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ABSTRACT

This thesis adopts a Wendtian constructivist perspective in order to explore how Iran defined its interests in the context of the nuclear issue during the Ahmadinejad presidency. Against realist-type approaches which often attributed a nuclear weapons rationale to Iran and framed its programme as a threat to international security, it argues that Iran’s nuclear policy must be interpreted within the context of its identity and the latter’s causal and constitutive effects on its interests and behaviours. The Wendtian perspective, together with a mixed methods approach combining document analysis and interviews, sheds light on how Iran understood its interests and why the regime perceived opportunities/threats and permissible/unacceptable options in the way it did.

This thesis demonstrates that Iran’s nuclear programme was interpreted within a structure of meaning that emphasised its legality and legitimacy. Additionally, it shows that the Ahmadinejad administration’s resistance strategies cannot be understood outside the context of the perceived humiliating failure of the Khatami administration’s confidence-building approach. Not only had Iran’s reputation and independence been jeopardised, but its failure to secure recognition of its nuclear rights also confirmed that the issue was a Western-led manufactured crisis that aimed to undermine the IRI, prevent the development of the Iranian nation and transform the IAEA’s mandate. Iran thus engaged in strategies of self-assertion to challenge the perceived illegal and illegitimate policies of its negotiation partners, the UNSC and the IAEA.

Furthermore, this thesis contends that the Ahmadinejad administration sought to transform the diplomatic focus on its nuclear programme into multifaceted geopolitical opportunities. On the one hand, Iran attempted to situate the issue within the wider context of global debates around access to peaceful nuclear energy and the sustainability of the non-proliferation regime. Its denunciations of the Western NWSs’ discriminatory practices echoed with other states’ concerns. On the other hand, Iran’s proposals to the EU-3/P5+1 included repeated offers of cooperation on a range of dilemmas of common interests and aversion. As such, Iran pursued dual-
track strategies towards its main nuclear opponents, combining enforcement costs with inducements. Finally, the belief that the US lay at the core of the nuclear issue prompted important debates and developments within Iran about the question of their bilateral relations. While these challenged conventional wisdoms about the principlists’ preferences, Iran’s discursive and ever-increasing strategic dependence on the US continued to explain its Janus-faced strategies towards the superpower.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>Turkish Justice and Development Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Additional Protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRICS</td>
<td>Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU-3</td>
<td>France, Germany and the United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAEA</td>
<td>International Atomic Energy Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICTs</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRGC</td>
<td>Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRI</td>
<td>Islamic Republic of Iran</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEU</td>
<td>Low Enriched Uranium</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEK</td>
<td>The People’s Mujahedeen of Iran</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENWFZ</td>
<td>Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone</td>
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<td>NAM</td>
<td>Non-Aligned Movement</td>
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<td>NCRI</td>
<td>National Council of Resistance of Iran</td>
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<td>NIE(s)</td>
<td>National Intelligence Estimate(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NNWS(s)</td>
<td>Non-Nuclear Weapon State(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>Nuclear Posture Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPT</td>
<td>Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWS(s)</td>
<td>Nuclear Weapon State(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5+1</td>
<td>The five permanent members of the UNSC (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the US), plus Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNSC</td>
<td>Supreme National Security Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRR</td>
<td>Tehran Research Reactor</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Resolution</td>
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<td>WMDs</td>
<td>Weapons of Mass Destruction</td>
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Iran’s Nuclear Programme: a Threat to International Security

On 14 August 2002, during a press conference in Washington, D.C., Alireza Jafarzadeh, the spokesperson for the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), accused Iran of clandestinely developing an underground uranium centrifuge enrichment plant at Natanz and a heavy water production facility at Arak.¹ This allegation prompted the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the organisation mandated to verify that the parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) comply with their international obligations, to begin thorough inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities and activities.²

During the period 2003-2013, the IAEA never concluded that Iran was pursuing a nuclear weapons programme. Instead, it repeatedly noted that it was “unable to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities”.³

For its part, the intelligence community of the United States (US) produced two National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) on Iran’s nuclear capabilities, the first in 2007 and the second in 2010. Both reportedly estimated that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons programme in fall 2003. The 2007 NIE attracted considerable media and political attention since it contradicted previous judgements that Iran was continuing to work towards building a nuclear bomb.⁴ In addition, it estimated that the

¹ The NCRI is an umbrella organisation of Iranian dissident groups that share a common opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was founded in Paris in 1981. The People’s Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK) is one of the most powerful groups within the NCRI.
programme was halted primarily in response to international pressure, thus indicating that “Tehran’s decisions [were] guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic, and military costs”.\(^5\)

Despite the absence, however, of direct evidence of a non-civilian programme, the IAEA investigations raised deep concerns amongst policymakers, academics and think-tank analysts, mostly based in North America, Europe, the Arab Gulf states and Israel, that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions and that its programme constituted a threat to international security and stability.\(^6\) These beliefs persisted throughout the successive administrations of presidents Khatami (1997-2005), Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) and Rouhani (2013-present).

In the following sections, I analyse the motives behind the strong suspicion that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions and explore why its programme was often conceived as a profound threat to international security and stability. While this enables me, in general, to identify conventional perspectives on Iran’s foreign policy behaviour since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, particularly during the Ahmadinejad presidency, their shortcomings also set the context for my research topic. In this thesis, I take issue with the dissociation between ideologically and pragmatically foreign policy behaviours on the one hand, and the dichotomisation of the Iranian political spectrum along the lines of pro-integration moderates versus status quo challengers/aggressive revisionists on the other. Instead, I choose a Wendtian-constructivist perspective to explore how Iran defined its nuclear interests, why it interpreted them the way it did, and how it chose to secure them at the strategic level. In so doing, I am in a position to both contextualise Iran’s rationality of action “from within” and avoid explaining patterns of continuity and discontinuity in the country’s foreign policy against a set of a priori assumptions.

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\(^5\) Ibid.

Attributed Rationale for Nuclear Weapons: Push Factors and Behavioural Evidence

Nuclear weapons, practitioners and experts repeatedly argued, would provide substantial benefits to Iran. First, they would enable it to manage its acute security dilemmas more effectively. Iran was a profoundly isolated state with few external opportunities to strengthen its security (necessity of self-reliance). It also had to contend with an extremely changeable, conflict-ridden and hostile geopolitical environment (anarchical regional and international systems). Additionally, Iran’s conventional military remained severely limited, constraining its defensive and deterrence potential.

To make matters worse, Iran maintained profoundly adversarial relations with several Nuclear Weapon States (NWSs), particularly the US and Israel, which significantly aggravated its strategic disadvantage and placed it under the continuous threat of military intervention. Writing in the context of the War on Terror, Dueck and Takeyh thus argued that the “muscular unilateralism and calls for regime change” of the Bush administration had convinced the leadership that Iran required nuclear weapons’ immense destructive and strong deterrent capabilities. In a co-authored article with Pollack, Takeyh also contended that the experiences of Iraq and North Korea (and, later, Libya) had strengthened the Iranians’ conviction that nuclear weapons were “the only viable deterrent to U.S. military action”. Iran’s interests in such capabilities were, in other words, a pragmatic response to a situation of profound power inequality and uncertainty (maximisation of security).

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Second, several key domestic actors were thought to have strong interests in developing nuclear weapons, whether in the form of latent or actual capabilities. Iran’s scientists were considered “strong nationalists determined to [...] provide their country the full spectrum of technological discovery, including advances in nuclear science.”\(^{12}\) Additionally, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which was responsible for the security of the country’s nuclear installations and a chief actor in Iran’s defence programmes, was often assumed to favour its power of deterrence.\(^{13}\) Events during and since the “Sacred Defence” (the Iran-Iraq war, 1980-1988) had heightened the Revolutionary Guards’ mistrust of foreign powers and international law and institutions, as well as their belief in the need for military self-reliance.\(^{14}\)

Third, Iran was thought to have profound normative incentives in developing nuclear weapons. NWSs have a “special” status within the international system since they are commonly associated with the most scientifically and technologically developed actors. Within this context, it was only natural that Iran, a profoundly nationalistic, independent and proud actor, would be positively oriented towards scientific development and the acquisition of nuclear technology.\(^{15}\)

Iran’s own pattern of behaviour, both prior to and following the August 2002 revelations of its concealed nuclear facilities, also strengthened the profound assumption, amongst policymakers, academics and think-tank analysts, that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions. Initially, Iran had chosen to conduct significant elements of its nuclear research and development activities under conditions of secrecy, thus keeping from the IAEA the full extent of its programme. Furthermore, the disclosure of the plants in Natanz and Arak revealed that Iran had attempted to develop the sensitive nuclear technologies which, while not restricted

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 10-11.
by the NPT, can be put to weapons use.\textsuperscript{16} More tellingly, Iran significantly increased the elements necessary to nuclear weapons capability from 2005 onwards, including uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, thus strengthening suspicions that the regime was bent on becoming a nuclear threshold state.\textsuperscript{17}

Such states possess a latent nuclear weapons capability (a “bomb in the closet”) and the necessary industrial infrastructure and scientific expertise to develop them quickly should they so choose.\textsuperscript{18} Fitzpatrick repeatedly argued that Iran’s programme revealed a “nuclear hedging strategy” by which the regime sought to reach the threshold of breakout capability while remaining within the legal limits of the NPT.\textsuperscript{19} Cordesman similarly contended that Iran’s nuclear efforts were such that it could “pursue nuclear weapons development through a range of compartmented and easily concealable programs without a formal weapons program”.\textsuperscript{20} For Patrikarakos, this strategy provided the Iranian regime with the significant domestic and normative benefits traditionally associated with nuclear technology, but without the political costs of publicly developing nuclear weapons (i.e. sanctions, military intervention).\textsuperscript{21} Iran, in other words, was considered to be keeping the option of “going nuclear” and “breaking out” open, an assumption confirmed by its continuous failure to offer the level of transparency and openness required by the IAEA in its successive resolutions on Iran.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{17} Iran could, for example, enrich uranium to high levels necessary for use in nuclear weapons, or reprocess spent nuclear fuel to acquire plutonium for weapons.
\bibitem{18} M. Fitzpatrick, “Assessing Iran’s Nuclear Programme,” \textit{Survival: Global Politics and Strategy} 48, no. 3 (2006): 13; M. R. Rublee, “The Nuclear Threshold States: Challenges and Opportunities Posed by Brazil and Japan,” \textit{Nonproliferation Review} 17, no. 1 (March 2010): 63-64. According to Fitzpatrick, “the vast majority of the effort required to enrich natural uranium to weapons grade has already been expended by the 20% level”, which is the legally permissible level of enrichment for the Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWSs) of the NPT. In addition, “72% of the effort to produce weapons-grade uranium is accomplished by the time the product is enriched to 3.5%. By the time the uranium is enriched to 20%, nine-tenths of the effort to reach weapons grade has been expended”. See M. Fitzpatrick, “Iran: The Fragile Promise of the Fuel-Swap Plan,” \textit{Survival: Global Politics and Strategy} 52, no. 3 (June-July 2010): 78.
\bibitem{19} Fitzpatrick, “Chapter One,” 13.
\bibitem{20} Cordesman, “Rethinking Our Approach.”
\bibitem{22} For a full list of IAEA Resolutions on Iran, see “IAEA and Iran - IAEA Resolutions,” accessed 18 June 2015, \url{https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/iaea-andiran-iaea-resolutions}.
\end{thebibliography}
Iran’s nuclear programme was thus interpreted within a securitised context, marked by the assumption that the regime was being deceptive and secretly pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions. These negative expectations were strongly intertwined with Iran’s rogue state status which, in turn, structured the view that a nuclear-armed Iran would be a threat to international security and stability.23

The Securitisation of Iran’s Nuclear Activities: Iran, the Rogue State

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which led to the abrupt fall of the Pahlavi monarchy and the emergence of “a defiant, fiercely independent, proactively religious and non-aligned power”, Iran remained a profound and systematic concern to the Western core powers, especially the US, and its regional allies, particularly the Arab Gulf states and Israel.24

The Revolution, with its calls for “Independence, Freedom: Islamic Republic”, “Self-Sufficiency” and “Neither West, Nor East: only the Islamic Republic”, signalled Iran’s shift from a strategic US ally and status quo power to an enemy state that rejected, both theoretically and practically, any form of foreign interference and dependence.25

The new Iranian leadership, led by the charismatic Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, divided the world into two broad categories of “oppressors” and “oppressed”, equated Iran’s national interests with those of dispossessed nations and portrayed Islam as the source of revolution and liberation for all Muslim and exploited masses.26

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23 Nuclear weapons proliferation is commonly perceived by practitioners and analysts alike as a threat to international security. Although they reportedly played a stabilising role during the Cold War, the nuclear non-proliferation regime and its associated counter-proliferation efforts have since aimed to prevent new states from acquiring nuclear weapons and to disarm all nuclear weapons stockpiles.


The Islamic Republic of Iran’s (IRI) advocacy of national and global social justice, together with its emphasis on national independence, sovereignty and dignity, profoundly impacted its foreign policy practices: “the new revolutionary state envisioned its initiatives as global in scope, ideational in means, and civilizational in objective.”

Indeed, Iran shifted to a self-reliant, pro-Third World and Muslim-oriented foreign policy that aimed to change the nature of the Arab Gulf regimes, revolutionise the regional balance of power and challenge the global world order with its core-periphery and dependency dynamics. While the US embassy hostage taking epitomised the regime’s changed attitudes and strategies vis-à-vis the “Great Satan”, Iran’s policy of exporting the Islamic Revolution and its backing of organisations such as Hezbollah signalled its anti-status quo strategies.

Since the late 1970s, Iran’s support for international terrorism, its opposition to the state of Israel and the Middle East peace process, its perceived determination to acquire WMDs, its antagonistic manoeuvres in the Persian Gulf region and the recurrent violation of human rights all served to illustrate its non-compliance with international norms of behaviour. For many policymakers, academics and analysts, Iran, the “regime of the mullahs”, was a rogue state, whose anti-status quo interests and aggressive practices made it a threat to regional security and global peace and stability. This threat was all the more potent given that Iran, the 18th largest country in the world, bordered the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. As such, it was rather uniquely situated between the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. It was also strategically located on the Strait of Hormuz, a maritime pathway vital for crude oil transport. Furthermore, it possessed substantial hydrocarbon resources, ranking second in the world in natural gas reserves and fourth in proven crude oil reserves. In sum, Iran was an important strategic actor that

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29 Halliday, Nation and Religion, 140.
could disrupt energy markets and regional stability on both its western and eastern borders.

By extension, a nuclear-armed Iran was likely to become a more profound challenge to regional and international security. In particular, it was feared that the regime would feel emboldened by the possession of the bomb and ultimate strategic deterrent. Should it believe that its nuclear capabilities would protect it against retaliation, Iran could decide to behave more irresponsibly and further challenge the Western core powers and the regional balance of power.\(^{31}\)

Specific concerns included a shift to increased support for its non-state allies, especially Hamas, Hezbollah and the Shi’a populations of Iraq, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia; stronger reliance on its conventional military forces, perhaps to provoke the state of Israel or close the Strait of Hormuz to alter global oil prices; and a temptation to transfer the nuclear weapon technology to terrorist groups, either accidentally or voluntarily.\(^{32}\) This last concern was particularly strong as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (and the subsequent nexus between terrorism and WMDs) and Iran’s long record of assisting such organisations. On this aspect, Sagan’s warning was unequivocal:

it is not the professional Iranian military but the Revolutionary Guard Corps guarding the development sites whose own financial units have often been those used to purchase different parts of the program. These are the same individuals running the arms supply operations to terrorist organizations that Iran supports. To have your nuclear guardians and your terrorist supporter organizations be one and the same is a recipe for disaster.\(^{33}\)

Policymakers and analysts thus widely warned against the consequences that a nuclear-armed Iran would have on the NPT and the nuclear non-proliferation regime.


In particular, they questioned whether other states in the Middle East region would chose to mend ties with Tehran (bandwagon), seek protection from a NWS (external balancing) or develop their own nuclear capabilities (internal balancing). Analysts and experts also frequently compared the case of Iran with that of the Democratic Republic of Korea.

North Korea is commonly viewed, by policymakers and analysts alike, as a rogue state and its nuclear programme is considered a challenge to international security and stability. In January 2003, North Korea abruptly left the NPT after reaching the threshold of nuclear breakout capability, which explained much of the uneasiness surrounding Iran’s apparent nuclear hedging strategy. As Chubin summarises, “Enrichment per se is not dangerous. In the hands of a hostile and ambitious regime with a record of duplicity and treachery, it becomes another matter.” It was also feared that Iran could be tempted to use its nuclear programme as “a bargaining chip”, much as North Korea did, to extract concessions from the US in the context of the 1994 Agreed Framework. For Fitzpatrick, according to whom there existed “ample prima facie evidence that North Korea and Iran take pages from the other's playbook”, Iran had learned that “high-stakes brinkmanship brings rewards.” A blackmailing nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable Iran was thus a daunting possibility.

34 The exchange between Waltz and Kahl in Foreign Affairs in 2012 largely summed up the gist of this debate. See Waltz, “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb,” Foreign Affairs 91, no. 4 (July/August 2012): 2-5 and Kahl, “Iran and the Bomb”.
36 North Korea announced in October 2002 that it had secretly pursued plans for enriching uranium. It declared its immediate withdrawal from the NPT in January 2003, thus becoming the first state to terminate its membership. In February 2005, North Korea claimed that it had acquired nuclear capability and has since conducted nuclear tests in October 2006, May 2009 and February 2013.
Two domestic political considerations also contributed to the securitisation of Iran’s nuclear activities. On the one hand, knowledge and understanding of the IRI’s decision-making processes remained extremely limited, making it particularly difficult to predict how future domestic change would impact on its nuclear calculus and whether a deterrence strategy could be effective (logic of uncertainty). Seliktar thus emphasises:

A future change in leadership can make a huge difference, and “the chance that a hostile nation armed with nuclear weapons may end up under a leader who is mentally unbalanced or who miscalculates the consequences of his or his action” is not an outlandish possibility […] even if Tehran acts rationally in developing a nuclear weapon, it may still act irrationally or nonrationally in using it in the future.  

Analysts had long complained about the “shrouded nature of decision making on security matters” and warned against the consequences of not knowing who was in charge and how decisions were made. On the other hand, Iran was not a unitary actor. Since the late 1980s, the IRI’s power structure has grown increasingly complex, with “a multitude of loosely connected and fiercely opposed competitive power centres, both formal and informal”. Additionally, Iran’s factions, which were “rather fluid” and “normally comprised of a variety of tendencies and blocs built around powerful personalities”, tended to promote different strategic priorities and means of engagement with external powers. Chubin captures a recurrent description of the factions’ preferences:

In essence, the basic division in foreign policy is between those who seek an accommodation with the West from a position of strength (Rafsanjani, Khatami, Rowhani) and those who wish to challenge it by adopting the course of the Islamic Republic circa 1979 (Ahmadinejad, Larijani, Ayatollah Taghi Mesbahi Yazdi). This division corresponds to those who are willing to consider a grand bargain with the United States and to adjust their regional policies in exchange for recognition and security guarantees and those who reject

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41 Ibid., 198.
43 Ehteshami, “The Foreign Policy of Iran,” 292.
compromise in favour of pursuit of regional hegemony and self-reliance. Thus, if one group sees capabilities and policies as bargaining chips, then the other seeks the determined pursuit of goals without reference to the costs or consequences.\textsuperscript{44}

Similarly, the 2010 RAND Corporation report “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics” observes:

Broadly speaking, there are two opposing views of how Iran should approach the outside world: There are those (mainly the reformists and some pragmatic conservatives) who want to ease Iran into the global system, and there are those (including pro-Ahmadinejad principlists) who wish to pursue revolutionary goals. In general, the first group sees the necessity for Iran to develop into a normal state, a path that requires Iran to be at peace with the international community and to espouse a moderate foreign policy. The second group sees Iran as a revolutionary state that should adopt an assertive foreign policy in defense of Islamic interests, rally domestic and regional forces, and create social justice through the redistribution of the country’s oil wealth and the marginalization of those considered insufficiently revolutionary.\textsuperscript{45}

Within this context, it was thus likely that Iranian factions would have different views on the strategic, political and normative benefits of Iran’s nuclear capabilities and advocate different uses of the programme.\textsuperscript{46} These two factors, a limited insight into Iran’s decision-making processes and the variety of views and sources of influence over the foreign policy machinery, also explain why Iran’s nuclear hedging strategy was perceived as a great threat to international security. The closer Iran moved to nuclear breakout capability, the greater the risks that a change in leadership would lead it to shift to a strategy of weaponisation. The particularities of the Ahmadinejad administration revived these threat assessments, which is why Iran’s uranium enrichment and reprocessing technologies became a central concern of the EU-3/P5+1 countries.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{44} Chubin, \textit{Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions}, 36.
\textsuperscript{45} Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads,” 79.
\textsuperscript{47} France, Germany and the United Kingdom formed the so-called “EU-3”. As I subsequently analyse, they led the parallel diplomatic negotiations with Iran between 2003 and 2006. The P5+1, which is sometimes referred to as EU3+3, consists of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the US) plus Germany.
The Ahmadinejad Presidency: a Threatening Nexus Between Intentions and Capabilities

Concerns about the likely consequences of a nuclear-armed Iran profoundly heightened throughout the Ahmadinejad presidency. First, the coming to power of the principlists was commonly associated with the return to “revolutionary ideology” and “radicalism” in Iran’s domestic politics and foreign policy practices. Iran had seemingly broken away from the growing “normalisation” and “moderation” that the Khatami presidency had pursued.

Relatively attuned with Iran’s societal developments, particularly the growing range of socio-economic, political and individualistic demands, President Khatami had articulated a positive relationship between domestic reforms (and their very possibility) and the improvement of Iran’s external relations.48 Aware of the sources of anxiety regarding Iran’s foreign policy behaviour, President Khatami had multiplied practical and symbolic gestures of peaceful intentions, including towards the Western core powers, and adopted a language of détente and dialogue among civilisations and cultures. A RAND corporation report concluded in 2001 that although Iran had not given up its commitment to revolutionary ideals, the regime had proved highly selective in its strategies and given great importance to territorial integrity.49 In other words, Iran’s behaviour was increasingly “rational”, its policies towards Israel and the US “often an exception to its overall shift toward prudence. Restrictions on relations with both countries remain one of the strongest parts of the revolutionary legacy”.50

Within this context, the June 2005 election of President Ahmadinejad and the coming to power of the principlists appeared to be “a throwback to the early days of the revolution, with its emphasis on first principles (social justice, independence, and

48 A. Adib-Moghaddam, “The Pluralistic Momentum in Iran and the Future of the Reformist Movement,” Third World Quarterly 27, no. 4 (2006): 6. Ramazani, for example, writes that Khatami’s election in 1997 was the result of two key developments which had been occurring since the late 1980s. The first related to the depth of internal changes within Iranian society, particularly the fact that the young had benefited from rising standards of living and aspired to a freer social and political life. The second related to young Iranians’ aspiration for integration into the international community. See R. K. Ramazani, “The Shifting Premise of Iran’s Foreign Policy: Towards a Democratic Peace?,” The Middle East Journal 52, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 178-79.
50 Ibid., xiv.
export of the revolution). The Ahmadinejad administration signalled the increasing militarisation of Iran’s domestic politics, a development thought to be favoured by the authoritarian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. Iran’s path to liberalisation and democratisation had thus given way to a profoundly ideological, nationalistic, populist and authoritarian regime. More worryingly, from the perspective of many practitioners and analysts, the principlists were highly suspicious of, and hostile to, the Western core powers and their regional allies:

The world, in the view of this group, is a Hobbesian one of unremitting struggle, where predatory powers lurk to dictate and dominate and where the only currency is military power. Power, in this view, is the indispensable element for survival and for the extension of the regime’s values beyond its borders. What is known by Ahmadinejad as active diplomacy describes a policy that seeks to increase power not just to survive but to impose Iran on the international community.

The principlists were thus perceived as strong proponents of a confrontational, aggressive, expansionist and unilateral foreign policy devised to strengthen Iran’s independence and undermine the regional and global structures of power. Gasiorowski, for example, wrote about “a new aggressiveness” in Iran’s foreign policy, especially with regard to the nuclear issue and Iraq. Chubin similarly assessed Iran’s foreign policy as more active, manifested in “a certain braggadocio and recklessness and a coarsening of language”.

The Ahmadinejad administration also came to power at a time of profound regional and global power shifts, which further heightened the security concerns surrounding Iran’s nuclear programme. The US-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq had overthrown two profoundly adversarial regimes on Iran’s western and eastern borders and, in so doing, created a range of unintended opportunities for unprecedented influence in the domestic politics of the two neighbouring countries.

51 Chubin, Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions, 32.
52 Ibid., 33.
Furthermore, Iran’s links with, and influence through, Hamas and Hezbollah increased with the former’s victory in the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections and the latter’s war with Israel in the summer of 2006. Iran also benefited from the sharp rise in global oil prices during the period 2005-2008. The rise in power of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), together with the unprecedented challenges to the US' relative power position (e.g. financial crisis; military bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan) and legitimacy (e.g. undermined soft power), offered Iran the prospect of new balancing opportunities. According to Takeyh, “the New Right” held a dual belief: Iran may not “need to come to terms with the US at all”, due to the diffusion of power within the international system, and the regime faced “a rare opportunity to become the predominant power in the Persian Gulf region and a pivotal state in the Middle East”.  

Profound doubts emerged as to whether the risk-acceptant and risk-taking principlists could be deterred and would abide by the norm of non-use. In August 2007, US President George W. Bush declared that “Iran’s active pursuit of technology that could lead to nuclear weapons threatens to put a region already known for instability and violence under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust.” In his September 2012 address to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), US President Obama stated that “A nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained.” Fitzpatrick, for his part, warned against the “inexperience” and “dogmatic views” of President Ahmadinejad and his allies, which could lead to devastating miscalculations. He also deplored “Ahmadinejad’s unrepentant calls for Israel to be wiped off the map”, which “underscore the existential threat a nuclear weapon in Iran’s hands would pose to that country”. The Israeli leadership repeatedly made this point, portraying a nuclear weapon-capable, let alone a nuclear-armed Iran, as an “existential threat”.

60 Fitzpatrick, “Iran and North Korea,” 69.
There was alarmism too among those who used a religious argumentation to emphasise that the Iranian leadership would be able to justify the use of nuclear weapons. The Shi’a religious doctrine, especially the notions of martyrdom of the faithful and “Mahdism”, were often singled out as evidence that ideological goals could be prioritised over physical survival.\(^61\) Jafarzadeh, the long-time Iranian dissident who revealed the existence of the concealed facilities, even argued that inherent in Tehran’s version of Islamic rule is a lack of an ethical standard that would forestall the actual use of nuclear weapons. Tehran’s leaders have no moral ambiguities about using nuclear weapons to annihilate “global arrogance” and clear a path for radical Islamic rule.\(^62\)

Furthermore, the Ahmadinejad administration’s lack of compliance with the hybrid diplomatic strategy of the P5+1, which combined positive incentives (i.e. engagement, inducements) with instruments of coercion (i.e. unilateral and multilateral, broad and targeted sanctions), confirmed practitioners’ and analysts’ assessments that the Ahmadinejad administration valued revolutionary goals over material benefits, and was bent on developing nuclear weapons capability. Iran’s failure in July 2006 to respond to the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1696, which threatened sanctions for non-compliance, exemplified the regime’s disregard for material considerations and its people.\(^63\) So did its non-reaction to predominantly US warnings that “the window was closing”, “all options were on the table” and “time was short”. Iran, in other words, “appeared on a collision course with the international community in general and the United States in particular”.\(^64\) It was acting aggressively and provocatively.

To conclude, Iran was strongly suspected of pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions, an assessment which originated in the intertwining of its assumed motives for nuclear weapons proliferation and the regime’s own pattern of behaviour prior to and

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\(^{62}\) A. Jafarzadeh, The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), x.


\(^{64}\) Cronin, “The Trouble with Iran,” 15.
following the public revelations of its concealed nuclear facilities and activities in 2002. Crucially, Iran's nuclear programme was widely perceived as a threat to international security and stability, an interpretation that was embedded in common understandings of the untrustworthy, threatening and unpredictable nature of the regime of the IRI. Pessimistic threat assessments profoundly increased throughout the Ahmadinejad presidency, in large part because the principlists embraced “revolutionary ideology” and a foreign policy of confrontation instead of more pragmatic and national security considerations.

**Statement of the Problems**

The suspicion that Iran was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions and the framing of its programme as a threat to international peace and security, both of which pre-existed but deepened during the Ahmadinejad presidency, were symptomatic of two key shortcomings within conventional approaches to Iran’s foreign policy. The first revolved around the dissociation between ideologically and pragmatically motivated foreign policy behaviours. The second lay in the dichotomisation of the Iranian political spectrum, along the lines of pro-integration moderates versus status quo challengers/aggressive revisionists. I examine both aspects successively and highlight their main theoretical and empirical limitations, both generally and with respect to the Iranian nuclear issue. This, in turn, sets the context for my research topic.

**Materialist Approaches and the Exclusiveness of “Ideology” and “Pragmatism”**

Iran’s foreign policy since the Revolution has been chiefly interpreted within the prism of materialist approaches, which believe that the nature and organisation of material forces have the most fundamental effects on international politics. While ideas may be important, their effects are only secondary. Further to this, the conclusions of many analyses of Iran’s foreign policy since the late 1970s appear to be strongly influenced by the dominance of (materialist) realistic perspectives in the field of international relations. Broadly speaking, such perspectives reason that states evolve in an anarchical international system and rely on self-help mechanisms to provide for their security. The structure of the international system forces them to
compete with each other and pursue power. Power is based on the material capabilities that a state controls. While military capabilities are crucial, a state’s wealth and population size also matter. Ideological leanings, cultural systems and leaderships make little difference to how states behave towards one another and how they define their interests.

For many academics and experts, however, Iran’s foreign policy since the Revolution has challenged the premises of “rationalist” or “pragmatic” behaviour, an unorthodoxy chiefly explained by the residual influence of ideational factors. I provide four examples to illustrate this point.

One, in 1990 Hunter contended that Iran’s foreign policy was best analysed “as that of a revolutionary state at different stages of internal consolidation and adaptation to its external setting”. She noted that, due to a range of internal and external pressures, Iran had increasingly “ben[t] its ideological principles” to pursue its national interests. Ideology was increasingly used to rationalise and legitimise policies rather than to define them. However, she observed that “Iran’s Islamic ideology still affect[ed] its world view, its aspirations, and its external behaviour, thus producing a tension between ideologically inspired goals and a pragmatically prescribed course of action.” Hunter adopted a rather instrumentalist understanding of the role of ideology in Iran’s foreign policymaking and implementation (a tool for legitimating regime and state interests). She also juxtaposed “ideology” and “pragmatism”, an argument she expanded in her 2010 Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order. There, she argued that Iran had pursued an “unrealistic” and “naïve” foreign policy, which had prevented it from “sufficiently [adjusting] its foreign policy objectives and practices to the new international realities” of the post-Cold War environment and led it to incur “substantial economic, political, and strategic losses”. Iran’s “failure to respond appropriately to post-Soviet systemic changes” was down to two chief internal factors:

66 Ibid., 2.
67 Ibid.
68 S. T. Hunter, Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), vii, 240.
the ideological rather than national and democratic basis of its legitimacy, of which resistance to great-power pressure and support for Islamic causes are two essential components; and the fragmented nature of the ruling elite along ideological and power lines, and the elites’ manipulation of these fundamental ideological principles of the regime for their own interests.69

Hunter thus attributed Iran’s inability to behave pragmatically (a term she does not define) to the continuous relevance and effects of its ideological legacy and internal infighting.

Two, Ahmadi, who used Morgenthau’s offensive realist perspective to explore what he called “the dilemma of national interest in the Islamic Republic of Iran”, attributed the pursuit of an essentially idealist foreign policy to the Constitution of the IRI.70 On the one hand, the Constitution emphasised “Islamic idealism”, including the defence of Muslims’ collective interests, but neither mentioned Iran’s national interests nor defined the parameters of a rational foreign policy.71 On the other hand, the Constitution embedded a “structural dualism” between “the traditional Islamic system” of the Velayat-e faqih and “the modern presidential system”.72 With little substantiation of his claim, Ahmadi contended that these two power centres pursued different types of foreign policy: idealist for the former and rationalist for the latter. He also provided several examples to assess whether Iran had pursued an idealist or rational foreign policy. In focusing on policy results, however, he failed to recognise explicitly that negative or unintended consequences do not necessarily make policies irrational.

Three, Takeyh argued that Iran’s foreign policy was composed of “a matrix” of three competing elements: “Islamic ideology”, “national interests” and “factional politics”.73 These factors were constantly in conflict with each other, thus producing a foreign policy that had “always been characterised by a degree of inconsistency and wild oscillation between pragmatism and dogma”.74 Ideology was thus antinomic to the

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69 Ibid., 239-40.
71 Ibid., 30.
72 Ibid., 38.
73 Takeyh, Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power, 4.
74 Ibid.
pursuit of pragmatic interests, a fact that was lost on some domestic actors more than others. The how and why of both aspects were, however, left unexplained.

Four, Ramazani, a prominent academic on Iran’s history and foreign policy, also observed a tension between “religious ideology” and “pragmatism” that pre-existed the Revolution. He contended, however, that Iranian policymakers had seldom disregarded the pragmatic interests of the state. Additionally, while Ayatollah Khomeini’s “spiritual pragmatism” had enabled Iranian leaders to combine ideological commitments with pragmatic considerations, Iran had “significantly moved away from the intrusion of ideology into foreign policy” from the late 1980s.

Writing during the Khatami presidency, Ramazani attributed this shift to a “process of maturation”, which the reformist administration epitomised. As such, he treated ideology and rationalism as two mutually exclusive entities that pulled the country towards revisionism and pragmatism respectively.

The aforementioned examples show that realist-type approaches have been based upon the premise that ideological elements obstructed Iran from behaving pragmatically. Although they tended to agree that Iran’s foreign policy had shifted from ideological fervour towards more pragmatic considerations, especially in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war and throughout the Khatami presidency, ideational factors had nevertheless continued to prevent Iran from pursuing its national interests fully. Power and security were not always maximised; ideology had negative policy consequences and was an impediment to rational foreign policy behaviour.

There are two broad issues with such perspectives. First, they tend to produce largely decontextualised, inside-out analyses which examine Iran’s foreign policy and judge its rationality of action against a set of a priori assumptions and universally predefined interests. As such, they fail to explore what may constitute “power”, “security” and “interests” from Iran’s perspective. They also tend to fail to define the

76 Ibid., 550-54.
77 Ibid., 555-58.
78 Ibid., 559.
methods by which they came to their conclusions on Iran’s relative rationality of action. Second, realist-type analyses have had important policy consequences: the assessment that Iran’s foreign policy behaviour is always more or less pragmatic both participates in, and helps legitimise, its exceptionalisation and securitisation. Broadly speaking, since Iran defies “normal” norms of behaviour, it must be carefully watched and contained. This is all the more critical given that the IRI is hostile towards the Western core powers and their regional allies.

These two limitations are observable in the context of Iranian nuclear issue. Realist-type approaches resulted in complete denial or outright distrust of Iran’s nuclear rationale. During the Khatami and Ahmadinejad presidencies, Iranian officials offered consistent discourses on why Iran needed nuclear energy, why it accepted and abided by the principles of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and why it firmly rejected WMDs. Practitioners and analysts, however, placed little to no trust and value in Iran’s claimed nuclear intentions and strategic principles. They did not need to engage with Iran’s official discourses in any depth since it had “objective” needs for nuclear weapons (security, domestic and normative motives). Iran’s apparent nuclear hedging strategy also demonstrated that the leadership intended to mislead its negotiation partners until it could deliver a fait accompli.

By the same token, policymakers, academics and think-tank analysts placed little confidence and value in Iranian officials’ continuous insistence that Iran refused to be treated differently from the other non-nuclear weapon state (NNWSs) of the NPT and firmly objected to the principles of a dual-track diplomatic strategy. In realist-type accounts, Iran’s non-compliance with the demands of the EU-3/P5+1, the IAEA and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and its decision to endure increasingly stringent unilateral and multilateral sanctions, confirmed that Iran was bent on challenging the Western core powers and international institutions. Iran, in other words, and the Ahmadinejad administration in particular, was behaving ideologically and sacrificing Iran’s national interests. Consequently, its nuclear activities needed to be contained for they posed a profound threat to international security and stability.

Such realist-type perspectives on Iran’s nuclear policy thus prevented an in-depth and contextualised analysis and understanding of how (and why) Iran defined its
(nuclear) interests. Crucial questions pertaining to how (and why) Iran perceived its opportunities, threats, permissible and non-permissible options, and strategic priorities were systematically excluded. Such questions included:

- How (and why) did Iran view its nuclear programme and define its necessity?
- How (and why) did Iran interpret the framing of its nuclear activities as a threat to international peace and security?
- Who (and why) did Iran hold responsible for the securitisation of its nuclear programme?
- How (and why) did Iran understand the aims and motives of the coercive diplomatic strategy of individual states and the EU-3/P5+1?
- How (and why) did such interpretations affect Iran’s nuclear policy and its strategies towards the EU-3/P5+1 as well as the IAEA and the UNSC?
- Why did the Ahmadinejad administration perceive the costs of defiance to be inferior to the costs of compliance with the expectations of the EU-3/P5+1 and the UNSC?
- What benefits, if any, did Iran’s nuclear strategy bring to the regime?
- How, in sum, did Iran define its national interests in the context of the nuclear issue?

Instead of seeking to assess Iran’s rationality and the desirability of its actions a posteriori and against a set of a priori assumptions, such questions could pave the way for an inside-in perspective on its interests and aims.

The Aggressive/Confrontational Versus Détente/Accommodation Prism of Debate
A key concern amongst policymakers, academics and analysts about Iran’s nuclear programme was that Iran was not a unitary actor and its factions were affected differently by the Revolution’s ideological legacy. The relative power position and influence of the more or less ideologically inspired and anti-status quo factions over the decision-making process thus explained whether and why Iran’s foreign policy behaviour was more or less pragmatic in specific instances or during a particular time frame. This, in turn, helps clarify why policymakers, academics and analysts frequently questioned and debated “what Iran wanted”:
• Did Iran seek to overthrow the international system or improve its position within it?
• What sort of role did Iran aspire to play?
• What kinds of relations did Iran seek with other states?
• What price was Iran willing to pay for its aims and ambitions?
• In other words, did Iran seek isolation or engagement, and at what cost?

The problem with this conceptualisation of Iran’s domestic politics is twofold. First, it leads to ideal-type categorisations of Iranian political factions and several assumptions about their foreign policy positions. While their views are taken for granted, their actual approaches and strategies are not subjected to vigorous empirical enquiry. Second, in representing the “ideologues” as “expansionist and at war with the world order” and the “pragmatists” as “less confrontational in their approach”, most studies have focused on the preferred means of engagement of each rather than their respective objectives.79 Yet, as Farhi and Lotfian conclude, differences among Iranian policymakers have tended to revolve around “the scope and instruments of foreign policy” rather than the overall objectives. For example, they widely agreed on Iran’s legitimate role and significance in its external environment and a drive for greater regional and international reach.80 They also firmly rejected Western imperialism and prioritised Iran’s territorial integrity, national sovereignty and independence.81 Iran’s foreign policy discourse thus created a near consensus on the objective of pursuing “a foreign policy that enhanced Iran’s strategic weight and role in the Middle East region while maintaining the country’s Islamic identity in the face of resistance by global power wielders”.82 Importantly, this near consensus amongst Iranian policymakers also emphasised the impossibility of “giv[ing] in” to external pressures.83 At the same time, Farhi and Lotfian argue that there was disagreement about the ways in which Iran might achieve its objectives, especially how to achieve “true independence” and enhance Iran’s external role.84

79 Farhi and Lotfian, “Iran’s Post-Revolution Foreign Policy Puzzle,” 115.
80 Ibid., 117.
81 Ibid., 114, 117, 122.
82 Ibid., 117.
83 Ibid., 121.
84 Ibid.
In this thesis, I demonstrate that Iran’s foreign policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency profoundly challenged the ideal-type categorisations of the Iranian factions. Additionally, it brought to the fore the necessity of understanding more clearly the nuances between foreign policy objectives and strategies to secure them. Broadly speaking, Iran’s foreign policy during the period 2005-2013 was characterised by both patterns of continuity and discontinuity, which also often occurred in unexpected ways in light of what was assumed about the principlists’ preferences. For example, Iran remained committed to the NPT and renewed its defence of the normative and institutional principles of the nuclear non-proliferation regime (see chapters 4 and 5). It continued the diplomatic negotiations with the EU-3/P5+1 and regularly offered proposals that paved the way for stronger and broader cooperation between Iran and the Western core powers (see chapter 5). Furthermore, if the Khatami presidency had witnessed substantial developments in US-Iran relations, including strategic cooperation in Afghanistan in the early 2000s, the Ahmadinejad administration observed unprecedented transformations, such as repeated public offers of direct talks (see chapter 6).

Further to this, Ahmadinejad was president at a time of significant internal and external political developments. Iran faced unprecedented crises of governance performance (e.g. economic mismanagement and corruption) and electoral legitimacy (e.g. the 2009 presidential election and ensuing popular protests) which, while severely repressed (securitisation), led to the profound polarisation of the elite and the severe criticism of the president (see chapter 3). Regime legitimacy was a particular source of concern for the Iranian leadership, not least for the Supreme Leader, whose personal role and institutional position faced unprecedented public challenges.

In addition, though, as previously touched upon, developments within Iran’s regional environment and the global order created substantial opportunities for Iran’s external relations, the regime also continued to face profound threats, many of which were transnational in nature (e.g. terrorism, drug trafficking) and/or accelerated following the beginning of the Arab uprisings (e.g. destabilisation of the Syrian regime). How Iran perceived such internal and external developments, how it defined its range of opportunities and constraints, and how it interpreted its interests, requires analysis
and contextualisation. Conventional wisdoms on Iran’s factions in general, and the principioists in particular, must be put to the challenge of analytical observation for the principiulist administration of President Ahmadinejad cannot be assumed to have adopted or supported particular foreign policy positions.

**Thesis Aims and Rationale**

**Research Objectives**

In this thesis, I explore Iran’s foreign policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency through the prism of the nuclear issue. I specifically analyse how Iran defined its national interests in a context where it faced both informal (i.e. discursive condemnation) and formal (i.e. UNSC resolutions, state-level and multilateral sanctions legislation) external opposition to its nuclear programme, especially from the Western core powers. I also examine why Iran interpreted its interests the way it did and how it chose to secure them at the strategic level. In so doing, I seek to contextualise Iran’s rationality of action “from within.”

First, my study makes Iran’s identity and interests a central subject of enquiry. Although I subsequently explain my choice of a Wendtian-constructivist perspective, it is worth noting here that such an approach is equipped to enquire into, and contextualise, how (and why) Iran interpreted the nuclear issue as well as its range of options and opportunities. As such, it is particularly well suited to examine the causal and constitutive dynamics between (construction of) interests on the one hand, and logics of action on the other. In so doing, my aim is not to assess whether or not Iran behaved pragmatically or ideologically but to understand the underlying motives and factors that justified its policy choices. Furthermore, a Wendtian-constructivist perspective allows for a conceptualisation of Iran’s national interests that is not limited to material aggregates and is, instead, inclusive of less tangible considerations.

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It is worth emphasising that my objection to the argument that a dichotomy between “ideological” and “pragmatic” sources of foreign policy behaviour has great empirical relevance and theoretical validity, and my decision to adopt a Wendtian-constructivist perspective, lead me to put great value in the work produced by academics like Adib-Moghaddam and Warnaar. In rejecting the binary opposition between “realism” and “idealism”, they have both been able to question and examine the long-term constitutive effects of ideational elements on Iran’s national interests and logics of action. Adib-Moghaddam, for example, has often used a critical cultural genealogy approach to identify and explain the permanence and resonance of ideological factors within Iran’s foreign policy culture. He has also examined how and why dynamics of conflict, including between Iran and the US, have been perpetuated over time. In particular, he notes that the religiously framed, anti-imperialist discourse of Ayatollah Khomeini was codified as a revolutionary narrative and institutionalised as a central ideological precept of the IRI.86 This process gave Iran’s foreign policy culture a “utopian-romantic meta-narrative” dimension, which penetrated to the core of the strategic thinking of the country’s elite. This, in turn, explains why core principles of the revolution – radical cultural and political independence, economic autarky, diplomatic and ideological mobilization against Zionism and resistance against US interference in regional and domestic affairs – continue to guide the country’s foreign policy elites.87

Economic independence, support for the Palestinians, competition with US and Israeli policies, Islamic communitarianism and empowerment of the non-aligned world have all shaped Iran’s strategic preferences and transcended Iranian factions and political divisions.88 There is, as Adib-Moghaddam writes, “a culturally constituted consensus” about Iran’s external role that “functions as the guardian of identity […] and provides for the foreign policy elites a coherent, if systematically abstract, overall orientation in the conduct of international affairs.”89 From Iran’s viewpoint, there is no contradiction between the IRI’s revolutionary ideals and its

86 A. Adib-Moghaddam, “Islamic Utopian Romanticism and the Foreign Policy Culture of Iran,” Middle East Critique 14, no. 3 (2005): 278.
87 Ibid., 267.
88 Ibid., 285.
89 A. Adib-Moghaddam, Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic (London: Hurst, 2007), 70-71.
national interests. Challenging the international status quo and the world’s superpower is a function of Iran’s identity commitments and its strategic preferences.

Warnaar, whose work I came across towards the end of my research, uses a constructivist perspective to study Iran’s foreign policy. While she argues that the country’s domestic “foreign policy ideology” provides the context for its external behaviour, she shows that ideas constitute foreign policy by making certain options possible whilst precluding others. She thus makes a powerful case against studies which either ignore the constitutive role of ideational factors in shaping a state’s foreign policy or understand them as harmful to its national interests. Rationality, she argues, must be contextualised within the state’s foreign policy ideology. As such, she pays particular attention to the ways in which the Iranian regime interpreted ideas to justify its decisions (internal and external legitimacy). In addition, she notes that Iran’s identity is shaped by processes of linking and differentiation with “a temporal other” (Iran before and after the Revolution) and “a number of spatial others” (Iran as a changed nation against the unchanged arrogant powers; Iran as an example for oppressed nations).

Furthermore, she observes that whilst ideology constitutes foreign policy, foreign policy also enacts, confirms and possibly reinforces ideology. As such, there is a process of mutual constitution between ideology and foreign policy, a dynamic that Iran’s “discourse of change” illustrates. More specifically, according to Warnaar, the regime of President Ahmadinejad often “acted as if” international change was happening, pursuing an active foreign policy of building alliances with rising powers and nations opposed to the Western hegemony. In so doing, Iran was able to shape international developments which challenged the status quo, especially US hegemony and the notion that Iran was isolated.

In the subsequent chapters, I make frequent references to Adib-Moghaddam and Warnaar’s observations. Having covered the same phase of Iran’s foreign policy as the latter, I also explain how and why our conclusions may overlap or differ.

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92 Warnaar, “We Belong to the Future,” 190.
93 Ibid., 12, 35.
However, it is also worth emphasising that Warnaar’s analysis of Iran’s nuclear policy was limited to the 2010 Turkey-Brazil-Iran agreement (chapter 6) and the regime’s insistence on its nuclear rights. In this respect, we pursued different objectives.

