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A Constructivist Approach to the US-Iranian Nuclear Problem

by

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ABSTRACT

While the subjects of US-Iranian relations and Iranian nuclear politics have received considerable attention in recent years, relatively few works have approached these issues from a constructivist perspective. This work seeks to redress this imbalance by examining how a constructivist approach to the US-Iranian problem can help deepen our understanding of such a conflict. The central problem in adopting this approach, however, is how to apply a perspective that emphasizes shared understanding to a conflict situation where other than a shared enmity there is very little that the two actors agree upon. This issue is addressed by applying a discourse-based constructivist approach to examine first, the constructed nature of identity and threats, and then, the competition for the acceptance of given representations of the nature of Iran's nuclear activities. Ultimately it is argued that constructivism can indeed deepen our understanding of the nature of this and other such conflicts.

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To Ted Hopf, whose sage words I should have paid greater attention to a long ago, for as he notes, and as I now well know, “Constructivism is no shortcut.”

And lastly, I must reach out to thank the three special ladies in my life, Ayana, Maliha, and of course Safa, for it goes without saying that you brighten my every day. It’s been a difficult journey, and yet through the arrival of more than one new little person in this world we’ve somehow rode the wave and stuck it out as a little family. I can only apologise for the Julian-shaped hole that has persisted in your lives for so long and will promise to do all I can make it up to each one of you through the coming years. Maliha, you can stop chasing that monkey I told you about as soon he will be finally off my back. Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of our lives...

DEDICATION

To the lights of my life,
Maliha and Ayana,
the greatest distraction any
thesis writer could wish for.

And to Safa's comma,
one in a million...

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ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Additional Protocol
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
DA	Discourse Analysis
EU	The European Union
EU3	United Kingdom, France, and Germany
HEU	Highly Enriched Uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IR	International Relations
IR2	Iran's 2 nd Generation Centrifuge Design
ISIS	Institute for Science and International Security
KEC	<i>Kalaye</i> Electric Company
MEK	<i>Mujahideen-e Khalq</i>
MI6	British Secret Intelligence Service
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NCRI	National Council of Resistance of Iran
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
P-1/P-2	Pakistan's 1 st /2 nd Centrifuge Design
P5+1	The 5 Permanent Members of the UN Security Council
TRR	Tehran Research Reactor
UF ₆	Uranium Hexafluoride
UN	United Nations
US	United States
UK	United Kingdom
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWII	World War Two

INTRODUCTION

On August 14, 2002, an Iranian opposition group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, publicly revealed that Iran had been secretly working on the construction of hitherto undeclared nuclear plants at Arak and Natanz. This development was of serious concern to many in the international community. Not only did it reveal that Iran's nuclear program was considerably more advanced than previously thought, but with the addition of these two new plants it also offered Iran a viable route towards producing a nuclear weapon, should that be their eventual goal. Furious diplomacy ensued, with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) spearheading attempts to seek assurances from Iran that its nuclear ambitions were purely peaceful, as Iran maintained they were. The United States, who had long been at odds with Iran over a range of issues, led the chorus charging that Iran's real aim was the acquisition of a nuclear device. Despite numerous attempts to alleviate the growing crisis the IAEA have been unable to verify that Iranian intentions are purely benign. In 2006, the Iranian file was eventually transferred to the UN Security Council where it remains today and the crisis persists.

While the effect of Iran's actions on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is of great concern, arguably at the heart of this issue lies the ongoing enmity between Iran and the United States. Historically, the two actors have clashed over issues such as state-sponsored terrorism, human rights, Israel and the Occupied Territories, and the mutual involvement of each in the wider Middle East. American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have brought the interests of the two states into greater conflict and simmering tensions have at times been raised to boiling point. Against this background of shared antipathy, the Iranian nuclear

issue presents an almost insurmountable obstacle towards reconciliation. With each not wanting to cede ground to the other, the impasse persists.

Traditional approaches to analyzing the US-Iranian conflict in general, and the Iranian nuclear problem in particular, have often emanated from analysts and practitioners within the security community who have tended to adopt a hard-nosed neorealist perspective. Neorealism emphasizes the importance of power in international relations conceived of primarily in terms of materiality, and thus casts such conflicts in a very particular light. Considerably less attention has been given to examining the problem from a constructivist viewpoint, which focuses on the role that ideas, rather than material considerations, play in shaping the world. Constructivism, through its examination of how ‘intersubjective’ practices come to shape our understandings and representations of structures and practices of the world, posits that such objects and processes are not objectively given, but instead are created through social interaction. Such an approach, which privileges an examination of the social role that the actors play in creating and maintaining conflict, offers not only the potential of deepening our understanding of such conflict, but also allows for the possibility of overcoming it.

Accordingly, the central question that this study seeks to answer is: how can the application of a social constructivist approach to the US-Iranian conflict over Iran’s nuclear program enhance our understanding of the nature of this conflict? In seeking to answer this question, a number of sub-questions are raised. First, what exactly is constructivism, what are its central principles, how has it been adopted elsewhere, and how can it be applied to this particular study? Following on from these questions though, is the difficulty of applying an approach that emphasizes shared understanding to a situation in which, other

than having a common view of the other as an enemy, there is little that the two parties agree upon (and hence very little that they co-construct in the usual non-hostile sense). Thus, the underlying problem, perhaps the central obstacle for this study, is how can an orientation that focuses on the creation and maintenance of social reality through shared understandings be adapted to such a conflict situation?

The approach proposed to address this issue is to focus on the constructivist insight that identities, both for ourselves and those that we bestow upon others, are themselves socially constructed, not given. As shall be shown, these identities inform an actor's interests, which in turn leads to how the identities and intentions of other actors, whether friendly, benign, or otherwise, are formed. By paying attention to how actors construct identities, and thus how they come to view threats, the mechanisms involved in creating and perpetuating conflict can be further illuminated. Ultimately, it will be argued, the same processes involved in constructing actors' identities are also involved in representing actors' interpretations of any given situation, including the competing portrayals of the Iranian nuclear program, which in turn then contribute to notions of identity in a dialectical process. Examining these processes can thus also illuminate the nature of the US-Iranian nuclear problem.

Chapter One begins by examining constructivism and identifying how it can be applied to the US-Iranian situation. The basics of the constructivist approach are introduced and its position within the field of International Relations, where its application with regards to state-to-state relations is perhaps most highly developed, is examined in more detail. Constructivism is then contrasted to the traditionally dominant neorealist theory and its use within a Strategic Studies context to show how this new approach can deepen

conventional understandings of US-Iranian conflict. Constructivism's key tenets will then be reviewed and unpacked in more detail to show what they have to offer with regards to US-Iranian relations and how they link to the nuclear issue through the question of representation. Finally, the manner by which such social constructions are represented in practice will be examined. Showing that the same representational processes are also taking place for the public portrayals of the nuclear problem as with identity construction will then provide the foundation for the central focus of this study, the competing constructions of the Iranian nuclear program.

Chapter Two unpacks the methodological approach employed. It will begin by briefly reviewing constructivist methodology, before detailing specifically how this study will be undertaken. In particular, the study will follow a discourses-based methodology that pays attention to the statements made by the central actors and the power and meaning that is conveyed by these statements. Insights from contemporary constructivist research will also be drawn upon. Then, the steps taken to conduct the study will be detailed in full. Finally, justification will be given for the source materials utilized and the weight accorded to the importance of the statements of various actors, drawing attention to the biases found in such materials.

Chapter Three provides an understanding of the necessary issues to give the necessary context for the analytical chapter. To begin, the basics of nuclear technology and the nuclear non-proliferation regime will be reviewed, along with common nuclear drivers, in order to situate Iran's nuclear activities within the politics of nuclear non-proliferation. Then, the history of US-Iranian relations is briefly examined in order to orient the statements analyzed with regards to identity and threat in the subsequent chapter. Lastly,

Iran's nuclear activities are reviewed, paying special attention to those conducted in secret that cast doubt on the nature of Iran's nuclear goals.

Chapter Four, the analytical chapter, seeks to bring the insights of the previous chapters together and put them into practice in a two-stage process. First, a review of the history of US-Iranian discourse with regards to the identity of each other will detail how the identities of these two actors have crystallized into today's conceptions. Following the understanding of the role such identity portrayals play in informing conceptions of interest and threat, the means by which Iran and the US view the actions of one another will then be highlighted. Discourse, it is shown, creates and maintains representations of the nature of each actor, but also frames how each state interprets and depicts the intentions and actions of each other, which further influences identity conceptions. The chapter draws from this understanding by then examining the competing representations of Iran's nuclear program. By looking at the discourse employed by each state at key moments of the nuclear crisis it will be shown that such conflict is created and sustained by the social interactions between the two parties, rather than the material realities underlying such nuclear politics, a situation that constructivism is suitably oriented to address.

Finally, Chapter Five will review the analytical section, discussing the key findings and addressing the question of the importance of employing a constructivist approach toward such a conflict situation. Difficulties and limitations to the approach will also be noted and the means to overcome such problems will be examined. The insights derived from the study, with regards to US-Iranian relations and the nuclear crisis, will also be discussed and compared to more traditional explanations of the conflict. Future areas of

study that may build upon this work will be identified, such that the understanding of the US-Iranian relationship and other such conflict situations can be deepened further.

Ultimately, it is argued that a constructivist approach to the US-Iranian conflict over Iran's nuclear program can deepen our understanding of that conflict by highlighting the ways in which actors and their representations of any given situation are constructed, rather than being objectively given. Identities, social constructs themselves, inform whether the subsequent actions of actors are understood to be threatening. It follows that the very representational/discursive practices used in identity creation and maintenance are also those that are used try to persuade others of the given meaning of Iran's nuclear actions. Thus, it is argued, the most fiercely contested area of conflict waged between the United States and Iran is the competition for acceptance of their given portrayal of reality, a battle waged in the constructivist domain of intersubjectivity via discourse. Paying attention to this discursive competition, therefore, enhances our understanding of conflicts such as the US-Iranian one by illuminating the mechanisms underpinning conventional understandings of such conflict.

CHAPTER ONE – THEORY

Introduction

Constructivism is an approach to the study of international relations that has seen increased acceptance within the discipline over the last two decades. What, however, is constructivism, and how has it been conceived and applied in the fields of International Relations ('IR') and Strategic Studies? These seemingly simple questions do not elicit simple responses. The constructivist project is complex and fragmented, mired in part by some ontological, and more particularly, by epistemological divisions that often threaten to diminish the utility of the approach. A common thread does exist within constructivist work, however, a shared emphasis on the importance of social interactions in both understanding, and creating, the 'reality' of the world around us. Recognizing and acknowledging the importance of the social nature of man – and hence the social constructions of man – paves the way for a deeper understanding, and perhaps even groundbreaking reformulation, of explanations of world events. This aim of privileging social interaction lies at the heart of the constructivist project.

This chapter has a number of key aims: to identify and unpack the central principles of constructivism; to demonstrate what the approach has to offer for deepening our understanding of the US-Iran nuclear confrontation; and finally, to detail how these insights can be applied in this study. First, a general overview of constructivism will be given. The key principles of constructivism will then be distilled, paying particular attention to the elements most salient to this study. Next, the theoretical approach of neorealism, one of the dominant theories in the field of IR, will be briefly reviewed in order to demonstrate what

constructivism has to offer to enhance such traditional understandings of the US-Iranian conflict.

The central problem of this study is how to apply an approach that emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality to a situation where, beyond a shared enmity, there is very little that the two parties agree upon, and hence little that they purposefully ‘co-construct.’ The approach taken will be to draw from constructivism’s insights about the socially constructed nature of threats, and more specifically of the relationship between identity and threat construction – how the identity of both oneself and of a significant other affects how a particular situation is construed, and accordingly, how interests are thus contingent on the identities of the actors involved. A brief review of both the traditional threat perception literature and also of more contemporary approaches to notions of threat within Strategic Studies will provide a contrast to what the constructivist approach has to offer in this area. The constructed nature of identities will then be examined in detail to provide an understanding of the lens employed by each party in viewing the statements and actions of the other. An explanation of identity construction provides a basis for understanding state conceptualizations of threat. Such an understanding offers a foundation to examine the dynamics of the US-Iranian conflict over Iran’s nuclear program.

Finally, this chapter will review the key works examining the manner by which parties represent social phenomenon such as identity, which shape what type of things or actions are conceived as threatening, paying attention to the role of discourse in particular. Initially the focus will be on the social construction of identity and how concepts of identity then inform others of an actor’s intentions. Examination of these ‘representational practices,’ however, also reveals that the same processes take place in depictions of the

‘correct’ understanding of Iran’s actions and intentions regarding its nuclear program. Ultimately, it will be argued that paying attention to the discursive representations, first of identity construction, and then of the contested interpretation of the nature of Iran’s nuclear program, illuminates where much of the conflict is being waged between Iran and the US and how each side is conducting this conflict.

An Introduction to Constructivism

This section will begin by providing a broad overview of constructivism and giving a brief review of its development within the field of IR. After noting the various differences within constructivist approaches, constructivism’s key principles will be reviewed and the ones most applicable to this study then highlighted, to be then unpacked further in the subsequent section.

According to many of its advocates, constructivism is best described as an approach or orientation rather than a theory.¹ Whereas a theory seeks to give an explanation of a particular phenomena, constructivism simply provides an orienting framework towards viewing such phenomena by focusing upon the importance of social interactions and the manner in which these interactions help create the reality of our world. As Gergen observes, “The terms by which we understand our world and our self are neither required

¹ See Nicholas Onuf, “Constructivism: A User’s Manual,” in *International Relations in a Constructed World*, ed. V. Kubalkova et. al, (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998) 58-78; Hopf, “Promise of Constructivism”; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917; and John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 11. By contrast see Nicholas Onuf, “A Constructivist Manifesto,” in *Constituting International Political Economy*, ed. Kurt Burch and Robert A. Denemark, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997) 7, Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 7, who do try and formulate a constructivist theory. For the purposes of this study the former understanding will be adopted and constructivism will be conceived of as an approach rather than a theory, allowing greater scope for application of the approach.

nor demanded by ‘what there is’...for any state of affairs a potentially unlimited number of descriptions and explanations is possible.” He continues, “Our modes of description, explanation and/or representation are derived from relationship. ...Meanings are born of coordinations amongst persons – agreements, negotiations, affirmations. From this standpoint, relationships stand prior to all that is intelligible.”² Constructivism’s central focus is on this social aspect that mediates our perceived reality.

Elements of constructivism’s core insights can be traced back to the work of Durkheim. Durkheim tells us, “consider social facts as things.”³ These social facts, following Searle, “are only facts by human agreement.”⁴ In contrast to ‘material facts’ that exist independently of human agency, social facts are wholly dependent on the subjective meanings given to them. In effect, these social facts would cease to exist if humans also no longer existed. Beyond this simple sketch, however, the multiplicity of the constructivist project inhibits a simple depiction of the subject. Historically, within the social sciences, the constructivist project has not been well defined.⁵ As Zehfuss writes, “The significance of constructivism is established more easily than its identity.”⁶ However, a brief examination of constructivism’s roots in IR, focusing on some central definitions and descriptions of constructivism, will help give an understanding of the scope of the field and provide a foundation from which to build towards the application of constructivism to the US-Iranian problem.

² Kenneth R. Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2007), 47-48.

³ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 14-18; Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity*, 857-861.

⁴ John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 1.

⁵ Ronen Palan, “A World of Their Making: An Evaluation of the Constructivist Critique in International Relations,” *Review of International Studies* 26 (2000): 578.

⁶ Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

It was not until the late 1980s that constructivism began to assert itself in the discipline of IR. Nicholas Onuf and Alexander Wendt were two of the first scholars to contemplate constructivism within IR. Although Onuf's detailed formulation of constructivism has been credited as first introducing the concept to IR,⁷ Wendt's work has undoubtedly exerted a far greater influence in the field due to its greater acceptance by the IR community, in part due to the challenge it posed to the dominance of neorealist theory. Wendt's constructivism has evolved over time and to many academics has become the heart of IR's constructivist project, though its structural character positions it as a very particular kind of constructivism. Many other constructivist approaches exist and the central point here is that what constitutes constructivism within the discipline of IR is not self-evident and indeed is a highly contested area, often with substantial differences between each approach.

A number of alternative and more generally conceived depictions of constructivism to Wendt's formulation are available. Adler highlights the importance of shared meanings in shaping our world when he states, "Constructivism shows that even our most enduring institutions are based on collective understandings."⁸ Also, Finnemore and Sikkink describe constructivism as,

An approach to social analysis that asserts the following: (a) human interaction is shaped primarily by ideational factors, not simply material ones; (b) the most important ideational factors are widely shared or "intersubjective" beliefs, which are not reducible to individuals; and (c) these shared beliefs construct the interests and identities of purposive actors.⁹

⁷ Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations*, 10.

⁸ Emanuel Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 3 (1997): 322.

⁹ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "Taking Stock," 392-393.

While this description does not encapsulate the constructivist project in its entirety, it is representative of much constructivist thought and is in line with the understanding of constructivism employed for this study. Building from this understanding, constructivism's association with such wide-ranging concepts as the prominence of ideational over material structures, interests and identities, and patterns (that is, behavior, or norms), hints at the myriad ways that constructivist thinking may be conceived of and applied. This point serves to reinforce contentions that constructivism defies simple categorization.

The core of the conflict is fought in the realm of epistemology (of how we know what we know) rather than over issues of ontology (over what the basic units of analysis are). Divisions over epistemological issues emanate from philosophical questions surrounding the nature and practice of social science itself.¹⁰ Constructivism's strength, however, is the various approaches' shared ontological focus, loosely based around the importance of social interactions.¹¹ Checkel describes this ontology as "one of mutual constitution where neither unit of analysis – agents or structures – is reduced to the other and made "ontologically primitive"."¹² While sharing this ontological focus, constructivists can, following Weiner, then be subdivided according to how they attribute within the

¹⁰ Hopf makes a distinction between what he terms 'conventional constructivists' and 'critical constructivists,' writing, "Although conventional and critical constructivism share a number of positions – mutual constitution of actor and structures, anarchy as a social construct, power as both material and discursive, and state identities and interests as variable – conventional constructivism does not accept critical theory's ideas about its own role in producing change and maintains a fundamentally different understanding of power." Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 185. Similar distinctions are made by a number of other authors, each employing their own terminology. See also Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, and Stephen D. Krasner, "International Organization and the Study of World Politics," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 677; Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity*; Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 3; Palan, "A World in Their Making," 576; Emanuel Adler, "Constructivism and International Relations," in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 106-107.

¹¹ Antje Wiener, "Constructivism: The Limits of Bridging Gaps," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 6, no. 3 (2003): 257.

¹² Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50 (1998): 326.

intersubjective realm the importance of ideas, norms, language, and constitutive practices.¹³ In actuality these ontological divisions are not discrete entities, more of a heuristic device to help categorize approaches to constructivist studies. For this study two aspects will be drawn from in particular: ‘constitutive practices,’ which according to Weiner, “places the ontology of interaction above the ontologies of agency and/or structure;” and language use, with “its focus on the constitutive impact of interaction.”¹⁴ These aspects will be expounded upon shortly via the insights of Hopf.

Ultimately, it will be the general principle of the importance of non-material factors (‘ideas’) mediated through social relations that will guide this study.¹⁵ The approach taken will be to draw from Hopf’s review of constructivism, and examine the central issues that he believes constructivism is equipped to address. The issues relating to the US-Iranian dynamic will be identified and unpacked further. Specifically, Hopf details five issues within IR that he sees constructivism being particularly suited to examine. These are: the mutual constitution of actors and structures; “anarchy as an imagined community”; identities and interests; “power of practice”; and the notion of change.¹⁶ It should be noted that these examples given do not encompass all the potential applications of constructivism, but are simply intended to provide an indication of some of the major issues that the approach has attempted to comprehend.

Of these issues, the agent-structure problem relates to the US-Iranian dynamic in important ways in that the structure, the ongoing antagonistic relationship between the two, affects and is affected by the actors themselves. Central to this problem, however, are

¹³ Wiener, “Constructivism: The Limits of Bridging Gaps,” 260.

¹⁴ Wiener, “Constructivism: The Limits of Bridging Gaps,” 263-264.

¹⁵ Zehfuss, *Constructivism*, 10-23.

¹⁶ Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism,” 172-181.

notions of identity and interest, aspects that play a part in the constitution of the actors themselves, which in turn relate to the elements of power and change. Evidently these issues are inextricably intertwined. As will be shown shortly, the notions of identity and interest are of crucial importance to this study. Given how they relate to the understandings of the actions and intentions of others they will form the core of this theoretical overview and will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section. However, the manner in which they manifest themselves is intimately linked to the ‘power of practice.’ This element will be from where much of the analysis in subsequent chapters will be derived, ultimately perhaps linking to Hopf’s final issue, the possibility of change.

While most neorealist theories emphasize the importance of material factors in the projection of power, constructivism, while not denying the importance of materiality, also sees ideas and language as conveying power. Echoing the analytical focus of Weiner on ‘constitutive practices’ and ‘language use’ identified earlier, Hopf refers to this ‘discursive power’ as the ‘power of practice,’ and writes,

An actor is not even able to act as its identity until the relevant community of meaning...acknowledges the legitimacy of that action, by that actor, in that social context. The power of practice is the power to produce intersubjective meaning within a social structure. It is a short step from this authorizing power of practice to an understanding of practice as a way of bounding, or disciplining interpretation, making some interpretations of reality less likely to occur or prevail within a particular community. The meanings of actions of members of the community, as well as the actions of Others, become fixed through practice; boundaries of understanding become well known. In this way, the ultimate power of practice is to reproduce and police an intersubjective reality.¹⁷

Thus, how actors come to be seen, how their actions and intentions should be judged, becomes filtered through notions and representations of the type of actor they are; through

¹⁷ Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism,” 178-179.

the ideas about them projected by other actors, and how these are received and acted upon. This observation is of crucial importance to this study and will be taken up further in the final sections of this chapter.

Of course, such portrayals are highly contested and in a constant state of flux, and it is the examination of the area of contestation, enacted through discourse, which is suited to applying constructivism to US-Iranian nuclear conflict. Furthermore, as Hopf points out, the ability to assert the dominance of one depiction over another is also a function of the material resources available to an actor (as well as an ability to make use of available resources), and so attention must be given to such complexities, as the discourse-based ideational realm is shown to be intimately linked to the power dynamics of the material one.¹⁸ Ultimately, examining how discursive practice informs how the identity – and hence the interests and actions – of an actor is understood can help inform the nature of US-Iranian enmity, possibly even opening the door to viable solutions to the ongoing conflict. First, however, the constructivist approach must be situated in relation to more traditional approaches used in understanding state conflict in order to show what it has to offer in advancing understandings of such conflicts. Then, after identifying the difficulties involved in applying constructivism towards such activities, the means by which to proceed will then be established, issues to which the next section now turns.

Notions of Threat

Traditionally, Waltz's neorealist approach has heavily influenced Strategic and Security Studies, and also how the US-Iranian conflict has been conceived. Indeed, Colin

¹⁸ Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 179.

Gray writes, “strategists may be termed, and should acknowledge that they are, without apologies, neo-realists.”¹⁹ This section will contrast this approach with constructivism, and then highlight the main advantages and difficulties of a constructivist approach.

For Waltz, states are the primary actors in international relations and their interests and behavior are determined and can be explained by the anarchical nature of the international system itself. As a result, Waltz claims that as rational actors states can be viewed as ‘functionally-undifferentiated’ like-units, self-interested sovereign actors seeking to survive by maximizing their own security, through self-help.²⁰ This need for self-help comes from the absence of a higher political authority, but also from a fear and mistrust of the intentions of others, who are also striving to survive and leads to a ‘security dilemma.’²¹ While recognizing that all states face the same security concerns, Waltz emphasized that their ability to address these concerns varies greatly and can be accounted for by the distribution of capabilities amongst states, conceived primarily in terms of material attributes: “size, wealth, power, and form.”²² This situation explains the differentiation between the great and lesser powers. As a result, to ensure survival, states are inherently inclined to balance against such power, with the most stable balance believed to be a bipolar system, such as during the Cold War.²³

¹⁹ Colin S. Gray, *Strategic Studies and Public Policy: The American Experience* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1982), 188.

²⁰ Rationality can be conceived of as “the ability of individuals to rank order their preferences and choose the best available preference” – Richard Little, “International Regimes.” in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis and Steve Smith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 314.

²¹ A security dilemma describes the situation occurring when an actor arms themselves to enhance their security, leading to other actors to also acquire more arms out of fear of the first actor’s newly acquired arms. The first actor then also feels less secure, requiring them to obtain even more arms, in an ongoing circle.

²² Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1979), 96.

²³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 170-176.

One important element lacking in Waltz's theory, however, was an account of how states chose to balance against some states yet ally with others. From within the neorealist camp though came an important modification to Waltz's thesis from Stephen Walt. While seeking to explain why states ally, Walt postulated that rather than balancing against power, states instead banded together to balance against threats.²⁴ But how was a state to determine whether another state's actions were threatening or in line with its own interests? For Walt the answer was to introduce a new variable linked to the notion of threat: aggressive intentions.²⁵ The addition of an actor's assessment of the intentions of others is no minor adjustment to Waltz's theory. Katzenstein characterized this shift, writing, "Walt's threat theory is ...a substantial departure from [neorealism]. ...his emphasis on threat perception moves away from the systemic level and shifts analysis from material capabilities to ideational factors."²⁶ Of course, this shift in emphasis from material to ideational considerations is precisely the move that constructivism seeks to undertake.

Threat perception is a mainstay of Security and Strategic Studies, where the concept of security itself is intimately linked to questions over whom or what may threaten such security and so is not exclusive to constructivist approaches. More recently, such traditional views have come under increasing scrutiny in the fields of Strategic and Security Studies from the insight that the nature of threats, and indeed the very objects under threat, are not given and fixed, but rather are themselves social constructions, leading to greater calls to utilize constructivist understanding.

²⁴ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

²⁵ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 25-26.

²⁶ Peter J. Katzenstein, "Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 27.

Of particular relevance for this study is how certain actors or actions become labeled as threats, while the threat potential of others is downplayed or ignored. A number of scholars, working with a more constructivist-oriented perspective within Security and Strategic Studies disciplines, have sought to address this problem. Termed ‘constructing insecurity’ by Weldes, and alternatively ‘production of danger’ by Fierke, and ‘security as discourse’ by Hansen, the focus shifts from an understanding of security concerns as being objective and given, to the processes through which something becomes represented as a threat to security.²⁷ Fierke argues that, “The central point [of the approach] is to demonstrate that threats are made in an active process rather than discovered in a static environment.”²⁸ Fierke continues,

The focus is the process by which objects embedded in one set of relationships are given meaning as threatening while in another they are understood to be benign. Conventional approaches to security start with an objective threat, external to the agents of security. They assume that threats exist independently of the routines, procedures, discourses and knowledge brought to bear by security agencies. ...More critical approaches emphasize that threats are a product of a politics of representation.²⁹

Fierke concludes, “It is not that weapons or threats of one kind or another have been made up but rather that the meaning attached to them, and the subsequent practice, has been molded in discourse.”³⁰ This ‘politics of representation’ clearly ties to the notions of ‘constitutive practices’ and ‘discursive power’ identified earlier and as the mechanism of threat construction will be revisited shortly.

²⁷ Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 1-2; Karin Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 99; Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006), 33.

²⁸ Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 99.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

As noted earlier, one difficulty, perhaps the central problem for this study, is how to apply constructivism's intersubjective ontology to two subjects, Iran and the United States, that have a conflictual rather than consensual relationship. Traditionally a central focus of much of the constructivist work has been on areas of shared agreements and consensus building, rather than conflict issues where there is relatively little that the parties co-construct through agreement.³¹ The empirical focus of this study is, however, a set of conflicting and competitive understandings. Whether constructivism can be applied beyond the limited focus of consensus and cooperation is thus a central issue. However, by building on the role of ideas in conceptualizing threats, a more nuanced understanding of the constructed nature of threats and the mechanisms involved can offer a way forward.

Consequently, this study will adopt a two-pronged approach to the application of constructivism to understanding the US-Iranian conflict over the Iranian nuclear program. First, the manner in which the identity of each state has come to be conceptualized by the other will be examined in order to provide a deeper understanding of how the interests surrounding the Iranian nuclear program have come to be so radically opposed and how these states see one another today. This next section will therefore unpack the theoretical aspects of identity, reviewing how identity has been conceived of in the constructivist literature and suggesting how the concept can then be applied to understanding US-Iranian relations. Then the chapter will examine the processes by which the competition occurs, both in the realm of identity construction and in understanding the nature of Iran's nuclear

³¹ For a comprehensive list of such consensual constructivist studies see Katzenstein, "Introduction," 21, n. 66. For an examination of the constructivist approaches to conflict see Richard Jackson, "Constructivism and Conflict Resolution," in *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk and I William Zartman (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 172-89.

program. It will be argued that a discursive approach is necessary to understand this conflict, the mechanisms of which will be examined in the final section of this chapter.

Constructivism and Identity

This section will unpack the theoretical aspects of the concept of identity in general, and examine how identity links to interests to account for the construction of threat. The first step is to clarify what is meant by the concept of identity, which has been treated as self-evident thus far. What exactly is ‘identity,’ how can it be defined, and how is it conceived in IR and more specifically within constructivism? Ultimately the working definition for the purposes of this study will be to view identity as, ‘a placeholder for Self-and-Other-in-context.’ The rationale behind this definition will be provided in the following discussion. It should be noted that debates relating to notions of identity are extensive and complex and so discussion will be necessarily limited to the aspects most salient for this particular study.

The work of Goff and Dunn provides a useful entry point to examine notions of identity. They highlight four aspects of identity: alterity (‘otherness’); fluidity; constructedness; and multiplicity.³² The following discussion focus draws from these four aspects to help clarify how identity is best understood within a constructivist context. Outside of these general attributes there is no commonly accepted definition of the concept, and ultimately, perhaps no given definition will suffice for every application.

³² Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn, “Introduction: In Defense of Identity,” in *Identity and Global Politics: Empirical and Theoretical Elaborations*, ed. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 4-8.

In social psychology and sociology, where much of the theorizing on identity first originated, it has been conceptualized as “a voice inside which speaks and says: this is the real me,”³³ and alternatively as a location in the world.³⁴ At first glance these two descriptions appear at odds with one another, the first emphasizing an actor’s own individual conception of their identity, and the latter depicting identity as a relational concept. Jepperson et al. write, “More precisely, identities come in two basic forms – those that are intrinsic to an actor (at least relative to a given social structure) and those that are relationally defined within a social structure.”³⁵ Clearly, identity is a multi-dimensional concept. Emphasis on the intrinsic aspects of identity highlights an important restriction – identities have limits and are heavily influenced by material realities. Factors such as geography and history impose limitations on how a state’s identity can be conceived. As Spivey reminds us, “there is an empirical world out there to be respected.”³⁶ Beyond these material constraints, however, the conception of the ‘constructed’ aspect of identity comes to the fore: which of the many intrinsic aspects of identity are important and how they should be understood are issues that fall within the socially constructed realm.³⁷

Here lies a crucial difference between constructivism’s conceptualization of identities and interests and that of neorealism. Waltzian neorealism sees identities and interests as being derived from the condition of structural anarchy, and hence as being

³³ William James quoted in Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1968) 19; Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 22-23.

³⁴ Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 132.

³⁵ Ronald L., Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J Katzenstein, “Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J Katzenstein, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 59, n. 85.

³⁶ Michael Spivey, *Native Americans in the Carolina Borderlands: A Critical Ethnography* (Southern Pines, NC: Carolinas Press, 2000), 37.

³⁷ Also see David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the near Abroad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 11-13, 19-21.

immutable and the same for all actors. By contrast, constructivism's insight that identities and interests are socially constructed not only provides an explanation of how states remain in conflict with one another, but also hints at the possibility of overcoming conflict through a radical mutual reconstitution of identities and interests. As Hopf states, "Constructivism conceives of the politics of identity as a continual contest for control over the power necessary to produce meaning in a social group." Thus, investigating how the identities of the US and Iran, vis-à-vis one another, have been construed through their interactions can illuminate how their interests, derived from identity, have come to be so radically opposed. According to Hopf, "Identities are necessary, in international politics and domestic society alike, in order to ensure at least some minimal level of predictability and order. Durable expectations between states require intersubjective identities that are sufficiently stable to ensure predictable patterns of behavior."³⁸ Importantly, however, Hopf reminds us that "The crucial observation here is that 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."³⁹

Consequently, it is the relational, that is, the intersubjective nature of identity that accounts for the fluid and multiple features of identities, that identities (and interests) can and indeed do vary over time and with context. How actors see themselves and are seen by others varies according to the type of interaction and with whom they interact. States project or can be attributed particular identities. Which of these identities will come to the fore in a particular instant will depend upon the emphasis given by each actor, and the acceptance or rejection of that emphasis by other key actors. Thus, the dialectical nature of

³⁸ Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 174.

³⁹ Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 175.

identity and interests is integral in shaping the ‘reality’ of such identities. Each representation of a given identity then challenges or reaffirms a given conception, with the solidification or rejection of an identity being the result of the acceptance (or ambivalence) of the other actors involved. However, just because identities can become transformed through interaction with significant actors, it does not necessarily follow that they do so easily, resulting at times in the appearance of more entrenched or static identities.⁴⁰ Also, these identities may be constructed by the states themselves, or be attributed to states from the outside, by others. An actor may have a conception of its own identity, formed over time through interactions with others, but whether this is mirrored by the portrayals by others may be out of its control. It can contest portrayals by others, but in the face of a notable power dynamic it may not possess the necessary resources to shake projections of its identity that differ from its own. Thus, identity construction must be seen as an area of both consensus and contestation, with states’ conceptions of their own and others’ identities potentially at odds with the projections of these identities by other actors. This Self-Other dynamic (or ‘alterity’), marks the area where conflict may occur depending upon how the lines are drawn.

The definition of identity employed for this study, “a placeholder for Self-and-Other-in-context,” attempts to capture much of this complexity. This definition is modified from Fitzgerald’s who defines identity as, an academic placeholder “for self-in-context.”⁴¹ The inclusion of the ‘Other’ is intended to reflect attention to the conceptions held by significant Others and the importance they play in the mutual constitution of one’s own

⁴⁰ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 423.

⁴¹ Thomas K. Fitzgerald, *Metaphors of Identity* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 3.

identity. The emphasis on context reminds us of the fluidity and multiplicity of identities. Lastly, the modification of the notion of an ‘academic placeholder’ to ‘placeholder’ highlights the concept of identity as portrayed by important actors themselves, rather than purely from the understanding and vantage point of the analyst. Brubaker and Cooper disagree, and distinguish between the use of identity as a ‘category of practice’ and a ‘category of analysis,’ insisting that the use of the former by relevant actors does not necessitate the academic use of the latter.⁴² However, a focus on the ‘constructed’ aspect of identity necessitates an inductive approach, where conceptions of particular state identities are located within the understandings of significant actors themselves. In this instance, separating categories of practice from categories of analysis, as Brubaker and Cooper suggest, threatens to erase the self-understandings of the actors themselves, precisely the element of most interest here. The intersubjective contestation of how each state should be viewed by others is central to understanding the actors involved: it should not be reduced to some artificial construction imposed from without. Consequently, the next section will now turn to the area of contestation known as ‘Othering,’ the drawing of difference where Self and Other meet, and examining how this contestation is undertaken.

The Mutual Constitution of the Self/Other

If interests are informed by identities, how are identities formed and maintained? Specifically, how is it that the US and Iran see one another as actors that cannot be trusted, casting Iranian and American statements and actions with regards to Iran’s nuclear program in a particular light? What is required is an understanding of the conception of the identity

⁴² Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond “Identity”,” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 4.

of one actor by another, of how the US sees Iran and its actions in the way it does, and vice-versa. Fortunately, the intersubjective approach of constructivism offers a way to resolve these questions. Identities do not stand alone, but in this view they exist, indeed are created, in relation to significant Others within a given context. This concept is encapsulated by Goff and Dunn's attention to alterity, or 'otherness.' As such, this section will look first at the concept of 'Othering,' the drawing of boundaries between the Self and the Other, in more detail, then at the politics of identity and Othering more generally. Next, the IR constructivist approach to the Self/Other dynamic will be examined, first by looking at Wendt, and then at the work of Neumann and Welsh, who, have put the insights of the Self/Other into practice. Finally, a review of Doty's work will focus on the power dynamics involved and on the mechanisms used to delineate Self and Other.

For Goff and Dunn, identity should be viewed as a relational term, with one's own identity often defined in regards to a significant Other.⁴³ Similarly, Klotz and Lynch note how constructivists see identity as being 'constituted through comparisons,' as being based "on a division between 'us' and 'them'."⁴⁴ In these conceptions, identity is no longer fixed or essential, but rather is created, maintained, and redrawn via interaction. Boundaries are formed but are not static, being constantly redrawn. Thus, the production and understanding of the 'Self' itself is necessarily a social enterprise,⁴⁵ constantly contested and negotiated during interactions with significant others. Theorizing on this Self-Other nexus is vast and has deep roots in the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, religion, and psychology. The more recent constructivist turn in IR and Strategic Studies, however, with its focus on

⁴³ Goff and Dunn, "Introduction: In Defense of Identity," 4-5.

⁴⁴ Audie Klotz and Celica Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 74-84.

⁴⁵ Berger and Luckmann. *Social Construction*, 51.

identity is less developed. Within the discipline, much of the work on this aspect of identity has been imported and adapted to the particularities of state-to-state relations. A brief review of how this imported work has been adapted and applied to constructivism in IR and Strategic Studies will be provided.⁴⁶

Connolly's *Identity/Difference*, provides a suitable entry point for examination of the divisions between Self and Other. In an oft-quoted passage Connolly writes,

An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity. ...[Consequently] the maintenance of one identity (or field of identities) involves the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates. Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.⁴⁷

This move from mere difference to 'Othering,' identifies the Other, and also creates and maintains the Self. For Connolly, identity is "a site at which entrenched dispositions encounter socially constituted definitions."⁴⁸ This highlights its contested nature. The idealized and internalized view created of a particular identity is open to contestation through the conceptions of that very same identity by all others. This contestation is critical in delineating where a particular identity begins and ends. Binary oppositions such as democratic/non-democratic, capitalist/socialist, non-proliferator/proliferator create a hierarchy of identities and in the process subordinate one form of identity to the other. As Gregory writes, "The very differentiation and exclusion of this subordinate "opposite" define the dominant term, which, as it were, draws a boundary around itself and declares:

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive review of this literature along four paths, the ethnographic, psychological, continental philosophical and 'Eastern excursion' paths see Iver B. Neumann, "Collective Identity Formation: Self and Other in International Relations" *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 2 (1996).

