

The Endurance of US-Iranian Enmity after the Nuclear Deal: A Constructivist-Based Discourse Analysis

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Introduction

After a decade of tough negotiations based on the principle of “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”, Iran and the P5+1 countries (the United States (US), the United Kingdom, China, Russia, France, and Germany) agreed on a comprehensive deal that would curb large parts of the Iranian nuclear infrastructure. According to the deal concluded on 14 July 2015, Iran has committed itself to reduce its uranium enrichment capacity in exchange for the gradual abolition of sanctions that hit Iran’s key energy and financial sectors. Described by the EU’s Head of Foreign Policy, Federica Mogherini, “as a very good one for all sides”, the deal has raised prospects for a rapprochement between Iran and the US that would go beyond the nuclear field. It is expected to contribute to the acceleration of the Arab-Israeli peace process, establishment of stable governments in Iraq and Afghanistan, enhancement of American efforts to fight against terrorists groups, and the access of US businessmen to the Iranian market (113. Congress, 2nd Session, 18 November 2014, House vol.160, no.141, H8039)

Although this deal has created a prospect for solving the above-mentioned objectives, it is far from ending more than three decades of hostility and mistrust between Iran and the US. As clearly underlined by the US President Obama, the deal with Iran is not built on trust, but on verification. Moreover, by arguing that Iran continues to pose an extraordinary threat to the security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States, the President Obama ordered that the national emergency with respect to Iran remain in effect beyond 15 March 2015 (www.whitehouse.gov). Although the Iranian pragmatist President Hasan Rouhani described the nuclear deal as a “new page in history” for Iran (www.bbc.com), the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei made it clear that the nuclear deal with the West would not lead to any wider shift in Iran’s relationship with the US or its policies in the Middle East (Khamenei, 18 July 2015). Emphasizing the clash of interest between the US and the Iranian policies in the region, Khamenei stated that Iran would keep on supporting the people of Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, and Bahrain (Khamenei, 17 August; 18 July 2015). In an uncompromising attitude towards the US, Khamenei stated that, “our policy toward the arrogant government of America will not change a bit” (Khamenei, 18 July 2015). Moreover, framing the US as the greatest threat to the regional and global security, Khamenei,

highlighted that negotiations carried out with the US was only limited to the nuclear issue. He stated that:

These negotiations that are under way, part of which is negotiation with the American sides, is only about the nuclear issue; only. At present, we do not negotiate with America on any other issue; nothing. Everybody should know this. Neither on regional issues, nor on various domestic issues, nor on international issues. Today, the only topic for discussion and negotiations is the nuclear issue (Khamenei, 10 April 2015).

Although the US President Obama made it clear that he would veto any legislative efforts to derail the implementation of the recent nuclear deal, an overwhelming majority of members in the US Congress believes in taking a hard-line position against Iran. The dominant interpretation in the US Congress regarding Iran's goals and intentions is still based on scenarios in which Iran develops nuclear weapons and uses them to assert its regional hegemony and destroy Israel (26 January 2015. Senate vol. 161, no. 12. S468, S. Res. 40; 13 November 2013. House vol. 159, no. 161.H7037; 7 May 2015. Senate vol. 161, no.69. S2727). The US Congress still continues to depict Iran as the most dangerous threat both for the United States and for the international community as a whole (11 September 2015. vol.161, no.131, H5946; 22 July 2015, Senate vol.161, no.115, S5433; 9 July 2015, vol.161, no.106, Extensions of Remarks, E1023-4; 26 January 2015 Senate vol. 161, no. 12, S468, S. RES. 40).

These narratives illustrate how deeply the estrangement between Iran and the US remains. Based on a discourse-based constructivist perspective, this paper attributes this ongoing mistrust and hostility between the two countries to the socially created discursive context in which Iran and the US portray their identity. Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the following hostage crisis, coupled with the Iranian support for Hezbollah and Hamas, the US has traditionally portrayed Iran as an outlaw, fanatical, and rogue state that seeks weapons of mass destruction, finances and supports terrorism, and is involved in domestic human rights abuses (Tsui, 2013:8). Following a similar antagonistic narrative, Iran has historically accused the US for interfering into domestic affairs of Iran such as the CIA involvement in the 1953 coup against the Mossadegh government and attempts of regime change in Iran (Khamanei, 22 March 2009).

Such narratives have created the structure within which the mutual mistrust between two countries has consolidated an antagonistic relationship. As Iran and the United States share negative intersubjective meaning vis-a-vis each other based on their mutual mistrust and perception of the other as an enemy; it can be argued that this negativity prevents the recent nuclear deal to serve as a catalyst that would shift the dynamics of the relationship between Iran and the US. In order to understand the endurance of hostile relations between the two countries, the study follows a discourses-based constructivist approach that examines the discursive strategies and mechanisms deployed by the central actors in both sides.

Analyzing how 'intersubjective' meanings shape our perception and representation of structures of the material world, constructivist perspective offers a useful tool to examine the role actors play in creating and maintaining conflict through social interaction. Based on the

interaction between structure and agency, constructivism examines how the ongoing antagonistic relationship between Iran and the US, namely the structure, shapes and is shaped by the actors themselves. Another aspect of constructivism that most suits to this study is its emphasis on the complex link between interests, threat perceptions and socially constructed nature of identities. This approach reveals how the discourse and actions of both states derive from the identity projections they each envisage of one another. The socially constructed identities of both countries shape their interests and threat perceptions vis-a-vis each other, while at the same time their respective identities are shaped by interests and threat perceptions in a dialectical process.

As important sites of identity construction, the discourse used by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei as the highest authority in Iran and US Congressional Records are central for understanding the process of the mutual construction of identity by the US and Iran regarding each other. Therefore, in order to understand how the US-Iranian enmity has become so entrenched, this paper uses discourse analysis that provides a detailed understanding for how various textual strategies are deployed to construct social identities and relationships. The texts examined are selected from the statements made by the Supreme Leader and the US Congress hearings on Iran in order to reveal how the negative intersubjective meanings constructed by each side over the course of their relationship lead to the endurance of oppositional interests between them.

This paper is composed of four parts. The first part presents the main elements of the constructivist approach to examine how the ongoing mistrust and enmity between Iran and the US has been socially constructed. As hostility between the two is based upon the intersubjective interpretations of the actors themselves, the second part examines how the US and Iran represent identity of themselves and each other at critical historical moments throughout their interaction such as the Iranian Revolution, hostage crisis, Iran-Iraqi war, 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the reveal of the Iranian nuclear program. The third part examines the US hearings on Iran. As reflected in hearings, anti-Iranian narrative will be articulated according to discursive story lines such as: 'Iran is a leading state sponsor of terrorism', 'Iran is an enemy of the US and Israel and undermines US national security interests', 'Iran is committed to develop nuclear weapons', 'A nuclear Iran triggers an arms race in the region, and 'Iran is one of the world's worst human rights violators'. The fourth part will examine the Iranian construction of American identity on basis discursive themes such as: 'The US tries to abolish Islamic Revolution', 'The US is an enemy that cannot be trusted', 'The US is a hegemonic oppressive power that tries to keep Iran dependent and weak', 'The US is trying to deny Iran its right to enrich uranium'.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is based on the idea that our understanding of the world is not objectively derived but instead is the result of socially constructed concepts (Ruggie, 1998:856). It holds that human agents do not exist independently from their social environment and its collectively shared systems of meanings (Risse, 2004:160). From a

constructivist approach, human interaction is argued to be shaped by collectively shared beliefs, which are rooted in ideational rather than simply material factors (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001:391). Constructivism treats social variables, such as socially constructed rules and intersubjective beliefs as basic causal variables that shape preferences and outcomes. It emphasizes how intersubjective beliefs may provide actors with understandings of what is important, valuable, appropriate, necessary and legitimate (Finnemore, 1996:15).