Second, I pursue a comprehensive study of Iran’s foreign policy approach to the nuclear issue and argue that the Ahmadinejad regime attempted to transform the diplomatic focus and concerns around its nuclear programme into complex and multifaceted geopolitical opportunities. The regime pursued interests that went well beyond the realm of the nuclear field, an argument that I unpack along several lines. To begin with, I observe that Iran pursued its own version of dual-track diplomatic strategies vis-à-vis its negotiation partners, the Western powers in particular. On the one hand, the Western-led opposition to what Iran viewed as its legal and legitimate “nuclear rights” revived the leadership’s resentment and mistrust of the Western powers. Such perceptions paved the way for a more assertive nuclear strategy that would protect Iran’s national interests better than the Khatami administration had achieved during the period 2003-2005. On the other hand, Iran repeatedly suggested broader cooperation between Iran and the countries of the EU-3/P5+1, the Western powers in particular, on a range of issues of mutual interest. Its negotiation proposals also frequently included details about the principles that needed to govern their modalities of interaction both during and beyond their nuclear-related encounters. Iran thus combined elements of pressure with strategies of inducement vis-à-vis its main opponents.

Furthermore, I note that Iran attempted to generate external agreement and support for its articulation of its nuclear rights and its consequent resistance strategies against the demands of the IAEA, the EU-3/P5+1 and the UNSC. I argue that the nuclear issue enabled Iran to articulate and reinstantiate its identity and interests as a guide and role model for developing nations. To this end, I am particularly interested in identifying how and why Iran attempted to “build its case”, legitimise its position, make it resonant with other actors’ concerns and interests and, in so doing, compete with rival frames. To this extent, I also assess the effects of Iran’s framings of the nuclear issue, especially whether, how and why others may have adopted its discourses.
Finally, I observe that the nuclear issue heightened domestic political debates on the question of Iran-US relations during the Ahmadinejad presidency. From the regime’s viewpoint, the failure of the Khatami administration to resolve the nuclear issue confirmed the prime necessity of the US’ acceptance of an agreement for a comprehensive resolution of the stalemate. As such, partly out of necessity (and partly out of choice), Iran also attempted to transform the nuclear issue into an opportunity to engage its significant Other.

**Analytical and Empirical Contributions**

This thesis hopes to contribute to a rich scholarship on Iran’s foreign policy since the Revolution, particularly during the Ahmadinejad presidency. By adopting a Wendtian-constructivist approach and, thus, by making Iran’s identity and interests a central subject of enquiry, I am able to go beyond the restrictive paradigm of “ideologically” versus “pragmatically” motivated foreign policy behaviours. I dispute this conceptualisation for epistemological reasons and its policymaking consequences, particularly the securitisation and exceptionalisation of the IRI. In seeking to examine and understand the drivers of Iran’s foreign policy in the context of the nuclear issue, I produce an in-depth analysis of how (and why) Iran (and its policymakers) interpreted specific situations, defined its range of opportunities and threats, permissible and unacceptable options, and sought to pursue its interests. This systematic approach allows me to contextualise Iran’s rationality of action “from within” and to provide new insights into what the regime attempted to achieve. In particular, I put forward the argument that the Ahmadinejad administration sought to transform the nuclear issue into multifaceted geopolitical opportunities that both reified Iran’s identity as an ally of dispossessed nations and a potential interlocutor for the Western core powers, including the US.

Additionally, unpacking how (and why) Iran defined its national interests puts me in a position to produce a more nuanced analysis of the Iranian political factions, the principlists in particular. Although knowledge of Iran’s foreign policy decision-making processes remains limited, I nevertheless demonstrate that the ideal-type categorisation of the Iranian political spectrum along the lines of aggressive/confrontation versus détente/accommodation fails to account for several
empirical developments. In focusing on Iran’s multifaceted approach to the nuclear issue, I am indeed able to identify (the sometimes unexpected) patterns of continuity and discontinuity in its foreign policy behaviour. In so doing, I am able to better differentiate between foreign policy objectives and methods, and to contextualise foreign policy choices in light of the particular circumstances that Iran faced throughout the period 2005-2013.

It is hoped that this thesis will have some policymaking relevance. It reiterates the constructivists’ claim that conflicts are socially constructed, that states’ national interests are not limited to power maximisation and must be studied empirically. In explaining why Iran refused to comply with the resolutions of the IAEA and the UNSC, reacted negatively to the Obama administration’s dual-track diplomatic strategy and decided to endure the costs of the international community’s unilateral and multilateral sanctions, I show that ideological factors constituted how Iran framed the nuclear issue and interpreted its interests. It is clear that neither the role nor the effects of these elements can be ignored or downplayed. Instead, they must be integrated into any planning and decision making process. In this respect, policymakers may find it more efficient to tune and frame their foreign policy orientations vis-à-vis the IRI in light of the key foreign policy objectives and strategic principles that transcend the Iranian leadership. All Iranian political factions are, for example, highly adverse to policies or compromises that would jeopardise Iran’s independence and dignity. Additionally, this thesis shows that Iran long pursued a Janus-faced policy towards the US that reflected a strategic consensus within the leadership that less conflictual relations within a context of “mutual respect” could be greatly beneficial to the IRI.

**Methodological Considerations**

Putting into practice a Wendtian-constructivist approach is not straightforward, in large part because Wendt, like many constructivists, neither clarifies nor indicates how social processes should studied in practice. As Klotz and Lynch remark, constructivist approaches have rarely explained “how to do” constructivist research.94

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Being little concerned with matters of empirical politics, Wendt remains virtually silent on questions of epistemology:

Readers looking for detailed propositions about the international system, let alone empirical tests, will be disappointed. The book [Social Theory of International Politics] is about the ontology of the states system, and so is much more about international theory than about international politics as such.95

However, the ontological premise that structures are social, and that states’ identities and interests are in large part constructed by them, called for an interpretive epistemology and methodologies capable of acknowledging and capturing contingency and context. With this in mind, my theoretical prism of analysis was executed through a mixed methods approach, which combined document analysis (primary and secondary sources) and semi-structured interviews.

First, my research relies on numerous Iranian official documents which were widely available on Iran’s state-sanctioned English-language websites or international organisations’ webpages.96 These official documents consisted of interview transcripts, declarations and media broadcasts. They offered state-centric and elite perspectives, and provided critical access points into the ways in which the Iranian leadership and individual officials framed particular situations or challenges, and packaged their decisions to domestic constituents and/or external observers in the language of national interest. They showed the existence of particular intersubjective understandings (structures of meanings) and their effects on logics of action (causal and constitutive effects of meanings). Additionally, these official documents helped identify and understand whether, how and why the Ahmadinejad administration instantiated and reinforced or, quite the opposite, challenged institutionalised structures of meanings and practices. Finally, these documents revealed how and

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95 Wendt, Social Theory, 6.
why Iran sought to legitimise its position, mobilise support and delegitimise competitive claims.

As Bryman rightly notes, several factors must be borne in mind when analysing official documents.\(^97\) One is the context within which they were produced and their implied readership (i.e. the question of biases).\(^98\) The declarations of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the IAEA, for example, were directed at the Agency as well as the states which were either directly involved in the negotiations or concerned by their development. These declarations often revealed a number of strategic messages, especially in the way they sought to both portray Iran’s rationale for its firm nuclear stance and explain the dynamics of the nuclear issue. The documents available on the website of the Office of the Supreme Leader, for their part, were often translations of speeches that Ayatollah Khamenei had given within Iran. The intended readership was primarily internal and, as such, the impressions conveyed were different, especially their emphasis of the legitimacy of the system of the IRI and its foreign policy principles. Overall, these official documents were relevant for my research since they presented the views and messages that officials wished to get across.

Halliday warns us against the dangers of relying solely upon leaders’ declarations:

> We do need to know what leaders, peoples and experts from the region say; but if our aim is to explain the course of events, and critically evaluate different accounts of these events, the arguments of leaders and rebels, as much as those of external observers and powers, need to meet criteria of plausible explanation and accuracy.\(^99\)

To avoid any possible gaps between “claims” and “reality”, I conducted systematic validity checks on the information provided in the official documents and interviews. I was generally able to do so with the help of a wide range of secondary sources.

Second, my research relied on the examination of an extensive selection of secondary sources, such as publications from a variety of academic journals, books, think tanks, conferences and panels on Iran, media broadcasts, IAEA reports and

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\(^98\) Ibid., 554-55.
\(^99\) Halliday, The Middle East in International Relations, 33.
UNSC Resolutions. As such, part of the data collected for the purpose of this analysis was first researched and interpreted by third parties. The reason for this was twofold. On the one hand, secondary sources allowed me to identify key concepts, theories and research methods that have traditionally been used to analyse Iran’s foreign policy behaviour since the 1979 Revolution. This shed light on the main strengths, gaps and areas of disagreement in the field. In turn, this helped me position my research project and articulate my contribution. On the other hand, secondary sources provided a wealth of knowledge on various aspects of Iran’s domestic politics and foreign policy since the Revolution. This abundant material offered critical insights into Iran’s subjective and intersubjective identities and the structures of its relations with other actors. This was particularly important since the Wendtian-constructivist approach required a great amount of contextualisation: to understand “what was there” before President Ahmadinejad came to power (the context within which meanings had been formed), and how and why his administration may have shifted or reproduced existing logics of representation and interaction (the practices that may be fixed or changed).

I placed particular importance on the work that scholars such as Adib-Moghaddam, Ansari and Ehteshami produced. While their theoretical approaches and topics of enquiry differed from mine, their affinity with Farsi, their ability to engage with materials (e.g. articles) produced in Iran, and their knowledge of the country’s history and culture, were crucial to the very possibility of this project. Indeed, their work substantially influenced my understanding of the role and effects of several historical episodes on contemporary Iranian politics (e.g. the myth of the 1953 coup against Mossadegh) or the motives and meaning of recurrent themes (e.g. the representation of the US as “world arrogance”). In a context where I could not read sources in Farsi, the work of these authors guided my understanding of several aspects of Iran’s domestic politics and foreign policy behaviour. As such, they form the foundations upon which this analysis of Iran’s nuclear policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency was built.

Additionally, secondary sources shed light on key domestic and geopolitical dynamics, developments and trends that shaped Iran’s internal politics and external environment. With regards to the nuclear case study, secondary sources also
revealed the external, competitive frames that Iran faced; namely, how other actors constructed its identities, interests and logics of action, and how these understandings shaped their policies towards Iran.

Third, I carried out several interviews with Iranian officials who were based outside Iran during the Ahmadinejad presidency. These participants were selected in virtue of their involvement in the institutions of the IRI and their knowledge of Iran’s foreign policy (i.e. relative proximity to decision-making circles). The interviewees were mostly contacted by email. When I could not find their contact details, I approached journalists who had interviewed them. I disclosed the fact that I was a research candidate at the University of Exeter, studying Iran’s foreign policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency, and wished to contact X for the purpose of an interview for my doctoral thesis. I asked for advice on how to contact the Iranian official in question. This strategy proved fairly successful and sometimes led to further contacts between the journalists and myself. This was the case with Laura Rozen, the writer of the Back Channel news-blog for Al Monitor, and Barbara Slavin, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, a correspondent for Al Monitor and the author of Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation.100

I systematically explained the purpose of my research to potential interviewees in broad terms and the reasons for seeking their participation in the project. They were all informed that, should they accept to grant me an interview, they would receive the University of Exeter’s ethics consent form, which detailed the conditions of anonymity, the voluntary nature of participation and the measures in place to ensure that the data collected remained confidential. It was also clarified that no commercial or other interests were involved in the project, which was not funded by any organisation. I often had to make several attempts before securing a response, be it positive and negative. The date, time and location of the interviews were left at the discretion of the participants. Some interviews took place face-to-face, others via email.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to cover the topics I wanted to focus on and, simultaneously, to give the interviewees a great deal of leeway in their answers. My interest lay in their interpretation and understanding of issues, events and decisions. As such, the questions were all open-ended. Similar questions were used for all the interviewees in order to make comparisons between answers. Some of the questions were rephrased or reordered when I felt they were not straightforward or clear enough. For example, questions related to the participants’ understandings of the profound motives for external opposition to Iran’s nuclear activities were best positioned as follow-up points after the interviewees had expressed their views on Iran’s external relations, the power dynamics within the international system, etc. Questions specific to the particular occupation and expertise of the participants were also included in the interviews. For example, when I prepared for my interview with Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran’s Ambassador to the IAEA from 2005 to 2013, it became clear that the failure of the August 2007 Work Plan between Iran and the Agency was a bitter disappointment to him. One of my open-ended questions related to this specific phase of negotiation. Finally, impromptu questions were systematically used in order to follow up on points or information that emerged during the interview.

At the start of each interview, I gave the participant a copy of the ethics consent form, which had also been sent to them 48 hours prior to our meeting. This often provided an opportunity for the interviewee to ask more questions about my research aims. Apprehension was often visible, with many interviewees seeking clarifications about my intentions, nationality and choice to study in the UK. The ethics consent form also provided an opportunity to clarify the conditions of confidentiality and anonymity. The interviewees could choose to be identified by their name and position, their position only, or not to be identifiable at all. In the majority of cases, the interviewees chose to remain unidentifiable.

Each of the interviewees was asked if I could use my voice-recorder and take notes during the interview. While most agreed, one individual refused. This was undoubtedly my most challenging interview. At first, the Iranian official seemed more interested in asking me questions or hearing my thoughts on the questions I presented to him. The interview, however, lasted for three hours and was the most
revealing that I conducted. The participant was willing to discuss aspects of Iran’s domestic politics and highlighted patterns of continuity in Iran’s foreign policy under the Shah’s regime and since the Revolution. He also spoke of the numerous resemblances between Iran and the US.

I faced four main challenges during my research project. The first lay in that several officials expressed the wish to be interviewed by email. I thought this could offer them the flexibility to reply as and when was most convenient to them and to take the time to construct their responses and elaborate their argument. Email interviews would also reduce my own costs and time constraints. Although I was able to secure additional interviews by this method, I found that the participants were often slow in sending their responses. Furthermore, the interviewees’ responses were generally very short, thus making it difficult to assess what some of the responses meant.

The second challenge was that my overall access to Iranian officials remained limited. The responses from those who were based inside Iran were all negative, the emails and invitation letters often remaining unanswered. In some cases, some explained that they could not take part in the research. This was the case of Ali Larijani, the Secretary of the SNSC from August 2005 to October 2007 and the Majles Speaker since May 2008. Through a contact, I was informed that Larijani recommended that I seek assistance from Manouchehr Mottaki and Ali Akbar Salehi. Mottaki, Iran’s Foreign Minister from August 2005 to December 2010, declined due to time constraints. Salehi, for his part, never replied to my emails. On a number of occasions, I was also asked to answer a list of questions pertaining to my nationality, the reasons for my interests in Iran, and the name and research focus of my supervisors. Unfortunately, I was often refused interviews when such questions were raised. Some official organisations, such as the Permanent Mission of Iran to the UN, also seemed to have a “geographical division”. The Mission in New York, for example, invited me to contact their colleagues in Vienna since I was based in Europe.
Additionally, the wished-for snowball sampling effect did not materialise.\footnote{Bryman, Social Research Methods, 424.} It was hoped that the interviewees would be able to suggest other participants and, possibly, facilitate establishing contact with them and/or others I had difficulties getting in touch with. The interviewees were not very receptive to these suggestions. This can be understood in light of the fact that most wished to remain anonymous. I was also informed that Iranian officials based inside the country were rarely authorised to talk to foreigners, especially for the purpose of doctoral theses.

My third challenge was that my fieldwork in Iran was abruptly cancelled in April 2011. At the time, the French government recommended against travelling to Iran. Following a meeting between my first supervisor and the manager of Exeter’s College of Social Sciences and International Studies, it was decided that I should postpone my trip. After the storming of the British Embassy in Tehran in November 2011, fieldwork in Iran was made more difficult. Several Iranian officials also advised me against going to Iran for my research. Some encouraged me to go but only in order to learn the language and become more acquainted with the country. Another official explained that “things are bad” and my presence could jeopardise the position of my interlocutors.

My research project could have been substantially enriched, had I had the opportunity to do fieldwork in Iran. Spending time in the country, meeting with people, connecting with academics, research institutions or other organisations, would have been a source of personal fulfilment and made the research process much more intellectually rewarding than “at a distance” in my office. I could have also carried more interviews, made more observations and perhaps gained unexpected insights that, ultimately, would have improved the depth and breadth of my research.

With respect to Farsi, had I become more acquainted with the language and not limited myself to studying Farsi for two years for two hours per week, I could have perhaps read original sources and conducted interviews in the participants’ native language. Arguably, this would have enabled me to revisit and check
interpretations/meanings and identify potentially new/different frames of reference. In this respect, I cannot help but wonder whether and how the official documents I accessed on Iran’s state-sanctioned English-language website or international organisations’ webpages may have varied if read in Farsi (see page 42). I hope, however, that within the circumstances in which my research project unfolded, my theoretical and methodological considerations have allowed me to produce as thorough and contextualised analysis of Iran’s approach to the nuclear issue during the Ahmadinejad presidency as possible.

Finally, a colleague of mine, who had attended one of my presentations during a conference on Iran, mentioned that I had a very “idealistic” and “romanticised” interpretation of Iranian politics. Having been born and raised in the Middle East and having been to Iran, he felt that I overlooked both its destabilising policies within the Middle East region and its systematic violation of human rights. This observation stayed with me for it touched upon several ethical dilemmas that I had faced: how can I reconcile my attempt to empathise with Iran’s foreign policy with the fact that, under the Ahmadinejad administration, the promotion and protection of human rights in Iran deteriorated to new lows? How can I seek to explain the underlying logics and benefits of Iran’s nuclear strategy of resistance for the regime while (not) overlooking the substantial costs and consequences of this policy for ordinary Iranians and the country’s socio-political dynamics? How can I treat Iran as a nation-state when friends and colleagues repeatedly articulate that they do not identify with the Shi’a-Persian dominated state?

Although these ethical dilemmas never ceased to intersect with my research project, I became acutely aware that a constructivist interpretation of Iran’s foreign policy could position me as a “government mouthpiece”. Since my aim was to understand, contextualise and explain particular aspects of Iran’s foreign policy behaviour, I was always at risk of coming across as politically sympathetic to the regime and thus too biased and uncritical of the limitations of its policies. Within this context, I found it particularly relevant to present and articulate as clearly as possible my theoretical approach and insist that I was engaging with Iran’s framings and views. As Finnemore and Sikkink highlight, for constructivists, “understanding how things are put together and how they occur is not mere description. Understanding the
constitution of things is essential in explaining how they behave and what causes political outcomes.\textsuperscript{102}

As such, the analysis focuses on Iran’s narratives; how, for example, the regime explained the nuclear issue, justified its position and defended its policies and priorities. However, taking into account Halliday’s warning on the limitations of relying solely upon leader’s declarations (see page 43), I attempted to study both Iran’s rhetoric and behaviour in order to identify and distinguish manipulation and issues of “impression management” (see pages 95-96) from more “sincere” forms of communication. Although I found remarkable consistency between Iran’s narrative and the policies pursued, I also sought to highlight areas where discrepancies emerged. Thus, on pages 191-192, it is noted that despite the Ahmadinejad administration’s insistence that it was determined to use the full spectrum of Iran’s rights under the NPT and no longer accept measures that would single it out, the regime nevertheless took several steps that went beyond its legal obligations. Additionally, the domestic politics chapter (chapter 3) highlights that it cannot be ignored that Iran’s firm and consistent nuclear stance, especially its intransigence in the face of mounting external pressures, could have been partly down to domestic paralysis (see pages 146-148).

I also found it important to highlight aspects of Iran’s narratives that had been largely ignored or overlooked. This included its insistence that the Iranian nuclear file had been illegally referred to the UNSC and that the IAEA had stepped beyond its statutory and legal mandate. Additionally, I saw the importance in explaining how and why a constructivist perspective could contribute to policymaking. One of the underlying aspects of the criticism that I “idealised” Iran’s foreign policy was related to the fact that my analysis did not really engage with realpolitik, the nuts and bolts of foreign policy. I dispute this assertion on the ground that identity and interests must be problematised, for only they can shed light on foreign policy orientations, enabling policymakers to appreciate how the Iranian leadership may receive their discourses and policies.

Structure of the Thesis

I have organised my thesis into seven chapters. Serving as bookends, chapter 1 contextualises my approach and chapter 7 offers a comprehensive overview of the key research findings and articulates my overall empirical and analytical contribution.

Chapter 2 sets out the theoretical framework that guided and structured the research process. I engage with Wendt’s argument that the structures of the international system are social and that states’ identities and interests are in large part constructed by them. In the first section, I argue that states always possess subjective and intersubjective identities. The former are rooted in processes of self-understanding, and the latter are structured by states’ beliefs, expectations and culture of relations with their significant Others. Crucially, states’ subjective and intersubjective identities have constitutive effects on how they interpret their interests as well as their (legitimate and feasible) foreign policy options in a given situation. Identities thus have important motivational and behavioural consequences.

Furthermore, I engage with Wendt’s contention that states possess several essential needs linked to their subjective identities, which are more complex than the realist focus on physical security and economic health. In the second section, I delve into Wendt’s key argument that “anarchy is what states make of it.” I analyse the ways in which and the reasons why states’ intersubjective identities shape their collective knowledge and have powerful domestic socialisation effects. This, in turn, allows one to shed light on the core motives that sustain resilient patterns of behaviour and dynamics of interaction.

In the third section, I outline the main features and policy consequences of the Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian cultures of anarchy. This is particularly useful for specifying why similar material resources acquire different meanings, and why peaceful, competitive or conflictual relations exist as a result of interaction, and not the power distribution or the inevitable consequence of self-help within the international system. In the last section, I pursue the argument that cultures of anarchy are always contingent and outline the chief domestic and systemic factors that either facilitate or inhibit collective identity formation.
Chapter 3 focuses on Iran’s domestic politics during the Ahmadinejad presidency in order to identify the chief internal forces and pressures that shaped its foreign policymaking processes during the period 2005-2013. In the first section, I observe that the June 2005 election of President Ahmadinejad paved the way for a growing securitisation of Iran’s domestic politics, which was itself a result of a conflagration of internal and external circumstances. The post-electoral legitimacy crisis of 2009 represented the most profound challenge to the IRI’s stability since the Iran-Iraq war and deepened the regime’s strategies of repression, violence and control. The acute securitisation of Iran’s domestic politics continued until the end of the Ahmadinejad presidency, quite unsurprisingly in light of the external pressures that the nuclear issue simultaneously exercised on the regime.

In the second section, I analyse the unprecedented polarisation of Iran’s domestic politics, which was, in part, created by the aforementioned securitisation dynamics. Profound divisions arose within the conservative forces, particularly between the “old” and the principlist “new” guard on the one hand, and between President Ahmadinejad and his followers and their opponents on the other. Criticisms coalesced around the partly related issues of Iran’s economic and foreign policy situations. After analysing the chief aspects of the elite-level condemnations of the Ahmadinejad administration’s performance, I engage with the institutional and informal attempts to constrain and limit the principlists’ role and influence.

I conclude this chapter by arguing that the intertwined dynamics of securitisation and polarisation likely affected Iran’s external behaviour in two main ways. On the one hand, the regime may have had greater incentives to use the foreign policy arena, especially the nuclear issue, as an instrument of domestic diversion and legitimacy bolstering. It may have become increasingly dependent on external performance in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election and the international community’s enforcement of increasingly stringent sanctions. On the other hand, the acute divisions within the elite, and between the elected and unelected institutions of the IRI, may have hindered Iran’s autonomy and capacity to adapt and transform its foreign policy strategies, particularly from 2009 onwards. Within this context, I cannot exclude the possibility that Iran’s firm nuclear stance could have been partly the result of domestic paralysis.
Chapter 4 forms the first part of my analysis of Iran’s multifaceted approach to the nuclear issue. To understand why Iran never agreed to renounce, or significantly alter, its nuclear programme following the revelation of its concealed facilities and activities in August 2002, I show that it was embedded in a structure of meaning that emphasised its legality and legitimacy. I then focus on the first phase of Iran’s approach to the nuclear issue, during the Khatami presidency, when the regime followed a confidence-building approach towards the IAEA and the EU-3 that led to voluntary and temporary suspension of its nuclear enrichment and reprocessing activities. This approach failed to secure Iran’s rights to peaceful nuclear energy under the NPT. For Iran, its negotiations with the EU-3 not only proved humiliating but also demonstrated that at the core of the nuclear issue lay the problem of Iran-US relations. This formative experience called for a less compromising and more assertive negotiation strategy, which the Ahmadinejad administration both pursued and legitimised.

In the third section, I analyse the regime’s framing of the nuclear issue as a Western-led attempt to undermine the IRI, prevent the scientific and economic development of Iran, and transform the mandate of the IAEA to weaken Iran’s national security. From the regime’s perspective, the securitisation of its nuclear programme was less related to the West’s proliferation concerns than yet another attempt to weaken and humiliate Iran. Within this context, Iran had to pursue an assertive strategy that combined tit for tat dismissal of the IAEA’s demands and the UNSC’s Resolutions, with the creation of new de facto nuclear realities. I conclude that, despite its material costs, Iran’s resistance strategy benefited the regime. Its substantial nuclear achievements and the objective failure of the unilateral and multilateral coercive diplomatic strategy to affect its nuclear calculus both strengthened Iran’s national independence and confidence in the righteousness of the IRI’s moral and strategic principles.

Chapter 5 engages with two other key aspects of Iran’s approach to the nuclear issue, which, though different in their emphasis, both related to its attempt to transform the matter into wider geopolitical opportunities. In the first section, I analyse how Iran attempted to broaden the scope of the dispute by transforming it
into a debate about the practices of the NWSs of the NPT, particularly the Western powers. On the one hand, it denounced the NWSs’ failure to fulfil their legal obligations towards the NNWS, particularly with regard to the development and sharing of peaceful nuclear technology. On the other hand, it condemned the NWSs’ failure to fulfil their nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation obligations. Through this dual framing, Iran sought to alter perceptions of its nuclear programme as a proliferation challenge and a threat to international peace and security. Instead, it portrayed its resistance strategy as driven by interests greater than its own. The regime positioned itself as a constructive state party to the NPT and a morally driven actor actively resisting injustice and acting for the good of the international system in general, and developing nations in particular.

I also examine how and why Iran’s condemnations of the NWSs’ double standards and illegal and illegitimate practices in the nuclear field enabled it to gain rhetorical and practical expressions of support. The NPT Review Conferences, the statements of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the May 2010 Turkey-Brazil-Iran Agreement all showed that Iran had tapped into and successfully mobilised pre-existing sources of discontent and grievances. This external support in turn helped legitimise and confirm Iran’s identity narrative as a responsible and morally driven state actor that was not isolated within the international system and that was able to challenge the Western core powers.

In the second section, I focus on the fact that Iran did not seek solely to devalue, and assert itself vis-à-vis the Western NWSs. The negotiation proposals of the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad administrations included cooperation on a range of issues unrelated to the nuclear question. Despite differences in tone and emphasis, their proposals clarified how Iran contemplated its (desired) processes of interaction with these actors. I conclude that the nuclear issue provided paradoxical threats to and opportunities for Iran since it both profoundly revived its grievances and negative beliefs concerning the Western core powers while simultaneously creating potential for engagement on issues of mutual interests. In other words, Iran displayed complex role-identities as an anti-status quo power that was willing to cooperate with long-standing rivals on several transnational security challenges.
Chapter 6 builds on the argument that Iran’s approach to the nuclear issue was multifaceted and incorporated elements of estrangement and conciliation towards the Western core powers, the US in particular. I focus in greater detail on Iran’s US policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency to understand how (and why) Iran conceived of its relationship with the world’s superpower and whether (and why) its logics of representation and interaction persisted or were challenged during the Ahmadinejad presidency. To do so, the first section examines the constitutive features and dynamics of the Iran-US culture of enmity since the Revolution. I show why their mutual mistrust and worst-case assumptions acquired self-perpetuating qualities, especially since they became embedded in individual and collective consciousness, internal and external status quo interests, and routinised practices of hostility. I also emphasise that, despite substantial differences in their material capabilities and ability to harm, Iran systematically relied on deterrence strategies of different kinds to counter US threats to its physical security, economic well-being and status.

In the second section, I demonstrate that Iran often pursued Janus-faced strategies towards the US. I outline the Khatami administration’s pronounced and repeated attempts to “altercast” the superpower, both rhetorically through the “dialogue of civilisations” and practically via its multilevel cooperation in Afghanistan in the early 2000s and its unprecedented negotiation proposal in May 2003. These efforts were prompted by both will and necessity in light of the post-9/11 geopolitical context and the Bush administration’s foreign policy agenda.

I then examine in greater detail Iran’s US policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency, which witnessed substantial developments in the form of direct public and private engagement between US and Iranian officials, including high-level figures, and domestic public discussions on the question of engagement between the two estranged actors. As such, the Ahmadinejad presidency oversaw substantial shifts in Iran’s institutionalised processes of representation of, and interaction with, the superpower.

I conclude that Iran’s Janus-faced US policy, which oscillated between condemnation and defiance on the one hand, and carefully calibrated engagement
and conciliation attempts on the other, must be understood in light of Iran’s
discursive and strategic dependence on the US. A transformation of US-Iran
relations, away from enmity and towards more collective identity information, would
help Iran reduce its security dilemmas and help bridge the gap between the
perceptions of its legitimate interests and its ability to play a role commensurate with
its geopolitical aspirations. Crucially, the Supreme Leader’s views on US-Iran
relations and Iran’s national interests evolved. Engagement was neither necessary
nor intrinsically negative as long as core and non-negotiable expectations were met
so that neither the heritage of the Revolution nor Ayatollah Khamenei’s personal
legitimacy would be jeopardised.
In this chapter, I explore the theoretical approaches that informed and shaped my analysis of Iran’s foreign policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency. I review how and why a Wendtian-constructivist perspective raises relevant questions and crucial insights into the underlying logics and drivers of states’ behaviours and processes of interaction. However, I do not engage with all aspects of Wendt’s thinking, especially his argument on the philosophy of social theory. I also include several elements of realist thinking and domestic politics to strengthen the overall cohesiveness and relevance of my theoretical framework. While Wendt has been the subject of wide critique in the literature on International Relations (IR), my data also revealed that his approach would struggle to account for and incorporate several key elements, thus calling for a refinement of the research design.103

In sum, although a range of constructive approaches exists and scholars have often combined them, I chose instead to engage with Wendt’s argument, identify very clearly how and why his own particular approach was well suited to my research subject, where it lacked analytical potential, and how and why such shortcomings would be revealed in the context of this thesis.104 In so doing, I offer a comprehensive and cohesive theoretical framework, which avoids both making an under-defined claim that I have developed “a constructivist perspective” and the “catalogue effect” of combining various constructivist theories.

Wendt’s thought-provoking 1992 article “Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, and his groundbreaking Social Theory of

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International Politics (1999), established him as one of the core social constructivist scholars in the field of IR.\textsuperscript{105} His approach was substantially developed in response to Waltz’s Theory of International Politics, Wendt himself recognising a process of borrowing and rejecting since his “theory competes with Waltz’s argument in some ways and supports it in others.”\textsuperscript{106}

Wendt’s theory shares many of the same premises as his counterpart, including the choice of developing a “states systemic project.”\textsuperscript{107} A Wendtian constructive perspective thus also seeks to explain the behaviour of states in the international system. States, defined as “structure[s] of political authority with a monopoly on the legitimate use of organised violence,” are considered to be at the centre of the international system since they are the channels through which violence, continuity and/or change ultimately happen.

Additionally, like Waltz, Wendt seeks to develop a systemic (as opposed to reductionist) theory of international politics.\textsuperscript{108} He similarly emphasises the causal powers of the structure of the international system in explaining state behaviour. His focus does not lie with the properties of the states per se (i.e. unit-level factors like domestic politics or decision-makers’ personality).\textsuperscript{109} Contrarily to Waltz, however, Wendt argues that “the challenge of ‘systemic theory’ is not to show that ‘structure’ has more explanatory power than ‘agents,’ as if the two were separate, but to show how agents are differently structured by the system as to produce different effects.”\textsuperscript{110}

Finally, Wendt agrees that brute material forces have independent effects on international politics.\textsuperscript{111} As such, the Wendtian-constructivist perspective does not espouse the contention that international life is ‘ideas all the way down.’ “In at least

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{107} Wendt, Social Theory, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 110-13.
\end{flushright}
three ways,” Wendt writes, brute material forces constraint states’ actions.\textsuperscript{112} Firstly, the distribution of material capabilities amongst actors affects “the possibility and likelihood of certain outcomes.”\textsuperscript{113} It is, for example, unlikely that a militarily weak state be able to conquer a powerful counterpart. Secondly, the “composition” of material capabilities similarly constrains the probability of certain outcomes. “Armies with tanks will usually defeat armies with spears.”\textsuperscript{114} Finally, geography and natural resources endow states with differing comparative advantages. Although Wendt contends that brute material forces are constituted independently of states and affect them in a causal way, “it is only because of their interaction with ideas that material forces have the effects that they do”.\textsuperscript{115}

Wendt has three main points of contention with Waltz’s neo-realist approach, which form the basis for his account of international politics. First, Waltz’s reliance on the analogy of neoclassical micro-economic theory makes him an “individualist”: “States are likened to firms, and the international system to a market within which states compete.”\textsuperscript{116} Within this context, states have a universal national interest (exogenously given) and a rational behaviour predicated on the maximisation of their preferences.

Second, Waltz conceives of the structure of the international system as the distribution of material capabilities under anarchy. As such, the “kinds of ideational attributes or relationships that might constitute a social structure, like patterns of friendships or enmity, or institutions, are specifically excluded from the definition”.\textsuperscript{117} The anarchical structure of the international system (i.e. the absence of a central authority and collective security) leads states to compete for power and influence, thus producing forms of behavioural uniformity (‘like units’) and the punishment and elimination of those that do not follow them.\textsuperscript{118} In anarchic environments, “each unit’s incentive is to put itself in a position to be able to take care of itself since no one else

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 15-16.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 16, 318.
can be counted on to do so.”¹¹⁹ As such, there is no profound differentiation of function; the principal difference is one of capability: “States perform or try to perform tasks, most of which are common to all of them; the ends they aspire to are similar.”¹²⁰

Wendt, by contrast, argues that states’ identities and interests are both significantly affected and constituted by the international system. They are not pre-defined and exogenous to interaction and can thus be neither ignored nor taken for granted. Instead, they must be problematised in order to understand states’ foreign policy behaviours. Crucially, Wendt argues, identities constitute and shape states’ preferences and actions.¹²¹ Additionally, Wendt disagrees that self-help is a structural feature of the international system.¹²² Anarchy, as he famously coined it, “is what states make of it”. International politics is determined by “the beliefs and expectations that states have about each other”, and the meaning and effects of material power depend on the type of social structure that dominates.¹²³ International structure is a social rather than a material phenomenon; it does not have a logic but is driven by process instead.¹²⁴

Third, Waltz neglects international interaction and, consequently, situations of power transitions and variations in the system structure can only be accounted for by changes in the distribution of material capabilities.¹²⁵ Waltz’s materialist theory, and his assumption about state identity, is unable to explain structural change that does not involve a transition in the distribution of capabilities, as was the case during the Cold War. Arguably, too, the profound transformation of Iran’s foreign policy interests and behaviours in the aftermath of the Revolution cannot be explained by reference to material structures alone.

¹²⁰ Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 96. Cited in Donnelly, Realism and International Relations, 17.
¹²² Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 394; Wendt, Social Theory, 146.
¹²³ Wendt, Social Theory, 20.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 21.
¹²⁵ Ibid., 16.
To summarise, there are two main strands to Wendt’s disagreement with Waltz, which both derive from his emphasis on intersubjectivity: the structures of the international system are social (rather than material), and states’ identities and interests are in large part constructed by them (rather than given exogenously to the system). In other words, structures exist only through processes and interactions substantially give meaning to one’s identities and interests. I now turn to exploring both aspects in greater detail, systematically emphasising how and why each informs my analysis of Iran’s foreign policy. Additionally, I engage with the limits of Wendt’s approach and explain how and why complementary perspectives strengthen my overall theoretical framework.

**States’ Identities and Interests**

In contending that states’ identities and interests are not given and exogenously defined, Wendt is able to make three core arguments regarding the sources of foreign policy behaviour. First, identities have subjective and intersubjective qualities and, as such, states’ understanding of their identities is rooted in processes that are both related and unrelated to interaction with other actors. Second, identities shape interests in significant ways since they help interpret situations and identify which options are acceptable (question of legitimacy) and possible (question of feasibility). Finally, in virtue of their subjective identities, states share universal national interests which set limits on their foreign policy options.

**Subjective and Intersubjective Qualities**

Wendt defines identity as “relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self” and “a property of intentional actors that generates motivational and behavioural dispositions”. Identity has both subjective and intersubjective qualities. It is subjective in the sense that it is rooted in an actor’s self-understanding and neither requires nor implies the existence of an Other. It also has an intersubjective, or systemic, quality as “the meaning of an actor’s self-understanding will often depend on whether other actors represent an actor in the

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127 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 397; Wendt, *Social Theory*, 224.

128 Wendt, *Social Theory*, 224.
same way.” The intersubjective quality of identity thus involves an element of recognition and acceptance. This internal-external nexus is, however, more complex, for Wendt argues for the existence of “several kinds of identities.” While “corporate” and “type” identities are subjective, “role” and “collective” identities have an intersubjective dimension.

**Corporate, Type, Role and Collective Identities**

States have “personal or corporate identities”, which are “constituted by the self-organising, homeostatic structures that make actors distinct entities.” As such, corporate identities refer to some of the intrinsic and essential properties of states, which are not socially constructed by the international system, but include “a consciousness and memory of Self as a separate locus of thought and activity.” States do not have “bodies’ if their members have no joint narrative of themselves as a corporate actor, and to that extent corporate identity presupposes individuals with a collective identity. The state is a ‘group Self’ capable of group-level cognition.” “Type identities”, for their part, correspond to “regime types” or “forms of state”, such as capitalist or monarchical states. Such identities are exogenous to the international system since they do not depend on other states for their existence. They are “constituted by internal principles of political legitimacy that organize state-society relations with respect to ownership and control of the means of production and destruction.”

In addition to states’ corporate and type identities, Wendt also identifies two types of intersubjective identities. “Role identities” do not have “intrinsic properties and exist only in relations to Others”. As such, they imply the existence of a social structure between the Self and the Other. A role identity, Wendt argues, is learned and

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129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid., 224-25. For human beings, corporate identities refer to their body and experience of consciousness. For organisations, they relate to their members, physical resources and shared beliefs and institutions. See Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation,” 385.
132 Ibid. Social Theory, 225.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid., 226.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., 227.
potentially reinforced as a result of the way in which actors are treated by Others, a principle called “reflected appraisal” or “mirroring”:

actors come to see themselves as a reflection of how they think Others see or “appraise” them, in the “mirror” of Others’ representations of the Self. If the Other treats the Self as though she were an enemy, then by the principle of reflected appraisals she is likely to internalise that belief in her own role identity vis-à-vis the Other.138

This means that a state’s ideas about Self and Other are not passive: “You are an X; I expect you to act like an X, and I will act toward you as if you were an X.”139 States’ behaviour depends on the perceived meaning of their beliefs about and expectations of Others.140 For example, states act differently towards enemies and friends because the former are seen as threatening.141 As such, the extent to which, and the manner in which, states identify with one another affects whether they pursue policies of self- or collective interests.142 However, not all Others are equally significant in constituting a state’s identity. Power relations and dependency relationships play an important role.143 Wendt provides the example of the Arab-Israeli conflict to highlight the fact that the enemy’s role identity is not easily discarded.144 A similar argument is made in chapter 7 about the Iran-US conflict.

“Collective identities” are specific role identities in which the distinction between Self and Other is blurred.145 This is what Wendt calls “identification” and is linked to his definition of a “Kantian culture”.146 Collective identities build on type identities since identification is “usually issue-specific and rarely total”.147 They “vary by issue, time, and place and by whether they are bilateral, regional, or global”.148

138 Ibid., 327.
139 Ibid., 335.
140 Ibid., 140.
141 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 7-8.
142 Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation,” 386.
143 Wendt, Social Theory, 228.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., 229.
146 Ibid. Wendt’s approach is strongly shaped in reaction to the neo-realists’ view that self-interest is determined by, and intrinsic to, the anarchical structure of the anarchical system. Against this apparent pessimism, Wendt recognises a role for agency and explores the possibility of collective interests.
147 Ibid.
Wendt thus identifies four types of identities. Importantly, with the exception of corporate identities, these identities can “take multiple forms simultaneously” within the same state.\textsuperscript{149} Furthermore, while some situations may call on certain particular identities more than others, it is also possible that some circumstances mobilise “several identities that may point in different directions”.\textsuperscript{150} When this is the case, Wendt suggests that internal identity conflicts follow the rule: “(1) in any situation the solution to identity conflicts within an actor will reflect the relative ‘salience’ or hierarchy of identity commitments in the Self, and (2) that hierarchy will tend to reflect the order [of corporate, type, role and collective identities]”.\textsuperscript{151} Identities are thus ordered hierarchically: some are crucial to a state’s self-understandings, others less so.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is worth highlighting several crucial dimensions of Iran’s subjective and intersubjective identities. First, Iran emphasises a sense of importance as a regional or global actor: nationalism is very pronounced and has long infused Iranian consciousness with perceptions of grandeur and a legitimate role in its external environment. Iran’s history is replete with great successes. The Achaemenid dynasty (550-330 BCE), for example, ruled an Empire that stretched from Egypt to India and is often cited as the apex of Iran’s golden age.\textsuperscript{152} The Safavid dynasty (1502-1736) is also remembered as a period of national greatness and regional power.\textsuperscript{153} The 1979 Revolution similarly stands as a unique event, which had significance well beyond Iran’s borders and liberated the country from foreign influence. Many analysts thus argued that Iran’s strong sense of national identity, together with its strategic geographic location and its substantial hydrocarbon resources, profoundly shaped its foreign policy ambitions.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{149} Wendt, Social Theory, 230.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} D. E. Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads,” 6.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 7.
Second, Iran also presents a profound sense of insecurity and suspicion of foreign actors in large part due to the fact that it was repeatedly invaded or manipulated by foreign powers, including the Greeks, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, and the British and Russians from the 19th to the mid-20th century. Iran’s relative impotence in the face of Anglo-Russian rivalries left deep scars in the social fabric of Iranian society, including intense threat perceptions of foreign powers and a profound need to resist interference in the country’s sovereign affairs. The Tobacco Monopoly revolt (1890-1891), the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1906), the oil nationalisation movement (1951-1953) and the 1979 Revolution all constituted nationalist rejections of external penetration and exploitation of Iran’s resources. Abrahamian thus writes that a “conspirational mindset” exists among all periods and factions of Iranian politics. Farhi and Lotfian similarly observe that external actors are often represented as “thieves, always seeking to extract resources and ‘concessions’ (emtiaz) from Iran by manipulating domestic cleavages”.

Third, and closely linked to the first two points, a near consensus exists within Iran on key foreign policy principles. In particular, Iran stands against the unjust and oppressive global structures of power, it supports the non-aligned and oppressed nations and aspires to greater regional and international reach while maintaining its national independence. In this respect, it is worth noting that Ehteshami writes about an “arrogance of non-submission”. Fourth, the Revolution produced a unique political system that combines elements of republicanism and theocracy. While the IRI articulates complex conceptions of legitimacy (popular/electoral and religious/divine), Iran has continuously demanded external actors’ respect for, and acceptance of, its unique political system and norms. Further, while the republican component of its political system came under stress during the Khatami presidency (i.e. fierce institutional competition between elected and unelected institutions), the Ahmadinejad administration posed an unprecedented challenge to the social contract (see chapter 3).

156 Farhi and Lotfian, “Iran’s Post-Revolution Foreign Policy Puzzle,” 121.
Identities and Interests

One of Wendt’s most important claims is that a constitutive relationship exists between identities and interests: while the former refers to who or what actors are, the latter alludes to what they want. Interests thus always presuppose identities since an actor cannot know what he wants before he knows what it is: “Actors do not have a ‘portfolio’ of interests that they carry around independent of social context; instead, they define their interests in the process of defining situations.” To define situations, actors rely upon their identities.

Additionally, identities strongly imply particular preferences and thus behavioural logics. Some forms of actions are weighed and perceived as more appropriate or legitimate than others. Constructivists commonly refer to this dynamic as the “logic of appropriateness” (a term Wendt does not use), which opposes the realist “logic of consequences”, according to which states follow cost-benefit evaluations and “calculate the consequences of a particular course of action and […] choose the action that offers them the most utility.” Constructivists argue, instead, that states follow the norms associated with their particular identities. As such, and although much depends on the context of the situation, states seek to do “the right thing in accordance with their identity”. Conceptions of legitimacy thus shape and constrain behaviours.

In a 1996 co-authored chapter with Jepperson and Katzenstein, Wendt argues that norms are “collective expectations about proper behaviour for a given identity.” Norms not only constitute identities, they also have regulative effects since they generate expectations about appropriate behaviour in varying circumstances. In their analysis of the social construction of weapons of mass destruction as unacceptable weapons, Price and Tannenwald demonstrate that “models of
‘responsible’ or ‘civilised’ states are enacted and validated by upholding specific norms.”

States committed to such identities have historically constrained their use of these (socially constructed) ‘illegitimate’ weapons; civilised states could not resort to nuclear and/or chemical weapons. In sum, norms affect both states’ interests and the instruments and means that they deem appropriate to pursue their preferences and policies. The delegitimisation of these weapons shapes states’ practices and their permissible repertoire of action despite their potential utility.

Wendt also introduces nuance to the relationship between being (identities) and wanting (interests) with the concept of “subjective interests”. These are the beliefs actors hold about how to meet their identity needs in practice. Beliefs are important to explain a state’s behaviour since the latter is caused not only by what an actor wants, but also by what it believes is possible. As such, beliefs mediate the pivotal relation between identities and interests, between wanting and acting. Although Wendt does not explicitly make this argument, his concept of “subjective interests” alludes to the fact that foreign policy decisions tend to reflect the assessment of a range of opportunities and constraints in contingent circumstances. As Hill famously declared, “Foreign policy always exists on the cusp between choice and constraint.”

**Universal National Interests: Physical Survival, Autonomy, Economic Well-Being and Collective Self-Esteem**

If Wendt takes issue with Waltz’s contention that states share given interests, he nevertheless contends that it is possible to generalise about a universal national interest, which all states share in virtue of their corporate identity. In other words,

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166 Wendt, Social Theory, 232.

167 Ibid.

168 Ibid.

169 Ibid., 231.


171 Wendt, Social Theory, 233.
states possess certain essential needs that arise from their nature as self-organised political units. These interests are not social constructions; they are “pre-social”.172

Wendt defines national interest as “the reproduction requirements or security of state-society complexes”.173 He identifies four types: “physical survival”, “autonomy”, “economic well-being” and “collective self-esteem”.174 Physical survival refers to the survival of a state-society complex and has increasingly been identified with the preservation of territorial integrity.175 Autonomy, a result of sovereignty, relates to “the ability of a state-society complex to exercise control over its allocation of resources and its choice of government”.176 It enables states to respond to internal and external contingencies. Economic well-being refers to the maintenance of the mode of production and, in the existing capitalist system, to the state’s economic health (growth).177

Finally, collective self-esteem relates to “a group’s need to feel good about itself, for respect or status”.178 Wendt transposes an individual-level phenomenon, human beings’ need for self-esteem (respect) and recognition, to the state level. A defining factor of collective self-esteem is whether “collective self-images” are positive or negative.179 This, in turn, depends “in part on relationships with significant Others, since it is by taking the perspective of the Other that the Self sees itself”.180 “Positive self-images” tend to emerge from mutual respect and cooperation.181 Recognition of state sovereignty seems particularly important since “it means that at least formally a state has an equal status in the eye of Others.”182 In such a situation, not only are states more reassured of their safety from aggression, but they are also less inclined to feel the need to compensate for status. “Negative self-images” arise from perceived disregard or humiliation by other states and are thus more likely to occur.

172 Ibid., 234.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid., 235. Wendt notes that George and Keohane, who inspired him, identify three national interests: physical survival (“life”), autonomy (“liberty”) and economic well-being (“property”).
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid., 236.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid., 237.
in highly competitive environments. If states are to meet the self-esteem needs of their members, they cannot long tolerate negative images and will seek to “compensate by self-assertion and/or devaluation and aggression toward the Other.”

