that the dominant discourse also completely ignores the fact that the President and Supreme leader of Iran have continuously stated they have no desire to have nuclear weapons and fundamentally reject such weapons, not only because they believe it not to be in their interest, but moreover because this is prohibited in Islam.¹³³ It is ironic that they base this rejection on their Islamic ideology, as the US has presented this as a negative factor. As Ayatollah Khamenei has said, “The Islamic Republic of Iran, based on its fundamental religious and legal beliefs, would never resort to the use of weapons of mass destruction. In contrast to the propaganda of our enemies, fundamentally we are against any production of weapons of mass destruction in any form”.¹³⁴

Furthermore, the US frequently refers to the doom-scenario of terrorists with weapons of mass destruction that would threaten not only the US and Israel but the entire world. It argues that if Iran had nuclear weapons, it would provide these weapons to them. This is again based on the assumption that Iran’s leaders would be irrational enough to give these weapons to them *if* it possessed these weapons. It also bases it on the assumption that Hezbollah and Hamas are inextricably tied to Iran and can be considered as proxies or extensions of the Iranian government, which have previously been shown to be exaggerations. This exaggeration is characteristic of and illustrative of the influence of Israel and the lobby, which will be discussed further in Chapter III.

The third assumption, and perhaps the most intriguing and crucial to the US’ construction of Iran as a threat, is that Iran has called for the destruction of Israel. This assumption is based on the alleged statement by President Ahmadinejad that “Israel must be wiped off the map”. It has become the most frequently quoted statement with regard to the Iranian nuclear issue, and has been referred to by the majority of politicians and media around the world,

¹³² Dickey, Christopher. “Mohamed ElBaradei: ‘They are not Fanatics’”. 23 May, 2009. [Newsweek](http://www.newsweek.com/id/199149). <<http://www.newsweek.com/id/199149>> par. 13

¹³³ “Q&A: Iran and the Nuclear Issue.” 22 May 2009. [BBC](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4031603.stm). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4031603.stm>

¹³⁴ Collier, Robert. “Nuclear weapons unholy, Iran says”. 31 October, 2003. [San Fransisco Chronicle](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/10/31/MNGHJ2NFRE1.DTL&hw=Khamenei+fatwa&sn=001&sc=1000). <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/10/31/MNGHJ2NFRE1.DTL&hw=Khamenei+fatwa&sn=001&sc=1000>> par. 3

who reacted offended or appalled.¹³⁵ However, this was a significant mistranslation of his words. He originally said: “Imam ghoft een rezhim-e ishghalgar-e qods bayad az safheh-ye ruzgar mahv shaved”, which correctly translates as “The Imam [Khomeini] said that this regime occupying Jerusalem must be erased from the page of time”, and added “This is a very wise statement”.¹³⁶

He was first of all referring to something that Ayatollah Khomeini had apparently already said; and second, the entire speech that included this statement was about how some political situations end without war but simply vanish from the page of time, taking the Soviet Union as his example. Note the word “rezhim-e”, meaning “regime”: he was referring to regime change, not war. The Farsi word for map was not even used.¹³⁷

This raises the obvious question of why this ever became quoted as “Israel must be wiped off the map”, and secondly, why the vast majority of people around the world still believe this is what Ahmadinejad said. Surprisingly, it was originally a translation mistake by the Iranian news agency IRNA from Farsi into English. However, the problem was that international news agencies copied this quote without verifying its accuracy and rarely mentioning the source, and made headlines out of it. This included news agencies such as the BBC, CNN and Al-Jazeera, and soon others followed, simply assuming it was correct. Although the Iranian Foreign Minister tried to correct this statement, the quote already had a life of its own.

It became a key statement of US and Israeli government officials in addressing the Iranian nuclear issue and in presenting it as a threat that must be taken seriously. The correct translation became completely marginalized by the dominant discourse. As El-Baradei commented in an interview, “There have been a lot of offensive statements, frankly, on the part of Iran, although from what I understand, Iran wants a one-state solution [to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict] - not, as reported in the media, that Israel should be wiped off the map.”¹³⁸

Aside from being misquoted in thousands of news outlets around the world, the quote has also been significantly distorted. This distortion has occurred due to the US government and the media. In news reports, it soon became “wipe Israel off the face of the earth”, then

¹³⁵ Collins, Alan. “Contemporary Security Studies”. 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 138

¹³⁶ Collins, Alan. “Contemporary Security Studies”. 2007. Oxford University Press Inc. p. 138

¹³⁷ Noruzi, Arash. “Wiped off the map: the Rumour of the Century”. 20 January, 2007. Global Research. <<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=4527>> par 10-25

¹³⁸ Weymouth, Lally. “A Conversation with Mohamed El-Baradei”. 1 February, 2009. Transcripts of Interviews (original from Washington Post), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). <<http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Transcripts/2009/wp010209.html>>

“Ahmadinejad has called for Israel’s destruction”, and finally “Iran seeks to destroy Israel”.¹³⁹ These statements have been made by US government officials and have simply been taken over by the media to the extent that they used these phrasings themselves, without being slightly critical or investigating the source.¹⁴⁰ This shows first of all that the assumption that Iran has called for the destruction of Israel is not true, and that the idea that Iran would destroy Israel if it had nuclear weapons is completely unfounded. Second, it shows how such assumptions have become embedded in the dominant discourse to the extent that people believe these are true and no longer question them. It also demonstrates the role that the media have played in sustaining the dominant discourse and marginalizing alternative narratives. They have effectively sustained, reproduced and reinforced the image of Iran as a threat and the paradigm of enmity.