Concerned with human consciousness and the effect this has on state identities and interests, this approach tries to understand where social interpretations of the world come from, how and when they change, and how they influence the behaviors of individual and state actors (Ruggie, 1998:856; Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001:391). Therefore, the biggest contribution of the constructivist approach to this study has been its tendency not to treat identity and interests of states as taken for granted and fixed. Constructivism rather argues that the identity of a state constitutes the basis of interest formation of that state (Wendt, 1992:398; Ruggie, 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998).

Defined as “role specific understandings and expectations about the self,” such as the “leader of the free world” and the “imperial power”, identity is assumed to lead each state actor to assign itself and other actors a position within an international hierarchy (Wendt, 1992: 397). From a constructivist perspective, the concept of identity is not fixed, rather is relational and intersubjective, which implies that identities and interests vary over time and with context. It also implies that the way actors represent themselves and are perceived by others varies according to the nature of interaction and with whom they interact. According to Goff and Dunn (2004:4-5), identity created, maintained, and redrawn through social interaction determines that self is defined and differentiated in regards to a significant other within a given context.

As identity as a relational term determines who is self and who is others, the construction of identity is also a process of separating one’s own identity from the others (Wodak, 1996:126). Accordingly, the construction and perception of the self itself is constantly contested during interactions with others. For Hopf (1998, 175), the producer of the identity is not in control of what it ultimately means to others; the intersubjective structure is the final arbiter of meaning. Identity is also assumed to be socially constructed in discursive activities (Mumby and Clair, 1997). The discursive construction of identity implies that identities shape an actor’s interests, which in turn affects how the identities and behaviors of other actors, whether friendly or aggressive, are constructed. This constructivist insight that emphasizes the mutual construction of identities and interests helps to understand the endurance of conflicts among states. The intersubjective nature of constructivism provides an analysis to explore how the US and Iran perceive each other as enemies that cannot be trusted. Each actor constructs itself as a responsible and peaceful state, while identifying the other as the biggest threat to its national security. This approach is thus very useful for examining how the socially constructed identities and interests of the US and Iran remain so radically opposed.

Another contribution of the constructivist perspective to this study stems from its conceptualization of power as both discursive and material (Hopf 1998). Referring to the 'discursive power' as the 'power of practice,' Hopf (1998:178-179) states that, "The power of practice is the power to produce intersubjective meaning within a social structure". This implies that the power of practice reproduces an intersubjective reality. Therefore, for the constructivist approach, the discourse surrounding the behavior is as important as the action itself (Finnemore, 1996). Constructivists highlight the constitutive role of discourse that produces intersubjective meanings by which social reality can be understood and explained. Discourses frame and structure what can be conceived and uttered (George, 1994:29-30). As discourse is considered to influence perceptions and representations of the 'reality' around us, they are conceptualized as "operationalising a particular 'regime of truth' while excluding other possible modes of identity and action" (Milliken, 1999:229). Discourses thus have the power to determine a certain common sense but make other modes of interpretation and perception meaningless, inadequate or disqualified (Milliken, 1999:229). In other words, discourses encompass any semantic production that generates a shared understanding of reality (Hajer, 1993). This shared understanding of reality is collectively established in public consciousness through an organizing system of 'narratives', each of which are composed of supporting story lines (Hajer, 1993). Story lines are the component lines of reasoning that collectively support an understanding of the truth. Discourse around an issue is thus a common conceptual comprehension consisting of narratives, and the story lines that collectively establish and reinforce the 'reality' of the narratives.

Doty (1996) emphasizes the role discursive strategies such as binary oppositions and representational strategies play in the construction of a social reality. She underlines that things are given meaning and simultaneously positioned vis-a-vis other things through binary oppositions that are key representational elements in national identity narratives. Binary oppositions set up an international hierarchy of subjects by attributing the self positive characteristics, whereas the other negative traits. Giving meaning and "positionality" to subjects, binary oppositions thus constitute the "deep structure" or "operative principles" of the dominant discourse, which then sets the parameters for the policies states will follow (Doty, 1996). As for the representational strategies, Doty (1996) argues that agents in a subject's discourse are assigned certain characteristics and capabilities through representational strategies. The set of labels, or cluster of attributes, attached to an agent establishes its identity and endows it with a certain kind and degree of agency, based on a range of practices associated with the constructed identity. According to Doty (1996), a subject's discourse places agents into categories, thereby positioning them vis-a-vis one another and justifying hierarchical relationships among them.

Tracing the Discursive Construction of Iranian-American Enmity

The CIA coup that ousted Mohammad Mosaddegh from power in 1953 constructed the basis for the hostile relations between the US and Iran. The US role in the overthrow of a democratically elected government in Iran shaped the identity of Iranians by creating a negative image of the US (Bill, 1988). The subsequent American support extended to the Shah

despite his autocratic rule and repression through partnerships and trade in oil and arm sale triggered a sense of mistrust towards the US. The US began to be seen as the Great Satan, which referred to the imperialistic power that put an end to democratic rule in Iran through a coup and corrupted the Iranian culture (Beeman, 2005: 67).

After the 1979 revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis, the relation between Iran and the US deteriorated and the negative images that two countries held towards each other became more entrenched. Influential figures in both Iran and the United States used antagonistic discourses to shape representations of each other. While Iran framed the United States as the Great Satan that aims to abolish the Iranian revolution, the United States designated Iran as a rogue, backlash, outlaw state that sponsors international terrorism and violates international human rights. Both countries embarked on such statements to construct a particular image with regards to each other.

What further undermined the Iranians' view about the credibility of the US was the American support to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war. Considering Iraq as a counterbalance to the post-revolutionary Iran, the US supported Saddam Hussain in his war against Iran. In addition to preventing efforts to declare Iraq's invasion of Iran as an act of aggression and a threat to international security at the UN Security Council, the US provided material and logistical support to Saddam. Such incidents have left an enduring influence on the Iranian politics and steeled the sense of nationalism. The US support of Saddam Hussein coupled with the international community's willingness to overlook Saddam's use of chemical weapons against Iran made Iranians conclude that they cannot fully rely on any country or international body to preserve Iran's independence and security. Moreover, as Iran did not lose any territory during the eight year war with Iraq, Iran became convinced that it could preserve its sovereign rights and pursue strategic objectives despite external manipulations.

The death of Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the rise of a pragmatic President Rafsanjani in Iran raised hopes for cooperation between two countries. Iran helped negotiate the release of American hostages in April 1990, but the US did not react positively to this Iranian goodwill gesture. Iranian-American relations continued to be extremely tense after the then US President Bush signed in October 1992 the Iran-Iraq Arms Nonproliferation Act that aimed at containing rogue states (Ferrero, 2013:47). The Clinton administration' embarking on the policy of dual containment on 18 May 1993 further institutionalized the negative image of the Iranian state. Accusing Iran of sponsoring international terrorism and pursuing weapons of mass destruction, Clinton issued in 1995 two executive orders that prohibited any US trade and investment in Iran and broadened the 1987 sanctions imposed on Iranian imports by the Raegan administration. As the United States imposed more sanctions on Iran, Iran publicly protested against US actions, further strengthened its ties with groups like the Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian Hamas (Mohseni-Cheraghloo, 2015:100).

