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THE ONGOING IRANIAN SECURITIZATION OF THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE NUCLEAR DEAL: AN ACTOR AND CONTEXT-BASED ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Based on the Copenhagen School's approach to the securitization theory, this paper examines the Iranian promotion of the United States (US) as a security threat in political, military, economic, and societal sectors despite the nuclear deal concluded in 2015. Analyzing the speeches of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, as the highest authority in Iran, and the historical context that constitutes the structure of the Iranian-American enmity, the paper shows how Iran has engaged in legitimizing its ongoing securitization discourse vis-à-vis the United States. Within the framework of the socially created discursive historical context in which Iran portrays itself and the US identity, Iran has historically accused the United States for interfering into its domestic affairs for a possible regime change in the country. Emphasizing the embeddedness of such discourses within historical conditions, the paper highlights that Iran exploits the historical context to justify and promote its securitization against the United States.

Keywords: *Iran, United States, Securitization, Copenhagen School.*

İRAN'IN NÜKLEER ANLAŞMA SONRASI AMERİKA BİRLEŞİK DEVLETLERİNİ GÜVENLİKLEŞTİRMEYE DEVAM ETMESİ: AKTÖR VE BAĞLAM-MERKEZLİ ANALİZ

Öz

Bu çalışma, güvenlikleştirme teorisinin Kopenhag Okulu yaklaşımı çerçevesinde, 2015'te imzalanan nükleer anlaşmaya rağmen İran'ın Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ni (ABD) siyasi, askeri, ekonomik ve toplumsal sektörlerde güvenlik tehdidi olarak tanımlamaya devam etmesini incelemektedir. İran'daki en yüksek siyasi otoriteyi temsil eden Ruhani Lider Ayatollah Hamaney'in konuşmaları ve İran-Amerikan düşmanlığının yapısını oluşturan tarihsel bağlam analiz edilerek İran'ın ABD'ye karşı devam eden

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güvenlikleştirme söylemini nasıl meşrulaştırmaya çalıştığı gösterilmiştir. Hem kendisinin hem de ABD'nin kimliğini tanımladığı söylemsel tarihsel yapı çerçevesinde İran, ABD'yi tarihsel olarak İran'da rejim değiştirmek amacıyla ülkenin iç işlerine karışmakla suçlamıştır. Bu tür söylemlerin tarihsel koşullardan kaynaklandığını vurgulayan makalede, İran'ın ABD'ye karşı yürüttüğü güvenlikleştirme sürecini meşrulaştırmak için tarihsel bağlamdan yararlandığı ileri sürülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Güvenlikleştirme, Kopenhag Okulu.

INTRODUCTION

After a decade of tough negotiations, Iran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with the P5+1 countries (five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany). According to the deal concluded on 14 July 2015, Iran has agreed to reduce large parts of its nuclear infrastructure in exchange for the gradual abolition of sanctions that hit its key energy and financial sectors. The deal has raised prospects for a rapprochement between Iran and the US that would go beyond the nuclear field such as the acceleration of the Arab Israeli peace process, the prospect for stability in Iraq and Afghanistan, and enhancement of the efforts to fight against terrorists groups (Parliamentary Records, 18 November 2014). However, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, declared that the deal with the West in the nuclear area 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). In an uncompromising attitude towards the US, Khamenei stated that, "our policy toward the arrogant government of America will not change in any way" (Khamenei, 18 July 2015). Moreover, framing the US as the greatest threat to the global security (Khamenei, 19 April 2015), Khamenei (9 April 2015) highlighted that negotiations carried out with the US was only limited to the nuclear issue (Khamenei, 23 March 2015).

The Iranian uncompromising attitude towards the US was complemented by the American hard-line position that depicted Iran as seeking nuclear weapons and posing a great threat to regional and world security (Parliamentary Records, 12 October 2017; 22 July 2015). The harsh criticisms against Iran has particularly increased under the Trump administration that highlighted the need to revise the 2015 nuclear deal in order to toughen its provisions and restrict the capacity of Iran to develop ballistic missiles (White House, 2017, p.49). When the President Trump pulled the United States from the nuclear deal on 8 May 2018, Ayatollah Khamenei (23 August 2018; 22 July 2018; 30 June 2018) announced that Iran would not negotiate with the United States that always broke its promises and proved its untrustworthiness by nullifying the deal.