In his 2003 article “Why a World State is Inevitable”, Wendt clarifies his argument that individuals and states desire recognition. This desire has deeper aspirations than the simple recognition of physical security (“thin recognition”). It is a condition fundamental to the Self: “Only through recognition can people acquire and maintain a distinct identity. One becomes a Self, in short, via the Other – subjectivity depends on inter-subjectivity.” Furthermore, the desire for recognition can be fulfilled “either symmetrically or asymmetrically – by recognition of the Other’s equality, or by securing his recognition of the Self without reciprocating it”. The former is more stable since, in a situation of asymmetric recognition, those who are not fully recognised will struggle for recognition “as best they can”, thus imposing material and ideational costs. Finally, the effect of mutual recognition (namely being accepted as different and accepting the normative constraints that such recognition implies) is relatively paradoxical since it leads to a form of “collective identity or solidarity”.

Importantly, Wendt argues that the four essential needs of physical survival, autonomy, economic well-being, and collective self-esteem must constantly be addressed if states are to continue to exist. As such, they set limits on what states can do when defining their foreign policy interests and strategies. Furthermore, the four corporate needs can sometimes have contradictory implications, thus requiring prioritisation. Both of these points confirm that foreign policy behaviour only reflects what a state believes is legitimate, best and possible to achieve at a

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183 Ibid., 236.
184 Ibid., 237.
186 Ibid., 511.
187 Ibid., 511-12.
188 Ibid., 512-13.
189 Ibid., 512.
190 Wendt, Social Theory, 237.
191 Ibid.
particular point in time. Some options are more appropriate and justified than others, not more or less rational. In addition, physical security and economic health, which Waltz and the neo-realists view as the core of a state’s national interests, are two among four, equally important, needs.

To conclude, identities have subjective and intersubjective qualities, and causal and constitutive effects on states’ interests. Identities help interpret situations and shape the range of permissible options, which are defined against the dual backdrop of legitimacy (logic of appropriateness) and feasibility (subjective interests). Thus, although states share a universal national interest, the way in which their four requirements are met in practice is subject to their respective (and contingent) interpretations of situations and options. A Wendtian-constructivist approach to Iran’s foreign policy can thus bring to the fore factors that have been ignored, downplayed or misinterpreted within the prism of the “rationalism” versus “idealism” debate. The content and effects of Iran’s identities, and its perceptions of legitimate and possible foreign policy options, can be analysed and contextualised. Additionally, the four requirements of Iran’s corporate identities can help identify whether processes of prioritisation took place and, if so, understand their underlying motives.

Wendt, however, does not develop his argument on states’ likely responses to negative images. What, for example, might “self-assertion” or “devaluation” of the enemy significant Other entail? How can a state compensate for perceived disregard and humiliation, and articulate its demands for respect and recognition? As I subsequently analyse, Iran prioritised collective self-esteem over economic well-being and threats to its physical security in its nuclear strategy during the period 2005-2013. Fear of another weak performance, and its likely consequences for Iran’s reputation and future foreign policy options, substantially informed the rejection of the Khatami administration’s conciliatory approach (see chapter 4). Additionally, Iran

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192 As Saurette observes, little work has been done in the field of IR to systematically understand and account for the role that emotions in general, and dynamics of humiliation in particular, may play in global politics. Interestingly, he notes that Wendtian constructivism “strives to provide a more nuanced account of the constructed and constructive role of beliefs and emotions even if, as some suggest, constructivism under-appreciated the visceral nature of emotions and too quickly reduces them to ‘beliefs’ as opposed to affective forces”. See P. Saurette, “You Dissin Me? Humiliation and Post 9/11 Global Politics,” Review of International Studies 32, no. 3 (July 2006): 500. Mercer similarly calls for greater attention to the importance of emotions. See J. Mercer, “Emotional Beliefs,” International Organization 64 (Winter 2010): 1-31.
frequently appealed to, and expressed its support for, the international norms and treaties that regulate the nuclear non-proliferation regime (see chapter 5). In so doing, Iran attempted to present its nuclear policy as legal and legitimate, and thus undermine its opponents’ discourses and policies. The subsequent chapters explore how and why, in a context where negative self-images were prominent, Iran's processes of “self-assertion” and “devaluation” partly translated into strategies of resistance and legitimisation.
“Anarchy is What States Make of it”

Wendt disagrees with Waltz that the structure of the international system is based upon a distribution of material capabilities alone. Instead, he makes the central claim that all structures are “social structures” that do not exist independently of actors’ conceptions and practices. More specifically, structures contain three elements: “shared knowledge”, “practices” and “material resources”. The first defines the type of culture of anarchy that exists between two states, which, in turn, shapes their processes of interaction and interpretations of material reality.

I engage with Wendt’s argument on the constitution and self-perpetuating qualities of structures of identities and interests. I also highlight two main weaknesses in his thesis and explain how I seek to compensate for them in my analysis of Iran’s foreign policy.

Role and Effects of Collective Knowledge

Wendt agrees with Waltz and the realists that the distribution of material capabilities affects a state’s calculations. How it does so, however, is not a straightforward matter and strongly depends on the intersubjective understandings and expectations that constitute a state’s conceptions of Self and Other. More specifically, behaviour is determined by states’ “beliefs” and “expectations” about one another. This brings us to Wendt’s conception of role identities as well as to his argument on how and why social structures of relations tend to acquire self-perpetuating qualities.

Wendt provides the analogy of Alter and Ego encountering each other for the first time to explain the processes by which states start creating intersubjective meanings. Unlike Waltz, who postulates that states are self-interested, Wendt contends that, prior to interaction, they have no particular expectations of one another’s interests and likely aggressiveness. They only bring their corporate identities with them, together with their associated needs of physical security, autonomy, economic well-being and collective self-esteem. The first social act

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195 Wendt, Social Theory, 20.
196 Ibid., 328.
between Alter and Ego is thus critical since it “creates expectations on both sides about each other's future behaviour”.197 If, for example, states threaten each other's security in their first encounter, they are likely to develop self-interested conceptions of their identities and interests, and engage in competitive dynamics in their subsequent relations. If, however, states embrace a friendly and non-threatening attitude in their first encounter, less security-oriented and more collective dynamics of identity, interests and interaction may ensue.

In the longer term, states' beliefs and expectations acquire meaning and significance in what Wendt calls “collective knowledge”.198 Social acts are processes of signalling, interpreting and responding in which shared knowledge is created.199 Practices are thus critical to Wendt's argument: “It is through reciprocal interaction [...] that we create and instantiate the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define our identities and interests.”200 Role identities are produced and reproduced through interaction in a context where little new learning about the Other takes place. This stabilised culture comes to form an “institution”, which is defined as “a relatively stable set or ‘structure’ of identities and interests”.201 Consequently, social structures often form “self-fulfilling prophecies that tend to reproduce themselves”.202

Importantly, Wendt specifies that he uses the term “knowledge” “in the sociological sense of any belief an actor takes to be true”.203 These beliefs need not be true, only believed to be true, which means that errors of attribution, or misperceptions, are possible.204 Within this context, “history matters” since, once a culture has been institutionalised, states make attributions about each other's intentions, which are based more on what they know about the structure of their relations than what they know about each other.205 The introductory chapter pointed to this dynamic: the framing of Iran's nuclear programme as a weapons programme and a threat to

197 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 405.
198 Wendt, Social Theory, 140.
199 Ibid., 330-31.
200 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It”, 406.
201 Ibid., 399.
202 Wendt, Social Theory, 264, 309.
203 Ibid., 140.
204 Ibid., 159.
205 Ibid., 108.
international security was based less on direct and/or circumstantial evidence than assumptions about the preferences and ambitions of the so-called “rogue state”.

Social Structures and Domestic Politics
Wendt recognises that “states are intentional, corporate actors whose identities and interests are in important part determined by domestic politics rather than the international system”, and that much state action is driven by “domestic politics or leader psychology”. As such, his explanation of the emergence and self-perpetuating qualities of cultures of anarchy incorporates the fact that human beings play a role in instantiating and reproducing structures of identities and interests: “structure exists, has effects, and evolves only because of agents and their practices.”

In particular, Wendt argues that structures exist only by virtue of actors’ socialisation to, and participation in, collective knowledge. The relationship between collective structures of meaning and individuals’ belief is one of “supervenience and multiple realizability”. By this, Wendt means that collective representations can neither exist nor have effects unless individuals believe in them and are willing to engage in practices that reproduce those structures. At the same time, “the effects of collective knowledge are not reducible to individuals’ beliefs.” Social structures confront individuals “as more or less coercive social facts” and are experienced as having an existence independent of the individuals who embodied them in the first place. The state, for example, is a real self-organising entity that is not dependent for existence on any particular actor. Rather, it is contained in many individuals’ collective beliefs and narratives.

Group beliefs, Wendt notes, are often held in “collective memory”; that is “the myths, narratives, and traditions that constitute who a group is and how it relates to

206 Ibid., 246.
207 Ibid., 185.
208 Ibid., 162.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
211 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 399.
others”. Such beliefs enable groups to acquire continuity and identity over time through a “process of socialisation and ritual enactment”, and affect the way policymakers perceive their external environment. Structures of collective knowledge thus socialise successive generations of policymakers to certain representations of Self (subjective identities), Self and Other, and the world in general (intersubjective identities). They provide a frame of reference which helps explain “patterns in aggregate behaviour”. Thus, individuals develop a double relationship with social structures. They are both passive and active actors since, while they are influenced by social structures, they also contribute to instantiating and shaping them.

Wendt’s argument on the mutually constitutive relationship between agents and collective knowledge is short and elusive. This is in large part due to the fact that he purposely bracketed off domestic factors in his explanation of foreign policy behaviours. As he explains, “The fact that state agents are not constructed by system structures all the way down does not mean they are not constructed by them to a significant extent.” While this is a very relevant point, it remains that Wendt states, rather than explains, how “domestic politics” and “leader psychology” play an important role in shaping a state’s foreign policy behaviour.

Interestingly, constructivist approaches have often been criticised for their structural biases: “the explanation of the policy choices made by decision makers is in terms of the effect of social structures (broadly defined) on the individual actor rather than with reference to any innate characteristics of such actors.” In response to this, some scholars have called for “‘actor-specific’ complements to constructivism”.

Without more sustained attention to agency, constructivist scholars will find themselves unable to explain where their powerful social structures come from in the first place, and, equally important, why and how they change over time. Without theory, especially at the domestic level, constructivists will not

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213 Wendt, Social Theory, 163.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Ibid., 246.
218 See for example Flockhart, “Constructivism and Foreign Policy,” 87.
be able to explain in a systematic way how social construction actually occurs or why it varies cross-nationally.\textsuperscript{219}

In this thesis, I combine the Wendtian approach with a model that offers a synthetic but comprehensive perspective on the two-way interaction between agency and structure in decision-making processes. Additionally, a focus on the role of language is useful since it plays important functions in both the phenomenon of “supervenience and multiple realizability” and the creation of social meaning between states.\textsuperscript{220}

**Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision-Making**

The model of Hollis and Smith, which draws from the strengths and weaknesses of the rational actor and bureaucratic politics models, was first developed in a 1986 article titled “Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision Making”.\textsuperscript{221} Later refined in *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, it makes three key points.\textsuperscript{222}

First, roles are “constraining” since they entail “normative expectations”.\textsuperscript{223} These refer to “what is required, in the sense that failure to perform the role is open to criticism, censure and penalty.”\textsuperscript{224} The expectations are partly those that go with the foreign policy decision-makers’ positions and those of actors in other roles, who are either partners or opponents.\textsuperscript{225} Decision-makers not only have formal duties by virtue of their role, but are also responsible (accountable) to multiple constituencies. Furthermore, some of these normative expectations are incorporated into institutions, which explains their lasting effects and capacity to define the parameters of policy choice. Roles, in sum, are constraining because they incorporate the collective knowledge and set standards of legitimacy and performance against which officials are judged. As Hinnebusch observes:

\textsuperscript{220} Wendt, *Social Theory*, 162.
\textsuperscript{221} M. Hollis and S. Smith, “Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision Making,” *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 3 (July 1986): 269-86.
\textsuperscript{223} Hollis and Smith, “Roles and Reasons,” 275.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 275-76.
once a role is established and shapes the socialisation of the next generation of policy makers, it sets standards of legitimacy and performance, which, to a degree, constrain elites, imparting a certain consistency to foreign policy despite changes in leadership and environment.\textsuperscript{226}

In the case of Iran, the Revolution’s foreign policy principles were inscribed in the Constitution, which ensured the continuous relevance of its normative framework, including:

the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defence of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonist superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.\textsuperscript{227}

The Guardian Council also vets candidates on the basis of their loyalty to the system of the IRI and their Islamic credentials, thus enabling constancy.

Second, roles have an “enabling” element in the sense that the requirements of an individual’s position cannot be specific enough to command all decisions and make them automatic.\textsuperscript{228} Any role comes with some specific duties and red lines, the “normative expectations”, but there is also a large area of indeterminacy, which gives decision-makers the opportunity to interpret their role in new ways on the basis of their own personality and particular circumstances.\textsuperscript{229} This partly echoes Wendt’s argument that culture is never fixed.\textsuperscript{230} Agents are behind the accomplishment of culture and, whilst constrained by it, they can adopt different practices.

Furthermore, Hollis and Smith note that actors have several roles and conflicts between these are not uncommon (e.g. one can be a President but also the leader of the Democrats, a father and a churchgoer).\textsuperscript{231} When such a conflict arises, actors have to decide which role should prevail, which implies a place for agency.\textsuperscript{232} Within this context, “personality types” matter because they affect the sort of judgements

\textsuperscript{226} R. Hinnebusch, \textit{The International Politics of the Middle East} (Manchester University Press, 2003), 94.
\textsuperscript{227} Article 152 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
\textsuperscript{228} Hollis and Smith, “Roles and Reasons,” 276.
\textsuperscript{229} Hill, \textit{The Changing Politics}, 89.
\textsuperscript{230} Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 188.
\textsuperscript{231} Hollis and Smith, \textit{Explaining and Understanding}, 156.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
that actors make when they interpret facts, weigh their importance and assess the likely consequences of their decisions.\textsuperscript{233} Perceptions, motives, beliefs and desires play an important part in determining choices.

The decision-making model of Hollis and Smith thus values the actors as well as the bureaucratic structures within which they operate: “It relates reasons to structure and allows for flexibility and judgement in the playing of the role: in so doing we bring the individual back in without reducing our explanations of foreign policy to the individual as the unit of analysis.”\textsuperscript{234} While the organisation constrains the choice an individual can make, the latter relies on his “reasoned judgement” and beliefs in the playing of his role. Individuals are rational, not because their reasons for action originate from calculated expected utilities and means to unquestioned ends, but because they “interpret information, monitor their performance, reassess their goals”.\textsuperscript{235} It is their capacity to reflect and define situations that makes them rational.\textsuperscript{236} The way they respond to foreign policy situations is driven by existing frameworks of meanings, including assumptions of a desired state of affairs and the “powers, perceptions and aims shaped in previous manoeuvres”, which they can decide to support or oppose.\textsuperscript{237}

Third, Hollis and Smith highlight that decision-makers always present their policy in the language of national interest.\textsuperscript{238} Although they may be pursuing more parochial interests or different goals simultaneously, they tend to embrace the language of national unity and collective responsibility: “The language of decision-making is also the language of manoeuvre. It constrains and enables the actors, whatever their personal aims.”\textsuperscript{239} Policies must always be presented as legitimate, plausible and in service to the national interest.\textsuperscript{240} Thus, and in line with Wendt’s argument, the national interest of a state cannot be assumed: it must be the subject of enquiry. As explored in this chapter, states possess different types of identities that have

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 168.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{237} Hollis and Smith, “Roles and Reasons,” 284.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{239} Hollis and Smith, \textit{Explaining and Understanding}, 166-67.
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., 167.
subjective or intersubjective qualities and different degrees of salience. Identities also constitute interests, thus implying that the range of permissible options is not indefinite. Additionally, the four essential needs of physical survival, autonomy, economic well-being, and collective self-esteem impose limits on foreign policy options: while their requirements can be prioritised, they must nevertheless be addressed for states to continue to survive. Interests, in other words, are constituted by the ideas that states hold about how to (try to) meet their needs. Within this context, decision-makers seek to frame their policy decisions and priorities in a language that articulates the legitimacy of choices in light of their national repertoires of meaning, acceptability and desirability.

Hollis and Smith’s model guides my analysis of Iran’s foreign policy in three chief ways. To begin with, it helps specify and contextualise Wendt’s argument on the role of agents and the phenomenon of “supervenience and multiple realizability”. Iranian decision-makers are profoundly shaped, influenced and constrained by Iran’s subjective and intersubjective identities, including its “collective knowledge” with other actors, in large part due to the institutionalised “normative expectations” that come with their role, shape their repertoire of interpretation, and set standards of legitimate foreign policy performance. Furthermore, culture remains “an on-going [sic] accomplishment” and, as such, Iranian decision-makers always have the potential to challenge institutionalised structures of identities and interests, either out of will or necessity. Finally, the dual aspects of any role, with its constraining and enabling elements, provide a useful analytical tool to both interpret President Ahmadinejad’s modus operandi during his two terms in office and understand why he was perceived as a challenge to the legitimacy and stability of the IRI by its internal opponents.

Role and Effects of Language
Language, to which Wendt refers on several occasions, helps shed light on the mutually constitutive dynamics between social structures and individuals’ beliefs. For example, it helps to create reality and produce meaning and, as such, constructs

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241 Wendt, Social Theory, 188.
242 Zehfuss similarly remarks that, although Wendt repeatedly mentions the role of language in his analysis, he does not analyse it in any depth. See Constructivism in International Relations, 48.
social reality. Language also participates to the instantiation and reproduction of structures of subjective and intersubjective identities. It provides the structure within which history and collective memories are narrated and actors are socialised. As such, institutionalised discourses create perceptions of identities and interests with self-perpetuating qualities. Language is a key vehicle through which one’s status and prestige are created, communicated, reproduced and contested: the boundaries between the Self and the Other; it is what makes the Self different, if not superior, from the Other. Language, according to Halliday, “helps to constitute power, identity and hierarchy as well as encode history”.243

Additionally, language helps explain the institutionalisation and reproduction of cultures of anarchy over time. It forms one of the key elements through which states are able to interpret, communicate, signal, reproduce and potentially transform their role identities and adjacent interests. As Adib-Moghaddam notes in his analysis of Jurgen Habermas’ communicative theories of world politics, language is central to “achieving understanding”, including “empathetic understanding”.244 In particular, it can play a critical role in processes of mediation and reconciliation.245 A transformation of relations may entail not just different behavioural practices but may also include (if not require) new verbal performances. Conversely, discourse can help produce and instantiate estrangement and condemnation. For “negative self-images” to be communicated, a state would rely upon a type of discourse that criticises and rejects, if not humiliates.

Language has causal and constitutive effects: it can reproduce or challenge existing patterns of interaction. It enables and constrains. In chapter 4, for example, I show that Iran profoundly rejected the type of language used by the Western-led opposition to denounce and delegitimise its nuclear programme. From the regime’s perspective, these discourses illustrated the Western core powers’ disrespect for the Iranian nation and their “real” intents in politicising Iran’s nuclear activities.

244 A. Adib-Moghaddam, On the Arab Revolts and the Iranian Revolution: Power and Resistance Today (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 153. Jürgen Habermas is a German sociologist and philosopher who focused on the foundations of social theory and epistemology, democracy and the rule of law. He is well known for his theories on communicative rationality.
245 Ibid.
Additionally, one of Iran’s main bones of contention with the US lay in the latter’s discourses and attitudes regarding Iran (see chapter 6). In both cases, language confirmed and reified existing negative images and adjacent role identities.

To conclude, Wendt offers a powerful explanation of the role and effects of social structures on states’ logics of behaviour. Interactions (practices) play a key role in constituting states’ beliefs and expectations of one another and in defining their role identities. Further to this, structures of identities and interests have long-term consequences. Not only can stable processes of interaction lead to their institutionalisation in the form of collective knowledge, they also have sub-state consequences (socialisation effects). Omitted from the analysis so far is the fact that Wendt does not make a priori assumptions about the logic of anarchy in the international system. If, for Waltz and his followers, self-help is a constitutive feature of anarchy, Wendt argues that no such logic exists and that different cultures are possible.246 This argument rests upon the fact that it is states’ shared knowledge which defines whether a system is conflictual or peaceful: self-help “emerges causally from processes in which anarchy plays only a permissive role”.247

**Cultures of Anarchy**

Wendt identifies three kinds of cultures of anarchy, “Hobbesian”, “Lockean” and “Kantian”, which depend on the type of role that dominates the system, namely, “enemy”, “rival” or “friend” respectively.248

Each culture of anarchy, an ideal type, involves two key elements: a distinct posture or orientation of the Self towards the Other with respect to the use of violence, and a different conception of the extent to which, and the manner in which, the Self is identified cognitively with the Other.249 Additionally, the culture of anarchy defines the particular interpretation of material resources, such as physical phenomena like natural resources (e.g. oil, water) and technological artefacts (e.g. weapons). In contrast to Waltz, Wendt contends that material resources acquire meaning only

246 Wendt, *Social Theory*, 247, 308. Wendt takes it as far as arguing that anarchy “is an empty vessel, without intrinsic meaning” (Ibid., 309).
247 Ibid., 146.
248 Ibid., 247.
249 Ibid., 258.
through “the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded”. Identities and interests cannot simply be considered alongside material forces; they constitute material factors. To illustrate the point that it is not the distribution (and composition) of material capabilities per se but the social structure of relationship within which they are perceived and interpreted that matters, Wendt provides the following example: “The threat posed to the United States by five hundred British nuclear weapons is less than that posed by five North Korean ones, because the British are friends and the North Koreans are not, and amity and enmity are social, not material, relations.” This dynamic helps explain the superpower’s contrasting responses vis-à-vis the Iranian and Indian nuclear programmes (see pages 217-218).

I now turn to the main characteristics of the three particularly salient cultures of anarchy and emphasise how each impacts on a state’s conceptions of the Other, its security requirements and its interpretations of material realities. In contextualising the motives for, and characteristics of, different cultures of anarchy, Wendt is in a position to analyse how and why their existence is contingent and their transformation, though difficult, is always a possibility.

The Hobbesian Culture of Anarchy

According to Wendt, a Hobbesian culture dominated the international system until the seventeenth century. Such a social structure is characterised by the role relationship of threatening enemies. Actors do not recognise each other’s right to exist as an “autonomous being” or “free subject” and are unwilling to limit their use of violence in their processes of interaction. Importantly, the concept of enmity does not imply that the images of the Other are justified. Some enemies are “real” (they pose an existential threat to the Self); others are “chimeras”. What matters is that these images are believed to be true (institutionalisation) and have real foreign policy consequences.

250 Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” 73.
253 Ibid., 260-61.
254 Ibid., 261.
Wendt identifies “at least four” such consequences.\textsuperscript{255} First, the Hobbesian culture of anarchy produces a very competitive security system in which one’s gain is seen as the other’s loss.\textsuperscript{256} Consequently, states tend to respond to an enemy by acting like deep revisionists or power-seeking entities, even though they may have status quo interests.\textsuperscript{257} By mirroring back the representations they have attributed to their enemy, states fall into mutual securitisation. Second, decision-making tends to be heavily oriented towards worst-case scenarios.\textsuperscript{258} There is thus little likelihood of reciprocating any cooperative move made by the enemy since they tend to be interpreted as lies or traps. Mistrust and worst-case assumptions are dominant. Third, enemies view relative military capabilities as crucial to their very survival.\textsuperscript{259} They also tend to infer others’ intentions from their capabilities.\textsuperscript{260} Finally, in the case of an actual war, enemy states fight with no limits to their own violence.\textsuperscript{261} Acting otherwise would create a competitive disadvantage and endanger their survival.\textsuperscript{262}

A Hobbesian culture of anarchy also has several domestic consequences. First, military-industrial complexes are prominent: they tend to profit from the security dilemma and lobby their national decision-makers so that they do not reduce arms spending.\textsuperscript{263} In so doing, they contribute to the existence and reproduction of an Other who poses an existential threat to the Self. Second, enemies can help generate “in-group solidarity”.\textsuperscript{264} Wendt notes Campbell’s and Mercer’s contributions on this topic.\textsuperscript{265} From the former, he borrows the claim that a “discourse of danger” can help produce and sustain a state’s existence, distinction and cohesion by

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., 262.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid., 262.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid., 263, 265.
\textsuperscript{260} Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation,” 389.
\textsuperscript{261} Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 262.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 275.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{265} In \textit{Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992 and 1998), David Campbell seeks to demonstrate how interpretations of danger have functioned to establish the identity of the US. Jonathan Mercer, for his part, develops the argument in “Anarchy and Identity” that the very perception of another group leads to in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. Mercer thus concludes: “Unlike Waltz, who thinks this competition is due to structure, and unlike Wendt, who thinks competition is due to process, I argue that our cognitions and desire for a positive social identity generate competition. Thus for cognitive and motivated (rather than structural or social) reasons, ego and alter will compete against one another.” See “Anarchy and Identity,” \textit{International Organization} 49, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 229-52.
maintaining the Self-Other divide.\textsuperscript{266} This shows that Wendtian constructivism is compatible with a focus on the role and effects of language. It also confirms that considerations of domestic legitimacy have an impact on decision-makers’ approach to foreign policy issues. From Mercer, Wendt notes that group members have “in-group bias” and tend to compare their own group favourably to Others.\textsuperscript{267} Identities thus help create hierarchies and comparisons and strengthen the homogeneity of a group.

In sum, the logic of the Hobbesian anarchy lies in “‘the war of all against all’, in which actors operate on the principle of sauve qui peut and kill or be killed”.\textsuperscript{268} The self-help system, however, is only a result of states’ representations of one another as existential threats and their consequent practices.\textsuperscript{269} The Hobbesian culture acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy to the extent that “its beliefs generate actions that confirm those beliefs”, thus creating much insecurity and distrust.\textsuperscript{270}

\textbf{The Lockean Culture of Anarchy}

Wendt contends that a qualitative structural change occurred in international politics with the signature of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648: “The kill or be killed logic of the Hobbesian state of nature has been replaced by the live and let live logic of Lockean anarchical society.”\textsuperscript{271} The Lockean culture is based on a role structure of rivalry. The Lockean Other is less threatening than in a Hobbesian culture since it only seeks to revise the Self’s behaviour or property.\textsuperscript{272} As such, whilst rivals impute to each other aggressive intent, their level of mutual violence is constrained by their recognition of each other’s sovereignty.\textsuperscript{273}

Sovereignty is relatively central to Wendt’s thinking. It is an intrinsic property of states which becomes a “right” when other states recognise it.\textsuperscript{274} Although it is largely taken for granted, mainly because it is institutionalised in international law,
sovereignty remains an accomplishment of practice.\textsuperscript{275} It is a norm which, by virtue of their socialisation to it, has transformed states’ understanding of what is good and appropriate, thus shaping and constraining their behaviours. Furthermore, sovereignty constitutes a particular form of community: one in which states share some level of identity (and thus solidarity) since they mutually recognise “one another’s rights to exercise exclusive political authority within territorial limits”.\textsuperscript{276} Sovereignty forms the basis of states’ individuality and arguably satisfies their corporate interests of physical security, autonomy and recognition.\textsuperscript{277}

Wendt identifies four main implications of a Lockean culture on states’ foreign policy behaviours.\textsuperscript{278} First, war is both “accepted and constrained”.\textsuperscript{279} While states retain the right to use violence to advance their own interests, this remains within “live and let live’ limits”.\textsuperscript{280} States tend to behave in a status quo fashion and, as such, the system is not self-help all the way down.\textsuperscript{281} Wendt does not exclude the possibility of violation of territorial rights, but highlights that this would not be possible without a “just cause”.\textsuperscript{282} In addition, when wars of conquest occur, other states tend to act together to restore the status quo, as was the case during the 1991 Gulf War.\textsuperscript{283} Second, states’ concerns for their security are less intense and, consequently, they do not need to make decisions on the basis of high security risks.\textsuperscript{284} Their survival is not at stake if their relative power falls.\textsuperscript{285} Third, and linked to the previous point, states’ relative sense of security enables them to entrust international law to safeguard their national interests:

To the extent that their ongoing socialisation teaches states that their sovereignty depends on recognition by other states, they can afford to rely more on the institutional fabric of international society and less on individual national means – especially military power – to protect their security.\textsuperscript{286}

\textsuperscript{275}Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 413; Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 280-81.
\textsuperscript{276}Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 412.
\textsuperscript{277}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{278}Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 282.
\textsuperscript{279}Ibid., 283.
\textsuperscript{280}Ibid., 279, 281.
\textsuperscript{281}Ibid., 282.
\textsuperscript{282}Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 415.
\textsuperscript{283}Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 283.
\textsuperscript{284}Ibid., 282.
\textsuperscript{285}Ibid., 284.
\textsuperscript{286}Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 415.
Unfortunately, Wendt does not engage with the fact that many states mistrust international law and institutions or, more specifically, the reliability of international treaties, norms and organisations to protect their national interests. Many countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) have, for example, taken issue with the ability (and willingness) of some states, especially the Western core powers, to instrumentalise them for selfish ends (see chapter 5). Finally, in a Lockean culture where states do not face the threat of revisionism, they can resolve their differences by remaining neutral or non-aligned.  

**The Kantian Culture of Anarchy**

In contending that the structure of the international system is nothing but a function of historically contingent shared ideas and practices, Wendt is able to conceptualise cultures of anarchy that are not solely based on self-help. According to him, “the North Atlantic states”, which he subsequently calls “the West”, seem to have moved away from the Lockean culture towards Kantian norms since the Second World War. While they have not used violence amongst each other, they have also consistently thought of their security in more collective terms, thus showing the emergence of more solidaristic norms.

In both the Hobbesian and Lockean cultures of anarchy, security remains the individual responsibility of each state. In the Kantian culture, by contrast, security has a very different logic and results from states’ positive identification with one another. Collective identity, Wendt argues, produces identification, which is “a cognitive process in which the Self-Other distinction becomes blurred and at the limit transcended altogether. Self is ‘categorised’ as Other”. Thus, in a culture of friendship, states abide by the “rule of non-violence”: war or the threat of war is not considered a legitimate means of settling disputes. When conflicts emerge, states resort to other strategies, such as negotiations and arbitration. A Kantian culture of

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288 Ibid., 297, 314. Wendt observes that the concept of “friend” is under-theorised in IR, which has privileged “enemy images”, “enduring rivalries” and “the causes of war” over “friend images”, “enduring friendships” and “the causes of peace” (Ibid., 298).
289 Ibid., 279, 297.
290 Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," 400.
291 Wendt, *Social Theory*, 229.
292 Ibid., 299.
anarchy would thus expect far fewer conflicts (i.e. democratic peace theory). Furthermore, as per the “rule of mutual aid”, friends provide aid to each other if their security is threatened since this is perceived as a collective responsibility.\textsuperscript{293} In sum, collective identity leads states to share feelings of solidarity, community and loyalty.

Wendt, however, specifies that identification is “usually issue-specific and rarely total”.\textsuperscript{294} As such, while friendship always concerns national security, identification with other issues varies: “I may identify with the United States on military defence but with the planet on the environment.”\textsuperscript{295} Total identification is rare, in large part due to the fact that states “worry about being engulfed” by another actor.\textsuperscript{296} Furthermore, Wendt makes an important distinction between “friends” and “allies”.\textsuperscript{297} While the role structures of friendship are open-ended and not limited to specific circumstances, alliances are “temporary coalitions of self-interested states who come together for instrumental reasons in response to a specific threat.”\textsuperscript{298} Wendt contrasts them further:

In an alliance states engage in collective action because they each feel individually threatened by the same threat. Their collaboration is self-interested and will end when the common threat is gone. Collective security is neither threat- nor time-specific. Its members pledge mutual aid because they see themselves as a single unit for security purposes a priori, no matter by whom, when, or whether they might be threatened.\textsuperscript{299}

Consequently, capabilities do not have the same meaning in friendships and alliances. Since allies do not expect their arrangement to perpetuate, they will view each other as a latent threat, not as an asset for the security of all.\textsuperscript{300}

To conclude, Wendt argues that the social structures of relations can be defined by three different conceptions of security and identification with the enemy, rival or friend Other. Each culture of anarchy has substantial consequences for states’ expectations of one another’s interests and their consequent processes of

\textsuperscript{293} Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 400; Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 299.
\textsuperscript{294} Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation,” 386.
\textsuperscript{295} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{296} Ibid., 299.
\textsuperscript{297} Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 337.
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid., 299.
\textsuperscript{299} Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation,” 386.
\textsuperscript{300} Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 301.
interaction. As such, Wendt helps understand and contextualise the underlying motives that produce and sustain states' practices, be they peaceful, competitive or conflictual. His critical point, however, that “anarchy is what states makes of it,” points to the fact that social structures exist only in process.\textsuperscript{301} A Hobbesian culture of anarchy is sustained for as long as actors continue to act towards each other in egoistic and confrontational ways. It is neither the result of the material distribution of power nor an inevitable consequence of the international system. Thus, while structures of identities and interests may appear natural, they are always endogenous to interaction and the result of sufficient stabilisation over time (deep embedment in individual and collective consciousness and routinised practices, lack of contestation).\textsuperscript{302} Cultures of anarchy are thus contingent and, in principle, can be transformed.

**The Possibility of Structural Change Towards More Collective Identity Formation**

The boundaries of the Self are always at stake in interaction since identities and their adjacent interests are produced and reproduced in social practices. As such, it is in the process of interacting that states can take on new roles and transform their shared ideational structures.\textsuperscript{303} In his argument on the factors that facilitate or hinder the formation of collective identity formation, Wendt focuses on the Lockean culture of anarchy and the challenge of transforming rivals into friends.

**Domestic and Systemic Factors Facilitating Collective Identity Formation**

Wendt identifies several domestic factors and systemic-level variables that help undermine existing cultures of anarchy. At the domestic level, there are two preconditions for actors to engage in critical self-reflection and consciously make the choice to transform their role identity.\textsuperscript{304} First, actors must have a reason to think of themselves in novel terms, which would “most likely stem from the presence of new social situations that cannot be managed in terms of pre-existing self-

\textsuperscript{301} Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” 74.
\textsuperscript{302} Wendt, *Social Theory*, 340.
\textsuperscript{303} Copeland, “The Constructivist Challenge,” 5.
\textsuperscript{304} Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 419.
conceptions”. In such circumstances, a situation of “cognitive inconsistency” emerges, wherein existing beliefs, expectations and norms are no longer relevant and cannot be relied upon to identify appropriate behaviour. Second, the benefits of such a transformation must outweigh its expected costs. The national interest must be perceived as being better served by a revised pattern of representation and interaction than by the reproduction of existing processes.

At the systemic level, four main “master variables” can explain why states in a Lockean culture of anarchy may decide to engage in “prosocial security policies and thereby spur collective identity formation”. Three of them, “interdependence”, “common fate” and “homogeneity”, are “active or efficient causes of collective identity”. The fourth, “self-restraint”, is an “enabling or permissible cause”. In the following paragraphs, I combine the arguments Wendt made in “Collective Identity Formation and the International State” (1994) and Social Theory of International Policy (1999).

Interdependence refers to a situation where outcomes for actors are objectively dependent on the choice of others. Importantly, friends can be as interdependent as enemies. To produce collective identity, however, this objective interdependence must change into an intersubjective situation. Interdependence is also “issue-specific” and not transposable (e.g. interdependence in security does not necessarily affect other areas, like the economy). Additionally, it is “a matter of degree, depending on the ‘dynamic density’ of interaction in a context; higher density implies greater interdependence”. Wendt contends, in his 1994 article, that an increase in the “dynamic density” of interactions (e.g. trade and capital flows) can generate “dilemmas of common interests” for rivals. In an increasingly interconnected global system, for example, states share a growing interest in maintaining financial stability.
or ensuring that pandemic diseases remain under control. In general, growing interdependency has heightened the need for multilateral cooperation and coordinated measures, thus producing further dilemmas of common interests. Wendt, however, also persuasively remarks that a higher density of interaction need not imply the realisation of joint gains: “interdependence also entails vulnerability and the risk of being ‘the sucker,’ which if exploited will become a source of conflict rather than cooperation.” Cooperative practices must therefore be rewarded to transform competitive identities.

Wendt’s key argument is that cooperative behaviour (due to a situation of interdependence) can have constitutive effects on egoistic identities. Cooperation can produce a transformation of a social culture because actors can internalise new understandings of Self and Other and teach them to each other. “Complex learning”, Went argues, has construction effects on states’ identities and interests. Wendt identifies two types of communication through which states can communicate new identities: behavioural and rhetorical (yet again showing Wendt’s engagement with the role and effects of language). By choosing to cooperate with a rival, an actor engages in new practices and signals that it wants these new behaviours to be reciprocated. It is “altercasting”, which is

a technique of interactor control in which ego uses tactics of self-presentation and stage management in an attempt to frame alter’s definitions of social situations in ways that create the role which ego desires alter to play. In effect, in altercasting ego tries to induce alter to take on a new identity (and thereby enlist alter in ego’s effort to change itself) by treating alter as if it already had that identity.

If Alter reciprocates, then Ego’s tentative new identity will be strengthened, leading to further cooperation and the progressive transformation of their structure of shared knowledge (principle of “reflected appraisal” or “mirroring”). Rhetorical practice can have similar effects in that it can “create solidarity” to realise collective aims:

when European statesmen talk about a “European identity,” when Gorbachev tries to end the Cold War with rhetoric of “New Thinking” and a “common

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314 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 416.
315 Ibid., 390.
316 Wendt, Social Theory, 327.
317 Ibid., 421.
European home,” when Third World states develop an ideology of “nonalignment,” or when the United States demonizes Saddam Hussein as “another Hitler,” states are engaging in discursive practices designed to express and/or to change ideas about who “the self” of self-interested collective action is.318

Human beings, Wendt clarifies, are able to “grasp interdependence symbolically, and on that basis engage in ‘ideological labor’ [...] to create a shared representation of the interdependence and the ‘we’ that it constitutes”.319 Additionally, verbal communication can help establish the trust before pro-social behaviours are generated and, as such, it has benefits over non-verbal communication, for which trust can only emerge after a period of collective behaviour.320

Common fate relates to a situation where one’s “survival, fitness, or welfare depends on what happens to the group as a whole.”321 While the threat may be social (e.g. Nazi Germany to European states) or material (e.g. ozone depletion), it is a third party that affects all other actors. As with interdependence, common fate can only produce collective identity if it is an objective condition that becomes subjective.322 Thus Wendt observes, in his 1994 article, that the rise of a “common Other”, whereby states come to share an enemy (an actor or an issue), may produce “dilemmas of common aversions”.323 International terrorism emerged as a dilemma of common aversion for many states around the world, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Key to Wendt’s argument, however, is that dilemmas of common aversions, much like dilemmas of common interests, “increase the objective vulnerability and sensitivity of actors to each other” and, thus, the extent to which states can no longer satisfy their corporate interests unilaterally: “As the ability to meet corporate needs unilaterally declines, so does the incentive to hang onto the egoistic identities that generate such policies, and as the degree of common fate increases, so does the incentive to identify with others.”324

319 Wendt, Social Theory, 346.
320 Ibid., 347.
321 Ibid., 349.
322 Ibid.
324 Ibid.
Homogeneity denotes a situation where actors become alike in their corporate and type identities. This refers to states’ “centralised authority structures with a territorial monopoly on the legitimate use of violence” and how their political authority is organised domestically. In his 1994 article, Wendt identifies “the transnational convergence of domestic values” as a systemic factor able to spur collective identity formation. Cultural (e.g. the rise of global consumerism) and political areas (e.g. the spread of democratic norms and institutions) can help reduce heterogeneity among actors and, thus, the likelihood of conflict.

Self-restraint, however, is the permissible cause that allows states to engage in pro-social behaviours to transform their objective situation of interdependence, common fate or homogeneity into subjective needs. States have national interests by virtue of their corporate identities, which they must meet to survive:

actors must trust that their needs will be respected, that their individuality will not be wholly submerged by or sacrificed to the group. Creating this trust is the fundamental problem of collective identity formation, and is particularly difficult in anarchy, where being engulfed can be fatal.

However, as Wendt remarks, states are currently evolving in a Lockean culture of anarchy, in which the right to sovereignty is strongly institutionalised and respected, thus reducing the fear of being killed or exploited.

In principle then, states can transform their Lockean culture of anarchy towards a more collective identity formation. While they have a capacity for “reflexivity”, a range of internal and systemic factors are required (or may facilitate) such a process of social transformation. However, though structural change is possible, it remains difficult and the exception rather than the rule:

The term “structure” itself makes it clear why this must be so, since it calls attention to patterns or relationships that are relatively stable through time. If things were constantly changing then we could not speak of their being structured at all.

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325 Wendt, Social Theory, 353.
327 Ibid.; Wendt, Social Theory, 354.
328 Ibid., 358.
329 Ibid., 339.
Domestic and Systemic Factors Inhibiting Collective Identity Formation

Wendt identifies two domestic factors and one systemic dynamic which explain why cultures of anarchy often tend to act as self-fulfilling prophecies.

At the domestic level, actors tend to have an interest in maintaining relatively stable role identities.330 First, human beings have a need for ontological security, namely order and predictability.331 Their affective and cognitive predispositions make them hostile to change and uncertainty. In general, psychological approaches to foreign policy have contradicted the assumptions of the rational actor model. Hollis and Smith note, for example, that uncertainty, information overload, complexity and bounded rationality continuously confront individuals, preventing them from living up to the ideals of rational method.332 In addition, perceptions of reality are always filtered by decision-makers’ belief systems and values:

Beliefs about what should be affect beliefs about what is. This is particularly the case when belief-systems are “closed”, so that information is processed in such a way as to recuse cognitive dissonance, thereby preventing information from challenging deeply held beliefs. This is also a source of misperception.333

In Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War, Jervis notes that, once a belief or an image is established, new information is likely to be ignored and assimilated to pre-existing views.334 This is why change is “difficult and slow” and enmity and distance make the job of intelligence, the understanding of the Other’s rationality of action and interests, even more difficult.335 By the same token, this cognitive predisposition helps explain why policymakers may persevere in pursuing unsuccessful policy strategies. They may not be able to grasp the reasons for their policy failures, including the effects of their strategies on Others. In the case of the Western-led coercive diplomatic strategy to change Iran’s nuclear calculus during the Ahmadinejad presidency, the discrepancy between the professed intentions and the observable results was often interpreted as a sign of the regime’s irrationality and its rogue identity.

330 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 411.
331 Ibid.; Wendt, Social Theory, 339.
332 Hollis and Smith, Explaining and Understanding, 145-46.
333 Ibid., 161.
335 Ibid., 175-76.
Second, actors may want to avoid the costs of breaking commitments they have made to others, such as domestic constituencies and foreign allies, through their previous practices. Here, the level of resistance to break these ongoing commitments depends on the salience of particular role identities to the actor. As Hollis and Smith contend, roles are constraining in large part due to the fact that decision-makers are held to account by their role partners, opponents and public opinion. This is a point that I develop in chapter 6 in relation to President Obama’s unprecedented reaching out to Iran.

At the systemic level, Wendt notes that, once constituted, social systems confront their members as an objective social fact that reinforces certain behaviours and discourages others. The internalisation of role identities produces strong “subjective commitments” which are likely to go unquestioned as long as “feedback from the system stays within an acceptable range relative to their national interests”. The transformation of intersubjective structures thus strongly depends on “how much slack” exists in a states system for dynamics of collective identity formation to develop. In fact, what really matters is “the degree of interdependence or ‘intimacy’ between Self and Other.” Wendt takes the example of the Arab-Israeli question to show that role identities might not be a matter of choice but positions forced on actors by the representations of their significant Other: “In this situation even if a state wants to abandon a role it may be unable to do so because the Other resists out of a desire to maintain its [own] identity.” Additionally, the greater their degree of conflict, the more states are fearful of each other’s intentions and prone to engage in relative gains thinking:

In a Hobbesian war of all against all, mutual fear is so great that factors promoting anything but negative identification with the other will find little room to emerge. In the Lockean world of mutually recognized sovereignty, however, states should have more confidence that their existence is not threatened, creating room for processes of positive identification to take hold.

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336 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 411.
337 Ibid.
338 Wendt, Social Theory, 339.
340 Wendt, Social Theory, 228.
341 Ibid.
Arguably, Wendt’s discussion of the systemic factors inhibiting collective identity formation would have benefited from a stronger engagement with realist thinking on the problem of uncertainty and the issue of deception. Both, as chapter 1 highlighted, played fundamental roles in the securitisation of Iran’s nuclear activities. For many policymakers, academics and think tank analysts, Iran’s official nuclear rationale was dubious and untrustworthy. Not only did the isolated rogue regime possess ‘objective’ security, domestic and normative motives for seeking to acquire the nuclear weapons technology, but its pattern of behaviour, both prior to and following the August 2002 revelations of its concealed nuclear facilities, indicated a determination to develop the dual-use technologies and become a nuclear threshold state. Consequently, Iran’s proclaimed nuclear rationale needed to be viewed and managed as an attempt to deceive its opponents. Furthermore, Iran’s domestic politics remained a variable that could be neither controlled nor influenced to any great extent. Iranian factions were also known to promote different strategic priorities and means of engagement with external powers. Uncertainty over future developments within Iran’s domestic politics further heightened the security concerns over its nuclear programme.

Waltz and his followers claim that it is states’ uncertainty about the present and future intentions of other actors which explain their continuous security concerns and reliance on relative military capabilities.\(^{343}\) These two temporal dimensions are at the core of their understanding of the security dilemma. Uncertainty about others’ present and future intentions makes “the levels and trends in relative power” fundamental variables for states’ interpretation of their security needs.\(^{344}\) For realists, the problem of future intentions is particularly challenging:

> even when states are fairly sure that the other is also a security seeker, they know that it might change its spots later on. States must therefore worry about any decline in their power, lest the other turn aggressive after achieving superiority.\(^{345}\)

Other states’ domestic politics is a variable over which they have little control. This is a point that Wendt acknowledges since, in his conception of states’ subjective and intersubjective identities, corporate and type identities do not exist through external

\(^{343}\) Copeland, “The Constructivist Challenge,” 2.

\(^{344}\) Ibid.

\(^{345}\) Ibid.
interactions but only through socialisation processes internal to a state. The 1979 Revolution, for example, not only profoundly transformed Iran's type identity but also had substantial consequences for its foreign policy behaviours (and role identities with other states). This problem of uncertainty can act as a constraint on states’ ability to adopt more collective forms of identity and conceptions of interests. As Copeland writes,

Wendt's building of a systemic constructivist theory-and his bracketing of unit-level processes-thus presents him with an ironic dilemma. It is the very mutability of polities as emphasized by domestic-level constructivists - that states may change because of domestic processes independent of international interaction - that makes prudent leaders so concerned about the future. If diplomacy can have only a limited effect on another's character or regime type, then leaders must calculate the other's potential to attack later should it acquire motives for expansion.

Furthermore, in his 1997 article “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” Glaser notes that militaries and associated interest groups tend to exaggerate the offensive potential and negative intentions of other states, often as a means to pursue their own status quo interests. This is an argument that Wendt himself developed when he argues that, in Hobbesian cultures of anarchy, military-industrial complexes tend to lobby their national decision-makers and thus contribute to the reification of enemy Others (pages 83-84).

Additionally, Wendt does not address the issue of deception, which realists have identified. States could seek to deceive one another and not be genuine when they “altercast”. As Copeland rightly observes, Wendt does not discuss the issue of “impression management”, whereby states’ public images of their interests and intentions may have little to do with their profound beliefs and aims:

In laying out his dramaturgical view of Ego and Alter co-constituting each other’s interests and identities, Wendt assumes that both Ego and Alter are making genuine efforts to express their true views and to ‘cast’ the other in roles that they believe in. But deceptive actors will stage-manage the situation to create impressions that serve their narrow ends.