The Khobar Tower bombings that killed 19 US servicemen and wounded 498 people from various countries on 25 June 1996 further increased antagonism between the US and

Iran. As Iran was blamed for the attack, the US Congress passed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act on 16 July 1996, which imposed penalties on any company, foreign or domestic, that invested in Iran or Libya's energy sectors. The Clinton administration pursued this hard line strategy until the rise of a reformist president, Mohammad Khatami in 1997 Iranian elections. The reformist Khatami reached out to the US in a January 1998 CNN interview in which he called for a "Dialogue of Civilizations". Khatami praised the great American civilization and also implied that the infamous Iranian hostage crisis was an unfortunate tragedy, which he regretted. Based on the socially created image of Iran as one of hostage-taking, declaring a war on the US and the West, and sponsor of terrorism, the 'dialogue on civilizations' initiative of the Khatami government was welcome with caution by the US. Upon this caution, the reformist President Khatami (quoted in Pollack, 2005:314) stated that, "We will not accept bullying and domination-seeking policies, and any changes in our policies towards the USA depends on changes in the attitude and positions of the USA concerning Iran's Islamic revolution".

Two years after the dialogue on civilizations' initiative of the Khatami government was announced, the Clinton administration took steps to improve relations with Iran such as relaxing restrictions on travel visa between the two countries and lifting sanctions on carpets and foodstuffs (Abrahamian, 2004: 95). The US also tried to open a dialogue with Iran on 17 March 2000, through the speech of the then Secretary of State Madeline Albright, who admitted the role played by the United States in the 1953 coup that ousted Iran's prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh from power. After two decades of threats and sanctions imposed on Iran, Albright's speech was an unprecedented move by the US. Nevertheless, the change in US position came a bit too late for Iranians. The Supreme Leader, Khamenei (quoted in Hiro, 2005:32) responded to this speech in an uncompromising manner by stating, "The Americans are presuming that such acknowledgements, which did not even include an apology, will cause us to forget America's acts of treason, hostilities, and injustices". The "dialogue among civilizations" initiative of Khatami and Albright's call for deepening bonds of mutual understanding and trust between two countries were short-lived as the Republican President Bush replaced Clinton on 20 January 2001.

The September 11 2001 terrorist attacks arouse the sympathy from the Iranian public for American people and the US war on terror opened a space for both countries to cooperate against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Iran helped the US military operation in Afghanistan by persuading certain warlords to abandon their bids for power and assisted the US in forming the interim government (Mohseni-Cheraghloo, 2015:108-9). However, the negative depictions of one another of both countries continued along the same lines. In his 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush accused Iran of pursuing weapons of mass destruction and exporting terrorism and declared Iran as an axis of evil that threatens the peace of the international community (Bush, 2002a: 131). Denouncing the rhetoric of Bush for being arrogant and humiliatingly aggressive, Khamenei declared the US to be the most hated Satan in the world (Clawson and Michael Rubin, 2005:153). Bush's axis of evil speech that aimed at transforming those hostile regimes to become democratic states by force if necessary has reinforced Tehran's deep-seated mistrust of Washington. Khamenei (quoted in

Pollack, 2005:352) stated that “The Islamic Republic is proud to be the target of the hate and anger of the world’s greatest evil; we never seek to be praised by American officials”.

After the clandestine Iranian nuclear program came to light in 2002, the mutual animosity and mistrust between Iran and the US escalated to a higher level. Each state continued to represent the other in a negative narrative and themselves in a positive manner. The US positioned Iran as an aggressive nuclear proliferator, while depicting itself as a responsible state seeking to curb nuclear proliferation. Given their decades of negative identity conceptions of each other, American and Iranian public pronouncements on the nature of Iran’s nuclear program were radically opposed. Iran claimed that its nuclear program was built on civilian purposes, aiming at generating electricity. Iran insisted on its right to be able to enrich uranium, while the US insisted that Iran conducts a nuclear program with military intentions and violates international norms. Although Iran denied such charges by arguing that nuclear weapons have no place in Iran’s security strategy, Iran was subject to bilateral sanctions and six UN Security Council Resolutions- four of which have included the imposition of economic sanctions against Iran.

Faced with the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, coupled with threatening rhetoric of the Bush administration about regime change in Iran, Iran made an important initiative toward rapprochement for mending its antagonistic relations with the United States. With a grand bargain proposal submitted to the US in May 2003, Iran suggested that it would end its assistance for Palestinian terrorist groups, assist in fighting against al-Qaeda, accept a Saudi plan for comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, and engage in full cooperation on its nuclear programme (Mohseni-Cheraghrou, 2015:111). In exchange, Iran asked that the US recognise the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic and its security concerns, abolition of all sanctions, and access to peaceful nuclear technology (Parsi, 2007: 243-247). When the Bush administration rejected the proposal, anti-American rhetoric that emphasized the political danger of reaching out to the United States increased in Iran. Iran engaged in constraining US efforts to pose an existential threat to the Islamic regime. In order to maximize the cost of the Iraqi occupation, and thus reduce the risk of future US invasion of Iran, Iran fought a proxy war to weaken the US military in Iraq (Mohseni-Cheraghrou, 2015:112). In his 2005 State of the Union address, President Bush announced that Iran remained the world’s primary state sponsor of terrorism and pursued nuclear weapons. In response, Khamenei called America as “a global tyrant” that denies “the talented Iranian nation of progress and deprive it of existence” (The Telegraph, 4 February 2005).

The electoral victory of President Barack Obama in late 2008 paved the way for a new era in US-Iranian relations. In a landmark video address, Obama reached out directly to Iranian leaders on 20 March 2009, declaring that his administration was committed to diplomacy to build constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community (www.whitehouse.gov). Obama announced that “This process will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect”. Reminding the American efforts to topple the Islamic regime in Iran, the US role in

encouraging Saddam financially and politically to attack Iran, and the unconditional US support for Israel, Khamenei (22 March 2009) responded with suspicion saying:

They say that they extended their arm towards Iran. What kind of a hand? If it is an iron hand covered with a velvet glove, then it will not make any good sense. They congratulate the Iranian nation on the occasion of the New year, but in the same message call the Iranian nation supporters of terrorism, who seek nuclear weapons... Where is the change? What has changed? Changes in words are not adequate... Change must be real... If the US Government continues its same behavior, method, course, policies against us, as in the past 30 years, we are the same people, the same nation that we were for the past 30 years... We do not have any experience with the new US President and Government. We shall see and judge. You change, and we shall change as well.

The change came with the rise of moderate pragmatist Hassan Rouhani as Iranian President in 2013. President Rouhani, who was a former nuclear negotiator, urged a cooperative approach vis-à-vis the international community. The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, embarked on the concept of “heroic flexibility” in relations with the United States and Iran’s willingness to negotiate on its nuclear program substantially increased. Unlike previous years of opposition to direct talks with Americans, Rouhani was committed to change the trajectory of Iran’s foreign policy from confrontation to cooperation. In line with this change coupled with Ayatollah Khamenei’s cautious support of engagement with the US, Iran held a series of talks with the United States, France, the United Kingdom, China, Russia, and Germany (P5+1). After multiple rounds of negotiations, on 24 November 2013, Iran and the P5+1 countries signed the Geneva Interim Agreement (Joint Plan of Action) that aimed at finding a long-term comprehensive solution to Iran’s nuclear program. The framework of a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that was concluded on 2 April 2015 was finalized by all parties on 14 July 2015.

The deal has raised prospects for a rapprochement between Iran and the US that would go beyond the nuclear field. It is expected to produce greater US-Iran cooperation for the solution of problems such as ending the Islamic State organization’s terrorist activities in Iraq and Syria. Despite such prospects, the deal is far from ending more than three decades of hostility and mistrust between Iran and the US due to the socially created anti-Iran and anti-American sentiments of each side vis-à-vis each other as shown in the following parts.