Convenient Copying

These ideas have become embedded in the discourse to the extent that they are now unquestioned or normalized and are usually treated as factual. Those that try to ascertain the extent to which there are grounds to believe this threat truly exists, and critically examine what is factually known about Iran’s nuclear activities are in the minority. This also points to successful securitization on the part of the US (and Israel).

The statement about wiping Israel off the map demonstrates that there is a great deal of misinformation in the media and even in the academic world. The vast majority of these also misquotes Ahmadinejad’s statement or refers to the assumptions the US has put forward without critically assessing these. Many academics and analysts frequently use them as a starting point for their analysis on Iran, which is a worrying phenomenon as one would expect these groups to perform the role of making sure the information is correct and founded. In addition, when discussing Iran’s nuclear program, they often refer to information that originates from American or Israeli sources, copying them without being critical of the reliability of these documents, such as the US national intelligence estimates, or the House of Representatives reports.

Although these have not been reliable in the past, as was demonstrated in the case of Iraq, such information and the US’ assumptions have been so frequently repeated in the

¹³⁹ These are mere examples of many different distortions.

¹⁴⁰ Noruzi, Arash. “Wiped off the map: the Rumour of the Century”. 20 January, 2007. Global Research. <<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=4527>> par. 10-25

media, academic literature and by politicians, that it is assumed to be objective. It comes as no surprise then that the US House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Policy Staff report said that “Publicly available information also leads to the conclusion that Iran has a nuclear weapons program (...)”.¹⁴¹

Besides the media having reproduced the constructs of Iran as a threat, the US has also tried to securitize the issue by convincing other countries that Iran’s nuclear program constitutes a threat, which has been the most successful in the West, arguing that there was a need to “defend Europe against the emerging Iranian threat”.¹⁴² Right after the NIE of 2007 came out, which stated that Iran did not have a nuclear weapons program at that time, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel said at a press conference that “Iran continues to represent a threat”, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy stated, “Notwithstanding the latest elements, everyone is fully conscious of the fact that there is a will of the Iranian leaders to obtain nuclear weapons.”¹⁴³ This shows that the US securitization has been quite successful in this respect, as this audience is convinced that Iran’s nuclear program is a threat, and has taken over the assumptions about Iran’s nuclear program, also reinforcing the dominant discourse worldwide.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that although the majority of European leaders have taken over the critical assumption that Iran would be dangerous with nuclear weapons, they do not refer to the Iranian nuclear threat as aggressively or forceful as the US. They also do not mention the dramatic hypothetical scenarios previously discussed as often. Yet the crucial difference lies in the approach: the Europeans have always preferred to employ a diplomatic and multilateral approach towards the Iranian issue and negotiate directly, as opposed to the American unilateral approach of containment and isolation. The US justified its policy by suggesting one could not reason or negotiate with a rogue state like Iran, as it could not be trusted and was an irrational actor, implying it would be a pointless endeavor in any case, while the Europeans thought differently.

The US has also tried to persuade Russia and China that Iran is a threat and that they should therefore support further sanctions against Iran. In October 2009, Hillary Clinton expressed her satisfaction about the progress the US has made in convincing Russia, saying,

¹⁴¹ “Recognizing Iran as a Strategic Threat: An Intelligence Challenge for the United States.” 23 August, 2006 Staff Report of the House Permanent Select Committee. [US House of Representatives](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/14_09_06_representatives.pdf).

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/14_09_06_representatives.pdf> p. 8

¹⁴² Spetalnik, Matt. “Bush: Missile shield is meant to deter Iran”. Oct 23, 2007. [Reuters](http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSWAT00833920071023).

<<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSWAT00833920071023>> par. 15

¹⁴³ “Iran a threat, say Europe allies”. 6 December, 2007. [BBC](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7131703.stm).

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7131703.stm> par. 5-10

“I think that there has been a tremendous move on the part of the Russians to recognize this threat, because that’s where it starts”. Securitization indeed starts with trying to convince others of a threat, which in this case is Iran’s nuclear program. The US has tried to do so in several ways, the most important of which are outlined below.

First, it not only has asserted that Iran poses a threat to itself, but also to Israel, the region, and the rest of the world. It has done so in order to convince and suggest to other countries that this issue is not only local but that their security is also involved and threatened, stressing that they have an interest in preventing this threat and taking this seriously as well. Second, it has not only claimed Iran to be an existential threat, but has also tried to create a sense that this threat is an imminent one. This is crucial because it would justify the doctrine of a pre-emptive military strike, as advocated by the Bush administration and by Israel. As it also did prior to the invasion of Iraq, the US argues that Iran presents an imminent threat to the world, and that if not dealt with soon and without leaving the military option on the table, catastrophic scenarios could ensue. Despite all the estimates made by US intelligence agencies on when Iran would likely have enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon (as discussed in Chapter I), many US government officials have still suggested Iran will have nuclear weapons or the capability to build them sooner than predicted, (even though the past predictions already proved to be premature).

John Bolton warned in April 2004 that: “If we permit Iran's deception to go on much longer, it will be too late. Iran will have nuclear weapons.” In 2005, Vice President Cheney even suggested that Iran’s nuclear advances were advancing with such speed that Israel might be forced to attack Iran’s facilities.¹⁴⁴ In light of the intelligence assessments and those of the IAEA discussed in Chapter I, it becomes clear that such statements giving credence to the idea that a nuclear threat from Iran is imminent are ill-founded. As El-Baradei remarked, “(...) to present the Iran threat as imminent is hype.”¹⁴⁵

The imminence also inherently suggests that there is only a limited time-frame within which this issue can be dealt with. They have often referred to this by saying that “time is running out”, and by warning that if Iran continues to enrich uranium, action must be taken soon before it is “too late”.¹⁴⁶ In June 2009, President Obama said, “(...) the clock is ticking.