346 Ibid., 13-14.
In other words, Wendt does not clarify when peaceful gestures should be taken at face value or discounted as deceptions: “If the other is acting cooperatively, how is one to know whether this reflects its peaceful character, or is just a façade masking aggressive desires?” As Wendt himself acknowledges, states are more prone to engage in relative gains thinking when they are fearful of each other and their relations are structured by a role identity of enmity or rivalry. In such situations, they may be likely to believe that the Other is set on deceiving them and that its conciliatory gestures may be lies or traps.

Finally, Wendt’s argument that, in the current international system, states can “learn a great deal about what the other is doing and thinking” is questionable. As Copeland notes, this view is inconsistent with Wendt’s other argument that states often have difficulty learning about the other: “behaviour does not speak for itself” and, instead, must be interpreted. Mistakes in inferences can occur. Thus, the problem of present and future intentions and the issue of deception, whose effects are present in the Lockean culture of anarchy, also explain why states may struggle to undermine and overcome their rival role identities.

Concluding Remarks

A Wendtian-constructivist approach allows for systematic research that makes Iran’s identities and interests a central focus. Its national interests cannot be taken for granted (they are not pre-defined) and must be the subject of empirical enquiry. Iran’s foreign policy behaviour cannot be adequately understood if it is not contextualised within its ideational structures.

Like all other states, Iran has subjective and intersubjective identities which shape its interests since they help interpret situations and define which options are legitimate, acceptable or, on the contrary, undesirable and impossible. Furthermore, Iran’s corporate identities set limits on its foreign policy options since its four equally important needs – physical security, autonomy, economic well-being and collective self-esteem – must be continuously addressed. This point holds much importance:

350 Ibid., 2.
351 Ibid., 11.
352 Ibid., 12.
states aspire to respect and recognition and such desires can profoundly shape their foreign policy behaviours.

A Wwendtian-constructivist approach also sheds light on what is actually at stake when states interact. By contending that the structures of the international system are intersubjective, rather than material, and that actors take each other into account when they decide on their behaviours, Wendt is able to show that culture matters. More specifically, Iran's behaviour during the Ahmadinejad presidency can be explained to a great extent in light of Iran's beliefs and expectations of the other states with which it came into contact, thus meaning that these structures of ideas must be analysed to understand their effects and potentially self-perpetuating qualities.

Cultures of anarchy tend to act as self-fulfilling prophecies to the extent that they are institutionalised in individual and collective consciousness (socialisation effects) and routinised in practices that confirm the relevance of these very beliefs and expectations. Thus, shared knowledge cannot be easily discarded. In this respect, Wendt's three cultures of anarchy are profoundly helpful since they identify three possible “types” of relations between Iran and other actors. More specifically, they clarify the possible causal and constitutive effects of each role identity associated with those types on Iran's national interests and interpretation of material capabilities.

Finally, the Wendtian-constructivist approach reveals that social structures only exist as a result of practices. As such, they can be subject to change. Wendt’s distinction between “allies” and “friends” is particularly useful, as is his discussion on the domestic- and systemic-level factors which can spur collective identity formation.

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353 Wendt, *Social Theory*, 249.
CHAPTER 3
Securitisation and Polarisation of Iran’s Domestic Politics:
Domestic Functions of, and Constraints on, Foreign Policy

This chapter examines the main characteristics of Iran’s internal politics during the Ahmadinejad presidency in an attempt to assess the likely domestic functions of, and constraints on, its foreign policy. First, I engage with the country’s growing securitisation. The results of the June 2005 presidential election shifted the balance of power in favour of the more conservative factions of Iran’s political spectrum, including the formal and informal ascendance of the IRI’s military-security stratum. Preoccupation with (perceived) internal and external security threats grew substantially, as did the responses to these multi-level pressures.

Second, Iran’s domestic politics underwent an unprecedented polarisation. The disputed 2009 presidential election, the brutal repression of protesters and political figures, and the Supreme Leader’s public endorsement of the official results all produced a profound crisis of popular legitimacy. The regime, which became much warier of foreign meddling and domestic traitors, responded to these perceived threats by substantially increasing its strategies of repression, violence and control. A simultaneous crisis of elite cohesion placed additional stress on Iran’s social contract. While President Ahmadinejad faced repeated denunciations for threatening the country’s national interests, elite-level criticisms also coalesced around the two interrelated issues of Iran’s deteriorating economic situation and the management of the nuclear negotiations. The substantial securitisation and unprecedented polarisation of Iran’s domestic politics produced mutually reinforcing dynamics, particularly throughout President Ahmadinejad’s second mandate.

Third, I turn to President Ahmadinejad’s personal behaviour and the consequences of his *modus operandi* for internal and external political dynamics. I examine the formal and informal strategies he used to extend his influence and ensure that he would not be sidelined from any important domestic or foreign policy-related debate.
I then analyse the potential consequences of Iran’s political dynamics of securitisation and polarisation for the regime’s foreign policy options. Although conclusive answers are the exception rather than the rule, in large part due to our limited knowledge of Iran’s decision-making processes, I first ask whether the situation of weakened domestic legitimacy and external “negative self-images” may have strengthened Iran’s need to articulate and demonstrate the relevance, righteousness and appeal of the Islamic Revolution. In this respect, the nuclear issue acted as a foreign policy diversion and an opportunity to rearticulate and reinstantiate the *raison d’être* of the revolutionary regime. I then bring to the fore the fact that the Iranian regime’s weakened domestic legitimacy could have complicated consensus-building efforts. Iran would likely have struggled to redefine, adapt and transform its foreign policy strategies, particularly from 2009 onwards. As such, it is possible that Iran’s remarkably firm and consistent nuclear stance could have been partly the result of domestic paralysis.

**Securitisation of Iran’s Domestic Politics**

To explain the securitisation of Iran’s domestic politics, I first engage with the forces that brought President Ahmadinejad to power in June 2005. I then analyse the increasing influence of Iran’s military-security stratum over the state’s economic and political institutions. Finally, I turn to the 2009 election dispute and its key political ramifications.

**Key Dynamics behind President Ahmadinejad’s June 2005 Election**

Ahmadinejad’s election came as an immense surprise to most policymakers and analysts. 354 As Hourcade and Silverstein write,

> The case of Ahmadinejad is completely singular and, at first blush, inexplicable. How could an almost unknown Islamist militant, who made his name in local administration and the intelligence services, receive several hundred thousand more votes than a political figure with as much capacity for popular mobilisation as Karroubi? How could he mobilise such an electorate? 355

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Of the eight candidates, Ahmadinejad was the least well known. His campaign had received little domestic coverage and institutional support. Until a week prior to the election, he had barely surfaced in opinion polls. Yet, though former President Rafsanjani came first in the first round, with 21.5 percent of the votes and Ahmadinejad second with 19.5 percent, the second round witnessed the latter’s landslide victory with 64 percent of the votes against Rafsanjani’s 36 percent.

**Popular appeal.** In his presidential programme and election campaign strategy, Ahmadinejad consistently emphasised his feeling of proximity with the Iranian people. He repeatedly described himself as “a common working man”, stressed that he was “first and foremost a university teacher” and highlighted his poor village background and frugal lifestyle. When casting his ballot, he declared “I am proud of being the Iranian nation’s little servant and street sweeper.” To an extent, his proclaimed simplicity and humility were observable in his campaign strategy since he did not make much use of the national radio and television, and resorted to recorded messages and monochrome posters instead.

Throughout his campaign, Ahmadinejad claimed that the revolutionary ideals had been subverted after Ayatollah Khomeini’s death. He promised an alternative (“the beginning of a new era”), signalled by his slogan “we can”, and vowed to change the country’s power structure in favour of social justice – a cornerstone of Ayatollah Khomeini’s ideology and programme of governance. Changes in the country’s

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356 The vetted candidates were former President Rafsanjani, former Director of the national television and radio network Ali Larijani, former IRGC Commander Qalibaf, former Speaker of the Expediency Council Rezaei, former Chairman of the Majles Karroubi, former Minister of Higher Education Moin, former Vice-President Mehralizadeh and former Mayor of Tehran Ahmadinejad.


361 De Bellaigue’s personal experience in Ahmaghieh, a poor suburb of Tabriz, illustrates how Ahmadinejad’s films, which showed him in his modest house and in his office dealing with people’s problems, won him support (De Bellaigue, “New Man in Iran”). See also A. McDowall, “Iran Observed: The Rise of the Iranian Neo-Conservatives,” *Asian Affairs* 39, no. 3 (2008): 384.

362 De Bellaigue, “New Man in Iran.”

economy would enable him to realise his programme of social justice. As such, he declared his intention to redistribute oil and gas income (“put Iran’s petroleum income on people’s table”), raise wages, and tackle unemployment and poor housing. Ahmadinejad also promised to reverse previous policies that had enriched a minority at the expense of the majority. In so doing, he targeted influential personalities, especially Rafsanjani, whom he described as wealthy, corrupt and out of touch with the Iranian people. Ahmadinejad, in other words, portrayed himself as an outsider determined to fight the widespread national inequalities and inequities.

His sociopolitical programme and distinctive campaign strategy won over large numbers of Iranian voters. In promoting a sense of belonging to the people and prioritising a programme of social justice, he became the candidate of the politically disenfranchised masses. His anti-establishment, anti-corruption and social justice campaign thus successfully echoed people’s resentment of the “old guard”, of which Rafsanjani was a key representative.

Furthermore, many voters who had previously backed President Khatami also came to support Ahmadinejad in June 2005. The 2003 municipal and 2004 Majles elections had shown tangible signs of growing disappointment with the reformist administration. Khatami was first elected in 1997 with almost 70 percent of the votes, with strong support from the country’s youth, women, intellectuals and urban areas. In 2001, he received a greater mandate with almost 78 percent of the votes cast. In the 2003 and 2004 elections, however, the turnout was quite low, particularly in urban areas, and a large majority of seats fell into the hands of conservative lists

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370 Ehteshami and Zweiri, Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives, 36.
and candidates.\textsuperscript{371} Their prioritisation of socio-economic change over programmes of political liberalisation had managed to attract more voters.\textsuperscript{372} As such, the result of the 2005 presidential election confirmed that the reformists had disappointed their once enthusiastic supporters. Several analysts also suggested that, unlike his predecessors and most other candidates, Ahmadinejad was not a cleric and may have seemed like a breath of fresh air in a political environment that had been dominated by the clerics since the Revolution.\textsuperscript{373}

**Support of the military-security stratum and the conservative establishment.** Ahmadinejad received significant support from the Basij in both rounds of the election.\textsuperscript{374} Founded in November 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini’s decree, the Basij (“mobilisation”) aimed to protect the IRI against internal and external disruptions.\textsuperscript{375} It played a critical role during the Iran-Iraq war through its mobilisation of many volunteers to the front. From the late 1980s onwards, its role became increasingly domestically oriented, with law enforcement responsibilities formally included in its mandate in November 1993.\textsuperscript{376} The Basij played a central part in the promotion of revolutionary values and a “culture of defence”, a term Ostovar describes as “the ethos of religious and nationally-motivated militancy and sacrifice fostered during the Iraq war”.\textsuperscript{377}

That Ahmadinejad received the Basij’s support during the 2005 election can be understood in light of the fact that he had consistently declared his allegiance to them long before (and after) coming to power. In February 2004, then Mayor of

\textsuperscript{371} In the 2003 municipal election, the turnout was just 12 to 15 percent of eligible voters in key cities such as Tehran, Isfahan and Mashhad. In the 2004 Majles election, voter turnout was below 49 percent. For the detailed results of the 2003 and 2004 elections, see Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives*, 36, 39.


\textsuperscript{375} For more information see Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 65-66; A. S. Hashim, “The Iranian Military in Politics, Revolution and War, Part Two,” *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 71.

\textsuperscript{376} Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution,” 142.

Tehran, Ahmadinejad had stated that Iran needed “revolutionary forces who can come with the mentality of Basij members” to solve its problems.\textsuperscript{378} Once elected, he continued to show his respect, for example declaring a Basij week in November 2005.\textsuperscript{379}

Although Ahmadinejad was never close to the IRGC senior command, he received significant support from the Guard during the 2005 election.\textsuperscript{380} During the campaign, the Supreme Leader’s representative to the IRGC, Ayatollah Mohavedi-Kermani, highlighted six key attributes of the ideal presidential candidate:

- that he heed the religious demands of the people and be accountable to them,
- be obedient to the Supreme Leader and serve at his pleasure,
- live a modest life and understand the suffering of the poor and dispossessed,
- lessen the gap between the wealthy and the impoverished,
- speak on welfare and the economy,
- not attract votes with empty slogans.\textsuperscript{381}

For many analysts, Ayatollah Khamenei had articulated his preference for the military-security stratum.\textsuperscript{382} Ahmadinejad may have also been the ideal candidate since he was a devoutly religious engineer running on a campaign platform of social justice, integrity and devotion to the people and the Revolution.\textsuperscript{383}

Finally, Ahmadinejad benefited from the support of older figures of the establishment.\textsuperscript{384} In particular, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the Secretary of the Council of Guardians, publicly favoured his candidature.\textsuperscript{385} It is also worth recalling that, confronted with calls for reform from both within and outside Iran, the conservatives clearly wished to regain power, especially after 9/11. In the 2003 municipal and the 2004 Majles elections, the Parliamentary Committee for Internal Affairs and Councils

\textsuperscript{378} Arjomand, \textit{After Khomeini}, 150.
\textsuperscript{379} Ibid., 152.
\textsuperscript{380} Hashim, “The Iranian Military in Politics,” 78.
\textsuperscript{381} Cited in Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution,” 169.
\textsuperscript{382} See for example A. Alfoneh, “The Revolutionary Guards’ Role in Iranian Politics,” \textit{Middle East Quarterly} 15, no. 4 (Fall 2008), accessed 18 February 2015, \url{http://www.meforum.org/1979/the-revolutionary-guards-role-in-iranian-politics}.
\textsuperscript{383} Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution,” 169.
\textsuperscript{384} Takeyh, \textit{Guardians of the Revolution}, 226.
\textsuperscript{385} Arjomand notes that Ayatollah Jannati went as far as taking all twelve members of the Council of Guardians to visit the newly elected President to congratulate him and assure him that he would have the Council’s full support. See Arjomand, \textit{After Khomeini}, 161.
and the Council of Guardians used their respective institutional powers to restrict the base of the reformists and facilitate the victory of more conservative elements, including the political manifestation of the IRGC, the Abadgaran-e Iran-e Islami ("Developers’ Coalition of Islamic Iran"). For Arjomand, the gatekeeping of all elected offices had become the Council of Guardians’ most important function during the Khatami presidency.\(^{386}\)

To conclude, President Ahmadinejad’s election in June 2005 was the result of an informal coalition of popular support and institutional and non-institutional conservative backing. It also reflected a conflagration of internal and external circumstances that had made the securitisation of Iran’s domestic politics a prime necessity.

**Increasing Influence of the IRGC Over State Institutions**

The Ahmadinejad presidency witnessed a deep infiltration of the state institutions by the security and military apparatus of the IRI, the IRGC in particular. To assess the extent to which the Ahmadinejad presidency “transformed” its role and relative power position, I briefly outline its responsibilities and functions prior to 2005.

**The role of the IRGC prior to the Ahmadinejad administration.** Created in May 1979, the IRGC started as a militia mandated to protect the nascent Revolution from its internal foes.\(^{387}\) Under the command of the Supreme Leader, it played a critical role in eliminating non-Islamic opposition. The Iran-Iraq war brought the first change to its structure and mission. Iran’s regular military was in complete disarray following the Shah’s fall, the desertions and the purges of the officer corps.\(^{388}\) Shortly after Saddam Hussein’s army invaded Iranian territory in September 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini thus reorganised the IRGC into a parallel military to ensure Iran’s external security. Alongside the Basij, the IRGC proved critical to the IRI’s survival.

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386 Ibid., 12. Rieffer-Flanagan similarly observes that the Council adopted a “more aggressive approach” than in the 1980s when it never disqualified more than 20 percent of the candidates running for political office. See *Evolving Iran: An Introduction to Politics and Problems in the Islamic Republic* (Georgetown University Press, 2013), 88.


Following the end of the war and Iran’s power transition, the IRGC witnessed another significant transformation of its role and responsibilities. Faced with the challenge of demobilising and integrating the Guard into Iran’s post-war development plans, the regime expanded its mandate to non-military affairs and gave it a central role in the reconstruction schemes.\textsuperscript{389} The IRGC was placed at the centre of Iran’s industrial and commercial development, and became the chief recipient of lucrative state contracts.\textsuperscript{390} Its expanding corporate and financial interests thus gave the Guard an important stake in the regime’s policies.\textsuperscript{391}

Analysts often portray the Guard as profoundly devoted to the security and defence of the IRI.\textsuperscript{392} They would perceive the 1980s as a decade of ideological solidarity, national cohesion, and personal and collective struggle and sacrifice.\textsuperscript{393} As such, the Revolution and the Sacred Defence generated their own primary group of solidarity among the IRGC and the Basij.\textsuperscript{394} As Octovar writes, “The Iran-Iraq war had both played a central unifying role for the nascent Islamic Republic of Iran and come to define the values of an entire generation of combatants.”\textsuperscript{395}

Having proved their efficiency and loyalty to the Revolution during the war, the Guard claimed a legitimate right to guide Iran’s politics. In his 1992 study, Katzman already emphasised that the IRGC saw “involvement in politics as not only permissible, but as part of its mission to defend the Islamic revolution”.\textsuperscript{396} In his assessment, the Guard was less a professional military power than a political force, distinguishable by its “flexibility, adaptability and resiliency”.\textsuperscript{397} Unlike other revolutionary armed forces formed in revolutions, the IRGC had turned into

a relatively complex and cohesive organisation without losing its ideological zeal [...] The conventionalisation of the Guard’s structure did not bring its tactical and strategic decision-making process more in line with those of

\textsuperscript{389} Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution,” 130.
\textsuperscript{390} Ibid., 137.
\textsuperscript{391} Ostovar notes that the IRGC tended to support President Rafsanjani’s policies in his first term. In his second term, however, he took measures, such as increasing governmental oversight of the commercial sector, which jeopardised the Guard’s interests. Consequently, they started to develop a firmer alliance with the Supreme Leader and the “conservatives” (Ibid., 130, 139, 157).
\textsuperscript{393} Takeyh, Guardians of the Revolution, 223-25.
\textsuperscript{394} Arjomand, After Khomeini, 9, 11.
\textsuperscript{395} Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution,” 130.
\textsuperscript{396} Katzman, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, 2.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., 23.
professional armed forces. Objective military criteria did not replace hardline revolutionary goals, and conventional organisation did not thwart ideological enthusiasm and motivation.\textsuperscript{398}

The Khatami presidency represented another turning point in the development of the Guard, especially since its alliance with the Supreme Leader grew stronger. Having served as Iran’s Minister of Defence in 1980, supervisor of the IRGC after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war and as President from 1981 until Ayatollah Khomeini’s death, Ayatollah Khamenei had established deep connections with the Guard.\textsuperscript{399} Following his appointment as Supreme Leader, he used these relations to secure the appointments of military commanders and intelligence agents into various institutions.\textsuperscript{400} In doing so, he was able to marginalise his rivals and shepherd a new generation of politicians loyal to him.\textsuperscript{401}

Much like him, many Guards perceived President Khatami’s socio-economic and foreign policy agendas as threats to the heritage of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{402} The IRGC directly interfered with the Khatami administration’s decisions on a number of occasions (e.g. the abrupt closure of the Imam Khomeini International Airport in May 2004).\textsuperscript{403} The Guard also strengthened its role as the state’s premier security institution, leading to an “empowerment of militarism in Iran”, a strategy that became more pronounced after the January 2002 Axis of Evil speech and the 2003 municipal elections.\textsuperscript{404}

\textbf{Formal and informal penetration of Iran’s economic and political institutions.} The Ahmadinejad presidency gave rise to a substantial increase in the power of the IRGC. Its significant formal and informal penetration of all sectors of the

\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., 17, 189.
\textsuperscript{400} Arjomand, After Khomeini, 172.
\textsuperscript{401} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{402} A. Hashim, “Civil-Military Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” in \textit{Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States}, ed. J. A. Kechichian (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 44. It is important to highlight that some veterans of the IRGC were supportive of President Khatami.
\textsuperscript{403} Hashim, “The Iranian Military in Politics,” 76. A Turkish-led consortium was selected by the Khatami administration to operate Imam Khomeini International Airport. The IRGC claimed that this presented a security risk to the state. In addition to closing down the new airport, the IRGC also threatened to shoot any aircraft that tried to land there, thus causing considerable tensions between the Turkish-Austrian consortium and the Khatami administration.
\textsuperscript{404} Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution,” 132, 159.
Iranian state, including domestic security, foreign policy, economic development and ideological promotion led a RAND Corporation report to conclude that, while the 1980s was the clerics’ era, and the 1990s the epoch of the Bonyads, the 2000s marked the ascendance of the Guard. The IRGC had “acquired all the trappings of a state within a state accountable only to the Supreme Leader and increasingly present or even dominant in many facets of society.”

I outline below three main dimensions of the growing influence of the IRGC over Iran’s domestic politics.

Economic infiltration. As Mayor of Tehran, Ahmadinejad had given the IRGC and the Basij many of the capital’s lucrative development projects and waived the municipality’s financial claims on the Guard. Such favouritism continued during his presidential mandate. Examples include the unilateral allocation of significant budgets or the award of important contracts, especially in the areas of oil and natural gas extraction, pipeline construction and large-scale infrastructure development.

As such, despite his anti-corruption campaign, President Ahmadinejad came to face accusations of cronyism.

In 2006 alone, the Guard secured 1,500 projects, whose value amounted to billions of dollars. In addition, the IRGC considerably expanded its influence over Iran’s oil and gas projects, thus placing itself at the centre of Iran’s economy. Its economic empowerment transformed the organisation into an economic powerhouse in fields as varied and critical as Iran’s energy sector, armament manufacturing, electronics and transportation. Furthermore, international sanctions against Iran played in its

405 Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads,” 59.
406 Arjomand, After Khomeini, 153.
407 Majloo, “Three Placement Modes,” 40.
410 In June 2006, for example, the IRGC-controlled industrial company Khatam al-Anbia won a contract worth billions of dollars for a gas pipeline from the Persian Gulf to the eastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan. In addition, the IRGC was able to launch Oriental Kish, Iran’s then largest private oil company. See Arjomand, After Khomeini, 153; Hashim, “The Iranian Military in Politics,” 77.

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favour to the extent that the organisation was able to use its role in border security to operate an extensive smuggling network.\textsuperscript{411}

In sum, the Ahmadinejad presidency expanded and institutionalised the IRGC’s bureaucratic privileges. With such significant economic and corporate interests, it likely became more inclined to influence political developments to ensure that the country remained a place beneficial to its parochial interests.

\textit{Political infiltration.} To implement his programme of social justice and inaugurate the “beginning of a new era”, President Ahmadinejad engineered a drastic change of most of the officials in charge of governmental or state-owned institutions, including at local and middle-ranking levels.\textsuperscript{412} His approach was to appoint “clean hands” and dismiss those who were reformists or had enriched themselves.\textsuperscript{413} He also selected representatives more in tune with his personal specifications. These new individuals were predominantly not clerics and tended to be educated in technical fields, most of them holding engineering degrees.\textsuperscript{414} They often came from Iran’s provincial peripheries, not Tehran. They were largely indebted to the IRI for the social prestige they had acquired through their involvement in the Iran-Iraq war and the post-war administration of provincial rule.\textsuperscript{415} As such, the majority of President Ahmadinejad’s government were relatively young, often unknown, men with little (if any) political experience.

The Guard undoubtedly benefited from this political strategy. President Ahmadinejad’s first cabinet, for example, included an unprecedented number of IRGC veterans and people with security intelligence and military backgrounds.\textsuperscript{416} They also occupied some of the central positions, such as the ministries of energy, industries, justice, petroleum, defence and commerce. Rahimi thus concludes that Iran became a “military-theocratic order” defined by

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Arjomand, \textit{After Khomeini}, 153-54.
\item Ibid.
\item Hashim, “The Iranian Military in Politics,” 76.
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the consolidation of a clergy-military monopoly of power in the systemic prioritising of technical security considerations in the management and performance of politics. In terms of elite institutional realignment, it is not that the IRGC is simply gaining power over the civilian sphere, but that there is a growing cross-fertilization of an organisational network, familial ties, and information security ties between the clergy and the paramilitary forces, which is shaping a very unique elite guardian class with claims on state power.\textsuperscript{417}

The Ahmadinejad presidency thus profoundly transformed Iran’s domestic politics. Not only did it substantially constrain the traditional balancing dynamics between Iran’s reformist and conservative tendencies, it oversaw a multi-level ascendance of the military-security stratum within state institutions. As Adib-Moghaddam highlights, the IRGC and the Basij had become “a sophisticated military-industrial complex with political clout”, which gave the state “transversal power” and the ability to diffuse mass demonstrations.\textsuperscript{418} The Iranian state developed and strengthened its “diffuse, multi-structural power” in the form of administrative influence, muti-level disciplinary surveillance through its police stations, military compounds, Bassij headquarters, Internet police, and with the help of its bonyads that have supported the welfare of millions of Iranians and acted as vehicles of social mobility. This dissemination of power made protests and challenges to the state much more difficult.

**Post-Electoral Challenges to the Stability of the IRI in 2009**

According to the official count, President Ahmadinejad won a landslide victory, securing 62.63 percent of the vote, while Mousavi gained 33.75 percent.\textsuperscript{419} The turnout was also the largest recorded since 1979 (85 percent).\textsuperscript{420} The announcement of the results, however, prompted large-scale demonstrations in Tehran and other cities.\textsuperscript{421}


\textsuperscript{418} Adib-Moghaddam, On the Arab Revolts, 141-42.

\textsuperscript{419} Four candidates ran in the 2009 presidential election: incumbent President Ahmadinejad, former IRGC Commander and deputy to Rafsanjani, Mohsen Rezaei, former Majles Speaker Mehdi Karroubi and former Prime Minister, Mir Hossein Mousavi.


\textsuperscript{421} H. Dabashi, Iran, the Green Movement and the USA: The Fox and the Paradox (London; New York: Zed Books, 2010), 56.
Electoral fraud: popular and elite indignation, legitimacy deficit. The protests crossed generational, ideological and social lines.\(^{422}\) The slogan “Where is my vote?” expressed protesters’ demand for accountability as well as a “sense of humiliation”.\(^{423}\) The unprecedented televised debates between the candidates and the authorised public gatherings had given an “illusion of democratisation” with great freedom of speech and assembly:

Demonstrators vividly posed the problem of “democratic self-esteem”. Not only was indignation deeply felt, but people also believed they were cheated, treated as non-citizens in a fool’s bargain that put into question their sense of honour and dignity.\(^{424}\)

Analysts and journalists widely focused on the so-called “Green Movement”, which was variously described as an “Iranian-style Intifada” (Robert Fisk), a “great emancipatory event” (Slajov Žižek), a “grassroots civil rights movement” (Hamid Dabashi) or a “post-Islamist democracy movement to reclaim citizenship within an ethico-religious order” (Asef Bayat).\(^{425}\) It reportedly embodied the depth of internal changes that had taken place within Iranian society since the late 1970s, in particular the profound yearnings for civil and political rights, governmental accountability, and freedom from fear and arbitrary rule.\(^{426}\) Bayat, for example, contended that the Green Movement was “the outcome of Iran’s deep political and social divide between a doctrinal regime which regards people as dutiful subjects and a large segment of the population who see themselves as full citizens of a Republic”.\(^{427}\) Ansari similarly viewed the protests as symptomatic of a “far deeper malaise in the structure and ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, especially between its two pillars, Islam and Republicanism.\(^{428}\) The 2009 popular protests, in other words, brought to the fore the

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\(^{422}\) Mousavi was widely perceived as the unofficial symbol and leader of the Green Movement. He had served as Iran’s Prime Minister from 1981 to 1989. When the position was eliminated at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, he withdrew from political life.

\(^{423}\) Ansari, *Crisis of Authority*, 55.


\(^{425}\) The first three expressions were cited in N. Hashemi and D. Postel, “Introduction,” in *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran’s Future*, eds. N. Hashemi and D. Postel (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2010), xii. The last expression was cited in A. Bayat’s chapter in the same book, “A Wave for Life and Liberty: The Green Movement and Iran’s Incomplete Revolution,” 51.

\(^{426}\) Ansari, *Crisis of Authority*, 86-87; Dabashi, *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA*, 14.


\(^{428}\) Ansari, *Crisis of Authority*, 1.
issue of the IRI’s political trajectory and the contentious legacies between popular sovereignty and religious authority.

Furthermore, as protesters’ demands were met with repression, the nature of their contestation changed and turned to questioning the very legitimacy of the Supreme Leader’s authority (“Down with the dictator”, “Down with Khamenei”). In endorsing President Ahmadinejad’s re-election, Ayatollah Khamenei had inadvertently turned the dispute into a challenge to his own authority.

Importantly, expressions of discontent were not limited to bottom-up dynamics. Prominent personalities also strongly condemned the fraudulent election and the violence used by the security institutions. Ayatollah Montazeri, whose mobilisation was particularly symbolic as he was once the heir apparent to Ayatollah Khomeini, fiercely condemned the electoral fraud, denounced Ayatollah Khamenei as an “unqualified and illegitimate” leader and declared the Ahmadinejad government illegitimate in a number of fatwas. In his 17 July 2009 public prayer sermon, Rafsanjani openly challenged the election results and condemned the Ahmadinejad government. He also warned against deviating from the state’s dual sources of legitimacy: “the term Islamic Republic is not a ceremonial title. It is both a republic and Islamic. [Both] have to be together. If one is damaged, then we will no longer have a revolution and an Islamic Republic.”

Repression, violence and control. Iranian policymakers had long denounced internal and external conspiracies against Iran. Similar dynamics were at play in the regime’s portrayal of the protests as “a velvet revolution”, a product of Western interference and internal traitors (“seditionists”). On the one hand, the US and Great Britain, especially the BBC and the British Embassy in Tehran, were

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430 Ansari, Crisis of Authority, 81-82; D. Poster, “Counter-Revolution and Revolt in Iran: An Interview with Iranian Political Scientist Hossein Bashiriyeh,” in The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran’s Future, eds. N. Hashemi and D. Postel (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2010), 92.
431 Arjomand, After Khomeini, 187.
433 Ansari, Crisis of Authority, 72.
accused of plotting to “dismember” Iran by aiding the protesters, ethnic insurgents and separatist groups. On the other hand, accusations of surrendering to, sympathising with, and allowing foreign meddling intensified during President Ahmadinejad’s second mandate, particularly against reformist figures.

The popular protests expanded and grew more defiant until February 2010, when they became fewer and further between, possibly because of the level of violence the Iranian regime deployed against the demonstrators and prominent personalities. Indeed, the protests were fiercely suppressed. Whilst the images of 26-year-old Neda Aqa Soltan’s death in the streets of Tehran in June 2009 were widely broadcast, the Evin and Kahrizak prisons became notorious for their daily acts of torture, rape and murder. The death of Iranian blogger Sattar Beheshti in November 2012 acquired similar notoriety. The reports of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International consistently highlighted the extensive human rights violations during President Ahmadinejad’s second term. Violence and repression thus became the cornerstones of the regime’s response to expressions of dissent.

The regime also sought to limit Iranians’ access to information and communication technologies. Such technologies, which challenge the regime’s monopoly on information, acquired a new threat dimension in the summer of 2009, partly because of the protesters’ ability to use cyberspace to share videos and pictures and organise themselves. The regime developed new ways of policing the media with the result

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435 Ibid., 269-70.
436 The protests did not materialise on the day of the thirty-first anniversary of the 1979 Revolution in February 2010. Demonstrators had been heavily discouraged from taking to the streets following the regime’s mass arrests and repeated episodes of torture, the deployment of an enormous security presence and the relentless threats of executions.
438 Violations of human rights and infringements upon personal liberties had also occurred throughout President Ahmadinejad’s first term. For example, Iranian universities had witnessed a purge of their professors and curriculum. In the months prior to the June 2013 presidential election, the regime also insisted that there would be no repeat of the “sedition” of 2009. Journalists were arrested or harassed and the IRGC issued warnings against interference at home and abroad.
439 Ansari, Crisis of Authority, 61.
that Iran ranked 175 out of 179 for press freedom in Reporters Sans Frontières’ 2012 report.\(^{440}\)

Two new institutions were set up to police the Internet: Fata, a cyber-police in charge of identifying bloggers and users breaking laws, and a supreme council of virtual space tasked with filtering the Internet and blocking access to websites deemed inappropriate.\(^{441}\) YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Google and Gmail were all regularly blocked.\(^{442}\) In addition, the regime tried to establish a walled-off national Intranet separate from the worldwide Internet. Officially, “Internet melli” aimed to improve the nation’s cybersecurity against threats such as the Stuxnet virus. Unofficially, it limited Iranians’ access to the outside world.\(^{443}\) Thus, as cyberwarfare became a new battlefield between Iran and its external adversaries, the regime increasingly turned its attention to the Internet as a means of reasserting control over both domestic narratives and internal opponents.

Finally, the regime’s determination to tighten its control over Iran’s domestic politics translated into visible acts of coercion against influential individuals and their networks. Karroubi, Mousavi and his wife Zahra Rahaward were placed under house arrest. Rafsanjani and Khatami, two major pillars of the IRI, were publicly humiliated on repeated occasions. Rafsanjani lost his post as Head of the Assembly of Experts in March 2011, was prevented from leading the Tehran Friday prayers and was disqualified from running in the 2013 presidential election by the Council of Guardians. His family also experienced heightened governmental pressures. In September 2012, for example, his daughter was sentenced to a six-month jail term for supporting the reform movement and “spreading anti-state propaganda.”\(^{444}\) In an unprecedented move, Rafsanjani openly stated in April 2013 that there was distrust


between himself and the Supreme Leader. According to Namazikhah and Marashi, he also “criticised Ayatollah Khamenei for allowing the Revolutionary Guard undue influence in Iran’s economic and foreign policy, and enabling the development of a militarised state”. Such public expressions of disagreement and disapproval between Ayatollah Khamenei and Rafsanjani were significant in view of their respective historical pedigrees, political experience and substantial authority and influence.

A challenging external environment. The Arab uprisings also likely contributed to the regime’s continuous reliance on measures of control and repression. The dynamics of contentious collective actions and processes of political change that spanned Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria from December 2010 onwards took “almost everyone by surprise”, as Bayat put it. These unexpected developments initially held great promise for the IRI: “anti-Iranian regimes were toppled across the region, Islamic political parties promised to do well in many important countries and US influence in the Middle East seemed to diminish.” The Iranian regime, the Supreme Leader especially, portrayed the uprisings as an “Islamic Awakening” that was following the path of Iran’s Islamic Revolution. However, the sociopolitical developments within the Middle East and North Africa resulted in three broad challenges to the Iranian leadership.

First, Iran’s neighbours were facing severe internal questioning of their social contracts. Many grievances echoed those that Iranians had articulated in the 1997 and 2001 presidential elections, and the post-2009 electoral protests. Although the uprisings varied in their intensity and development, they all partly originated in citizens’ frustration with their countries’ deep socio-economic problems. These took the form of “persistently high unemployment, especially among youth (and educated youth at that), rampant corruption, internal regional and social inequalities, and a


further deterioration of economic conditions because of the global 2008 financial crisis and food price increases”\textsuperscript{448} These socio-economic grievances were also intertwined with, and catapulted by, “a call for dignity and a reaction to being humiliated by arbitrary, unaccountable and increasingly predatory tyrannies”\textsuperscript{449} In other words, the uprisings displayed the gaps between governmental promises on the one hand, and sociopolitical and economic realities on the other.

Second, although it remains unclear how the Internet contributed to social and political change before, during and after the uprisings, the events of late 2010-early 2011 showed that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in general, and social media in particular, played important sociopolitical roles.\textsuperscript{450} References to the “Facebook revolutions” and “citizen journalism” abounded. For Iran, much like other states, ICTs formed an increasingly important mediating variable of state-society relations with enabling (e.g. dissemination of official information to domestic and foreign audiences) and constraining (e.g. display of dissent, publicity of protests, creation of new webs of solidarity) effects.

Third, the uprisings had various political consequences, including regime change, reform measures and profound internal fracturing. Despite the Iranian leadership’s initial hopes, its regional environment became less predictable and more challenging following the uprisings. For example, the short-lived government of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi produced neither a rapprochement between Iran and Egypt nor a transformation of Egypt’s dependence on the US; the situation in Libya resulted in a NATO-backed military intervention; and the cases of Syria and Bahrain showed continuing foreign meddling.\textsuperscript{451} Additionally, sectarian tensions, already heightened by the 2003 US-led intervention in Iraq, continued to deepen, while Iran and Saudi Arabia were drawn into a renewed regional power competition.\textsuperscript{452} The Arab uprisings, in other words, intensified the Iranian regime’s profound concerns

\textsuperscript{448} Dalacoura, “The 2011 Uprisings,” 67.
\textsuperscript{449} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{451} H. Dabashi, “Iran and the Arab Spring: Why Haven’t Iranians Followed the Arabs in Waging Revolution?,” Asian Politics & Policy 5, no. 3 (July 2013): 409.
\textsuperscript{452} R. Hinnebusch, “The Middle East Regional System,” in The Foreign Policies of Middle East States, eds. R. Hinnebusch and A. Ehteshami. 2nd ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2014), 67-68.
vis-à-vis its polity (i.e. social contract under stress), foreign meddling within its neighbours’ internal affairs and the destabilisation of the axis of resistance (i.e. Syria, Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah). 453

To conclude, the Ahmadinejad presidency amplified processes that had become increasingly visible during President Khatami’s second term in office. The June 2005 election of a principlist candidate, and the subsequent multi-level power ascendance of the military-security stratum, ensured that Iran’s domestic politics became more authoritarian. The popular and elite protests that followed the official announcement of the June 2009 presidential election results had complex consequences. On the one hand, the domestic legitimacy crisis meant that the social contract was under profound stress and the regime remained insecure. The very fact that prominent personalities publicly disavowed the 2009 electoral process, including the actions of the Supreme Leader, indicates the extent to which the regime lacked traditional elite-level legitimising forces. Conversely, the vehemence with which influential individuals and their networks were condemned, delegitimised, ostracised and “neutralised” by the state, shows that, in a context where the regime faced substantial internal and external threats, Iran continued to rely on strategies of oppression and control. Containment and deterrence of further challenges to domestic stability became a priority. The growing securitisation of Iran’s domestic politics, however, had causal and consequential effects on the polarisation of the Iranian elite.

Polarisation of Iran’s Domestic Politics

Although there had always been political divisions, the Ahmadinejad presidency was distinguishable by the unprecedented level of elite polarisation it produced. In this section, I draw attention to three main factors. First, the period 2005 to 2013 witnessed the acceleration and deepening of divisions within the (inherently pluralistic and ill-defined) “conservative” tendencies of the Iranian political spectrum. Second, elite criticisms coalesced around the intertwined issues of the country’s economic situation and its nuclear policy. Finally, President Ahmadinejad’s

453 For more information on the ways in which its own position on the Syrian conflict, and those of Hamas and Hezbollah, affected Iran, see A. Ehteshami, “The Foreign Policy of Iran,” in The Foreign Policies of Middle East States, eds. R. Hinnebusch and A. Ehteshami. 2nd ed., 281-83.
interpretation of his role and *modus operandi* profoundly alienated his domestic rivals.

**Old and New Lines of Fracture Within Iran’s Elite**

If the Khatami presidency was dominated by severe power rifts between the “conservatives” and the “reformists”, the Ahmadinejad mandates were marked by divisions within the conservative bloc itself. Reflecting on the 2005 presidential election, Ehteshami and Zweiri persuasively highlighted that

> In many ways, Ahmadinejad’s victory reflects the transformation of the political struggle in Iran from being one between the conservatives and the reformists to one within the powerful conservative faction itself. The new guard represents the rise of the military in Iranian politics. The old guard, however, remains at the heart of power, occupying many of the unelected offices of the system. 

After outlining how and why the “new guard” challenged the “old guard”, I briefly engage with the national elections held under Ahmadinejad. This allows me to nuance my depiction of Iran’s military-security stratum (the IRGC is not a cohesive actor) and to emphasise that President Ahmadinejad proved relatively unpopular throughout his mandates.

**Acute political competition within conservative factions.** Analysts and academics have used a plurality of terms to qualify the Ahmadinejad governments and the emerging force they represented within the Iranian political spectrum. These include “neo-conservatives” (Naji), “principlists” (Ansari), “hardliners” (Arjomand), “puritan hardliners” (Haghghi and Tahmasebi) and “the new right” (Takeyh). While this absence of consensus captures long-standing difficulties in analysing Iran’s political groups, I refer to “principlists”, a term those concerned themselves used.

Broadly, the principlists were profoundly loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini and “reimagined the Islamic Republic in the nostalgia of the war years and in terms of the redemptive ethos of self-sacrifice for the nation and Islam”. Shaped by the Iran-Iraq war more


455 As Rahimi emphasises, Ayatollah Khomeini left “contentious legacies”. During the Khatami presidency, for example, the reformists referred to “his inclusive and democratic tropes before the Revolution”, while the conservatives highlighted “his post-revolutionary clericalist discourse”. The
than the struggle against the Shah, they wished to revive the “utopian-populist spirit” of the Revolution and, thus, reinvigorate social justice policies. Additionally, they criticised the right of veto of many unelected offices, argued in favour of justice and meritocracy, and contended that their technocratic credentials and ideological commitment made them ideal candidates. They also often used religious arguments to challenge the authority and legitimacy of the “old guard”. In this context, the drastic personnel changes among the elite during President Ahmadinejad’s first mandate could have been an attempt to undermine the power of the clergy.

National elections: thermostat of Iran’s elite-level polarisation. The municipal and Majles elections that took place during the Ahmadinejad presidency attested to the profound polarisation of Iran’s domestic politics. First, the Council of Guardians continued to use its veto to limit the reformists’ political influence. In the March 2008 Majles election, for example, the Council disqualified 41.1 percent of the candidates, most of whom were reformists. In response, the reformists boycotted the March 2012 Majles election on the grounds that the basic requirements for a free and fair election did not exist. The “republican” component of the state thus remained severely unbalanced throughout the period 2003 to 2013, both out of will (official strategies) and necessity (refusal to participate in an unfair political process).

Second, the military-security stratum of the IRI never presented a cohesive front. Instead, its affiliated candidates systematically ran on competing lists. This illustrates two important political dynamics: internal divisions and competition for power on the one hand, and opposition to the candidates and lists affiliated with President Ahmadinejad on the other. Crucially, from his first electoral test in December 2006 to his last in March 2012, President Ahmadinejad faced fierce competition and often lost to candidates more closely affiliated with the Supreme Leader. In the December 2006 municipal election, for example, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, an IRGC


457 Naji, Ahmadinejad: The Secret History, 47.

458 In the 2008 Majles elections, the Council of Guardians initially rejected more than 2,000 candidates. A number of (mainly reformist) candidates were subsequently reinstated. See Rieffer-Flanagan, Evolving Iran, 90.
commander during the 1980s and a candidate in the 2005 presidential election, did better than President Ahmadinejad.\textsuperscript{459}

The March 2012 Majles election set the conservatives associated with the Supreme Leader against those allied to President Ahmadinejad.\textsuperscript{460} As was the case during the March 2008 Majles election, IRGC affiliates won enough seats to limit substantially the Ahmadinejad administration’s room to manoeuvre.\textsuperscript{461} Despite the quasi-absence of reformist candidates, voters were able to reject President Ahmadinejad (and his vetted followers) by giving their support to other conservative groupings, thus forcing “the ideological moderation of the Iranian political spectrum by rebalancing the conservative factions represented in parliament”.\textsuperscript{462} Going back to the argument that the IRGC neither presented a cohesive front nor provided the principlists with an unconditional support base, an Iranian official insisted that:

The Revolutionary Guards is not a political party. They have many different opinions. It was very interesting for me that, in 2009, most of the supporters of the Green Movement were coming from the Revolutionary Guards. They are not a unified military group that tries to capture all the power. It is a wrong perception. They have different political opinions. Some of them have supported Khatami and, at present, some of them are supporting President Ahmadinejad. Of course, they are influential. I do agree with that. They have increased their influence. Why have they done so? The reason is clear: insecurity. When the security of the country is in danger, who will get more support and influence? The security forces. When the United States tried to threaten Iran, when Israel threatens Iran, when the EU states that all options are on the table, what do you expect?\textsuperscript{463}

\textbf{Economic Policies and Foreign Relations: Two Particularly Contentious Issues}

Domestic critics repeatedly castigated President Ahmadinejad and his administration as threats to Iran’s national interests, a point upon which all rival candidates agreed during the 2009 presidential election.\textsuperscript{464} After examining the main motives behind the claim that the regime had endangered Iran’s national economy and foreign relations,
I analyse the informal (verbal delegitimisation) and formal (institutional) strategies put in place to constrain the President and his administration’s room to manoeuvre. The section on Iran’s economic situation is longer for I also explore the interconnected effects of mismanagement and sanctions.

**Economic policies: ruptures and continuities.** Iran’s economy was always a major preoccupation for its successive presidents. Despite its vast hydrocarbon resources, crucial geographic location and impressive human resources, Iran always faced a low and volatile economic growth rate, a situation explained by five main factors.\(^{465}\)

First, Iran was structured as a typical rentier state, exporting its hydrocarbon resources, importing higher-end manufactured products, and adversely affected by change in oil prices and selling capacities. Second, Iran’s economy was dominated by a relatively large state sector characterised by “the prevalence of highly subsidised, inefficient and overstuffed state-owned enterprises”\(^{466}\). Third, since the Revolution, Iran had faced a combination of high inflation and unemployment.\(^{467}\) Fourth, Iran attracted relatively little foreign direct investment, in part due to a number of legislative issues in the areas of foreign ownership and exploitation of Iranian oil.\(^{468}\) Finally, the private sector showed little incentive to commit to long-term investments, which, according to Karshenas and Hakimian, was attributable to

[the] lack of credibility in government policies, [the] capture of the state by particular interests, which undermine competition and divert energies to unproductive, rent-seeking activities, and the arbitrary interventions by different branches of the government in safeguarding the interests of particular groups at the helm of power.\(^{469}\)

Although the Iranian leadership never abandoned the Revolution’s ideals of achieving economic independence and social justice, the economic and political elite

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\(^{467}\) This challenge was all the more acute given that Iran had a disproportionately high youth population, with over 60 percent of its total population estimated to be under the age of 30.


\(^{469}\) Ibid., 79.
often acted as powerful entrenched groups that limited the impact of successive restructuring programmes.\textsuperscript{470}

Nevertheless, President Ahmadinejad inherited a relatively good economic situation when he first came to power. This was mainly due to his predecessor’s establishment of an “Oil Stabilisation Fund” and high oil revenues:\textsuperscript{471}

Iran’s oil revenues under Ahmadinejad’s first term were 44 percent higher than the entire earnings of Khatami’s eight years in office, and nearly double that of Rafsanjani’s two terms. Of the more than $700 billion that Iran has earned through oil exports in the past thirty years, nearly 40 percent came in during the past four years [2005-2009].\textsuperscript{472}

The oil windfall, which considerably increased the government’s monetary resources, helped President Ahmadinejad implement his programme of social justice.\textsuperscript{473} During his first term, he increased the government’s subsidies for a wide range of products, including food, energy and bank credit.\textsuperscript{474} Poorer Iranians benefited from the government’s social welfare policies, especially the new “justice shares”.\textsuperscript{475} Other initiatives included a housing initiative for low-income families and an offer of interest-free loans to young couples for marriage and housing needs.\textsuperscript{476} Ahmadinejad closed down Iran’s Management and Planning Organisation, following the resignation of its head in late 2006 due to the President’s “arbitrary and undue


\textsuperscript{471} Early in his presidency, Khatami had qualified the Iranian economy of “diseased” and advocated “a proper spring cleaning”. His Third Plan (March 2000) aimed to address the core of Iran’s economic problems. For example, it sought to increase the role and diversity of the private sector, reduce obstacles to foreign and domestic investment, initiate privatisation, support export-led growth and develop the non-oil sectors. Furthermore, when, from 2000 onwards, Iran witnessed a rise in oil prices, the government capitalised on this favourable context to establish an Oil Stabilisation Fund. The fund was managed by the Central Bank of Iran and designed to divert excess revenues to pay foreign debt and help smooth the impact of recurrent fluctuations in oil prices. See Karshenas and Hakimian, “Oil, Economic Diversification,” 76-77.