The US Construction of Iran

The US Congressional Records on Iran constantly produce an unchanging evil image of Iran. While hearings position the US as a responsible state that continuously promotes peace, democracy, and individual freedom, they present Iran as a great threat to these values by engaging in a complex and dangerous nexus of terrorism, instability, and autocracy (28 February 2014, House vol. 160, no. 34, H2094). The Iranian revolution in 1979 and the seizure of the US embassy and the subsequent hostage crisis is still the reference point of

many hearings (2 December 2013, House vol. 159, no. 169, H7378). By making references to such historical incidents, Congressional members like Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen reminds the American public that:

Iran has been a US-designated State Sponsor of Terrorism since 1984 and has been the foremost supporter for terrorist groups across the world since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Through its proxies likes Hezbollah and Hamas, Iran has targeted America and our ally, the democratic Jewish State of Israel, with violent acts of terror for over three decades, including the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis, the 1983 Beirut bombing and Marine barracks bombing, and the 1992 Israeli Embassy bombing and the 1994 AMIA Jewish community center bombing, both in Buenos Aires, Argentina (18 November 2014, House vol. 160, no. 141, H8037).

Promoting Iran as a hostage-taking state, Senator Johnny Isakson emphasizes the humiliation and the suffering of the American people during the the hostage crisis by saying:

Thirty-four years ago today, January 20, 1981, 52 of our fellow American citizens returned home after a harrowing 444-day ordeal of being illegally held hostage in Iran... Nevertheless, they all paid dearly for this service by being forced to endure humiliating treatment, brutal interrogations, mental and physical torture, and even mock firing squad executions while their families suffered endless waiting and genuine fear of their loved ones' imminent demise... (26 January 2015, Senate vol. 161, no. 12, S463).

Highlighting Iranian slogans such as 'death to America', 'Great Satan', and 'death to Israel', Rep. Ron DeSantis argues that Iran has been at war with the US since the Iranian revolution in 1979. Presenting Iran as a totalitarian Islamic state, DeSantis emphasizes that:

Iran proceeded to hold more than 50 American Embassy personnel hostage for over 400 days, and they commandeered our embassy, which is itself an act of war. Iran sponsored the massacre of 241 U.S. Marines at the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in 1983 through their proxy Hezbollah. Iran supported the bombing of the Khobar Towers in 1996 which killed 19 United States Air Force personnel and wounded 372 more (18 November 2014, House vol. 160, No. 142, H8064).

Revoking these historical atrocities, Congressional records depict Iran as the most dangerous threat to the US and world peace (11 September 2015. House vol.161, no.131, H5946; 22 July 2015, Senate vol.161, no.115, S5433; 29 May 2014, House vol. 160, no. 82, H4923; 26 February 2014, Senate vol. 160, no. 32, S1140). Iran is cast as the foremost security problem in the post-cold war era, replacing the former enemy Soviet Union. Emphasizing the support extended by Iran to Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, Rep. Steny Hoyer and Rep. Ted Poe argue that Iran continues to be the leading state sponsor of terrorism directed against America and its allies (28 February 2014 House, vol.160, no.34, H2094; 4 March 2014-Extensions of Remarks, vol.160, no. 36, E300). Acknowledging Iranian terrorist activities, Rep. Hoyer adds that Iran remains a primary backer of Syria's

dictator, Hafez al- Assad, who has gassed his own people and continues to target civilians (28 February 2014, House vol. 160, no. 34, H2095-6).

The majority of Congressional texts emphasize that United States has been officially in a continued state of national emergency with respect to Iran, as it poses the greatest threat to US national security interests. Iran is depicted as struggling for regional hegemony that would automatically threaten vital US security interests, commercial activities, and security of Israel. Presenting Iran as undermining US interests, Rep. Hoyer highlights that:

The extremist regime in Tehran is at the heart of the instability that is undermining America's interests across the region. Those interests are the safety of our troops stationed in the region, regional stability and prosperity, the prevention of an arms race that could spiral out of control, ensuring that weapons of mass destruction do not end up in terrorists' hands, the protection of trade routes and resources that fuel economies across the world, and safeguarding our ally, Israel (28 February 2014, House, vol. 160, no. 34, H2094).

Congressional hostility toward Iran is also based on resentment that Iran has repeatedly made threats against the existence of Israel and supported terrorist activities and violence against its citizens. By emphasizing the former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad' speech that called for a world without America and Zionism on 27 October 2005 as well as Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei's February 2012 speech that described Zionist regime as a true cancer tumor on this region that should definitely be cut off, senators like Bob Menendez highlights how threatening Iran is for Isreal, a true ally of the US (February 28, 2013, Senate vol. 159, no. 29, S1035 Sen. Res. 65). Positioning Israel as a state with a pluralistic, democratic political system, including freedom of speech, free, fair, and open elections; the rule of law; a fully independent judiciary; and other democratic principles and practices, Menendez and like-minded senators accuse Iran for not sharing these values (February 28, 2013, Senate vol. 159, no. 29, S1035 Sen. Res. 65). Hoyer similarly warns that

Iran's leaders continue to vilify Israel and its people, calling for the annihilation of the Jewish state, something Israel, America, and the world will never tolerate....We cannot, must not, and will not allow their leaders to continue to put the world at risk. (28 February 2014, House, vol. 160, no. 34, H2095-6).

Another important element of the Congressional narratives that portray Iran as evil involves the story line that Iran is committed to develop nuclear weapons that poses a great threat to the US, to its ally Israel and the entire world. (26 February 2014 , Senate vol. 160, no. 32, S1140; 9 December 2014, House vol. 160, no. 149, H8876; 28 February 2014, House, vol. 160, no. 34, H2094; 4 December 2013, House v. 159, no. 171, H7494; 26 January 2015, Senate vol. 161, no.12, S468, S. RES.40). The US Congress attributes Iran's pursuit of a nuclear program purely to offensive motives. The discourse of 'nuclear Iran with military intentions' has been channeled into public consciousness and it has become a very important dimension to the anti-Iranian narrative. Rep. Ros-Lehtinen presents Iran's continued nuclear

activities, its violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions, and progress in its ballistic missile program as an evidence of Iran's desire to acquire a nuclear weapon (14 November 2014, House vol. 160, no. 139, H 7981).

Rejecting Iranian insistence on having nuclear facilities for peaceful purposes, Rep. Peter Roskam argues that

.... And let's be frank. There is nobody with a straight face that is saying that the Iranians have any interest in pursuing nuclear technology because of an interest in global warming. This is not an energy pursuit at all. It is clearly a pursuit to manipulate the world stage toward their ends that are oftentimes driven by terror (4 December 2013, House vol. 159, no. 171, H7495).

Based on nuclear proliferation scenario in the Middle East, most of the hearings emphasize that nuclear weapons would further destabilise the Middle East and motivate regional states like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf States to search for nuclear weapons capabilities (20 November 2013, House vol. 159, no. 166, H7255; 7 May 2015, Senate vol. 161, no. 69, S2727). Establishing a link between a nuclear Iran and a possible arms race in the region, Rep. Jackie Walorski claims that:

There is no question that a nuclear armed Iran would dramatically change the balance of power in the Middle East and threaten freedom and peace for the rest of the world. It could also encourage other Middle Eastern nations to develop nuclear weapons on their own, further reducing our influence in that critical region of the world (18 November 2014, House vol. 160, no. 142, H8064).