¹⁴⁴ Linzer, Dafna. “Iran Is Judged 10 Years From Nuclear Bomb: U.S. Intelligence Review Contrasts With Administration Statements”. 2 August, 2005. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/01/AR2005080101453_pf.html>

¹⁴⁵ Varadarajan, Siddharth. “Language of Force is Not Helpful on Iran Issue.” 3 October, 2009. The Hindu. <<http://www.hindu.com/2009/10/03/stories/2009100355310900.htm>> par 6-7

¹⁴⁶ “U.S.: Time running out for Iran”. 1 December, 2009. CNN. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/12/01/iran.nuclear/>> par. 2

Iran is developing nuclear capacity at a fairly rapid clip; they have been doing so for quite some time.”¹⁴⁷ Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned that time is running out for dialogue to avoid a nuclear-armed Iran or a military strike against the Islamic Republic, adding that “that window is a very narrow window”.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, in arguing a case for the Iranian nuclear threat, the US has tried to give the impression that the majority of the world is behind its stance on Iran, by referring to “the international community” while it often concerned only the views of the US or that of its Western allies. However, the Non-Aligned Movement, representing around 150 countries (constituting the majority), signed a statement that expressed solidarity and support for Iran’s use of nuclear energy technology, stating that this is the right of all nations, including Iran, to do so, and that this right must be respected.¹⁴⁹ The suggestion that the entire world perceives Iran’s nuclear program as a threat that must be stopped is thus misleading.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it has become clear that the paradigm of enmity, in which the US and Iran each have identified the other as its evil adversary, has been greatly affected by grievances from past events such as the hostage crisis, and has resulted in an atmosphere of mutual distrust and animosity. This has caused the US to interpret Iran’s behavior as malignant, as it does not trust Iran’s intentions, particularly when it comes to their nuclear program. Alternative interpretations of Iran’s actions have become marginalized through the dominant discourse, although these interpretations may provide useful insights and are backed up by facts.

Furthermore, the representations of Iran as an evil, hostile, untrustworthy, radical Islamist, undemocratic country with irrational, repressive leaders, have become embedded in the US’ construction of Iran’s identity. These ideas have unconsciously been reproduced through the paradigm of enmity, thereby reinforcing the dominant discourse on Iran’s nuclear program, and due to interactions between the two countries, have often become self-fulfilling prophecies. They have been strengthened further through the US’ active securitization of the

¹⁴⁷ “Remarks by President Obama and German Chancellor Merkel.” 26 June, 2009. The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. <<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/June/20090626154718xjsnommis0.5205609.html&distid=ucs>> par. 42

¹⁴⁸ Morgan, David. “U.S. military chief says clock ticking on Iran nuke.” 8 July, 2009. Reuters. <<http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-40879020090707>> par.3

¹⁴⁹ “NAM backs Iran’s right to nuclear technology”. 2 August, 2008. Tehran Times. <http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=174294> par. 3

Iranian nuclear issue, of which the demonization of Iran was an important part. It constitutes a conscious effort to convince others that Iran poses a threat not only to its own security, but also to the entire world, in order to justify otherwise politically unacceptable means to counter this threat.

In analyzing the process by which this threat has been constructed by the US, I have deconstructed the arguments and assumptions the US has put forward in trying to convince others that Iran's nuclear program is a threat. These appear to be ill-founded assumptions that do not support the notion of a threat. Moreover, without the critical underlying assumption that Iran *intends* to develop nuclear weapons (which was also shown to be unfounded in Chapter I), the arguments the US has put forward based on these assumptions become irrelevant. This casts significant doubt on whether Iran should be seen as a threat at all, and whether it has rather been "hyped", as El Baradei and others have said.

As has become clear throughout this research, the assessment of Iran's intentions is crucial to the US' characterization of Iran as a threat. The fact that it does not use the same characterization for other NPT signatories that have mastered the technology to develop a nuclear weapon (but only have a civilian program), shows that it is a matter of trusting one's intentions. An important factor which makes the crucial difference in this case is Israel. The effect Israel has had on US-Iranian relations and the US' characterization of Iran as a threat is significant and crucial to understand how it came about. This will be done in the following Chapter.

Chapter III – Israel and the Lobby

“Israel and the United States have long understood the acute danger embodied in a nuclear Iran, and are working closely in a concerted, coordinated effort to prevent Iran from becoming nuclear. Israel will not tolerate the possibility of a nuclear Iran, and neither should any other country in the free world.” – Israeli President Ehud Olmert at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) convention.¹⁵⁰

Introduction

It is well-known that there is a special relationship between the US and Israel. The former has provided practically unconditional economic, military, and diplomatic support to the latter, on the basis of the belief that this will further US interests in the Middle East. Every Presidential election in the United States, each candidate that is serious about being elected vows to protect this special relationship and claims to envision the interests of the Jewish state. Through this phenomenon and in many other instances it has become clear that Israel and its interest groups in Washington exercise a significant amount of influence on US policy and its relations with other states. Particularly in relation to America’s relations with Iran, Israel and the lobby have played an important role in shaping the US’ stance towards the Islamic Republic.¹⁵¹ In this Chapter, I will examine the way that Israel and the lobby have influenced Washington’s characterization of Iran as a threat. In doing so, I will

¹⁵⁰ Flower, Kevin. “Israeli politician threatens Iran with attack over nukes”. 6 June, 2008. [CNN](http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/06/06/israel.iran/index.html). <<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/06/06/israel.iran/index.html>> par. 12

¹⁵¹ The Israel lobby.....

discuss Israel as a factor in the US' argumentation of Iran as a threat, the securitization by Israel.