⁴⁷ William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 64.

⁴⁸ Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 163.

“This I am, and not that.” “That,” outside the boundary, is the Other, the not-self, upon which “This” depends for its identity.”⁴⁹

Wendt confronts neorealism by proposing a constructivist approach to the anarchy question that considers the origins of identities and interests, accepting some of neorealism’s key assertions, such as the primacy of states, but challenging it by positing that identities were constructed rather than given. For Wendt, “Identities and such collective cognitions do not exist apart from each other; they are “mutually constitutive.”” Thus, “all relatively stable self-other relations – even those of “enemies” – are defined intersubjectively,”⁵⁰ In his later work, Wendt treats identity “as a property of intentional actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions. This means that identity is at base a subjective or unit-level quality, rooted in an actor’s self-understandings.”⁵¹ With this identity in hand, actors enter into interactions with Others and these Others respond with their own conceptions, confirming or challenging the view of the Self. A dialectical process ensues.⁵² However, while Wendt’s insights help provide a foundation for a constructivist understanding of identity, Wendt’s emphasis on system-oriented processes is not in line with the focus of this study.

One of the foremost works to examine the real-life mutual constitution of Self and Other was Neumann and Welsh’s study *The Other in European Self-Definition*. This work examines how conceptions and portrayals of an external actor help secure the identity of the Self. Neumann and Welsh contend that the historical delineation of a European self-identity

⁴⁹ Donna U. Gregory, “Forward,” in *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, ed. James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1989), xvi.

⁵⁰ Wendt, “Anarchy,” 399.

⁵¹ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 224.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 316-317.

rests on a general consensus over shared social and cultural traits at the domestic level and a contrasting of these traits against others in the international realm.⁵³ By drawing on, and emphasizing distinctions between, ‘them and us,’ the identity of the Self, of what it means to be European, is solidified vis-à-vis an external Other. It was demonstrated that Turkish cultural and political differences, rather than the Turk’s military strength, were depicted as the primary threat to the European collection of states.⁵⁴ This characterization of who the Turk was, and was not, drew the lines between inside and outside and in turn solidifying European notions of Self. One key problem with this work, however, is the absence of the Turkish voice, an omission to be avoided when looking at US/Iranian identity construction as the inclusion of position of the external Other is crucial given that the relationship is ultimately a dialectical one.

In *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*, Doty does consciously confront the one-sided characterization of the identity of one actor by another by drawing attention to the power discrepancies involved. Doty examines how actors and entities in the ‘global South’ are represented by those in the ‘global North.’ Regarding “practice(s) of representation,”⁵⁵ Doty writes,

By representation I mean the ways in which the South has been discursively represented by policy makers, scholars, journalists, and others in the North. This does not refer to the “truth” and “knowledge” that the North has

⁵³ Iver B Neumann and Jennifer M. Welsh, “The Other in European Self-Definition: An Addendum to the Literature on International Society,” *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 4 (1991): 328.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 333-338.

⁵⁵ Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 2; Doty’s study parallels Hopf’s notion of ‘power of practice’ identified earlier and also echoes Said’s Orientalism. Orientalism is described by Said as “a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”.” As Said argues, ultimately Orientalism “has less to do with the Orient than it does with “our” world.” Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 2 & 12.

discovered and accumulated about the South, but rather to the ways in which regimes of “truth” and “knowledge” have been produced.⁵⁶

The justification for the one-sided approach to examining these representational practices stems from the hegemony of the North over the South, of the greater resources of the North to represent the South and the relative inability of the South to challenge these portrayals. The importance of paying attention to such power discrepancies clearly has implications for US-Iranian relations and must also be considered.

While not overtly constructivist as popularly conceived in IR, the constructivist tenets are evident when Doty writes, “North-South relations become...a realm of politics wherein the very identities of people, states, and regions are constructed through representational practices.”⁵⁷ The overlap with constructivism can be extended further as Doty then moves to identify how identities inform the interests that states have, which then legitimizes certain policies and practices.⁵⁸ For Doty, attention must be given to the discursive practices that not only frame our understanding of the actions of others, but go beyond mere framing to actually construct the actors themselves. In Doty’s words, “These representational practices simultaneously construct the ‘other’ which is often ostensibly the object of various practices, and also importantly construct the ‘self’ vis-à-vis this’ other.”⁵⁹ In short, the entities referred to as North/South or US/Iran (and the meanings attributed to their actions), become reified through these representational practices.

⁵⁶ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 2.

⁵⁷ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

Construction Through Discourse

Doty's insights are further expanded by reviewing the works of Weldes, Campbell, and Mutimer, who examine the practices used by states to create identities and thus to inform notions of interest and threat. In particular, attention will be given to how discourse, broadly conceived as "actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language,"⁶⁰ can be used to shape understandings and representations of the 'reality' around us. These works are the basis for this study's analytical approach, the detailing of which will be the final part of this chapter.

The studies by Campbell and Weldes exemplify the interplay between the historical representations of the identity and actions of other states, and the interests, constructions of threat, and policies such a representation enables for one's own state. Weldes highlights key constitutive features of US identity, such as its role as 'leader of the free world' and defender of freedom, which necessitated the drawing of attention to oppositional identities in order for it to act upon this identity conception. Weldes writes,

U.S. identity was defined in opposition to its enemies. The prevailing representation of the Soviet and communist adversaries of the United States contributed significantly to the production of the U.S. identity. By defining its adversary as a totalitarian regime that enslaved its subjects populations, for instance, it was implied that the United States, in contrast, was a democratic state that acted to free rather than enslave others.⁶¹

Weldes demonstrates how, when viewed through the lens of identity formation, the Cuban Missile Crisis represented a challenge to the US portrayal of its ability to defend 'freedom

⁶⁰ Barbara Johnstone, *Discourse Analysis* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 2. This definition is ultimately built upon that of Blommaert who writes "Discourse is language-in-action, and investigating it requires attention both to language and action." This latter definition is most applicable for examining US-Iranian interaction and consequently will be the one utilized for this study. Jan Blommaert, *Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

⁶¹ Weldes, *Constructing National Interests*, 206.

everywhere,’ necessitating a response in order to maintain credibility as the world leader and an opportunity to reaffirm aspects of the United States identity. In what Weldes terms “a pervasive and inescapable credibility problem,” and consistent with an understanding of identities as being fluid rather than static, the US identity needed to be continually “reproduced and reenacted.”⁶²

Campbell too examines how a state needs to constantly reproduce its identity via discursive practices. Campbell proposes that states are unstable and precarious entities, “always in a process of becoming.”⁶³ He studies the ways in which the representations and practice of US foreign policy depicts the identity and actions of significant Others, and in turn constructs the identity, and thus the interests, of the United States itself. Campbell details how threats located within the international realm can be seen as created rather than given: “Meaning and identity are, therefore, always the consequence of a relationship between self and the other that emerges through the imposition of an interpretation, rather than being the product of uncovering an exclusive domain with its own pre-established identity.”⁶⁴ The characters and boundaries of the state, and those of other states, are drawn via ‘discourses of danger,’ that themselves are evidenced through the practices of foreign policy and the discursive forms these practices take.⁶⁵ Here, with regards to notions of identity, Campbell is worth quoting at length:

While dependent on specific historical contexts, we can say that for the state, identity can be understood as the outcome of exclusionary practices in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the “inside” are linked through a discourse of “danger” with threats identified and located on the

⁶² Weldes, *Constructing National Interests*, 215.

⁶³ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, revised edition, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

“outside.” The outcome is that boundaries are constructed, spaces demarcated, standards of legitimacy incorporated, interpretations of history privileged, and alternatives marginalized. Foreign policy (conventionally understood as the external orientation of preestablished states with secure identities) is thus to be re-theorized as one of the boundary-producing practices central to the production and reproduction of the identity in whose name it operates.⁶⁶

An examination of how the US and Iran have engaged in these practices through paying attention to the discourse employed at key moments can thus highlight how their identities are created and maintained, and consequently, where interests are generated, how threats are constructed, and how ‘reality’ is portrayed and understood.

The mutual constitution of Self and Other is evidenced in this analysis. Each side needs to support its own identity portrayals, which in turn affects how they view the actions of others. Notions of threat are not merely passively acquired but instead are products of attempts to secure an identity of the Self. Accordingly, Campbell reformulates the understanding of the Cold War as “another episode in the ongoing production and reproduction of American identity through the practices of foreign policy, rather than as simply an externally induced crisis.”⁶⁷ He is careful not to claim that the Soviet Union’s military capabilities were not important, but rather that the perceived intentions underlying this military build-up were already informed by pre-given formulations of the communist threat prior to the Soviet strengthening of arms.⁶⁸ The parallels here with US conceptions of the Iranian state and their nuclear activities are clear: by paying attention to the representations and discourse employed by Iran and the US, this study can illuminate how they remain in conflict with one another.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 132.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 139.

Finally, Mutimer's *The Weapons State: Proliferation and the Framing of Security* also offers essential insights into representations of the Self/Other discourse dynamic for the US-Iranian case, particularly due to its focus on the role proliferation discourses play in identity formation. Like Campbell, Mutimer's study also focuses on the end of the Cold War and the search by the United States for a new external threat to substantiate its own identity and practices of state (in particular its military posture). Mutimer argues that with the demise of the Soviet Union, the US was in effect left with a 'threat deficit' and thus its military forces lacked a *raison d'être* for maintaining their levels of strength. The solution, in Mutimer's view, was to construct a new existential threat mediated through the discourse of proliferation. The first target of this reformulation of threat perception was the state of Iraq, though Iran was soon similarly labeled, a label accentuated under the policy of dual containment.⁶⁹

Mutimer argues that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 provided the United States with the opportunity it sought to refocus its attentions on the international stage and offer as a means to reconstitute its identity through the relation with the identity of a new Other. Mutimer examines the US responses to the Iraqi invasion, writing,

Following the events of August 1990, Iraq's identity was established by more than the 'purely linguistic' act of naming. At least equally important, that identity was established through a practical engagement with Iraq in those particular terms – in this instance, primarily practices of UN sanction and military action. These two facets of the social construction of identity are inseparable. The naming of Iraq in a particular way, the interpretation of its behavior as behavior of a certain kind, enables the practices of the United Nations and the coalition. At the same time, the engagement with Iraq as an enemy and a subject of sanctions produced and reproduced its identity.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ David Mutimer, *The Weapons State: Proliferation and the Framing of Security* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000) 91-95; See the Chapter Three for more on dual containment.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 82.

Undoubtedly a very similar process has been taking place with Iran in recent years, perhaps accelerated now that Iraq is no longer viewed as the threat it once was. Speaking more generally with regards to the socially constructed nature of proliferation issues and their relationship towards identities, Mutimer writes, “If we want to understand a particular form of engagement – for example, international engagement with weapons proliferation – we need to look at the way objects and identities of those engaged have been constructed.”⁷¹ Mutimer’s work is also of relevance to this study as not only does it focus on the relationship between a constructed identity and nuclear discourse, but it also serves as a reminder that actions as well as words are a powerful aspect of these discursive processes.

Paying attention to the words and actions employed at key moments can inform how each state shapes the understanding of the identity and interests of others. One note of caution must be added, however. Conceptions of the identity of the Self and Other have been portrayed as coming into being via a mutually constituting dialectical process. The role of power has been noted such that one actor may at times be able to disproportionately impose its rendering of the Other. It is important to clarify though that even these conceptions of the powerful do not remain unchallenged. Consistent with constructivist understandings of identity as being fluid and in-process, identity can be a contested zone, especially when each actor has a radically opposed understanding of its own identity and the identity of others. This notion is captured by Brubaker and Cooper’s distinction between “self-identification and the identification and categorization of oneself by

⁷¹ Ibid., 25.

others.”⁷² Even if two parties are talking past one another, they can still be viewed as interacting as the views and portrayals of one contest the views and portrayals of the other, whether intentionally or not.

This view is echoed by Neumann in his discussion of identities as ‘context-bound instantiations’ that become ‘talked into existence.’⁷³ Neumann stresses that his emphasis on the discursive nature of identities, of what he terms, “essentialising representations of identities,” takes nothing away from the ontological reality of such identities, but argues that, “these essentialising representations do not become any less real for being imagined.”⁷⁴ But to whose reality is being referred to here? He continues,

I would like to suggest that the making of selves is a narrative process of identification whereby a number of identities that have been negotiated in specific contexts are strung together into one overarching story. The making of selves is dependent on the raw material of available identities. The forging of selves, then, is a path-dependent process, since it has to cram in a number of previously negotiated identities in order to be credible.⁷⁵

In this view the Self is decoupled from context and instead becomes a highly generalized composite view of identity. This process takes place for all actors, both in viewing themselves and Others. The crucial element from a constructivist perspective is the notion of recognition⁷⁶ – how a particular constitution of Self or Other, whether in contextual or composite form, is received by Others (most especially by the actor that such a portrayal is imposed upon). Neumann draws attention to situations when actors do not share similar conceptions of a Self:

⁷² Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond “Identity”,” 15.

⁷³ Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: “The East” in European Identity Formation* (Minnesota, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 212 & 223.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

An instance that is worthy of particular theoretical attention is of course the one in which others deny recognition to the self's constitutive stories. In this case, the storied self has three options: to accept stories told of it by others, to abandon the stories that are not recognized in favor of others, or to stand by the original story and to try and convince the audiences that it in fact does apply.⁷⁷

Here the final option clearly brings conceptions of an actor's self-identity into conflict and should be instantly recognizable as the situation that characterizes US-Iranian relations, and more specifically of the conflicting portrayals by the US and Iran of Iran's nuclear intentions. As Hopf surmises, "An actor is not even able to act as its identity until the relevant community of meaning ...acknowledges the legitimacy of that action, by that actor, in that social context."⁷⁸ Thus, for the case of Iran's nuclear program, Iran cannot behave as a 'legitimate' nuclear state until it has been accept by the relevant actors as such.

Extending Discourse to the Nuclear Realm

These insights can be further extended to the nuclear realm. The US-Iranian nuclear dispute can be understood as one context-bound aspect of their relations in general, just one element of the overall interaction between the two. The statements and actions of both states with respect to this nuclear dispute build upon the generalized identity they each project of one another, informing their interests and threat perceptions, which in turn further inform notions of identity in a dialectical process. This is not to say that Iran's nuclear program is purely discursive: clearly Iran is working toward some ultimate goal, whether it be to acquire a nuclear device, to reach strategic ambiguity and retain the option

⁷⁷ Ibid., 223-224.

⁷⁸ Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 178-179. The idea is paraphrased from, Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* New York: MIT Press, 1953.

of building a bomb, or to merely develop a peaceful nuclear program. However, how these actions are understood is mediated through identity discourse, which in turn affects the actual path that Iran's nuclear program takes.

Throughout this discussion of the Self/Other dynamic, attention has been placed on the role of discursive practice in the creation of identity and interests. With respect to identity and interests in general, and Iranian nuclear actions in particular, competing representations by Iran and the US can be seen less as a process of mutual constitution, than as a competition for the intersubjective acceptance and recognition by others of their own 'correct' portrayal. From this perspective, such a conflict can also be seen as discursive, rather than merely material. Constructivism is equipped to analyze and understand such a conflict by paying close attention to the competing narratives and discourses of each actor and how and where they are projected to other actors.⁷⁹ Examination of the depictions of each actor can be extended from the realm of identity formation in general to that of the nuclear discourse in particular, which serves to inform the 'correct' understanding of a given situation. Description of a particular reality not only attempts to influence others as to the correct understanding, but also serves to contest the alternative understandings projected by others. That is, the meaning behind Iran's actions with regards to its nuclear activities is open to contestation. Here, language is seen as constitutive of reality, instead of merely being a mirrored description of it.⁸⁰ Paying close attention to how each side has framed Iranian nuclear developments within the wider context of how each state has

⁷⁹ Patricia M., Goff and Kevin C. Dunn, "Conclusion: Revisiting the Four Dimensions of Identity," in *Identity and Global Politics: Empirical and Theoretical Elaborations*, ed. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 241-242.

⁸⁰ Spivey, *Native Americans*, 34.

represented one another will thus illuminate hitherto hidden aspects of the United States and Iran's ongoing antagonism.

In summary, this chapter began by looking at constructivism as generally conceived and then focused on aspects of the approach most suited to the study at hand: the socially constructed nature of identities and their link to interests and threat perceptions. Next, constructivism was compared to more traditional approaches to identify what it had to offer in advancing our understanding in this area. The concept of identity was then examined within the constructivist context. The Self-Other dynamic was recognized as being a central area of contestation between actors. Consequently, the realm of discourse was established as a central mechanism by which actors put forward and contest portrayals of their identity. With this understanding in hand, the Iranian nuclear problem can also be viewed as a competing set of representational practices employed by the various actors in their wider relationships. Paying attention to these discourse practices offers a way forward to probe the US-Iranian nuclear issue in more detail.

CHAPTER TWO – METHOD

Constructivist Methodology

The previous chapter has outlined what the constructivist approach looks like in general, focusing on the aspects of constructivism most salient to the Iranian-US nuclear dispute and how these aspects have been employed by others. But what does such an approach entail in practice? The purpose of this chapter is to detail the methodological steps that the study will take, showing primarily how discourse analysis can be applied, but also demonstrating how the use of complementary methods will help strengthen analysis. Then, justification will be given for the choice of the US-Iranian interactions and key events examined, in addition to qualifying which source materials will be utilized, and discussing how issues such as selection bias, the use of sources in translation, and the peculiarities of the US-Iranian relationship have been addressed.

Historically, inattention to methodological detail has been a key criticism of the constructivist project.⁸¹ More recently, however, attention has been devoted to the application of methodology within constructivist research programs. Klotz and Lynch survey the array of methods available to constructivists and give an orienting guide for this study, including genealogy, participant observation, examination of narratives, framing, and ethnography. Sidestepping epistemological divisions, they examine methodologies orientated roughly around the concepts of structure, agency, identity, and interests. Here they argue that no definitive methodology exists, but rather it should be selected according

⁸¹ Vincent Pouliot, ““Subjectivism”: Toward a Constructivist Methodology,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007), 359-360.

to the job at hand.⁸² The complexity of constructivist research the study of identity is also underscored when they note how identity may be examined as a dependent or independent variable, or viewed as a recursive combination of both variables.⁸³ In this study identity formation will be examined, but identity effects in the nuclear issue will also be assessed. Ultimately though, the two sides are indeed recursively connected, but for simplicity's sake, and as a practical methodological choice, they must first be treated in isolation.

Klotz and Lynch also note the mutual constitution of structure and agency as a difficulty that researchers face, often overcome by bracketing one side and focusing on the other. They note that, "For constructivists, stable meanings form structures. Discursive repetition of Cold War era rivalries, for instance, stabilized identities within institutions."⁸⁴ The similarity with US-Iranian relations is self-evident. Tracing the discursive repetition and modification of identity formulations over time helps highlight the way the US-Iranian enmity has become so entrenched, leading to the production of oppositional interests (and vice-versa). Clearly though, such an examination lies in the study of the formulations of the actors themselves, and thus it is paying attention on the actor side of the agent-structure debate that will serve this study best.

Klotz and Lynch also flag the analysis of the 'frames' that actors use to identify and orient particular issues and policy problems, where to 'frame' is to "to denote a template that identifies a problem and offers a solution."⁸⁵ They write,

To identify these frames, researchers start with much of the same evidence used in other discursive methods, such as statements of leaders, minutes of grip meetings, publicity materials, and press treatments of the message. The

⁸² Klotz and Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations*, 23.

⁸³ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 52.

main difference is the explicit focus on action in distilling these materials. The analyst seeks to identify a basic template that designates an actor's view of a fairly narrow issue, particular grievances, potential opponents, and other key assumptions that reflect strategies for maneuvering through the policy-making process and promoting specific prescriptions for action.⁸⁶

This approach is applicable to the analysis of the representational practices employed by US and Iran over the nuclear debate. Key frames used by the US and have already been identified such as the other as being untrustworthy, an enemy, a threat, and of course the polarized manner in which they view nuclear politics. Ultimately though, once again it is through examination of discourse that such analyses are undertaken. As Klotz and Lynch note, discourse analysis, "broadly denotes methodologies that capture the creation of meanings and accompanying processes of communication."⁸⁷

Chapter Two defined discourse as "language in action."⁸⁸ Unfortunately, what discourse analysis (DA) actually entails is not self-evident. In a review of the use of DA in IR Milliken suggests that there has been, "strikingly little examination of appropriate methods and criteria for discourse study," and continues, adding, "...no common understanding has emerged in International Relations about the best ways to study discourse."⁸⁹ Milliken tackles this problem by noting three theoretical commitments made by practitioners of DA within IR, suggesting that there is considerable overlap of DA with constructivism and underscoring the validity of the method for this case study. First, discourses are viewed as "structures of signification which construct social realities, [and] underlying this commitment is a constructivist understanding of meaning – things do not

⁸⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁸ Blommaert, *Discourse: A Critical Introduction*, 2 (see chap. 1, n. 60.).

⁸⁹ Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (1999): 226.

mean (the material world does not convey meaning); rather, people construct the meaning of things, using sign systems.”⁹⁰ Second, ‘discourse productivity’ is where discourses are seen as “being productive (or reproductive) of things defined by the discourse.” Milliken continues, “The point here is that beyond giving a language for speaking about (analyzing, classifying) phenomena, discourses make intelligible some ways of being in, and acting towards, the world, and of operationalizing a particular ‘regime of truth’ while excluding other possible modes of identity and action.”⁹¹

In short, discourse matters. What is said has real implications for how other statements, actions, and material processes are understood, accepted, or excluded. This is precisely the kind of competition that the US and Iran are engaged in when defining the ‘reality’ of Iran’s nuclear program. Lastly, Milliken flags the ‘play of practice,’ the study of how “the theoretical commitment of discourse productivity directs us towards studying dominating or hegemonic discourses, and their structuring of meaning as connected to implementing practices and ways of making these intelligible and legitimate.”⁹² The ability of one actor to control a discourse by negating or marginalizing competing discourses also has clear relevance for this study. Together these three commitments serve to guide discourse analysis more generally, and also for this study.

Of the methods that Milliken identifies, predicate analysis, juxtapositional methods, and the genealogical method are particularly suited to the approach of this study.⁹³ A combination of these methods proves particularly useful for the approach outlined to study the US-Iranian dynamic. The genealogical method, and more generally process tracing,

⁹⁰ Milliken, “Study of Discourse,” 229.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 230.

⁹³ For more on each of these methods see Milliken, “Study of Discourse,” 235-243.

offers a structured way to examine the historical development of contemporary discursive practices by tracing the development of one particular aspect of a relationship over time.⁹⁴ The approach is thus ideally suited for following the mutual construction of identity by Iran and the US with regards to one another over the course of their relationship by tracing the development of US-Iranian identity portrayals of themselves and of each other.

Next, predicate analysis, which focuses on the manner in which actors are portrayed through language by paying attention to the “verbs, adverbs, and adjectives” used in connection with these actors, basically how they are depicted, offers a concrete way of examining the statements and representations given by Iran and the United States.⁹⁵ Attention to this form of language use is applicable to analysis of both identity construction and the public interpretations of the Iranian nuclear program. Predicates of interest to this study revolve around the descriptors each side attaches to the statements made regarding the other and their actions, which transforms an actor from a potentially neutral entity and orients it in a particular manner. The juxtapositional method draws together these aforementioned techniques, complementing the two by setting the discourse of actors in motion by examining it in its intersubjective context. This approach seeks to analyze a particular issue or event by comparing the dominant discourse and given representations within this discourse against those of competing or more marginalized voices that view or

⁹⁴ A central difference between the two forms is genealogy’s attention to discontinuities, in contrast to process-tracing’s attempt to follow continuities and causal mechanisms, though genealogy too also has a commitment to emphasizing hegemony and power that process tracing need not incorporate. See Klotz and Lynch, *Strategies*, 30-37 & 92-95, who discuss genealogy and process-tracing; Also see Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), 203-232; Amir Lupovici, “Constructivist Methods: A Plea and Manifesto for Pluralism,” See Richard Price, “A Genealogy of the Chemical Weapons Taboo,” *International Organization* 49, no. 1 (1995): 73-103, for a discussion on genealogical method, and Christain Reus-Smit, “Reading History through Constructivist Eyes,” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008): 395-414 on historical constructivism.

⁹⁵ Milliken, “Study of Discourse,” 231-235.

portray the events/issues in a different way, thus highlighting the politicized nature of discourse.⁹⁶ For example, a focus will be given to examining the competing statements of both sides over issues such as whether Iran is seeking a bomb, the other as a threat, the degree of opinion against Iran, and the meaning of new revelations of secretive or suspicious Iranian actions.

Finally, the study will draw on Pouliot's 'subjectivist' approach, which "aims at transcending the epistemological duality of subjectivism and objectivism."⁹⁷ The essence of the approach is to first ground analysis in the subjective understanding of actors themselves, prior to moving to establish analytical categories from outside of the interaction. Pouliot writes,

The way forward consists of building on the social facts that are naturalized by social agents. Already reified by agents, social facts provide constructivism with some sort of epistemic foundations.... The focus is on what it is that social agents, as opposed to analysts, take to be real. In this epistemological sense, social facts are "the essence of constructivism". They are knowledge that makes social worlds come into being. Ultimately, to know whether a social fact is 'really real' makes no analytical difference; the whole point is to observe whether agents take it to be real and to draw the social and political implications that follow.⁹⁸

Pouliot stresses the need for a three-pronged constructivist methodology, which is, "inductive, interpretive, and historical."⁹⁹ Induction ensures that understanding is rooted in the subjective meanings of actors. The next step is then to place the subjective meanings within the proper intersubjective context, primarily through discourse analysis, in which, "meanings do not belong to a subject anymore; they become truly intersubjective."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Ibid., 243.

⁹⁷ Vincent Pouliot, "Sobjectivism", 367.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 364.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 367.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 372.

Interpretative methods such as discourse analysis enable the analyst to move from subjective to objective meaning by placing subjective understandings in an intersubjective context.¹⁰¹ This step though leads to a “static form of knowledge,”¹⁰² historicizing these understandings by placing them within a specific context, so a third stage is required to set the meanings in motion by tracing the historical progression of particular concepts and narratives.¹⁰³ This step is undertaken by examining how such intersubjective meanings have evolved over time through methods such as genealogy, construction of narrative, or process tracing.¹⁰⁴

Application to this Study

So precisely how will these various methods be employed here? As Pouliot emphasizes, research should be question-driven rather than method-driven, with methods designed and employed to fit the task at hand.¹⁰⁵ This study does not lend itself to many of the inductive methods suggested, such as participant observation or qualitative interviews, due to the practical considerations involved. Beginning with the principle of induction though, each section of analysis – the examination of the identity conceptions by the US and Iran of themselves and each other, and then how nuclear developments themselves have been framed – must first be rooted in the self-understandings of the actors themselves. Fortunately, a significant amount of data is available here, through the public pronouncement and protestations of key figures in both the US and Iranian regimes. With

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 370-372.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 372-374.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 372-374.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 360.

the freezing of diplomatic relations in the early 1980s these relations became routinely conducted in the public realm via statements put forward through media outlets, official declarations and such, as opposed to the relatively limited interactions that took place behind closed doors. Consequently, the availability of this kind of data is greater in this particular case because of the public manner in which US and Iran have interacted due to their ongoing mutual hostility.¹⁰⁶

Attention will first be given to Iranian and American representations of identity of themselves and each other at significant moments in their history. This step charts the development of such identity representations over time in order to help understand contemporary identity portrayals, their antecedents, and how threat perceptions are informed. The events/interactions examined will be roughly oriented in accordance with the key historical interactions identified in the background chapter. Underlying this analysis are the principles of predicate and frame analysis outlined above, with a focus on the type of language used by statesmen in characterizing themselves and the Other. These steps enable a picture to be built of the construction of identities, and hence of threat perceptions, vis-à-vis one another over time. This section, however, is not the primary focus of the study. It serves to contextualize and helps orient the second component, the recent representations of Iran's nuclear program. Accordingly, this review must be limited in scope. With this in mind, while drawing from primary sources is preferable, secondary sources will also inform the analysis, recognizing the limitations that come from such a shift.

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted that at times the US and Iran do communicate through unofficial back channels, most frequently via the Swiss, but also on occasions through low-level diplomats, though it is assumed that these communiqués have generally been infrequent and atypical.

With an account of identity and threat constructions in hand, attention will then turn to the competing representations of the Iranian nuclear program by the US and Iran. The analysis will survey a variety of US-Iranian nuclear interactions over time, with attention being given primarily to the manner in which the two parties interact, the language/phrases used in depicting actions and events, and how each responds to the statements of the Other. The focus will be on how each state accepts or contests representations of the other's actions and interpretations over Iran's nuclear developments to highlight the intersubjective process of construction of the accepted reality of this situation. While predicate/frame analysis will guide the treatment of the key statements, ultimately the juxtapositional method will help illuminate the dynamics involved in the representational practices of both states. A comparison of the competing statements and interpretations of particular developments, paying close attention to the interactional aspects of each side's public discourse, will serve to draw attention to the intersubjective context in which competing realities are contested.

Regarding the selection of incidents to examine, in many ways the choice is somewhat self-evident. The importance of a particular event is often signified by the attention given to it by the participants themselves, as shown by the intensity of the response,¹⁰⁷ or the level in the hierarchy of the statesman involved. In practice though, any such interaction over the nuclear issue should demonstrate the representational processes involved. Key moments will also be reflected by the attention given to them by secondary sources, and so to some degree the important events should 'speak for themselves,' though

¹⁰⁷ Intensity may be represented by the quantity of statements regarding a particular issue, the prominence given to the issue, or perhaps through the strength of the language used.

external actors such as journalists, think-tanks, interest groups, intergovernmental organizations, and other states also play a vital and far from neutral role in shaping the discourse.

Clearly the situation is often much more complex than this simple depiction. One problem is the issue of ‘multiple audiences,’ where the US and Iran may appear to be addressing one particular actor, but parts of the message are heard by or aimed at others. President Ahmadinejad’s UN speeches are one example of this, where parts may be directed at particular states, whereas other elements may be for the benefit of a wider audience, to the Muslim world, or domestic constituents, in order to convey a particular message. The proposed approach to deal with this issue will be to try and situate such comments in the context of the state-to-state discourse insofar as a statement will be shown to be relevant as indicated by the speaker or demonstrated by the response of the actors themselves.

Another complicating factor is that the principal actors are constantly changing. The contemporary US-Iranian dynamic can be delineated along three lines: the Bush/Khatami, the Bush/Ahmadinejad, and finally the Obama/Ahmadinejad eras. To control for potential differences across these different relationships the focus will be placed primarily on nuclear-related interactions during the Bush/Ahmadinejad time period. The Bush/Khatami era will show how the crisis was initially represented and will demonstrate discourse dynamics more generally, while the more recent Obama/Ahmadinejad will then be drawn upon to show any continuities and differences over time.

Finally, although the relevance of a particular actor or statement will likely be shown within the discourse itself, that is, by the reaction any such statement receives from

others, clearly certain actors carry more weight than others. The importance of specific statements will be a function of the assigned importance of the actors within each state. For Iran the focus will be on pronouncements made by the Supreme Leader, the President, the Foreign Minister and his deputies, chief nuclear negotiators, UN Ambassadors, and other prominent members of the Iranian regime. For the United States attention will be given to statements made by the President and Vice President, the Secretary of State and other prominent members of the State Department, the Secretary of Defense, US Ambassadors to the UN Security Council, and representatives on the IAEA board. Data will be drawn from outside of these sources when applicable. Fortunately, assessing the importance of particular actors is less problematic in the US-Iranian context than with other state-to-state relations because in general divisions within each state are diminished through a shared sense of how to view and approach the other state and over the importance of Iranian nuclear developments. Although divisions do exist within each state, the desire to present a united front encourages the appearance of a unified policy, with internal disagreements within a state more often taking place in private rather than public. In practice, major public disagreements appear to occur infrequently and debates revolve around more nuanced rather than substantive policy differences.

One additional problem when conducting the analysis is dealing with sources in translation rather than in the original Farsi. Lack of a proficiency in Farsi limits the analysis to English sources in translation, for which there may be competing interpretations. Of course this is a problem that the US and Iran must deal with, and to a large degree the intersubjective nature of discourse helps address this issue, where the response dictates how a particular phrase was interpreted, and the counter-response signals instances of

misinterpretation or disagreement. Lastly, there is the issue of the bias inherent in secondary sources. A substantial portion of the literature is Western, and especially American in its perspective. This situation is to be expected given that this study itself is undertaken in the Western world, conducted almost exclusively by drawing upon English language sources.¹⁰⁸ The point is still noteworthy though because such an orientation has a tendency to stress the importance of certain events and downplay others, an importance not necessarily shared on the Iranian side of the equation. Likewise, a reverse-bias will also be evident when scrutinizing Iranian sources and must also be considered.¹⁰⁹

In summary, this chapter began by outlining constructivist methodology and then focusing on the elements most suitable to this particular study and how they may be applied. A more detailed methodological approach through methods within discourse analysis has been discussed for the construction of identity, and then representational practices surrounding Iran's nuclear program. Appropriate sources have been identified, along with any complicating factors to consider when examining these sources. The next stage is to put this understanding into practice. First though, to situate this analysis, a background review will be given of the basics of nuclear technology and non-proliferation controls, of historical and contemporary US-Iranian interactions, and of the key moments in Iran's nuclear history, areas to which the next chapter will now turn.

¹⁰⁸ Iranian sources in translation will be drawn upon where possible (often translated by the Iranian authorities themselves), but ultimately the much of the work is derived from English sources, most particularly the secondary sources.

¹⁰⁹ For example, not only will there be a different emphasis on the importance of certain events in Iran than the West, but also within Iranian intellectual circles there exists a historical movement aimed at purging Iranian society of Western intellectual influences. The concept of *Gharbzadegi*, roughly translated as 'Westoxication' was first introduced by Ahmad Fardid, but was popularized by Jalal Al-e Ahmad in his 1962 monograph *Gharbzadegi* to depict fascination of the West as a social illness affecting Iranian society. Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse, 1996), 52-76.

CHAPTER THREE – BACKGROUND

Introduction

This chapter provides background information in three areas. First, it reviews the dynamics of nuclear technology, its ambiguity, and attempts to legislate against this ambiguity. Second, it sketches US-Iranian relations up to late 2002 to provide background for the key historic interactions examined in the analytical chapter. This section will include important US-Iranian interactions outside of the nuclear realm in the post-2002 period, to provide context for the nuclear interactions under review. Third, it will review Iran's nuclear history, focusing on key trends rather than a strict chronological review, in order to provide the context for developments in the Iranian nuclear program and in US-Iranian relations in the post-2002 period, which is analyzed in the subsequent chapter. This chapter will conclude by identifying outstanding issues of concern with respect to Iran's nuclear activities. Lastly, it should be noted that since 2002, when the existence of the clandestine Iranian nuclear program came to the world's attention, a great many publications have examined the various aspects of Iranian affairs – domestically, internationally, and on the nuclear front. Few, however, have examined these issues through the lens of constructivism, identity, or discourse. Of those that have, none has integrated all three elements as this study has sought to do.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ In particular see Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); William O. Beeman, *The "Great Satan" vs. The "Mad Mullahs": How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005); Maysam Behraves, "A Crisis of Confidence Revisited: Iran-West Tensions and Mutual Demonization," *Asian Politics and Policy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 327-47; Rahman Ghahrempour, "Iran Looking West: Identity, Rationality and Iranian Foreign Policy," in *Iran and the West: Regional Interests and Global Controversies*, ed. Rouzbeh Paris and John Rydqvist, 54-72: FOI, 2011; Homeira Moshirzadeh, "Discursive Foundations of Iran's Nuclear

Proliferation Basics: A Nuclear Primer

A key problem with the Iranian nuclear program, and a fundamental problem underlying all peaceful nuclear programs, is that the technology and know-how used to generate nuclear energy is closely associated with that needed to produce a nuclear weapon. Mastery of the former gives potential (and perhaps, intentional) access to the latter. Designers of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty were well aware of this fundamental concern, but the basic bargain of providing access to nuclear energy (under Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty) in return for a commitment towards the non-acquisition of nuclear weapons and the acceptance of safeguards (Article III) offers the possibility for determined cheaters to gain access to the necessary technology and then turn it to more sinister means. The responsibility for verifying compliance is delegated to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Safeguard Agreements are negotiated with the IAEA on a state-by-state basis, with each state undertaking to provide the IAEA with a detailed list of their nuclear facilities and accounts of their nuclear materials.¹¹¹ Compliance is assessed against the “correctness and completeness” of these declarations in accordance with a state’s actual nuclear activities.

Over time advances in technology and drawbacks in the safeguards system have made it easier for would-be proliferators to disseminate nuclear technology. Prior to revisions in the safeguards system in the 1990s, the voluntary nature of declarations limited

Policy,” *Security Dialogue* 38 (2007): 521-43; Mahdi Mohammad Nia, “Understanding Iran’s Foreign Policy: An Application of Holistic Constructivism,” *Alternatives* 9, no. 1 (2010): 148-80; Ali Akbar Rezai, “Foreign Policy Theories: Implications for the Foreign Policy Analysis of Iran,” in *Iran’s Foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, ed. Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2008).

¹¹¹ IAEA, “The Structure and Content of Agreements between the Agency and States Required in Connection with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” June 1970. <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infocircs/Others/infocirc153.pdf>; VERTIC, *WMD Verification*, 10-15.

the IAEA to assessing the “correctness” rather than also the “completeness” of a declaration, and thus limited the IAEA’s ability to detect the illegal activity of a determined cheat. Additionally, under the NPT, a state can acquire some of the nuclear technology and knowledge to construct a nuclear device and then withdraw from the NPT and build a bomb, the so-called ‘break-out option.’¹¹² This allows states to remain technically compliant with the NPT while retaining an option to opt out and construct a bomb at a time of their choosing. Iran is charged with attempting to pursue this route, but the same path could be taken by any state with the desire and the necessary technology. It is virtually impossible to readily distinguish in the early stages between a state seeking nuclear weapons and one just seeking a bomb option.