\textsuperscript{472} S. Maloney, “Sanctioning Iran: If Only it Were so Simple,” The Washington Quarterly 33, no. 1 (January 2010): 137.

\textsuperscript{473} Pesaran, “Ideals, Interests and Economic Liberalisation,” 25.


\textsuperscript{475} The “justice shares” were designed to ensure that a significant portion of the public assets assigned for privatisation would be redistributed among the low-income and state dependents. For Majloo, they formed an aspect of the Ahmadinejad administration’s strategy to “mobilise support and to reward loyalty in a nepotistic way”. See “Three Placement Modes,” 39.

interference in the budgetary process”. This decision was indicative of his determination to take control of the country’s developmental planning, including the drafting of the national budget and the five-year plans. It also meant that President Ahmadinejad was in a stronger position to reward those who supported him and his administration.478

Economic situation: effects of mismanagement and sanctions. The Ahmadinejad administration’s edifice of subsidies and initiatives weakened previous attempts to divert excess oil revenues and considerably shrunk the Oil Stabilisation Fund.479 Iran’s twin issues of high unemployment and inflation also sharply increased. For example, the regime’s decision in December 2010 to lift the subsidy on a number of state-sponsored items resulted in a sharp rise in government spending and inflation.480 As gasoline prices quadrupled and bread prices tripled, the government had to increase its direct cash grants to families.481 Iran’s economic policies also generated a lack of confidence amongst Iranian and foreign businessmen, investors and bankers.482 This resulted in large transfers of Iranian-owned assets to the United Arab Emirates where a large Iranian business community exists.483 Iran’s ranking in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index also steadily deteriorated: from 88 in 2005 (out of 158 countries surveyed) to 144 in 2013 (out of 177).484

478 Ibid.
479 According to Ehteshami, by 2008, the Ahmadinejad administration “had already spent the bulk of the $200 billion in oil exports earned since 2005, and the strategic oil fund had been raided so intensively that there probably was less than $7 billion left”. See “Iran’s Tenth Presidential Election,” 38.
482 Ehteshami and Zweiri, Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives, 76, 89.
483 Kian, L’Iran: Un Mouvement Sans Révolution?, 111.
Within this context, domestic critics continuously accused the Ahmadinejad administration of pursuing incoherent policies, exacerbating structural weaknesses and hampering long-term development. While this was a major rallying point for its opponents during successive election campaigns, Iranian economists and professors repeatedly voiced their concerns.\(^485\) Popular disapproval was also visible in a number of protests.\(^486\) Importantly, several threats and institutional attempts were engineered to rein in Ahmadinejad’s influence over the economy. In March 2007, Rafsanjani, then head of the Expediency Council, declared that President Ahmadinejad’s “trial period is over” and that the Council would use its supervisory powers to reshape the government’s economic policies.\(^487\) The Council’s ability to oversee the administration’s economic policies was the result of a constitutional change the Supreme Leader had instigated in October 2005, when he gave it supervisory powers over all branches of government.\(^488\) President Ahmadinejad and the Executive branch were required to submit their planning and policies for approval before implementation.

If Iran’s deteriorating economic situation was substantially due to the administration’s mismanagement, the comprehensive regime of individual and multilateral sanctions also produced highly destabilising effects. In a July 2013 article, Khajepour, Marashi and Parsi emphasise that the representatives of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce they had interviewed believed that “50 percent of the economic predicament [was] a direct consequence of sanctions and the other 50 percent [was] due to failed economic policies.”\(^489\) As the political stalemate over Iran’s nuclear programme grew,

\(^{485}\) See Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives*, 76; Amuzegar, “Iran’s Oil as a Blessing and a Curse,” 54.


\(^{487}\) Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads,” 64-65.

\(^{488}\) Founded in 1988, the Expediency Council was initially responsible for both advising the Supreme Leader and breaking stalemates between the Majles and the Council of Guardians. The Supreme Leader’s decision to expand the Council’s role and to appoint Rafsanjani as its new President may have been born out of concern for balancing power between the principlists and the clerical establishment, and/or between relatively inexperienced and very qualified figures. Rafsanjani’s domestic power position was considerably strengthened as he was elected Head of the Assembly of Experts in 2006.

sanctions moved from targeting individuals and specific goods to more vital economic activities such as oil trade, financial transactions and foreign investment.

Sanctions against Iran’s oil trade were particularly hard-hitting for the rentier economy since they constricted its ability to export its crucial resources, receive foreign exchange and buy vital imports for food supply and industrial inputs. In February 2013, the International Energy Agency thus reported that Western sanctions had slashed Iran’s oil export revenues by over $40 billion in 2012, Iranian crude exports had declined to an average 1.5 mb/d in 2012, down about 1 mb/d from 2011 levels, and its oil production was hovering below three-decade lows. Sanctions against Iran’s financial transactions led to a decrease in foreign investment. Several foreign oil and gas companies abandoned their activity in the country, such as the Dutch-British multinational oil and gas company Royal Dutch Shell, France’s Total and Norway’s Statoil. Iran’s exclusion from the Swift banking system in March 2012 was particularly damaging since it prevented businesses from carrying out international transactions and sharply increased the price of imports due to higher banking, insurance and shipping charges. The banking restrictions also led to the bankruptcy of many Iranian contractors and producers, thus exacerbating the structural problem of unemployment.

In 2012, Iran’s economic situation started to deteriorate significantly and an increasing number of (foreign) reports focused on Iranians’ daily struggles. The price of basic food and goods skyrocketed, and Iranians faced medicine shortages for

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491 “The Big Squeeze,” The Economist.
the treatment of illnesses.\textsuperscript{496} The deteriorating economic situation also had significant sociopolitical consequences. According to a 2009 International Monetary Fund estimate, Iran was losing more than 150,000 of its educated and skilled citizens annually (brain drain).\textsuperscript{497} Observers and activists increasingly deplored the effects of the sanctions on Iran’s middle classes.\textsuperscript{498} The International Crisis Group and the National Iranian American Council both observed that, far from causing significant domestic upheaval or affecting Iran’s nuclear calculus, the sanctions had deepened the securitisation of Iran’s politics.\textsuperscript{499} As such, the sanctions had similar domestic effects to the 2002 Axis of Evil speech: a state of war that necessitated increased repression and control.

Important, the Ahmadinejad administration changed its public position on the effects of the sanctions after 2012. While it had mainly dismissed them as ineffective until then, it began to acknowledge that they had created difficulties for the country.

In early September 2012, in a live interview on Iranian state television, President Ahmadinejad declared that the country was facing “problems” exporting its oil.\textsuperscript{500} In October 2012, Foreign Minister Salehi recognised that “the sanctions create[d] inconveniences”.\textsuperscript{501} In general, the regime portrayed the sanctions as “barbaric”.\textsuperscript{502}


\textsuperscript{497} George and Hosseinian, “Unemployment Mounts.”


The Supreme Leader presented the image of an immoral and oppressive enemy determined to keep Iran underdeveloped and dependent (see next chapter). He rejected the notion that the sanctions were targeting Iran’s nuclear activities and called on national solidarity and resistance against external oppression and injustice. As such, he proclaimed 2010 the year of doubled effort and labour, 2011 the year of economic jihad, 2012 the year of national production and support of Iranian labour and capital, and 2013 the year of political and economic epics. In other words, the Supreme Leader appealed to Iranians’ patience and confidence in the regime’s steadfastness.

The framing of the sanctions as a tool of humiliation, oppression and coercion also worked at the elite level. According to a 2013 study carried out by Khajepour, Marashi and Parsi from the National Iranian American Council, and for which the authors relied on interviews with senior Iranian politics officials, analysts and members of the business community:

Stark divisions over foreign and domestic policy among the Iranian elite are unmistakable. However, those divisions do not appear to have affected regime cohesion around the nuclear issue or on the response to sanctions. And if elite insiders are to be believed, sanctions have helped strengthen cohesion rather than intensify rifts.

Despite the depth of its antagonism towards the Ahmadinejad administration, the survival of the IRI remained a priority for all. The elite also widely agreed that Iran should never give up its nuclear rights (see next chapter). Additionally, though dissatisfied with the negative impact of the sanctions and government policies, the Iranian business community (private or quasi-governmental), systematically lobbied the government to secure concessions. In so doing, they were not campaigning for a change of nuclear policy but for an improvement of their own situation within a largely unfavourable context.

Diplomatic inexperience and failed strategies. Throughout the period 2005 to 2013, President Ahmadinejad and his administration faced vivid internal criticisms for undermining Iran’s external relations and the country’s security. These

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503 Khajepour, Marashi and Parsi, “The Trouble with Sanctions.”
504 Ibid.
505 Ibid.
condemnations were twofold. On the one hand, they targeted the personalities and the perceived amateurishness of those who staffed the Ahmadinejad administration. This illustrated tensions between the “old” and the “new” guard, and their conflicting legitimacy claims: technocracy and political experience for the former, meritocracy and security involvement for the latter. On the other hand, domestic criticisms focused on the strategies (methods rather than overall objectives) pursued by the Ahmadinejad administration to secure Iran’s nuclear interests.

Domestic criticism of President Ahmadinejad’s modus operandi in the area of foreign policy started very early in his mandate. Following his October 2005 statements on the Israeli-Palestine issue and the Holocaust, President Ahmadinejad was accused of promoting “adventurism at the expense of national interests” and deviating from Ayatollah Khomeini’s ideology. He was also criticised for heightening misunderstandings and fears. Rouhani, one of his most vociferous critics, accused him of using an excessively provocative rhetoric that played against Iran’s security. He also scathingly criticised his decision-making methods, declaring in October 2007:

The country is not the private property of anyone, this sentiment that the country belongs to you is the biggest and incurable disease of our nation and also to leave difficult problems to a few, not listening to experts and not taking their advices [sic] into account.

Additionally, Rouhani sought to delegitimise the President’s religious discourse and his declarations of proximity with the Twelfth Imam. In February 2008, he characterised Ahmadinejad’s views as “superstitious” and “charlatanistic”, and called his allies a “bunch of misguided children.” Similarly, Rafsanjani regularly used the media as a means to bypass President Ahmadinejad and promote an alternative message to the international community, especially the message that Iran did not


507 One of Mousavi’s campaign slogans in the 2009 presidential election was a direct response to President Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy strategy: “a new greeting to the world”.

508 Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads,” 88.


wish to dominate the region or interfere in other countries’ spheres of influence. Rafsanjani also condemned the systematic replacement of competent officials with inexperienced individuals. Other influential personalities, such as Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a spokesperson for the Iranian nuclear negotiation team during the Khatami administration, denounced Ahmadinejad’s “limited comprehension of complex foreign policy issues” and his systematic retaliation strategy in response to each new UNSC resolution.

During the 2013 presidential election campaign, Saeed Jalili, Iran’s top nuclear negotiator from 2007 to 2013, was also strongly challenged for failing to win diplomatic results and leading Iran down a path of increasingly extensive sanctions. His critics tended to target his inexperience, intransigence and preference for posturing and maximalist demands. Ali Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader’s main foreign policy advisor, criticised Ahmadinejad’s approach during the final debate of the 2013 presidential election:

You want to take three steps and you expect the other side to take 100 steps, this means that you don’t want to make progress […] This is not diplomacy […] We can’t expect everything and give nothing […] Being conservative does not mean being inflexible and stubborn.

The last sentence indicates a degree of internal competition amongst “conservatives” over the kind of strategies best suited to protect Iran’s national interests and the

511 Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads,” 88. Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2005 “A World without Zionism Conference”, several Iranian officials attempted to mitigate the reputational and practical consequences of President Ahmadinejad’s declarations. In February 2006, Foreign Minister Mottaki told a news conference that Iran did not want to see Israel “wiped off the map” and explained that the President had been misunderstood. Ali Larijani, then head of the nuclear negotiation team, similarly declared that Ahmadinejad’s speech had been subject to “abusive misinterpretation” by “certain Western media and certain countries […] who want to weaken Iran in international institutions”. Cited in Ehteshami and Zweiri, Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives, 114.

512 Ibid., 75.


legacy of the Revolution. It also points to attempts, on the part of the President’s domestic opponents, to disentangle the conception that a firm nuclear policy ought to reject compromise.\textsuperscript{516} Velayati’s condemnation was particularly symbolic because of his official position.

In addition to strongly condemning and delegitimising the diplomatic performance of President Ahmadinejad and his administration, his opponents used several institutional avenues to limit the latter’s influence over Iran’s foreign policy. Foreign Minister Mottaki was thus more or less forced upon President Ahmadinejad in 2005.\textsuperscript{517} Also telling was Ayatollah Khamenei’s creation of the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations in June 2006. Not only was the Council responsible for devising new foreign policy approaches and facilitating the decision-making process, but the appointments of Velayati and Kamal Kharrazzi, Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Khatami presidency, also illustrated a search for expertise and experience.\textsuperscript{518}

Additionally, institutional attempts to contain President Ahmadinejad’s personal influence noticeably increased during his second mandate, when several of his close allies were “neutralised” by way of impeachment, dismissal and imprisonment. In September 2012, Ali Akbar Javanfekr, a close aide and press advisor, was given a six-month sentence after being convicted of publishing material offensive to Islamic codes and public morality.\textsuperscript{519} Akin to a public humiliation strategy, the judicial authorities repeatedly rejected President Ahmadinejad’s attempts to visit Javanfekr

\textsuperscript{516} In this respect, it is worth noting that, during the 2013 presidential election campaign, Rouhani repeatedly emphasised that the Khatami administration had been able to continue Iran’s nuclear activities while simultaneously pursuing proactive negotiations with the EU-3 and avoiding punitive policies.

\textsuperscript{517} Mottaki had occupied various official positions in the 1980s and 1990s, mainly as a Deputy Foreign Minister and an Ambassador. He had also acted as Ali Larijani’s campaign manager during the 2005 election and was known to enjoy close relations with Ali Akbar Velayati, an advisor to the Supreme Leader. See W. Posch, “Only Personal? The Larijani Crisis Revisited,” Centre for Iranian Studies, Durham University, Policy Brief no. 3, November 2007, 4, accessed 27 February 2015, https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/iranian.studies/larijani_final01.pdf.


in prison. In February 2013, former Tehran chief prosecutor Said Mortazavi, a close ally, was arrested on corruption charges. Finally, the 2013 modification of the presidential election procedure ensured that President Ahmadinejad would not be able to use his influence within the Ministry of the Interior to promote his preferred candidate (Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei) or attempt to delay the election.

To conclude, President Ahmadinejad and his administration faced strong domestic criticism, including from influential personalities closely affiliated with the Supreme Leader, and several institutional attempts to limit their ability to shape Iran’s economic and foreign policy strategies.

**President Ahmadinejad: Modus Operandi and Role Interpretation**

President Ahmadinejad’s political strategy illustrates Hollis and Smith’s argument that roles always include “constraining” and “enabling” elements: while they structure, they do not determine reasoned judgements. Broadly, President Ahmadinejad followed the “normative expectations” that came with his position. While he put the Constitution into practice and directed the Executive branch of the government, he presented a programme that aimed to strengthen the cause and principles of the Revolution. His role, however, also comprised large areas of indeterminacy. It is in the nexus between constraints and opportunities that President Ahmadinejad’s determination to assume a decisive and proactive leadership becomes visible. I outline his main internal and external strategies to identify why

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520 On 8 and 22 October 2012, President Ahmadinejad’s visiting requests were rejected. In the latter case, the Chief Prosecutor, Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie, declared that “as we are faced with special circumstances and the country’s priorities are the economy and people’s living conditions, all authorities should focus on solving key issues … visiting a prison is extraneous”. See “Iranian Judges Block Ahmadinejad Prison Visit,” *Al Jazeera*, 22 October 2012, accessed 27 February 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/10/2012102223530435716.html.

521 Dehghanpisheh, “Iran’s Khamenei Seen Tightening his Grip.” Mortazavi was dismissed from his judicial post after the 2009 presidential election. Dubbed by some as “the butcher of the press”, Mortazavi played a central role in shutting down reformist newspapers and arresting dozens of journalists. Human Rights Watch had previously described him as a “serial human rights abuser”. His trial was prompted by the concern that, under his leadership, the Social Security Organisation, Iran’s largest pension fund and one of its largest economic organisations, had sold major public assets to individuals and companies close to the government.

522 Until then, the Ministry of the Interior had overseen Iran’s presidential elections. Under the reformed law, the Ministry would play a smaller role. The Ministers of Interior and Intelligence, the State Prosecutor, a Parliament representative and seven permanent members were now in charge of organising the elections.
and how he was often able to carve out opportunities to exist politically, including when institutional avenues were unavailable.

**Political strategy within Iran.** President Ahmadinejad consistently used three main strategies to expand his influence within Iran’s domestic landscape. First, he travelled and spoke extensively. Second, he relied on tit for tat retaliation, which allowed him to exploit tensions and conflicts with his domestic rivals in order to remain at the centre of Iran’s politics. Finally, he increasingly and openly challenged the clerical elite, including the Supreme Leader.

**Domestic travel and speeches.** President Ahmadinejad travelled extensively within Iran and gave many speeches, including in small towns and villages. In his first year in office, he visited all thirty provinces and delivered more than 166 speeches in more than 2,000 towns. Unlike his predecessors, he held several cabinet meetings away from the capital and in smaller towns. His first cabinet meeting, for example, took place in Mashhad. During these trips, especially throughout his first mandate, he received hundreds of requests and petitions, and promised many new services and infrastructure projects. His provincial tours increased his visibility and proximity, which reportedly earned him the devotion of millions of Iranians.

His speeches were widely broadcasted on national television, thus helping him to become “the newsmaker rather than a person in the news”. He used the national media as an instrument of power projection and dissemination of his values and ambitions for the development of Iran. He also used a “Khomeini-type language”,

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528 Dareini and Murphy, “Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Legacy.”
simple and easily accessible whilst simultaneously ferocious and denunciatory, to silence his critics and strengthen his position.\textsuperscript{530}

**Tit for tat.** President Ahmadinejad refused to be sidelined from key policy debates. He seemed to have little interest in consensus building and embraced division as a means to exist politically. His tit for tat strategy was most evident in five key areas.

First, he developed a particularly tense relationship with the conservative-dominated Majles, whose constitutional control over the government’s budget he regularly attempted to deny. A case in point is his decision to set up the Imam Reza Love Fund despite the Majles’ rejection of his bill to use US$8 billion of Iran’s foreign exchange to achieve this.\textsuperscript{531} He also repeatedly failed to enact bills passed by Parliament. The Majles never impeached President Ahmadinejad but questioned him in March 2012: a first in the history of the IRI. He was strongly criticised for his economic policies and for challenging the Supreme Leader’s authority.\textsuperscript{532} Ahmadinejad, however, instrumentalised the live session to increase his domestic visibility. He denied accusations of failure and underplayed the significance of the session, declaring that he wanted to share “jokes” with the legislators and that their questioning “was not a very difficult quiz”.\textsuperscript{533}

Second, Ahmadinejad frequently used his constitutional prerogative to dismiss ministers in order to isolate his opponents and surround himself with close allies. In May 2008, he dismissed Interior Minister Mostafa Purmohammadi without warning or


\textsuperscript{531} The Majles regularly countered President Ahmadinejad’s arbitrary (unconstitutional) decisions. In 2007, for example, the parliament restored daylight saving time, which Ahmadinejad had abruptly abolished as un-Islamic by executive order. It also insisted that the President submit a budget line. See Arjomand, *After Khomeini*, 163.

\textsuperscript{532} President Ahmadinejad was asked about the sharp hike in prices and the failure to provide a budget for Tehran’s subway system. In addition, he was questioned about his eleven-day refusal to implement Ayatollah Khamenei’s order to reinstate Intelligence Minister Moslehi. He was also accused of promoting Iranian nationalism instead of Islamic values.

In December 2010, he fired Foreign Minister Mottaki while the latter was on an official tour of Africa. Equally insightful of the President political strategy was the 2007 Larijani crisis.

According to article 176 of the Constitution, the President is responsible for naming the Chairman of the SNSC. Traditionally, however, the Ayatollah had appointed the Chairman. In August 2005, the Supreme Leader replaced Hassan Rouhani with Ali Larijani, who was the lead negotiator with the EU-3 until 2007. He was known to benefit from the Supreme Leader’s confidence and disagree with President Ahmadinejad’s handling of the nuclear issue. In October 2007, Ahmadinejad asserted his constitutional prerogative and appointed Said Jalili, a close ally, as the new Chairman of the SNSC. This decision was noteworthy for three main reasons.

To begin with, it illustrated President Ahmadinejad’s determination to play a proactive foreign policy role and “unify all foreign and security related policy issues, including the nuclear dossier and the decision-making processes related to them, under his authority.” Furthermore, it showed Ahmadinejad’s preference for appointing relatively unknown low-level officials who shared his generation’s battlefield experience. Jalili, a Deputy Foreign Minister, had “little personal experience of international life” and had never held such a senior position.

Finally, Ahmadinejad’s relations with Ayatollah Khamenei were never as cooperative as many analysts often claimed them to be. For many, his election was a triumph for the Supreme Leader since all elected and unelected institutions were under the firm control of conservative elements. Takeyh, for example, argued that Ayatollah Khamenei “was finally heading a regime whose politicians yielded to his judgements without undue protest, shared his dogmatic values, and viewed him as the arbiter of

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534 Purmohammadi was the ninth Cabinet Minister to be dismissed since 2005. Also dismissed was Economy and Finance Minister Davud Danesh-Jafari, who had protested in public about “unrealistic government policies”. See Ehteshami, “Iran’s Tenth Presidential Election,” 39.
537 Ibid.
538 Ibid., 11.
all of their debates”. While conservative forces represented a lesser threat to Ayatollah Khamenei, tensions between President Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader existed early on. In this respect, it is worth noting that Ayatollah Khameini almost immediately named Larijani as one of his two representatives on the SNSC. Larijani was thus able to attend the nuclear negotiations between Jalili and EU Foreign Minister Javier Solano in October 2007, when it was made clear that Jalili was not representing the Supreme Leader. Larijani was also elected Speaker of the Majles in May 2008 and used this institutional platform to offer constant condemnation of President Ahmadinejad’s nuclear policy.

Third, the more domestic criticism and institutional pressures President Ahmadinejad faced, the more he pursued his anti-establishment programme. In July 2011, for example, he accused the IRGC of smuggling goods through the country’s key ports. In a letter published in October 2012, he also accused Sadeq Larijani, the head of the Judiciary, of protecting certain individuals from prosecution for economic corruption. In February 2013, he played a secretly recorded conversation with Fazel Larijani during a televised Majles session. Ahmadinejad accused Fazel and his family of fraudulent business activities. His unprecedented move undermined the Supreme Leader’s October 2012 warning that any officials from the three branches of the state who argued in public would be guilty of treason. While his critics

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539 Takeyh, Guardians of the Revolution, 236.
540 Arjomand, After Khomeini, 184-85. Jalili’s appointment was received with much reservation, partly because he did not have much diplomatic experience. Ayatollah Khamenei’s advisor in foreign policy matters, Ali Akbar Velayati, deplored the fact that Larijani’s replacement occurred just before an important meeting with Solana. He also stressed that Larijani and Rouhani had acted on behalf of the Iranian regime and the new negotiators should draw from their experience, thus indicating that Jalili should not significantly depart from their negotiation stance. See Posch, “Only Personal?,” 3, 8.
541 Ibid., 9; Arjomand, After Khomeini, 184-85.
dubbed his tactic *begam, begam*, "I'll tell, I'll tell", Ahmadinejad’s actions certainly complicated their attempts to isolate him and his allies.\(^{546}\)

Fourth, Ahmadinejad denounced the subversion of the Revolution’s ideals and openly challenged the authority of the ruling clerical elite. According to Rahnema, President Ahmadinejad, Mebah Yazdi and his students, used religious superstition for two concomitant political purposes.\(^{547}\) First, they acted as a tool of popular manipulation to increase the President’s power and authority. In claiming to have seen a halo of light during his speech at the September 2005 UNGA, President Ahmadinejad started to advance the idea of his connectedness with the Hidden Imam. That same month, he sponsored the first annual International Conference of Mahdism Doctrine in Tehran.\(^{548}\) Ahmadinejad, who made the Mahdi a central focus of his rhetoric and policy, claimed to enjoy a special status, as “an oracle and a facilitator of the Twelfth Imam’s appearance”, which complicated efforts to criticise his government’s policies.\(^{549}\) It is worth noting that his friendship with Mashaei caused significant domestic uproar since the latter was accused of supporting a deviant current that sought to overthrow the clerics and promote direct relations with God.\(^{550}\)

Second, religious superstitions and the appropriation of the Hidden Imam enabled President Ahmadinejad and his followers to delegitimise previous administrations’ policies and justify the use of repression against their critics. Ahmadinejad also questioned the clerics’ interference in the domain of morality and pushed for a more nationalist conception of Iran (rather than calls for the *ummah*).\(^{551}\)

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\(^{546}\) Cited in Dehghanpisheh, “Iran’s President Defies Supreme Leader.”


\(^{549}\) Rahnema, *Superstition as Ideology*, 60.


\(^{551}\) President Ahmadinejad criticised the clergy’s rigidity concerning proper Islamic dress and supported the right of women to go to sports stadiums alongside men. His media advisor, Ali Akbar Javanfekr, was arrested and jailed in September 2012 for writing in an official publication that the practice of women wearing the *chador* was not Iranian but imported. See “Iran’s Ali Akbar Javanfekr, Ahmadinejad Adviser, Jailed,” *BBC News*, 27 September 2012, accessed 22 February 2015, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19741739](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19741739).
In particular, he praised elements of Iran’s pre-Islamic past, including Cyrus the Great of the ancient Persian Empire.552

Finally, in questioning the religious, moral and political authority of the clerical elite, President Ahmadinejad also challenged the Supreme Leader’s legitimacy. Much as those with Khatami, the tensions between Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad partly stemmed from the dual structure of the state’s institutions. Unlike his predecessor, however, Ahmadinejad very openly challenged the Supreme Leader, especially during his second mandate. Three examples are noteworthy.

To begin with, less than a month after his disputed re-election, he refused to obey Ayatollah Khamenei’s order to dismiss Mashaei from the post of Vice-President.553 While his action was widely condemned, he proceeded to dismiss the Ministers of Intelligence, Culture and Islamic Guidance, Labour and Health.554 In another tit for tat retaliation, he named Mashaei as his Chief of Staff and, in December 2012, Head of the Secretariat for the NAM.555 Ayatollah Jannati, the Secretary of the Council of Guardians and a key supporter of his 2005 election, reproached him for his disrespect.556 Second, in the summer of 2010, Ahmadinejad appointed four special envoys in a presumed attempt to bypass the Foreign Ministry. Foreign Minister Mottaki, the Supreme Leader and the Majles all criticised this decision.557 In response, Ahmadinejad called the envoys “advisors” and appointed two more. Finally, in April 2011, President Ahmadinejad dismissed Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi.558 Ayatollah Khamenei opposed this decision and reinstated him. The President retreated to his house for eleven days and failed to attend cabinet meetings; an act that was widely condemned within the Iranian establishment.559

553 Arjomand, After Khomeini, 165.
554 Ibid.
556 Arjomand, After Khomeini, 165.
557 Warnaar, “‘We Belong to the Future,’” 100.
These three examples indicate President Ahmadinejad’s demonstrated willingness to both publicly challenge the Supreme Leader’s authority (a first in the history of the IRI) and sacrifice sources of support in doing so. As an Iranian official pointed out during the October 2014 conference “Iran in the World: Old challenges and new opportunities in the changing Middle East”, President Ahmadinejad left office with minimal support because he had “deviated from the system of the Islamic Republic”, especially in terms of his lack of respect for the Supreme Leader’s authority.\(^{560}\) However, President Ahmadinejad’s *modus operandi* illustrates his ability to use retaliation as a means to enhance his political visibility and *de facto* influence. Although this *modus operandi* caused great domestic consternation, it nevertheless ensured that he remained an actor to be reckoned with.

**President Ahmadinejad and the world stage.** Ahmadinejad’s statements during international events and trips abroad routinely attracted considerable global media and political attention. He used these trips as opportunities to raise his profile and visibility on foreign policy-related matters. Although Iranian presidents have limited authority over foreign policy, they can substantially affect its tone and style.\(^{561}\)

I review the three main issues that President Ahmadinejad was particularly active on: the Palestinian question, the nature of the international system and the nuclear issue.

**The Palestinian issue.** President Ahmadinejad’s statements on the Palestine question were the primary initial factor behind the considerable media and political attention he attracted. In October 2005, shortly after his speech at the UNGA, President Ahmadinejad declared during the Tehran-held conference, “A World without Zionism”, that the “Jerusalem-occupying regime must disappear from the page[s] of time”.\(^{562}\) He denounced attempts to normalise relations with the “Zionist

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\(^{561}\) Although the President chairs the SNSC and the Council of Ministers, he cannot make final decisions on foreign policy and has no control over the armed forces. In addition, proximity with the Supreme Leader reportedly plays an important role in the decision-making process.\(^{562}\)

regime”, condemned all Muslim leaders who accepted its existence as “acknowledging a surrender and defeat of the Islamic world” and declared that the Palestine issue would be resolved “the day that all refugees return to their homes [and] a democratic government elected by the people comes to power”. Although he was wrongly accused of calling for the destruction of the state of Israel, the statements attributed to him caused media and political uproar. Iran’s opponents, including Israeli officials, rapidly framed the President’s comments as a sign of the potent threat that Iran’s nuclear activities posed to regional security and international stability. On this occasion, President Ahmadinejad’s views were largely consistent with Iran’s previous policies. He continued, however, to make a series of rather ludicrous and appalling statements.

In December 2005, during the two-day summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in Saudi Arabia, he explained that Israel should be relocated to Europe. He also defended the academic integrity and freedom of speech of Holocaust deniers and expressed doubts about the extent of the Shoah. Later that month, in a speech broadcast live on Iranian television, Ahmadinejad made similar assertions, questioning the historical reality of the Holocaust. He repeated that the perpetrators of the crimes against Jews should give the latter a piece of their own land, “somewhere in Europe or America and Canada or Alaska”. A year later, in December 2006, he participated in the organisation of an “International Conference to Study the Global Vision of the Holocaust”, which aimed to explore how the Holocaust had been used to deny Palestinians their right to national self-determination. Widely depicted as a Holocaust denial event, many politicians shunned the conference.

565 In Ahmadinejad’s view, if Germany and Austria felt responsible for the massacres committed during the Second World War, the state of Israel should be established on their soil. Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History*, 153.
566 Ibid., 154.
568 Hooglund, “Decoding Ahmadinejad’s Rhetoric on Israel,” 204. Never before had the President of Iran publicly endorsed revisionism and defended the freedom of speech of Holocaust deniers. His December 2005 declarations had also come at a time when Israel had withdrawn from the Gaza Strip, “in a move considerably unthinkable and politically impossible only a few years before”. See Naji,
In sum, in making the extravagant suggestion that the state of Israel should be relocated and in endorsing revisionism, President Ahmadinejad caused internal and external outrage and conflated perceptions of Iran’s foreign policy behaviour with his persona. For many, his statements illustrated his fundamentalism and the threat posed by Iran’s foreign policy and nuclear activities. His declarations, however, allowed him to increase his profile considerably.

Irán and the world. Although foreign policy issues did not figure highly in his 2005 election campaign, President Ahmadinejad proved to be profoundly proactive on this front. He regularly offered his views on the nature of the international system, and three interconnected points appeared quite consistently in his discourse.

First, he shared Iranian officials’ perceptions (collective knowledge) that world politics was both unfair and organised to favour the Western core powers and their allies. He deplored the practices that regulated states’ interactions and denounced the “arrogant” and “bullying” Western powers for pursuing policies based on intimidation, double standards and injustice. He condemned the tendency amongst those powers to think of themselves as representing, and speaking on behalf of, the international community, thus failing to recognise states’ sovereign independence and equality:

Some certain states are calling themselves a world manager and consider themselves to be the ruler, the possessor of the world. These countries consider themselves above other states and do not respect the rights of other nations. They wage wars and occupy lands by the virtue of various excuses [...] The world can’t be run by unilateralism and monopoly any longer. It is not acceptable to see that a select group of governments and countries consider themselves superior and prevent others from the world management [sic].

He often denounced the UN in both enabling and sustaining these situations of injustice and insecurity. In his opinion, the very institution in charge of regulating international relations had failed in its responsibility to promote the equality and security of all nations. It had become an instrument of threat or coercion at the hands of...

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of the most powerful states. Nevertheless, President Ahmadinejad never disputed the existence of the UNSC nor the values it promotes. In 2009-2010, for example, he attempted to secure Iran a position as a non-permanent member of the UNSC. He denounced the organisation’s credibility and effectiveness and advocated a reform of its structure and working methods so that it could act as a peaceful and just organisation. As such, Ahmadinejad’s discourse on the UN was reminiscent of the grievances expressed by many developing states since the end of the Cold War.

Second, Ahmadinejad believed that the power dynamics within the international system were immoral and unsustainable. The bullying powers were pursuing foolish policies, which were harming the interests of the oppressed nations as well as their own. As previously highlighted, Ahmadinejad came to power at a time when the world’s superpower was confronted by a rising tide of anti-Americanism and anguish over violence in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US was also entering a new era of competition with rising powers, especially China and Russia. In addition, anti-status quo and pro-Third World governments had come into power, especially in Latin America, and shared many of Iran’s grievances.

Third, if the power dynamics within the international system were unfair and unsustainable, Ahmadinejad considered Iran to be in a position to offer an alternative to the current world order. As such, he shared the solidarity outlook of the Revolution. In his September 2012 speech for the 32nd anniversary of the commemoration of the Iran-Iraq war, he recalled that the “sacred defence was not defending a territory, a nation or a school of thought alone. It was well beyond that. It was defending human dignity, the rights of all nations and those of the oppressed people of the world”. In his view, Iran was guided by the very ideals of justice, spirituality and ethics which not only justified, but also required, that it play a proactive role in the international system. Amuzegar thus rightly concludes that

Tactically, [Ahmadinejad] has changed Iran’s position from that of a defendant to that of a prosecutor. That is, instead of defending the regime’s socio-

570 Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 317.
political policies against western accusations, Iranian diplomats are now required to highlight the West’s own shortcomings, present Iran’s grievances against the superpowers, and counter Washington’s “arrogance and hegemony.” The new orthodoxy has thus changed the earlier post-revolution slogans of rights and wrongs to those of justice and tyranny, and substituted the goal of exporting the revolution by offering moral guidance.573

President Ahmadinejad’s opinions on the nature of the international system translated into a dual foreign policy strategy: resistance against imperialist policies towards Iran, the Middle East region and within international institutions on the one hand, and prioritisation of relations with “independent nations” and “emerging powers” on the other. As Ehteshami and Zweiri observe, “The conduct of Iran’s foreign relations represents a picture far from the idea of Ahmadinejad leading Iran down a path of isolation and painful retraction.”574 Quite the contrary, President Ahmadinejad sought to diversify Iran’s external relations. In his eyes, by working together more closely, “justice and freedom seeking countries” would be able to realise their ideals and limit the harmful influence of the “bullying powers”.575 However, as I contend in chapter 6, he also showed a profound interest in the contentious topic of US-Iran relations.

President Ahmadinejad tried to position himself as a spokesperson for developing and oppressed nations.576 He visited numerous countries, most of which were Muslim-dominated or widely viewed by the Western core powers and their allies as rogue, anti-American and anti-Western.577 As Warnaar contends, Ahmadinejad focussed less than Ayatollah Khamenei on Muslim communities and more on developing countries: “He [did] so by emphasizing their shared identity not just as victims of arrogant powers, but also as the cradles of culture, civilization, and of great thinkers and poets.”578

573 Amuzegar, “The Ahmadinejad Era,” 47.
576 Ehteshami and Zweiri, Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives, 107-08.
577 Ibid., 106.
578 Warnaar, Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad, 87.
His relations with several Latin America heads of state were highly personal and “supplanted institutionalised, formal policies.”\(^{579}\) Such was the case with Chávez (Venezuela), Ortega (Nicaragua), Morales (Bolivia) and Correa (Ecuador). He sometimes attended functions he was not expected at, such as the March 2010 NPT Review Conference, where he was the only head of state.\(^ {580}\) Several polls attested to his initial popularity in the Middle East.\(^ {581}\) As Amuzegar writes:

> as much as he is admired in the East and South, he is vilified in the North and West. To millions of displaced Palestinian refugees, poor Arab masses in the street and a vast majority of Washington-bashers among the Non-Aligned Movement, he is a savvy and indisputable hero.\(^ {582}\)

This quote must be contextualised, however, for the 2009 disputed presidential election may have damaged his reputation.

**The nuclear issue.** Ahmadinejad regularly expressed himself on the nuclear issue both within and outside Iran. While this was unsurprising in view of the centrality of this policy challenge for Iran’s security, the tone and content of his declarations explain why and how Iran’s nuclear programme became significantly intertwined with his own persona.

Within Iran, he transformed the nuclear issue from an elite matter to a popular one. He repeatedly discussed Iran’s nuclear policy during his trips and sought to rally popular support by “sloganeering about Iran’s ‘nuclear rights’, putting out stamps bearing an image of Natanz and declaring a “nuclear awareness day”.\(^ {583}\) In so doing, he bypassed his limited constitutional responsibilities and overshadowed the institutions formally entrusted with the foreign policy decision-making process.


\(^{580}\) Mousavian, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis*, 394.

\(^{581}\) Kian highlights that the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies conducted a poll in August 2006 on a sample of 1,700 Egyptians shortly after the Israel-Hezbollah war. The results showed a very large support for both Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, and President Ahmadinejad. An additional poll conducted by *Al Jazeera* later confirmed the popularity of the Iranian regime and President Ahmadinejad. See *L'Iran: Un Mouvement Sans Révolution?*, 163.

\(^{582}\) Amuzegar, “The Ahmadinejad Era,” 36.

\(^{583}\) Chubin, “The Domestic Politics of the Nuclear Question,” 103.
Externally, he positioned himself as a courageous, moral and justice-seeking president of a great nation that was the victim of the Western core powers’ discriminatory practices. His first statement abroad on the nuclear issue took place during the September 2005 UNGA, where he focused at length on the Western “propaganda ploy” and denounced “attempts to impose an apartheid regime on access to peaceful nuclear energy”. The expressions “apartheid regime” and “nuclear apartheid” were catchy and widely broadcast. For Ahmadinejad, the nuclear issue exemplified the pitfalls of the international system, especially the core powers’ policy double standards, violation of international treaties and instrumentalisation of international institutions.

Furthermore, the nuclear issue enabled Ahmadinejad to position himself as a man of principle. He promoted an assertive strategy of not bowing to pressure. During his speech at the 2005 UNGA, he thus alluded to a stronger Iranian position on the nuclear issue: “if some try to impose their will on the Iranian people through resort to a language of force and threat with Iran, we will reconsider our entire approach to the nuclear issue.” Throughout his mandates, he thus likened Iran’s nuclear programme to “a train with no brakes and no reverse gear” and presented the accelerating nuclear activities as a strategy of resistance against imperialist policies.

Additionally, Ahmadinejad presented himself as a man of solutions, able to offer a noble outcome for the resolution of the nuclear issue. As per the example of the Palestine question, this was quite typical of his modus operandi: he would rarely condemn a situation without offering an alternative. During his September 2005 UN declaration, he thus made three offers. First, Iran was prepared to engage in partnerships with foreign private and public sectors for its uranium enrichment programme: “This represents the most far reaching step, outside all requirements of the NPT, being proposed by Iran as a further confidence building measure.” Thus,

585 Ibid.
587 Address by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad before the Sixtieth Session of the UNGA, 17 September 2005.
far from advocating Iran’s withdrawal from the international instrument of regulation of nuclear activities, President Ahmadinejad seemed inclined to build the necessary trust and confidence to resolve the issue (see chapter 4). Second, he suggested that South Africa, a NNWS of the NPT and a unique witness of the apartheid regime, be involved in the negotiations. Finally, he proposed that the UNGA mandate “an ad-hoc committee to compile and submit a comprehensive report on possible practical mechanisms and strategies for complete disarmament”. This committee should also investigate Israel’s nuclear activities and help establish a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East. This suggestion confirmed Ahmadinejad was critical of the UN but advocated reforms within the system rather than its abolition.

In sum, President Ahmadinejad’s modus operandi within and outside Iran presents the picture of an official who embraced a very expansive interpretation of his role, responsibilities and capacity to influence. He systematically sought to position himself as a strong player in many aspects of Iran’s domestic and external politics. Since institutional avenues offered limited opportunities to assert his authority, he used informal means to capture power. His numerous trips, both within and outside the country, and his highly mediatised statements, enabled him to carve out opportunities to exist politically and position himself as a proactive leader driven by profound ethical principles and moral convictions. I agree with Maloney that the Iranian President had “a real talent for populist theatrics and bureaucratic gamesmanship”, which helped him outmanoeuvre his rivals.

Concluding Observations

In this chapter, I have argued that Iran’s domestic politics during President Ahmadinejad’s two terms was characterised by the intertwined and interrelated dynamics of securitisation and polarisation. Additionally, it was marked by informal and formal attempts to delegitimise, isolate and contain the proactive and controversial President and his administration of perceived inexperienced and short-sighted staff. The results of national elections between 2005 and 2013 revealed continuous curtailment of the reformists, profound divisions within the conservatives and the systematic isolation of President Ahmadinejad’s followers.

588 Ibid.
589 Maloney, Iran’s Long Reach, 14-15.
Information is scarce on the subject of Iran’s decision-making processes. Although this is not unique to Iran, its complex system of competing institutions, and formal and informal sources of influences over the policymaking processes, make it particularly difficult to assess how decisions were made and implemented. While the argument that the Supreme Leader remained Iran’s ultimate arbiter and decision-maker led analysts and observers to assume that the country’s foreign policy decisions had his consent, it failed to provide any insight into the domestic jockeying for influence. Additionally, although the Ahmadinejad presidency witnessed an unusual display (in both content and intensity) of elite-level conflict, this did not shed much light on the ways in which foreign policy strategies were formulated and revised. In the following two sections, I suggest that the domestic political situation had two broad effects on Iran’s foreign policy orientation and processes.

**Diversion and the Rally Around the Flag Effect**

Key ideas of the diversionary theory of war may have some relevance in light of the domestic situation of extreme discontent and the regime’s contentious legitimacy. Broadly, the theory posits that unpopular leaders may generate or exploit foreign policy crises as a means to divert the public’s attention from dissatisfaction with their rule and bolster their legitimacy through a rally around the flag effect. Domestic issues can thus provide incentives for foreign policy diversions. I suggest that the nuclear issue may have provided two such opportunities for attention grabbing and legitimacy bolstering.

First, as previously highlighted, President Ahmadinejad popularised the nuclear dispute and helped transform it into a matter of national dignity and rights.\(^{590}\) He continuously attempted to position himself as a man of principle who strove to uphold the principles of the Revolution and the norms, regulations and institutions that regulated the nuclear non-proliferation regime. This positioning helped him raise his internal and external profile and made it more difficult for his domestic opponents to silence and isolate him.

Second, the Ahmadinejad administration’s framing of the nuclear issue and (Western-led) sanctions may have been partly designed to heighten feelings of ingroup solidarity and support for the regime’s firm nuclear stance. As explored in the previous chapter, discourses of danger can help sustain and revive a state’s internal cohesion and legitimacy by maintaining Self-Other, us-them and superior-inferior dichotomies. In the official portrayal, the bullying and oppressive Others were presenting Iran, a deeply moral state actor, with profound material threats to its economic independence and physical security on the one hand, and ideological menaces to its national dignity and pride on the other. This framing of the nuclear issue called on nationalist feelings of solidarity and resistance. The issuing of new stamps celebrating Iran’s nuclear programme (2005), or 50,000 Rial notes bearing images of nuclear isotopes (2007), illustrated governmental efforts to mobilise the population.

Additionally, the nuclear issue provided an avenue for the regime to reaffirm its very raison d’être as well as the relevance, righteousness and appeal of the Revolution. By framing the nuclear issue as a Western-led politically motivated attempt to undermine the IRI and prevent the development of the Iranian nation (see chapter 4), and as an issue of discrimination against the NNWSs of the NPT (see chapter 5), Iran articulated and instantiated its identities as a fiercely independent actor and a role model for oppressed nations. This framing may have aimed to distract from, if not overshadow, the regime’s weakened domestic legitimacy. In the post-2009 context, the Iranian regime may have become more performance-dependent.

**Difficulties of Adapting Iran’s Foreign Policy**

The Iranian regime likely struggled to redefine, adapt and transform its foreign policy strategies, particularly from 2009 onwards. The extent to which a regime is secure profoundly affects its autonomy to devise and implement a coherent foreign policy strategy. The more fragmented a regime is, the more constraints it faces in its decision-making, in large part since it may not be supported by a sufficient degree of internal agreement. Iran’s weakened domestic legitimacy and its profound intra-elite disputes could thus have complicated consensus-building efforts, let alone its capacity to implement policy shifts and adapt to changing circumstances. As such, it is possible that Iran’s firm and consistent nuclear stance, especially its intransigence
in the face of mounting external pressures and its almost continuous acceleration of its nuclear activities (see chapter 4), could have been partly down to domestic paralysis.

Furthermore, the abrupt and unexpected turnaround of the Iranian leadership following the 2009 Vienna Agreement signalled that a diplomatic resolution of the nuclear issue while President Ahmadinejad was in power was unacceptable to opponents from all sides of Iran’s political spectrum. This calls into question whether the Iranian regime was in a position to agree to a comprehensive agreement with the P5+1, let alone implement it, in the post-2009 context. Broadly, Iran made a request in June 2009 to the IAEA to buy fuel pads for its Tehran Research Reactor (TRR). The reactor produced medical isotopes for hundreds of Iranian patients and its fuel pads were expected to run out by the end of 2010. On behalf of the so-called Vienna Group, which comprised France, Russia, the US and the IAEA, the Agency proposed that Iranian-produced Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) be exchanged for the supply of fabricated fuel.

Two main developments showed that Iran’s domestic political situation was affecting its foreign policy. On the one hand, Iran continually delayed its responses to the Vienna group proposals and requested additional negotiations, thus potentially indicating paralysis of the decision-making process. On the other hand, the Iranian government unexpectedly revoked the modalities of the agreement with the Vienna Group shortly after its conclusion on 21 October 2009. Analysts widely attributed the regime’s change of position to the pressures exerted by President Ahmadinejad’s opponents, especially Mousavi, Larijani and Rafsanjani. Had the agreement been successful, he could have used it as a means to revive his political legitimacy. Critics of the deal also condemned the fact that it deprived Iran of its rights under the NPT and threatened Iran’s national autonomy and independence. In particular, the agreement did not guarantee Iran’s right to enrich uranium on its national territory.

592 Ibid., 141.
593 Patrikarakos, Nuclear Iran, 257.
These considerations, in turn, call for additional observations on the Supreme Leader's ruling strategy during the Ahmadinejad presidency.