In analyzing the influence of the Israel lobby, I will define it the way that prominent International Relations scholars John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt have described the term in their book, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (2007): “The lobby is a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively works to move US foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. (...) it is not a single, unified movement (...) [but rather] a powerful interest group whose (...) purpose is to (...) influence American foreign policy in ways that its members believe will benefit the Jewish state.”¹⁵²

I will look at both the influence of the Israeli government and the Israeli lobby in Washington, recognizing that the latter does not always represent the interests of the former. Nevertheless, I will focus on their impact rather than their differences, due to the scope of this research. In addition, this chapter is not meant to argue that the lobby is all powerful or dictates US policy, but rather that the influence it wields, especially in the case of US-Iranian relations and the classification of Iran as a “threat”, is significant and should not be neglected nor underestimated.

Israel in the lead: the core of the argument

One of the ways in which the significance of the factor Israel comes to the fore is how the US treats Iran differently from other countries that have the potential to develop a nuclear weapon, or in comparison to those that already possess such weapons. Iran is presented by the US (and Israel) as a grave threat to world peace because it is acquiring the knowledge necessary to complete the entire fuel-cycle for energy purposes, which could enable it to develop nuclear weapons. However, countries such as Germany, Brazil, the Netherlands, and Japan, already have this know-how and could at any time decide to change their civilian programs into weapons programs within months, but are not considered as threats at all.¹⁵³ India even already possesses nuclear weapons and is not a signatory to the NPT, but it has recently been rewarded with a civil nuclear cooperation deal with the United States.

Moreover, the US is more concerned about Iran than it is about North Korea, even though it is also an enemy of the US, has threatened US allies in the region (such as Japan

¹⁵² The Israel lobby p. 5

¹⁵³ El-Baradei, Mohamed. “Charlie Rose interviews Mohamed El-Baradei”. 11 November, 2009. Online video clip. Youtube. Interview of Charlie Rose. IAEA video. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4Z3D_pQOek>

and South Korea), is part of the same “axis of evil” as Iran, and has (most importantly) already clandestinely acquired nuclear weapons. The US has not only adopted a far more hostile and aggressive posture towards the Islamic Republic, but it has even rewarded North Korea by taking it off the list of terrorist sponsors and negotiating with it directly.¹⁵⁴ This shows that the way it treats Iran as a threat cannot be fully explained by the factors of animosity and distrust on the part of the US. It is also significantly influenced by the presence of another factor: Israel.

This becomes evident in the reasoning put forward by the US that Iran is a threat, as outlined in Chapter II. It becomes clear that the doom-scenarios, which are used to emphasize and convince others of the threat that Iran poses, are essentially about Israel. There are two main arguments that the US has put forward: first, Iran would use nuclear weapons against Israel because it has expressed its desire to destroy the Jewish state; and second, Iran would give nuclear weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas because they are closely allied anti-Israel terrorists that would primarily target Israel, essentially leading to the former suggested scenario. The most consistent and strongest argument the US presents in this regard is that the world should be wary of Iran because it has called for the destruction of Israel, which, as has been shown earlier, proves to be unfounded.

Even the media and academics have used this as an explanation and even justification for the discriminatory treatment of Iran, to which normal rules do not apply, as for example in an article by the *Harvard International Review*, which asserted: “(...) would Australia be referred to the UN Security Council if it started to enrich uranium? Iran is a unique case because its regime is both repressive and highly ideological, controls vast energy resources, and outwardly espouses the complete destruction of Israel.”¹⁵⁵ In a Washington Post interview with El-Baradei, the role that Israel plays in the treatment of Iran became very clear. When the DG posed the rhetorical question: “Why isn’t the world worried about Japan, which has the full cycle of technology?”, the interviewer’s response was: “The Japanese Government hasn’t said that its aim is to destroy the state of Israel.”¹⁵⁶

Israel is not only the central theme in the arguments that the US has presented in presenting Iran as a threat, it is in fact the principal securitizing actor. It was only when Israel

¹⁵⁴ Lee, Matthew. “U.S. removes N. Korea from terror list”. 11 October 2008. *The Associated Press*. MSNBC.com.< <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27109746/>> par. 1

¹⁵⁵The IR. “Implications of the US-India Nuclear Deal”. No date. *Harvard International Review*. <<http://hir.harvard.edu/index.php?page=article&id=1363>> par. 4

¹⁵⁶ Weymouth, Lally. “A Conversation with Mohamed El-Baradei”. 1 February, 2009. Transcripts of Interviews (original from Washington Post), *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*. <<http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Transcripts/2009/wp010209.html>> par. 16

started to call Iran a threat in the 1990's and pushed the US to do the same, that the US followed suit. The United States did not consider Iran or its nuclear program as a "threat" right after the Islamic Revolution took place. The emergence of the "Iranian threat" coincided with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 between Israel and the Palestinians. For Israel, it was difficult to sell this deal domestically as they had been demonizing the Palestinians for as long as they could remember. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin chose Iran as Israel's new enemy, and according to several Israeli decision-makers, *exaggerated* the threat coming from Iran in order to justify making peace with the Palestinians.¹⁵⁷ He argued that Israel needed to make peace with them in order to confront a larger threat in region than the Palestinians and the Arab world, which was embodied in Iran. Israel also believed that of all of its foes, Iran was the most likely to acquire nuclear weapons, even though Iran's nuclear program was practically moribund at the time, making it a good candidate for securitization.¹⁵⁸