Presenting the US as a world leader that has a responsibility to prevent a nuclear Iran, Rep. Gus Bilirakis argues that an Iran with nuclear weapons capabilities would further exacerbate and destabilize the region and would certainly inspire an arms race among other nonnuclear nations. Expressing his disappointment over the content of the final nuclear deal concluded on 14 July 2015 with Iran, Bilirakis calls civilized nations to stand united against the destructive output from rogue regimes like Iran (22 July 2015, vol.161, no.106, H4966). Positioning Iran as chief sponsor of global terror and emphasizing its desire to obliterate the United States and its great ally Israel, Senator Tillis similarly criticizes the recent nuclear deal for giving birth to the Middle East nuclear arms race by saying:

Ask yourself this question: Do you think it is likely that Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and other Gulf States are going to stand idly by when a hostile regime is going to have a nuclear capability over some period of time? Of course not. They are going to do what they need to do to feel like they are protecting their citizens. It will give rise to an arms race (22 July 2015, vol.161, no.115, S5437).

Along the same story-line, Rep. Ros-Lehtinen argues that a nuclear-capable Iran with a progress on its intercontinental ballistic missile program will trigger an arms race in the region and directly threaten America's security interests (26 January 2015, House vol. 161,

no. 12,H555; 22 July 2015, vol.161, no.115, H5343). Rep. Brad Schneider similarly argues that:

Iran, with their intercontinental ballistic missiles, ICBMs, is working to develop a capability to deliver such a weapon of mass destruction not just in this region but throughout the world. Iran, for Israel, is an existential threat. But Iran, for the region, and Iran, for the world, is as extreme a threat as it is for Israel. We must prevent a nuclear Iran not just because Israel is our ally, but because a nuclear Iran is a threat to the whole region—a threat to nuclear destabilization, a nuclear arms race among other countries in the region (2 December 2013, House vol. 159, no. 169, H7380).

Positing Iran with a nuclear capacity as the locus of hostility and danger, Rep. Poe similarly indicates that:

Iran pretends like it wants peace, but it really wants to conquer the entire Middle East... Right now, today, Iran is trying to gobble up Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. That is four countries in the Middle East. Now imagine what Iran would do once it had a nuclear weapon? We cannot let that happen. We must stop the Iranian mullahs that threaten both the United States and Israel (29 April 2015, Extensions of Remarks, vol. 161. no.63. E615).

Along the same lines, Rep. Michele Bachman claims that by using its nuclear arsenal, Iran wants to be a hegemon in its wider region:

...Iran seeks to be the dominant power in not only the Middle East region, but they also have evidence of dabbling in the far East in China, in the Philippines, and in South America. They intend to have their fingers in places all over the world because they intend to dominate. They intend to dominate with the shia religion. They intend to dominate through the use of nuclear weaponry through the most vile form of violence that there is in the world in order to achieve their objectives (13 November 2013, House vol. 159, no. 161.H7037).

Blaming the Iranian regime for having hegemonic aspirations that would pose a threat to the security of American allies in the region, Senator Thom Tillis states that

Our Arab friends see Iran creating a satellite “Shia Crescent” stretching to the Mediterranean and consisting of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. To their south and west, they see Iran gaining control of Yemen. Shia Iran is so obsessed with its race to dominate the Middle East that it is funneling millions of dollars to the Sunni terrorist group Hamas, to fund their war against Israel... (7 May 2015, Senate vol. 161, no. 69, S2727).

Senator Tillis (7 May 2015, Senate vol. 161, no. 69, S2727) blames the Obama government for ignoring 40 years of hostility with Iran. Based on this decades long animosity, Rep. Poe warns the American public by making reference to Iranians’ philosophy of hate. Criticizing the Obama government for being naive and soft on Iranian nuclear program, Poe calls for tightening sanctions against Iran:

Khamanei vowed that Iranians would slap the aggressors in the face in a way that they would not forget. Mr. Speaker, we cannot change the Iranians' philosophy of hate, but we can change their actions. They must be forced to stop nuclear weapon development with tougher sanctions (21 November 2013, House vol. 159, no. 167, H7336).

When constructing the Iranian reality, the US Congressional discourse relies also on analogies that define the nature of the problem by comparing a familiar situation with a new situation. The nuclear deterrence pursued between the US and the Soviet Union during Cold War years is compared with a possible nuclear equilibrium between Iran and the US. It is argued that unlike the Soviet-American nuclear deterrence, the Iranian-American nuclear equilibrium is not likely to be achieved. Along this story-line, Rep. Trent Franks warns the American public that :

We have to be very careful not to mistakenly assume that a relatively stable balance of deterrence, similar to the nuclear equilibrium between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, can be achieved with Iran. A nuclear Iran represents a very different type of threat that simply cannot be managed (15 February 2013, House vol. 159, no. 25, H571).

Using the analogy of North Korean nuclear proliferation despite fierce international reaction, Congressional texts equate Iran with North Korea in terms of their capacity to destabilize their respective regions and their hostility to the West. Constructing discursive links between the North Korean case and the Iranian nuclear program, Rep. Doug Lamborn emphasizes the failure of the international community to prevent North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons. He warns that international community will face another proliferation by saying, "We are witnessing a recurrence of the kind of effort that failed to prevent North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons, but in an even more volatile and dangerous region of the world" (4 December 2013, House vol. 159, no. 171, H7494).

Applying North Korean lessons to Iran, Rep. Doug Collins similarly argues that Much like negotiations with North Korea over its nuclear program, the US is being duped.... I don't want the US to go down the same path with Iran that it did with North Korea. In 2005, it was then seen as a landmark deal. North Korea agreed to abandon its nuclear weapons program in return for economic security and energy benefits. Twelve months later North Korea tested its first nuclear weapon (2 December 2013, House vol. 159, no. 169, H7378).

Comparing the final nuclear deal concluded with Iran on 14 July 2015 with the one concluded with North Korea in the mid-1990s, Rep. Ros-Lehtinen argues that it is a dangerous gamble to make with US national security. She reminds how the then deal with North Korea failed to dismantle any of North Korea's nuclear infrastructures and claims that the same applies for the Iranian case (114.Congress, 1.session, 8 July 2015, vol.161, no.105, H4947). Arguing that Iran should not be trusted today just as North Korea could not be trusted two decades ago, Rep. Ros-Lehtinen further states that:

This Iran nuclear deal is a bad deal because we have seen this movie before. We know how it ends. I have repeatedly stated that Iran has been following the North Korean playbook on exactly how to extract concessions from the United States and the international community while simultaneously continuing to improve its nuclear program, expand its infrastructure, and support its illicit activities...We saw what happened with North Korea, and we can be sure that Iran plans to follow suit (29 July 2015, vol.161 no.121, H5596).

Attributing Iran the Nazi Germany's genocidal intentions, Rep. Tom McClintock emphasizes the threat Iran as a rogue state can pose to the world security with nuclear weapons. Arguing that Iran has a well-established and consistent record of routinely violating international law and an obvious desire to acquire nuclear weapons, Rep. McClintock states that the recent deal fails to prevent the nuclear armament of Iran. He highlights that the deal only postpones Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons by 10 to 15 years by allowing its nuclear infrastructure remain intact and offering an unreliable verification mechanism. Presenting the abolishment of arms embargo on conventional weapons in five years and ballistic missiles in 8 years under the final nuclear deal as an appeasement, McClintock likens the deal to Chamberlain's Munich accord with Nazi Germany (114. Congress, 1.session, 15 July 2015, vol.161, no.110, H5182). Framing the nuclear negotiations with Iran as an appeasement to an oppressive regime that promotes destruction of the US and Israel, Rep. Wilson similarly argues that, "It is not too late to prevent a legacy of appeasement and avoid being remembered as a new Neville Chamberlain, establishing nuclear weapons across the Middle East" (114. Congress, 1.session, 8 July 2015, vol.161, no.105, H4876).