The structural basis of the Iranian animosity towards the United States has been examined by various scholars that comprehensively reflected how Iran represented itself and the US particularly in the context of history and threat

constructions (Duncombe, 2016; Shoab, 2016; Adib-Moghaddam, 2007; 2009; Buonomo, 2018). Making references to historical incidents such as the suppression of the Iranian people during the Shah period and hypocrisy of the West in the Iran-Iraq war, Buonomo (2018) examines the hostility of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei to the US and Israel. Highlighting how Iran constructed the US as a foremost threat based on the binary representations of the positive-self and the negative-other, Adib-Moghaddam (2009) depicts the Iranian representation of the US as an enemy that tries to undermine Iran. Analyzing how negative mutual representations of Iran and the US have led to the rise of the feelings of misrecognition and disrespect, Duncombe (2016) shows the increasing Iranian-American frustration throughout nuclear negotiations. Building upon this literature, the paper examines how Iran has reproduced its enmity towards the United States by engaging in a securitization process of the US. It argues that the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has kept on securitizing the US as a major threat both when negotiations were ongoing for a nuclear deal and after the deal was concluded.

Based on the analytical tools of the Copenhagen school that emphasizes the role of the securitization actors, their speech acts and the context these discourses are embedded in the securitization process, the analysis starts with identifying the core actor that conducts the securitization process of the US. The paper acknowledges the role of the President, Islamic Revolutionary Guard, and the Supreme National Security Council in the Iranian securitization process of the US. However, considering the constitutional and symbolic power of the Supreme Leader as the highest political authority in Iran compared to other political figures (Ganji, 2013), the paper analyses the data retrieved from Ayatollah Khamenei's official statements. The texts examined are selected from the statements made by Ayatollah Khamenei since 2013 when Iran agreed on the Geneva Interim Agreement as part of the multilateral efforts to solve the disputed aspects of the Iranian nuclear program. The texts examined helped identify and understand how Khamenei constructed, reinforced and legitimized his speech acts that framed the US as an existential threat to the Iranian political, economic, and societal interests.

This paper is composed of three parts. The first part presents the main elements of the securitization theory. The second part highlights the historical context of the construction of the Iranian-American enmity. This part emphasizes critical historical moments such as the 1953 coup organized by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to oust Mossadegh government, the American support extended to the Shah regime despite its undemocratic and repressive nature, attempts of regime change, and the role of the sanctions imposed on Iran by the US particularly pursuant to the reveal of the Iranian nuclear program. The third part examines the speech acts used by Khamenei to conduct and justify the political, economic and societal securitization of the United States.

MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL OF SECURITY STUDIES

Based on constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology, securitization theory holds that truth is not objective; rather it is created and made meaningful by the ideas, discourses, and insights of human beings (Wæver, 1995). Assuming that social reality is intersubjectively constructed; thus can be changed by human agency, this perspective rejects the realist conceptualization of security that is argued to be fixed and given by geopolitical realities (Buzan et al., 1998, p.31). Securitization theory analyzes the construction and deconstruction of threats as a social reality by using speech acts, images, tools and practices (Balzacq, 2011). It considers security as a 'speech act', which is not given but constructed through a discursive process (Wæver, 2003, p.48). A speech act is a security utterance that frames the issue in conflictual terms that it becomes represented and recognized as a threat (Wæver, 1995).

The Copenhagen School considers traditional approaches insufficient to understand post-Cold War security challenges including civil strife, illegal migration, refugee crisis, environmental degradation, climate change, transnational terrorism, and health epidemics. It has thus widened the scope of security to other spheres other than military including economic, environmental, societal, and political sectors (Buzan et al., 1998, p.32). It accordingly examines how political elite moves issues like migration, environmental degradation or religion into the realm of security through speech acts. The sectors of securitization help us better analyze which referent objects are framed as being subject to an existential threat. Buzan et al. (1998, pp.22-23) identify states, sovereignty or the ideology of states, national companies, collective identities such as nations and religions, and individual species and climate as the possible referent objects in the military, political, economic, societal and environmental sectors, respectively.