In response to these concerns, a series of measures were introduced to assist in monitoring state compliance and detecting illicit diversion of nuclear material.¹¹³ In the early 1990s the IAEA strengthened the verification regime by pursuing their ability to conduct short notice inspections and undertaking more detailed analytical sampling.¹¹⁴ One measure introduced at this time was a request by the IAEA for states to modify ‘Code 3.1’ of the Subsidiary Agreements, the supplementary information to the Safeguards Agreement that specifies details of how the IAEA will apply the agreed safeguards. Code 3.1 originally required states to report new nuclear facilities at least 180 days in advance of the first introduction of nuclear material. Recognizing that this was insufficient time to implement full safeguards in a new facility, the IAEA modified Code 3.1 to require consenting states

¹¹² Stephen M. Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 31.

¹¹³ For a detailed review of all measures see Robert F. Mozley, *The Politics and Technology of Nuclear Proliferation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 151-152.

¹¹⁴ United States, Government Accountability Office, “Nuclear Nonproliferation: IAEA Has Strengthened Its Safeguards and Nuclear Security Programs, but Weaknesses Need to Be Addressed,” last modified October 2005, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0693.pdf>.

to inform the IAEA the moment the decision is undertaken to construct a new nuclear facility.¹¹⁵

In 1997, the IAEA introduced the Additional Protocol (AP), under which states consent to a greater scrutiny of their nuclear activities. The Additional Protocol includes measures such as more intrusive inspections, access to import and export records and facilities, and a requirement to provide more comprehensive information covering all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle. While states were under no obligation to implement the AP, doing so would be a confidence-building measure, especially in cases where a state's treaty compliance has come under question, such as Iran. To date, 135 states have signed the AP, with 109 of these states actually implementing it. Iran has signed, but has yet to bring the AP into force, whilst the United States itself only brought it into force on January 6, 2009.¹¹⁶ Even with these measures the basic problem remains of how to prevent states from acquiring the ability to pursue a nuclear bomb option without denying them their "inalienable rights" under the NPT.

Crucially, the stages required to manufacture a nuclear device arise in the legitimate enrichment and the reprocessing phases of the fuel cycle. The nuclear fuel cycle refers to the various stages that nuclear fuel transitions in the course of operating a peaceful nuclear program. Naturally occurring uranium is found as a mixture of isotopes, primarily U-235 and the heavier U-238. Typically, the ratio of these isotopes is 7:993, or ~0.7% U-235. Only U-235 is capable of producing the fusion reaction needed to create nuclear energy and

¹¹⁵ IAEA, GOV/2003/40, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," June 6, 2003. <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-40.pdf>; James M. Acton, "Iran Violated International Obligations on Qom Facility." Carnegie Endowment, last modified September 25, 2009, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23884>.

¹¹⁶ IAEA, "Safeguards and Verification: Status of Additional Protocols," last modified June 11, 2011. <http://www.iaea.org/OurWork/SV/Safeguards/protocol.html>.

so for most reactors the U-235 component must be concentrated, a process known as enrichment. Today, the enrichment path of choice is usually by centrifuge, where uranium hexafluoride gas is spun at extremely high speeds to separate the lighter U-235 from the heavier U-238.¹¹⁷ Once the U-235 is enriched to levels of 3-5%, fuel can then be manufactured. Plutonium, also a fissile element suitable for bomb manufacture, is one of the byproducts of a uranium nuclear fission reaction – leading to a further proliferation risk. The final stage of the fuel cycle is reprocessing, where spent nuclear fuel can be recycled for storage purposes or be further enriched to produce more nuclear fuel.

There are two essential ingredients needed in making a bomb: fissile material and personnel with the necessary knowledge and skill-set to construct one.¹¹⁸ Nuclear skills and know-how are now widely available, so the core technological barrier to a nuclear device is the acquisition of sufficient quantities of fissionable material.¹¹⁹ Of the two forms of fissile material suitable, U-235 and plutonium-239 (Pu-239), both represent an integral part of the fuel cycle. To produce a uranium-based device U-235 must be enriched to levels of around 90%,¹²⁰ though a crude ‘gun-type’ device can be constructed with lesser purity. Thus, the very same enrichment process used to produce nuclear fuel can be operated to acquire weapons grade material.¹²¹ Like the uranium route, acquisition of sufficient fissile material

¹¹⁷ For details regarding other enrichment processes see Mozley, *Politics and Technology*, 84-125.

¹¹⁸ Thomas C. Schelling, “Who Will Have the Bomb?” *International Security* 1, no. 1 (1976): 78.

¹¹⁹ Peter D. Zimmerman, “Technical Barriers to Nuclear Proliferation,” *Security Studies* 2, no. 3 (1993): 353.

¹²⁰ Mozley, *Politics and Technology*, 23; Frank Barnaby, *How to Build a Nuclear Bomb* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 76.

¹²¹ Jeffrey Lewis provides a simplified explanation of this process with respect to Iran: “Imagine 1000 atoms of uranium. Seven of them will be the fissile isotope Uranium 235. The rest are useless Uranium 238. ...To make typical reactor fuel, Iran or any other country would remove 860 of the non-U235 isotopes, leaving a U235:U238 ratio of 7:140 (~5 percent). To make fuel for the TRR [Tehran research reactor], Iran removes another 105 non-U235 atoms from the 140, leaving a ratio of 7:35 (20 percent). To make a bomb, Iran needs only to remove 27 of the remaining 35 atoms, leading a ratio of 7:8 (~90 percent).” Jeffrey Lewis, “Iran to

to construct a plutonium-based device is possible through diversion of a sufficient quantity of plutonium, approximately five kilograms,¹²² during the reprocessing phase. Additional stages are then necessary to build a bomb. These may include conversion of the fissile material into metallic form, shaping this metal into units of subcritical mass (that is units of a quantity less than that required to produce a nuclear explosion),¹²³ designing and constructing explosives and a neutron source to initiate the reaction,¹²⁴ and finally, assembly of the weapon. Once a state has mastered the full nuclear fuel cycle, it becomes increasingly difficult for the IAEA to prevent them from proceeding to construct a bomb, should they choose to do so.

The underlying motivations behind a state's desire to acquire a nuclear device are numerous and their relative importance may shift over time. Meyer identifies three of these as, "international political power/prestige incentives, military/security incentives, and domestic political incentives."¹²⁵ The political power derived from being a nuclear weapons state not only offers the potential of a stronger bargaining position during international negotiations, but also allows a state to project its power throughout the region. Both are relevant for Iran, as well as being a statement of independence from first world

Enrich 20 Percent LEU," *Arms Control Wonk*, last modified February 9, 2010, <http://lewis.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/2620/iran-to-enrich-20-percent-leu>.

¹²² Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation*, 22.

¹²³ Mozley, *Politics and Technology*, 127-128.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁵ Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation*, 46; See also Campbell who expands this list to five factors to include: change in the direction of US foreign and security policy; a breakdown of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime; and increasing availability of technology. Kurt M Campbell, "Reconsidering a Nuclear Future: Why Countries Might Cross over to the Other Side," in *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, ed. Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn and Mitchell B. Reiss, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 20.

hegemony.¹²⁶ The most fundamental strategic advantage provided is clearly a deterrent capability, which is particularly important for Iran when trapped between the nuclear arsenals of Israel, Russia, Pakistan, India, and the United States, in addition to potentially hostile states such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia with a history of nuclear or chemical weapons programs. Another strategic benefit is the possibility of reducing expenditure on the conventional military, a particularly important factor for Iran, which has experienced considerable difficulties modernizing their forces in the face of hostile sanctions.¹²⁷ Domestic considerations, especially “domestic legitimation” are also an important consideration for Iran. An overwhelming majority of Iranians support its right to acquire nuclear technology and have taken pride in its nuclear advances.¹²⁸ Domestic support gained by standing up to the United States provides proponents of a nuclear capability with political currency and may bolster their standing in the eyes of their constituents.¹²⁹ An additional benefit is that the ongoing debate over the right to nuclear technology diverts attention from many of the Iranian government’s failings.

Key Moments in US-Iranian History

The United States and Iran have a rich, complex, and often confrontational history. Five key moments will be noted here, but much is omitted from this brief and oversimplified sketch. Of prime importance are the two very different starting points for

¹²⁶ Jacques E. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10; Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation*, 48.

¹²⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran’s Developing Military Capabilities*, 4th ed. Vol. 27. (Washington, DC: The CSIS Press, 2005), 84; Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation*, 49.

¹²⁸ Shahram Chubin, *Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 28.

¹²⁹ Daniel Byman, “The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Latest Developments and Next Steps,” Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, last modified March 17, 2007, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/testimonies/2007/0315iran_byman/byman20070315.pdf.

Iranian and American animosity toward each other. Two incidents, the US role in the 1953 Iranian coup, and the 1979 hostage crisis, are pivotal and continue to influence US-Iranian interactions to this day. Other key moments in US-Iranian relations are the Iran-Contra affair in the mid-1980s, the Clinton-Khatami rapprochement of the late 1990s, and lastly, developments in US-Iranian relations following the 9/11 ‘terror’ attacks. It is also important to note that understandings of these events themselves are multifaceted and highly contested affairs, with actors presenting competing interpretations. Thus, what follows is a generalized description of the central moments in US-Iranian history, rather than a definitive account.

Substantial American involvement in Iran did not occur until WWII with the occupation of Iran by allied forces.¹³⁰ Then, by the 1950s, a sizeable number of Iranians, inspired by nationalistic movements around the world, were protesting against the unjust and disproportionate involvement of the British government in Iranian affairs, especially the oil industry. The National Front, a loose coalition emanating from the Iranian middle classes, led this opposition, centering on the unwavering stance of Iran’s Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq. A breakdown of diplomatic relations culminated with the expulsion of the British from Iran and both the British and Iranian governments turned to the United States for assistance.¹³¹ Initially it was unclear with whom the Americans would side. While President Truman was averse to involving the US in Iran’s internal affairs, the Cold War was gathering momentum and incoming President Dwight Eisenhower, keen to prevent the Soviets from making gains in Iran, had no such reservations. US sympathy and

¹³⁰ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 16.

¹³¹ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 66.

support for Iran subsequently crumbled. With the British expelled from Iran, the task of subverting Mossadeq fell to the Americans. ‘Operation Ajax,’ a MI6/CIA plan to foment unrest in Iran and topple Mossadeq, was implemented on August 16, 1953. After three days of rioting, and amid calls for Mossadeq to step down, he was finally arrested and the Shah was returned to power. To many Iranians the American involvement in the 1953 coup was the definitive moment in the history of US-Iranian relations. This feeling only intensified during the Shah’s rule.¹³² As Iranian political expert James Bill observes, “This direct covert operation left a running wound that bled for twenty-five years and contaminated America’s relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran following the revolution of 1978-1979.”¹³³

The coup gave the Shah an opportunity to consolidate absolute control over the state through repression of internal dissent. Attempts by the Shah to modernize Iran, such as the White Revolution of the early 1960s, only deepened opposition to his rule. For much of the Shah’s reign the United States turned a blind eye to human rights abuses. With the US preoccupied in Vietnam, US military support to Iran and Saudi Arabia enabled them to become islands of stability and allegiance, propped up by American support in a region rife with Arab nationalism, anti-Americanism, and unstable regimes ripe for Soviet co-option. Iran was just too solid an ally for the United States to be overly concerned with the Shah’s domestic abuses. To many Iranian eyes, however, American support of the Shah was equated with complicity in his actions and an extension of the betrayal of 1953. Rather than

¹³² See for example Pollack who in his review of US-Iranian history devotes just nine pages to the “countercoup.” Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005), 63-71.

¹³³ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 86.

atonement for their role in the coup, American leaders thus perpetuated their crime through years of support of the Shah's brutal regime.

By the mid-1970s the United States was increasingly aware of the Shah's own desire for a more significant role on the world stage. US military support was curtailed and relations began to fray. By the time President Carter attempted to introduce his human rights reforms program in Iran it was too late: for many of the Iranian revolutionaries, the United States was viewed synonymously with the Shah's regime. Finally, in 1979, the Iranian Revolution forced the Shah from power. Images of mullahs angrily denouncing America as 'the Great Satan' pervaded American media. Seemingly overnight, the world was introduced to the new face of political Islam. Few occasions within the foreign affairs of the United States are burned more deeply into the collective American psyche than the Iranian hostage crisis, which began on November 4, 1979 holding fifty-two American citizens hostage for 444 days.¹³⁴ To many Americans it was as if the United States was itself being held hostage, perplexingly by a state that under the stewardship of the Shah had for the last several decades been one of the United States' staunchest allies in the region.

The third key moment in US-Iranian relations is the 1986 Iran-Contra 'arms-for-hostages' affair. To understand the significance of this event it must first be situated within its historical context. First, there was the role played by the US in the decade long Iran-Iraq War, where the United States not only refused to allow Iraq's invasion to be declared as an act of aggression and a threat to international security at the UN Security Council, but also provided material and logistical support to the Iraqis and at times even engaged militarily the Iranians themselves. Second were the Iranian-US interactions in Lebanon during the

¹³⁴ For example, see David Farber, *Taken Hostage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Lebanese Civil War, where Iranian proxies were involved in the killing and kidnapping of Americans.¹³⁵ In the context of these events, the Iran-Contra deal, the public exposure of behind-the-scenes dealing between high-ranking members of the Reagan Administration and Iranian moderates in November 1986, is seen to be all the more incredible. Through the use of Israeli intermediaries, Robert McFarlane, the former US National Security Advisor, brokered a deal to supply Iran with much needed arms for use in its protracted war with Iraq in return for the release of American hostages held in Lebanon. The deal was conducted behind closed doors, without the approval of Congress, so when details of the affair became public, the ramifications were profound, shaking the Reagan administration to its core.¹³⁶ Needless to say, once details of the arms-for-hostages transactions became public, dealings between moderates on both sides were abruptly terminated. The implications of this event continue to have significance to this very day. Crucially, future attempts to take an innovative approach to reconciling differences between the two states were dealt a heavy blow. Ever since, accommodating policymakers in both Iran and the United States, cognizant of the domestic political consequences should they fail, have continued to shy away from cooperation whenever a potential occasion has arisen.

Another key moment in US-Iranian relations was the missed opportunity by Presidents Clinton and Khatami to put decades of mutual misunderstanding and mistrust to rest. Once again, this affair must be viewed within the wider historical context. The early

¹³⁵ Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 209-210; Anna Sabasteanski, ed., *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1985-2005: U.S. Department of State Reports with Supplementary Documents and Statistics* (Great Barrington, Mass.: Berkshire Pub., 2005), 63. What is often omitted regarding the telling of these events is that the first instance of hostage taking actually involved Iranian diplomats, when four Iranians disappeared in Lebanon on July 4, 1982. See H.E. Chehabi, "Iran and Lebanon in the Revolutionary Decade," in *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, ed. H.E. Chehabi (Oxford: The Centre for Lebanese Studies, 2006), 217.

¹³⁶ See Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affair* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991).

1990s were a time of sweeping change for Iran, though not so for US-Iranian relations. The protracted war with Iraq had helped entrench the Iranian regime domestically, but internationally Iran remained weak, ostracized, and isolated in a hostile world. The death of Khomeini in 1989, however, presented a new opportunity for change. Under President Rafsanjani's careful stewardship, and with the new Supreme Leader's consent, moderation and pragmatism became the new mantra of the Islamic Republic. Revolutionary rhetoric was toned down and Iranian support for US-designated terror groups was moderated. Slowly, a rejuvenated Iran was reintegrated into the international community. Relations with its old adversary the United States, however, continued to deteriorate.

The United States too was experiencing sweeping changes on the international stage. The end of the Cold War left it searching for a new role in the world and the 1991 Gulf War gave the US a chance to establish a firm foothold in the strategically important Gulf region. The American military was not likely to relinquish such an advantage without good reason. More generally, 'rogue states' became the new US watchword, 'clearly' a newly emerging threat, it was argued, as Saddam Hussein had amply demonstrated. With its hostile orientation to the international order and purported support for terrorist organizations, Iran fit the rogue state moniker perfectly. President Clinton unveiled a policy of 'dual containment' that sought to weaken and isolate both Iran and Iraq and sanctions became a prominent policy tool.

Change meanwhile continued to take place domestically in Iran. On a wave of popular support, the seemingly moderate Mohammad Khatami was swept to power as President, offering new opportunities for rapprochement with the world. A reformist president, who sought to bring sweeping liberalization to Iran, he stood out from others in

his willingness to attempt to pursue a path of reconciliation with the West, formulated most famously in his ‘dialogue of civilizations.’ In an interview with Christiane Amanpour of CNN, he reached out to America in hope of breaking down the “wall of mistrust.”¹³⁷ Washington, however, initially failed to pick up on these changing political currents and responded to such overtures rather belatedly. Only in March 2000 did US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright respond to Khatami’s initiative, welcoming the ‘refreshing’ “democratic winds in Iran.”¹³⁸ This response came much too late. Within Iran, a series of successive political crackdowns in the late 1990s against reformist elements blunted any impetus for change. This might indicate that President Khatami was isolated and overly optimistic in his reaching out to the Americans. If a debate had occurred within the Iranian regime over whether to reengage the United States, however, the delayed American response undoubtedly favoured those elements arguing against such reconciliation. Blunted and demoralized, Khatami lived out his second term to 2003 by falling in line with the regime’s hard-line stance.

Such trends continue to this day, as evidenced by the missed opportunity for change following the 9/11 attacks. As the world recoiled, a brief opening for reconciliation presented itself. In Iran, public outcry over the attacks and demonstration of sympathy with the victims was considerable. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei responded, however, by publicly criticizing Bush’s intention to “go to war against ‘terrorism’ without either defining what the term meant and consisted of, or producing any evidence of the guilt of

¹³⁷ CNN, “Transcript of Interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami,” last modified January 7, 1998, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html>.

¹³⁸ United States, Department of State, “American-Iranian Relations,” last modified March 17, 2000, <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/2000/000317.html>.

the targets of attack.”¹³⁹ Nevertheless, when the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan on October 7, 2000, Iranian and US interests began to coalesce. In December 2001 the United States and Iran jointly participated in the Bonn Conference, the aim of which being to help form an interim government in Afghanistan. As a result, more comprehensive US-Iranian contact occurred at the ‘six-plus-two’ meetings in Geneva. Over time, US and Iranian representatives began working together under a subgroup, the Geneva Contact Group.¹⁴⁰ Monthly ‘one-on-one’ meetings regarding the situation in Afghanistan began in Geneva in late 2001, and despite official hostilities, these meetings continued to run until their cancellation in May 2003.¹⁴¹ James Dobbins, a senior US diplomat at these meetings, details how Iran wished to extend US-Iranian cooperation further, outside the realm of Afghanistan.¹⁴² Unfortunately, key figures in the US administration showed no interest in pursuing the Iranian offer, presumably because the mantra of regime change was gaining traction in Washington. On January 3, 2002, US-Iranian relations became strained once again when the Israeli military intercepted the *Kharine A*, a ship purportedly carrying Iranian arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon.¹⁴³ Several weeks later, on January 29, President Bush in his State of the Union Address labeled Iran as part of the ‘Axis of Evil’. A brief opportunity of reconciliation thus slipped away and once again US-Iranian relations reverted back into a familiar refrain of mutual animosity and mistrust.

¹³⁹ Cited in P. van der Veer, and S. Munshi, *Media, War, and Terrorism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 91.

¹⁴⁰ Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 346.

¹⁴¹ Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 199.

¹⁴² David E. Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics,” (RAND, 2010) 88-89.

¹⁴³ Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Conflict in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 186-187.

Partly as a result of the ongoing nuclear antagonism, in addition to shifting global dynamics, Iran and the US have shared an increasing number of diplomatic interactions from 2002 to date. Perhaps encouraged by the success of the one-on-one talks on Afghanistan in Geneva, in May 2003 Iran forwarded a comprehensive proposal to the Americans detailing the major issues of conflict such as the Iranian WMD program, support for terrorism, Iraq, sanctions regimes, recognition of Israel, and Iranian security guarantees. The existence of this so-called ‘Grand Bargain’ was not revealed until early 2007 and purportedly carried approval from the Supreme Leader himself.¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the Iranians never received a response.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps to force the issue, the Iranian offer coincided with the breakdown of the one-on-one talks but once again these overtures came to nothing as US-Iranian relations reverted to type.¹⁴⁶ Emboldened by the initial success of the Iraq War, the Bush administration seemed in no mood to make concessions and the marked deterioration of US-Iranian relations continued.

The Bush Administration’s focus on “regime change,” – altering behaviour by changing the make-up of so-called ‘rogue states’ – entailed a shift “from a focus on the spread of *weapons technology* to the *identity* of states seeking weapons of mass

¹⁴⁴ Glenn Kessler, “2003 Memo Says Iranian Leaders Backed Talks,” *The Washington Post*, February 14, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/13/AR2007021301363_pf.html; Nicholas D. Kristof, “Iran’s Proposal for a ‘Grand Bargain’,” *The New York Times*, April 28 2007, <http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/04/28/irans-proposal-for-a-grand-bargain>; Parsi also notes how in the Iranian version of events it was the US that initiated the Grand Bargain: Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 246-254.

¹⁴⁵ In February 2007, when pressed by Congress on the issue of why the Bush Administration failed to consider entering into talks with Iran, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice responded stating, “I just don’t remember ever seeing any such thing.” – *Briefing on Iraq and Hearing on the International Relations Budget for Fiscal Year 2008, Hearing before the Comm. on Foreign Affairs*, 110th Cong. 79. (2003) (statement of Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State, US Department of State).

¹⁴⁶ Chubin, *Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions*, 89.

destruction.”¹⁴⁷ A change to a more democratic form of government, with ensuing greater transparency, it was believed, would presumably eliminate much of the doubt over the nature of a state’s nuclear activities. To this end, in February 2006, Condoleezza Rice petitioned the US Senate to provide an additional \$75 million to fund a democracy program in Iran. Despite repeated assertions by American leaders that ‘all options are on the table,’ the one option that was seemingly absent from the table was to negotiate with Iran.

With the possibility of direct talks dispelled, Iranian relations with the US degenerated into an ongoing series of military skirmishes and diplomatic altercations.¹⁴⁸ The most comprehensive interactions took place in Iraq, where the US charged Iran with providing material and logistical support to Iraqi insurgents. This ongoing brinksmanship spilled over too into the diplomatic world with the American refusal in 2006 to engage in a series of unorthodox diplomatic initiatives by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who replaced President Khatami in August 2005.¹⁴⁹ In early 2006, the Bush administration began shifting from a distanced stance with regards to dealing with Iran and its nuclear program to one of greater engagement, placing a greater emphasis on multilateralism and coercive diplomacy. The decisive moment in this shift was Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s offer on May 31 to engage in talks with Iran provided Iran’s uranium enrichment

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 82-83. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁸ See Eric Schmitt, “After the War: Detentions ; 5 Americans Are Held 26 Hours by Iranians,” *The New York Times*, June 4, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/04/world/after-the-war-detentions-5-americans-are-held-26-hours-by-iranians.html>; Hassan M. Fattah, “U.S.-Led Exercise in Persian Gulf Sets Sights on Deadliest Weapons,” *The New York Times*, October 31 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/31/world/middleeast/31gulf.html>; Robert Tait, “Iran Begins 10 Days of War Games,” *The Guardian*, November 2, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/nov/02/iran.roberttait>.

¹⁴⁹ Reuters, “Ahmadinejad’s Letter to Bush,” *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/09/AR2006050900878.html>; Michael Slackman, “Iran’s President Criticizes Bush in Letter to American People,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/30/world/middleeast/30iran.html>.

activities were verifiably suspended first. Having previously refused to negotiate directly with Iran, this offer presented the possibility of a significant shift in US policy, but nothing resulted from the overtures. Elsewhere, however, Iran and the United States were indeed preparing to sit down and talk. On March 28, 2006, the first of several direct meetings took place to discuss the situation in Iraq, the first high-level talks since 1980, though these talks ultimately led nowhere.¹⁵⁰

Impetus did swing behind a diplomatic rather than a military track, however, when the American intelligence community issued an edited summary version of the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate declaring, “We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program.”¹⁵¹ The fallout of the report was considerable, with many political analysts seeing the claim as a political move on the part of the intelligence agencies to undercut the more hawkish elements of the Bush administration and any possible attempt to push for a war against Iran before the end of Bush’s term.¹⁵² While President Bush complimented the intelligence community for its “reevaluation of the Iranian issue” he steadfastly reasserted that, “all options are on the table.”¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Michael Slackman and David E. Sanger, “U.S. And Iranians Agree to Discuss Violence in Iraq,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/17/international/middleeast/17iran.html>.

¹⁵¹ National Intelligence Council, “Prospects for Iraq’s Stability: A Challenging Road Ahead,” http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070202_release.pdf.

¹⁵² See Anthony H. Cordesman, “Understanding the Key Judgments in the New NIE on Iranian Nuclear Weapons,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, last modified December 4, 2007, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/071206_irannuclearnieanalysis.pdf; James Phillips, “The Iran National Intelligence Estimate: A Comprehensive Guide to What Is Wrong with the NIE,” *Backgrounder*, No. 2098, *The Heritage Foundation*, last modified January 11, 2008, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2008/01/The-Iran-National-Intelligence-Estimate-A-Comprehensive-Guide-to-What-Is-Wrong-with-the-NIE>; Joshua Pollock, “Why Iran’s Clock Keeps Resetting,” *Arms Control Wonk*, last modified August 20, 2009, <http://pollack.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/2435/why-irans-clock-keeps-resetting>.

¹⁵³ United States, White House, “Press Conference by the President,” last modified February 14, 2007, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/02/20070214-2.html>.

On July 19, 2008, William Burns, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, sat in on nuclear negotiations with Iran for the first time in a move that sought to demonstrate the US willingness to reach a diplomatic solution. Burns was hoping for a response to a new package of incentives detailing “possible areas of cooperation” that had built on the June 2006 offer of economic assistance, provision of security guarantees, and an offer of a guaranteed nuclear fuel supply. Negotiations on the details would begin once Iran suspended its enrichment and reprocessing activities, but again Iran balked at the condition of freezing of uranium enrichment. Despite a further flurry of US diplomatic initiatives, momentum was quickly lost and ultimately no direct talks occurred.

The election of President Barack Obama in late 2008 offered the potential of a new impetus in US Iranian policy. During the Presidential campaign, Obama was careful to distance himself from the approach of the Bush Administration with regards to Iran and what he described as “the failure of today’s policy.”¹⁵⁴ Obama expressed a willingness to dispense with “self-defeating preconditions” and a desire to “lead tough and principled diplomacy with the appropriate Iranian leaders.”¹⁵⁵ Then, on March 20, 2009, on *Norwuz*, the Iranian New Year, he reached out directly to Iranian leaders in a landmark video address, declaring that the process of overcoming “old divisions. ...will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect.”¹⁵⁶ The question was, just how would the Iranians respond?

¹⁵⁴ American Israel Public Affairs Committee, “Senator Barack Obama - Policy Conference 2008,” last modified June 4, 2008, http://www.aipac.org/Publications/SpeechesByPolicymakers/PC_08_Obama.pdf.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ United States, White House, “Videotaped Remarks by the President in Celebration of Nowruz,” last modified March 20, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/videotaped-remarks-president-celebration-nowruz>.

Unfortunately, Iranian leaders reacted to Obama's overtures with mixed signals. In mid-February, Iranian Foreign Minister, Manoucher Mottaki, announced the termination of security talks on Iraq with the United States. Nevertheless, at this same time, while waiting for "real and basic change in the American policies," President Ahmadinejad expressed a readiness for Iran to engage in talks with the US "in a fair atmosphere and mutual respect."¹⁵⁷ A hesitant response to President Obama's *Norwuz* overture also suggested that such engagement would not be imminent. Ultimately though, the contested and highly controversial tenth Iranian presidential election compelled the US to modify its Iran approach. President Obama became increasingly critical of the Iranian regime and its use of force against opposition demonstrations protesting against what was claimed to be the rigged re-election of President Ahmadinejad. Iran, preoccupied by domestic upheaval and making steady progress on the nuclear front, showed little sign of reaching out to the United States.

In September 2009, overshadowing looming US-Iranian nuclear talks¹⁵⁸ was the dramatic revelation that Iran had another secretive uranium enrichment facility hidden in the mountains of Fordow, Qom. The fallout of the Fordow enrichment plant disclosure was considerable and the position of the Obama administration shifted to a stance of increased pressure. By April 2010, reports of a confidential memo by Defense Secretary Robert Gates reminding the US President of the need for military contingency plans for Iran underscored

¹⁵⁷ Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "President: Islamic Revolution Has Left Impacts on Int'l Relations," <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehran/en/NewsAndHappenings/president> (web page no longer accessible).

¹⁵⁸ Julian Borger, "Nuclear Talks Lead to Rare Meeting between US and Iran," *The Guardian*, October 1, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/01/iran-nuclear-geneva-talks>.

the lack of progress in redefining US-Iranian relations.¹⁵⁹ In many ways Iran's position following the Fordow disclosure and subsequent US moves has been a continuation of their stubborn and antagonistic stance of recent years. Instead of compromise, Iranian leaders have increasingly thumbed their nose at the West, making antagonistic moves on the nuclear front and choosing to limit cooperation with the IAEA in the face of further sanctions. As such, to date, US-Iranian enmity continues and the nuclear impasse persists.

Iran's Nuclear History

Iran's Nuclear Developments to 2002

This section will provide an overview of Iranian nuclear activities in two distinct periods: a brief note on the nuclear developments under the Shah will be followed by a more detailed examination of Iranian progress from the mid-1980s until the dramatic revelations in August 2002. Here, three key trends will be examined: those of 'persistence and incrementalism,' 'opportunism,' and a 'dual track approach.' In part driving them and being driven by them (the direction of causation is indeterminate as one mutually constitutes the other), is the role of American opposition to nuclear ambitions in post-revolutionary Iran. This role too, when relevant, will be unpacked further.

It is often forgotten that the nuclear collaboration began between Iran and the US in the 1950s. By the 1970s, with the Shah as a valuable ally and Iran as an NPT signatory, successive US administrations enthusiastically supported his nuclear program.¹⁶⁰ During the mid-1970s though serious concerns developed over the Shah's true intentions. As

¹⁵⁹ David E. Sanger and Thom Shanker, "Gates Says U.S. Lacks a Policy to Thwart Iran," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/18/world/middleeast/18iran.html>.

¹⁶⁰ See William Burr, "A Brief History of U.S.-Iranian Nuclear Negotiations," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 65, no. 1 (2009): 21-34, which documents US-Iranian nuclear dealings between 1974-1979.

recently declassified documents have shown, these concerns were well founded: the Shah did in fact have designs on possessing a nuclear weapon.¹⁶¹ To signify its peaceful intent, however, Iran concluded its Safeguard Agreement on May 14, 1974, an agreement that remains today as the basis to monitor non-diversion of Iran's declared nuclear material. The agreement facilitated the transfer of nuclear technology from American companies, including the Iranian financing of a uranium enrichment plant in the United States.¹⁶² Just as the final details of American-Iranian nuclear cooperation were concluded, support for the Iranian nuclear program quickly dissipated as the Iranian Revolution swept Khomeini to power.

After the revolution, Khomeini's inimical stance to working with the West, and the relative disarray of the revolutionary government, coupled with the war effort against Iraq, meant that there were more pressing matters than pursuing nuclear energy. Existing nuclear projects abruptly ground to a halt. As the war with Iraq began to tip in Iran's favour, however, the abandoned nuclear program was restarted. Because of the heavy capital investment already committed to the project, completion of the unfinished reactors at Bushehr became the focus of attention, but over time, resources were committed to a much wider range of nuclear projects.

Three key characteristics mark the Iranian nuclear program from the mid-1980s until around 1999. The first, 'persistence and incrementalism,' describes how Iran was forced to persevere to make even small advances on the nuclear front.¹⁶³ This was necessary because of the hostile international environment of the Islamic Republic – the

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁶² Ibid., 21.

¹⁶³ Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, 7.

drain of resources in the Iraq war and isolation on the international stage – limited Iran's ability to gain access to much needed material resources and technical expertise. Significantly, American opposition to the Islamic Republic intensified throughout the 1990s, depriving Iran of access to many of the legitimate channels enjoyed by other states. As a result Iran's nuclear program limped forward.

American scrutiny of Iran's nuclear activities intensified when Khomeini came to power and continued to do so into the 1990s. One of the main reasons for increased American concern was the alarming discovery of the existence of a clandestine Iraqi nuclear weapons program.¹⁶⁴ In 1992, the United States pressed the IAEA to also examine Iran's nuclear facilities, but little untoward was discovered.¹⁶⁵ The previous dominance of Soviet and state-focused activities had left US intelligence and their allies ill-equipped to chart non-state actors such as the Khan network and Chinese intermediaries, with who Iran had been dealing with, and a great deal of activity was able to pass unnoticed.¹⁶⁶

American opposition also played a significant role in Iranian opportunism. Facing strong US opposition, Iran has been willing to work with anyone, often those out of political favour with the United States. In 1987, US pressure persuaded the German company Kraftwerk Union to pull out from the Bushehr reactor deal for good.¹⁶⁷ In 1995 a suitable partner was found and a deal was struck with Russia to complete one of the two

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Cirincione, Jon B. Wolfsthal, and Miriam Rajkumar, *Deadly Arsenals: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Threats*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 329.

¹⁶⁵ Gordon Corera, *Shopping for Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity, and the Rise and Fall of the A.Q. Khan Network* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 68.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁶⁷ Scott Ritter, *Target Iran: The Truth About the White House's Plans for Regime Change* (New York: Nation Books, 2006), 26.

Bushehr reactors.¹⁶⁸ In the early 1990s, Russia, like China, was concerned by American actions that appeared to signal pretensions towards global hegemony. This period thus saw the forging of a strategic alliance between Russia and Iran: Iran would not interfere in the Caucasus and Central Asia in return for Russian technical assistance and arms supplies.¹⁶⁹ In 1995, Russian President, Boris Yeltsin refused US requests to withdraw from the Bushehr reactor deal, noting the assistance that Clinton had just provided to North Korea.¹⁷⁰ The strategic importance of nuclear trade relations with Iran was affirmed by Victor Mikhailov, Russia's Atomic Energy Minister, who "characterized the nuclear ties between Moscow and Tehran as the "trump card" in the Kremlin's foreign policy."¹⁷¹ Russian assistance to Iran continues to this day.

A second example of Iranian opportunism is Iran's relationship with China, a major supplier of arms during the Iran-Iraq War.¹⁷² This relationship was further deepened following the repressive crackdown at Tiananmen Square in June 1989. In 1992, China finally acceded to the NPT and committed in principle to combat nuclear proliferation.¹⁷³ This period was a time of complex interactions between Iran, China, and the United States. When, on September 2, 1992, the US sold 150 F-16 fighter aircraft to Taiwan, on September 10, possibly in retaliation, China announced the completion of a deal to help build four 300MW nuclear reactors for Iran. Two weeks later, however, wary of further

¹⁶⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, *Iran's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Real and Potential Threat*. Vol. 28. (Washington, DC: The CSIS Press, 2006), 108.

¹⁶⁹ Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, 15.

¹⁷⁰ Adam Tarock, *Iran's Foreign Policy since 1990: Pragmatism Supersedes Islamic Ideology* (Commack, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1999), 65.

¹⁷¹ Ilan. Berman, *Tehran Rising: Iran's Challenge to the United States* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 35.

¹⁷² Adam Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War* (Commack, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1998), 93.

¹⁷³ Joesph Cirincione, Jon B. Wolfsthal, and Miriam Rajkumar, *Deadly Arsenals*, 171; Garver, *China & Iran*, 143.

deterioration in US-China relations, China announced the cancellation of the planned sale to Iran of a 27MW research reactor.¹⁷⁴ In 1996, China also suspended the sale to Iran of a uranium hexafluoride production plant and cancelled the contract for the four 300MW reactors just one year later.¹⁷⁵

Regardless of whether Iran's nuclear intentions have been benign or not, a crucial result of this need to keep one step ahead of American opposition was that Iran has been forced to become increasingly embroiled in secretive dealings. A central consequence of such moves would be to cast a lingering doubt over the true nature of Iran's activities, a question extremely difficult to resolve. Recognizing the degree of US-Iranian enmity, it appears that states have often used their nuclear dealings with Iran as a bargaining chip to gain concessions from the US, or for fostering new relations with the world's sole superpower, often withdrawing support to Iran in the process. This has likely led the Iranian leadership to conclude that, despite the right to technology and assistance under Article IV of the NPT, ultimately they cannot rely on others but must instead become self-sufficient. The need for self-sufficiency has led to a dual-track approach by Iran. In addition to the official nuclear projects outlined above, Iran has also sought to acquire nuclear technology by clandestine means whenever the opportunity has presented itself. The very nature of the black-market suppliers offering such technology necessitates such a secretive approach. Such lack of transparency is a double-edged sword. Successful acquisition of nuclear technology by clandestine means inevitably exposes Iran to the charge of sinister intent as it could indicate the pursuit of a nuclear device, but also could

¹⁷⁴ John W. Garver, *China & Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006), 213-214.

¹⁷⁵ Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, 62.

imply necessity due to political opposition by the US. In practical terms, assessment depends on one's view of the nature of the Iranian regime.

Iran's clandestine activity, first began under the Shah, was initially abandoned by Khomeini, but was eventually restarted around 1984-1985.¹⁷⁶ Collaboration with China led to the supply in 1991 of 1.8 tons of uranium in the form of uranium hexafluoride, uranium tetrafluoride, and uranium dioxide.¹⁷⁷ This material enabled Iran to carry out enrichment experiments and would remain undeclared until Iran revealed its existence following the Tehran Declaration in 2003.¹⁷⁸ While these deals with China were taking place, Iran was also involved in an even more covert scheme through an underground nuclear proliferation racket run by Pakistan's preeminent nuclear scientist Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the extent of which would not be revealed until 2003-2004. In 1987, Khan representatives gave Iran a 'shopping list' of technology on the black-market.¹⁷⁹ Iran was also supplied with a number of designs and samples of the 'P-1' centrifuge used by Pakistan in its uranium enrichment facilities, and documentation describing how to convert uranium hexafluoride (UF₆) into uranium metal (which Iran denies ever requesting).¹⁸⁰ Iran decided to procure a 'limited package' from which it hoped to manufacture its own indigenously produced centrifuges.¹⁸¹ It is unclear whether any other illegal transactions took place in the late 1980s, but in unrelated events, Iran later admitted undeclared activities including Polonium-210

¹⁷⁶ Alireza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 130.