Untrustworthiness of Iran is another story-line promoted in Congressional hearings. Rep. Rod Blum highlights that:

We cannot trust a country that continues to sponsor and sanction terrorism against U.S. interests and actively promotes the destruction of our strongest ally in the Middle East, Israel ... I am deeply concerned that the U.S., once a strong leader on the world stage, is now allowing ourselves to be duped and undercut by a country with an agenda of terror and instability rather than the peace and cooperation that developed nations seek (9 July 2015, vol.161, no.106, Extensions of Remarks, E1023-4).

Reminding Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's 18 July 2015 speech that Iranians responded to with chants of 'death to America' and 'death to Israel', Rep. Rogers and Senator Thune posit Iran as an unreliable partner that cannot be trusted to comply with any deal including the implementation of the nuclear deal (28 July 2015 vol.161 no.120, H8536-7; 21 July, Senate vol.161, no.114, S 5195). Rep. Roger says that

Iran has proven time and again it is a state that cannot be trusted. The current deal rewards its bad behavior while compromising our national and global security... How could anyone believe that Iran could be trusted to play by any agreed upon rules? (28 July 2015 vol.161 no.120, H8536-7).

Presenting the nuclear deal that allows Iran maintain thousands of centrifuges, enrich its threshold nuclear capability, spend a multibillion-dollar sanction relief on terrorism as posing a great threat the US security, Rep. Poe says that “Iran is a wolf in wolf’s clothing, and the wolf has made a deal with the sheep not to eat them for 10 years. Then what? Supper?” (14 July 2015, vol.161, no.109, H5124). Expressing his deep dissatisfaction over the nuclear deal with an unreliable Iran, Senator McConnell similarly argues that

Let’s not forget that Iran is pursuing a full-spectrum campaign to expand its sphere of influence and undermine American security and standing in the region. Iran's continued support of terrorism and its determination to expand ballistic missile and conventional military capabilities should be gravely concerning to each of us (14 July 2015, vol.161, no.109, S5021-2).

Having suspicions on the implementation of the nuclear deal conducted between Iran and the P5+1, Rep. DeSantis similarly argues that

We know that Iran cannot be trusted to have any capabilities that could lead to nuclear weapons. They will not honor their agreements. We cannot even verify all of the facilities that they have, and consistently we have never been able to do that. So I think Iran will likely only strike a deal in which they can cheat and in which they will develop a nuclear weapon (18 November 2014, House vol. 160, no. 142, H8065).

Emphasizing Iranian proxy wars against the United States and its allies since at least the early 1980s and its continuingsupport for Bashar Assad in Syria and Palestinian terrorist groups, Senators like John Cornyn, John Barrasso, and Daniel Coats argue that Iran has cheated in the past and they are going to cheat in the future as well (22 July 2015, Senate vol.161, no.115, S5433-6). Concerning the inspection regime of the nuclear deal concluded with Iran, Senator Coats claims that “They are going to try to interpret every nuance and every word in this agreement as something different than what we will describe” (22 July 2015, Senate vol.161, no.115, S5436). Rep. Gus Bilirakis similarly puts forward that:

...If the past is any indication of the future, we can expect that Iran will continue to employ its stonewalling tactics, blocking any real transparency or inspections of its nuclear facilities.... How can we set up a sanctions relief system that is based on trust and verification if the country has proven objectively incapable of trust and transparency? (22 July 2015, vol.161, no.106, H4966).

Along the same lines, several hearings argue that Iran will use billions of dollars of sanctions relief to be available under the nuclear deal for financing the spread of terrorism and violence around the world, dominating the region, and posing a threat to the security of Israel (23 July 2015, Extensions of Remarks, vol.161, no.116, E1120; 16 July 2015, vol.161, no.111, H5242; 15 July 2015, vol.161, no.110, H5179; 15 July 2015, vol.161, no.110, H5187; 22 July 2015, Senate vol.161, no.115, S5437). Presenting Iran as an actor that cannot be

trusted even under the rule of the so-called moderate Rouhani government, Rep. George Holding states that:

History has taught us that we are not dealing with an honest broker in Tehran. The election of President Rouhani does nothing to change the fact that the Supreme Leader is still in charge. Nothing in this agreement denuclearizes a hostile and an oppressive regime (27 January 2014, House vol. 160, no. 15, H1255).

Rep. Collins also emphasizes that despite the election of a new Iranian government, there is no evidence of change in Iranian evil intentions:

Congress and the American people do not trust the Iranian regime. ... The past is prologue to what happens now, and I think what we have got to understand is the regime has not inherently changed. The regime in Iran still has just core issues with the West and especially with Israel (2 December 2013, House vol. 159, no. 169, H7378).

Presenting Rouhani as equally murderous and sadist like Khameni, Rep. Ros-Lehtinen similarly argues that nothing has changed in Iran as calls for the destruction of Israel and the US still remain (8 July 2015, vol.161, no.105, H4948). Describing Rouhani as the Supreme Leader's handpicked puppet, Ros-Lehtinen highlights that a nuclear deal with the Iranian regime is a disaster that will set in motion a nuclear and conventional arms race in the world's most volatile region. She emphasizes that:

This is the same regime that openly calls for death to America and to our ally, the democratic Jewish State of Israel, and the same despots who support terror all across the globe aimed at US interests (13 July 2015, vol.161, no.108, H5107-8).

The story line that Iran is one of the world's worst human rights violators has become another focus of the anti-Iranian narrative (14 November 2014, House vol. 160, no. 139, H7981). Condemning Iran for its gross human rights violations of the fundamental human rights of the Iranian people by reminding the voting irregularities during the election of Ahmadinejad, brutal suppression of wide segments of civil society during the Green Revolution in 2009, and house arrest of the principal leaders of the Green Revolution since February 2011, Rep. Edward R. Royce states that Iran continues to restrict freedom of speech and peaceful assembly, particularly for journalists and human rights activists (113th Congress, 2nd Session, 19 November 2014, House Vol. 160, No. 142, H8106).

In a Senate resolution (28 February 2013, Senate vol. 159, no. 29, S1035 Res. 65), several senators accuse Iran of violating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by denying its citizens basic freedoms, including the freedoms of expression, religion, peaceful assembly and movement, and for flagrantly abusing the rights of minorities and women. Depicting Iran as one of the world's worst human rights violators, Rep. Ros-Lehtinen states that:

It is currently designated a Tier 1 Country of Particular Concern, a designation reserved for the world's worst, most egregious violators of religious freedom as stated by our own State Department and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. Despite the selection, not a real election, of a so-called moderate last year, Iran's human rights record has only gotten worse as Iran has executed a record number of people under so-called President Rouhani (18 November 2014, House Vol. 160, No. 141, H8037).

Iranian Construction of the United States

Iran constructs the US within the framework of anti-western revolutionary identity, which is built on themes such as Islamic unity, counter-hegemony, independence, resistance, and nationalism (Firozabadi, 2008). By using these signifiers, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei constructs and fixes social realities about the US. The 1953 overthrow of Mosaddegh government by the involvement of the CIA, the American support extended to the Shah despite his autocratic rule and repression, and the American support to Saddam regime against Iran during the Iraq-Iran war are the dominant narratives used by the Supreme Leader. Khamenei emphasizes how the US disappointed Iranian people by getting involved in a coup against the democratically elected Mosaddeq government in 1953 by saying:

The arrogant outlook which the Americans have adopted and which has continued since decades ago until today has made all nations in the world have a feeling of mistrust and hatred towards the government of America...Dr. Mosaddeq trusted and relied on the Americans so that he could free himself from the pressure of the English. Instead of helping Dr. Mosaddeq who had trusted them, the Americans allied themselves with the English. They dispatched their agents into our country and they launched the coup... Anyone who trusted America received a blow... (Khamenei, 3 November 2013).