Conceptualizing security in broader terms, the Copenhagen school is composed of three pillars: Securitization, sectors of securitization, and Regional Security Complex Theory. Considering proximity as an important factor in security studies, Regional Security Complex Theory focuses on subsystems or regions defined as units having specific characteristics that differentiate them from other units within the international system (Buzan et al., 1998, p.6). According to Regional Security Complex Theory, unlike the anarchical nature of the international system that is fixed, the structures of subsystems can change due to significant shifts in major components of the security complex such as the distribution of power among major units and the patterns of friendship and enmity among the units (Buzan et al., 1998, p.13). Emphasizing the existence of superpowers, great powers and regional powers as three types of power in the international system, this theory highlights the level of interdependence between them. Buzan and Wæver (2003, p.43) emphasize that the actions and tactics that will be used by the first two groups of power to dominate certain regions will differ

in different regions because of the unique characteristics and features of each region.

The securitization pillar has put forward that a certain issue is securitized when identified as a threat to a referent object; requiring extraordinary measures (Buzan et al., 1998, pp.24-25). According to the Copenhagen School, deciding on which issues to securitize as a threat is a political choice (Buzan et al., 1998, p.29). The politically decided and socially constructed securitization process is analyzed through three levels of analysis: agents, acts and context. The agents level of analysis deals with revealing the actors that are engaged in securitizing issues and/or the actors that resist such securitizing initiatives. While securitizing a particular issue, the securitizing actor, including political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobby and pressure groups, labels a particular issue as a national security threat by using certain words, phrases and actions in order to justify a certain policy tool to be implemented (Buzan et al, 1998, p.40). Wæver (2003, p.9) has suggested that by framing a specific issue as an eminent threat, the political elite claims a right to take extraordinary measures to combat it.

Although it is the securitizing actor that frames a certain issue as an immediate threat through speech acts, the audience must accept that there is an existential threat that requires extraordinary measures. Issues become securitized based on an intersubjective interaction between the securitizing actor and the audience that gives consent to the securitization discourse. It is thus necessary to persuade the audience to internalize the threat claims of the securitizing actor. Balzacq (2011) emphasizes the need for the securitization actor to use the right language, body gestures, and ideas to convince the public for the urgency of a specific security threat.

While the agent level of analysis focuses on the discursive practices of securitization actors during the securitization process, the context level of analysis is concerned with studying the context in which securitization process occurs. It deals with the social and historical construction of the structure on which common interpretations regarding what constitutes a threat and how that particular threat might be abolished is grounded (Buzan et al., 1998, p.26). Criticizing the Copenhagen School's overemphasis on the role of textual analysis while ignoring contextual analysis, the sociological approach to the securitization theory (Paris School) focuses on both the context in which securitization discourses are embedded and the practices of the institutions on a given security issue (Balzacq, 2011). The Paris School insists on the examination of the broader context in which securitization process occurs, rather than focusing narrowly on political elites and their speech acts. McDonald (2008) similarly highlights the need to examine the role of the context in securitization theory to understand why particular securitization claims have repercussions on a particular audience.

The acts level of analysis examines the outcomes of policy instruments and tools that are used by securitizing actors to overcome threats in the securitization process (Balzacq, 2011). It deals with the impact of the constructed social reality on security concerns. Instead of focusing on the securitizing actors and the nature of their discourse, the Paris School examines the outcomes and effects of security discourses in real life conditions (Balzacq, 2011). It empirically examines the outcomes of a particular securitization instrument and tool in the construction and consolidation of a security threat.

While this paper adopts the Copenhagen School's approach to the security studies, it adds the Paris School's concept of context as another component of securitization theory, enabling an agent and context level of analysis. Accordingly, it is interested in how an issue is presented as a real threat through speech acts that are embedded in certain historical contexts. Such an approach is crucial in uncovering the socially constructed and context dependent nature of the Iranian-American enmity sustained by core political actors.

TRACING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE IRANIAN-AMERICAN ENMITY

The involvement of the CIA in the coup that ousted Mohammad Mosaddegh from power in 1953 constructed the basis for the hostile relations between Iran and the US. The US role in the overthrow of an elected government in Iran shaped the identity of Iranians by creating a negative historical image of the US (Kinzer, 2003). 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, p.67; Khamenei, 18 October 2017; Khamenei, 17 September 2017).