¹⁷⁷ Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, 62; Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat*, 157; Ritter, *Target Iran*, 62.

¹⁷⁸ Ritter, *Target Iran*, 62.

¹⁷⁹ Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, 65.

¹⁸⁰ The 'P' signifies that the centrifuge was designed in Pakistan, just as 'IR' is used to designate Iranian-designed centrifuges.

¹⁸¹ IAEA, GOV/2007/58, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006) and 1747 (2007) in the Islamic Republic of Iran," November 15, 2007, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2007/gov2007-58.pdf>; Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, 68.

experiments in 1988 (Polonium-210 can act as a neutron initiator in a nuclear weapon),¹⁸² and plutonium separation experiments between 1988 and 1998.¹⁸³

In 1993, Iran dealt with the Khan network again as it had been able to make little progress working alone with the information and material received from the 1987 deal.¹⁸⁴ In October 1994, it obtained further designs and components for the P-1 centrifuge, and drawings of the more advanced P-2 model, receiving these goods in various shipments in 1994 through to 1996.¹⁸⁵ Using these designs, Iran was able to develop and test the P-1 model from 1997-2002 at a hidden nuclear research center, the *Kalaye Electric Company* (KEC).¹⁸⁶ Further dealings allegedly took place with the Khan network from 1996 until their apparent termination in 1999.¹⁸⁷ Iran finally admitted to this secret work in February 2004 after the Khan network's was uncovered.¹⁸⁸

In light of these activities, it is important to consider what compelled Iranian leaders to pursue a clandestine nuclear program in 1987 and expand it to the industrial scale in the late 1990s. While no definitive answer can be given to these questions, a number of explanations are plausible. Coming under Iraqi WMD attacks during the Iraq War undoubtedly played a huge role in the decision. While there is no clear evidence to suggest that Iran sought to construct a nuclear device, clearly possession of one would give Iran the upper hand in such a conflict and provide security guarantees for the regime in general.

¹⁸² IAEA, GOV/2007/58.

¹⁸³ See Annex 1 in IAEA, GOV/2005/67, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," September 2, 2005, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2005/gov2005-67.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ IAEA, GOV/2007/58, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006) and 1747 (2007) in the Islamic Republic of Iran."; Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, 68.

¹⁸⁵ Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, 69.

¹⁸⁶ Cordesman, *Iran's Developing Military Capabilities*, 109-110.

¹⁸⁷ Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, 70.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

Rafsanjani inadvertently drew attention to the regime's thinking during this period when in October 2006 he cited a letter written by Khomeini that questioned whether the Iran-Iraq War was winnable and made reference to nuclear weapons as "the necessities of modern warfare."¹⁸⁹ This statement may indicate a debate occurred within the Iranian regime of the utility of acquiring these weapons. Additionally, the timing of the assistance from a knowledgeable actor such as Khan cannot be overlooked.

Likewise, many factors likely lie behind the decision in the late 1990s to take the nuclear program to the industrial scale. Quite simply, they could well have embarked on the new Arak and Natanz plants because they were able to do so. Also, Iran has experienced a history of broken promises in the provision of nuclear assistance. An autarkic approach would negate the leverage others had over Iran in the nuclear realm. Such explanations are not exhaustive, but rather indicate some of the possible reasons why Iran would embark on its clandestine large-scale facilities at Natanz and Arak in the late 1990s, outside of its relationship with the United States.

Contemporary Developments of the Iranian Nuclear Program

A great deal has occurred since the world first became aware of Iran's secret nuclear program. In this section a summary will be provided of the key nuclear developments since August 2002. Attention will be given to the initial revelations of the Natanz and Arak facilities and the implications that followed. Further aspects reviewed will be the subsequent IAEA investigations of Iran's nuclear program in general, the nuclear activities

¹⁸⁹ Rasool Nafisi, "The Khomeini Letter - Is Rafsanjani Warning the Hardliners?" *Payvand News*, last modified October 11, 2006, <http://www.payvand.com/news/06/oct/1114.html>.

uncovered by the IAEA, moves taken to reduce tensions, and an evaluation of how things stand to date. This section will then detail the major issues of non-compliance, both resolved and outstanding, and analyze the implications of these issues with regards to Iranian claims that their program is purely for peaceful means. Attention will be drawn to recent developments such as the revelation of a further hidden nuclear facility at Fordow in 2009 and the state of the program to date.

On August 14, 2002, the existence of Iran's secret nuclear plants at Natanz and Arak was revealed for the first time. The manner of their unveiling is in itself rather surprising, for the revelations were given in a Washington D.C. hotel by a spokesman for the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the *Mujahideen-e Khalq's* ('MEK,' an Iranian opposition group) North American political wing, a group designated at the time by the US State Department as a foreign terrorist organization. Details were lacking, but early assessments that the sites were for uranium enrichment and heavy water production ultimately were proven correct. State Department Spokesman, Richard Boucher, expressed US concerns, stating: "That facility was probably never intended by Iran to be a declared component of a peaceful program. Instead, Iran has been caught constructing a secret underground site where it could produce fissile material."¹⁹⁰ It is difficult to know if US intelligence agencies were already aware of the Natanz and Arak facilities. Indications are that the NCRI's information had been spoon-fed by Israeli intelligence agents.¹⁹¹ It is hard to believe that none of this information had been also shared with Israeli intelligence's American counterparts.

¹⁹⁰ United States, Department of State, "Daily Press Briefing," last modified December 13, 2002. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2002/15976.htm>.

¹⁹¹ Ritter, *Target Iran*, xxv.

Expansive in scope and ambitious in intent the 'IR-40' heavy water reactor at Arak and the underground uranium enrichment facility at Natanz showed Iran's nuclear program to be far more advanced than expected. First conceived in 1996 reportedly with Russian assistance,¹⁹² and with construction beginning in 1999, the heavy water plant at Arak has been estimated by the IAEA to reach completion by approximately 2009.¹⁹³ The building of the Natanz facility was believed to have begun a little later in 2000/2001.¹⁹⁴ The Natanz site is composed primarily of a number of large underground chambers intended to house both small-scale P-1 centrifuges and eventually a larger industrial-scale 50,000 unit P-1 centrifuge enrichment facility.¹⁹⁵ In June 2003, four months after being officially declared, UF₆ was introduced into the small-scale centrifuges for the first time. Aside from a fifteen-month voluntary suspension period and occasional technical shutdowns, these pilot plants have continued to run to the present day.¹⁹⁶

It is hard to overstate the importance of the disclosure of the Natanz and Arak facilities. To this point, evidence that Iran could be seeking the ability to manufacture a nuclear device was rather speculative. The revelations of the Natanz and Arak projects, however, changed the public understanding of the possible nature of Iran's nuclear program, laying bare the secretive dual-track approach taken by Iran for all to see. The halting progress of the Bushehr reactors was seen in stark contrast to the relatively advanced Natanz and Arak plants. The lengths that Iran had gone to conceal these facilities

¹⁹² Garver, *China & Iran*, 151; Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat*, 169.

¹⁹³ Cordesman, *Iran's Developing Military Capabilities*, 109.

¹⁹⁴ Roger Howard, *Iran Oil: The New Challenge to America* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 143.

¹⁹⁵ Cordesman, *Iran's Developing Military Capabilities*, 105-106; Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, 71.

¹⁹⁶ Cordesman, *Iran's Developing Military Capabilities*, 106.

was revealed when the IAEA confirmed how much progress had been made in secret during the first inspection of these facilities in February 2003.¹⁹⁷

From a non-proliferation perspective, the greatest concern regarding the Arak facility is that a heavy-water research reactor could provide the necessary plutonium for a nuclear device, while the technology and know-how developed at Natanz could support a uranium-based weapon. The issue, like many nuclear actions, can be reduced to one of rights versus one of responsibilities and the signals of intent it sends. Ignoring questions surrounding the issue of Iran's secretive approach, from a narrowly conceived legal standpoint, Iran was within its rights to build the Arak and Natanz facilities. According to Article 42 of Iran's Safeguard Agreement, it has to provide design information "as early as possible before nuclear material is introduced into a new facility."¹⁹⁸ Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangement required Iran to report new facilities to the IAEA "normally no later than 180 days before the facility is scheduled to receive nuclear material for the first time."¹⁹⁹ As the plants were still far from that point, technically speaking, Iran was not in violation of its Safeguard Agreement. In response, the IAEA requested that Iran accept the modified Subsidiary Arrangement, requiring notification of new facilities as soon as the decision is taken to construct them. Iran agreed to do so on February 26, 2003.²⁰⁰

As opposed to Iran's legalistic perspective, from a transparency viewpoint Iran's secrecy does not foster confidence in their ultimate intentions. Iran can argue that American

¹⁹⁷ IAEA, GOV/2003/40, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," June 6, 2003, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-40.pdf>.

¹⁹⁸ IAEA, INFCIRC/214, "The Text of the Agreement between Iran and the Agency for the Application of Safeguards in Connection with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," December 13, 1974.

¹⁹⁹ Acton, "Iran Violated International Obligations on Qom Facility," 2009.

²⁰⁰ IAEA, GOV/2003/40.

actions in pushing states to withdraw nuclear support to Iran, coupled with what they view as the illegitimate sanctions regime imposed by the US from the early 1990s, has denied them their inalienable rights of access to nuclear technology under the NPT, necessitating such a secretive approach. For those states that have long believed that Iran is seeking a nuclear device, however, the clandestine approach to the new Iranian facilities seemingly demonstrated Iran's ulterior designs. Consequently, from early 2003 onwards, the debate over the 'true nature' of the Iranian nuclear program has become couched in terms of Iran's focus on its legal rights versus a 'trust deficit' regarding Iranian proliferation concerns in the view of some members of the international community. In these circumstances, in February 2003, Iran begrudgingly welcomed increasingly intrusive inspections by the IAEA to demonstrate greater transparency and cooperation in the hope of allaying fears that it was seeking to acquire a nuclear device.

Throughout 2003 and into 2004 the IAEA conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities. Much activity had not been declared, a direct violation of Iran's Safeguards Agreement. Thus, these inspections only cast further doubt on Iran's true nuclear aspirations as more evidence of illicit Iranian nuclear activity was uncovered. With Iranian input the IAEA discovered the previously undeclared imported nuclear material from China in 1991, conversion of uranium tetrafluoride into uranium metal, highly enriched uranium contamination ('HEU') at KEC (from the centrifuge technology obtained via the Khan network), plutonium separation, polonium-210 experiments, and laser enrichment experiments with the uranium metal imported from Russia.²⁰¹ This put Iran in a

²⁰¹ For a detailed chronology of these activities see Annex 1 of IAEA, GOV/2003/75, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," November 10, 2003. <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-75.pdf>.

difficult position, as it had previously stated that it had come clean regarding all of its undeclared activities. The fallout resulted in the forced disclosure in February 2004 of Iran's dealings with Khan, including the acquisition and testing of the previously undeclared P-2 centrifuges. This omission further fueled the notion that Iran was trying to conceal its nuclear activities and was not working with the IAEA in good faith.

Iran was put on the defensive, with the IAEA placing heavy pressure on it for greater transparency and a willingness to resolve all outstanding concerns. Extensive negotiations with the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (the EU3) ensued, leading to the Tehran Declaration on October 21, 2003, in which Iran consented to implement the yet-to-be-ratified Additional Protocol. With the Additional Protocol temporarily in place, Iran was obligated to place its facilities under greater IAEA scrutiny. Transparency, however, was still less than forthcoming. As a confidence-building measure, the IAEA requested that Iran suspend its uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities. Further negotiations with the EU3 led to the Paris Agreement of November 15, 2004, where Iran voluntarily agreed to freeze its uranium processing and enrichment activities. In return, the EU3 affirmed their recognition of Iran's rights under the NPT and offered to "provide firm guarantees on nuclear, technological and economic cooperation and firm commitments on security issues."²⁰² These moves temporarily reduced proliferation concerns but their central effect, however, was to forestall American calls for the IAEA to refer Iran to the UN Security Council.

²⁰² IAEA, "Iran-EU Agreement on Nuclear Programme," last modified November 14, 2004, http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaea/iran/eu_iran14112004.shtml.

The election of the conservative and polarizing figure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as Iranian president on June 24, 2005, ushered in a more belligerent Iranian approach to relations with the IAEA and dealing with the international community in general.²⁰³ In turn, the EU3 expressed frustration with the Iranians, upset at the unwillingness of the Iranians to accept their incentives package and secretly advancing aspects of their nuclear program in direct violation of the Paris Agreement. Likewise, the IAEA grew increasingly exasperated at Iranian stalling and continued lack of transparency and cooperation. Things came to a head when Iran, seemingly frustrated with lack of progress in negotiations with the EU3, but also now ready to progress with enrichment, defiantly asserted its legal right to pursue a full nuclear cycle. On Aug 1, 2005, Iran declared its intention to restart work at the Esfahan Uranium Conversion Facility, with the processing work beginning just a few days later. Under these circumstances, and under heavy pressure from the US, the IAEA Board finally lost patience with Iran and on September 24, 2005, reported Iran to the UN Security Council as being in violation of its obligations under the NPT.

Under Ahmadinejad's confrontational stewardship, with Ali Khamenei directing policy from behind the scenes, emboldened by American difficulties in Iraq, and with the threat of the Security Council looming over them in late 2005 through to 2006, Iran's position steadily hardened. In early January 2006, Iranian nuclear officials broke the IAEA seals at Natanz. By early February, the first enriched uranium was produced, and by May 2, 2006, uranium had been enriched to a level of 4.8%. This act of defiance, coupled with a series of provocative statements by Ahmadinejad regarding Israel and the Holocaust,

²⁰³ Ali M. Ansari, *Iran under Ahmadinejad: The Politics of Confrontation* (London: Routledge, 2007); Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2008).

helped galvanize many in the international community, which was slowly overcoming its differences and reaching a consensus on how best to deal with Iran.

On May 31, a high profile statement by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice offered direct US participation in the EU3 nuclear negotiations with Iran, providing that Iran first implemented a full enrichment freeze.²⁰⁴ The rationale behind the timing of this offer is unclear. It may have tried to forestall an Iranian initiative to speak directly with the US, and could well have been an attempt to unify the Security Council to table a resolution against Iran. This diplomatic initiative was immediately followed by an offer from the EU3 of a modified package of incentives to Iran in exchange for a complete freeze on its enrichment activities. Finally, on August 31, 2006, the UN Security Council reviewed Iran's nuclear file, triggering Security Council resolution 1696.

Subsequent developments have followed a recurring theme. By June 2011, the Security Council had repeatedly denounced Iran's ongoing nuclear efforts in six successive resolutions that have imposed incremental sanctions. Despite setbacks, Iran's nuclear program has steadily progressed. From running a 164-centrifuge cascade in early 2006, Iran has now successfully expanded their enrichment process testing and operated their indigenously produced 'IR2' centrifuge since February 2008. By late May 2010, approximately 8500 centrifuges had been installed and by May 2011, thirty-five of Iran's fifty-three 164-centrifuge cascades were running and Iran had a stockpile of over three

²⁰⁴ United States, Department of State, "Daily Press Briefing," last modified December 13, 2002.

thousand kilograms of low enriched UF₆.²⁰⁵ Despite the relatively slow progress, Iran has clearly gained mastery of the enrichment process.

Ongoing concerns over Iranian deception

This section will now highlight ongoing areas of concern that continue to cast doubt over Iranian claims that its program is purely peaceful. To begin, there is the litany of violations of Iran's Safeguard Agreement, spanning several decades and demonstrating a record of obscurity and deceit in direct violation of Iran's NPT commitments. This history does not inspire confidence that Iranian nuclear aspirations are benign (an alternative reading might suggest that Iranian failures to meet their reporting commitments arise from a need to operate under secrecy to overcome denial of technology by the Americans). Over the course of eight years of IAEA investigations, the full extent of these secret activities has come to light, culminating in an Iran-IAEA work plan of August 2007 to demonstrate Iranian complicity and provide assurances that these activities were not indicative of something more sinister.

The outcome of these IAEA investigations and the work plan can be divided into two categories.²⁰⁶ The first set of questions relate to issues that have been sufficiently resolved and are no longer of concern, such as Iran's plutonium and polonium-210 experiments, issues related to the Khan network such as the acquisition of P-1/P-2 centrifuges, and the associated highly enriched uranium contamination. The second

²⁰⁵ International Atomic Energy Agency, GOV/2011/29, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," May 24, 2011.

<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-29.pdf>.

²⁰⁶ For a breakdown of these issues see Sharon Squassoni and Nima Gerami. "Iran's Plan for Nuclear Compliance," *Carnegie Endowment*, last modified March 8, 2008, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19967&prog=zgp&proj=znpp>.

category of activities relates to outstanding concerns that continue to cast doubt on Iranian denials that they were seeking to manufacture a bomb. These activities include the ‘alleged studies’ and questions regarding Iran’s conversion of uranium into metallic form (a necessary step to manufacture a bomb). The alleged studies relate to a series of issues described by the IAEA as being “related to the development for a nuclear payload for a missile.”²⁰⁷ These alleged activities involved an Iranian operation entitled the ‘Green Salt Project,’ which included spherical high explosive testing (suitable for compression of fissile material), neutron initiator experiments (to begin a fission reaction), and purported adapted missile re-entry designs capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. Precise dates of when these operations were supposedly conducted are difficult to determine given the extreme secrecy involved, but some are reported to have occurred as late as the summer of 2003.²⁰⁸

One difficulty in assessing the validity and implications of these allegations is that much of the information comes from non-neutral sources. The Green Salt Project, for example, was allegedly discovered by the CIA on a stolen Iranian laptop, yet Iran has been denied access to this and other source documents.²⁰⁹ Over time, the IAEA was shown the information, which Olli Heinonen, the IAEA Deputy Director General, describes as having “a 90-percent likelihood of being authentic.”²¹⁰ Iran, without access to the potentially incriminating documents, has declined to work with the IAEA on these issues, dismissing

²⁰⁷ IAEA, GOV/2010/10, “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” May 10, 2010, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2010/gov2010-10.pdf>.

²⁰⁸ Erich Follath and Holger Stark, “The Birth of a Bomb: A History of Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions,” *Spiegel Online*, June 17 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,druck-701109,00.html>; “Powell Iran Nuclear Allegations Based on Unverified, Single Source, Officials Say,” *Global Security Newswire*, last modified November 19, 2004, http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/GSN_20041119_059DDFD5.php.

²⁰⁹ Follath and Stark, “The Birth of a Bomb.”

²¹⁰ Quoted in Follath and Stark, “The Birth of a Bomb.”

the allegations as politically motivated and baseless fabrications akin to those made against Iraq. Nevertheless, the IAEA believes that the documents are sufficiently consistent and credible to merit further investigation. As long as these activities remain unresolved, questions will linger over how genuinely forthcoming Iran is being regarding its nuclear ambitions.

More recently, the dramatic revelation of the hitherto unreported uranium enrichment facility in an underground location at Fordow, Qom, also casts doubt on Iran's intentions. Sensing that their facilities were about to be exposed, Iranian officials sent a hastily prepared declaration to the IAEA announcing construction.²¹¹ Western leaders denounced the plant as yet another example of Iranian duplicity, with US President Barak Obama imploring Iran to "come clean" lest they "continue down a path that is going to lead to confrontation."²¹² The Fordow plant was viewed by the IAEA as a further violation of the Iranian Safeguards Agreement, a breach of Iran's modified Code 3.1. requiring declaration of all new facilities the moment the decision is taken to build them, and thus further evidence that the Iranians were not operating in good faith.²¹³ The Iranians, however, have contested this interpretation. Worryingly, from a non-proliferation perspective, a plant so small (3000 centrifuges) could not possibly have the capacity to enrich uranium on a commercial scale. The implication was that it could only serve one

²¹¹ Julian Borger and Patrick Wintour, "Why Iran Confessed to Secret Nuclear Site Built inside Mountain," *The Guardian*, September 26, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/25/iran-nuclear-uranium-enrichment-intelligence>; Helene Cooper and Mark Mazetti, "Cryptic Note Ignited an Iran Nuclear Strategy Debate," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/middleeast/26intel.html>.

²¹² United States, White House, "Remarks by President Obama at G20 Closing Press Conference," last modified September 25, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-g20-closing-press-conference>.

²¹³ Recall that Iran contested the IAEA's interpretation the application of Code 3.1.: Acton, "Iran Violated International Obligations on Qom Facility," 2009.

purpose: a secret route to the bomb. Iran argued that dispersal and concealment of its nuclear facilities was necessary to guard against possible military strikes. Furious diplomacy ensued, with one failed attempt to defuse the crisis following another.

At present, Iranian defiance continues, Western suspicions persist, and given ongoing IAEA reporting of non-compliance, the Iranian nuclear file remains with the UN Security Council. With close to enough fuel to produce two nuclear devices, the ongoing lack of transparency and history of obstruction and deceit continues to cause consternation over Iran's true nuclear intentions.

CHAPTER FOUR – ANALYSIS

Introduction

The central purpose of this chapter is to apply the approach set out in the theory and method chapters to address the question of how a constructivist approach to the US Iranian conflict over Iran's nuclear program can enhance our understanding of the nature of this conflict. As detailed earlier, the analysis will consist of two sections, the insights of each having relevance for one another. First a review of statements made at key moments in US-Iranian history will be undertaken to examine how each state has represented the identity of themselves and the other. Attention will be given to the representational practices involved and how identity construction has changed over time to provide insight into how each view the other today, and consequently, how these notions of identity then inform perceptions of threat.

The second section, the substantive part of the analysis, focuses on US-Iranian discourse over Iran's nuclear program. It consists of three parts: the first looks at the Khatami-Bush period and examines how each side represented Iran's nuclear program in light of the Natanz and Arak disclosures and subsequent developments, in addition to highlighting the discourse dynamics taking place more generally; the second section will focus on the Ahmadinejad-Bush period, concentrating on the competing statements of each state during a select number of incidents to examine the intersubjective processes in play during these times as each seeks to put forward and gain acceptance for their chosen interpretation of the situation while contesting the view of the other; finally, a brief review of the Ahmadinejad-Obama period will conclude the analysis by focusing on the nuclear

representational practices of yet another set of actors, reviewing how they have changed over time by comparing them to those of the previous time periods. Throughout these sections the relevance of identity construction will be highlighted where appropriate.

US-Iranian Identity Construction

This section will trace the identity conceptions of key actors in Iran and the United States at prominent moments from the early 1950s to the beginning of the present-day nuclear crisis. To recall, the United States was propelled into Iranian domestic politics in the early 1950s as a result of the ongoing dispute between Great Britain and Iran over attempts to nationalize the Iranian oil industry. The British had attempted to persuade others to support their cause by utilizing identity portrayals to bolster their arguments, actively portraying the leader of the nationalist movement and then Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq, in negative terms to their American allies, describing him as,

A “wily Oriental” [who] was “wild,” “erratic,” “eccentric,” “crazy,” “gangster-like,” “fanatical,” “absurd,” “dictatorial,” “demagogic,” “inflammatory,” and “single-mindedly obstinate”; and that Iranians were by nature “child-like,” “tiresome and headstrong,” “unwilling to accept the facts,” “volatile and unstable,” “sentimentally mystical,” “unprepared to listen to reason and common sense,” and “swayed by emotions devoid of positive content.”²¹⁴

By contrast, the report that President Truman received of Mossadeq stated that he was ““supported by the majority of the population,” describing him as “witty,” “affable,” “honest,” and “well informed.””²¹⁵ It was not until Democrat President Truman was

²¹⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, “The 1953 Coup in Iran,” *Science and Society* 65, no. 2 (2001): 193.

²¹⁵ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, Hoboken (NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 128.

replaced by the Republican candidate Eisenhower that US sympathy and support for Iran crumbled.

With Eisenhower at the helm, a marked difference was evident in the US identity portrayals of Mossadeq and the American and British views coalesced. Anglo-American reports negatively characterized Mossadeq as ““a pint-sized trouble maker” who had the agility of a goat” and who “pranced before a group of journalists,”²¹⁶ that he was “not quite sane,” and whose “avowed object [was] to drive all foreigners and foreign influence from Persia.”²¹⁷ Anglo-American officials depicted Mossadeq’s theatrical behaviour as “signs of weakness and effeminacy that diminished Mossadeq’s standing as a statesman and absolved them of the need to deal with him as an equal.”²¹⁸ Anglo-American governmental reports also described him as having a tendency to “change his mind, to become confused,” to act like a “fractious child,” and like ““the naughty boy” who needed to be disciplined.”²¹⁹ Heiss notes while these traits were viewed as signs of weakness in the West, to many Iranians Mossadeq’s behaviour was “deeply symbolic...of their personal plight and that of their nation, symbolic of the frailty of righteousness beset by powerful forces of evil.”²²⁰ James Bill makes a similar point, observing, “His very emotionalism and physical frailty (he was in constant poor health) endeared him to his people, who saw in him the embodiment of a weak and embattled Iran.”²²¹

²¹⁶ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*,” 54-55.

²¹⁷ Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 138.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 230.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 231.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 232-233, n. 17.

²²¹ Bill, *The Eagle*, 55.

US diplomat Averell Harriman's description of Mossadeq encapsulated the manner in which leaders in Washington ultimately came to view the Iranian leader, "Caught in deception, as he often was, [Mossadeq] would respond with disconcerting, childlike laughter or a heart-rendering confession, often followed by a repeat of the devious tactics with an ill-concealed new twist."²²² Loy Henderson, US Ambassador to Iran, further contributed to the US move against Mossadeq and his allies, describing the Iranian National Front as consisting of, "the street rabble, the extreme left...extreme Iranian nationalists, some but not all of the more fanatical religious leaders, [and] intellectual leftists, including many who has been educated abroad and did not realize that Iran was not ready for democracy."²²³ Such depictions, especially those implying communist leanings, helped construct the type of state Iran was becoming, and facilitated the ease with which the Eisenhower government would accept the decision to instigate the 1953 coup.

For his part, Mossadeq attempted to depict Iran to the US as an impoverished state in need of assistance, stating during a meeting with US officials, "Mr. President, I am speaking for a very poor country, a country all desert – just sand, a few camels, a few sheep," a portrayal which Secretary of State Dean Acheson undermined by countering, "Yes, and with your oil, just like Texas!"²²⁴ On October 15, 1951, Mossadeq continued this approach in front of the United Nations Security Council, claiming, "My countrymen lack the bare necessities of existence. Their standard of living is probably one of the lowest in the world,"²²⁵ but his request for aid though was ultimately rebuffed, and the United States resolved to side with the British and overthrow him. Once the decision to work against

²²² Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, 103.

²²³ Quoted in Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, 155.

²²⁴ Ibid. 128-129.

²²⁵ Ibid. 123.

Mossadeq had been made, the American resort to negative representations of him went into overdrive, with Richard Cottam, an operative working on Operation Ajax that sought to overthrow Mossadeq, revealing, “They [the CIA] were designated to show Mossadeq as a Communist collaborator and as a fanatic.”²²⁶ Indeed, as a 1953 CIA report reveals, “At this same time the psychological campaign against Mossadeq was reaching its climax. The controllable press was going all out against Mossadeq.”²²⁷

The role of the press in the characterization of actors is particularly pertinent for US-Iranian relations given the powerful images it has historically conveyed to the public in both states. Whether ‘controllable’ or not, the depictions of actors presented by the press are often the most persistent images – and perhaps the only images – accessed by the public, and therefore play an integral role in shaping national opinion of the other state and their statesmen. This role of the media was amply demonstrated with the backlash of the American press against Mossadeq in the early 1950s. During the Anglo-Iranian oil crisis, the media characterized the US an “honest broker” and regularly made reference to American officials’ attempts to “save Iran from national suicide.”²²⁸

By contrast, Time magazine designated Mossadeq the 1951 ‘Man of the Year,’ using the accolade to then proceed to denigrate the Iranian leader. The article describes Mossadeq as a “dizzy old wizard,” whose “acid tears had dissolved one of the remaining pillars of a once great empire,” how “in his plaintive, singsong voice he gabbled a defiant challenge that sprang out of a hatred and envy almost incomprehensible to the West,” and

²²⁶ Dilip Hiro, *The Iranian Labyrinth: Journeys through Theocratic Iran and Its Furies* (New York: Nation Books, 2005), 78.

²²⁷ Quoted in Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 13.

²²⁸ Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Abroad; in a Pinch We Always Stand Together,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 1952, <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca>; “Appeal to Iran,” *The New York Times*, September 4, 1952, <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca>.

how he was “by Western standards an appalling caricature of a statesman.”²²⁹ Newsweek too engaged in the vitriolic diatribe, wryly noting how during a meeting, “Premier Mohammed Mossadeq did not faint once. He shed no tears. He acted as a normal human being.”²³⁰ As the New York Times surmised at Mossadeq’s fall, “We thought of him as a sincere, well-meaning, patriotic Iranian who had a different point of view and made different deductions from the same facts. We now know that he is a power-hungry, personally ambitious, ruthless demagogue who is trampling upon the liberties of his own people.”²³¹

The demonization of Mossadeq illustrates how the depictions of the Other, by governments and the popular press alike, lend legitimacy to the arguments and subsequent actions made for and against other actors. Unsurprisingly, the New York Times championed the return of the Shah, writing, “While he has been a weak monarch on the whole, he was always true to the parliamentary institutions of his country; he was a moderating influence in the wild fanaticism exhibited by the nationalists under Mossadeq, and he was socially progressive.”²³² Writing in the late 1960s, then Iran analyst Richard Cottam identifies this media support for the Shah noting, “The American press seemed to treat the Iranian regime as sacrosanct.”²³³ James Bill concurs, writing,

The American mass media’s coverage of Iran has over the years been consistently sparse, superficial and distorted. Major newspapers such as the New York Times, The Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal have been

²²⁹ “Man of the Year: Challenge of the East,” *Time*, January 7, 1952, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,815775,00.html>.

²³⁰ Quoted in William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1987), 30.

²³¹ “Mossadegh Plays with Fire,” *The New York Times*, August 15, 1953, <http://www.mohammadmossadegh.com/news/new-york-times/august-15-1953>.

²³² Quoted in Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 87.

²³³ Quoted in Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 338, n. 399.

especially weak in their reporting on Iran, misrepresenting the nature and depth of opposition to the Shah.²³⁴

By the late 1970s, television media became integral in perpetuating images of the Other. For example, Iranian television footage depicted the US, the “heir to colonialism” as “an arsonist, a mass murderer and a hedonistic beast ready to destroy whole countries in a mad rage.”²³⁵ Arguably, the most influential coverage was Ted Koppel’s nightly ABC ‘America Held Hostage’ specials, focusing on the US Embassy hostage crisis. These specials regularly showed images of turbaned mullahs angrily denouncing America or hostile crowds burning effigies of Uncle Sam and chanting “Death to America,” replacing the more benign shout of “Yankee go Home” that surfaced in the early 1950s.²³⁶ David Faber notes that America’s media reporting of Middle Eastern affairs helped create “a moral geography”²³⁷ for the American citizen, and that “American mass media coverage of the Iran crisis helped persuade Americans to see themselves as victims of “terrorists” who irrationally hate “us,” rather than to recognize that Iranians had attacked the US embassy in response to American policy in Iran.”²³⁸ This commentary and the previous analysis demonstrates the tendency flagged by Campbell in Chapter One of the resort to negative identity characterizations to facilitate a particular foreign policy.

Outside of the media, key actors in both Iran and the United States continued to shape the discourse through their representations of the other. Given the crucial role Iran played in US Middle Eastern policy, successive Presidents continued to publicly praise the

²³⁴ James A Bill, “Iran and the Crisis of ‘78,” *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 2 (1978): 323-324.

²³⁵ Amir Taheri, *Nest of Spies: America's Journey to Disaster in Iran* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 72-73 & 83.

²³⁶ Taheri, *Nest of Spies*, 177.

²³⁷ Melanie McAlister, quoted in David Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 154.

²³⁸ Faber, *Taken Hostage*, 154.

Shah, in spite of his autocratic rule and repression at home.²³⁹ President Carter praised the Shah for “[seeking] aggressively to establish democratic principles in Iran,” and for adopting “a progressive attitude towards social questions [and] social problems.”²⁴⁰ On December 31, 1977, Carter stated, “Iran, because of the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world,” before adding, “We have no other nation on Earth who is closer to us in planning for our mutual security. ... And there is no leader with whom I have a deeper sense of personal gratitude and personal friendship.”²⁴¹

Not everyone in the US government agreed with such appraisals. As one US Iranian specialist wrote that, “This regime is considered by most aware and articulate Iranians as reactionary, corrupt, and a tool of Western (and especially Anglo-American) imperialism.”²⁴² A 1976 State Department report too noted, “...many Americans...deplore the shah’s authoritarian regime and his policies, in particular the relatively low regard for human rights in the political sphere and the shah’s role in keeping oil prices high. The idea of a ‘special’ relationship with Iran based on US military support is also distasteful or repugnant to many.”²⁴³

Unsurprisingly, criticism of the Shah and the type of Iran he was seeking to create also emanated from within Iran itself. While the Shah was successful in liquidating many of his domestic opponents, he had difficulty silencing the clerics, Ayatollah Khomeini in

²³⁹ On the lack of criticism by Johnson, Nixon, and Ford of the Shah see Richard Cottam, *W. Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study* (Pittsburgh, PA.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 147-148.

²⁴⁰ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 225.

²⁴¹ Quoted in Faber, *Taken Hostage*, 82.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁴³ Quoted in Taheri, *Nest of Spies*, 77.

particular. Khomeini was propelled into action against the Shah during the early 1960s when the Shah implemented widespread reform known as the ‘White Revolution.’ While Khomeini’s initial attacks centered on the Shah, increasingly over time the US was seen to be synonymous with the Shah, or the ‘American King,’²⁴⁴ as he was known by many in Iran. On June 3, 1963, regarding the White Revolution and with an oblique reference to the US, Khomeini stated, “...dear Mr. Shah, abandon these improper acts. I don’t want people to offer thanks should your masters decide that you must leave.”²⁴⁵ On October 27, 1964 Khomeini took direct aim at the Americans in response to the Shah’s granting of capitulatory rights to the United States,²⁴⁶ declaring,

What use to you are the American soldiers and military advisers? If this country is occupied by America, then what is all this noise you make about progress? If these advisers are to be your servants, then why do you treat them like something superior to masters? ...If our country is now occupied by the U.S., then tell us outright and throw us out of this country!²⁴⁷

Khomeini continued, “They have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog,”²⁴⁸ adding,

Are we to be trampled underfoot by the boots of American simply because we are a weak nation and have no dollars? ...Let the American President must know that in the eyes of the Iranian people, he is the most repulsive member of the human race today because of the injustice he has imposed on our Muslim nation.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 125.

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Faber, *Taken Hostage*, 64.

²⁴⁶ These rights provided all US military and their dependents living in Iran full diplomatic immunity, granting them immunity from prosecution. See Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 156-161.

²⁴⁷ Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 181-182.

²⁴⁸ Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, 182.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

This speech, that ended with the declaration, “Let the American government know that its name has been ruined and disgraced in Iran,”²⁵⁰ culminated in Khomeini’s expulsion from Iran in November 1964.

Over the next two decades Khomeini relentlessly attacked the Shah and his principal backer the United States. The following statements demonstrate how Khomeini characterized the US, with each of these statements serving to construct a particular image of the type of actor the US ‘really’ is:

- “...Then came the new imperialists, the Americans and others. They allied themselves with the British and took part in the execution of their plans.”²⁵¹
- “All the problems of the East stem from those foreigners from the West, and from America at the moment. ...All our problems come from America.”²⁵²
- “We consider the entire ruling system of the United States the most criminal against humanity. ...We consider it as the Number 1 enemy of our Islamic revolutions; we consider this system a plundering and criminal system.”²⁵³
- “Today our chief enemy is the same eternal supporter of the Shah: The United States.”²⁵⁴
- “He [Carter] is willing to do anything – to commit any crime, to try any trick – in order to protect his personal interests, or what he imagines are the interests of his nation.”²⁵⁵

The symbol of the ‘Great Satan’ in particular was employed to powerful effect. As Beeman notes, “As a metaphor, the Great Satan is thus far more than a rhetorical device. It is a statement of moral order that actually is more precise in its identification of the spiritual characteristics, rights, and legitimate actions of the Islamic clergy than in its specification of the crimes of the United States.”²⁵⁶ Beeman continues, “Its creation as a suitable metaphor was a slow and steady process created over the years as the United

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 185.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 139. From Feb 8 1979.

²⁵² Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 277.

²⁵³ Quoted in Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 292. From May 25 1979.

²⁵⁴ Quoted in Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 292. From May 28 1979.

²⁵⁵ Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, 281. From Nov 12 1979, eight days after occupation of the US embassy.

²⁵⁶ Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs. The “Mad Mullahs*, 129.

States, in myopic fashion, persisted in digging itself into a ready-made villain's role. ...As all serious students of culture know, symbolic structures are not erased quickly.”²⁵⁷

Following the revolution, as relations between the United States and Iran further deteriorated, the negative images that each held and conveyed of the other became ever more entrenched. Iranian support of groups such as Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad in Lebanon led to US Secretary of State George Shultz to designate Iran as a State Sponsor of International Terrorism.²⁵⁸ While Iranian proxies engaged the US in Lebanon, it was the Iran-Iraq War that truly propelled the two states together as the US sought to counter Soviet influence in the strategically important Gulf region, while simultaneously working to prevent Iranian advances in Iraq.²⁵⁹ Khomeini himself drew attention to Washington's role in the conflict, describing “The US hand emerging from Saddam's sleeve.”²⁶⁰ As the war progressed, the Reagan administration was uncompromising in its damning characterizations of Iran. On May 27, 1987, when Iraq attacked the USS Stark killing thirty-seven US servicemen, President Reagan responded instead against Iran rather than Iraq, calling Iran “this barbaric country” and stating, “We have never considered Iraq hostile at all. Iran is the real villain in the piece.”²⁶¹ Rafsanjani understood the message, declaring, “We are really at war with the United States now.”²⁶² Iranian Foreign Minister Al Akbar Velayati announced to the UN General Assembly, “The arrogant superpowers,

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 130.

²⁵⁸ Raymond Tanter, *Rogue Regimes: Terrorism and Proliferation* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999), 76.