**Ayatollah Khamenei's Ruling Strategy**

In October 2011, Ayatollah Khamenei hinted at the possibility of altering the state's political structure and eliminating the position of president.\(^{595}\) While former Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami had both profoundly challenged the Ayatollah's relative authority and influence, the Ahmadinejad presidency posed a substantial threat to his personal rule, position and the overall system of the IRI. Despite these challenges, the Supreme Leader visibly opted for a strategy of “buying time” until the June 2013 presidential election. For example, in November 2012, he ordered the Majles not to summon Ahmadinejad over Iran’s economic situation.\(^{596}\) In February 2013, shortly after the President played the secretly recorded tape in the Majles, Ayatollah Khamenei held an emergency meeting with Sadeq Larijani, the head of the Judiciary.\(^{597}\) Sadeq subsequently declared that, at the request of the Supreme Leader, he would not pursue the issue against President Ahmadinejad. Ayatollah Khamenei had repeatedly warned that internal divisions were playing in favour of Iran’s opponents, thus leading him to opt for strategies of repression and coercion, co-optation schemes via the electoral process and patronage, and the institutional and informal containment of the controversial President.

Although Ayatollah Khamenei’s personal and institutional authority were severely challenged in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election, it is important to emphasise that he continued to remain profoundly influential within Iran. He was able to rely on the vast and powerful network of supporters he had started to cultivate soon after taking up his position. From the late 1980s onwards, he extended his influence and authority through the creation, and henceforth consolidation, of an


\(^{597}\) Dehghanpisheh, “Iran’s President Defies Supreme Leader.”
independent base of support, “a personal network working as his ‘eyes and ears’”\(^{598}\). Ayatollah Khamenei enjoyed a relatively fragile religious and political authority when he first became Supreme Leader, especially in comparison to his charismatic predecessor and President Rafsanjani’s authority.\(^{599}\) He consequently expanded the Leadership Office to unprecedented proportions, which allowed him to exercise tremendous control over Iran’s politics, monitoring many aspects of the state’s policies through his closely interconnected, nationwide system of clerical commissars.\(^{600}\) According to Buchta, these commissars were “more powerful than ministers and other government functionaries”.\(^{601}\)

Ayatollah Khamenei also continued to exercise indirect control over vast sectors of Iran’s economy.\(^{602}\) While the Leadership Office benefited from a huge discretionary budget, the Supreme Leader was also responsible for appointing the directors of the \textit{bonyads}, the powerful para-state institutions that held a substantial influence over Iran’s economy and acted as influential vehicles for patronage.\(^{603}\) In the summer of 2009, they reportedly controlled an estimated 10 to 20 percent of Iran’s gross domestic product.\(^{604}\) In other words, the rentier structure of the economy, together with the Supreme Leader’s direct and indirect influence over state-owned enterprises, the \textit{bonyads} and other organisations, helped ensure that the Iranian people were continuously provided with employment opportunities, subsidies and welfare benefits. Here, it is worth noting that the demonstrations in 2009 had come from a particular section of Iran’s middle class and failed to attract other constituencies.\(^{605}\) The IRI retained some ideological support, particularly in the poorer, rural areas of the country, where Iranians tend to be more pious and dependent on state-controlled media and support.

\(^{598}\) Sadjapour, “Reading Khamenei,” 7.


\(^{602}\) Arjomand, \textit{After Khomeini}, 174.

\(^{603}\) S. Maloney, “Agents or Obstacles? Parastatal Foundations and Challenges for Iranian Development,” in \textit{The Economy of Iran: Dilemmas of an Islamic State}, ed. P. Alizadeh (London: Tauris, 2000), 155; Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads,” 25. The \textit{bonyads} were the beneficiaries of the assets seized from the Shah’s family and other exiled members of his elite. They were at the centre of the IRI’s commitment to social justice and a more equitable distribution of the national wealth. Over time, the \textit{bonyads} developed into conglomerates with immense powers.

\(^{604}\) Thaler et al., “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads,” 58.

Finally, individuals profoundly loyal to the Supreme Leader continued to lead some of the country’s most powerful institutions, such as the Council of Guardians and the Judiciary. The Majles’ decision in December 2008 to exempt all financial and political activities under the Leadership Office from parliamentary oversight showed his authority.\footnote{The Majles had almost never used this prerogative. The reformist-dominated Parliament between 2000 and 2004 had made only limited attempts to account for the immense budget and expenditures of the Leadership Office. This was, however, an important constitutional prerogative given to one of the elected institutions of the IRI. See Arjomand, \textit{After Khomeini}, 174.}
CHAPTER 4
Contextualisation of Iran’s Nuclear Strategies of Resistance Through its Framing of its Programme and the Nuclear Issue

In this chapter, I analyse the motives for, and aims of, Iran’s firm nuclear policy towards the EU-3, the P5+1 and the UNSC during the Ahmadinejad presidency. To do so, I first explore how Iran defined its interests in the field of nuclear energy and the value of its nuclear programme. I highlight that Iran’s determination to develop nuclear energy and acquire the full fuel cycle was founded on three mutually reinforcing factors: its rights as a NNWS party to the NPT; its corporate needs for autonomy, economic well-being and self-esteem; and its experience in the field of nuclear cooperation with the Western core powers.

Second, I examine Iran’s nuclear policy from 2003 to 2005. The Khatami administration’s pursuit of a confidence-building approach with the IAEA and the EU-3 is important for two main reasons. It shows that the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad administrations pursued the same objectives, thus attesting to a profound strategic consensus within the leadership that transcended factional divides and arguably revealed the Supreme Leader’s preferences and ambitions. Furthermore, Iran’s less conciliatory nuclear approach during the Ahmadinejad administration cannot be understood outside the context of Iran’s experience during the period 2003 to 2005. On the one hand, the failure of the October 2003 Tehran Statement and the November 2004 Paris Agreement to pave the way for the recognition of Iran’s nuclear programme, confirmed that the nuclear issue was a proxy in a wider struggle between the Iranian regime and the Western core powers and their allies. On the other hand, Iran’s conciliatory approach towards the IAEA and the EU-3 brought few tangible benefits and actually endangered its national interests. The Iranian regime and nation stood humiliated, their reputation and credibility discredited.

Third, I build on the previous sections to contextualise the Ahmadinejad administration’s framing of the nuclear issue as a Western-led attempt to undermine
the IRI, prevent the development of the Iranian nation and transform the IAEA’s mandate. This threefold narrative, which competed with the portrayal of Iran’s nuclear programme as a threat to international security, profoundly structured how Iran chose to engage with its negotiation partners, the IAEA and the UNSC. In particular, I argue that Iran’s *proclaimed* resolve to develop indigenous nuclear energy capabilities, and its *demonstrated* scientific and technological achievements, were the responses of an aggrieved regime that was the victim of a hidden, illegal, illegitimate and immoral foreign agenda. Only by refusing to bow to external pressures, and by creating new, indisputable and undoable nuclear realities could Iran protect its national interests. Furthermore, Iran’s assertive nuclear stance was an indispensable reaction to the repeated humiliations the Iranian nation had experienced, whether in the form of unfulfilled agreements, degrading language, sanctions or the martyrdom of its scientists. In sum, Iran’s nuclear strategy under the Ahmadinejad administration was one of resistance based on legal and moralistic principles against the imperialist strategies of the Western core powers and the politically instrumentalised IAEA and UNSC.

**Iran’s Nuclear Programme: a *Sine Qua Non* for the State’s Corporate Needs**

Following August 2002’s public revelations of its concealed facilities and activities, Iran and its nuclear opponents engaged in a discursive battle over the regime’s intentions and the nature of its programme. As the introduction highlights, a very significant number of policymakers, academics and think tank analysts firmly believed that Iran was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions and aimed to become a nuclear threshold state at the very least. They also widely viewed Iran’s nuclear programme as a threat to international security; a perception that was embedded in their beliefs about the rogue state’s interests, ambitions and foreign policy practices. These views had important political consequences: the Iranian nuclear issue was a political and security challenge because several states firmly opposed the regime’s activities *and* were able to promote and implement policies to curtail and oversee its programme.
Iran systematically rejected accusations of nuclear weapons ambitions and depictions of its programme couched in threatening language. Officials put forward a profoundly consistent narrative that emphasised the legality and legitimacy of their nuclear activities.

**Peaceful Nuclear Energy: a Legal and Legitimate Right**

Iran’s nuclear energy rationale was rooted in arguments that intertwined legality and legitimacy. While each element was important in and of itself for the way in which Iran perceived itself and its scientific performance, their combination ensured that the leadership would be extremely resistant to the idea of renouncing its nuclear programme, especially its enrichment activities.

**A legal nuclear programme with no ulterior motives.** Iranian officials continuously argued that their programme pursued two chief objectives: the production of fuel for Iran’s domestic economy and medical isotopes for its national health service. They also contended that the facilities they were installing to realise these ambitions were legal and in line with Article IV of NPT, whose first section refers to “the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination”.

From the Iranian leadership’s viewpoint, the NPT provided an independent right of peaceful nuclear energy research, production and use, including uranium enrichment. In its August 2005 communication to the IAEA, Iran thus stated that its right to produce nuclear energy for peaceful purposes cannot be undermined or curtailed under any pretext. Any attempt to do so, would be an attempt to undermine a pillar of the Treaty and indeed the Treaty itself. Iran, like any other Non-Nuclear-Weapon State, has no obligation to

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negotiate and seek agreement for the exercise of its “inalienable” right, nor can it be obligated to suspend it.\textsuperscript{609}

As an official emphasised, “principles matter a great deal to Iran because justice and peace cannot exist if you don’t have these principles.”\textsuperscript{610} Consequently, the regime could not compromise Iran’s “inalienable rights” under the NPT.

The Iranian leadership also rejected claims that it had illegally concealed nuclear facilities and activities from the IAEA. At the time of the revelations, Iran was subject to the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, which enabled the Agency to verify that a state’s nuclear programme was not diverted to military purposes and that all its nuclear activities had peaceful purposes only.\textsuperscript{611} Iran had not committed to any other agreement, such as the Additional Protocol (AP), which would have allowed the IAEA to increase its monitoring capacities. Indeed, until the AP was introduced in 1997, the Agency’s assessment of the “correctness and completeness” of a state’s nuclear programme was limited to the state’s own declared activities.\textsuperscript{612} The AP, which provided the IAEA with greater investigative powers, aimed to complement the Safeguards Agreement to increase the likelihood of detecting a clandestine nuclear weapons programme. According to the Arms Control Association,

\begin{quote}

The essence of the Additional Protocol is to reshape the IAEA’s safeguards regime from a quantitative system focused on accounting for known quantities of materials and monitoring declared activities to a qualitative system aimed at gathering a comprehensive picture of a state’s nuclear and nuclear-related activities, including all nuclear-related imports and exports.\textsuperscript{613}
\end{quote}

The AP remained a voluntary agreement however.\textsuperscript{614}


\textsuperscript{610} Author interview with Iranian official 1 working in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.


\textsuperscript{612} Iraq’s secret nuclear weapons programme exposed the weaknesses of the IAEA’s Safeguards Agreement and prompted the creation of the AP. To advance its concealed programme, the Iraqi regime had not declared its scattered facilities to the IAEA.


\textsuperscript{614} The US Additional Protocol, for example, only came into force in January 2009.
From the Iranian leadership’s viewpoint, it was not obligated under the terms of its Safeguards Agreement to inform the Agency about the construction of the Natanz and Arak facilities until six months before introducing nuclear material into them.\textsuperscript{615} The unreported facilities constituted a violation of neither the NPT nor the IAEA’s Safeguards Agreement.\textsuperscript{616}

Furthermore, in a likely attempt to undermine suspicions of nuclear military intentions and articulate truth claims about Iran’s identity and normative principles, the regime continuously declared its opposition to nuclear weapons on religious and moral grounds.\textsuperscript{617} Ayatollah Khamenei issued an oral \textit{fatwa} in October 2003, which characterised nuclear weapons as “a cardinal sin”, and condemned their development, production, stockpiling and use. Iranian officials frequently claimed that their Supreme Leader’s \textit{fatwa} held more significance than the NPT. According to Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran’s permanent representative to the IAEA during the Ahmadinejad presidency:

Doubts about the \textit{fatwa} are irrelevant. Our track record is clear. We have proven in practice that we are against using weapons of mass destruction, as we opted not to retaliate against Saddam’s use of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq War. Additionally, as the Supreme Leader is both a religious leader and the commander-in-chief, implementation of his edicts is compulsory.\textsuperscript{618}

In other words, if treaty-based commitments were insufficient to promote the necessary trust and confidence that Iran was not pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions, the internal “chain of command” demonstrated officials’ sole commitment to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Furthermore, while Iranians had fallen victim to the indiscriminate impact of WMDs during the Iran-Iraq war, the IRI had stood firm


\textsuperscript{616} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{617} Ayatollah Khamenei repeatedly condemned nuclear weapons. In February 2012, he declared that “The Iranian nation has never pursued and will never pursue nuclear weapons. There is no doubt that the decision-makers in the countries opposing us know well that Iran is not after nuclear weapons because the Islamic Republic, logically, religiously and theoretically, considers the possession of nuclear weapons a cardinal sin and believes that the proliferation of such weapons is senseless, destructive and dangerous.” Cited in “The P5+1, Iran and the Perils of Nuclear Brinkmanship,” International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 34, 15 June 2012, 3 n. 9, accessed 16 March 2015, \url{http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Iran/b034-the-p5-plus-1-iran-and-the-perils-of-nuclear-brinkmanship.pdf}.

\textsuperscript{618} Ibid.
against their use. 619 This demonstrated that WMDs did not fit Iran’s ethical and normative self-images. In a February 2013 speech in the Iranian region of Azerbaijan, Ayatollah Khamenei also insisted that Iran’s normative condemnation of nuclear weapons was unrelated to the US:

We do not want to make nuclear weapons. Not because America is upset over this, but because it’s our own belief. We believe that nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and must not be produced and that those that already exist in the world must be eliminated. This is our belief. It has nothing to do with you. 620

Iran was thus guided by its own ethical concerns and its unequivocal stance on WMDs remained unaffected by the superpower’s position or political pressure.

Iranian officials also rejected the production and use of nuclear weapons on strategic grounds. They continuously insisted that Iran’s security doctrine was based on deterrence, not offensive action, thus challenging Iran’s rogue and power-seeking image. They also argued that nuclear weapons would have no deterrent value since Iran’s negotiation partners already possessed vast and high-quality nuclear arsenals. To the contrary, nuclear weapons would increase Iran’s strategic vulnerability:

Iran is negotiating with group of 5+1, which includes 5 nuclear weapon states, on the basis of mutual respect and on equal basis. If, hypothetically Iran decides to manufacture nuclear weapons; it would not be able to compete with the nuclear weapon states whom possessing over 20,000 nuclear warheads. As far as number of nuclear weapons is concerned, dealing with 5 nuclear powers would then be at disadvantage and weaker position, no more in an equal footing, as it is the case now, therefore it would be a strategic mistake for Iran to go for nuclear weapons [sic]. 621

In a 2007 article, Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran’s Permanent Representative to the UN from 2002 to 2007, similarly highlighted that nuclear weapons never provided domestic stability or external security and “Even the perception that Iran is pursuing

619 According to Barzegar, the Iran-Iraq war left the Iranian public with a “profoundly ambivalent attitude towards weapons of mass destruction” and he identifies several reasons why Iran would likely limit itself to a purely civilian nuclear programme. See “The Paradox of Iran’s Nuclear Consensus,” 26.
nuclear weapons negatively impacts Iran’s power by decreasing its regional influence and increasing its global vulnerabilities.”

Iran thus partly framed its nuclear programme as a legal undertaking. As a NNWS party to the NPT, it had a legal right to engage in peaceful uses of nuclear materials, including uranium enrichment activities. Its firm condemnation and rejection of nuclear weapons also served to emphasise its normative and strategic commitment to the NPT and the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Iran, in other words, was pursuing neither the illegal activities nor the concealed ambitions that other actors attributed to it. Before exploring the second aspect of Iran’s narrative of its nuclear programme, it is important to emphasise that the IAEA’s December 2015 report challenged the argument that the regime had not illegally concealed nuclear facilities and activities from the Agency. Entitled “Final Assessment on Past and Present Outstanding Issues regarding Iran’s Nuclear Programme”, the report noted that:

The Agency’s overall assessment is that a range of activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device were conducted in Iran prior to the end of 2003 as a coordinated effort, and some activities took place after 2003. The Agency also assesses that these activities did not advance beyond feasibility and scientific studies, and the acquisition of certain relevant technical competences and capabilities. The Agency has no credible indications of activities in Iran relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device after 2009.

A legitimate programme for autonomy, economic well-being and self-esteem. Iran also framed its nuclear programme as the legitimate undertaking of a sovereign state that had an objective need for nuclear energy. First, in view of its growing population, rising domestic energy demands and aging energy infrastructures, Iran contended that it needed to rely on a mix of energy sources and

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less on oil revenues. Nuclear energy would thus contribute to its long-term energy security and enhance its economic well-being and autonomy.

Such concerns can be understood in the context of the Revolution, which conceived self-sufficiency and economic independence to be crucial to the country’s ability to achieve genuine political independence. While systematic attempts were made to minimise the constraints of economic dependency on its autonomy and sovereignty, the unilateral and multilateral sanctions against Iran profoundly revived the leadership’s urge to address the country’s structural weaknesses and reduce its dependence on oil revenues (e.g. 2011 the year of economic jihad).

Second, the Iranian leadership claimed that nuclear energy would produce a positive snowball effect in other scientific areas. Ambassador Soltanieh, who emphasised that he was a nuclear physicist by training (legitimacy claim), presented this ambition as follows in interview:

The nuclear technology is the meeting point of the highest standards of different disciplines. It means that, if a country embarks on a nuclear technology, that country needs the highest calibre of engineers and scientists [...] in civil engineering, mechanics, metallurgy, electronics, all this. Therefore, the universities have to train top scientists, top graduates in science and technology. Therefore, you won’t be surprised that this country will jump from developing country to developed country.

Nuclear energy, Iranian officials hoped, would accelerate Iran’s scientific and technological development, create new economic prospects and, in turn, strengthen its internal and external reputation and prestige.

Here, it is worth recalling that, both prior to and since the Revolution, Iran had aspired to great status among the powerful and respected nations of the world, and

625 Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh at the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.
placed great importance in scientific and technological development.\textsuperscript{627} The Ahmadinejad administration took forward this ambition in its Strategic 20-Year Plan for the period 2005 to 2025, which sought to transform Iran into a developed country, ranking first in the region economically, scientifically and technologically.\textsuperscript{628} Its nuclear programme was “part and parcel of this thrust for demonstrable development – demonstrating Iran’s arrival as an industrialised nation.”\textsuperscript{629} It was a crucial component in its journey towards greater economic well-being, autonomy and status.

As Manouchehr Mottaki, Iran’s Foreign Minister from 2005 to 2010, explains:

\begin{quote}
The right of the people of Iran to peaceful uses of nuclear technology is a clear example of the realisation of the “right to development”, “right to natural resources” and “right to self-determination”. Such rights are among the fundamental rights of nations.\textsuperscript{630}
\end{quote}

Additionally, Ayatollah Khamenei continuously valorised and emphasised national development and self-determination:

\begin{quote}
A recurring theme in Khamenei’s speeches is the causal relationship linking scientific advancement, self-sufficiency, and political independence. His ideal vision is of an Iran that is scientifically and technologically advanced enough to be self-sufficient, self-sufficient enough to be economically independent, and economically independent enough to be politically independent.\textsuperscript{631}
\end{quote}

The Supreme Leader clarified, in a September 2007 address to “young elites”, however, that the national determination to build a scientifically developed country did not mean westernising it:

\begin{quote}
These two must not be confused. Westerners enjoy a high level of scientific progress, but their scientific progress is contaminated by other things, which we avoid. We loathe being westernized. We only seek science. The current knowledge of the so-called advanced countries is dangerous for humanity. Westerners have used science to make wars, encourage violence, and advertise prostitution and sex. They have also used it for supplying drugs, invading and colonizing other nations, and spilling blood […] We seek to use
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{627} W. O. Beeman, \textit{The “Great Satan” vs. the “Mad Mullahs”: How the United States and Iran Demonize each Other} (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 91.
\textsuperscript{628} For more information on Iran’s scientific progress during the Ahmadinejad presidency, see A. Adib-Moghaddam, “Iran is not About to Collapse,” \textit{Guardian}, 22 November 2011, accessed 22 June 2015, \url{http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/nov/22/iran-sanctions-economy-government}.
\textsuperscript{629} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{631} Sadjapour, “Reading Khamenei,” 11.

This quote, much like his argument on Iran’s condemnation of nuclear weapons, reveals that Iran profoundly defined itself, its ethical principles and scientific interests, in juxtaposition to its significant Other, the US – a point I develop further in chapter 6.

Iran’s nuclear programme was thus embedded in a structure of meaning that emphasised its legality and legitimacy. Its quest for peaceful nuclear energy was conceived as crucial to its national interests, particularly in light of the technology’s ability to satisfy Iran’s corporate needs of economic well-being, autonomy and self-esteem. Iranian officials, however, also emphasised that indigenous capabilities were essential.

An Indigenous Nuclear Energy Programme for Genuine Independence
Following the Revolution, Iran’s external partners unilaterally dissolved their contracts to build nuclear power plants in Iran or withheld nuclear material that the Shah’s regime had purchased.\footnote{An August 2005 note verbale from the Permanent Mission of the IRI to the IAEA summarises Iran’s negative experiences in the field of nuclear cooperation since the Revolution. See “Communication Dated 1 August 2005,” IAEA, 1 August 2015.} In addition, several nuclear agreements were implemented with long delays.\footnote{This was the case of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Iran and Russia reached an agreement in 1994 to resume work and restore the partially completed facility, which had sustained severe damage during the Iran-Iraq war. Numerous delays occurred in the completion of the Bushehr plant, some of which were due to American pressure. The plant finally began operating in 2011.} These past experiences strongly informed Iran’s post-revolutionary nuclear strategy, thus confirming Wendt’s argument that “history matters”.

\textbf{History cannot repeat itself.} Iran’s experience of Western countries violating their contractual obligations and the NPT “in complete impunity” produced the expectation that such an experience could occur again.\footnote{Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh in Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.} Such was the regime’s narrative. Whether this concern over the country’s autonomy in the field of nuclear
energy was more instrumental than genuine, it nevertheless remained central to the argument that Iran needed to be able to develop the full fuel cycle. In 2006, Ali Larijani, the Secretary of the SNSC, thus declared that “it is possible that other countries will one day decide to stop supplying nuclear fuel to Iran and we should therefore be capable of producing it ourselves as a manifestation of our national dignity and independence.”\footnote{Larijani: Iran Determined to Enrich Uranium at an Industrial Level,} Iran could not accept dependence on external procurement of nuclear fuel. Only indigenous nuclear capabilities would ensure its autonomy and interests. They were a \textit{sine qua non} to Iran’s “national dignity and independence”. As Zarif articulates, although domestic production of fuel for nuclear power plants was economically sound, “Iran’s decision should not be judged solely on economic grounds.”\footnote{Zarif, \textit{Tackling the Iran-U.S. Crisis}, 83.} It was also informed by its experience of the US’ systematic attempts to restrict all aspects of its nuclear programme, and the regime’s determination that Iran would never again be dependent and “hostage to the political whims of suppliers in a tightly controlled market”.\footnote{Ibid.}

\textbf{Lessons learnt and the necessity of concealing Iran's nuclear activities.}  

Iran’s nuclear experience following the Revolution also served as a justification for the leadership’s decision to acquire nuclear technology and capability covertly. Mousavian summarises this logic as follows:

> Iran, due to sanctions and pressure from the West, had no option other than to obtain materials and technology for its civilian nuclear program secretly and on the black market. For Iran to declare to the IAEA far in advance its intention to build a new enrichment facility would only make it easier for Western countries to prevent Iran from obtaining the necessary materials and technology.\footnote{Mousavian, \textit{The Iranian Nuclear Crisis}, 62.}

In this narrative, Iran did not turn to the black market because it was inherently deceitful and defiant but because of the behaviour of its key nuclear partners in the aftermath of the Revolution. It is their actions that encouraged such dynamics. Zarif uses a carefully calibrated choice of words when he writes that “Iran was left with no option but to be discrete in its peaceful activities.”\footnote{Zarif, \textit{Tackling the Iran-U.S. Crisis}, 81.}
Furthermore, the regime’s rationale for not declaring “to the IAEA far in advance its intention to build a new enrichment facility” illustrates the role of beliefs in constituting behaviour. Iran defined its posture in view of the importance it attributed to its nuclear programme, and its expectation that the US and European governments would seek to prevent its policy. Thus, and quite paradoxically, Iran’s expectations regarding the policies that these states would pursue produced the very type of behaviour which would later confirm, rather than undermine, the latter’s beliefs that the IRI was a rogue regime.

To conclude, Iran continuously put forward a cohesive counter-narrative to the one that portrayed its nuclear programme as a weapons programme and a threat to international security. As an Iranian official explained, “Iran’s nuclear programme [was] a matter of pride and independence.” The intertwining of treaty-based rights (legality) and corporate needs (legitimacy) strongly explains the leadership’s unfaltering commitment to its nuclear programme throughout the period 2002 to 2013. Furthermore, Iran’s insistence on developing indigenous nuclear energy capabilities was informed by its past negative experiences with the Western core powers, especially the US, France and Germany. The fact that these same states would, from 2002 onwards, be the key proponents of a constrained Iranian nuclear programme, heightened Iran’s need for indigenous capabilities. This became particularly true after the Khatami administration’s confidence-building approach towards the IAEA and the EU-3 failed to secure recognition of Iran’s nuclear rights.

**Iran’s Nuclear Policy during the Khatami Presidency**

The Khatami administration’s nuclear negotiation strategy was remembered with much bitterness within Iran and repeatedly condemned by the Ahmadinejad administration. From the principlists’ viewpoint, the regime’s confidence-building approach during the period 2002 to 2005 failed to bring tangible results and, instead, compromised Iran’s journey to become a more economically independent and secure country, as well as its image and identity as an independent force.

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641 Author interview with Iranian official 2 working in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.
To shed light on this key formative experience, I outline Iran’s negotiation approach towards the IAEA and the EU-3. I also explore how Iran defined its nuclear and national interests in the context of the October 2003 Tehran Statement and the November 2004 Paris Agreement, and how the failure to reach a comprehensive agreement ultimately necessitated a less conciliatory and more assertive approach.

**Confidence Building to Secure Iran’s Nuclear Rights**

At the time of the public revelations of Iran’s covert facilities, significant developments were taking place within both Iran’s regional environment (e.g. the 2001 military intervention in Afghanistan) and the international system (e.g. the US’ War on Terror and preventive first strike option policy). The January 2002 Axis of Evil speech had also singled out Iran as a key agent and exporter of “terror”. Within this context, the Khatami administration rapidly moved to manage and respond to what was emerging as an international security challenge and a key subject of media, political and analytical focus. In line with President Khatami’s détente policy, Iran opted for a confidence-building strategy to provide the assurances required by the IAEA, secure the formal recognition of its legal rights to nuclear energy and prevent a referral from the IAEA Board of Governors to the UNSC.

**Iran and the IAEA: modifying the Safeguards Agreement, negotiating an AP.** The August 2002 revelations prompted the beginning of the IAEA’s inspection activities, which continuously paralleled the diplomatic negotiations between Iran and the EU-3/P5+1. The Agency published its first report on Iran’s nuclear activities in June 2003 and its resolution in September 2003. Although the IAEA did not cite any violations of the NPT *per se*, it identified three chief failures of notification: the importation of natural uranium in 1991, the Natanz enrichment facility and the heavy water production plant at Arak.642 By framing the issue as a failure of transparency, the IAEA seized on the matter, and encouraged Iran to “promptly and unconditionally sign, ratify and fully implement the additional protocol” on the grounds that “Without such protocols in force, the Agency’s ability to provide credible assurances regarding

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the absence of undeclared nuclear activities is limited.\textsuperscript{643} Additionally, Iran was asked to “suspend all further uranium enrichment-related activities, including the further introduction of nuclear material into Natanz, and, as a confidence-building measure, any reprocessing activities.”\textsuperscript{644}

In February 2003, Iran had announced that it would accept modifications to its Safeguards Agreement, which would “require the early provision of design information on new facilities and on modifications to existing facilities”.\textsuperscript{645} In addition, in a letter dated 24 August 2003, Iran informed the IAEA that it was prepared to begin negotiations on the AP.\textsuperscript{646} Rouhani, Iran’s lead negotiator and the Secretary of the SNSC, the body now in charge of Iran’s nuclear decision-making processes, justified these decisions in view of the new “emergency conditions”.\textsuperscript{647} These most likely referred to the IAEA 2003 resolution and the particular circumstance of the international context of the time.

Importantly, Iran presented its nuclear-related decisions as ones of goodwill and transparency. Although not legally obliged to adopt an AP, Iran was willing to comply with these additional responsibilities to increase international confidence in its nuclear intentions.\textsuperscript{648} Iranian officials strongly emphasised the voluntary nature of the AP and that the suspension of its uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities could not be interpreted as a legal entitlement of the IAEA under its transparency and verification mandates.

This is a particularly significant point: from the publication of the Agency’s first report on Iran’s nuclear activities to the end of the Ahmadinejad presidency, the leadership

\textsuperscript{643} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{644} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{648} Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 74.
took great pains to identify, differentiate and articulate its legal rights as a state party to the NPT, the IAEA’s legal mandate and the extra-legal demands that were placed on Iran. While Iran proved willing to abide by additional and extra-legal provisions, the regime made it clear that these could not be forced upon it. Iran's insistence that its confidence-building measures be clearly differentiated from its legal obligations allowed it to portray itself as both a responsible state party to the NPT and a constructive member of the international community (see chapter 5). It also indicated the leadership’s determination that Iran be treated indiscriminately and its nuclear rights be fully recognised. It is also worth noting that during the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad administrations, Iranian officials systematically emphasised that the nuclear issue started in 2003 following the results of the IAEA investigations in Natanz and Arak. In so doing, they negated the political significance of Jafarzadeh/the NCRI’s public revelations and emphasised the Agency’s sole expertise in assessing the nuclear programmes of the state parties to the NPT.

**Iran and the EU-3: resolving the nuclear issue through dialogue.** Soon after the discovery of the clandestine nuclear facilities in Natanz and Arak, and the publication of the June 2003 IAEA report, Iran and the EU-3 entered a process of diplomatic negotiations, which requires three main observations.

First, while the EU-3’s *ad hoc* approach to addressing the Iranian nuclear challenge was unusual, it was not unprecedented. Since the end of the Cold War, states or groups of states had attempted to address nuclear proliferation challenges either unilaterally (e.g. the 2005 Indo-US nuclear initiative) or multilaterally (e.g. the preventive war against Iraq’s WMD programme in 2003). This trend aimed to complement traditional institutional approaches, such as the NPT, and non-treaty based multilateral strategies, such as the various UN declarations and UNSC Resolutions.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11, the EU recognised the proliferation of WMDs as a growing threat to international peace and security, and began to “formulate a

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650 Ibid., 419, 421.
stronger, more coherent policy on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction". In December 2003, the European Council adopted its first European Security Strategy and an EU Strategy against Proliferation of WMD. The latter called for the universalisation of multilateral agreements as well as stronger compliance with the existing processes of multilateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. It also advocated stronger capabilities to detect treaties’ violations and the possibility of relying on coercive strategies under Chapter VII of the UN when measures to prevent nuclear proliferation fail. Importantly, the EU advocated a “holistic” approach to address the root causes of nuclear proliferation. For example, it identified that a stable international and regional environment was an essential condition:

The best solution […] is that countries should no longer feel they need them. If possible, political solutions should be found to the problems which lead them to seek WMD. The more secure countries feel, the more likely they are to abandon programmes: disarmament measures can lead to a virtuous circle just as weapons programmes can lead to an arms race.

In late 2003, the EU was thus more willing and better prepared to deal with a nuclear proliferation challenge, including on an ad hoc basis.

Second, the diplomatic track record between Iran and the EU-3 reflected the significant security concerns surrounding Iran’s nuclear activities, which, from the perspective of the US, the EU and many of their regional allies, needed to be resolved as soon as possible. As such, the parallel negotiations were designed to complement, if not accelerate, the IAEA investigations. They were intended to

653 Ahlstrom, “The EU Strategy,” 33. Chapter VII of the UN Charter clarifies UN member states’ possible actions with respect to “threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression”. It allows them to use all possible means, including economic sanctions and military action, to enforce a UN resolution.
654 By contrast, Ahlstrom highlights that the December 2002 US WMD strategy focused primarily on the pre-emptive use of force to address nuclear proliferation challenges. It failed to refer to existing multilateral non-proliferation agreements and ignored the root causes of proliferation (Ibid., 45).
655 Ibid., 36.
persuade Iran to provide greater transparency regarding the history, scope and purpose of its programme and thereby restore the necessary trust and confidence in its activities and intentions.

From Iran’s perspective, a goodwill nuclear policy would help diffuse the crisis and secure its rights. However, the dual dimension of the nuclear issue, a technical investigation by the IAEA and parallel diplomatic negotiations, had mixed consequences for the Iranian regime. The involvement of the EU-3 (and later the P5+1) contributed to the politicisation of its nuclear programme since the investigations and the negotiations were not solely the preserve of the IAEA; a point that I develop below.

Third, the fact that the European states took the lead in the negotiations with Iran showed their profound disagreements with the Bush administration. The US had argued that the issue should be brought immediately before the UNSC. European leaders, however, emphasised the importance of resolving the nuclear issue through diplomacy. In addition, the EU had promoted a strategy of dialogue and conditional engagement with Iran since the late 1980s. During the Rafsanjani presidency, the EU adopted the “Critical Dialogue” (1992-1997), which sought to influence the regime on key areas of concern, especially human rights, regional stability and terrorism. In contrast, the US had pursued a policy of active containment from 1995 onwards, which included increasingly severe economic sanctions. President Khatami’s election in 1997 opened new opportunities for Iran and the EU with the inauguration of a “Comprehensive Dialogue”, which offered further incentives for cooperation. In particular, the EU began to negotiate a comprehensive Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Iran in 2002, which linked deeper economic and diplomatic relations with progress in human rights, non-proliferation, terrorism and the Middle East Peace Process. A contrario, the Bush

administration launched its Greater Middle East initiative in June 2004, which sought to actively transform the countries of the region into democratic societies.658

In sum, the US and the EU profoundly disagreed on the types of strategies that were desirable and effective to encourage the Iranian regime to transform its internal and external behaviours, and its nuclear policy in particular. The October 2003 and November 2004 agreements reflected the EU’s preferences for a hybrid and holistic policy approach.


The Tehran Statement was adopted on 21 October 2003 and was a significant agreement that endorsed Iran’s rights to peaceful use of nuclear energy under the NPT and stressed that the issue could be resolved by the IAEA. In addition, the statement clarified EU support for long-term cooperation with Iran in nuclear energy and regional security. This reflected the EU’s willingness to address Iran’s security situation and create incentives to influence the regime’s nuclear policy.

Under the terms of the Tehran Statement, Iran committed to engage in full cooperation with the IAEA to address and resolve all of the Agency’s outstanding questions.659 Furthermore, Iran signed the AP, commenced ratification procedures and began its full implementation of the Protocol. As such, in addition to allowing for expansive IAEA inspections, Iran suspended all activities related to uranium enrichment and reprocessing. These measures were presented as means to “promote confidence” and confirm its “good intentions”.660 The Tehran Statement, however, emphasised that Iran’s suspension of its activities did not contravene its rights to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes: “the Additional Protocol is in

658 The Greater Middle East Initiative identified three keys areas of reform: promoting democracy and good governance, building a knowledge society and closing the prosperity gap between the Middle East and the more developed parts of the world.
660 Ibid.
no way intended to undermine the sovereignty, national dignity or national security of its State Parties.\textsuperscript{661} Rouhani warned that, in case of referral to the UNSC, Iran would immediately suspend implementation of the AP and resume its enrichment activities.\textsuperscript{662} Thus, while a solution to the nuclear issue could not single out Iran and enact restrictions to which other NNWSs were not subject, Iran nevertheless accepted short-term interruptions to the parts of its programme which were of greatest concern.

On 14 November 2004, the EU-3 and Iran concluded the Paris Agreement, which built on the Tehran Statement. Iran pursued its confidence-building policy, affirming that it would “continue implementing voluntarily the Additional Protocol pending ratification”.\textsuperscript{663} In addition, the Agreement specified that Iran had decided “on a voluntary basis, to continue and extend its suspension to include all enrichment related and reprocessing activities”.\textsuperscript{664} The EU-3 presented these suspensions as “a voluntary confidence building measure and not a legal obligation”, thus recognising Iran’s rights under the NPT “without discrimination”.\textsuperscript{665} Furthermore, Iran and the EU-3 clarified the timeline and the principles of their mutually acceptable agreement, trading “objective guarantees” (i.e. Iran’s nuclear fuel cycle was for peaceful purposes only) for “firm guarantees” (i.e. political, security, technology and nuclear cooperation between Iran and the EU-3 would continue). In particular, the agreement clarified that, as soon as the IAEA confirmed the full suspension of Iran’s enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, negotiations on a trade and cooperation agreement would resume, and the EU would actively support the opening of negotiations on accession to the World Trade Organisation with Iran. Finally, the Paris Agreement specified several key security concerns on which the

\textsuperscript{661} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{662} Cited in Farhi, “Atomic Energy is our Assured Right,” 11. According to Mousavian, the Iranian leadership had started to prepare, as early as October 2003, for the eventuality of sanctions placed on Iran. A special committee of the SNSC was established to identify and prepare several strategies, such as the stockpiling of goods, policies to diversify Iranian assets held outside of the country and conversion of foreign currency reserves from US dollars to euros. See The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 115.
\textsuperscript{663} See “Communication Dated 26 November 2004 Received from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Kingdom Concerning the Agreement Signed in Paris on 15 November 2004,” IAEA, 26 November 2004, accessed 17 March 2015,
\textsuperscript{664} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{665} Ibid.
EU-3 and Iran would cooperate, “irrespective of progress on the nuclear issue”. These included the activities of Al Qaeda and the Iraqi political process.

Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, declared that the November 2004 Agreement represented the beginning of “a new chapter” in EU-Iran relations.\textsuperscript{666} Mousavian similarly argued that this was a truly historical opportunity since an enhanced cooperation between the two parties “had the potential to enhance Iran’s position in regional and global security arrangements as well as its economic situation”.\textsuperscript{667} As such, and as I analyse in the following chapter, if the EU-3 was using the carrot of cooperation on economic, security and nuclear energy matters to induce Iran to comply with the IAEA’s investigations, the nuclear issue was also providing Iran with a wider geopolitical opportunity. The negotiations between Iran and the EU-3 stumbled after the conclusion of the Paris Agreement however.

**“Objective” and “Firm Guarantees” Between External and Domestic Pressures**

Before the end of the Khatami presidency, Iran put forward four proposals to the EU-3 (17 January, 23 March, 29 April and 18 July 2005). The EU-3 proposed one negotiation agreement (5 August 2005). These offers largely paralleled each other and demonstrated an increasing distance between Iran and the EU-3, particularly as each side sought to prioritise its respective expectations of “objective” or “firm” guarantees.

The Khatami administration put great stock in its March 2005 proposal.\textsuperscript{668} It provided exhaustive details of the “objective guarantees” Iran was willing to provide to enhance international trust and confidence in its nuclear programme. Entitled “General Framework for Objective Guarantees, Firm Guarantees, and Firm


\textsuperscript{667} Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 152.

Commitments”, the proposal included a step-by-step approach in four distinct phases and simultaneous actions to be undertaken by the EU-3 and Iran at each stage. This provided a strategy to deal with the issue of mutual mistrust. According to the terms of the March 2005 proposal, Iran would first develop the least sensitive aspects of its enrichment programme and move to its more delicate components as confidence increased. Iran offered “enhanced monitoring” of its nuclear activities, in the form of continued implementation of the AP and the constant on-site presence of IAEA inspectors at its conversion and enrichment facilities.669

The EU-3 did not respond to Iran’s March proposal and presented, instead, a “Framework for a Long-Term Agreement” in August 2005.670 Key in the EU-3 proposal was the demand that Iran “make a legally binding commitment not to withdraw from the NPT and to keep all Iranian nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards under all circumstances”. Although illustrative of the concerns that Iran would chose to “break out” and act like North Korea, this demand essentially called on Iran to renounce its sovereign right to withdraw from an international treaty. Furthermore, the EU-3 demanded that Iran make “a binding commitment not to pursue fuel-cycle activities other than the construction and operation of light water power and research reactors”, and acquire its fuel through external sources. In effect, Iran was asked to renounce the full spectrum of its rights under the NPT. The proposal also stated that Iran’s “binding commitment” not to pursue fuel cycle technologies would be subject to review every ten years.

For the Khatami administration, the EU-3 offer was a significant setback since it failed to formally recognise Iran’s right to enrichment and showed an intention to treat Iran differently from the other NNWSs of the NPT. It was also unclear whether Iran would ever be able to pursue fuel-cycle activities as it would first need to restore international confidence, an unspecific variable which the US and others could instrumentalise. The package was thus deemed “insulting” and an “empty box”.671 An Iranian official stated in interview that “the Europeans were treating the Iranians in a

669 “Communication Dated 1 August 2005,” IAEA, 1 August 2005.
very cheap way” and their proposal was “disrespectful”. President Ahmadinejad declared that the European proposal was “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”.

From Iran’s perspective, the EU-3 had broken the terms of the Paris Agreement. On 1 August 2005, in the final days of the Khatami administration, Iran thus notified the IAEA that it would resume its uranium conversion activities at the Isfahan facility. In its communication to the Agency, Iran insisted that it had “repeatedly expanded its voluntary confidence building measures only to be reciprocated by broken promises and expanded requests”. It had become evident that the EU-3 was pursuing “prolonged and fruitless negotiations, thereby prejudicing the exercise of Iran’s inalienable right to resume its legal enrichment activities”.

To understand why the 2003 Tehran Statement and the 2004 Paris Agreement failed to pave the way for a long-term, mutually beneficial nuclear agreement between Iran and the EU-3, key external and internal power dynamics must be incorporated into the analysis.

The US position on Iran’s enrichment technology. The trade that the Paris Agreement laid out between “objective guarantees” and “firm guarantees” failed, in large part, due to the EU-3’s inability to provide the necessary guarantees for Iran to develop peaceful use of nuclear energy in accordance with the NPT. More specifically, the European negotiators were constrained by the US’ continuous refusal to accept, let alone formally recognise, an agreement which would leave Iran with dual-use technologies. The Bush administration viewed the IRI as a threat to international security, and a key member of a so-called international “axis of evil”, thus maintaining a zero-enrichment objective and dismissing Iran’s nuclear claims.

672 Author interview with Iranian official 1 based in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.
674 “Communication Dated 1 August 2005,” IAEA, 1 August 2005.
675 Ibid.
676 Zarif, “Tackling the Iran-U.S. Crisis,” 82; Parsi, A Single Roll of the Dice, 12.
The differing positions of the US and the EU-3 significantly affected diplomatic attempts to resolve the nuclear issue. As Kaussler persuasively argues, the EU-3 was successful in creating a diplomatic engagement and preventing a military intervention against Iran but “ultimately failed to implement an effective problem-solving strategy”.

On the one hand, the Bush administration wanted to declare Iran non-compliant with the NPT so that the nuclear issue could be referred to the UNSC. On the other hand, the EU-3 increasingly adopted the US policy of demanding cessation of enrichment. In turn, this external context put significant limitations on the Khatami administration’s room to manoeuvre.

Mounting domestic pressures in Iran. The Khatami administration’s goodwill and confidence-building nuclear policy had significant domestic political consequences. First, divisions in Iran’s elite increased as it became clear that the negotiation strategy was compromising Iran’s rights under the NPT and leading to discriminatory policies against its programme. Rouhani’s *National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy* (2011) and Mousavian’s *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir* (2012) offer insights into the internal dynamics and security calculus that guided Iran’s nuclear negotiations during the period 2003 to 2005. Both insist that the suspension of Iran’s nuclear activities was the result of a heightened debate within official circles. The argument that such an approach was the best option to protect Iran’s national interests had prevailed, at a time when the US was pursuing a confrontational foreign policy and wished to refer Iran to the UNSC.

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678 A state is found to be in “non-compliance” when it violates its Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA. This includes diverting nuclear material from declared nuclear activities, failing to declare nuclear material or preventing the Agency from carrying out its verification activities. In the event of non-compliance, the IAEA Director-General must report the matter to the Agency’s Board of Governors, which then calls upon the member state to remedy the problem. The board must also inform other IAEA member states, the UNSC and the General Assembly. The Security Council may take additional actions, including sanctions, to reinforce the compliance.
679 Kaussler, *Iran’s Nuclear Diplomacy*, 42.
681 Although aimed at different audiences (domestic for Rouhani, external for Mousavian), both emphasise that decisions regarding the nuclear issue were collegial and enjoyed the Supreme Leader’s endorsement.
682 According to Farhi, “the decision to take initiative and enter into agreement with the three European states must be seen as a culmination of a heated internal debate – a national conversation.
However, Iran’s policy was contingent upon the prospect of securing a formal recognition of its rights to peaceful nuclear energy. As such, when the negotiations stumbled after the 2004 Paris Agreement, at a time when conservatives of different shades had come to dominate the Majles (following the March 2004 elections), and all Iranian factions were preparing for the upcoming June 2005 presidential election, the Khatami administration’s push for policies of engagement and incentives beyond the legal requirements of the NPT lost ground. Various forces within Iran, including extremely influential personalities such as Ali Larijani and Ahmad Jannati, were strongly opposed to the pursuit of such strategies with the EU-3. From their perspective, the two years spent pursuing intensive negotiations had led to the recognition of neither Iran’s right to enrichment nor the promised nuclear, economic and security guarantees. In addition, they had endangered Iran’s independence through facilitating external interference in its sovereign affairs. According to Ansari, the recently elected Parliament was averse to ratifying the AP and insisted that Iran should exercise all its national rights. As per the diversionary theory of war (see chapter 3), this emphasis on nationalism partly aimed to compensate for the Parliament’s legitimacy deficit:

Nuclear developments, particularly the need to enrich uranium, became an iconic issue that would brook no questions, not even those relating to the cost of the venture. It became an exercise in vulgar nationalism, a hijacking of an ideology in the interests of power that disguised the supreme irony: a Parliament elected on the basis of contempt for the national will presenting itself as the protector of that nation.

Second, Ayatollah Khamenei appears to have shifted position. In January 2008, reflecting on Iran’s two-year suspension of its enrichment activities, he declared:

We, for our part, imagined that it was temporary and imagined that it was voluntary. Then, when we talked of resuming work, they started this media frenzy and tumult in political circles, saying, “Woe! Iran wants to end the suspensions!” The suspension became a sacred issue that Iran had absolutely no right to approach. [...] Finally, they said, “This temporary


Ibid., 38 n. 8.

A. Ansari, Confronting Iran: the Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust (London: C. Hurst, 2006), 216.
suspension isn’t enough; you must completely pack the whole atomic project in.” This was a setback for us. 685

Consequently, he decided to end “the course of retreat” and instructed the Khatami administration to start “a course of advancing”. 686 Since the negotiations were being used as a means to prolong the suspension of Iran’s enrichment activities indefinitely, a change of approach was necessary to defend the country’s rights, sovereignty, independence and honour. Rouhani reportedly informed European negotiators in April 2005 that Ayatollah Khamenei had instructed that the uranium conversion activities at Isfahan recommence. 687 In addition, in his 18 July 2005 letter to the EU-3, Rouhani warned the negotiators that they should not use Iran’s presidential election as an excuse not to move forward, especially since the new administration would honour past agreements. 688 Officials within the Khatami administration may have thus likely attempted to warn of the escalating domestic pressures and limited manoeuvrability. 689

Third, discontent within the Iranian leadership was matched by the dissatisfaction of individuals and groups working for the Iran Atomic Energy Organisation and within the wider field of nuclear energy (i.e. students and academics), for whom the suspension of Iran’s nuclear activities meant that they could no longer carry out their research and development projects. At the end of October 2003, about 500 students from the most prestigious engineering school in Iran and 240 faculty members from different universities wrote two open letters asking the government to be careful with its promises to the IAEA. 690 In October 2004, 1,375 professors signed a similar letter calling for the resumption of enrichment activities. The Khatami administration’s nuclear policy was thus facing simultaneous top-down and bottom-up criticisms and pressures.