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 Hussein in his war against Iran. Iran has accused the US for preventing efforts for the declaration of Iraq by the United Nations Security Council as an aggressor state that violated international peace and security by invading Iran (Khamenei, 14 April 2018). The Western support extended to Saddam Hussein coupled with the inaction of the United Nations to punish Iraq for its use of chemical weapons against Iran made the Iranian political elite to conclude that Iran was in a self-help situation to preserve its security and independence (Khamenei, 14 April 2018). Moreover, given the country's success in keeping its territorial boundaries intact throughout the war with Iraq, Iran became convinced that it could challenge any external threat by maintaining its national unity and solidarity (Khamenei, 11 March 2018). Such

incidents have left an enduring influence on the Iranian politics and steered the sense of nationalism in Iran.

The death of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the rise of a pragmatic President Rafsanjani as President raised hopes for cooperation between Iran and the US. Iran played a positive role in helping 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 dramatized already tense relations by embarking on the containment policy that further institutionalized the negative image of the Iranian state. Accusing Iran of sponsoring international terrorism and seeking weapons of mass destruction, Clinton issued in 1995 two executive orders that put a ban on trade and investment in Iran and broadened the 1987 sanctions imposed on Iranian imports by the Reagan administration. As a reaction to these sanctions, Iran increased its existing ties with groups like Hezbollah and Hamas (Mohseni-Cheraghloo, 2015, p.100).

Another incident that increased the Iranian enmity towards the US was the latter's unwillingness to respond positively to the 'dialogue on civilizations' initiative of the reformist Khatami government. After his initiative that aimed at reaching out to the US in a January 1998 CNN interview was welcome with caution by the US, 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".

The September 11 2001 terrorist attacks arouse the sympathy from the Iranian public for the 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, pp.108-109). However, the negative depictions of one another of both countries continued along the same lines. In 2002, President Bush accused Iran of exporting terrorism and declared it as an axis of evil that threatened regional and global peace. 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 Rubin, 2005, p.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.

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 relationship with the United States. With a grand bargain proposal submitted to the US in May 2003, Iran declared its commitment to withdraw its assistance from terrorist groups, contribute to the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and engage in full cooperation on its nuclear program (Mohseni-Cheraghrou, 2015, p.111). In exchange, Iran asked for the recognition of its Islamic regime, alleviation of its security concerns, abolition of all sanctions, and access to nuclear technology for peaceful reasons (Parsi, 2007, pp.243-247). When the then 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 weaken 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, p.112).

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. Given their decades of negative identity conceptions, the US and Iranian explanations regarding the Iranian nuclear program contradicted each other. Iran claimed that its nuclear program was built on civilian purposes, aiming at generating electricity (Khamenei, 17 September 2017; 9 May 2018). Iran insisted on its right to be able to enrich uranium, while the US insisted that Iran conducted a nuclear program with military intentions and violated international norms (Parliamentary Records, 29 April 2015; 7 May 2015; 12 October 2017). Although Iran denied such charges by arguing that nuclear weapons had no place in Iran's security strategy (Khamenei, 9 April 2015), Iran was subject to severe sanctions that heavily hit its economy.

The negative consequences of sanctions on the Iranian economy played an important role in the rise of Hassan Rouhani who replaced the hardliner Mahmud Ahmedinejad and committed himself to change the trajectory of Iran's foreign policy from confrontation to cooperation. Unlike previous years of opposition to direct talks with Americans, Khamenei embarked on the concept of heroic flexibility and allowed engagement with the US for negotiations to be conducted on the Iranian nuclear program. 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, the parties signed the Geneva Interim Agreement (Joint Plan of Action) that sought a permanent solution to the disputed aspects of the Iranian 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. In accordance with the deal, Iran undertook to reduce its enriched uranium capacity by 98%, put restrictions on the amount of its centrifuges for 15 years, give an end to its capacity to produce plutonium that could be used in weapons construction, and allow comprehensive and spontaneous surveillance to be conducted by the International Atomic Energy Association

(IAEA). The Iranian pragmatist President Hasan Rouhani described the nuclear deal as a ‘golden page in history’ for Iran as it enabled the country to get rid of sanctions that hit its economy badly (www.telegraph.co.uk). Despite the acknowledgement of the nuclear deal that yielded sanctions relief, Khamenei kept on securitizing the US in economic, political, military, and societal sectors as examined below.