Along with this change in its policy, Israel also wanted the US to support its new position by putting Iran under a tremendous amount of economic and political pressure. It was against any US-Iran dialogue or rapprochement as it believed Iran was only interested in doing so with the US, and not with Israel, fearing that this would come at the cost of Israel's security interests. Since then, Israel and the lobby have been set on a course to prevent such a dialogue from taking place, fostering a confrontational relationship between the United States and Iran.¹⁵⁹ In doing so, as Mearsheimer and Walt describe it, "Israel began warning the US in 1993 that Iran was a grave threat not only to Israel but to the US as well."¹⁶⁰ Well aware of the commitment of the White House to the Middle East peace process, Israel tried to convince the United States that Israel could not pursue peace with the Arabs unless the US adopted a tougher stance towards Iran.¹⁶¹ It proved to be a successful tactic.

The Clinton administration responded to this pressure by adopting the policy of Dual Containment, which had been proposed by Martin Indyk, the founder of a pro-Israeli think-tank, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.¹⁶² The assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs at that time, Robert Pelletreau, said the proposal was essentially a copy

¹⁵⁷ Parsi, Trita. "Tracherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US". 2007. Yale University Press. p. 266

¹⁵⁸ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy". 2007. Penguin Books. p. 291

¹⁵⁹ Parsi, Trita. "Tracherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US". 2007. Yale University Press. p. 181, 272

¹⁶⁰ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy". 2007. Penguin Books. p. 283

¹⁶¹ Parsi, Trita. "Tracherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US". 2007. Yale University Press. p. 184

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 170-171

of an Israeli proposal.¹⁶³ As this containment policy was not effective, Rabin contacted the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), one of the most powerful Israel lobbies in the United States, to press the US to impose new and more stringent sanctions on Iran. As Trita Parsi, a leading expert on US-Iranian relations, illustrated, “At the behest of the Israeli government, AIPAC drafted and circulated a seventy-four-page paper in Washington arguing that Iran was a threat not only to Israel, but also to the United States and the West”.¹⁶⁴

The dedicated efforts by the Israeli government and the lobby proved to be effective, as they led to the Clinton administration’s frequent sanctioning of Iran, examples of which are the two Executive Orders banning trade with Iran, and the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), as discussed in Chapter I.¹⁶⁵ As these came about through the Israeli lobby’s extensive efforts, these groups have significantly contributed to the animosity and confrontational relationship between Iran and the United States.

As these sanctions prohibited firms from investing in Iran’s oil and gas sector, the oil lobby (often seen as the major force behind America’s policies in the Middle East) heavily opposed them, but to no avail. Ironically, such opposition also came from former Vice President Dick Cheney, who openly complained about these sanctions when he was president Halliburton, an oil-services company, in the 1990’s. As the Vice President under the Bush administration, he was the most prominent advocate of a military option against Iran and supported the policy of containment.¹⁶⁶

Speaking of a threat and a timetable

Israel’s efforts to convince the United States of the Iranian threat did not only lead to the US’ policy shift and the imposition of sanctions on Iran, it also caused the US to speak of Iran as a threat for the first time. It demonstrated the success of Israel and the lobby in convincing the most important and powerful “audience” (the US) that Iran was not only an existential threat to Israel, but also to America’s national security, against which every

¹⁶³ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”. 2007. Penguin Books. p. 286

¹⁶⁴ Parsi, Trita. “Traacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US”. 2007. Yale University Press. p. 184

¹⁶⁵ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”. 2007. Penguin Books. p.288-289

¹⁶⁶ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”. 2007. Penguin Books. p. 289

possible measure could be taken to confront it, justifying even military action.¹⁶⁷ It led to a sudden and fundamental change in the way the US thought about Iran, and as Parsi remarked, “[b]y October 1994 (...), Washington started to adopt the Israeli line on Iran. In response to Israeli pressure (and not to Iranian actions) Washington’s rhetoric on Iran began to mirror Israel’s talking points.”¹⁶⁸ The claims of the US about Iran’s nuclear program, its intentions and the extent of the threat, clearly demonstrate this point. It has even taken over Israel’s tendency to emphasize worst-case scenarios, as outlined in Chapter II.¹⁶⁹

In some cases the US has also characterized the Iranian threat in a manner which reflects the hawkish end of Israeli thinking, typical of Israel lobby groups such as AIPAC or the Christians United for Israel, or of hawkish Israeli leaders such as Prime Minister Netanyahu. For instance, in an address to the Israeli Knesset in 2008, President George Bush likened Ahmadinejad to Osama bin Laden, and then compared Barack Obama (who was a Presidential candidate at the time) to Nazi appeasers, for suggesting a dialogue with Iran, saying: “Some seem to believe we should negotiate with terrorists and radicals (...). We have heard this foolish delusion before. As Nazi tanks crossed into Poland in 1939, an American Senator declared: ‘Lord, if only I could have talked to Hitler, all of this might have been avoided.’ We have an obligation to call this what it is -- the false comfort of appeasement (...).”¹⁷⁰