²⁵⁹ As Geoffrey Kemp, ex-Middle East National Security Council head stated, “It wasn't really that we wanted Iraq to win the war; we didn't want Iraq to lose. We really weren't that naïve. We knew he (Saddam Hussein) was an SOB, but he was our SOB.” Quoted in Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 21.

²⁶⁰ Shahrām Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 206.

²⁶¹ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 307.

²⁶² Cited in Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 232.

U.S. topping the list, want to teach a lesson to Iran for not accepting and practicing the so-called American Islam, practiced by the reactionary sheiks of the Al Sabah and Al Saud clans.”²⁶³

Then, on July 3, 1988, things came to a head with the US shooting down Iranian airliner Iran Air 655, killing all 290 civilian passengers on board. Vice President Bush defended the actions at the UN, stating, “...the critical issue confronting this body is not the how and why of Iran Air 655. It is the continuing refusal of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to comply with Resolution 598,”²⁶⁴ the resolution demanding a cessation of fighting. President Reagan was also unremorseful following the incident, stating, “The responsibility for this tragic incident, and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of other innocent victims as the result of the Iran-Iraq War, lies with those [i.e. the Iranians] who refuse to end the conflict.”²⁶⁵

Needless to say, relations between the US and Iran continued to be extremely strained, with each state drawing upon the familiar representations of the other. However, the death of Khomeini in 1989 ushered in a new era of pragmatism within Iran and the 1990s witnessed a gradually toning down of the anti-American rhetoric. Still, in September 1990, as US troops amassed in the Gulf ahead of the US-led campaign to expel Iraq from Kuwait, Ayatollah Khamenei denounced what he called “America’s demanding, bullying, and shameless attitude.”²⁶⁶ The US, slow to pick up on any possible change coming from Iran, continued to see Iran in much the same light, with the Department of State in its 1992 annual Patterns of Global Terrorism report designating Iran “the most dangerous state

²⁶³ Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 171.

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs. The “Mad Mullahs,”* 132.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 179.

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Hiro, *The Iranian Labyrinth*, 259.

sponsor of terrorism.”²⁶⁷ Then, on May 18, 1993, the Clinton administration unveiled the policy of dual containment, institutionalizing the persistent images of the Iranian state. As Tarock notes, “Up until the coming to power of President Khatami [in 1997], words such as “rogue,” “backlash,” “outlaw,” and “terrorist” had become part of the political vocabulary of US officials whenever they mentioned Iran.”²⁶⁸ Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, typifies this attitude when calling for regime change in Iran in 1995, stating, “There must be a totally different kind of government in Iran, because we cannot deal with the irrational, fanatical government of the kind they now have.”²⁶⁹

By 1997, the overtures by ‘reformist’ President Khatami, entailed a further toning down of the anti-US rhetoric. On May 27, 1997, as part of his ‘dialogue on civilizations’ initiative, Khatami tentatively extended a hand to the US while still adding a note of caution, stating, “America is the source of the strains in and the severing of its ties with Iran. We are sorry that US policies have always been hostile towards the revolution, the people and our interests.” Khatami then added, “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.”²⁷⁰ This speech was followed up on January 7, 1998, by a celebrated interview with CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour, where President Khatami called for peace between the two nations. During the interview, Amanpour summarized the typical American perception of Iran as one of “hostage taking, the message of death to America, the message of burning the American flag, the message that almost looks like Islam has declared a war against

²⁶⁷ Sabasteanski, ed. *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1985-2005*.

²⁶⁸ Tarock, *Iran’s Foreign Policy since 1990*, 5.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁷⁰ Quoted in Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 314.

America and the west.”²⁷¹ While Khatami responded by noting, “There are slogans being changed in Iran,” and refrained from employing images such as the ‘Great Satan,’ he nevertheless continued to comment on how “U.S. foreign policy behavior toward Iran has inflicted damages upon us,” drawing attention to “... a bulky wall of mistrust between us [Iran] and the U.S. Administration, a mistrust rooted in improper behaviors of the American governments.”²⁷² Still, it was a marked difference from prevailing hostile characterizations of the US by Iranian officials and represented a possible opening for reconciliation between the two states.

The American response was cautious, with James Rubin of the State Department replying, “We welcome his statement that this period in Iranian history is over, and that the rule of law should be respected both domestically and internationally. On terrorism, President Khatami’s rejection and condemnation of all forms of terrorism directed at innocents was noteworthy.”²⁷³ On June 18, 1998, President Clinton announced that his government was seeking “a genuine reconciliation based on mutuality and reconciliation [with an Iran now] changing in a positive way under the reformist influence of President Muhammad Khatami.”²⁷⁴ Indecision over how best to respond delayed any real moves toward reconciliation, and it was not until March 17, 2000, in the landmark speech, that Secretary of State Madeline Albright finally reached out to Iran. Albright began by again repeating the dominant view Americans held of Iran, stating, “It is no secret that, for two decades, most Americans have viewed Iran primarily through the prism of the U.S. Embassy takeover in 1979, accompanied as it was by the taking of hostages, hateful

²⁷¹ CNN, “Transcript of Interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami.”

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Quoted in Hiro, *The Iranian Labyrinth*, 268.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 271.

rhetoric and the burning of the U.S. flag.”²⁷⁵ She added, “We took Iranian leaders at their word, that they viewed America as an enemy. And in response we had to treat Iran as a threat. However, after the election of President Khatami in 1997, we began to adjust the lens through which we viewed Iran.”²⁷⁶ Most significantly, Albright broke with past policy and made a major concession, admitting, “In 1953 the United States played a significant role in orchestrating the overthrow of Iran's popular Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadeq. ...but the coup was clearly a setback for Iran's political development.”²⁷⁷ Albright then stated,

Moreover, during the next quarter century, the United States and the West gave sustained backing to the Shah's regime. Although it did much to develop the country economically, the Shah's government also brutally repressed political dissent. As President Clinton has said, the United States must bear its fair share of responsibility for the problems that have arisen in U.S.-Iranian relations. Even in more recent years, aspects of U.S. policy towards Iraq, during its conflict with Iran appear now to have been regrettably shortsighted, especially in light of our subsequent experiences with Saddam Hussein.²⁷⁸

The speech concluded by listing the US's own grievances, before finishing with a “call upon Iran to join us in writing a new chapter in our shared history.”²⁷⁹

Ayatollah Khamenei's reply was uncompromising:

...after half a century, or over 40 years, the Americans have now confessed that they staged the 28th Mordad coup. They confessed that they supported the suppressive, dictatorial, and corrupt Pahlavi shah for twenty-five years. ...And now they are saying that they supported Saddam Husayn in his war against Iran. What do you think the Iranian nation, faced with this situation and these admissions, feels? ...In the course of those days, during the war, we repeatedly said in speeches that the Americans are helping Saddam Husayn. They denied this and claimed they remained impartial. Now that 12

²⁷⁵ United States, Department of State, ““American-Iranian Relations”.”

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., For further discussion of the Albright speech see Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 340-342.

years have elapsed after the end of the war...this American Secretary of State is officially admitting that they helped Saddam Husayn. The question is, what good will this admission do us?...What good does this admission—that you acted in that way then—do us now?...An admission years after the crime was committed, while they might be committing similar crimes now, will not do the nation any good.²⁸⁰

Khamenei continued, “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,”²⁸¹ and he finished by quoting Khomeini, declaring, “America can’t do a damn thing,”²⁸² effectively eliminating any possibility of reversing years of shared enmity.

Certainly, many factors were at work here for Khomeini’s uncompromising response. Domestic politics undoubtedly played a significant role in the actions of both states, accounting not only for two years of heel-dragging before Washington responded to Khatami’s overture, but also for the mixed-messages coming from Iran from the ‘reformist’ and ‘hardliner’ camps. The US itself though was also sending mixed messages, on the one hand reaching out to Iran, yet simultaneously continuing to approve the release of funds to support Iranian opposition groups and renewing sanctions against Iran.²⁸³ Clearly the images conjured of the Other, images solidified over time through repeated invocation at key moments, are difficult to modify or erase, especially when those with vested interests seek to perpetuate such images. As Tarock writes,

Each nation, led by governmental leaders, constructed a mythological image that served to ‘demonize’ the other. Paradoxically, each fulfilled the worst

²⁸⁰ Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, xxv.

²⁸¹ Quoted in Hiro, *The Iranian Labyrinth*, 278, n. 32.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ See Hiro, *The Iranian Labyrinth*, 267, regarding the \$18 million sanction by the US Congress in late 1995, and for a commentary on how President Clinton renewed a trade embargo against Iran just four days prior to Albright’s March 17 2000 speech.

expectation of the other, playing true to the images being created for it. ...For Iran, the United States became the Great Satan, an external illegitimate force that continually strove to destroy the pure, internal core of the Iranian revolution. For the United States, foreign policy is defined in terms of normalcy, of expectations about how actors in the world behave and are motivated to act. Nations and actors that do not fit this mould are relegated to residual cognitive categories of being 'crazy outlaw' and 'barbaric' nations whose activities were illegal, unpredictable, and irrational, labels which the United States officials repeatedly put on revolutionary Iran.²⁸⁴

Once such symbolic images have coalesced in the collective mind of a nation and its leaders they are hard to erase, continuing to act as the lens through which each state views the statements, actions, and interests of the Other.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, despite an outpouring of sympathy from the Iranian public, US-Iranian depictions of one another continued to follow a predictable course. On October 7, 2001, in response to American bombing of Afghanistan, echoing Khomeini, Khamenei said, "Terrorism is only an excuse. ...Why don't they announce their real intention – their motivation for grabbing more power, for imperialism?"²⁸⁵ Although officials in both states found ways to work together in Afghanistan, domestic divisions ensured that traditional stances prevailed.²⁸⁶ Famously, President Bush's 2002 State of the Union address declared, "Iran aggressively pursues these weapons [of mass destruction] and exports terror. ...States like these, and their

²⁸⁴ Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 52.

²⁸⁵ Jonathan Steele, "American 'Imperialism' Condemned by Tehran," *The Guardian*, October 9, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/oct/09/afghanistan.terrorism4>.

²⁸⁶ Recall the 1+1 talks discussed earlier (see chap. 3, n. 140-141); See also Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Javad Zarif, who in 2004 speaks to how the *Kharine-A* incident successfully undermined the Geneva channel, stating, "In a matter of a few days, a policy of cooperation was transformed into a policy of confrontation. ...Kharine A continues to be a mystery that happened at an exactly opportune moment for those who wanted to prevent US-Iran engagement." – Quoted in Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 234.

terrorist allies, constitutes an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.”²⁸⁷ Iran’s response was predictable, with Khamenei denouncing America in kind, stating, “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,”²⁸⁸ before calling America, “the most hated Satan in the world.”²⁸⁹ President Khatami also charged that President Bush “spoke arrogantly, humiliatingly, aggressively, and in an arrogant way.”²⁹⁰

Over the course of the next few years, as the full scope of the secret Iranian nuclear program came to light, Iran and the US continued to depict the other in the most negative of terms and themselves in a positive light. In July 2002, President Bush attempted to reach out to the Iranian people, declaring, “they will have no better friend than the United States of America.”²⁹¹ On July 17, 2004, President Bush, clearly influenced by his perceptions of Iran, stated, “although the Central Intelligence Agency had found “no direct connection between Iran and the attacks of September 11. ...We will continue to look and see if the Iranians were involved.””²⁹² In 2005, shortly after Condoleezza Rice included Iran in a list of “outposts of tyranny,” President Bush’s State of the Union address announced, “Iran remains the world’s primary state sponsor of terrorism – pursuing nuclear weapons while

²⁸⁷ United States, White House, “President Delivers State of the Union Address,” last modified January 29, 2002, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>; See also Daniel Heradstveit and G. Matthew Bonham, “What the Axis of Evil Metaphor Did to Iran,” *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 3 (2007): 421-40. Heradstveit and Bonham’s research shows the “metaphor had an impact on political discourse in Iran and strengthened the rhetorical position of conservatives vis-à-vis reformers by reviving militant revolutionary language with the Great Satan (the United States) as the main target of the theocratic and conservative forces.”

²⁸⁸ Quoted in Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 352.

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Patrick Clawson and Michael Rubin. *Eternal Iran: Continuity and Chaos*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 153.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 157.

²⁹² Quoted in Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs. The “Mad Mullahs*, 209.

depriving its people of the freedom they seek and deserve.”²⁹³ For their part, Iran continued to respond in kind, with a typical speech of Khamenei answering Bush’s address by calling America “a global tyrant,” which was trying to “deny the talented Iranian nation of progress and deprive it of existence.”²⁹⁴ By late 2005, with the nuclear crisis in full swing, the resorting to such imagery and the negative effect such imagery then went into overdrive, as shall be revealed shortly.

In summary, this brief sketch of US-Iranian relations and the depictions of key players by one another over the last sixty shows how the identity conceptions of one by the other have developed over time. Tracing such a history facilitates a deeper understanding of the identity conceptions each state holds of the other (and of itself) in contemporary times and demonstrates how enduring these images are. Holding such an understanding is crucial in order to assess the manner in which each views the intentions and actions of the other in contemporary times, most particularly in the nuclear realm, to which the remainder of this chapter will now turn.

Nuclear Representations

With a history of US-Iranian identity representations in hand, this section will bring to bare the insights of previous chapters and apply the discourse-based constructivist approach to the US-Iran nuclear problem. What can paying attention to the representational practices of each state in this realm show about their ongoing conflict more generally, and how do their statements and actions shape the manner in which understandings of the

²⁹³ United States, White House, “State of the Union Address,” last modified February 5, 2005, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050202-11.html>.

²⁹⁴ “Khamenei Condemns Bush Address,” *The Guardian*, February 5, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/feb/03/iran.usa1>.

‘reality’ of Iran’s nuclear activities are popularly conceived? The approach draws upon the methodological insights detailed in Chapter Two, and examines the nuclear discourse across three periods: the Khatami/Bush, Ahmadinejad/Bush, and Ahmadinejad/Obama eras. The first section will look at nuclear representational practices in a broad sense to demonstrate the type of processes taking place, highlighting the various angles that a constructivist approach can illuminate. The second will look in detail at what both states do and say in relation to one another for a few choice moments in the unfolding of the public awareness of Iran’s nuclear activities in order to examine the intersubjective conflict taking place in the ideational, rather than material, realm. Finally, the third section will briefly review the discourse under a markedly different US administration to ‘place in motion’ the continuities and differences by contextualizing them across all three periods. Once again, the role that identity plays in informing the nuclear discourse, and in turn the manner in which the nuclear discourse serves to reinforce or challenge identity conceptions, will be highlighted where applicable.

Nuclear Discourse in the Bush-Khatami Era

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the US actively depicted Iran as seeking a nuclear capability. By early 2002, perhaps as an extension of this discourse, or alternatively as a prelude to the revelations and interpretations of Arak and Natanz, a number of prominent US officials were perpetuating the notion that Iran was an active nuclear proliferator, which by extension positioned the US as a conscientious state seeking to curb proliferation. Supported by CIA claims that Iran may acquire enough fissile material for a bomb by 2010, George Bush, in his State of the Union Address, declared Iran in accordance with his Axis-

of-Evil attribution to be actively pursuing WMDs.²⁹⁵ The claim was later repeated by Vice President Dick Cheney who noted, “their active support of terrorism, and their... unstinting efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction.”²⁹⁶ While the US Defense Department erringly reported that Iran was unlikely to produce its own fissile material, and though attention appeared focused on Russian assistance to its missile program, the charge that Iran was seeking a nuclear capability resurfaced throughout the year.²⁹⁷ Iran denounced such claims, but by the time of the NCRI’s shock Arak and Natanz announcement, that Iran should actively be portrayed as a nuclear proliferator was something that was firmly on the Bush administration’s radar.

The timing of the NCRI’s August 14, 2002, announcement seemed carefully calibrated, stealing much of Iran’s thunder by coinciding with, and thus undermining, President Khatami’s visit to Afghanistan, the first Iranian Presidential visit there in forty years. While Khatami used the opportunity to strike out at President Bush and his response to the 9/11 attacks, much of the message was overshadowed in the West by the NCRI’s disclosure.²⁹⁸ The importance of paying attention to timing in subverting the message of the Other will be addressed shortly, though care must be taken not to place too much emphasis on any one occurrence given the difficulties involved in distinguishing a deliberate act from a random coincidence.

²⁹⁵ Iran Watch, “Worldwide Threat - Converging Dangers in a Post 9/11 World: Testimony of George J. Tenet, Director, Central Intelligence Agency,” last modified February 6, 2002, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/US/Congress/Hearings/sic-020602/us-sic-tenet-020602.htm>; White House, “President Delivers State of the Union Address,” 2002.

²⁹⁶ United States, White House, “Remarks by the Vice President to the Council on Foreign Relations,” last modified February 15, 2002, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/vicepresident/news-speeches/speeches/vp20020215.html>.

²⁹⁷ See March 21, 2002 entry in The Nuclear Threat Initiative, “Iran Profile: Nuclear Chronology – 2002,” last modified August, 2005, http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iran/Nuclear/chronology_2002.html.

²⁹⁸ John F. Burns, “Iranian President Says U.S. Leaders ‘Misused’ Sept. 11,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/14/world/iranian-president-says-us-leaders-misused-sept-11.html>.

Interestingly, both Iran and the United States were rather mute following the breaking of the NCRI story, but with CNN's publication of satellite pictures of the two sites in December 2002, the accusations and denials began in earnest. The role of independent actors is also noteworthy here and it is highly plausible (albeit speculative) that both the NCRI and CNN could have been fed the information by US officials or an intermediary,²⁹⁹ which may account for the relative silence of the US government about the report in the initial months. Upon the release of the CNN pictures though, the US characterized them as highly suspicious, questioning the economic value of such facilities, suggesting instead that they were more consistent with "Iran's across-the-board pursuit of weapons of mass destruction."³⁰⁰ Iran denied they were using the facilities for the pursuit of nuclear weapons.³⁰¹

To this day, despite the litany of information that has come to light about Iran's past activities, it is still difficult to determine with certainty what Iran's true intentions were/are. In part, this reflects the ambiguity surrounding nuclear technology and its dual-use nature. It also is plausible though that Iran have not taken the decision to try to acquire a nuclear weapon, but rather are choosing to obtain and master the technologies and processes needed

²⁹⁹ Ritter, *Target Iran*, xiii-xx. Scott Ritter has pointed out that it is most surprising that the NCRI, a public representative of an officially designated terrorist organization, the MEK, could operate with impunity in Washington in the post-9/11 climate without the acquiescence of the US government reinforcing the notion that the NCRI were a channel used by the US government (or Israel, with the US's approval) to release intelligence at choice moments. If true, the Israeli's would most likely be a go-between for the US given that the State Department's Spokesman Richard Boucher has declared "We do not have any contact with the National Council for Resistance because they are a front organization for the MEK." United States, Department of State, "Daily Press Briefing," last modified October 14, 2003, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2003/25168.htm>.

³⁰⁰ United States, White House, "Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer." Last modified December 13, 2002. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/12/20021213-6.html>; United States, Department of State, "Daily Press Briefing," last modified December 13, 2002.

³⁰¹ CNN, "Iranian Diplomat Denies Nuclear Weapons Program," last modified December 13, 2002. <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/meast/12/13/zarif.transcript/index.html>.

should they decide to build one, the so-called breakout option. From 2003 onwards the dominant interpretation of Iran's actions and their 'true'³⁰² intentions would shape how Iran's nuclear activities were received by the wider international community, and therefore whether they were deemed legitimate or not. With such ambiguity, the policing of the 'correct' understanding of what Iran's nuclear program 'really is' is open for contestation, a conflict between Iran and the US waged in the ideational realm, rather than the material one. As noted earlier, underlying such interpretations are perceptions and representations of the kind of state Iran is (and by extension the kind of state the US is too). Ultimately, it is the acceptance or rejection of these competing depictions by other key actors that determines which image triumphs. Often vested political interests, themselves rooted in shared identity conceptions, underlie which story an actor may subscribe to and/or publicly endorse. As Neumann and Welsh write, "The demonization of challengers to international society may strengthen the ties between its most established constituent members. Indeed, those members may use the existence of a challenge for that exact purpose."³⁰³ Clearly Iran presented such a challenge. Also, its nuclear activities served as a means to restore cohesion in the West following the schism that so badly divided the US from many European states due to their opposition to the 2003 US-led war in Iraq.

Unsurprisingly, given their history and mutual identity conceptions, American and Iranian public pronouncements on the nature of Iran's nuclear program were radically opposed. In April 2003, at the NPT PrepCom Review Conference, US Ambassador, John Wolf characterized Iran's nuclear program as, "the most fundamental challenge ever faced

³⁰² The bracketing of such terms is intended to highlight how few material facts really speak for themselves, but rather that the popular meaning is itself socially constructed for often there is no one 'correct' understanding.

³⁰³ Neumann and Welsh, "The Other in European Self-Definition, 346-348.

by the NPT,” contesting Iran’s “professions of transparency and peaceful intent,” and charging that, “Iran has been conducting an alarming, clandestine program to acquire sensitive nuclear capabilities that we believe make sense only as part of a nuclear weapons program.” In making these comments Wolf took care to broaden the concern to involve all states, arguing, “This is not, a bilateral issue between Iran and the United States. This is an issue between Iran and the rest of the world. Every NPT party has a stake in seeing the veil of secrecy lifted on Iran’s nuclear program.”³⁰⁴

Iran’s response was clearly directed at the United States, both challenging its character and their depiction of Iran and its nuclear intentions. In a presentation unambiguously entitled, “Unlike Some Others, We Consider The Acquiring, Development And Use Of Nuclear Weapons Inhuman, Immoral, Illegal And Against Our Very Basic Principles,” Iranian Ambassador Ali Khosroo emphasized disarmament and alluded to the United States when drawing attention to the climate of “militarization,” “unilateralism,” and the “emergence of a new security doctrine that set rationale for possible use of nuclear weapons is among those developments.”³⁰⁵ While defending the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear activities, Khosroo took aim at the US:

Let me ask some concrete questions: How many nuclear weapon states other than the United States have prescribed the use of nuclear weapons in conventional conflicts and developed new types of nuclear weapons compatible with its combat scenarios? None. Which other nuclear weapon states have named non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT as the targets of their nuclear weapons? None.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ United States, Diplomatic Mission to Italy, “U.S. Urges Serious Consequences for Non-Proliferation Treaty Violators,” last modified April 23, 2003, http://www.usembassy.it/viewer/article.asp?article=/file2003_04/alia/A3042807.htm.

³⁰⁵ Islamic Republic of Iran, “Statement by H. E. Mr. G. Ali Khoshroo Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” last modified May 9, 2003, <http://missions.itu.int/~missiran/NPT2003.htm>.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

Such an interchange is fairly representative of US-Iranian nuclear interactions in recent years. Common aspects of such exchanges would include competing interpretations of what any new revelations of Iran's nuclear activities indicated, depictions of the nature of the Other, which undermines the credibility of their claims, and by extension a defense/championing of the character of the Self and the bolstering of one's own claims, and a defence of one's own actions. Often, references to specific charges given by the Other were absent, likely an attempt to play down the importance of such claims and shift the focus of the discourse. Examination of various statements given by both states in regards to Iran's nuclear program over the next two years, drawing on the principles of frame and predicate analysis detailed earlier, will serve to highlight the way both states have competed with one another in the realm of discourse.

The central charge that the US leveled at Iran was that their clandestine nuclear program was designed to produce nuclear weapons. Coupled with this charge are the associated claims that Iran is lying (they cannot be trusted), and accordingly that they are only coming clean now because they were caught red-handed. Many of the statements by US officials repeated these claims, in what was seemingly a push to have Iran quickly referred to the UN Security Council. In June 2003, in an overt reference to Iran, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld warned of the threat from, "the nexus of terror and weapons of mass destruction." Condoleezza Rice too declared, "we must as an international community be resolved to say to the Iranians that the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, is not acceptable." Lastly, President Bush warned, "Iran would be dangerous if they have a nuclear weapon," seeking support for his position by stating, "The

international community must come together to make it very clear to Iran that we will not tolerate the construction of a nuclear weapon.”³⁰⁷ The implication was that Iran was actively seeking a nuclear weapon, a conclusion that appears indeterminate, and hence premature, at this point, though it is also plausible that the US possessed intelligence at this time that lay outside of the public realm that implied this was really the case.

Later, in 2003, after the IAEA board had voted to give Iran until October 31 to answer the IAEA’s questions and provide unrestricted access to all nuclear sites, US officials took the opportunity to provide commentary on what Iran was up too. Regarding Iran’s reluctance to cooperate with the IAEA following the vote against them, Energy Secretary, Spencer Adams, said, “This is pretty simple. I mean, either you’re pursuing a program that is a peaceful-use program, and you’ve got nothing to hide, or you’re not.”³⁰⁸ John Bolton, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, declared,

The United States believes that Iran’s covert and costly effort to acquire sensitive nuclear capabilities make sense only as part of a nuclear weapons program. Iran is trying to legitimize as “peaceful and transparent” its pursuit of nuclear fuel cycle capabilities that would give it the ability to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons.³⁰⁹

Secretary of State Colin Powell stated, “We’re looking for Iran to stop supporting terrorist activity, and to get rid of its weapons of mass destruction program, and to join the civilized world,”³¹⁰ making it very clear how the US thought that Iran should be viewed. Lastly, while laying out the Bush administration’s Iran policy, Deputy Secretary of State, Richard

³⁰⁷ United States, Department of Defense, “The Marshall Center 10th Anniversary,” last modified June 11, 2003. <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=451>.

³⁰⁸ “Iran Backpedals, Promises Continuing IAEA Cooperation,” *Global Security Newswire*, last modified September 15, 2003, http://www.nti.org/d_newswire/issues/2003/9/15/4p.html.

³⁰⁹ United States, Department of State, “The New World after Iraq: The Continuing Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction,” last modified October 30, 2003, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/t/us/rm/25752.htm>.

³¹⁰ United States, Department of State, “Interview with Senior Editors Roundtable,” last modified October 23, 2003, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/25618.htm>.

Armitage, spoke on the one hand of how “we make no conclusions about the nature of Iranian intent,” but then contradicted that claim when referring to “Iran’s clandestine nuclear weapons program,”³¹¹ clearly an assessment of intent.

Iran, for their part, denied such claims and countered with charges that questioned and undermined the credibility of the United States. Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, reiterated how “Weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran’s defensive strategy,”³¹² and Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Ali Khoshroo, addressed 2003 NPT PrepCom Committee, noting how “Due to the reluctance of some nuclear weapon states, the disarmament objectives of the NPT have not materialized in spite of their clear obligations and the continuous calls of the international community.”³¹³ Iran’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Javad Zarif, spoke of Washington’s “intention to deprive Iran [of their nuclear rights],”³¹⁴ and Iran’s Ambassador to the IAEA, Ali Salehi, angrily denounced the commentary of the US regarding Iran’s nuclear intentions, stating,

Fine! Every State can draw up and perceive threats, real or imaginary, as they wish... They may also build up hoopla around such perceptions and elevate them the level of highest international priority, as they can... They can spin the facts, deceive and lie, as they want... They are even able to wield massive power to crush the conceived culprit, as they do. But what then? There is no surprise, of course, to hear such roar from the United States. At present, nothing pervades their appetite for vengeance short of confrontation and war. ...If cooperation has been slow, at times, ...if there have been few incidences of discrepancies, ...if there have been hesitations to adhere to the Protocol, ...or to embrace confidence building initiatives, it

³¹¹ *Briefing on Iran: Security Threats & U.S. Policy*, Before the Comm. on Foreign Relations, 108th Cong. (2003) (statement of Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State).

³¹² Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Dr. Kharrazi’s Speech in Columbia University,” last modified September 29, 2003, <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehran/en/NewsAndHappenings/foreignMinister> (web page no longer accessible).

³¹³ The Islamic Republic of Iran, “Statement by H. E. Mr. G. Ali Khoshroo.”

³¹⁴ Felicity Barringer, “Iranian Envoy Blames U.S. For Nation’s Reticence on Nuclear Plans,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/12/world/iranian-envoy-blames-us-for-nation-s-reticence-on-nuclear-plans.html>.

is all out of one and only one concern. The U.S. intention behind this saga is nothing but to make this deprivation final and eternal.³¹⁵

He concluded by reasserting, “Iran, in this midst, has stressed sternly and insistently that it has no intention whatsoever to pursue nuclear weapons, that it only yearns for peaceful capability, that it is ready and prepared to fulfill all its obligations under the Safeguards.”³¹⁶ Khamenei too weighed in, speaking with regards to the US and Israel, and showing an awareness of the power of the word stating, “They have concocted a slogan and they are chanting it in the world, saying that Iran is trying to acquire nuclear weapons. They have started a commotion and sensitized public opinion and many governments as well.”³¹⁷

While attempts have been made during this analysis to concentrate on prominent statements at key international gatherings, unsurprisingly there are no shortage of such claims and counter-claims to draw upon, which demonstrates how pervasive the conflict over representation is. The particular issue under contestation during the 2003/2004 period was what to make of the increasing number of IAEA reports indicating that Iran had been less than forthcoming during its declarations of its nuclear activities. Clearly there was more going on beyond what Iran had stated and such questionable discoveries as the presence of highly enriched uranium and evidence of polonium-210 and plutonium experimentation provided a material reality in need of interpretation. For the US this was seemingly unequivocal proof that Iran was indeed seeking a bomb, but there is nothing in this evidence per se to definitely suggest that Iran was looking to construct a nuclear

³¹⁵ International Atomic Energy Agency, INFCIRC/657, “Communication Dated 12 September 2005 from the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Agency,” May 15, 2003, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/2005/infcirc657.pdf>.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ “Ayatollah Al-Udhma Khamenei: We Are Armed with the Weapon of the People’s Will and Faith,” last modified November 2, 2003, http://www.khamenei.de/speeches/speech2003_3.htm#02112003.

device, especially given the ambiguity inherent in nuclear technology. Indeed, it would be hard to conclude as much so unreservedly given the ambiguity inherent in nuclear technology. Rather, the US bolstered its arguments by attempting to convince others of what kind of actor Iran was, invoking identity conceptions when necessary to do so (and simultaneously strengthening and perpetuating existing conceptions).

This is not to suggest that the US did not have additional information supporting its conclusion. The nature of intelligence is that states often base their assessments upon knowledge that has yet to be revealed publicly. The Khan revelations in late 2003/early 2004 would be one example where the US likely knew of undeclared Iranian activities supporting their accusations. Purported Iranian nuclear weapon designs and the laptop acquired by the US are further examples of intelligence that may have strengthened the Bush Administration's belief that Iran was caught trying to secretly acquire the bomb. In these cases though, based on the chronology detailed in secondary sources, it is unlikely that the US would have been in possession of it by early 2003 when many of the strong claims regarding Iran's nuclear ambitions were already being made.³¹⁸

Iran's line of reasoning as to why these discrepancies existed was twofold: on the one hand they argued that they were forced to carry out nuclear transactions discretely via back-channels due to the imposition of 'illegal' US sanctions;³¹⁹ on the other hand, they claimed they were holding back because of concern over how Iran would be punished for

³¹⁸ Dafna Linzer, "Nuclear Disclosures on Iran Unverified," *The Washington Post*, November 14, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A61079-2004Nov18.html>; William J. Broad and David E. Sanger, "Relying on Computer, U.S. Seeks to Prove Iran's Nuclear Aims," *The New York Times*, November 13, 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/13/international/middleeast/13nukes.html>.

³¹⁹ The Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Iran Profile: Nuclear Chronology – 2003," last modified August, 2005, http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iran/Nuclear/chronology_2003.html - see reference to IRNA report "Rowhani: Iran has been forerunner in signing disarmament treaties," October 22, 2003.

any past indiscretions.³²⁰ It did not help matters that Iran was taking a minimalist cooperation interpretation, steadfastly clinging to their inalienable rights while doing as little as they believed necessary to uphold their NPT commitments, rather than providing better assurances of their intentions. But ultimately, as the constructivist position holds, facts do not speak for themselves, and thus they are left open to interpretation and contestation. It could well have been (and still could be) that Iran was indeed trying to secretly build a nuclear device and they got caught. At this point though, aside from certain issues that were raised later such as alleged weaponization testing, Iran may well have just been taking the steps necessary to have a nuclear option, remaining within the NPT while doing so.

That the US publicly chose to see these facts in the manner they did stems in a large part from their identity conceptions of the Iranian regime (and indeed their interests, which are both informed by, yet also inform, identity conceptions of Iran) as they appeared to have reached this conclusion before the full extent of Iran's transgressions came to light. While Iranian Spokesman Abdullah Ramezanzadeh complained, "They [the US] have leveled too many false accusations against us,"³²¹ ultimately it would be the ability of each party to steer the discourse in a particular direction that would win support and lead to the dominant interpretation of Iran's intentions. Saturating the discourse with interpretations

³²⁰ David E. Sanger, "Iran Seeks U.N. Assurance on Nuclear Arms Issue," *The New York Times*, November 21, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/21/world/iran-seeks-un-assurance-on-nuclear-arms-issue.html>.

³²¹ Nazila Fathi, "Iran Demands Concessions from U.S. In Return for Cooperation," *The New York Times*, October 30, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/30/international/middleeast/30IRAN.html>; Perkovich also made this point stating, "An underappreciated factor in Tehran's unwillingness or inability to answer the IAEA's questions is that Iranian leaders must wonder what would happen if they did 'come clean. ...' 'Would the United States and other major powers use such admissions to justify further penalties, whether sanctions or military strikes?' " George Perkovich, "Iran Says 'No'—Now What?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 2008, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/pb63_perkovich_iran_final.pdf.

and accusations would drown out dissenting views and persuade others to accept the ‘reality’ of each state’s argument. Iran were certainly aware of the power of discourse, as evidenced by the strategy laid out in February 2005 by a chief nuclear negotiator, Hossein Mousavian:

Correct world public opinion, because the Americans had portrayed Iran’s nuclear activities as a monster to the world. The polls that were taken worldwide ...showed that about 66 to 67 percent of the people around the world thought Iran’s nuclear activities were a serious threat to international peace. Well, with this kind of public opinion, one cannot pursue nuclear activities peacefully.³²²

As has already been noted when studying discourse attention must also be given to the actions of states, which can themselves be intended as signals or statements to others. US State Department Deputy Spokesman, Joseph Ereli, indicated as much when responding to a question of whether he thought that Iran would remain in the NPT with the use of a familiar maxim, “Actions speak louder than words. Let’s see them take the actions that are called for.”³²³ These actions, statements in themselves, can serve to strengthen or undermine the messages in official statements, though often it is the attention drawn to a particular action through speech that determines its importance in the discourse.³²⁴ One such example is the contrast between ongoing US protestations that they are not seeking regime change in Iran, despite calls often to the contrary,³²⁵ and the State Department’s

³²² The Nuclear Threat Initiative, “Iran Profile: Nuclear Chronology – 2005,” last modified May, 2006, http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iran/Nuclear/chronology_2005.html.

³²³ United States, Department of State, “Daily Press Briefing,” last modified December 15, 2003, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2003/27225.htm>.

³²⁴ A comparison here would be with the notion of ‘Speech Acts’ where words are seen as ‘doing something’ during speech, and taken together words and actions can be seen as two sides of the same coin. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1975).

³²⁵ Steven R. Weisman, “U.S. Takes Softer Tone on Iran, Once in the ‘Axis of Evil’,” *The New York Times*, October 29, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/29/international/middleeast/29DIPL.html>; Julian Coman and Damian McElroy, “US Considers Helping Terror Group to Stop Iran’s Nuclear Programme,” *The*

request for an additional \$75 million with which to “actively confront the aggressive policies of this Iranian regime and at the same time...work to support the aspirations of the Iranian people for freedom in their own country.”³²⁶

Iran’s leaders are also very aware of the messages that actions send. Regarding meeting their American counterparts, Iranian Parliamentary Speaker, Ali Larijani, in 2009 noted how Iran had yet to receive “any concrete offer” and decried that “declarations in interviews or in speeches” were insufficient.³²⁷ Both Iran and the United States have also often used displays of force or the threat of force to send messages intimating the possible implications ahead of key moments in the unfolding of Iran’s nuclear program.³²⁸ For example, on June 2, 2003, Iran detained four US soldiers and one civilian just days ahead of the first IAEA report on its recent nuclear activities. Again, on March 23, 2007, fifteen British soldiers were captured by Iran a day before the UN Security Council met to pass Resolution 1747.³²⁹ The US itself then responded to this incident with a show of force by conducting joint military exercises in the Persian Gulf.³³⁰ Iran has also often used military posturing to make a statement, for example, responding to American-led military exercises in the Gulf on October 30, 2006, just two days later with missile tests and maneuvers of

Telegraph, June 1, 2003, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/1431682/US-considers-helping-terror-group-to-stop-Irans-nuclear-programme.html>.

³²⁶ Quoted in Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*: 220.

³²⁷ Berlin Associated Free Press, “Iran Awaits ‘Concrete Offer’ from US: Speaker,” *Spacewar*. last modified February 8, 2009, <http://www.spacewar.com/2006/090208174544.y6yeeucv.html>.

³²⁸ For a comprehensive review of the kinds of messages Iranian military exercises are intended to send see BBC Monitoring Middle East. “Iran Press: Editorial Outlines Military, Diplomatic Message of Recent Exercises.” *Kayhan*, April 15, 2006. Factiva, (BBCMEP0020060415e24f0012x). This article aims to “clarify precisely the messages of the exercises” listing them as: 1) a conflict with Iran would come at a high price; 2) Iran’s real strength is greater than their capabilities on show; 3) Iran is capable of surprise; 4) that Iran enjoys the upper hand; and 5) Iran has capabilities to hurt Western interests.

³²⁹ Schmitt, “After the War: Detentions;” Robert Tait, “Kidnappings Came Day before UN Resolution,” *The Guardian*, March 26, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/mar/26/iran.roberttait>.