Khamenei presents the United States as pharaoh that oppresses countries subordinated to its rule through economic, political and cultural dominance. Emphasizing the American hegemony in Iran during the rule of Shah, Khamenei states that

For 25 years, America was the absolute ruler in this country; they commanded the generals of the Shah in this manner; in the economic fields, in the political fields, in the security fields, [and] in the foreign policy fields, Americans had the final say in Iran; [this was] the absolute rule of America [over Iran] during the time of the despotic regime [of the former Iranian Shah... The great nation of Iran expelled this Great Satan from the country; [we] must not allow it to return again; [we] must not allow [that] after it has left through the door, to return through the window; [we] must not allow it to infiltrate [into the country]; their hostility is unending (Khamenei, 10 September 2015).

Reminding the Iranian people about the political, material and logistical support given to Saddam regime during the eight year war between Iraq and Iran, the Supreme Leader, Khamenei (7 May 2015) says that “During the eight years of Sacred Defense (1980-1988 Iraqi imposed war) all world powers tried to bring this nation to its knees, but they failed. Therefore, this greatness and splendor should be safeguarded”. Khamenei also says that

They imposed eight years of war on our country. About 300.000 of our young people, our people, were martred in this eight-year war...The United States constantly supported Saddam and helped him financially, with ammunition, and political advice...They closed they eyes to Saddam’s crimes. The Halabcheh incident took place, hitting various towns of our country with missiles. They destroyed houses, they used chemical bombs on the frontlines, they stil closed their eyes. They did not object at all (Khamenei, 22 March 2009).

The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, presents the US as an oppressive hegemonic power that tries to keep Iran dependent and weak. Thus, he positions Iran as a counter-hegemonic state that challenges all kinds of colonialism and imperialism (Ayatollah Khamenei, 20 May 2015). Based on the discourse of counter-hegemony, Khamenei claims that the objective of the Islamic revolution is to overrule hegemonic discourses and establish a new fair international system. He puts forward that:

“The Islamic discourse supports justice; supports freedom of human beings; supports the elimination of all the grounds for arrogance and colonialism; supports annihilation of the hegemonic system across the world; that is, there must not be two poles of the dominant and dominated in the world; this is the discourse of the Islamic Establishment (Khamenei, 20 May 2015).

Emphasizing the importance of Islamic Revolution and Islamic unity in challenging hegemonic powers like the US, he states that

We will not give up our dignity, which has been obtained through Islam and Islamic Establishment and revolutionary movement and revolutionary attitude and revolutionary ideals. Today, enemies are challenging [us] and every day they pose a specific challenge to the Islamic Republic of Iran. We are not daunted, we are not afraid... (Khamenei, 20 May 2015).

Presenting the Islamic discourse as the symbol of justice and freedom and depicting the American discourse as oppressive, arrogant and selfish, Khamenei claims that

...These two discourses never come to reconciliation; these two discourses, never get close; cannot reconcile. One discourse is the discourse of oppression and belligerence against the oppressed and nations; another discourse is the discourse of supporting the oppressed and fighting against the oppressor; how these [two discourses] can shake hands? How they can get close to each other? (Khamenei, 20 May 2015).

The US opposition to Iran’s nuclear program as an attempt to keep Iran underdeveloped is another narrative Khamenei embarks on frequently to construct a negative

image of the US. He claims that United States opposes to Iran's nuclear program not for the sake of the proliferation threat, but rather because of the independence and economic leverage Iran would gain. Khamanei claims that:

Neither democracy, nor human rights, nor the nuclear issue are important to them. The issue is that the Islamic Republic is standing on its own feet, is relying on its own power, is standing firm by relying on Allah... and is making progress in different areas. They do not like this, and so be it (Khamanei, 26 June 2013).

Refusing foreign dominance and economic dependence on hegemonic powers, Khamanei embarks on discourses such as self-sufficiency and independence to emphasize the necessity of eliminating Iran's reliance on foreign countries (Moshirzadeh, 2007: 529). For him, the development of indigenous technology to achieve self-reliance will reduce the dependence on foreign sources, especially in critical and vulnerable areas. He presents Iran's technological achievements as a source of pride, prestige, and status (Khamanei, 10 April 2015a). Khamanei highlights the importance of knowledge and technological achievement to confront the unjust pressure exerted by the US to push Iran into backwardness. Khamanei underlines that rapid development and scientific advancement, including in the area of nuclear technology, is vital for national progress by saying:

Their power, wealth and facilities are the result of their knowledge. It is not possible to confront them without knowledge. Knowledge is authoritative power... Knowledge is a source of power. Anybody who enjoys this source of power can move forward. Anybody, any nation or any society that does not have it will be forced to give in to the power of others. Therefore, this emphasis on science is based on an accurate calculation (Khamanei, 22 February 2012).

The supreme leader states that scientific advancement and knowledge constitute the main pillars of the Iranian national resistance against hegemonic powers. Khamanei thus presents its nuclear program as a tool to acquire nuclear technology necessary for Iran to become self-reliant in the nuclear area. He believes that the enemies oppose to Iranian innovation and advancement based on indigenous capabilities. He considers any compromise in this issue to be against the country's nationalistic interests and its sovereignty. In order to undermine efforts of the US to weaken Iran, Khamanei encourages resistance through scientific and economic jihad which refers to the persistent, comprehensive and purposeful movement with the intention of making Iran a prosperous country (Khamanei, 10 April 2015a). To this end, Khamanei states that:

...Today, the economic sector has turned into a battlefield, a warfront, due to the US hostile policies - a specific type of war. In this battlefield, anyone making efforts to the benefit of the country would be making jihad. Today, anyone who can help the country's economy, would be making a jihadi move. This is a jihad and of course a jihad with its own

specific tools and specific methods. Everyone has to contribute to this jihad by necessary prudence and with necessary tools (Khamanei, 10 April 2015a).

There is also almost no speech of Khamanei without emphasizing the role of the enemy that attempts to destruct the Iranian regime. Khamanei highlights that the arrogant international system represented by the US truly manifests the concept of the enemy. Stressing that “The US is fully devoid of human ethics and embarks on wickedness and crime with no bridle and under the guise of attractive words and smiles”, Khamanei warns the Iranian youth against American enmity towards Iran by saying:

Youth should know that the enmity of America towards the Islamic Republic began from the first day. They did whatever they could. America did not fail to take any course of action that was in its power in order to harm our people and our country in military, economic and security areas and in the area of cultural communications. They have done whatever they could until today. Their enmity was and still is towards our Revolution... This enmity existed in those days, it exists in the present time and it will continue to exist in the future (Khamanei, 8 February 2015).

Ayatollah Khamenei notes that the Islamic Republic has always been targeted by threats, sanctions, security pressures and a variety of political conspiracies for 35 years (Khamanei, 18 August 2015). He argues that the primary goal of the enemies is regime change in Iran. Emphasizing the American ambition for ending the Islamic regime in Iran, Khamanei stresses that

Of course they wanted to overthrow the Islamic Republic, which proved to be impossible for them, so they tried to at least keep the Islamic Republic and Iran backward. The Islamic Republic has overcome these threats (Khamanei, 7 August 2011).

Khamanei also presents American objections against Iranian nuclear program as a pretext by the US to raise international opposition and create domestic instability in Iran. Presenting severe sanctions imposed on Iran by the US as a pretext for regime change, he further stresses that:

Our enemies say openly that their objective behind economic pressures is a political one. Their objective is to turn the Iranian people against the Islamic establishment... Yes, of course, Death to the US! Because the US is the main factor behind these pressures and they (the Americans) themselves insist on concentrating on the economy of our dear nation. What's their objective? Their objective is to pit the people against the system. They say it openly that they intend to exert economic pressure in order to make conditions hard for people and force people to protest against the government and against the Islamic establishment (Khamanei, 10 April 2015a).