THE IRANIAN SECURITIZATION OF THE UNITED STATES IN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL SECTORS

Describing security as ‘one of the primary blessings of God’, Khamenei (17 September 2017) highlighted that scientific, moral and human progress in a country depended on the existence of security. Promoting security as such, he labeled the US as the vicious Satan that posed a threat to the Iranian security by saying: “The US and its cohorts have been trying to take away security from this country. In the course of the past 38 years, one of our main tasks has been to preserve security” (Khamenei, 17 September 2017). Khamenei argued that the US pursued a short-term, medium-term and long-term goal to undermine security in Iran. He described American short-term goal as creating domestic disorder and chaos to delegitimize the Islamic Republic; medium-term objective as undermining the economy of the country and the living conditions of Iranian people, and the long-term objective as destroying the Islamic regime (Khamenei, 10 May 2017).

When securitizing the US, Khamenei often appealed to themes such as Islamic unity, counter-hegemony, independence, resistance, and nationalism (Khamenei, 30 June 2018; Khamenei, 24 May 2018; Khamenei, 26 September 2016; 14 June 2016). By using these signifiers, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei fixed social realities about the US in political, military, economic, and societal sectors. He also grounded his socially constructed realities on the historical context which constituted the structure of the mutual enmity between the US and Iran. As presented below, the 1953 overthrow of the Mosaddegh government by the involvement of the CIA, the American support to the Shah despite his autocratic rule and repression, and the American support to Saddam regime against Iran during the Iraq-Iran war have been the dominant historical narratives used by the Supreme Leader to justify his political, military, economic, and societal securitization of the US.

The United States as a Political Threat

One of the dominant speech acts used by Ayatollah Khamenei for the securitization of the US in the political sector is ‘The US wants to overthrow the Islamic regime in Iran’. There is almost no speech of Khamenei without emphasizing the role of the enemy, the US, that attempted to destruct the regime in Iran (Khamenei, 18 July 2015, 2 July 2016, 27 December 2017, 23 May 2018, 9 May 2018, 10 January 2018). He constantly emphasized the US efforts to

undermine Islamic Republic through hostile measures such as imposing sanctions, attacking Iranian centers in the Persian Gulf, conducting political and economic propaganda against Iran, creating domestic rift, and shooting anti-Iranian movies (Khamenei, 24 May 2018; 27 December 2017, 2 November 2017; 2 November 2016). Emphasizing the American ambition for ending the Islamic regime in Iran, Khamenei stressed that:

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. Their enmity was and still is towards our Revolution (Khamenei, 8 February 2015).

He often reminded the Iranian people about the political, material and logistical support given to Saddam regime by the US and other NATO allies during the eight year war between Iraq and Iran (Khamenei, 2 November 2016; 14 April 2018; 11 March 2018). Highlighting how much the Iranian people suffered from the consequences of the war, Khamenei said that:

About 29 years have passed since the war ended; we still have people among our [former] combatants, who are afflicted [and] are suffering because of chemical contaminations of that time [and] many have been martyred in this way. The imposed war was a huge international conspiracy by the most powerful of the world's powers against the nascent Islamic Republic (Khamenei, 11 March 2018).

The possibility of the American infiltration to Iranian affairs was another major discourse often used by Khamenei to justify his political securitization of the US (Khamenei, 9 April 2015). After the nuclear deal was signed in July 2015, Khamenei began to accuse the US of trying to use Iran's nuclear negotiations with P5+1 countries as an instrument for infiltration into Iran. Khamenei underlined the importance of being alert against US efforts to "boost its economic, political and cultural infiltration into Iran" (Khamenei, 17 August 2015). He insisted that the negotiations between Iran and the US were limited to the nuclear issue. He 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; 23 March 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 2015; 18 July 2015).

Khamenei also constantly presented the US as an actor that cannot be cooperated with. When Iran was negotiating with P5+1 countries on the details of the nuclear deal, he kept on presenting the US as obstinate and deceitful that failed to keep its promises by saying:

The US may want to confine our country, our people and our negotiators inside a circle on the issue of details. I have never been optimistic about

negotiations with America. This pessimism is not based on an illusion- rather- it is based on experience (9 April 2015).