³³⁰ Michael R. Gordon, “U.S. Opens Naval Exercise in Persian Gulf,” *The New York Times*, March 28, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/28/washington/28military.html>.

their own.³³¹ It was reported that US Deputy National Intelligence Director Thomas Finger, “believes the message of the test was “I have the capacity to inflict pain.””³³²

Linked to these various actions is the issue of timing, of how a particular message is designed to warn, challenge, or subvert the actions of the Other at important junctures. Recent US-Iranian history is infused with such interactions that themselves form an important part of the discourse. As noted earlier in this chapter though, care must be taken not to put too much emphasis on the timing of any one incident given that intention and causality are hard to demonstrate, and that chance may also play a role in these apparent correlations. Nevertheless, such timely happenings do appear to occur on a regular basis. In addition to those already mentioned, here are some prominent examples:

- July 12, 2006, the date of President Bush’s self-imposed deadline for Iran to respond to the P5+1 offer, coincided with Hezbollah’s attack and kidnapping of Israeli soldiers, precipitating the Lebanon War. Hezbollah have long been associated with Iran and such an attack may have been a reminder of the trouble Iran could cause through its proxies.
- A series of Iranian actions and statements directly preceded important US diplomatic initiatives: On January 6, 2008, an altercation occurred between the US and Iranian navies, just days before George Bush visited Israel, declaring Iran to be “a threat to world peace.”³³³ On March 2, 2008, just a day before the UN Security Council convened to issue Resolution 1803 against Iran, President Ahmadinejad became the first Iranian president to visit Iraq since the Iran-Iraq War, openly flaunting himself in public and criticizing US policies and its presence in Iraq;³³⁴ On June 11, 2008, coinciding with President Bush’s trip to Europe in search of support for increased sanctions against Iran, President Ahmadinejad returned to Iraq and openly mocked Bush saying he “could not damage even one centimeter of the Iranian territory, the era

³³¹ Fattah, “U.S.-Led Exercise in Persian Gulf Sets Sights on Deadliest Weapons;” Nazila Fathi, “Iran Revolutionary Guards Hold War Games after U.S. Exercise,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/03/world/middleeast/03iran.html>.

³³² CNN, “Gates: Iran’s Test Shows Missile Defense Needed in Europe,” last modified July 9, 2008, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/07/09/us.iran/index.html>.

³³³ United States, White House, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” last modified September 20, 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

³³⁴ Islamic Republic of Iran, Presidency, News Service, “Ahmadinejad Urges Foreign Troops Pullout from Region,” last modified February 17, 2010, <http://www.president.ir/en/print.php?ArtID=8697>.

of George Bush has ended” before adding “The nation will wipe the satanic smile off its face.”³³⁵

- Iranian President Ahmadinejad wrote a letter to Bush on May 8, 2006, just one day before the P5+1 met to propose a resolution to put a new offer to Iran. Reaching out to President Bush may have been an attempt to accentuate divisions within the P5+1. Additionally the writing of the letter may have been designed to reach out for support in the Muslim world given the nature of its content, a focus on injustice, and its emulation of the practice of Prophet Mohammad of sending letters.
- On February 26, 2006, the US displayed weaponry captured in Iraq that it claimed Iran was supply to insurgents, just one day before an IAEA report announced that it was unable to confirm that no military diversion had taken place from uranium enrichment in Iran’s nuclear program. Such a revelation speaks to the character and the trustworthiness of the Iranian regime.
- On Aug 20, 2007 Iran released US-Iranian citizen Haleh Esfandiari from more than 110 days in detention immediately prior to an IAEA report assessing Iran’s cooperation with the Iran-IAEA work plan.
- On May 29, 2007, one day after the first high-level meeting between US-Iranian officials in decades, Iran charged three US-Iranian citizens with spying, possibly a reminder of how Iran is able to harm American interests.

There are a number of difficulties in assessing the impact of these signals. Aside from establishing intent and causality, there is also the problem of multiple audiences, where the messages may be aimed at a variety of actors. Indeed, along with attempting to influence the significant Other and to subvert the message of this Other, such messages may also be attempts at persuading other international actors (either by coercion or persuasion), or may be aimed at a domestic audience as part of political posturing.

Lastly, one important question to consider with regards to US-Iranian interactions is whether the two states actually communicate or merely talk past each other, addressing their message to a wider audience.³³⁶ Much has been made of the absence of direct talks between the two states and as such they conduct much of their business with each other in

³³⁵ Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Enemy Has Resorted to ‘Childish Plots’: President,” last modified June 11, 2008,

<http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehran/en/NewsAndHappenings/president> (web page no longer accessible).

³³⁶ See Dina A. Zinnes, “Three Puzzles in Search of a Researcher: Presidential Address,” *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (Sep. 1980): 315-42.

the public realm.³³⁷ As Beeman argues, because Iran and the US “began talking with each other, using different implicit models of how international communication should take place. ...both the United States and Iran have addressed each other for years with the specific intention of addressing someone else.”³³⁸ What these examples demonstrate, however, is that although it may be indeterminate if they are talking to one another, it is clear that they are at least listening to each other’s messages; indeed they must do so in order to respond with an alternative representation of a given occurrence or situation. But it is highly likely that the response would often be aimed at other states as part of the ongoing US-Iranian competition for acceptance of their representation of the given reality for acceptance is the final arbitrator of the dominant social understanding of such events.

As Javad Zarif, former Iranian Permanent Representative to the UN, has stated, in fact they do more than merely listen: “I follow every single statement that an American leader makes because I consider them in our national security environment.”³³⁹ It is safe to assume that the US too pays very close attention to official Iranian discourse. Though they may not always respond directly to the Iranians, they do often appear to challenge specific Iranian claims, attempting instead to steer the discourse in their preferred manner. A further complication in assessing how the discourse is constructed is that silence also makes a statement and may be a deliberate strategy to minimize the impact of the Other’s message. Alternatively the emphasizing of different parts of the message could serve to alter the focus of the discourse. Finally, drawing attention to divisions within the other state and

³³⁷ The specific recommendation of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group was to “actively engage Iran and Syria in its diplomatic dialogue, without preconditions.” Iraq Study Group, “The Way Forward - a New Approach,” December 6, 2006, http://media.usip.org/reports/iraq_study_group_report.pdf.

³³⁸ Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs. The “Mad Mullahs*, 37-38.

³³⁹ Zarif quoted in Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 145.

highlighting contradictions and inconsistencies in the communications of the Other may also undermine the impact of their message, helping to strengthen one's own interpretation of 'reality'. In short, there are many aspects of the nuclear discourse involved in the contest over how Iran's actions should be interpreted that attention must be paid to. These insights will now be put into practice by looking closely at several defining moments during the Ahmadinejad-Bush era.

Nuclear Discourse in the Ahmadinejad-Bush Era

This section will deepen the analysis by focusing on the discourse surrounding some specific incidents during Ahmadinejad-Bush era to highlight the juxtaposition in representation (the competition involved to depict reality) and show how such responses and counter-responses link to the constructivist notion of intersubjectivity. The analysis will focus on the discourse surrounding two key moments: first, the vote by the IAEA Board of Governors on September 24, 2005, to find Iran in noncompliance of the NPT (and the subsequent forwarding by the Board on February 4, 2006 of the Iran file to the UN Security Council); second, the decision on July 31, 2006, by the UN Security Council to take up the Iranian nuclear issue and pass its first resolution condemning Iran for its ongoing enrichment activities and allowing for the possibility of invoking "appropriate measures" under Article 41 of the UN Charter. This resolution required Iran to heed a Security Council request to suspend all enrichment activities by August 31, 2006, paving the way to the imposition of sanctions in late December 2006.³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰ It is not mandatory for the Security Council to take up a file once it has been referred by the IAEA. See Security Council Report, "February 2006: Iran," last modified February, 2006, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/pp.aspx?c=glKWLeMTIsG&b=1387817>.

Accompanying these decisions were a series of developments, the meaning of which were open to contestation, which played a huge role in influencing the response to Iran. Therefore, analysis will center on these: the Iranian move to revoke their voluntary cessation of enrichment and break the IAEA seals, first at the Esfahan reprocessing facilities on August 8, 2005, and subsequently at Natanz on January 10, 2006, decisions that led to the first successful enrichment of uranium for Iran and the IAEA's noncompliance determination and Security Council referral; In February-July 2006, the US move to have the Security Council demand that Iran suspend enrichment activities and Iranian attempts to counter this push. Lastly, where appropriate, the introduction, interpretation, and timing of new information regarding Iran's nuclear activities will also be reviewed, such as the uranium hemisphere documents and the so-called 'Iranian laptop' and Green Salt Project. Throughout, attention will be given to how these processes invoke identity and the social construction of threat.

The events of August and September 2005 were perhaps a pivotal moment in the US response to Iran's nuclear program. The breakdown of Iran's negotiations with the EU3 and subsequent resumption of uranium conversion activities at Esfahan precipitated the IAEA's vote of non-compliance, eventually leading to UN Security Council referral and sanctions. Key to these developments was how the breakdown of talks was represented, as these representations established a trend that later depictions would build upon. Did Iran have every right to undertake these actions, or was such a move a clear provocation that showed obvious contempt for the concerns of others, and perhaps, of a latent intent? Comparison of the competing characterizations by Iran and the US of this development

over the course of late 2005 and early 2006 can demonstrate how the interpretation of such an action is far from neutral and how discourse was furiously contested.

Iran's agreed suspension in the 2004 Paris Agreement was described by the IAEA Board in a resolution drafted by the EU as, "a voluntary, non-legally-binding, confidence building measure."³⁴¹ On this basis Iran might seem well within its rights to restart its uranium fuel conversion activities at a time of its choosing, though whether this action was the responsible thing to do given that confidence had yet to be fully established is debatable. After receiving the EU3's hastily prepared August 5 incentives package Iran immediately declared it unacceptable and carried through on its August 2 notice to remove the IAEA's seals at Esfahan. An EU diplomat all but confirmed that there was very little for Iran in the package, describing it as, "a lot of gift wrapping around an empty box."³⁴² Analyst Paul Ingram also characterized the offer as "vague on incentives and heavy on demands" and noted that the absence of concrete offers highlights how "the demands upon Iran in contrast are specific and uncompromising."³⁴³

Iranian officials reacted negatively to the offer. President Ahmadinejad said, "What the Europeans have forwarded to us does not look like a proposal at all. It is an insult to the Iranian nation. They have talked in a way as if the Iranian nation was suffering from backwardness and the time was 100 years ago and our country was their colony."³⁴⁴ Gholamreza Aqazadeh, head of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization, insisted that "the

³⁴¹ IAEA, GOV/2004/83, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," November 15, 2004, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-83.pdf>.

³⁴² Paul Ingram, "Preliminary Analysis of E3/EU Proposal to Iran," In *BASIC Notes: Occasional Papers on International Security Policy*, British American Security Information Council, 2005, <http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/PUB110805.pdf>.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Iran Watch, "EU Proposal on Nuclear Program Tantamount to Insult – Ahmadinejad," last modified August 9, 2005, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/Iran/iran-irna-ahmadinejadannan-080905.htm>.

proposal only served the interest of the West which had “selfishly” drafted the document,” calling the offer “humiliating,” “a political maneuver,” and “unreasonable.”³⁴⁵ Iran’s statement to the IAEA, which invoked the sixty-year anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings presumably to emphasize the US’s own nuclear track record, noted how, “The E3/EU has yet to honour its recognition, in the Paris Agreement of November 2004, of Iran’s rights under the NPT exercised in conformity with its obligations under the treaty, without discrimination.”³⁴⁶ Lastly, as if to try and underscore its peaceful intentions, Khamenei issued a fatwa that “the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that Iran shall never acquire these weapons.”³⁴⁷

On January 14, 2006, shortly after Iran had broken the IAEA seals at Natanz, President Ahmadinejad again criticized the EU3’s position stating, “We say: “fine, it was voluntarily and we no longer want to suspend it.” They say: “no, the condition for our negotiations with you is to suspend this forever.””³⁴⁸ Of course it could also be that Iran never had any intention to accept the offer, regardless of what the Europeans promised, and that the EU3 were seen to be giving very little merely provided the opportunity to pursue their desired course of breaking suspension. According to Akbar Ganji, one of Iran’s leading dissidents, former nuclear negotiator Hassan Rowhani, confirmed as much when he was reported to have said,

It is true that we accepted suspension, but not in order to close things down,

³⁴⁵ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Agency Explains Nuclear Position,” *Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, August 10, 2005, Factiva (BBCMEP0020050810e18a0012y).

³⁴⁶ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iranian Statement at IAEA Session – “Full Text”,” *IRNA*, August 10, 2005, Factiva, (BBCMEP0020050810e18a0025t).

³⁴⁷ “Leader’s Fatwa Forbids Nukes,” last modified August 10, 2005, <http://www.khamenei.de/news/news2005/aug2005.htm>.

³⁴⁸ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iran: Full Text of President Ahmadinezhad’s Press Conference,” *Islamic Republic of Iran News Network*, January 15, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060115e21f002e5).

...during the suspension, we built the centrifuges, we built the Arak plant.... Whatever was incomplete, we completed under the shadow of suspension. The West was demanding a suspension so that we would close things down, but we suspended things in order to complete the technology. ...I said at several meetings with the officials in charge of the technical side, 'Whenever you are ready for enrichment, let us know and we will break the suspension.'³⁴⁹

The Americans immediately moved to depict Iran's response negatively, utilizing representations of Iran's intent and character in doing so. President Bush, seemingly stretching the provisions of the NPT by invoking the subjective notion of 'comfort,' stated that Iran's civilian nuclear program "makes sense only so long as the plant is under strong international inspection regimes and the uranium used to run the power plant is provided by a country with whom we're comfortable."³⁵⁰ The US statement to the IAEA Board described how Iran "rejected the offer in the harshest of terms."³⁵¹ Later, US officials aimed rhetorically to place the blame squarely on Iran by the referring to Iran's "unilateral rupture of the Paris Agreement,"³⁵² of how they "unilaterally walked away from the talks,"³⁵³ and how "they broke a moratorium on enrichment and reprocessing activities at their major plant in Iran. ... and they essentially said to the world, We're not listening. We have no intention of going with the just demands of the world. And so, now, the world is

³⁴⁹ Akbar Ganji, "The Latter-Day Sultan: Power and Politics in Iran," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2008): 45-65.

³⁵⁰ United States, White House, "President Meets with Economic Team," last modified August 5, 2005, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/08/20050809-3.html>.

³⁵¹ United States, Mission to the International Organizations in Vienna, "IAEA Board of Governors Meeting, August 2005," last modified August 9, 2005, http://vienna.usmission.gov/_unvie/speeches_and_related_documents/IAEA-Meetings-US-Statements/519.php (web page no longer accessible).

³⁵² United States, Department of State, "Briefing on Ongoing Diplomatic Activities at the UN and Other Current U.S. Foreign Policy Issues," last modified September 15, 2005. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/us/rm/2005/53335.htm>.

³⁵³ United States, Department of State, "Remarks at the 60th United Nations General Assembly," last modified September 15, 2005, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/53374.htm>.

reacting.”³⁵⁴

In essence, what is at stake here are two contrasting red lines: for the Iranian’s insistence on their right to be able to enrich and to be able to possess the whole fuel cycle;³⁵⁵ by contrast, the EU3 (and the US) insisted that Iran suspend their enrichment, a demand that under the Bush administration would eventually morph into permanent cessation of enrichment on Iranian soil. From a constructive perspective, what is important to note though is that when presenting these positions, the arguments of each side were supplemented by characterizations of the Other, both in nature and intent (and thus of possible threat). It is not by chance that Iran invoked the American use of nuclear weapons when defending itself against American accusations at the IAEA Board meeting, or that the US suggested that Iran will pursue a nuclear weapons capability regardless of the cost to its citizens. Such identity conceptions seek to persuade others of the type of state they are dealing with, and whether they can be trusted.

Additionally, as noted earlier, the release of certain pieces of information often appears carefully calibrated to coincide with crucial moments in the contest. The release of such information at key times, with a mixed record of accuracy,³⁵⁶ seems to be an important device in undermining the claims and character of actors, also enabling further commentary on the nature and intentions. One such revelation, made when states were considering whether to refer Iran to the Security Council, was that Iran possessed a document detailing

³⁵⁴ United States, Department of State, “Interview on CBS Evening News with John Roberts,” last modified January 12, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/59105.htm>.

³⁵⁵ For where Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs declares to the IAEA Board that Iran “Regards having full nuclear fuel cycle as its inalienable right” see Iran Watch, “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Resolution of the IAEA Adopted by a Group of Members of the Board of Governors,” last modified September 28, 2005. <http://www.iranwatch.org/IAEAgovdocs/iran-mfa-statement-iaearesolution-092705.htm>.

³⁵⁶ Broad and Sanger, “Relying on Computer, U.S. Seeks to Prove Iran’s Nuclear Aims.”

procedures for the casting of uranium metal into hemispheres. The existence of this document was first reported in the IAEA's January 31, 2006, update report and the US were quick to comment on how "the IAEA recently discovered documents that indicate that Iran received information on casting and machining hemispheres of enriched uranium. We know of no application for such hemispheres other than nuclear weapons."³⁵⁷ Iran countered the following day claiming, "If any of you present here are able to manufacture a bomb with the use of one-and-a-half pages [of instructions], I'll build a gold statue out of him or her. ... Loads of this kind of information is available on the internet. Please pay attention to the fact that they said the same things even before the one-and-a-half page document existed."³⁵⁸ As the IAEA Board convened to assess the Iran file, US Assistant Secretary for International Security and Nonproliferation, Stephen Rademaker, depicted the document as "one particularly damning piece of evidence recently revealed by the IAEA."³⁵⁹ Interestingly, the US had been referring to "recently discovered documents"³⁶⁰ by the IAEA for several weeks prior to the IAEA report, suggesting they had foreknowledge of its existence. As reported in the media the document, which was given to Iran by the Khan network in the early 1990s, was only revealed to the IAEA after the US presented evidence implying that Iran was working on a nuclear weapon. This episode suggests how the introduction of material evidence can be introduced in order to enable the

³⁵⁷ United States, Department of State, "Countering the Iranian Nuclear Threat," last modified February 1, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/t/us/rm/60254.htm>.

³⁵⁸ BBC Monitoring Middle East, "Iran: Nuclear Negotiator's Press Conference in Tehran," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Network*, February 2, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060202e2220053d).

³⁵⁹ Iran Watch, "Iran's Challenge to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," last modified February 2, 2006, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/US/DOS/us-dos-rademaker-aei-020206.pdf>.

³⁶⁰ United States, Department of State, "Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD): Effective Multilateralism," last modified January 20, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/t/us/rm/60218.htm>.

steering of discourse towards a given goal.³⁶¹

Further releases around this time include a leaked 2005 intelligence report purporting to show that Iran had been attempting to develop a nuclear weapon, presumably to influence a move to take Iran to the Security Council,³⁶² and reports claiming that the CIA were involved in giving Iran flawed bomb designs.³⁶³ Lastly there was the sharing of information taken from the infamous laptop regarding the Green Salt Project and high explosive testing, of which no mention was made by the IAEA in its September 2005 report. These issues were then outlined in detail in the subsequent report on January 31, 2006, just days before the IAEA Board met and referred Iran to the Security Council.³⁶⁴ The crucial timing of the introduction of these revelations does seem to be carefully considered by the actors involved and should be viewed as part of the dialogue, attempting to influence accompanying discourse.

Intimately linked to the release of such information into the public record was the shift in the language used in US and Iranian discourse. Characterizations of Iran's intent provide an excellent example of this process. As IAEA Deputy Director General Olli Heinonen has stated, "These [IAEA] reports don't have assessments. They don't measure intentions. They just provide facts on how the state might or might not be in compliance

³⁶¹ "Iran Papers Reveal 'Uranium Warhead Instructions'," *The Guardian*, January 31, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/jan/31/iran.politics>.

³⁶² Ian Cobain and Ian Traynor, "Secret Services Say Iran Is Trying to Assemble a Nuclear Missile," *The Guardian*, January 4, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/jan/04/iran.armstrade1>.

³⁶³ James Risen, "George Bush Insists That Iran Must Not Be Allowed to Develop Nuclear Weapons. So Why, Six Years Ago, Did the CIA Give the Iranians Blueprints to Build a Bomb?" *The Guardian*, January 5, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2006/jan/05/energy.g2>.

³⁶⁴ IAEA, "Developments in the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Agency Verification of Iran's Suspension of Enrichment-Related and Reprocessing Activities: Update Brief by the Deputy Director General for Safeguards," last modified January 31, 2006, <http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/ddgs/2006/heinonen31012006.pdf>; Broad and Sanger, "Relying on Computer."

with its safeguards agreements.”³⁶⁵ Thus, it falls to the states to put the meaning of these material facts into motion to produce social facts. In late 2005 the Bush administration fell short of openly declaring that Iran was trying to construct a nuclear weapon, a more nuanced position compared to openly accusing Iran of seeking nuclear weapons at the beginning of the decade and even earlier that year. The US statement to the IAEA Board on August 8, 2005, typified this approach: “We can only conclude that the Iranian leadership is determined...to develop a nuclear weapons capability.”³⁶⁶ President Bush, speaking at the same time pointedly stopped short of accusing the Iranians of trying to acquire a weapon, stating, “we’ve condemned strongly Iranians’ attempt [*sic*] to develop any kind of program that would allow them to enrich uranium to develop a weapon.”³⁶⁷

In early January though, during while the US sought to persuade others to join with the EU and report Iran to the Security Council, there was a notable shift in the terminology used. Undoubtedly, some US statesmen had never shied away from openly declaring that Iran wanted a nuclear weapon, with Ambassador John Bolton bluntly asserting, “the Iranian pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile delivery systems threatens their region and threatens the world as a whole,”³⁶⁸ and Vice President Dick Cheney stated, “now they’re obviously in the business of trying to develop their own nuclear weapons.”³⁶⁹ Others only began to shift to this position during January 2006. On January 18 US Under Secretary of

³⁶⁵ Arms Control Association, “The Status of Iran’s Nuclear and Missile Programs,” last modified November 22, 2010, <http://www.armscontrol.org/print/4536>.

³⁶⁶ United States, Mission to the International Organizations in Vienna, “IAEA Board of Governors Meeting, August 2005.”

³⁶⁷ United States, White House, “President Meets with Economic Team.”

³⁶⁸ United States, Mission to the United Nations, “Remarks by Ambassador John R. Bolton, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on Afghanistan and Iran, at the Security Council Stakeout, January 17, 2005 [*sic*],” last modified January 17, 2006, http://www.un.int/usa/press_releases/20060117_006.html.

³⁶⁹ United States, White House, “Interview of the Vice President by Larry Kudlow, CNBC,” last modified June 19, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060119-8.html>.

State for Arms Control and International Security Bob Joseph stated, “I believe it is a nuclear weapons program and I believe that there are indications of weaponization which the IAEA is pursuing,”³⁷⁰ and on January 23, President Bush himself spoke of his concern “about a non-transparent society’s desire to develop a nuclear weapon.”³⁷¹ This trend continued on April 10, when in response to the announcement that Iran had succeeded enriching uranium to 3.5%, President Bush made reference to Iran’s “nuclear weapons ambitions,” speaking of “trying to convince the Iranians to give up its nuclear weapons program” and claiming that many states “have come to the conclusion that the Iranians should not have a nuclear weapon.”³⁷² In all, President Bush referenced Iran’s purported nuclear weapons ambitions seven times in this one speech, a notable shift in position and an excellent example of how repetition can reinforce a message. Later, on June 19, he continued this trend stating, “And by pursuing nuclear activities that mask its effort to acquire nuclear weapons, the regime is acting in defiance of its treaty obligations.”³⁷³

Perhaps the most notable shift was seen in the language of Condoleezza Rice, who until early May had steadfastly stuck to the phrase “nuclear weapons capabilities.” At the end of the month, coinciding with the US offer of willingness to negotiate with Iran if they suspended their enrichment activities, Rice too made a significant change in language use,

³⁷⁰ United States, Mission to International Organizations in Vienna, “Transcript of under Secretary Bob Joseph Television Interview with Mark Urban, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent for BBC Television News Program “Newsnight”,” last Modified January 18, 2006, <http://vienna.usmission.gov> (web page no longer accessible).

³⁷¹ United States, White House, “President Discusses Global War on Terror at Kansas State University,” last modified January 23, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060123-4.html>.

³⁷² United States, White House, “President Bush Discusses Global War on Terror,” last modified April 10, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060410-1.html>.

³⁷³ United States, White House, “President Delivers Commencement Address at the United States Merchant Marine Academy,” last modified June 19, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/06/20060619-1.html>.

referring to how “the negative choice is for the regime to maintain its current course, pursuing nuclear weapons in defiance of the international community and its international obligations.”³⁷⁴ In early August, Rice continued to reinforce this view, stating how Iran “has been active in trying to get a nuclear weapon undercover of civil nuclear power.”³⁷⁵ This shift in emphasis on the nature of Iranian intentions at key moments in the nuclear discourse is important to note. Such a change in vocabulary is not an innocent choice, especially when undertaken by more traditionally cautious actors such as Rice, and must be viewed as a conscious choice to try to shape the opinions of others.

For their part, Iran persistently denied such allegations, often immediately contesting a statement made by the United States, playing their role in shaping the intersubjective ‘reality’ of their nuclear program. For example, Khomeini’s August 8, 2005, fatwa against the use or acquisition of nuclear weapons coincided and contrasted with President Bush’s statement that the US did not want to see the Iranians obtain such a weapon.³⁷⁶ On January 5, 2006, President Ahmadinejad attacked Washington’s accusations noting, “They, however, point out that they suspect our intention. They say: We suspect your intention and we say that the Iranian nation and government intends to manufacture nuclear weapons; we therefore state that the Iranian nation should not possess this peaceful technology.”³⁷⁷ On January 18, 2006, Khamenei again questioned such accusations, stating, “We are not pursuing nuclear weapons, and Western countries are very well aware of this.

³⁷⁴ United States, Department of State, “Statement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,” last modified May 31, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/67088.htm>.

³⁷⁵ United States, Department of State, “Interview on CNN’s Larry King Live,” last modified August 3, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/69942.htm>.

³⁷⁶ “Leader’s Fatwa Forbids Nukes.”

³⁷⁷ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iranian President in Qom Repeats Views on Nuclear Issue, Palestine,” *Islamic Republic of Iran News Network*, January 5, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060105e21500439).

The reason is that access to nuclear weapons runs counter to our country's political and economic interests and is also contrary to Islamic precepts.”³⁷⁸ On February 7, shortly after the IAEA vote, again showing an acute awareness of the importance of discourse, Khamenei stated, “Lying, the American president and others keep mentioning nuclear weapons. This is to justify their own angry stance. Otherwise, they know that the issue here is not the issue of nuclear weapons; the issue is a country's independence.”³⁷⁹

In the days after Rice's May 31 offer, a number of Iranian officials reasserted Iran's denial that they were seeking a weapon. Javad Zarif reiterated, “nuclear weapons have no place in Iran's military and defense doctrine.”³⁸⁰ The Supreme Leader too repeated his denial stating, “we have declared at all times that we need not possess Atomic weapons because contrary to America we do not seek dominance over the world and are not minded to impose undue costs of such a pretension on our nation and at the same time consider the application of nuclear arms as being against Islam and religious tenets.”³⁸¹ Pointing to these claims and counter-claims does not suggest which is necessarily an accurate depiction of Iran's ‘true’ intentions; indeed, it could well be that Iran has yet to decide upon what their ultimate goal will be. Rather, what is important is how social reality is mediated through the representations given and accepted by the actors themselves. It need not matter if Iran is not actually trying to build a bomb if the United States is able to convince sufficient

³⁷⁸ The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, “Visiting Tajik President Calls on the Leader,” last modified January 18, 2006, http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=476&Itemid=30.

³⁷⁹ BBC Monitoring Middle East. “Iranian Supreme Leader Slams West, “Zionists” Over Cartoon Row,” Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran, February 7, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060207e227003bh).

³⁸⁰ Iran Watch, “Interview with Javad Zarif: Talking to American People on C-Span,” last modified May 6, 2006, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/Iran/iran-irna-zarif-interview-cspan-050606.htm>.

³⁸¹ Islamic Republic of Iran, The Office of the Supreme Leader Sayyid Ali Khamenei, “IR Leader Declares IRI's Principle Stance,” last modified June 4, 2006, <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=contentShow&id=3529>.

members of the IAEA Board and the UN Security Council that they are, or conversely, if Iran is able to convince them that they are not if they were. It is often dominant constructions that dictate how events proceed, rather than an actor's actual actions and intentions.

It is not merely the competing claims of each side over the interpretation of factual evidence that influences discourse, but also how the strength of such interpretations is bolstered by recourse to characterizations of the nature of the Other. Such characterizations are suffused with identity conceptions, perhaps the most important of which involves invoking the notion of threat (and in turn constructions of threat also influence identity conceptions). Attention will now turn to how claims regarding Iranian and American intentions are bolstered by identity and threat images to show how pervasive they are in the discourse and how they become intensified at crucial moments, strengthening the claims being made. Once again, analysis will center on the crucial 2005/2006 period, focusing in particular on the time leading up to the first Security Council resolution where the Bush Administration sought to persuade others, particularly Russia and China, to pass judgment against Iran. Attention will again be given to the intersubjective context when appropriate.

Throughout the nuclear crisis, a common tactic for Iran has been to juxtapose the charges that they are seeking nuclear weapons against the seeming contradiction that the very states who express such concern not only possess these weapons, but in the case of the United States, have used them and (along with others) continued to use them (in the sense that they form an integral part of their military doctrine). In the lead up to the IAEA Board's February 4 vote, President Ahmadinejad invoked the bombs of others stating, "A few countries that are armed with various types of weapons are after imposing a kind of

scientific apartheid and nuclear monopoly in the world.”³⁸² As Iran waited for a reply to its twenty-one-page August 22 response, the Security Council’s August 31 enrichment suspension deadline rapidly approached. In this context, on August 29, President Ahmadinejad, in a fiery speech that denounced the UN Security Council, stated,

They have used such bombs once. They killed 200,000 to 300,000 people. The anniversary for Hiroshima and Nagasaki was less than one month ago. Such people don’t have the right to talk. They should be ashamed of themselves to even mention trust. They should go and respect the NPT regulations. They should go and destroy their nuclear weapons. They should allow peace in the world. They should explain themselves not us.³⁸³

The American response ignored these issues, seeking to marginalize them in the discourse, and instead sought to keep the enrichment suspension as the central issue. A State Department spokesman responded, “I think the main thing here is to keep the focus where it should be. And the focus should be on the fact that Iran has until August 31st to meet a deadline set by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1696 for it to come into compliance with the demands of the international community.”³⁸⁴ The low-key response to Iran’s August 22 reply is an excellent example of the use of silence to downplay the worlds and actions of others in the discourse by starving it of attention. The US clearly preferred to be talking about the pending IAEA report and Iran’s lack of compliance. As the New York Times noted, “A senior Bush administration official said the group [the P5+1] wanted to avoid the criticism leveled at Iran last year for being too quick to turn down a European offer on its nuclear program. “The game is about appearing to be reasonable,” the Bush

³⁸² Islamic Republic of Iran, Presidency, “Ahmadinejad: Few Strongly Armed Countries after Imposing Scientific Apartheid,” last modified February 3, 2006, <http://www.president.ir/eng/ahmadinejad/cronicnews/1384/11/14/index-e.htm#b1>.

³⁸³ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “President Reiterates Iran’s “Right” To Peaceful Nuclear Energy,” Islamic Republic of Iran News Network, 2006.

³⁸⁴ United States, Department of State, “Daily Press Briefing,” last modified August 29, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2006/71632.htm>.

official said.”³⁸⁵ It was better to say nothing and wait rather than to speak out immediately in criticism.

Days after this exchange, President Bush, speaking in response to the IAEA report, stated,

This summer’s crisis in Lebanon has made it clearer than ever that the world now faces a grave threat from the radical regime in Iran. The Iranian regime arms, funds, and advises Hezbollah, which has killed more Americans than any terrorist network except al Qaeda. The Iranian regime interferes in Iraq by sponsoring terrorists and insurgents, empowering unlawful militias, and supplying components for improvised explosive devices. The Iranian regime denies basic human rights to millions of its people. And the Iranian regime is pursuing nuclear weapons in open defiance of its international obligations. We know the death and suffering that Iran’s sponsorship of terrorists has brought, and we can imagine how much worse it would be if Iran were allowed to acquire nuclear weapons.³⁸⁶

Within this one statement the Iranian regime is identified as radical, a supporter of terrorists, an instigator of trouble in Iraq, an abuser of human rights, and as seeking a nuclear weapon. Given this negative characterization of Iran, the invoking of threat conceptions of the hypothetical situation of Iran possessing a nuclear device by President Bush carries far greater weight.

Earlier that same day, President Ahmadinejad put forward some identity conceptions of his own, also challenging the credibility of the US, while reaching out for domestic support by declaring,

Today, the cause of humanity’s problems can be traced to certain powers which do not abide by God’s laws. They follow Satan, since they don’t obey God. Satan tempts humanity to wage war, to violate other people’s rights, to spread discord and to give into corruption. And that is why they promote

³⁸⁵ Helene Cooper, “In Muted Response to Iran, U.S. And Allies Seek Edge,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/25/world/middleeast/25diplo.html>.

³⁸⁶ United States, White House, “President Bush Addresses American Legion National Convention,” last modified August 31, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060831-1.html>.

war, aggression and bloodshed in the world. They are the instigators of problems and corruption. ...the root of all problems was the fact that American leaders had always tried to resolve every issue in the world through force, weapons and bombs.³⁸⁷

Further comments the following day, echoing historic identity characterizations noted earlier, invoked the US support of Saddam during the Iran-Iraq War, US backing of Israel and the suffering of the Palestinians, of “the enemies who imposed the dictator regime [of the Shah] and imposed the war on us,” and the claim that “You are not opposed to weapons, because you are manufacturing them. In reality, you are opposed to the Iranian nation’s progress.”³⁸⁸ Here President Ahmadinejad’s appeal appears aimed towards a domestic audience to rally support within the country, but often such messages are targeted internationally, as the US and Iran compete for the support from other states.

At all times such depictions reinforce a particular representation of the nature of the Other and contest the representations of the Self put forward by the Other.³⁸⁹ President Bush sums up many of the regular representations of Iran by the US when employing the popular trope, “The leaders of Iran sponsor terror, deny liberty and human rights to their people, and threaten the existence of our ally, Israel.”³⁹⁰ In the lead up to Iran’s Security Council referral, in echoes of the descriptions of Mohammad Mossadeq in the early 1950s, President Ahmadinejad was characterized as “a pretty strange duck,”³⁹¹ Iran was labeled

³⁸⁷ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iranian President Visits North-West, Reiterates Stand on Nuclear Rights,” *Islamic Republic of Iran News Network*, August 31, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060831e28v002mh).

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ See Beeman “The Great Satan vs. the Mad Mullahs.”

³⁹⁰ United States, White House, “President Delivers Commencement Address at the United States Merchant Marine Academy,” cf. the State Department Press release which also utilizes this same talking point: United States, Department of State, “Iran at a Crossroads: An Historic Opportunity for a Better Future,” last modified June 20, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/scp/2006/68109.htm>.

³⁹¹ United States, White House, “Interview of the Vice President by Neil Cavuto, Fox News,” last modified January 19, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060119-7.html>.

“the world’s most dangerous regime,”³⁹² and as if to underscore how terrible Iran’s actions had been, the Khan network where Iran acquired nuclear technology was said to be the “blackest of black markets.”³⁹³ Lastly, ahead of the first Security Council resolution, Condoleezza Rice called Iran “a closed non-democratic society,”³⁹⁴ a “troublemaker in the international system,”³⁹⁵ and later as “one of the most destabilizing forces...in the Middle East.”³⁹⁶

Iran too employs familiar refrains at key times to characterize the United States, juxtaposing (and championing) their own state against such images. In the run up to the IAEA Board’s February vote, President Ahmadinejad responded to President Bush’s accusations against Iran in the State of the Nation address stating, “Wherever there is a war in the world, wherever there is tyranny, they are involved, ...they are the ones who ignite the flames of war.”³⁹⁷ Following the Security Council referral he said that the Americans cannot be trusted (to provide nuclear fuel) because, “You have signed contracts to provide Iran with aircraft spare parts, as well as medicine. For 27 years you have deprived Iran of aircraft spare parts.”³⁹⁸ President Ahmadinejad spoke of the problem of “a few bullying

³⁹² Iran Watch, “Iran’s Challenge to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime.”

³⁹³ United States, Mission to the International Organizations in Vienna, “Breaking Seal, Breaking Commitments [*sic*]: Iran’s Nuclear Program: Presentation by Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Vienna and the International Atomic Energy Agency,” last modified January 19, 2006, <http://vienna.usmission.gov> (web page no longer accessible).

³⁹⁴ United States, Department of State, “The U.S.-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement,” last modified April 5, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/64136.htm>.

³⁹⁵ United States, Department of State, “Interview on Fox News Sunday with Chris Wallace,” last modified May 21, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/66536.htm>.

³⁹⁶ United States, Department of State, “Interview with Bill O’Reilly of the O’Reilly Factor,” last modified August 1, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/69838.htm>.

³⁹⁷ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iranian President Defiant on Nuclear Issue, Bush Criticism,” *Islamic Republic of Iran News Network*, February 1, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060201e2210012x).

³⁹⁸ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iranian President Addresses Revolution Day Rally,” *Islamic Republic of Iran News Network*, February 11, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060211e22b00461).

powers,”³⁹⁹ and later, just prior to the IAEA’s August 31 report, declared how “...some world powers consider themselves as owners of the world. ...They interfere in all global affairs, take decisions and wage wars.”⁴⁰⁰ Ayatollah Khamenei frequently makes reference to “the world’s arrogant and hegemonic powers,”⁴⁰¹ and when Iran replied to the EU’s June 4 package, in response to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, he said, “It was Americans who really wanted this war and started it. The great tyrant is America today.”⁴⁰²

References to the US’s past actions frequently occur, with Iran’s July 31, 2006, address to the Security Council drawing parallels of the nuclear issue with the October 12, 1951, UN resolution, describing the “Iranian people’s struggle to nationalize their oil industry...as a threat to international peace and security.”⁴⁰³ Ambassador Zarif noted,

That draft resolution preceded a coup d’etat, organized by the US and the UK – in a less veiled attempt to restore their short-sighted interests. [and]...as the only victims of the use of weapons of mass destruction in recent history, they [the people and government of Iran] reject the development and use of all these inhuman weapons on ideological as well as strategic grounds.⁴⁰⁴

American support of Saddam Hussein during the “imposed war”⁴⁰⁵ was also frequently invoked during this period, as Khamenei did just days after President Bush threatened Iran with Security Council action in mid-June 2006, as was the US’s unwavering support of

³⁹⁹ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “World Must Submit to Iran’s Decision to Acquire Nuclear Technology – President,” *Islamic Republic of Iran News Network*, March 8, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060308e238000ma).