685 Cited in Ganji, “Who is Ali Khamenei?”
687 Kaussler, Iran’s Nuclear Diplomacy, 40.
688 Ibid., 41.
689 Mousavian claims that he attempted, from January 2005, to warn his European counterparts that negotiations needed to move forward since Ayatollah Khamenei had decided to restart uranium conversion activities in Isfahan and enrichment in Natanz. See The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 171.
To conclude, the period from 2003 to 2005 constituted the first phase of the Iranian nuclear issue. The Khatami administration pursued a proactive, confidence-building strategy in its interaction with the IAEA and the EU-3 in an attempt to secure Iran’s rights to peaceful nuclear energy, prevent the referral of the nuclear dossier to the UNSC and set out the terms for a wider geostrategic partnership between Iran and Europe. Iran’s voluntary and temporary suspension of its uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities clearly illustrated the regime’s understanding that its dual-use technologies were particularly sensitive for its negotiation partners, who had limited trust and confidence in its intentions and behaviours. Similarly, the regime’s emphasis of the point that its policy of suspension did not contravene any of Iran’s rights under the NPT reflected its own limited trust and confidence vis-à-vis its European counterparts’ intentions (and those of the US and its regional allies). External pressures, especially from the US, and changing domestic circumstances in light of the limited policy results of the Iran-EU-3 talks, significantly affected Iran’s nuclear negotiation strategy towards the end of the Khatami administration. According to an Iranian official, in his National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy, Rouhani shows that the government had no choice but to relinquish its strategy of compromise, especially after the “insulting” European proposal of 2005.\textsuperscript{691} It is within this context that President Ahmadinejad came to power and his administration helped legitimise the shift in Iran’s nuclear negotiation strategy.

**Iran’s Nuclear Policy During the Ahmadinejad Presidency**

The Ahmadinejad administration presented a threefold narrative of the nuclear issue, which substantially reflected the mistrust of the principlists and the military-security stratum regarding the Western core powers’ intentions and behaviours vis-à-vis Iran and within international institutions. Iran shifted to a more assertive nuclear policy, which continued during the period 2005 to 2013. The path of resistance and steadfastness proved relatively beneficial, both domestically and externally.

**Official Narrative of the Nuclear Issue**

President Ahmadinejad and his followers presented a highly securitised and conspiratorial interpretation of the profound motives of Iran’s nuclear opponents.

\textsuperscript{691} Author interview with Iranian official 1 working in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.
Their framing of the nuclear issue was based on deeply held beliefs, lessons learnt from the Khatami administration’s negotiation strategy and developments during the period 2005 to 2013.

Before I move on to the Ahmadinejad administration’s threefold narrative of the politically motivated crisis, it is worth emphasising that my interviewees systematically highlighted a profound anger with the EU-3. In their view, the nuclear issue should have been resolved during the Khatami presidency. The fact that it was not was illustrative of their opponents’ intention to pressure Iran as much as possible to deprive it of its nuclear rights. As one official explained, during the first, “more optimistic phase”,

Iran was more cooperative and the negotiators thought Iran would be able to solve everything through the channels of negotiations. Iranians were looking for their Western partners to solve everything; to build confidence and ensure Iran’s inalienable right to nuclear energy. We did everything we could but this approach did not bring any results to Iran [...] This was a bitter experience for Iran. Iran was not successful at all with this approach. For every step Iran was taking, the Western countries wanted more and more. 692

Officials also repeatedly highlighted that the IAEA had been able to conduct an unprecedented number of routine and unannounced inspections during which no evidence of the diversion of nuclear material to military purposes was ever found. From 2003 to 2005, “Iran [...] proactively cooperated with the Agency in an extra-ordinary manner [...] with almost continuous inspections, amount[ing] to over 1300 man-day inspection, which is unprecedented in the history of the IAEA.”693 The Agency’s reports were quoted frequently, in particular the fact that there was no evidence that the previously undeclared nuclear material and activities were related to any nuclear weapons programme. 694

Iranian officials also pointed out that, had Iran not been a state party to the NPT, it would never have faced such challenges. In November 2009, Ambassador Soltanieh made the acerbic remark that

692 Author interview with Iranian official 2 working in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.
694 “Communication Dated 1 August 2005,” IAEA, 1 August 2005.
In spite of the fact that Iran is fully implementing the NPT, what could be the status quo if Iran were not party to the NPT? Not only it would certainly not have faced such challenges in the IAEA and UN Security Council, but it would have been embraced for nuclear cooperation by the same countries which have created obstacles and imposed illegal resolutions and sanctions [sic].

The bitterness and humiliation of this experience should not be underestimated: it substantially shaped the Ahmadinejad administration’s perception of the nuclear issue and its range of permissible options, thus showing that history resonates and acts as a repertoire of interpretations and actions.

**A Western-led attempt to undermine the Islamic Republic of Iran.** For the Ahmadinejad administration, the nuclear issue was a Western, mostly US and Israeli-driven, plot to destabilise, if not break, the IRI. As one Iranian official pointed out, “we are not talking about the legal aspects of Iran’s nuclear programme but about the intent of Iran with its nuclear capabilities. This is political, not legal.” It was also beyond doubt that “the nuclear issue [was] rooted in the history of the Iran-West relationship, especially the US,” and served as “a pretext” to confront the IRI. Iran was being challenged over the independence of its foreign policy since the Revolution, and for refusing to “listen and follow” the Western core powers. In sum, at the core of the nuclear issue was a problem with the identity and interests of the IRI.

Furthermore, the conviction that Iran’s opponents were using the nuclear issue as a proxy to undermine the IRI was strengthened by the fact that there was little the Iranian leadership could do to satisfy the EU-3 and its strategic allies. The more Iran “gave in”, the more it was asked to do. Reflecting on the 2004 Paris Agreement, Ambassador Soltanieh explained that his government had come to the conclusion that

> no matter how much it [made] concession[s,] they [were] intending to keep Iran’s issue in the Agenda since there was a hidden agenda, to pave the way

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696 Ibid.

697 Ibid.

698 Ibid.
to refer to [the] United Nations Security Council in order to impose sanctions and further punitive measures.\textsuperscript{699}

In March 2013, Ayatollah Khamenei similarly declared:

\begin{quote}
Whenever we are close to a solution, the Americans cause a problem in order to prevent reaching a solution […] My assumption and interpretation is that their goal is to keep the issue unresolved so that they can have a pretext for exerting pressure on us.\textsuperscript{700}
\end{quote}

The Western core powers were thus deceitful: their actions were not guided by nuclear proliferation concerns but by the aim of undermining a regime they had never come to terms with and which repeatedly challenged their status quo interests. The unilateral and multilateral sanctions also fed this narrative, especially those imposed upon Iran’s oil revenues. As Ayatollah Khamenei said in an August 2010 declaration, such sanctions were tantamount to a policy of regime change:

\begin{quote}
They want to bring the revolution down. One of the important means they have employed has been these economic sanctions. They say that [the sanctions] are not targeting the Iranian people, but they are lying! The sanctions are meant to cripple the Iranian nation. They are designed to exhaust the Iranian people and make them say, “We are under the pressure of the sanctions because of the [policies of] the Islamic Republican state.” They want to sever the ties between the people and the Islamic Republican system. This is the true aim of the sanctions.\textsuperscript{701}
\end{quote}

Similarly, US and Israeli deterrence strategies, especially their threats of military intervention against Iran, were depicted as “part and parcel of ‘psychological’ or ‘soft’ war” against Iranian officials and the Iranian people.\textsuperscript{702}

In sum, a key pillar of Iran’s narrative of the nuclear issue during the Ahmadinejad presidency concerned the belief that the Western core powers, the US in particular,


\textsuperscript{701} Cited in Ganji, “Who is Ali Khamenei?”

were instrumentalising the dispute in order to undermine a regime they profoundly disliked and had long sought to destabilise through coercive strategies.

**A Western-led attempt to prevent the development of Iran.** The Ahmadinejad administration also framed the Western-led opposition against Iran’s peaceful nuclear activities as an attempt to hinder the scientific, technological and economic development of the Iranian nation. President Ahmadinejad declared in 2010 that “The western and US sanctions and threats are not only aimed at putting the brakes on Iran’s progress in nuclear technology, but come to keep Iran from becoming an economic and industrial power.”

In other words, the nuclear issue was a secret targeting of a regime the Western governments detested and a nation they had so often exploited and destabilised and wished to keep dependent.

From the Ahmadinejad administration’s perspective, the nuclear issue was also used as a proxy to humiliate and disrespect the Iranian nation, an argument which had two main components. First, the “carrot and stick policy” and “dual track diplomacy” demonstrated that Iran was treated with great disregard and unfairness. On the one hand, officials argued that sanctions and threats were taking precedence over engagement, thus showing the duplicity and hypocrisy of the Western core powers and the negotiators. On the other hand, officials rejected the very language used by their counterparts. The carrot and stick policy was not considered “an acceptable phrase. It is for the donkeys. Iranians do not want to feel like donkeys.”

Ambassador Soltanieh similarly qualified this language as “a humiliation […] the language used to animals and therefore whoever is using it is condemned and considered uncivilised. This is a colonialist mentality”. For him, the Western states’ language and methods showed that they did not understand “how to deal with Iran”, particularly in view of its culture and the importance of showing mutual respect.

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704 Author interview with Iranian official 1 working in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.

705 Cited in Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, 236.

706 During interview, Soltanieh explained that “If you tell an Iranian ‘You must do something,’ the answer is ‘No’ with a loud voice. If you say ‘I ask you, please, to do that,’ or appeal to do that, the answer is ‘Yes, I'll try my best.’ Therefore, they have to understand: if they have a wish, they should not dictate to us, we will not accept it and it will be counter-productive. But if they have mutual
President Ahmadinejad echoed this position when he declared: “We cannot hold a stick over someone’s head and force them into dialogue. This is not the spirit of dialogue and cooperation or negotiation.”Iranian officials thus repeatedly argued that sanctions, deterrence strategies and the involvement of the UNSC were all counterproductive. Pressure and intimidation would fail to alter Iran’s nuclear calculus.

Second, Iran was reduced to its nuclear programme, which constituted another sign of disrespect of the nation. Nothing but its nuclear activities mattered. In his October 2012 statement at the Council on Foreign Relations, Foreign Minister Salehi accused the West of producing a fear industry and “reducing the totality of a nation like Iran, with its deep-rooted traditions of several millennia, its revolution of historical magnitude […] to a single issue of nuclear activity.” The Western media were often blamed for their negative role and responsibility in this situation. While Iranian voices were rarely heard, the repeated comparisons between Iran and North Korea were profoundly misleading and harmful:

It’s much easier to attack Iran by putting it together with North Korea […] They want to add another negative image. It’s totally wrong. Iran, from the nuclear point of view, is a member of the NPT. We have not expelled the IAEA, nor its inspectors. We have continued our cooperation. We have no nuclear weapons. We have not decided to make nuclear weapons.

Additionally, researcher Nabi Sonboli complained that Western policymakers, analysts and journalists compared Iran to the Soviet Union: they used the same concepts (i.e. sanctions, containment, deterrence) and behavioural logics. “But Iran is not the Soviet Union. You cannot compare the two. From a military point of view, for example, Iran is not a threat. It has one of the lowest military budgets in the whole region.”

709 Author interview with Nabi Sonboli, Researcher at Tehran’s Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Berlin, Germany, 30 April 2013.
710 Ibid.
In sum, Iranian officials interpreted the reduction of Iran to its nuclear programme, and the North Korea and Soviet Union analogies, as signs of disrespect and the Western core powers' lack of willingness to resolve the nuclear issue. This grievance narrative was strengthened by the belief that these Western actors were simultaneously politicising the only international institution mandated to inspect Iran's nuclear activities.

**A Western-led attempt to transform the mandate of the IAEA.** Iranian officials’ criticisms of the politically motivated nuclear issue included a third, largely unnoticed but equally important, component according to which the Western core powers were seeking to transform the mandate and responsibilities of an already failing IAEA. Four arguments were systematically put to the fore.

First, Iranian officials denounced the IAEA’s reliance on open source information for its inspections. Since the revelations of Iraq’s covert nuclear weapons programme in 1991, third-party data increasingly enabled the Agency to complement its own field inspections and search for evidence of unreported nuclear activities. The Iranian regime criticised the quality and reliability of this open source information.

Second, Iranian officials accused the IAEA Board of Governors, especially the US and European representatives, of seeking to transform the “nuclear material driven safeguards” into “intelligence driven safeguards”. Following the Revolution, Iran systematically stressed that the IAEA’s improved verification capabilities should not be used to exert diplomatic pressure on NPT member states and threaten their national sovereignty and security. According to Ambassador Soltanieh, the Western powers aimed to transform the Agency into a “‘UN Watchdog’ with maximum intrusiveness in safeguards in order to interfere to [sic] the national

711 Hibbs notes that the IAEA’s reliance on open source information had become increasingly central to its work. He highlights that this information needs to be “rigorously vetted and handled carefully” in order that the IAEA’s technical and political credibility not be seriously compromised. See M. Hibbs, “Intel Inside: Has the IAEA’s Information Become Politicized?,” Foreign Policy (10 December 2012), accessed 21 June 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/12/10/intel-inside/.

712 Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh, Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.

713 B. Pirseiedy, Arms Control and Iranian Foreign Policy: Diplomacy of Discontent (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2013), 141.
security of majority of Members States, under the pretext of non-proliferation”. 714 These actors were pursuing a “hidden agenda” and wished to “monitor and control Vienna from New York!” 715 In his interview, he thus spoke of the Western core powers’ intent to establish a so-called “Additional Protocol Plus” that would allow them maximum intrusiveness in the internal affairs of the NNWSs. 716

Third, Iranian officials often highlighted that, in view of the the IAEA’s status as an independent and autonomous organisation, the UNSC and the Agency could not and should not be dependent upon each other’s activities and decisions:

There are no provisions in the Safeguards Agreements and IAEA Statute which may authorize the United Nations Security Council to take over the role of the IAEA in implementing the Safeguards Agreements, impose new requirements, or modify the obligations of the parties to the Safeguards Agreements; Nor does the Agency have the right or authority to impose ultra vires demands on Iran by relying upon the UNSC resolutions. 717

Thus, after its referral to the UN in February 2006, Iran vehemently denounced the IAEA’s systematic references to UNSC Resolutions in its reports on Iran. In particular, the Resolutions required Iran to comply with the AP and provide access and information beyond its Safeguards Agreement. Iran did not consider the Agency to have a mandate to ask for such inspections and information, and accused the IAEA of producing political (not technical) reports that were neither balanced nor factual since it “arbitrarily [stepped] beyond its statutory and legal mandate”. 718

the Agency has become more Catholic than the Pope by seeking to implement the provisions of illegal resolutions of the UNSC, instead of

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716 Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh, Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.


focusing its attention on its core mandate and the specific provisions of the Safeguards Agreement with Iran.\textsuperscript{719}

The failure of the “Modalities of Resolution of all Outstanding Issues” (the Work Plan) epitomised Iran’s aforementioned disagreement with the IAEA.\textsuperscript{720} The Work Plan was completed on 21 August 2007 and consisted of an agreed timetable under which Iran would answer the Agency’s six outstanding questions in stages so as to reconstruct the history of its programme and build confidence about the scope and nature of its activities. Once these issues were resolved, the implementation of safeguards would be “conducted in a routine manner”. In its November 2007 and February 2008 reports, the IAEA concluded that it had been “able to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran”, and that the “answers provided by Iran […] are consistent with its findings […] or are not inconsistent with its findings […] Therefore, the Agency considers those questions no longer outstanding at this stage”.\textsuperscript{721} Iranian officials emphasised that the Agency had been able to address the six identified issues within six months instead of the eighteen months originally provided, a sign of the regime’s determination to resolve the nuclear issue. The so-called “alleged studies”, however, poisoned Iran’s relations with the IAEA until the end of the Ahmadinejad presidency. As the Arms Control Association reports:

these alleged studies primarily stem from a claim by Western intelligence agencies that they acquired a laptop computer and documentation that once belonged to an Iranian nuclear technician and that contained research relevant to a nuclear weapons program. This research included work on the conversion of uranium dioxide into uranium tetrafluoride, use of high explosives in a manner similar to that of a nuclear-weapon trigger, and the design of a missile re-entry vehicle that might be capable of accommodating a nuclear warhead.\textsuperscript{722}

\textsuperscript{719} “Communication Dated 22 March 2012,” IAEA, 30 March 2012.


The IAEA considered the verification of these “alleged studies” crucial to its assessment of “possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme”. Iran, however, argued that these allegations were “baseless and unfounded”. The regime declared that it did not need to cooperate with the Agency’s inquiries and systematically refused access to potentially relevant individuals, locations and documentation. Additionally, Iran repeatedly complained that it was not provided with any original and authenticated document pertaining to these studies: “How the Agency can support [sic] or pursue allegations against a country without provision of original documents with authenticity and ask the country concerned to prove its innocence or ask it to provide substantial explanations?”

For Iran, the “alleged studies” demonstrated the IAEA’s over-reliance on politicised open source information and the US’ intent to interfere with the Agency’s work.

Fourth, the very behaviour and reporting style of Director General Yukiya Amano, who took up the leadership of the IAEA in December 2009, were repeatedly challenged. Iranian officials vigorously denounced his reports, especially the inclusion of what they perceived as biased judgements and discriminatory conclusions. For example, the November 2011 report stated that the information that had given rise to concerns about possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme was assessed by the Agency “to be, overall, credible.” An Iranian official, a lawyer by training, highlighted that this conclusion was highly problematic: “the term ‘credible’ is a standard of proof within the law of evidence. The term ‘overall’ annuls the fact that the information is ‘credible.’”

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725 In October 2009, WikiLeaks released a cable from the US Embassy in Vienna to the US State Department in Washington, which stated that Amano was “solidly in the US court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.”

726 The February 2010 report was a case in point since it referenced the “alleged studies” and ignored past reports’ judgement that there was no clear evidence of a nuclear weapons programme in Iran. See “Communication Dated 1 March 2010 Received from the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Agency Regarding the Implementation of Safeguards in Iran,” IAEA, 2 March 2010, accessed 15 March 2015, https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infcircs/2010/infcirc786.pdf.

727 Author interview with Iranian official 1 working in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.
More generally, under Amano’s leadership, the IAEA appeared to be “working under a US dictated mandate”728. In a July 2013 note, Ambassador Soltanieh bluntly writes: “It is clear that the DG’s [Director General] intention is to keep open this issue in order to pave the way for Iran’s enemies.”729 Additionally, Iran denounced a pattern of incidents whereby the disclosure of confidential information to the IAEA resulted in a range of covert actions that included the assassination of Iranian scientists and sabotage of its nuclear facilities. The Agency’s impartiality, neutrality and credibility, and its respect for its Safeguards Agreement with Iran (which required protection of confidential information), were all called into question.730 An Iranian also asked:

> Information is leaked and publicised in the media. What is the aim of releasing this [confidential] information in the IAEA reports? What is the purpose? Is it a matter of nuclear proliferation? No, it’s a matter of political pressure.731

To conclude, during the Ahmadinejad presidency, Iranian officials widely interpreted the Western-led opposition to Iran’s legal and legitimate nuclear programme as a covert attempt to undermine the IRI, prevent the scientific, technological and economic development of the Iranian nation and expand intelligence-gathering activities in Iran. As such, the securitisation of Iran’s nuclear programme threatened the very corporate needs the regime wished to strengthen through the development of indigenous nuclear energy capabilities. Iran’s interpretation of the value of its nuclear programme and its understanding of the nuclear issue both profoundly shaped the Ahmadinejad administration’s approach towards the P5+1, the IAEA and the UNSC.

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731 Author interview with Iranian official 1 in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.
A More Assertive Nuclear Strategy to Protect Iran’s National Interests

The August 2005 notification to the IAEA that Iran would resume its uranium conversion activities at the Isfahan facility signalled a shift to a less compromising nuclear policy. In an interview, an Iranian official strongly emphasised that, although the Ahmadinejad administration’s negotiation strategy was vehemently criticised within Iran, it was initially strongly supported. The two and a half years of intensive negotiations and intrusive inspections had failed to produce the much sought after recognition of Iran’s rights to peaceful use of nuclear energy. While Iran’s prospects for enhanced economic well-being and autonomy had been jeopardised, the regime had also suffered humiliation, and gambled its internal and external reputation.

Sonboli used a Persian proverb to explain Iran’s position:

For one-sided love leads to headache. This means that you cannot like someone, cooperate with someone when he/she is behaving completely differently from you. If you do so, and your actions are not reciprocated, you will face problems. This is what happened between Iran and the EU from 2003 to 2005. 2005 was the headache for us. We didn’t want to change our plans. We didn’t change our positions on many issues [Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine]. However, we could no longer pursue the same cooperative policies with the EU-3.

Iran could not risk another weak performance in the nuclear negotiations. As Freedman and Raghavan persuasively remark:

A state’s behaviour during an encounter could influence the outcome of another encounter, as other states will scrutinise one’s behaviour for signs of resolve or lack thereof. Thus, if a state retreated in one area of contention, it would acquire a reputation for weakness or for lacking resolve. This in turn would lead its adversaries to doubt the credibility of its threats in other areas of contention, so rendering the state incapable of preserving its commitments by using coercive strategies.

The Iranian leadership was profoundly concerned about potential future challenges to the IRI should it continue what the Supreme Leader called a “course of retreat”. Officials thus strongly emphasised that Iran’s more assertive approach from 2005 onwards was a direct result of the lack of tangible results produced during the first

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732 Author interview with Iranian official 3 working in an Embassy in Europe, 30 April 2013.
733 Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh, Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.
phase of the nuclear negotiations\textsuperscript{735} Iran’s shift to a less compromising nuclear policy was partly prompted by its need to “compensate by self-assertion and/or devaluation and aggression” towards the Western core powers for their “negative self-images” (perceived disregards and humiliation).\textsuperscript{736} These factors paved the way for a more assertive nuclear policy that was bent on resisting illegal and immoral external pressures on the one hand and, on the other, reinstating Iran’s reputation and honour as a force of resistance.

Interestingly, the regime drew numerous analogies between the nuclear issue and other experience of concerted pressures brought to bear upon Iran’s pursuit of independent policies or technological progress.\textsuperscript{737} For example, parallels were drawn with Britain’s unwillingness to accept Iran’s nationalisation of its oil resources and the 1953 coup against Prime Minister Mossadegh. In addition, Iranian diplomats referred to the suspension of nuclear research as “a scientific Turkmenchai” in reference to the humiliating treaty of 1828 with Russia, which resulted in a huge loss of territory for Iran.\textsuperscript{738} The nuclear issue was also often compared to Iran’s eight-year war with Iraq, another episode of profound injustice and struggle for survival and legitimacy. According to Ambassador Soltanieh:

We had eight years imposed war by Saddam. We were trying to protect our national independence, sovereignty, around the international borders [...] Now, we are facing another war, another imposed war. We are protecting the borders of science and technology and our right. And this war is more important, more costly, and no compromise could be acceptable for generations. [The] Iranian next generation would never forgive [the] Islamic Republic if we would make a compromise [...] If you lose this territory of science and technology, which is [an] inalienable right, then we will lose for everything else. Therefore, there are two different wars. That war was physical war, this is moral. And nobody could compromise, neither this government nor [the] other government would be able to compromise on this, because this is something different. This is on the matter of principles [...] We have [an] inalienable right to have science and technology, nobody could deny it [sic] this right.\textsuperscript{739}

\textsuperscript{735} Author interview with Iranian officials 1 and 2 in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013; author interview with Iranian official 3 in an Embassy in Europe, 30 April 2013.
\textsuperscript{736} Wendt, \textit{Social Theory}, 236-37.
\textsuperscript{737} Baktiari, “Seeking International Legitimacy,” 25.
\textsuperscript{738} As a result of the treaty, Iran lost much of its territory in Central Asia and was forced to grant commercial privileges and extraterritorial rights to Russians. The treaty compromised Iran’s sovereignty and independence and is widely perceived as a humiliation.
\textsuperscript{739} Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh, Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.
While these various historical analogies strengthened Iran’s self-portrayal as an unfairly aggrieved party and potentially served instrumental functions, such as rallying broad popular support, they also provided a repertoire of interpretation and action that informed the regime’s approach to the nuclear issue. In particular, they justified the need to withstand external pressures, notably through making full use of Iran’s rights as a NNWS to the NPT and responding to pressure with pressure.

**Returning to the letter of the law.** Iran’s assertiveness partly translated into a proclaimed determination to return to the letter of the law by using the full spectrum of its rights under the NPT and no longer accepting measures that would single it out. As an official explained, “Iran was too generous in the dealings with the nuclear dossier. The international community was in debt to Iran.”

In practice, Iran renewed its commitment to comply with its Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, repeatedly highlighting that the Agency was the only institution legally mandated to assess the technical aspects of its programme. Iran placed all its nuclear facilities under the Agency’s Safeguards and allowed IAEA inspectors to inspect and verify its activities. Furthermore, Iran stopped cooperating voluntarily in the context of the AP, and claimed that its readiness to adopt and implement its provisions were conditional upon the return of the nuclear file from the UNSC to the IAEA. The AP was thus used as a bargaining chip. Additionally, Iran refused even temporary suspension of its nuclear enrichment activities. The development of an indigenous full nuclear fuel cycle became a priority. The regime’s rejection of the US’ May 2006 offer to engage in direct, bilateral negotiations with the IRI, under the condition that it first suspend its enrichment activities and allow more intrusive IAEA inspections, demonstrated the regime’s uncompromising position.

Iran’s commitment to exercising its nuclear rights under the NPT, while complying with its legal obligations to the IAEA, was accompanied by several attempts to establish “truths” about its nuclear programme. For example, in March 2010, Iran produced a document entitled “The root cause of Iran’s confidence deficit vis-à-vis

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740 Author interview with Iranian official 1 working in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.
741 Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, 229.
some western countries on assurances of nuclear fuel supply”. It outlined Iran’s negative experience with the US, Germany and France to explain its profound mistrust of the idea that it could rely on foreign procurement for its nuclear fuel. In November 2011, Iran published a list of 20 questions and answers on the grounds that “The public has the right to know the truth about the Nuclear Activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran”. In September 2012, it published key “Facts on Iran’s Nuclear Policy” which served to emphasise why Iran expected “dialogue and negotiations without precondition, with mutual respect, and on [an] equal footing”.

Interestingly, for all its condemnations of the Khatami administration’s confidence-building approach, the Ahmadinejad regime did take several steps that went beyond its legal obligations. Although these actions were kept relatively quiet, they pursued similar intentions: to demonstrate that Iran was a constructive state actor, reach a diplomatic resolution of the nuclear issue and avoid a military escalation of the conflict. Iran thus allowed the IAEA to visit the military site Parchin twice in 2005 to provide assurances of the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities there. Additionally, prior to its referral to the UNSC, the Ahmadinejad administration repeatedly proposed the establishment of regional and international consortiums for the development of Iran’s fuel-cycle activities. As such, the regime sought to address the confidence deficit issue by offering consent to external participation in Iran’s most sensitive activities. During this period, the Ahmadinejad administration simultaneously multiplied gestures of goodwill towards the IAEA, offering additional access and information, providing that the nuclear case remained within the Agency and be discussed in the context of Iran’s compliance with its Safeguards Agreement.

745 The establishment of an international consortium was again offered in March, September and October 2006, as well as in May 2008. See Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 208, 270.
746 Ibid., 237-38.
Furthermore, after putting a request to the IAEA in June 2009 to buy fuel pads for its TRR, Iran initially accepted the fuel swap proposal of the Vienna Group. Although it questioned the principle of the swap, especially since its LEU posed very limited proliferation risks, Iran nevertheless accepted to be treated differently as long as the delivery of the fuel pads was guaranteed. Additionally, when, in February 2010, Iran notified the IAEA about its decision to start enrichment activities up to 20 percent, it emphasised that, under its Safeguards Agreement, it was only obliged to declare a new facility to the IAEA 180 days prior to introducing nuclear material into it. In this case, however, it was giving the Agency 18 months’ notice.

**Responding to pressure with pressure.** Iran’s objection to yielding to external coercion, and its decision to actively confront injustice, translated into a threefold strategy.

First, Iran refused to comply with successive UNSC Resolutions, which it deemed illegal, illegitimate and, therefore, unbinding. The IAEA Board of Governors referred Iran to the UNSC on 4 February 2006 on the grounds that the Agency remained unable to make further progress in its efforts to verify the correctness and completeness of Iran’s declarations with a view to confirming the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme. Three UNSC resolutions were subsequently adopted within the space of nine months: a timeframe indicative of a consensus that Iran’s nuclear programme posed a threat to international peace and security. The international context, especially the July 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah and North Korea’s first nuclear test in October 2006, also likely heightened convictions that Iran’s nuclear activities had to be limited and brought under stricter control. Adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the Resolutions required Iran to both comply with the AP and suspend its enrichment activities until confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its programme was restored. Iran

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750 The first three UNSC Resolutions on Iran were adopted in July 2006 (1696), December 2006 (1737) and March 2007 (1747).
was thus asked to observe obligations beyond the NPT and its Safeguards Agreement.\textsuperscript{752}

For the regime, these extra-legal demands confirmed the Western core powers’ intent to transform Iran’s past voluntary suspension of its enrichment and reprocessing activities into legally binding commitments.\textsuperscript{753} Iran also contended that it had been illegally referred to the UNSC. While the IAEA had never declared evidence of diversion of nuclear materials, the Agency had continuously affirmed that it had been able to pursue its verification activities in the country. As such, Iran’s nuclear programme could not be considered a threat to international peace and security. Additionally, in his declaration at the UN on the day the Iranian nuclear file was referred to the UNSC, Zarif highlighted that the IAEA had identified 45 other countries in the same category as Iran (i.e. cases where the Agency was unable to conclude that all nuclear material remained in peaceful activities), including 14 European countries.\textsuperscript{754} Furthermore, the adoption of Resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter was unjustifiable: “The Security Council, before resorting to the measures stipulated in Articles 40 and 41 of the UN Charter must have exhausted all required procedures under Chapter VI of the UN Charter.”\textsuperscript{755} From Iran’s perspective, the UNSC had no legal right to be involved in the nuclear issue, which explained its non-compliance strategy with the UN Resolutions.

Iran also took issue with the Security Council’s double standards, particularly in relation to its failure to act on the repeated threats of force made against its territory. Officials often recalled paragraph 4 of Article 2 of the UN Charter, which states that “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”\textsuperscript{756} The Bush and the Obama administrations, for example, never discarded the military

\textsuperscript{752} Bali, “International Law and the Iran Impasse.”
\textsuperscript{753} Statement by Ambassador Soltanieh, Resident Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the IAEA before the Board of Governors, 18 November 2011, accessed 22 June 2015, \url{http://www.pmiran.at/sts2011/12.htm}.
\textsuperscript{755} “Communication Dated 22 March 2012,” IAEA, 30 March 2012.
\textsuperscript{756} Ibid.
option against Iran, repeatedly declaring that “all options are on the table”.\textsuperscript{757}

Following the adoption of the 2006 UN Resolution against Iran, Zarif declared:

> the resolution can only remind the Iranian people of the historic injustices this Security Council has done to them in the past six decades. It is reminiscent of the attempt made in this Council to punish the Iranian people for their nationalization of their oil industry, described as a threat to peace [...] It refreshes the memory of the time when the Council did not consider the massive invasion of Iran by the former Iraqi regime as a threat to international peace and security, and refused to even call on the invading army to withdraw from Iranian territory. It brings back the horrors of the long years when the Council turned a blind eye to the extensive and brutal use of chemical weapons against Iranian civilians and soldiers, and by so doing, shouldered responsibility for tens of thousands of Iranians who continue to suffer and perish as a result of chemical weapons whose components came from certain countries permanently seated in this Council.\textsuperscript{758}

Second, the regime not only continued to pursue, but also sped up and expanded, Iran’s nuclear programme. In so doing, it imposed enforcement costs on its coercers.\textsuperscript{759} Official declarations following the public announcement of the Fordow facility in September 2009 were emblematic of this position: “this new site at Fordow has a political message: we are saying to the world that even the threat of military attack will not stop enrichment [...] Enrichment in Iran will not be stopped or suspended at any price.”\textsuperscript{760}

In general, Iran’s technological and scientific achievements produced striking results. In 2003, it possessed about 164 centrifuges, one enrichment facility, one type of centrifuge, no fissile material stockpile and sought to enrich uranium to 5 percent.\textsuperscript{761}

At the end of the Ahmadinejad presidency, however, Iran possessed more than 18,000 centrifuges, two enrichment facilities, several types of advanced centrifuge,


\textsuperscript{759} Freedman and Raghavan define enforcement costs as those that the target state can enforce on the coercer(s). “These are costs associated with overcoming the target’s resistance and with incurring the pain or damage that the target is likely to inflict on the coercer.” See Freedman and Raghavan, “Coercion,” 214.

\textsuperscript{760} Cited in Patrikarakos, \textit{Nuclear Iran}, 253.

considerable amounts of fissile material and was enriching to both 5 and 20 percent levels.\textsuperscript{762}

Third, the regime often retaliated with a tit for tat strategy against the coercive diplomatic manoeuvres of the UNSC, the P5+1 and the IAEA. Examples include Iran’s decision in February 2006 to suspend all provisions of the AP and other non-legally binding Safeguards measures in reaction to the IAEA’s decision to report Iran to the UNSC. Following the publication of the November 2011 IAEA report, whose Annex detailed the basis of the Agency’s concerns about the “possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme” and clarified that the information was found to be “overall, credible”, Iran declared numerous technological achievements in various areas of its nuclear programme.\textsuperscript{763} For example, on 1 January 2012, Iranian state television announced that Iran had, for the first time, produced fuel rods for power plant use. Enrichment at the Fordow facility also started and new uranium enrichment centrifuges were to be built.\textsuperscript{764} In February 2013, Iran unveiled a new uranium production facility at Ardakan and two extraction mines in Saghand, just days after the failure of the Almaty talks with the P5+1.\textsuperscript{765}

The Majles both supported and sometimes instigated this strategy of non-compliance and retaliation. For example, in reaction to the January 2006 statement by the P5+1 that Iran should be referred to the UNSC, the Majles warned “the government that it should not allow the inalienable rights of the Iranian nation to be bargained away to

\textsuperscript{762} Ibid.


any government, nor bend to foreign bullying." Following the adoption of the December 2006 UNSC Resolution, the Majles approved a bill which called on the government to review its cooperation with the IAEA, suspend the voluntary implementation of the AP and accelerate Iran’s nuclear activities. The Majles similarly reacted to the March 2007 UNSC Resolution by passing a law that, this time, obliged the government to revise its cooperation with the IAEA. Thereafter, Iran banned several IAEA inspectors and refused to allow the installation of remote monitoring cameras. Furthermore, after the US and the P5+1 swiftly rejected the May 2010 Turkey-Brazil-Iran deal and imposed new sanctions against Iran (see chapter 5), the Majles passed a bill that authorised the government to continue enriching up to 20 percent for the TRR.

Interestingly, it is also after the dismissal of the May 2010 agreement that President Ahmadinejad declared that Iran would postpone nuclear talks to “teach a lesson to the West”: “It’s a punishment to teach them a lesson to know how to have a dialogue with nations.” According to Mousavian, he also identified four new preconditions for negotiations with the P5+1. First, Iran’s negotiation partner had to clarify their position on Israel’s nuclear arsenal. Second, the P5+1 countries must declare whether they support the organisation of a review conference to strengthen the NPT. Third, they were expected to clarify their ultimate objectives in the negotiations with Iran. Fourth, Iran wished to involve more countries in the multilateral negotiations about its programme. By postponing nuclear negotiations, and defining new rules of engagement, the Iranian President articulated Iran’s anger with the way it was treated. Both symbolically and practically, it was signalling that the conduct of the P5+1 was unjust and unacceptable. It remains unclear whether President Ahmadinejad’s new preconditions were the result of a concerted strategy within his administration, however, as the negotiations’ postponement could have been a default position due to domestic paralysis within Iran. Indeed, Lady Ashton’s June 2010 offer of negotiations with Jalili remained unanswered, as had Amano’s

766 Mousavian, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis*, 226.
767 Ibid., 261-63.
769 Black, “Iran Postpones Nuclear Talks.”
770 Mousavian, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis*, 393.
invitation to Iran. Furthermore, Jalili declared that the nuclear programme would not be discussed during the January 2011 Istanbul talks, and that Iran had two new preconditions for its negotiations with the P5+1: the removal of all sanctions and the formal endorsement of Iran’s right to enrich uranium. These announcements cast doubt on the regime’s capacity to negotiate and compromise, which was also partly confirmed by the fact that Iran and the P5+1 held no negotiations between January 2011 and April 2012.

In sum, Iran pursued a firm and assertive nuclear diplomacy which was determined by the belief that the nuclear issue was not a technical and scientific matter but a politically motivated crisis manufactured by Iran’s long-term opponents. To protect Iran’s national interests and its legal and legitimate nuclear rights, the regime refused to comply with the illegal UNSC Resolutions and the IAEA’s illegitimate demands. Iran pursued its nuclear programme and proceeded to create new realities on the ground, in accordance with its rights and obligations under the NPT and its Safeguards Agreement. The nuclear issue undoubtedly worsened during the Ahmadinejad presidency: Iran was referred to the UNSC, six UNSC Resolutions were adopted and increasingly stringent unilateral and multilateral sanctions were enforced against its economy. However, Iran’s stance of defiance and resistance produced several important positive domestic consequences.

**Domestic benefits of Iran’s path of resistance and steadfastness.** Iran achieved considerable scientific and technological progress during the Ahmadinejad presidency and these had three chief benefits for the regime.

First, the significant nuclear accomplishments allowed Iran to position itself as “capable to meet its highest technological needs, even in a field as complicated as nuclear energy, without having (external) support”.

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772 Parsi, A Single Roll of the Dice, 211.
773 “The P5+1, Iran and the Perils of Nuclear Brinkmanship,” International Crisis Group, 12.
774 M. Ahouie in his interview with Leonhardt van Efferink, Exploring Geopolitics, June 2010, accessed 17 March 2015, [http://www.exploringgeopolitics.org/interview_ahouie_mahdi_iranian_nuclear_program_bushehr_non_proliferation_treaty_power_plant_reactor_international_atomic_energy_agency_highly_enriched_uranium/](http://www.exploringgeopolitics.org/interview_ahouie_mahdi_iranian_nuclear_program_bushehr_non_proliferation_treaty_power_plant_reactor_international_atomic_energy_agency_highly_enriched_uranium/). Bazegar notes that the Iranian state had regularly been blamed for the country’s under-
scientific achievements strengthened a sense of national pride and dignity. Officials and scientists were able to demonstrate that the Iranian nation was capable of high technical and scientific development on their own. These achievements were thus portrayed as evidence of the righteousness of the Iranian leadership, and the strong moral and strategic principles of the IRI. Importantly, Ayatollah Khamenei helped legitimise Iran’s resistance policy. He argued this was a necessary (morally driven) strategy, which was worth fighting for despite its material costs:

In order to attain independence and achieve national sovereignty and honor, any nation will have to pay a certain price. But nations should incur such expenses and make every effort to achieve the above objectives. They should be hopeful of the valuable results of their endeavors, despite all the attempts that are being made by the enemies to undermine their hopes and aspirations.\(^{775}\)

Second, Iran’s nuclear achievements were presented as all the more remarkable because they had been made in an antagonistic context in which Iran faced continuous coercion and intimidation. More specifically, from the Ahmadinejad administration’s viewpoint, external pressures had pushed Iran to become more self-reliant and independent.\(^{776}\) In other words, the punitive policies had strengthened Iran’s national interests. For example, it was claimed that external circumstances had forced the regime to seek to become a fully independent producer of nuclear energy:

We had faits accomplis, one after the other. We created, we succeeded, we obtained this technology on our own […] The West created the will and the determination […] we could not swim but they push us to the pool and now we can swim, not only in the pool, but also in the ocean.\(^{777}\)

Ambassador Soltanieh similarly talked about a feeling of “wanting to grow as fast as possible” and “to go as far as we can”.\(^{778}\) For him, the intrusive IAEA inspections also had an unexpected \textit{ad hoc} benefit: the formal recognition of Iran’s technical achievements. Without the Agency’s investigations and reports, Iran’s claims of
technical progress would have been dismissed. "And, therefore, when I say ‘we are masters of nuclear enrichment technology’, it is based on the reports of top experts of the world that we are masters of nuclear technology".

Third, Iran’s firm nuclear stance, and its decision to endure the costs of resistance, allowed the regime to demonstrate the objective failure of the coercive diplomatic strategies of the P5+1 and the UNSC. Iran was not submitting; it was resisting and this was a source of considerable pride and confidence. Soltanieh’s November 2009 statement to the IAEA is emblematic of this position:

In conclusion, I reiterate that the Great Nation of Iran shall never [bend] to pressure and intimidation vis-à-vis its inalienable right for peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The knowledge is the heritage of mankind and no one has the right to deprive any nation to benefit from it [...] Neither resolutions of the Boards of Governors nor those of the United Nations Security Council which lack legal basis, and the last but not the least, neither sanctions nor the threat of military attacks can interrupt peaceful nuclear activities in Iran even a second [sic].

In interview, he insisted that although Iran had paid “a heavy price” for its resistance, including “the loss of national scientists in terrorist assassinations, sanctions and stuxnet,” Iran was strong because it had not compromised on matters of principles.

Iran’s nuclear achievements also created new de facto realities that could not be unlearnt and undone. For Mousavian, Iran’s decision to accelerate its enrichment programme was “a way of forcing the West to negotiate with them on an equal basis”. In this respect, it is worth noting that the Western core powers’ position evolved, from demanding a complete halt of Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme to

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779 Ambassador Soltanieh explained in interview: “Although we have had enormous and unprecedented inspections, at the same time, they have been helpful. Why? Because the top international nuclear experts from the IAEA have come and confirmed our technical, technological capacity and certified it. If we had said ‘Yes, we have been successful to 20%,’ some people would say ‘No, we don’t trust them. Who knows? Maybe they are bluffing.’ But when they came and they measured, they took samples to the laboratories in Europe, the IAEA laboratories; they proved it and, in fact, they certified the highest standards of our work [sic].”

780 Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh, Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.


782 Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh, Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.

783 Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 5.
requesting that it cap enrichment at a low level and accept stricter inspection of its nuclear facilities.

For example, during the April 2012 Istanbul talks, Iran and the P5+1 partly discussed their negotiation framework: a telling indication that, almost a decade after the beginning of the parallel diplomatic tracks, the parties still needed to set out a mutually acceptable framework for their discussions.\(^7\) The P5+1’s red lines shifted somewhat once Iran’s suspension of its enrichment activities was no longer a precondition for negotiation. Additionally, it was no longer the UNSC Resolutions, but the NPT, that was formally identified as the framework for future discussions. As a sign that goodwill begets goodwill, the IAEA reported that, between May and August 2012, Iran had converted almost half of its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium for medical use, thus keeping its stockpile of higher enriched fuel steady at a time when the P5+1 and Iran were negotiating.\(^8\) Although the Ahmadinejad administration never suspended its enrichment activities, it nevertheless used its dual-use technologies as a bargaining chip to ease external concerns or retaliate against its interlocutors.

During the February 2013 talks in Almaty, the P5+1 also dropped its long-standing demand that Iran shut down its underground enrichment plant at Fordow and allowed Tehran to keep some of its 20 percent enriched uranium for use in the TRR. This, as Farhi notes, was a de facto recognition of Iran’s nuclear enrichment rights.\(^9\)

### Concluding Remarks

To conclude, Iran’s nuclear policy demonstrates that states do not pursue exogenously defined interests that are a sole function of their structural position within the international system. The Iranian leadership viewed the nuclear

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programme as a crucial component of Iran’s national interests, which would strengthen its corporate need for economic well-being, autonomy and self-esteem. Indigenous capabilities and the full fuel cycle promised a sustainable and rewarding long-term opportunity for greater economic and political independence, as well as higher domestic and international status. As such, neither the Khatami nor the Ahmadinejad administration could accept either renouncing or undermining Iran’s legal and legitimate nuclear programme.

Furthermore, Iran’s responses to its opponents and negotiation partners show that states define their interests in the process of interpreting situations. The Ahmadinejad administration’s threefold narrative of the profound motives that explained the Western-led opposition to its nuclear activities was structured by Iran’s past experiences (analogical reasoning) and collective knowledge with those states. Additionally, the failure of the Khatami administration’s confidence-building approach towards the IAEA and the EU-3 had profoundly revived the mistrust, negative beliefs and threat assumptions of those who had assumed power to defend and revive the heritage of the Revolution. Worse, this first phase of the nuclear issue had humiliated Iran and compromised its independence and reputation.

Within this context, Iran’s nuclear policy from 2005 to 2013 demonstrated a prioritisation of long-term ambitions (corporate needs, principles of rights and dignity) over shorter-term considerations (harm to Iran’s economic well-being and autonomy, threats to its physical security). Iran engaged in strategies of self-assertion through which it claimed and demonstrated its determination to exercise the full spectrum of its rights under the NPT, and to challenge the perceived illegal and illegitimate policies of its negotiation partners, the UNSC and the IAEA. Thus, despite profound political and material consequences, which the regime acknowledged and justified, Iran’s strategies of resistance produced substantial domestic benefits.

From the leadership’s viewpoint, Iran’s national dignity, honour and independence were strengthened by the regime’s compliance with, and instantiation of, the values of the Revolution: independence and resistance against injustice. The resistance strategies helped boost Iran’s identity, affirming the IRI’s material and ideational independence, as well as its significant technical and political capabilities. The
coercive diplomatic strategies of the P5+1 and the UNSC were outweighed by the regime’s cost-benefit calculation that it was within Iran’s national interests to endure the costs of resistance and apply enforcement costs. In particular, the regime’s acceleration of its nuclear activities, and its substantial scientific and technological achievements in the field of peaceful nuclear energy, created new realities with which the negotiation partners had to contend and to which they had to adapt. I now turn to the other aspect in which Iran’s strategies of resistance contributed to the reinstatement of its identity as an independent, ethical and morally driven state actor, and brought several external benefits to the regime.
Chapter 5
Iran’s Dual-Track Nuclear Policy: Turning Threats Into Geopolitical Opportunities

In the previous chapter, I explored Iran’s positioning vis-à-vis the main direct (the EU-3, P5+1, UNSC and the IAEA) and indirect (the Western core powers, the US especially) protagonists of the nuclear issue. I examined how and why Iran’s indigenous nuclear programme was framed as a crucial component of the country’s long-term interests. I also analysed how the perception that the nuclear issue was a political (not a technical) crisis that was both endless and manufactured by Iran’s long-term rivals, determined the regime’s responses and strategic priorities. Confronted by illegal, illegitimate and unacceptable UNSC Resolutions, IAEA reports, covert warfare and media propaganda, Iran had to pursue an assertive nuclear policy.

The Ahmadinejad administration framed its nuclear strategies of resistance as the legal and legitimate undertaking of an NNWS of the NPT whose rights were being unfairly compromised. Its refusal to comply with the UNSC resolutions and some of the demands of the IAEA was matched by a strong commitment to make full use of Article IV of the NPT and actively cooperate with the Agency regarding its Safeguards Agreement. In so doing, Iran mixed incentives with enforcement costs and presented itself as a constructive state actor. On the one hand, Iran sought to demonstrate that it was a profoundly committed state party to the NPT that believed in its normative principles and upheld its legal obligations, including by helping to clearly differentiate between states’ responsibilities under the Safeguards Agreement and their potentially non-legally binding voluntary measures. On the other hand, Iran maintained a deeply proactive resistance to the Western core powers’ immoral and illegal practices.