Upon the withdrawal of the US from the nuclear deal on 8 May 2018, Khamenei (23 May 2018; 30 June 2018) accused the US for historically being deceptive, telling lies, and breaking promises, and presented the US as an actor that can never be trusted. Emphasizing the loss of credibility of Americans in terms of morality, legitimacy, and political credibility, he stressed the impossibility of working and negotiating with the US by saying:

You see that they easily terminate this international agreement, violate their own signature, go back on their word and say ‘no, we do not accept’ [this agreement]. Well, with such a government, you cannot sit down and negotiate, it cannot be trusted, no contract can be signed with it, [and] you cannot work with it (Khamenei, 30 June 2018).

To justify his discourse on the unreliability of the US, he often reminded the Iranian people about the American involvement in the coup against the democratically elected Mosaddeq government in 1953 by saying:

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).

Another common speech act used by Khamenei for the securitization of the US is: ‘The US poses a threat to regional peace and stability’ (Khamenei, 27 December 2017; 30 June 2018, 9 February 2018, 17 January 2018). Emphasizing the divisive policies of the United States in the region, Khamenei argued that Iran supported the territorial integrity of regional countries, while the US struggled for disintegrating Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Noting the incompatible clash of interests between the US and Iran over regional policies, Khamenei said 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” (Khamenei, 17 August 2015).

While accusing the US for posing a threat to the world, Khamenei positioned Iran as a responsible state that viewed security as the biggest divine blessing and resisted hegemonic powers for the sake of its own security and that of others (Khamenei, 18 October 2017). Referring to the ongoing events in Yemen and Gaza and the war on Lebanon as examples of non-compliance with international norms and attributing the insecurity in the Middle East region to the US divisive efforts, Khamenei accused the US for being behind many massacres that existed in several parts of the world. He stated that “Like a leech, the US is after sucking nations’ assets and resources” (Khamenei, 18 October 2017).

Highlighting the US intention to establish Western-oriented regimes in countries like Syria, Lebanon and Iraq and exerting influence from Nile to Euphrates, Khamenei argued that:

They had a certain plan for this region. The main axis and heart of this plan was comprised of Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Some governments were supposed to come to power in those three countries which would completely obey and serve the US (Khamenei, 21 September 2017).

In addition to accusing the US for committing many crimes in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, Khamenei also often insisted that it was the US that created terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Nusra Front and other such groups that massacred innocent people (Khamenei, 21 September 2017; 18 October 2017; 17 September 2017; 30 June 2018, 9 February 2018). Labeling the US as corrupted and oppressive, Khamenei further emphasized the role of the US in supporting terrorists by saying:

They supported DAESH as much as they could. In the present time too, despite all the fuss that they kick up, they are still helping DAESH and takfiris like DAESH behind the scenes... Is there any corruption which is graver than this? (Khamenei, 27 December 2017).

The US as an Economic Threat

The most common speech act Khamenei used for the securitization of the US in the economic sector is: ‘The US conducts economic war against Iran’ (Khamenei, 5 June 2016; 23 August 2018). Khamenei argued that the objective of the US in the economic war was to create dissatisfaction and discontentment which would in turn lead to internal turmoil in Iran (Khamenei, 23 August 2018). He highlighted the American efforts to undermine the living standards of the Iranian people in order to alienate them from the Islamic regime by saying: “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” (Khamenei, 23 March 2015).

Emphasizing the role of the American Treasury in conducting the economic war against Iran, Khamenei put forward that: “I tell you that our enemy has moved its war room into the [US] Department of Treasury; instead of Department of Defense, the war [room] against us is their Department of Treasury” (24 May 2018). Khamenei argued that by using its powerful economic institutions such as the Treasury, the US wanted to harm the Iranian economy by ensuring that:

The economy should not move forward, the people’s livelihood issues should be up in the air, labor and production should be low in the country, unemployment should become epidemic in the country in the form of a disaster and the people should become disappointed at the Islamic Republic

and the Islamic government because of their livelihood problems. This is the enemy's goal (Khamenei, 10 May 2017).

The US opposition to Iran's nuclear program as an attempt to keep Iran underdeveloped is another narrative Khamenei embarked on frequently to justify his discourse about the American economic war against Iran. Khamenei presented the nuclear-related economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the US as part of the economic war the US conducted against Iran (Khamenei, 27 November 2014; 17 January 2018). He labeled imposed sanctions as a pretext for regime change in Iran by saying: "Our country's strong and independent economy is a source of power for us. That is why they are opposed to it. They impose sanctions to damage the economy" (Khamenei, 10 May 2017). He claimed 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. Khamenei claimed 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 (Khamenei, 26 June 2013).