⁴⁰⁰ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “President Reiterates Iran’s “Right” To Peaceful Nuclear Energy.”

⁴⁰¹ Islamic Republic of Iran, The Office of the Supreme Leader Sayyid Ali Khamaneh, “Leader Receives Air Force Servicemen,” last modified February 7, 2006, <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=contentShow&id=3500>.

⁴⁰² BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Leader Says Iran Will Continue It [sic] Nuclear Activities Powerfully, Resiliently,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, August 22, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060822e28m0028l).

⁴⁰³ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iran Envoy Deplores UNSC Resolution against Nuclear Programme,” *IRNA*, July 11, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060731e27v006sh).

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iran: Text of Khameneh’s Address to State Officials,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, June 21, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060621e26l00335).

Israel, America's role in the suffering of the Palestinian people, and the contradictions in the professed US support for democracy. As Ali Larijani stated prior to the February 4 IAEA Board vote, seemingly in part to undermine the US charge of the lack of democracy in Iran,

Mr Bush's said in his address that he was very proud of fighting for such democracies. ... He needs to raise the flag of democracy. But it is very unfortunate that he raises the flag of democracy but when it comes down to the people of Palestine voting for their representatives, they are told they will not get any help if they fail to do what they are told.⁴⁰⁶

Lastly, the depiction of the US as 'troublemakers,' as a warmongering state with its hands on nuclear weapons, also surfaced frequently during crucial periods as a contrast to the American claims of the nature of the Iranian threat. As Ambassador Zarif stated,

The rhetoric that is used by the U.S. administration as well as Israeli officials against Iran is by far more fiery and more provocative than any statement that has come out of Iran. Iran's position is very clear: We don't intend to attack any country. We've never done that in the past, we'll never do it in the future. I wonder whether Israel or the United States can make that statement.⁴⁰⁷

Clearly there is no shortage of remarks that can be drawn upon to show how both sides regularly draw upon such images, castigating the other as the aggressor (that is, as a threat), as the one who cannot be trusted, while depicting themselves as the victim and the champion of good. Indeed, statements can be so saturated with these claims that often we fail to notice them. Knowledge claims about the Other rely on such depictions to augment the claim, for if others can be convinced of the 'true nature' of the Self and Other, then it is a short step to then determine an actor's 'real' intent. One of the most powerful strategies to

⁴⁰⁶ BBC Monitoring Middle East, "Iran: Nuclear Negotiator's Press Conference in Tehran."

⁴⁰⁷ Iran Watch, "Newsweek Interview with H. E. Dr. Javad Zarif Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations," last modified April 17, 2006, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/Iran/iran-irna-zarif-interview-newsweek-041706.htm>.

achieve this goal is to draw upon the notion of threat, as Iran does in the previous statement.

Notably, as the US pushed to have the IAEA Board and Security Council vote against Iran, the negative accusations of Iranian intent and constructions of an Iranian threat increased dramatically in both frequency and intensity.⁴⁰⁸ Doty highlights this tendency, observing, “The proliferation of discourse in times of crisis illustrates an attempt to expel the ‘other’ to make natural and unproblematic the boundaries between the inside and the outside. This in turn suggests that identity and therefore the agency that is connected with identity are inextricably linked to representational practice.”⁴⁰⁹ In early January 2006, the US rolled out a multi-pronged strategy of describing the hypothetical threat a nuclear-armed Iran would present, references to this threat that had previously been minimized. This switch was also accompanied in late 2005 by a shift in terminology to deemphasizing the bomb seeking of Iran, which not only served to counter charges that the US was being hasty and unreasonable, but also allowed the US to intensify the charges against Iran at a later date. President Bush also began to couple recent statements by President Ahmadinejad regarding Israel with the possible danger of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon, stating, “I want to remind you that the current President of Iran has announced that the destruction of Israel is an important part of their agenda. And that’s unacceptable. And the development of a nuclear weapon seems like to me would make them a step closer to achieving that

⁴⁰⁸ The public appearances of Condoleezza Rice in which she discussed Iran, for example, intensified just prior to her May 31, 2006 ‘talks-for-freeze’ statement, peaking in frequency on May 31/June 1 and dropping off again on June 4 after which no Iran-related speech occurred again until June 13.

⁴⁰⁹ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 168.

objective.”⁴¹⁰ Bob Joseph highlighted a different threat in responding to Iran’s removal of the IAEA seals at Natanz, which he believed, “poses a fundamental threat to the integrity of the IAEA and ultimately to the future of the nonproliferation regime.”⁴¹¹ Lastly, John Bolton further stoked fears by declaring, “One obviously has to worry that a nuclear-capable Iran would have the ability to deliver nuclear weapons not only through ballistic missiles, but also by giving these weapons to terrorist groups. It’s a huge fear.”⁴¹² This latter scenario is highly improbable given the huge repercussions Iran would face if an Iranian-backed non-state group ever detonated a nuclear device, but John Bolton had no qualms in raising the specter of this possibility.⁴¹³

The US push to emphasize the threat that Iran’s purported nuclear ambitions posed intensified throughout 2006. On February 2, ahead of the IAEA decisive Board meeting, John Bolton mused, “It sounds absurd to suggest that any nation would invite its own destruction by using such weapons. But this is a special regime, and its irrational hatred of Israel and the Jewish people knows no bounds.”⁴¹⁴ In early May, as the US stepped up its diplomatic effort, President Bush warned, “And when Ahmadinejad speaks, we need to take it seriously, and when he says he wants to destroy Israel, the world needs to take that

⁴¹⁰ United States, White House, “President Welcomes German Chancellor Merkel to the White House,” last modified January 13, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060113-1.html>.

⁴¹¹ United States Mission to the International Organizations in Vienna, “Transcript of under Secretary Bob Joseph Television Interview with Mark Urban.”

⁴¹² Iran Watch, “Remarks by John R. Bolton, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations,” last modified January 25, 2006, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/US/DOS/us-dos-bolton-pressbriefing-012506.htm>.

⁴¹³ For an assessment on the possibility of non-state actors acquiring nuclear weapons see Thomas J. Badey, “Nuclear Terrorism: Actor-Based Threat Assessment,” *Intelligence and National Security* 16, no. 2 (2001): 39-54.

⁴¹⁴ United States, Mission to the United Nations, “Remarks by Ambassador John R. Bolton, U.S. Representative to the United Nations, on the Program of Work, in His Capacity as President of the Security Council, at the Security Council Stakeout, February 2, 2006,” last modified February 2, 2006, http://www.un.int/usa/press_releases/20060202_014.html.

very seriously. It's a serious threat. It's a threat to an ally of the United States and Germany. But what he's also saying is, if he's willing to destroy one country, he'd be willing to destroy other countries."⁴¹⁵ It was not by chance that US officials emphasized the need to take statements such as these seriously while downplaying or contesting Iran's statements regarding denials of seeking nuclear weapons or expressions of readiness to talk.

Later, in August 2006, President Bush continued to emphasize the Iranian threat, using a popular talk-point for US officials, stating, "We know the death and suffering that Iran's sponsorship of terrorists has brought, and we can imagine how much worse it would be if Iran were allowed to acquire nuclear weapons."⁴¹⁶ On September 5, President Bush underscored his administration's view of the Iranian threat. In a lengthy speech that spoke to the danger of the "Shia strain of Islamic radicalism" President Bush ended by providing the hypothetical warning,

Imagine a world in which they were able to control governments, a world awash with oil and they would use oil resources to punish industrialized nations. And they would use those resources to fuel their radical agenda, and pursue and purchase weapons of mass murder. And armed with nuclear weapons, they would blackmail the free world, and spread their ideologies of hate, and raise a mortal threat to the American people.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Iran Watch, "Interview with President George W. Bush by *BILD*," last modified May 5, 2006, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/US/WH/us-wh-bush-interview-bild-germany-050506.htm>.

⁴¹⁶ United States, White House, "President Bush Addresses American Legion National Convention." See United States, White House, "Press Conference by the President," last modified August 21, 2006. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060821.html>, for another of the many examples of the use of such as phrase, this time coming just a day before Iran's self-proclaimed deadline to response to the EU3 incentives package.

⁴¹⁷ United States, White House, "President Bush Discusses Global War on Terror," last modified September 5, 2006. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060905-4.html>. This speech by President Bush on the Global War on Terror was accompanied by the release of a White House fact sheet entitled "In Their Own Words: What the Terrorists Believe, What They Hope to Accomplish, and How They Intend to Accomplish It" that flagged threatening statements by President Ahmandinejad including how he had declared, "We Will Soon Experience A World Without The United States And Zionism" and "Your Doomed Destiny Will Be Annihilation, Misfortune And Abjectness." See United States, White House, "In Their Own Words: What the Terrorists Believe, What They Hope to Accomplish, and How They Intend to Accomplish It," last modified September 5, 2006. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060905-7.html>.

With a few minor modifications to this statement these points could easily be said of the US by Iran, underscoring the similarity of the US and Iranian rhetorical strategies.

Inevitably, Iran issued statements of their own during this period, contesting the accusations of the US and putting forward threat perceptions regarding the danger the United States poses. As the Supreme Leader argued, “They feverishly repeat such allegations in different words and forms, but the truth is that the Iranian nation and many other nations the world over believe that there is no such global consensus against Iran.”⁴¹⁸ This statement succinctly captures the essence of constructivism’s intersubjective reality, for ultimately it is not necessarily the factual base that determines the ‘reality’ of a given situation, but rather how this reality comes to be defined socially. The abundance of statements by each side claiming to have the support of others highlights the need for social acceptance for one’s knowledge claim to triumph over that of others.

On September 27, 2005, Condoleezza Rice papered-over divisions within the IAEA Board by declaring Iran in noncompliance with its NPT obligations, stating, “Iran found itself in a situation in which a number of countries did not vote for the resolution, but abstained, leaving it clear that they had questions also about Iran and compliance,” then adding, “Nobody trusts them to have a fuel cycle.”⁴¹⁹ This interpretation is certainly a stretch given that the use of an abstention has many meanings in international politics, and it is far from certain that ‘nobody’ trusts Iran with a fuel cycle. Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns, commented, “It’s very significant to the US that India

⁴¹⁸ “Supreme Leader’s Remarks on the Passing Away Anniversary of Imam Khomeini,” last modified June 3, 2006, <http://www.khamenei.de/news/news2006/jun2006.htm>.

⁴¹⁹ United States, Department of State, “Interview with James Rosen of Fox News Channel,” last modified September 27, 2005, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/54081.htm>.

voted with the majority. That is a blow to Iran's attempt to turn this debate into a developed world versus a developing world debate."⁴²⁰ In contrast Iranian envoy Javad Va'idi disagreed, calling the outcome a "Western vote."⁴²¹

Throughout 2006, the Americans were at great pains to emphasize how unified the consensus was against Iran, while at the same time engaging in frantic diplomacy to try to obtain consensus. For President Bush, the opposition to Iran's nuclear ambitions was unequivocal and wide reaching: "Our message there is [*sic*], the Iranians have defied the world, and you're now isolated. And it's your choice to make. They must make the choice to give up their weapons."⁴²² Condoleezza Rice also invoked 'the world' when she said, "But Iran has to have that civil nuclear power without having access to the technologies that can allow Iran to build a nuclear weapon, because the world does not trust Iran with that technology."⁴²³ Further attempts to paint a picture of unified consensus were evidenced in Rice's statement that "from time to time, people try to set this up as a US-Iranian issue, but Iran's problem is not with the United States. Iran's problem is with the international community."⁴²⁴ This construction was seen too in President Bush's comment in relation to the Russians that "the Iranians need to understand that we're speaking with one voice that

⁴²⁰ United States, Department of State, "Remarks to the Press on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors Resolution Regarding Iran," last modified September 25, 2005, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/us/rm/2005/54035.htm>; The U.S.-India Civil nuclear agreement was completed March 2 2006, quite plausibly a reward for India's support at the IAEA meeting.

⁴²¹ BBC Monitoring Middle East, "Envoy Says Voting against Iran's Nuclear Case Failure for West," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Network*, September 24, 2005, Factiva (BBCMEP0020050924e19o0050I).

⁴²² Iran Watch, "Interview with President George W. Bush by Bild.," It should also be emphasized that resort to such a strategy is not new, nor limited to US-Iranian interactions.

⁴²³ United States, Department of State, "Remarks to Edward R. Murrow Journalism Program Participants," Last modified April 21, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/64969.htm>.

⁴²⁴ United States, Department of State, "Interview with Boston College Magazine and Boston College Student Newspaper the Heights," last modified May 22, 2006, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/66742.htm>.

they shouldn't have a weapon, and that's progress,"⁴²⁵ and of how he wants to "remind the American people that we've had a strategy in place to send a common message, a unified message to the Iranian leadership."⁴²⁶ The reference to a pre-determined strategy underscores the awareness of the importance of intersubjectivity in producing dominant and accepted representations in accordance with one's own views.

This attempt to paint a picture of universal agreement against Iran played an integral role in the putting together the June 4 incentives package, which in turn enabled the first Security Council resolution to be tabled as a result of perceived intransigence on the part of Iran. Iran, however, also demonstrated that they were acutely aware of this move, of the importance of the appearance of consensus, which they sought to contest. As Iranian spokesman, Kazem Jalili, observed, "The US is seeking to form an international consensus against Iran. It has now resorted to the 'offer for talks' as a means to this end, while the offer is being overshadowed by a precondition."⁴²⁷ Ayatollah Khamenei also contested the American assertion, stating,

The claim that there is a global consensus against Iran is a sheer lie uttered by the United States and a few other countries. The fact is that 116 member states of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) have supported Iran's earnest efforts to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Besides, the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and independent governments and even certain countries that are under U.S. pressure are also supporting Iran's efforts to this end, and the consensus among a few monopolist countries bears no significance.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵ United States, White House, "President Bush and Russian President Putin Participate in Press Availability," last modified July 15, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060715-1.html>.

⁴²⁶ United States, White House, "President Bush Tours Port of Miami," last modified July 31, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060731-3.html>.

⁴²⁷ Iran Watch, "Jalali: The U.S. is Expected to Engage in Talks Without Preconditions," Islamic Republic News Agency, last modified June 1, 2006, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/Iran/iran-irna-jalali-nopreconditions-060106.htm>.

⁴²⁸ The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, "Leader Attends Memorial Ceremony Marking the 17th Departure Anniversary of Imam Khomeini," last modified

President Ahmadinejad too challenged notions that Iran was isolated in its position, asserting, “I think that public opinion in the world’s nations accepts that it is peaceful. ... Some people should not equate themselves with the international community. The international community has a population of six billion, more than 190 countries.”⁴²⁹ Lastly, Iranian spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, sought, unsuccessfully, to depict the US as the one isolated with regards to its view of the Iranian nuclear program, arguing “Today the US stands alone in the progress of its ambition and dreams against Iran’s nuclear issue.”⁴³⁰

One further point to note here was the great care that the US took to distinguish the Iranian people from the Iranian regime, although there is still a sizeable proportion of the population who support the regime. Condoleezza Rice typified this position when she said, “We believe that if the world is really united in its response to Iran, that we will get Iran to change its ways. ... We, again, have no argument with the Iranian people. ... we have no desire to isolate the Iranian people. Iran is a great culture. The Iranian people are a great people.”⁴³¹ President Bush echoed this theme in his 2006 State of the Union Address, where he described the Iranians as “a nation now held hostage by a small clerical elite that is isolating and repressing its people,” continuing, “let me speak directly to the citizens of Iran: America respects you, and we respect your country. We respect your right to choose

June 4, 2006,

http://english.khamenei.ir/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=442&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=30.

⁴²⁹ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “President Reiterates Iran’s “Right” To Peaceful Nuclear Energy.”

⁴³⁰ United States, Department of Commerce, “Iranian Spokesman: We Will Not Accept Suspension as Negotiations Precondition,” *Iranian Students News Agency*, September 4, 2006, National Technical Information Service (200609041477.1_ab1200475c4512b6).

⁴³¹ United States, Department of State, “Remarks to Edward R. Murrow Journalism Program Participants.”

your own future and win your own freedom. And our nation hopes one day to be the closest of friends with a free and democratic Iran.”⁴³²

In part these appeals were designed to undermine Iranian leaders domestically, but a further message they sent was the notion that the Iranian regime truly was isolated, both at home and abroad. As would be expected, the Iranian leaders disputed the American claims, often arguing in front of large domestic audiences to the contrary. President Ahmadinejad’s speech in early September 2006, in the wake of the negative IAEA report, typifies this response. He stated, “The dear people of Iran are also firm. The entire Iranian nation is patient and firm. We saw how they toppled the dictator who was a puppet of America [the former Shah],” before adding, “They think that the government is alone on the nuclear issue and there are only scattered groups of the people, and they believe that they can force the Iranian nation to retreat, through propaganda pressure, issuing statements and resolutions, by speeches or showing their angry faces.”⁴³³

Once again, these conflicting claims highlight the intersubjective construction of social reality in practice, how the claims of each side are continually challenged by the other, with both actors competing for acceptance of their representation of ‘reality’ by the majority of other key actors. Often there may be a kernel of truth to the declarations of both sides, that Iran perhaps at times has indeed sought a nuclear weapon,⁴³⁴ or that the US has at times used the cover of the nuclear issue to weaken Iran or pursue a desired policy without sufficient evidence to support their accusations. What is important to note though,

⁴³² United States, White House, “President Bush Delivers State of the Union Address,” last modified July 31, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060131-10.html>.

⁴³³ BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Iranian President Addresses People in Sardasht, West Azarbayjan,” *West Azarbayjan Provincial TV, Orumiyeh*, September 2, 2006, Factiva (BBCMEP0020060902e292004v1).

⁴³⁴ BBC News, “Iran Mulled Nuclear Bomb in 1988,” last modified September 29, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/5392584.stm.

from a constructivist perspective, is the need to pay attention to how these states go about making and supporting these claims, strengthening them through the invocation of identity and threat conceptions, the occurrence of which has been demonstrated here in abundance.

A further element integral to this process is how these notions become accepted into popular thought by other major actors, these actors themselves of course having their own ideas as to how the social reality should come to be. Over time these notions may be used unquestionably, as a given, even though they are continually contested by the other side. Thus, the seemingly fixed representations of states are constantly shifting and far from immutable. As seen from the implications of the battle over referring Iran to the UN Security Council, the competition over whose reality prevails has meaningful consequences. In late 2005 and throughout 2006 it was the United States' claims that gained general acceptance, partly as a result of greater resources and ability to steer the discourse, but also through shared identity conceptions with other key actors built up over many years, that facilitated these actors in seeing the issue in a similar manner. The common identity of the 'West,' as nuclear suppliers, or as 'non-proliferators,' not only brought these states together, but also required an Other in order to be able to act out and support their own identities. In terms of the threat images linked to proliferation that Mutimer identifies,

The proliferation image creates two clear lines of difference. The first marks the distinction between those who can be trusted to make the rules – signaled by inclusion in the ranks of suppliers – and those who must follow the rules – the recipients. This second line marks the emergence of an enemy in this discourse of military security, for it is rogue behavior that poses a threat, that cause concern to those who make the rules.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁵ Mutimer, *The Weapons State*, 97.

Clearly, as the analysis of the Bush-Ahmadinejad period shows, Iran has been labeled as such by the US and, to a large degree, this label has been accepted by significant others (where ‘significant’ refers to those with the ability/power to produce meaningful consequences, such as a vote on the IAEA Board or UN Security Council), leading to very real consequences for Iran and its nuclear program.

Nuclear Discourse in the Ahmadinejad-Obama Era

This final section will briefly examine several important statements from the Ahmadinejad-Obama era and contrast them with those from the preceding periods. This enables the key nuclear constructions to be ‘set in motion,’ ‘historicising’ them, as Pouliot advises, to produce a dynamic, rather than static knowledge of how each actor has portrayed the other. What is particularly evident from this period is how intersubjective processes require the acceptance of new portrayals from both sides for entrenched notions of both identity of the Other and with respect to the nuclear issue to become displaced. The lack of such acceptance and the steadfast use of traditional identity references by Iranian officials ultimately led the Obama administration to revert to much of the vocabulary and identity characterizations of the Bush administration. Unfortunately, powerful identity symbols are not so easily replaced without the sustained will of all parties involved.

Prior to President Obama taking office, Iranian officials questioned whether a new leader would bring significant changes to the established discourse. Ayatollah Rafsanjani opined, “I don’t expect someone who considers himself to be originally from Africa and a member of the oppressed black race in America to repeat what (George W.) Bush has to

say.”⁴³⁶ Early indications suggested that relations perhaps could be different as, upon being elected, one of the first changes the President-elect considered was to appoint a special envoy to engage Iran.⁴³⁷ The absence of any direct talks with Iran during President Bush’s time in office were a real stumbling block to change, with Nicholas Burns, the former Under Secretary of State, writing, “To illustrate how far we have isolated ourselves, think about this: I served as the Bush administration’s point person on Iran for three years but was never permitted to meet an Iranian.”⁴³⁸ This situation is highly consistent with the principle of Othering. As Gergen writes, “First, there is a tendency to avoid those who are different and particularly when they seem antagonistic to one’s way of life. We avoid meetings, conversations and social gatherings. With less opportunity for interchange, there is secondly a tendency for accounts of the other to become simplified.”⁴³⁹ By late 2008, as demonstrated above, the US and Iran had more than thirty years in which to distill the complex identity of the Other into an extremely simplified account of the Other as an oppositional and hostile entity.

President Obama’s inaugural address hinted at a willingness to renew relations with Iran. Demonstrating how it takes both sides to reconstruct deep-seated notions, he stated, “To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are

⁴³⁶ “Military Action Not Needed Now against Iran, Israeli President Says,” *Global Security Newswire*, last modified December 11, 2008, http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw_20081211_7709.php.

⁴³⁷ “Obama to Assign Top Liaison for Iran, Official Says,” *Global Security Newswire*, last modified December 19, 2008, http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw_20081219_8141.php.

⁴³⁸ Robert Burns, “We Should Talk to Our Enemies,” *Newsweek*. October 25, 2008. <http://www.newsweek.com/2008/10/24/we-should-talk-to-our-enemies.html>.

⁴³⁹ Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, 148.

willing to unclench your fist.”⁴⁴⁰ Notably, in the first few months of Obama’s presidency, much of the hostile rhetoric, so clearly present with the Bush administration, was toned down or simply absent. His groundbreaking 2009 *Nowruz* address reached out directly to the Iranian leaders as well as the Iranian people, rather than over the leaders’ heads to the people as his predecessor tended to do. While the speech stressed, “This process will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect,”⁴⁴¹ it was what was absent that was most notable – the lack of any references to terrorism, human rights, or the nuclear question, topics so regularly invoked before.

This is not to say that these issues were never raised. On January 11, speaking domestically, President Obama commented, “We have a situation in which not only is Iran exporting terrorism through Hamas, through Hezbollah, but they are pursuing a nuclear weapon that could potentially trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.”⁴⁴² In February 2009, Vice President Biden spoke of presenting Iran a clear choice, “Continue down the current course and there will be continued pressure and isolation; abandon the illicit nuclear program and your support for terrorism, and there will be meaningful incentives.”⁴⁴³ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton too spoke of “...sending an unequivocal message to Iran that we will not stand idly by while you pursue a nuclear program that can

⁴⁴⁰ United States, White House, “Inaugural Address by President Barack Hussein Obama,” last modified January 20, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President_Barack_Obamas_Inaugural_Address.

⁴⁴¹ United States, White House, “Videotaped Remarks by the President in Celebration of Nowruz.”

⁴⁴² ABC News, “‘This Week’ Transcript: Barack Obama,” last modified January 11, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/Economy/story?id=6618199>.

⁴⁴³ United States, White House, “Remarks by Vice President Biden at 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy,” last modified February 7, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-vice-president-biden-45th-munich-conference-security-policy>.

be used to threaten your neighbors and even beyond.”⁴⁴⁴ Clinton then later said, “There’s nothing more important than trying to convince Iran to cease its efforts to obtain a nuclear weapon.”⁴⁴⁵ If anything, the differences between messages indicated a lack of consensus within the Obama administration, or at times they may also reflect the variation in a message aimed at a domestic versus an international audience. For the most part though, President Obama’s own statements seemed carefully calibrated, lacking much of the accusatory tone seen in previous years. The negative identity characterizations of Iran were absent and the Iranian threat potential was downplayed.

The Iranians quickly picked up on the possibility of change emanating from Washington, outwardly welcoming the new attitude, yet also adding a note of caution. In January 2009, President Ahmadinejad questioned whether there really would be any difference, stating, “If it’s like the past and America is bullying us ...then there will be no new era between us. The language of sticks and carrots is dead.”⁴⁴⁶ Ali Larijani also noted the importance of how actions form an integral part of the discourse, cautioning, “Our dispute with the U.S. is not an emotional issue and cannot be resolved by congratulatory messages or fine words.”⁴⁴⁷ This message was repeated by the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister who spoke of “a mixed signal” coming from the Obama Administration, that “They are not talking with the same tone that existed before. ...But still, the signal that is

⁴⁴⁴ Arshad Mohammed, “Clinton: Iran Moving toward Military Dictatorship,” last modified February 15, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/02/15/us-iran-usa-idUSTRE61E1FR20100215>.

⁴⁴⁵ Mark Landler and Nazila Fathi, “U.S. To Join Iran Talks over Nuclear Program,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/09/world/middleeast/09iran.html>.

⁴⁴⁶ “Iran’s Ahmadinejad Sceptical About Barack Obama’s Ability to Change America,” *The Telegraph*, January 22, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/4310244/Trans-Ahmadinejad-sceptical-about-Barack-Obamas-ability-to-change-America.html>.

⁴⁴⁷ “Iran Refrains from Going Fully Nuclear, Israeli Official Says,” *Global Security Newswire*, last modified March 26, 2009, http://gsn.nti.org/siteservices/print_friendly.php?ID=nw_20090326_7778.

reaching Iran from the United States is not a very clear and proper one.”⁴⁴⁸ Not only do these statements highlight how discourse encompasses more than just words, but they also serve to emphasize the constructivist notion of intersubjectivity, of how it requires both sets of actors to accept a given version of reality for it to take hold. President Ahmadinejad’s speech underscores these points when he stated,

Recently, you [U.S. President Barack Obama] said that Iran can have nuclear technology for peaceful [purposes], but does not have the right to have a bomb. ...I am telling you that the Iranian nation was never seeking a bomb as the era of bombs and armies is over. ...If you are talking of change ... change your method, your vocabulary and the path towards Iran. ...You have extended your hand to us. If you are sincere in it, we welcome it, but if not, then our reply will be same as the one we gave [to former President George W. Bush].⁴⁴⁹

President Ahmadinejad’s highlighting of the continued reference to Iran’s purported desire to acquire nuclear weapons demonstrates that despite President Obama’s attempts to shift away from the discourse of the Bush administration there remained a continuity of many of the messages, most particularly of Iran’s desire for nuclear weapons. President Obama’s statement in early June encapsulates this mixed message of complimenting the Iranian nation, while criticizing its nuclear ambitions: “My personal view is that the Islamic state of Iran has the potential to be an extraordinarily powerful and prosperous country. They are more likely to achieve that in the absence of nuclear weapons that could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region.”⁴⁵⁰ The reference to a ‘personal view’ further hints at a lack of unity within the Obama administration on Iran. By contrast, Vice-President Biden sent a

⁴⁴⁸ “U.S. Pledges to Halt “Illicit” Iranian Nuclear Activity,” *Global Security Newswire*, last modified February 27, 2009, http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw_20090227_8374.php.

⁴⁴⁹ “Iran to Claim Mastery of Nuclear Fuel Cycle, Analysts Say,” *Global Security Newswire*, last modified April 8, 2009, http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090408_1203.php.

⁴⁵⁰ Julian Borger, “Obama Hopes to Break Iranian Nuclear Deadlock by December,” *The Guardian*, June 2, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jun/02/barack-obama-iran-nuclear-talks>.

different message prior to the Iranian presidential election, stating, “Our interests are the same before the election as after the election, and that is we want them to cease and desist from seeking a nuclear weapon and having one in its possession, and secondly to stop supporting terror.”⁴⁵¹ As in the past, such divisiveness only played into the hands of those in Iran who frowned upon greater engagement.

If the Iranian unwillingness to take up President Obama’s overtures forestalled meaningful change between Washington and Tehran (or alternatively if the Obama administration’s failure to fully break with past representations made Iran unwilling to respond positively), the disputed election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2009 backed the Obama administration into a corner. On the one hand, continued engagement with Iran would provide legitimacy to President Ahmadinejad. On the other hand, forestalling diplomatic initiatives would be a significant setback to reconciliation. President Obama, seemingly paralyzed by a desire not to derail any chance of meaningful dialogue with Iran’s leaders, dithered in his response to the Iranian election and subsequent domestic crackdown, merely stating that he was “deeply troubled”⁴⁵² by the ongoing violence. It was not until June 20, some eight days after the Iranian election that President Obama first openly spoke out against the situation in Iran, declaring:

The Iranian government must understand that the world is watching. We mourn each and every innocent life that is lost. We call on the Iranian government to stop all violent and unjust actions against its own people. ...The Iranian people will ultimately judge the actions of their own government. If the Iranian government seeks the respect of the international community, it must respect the dignity of its own people and govern through

⁴⁵¹ Scott Wilson, “Muted Response Reflects U.S. Diplomatic Dilemma,” *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/14/AR2009061402684.html>.

⁴⁵² United States, White House, “The President Meets with Prime Minister Berlusconi, Comments on Iran,” last modified June 15, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2009/06/15/president-meets-with-prime-minister-berlusconi-comments-iran>.

consent, not coercion.⁴⁵³

While the statement still fell short of harsh condemnation of the Iranian government, and while it continued to lack the negative identity portrayals so prevalent in President Bush's pronouncements, it did draw on the familiar refrains of Iran-versus-the-world, and invoked once more the matter of the government-versus-the-people.

By July 2009, as divisions within the Iranian regime began to emerge,⁴⁵⁴ Iran was focused on more pressing domestic matters than the nuclear file and reconciliation with the United States. Relations became further strained in light of some controversial comments made by Hillary Clinton. First Clinton spoke of extending a "defence umbrella over the [Gulf] region" and how "it is unlikely that Iran will be any stronger or safer because they won't be able to intimidate and dominate as they apparently believe they can once they have a nuclear weapon."⁴⁵⁵ Then, just days later, echoing the refrain of the Bush administration, she continued, "You have a right to pursue the peaceful use of civil, nuclear power. You do not have a right to obtain a nuclear weapon. You do not have the right to have the full enrichment and reprocessing cycle under your control. But there's a lot that we can do with Iran if Iran accepts what is the international consensus."⁴⁵⁶ As with the Iranian regime, divisions within the Obama administration were producing a less than coherent message. In such circumstances, long-held representations will trump newly conceived ones.

⁴⁵³ United States, White House, "The President's Statement on Iran," last modified June 20, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2009/06/20/presidents-statement-iran>.

⁴⁵⁴ Elaine Sciolino, "Iranian Critic Quotes Khomeini Principles," *The New York Times*, July 18, 2009.

⁴⁵⁵ United States, Department of State, "Town Interview Hosted by Suttichai Yoon and Veenarat Laohapakakul of World Beat," last modified July 22, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/july/126335.htm>.

⁴⁵⁶ David E. Sanger, "Clinton Says Nuclear Aim of Iran Is Fruitless," *The New York Times*, July 26, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/27/us/politics/27clinton.html>.

In this context, a key turning point in President Obama's approach came at the UN General Assembly in September 2009. When the news of Iran's secret enrichment facility at Fordow broke, it proved to be the ultimate spoiler in recent attempts to overcome US-Iranian past animosities. In a high profile press conference President Obama spoke of the implications of the plant. In a strongly worded warning President Obama declared,

This site deepens a growing concern that Iran is refusing to live up to those international responsibilities, including specifically revealing all nuclear-related activities. As the international community knows, this is not the first time that Iran has concealed information about its nuclear program. Iran has a right to peaceful nuclear power that meets the energy needs of its people. But the size and configuration of this facility is inconsistent with a peaceful program. Iran is breaking rules that all nations must follow — endangering the global non-proliferation regime, denying its own people access to the opportunity they deserve, and threatening the stability and security of the region and the world.⁴⁵⁷

While this statement still lacked many of the negative identity qualifiers used so frequently by the Bush administration, such as the supporter of terror or denier of human rights, and notably still stopped short of accusing Iran of attempting to acquire a nuclear weapon, it did signal a definite shift in terms of Obama's language used with regards to Iran. Later, President Obama underscored his message adding, "The problem is, is that Iran repeatedly says that it's pursuing nuclear energy only for peaceful purposes and its actions contradict its words," and invoked a wider concern, stating, "But I think that if you have the international community making a strong united front, that Iran is going to have to pay attention."⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ United States, White House, "Statements by President Obama, French President Sarkozy, and British Prime Minister Brown on Iranian Nuclear Facility," last modified September 25, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statements-president-obama-french-president-sarkozy-and-british-prime-minister-brow>.

⁴⁵⁸ United States, White House, "Remarks by President Obama at G20 Closing Press Conference."

In November 2009, President Obama's stance towards Iran continued to harden, with Obama referring to, "a series of proposals that would permit Iran to show its intentions to give up any nuclear weapon programs," and questioned whether Iran's leaders' delay in responding to US offers was because "they are stuck in some of their own rhetoric."⁴⁵⁹ In February 2010, Hillary Clinton spoke of "Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons" and how she fears that "the rise of influence and power by the Revolutionary Guard... poses a very direct threat to everyone."⁴⁶⁰ In response, President Ahmadinejad questioned the coherence of the Obama administration stating, "We don't know what Mrs Clinton is saying reflects policy of the US administration or she is talking on behalf of different political wings of the United States,"⁴⁶¹ again underscoring the mixed messages still emanating from the United States.

By June 2010, President Obama, following the passage of Security Council resolution 1929 against Iran, spoke of how "while Iran's leaders hide behind outlandish rhetoric, their actions have been deeply troubling," noting how "these sanctions are not directed at the Iranian people." Obama concluded, stating that the Iranian government must face consequences "Because whether it is threatening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, or the human rights of its own citizens, or the stability of its own neighbors by supporting terrorism, the Iranian government continues to demonstrate that its own unjust actions are a

⁴⁵⁹ United States, White House, "Remarks by President Barack Obama and President Lee Myung-Bak of Republic of Korea in Joint Press Conference," last modified November 19, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-and-president-lee-myung-bak-republic-korea-joint-pre>.

⁴⁶⁰ United States, Department of State, "Remarks at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum," last modified February 14, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/02/136678.htm>.

⁴⁶¹ Islamic Republic of Iran, Presidency, "President in a Press Conference with Domestic and Foreign Reporters," <http://www.president.ir/en/?ArtID=20352>.

threat to justice everywhere.”⁴⁶² President Ahmadinejad too then responded in a familiar fashion, declaring, “[The] recent resolution means an end to the US President and to his slogan of change. That was the last gunshot to the US government [*sic*]; the government which tried through deception to concurrently occupy countries, massacre millions of people and support the most dictators, while chanting slogan of freedom and human rights.”⁴⁶³

In just eighteen months, in the face of continued Iranian belligerence, whether because Iran did not see the US attempt to reach out as genuine, or perhaps because it had an alternate agenda, the discourse of the Obama administration had gone from one of conciliation to one of increased hostility, and was becoming increasingly reminiscent of the language used by the Bush administration. The generalized composite identity of Iran and the US, which had been shaped into their contemporary forms over the previous decades, as highlighted in the first section of this chapter, had served to inform US-Iranian interactions in the nuclear realm. Patterns of hostility and views of ulterior intent of the other that were exhibited in the Khatami-Bush era were amplified, seemingly purposefully, in the Bush-Ahmadinejad era. While attempts were made by elements of the Obama administration to reshape relations by modifying the identity and threat discourse, ultimately, for the variety of reasons detailed above, relations reverted, once again, to a familiar type.

Consequently, in the absence of a shared view of ‘reality,’ no significant breakthrough was been made and the hostilities between the two states continue to this day.

⁴⁶² United States, White House, “Remarks by the President on United Nations Security Council Resolution on Iran Sanctions,” last modified June 9, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-united-nations-security-council-resolution-iran-sanctions>.

⁴⁶³ Islamic Republic of Iran, Presidency, “UN’s Anti-Iran Resolution Was Last Gunshot at UNSC,” <http://www.president.ir/en/?ArtID=22434>.

Unfortunately, it would seem clear that such entrenched notions of the identity of the Other required sustained effort by both parties to produce meaningful change. The roots of such conflicts, as this chapter has sought to demonstrate, run very deep such that change is not easy to achieve.

Summary

This chapter has drawn together the approach set out in the theory and method chapters with the information provided in the background chapter in order to examine the role that identity and threat constructions play in the US-Iranian discourse. The historic development of today's identity portrayals of Iran and the US has been traced to demonstrate that such seemingly entrenched identities are not fixed, but rather are constructed and thus potentially changeable, and to show that these identities then play a crucial role in shaping notions of threat. Lastly, identity and threat portrayals were then extended to the nuclear realm. By reviewing the discourse of different sets of US-Iranian actors it was shown that not only does discourse matter, that is, that the way in which discourse is strategically employed has real consequences, but also that it is within the realm of discourse that much of the US-Iranian conflict is really being waged. This is precisely the area that constructivism is equipped to examine. The final discussion chapter will now pull together the information presented in this analytical chapter in relation to the constructivist approach laid out earlier in the theory chapter in order to assess how successful the application of constructivism to the US-Iranian nuclear dispute ultimately was.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this final chapter is to bring the study full circle by discussing the analysis in relation to the insights detailed previously in the theory section. First, this chapter will review the key insights of the analytical chapter, relating them back to constructivism in general, and more specifically to the notions of identity, threat construction, and representational practices identified in Chapter One. Next, the primary question of ‘How can the application of a social constructivist approach to the US-Iranian conflict over Iran’s nuclear program enhance our understanding of the nature of this conflict?’ will be revisited and what constructivism tells us about this conflict will be reviewed. Potential problems with the study will be noted, as will possible means to overcome these problems in future works. Then, the study will be situated within a larger context, looking at the adaptability of the approach to other case studies. Lastly, in light of the study’s findings, the key question of interest to many in the international community will be taken up: is Iran seeking a nuclear weapon?