This echoes the frequent comparisons between Iran and Nazi Germany or Ahmadinejad and Hitler that have been made by several Israeli leaders and the lobby, such as those made by the former Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, who characterized the Iranian threat saying: “Since Hitler we have not faced such a threat”. (...) “Of all the threats we face, Iran is the biggest. The world must not wait.”¹⁷¹ The Chairman of the Christians United for Israel (another very powerful Israel lobby group), John Hagee, warned that “Iran poses a threat to the State of Israel that promises nothing less than a nuclear holocaust. (...) Iran is Germany and Ahmadinejad is the new Hitler.”¹⁷² His view echoes that of many other

¹⁶⁷ Parsi, Trita. “Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US”. 2007. Yale University Press. p. 185

¹⁶⁸ Parsi, Trita. “Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US”. 2007. Yale University Press. p. 185

¹⁶⁹ Parsi, Trita. “Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US”. 2007. Yale University Press. p. 282

¹⁷⁰ “Bush Compares Obama to Nazi Appeasers”. 15 May, 2008. The Huffington Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/05/15/bush-compares-obama-to-na_n_101859.html par. 2-3

¹⁷¹ Labott, Elise, and Aneesh Raman. “Iran president says U.N. sanctions unlikely”. 24 April, 2006. CNN. < <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/04/24/iran.nuclear/index.html> > par.8-9

¹⁷² Hagee, John. AIPAC Policy Conference. 11 March, 2007. AIPAC. <<http://www.aipac.org/Publications/SpeechesByPolicymakers/Hagee-PC-2007.pdf>>

powerful lobby groups, who in the United States are the most fervent supporters of a military strike against Iran.

Israel and the lobby have successfully securitized Iran, as they have created acceptance on the part of the US in case it would choose to undertake a unilateral military strike against Iran. Moreover, the US has even suggested it would offer Israel assistance in such a military strike, and has gone even further by saying it seriously considers the option of carrying out such an attack itself.¹⁷³ In statements by US politicians displaying this amount of support, they explicitly refer to the “existential threat” Iran poses to Israel, and have advocated and expressed sympathy for what would be an act of war.

In some cases, they have even already publicly excused Israel in advance in case it would attack at a time which may counter America’s interests. While the Obama administration is making efforts to engage and enter into negotiations with Iran, the question was asked whether the US expected “the Israelis, as an ally, to follow along with that and not take unilateral [military] action”. President Obama’s response was: “No, look, I understand very clearly that Israel considers Iran an existential threat, and given some of the statements that have been made by President Ahmadinejad, you can understand why. So their calculation of costs and benefits are going to be more acute.”¹⁷⁴ Israel has managed to successfully obtain justification and support for any extraordinary measures that it deems necessary in order to counter the threat.

Israel has used the threat of military action as a way of pressuring the United States and the European Union to act tough on Iran, which has been a key element of Israeli policy towards Iran since the 1990’s, essentially closing the window for diplomacy.¹⁷⁵ While Iran was actually interested in improving relations between the two countries in the 1990’s, it effectively thwarted any possibility of a rapprochement between the US and Iran.¹⁷⁶

Israel has also done so by convincing the US that the threat is imminent, with short term assessments of Iran possessing a bomb and pressing for arbitrary deadlines. Its intelligence agency, the Mossad, estimated in 2005 that Iran would have nuclear weapons

¹⁷³ Oren, Amir. “U.S. top brass: Nuclear Iran is existential threat to Israel”. 11 August, 2009. Haaretz. <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1126580.html>> par. 2

¹⁷⁴ Meacham, Jon. “A Highly Logical Approach”. 16 May, 2009. Newsweek. <<http://www.newsweek.com/id/197891/page/3>> p. 2

¹⁷⁵ Parsi, Trita. “Netanyahu and the threat of bombing Iran: The bluff that never stops giving.” 8 April, 2009. The Huffington Post. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/trita-parsi/netanyahu-and-threat-of-b_b_183822.html> par. 9-10

¹⁷⁶ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”. 2007. Penguin Books. p. 282

within three years.¹⁷⁷ In 2008, it judged precisely the same, contrary to the US NIE of 2007.¹⁷⁸ Prime Minister Netanyahu even suggested in 2006 that: “Israel would certainly be the first stop on Iran's tour of destruction, but at the planned production rate of 25 nuclear bombs a year ... [the arsenal] will be directed against ‘the big Satan,’ the U.S., and the ‘moderate Satan,’ Europe.”¹⁷⁹ Where this number of 25 nuclear bombs a year comes from is unclear.

In 2005, the Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz already described Iran’s nuclear program to be close to a “point of no return” to having sufficient know-how of enrichment for the development of a nuclear weapon. However, this term is only used by those that want immediate action and the call for such action completely disregards the fact that Iran has the “inalienable right (...) to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination” as it states in the Non-Proliferation Treaty it is a party to; unlike Israel.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, denying Iran this right would set a precedent in International Law to which the nuclear have-nots would likely be heavily opposed.