Khamanei further stresses American enmity by emphasizing the US strategy of division and infiltration that should be firmly resisted (17 August 2015). Hamanei accuses the US of trying to exploit the outcome of Iran's nuclear talks with six world powers as an

instrument for infiltration in Iran. Khamanei underlines the importance of being alert against US efforts to boost its economic, political and cultural infiltration into Iran. He indicates that “...we have firmly blocked this way and use all our high power to deny Americans any economic, political, [and] cultural infiltration or political presence in Iran” (Khamanei, 17 August 2015).

Emphasizing the necessity of countering divisive policies of the United States, Khamanei argues that Iran supports the territorial integrity of regional countries, while the US struggles for disintegrating Iraq and Syria. Noting the incompatible clash of interests between the US and Iran over regional policies, Khamanei says that, “They seek to partition the regional countries and create smaller and subordinate countries, but through the God’s power and grace, this will never happen” (Khamanei, 17 August 2015).

Positing the US as the other and opposite of Iran, Khamanei presents the US as an actor that can never be trusted. Khamanei emphasized that historically the Americans have been deceptive, telling lies, breaking promises and moving in the wrong direction by saying:

the opposite side, which is obstinate, untrustworthy, treacherous, looking for excuses, is apt for haggling, is apt to stab [us] in the back, and is apt to do such evil things, to try to encircle our country, our nation, [and] our negotiators when it comes to details (Khamanei, 10 April 2015b).

Highlighting the hypocrisy of the US, Khamanei also adds that:

The opposite point, is an oppressive, bullying, arrogant and selfish discourse [which is being promoted] by monopolizing powers of the world...In the past, they showed their true colors explicitly and outrageously in their words. Today, they do their job hypocritically and dishonestly under various covers of beautiful words such as human rights, such as the absence of violence, and the likes of them (Khamanei, 20 May 2015).

Presenting the US as an actor that can not be cooperated with, he insists that the negotiations between Iran and the US are limited to the nuclear issue:

“We will by no means negotiate with the US about domestic and regional issues and the issue of arms because the US policy in the region is aimed at creating insecurity and confronting regional nations and Islamic Awakening. That is contrary to the pivotal policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran” (Khamanei, 23 March 2015).

Based on a discourse of an unjust US that follows a double standard in international relations, Hamanei criticizes the US for putting pressure on Iran to prevent it from using technology for peaceful purposes, while ignoring Israeli nuclear arsenal. Arguing that Iran faces systematic discrimination in purchasing nuclear fuel due to US interventions to cancel contracts and sanction companies that do business with Iran, Khamanei points out that nuclear discrimination is apparent in the international community (Khamanei, 21 March 2013). Khamanei maintains that all nuclear activities in Iran are peaceful and constitute the nation’s indisputable and inalienable right. Presenting the nuclear industry is a necessity for the

country both for [generation of] energy, and for [production of] nuclear drugs, for converting sea water to fresh water, and for many other needs in agricultural and non-agriculture fields (Khamanei, 10 April 2015a), Supreme Leader says Iran will never renounce its peaceful nuclear rights under pressure. Khamanei states that:

the Americans, Europeans and some of their followers have fabricated the story that Iran seeks to acquire nuclear weapons, and that they portray the Islamic Republic as a threat (Khamanei, 20 April 2015)... “They accuse us of attempting to develop atomic bombs, while Iran’s Islamic establishment, based on the Sharia Law and logic, has never been seeking to build nuclear weapons and will never be, and considers them as a hassle” (Khamanei, 10 April 2015b).

Khamanei frames the US and its allies as actors that do not respect international norms, including non-interference, non-proliferation, disarmament, and human rights (Moshizadeh, 2007:533-534). While accusing the US for posing a threat to the world, Khamanei positions Iran as a responsible state that views security as the biggest divine blessing and resists hegemonic powers for the sake of its own security and that of others (Khamanei, 20 April 2015). Referring to the ongoing events in Yemen, the 2004 Gaza War and the war on Lebanon as examples of non-compliance with international norms, Khamanei says that

the regrettable events in Yemen along with the US and West’s backing for the invader is an example of behavior which sparks insecurity in the world... “Today, the biggest threats to the world and to the region are the US and the Zionist regime, which intervene in any spot they deem necessary and trigger killings, without any consideration and without conforming to religious and conscientious obligations and criteria...” (Khamanei, 20 April 2015).

The Supreme Leader stresses the double standard western powers follow in international relations by referring to the American use of atomic bombs and dangerous nuclear tests conducted by France:

Now a few criminal countries that have already either used nuclear bombs against nations, like America, or have tested them, like France, are trying to preach us! This very France conducted three nuclear tests one after the other in the ocean about 10-12 years ago, which were very destructive and destroyed marine environment. [It conducted] three very dangerous nuclear tests [which caused] a little uproar in the world and then they shut all people’s mouths and that was it. We are not seeking nuclear explosion, [do not want] to [conduct] nuclear test. We do not seek nuclear weapons, not because they say so, but because of ourselves, because of our religion and our wisdom. This is both our religious fatwa and rational fatwa. It is our rational fatwa that we don’t need nuclear weapons, today and tomorrow and not any other time [in future]. (Khamanei, 10 April 2015a).

Conclusion

This paper has examined how the socially constructed identities of Iran and the United States reproduce mutual enmity, mistrust, and conflicts of interests despite a historic deal concluded on 14 July 2015 to curb Iranian nuclear program. It has argued that although the nuclear deal has created a prospect for a possible rapprochement with the US, socially created discursive context in which Iran and the US portray their identity prevents the nuclear deal to serve as a catalyst that would shift the dynamics of the relationship between the two. Based on a constructivist-based discourse analysis, it has analyzed how actors construct and reproduce identities both for themselves and others by embarking on a certain discourse. By tracing the narratives used by the United States and Iran to sustain their respective identities and threat perceptions vis-a-vis each other, this paper has shown how the identity of the US has been formed in relation to the identity of Iran. Moreover, by emphasizing the role of discourse as defining the identity and thus interests of states, this paper has illustrated how the mutual intersubjective meaning each state holds regarding the other has constructed and maintained the generalized identities they hold today.

An important finding of this paper suggests that discursive strategies used by the US Congress and the Iranian Supreme leader played a major role in generating and sustaining the mutual animosity between two countries. The study has highlighted that their respective narratives have been embedded in a cultural historical context. Accordingly, the paper has illustrated that the 1953 coup against the democratically elected Mosaddegh government, the American support for Saddam during Iran-Iraq war, and attempts of regime change in Iran are still the dominant narratives used by the Supreme Leader of Iran to construct an evil image of the US. Congressional discourse on Iran reveals that the fall the Western-oriented Shah, the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis underlie American constructions of destructive set of ideas about Iran.

It has been emphasized that such historical narratives have created the structure within which the mutual mistrust between two countries has consolidated an antagonistic relationship for more than three decades. Based on this legacy, the dominant interpretation in the US Congress regarding Iran's goals and intentions is still based on scenarios in which Iran poses a great threat to the US, to its ally Israel and the entire world. An important element of the Congressional narratives that portray Iran as evil involves the story line that Iran sponsors terrorism, develops nuclear weapons, and violates international human rights. Iran on the other hand still frames the United States as the Great Satan that aims to abolish the Iranian revolution. Such negative intersubjective meanings constructed by each side over the course of their relationship lead to the endurance of oppositional interests between them. This finding has provided a better understanding as to how both states still view the actions of the other as threatening. Accordingly, the paper suggests that the power and meaning that is conveyed by the respective discourses of each side highlight how actors and their representations of any given situation are constructed, rather than being objectively given.

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