Presenting American objections against Iranian nuclear program as a pretext by the US to prevent Iran from using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, Khamenei argued that Iran faced systematic discrimination in purchasing nuclear fuel due to US interventions to cancel contracts and sanction companies that did business with Iran (Bali, 2008, p.102). Presenting the nuclear capacity of the country as essential "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", Khamenei declared that Iran would never renounce its peaceful nuclear rights under pressure (Khamenei, 17 September 2017; 9 May 2018).

Declaring Iran's technological achievements as a source of pride, prestige, and status, Khamenei highlighted the importance of knowledge and technological achievement to confront the unjust pressure exerted by the US to push Iran into backwardness (Khamenei, 24 May 2018; Khamenei, 18 October 2017). Emphasizing the importance of scientific development as a great asset for the nation, Khamenei stated that:

The enemy is opposed to every element of power in the Islamic Republic. Despite the enemy's efforts, we should try to increase the elements of power inside the Islamic Republic. One of these elements is science which you are involved with. This is really an arena of fighting and it is a source of power for the country (Khamenei, 18 October 2017).

Promoting scientific progress and knowledge as the ‘main pillars of the Iranian national resistance’ against the US, Khamenei (18 October 2017) presented its nuclear program as a tool to acquire nuclear technology necessary for Iran to become self-reliant in the nuclear area. Accusing the US for opposing Iranian efforts to achieve innovation based on its indigenous capacity, he considered any compromise in this issue to be against the country’s nationalistic interests and its sovereignty (Khamenei, 23 March 2015). In order to undermine efforts of the US to weaken Iran, Khamenei encouraged resistance through scientific and economic jihad which referred to the ambitious movement that intended to make Iran a prosperous country (Khamenei, 23 March 2015). To this end, Khamenei stated 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 (Khamenei, 23 March 2015).

Khamenei argued that the only way to defeat the US in its economic war against Iran was to endorse the slogan ‘The Economy of Resistance: National Production and Employment’ that was formulated by the Khamenei himself to strengthen the Iranian economy (Khamenei, 10 May 2017). Khamenei also highlighted the need to strengthen ties with the Iranian people to nullify American efforts of undermining Iranian economy by saying:

The courageous and motivated youth of the country should know that the enemy is opposed to their independence, dignity, progress, and presence in the arenas of science and politics. The economic pressures, which they primarily exert on the people, pursue a goal of tiring and exhausting the people. By Allah’s favor and grace, we will strengthen our bond with the people. We will preserve our enemy-breaking solidarity (Khamenei, 30 June 2018).

The US as a Societal Threat

One of the dominant speech acts used by Khamenei for the securitization of the US in the societal sector is: ‘The US tries to infiltrate into Iran to spread Western culture to turn Iranian people against the Islamic regime’. Khamenei highlighted that the US failed in its efforts to defeat Iran militarily and economically, thus it initiated a cultural war against the country by saying:

The real war is a cultural war. There are so many television and internet networks which are busy diverting the hearts and minds of our youth away from religion, our sacred beliefs, morality, modesty and the like. They are working in a serious manner and they are spending heavily on this. The real war is this (Khamenei, 15 February 2017).

Presenting the cultural war the US conducted against Iran as more threatening than a military war, Khamenei warned the Iranian people to be alert against American cultural attacks by saying:

If the enemy makes a military move, it will make the people more motivated and it will make them clench their fists against them more firmly. This is what a military move does. A cultural attack, however, works in the opposite way. If the enemy manages to launch a cultural attack, it will sap individuals' energy, it will make them indecisive, it will weaken their willpower, it will take away the youth from the country and it will render valuable forces useless. This is a cultural attack (Khamenei, 6 March 2017).

When highlighting the US cultural war efforts, Khamenei accused the US for using think tanks as major instruments of its cultural war against Iran. He indicated that:

The enemies are thinking. In the chambers that they refer to as "think tanks", they are busy thinking about how they can infiltrate the culture of the people of Iran and how they can convert the youth. Their desire is to make you youth – who breathe today with the love of Imam (r.a.), with the love of the Revolution, and with the love of lofty religious, Islamic and revolutionary values – become empty of all these values and turn into elements which are dependent on western culture and philosophy (Khamenei, 6 March 2017).