While Israeli intelligence has consistently predicted the prospect of Iran with nuclear weapons or the sufficient fissile material to be sooner than American intelligence reports have predicted so far, it has also urgently pressed Washington for deadlines, particularly when there are negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program. Netanyahu and Ehud Barak have confirmed the position of Israel that the only acceptable outcome from nuclear talks with Tehran is Iran’s full suspension of uranium enrichment.¹⁸¹ Arguing that, “[w]e’re running out of time to address the Iranian threat”, Defense Minister Ehud Barak said Israel was “convinced that the dialogue must be confined to a short period of time, while simultaneously stepping up sanctions.”¹⁸² It started to call any deliberation on the part of the Iranians or negotiated agreement such as that with the Europeans in 2004 as “buying time”, even when it

¹⁷⁷ “Iran will have nuclear weapon in three years: Mossad”. 5 February, 2009. AFP. <<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jQXIC9PbA5rxEyOvCoZTd7Xv-4xg>> par. 1

¹⁷⁸ “Iran rejects Mossad nuclear claim”. 26 January, 2005. BBC. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4208809.stm> par. 2-3

¹⁷⁹ Hirschberg, Peter. “Netanyahu: It's 1938 and Iran is Germany; Ahmadinejad is preparing another Holocaust”. 14 November, 2009. Haaretz. <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/787766.html>> par. 7

¹⁸⁰ “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)” Article IV (1), 22 April, 1970. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). <<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/Others/infcirc140.pdf>> p. 3.

¹⁸¹ Leverett, Hillary M., and Flynt Leverett. “Iran is no existential threat”. 4 December, 2009. Foreign Policy. <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/04/iran_is_no_existential_threat?page=0,1&%24Version=0&%24Path=/&%24Domain=.foreignpolicy.com,%20%24Version%3D0>

¹⁸² Mualem, Mazal, and Or Kashti. “Barak: We're running out of time on Iran threat”. 27 February, 2009. Haaretz. <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1067273.html>> par. 1

concerned Iran allowing inspectors to its recently disclosed enrichment facility at Qom.¹⁸³ As was also indicated by Admiral Dennis Blair, the new director of national intelligence, the nuclear-threat clock ticks a lot faster in Tel Aviv than it does in Washington.¹⁸⁴

Israel's exaggeration and emphasis on worst-case scenarios is to a large extent due to its underestimation of Arab capabilities in the 1983 Yom Kippur War, after which the intelligence apparatus started to overcompensate for this mistake in calculations.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, Israel sees it as a necessity to keep the pressure on Washington high in order to hinder any possible dialogue, pushing it to set arbitrary deadlines which often leave no room for the two countries to address all the issues and distrust that have accumulated for over more than thirty years.

It has also reacted strongly against any reports that contradict their own assessments. Israel was outraged by the US National Intelligence Estimate of 2007, which contradicted and disputed both the US and Israeli claims of the Iranian threat, particularly the imminence of it. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Israel put a large amount of pressure on the US intelligence community to reject the assessment and draft a new report which was more consistent with Israeli policy.¹⁸⁶ Although this did not happen, after President Bush's meeting with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert he assured the Israeli leader by saying that, "I interpreted it [the NIE] to mean you better take the Iranian threat seriously."¹⁸⁷ The conclusions of the IAEA also did not sit very well with the Israeli administration, giving rise not only to harsh criticisms, but also to calls for action against him.¹⁸⁸ Yet El-Baradei did not bend.

Public Opinion

One of the important audiences that the US has tried to convince as part of the securitization process is American public opinion. It is important to mention that this public opinion is mainly shaped by the information provided by the mainstream media in the US,

¹⁸³ "Iran rejects Mossad nuclear claim". 26 January, 2005. [BBC](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4208809.stm).

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4208809.stm> par. 15

¹⁸⁴ Sanger, David E., and William J. Broad. "Allies' Clocks Tick Differently on Iran". 14 March, 2009. [The New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com).

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/weekinreview/15SANGER.html>> par. 5

¹⁸⁵ Parsi, Trita. "Traacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US". 2007. [Yale University Press](http://www.yale.edu). p. 282

¹⁸⁶ "US faces pressure to rewrite NIE report on Iran". 17 October, 2009. [PressTV](http://www.presstv.com).

<<http://www.presstv.com/detail.aspx?id=108921§ionid=3510203>> par. 1

¹⁸⁷ Benn, Aluf and Barak, Ravid. "Bush, in Israel: Iran poses threat to world peace". 19 Januari, 2008. [Haaretz](http://www.haaretz.com).

<<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/943149.html>> par. 3

¹⁸⁸ "Israel minister: Sack ElBaradei". 8 November, 2007. [BBC](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7085213.stm). <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7085213.stm>> par. 5

which are significantly influenced by the Israel lobby. As Mearsheimer and Walt point out, pro-Israel forces do not control the media or what the media says, but do work hard to monitor and influence the mainstream media.¹⁸⁹ This has contributed to the marginalization of alternative interpretations that do not support Israel's policies towards the Islamic Republic, thereby reinforcing the dominant discourse in which the representations of Iran as an evil enemy have become embedded and reproduced. In this way the lobby has also aided the securitization process of the US, helping to convince the public of this threat and also influencing the US' perception of Iran, as discussed in Chapter II.

Conclusion

The influence of Israel and the Israel lobby on the US' characterization of Iran as a nuclear threat becomes evident in several ways. First, it is one of the main reasons why the US treats Iran differently from other countries such as Japan or North Korea in relation to their nuclear programs. This becomes explicit through the arguments that the US adopts in making the case for Iran being a nuclear threat, in which Israel is reoccurring and central theme.

Second, Israel has had a leading role in securitizing Iran and its nuclear program, and has been the main force behind the US' securitization of Iran. The US only started to talk about Iran as a threat in the 1990's after significant pressure from Israel and the lobby on the White House. They have successfully convinced the United States that Iran's nuclear program poses an existential threat to Israel, the US and world peace. The US has indicated it would acquiesce to unilateral military action on the part of Israel, or even take such action itself to confront this threat, again (wrongly) citing Iran's call for the destruction of Israel and referring to the existential threat it poses to the latter. It has also changed its policy towards Iran since then, starting to frequently impose sanctions on Iran and adopting the essentially Israeli proposed policy of Dual Containment. This demonstrates the influence of the Israel lobby on the way the US has dealt with Iran.