Analytical Review

The US/Iranian Construction of Identity and Threat

To begin, identity clearly matters. Not only have conceptions of identity been pervasive throughout US-Iranian history, as evidenced by the tracing of these conceptions from the 1950s to date, but also examination of more recent statements of each actor has demonstrated that these too are infused with issues of identity. The development of US and

Iranian conceptions of one another has followed a notable trajectory, leading to the sharply oppositional views that each state holds of the other today. While these conceptions have their antecedents in key moments in the past, such as the US role in the Mossadeq coup, US support of the Shah, and the Iranian Revolution, it is also clear that the process leading to how these states portray each other today was not a linear path, but exhibited many fluctuations along the way. Recalling Goff and Dunn's conception of identity as fluid, constructed, multiple, and of alterity ('otherness'), notions of identity are clearly not static, as they may appear today, and they shift with time, context, and the emphasis given by the actors themselves.

One key consequence of understanding the identities of Iran and the US as multifaceted and constructed is that caution should be taken in assuming the permanency of a given identity in any particular situation. While generalized 'composite identities' undoubtedly inform given situations, it should be recalled that identities are seen as 'context-bound instantiations' that are 'talked into existence.'⁴⁶⁴ This tension between the generalized notions of an actor's identity carried by others, versus variations of this identity in a particular instance (subtle or otherwise) explains why so many opportunities to reshape the Self-Other dynamic are missed, even when it may be in an actor's interests to alter the dynamic for the better. Khatami's rapprochement in the late 1990s and the events subsequent to 9/11 are two prominent examples of missed opportunities. Undoubtedly there were vested political interests that have led actors to behave as spoilers to reconciliation during this time, yet in doing so these actors have also resorted to identity characterizations – enacted in the realm of discourse – to shape how events unfolded. This point was

⁴⁶⁴ Neumann, *Uses of the Other*, 212 & 223.

exemplified by President Bush's 'Axis of Evil' reference and the corresponding message sent by the 'discovery' of the *Kharine-A* incident, the ship intercepted by Israel purportedly carrying Iranian-supplied weapons to the Palestinians, the timing of which, like so many other events, was notable. Thus, while identity conceptions can and do vary over time and with context, for Iran and the United States it is the enduring nature of their respective identities that is one of the key features of their relationship. Such powerful symbols, cemented into the very essence of each actor in their dealings with one another (that is, as mutually constituting), are something – outside of transforming events such as revolutions – that cannot be easily rewritten.

It is also evident that the actors themselves are consciously aware of the importance of identity. Statements involving the Other are often suffused with identity conceptions, and purposefully so. For example, the resort by the Bush administration to familiar tropes and talking points, such as, "The leaders of Iran sponsor terror, deny liberty and human rights to their people, and threaten the existence of our ally, Israel,"⁴⁶⁵ highlights a deliberate strategy to present a coordinated message of the type of actor Iran is. Both Khatami and Obama attempted to steer relations along a new path by deemphasizing negative images of the other, before being forced to return to type as the representation of new material circumstances, as well as a lack of acceptance by the other and opposition from within their own states, inhibited acceptance of such new constructions. As Hopf notes, "The crucial observation here is that the producer of the identity is not in control of

⁴⁶⁵ United States, White House, "President Delivers Commencement Address at the United States Merchant Marine Academy."

what it ultimately means to others; the intersubjective structure is the final arbiter of meaning.”⁴⁶⁶

Likewise, it was shown in the analysis that a common strategy of actors in both states was to resort to familiar and highly negative identity characterizations of the other at key moments. The strength of language, and the negativity of representations used to supplement interpretations of the meaning of events was often intensified to bolster an actor’s own reading of such events and to try and convince others of the correctness of such a reading. Examples of this dynamic were shown by shifts in the US discourse prior to key votes at the IAEA and UN Security Council. This point ties directly back to the insights of Fierke, Doty, Weldes, and Campbell of the importance of paying attention to language constructions.⁴⁶⁷ Far from being innocent, neutral descriptions of a world out there just waiting to be discovered, they instead should be understood as carefully calibrated statements designed to convey a particular message.

Additionally, the greater intensity of negative representations by Iran and the US at key times was coupled with a greater frequency of such representations. This trend was evidenced by a marked increase in the making of such statements by prominent US officials prior to the presentation of the package of incentives in early June 2006, and a corresponding drop off of these representations immediately after, thus framing the package in a particular light. Also, the subtle manipulation by the US of the claim that Iran was seeking a nuclear weapon, to one that Iran was seeking a ‘nuclear capability’ and later, once certain key actors had subscribed to the US position, the return to the more

⁴⁶⁶ Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism,” 175.

⁴⁶⁷ Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 99 (see chap. 1, n. 28-30); Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 2 (see chap. 1, n. 56-57); Weldes, *Constructing National Interests*, 206 (see chap. 1, n. 61); Campbell, *Writing Security*, 51 (see chap. 1, n. 65);

confrontational ‘seeking a nuclear weapon’ language shows how the careful portrayal of these images is intimately tied to the immediate context. The toning down of such strong claims by the US was most likely aimed at winning support of actors who were non-committal in their stance against Iran, such as China and Russia, with the US language returning to type once the support of these actors had been secured.

Finally, as the statements of actors themselves have demonstrated, they are sensitive to the importance of discursive and representational practices. For example, as a prominent Iranian official stated, “Issues of security and identity must be taken more seriously. ...The identity that Iran projects on the regional and global level must be reconstructed in a way as to encourage a recasting of perspectives in the US towards both Iran and Islam. Thus, a security shield can be provided.”⁴⁶⁸ Clearly actors are acutely aware that the success they have in receiving acceptance of their identity portrayals has important consequences and that the social constructions of identity really do shape interests and security issues (threats). Over time, as the views that Iran and the United States held of themselves and each other became increasingly oppositional and intertwined, it was just a short step from the constructed understanding of the nature of the other in a negative light to an interpretation of their actions and intent as an imminent threat. As Fierke notes, “threats are a product of a politics of representation.”⁴⁶⁹

With respect to the Self/Other dynamic, the US and Iran thus found themselves caught in an ongoing dialectic where, with respect to certain issues, the identity of each was mutually constituted by identity conceptions of the other. Each cast themselves as the agent

⁴⁶⁸ Quoted in Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics*, 75.

⁴⁶⁹ Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 99

of good in opposition to the other (as an agent of evil), and the resort to past identity constructions to bolster the states' positions only served to further reinforce such conceptions. Connolly, Wendt, Neumann and Welsh, Doty, and Weldes encapsulate the development of this 'Othering' dynamic, where the construction of the Other also secures the identity of the Self.⁴⁷⁰ The argument here is not that the identities of US and Iran were co-constituted in their entirety, as identities must be viewed as multiple and contextual. During their increasingly frequent interactions, however, a description of the nature of the Other in turn served to mark what the Self was not, exemplifying Connolly's observation of the shift from mere difference to actively drawing attention to this difference, that is, Othering. Thus, as each side continued to depict the other unfavorably, such notions served to reinforce the identity of the Self such that the identities of each over specific issues became inexorably co-constructed. In turn it also perpetuated hostile projections of the other and cemented views of the other as a threat.

When US-Iranian identity conceptions vis-à-vis each other are seen in this light, it really was easy for both actors to apply notions of identity and threat to the Natanz/Arak revelations in late 2002. Accordingly, the development of the contemporary Iranian nuclear program should be viewed as a specific context of the more generalized views Iran and the US hold of one another. Conversely, not only are Iranian/US actions with respect to Iran's recent nuclear activities informed by past constructions, but in turn they become an instance where Iran and the US are able to reaffirm, manipulate, or contest such constructions. This situation echoes Weldes' point of how identities, being constructed and

⁴⁷⁰ Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 64 (see chap. 1, n. 47); Wendt, "Anarchy," 399 (see chap. 1, n. 50); Neumann and Welsh, "The Other in European Self-Definition," 333-339 (see chap. 1, n. 54); Weldes, *Constructing National Interests*, 206 (see chap. 1, n. 61).

fluid, need to be continually “reproduced and reenacted.”⁴⁷¹ The identity-threat conception dialectic is a powerful and enduring one, which in part explains how such long-term conflict situations as the US-Iranian relationship are so difficult to resolve.

Consequently, with regards to the Iranian nuclear issue, Iran and the US are conditioned to see each related action and event from diametrically opposed positions. Each material development, such as the discovery of highly enriched uranium, the alleged studies, or the Fordow enrichment plant revelations, calls for a commentary on the meaning of these developments, over which Iran and the US are radically opposed. Not only did each state present competing explanations with regards to these issues, but they also resorted to supporting these explanations by also providing a commentary on the nature of the other. The US played up notions of Iran as a radical, oppressive, terrorist state, and Iran countered by depicting the US as a war-mongering, duplicitous, atomic bomb-wielding entity. Both readings of the Other emphasized each as a possible threat and as an actor that cannot be trusted. The importance of such “discourses of danger,” as Campbell refers to them, lies not only in how they seek to condition others to accept the same reading, but also in how it then facilitates and legitimizes desired foreign policy actions by each state.⁴⁷² Thus, Iran explained why it resorted to secretive illicit dealings because it was forced into doing so because of the illegal and hostile opposition by the United States. Likewise, the American success in rendering the Iranian nuclear program as problematic enabled it to take steps to further weaken and isolate the Iranian regime. Campbell’s rendering of the Cold War as “another episode in the ongoing production and reproduction of American

⁴⁷¹ Weldes, *Constructing National Interests*, 215 (see chap. 1, n. 62).

⁴⁷² Campbell, *Writing Security*, 51 (see chap. 1, n. 65).

identity through the practices of foreign policy, rather than as simply an externally induced crisis,”⁴⁷³ applies equally to the Iranian nuclear issue, to Iran as well as the US, and US-Iranian relations in general.

Mutimer built upon the insights of Campbell by focusing specifically on the framing of nuclear proliferation, of how proliferation discourse served to construct external threats for the US in the early 1990s, as it continues to do so today. Such discourse serves to reproduce the US’s identity through the demarcation between the Self (as non-proliferator and guardian of the NPT) and Other (as nuclear proliferator and rogue state), and enables certain foreign policy options, such as the ability to deny Iran access to sensitive technologies. Other states, such as Japan and Canada, possess the very same technology that Iran seeks, and yet neither is considered by the US as a proliferation risk. This difference is due in a large part to a shared constructed identity with the US with respect to key issues, but also because these states have not engaged in activities deemed to be indicative of proliferation desires, such as Iran’s possession of the uranium hemisphere document, or undeclared enrichment facilities. Conversely, Iran argues that it is precisely as a result of the proliferation discourse of the US that it has been forced to pursue clandestine ways to fulfill its legitimate nuclear ambitions. The problem is that this behaviour can also then be viewed as confirming the US image of Iran, a charge that became difficult to shake. States like Israel and India have acted outside of the NPT to construct nuclear devices, yet unlike Iran, because of overlapping identity conceptions outside of the proliferation image, their actions are seen as less threatening.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 132 (see chap. 1, n. 67).

Applying Constructivism to the US-Iranian Nuclear Problem

Clearly, Iran and the US fundamentally disagree over Iran's nuclear intentions, but how then do these competing singular views fall under social constructivism's 'shared' intersubjective ontology? Thus far, identity has been shown to be a constructed notion all-pervasive in US-Iranian discourse. It has also been demonstrated that negative and opposing notions of identity that the US and Iran carry of one another inform notions of threat of the other. The Iranian nuclear case is one such issue, used by both sides not only to facilitate policy actions with respect to the other, but also to reinforce identity conceptions of the Self and the Other. Ultimately, however, a central argument of this study is that the competition between Iran and the US to gain acceptance from others of their representation of Iran's nuclear activities as the correct reading of events is where the conflict between Iran and the US is primarily taking place, through the realm of ideas via discourse. Recall that a key problem of applying a constructivist approach to the US-Iranian dynamic was the issue of 'how can an approach that focuses on the creation and maintenance of social reality through shared understandings be adapted to such a conflict situation?' By viewing Iranian and American actions and statements as a competition to persuade others to support their representations, intersubjective understanding becomes the arbitrator in the dominant public renderings of the 'reality' of Iran's nuclear ambitions. Evidence of such a competition for intersubjective acceptance through the realm of discourse was demonstrated in abundance throughout the analytical chapter.

The analysis of the Ahmadinejad-Bush era in particular highlighted how both states frequently responded to the identity and threat-infused messages of the other regarding an aspect of the nuclear issue with contestations and counter messages of their own. At times

they would directly contradict points made by the other to try to steer the discourse in a preferred direction. At other times they might ignore or marginalize the discourse of the other, such as when the US downplayed the Iranian response to the EU3 incentive package. While communication between the two states has often been fraught with difficulties, both sides have indicated that they pay very close attention to what the other is saying and clearly respond accordingly. Also, the timing of the release of new information, or statements or actions that sought to cast doubt on the trustworthiness of the other, often immediately prior to a key meeting or vote on the Iran nuclear issue, further demonstrates that both states work hard to persuade others of the validity of their reading of events.

As Neumann noted, “An instance that is worthy of particular theoretical attention is of course the one in which others deny recognition to the self’s constitutive stories.”⁴⁷⁴ From the beginning Iran has protested that its actions, including construction of the facilities at Natanz and Arak, are for peaceful purposes only, whether this be the case or not. The US has consistently challenged this interpretation, arguing that Iran has ulterior motives and should not be trusted. The Iranian response has been in line with the third option presented by Neumann: rather than accept the US portrayals or alter their position, Iran instead chose to “to stand by the original story and to try and convince the audiences that it in fact does apply.”⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, the Iranians too have been remarkably consistent in their claims that their program is peaceful and in accordance with their inalienable rights under the NPT. The need to convince others of the validity of each state’s position was

⁴⁷⁴ Neumann, *Uses of the Other*, 223-224 (see chap. 1, n. 77).

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

further evidenced by the claims of unity of opinion by the US by invoking concerns of ‘the international community’ and the immediate contestation by Iran of such unity.

Likewise, when President Obama attempted to pursue a more conciliatory route in order to reach out to Iran (or at least appear to do so) he did so by toning down or eliminating many of the incendiary qualifiers previously attached to the statements regarding the Iranian state and its nuclear actions. Until the Fordow revelation and the shift in President Obama’s stance back towards that of the Bush administration, the statements of the US were less oppositional to the Iranian position. As a result, this more favorable stance offered the possibility of reconstructing the meaning of Iran’s nuclear actions along mutually agreeable lines. Unfortunately, as noted in the analytical chapter, one problem with this approach was that the United States was sending very mixed messages as to how it really viewed Iran and its nuclear program: others in the Obama administration often undermined President Obama’s stance. Iran too pointed out the mismatch between what President Obama was saying, and what the United States was actually doing (continuing sanctions, hostile activities in the Persian Gulf, etc.). Lastly, whether for these reasons or otherwise, Iranian leaders chose to reject Obama’s overtures. With intersubjective acceptance being the ultimate arbitrator of the dominant public representation of a given reality, the enmity persisted, then Iran’s nuclear program became framed in a particular light, Iran responded accordingly, and international opposition to the Iranian nuclear program increased.

Returning to the central question of ‘how can the application of a social constructivist approach to the US-Iranian conflict over Iran’s nuclear program enhance our understanding of the nature of this conflict?’, there have been a number of ways in which

constructivism has been shown to help deepen such an understanding. First, seeing identities as variable constructions, rather than as immutable givens – as in the more traditional neorealist approach to such conflict situations – furthers our understanding of how actors relate to one another in any given situation and builds upon the opening created by Walt of the importance of an actor's intentions.⁴⁷⁶ Reconceptionalizing identity in this way provides greater insight into the mutually constituting nature of the actors involved, and thus the Self/Other dynamic works to perpetuate the US-Iranian conflict. It also hints at the possibility, however, of overcoming such shared enmity by seeking to reconstruct actors' identities, though in this case it was also shown that with such enduring images it is far from easy to do in practice.

Next, as the constructivist perspective tells us, it follows that the identities of actors (and consequently an actor's interests) inform notions of threat. Thus, threats can be understood to be social constructions, rather than always existing as some objective condition just lying out there waiting to be discovered. Threats can be talked into being through 'discourses of dangers,' with social consensus being the ultimate affirmation of any socially constructed threat. Nuclear weapons, or nuclear enrichment programs even, are inert objects that serve little purpose until they are imbued with social meaning. Once the nature (identity) of the actor in possession of such objects is considered, however, the objects and actions are set in motion and they begin to take on new meaning.⁴⁷⁷ Consequently, the manner in which the US views Iran, an identity formulation that has evolved steadily over time, conditions how it understands and constructs the nature of

⁴⁷⁶ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 25-26 (see chap. 1, n. 25).

⁴⁷⁷ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*. Again, such an understanding builds on the insights of Walt by providing an explanatory mechanism for the notions of threat actors hold.

Iran's nuclear intentions, with the same process taking place for Iran towards the United States. This dynamic not only perpetuates the hostility between the two sides, but threat constructions in turn also mutually constitute identities in an ongoing dialectic. This situation persists because, as has been demonstrated throughout US-Iranian history, a unified consensus of the central actors in both states is needed to construct, and accept, a new image of the nature of the other and the associated threat that they present. Recalling the mutually constituting nature of agent and structure discussed in the theory section,⁴⁷⁸ actors are constrained by the effects of structure. In the US-Iranian case, the adversarial relationship is the structure that shapes actors. In turn these actors then behave in ways that further reinforces the structure in an ongoing dialectic. Such cycles are very difficult to break but still can – and do – change.

Such constructions of identity and threat were shown to be enacted through 'constitutive practices' in the realm of discourse. Examination of the discourses used by Iran and the US with respect to notions of identity and threat demonstrated how they maintained their respective socially constructed universes. Building upon this understanding, however, with respect to the Iranian nuclear issue, it was argued that Iran and the US are engaged in an ongoing competition for acceptance of their given representations of the meaning of the material developments underpinning Iran's nuclear program. While future confrontation may well be of a material, that is of a physical nature, primarily it is through the realm of ideas, via language, that the US and Iran engage and compete with one another. Though there may be little that they co-constitute – a key aspect of the more traditional constructivist approach – ultimately the war they are waging is over

⁴⁷⁸ Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 172-181 (see chap. 1, n. 16).

the competition for social acceptance of their given representations of ‘reality’ by other important actors, with the shared intersubjective understandings being what shapes any given social ‘reality’ (such as the meaning of Iran’s nuclear actions and intentions). This argument is not to suggest that conventional understandings of conflict have no relevance, but rather that to fully understand such conflicts, like the ongoing US-Iranian confrontation over Iran’s nuclear program, one must first understand that the competition is being fought primarily in the realm of discourse over social acceptance of the competing constructions of the actors involved.

What though provides the ability of states to compete for acceptance of their rendering of any given situation as the correct one? In the nuclear case to date, the US view has won out over Iran’s because they have been able to convince significant others that Iranian intentions were far from pure, that the case should be taken up at the UN Security Council, and that sanctions should be imposed. As has been highlighted, it was through the realm of discourse, or what Hopf termed ‘the power of practice,’⁴⁷⁹ that the US was able to outmaneuver Iran, but what facilitated the American ability to enact such discourse? The constructivist position holds that the ideational realm should be privileged over the material one, but to what degree do material resources facilitate the rendering of one’s ideas?

A number of elements must be considered. While not an exhaustive list, and while a full discussion of this dynamic lies outside of the scope of this thesis, three elements appear to be particularly important. First, as Hopf highlights, the ability of one actor to impose its rendering of an identity, threat, or representation of a given situation is necessarily a function of its material resources (and its ability to utilize those resources). Clearly the US

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 178-179 (see chap. 1, n. 16).

has considerably more resources at its disposal than Iran, and unsurprisingly the US has been able to draw from its economic, technological, military, and social reserves to get out its message in a way that Iran just cannot. For example, because American access to global media channels far outweighs that of Iran, the US has the ability to saturate the media, or downplay or drown out Iranian messages. This strategy was seen in late May 2006, when Condoleezza Rice presented the US offer to sit down to talk to Iran in turn for cessation of enrichment, when the Bush administration's media outreach went into overdrive. Additionally, with the number of US foreign embassies and military bases far outnumbering those of Iran, to pick just one example, their opportunity to extend their representations is clearly far greater.

Stemming from access to resources, however, is the far more pervasive issue of power. Power, of course, is a core concept in the more material-orientated approaches to international relations, most particularly the realist approach. Doty in particular, writing from a critical theory rather than a realist perspective, drew attention to how powerful actors are able to impose their representations of the Other with relative impunity. Undoubtedly this was also the case with the US and Iran, with much of the American power resulting from material attributes (military, financial, technological, etc.). However, power too should be understood as a multifaceted concept, and the importance of social power, derived from shared identity conceptions, for example, should not be discounted. Of course this social power is created in part through the drawing of differences, the demarcation between 'them' and 'us' highlighted by the works of Connolly, Wendt, and Neumann and Welsh. Most pertinently, the proliferation discourse identified by Mutimer clearly applies to the US-Iranian situation, and along with US membership on influential

bodies such as the IAEA Board and the UN Security Council, further assists the US in gaining acceptance of its representations of Iranian actions as the dominant readings.

Lastly, as was highlighted during the analytical chapter, actions are an important part of the process of acceptance and denial of given social constructions. As Mutimer stated with respect to Iraq, though this example also clearly applies to Iran today, “At the same time, the engagement with Iraq as an enemy and a subject of sanctions produced and reproduced its identity.”⁴⁸⁰ While it has been highlighted earlier that actions can be viewed as statements, often a material reality underpins such actions. A state must possess the material ability to conduct missile tests, impose sanctions measures, deploy aircraft carriers, or even threaten nuclear retaliation. Coercion may be part of the message, but such coercion rests on the ability to cause harm to some tangible target, once again drawing elements of the discourse and ideational realm as functions of the material one. That these material aspects, through constructivism, are then in turn shown to be a function of ideas instilled in them, that the meaning attached to a nuclear weapon is a function of the social context, for example, further demonstrates the complex dialectic nature of ‘reality.’

In summary, despite the aforementioned complications, it has been demonstrated that a constructivist approach has much to offer in helping deepen our understanding of the US-Iranian nuclear problem, despite its conflictual nature being at odds with constructivism’s intersubjective ontology. Constructivism not only provides an explanatory mechanism as to why US-Iranian enmity is so enduring, but more importantly, it demonstrates how this enmity is maintained. Additionally, by extending the mechanisms used in producing the social constructions of each side to the nuclear realm, it has been

⁴⁸⁰ Mutimer, *The Weapons State*, 82 (see chap. 1, n. 70).

shown that the essence of the conflict is being fought in the realm of ideas via the contestation for acceptance of each side's rendering of the meaning of Iran's actions as the correct one. Without such a constructivist understanding, conventional explanations of the nature of the US-Iranian nuclear problem are incomplete at best.

Extension of the Approach

Overall, the application of the constructivist approach to US-Iranian relations and their ongoing enmity has been presented as being relatively unproblematic. In doing so, however, a number of assumptions and simplifications have been made. Invariably international relations present a rather more complicated picture. Again, with no claims to comprehensiveness, this section will highlight some of the key problems that this study has faced and will identify possible means by which to overcome these issues.

To begin, the limitation of working with documents in translation rather than the original Farsi has already been noted. While access to the original Farsi documents would be desirable, to what degree would the study be enhanced as a result? In terms of the argument that the message may be lost in translation, it is true that particular nuances available only to those proficient in Farsi may be overlooked. In practice, however, it is highly unlikely that US officials would read such statements in anything other than translation, and, given that it is the intersubjective ontology that is of primary interest, if such nuances are of importance they would likely be highlighted in discourse more generally by the reactions of US officials. Also, it should be noted, the Iranian government often provides the source documents in English themselves. Given that this study has focused on general trends rather than specifics, for its purposes the absence of such detail is

unlikely to make a major difference. More importantly, however, working only in English limits the scope of Iranian statements. While this issue may weaken the strength of some of the study's claims regarding the trends identified, again the intersubjective nature of discourse provides a counterbalance such that if any key Iranian statement was omitted from the analytical review it would be expected to be flagged by a corresponding response by the Americans. Madeline Albright's reference to certain issues raised by Khatami in 1998 in her March 2000 statement is an excellent example of this dynamic.⁴⁸¹

More significantly, throughout this study Iranian-US interactions have been treated in isolation, whereas the reality is much more complicated. First, there is the issue of multiple audiences, where the statements of one side are designed to speak to different constituents, reaching out to domestic, international, and transnational actors. Again, however, this dynamic is relatively unproblematic given that with respect to notions of identity and threat construction the intersubjective ontology becomes the ultimate arbitrator of the importance of such statements, evidenced by whether the Other chooses to respond to the message, regardless if the message was actually aimed at them. Additionally, the argument made here has been that with respect to the nuclear issue, Iran and the US are competing for acceptance by others, and thus it is expected that a wide variety of other audiences will be drawn into the discourse.

Future studies, however, could build upon this work by expanding the number of actors analyzed within the discourse. With respect to identity construction, the issue could be extended as one of the 'West' versus Iran, much akin to Neumann and Welsh's study of

⁴⁸¹ United States, Department of State, ""American-Iranian Relations"" (see chap. 1, n. 275-278).

the ongoing creation of the European identity vis-à-vis the Turk.⁴⁸² Viewed as such, the Iranian nuclear ‘problem’ could be seen as an opportunity to rebuild the divisions in the ‘West’ over the opposing positions taken with respect to the 2003 US-led Iraq War. Alternatively, the issue could be viewed primarily through Mutimer’s proliferation image of suppliers, recipients, and rogues.⁴⁸³ A third way in which the actors involved could be recast would be to examine the role of ‘epistemic communities,’ actors with “an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within their domain of expertise.”⁴⁸⁴ Numerous actors working in the proliferation realm, such as the NCRI or the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), have often interjected within the discourse at key moments and their role would be worthy of further study.⁴⁸⁵

It should be noted that by viewing Iran’s nuclear program through the filter of US-Iranian relations, other possible drivers might have been omitted. As such, caution should be taken to avoid overstating the claims of this study. For example, the US was clearly not the only threat that Iran may have responded to. Indeed Iran may have subscribed to the US image of the (ultimately illusionary) imminent danger of Iraq’s WMD programs in the late 1990s/early 2000s and ramped up its own program accordingly. Likewise, it could very well have been the Israeli’s, rather than the American’s, talk of military intervention that led Iran to break the seals and restart their enrichment activities in late 2005. When numerous actors are involved, these issues can never be isolated with complete confidence.

⁴⁸² Neumann and Welsh, “The Other in European Self-Definition,” 333-339 (see chap. 1, n. 53-54).

⁴⁸³ Mutimer, *The Weapons State*, 97 (see chap. 1, n. 435).

⁴⁸⁴ For example see Emanuel Adler and Peter Haas, “The Emergence of Cooperation: National Epistemic Communities and the International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control,” *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 101-45.

⁴⁸⁵ United States, Department of State, “Daily Press Briefing,” last modified December 13, 2002. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2002/15976.htm> (see chap. 1, n. 190); Ritter, *Target Iran*, xxv (see chap. 1, n. 191).

Care must also be taken to consider alternative explanations for specific contexts and not to draw too general conclusions.

An additional factor complicating analysis of US-Iranian statements with respect to each other and the nuclear issue is the role of deception. Simply because each side makes a given statement, it does not follow that this is what they actually believe. The US, for example, may know very well that a certain action by Iran is benign, or conversely they may not possess enough evidence to make the strong claims that they do. For political reasons, however, they could choose to ignore such counter-evidence or lack of evidence lest it weaken their position. Similarly, even if Iran was/is seeking a weapons capability, or even a reasonable option on one, it may suit its purpose to emphasize peaceful intentions and NPT rights. The claims of this study, however, are not necessarily with regards to what the actors believe, for this position is in practice very difficult to demonstrate. Rather, the analysis has centered on what message they are projecting, in distinction to their actual beliefs, though in practice the two at times may well be the same (that Iran sees the US as a threat if it portrays it as a threat, for example). The possibility though that each actor is saying one thing publicly yet counseling other actors differently in private must also be considered.

One important consequence resulting from this observation is that all the reasons why Iran and the US are so fundamentally opposed may not be apparent. Constructivism is well equipped to address the constitutive questions of 'how' the US and Iran maintain their respective opposition and 'how' they have extended their conflict to the nuclear realm (ultimately just a subset of their relations more generally). Whether constructivism is able to fully answer the causal question of 'why' they have remained in conflict is a more open

question that is less easily answered. It has been argued that the enduring nature of negative images of the Other, the lack of unity and conflicting constructions within each state needed to achieve the intersubjective change necessary, and the nature of the agent-structure dynamic are all elements that speak to the ‘why’ question from a purely constructivist perspective. However, because of the opaque nature of the internal workings of each state and of the minds of the leaders themselves, it is not the intention to claim here that constructivism can fully account for the reasons why their conflict has persisted for so long. Possible avenues for future study of this issue could include the psychological/cognitive approaches typified by IR scholars such as Jervis and their relation to intersubjective practices,⁴⁸⁶ constructivist approaches that incorporate the internal dynamics of a state,⁴⁸⁷ or works that focus on security dilemmas and spirals of conflict.⁴⁸⁸ Ultimately, this issue lies beyond the scope of this study and it may well be that the ‘how’ insights of constructivism could serve as a prelude to addressing the ‘why’ questions by constructivism or other more traditional means.

Such a synthesis of the constructivist approach with more traditional orientations is not as outlandish as it may seem. For example, a work that attempts to address some of these issues is Samuel Barkin’s *Realist Constructivism*, which looks for ways to couple constructivist approaches privileging the social with realist ones that focus on the

⁴⁸⁶ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); For a comprehensive review of this body of work see Janice Gross Stein, “Psychological Explanations of International Conflict,” in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. by Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 292-308.

⁴⁸⁷ David L. Rousseau, *Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Moshirzadeh, “Discursive Foundations of Iran’s Nuclear Policy.”

⁴⁸⁸ See Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

importance of power.⁴⁸⁹ The complicating factor noted earlier in this chapter of the ideational-material dialectic, of how material factors can be used to influence ideational ones, could be one such problem that would benefit from such a syncretistic approach, as perhaps could the more pertinent questions of how and why US-Iranian enmity persists. Ultimately, however, from the perspective of this study, without claiming to understand this conflict in totality, much of the US-Iranian conflict has been explained via the constructed notions of identity and threat, themselves informed by the constraining effects of mutually constituting nature of the agent-structure dialectic.

A few points should also be made with regards to the possibility of expanding the insights of this study to other realms. To begin, it should be recognized that the US-Iranian relationship is unique in a number of ways. There are few state-to-state conflicts as intractable, and certainly few that carry such weight given the geostrategic importance of Iran due to its location, size, material resources, and historical significance. More importantly, the absence of diplomatic relations since the early 1980s casts US-Iran relations as a somewhat special case. This dynamic has resulted in the normalization of relations such that with the exception of a seemingly small number of communications via back channels (most particularly the Swiss), interactions between the two states have out of necessity been conducted primarily via statements made in the public realm. Consequently, the majority of key Iranian and American statements are accessible to the researcher, enabling the tracing of a fairly complete picture of the discourse between the two states. With other such cases, while the public discourse can be still be utilized to examine the

⁴⁸⁹ J. Samuel Barkin, *Realist Constructivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.); Also see Georg Sørensen, "The Case for Combining Material Forces and Ideas in the Study of IR," *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (2008): 5-32.

interaction between two actors, the more that diplomacy takes place behind closed doors, the less full a picture public discourse will be given.

However, the insights of this study regarding the socially constructed nature of identities and threats can certainly be extended to other spheres, though this approach is already a well trodden path in the field of International Relations and increasingly so in Strategic Studies. Perhaps the greatest contribution this work has to make elsewhere is the understanding that it offers in applying such a constructivist approach to conflictual rather than consensual relations. Most particularly, the discourse-based approach to examining conflict by viewing such discourses as competitions for intersubjective understanding allows the reconceptualization of such conflicts along constructivist lines. Illuminating how conflict takes place in the discursive realm via a struggle to shape shared understandings can only offer a greater chance of transcending such conflict.

Does Iran want the Bomb?

In light of the study's findings, it would be prudent to address the question of whether Iran has been, or is still, seeking nuclear weapons. Undoubtedly their actions are highly suggestive of a state that is pursuing this route, though a more nuanced understanding would be that they might be seeking an option, pulling up just short of constructing a bomb. While the secretive history of the Natanz and Arak plants and much of the associated acquisition of sensitive enrichment technologies are indicative of such a desire, ultimately there is nothing inherent in these activities per se that offers compelling proof that a bomb is their ultimate goal. Indeed, as noted in the background chapter, the dual nature of nuclear technology makes it extremely difficult to determine with any certainty Iran's true

ambitions. It is safe to assume that Iranian leaders too are aware of this dynamic and have consciously chosen to work in accordance with their claimed rights under the NPT (or as closely as they can given the US's ardent opposition), which has enabled the mastering of the necessary technology. Then, if circumstances dictate, Iran would be in a position to use these same technologies to build a nuclear device should they chose to do so – the so-called breakout option.

Because of the ambiguity inherent in nuclear technology, as has been argued throughout this work, states such as the US assess Iranian intentions based upon the identity conceptions they hold of Iran, according to what type of actor it is and whether it can be trusted. Such conceptions are social constructions that affect threat perceptions, which in turn are also socially constructed. As a result, the United States then acts in ways that confirms Iran's own identity constructions regarding the type of actor the US is: a hostile entity opposed to the progress of the Iranian state. A mutually reinforcing dialectic ensues that perpetuates the notions each holds of the other and encourages Iran to hedge its bets on the nuclear front by continuing its pursuit of the nuclear technology necessary to construct a weapon. Consequently, the question of whether Iran wants a nuclear weapon really is a function of the immediate social context. The very actions the US takes to try to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear device (most especially the statements made to convince others that this is Iran's ultimate goal) may be what causes Iran to want to do so in the first place.

However, with this socially constructed understanding in place, it cannot be ignored that mounting evidence is being uncovered to suggest that at least at some point in time, if not still today, Iran has pursued a nuclear weapon, or at least a nuclear weapons option,

with vigor. The uranium hemisphere document, the alleged studies, and most recently the hidden Fordow enrichment plant are all indicators that something more sinister has been afoot. Even so, such material evidence requires interpretation by Iran, the US, and other key actors to be set in motion to provide a social understanding as to what these signifiers ultimately mean and what consequences follow. There are no givens here and as many a false lead has indicated, intersubjective understandings can often trump the material realities underpinning such social facts. One need look no further than the absence of a tangible nuclear weapons program in Iraq following the US-led war aimed specifically at stopping such a program (or at least that was the professed aim). Similarly with Iran, ultimately it may not matter if Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons (though it may well be) if the US is able to successfully convince others that it actually is (as it appears to have been able to do). In turn, the ability of the US to win this battle for social acceptance of a given representation of 'reality' in the discursive realm may lead to Iran to pursue the very weapons that it did not initially want. In a world of socially constructed mutual constitution, there is much that cannot be taken for granted.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine how social constructivism can help deepen our understanding of the US-Iranian conflict over Iran's nuclear program. In doing so, the basic tenets of constructivism were unpacked to identify which aspects of the constructivist approach to seeing social reality as derived from the shared understandings of actors would be most suited to this particular case study. Focusing on the manner in which actors create and maintain identities, both for themselves and others, through language use in realm of discourse, the identities of Iran and the US were shown to be mutually constituted; that is, the identity of one was, in part (for given contexts), formed in relation to the identity of the other.

It then followed that unlike more traditional approaches to such studies, from a constructivist perspective, identity conceptions of the Other lead to conceptions of danger, of whether the other actor is seen as threatening or not. Therefore, such threats are also shown to be social constructions, rather than existing as some objective condition viewed alike by all actors. By tracing the statements made by Iran and the US of each other, the manner in which they maintain their respective identities and threat constructions was detailed. Doing so showed how a constructivist approach can illuminate the nature of the US-Iranian relationship and their mutual enmity. Over time, the numerous interactions between the two states, and more particularly, the statements made by key actors in each state, has helped shape the mutual understanding each holds of the other to produce the generalized identities they hold today.

Drawing from how Iran and the US have come to construct their portrayals of one another facilitates a deeper understanding as to how each side views the actions of the other with respect to Iran's nuclear program. A key problem that this study set out to address, however, was the problem of how to apply constructivism's shared (intersubjective) ontology to a situation where, aside from a shared enmity of one another, there was little that Iran and the US agreed upon, and hence little that they purposefully co-construct. The solution was to view the oppositional positions of Iran and the US regarding Iran's nuclear activities as a competition for acceptance by others of their representation as the 'correct' one. The representational practices used by both states with regards to identity and threat construction were shown to be the very same discursive practices through which each sought to influence the social understanding formed with respect to Iran's nuclear program. Ultimately, it was argued that through resort to a wide-variety of discursive practices, it was the United States that was able to impose its rendering of the 'true' meaning of the Iranian nuclear program, such that international sanctions have been imposed on Iran in an attempt to slow or halt its nuclear activities.

Two major consequences flow from this study: first, it has been demonstrated that constructivism has a lot to offer, not only in regards to deepening understandings of identity and threat, but more particularly with respect to offering new insights into understanding international conflict. Traditionally, conflict situations have been underrepresented in constructivist studies. Likewise, constructivist approaches, with their emphasis on shared understandings, have been underrepresented in conflict and strategic studies. This work, through the focus on how intersubjectivity is contested through representation via discourse, contributes to redressing these omissions by offering a way forward to

understand conflicts in a new light, ultimately, perhaps, even helping to transcend these conflicts.

Second, these insights have then offered new ways to understand US-Iranian relations in general, and have illuminated the nature of the conflict of both states over Iran's nuclear program in particular. As a result, one of the central points of this study was not to show that either side was 'right' or 'wrong' in their depictions of Iran and its nuclear intentions, for often no such assessment can be made. Rather, it is to emphasize that discourse plays an integral part in supporting – and shaping – the positions of both sides in their contest for acceptance of their rendering of social reality by others. The winner of this contest helps define the understanding of 'what is really going on' amongst all actors, a shifting consensus that is always open to contestation. The resort to wide variety of discursive practices by both Iran and the United States shows how pervasive this dynamic is. Ultimately, however, the actions Iran takes in the nuclear realm are a function of its wider relations with others, most particularly the United States. As these relations themselves are the result of social constructions then, on the nuclear front, little should be taken as immutable and given.

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