In addition to think tanks, Khamenei often accused the media as another instrument used by the US and its allies in the region to destabilize Iran by shaping people's perceptions about the Islamic regime. Khamenei (6 September 2018) argued that the US was 'striving to contaminate the media and thinking atmosphere of the society' through the brigade of media war it launched against Iran. He further elaborated on this issue by saying:

This media war is aimed at creating anxiety, anguish, hopelessness and a feeling of having hit a dead end as well as making the people cynical about one another and about the governing bodies, and exaggerating and amplifying the economic problems in the minds of the society (Khamenei, 6 September 2018).

Using the famous cartoon 'Tom and Jerry' as a metaphor to convince the Iranian people that the US would never be successful in its efforts to undermine Iran through its societal, economic, political, and military war, Khamenei indicated that:

[Despite] all steps that they took, [and] all the force that they used [and although] they took advantage of various means, all of them failed. It is

like that famous cat in the story of “Tom and Jerry,” [because] in all their numerous plans, they finally failed. (Khamenei, 30 June 2018).

Emphasizing the importance of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic unity in challenging US cultural attack against Iran, Khamenei often reminded the Iranian people how the Revolution increased national self-confidence of the Iranian people to shape the conditions of their country (Khamenei, 30 June 2018, 9 May 2018, 22 March 2018). He highlighted how this confidence deriving from the Islamic regime enabled the country to defeat the US in its cultural war against Iran (Khamenei, 23 August 2018). Embarking on discourses such as independence and national self-confidence, Khamenei declared 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).

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the central role of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, in framing the United States as a security threat to the regime of the state and identity of the Iranian nation despite the nuclear deal concluded in July 2015. By using the analytical tools of the Copenhagen School, the paper has shown how Khamenei framed the US as a pharaoh state that attempted to undermine the Iranian revolution, prevent the scientific and economic development of Iran, disrupt regional and global peace, disrespect Iranian cultural traits, and weaken Iran’s national security. It demonstrated that such political, military, economic, and societal securitization of the US were articulated along speech acts, including ‘The US wants to overthrow the Islamic regime in Iran’, ‘The US poses a threat to regional peace and stability’, ‘The US conducts economic war against Iran’, and ‘The US tries to infiltrate into Iran to spread Western culture to turn Iranian people against the Islamic regime’.

The analysis of such speech acts revealed that the speech acts used by Khamenei to securitize the US economically, politically, militarily and societally were grounded in the discursive historical context. The paper highlighted that the historical context that shaped Khamenei’s perception of the world and thus his discourses helped us to understand his speech acts that framed the US as a enemy that could harm Iran in political, military, economic, and societal sectors. It has accordingly demonstrated that the historical atrocities, including the 1953 coup against the democratically elected Mosaddegh government, the American support for Saddam during Iran-Iraq war, the imposition of sanctions on the Iranian nuclear program, and attempts of regime change in Iran have still been the dominant narratives used by the Supreme Leader to construct an evil image of the US.

The paper has highlighted the call of Khamenei for resisting the illegitimate practices of the United States in the pursuit of its national security by using speech acts that emphasized the need to maintain Iranian independence and self-esteem. In line with the analytical framework of the Copenhagen school of security studies, the Iranian nation as the targeted audience must accept the securitization claims of the Iranian leader vis-a-vis the US in order to respond to this call. This paper, however, does not analyze whether Iranians accept the securitization attempts conducted by the Supreme Leader. As rightly emphasized by the Paris School that considers the role of the audience as under-theorized and insufficiently defined in the securitization framework (Balzacq, 2005), further research is needed to reveal the audience's reaction to the securitization claims of the Supreme Leader. A broad public questionnaire might be conducted to reveal to what extent Khamenei's securitization of the US has been internalized by the Iranian people.

Considering security as an intersubjective process, the paper acknowledged that both Iran and the United States have intersubjectively reconstructed their mutual mistrust and perception of the other as a threat and an enemy. Despite the recognition of the mutually constructed nature of the US-Iranian enmity, this paper focused on the Iranian construction of the US as a security threat. The American contribution to the antagonistic structure between two countries is left aside for further research. Another related topic for further research might be the analysis of visual representations used by the Iran and the US in their mutual securitization of each other as a threat.

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