Third, Israel has also been the source of the idea that the threat from Iran is imminent, making predictions of Iran's nuclear capabilities suggesting that time is running out, and pushing for arbitrary deadlines in the dealings between the US and Iran. Furthermore, the demonization of Iran by Israel has also had an effect on US characterization of Iran as an evil

¹⁸⁹ Mearsheimer, John J. and Stephen Walt. "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy". 2007. Penguin Books. p. 169

enemy and a threat. This has become evident not only through the way this is echoed by US politicians, but also through the influence it has had on public opinion. Israel and the Israel lobby have shown to be a very significant factor and can perhaps be seen as a powerful external influence on the way the US has perceived and securitized Iran.

Conclusion

After critically analyzing the claims that the US has put forward about Iran's nuclear program, these appeared to be based on disputed intelligence and assumptions rather than facts. Disagreement with the IAEA over the nature of Iran's program is also a serious issue and strongly reminiscent to the case of Iraq. Particularly important to underscore in this research is the finding that the National Intelligence Estimate of 2007 has shown to be misleading, defining "nuclear weapons program" in a way that suggests it has evidence that Iran had such a program, while it in fact does not. The International Atomic Energy Agency also disagreed with this conclusion. Unfortunately, in the dominant discourse, this has been reiterated and used as a point of research, reflected in the media and in many academic works.

In addition, there has also been a switch of the burden of proof, which has been particularly problematic for the building of trust between Iran and the West. Iran has to prove it does not have nuclear weapons, while the actual burden should be on the US, which has claimed Iran had such a program in the first place.

Notwithstanding that the US claims about Iran's nuclear program were not found to be based on evidence, it is important to recognize that it is very difficult and highly unlikely that the IAEA will find evidence if it exists, meaning it largely comes down to assessing Iran's intentions. Such an assessment is inherently subject to interpretations, which in the case of the US has been influenced to a large extent by the paradigm of enmity, which has resulted from a legacy of animosity and distrust.

Chapter II has demonstrated how this has come about through the grievances that have resulted from humiliating events such as the hostage crisis. The US perceives Iran to be a hostile, radical Islamist, undemocratic country that is not part of the international community and has a repressive theocratic regime of irrational mullahs that aim to export their ideology and obstruct the interests of the US and its allies in the region. Both the representations by the US and Iran of each other are embedded in a "paradigm of enmity", in which each identifies the other as its evil adversary, which has been strengthened and reproduced over time by many different factors.

This has caused the idea that Iran is an evil state that is secretly trying to acquire nuclear weapons to prevail in the dominant discourse in the West. This has also been due to a large extent to the media, which have played a significant role in reproducing such constructions of Iran and spreading misleading and incorrect information, exemplified by the "wiping off the map" misquotation. The media have thereby also strengthened the paradigm of enmity and supported the notion of Iran as a threat.

Through this paradigm, the US has interpreted Iran's behavior in a particular way; usually as hostile, suspicious, or of bad intentions. Yet it has not only been a matter of unconscious ideas that have influenced the US' characterization of Iran; these ideas have also been strengthened and reinforced by the conscious reproduction of these on the part of the US. This aspect has been analyzed through the framework of securitization.

In applying this approach to the case of the US' construction of the Iranian threat, the US has said that it faces an existential threat from Iran, expressing concerns that it may potentially provide nuclear weapons to terrorists that want to attack the US. In addition, it names Israel as the referent object most existentially threatened by Iran's nuclear plans, and has argued that overall, Iran constitutes a threat to world peace. Both the US and Israel have

said that they may resort to military action to fend off this threat, and have brought forth many arguments to justify why this may very well be necessary. One of these arguments is that this threat is imminent, with Israel leading this argument. However, as the findings of Chapter I indicate, this imminence of the threat appears not to be an objective assessment but rather an exaggeration.

In analyzing the process by which this threat has been constructed by the US, these have appeared to be ill-founded assumptions that do not support the notion of a threat. Moreover, without the critical underlying assumption that Iran *intends* to develop nuclear weapons, which was shown to be unfounded in Chapter I, the arguments the US has put forward based on these assumptions become irrelevant. This suggests the Iranian threat is not based on objective facts but rather on ideas and assumptions that the US has of Iran and its nuclear program.

The fact that the US considers Iran as a threat has been significantly influenced by Israel. It only referred to Iran as such after Israel and the lobby made a considerable effort to convince the US that Iran was not only an existential threat to Israel, but also to America's national security, against which every possible measure could be taken to confront it, justifying even military action. It signifies a successful act of securitization on the part of Israel, having acquired acceptance of the US in case it decides to confront this threat by a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities and even leading the US to consider taking such action itself.

In the light of the findings as presented in Chapter I and II, it becomes clear that information is a powerful tool. Expressing doubt about the consideration of a military option, Senator Edward M. Kennedy said in a statement: "it's time for the president to look at the cold, hard facts on Iran and walk back from the overheated rhetoric. The last thing America needs is to be misled into another war based on hype and trumped-up intelligence."¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Neuman, Johanna. "Iran continues to be a threat, Bush says". 5 December, 2007. Los Angeles Times. http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/la-na-bush5dec05_0,1189992.story par. 7

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