Finally, Iran’s ability to achieve substantial scientific and technological development fed a sense of national pride and confidence in the normative and strategic principles of the IRI. Not only did Iran’s resistance strategies allow the regime to pursue its commitment to greater economic and political independence with renewed vigour,
but its refusal to submit to external pressures also bolstered its honour and dignity. In
sum, Iran’s nuclear policy instantiated and reaffirmed key values of the Revolution,
including those of independence, scientific and economic development, and
resistance against injustice and oppression.

In this chapter, I turn to another aspect of Iran’s nuclear policy, which also relates to
the regime’s attempt to present itself as a constructive state actor. My argument is
twofold. First, the Ahmadinejad administration sought to position Iran as a guide and
role model for the NNWSs of the NPT, which, it argued, were similarly confronted by
the injustice and double standards of the NWSs. On the one hand, the NNWSs’
access to peaceful nuclear energy had been continuously limited and jeopardised by
the NWSs’ biased interpretations of the rights and obligations of the states party to
the NPT. On the other hand, the NWSs had failed to comply with their own nuclear
disarmament obligations. In so doing, they had undermined the nuclear non-
proliferation regime and paved the way for serious vertical and horizontal
proliferation challenges.

The Ahmadinejad administration, in other words, situated the Iranian nuclear issue
within the wider context of global debates around access to peaceful nuclear energy
on the one hand, and the sustainability of the nuclear non-proliferation regime on the
other. In broadening the scope of the issue, and in positioning itself as a voice of
international justice and security, the Ahmadinejad administration attempted to
weaken its main nuclear opponents and to strengthen external legitimacy and
support for its strategies of resistance. Iran, I argue, was partly successful since it
received discursive and strategic backing from several NNWSs of the NPT,
members of the NAM, and China and Russia, two permanent members of the
UNSC. As such, while Iran was able to capitalise on potential disagreements and
rifts among UNSC members, and delay and soften several resolutions, expressions
of support for its nuclear policy also helped delegitimise the prominent claims that
the IRI was an isolated rogue state.

Second, the Iranian leadership used the nuclear negotiations as an opportunity to
discuss issues of potential mutual interest between Iran and the Western core
powers. Iran’s negotiation proposals during the Khatami and Ahmadinejad
administrations included repeated offers of cooperation on a broad range of security matters that were unrelated to the nuclear issue. I engage with the similarities and differences of their respective offers to the EU-3 and the P5+1 to draw out some conclusions on key processes of identity and interests formation within Iran. In particular, I note that Iran's approach to the nuclear issue was complex and multifaceted. It pursued processes of self-assertion and devaluation of the Western core powers to both reinstantiate its identity commitments as a force of resistance within a highly hierarchical international system and enhance its legitimacy and reputation. At the same time, it also attempted to transform the nuclear negotiations into a broader geopolitical opportunity to engage with its significant Others, the US in particular, which remained a prominent actor within the international system and its regional environment.

**Treaty Obligations Versus Practices: the NWSs on Trial**

The Ahmadinejad administration attempted to alter the framing of Iran’s nuclear programme as a threat to international security and to put forward a non-security oriented perspective of its nuclear rationale. The regime argued that, while the Western-manufactured crisis was a proxy to undermine the IRI, prevent the legitimate development of the Iranian nation and increase intelligence-gathering activities within Iran, it was also the result of the core powers’ profoundly discriminatory practices in the field of nuclear technology. In particular, Iran denounced the short-sighted behaviour of the Western NWSs of the NPT which, it argued, were threatening the implementation, effectiveness and sustainability of the formal (treaty-based) and informal (norms) institutions of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. As such, it was the Western NWSs, not Iran, that were a threat to a key pillar of international stability and security.

**Issues of Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Nuclear Energy**

Iran attempted to broaden the scope of the nuclear issue by presenting the Western-led opposition against its legal and legitimate nuclear activities as a powerful example of discriminatory practices against the NNWSs of the NPT.
The NWSs' discriminatory practices against the NNWSs. As highlighted in the previous chapter, Iranian officials frequently referred to Article IV(1) of the NPT to support their claim that Iran had the right to enrich uranium. As per the provisions of Article IV(2), they also regularly pointed to the fact that all states party to the Treaty had the right to participate in “the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy".\(^787\) Importantly, the article also clarifies that the onus was on those “in a position to do so” to contribut[e] alone or together with other States or international organizations to the further development of the applications of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, especially in the territories of non-nuclear-weapon States Party to the Treaty, with due consideration for the needs of the developing areas of the world.\(^788\)

This specification was pushed by the NNWSs during the NPT negotiations to avoid the possibility of the treaty-sanctioned mechanisms of control over their peaceful nuclear activities hampering their access to the knowledge and technology most needed to pursue their scientific development.\(^789\) As such, the recognition of their nuclear rights under Article IV(1) was matched by “a reciprocal obligation primarily incumbent upon NWSs to aid them in their development of peaceful uses of nuclear energy”.\(^790\)

In practice, the NPT proved relatively weak on enforcement and Article IV(2) was never implemented fully and effectively by “those in a position to do so”. The NWSs states, the US in particular, often distorted the NPT in such a way that access to peaceful nuclear energy was under-prioritised, resulting in the NNWSs’ legal interests being “unlawfully prejudiced”.\(^791\) According to Joyner, the NWSs gave greater consideration to the NNWSs’ non-proliferation obligations and used three main strategies to limit their access to peaceful nuclear energy.\(^792\)

\(^787\) Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).
\(^788\) Ibid.
\(^789\) Ibid., 13.
\(^790\) Ibid., 18-19.
\(^791\) Ibid., 2.
\(^792\) Ibid., 78.
First, they tended to require that the NNWSs “exclusively source nuclear material from a multilateral fuel bank or multinational enrichment centre as a condition of supply”. Preference was thus given to fuel-cycle facilities operating under international control and monitoring. This strategy was partly prompted by the structural weaknesses of the NPT, including the issue of dual-use technologies and latent nuclear weapons capability:

To alleviate potential concerns about proliferation, multilateral nuclear agreements have grown in popularity as a way to strengthen the non-proliferation regime through the “de-nationalisation” of sensitive fuel cycle facilities in non-nuclear weapons states. Access to nuclear energy technology by non-nuclear weapons states inevitably leads to concerns about the possible acquisition of nuclear weapons, as both require similar skills and technologies, the most notable being uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing capabilities.

Interestingly, discussions on whether and why Iran may have been tempted to become a nuclear threshold state largely failed to engage with the pressing questions that such states raise for the sustainability and efficacy of the non-proliferation regime. Nevertheless, the preference for the NNWSs to outsource their nuclear material impacted upon their right to develop indigenous nuclear energy production.

Second, the NWSs often demanded that the NNWSs accept the AP as a condition of supply. The voluntary agreement thus became a quasi de facto obligation. Third, they often conditioned supply and recognition of rights to nuclear technologies on compliance with the IAEA Safeguards Agreement. According to Joyner, the NWSs tended to maintain the following interpretation:

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793 Ibid., 2.
795 There is no guaranteed firewall between the peaceful nuclear activities permitted under the NPT and weapons capabilities. Threshold states usually insist on fissile material production and the right to the complete fuel cycle. As such, they make it difficult for the IAEA to verify that their nuclear programmes are limited to peaceful purposes, especially if they simultaneously reject the AP. In the mid-1990s, Sagan was already observing that “while most attention concerning proliferation in the immediate-term has appropriately focused on controlling nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union […] the longer-term and enduring proliferation problem will be ensuring that the larger and continually growing number of latent nuclear states maintain their non-nuclear weapons status.” For more information, see Sagan, “Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?”, 56; Fitzpatrick, “Introduction,” The Adelphi Papers 48, no. 398 (2008): 7; Rublee, “The Nuclear Threshold States,” 63-64.
796 Joyner, Interpreting the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 2.
1. Noncompliance with an IAEA safeguards agreement constitutes a breach of NPT Article III,
2. A breach of NPT Article III results in the invalidity of the rights and obligations in Article IV,
3. Thus, noncompliance with an IAEA safeguards agreement results in the invalidity of the rights and obligations in Article IV. 797

In sum, the “inalienable right” of the states party to the NPT “to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes”, and to receive contribution from those “in a position to do so”, was significantly hindered by the NWSs’ ad hoc requirements. From Iran’s perspective, this situation was highly problematic:

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that all provisions of the NPT are of equal importance. Maintaining the balance of the “rights and obligations” enshrined in the treaty preserves its integrity, enhances its credibility and encourages both universality of NPT and its full implementation. 798

Iran thus partly framed the nuclear issue as a product of the NWSs’ discriminatory practices and the resulting situation of imbalance between the rights and obligations enshrined in the NPT. The politically motivated crisis exemplified the NWSs’ failure to comply with their own legal requirements and responsibilities towards developing nations.

In his study of Iran’s arms control diplomacy from the Revolution to the Khatami presidency, Pirseyedi highlights the resilience of these concerns and demonstrates that Iranian officials systematically used international arms control fora to raise the issue of the prevention of NNWSs’ access to peaceful nuclear energy. 799 At the 1995 NPT Review Conference, for example, Iran took a lead role among the NAM countries in arguing that nuclear export controls were both discriminating against NNWSs’ rights to peaceful nuclear energy and enabling the NWSs to evade their

797 Ibid., 87. Article III of the NPT tasks the IAEA with the inspection of NNWSs’ nuclear facilities in order to verify that nuclear materials are not being diverted for weapons purposes. In addition, it establishes safeguards for the transfer of fissionable materials between the NWSs and NNWSs of the Treaty.
799 Pirseyedi, Arms Control and Iranian Foreign Policy.
obligations towards them.\textsuperscript{800} Worse, the NNWSs were profoundly disadvantaged since the non-party states to the NPT had faced no such restrictions and been able to benefit from cooperation and trade in nuclear technology for peaceful uses.\textsuperscript{801}

The Ahmadinejad administration sought to actively expose the illegal and illegitimate situation faced by the NNWSs and articulated two main motives to explain the NWSs’ seeming determination to block their access to peaceful nuclear energy. First, the Western core powers wished to restrict the transfer of advanced nuclear technology in order to monopolise the equipment, materials, and scientific and technological information necessary for research into and production of nuclear energy. Ayatollah Khamenei stated during his opening statement to the August 2012 NAM Summit:

Some Western countries, themselves possessing nuclear weapons and guilty of this illegal action, want to monopolize the production of nuclear fuel. Surreptitious moves are under way to consolidate a permanent monopoly over production and sale of nuclear fuel in centres carrying an international label but in fact within the control of a few Western countries.\textsuperscript{802}

President Ahmadinejad also denounced the NWSs’ politically motivated conflation of nuclear energy and nuclear weapons:

One of the gravest injustices committed by the nuclear weapon states is equating nuclear arms with nuclear energy. As a matter of fact, they want to monopolize both the nuclear weapons and the peaceful nuclear energy, and by doing so to impose their will on the international community.\textsuperscript{803}

Second, the Iranian regime argued that this Western-led strategy aimed to strengthen and entrench the division of the world into “two classes of nations […] those that have nuclear technology and can be advanced, and nations that must be restricted to production of tomato juice and air conditioners”.\textsuperscript{804}

\textsuperscript{800} C. Albin, \textit{Justice and Fairness in International Negotiation} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 197-98.

\textsuperscript{801} Ibid., 206. As a result, the statement adopted at the end of the 1995 NPT Review Conference established for the first time the principle of preferential treatment of NNWSs in activities to facilitate their right to develop nuclear energy.

\textsuperscript{802} Cited in “Communication Dated 12 September 2012,” IAEA, 12 September 2012.


Soltanieh framed the issue as one between the “‘Haves’ and ‘Have-nots’ […] ‘Aggressors’ and ‘Victim’ […] ‘Justice’ and ‘Injustice.’” From Iran’s viewpoint, the imbalanced interpretation and enforcement of the NPT’s provisions was intended to maintain the NWSs’ scientific and technological superiority over developing nations and perpetuate situations of dependency. The NWSs were pursuing imperialist ambitions through their manipulation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

**Iran as a guide and role model.** In attempting to broaden the scope of the Iranian nuclear issue and transform it into a debate over the right of the NNWSs to access, and receive cooperation in, peaceful nuclear energy, the Ahmadinejad administration sought to portray its resistance strategies as driven by interests larger than its own. More specifically, it tried to position itself as a constructive state party to the NPT that was acting for the good of the international community in general, and the developing nations in particular. Three points are noteworthy.

The Ahmadinejad administration framed the issue of non-compliance with the rights and obligations laid out in the NPT as a threat to states’ sovereign equality and, therefore, their security and independence. In their statements, officials repeatedly implied that effective compliance with international laws and treaties was a key foundation for a fair and stable international order. In the aftermath of Iran’s referral to the UNSC, Zarif thus declared:

> We are told we need to build confidence. Indeed. We all do, in this tumultuous world. But confidence could only be built through respect for and non-discriminatory application of the law. That is the only objective criteria; anything else would be to accept the whim of the powerful. And, international law and international treaties cannot be the subject of arbitrary, fluctuating and self-serving re-interpretations, adjustments or red lines even if they are convincingly imposed through resolutions. Such a precedent is dangerous for everyone.  

By introducing elements of predictability and relative certainty, and by reducing states’ incentives to cheat or seek to maximise power, international norms and treaties could thus ease some of the most negative and security-oriented logics of

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interaction present in the Lockean culture of anarchy. From Iran’s viewpoint, although hierarchy and the uneven distribution of power within the international system were highly immoral, unjust and had to be changed, they did not pose a threat to states’ national security per se so long as their sovereign equality and the provisions of international treaties were fully implemented.

This position helps explain why Iranian officials repeatedly denounced the Western core powers’ tendency to equate themselves with the “international community” and their consequent manipulation of international treaties for politically motivated aims. In August 2012, the Supreme Leader declared that the Western states imposed their interests on others “in the name of ‘international law’ and their domineering and illegal demands in the name of [the] ‘international community’”; the Western core powers “disguise their lies as the truth […] and their oppression as efforts to promote justice. In contrast, they brand as lies every true statement that exposes their deceit and label every legitimate demand as roguish”.

Iranian officials also warned that the resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue would have significant consequences for the other NNWSs of the NPT. Ambassador Soltanieh stressed that Iran’s nuclear policy was particularly important for developing nations since a domino effect would likely result if it failed to secure the recognition of its rights to peaceful nuclear energy:

Iran’s nuclear issue is a concern of all developing countries because we are talking about [the] inalienable right of a country to have access to a technology – peaceful use of nuclear technology – and nobody can accept the denial of this right […] they have no doubt that if Iran would not resist, they would be the next one in the queue […] Because if we would yield to pressure, then it would become a precedent for others. That is why we do not want to establish any precedent, at any price.

Thus, not only was Iran resisting for itself and its fellow NNWSs, it was also deeply conscious of the responsibility it shouldered.

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808 Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh, Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.
Finally, the Ahmadinejad administration did not stop at denouncing the illegal, unfair and hegemonic practices of the NWSs. It also tried to proactively address the issue of unequal access to peaceful nuclear energy among the states party to the NPT. During his September 2005 address to the UNGA, President Ahmadinejad thus recommended that the General Assembly ask the IAEA “to report on violations by specific countries that have hindered the implementation of [Article IV of the NPT] and also produce practical strategies for its renewed implementation”. Additionally, the regime emphasised that, in conformity with the NPT, it would support other NNWSs in their development of research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Iran would thus act “with due consideration for the needs of the developing areas of the world”, an ambition articulated by its motto “nuclear energy for all, nuclear weapons for none”. In a 2009 statement to the IAEA, Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran’s Vice-President and Head of the Atomic Energy Organisation, declared:

We will be pleased to contribute in meeting the humanitarian demands of brotherly and neighbouring countries by providing them pharmaceutical radioisotopes. Having acquired considerable experiences [sic] in nuclear technology, the Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to host various workshops and training courses on the applications of nuclear technology in medicine, agriculture and industry. Such workshops could be organized in collaboration with the IAEA, at regional and international levels.

Salehi thus framed Iran’s rationale as a humanitarian project, a statement that echoed other declarations according to which the prevention of nuclear energy cooperation amongst the NPT states was producing profoundly negative consequences for security. In his September 2011 statement to the High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security, Salehi, then Iran’s Foreign Minister, explained:

We underline the role of free and open technical and technological exchange among States in strengthening global nuclear safety and its contribution to safe development and use of nuclear energy, including safe operation of nuclear power plants. We express serious concern over the continued undue restrictions on exports to developing countries of such items which negatively impact the national capacity of developing countries in the nuclear safety areas [sic]. As the Fukushima accident demonstrated, any deficiency in terms

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809 Address by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, New York, 17 September 2005.
of nuclear safety shall lead to widespread casualties with no proper compensation. As a result, there should be no restrictions of any kind for the transfer of nuclear-safety-related technologies and exchange of information.\textsuperscript{811}

Pirseyedi also notes that, since the Revolution, Iranian officials had continuously proclaimed their determination to share their knowledge in the field of nuclear science and technology with the world’s developing nations.\textsuperscript{812} Science and technology, it was argued, should benefit the whole of humanity and not individual nation states, which could use their technological advantage to pursue unjust policies.

To conclude, the Western-led opposition to Iran's nuclear activities provided the regime with a platform to articulate its long-standing grievances against key power dynamics and behavioural practices within the international system. More specifically, it acted as an opportunity to expose and denounce illegal and illegitimate practices in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The regime condemned double standards and violations of international treaties. It emphasised principles of equality, justice, inclusivity and multilateralism, all of which were conducive to a more stable and fairer international system. In so doing, the Ahmadinejad administration attempted to portray Iran as a state that was well socialised to international norms and that promoted security and stability. Furthermore, the regime’s framing of the NWSs’ intentions and behaviours allowed it to position Iran, both symbolically and practically, as a proactive defender of developing nations, which relied upon the full and effective implementation of the NPT for their scientific and technological development. As such, Iran was able to instantiate its identity narratives as a responsible state party to the NPT and a morally driven entity. Reproducing such conceptions of Iran’s identity was particularly important since the nuclear issue was partly a struggle for the recognition of Iran as a legitimate nuclear state and a constructive actor in the international system. However, Iran’s attempt to broaden the scope of the nuclear issue was not limited to the question of the NNWSs’


\textsuperscript{812} Pirseyedi, \textit{Arms Control}, 140.
constrained access to peaceful nuclear energy. It also included a fierce condemnation of the NWSs’ failure to comply with their own obligations of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Problems of Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Obligations

The Ahmadinejad administration vividly exposed and denounced the NWSs’ lack of compliance with their nuclear disarmament obligations and the double standards in their dealings with nuclear-armed states that were not signatories of the NPT. In so doing, Iran sought to alter perceptions of its nuclear programme as a proliferation challenge and blame the Western core powers, especially the US, for the profound security threats posed by the dynamics of horizontal and vertical proliferation. These states’ practices, not Iran’s, were profoundly undermining the nuclear non-proliferation regime and threatening the stability of the international system.

The NWSs between disarmament obligations and vertical proliferation.

The NPT rests upon three key pillars: peaceful use of nuclear energy (Articles IV and V), non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Articles I, II and III) and disarmament of nuclear weapons stockpiles (Article VI). In exchange for their commitment to forego the possession of nuclear weapons, NNWSs were provided two guarantees. 813 First, they had the right to use nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes. Second, the NWSs would disarm:

Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. 814

The NWSs were thus obligated to move towards nuclear disarmament in “good faith”. This was a “legal understanding but also a political expectation”: “When the treaty was negotiated, halting further proliferation was the immediate concern; achieving nuclear disarmament the longer-term goal.” 815 The NNWSs’ relative

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813 Joynner, Interpreting the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 18.
814 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.
strategic vulnerability was acceptable because it was meant to be temporary.\textsuperscript{816} The NWSs were also required “not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly” (Article I). This included the transfer of any nuclear-related information or material to states that were not signatories to the NPT.

In practice, the NWSs neglected to implement many of the provisions pertaining to their non-proliferation and disarmament obligations. The Ahmadinejad administration repeatedly denounced an “imbalance in the pillars of the NPT” and pointed to three main failures.\textsuperscript{817} First, the NWSs, especially the US, prioritised the principles of nuclear non-proliferation abroad over their own disarmament obligations.\textsuperscript{818} In his 2010 declaration to the NPT Review Conference, President Ahmadinejad thus complained that the NWSs had manipulated the instruments of regulation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime:

\begin{quote}
\textit{...despite clear provisions of article VI of the Treaty and the Statute of the IAEA, no single report has been issued by the IAEA inspectors on the nuclear weapons facilities of the United States and its allies, nor is there any plan for their disarmament […] The IAEA has been putting the most possible pressures [sic] on non-nuclear weapon States under the pretext of proliferation risks, whilst those having nuclear bombs continue to enjoy full immunity and exclusive rights.}\textsuperscript{819}
\end{quote}

Second, despite significant reductions in their nuclear arsenals, the NWSs remained very far from meeting their disarmament commitments.\textsuperscript{820} Additionally, during the Ahmadinejad presidency, there was no agreement on a timeline for complete and irreversible cuts in the NWSs’ arsenals.\textsuperscript{821} Pledges to a commitment to a nuclear weapon-free world remained largely rhetorical.


\textsuperscript{818} Joyner, \textit{Interpreting the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty}, 2; Sidhu, “The Nuclear Disarmament,” 411-12.

\textsuperscript{819} “Statement by H. E. Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,” UN, 3 May 2010.

\textsuperscript{820} Sidhu, “The Nuclear Disarmament,” 414.

Third, contrary to their legal obligations, several NWSs sought qualitative and quantitative improvement of their nuclear arsenals (vertical proliferation). The UK, for example, decided to update Trident, its strategic deterrent system.

From the perspective of the Ahmadinejad administration, the biased interpretation and unequal enforcement of the NPT’s provisions constituted profound threats to the sustainability of the non-proliferation regime. By failing to reduce and eliminate their nuclear arsenals, the NWSs ran the risk that the NNWSs would lose trust and confidence in the benefits of the Treaty, thus undermining the prospects of international peace and security:

It is now clear that the production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and policies practiced by some nuclear weapon States, along with the weakness of and the imbalance in the NPT provisions have been the main causes of insecurity and served as an incentive for the development of such weapons.

Iran, however, did not limit its criticisms to the NWSs’ attitudes and practices vis-à-vis their nuclear arsenals. It also denounced their behaviours towards the NWSs that were not signatories to the NPT.

The NWSs and the challenge of horizontal nuclear proliferation. It is worth recalling that, during the period 2005-2013, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel were known or believed to have obtained nuclear weapons outside the purview of the NPT. These states presented two critical challenges to the sustainability of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

First, horizontal proliferation, which refers to states’ quest to develop and/or acquire nuclear weapons, undermined the NPT’s universal reach and made it increasingly inadequate as a means to achieve complete nuclear disarmament. At the time of its adoption in 1968, the states party to it had widely assumed that the NPT would

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823 The UK has possessed nuclear armaments since 1952. In 2007, despite nuclear disarmament commitments undertaken through the NPT, the UK’s Labour government decided to ensure British possession of nuclear weapons to the 2050s by updating its version of the Trident nuclear weapons system. The coalition government under David Cameron maintained that the UK needed to keep its nuclear deterrent and would thus renew the Trident system.
824 “Statement by H. E. Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,” UN, 3 May 2010.
ultimately bind all states to the same obligations. Second, the nuclear-armed states outside the NPT were not subjected to the same regulatory obligations and constraints as their counterparts who were NPT signatories, thus leading Sidhu to ask:

Can the (nuclear non-proliferation) regime make non-members comply with the norms and principles of the treaties even if they are not legally bound to the rules and regulations? Can non-members behave like members of the regime in spirit if not in law?

In sum, the NNWSs had strong incentives to mistrust the NPT's original bargain: while the NWSs failed to comply with their nuclear disarmament obligations, they also faced security dilemmas from those armed actors that remained non-NPT member states.

Additionally, the US provided substantial political, military, and/or scientific and technical support to Israel and India, including during the Ahmadinejad presidency. This assistance was significant for two main reasons. To begin with, it brought into question the US' commitment to the NPT. The Ahmadinejad administration denounced the fact that strategic considerations, not legal and normative principles, were guiding the US' non-proliferation priorities. The October 2008 US-India nuclear agreement, for example, which allowed civilian nuclear trade between the two states, overturned long-standing American policy efforts to curb, roll back and eliminate India’s nuclear weapons programme. As such, it created “a major exception to the US prohibition of nuclear assistance to any country that does not accept international monitoring of all its nuclear facilities”. India entered a “strategic partnership” with the US and became a de facto NWS outside the NPT.

Furthermore, the US' apparent willingness to support the nuclear armament of some non-NPT NWSs showed its contrasting policy responses towards adversarial and

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829 India tested its first nuclear device in 1974, and the US responded by passing the Non-Proliferation Act of 1978 and a range of sanctions.
non-adversarial proliferators. As Litwak argues, “Although leakage from Pakistan is the more likely pathway of terrorist acquisition, the transfer scenario involving Iran or North Korea had dominated the US strategic debate precisely because both countries are adversarial proliferators.”\textsuperscript{831} US treatment of the Indian, Pakistani, Iranian and North Korean nuclear programmes thus diverged because the administration had different threat assessments of each state’s identity, interests and likely behaviours.\textsuperscript{832} Haynes develops a similar argument and explains that, from the US’ perspective, India was a democracy and Iran a non-democratic theocracy.\textsuperscript{833} If it shared interests, values and trusts with the former, the US struggled to relate to Iran, which it found aggressive and untrustworthy.\textsuperscript{834} Consequently, Iran’s nuclear programme was securitised whilst India’s was desecuritised.

From Iran’s viewpoint, the treatment and support that some NWSs outside the NPT received from the US demonstrated the double standards of the superpower’s policies and its disregard for the nuclear non-proliferation regime. India, a non-signatory to the NPT, was allowed access to US nuclear technology while Iran, a state party to the NPT, was refused the right to the full fuel cycle.\textsuperscript{835} This fed the twofold narrative that the Iranian nuclear issue was a politically motivated move against Iran specifically (i.e. a regime with which the US never came to terms) and all NNWSs generally (i.e. a developing nation whose legal rights could be prejudiced via the medium of biased interpretations of the NPT).

\textbf{Iran, a peaceful and morally driven state actor.} The Ahmadinejad administration attempted to alter the framing of Iran’s nuclear programme as a threat to international peace and security by emphasising the menacing and short-sighted practices of the NWS of the NPT, especially the US. Their direct and indirect complicity in the dynamics of vertical and horizontal proliferation profoundly

\textsuperscript{831} Litwak, \textit{Outlier States}, 130.
\textsuperscript{832} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{834} Ibid., 988, 990-91.
\textsuperscript{835} In his study, Pant notes that the nuclear deliberations within India and the US from 2005 onwards reveal that little consideration was given to the impact of their agreement on either India’s own nuclear weapons programme or the nuclear non-proliferation regime. See \textit{The US-India Nuclear Pact}, 115-16, 121.
undermined the nuclear non-proliferation regime and threatened international security. Iran took a firm and proactive stance on these issues. It portrayed its position as driven by interests larger than its own and sought to present itself as a constructive, legitimate and morally driven state acting for the good of the international community in general, and the developing nations in particular. Its strategy was twofold.

First, the Ahmadinejad administration sought to reinforce the institutionalised norm against the use of nuclear weapons (the nuclear taboo). As shown in the analysis of the previous chapter, officials repeatedly argued that Iran was firmly opposed to the existence, production and use of nuclear weapons. In an attempt to strengthen Iran’s moral claims, frequent references were made to the fact that “only the US government has committed an atomic crime”. Furthermore, the Ahmadinejad administration firmly denounced the fact that the NWSs of the NPT continued to base their security policies on the strategic concept of nuclear deterrence. The use of nuclear weapons in their national and security doctrines was portrayed as an illegal practice that contravened the security assurances provided in the NPT.

The NNWSs accepted the permanent rejection of nuclear weapons in exchange for two kinds of security guarantees: positive assurances in the form of a commitment on the part of the NWSs to act in support of NNWSs threatened by nuclear attack, and negative assurances in the shape of a pledge by the NWSs to never employ nuclear weapons against them. Within this context, Iran firmly condemned the 2002 US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which stated that the US reserved the right to resort to nuclear weapons in future conflicts and identified Iran as one of its seven potential targets. The Obama administration’s 2010 NPR similarly included a reference to

US commitment to hold fully accountable any state, terrorist group, or other non-state actor that supports or enables terrorist efforts to obtain or use WMDs, whether by facilitating, financing, or providing expertise or safe haven for such efforts.

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The expression “fully accountable” left open the option of the use of nuclear weapons against the US’ adversaries. During the 2010 Tehran nuclear disarmament conference, President Ahmadinejad therefore complained that “the American government has both used nuclear weapons and has also officially threatened to use nuclear weapons.” Additionally, he warned against the potential consequences of such behaviour:

When those who possess nuclear weapons and use those weapons have the unequal veto right in the highest body responsible for international security, does this not mean encouraging others to proliferate nuclear weapons in order to provide their national security [sic]?" President Ahmadinejad thus pointed to the profound security dilemma that US behaviour was creating for Iran and the NNWSs of the NPT. Ambassador Soltanieh, for his part, stressed that “nuclear blackmail” constituted a “serious violation” of US obligations and commitments under international law, “particularly Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations and also the provisions of the Security Council Resolution 984, to refrain from the threat or use of force against any state”.

In his communication to the IAEA, he specifically quoted a comment the US Secretary of Defence had made during a news briefing at the Pentagon on 6 April 2010, according to which the NPR had “a very strong message for Iran […] all options are on the table in terms of how we deal with you”.

The second strand of the regime’s strategy was to engage in considerable diplomatic activity to reinforce the norm against the possession of nuclear weapons. To do so, it acted on four main fronts. To begin with, the Ahmadinejad administration tried to downplay the role of nuclear weapons in providing national security, pointing to a mismatch between the strategic insurances that nuclear weapons were commonly

840 Litwak, Outlier States, 135.
842 Ibid.
assumed to bring and the changing nature of threats in the twenty-first century. Although I subsequently engage with these considerations, suffice it to say that Iran emphasised the point that national security was increasingly less predicated on hard power and unilateral capabilities than states’ capacity to (multilaterally) respond to increasingly global threats, such as terrorism and narco-trafficking. In addition, nuclear weapons could not provide much deterrence and security against non-state actors.

Furthermore, the Ahmadinejad administration sought to reinforce the norm of non-possession of nuclear weapons by delegitimising the claim that they acted as sources of political influence and national prestige. Complete nuclear disarmament had been partly hindered by the fact that nuclear weapons continued to carry high value as instruments of status and power projection, both domestically and internationally. During the 2010 NPT Review Conference, President Ahmadinejad thus declared:

> the sole function of the nuclear weapons is to annihilate all living beings and destroy the environment, and its radiations would affect the coming generations and its negative impacts would continue for centuries. The nuclear bomb is a fire against humanity rather than a weapon for defense. The possession of nuclear bombs is not a source of pride; it is rather disgusting and shameful.\(^\text{845}\)

In addition to downplaying nuclear weapons’ strategic and political value, the regime also sought to build up international pressure against the NWSs and provide solutions to achieve a nuclear weapon-free world. Thus, in April 2010, shortly after the US held its Nuclear Security Conference, Iran organised its own international nuclear disarmament conference, titled “Nuclear Energy for All, Nuclear Weapons for None”. During the event, which was attended by various foreign ministers and worldwide nuclear experts, President Ahmadinejad laid out a range of propositions for global disarmament. In particular, he emphasised Iran’s readiness to help in the management of nuclear disarmament, and suggested that an independent international body be set up to oversee global nuclear disarmament.

\(^{845}\) “Statement by H. E. Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,” UN, 3 May 2010.
While the timing indicated a determination not to be sidelined from key nuclear-related debates, the conference also revealed an attempt to portray Iran as a constructive and proactive actor in its approach to matters of international security. The 2010 Tehran conference also indicated Iran’s lack of faith in the existing (politicised) international institutions to carry out the objectives of Articles I and VI of the NPT. Tellingly, President Ahmadinejad declared during the 2010 NPT Review Conference that

Comparing the Washington Nuclear Security Summit with the Tehran Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Conference, the efforts of the host of the former were aimed at preserving the monopoly over the nuclear weapons and superiority on [sic] other countries, while in the latter Conference all participants were seeking a world free from nuclear weapons.846

During the same Review Conference, he also suggested that the NPT should be transformed into a “Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Treaty (DNPT)”, which would place the complete destruction of nuclear weapons at the core of its mandate.847 Alongside other recommendations, he advocated the establishment of

an independent international group with full authority from the [NPT Review] Conference to prepare a set of guidelines to operationalize the provisions of article VI of the NPT, including planning and fully supervising nuclear disarmament and preventing proliferation.848

The Ahmadinejad administration’s approach to the problem of nuclear weapons was consistent with those of its predecessors, who similarly sought to mobilise the NNWSs and advanced proposals to control the NWSs’ arsenals.849 In the 1980s, for example, Iran had suggested the creation of an “international police force” consisting of developing countries and tasked with the control of the two superpowers’ nuclear arsenals under the supervision of the IAEA.850 The Khatami administration had called for the creation of “a Nuclear Weapons Convention” which would ban nuclear armaments.851 During his September 2005 statement to the UNGA, President Ahmadinejad also suggested the General Assembly “mandate an ad-hoc committee to compile and submit a comprehensive report on possible practical mechanisms

846 ibid.
847 ibid.
848 ibid.
849 Pirseyedi, Arms Control.
850 ibid., 123-24.
851 ibid., 144.
and strategies for complete disarmament.\footnote{Address by H.E. Dr. Mahmood Ahmadinejad," UN, 17 September 2005.} Of course, as Pirseyedi notes, Iran’s nuclear disarmament diplomacy was partly intended to alter the balance of hard power capabilities.\footnote{Pirseyedi, Arms Control, 163.}

Finally, the Ahmadinejad administration portrayed Israel’s nuclear weapons as a destabilising factor and a profound threat to regional security. Israel long pursued a policy of nuclear ambiguity and remained outside the NPT. From Iran’s perspective, this was the obstacle to the establishment of a Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (MENWFZ), which the Shah’s regime had initiated and the UN had endorsed in a December 1974 Resolution.\footnote{For an overview of the history of the proposals supporting the establishment of a Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, see “WMD-Free Middle East Proposal at a Glance,” Arms Control Association, July 2013, accessed 31 March 2015, http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/mewmdfz.} Successive Iranian administrations repeatedly presented the MENWFZ as an essential element of regional and international security, and a positive step towards global nuclear disarmament. In so doing, they denounced Israel’s nuclear arsenal and the illegal and illegitimate support it received from the US and the Security Council:

The Council has […] ignored the fact that the main obstacle to the establishment of such a zone is the Zionist regime that has not adhered to the treaties prohibiting weapons of mass destruction, a regime that its [sic] nuclear program and unsafeguarded nuclear facilities are a threat to international peace and security. The said regime, while enjoys [sic] impunity and is supported by the United States, continues to produce and stockpile all types of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.\footnote{“Communication Dated 26 March 2008,” IAEA, 28 March 2008.}

To conclude, Iran systematically attempted to broaden the scope of the Iranian nuclear issue by identifying and articulating key mismatches between the rights and obligations laid out in the NPT and the practices of the NWSs. As such, it continuously appealed to the treaty, the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and a key pillar of international security, to both justify its determination to acquire peaceful nuclear energy and expose the repeated legal breaches of the NWSs. In so doing, Iran sought to legitimise its nuclear policy and delegitimise the Western core powers by emphasising their failure to help NNWSs develop applications of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, disarm their nuclear weapons arsenals and not transfer nuclear weapon technology to any recipient. This framing
produced a number of abstract and tangible external benefits for the Iranian regime, which partly explain the resilience of its strategies of resistance between 2005 and 2013.

**External Benefits of Iran’s Nuclear Policy of Resistance**

Iran received discursive and strategic support for its firm nuclear policy, especially for its articulation of the legal rights and obligations of the states party to the NPT. This was partly because other actors shared its concerns with the *de facto* restrictions placed on NNWSs’ access to peaceful nuclear energy. As such, Iran was able to tap into pre-existing discontent and mobilise these grievance narratives. The May 2010 Turkey-Brazil-Iran Agreement was also significant because it demonstrated that Iran enjoyed diversified relations in a global context of power diffusion. Finally, China and Russia, two major rising powers and members of the P5+1, provided important but ambiguous support to Iran’s nuclear policy.

**Tapping into an existing reservoir of discontent.** A review of official statements pronounced during the NPT Review Conference and the NAM summits demonstrates why Iran’s attempt to broaden the scope of the nuclear issue could resonate with other states’ grievances and concerns.

Every five years since 1975, the states party to the NPT have held a Review Conference on the treaty, with the aim of assessing the implementation of its provisions and recommending measures to better fulfil its requirements. Two main strands of disagreement systematically punctuated these conferences: the right of NNWSs to acquire and develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes (Article IV), and the NWSs’ compliance with their disarmament obligations (Article VI).

NNWSs denounced the slow and limited pace and scope of the NWSs’ disarmament efforts. The 1995 NPT Review Conference, during which the Treaty was extended indefinitely, advocated the need for stronger and more explicit commitments to disarmament. The NWSs, however, fiercely opposed the introduction of any specific timetable and argued that they could eliminate their nuclear arsenals only

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when the international security situation permitted. For many of the NAM countries and the NNWSs, this showed how “unbalanced and discriminatory” the NPT was since it placed more restrictions on the have-nots than on the complacent NWSs.

As Alpin persuasively remarks:

States signed the Treaty in the belief that it would reduce dangers to their security, and provide gains in exchange for required sacrifices [...] This arrangement naturally provokes resentment and charges of injustice when some parties are seen as neglecting, or simply violating, their pledges while profiting from the compliance by others.

The 2000 NPT Review Conference led to the adoption of “13 practical steps” for systematic efforts to implement Article VI and reach the complete abolition of nuclear arms. The two Review Conferences that took place during the Ahmadinejad presidency, however, brought limited results. While the 2005 Conference ended with no consensus, the 2010 Conference approved a final document that called on the NWSs to move “towards an overall reduction in the global stockpile of all types of nuclear weapons” and to “enhance transparency and increase mutual confidence.”

The NWSs were notably asked to report on the progress of their disarmament. Additionally, the Conference decided that a regional conference be organised in 2012 to facilitate progress on a MENWFZ. However, in June 2014, the Arms Control Association reported that, while the regional conference had yet to take place, the NWSs’ progress reports showed that they did not always agree on how to proceed with their disarmament efforts.

Aside from the NPT Review Conferences, where objections similar to those of Iran were expressed, members of the NAM also often articulated similar grievances. In particular, the NAM, of which Iran was a member, regularly complained about the power structure of the international system and the behaviour of its dominant actors. Officially formed in 1961, the NAM had always emphasised the fundamental rights of

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858 Ibid., 202.
859 Ibid., 213.
all states to self-determination.\footnote{The Asian-African Conference of 1955, held in Bandung, was the catalyst for the establishment of the NAM, which was a product of the Cold War and the decolonisation of the former colonial empires.} It continuously rejected hegemonic and unilateral policies, which were “increasingly leading to the erosion and violation of international law, to the use and threat of use of force and to pressure and coercion by certain countries as a means to achieving their policy objectives”\footnote{“13th Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement,” Non-Aligned Movement, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 24-25 February 2003, accessed 31 March 2015, \url{http://cns.miis.edu/nam/documents/Official_Document/13th_Summit_of_the_Non-Aligned_Movement_-_Final_Document_Whole.pdf}.} In its statements, the NAM stressed its commitment to multilateralism, and argued that the UN Charter and principles of international law were crucial to international peace and security. In sum, multilateralism, principles of justice, and inclusivity were considered key to a fair and stable international order. Furthermore, and of particular relevance to Iran, the NAM continuously rejected the labelling of countries as “good” or “evil” and “repressive”.\footnote{Ibid., 9.} They also raised concerns regarding the imposition of sanctions, which should be considered “only after all means of peaceful settlement of disputes under Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter have been exhausted and a thorough consideration undertaken of the short-term and long-term effects of such sanctions”.\footnote{Ibid., 13; “14th Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement,” Non-Aligned Movement, Havana, Cuba, 11-16 September 2006, 20, accessed 31 March 2015, \url{http://cns.miis.edu/nam/documents/Official_Document/14NAMSummit-Havana-Compiled.pdf}.} As for issues related to peaceful nuclear energy, the NAM repeatedly put forward five key arguments.

First, each state party to the NPT had the sovereign right to define its national energy policies, including on fuel cycles, in accordance with its national requirements and its rights and obligations under the Treaty.\footnote{See for example “Statement by Indonesian Delegation on Behalf of the Group of Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons at the First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons on Cluster 3 Issues: Implementation of the Provisions of the Treaty Relating to the Inalienable Right of all Parties to the Treaty to Develop Research, Production and Use of Nuclear Energy for Peaceful Purposes without Discrimination,” Non-Aligned Movement, Vienna, 9 May 2012, accessed 31 March 2015, \url{http://cns.miis.edu/nam/documents/Statement/05.09.2012_statement.pdf}.} Iran’s decision that it needed nuclear energy for its economic development could thus be neither questioned nor curtailed. Second, the NAM continually highlighted the obligation of the NWSs to help developing countries fulfil their legitimate right to nuclear energy.\footnote{Ibid.} It also
warned against discriminatory limitations and restrictions on the export of nuclear material, equipment and technology for peaceful purposes to developing countries.\textsuperscript{869}

Third, the NAM firmly rejected any attempt to politicise the work of the IAEA and considered its existing criteria for the transfer of nuclear technology to be “robust and effective”.\textsuperscript{870} In this context, it systematically expressed its concerns at the expanding set of \textit{ad hoc} and non-institutional approaches to deal with potential nuclear proliferation challenges. In its 2012 statement, the NAM emphasised that measures and initiatives aimed at strengthening nuclear safety and nuclear security must not be used as a pretext or leverage to violate, deny or restrict the inalienable right of developing countries to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination.\textsuperscript{871}

Fourth, the NAM often stressed the fundamental importance of a clear distinction between the legal obligations and the voluntary confidence-building measures adopted by the states party to the NPT. Voluntary undertakings could not be transformed into legal obligations.\textsuperscript{872} Finally, the NAM repeatedly asserted that non-proliferation should go hand in hand with nuclear disarmament. As such, it systematically deplored the slow pace of progress and noted that reductions in deployment and operational status were no substitute for irreversible cuts in nuclear arsenals.\textsuperscript{873} The NAM also continually called on Israel to sign the NPT without preconditions or further delay.\textsuperscript{874}

For Iran, these articulations of the rights and obligations of the states party to the NPT were important. Not only did they help demonstrate that Iran was far from

\begin{footnotes}
\item[869] Ibid.
\item[870] Ibid.
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isolated within the international system (other states shared its grievances), they also illustrated the righteousness of its stance. As Sonboli explained, public expressions of support for Iran’s nuclear policy were crucial because “when the NAM or others support Iran, the EU and the US cannot say the ‘international community’ is opposed to Iran.” For example, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez incessantly rejected the unilateral and multilateral sanctions against Iran, and promised unrestricted support for Iran’s legitimate aspirations for nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. In so doing, Venezuela joined Iran in its criticism of the Western-led international system, its advocacy for deeper relations between the developing nations and its pursuit of greater autonomy and independence. In interview, Ambassador Soltanieh emphasised that the statements of the NAM were important to Iran because they showed that “on matters of principles, the NAM is united […] We are grateful for this support because it proves that we are on the right track and that the Americans are not telling the truth to the international community.”

Iranian officials also frequently expressed their thanks for supportive statements in official declarations to the IAEA Board of Governors and the UN. They also frequently referred to the NPT Review Conferences’ final documents to legitimise their position and resistance strategies. In a March 2012 note to the IAEA, for example, Iran articulated its right to pursue peaceful nuclear activities in light of the Final Document adopted during the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

In addition to discursive (direct and indirect) support, Iran’s nuclear policy also received strategic backing. One chief example is the May 2010 Turkey-Brazil-Iran Agreement, which was concluded three months after the Ahmadinejad administration announced that it would proceed to enrich uranium for its TRR.

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875 Author interview with Nabi Sonboli, Berlin, Germany, 30 April 2013.
877 Author interview with Ambassador Soltanieh, Vienna, Austria, 4 January 2013.
The May 2010 Turkey-Brazil-Iran Agreement. Iranian, Turkish and Brazilian negotiators reached an agreement rapidly (within 18 hours) and on terms similar to those discussed during the Vienna talks (a fuel swap deal). The so-called Tehran Declaration stipulated that, in exchange for removing 1,200 kilograms of its LEU to Turkey, the Vienna Group (namely, the IAEA, France, Russia and the US) would agree to provide 120 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium fuel to Iran within one year, for its TRR. However, the US and the EU rapidly and unequivocally rejected this Agreement. Sanctions had come to take priority over engagement, in a context where substantial political capital had been invested in rallying support for a new UNSC Resolution (Resolution 1929 of June 2010). In a joint letter to the IAEA, headed by France, the US and Russia, the Agreement was also decried for not addressing “Iran’s production or retention of 19.75 percent enriched uranium”, and for asserting “a right for Iran to engage in enrichment activities” despite several UNSC resolutions prohibiting Iran from pursuing such activities. Additionally, the Agreement failed to set a date for the removal of the LEU from Iran and to account “for Iran’s accumulation of LEU since the IAEA first proposed the TRR deal. Removal of 1,200 kg at present would leave Iran substantial stocks, decreasing the confidence-building value of the original proposal.”

The timing and characteristics of the Agreement indicate that a certain level of trust between Iran, Turkey and Brazil most likely played a constitutive role in the success of their negotiations. After nearly seven years of unsuccessful talks with distrusted Western-led partners, the May 2010 deal may have succeeded because it involved less antagonistic and threatening actors. Importantly, as Parsi argues, Turkey and Brazil’s diplomatic approach to the Iranian nuclear issue was based on equality.

881 Officially, the US and European governments criticised the deal for not taking account of the increase of Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium since the 2009 Vienna talks. The US also argued that Iran was playing for time and seeking to delay new sanctions. For more information about the Obama administration’s efforts to rally support from China and Russia before the May 2010 Agreement, see Parsi, A Single Roll of the Dice, 193.
883 Ibid.
respect and problem-solving rather than coercion. Additionally, Turkey and Brazil were non-permanent members of the UNSC, which lent weight and authority to their agreement. They were less constrained by domestic considerations than the US and the EU in their negotiations with Iran. As such, the Iranian regime may have felt relatively confident about transferring LEU off its soil.

Importantly, the Tehran Declaration illustrated the depth of NNWSs' concerns over their ability to access peaceful nuclear energy. Analysts systematically highlighted that, through the Tehran Declaration, Brazil and Turkey were seeking to strengthen the right of the NNWSs of the NPT to develop peaceful nuclear power in their own territory. The Declaration thus stipulated Iran, Brazil and Turkey's commitment to the NPT and “recall[ed] the right of all State Parties, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy (as well as nuclear fuel cycle including enrichment activities) for peaceful purposes without discrimination.”

Turkey, which ratified the NPT in 1980 and the AP in 2000, continuously campaigned for the full implementation of Articles IV and VI of the treaty. Its ambition to develop nuclear energy was also pursued more vigorously after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came into power in 2002. Turkish officials vigorously denounced any attempt to limit NNWSs' right and ability to access peaceful nuclear technology, including Iran. Brazil, for its part, only signed and ratified the NPT in 1998 after denouncing the institutionalised asymmetry between the NWSs and NNWSs for almost three decades. Interestingly, Brazil joined the NPT after it had developed capabilities to enrich uranium. It was a firm supporter of global nuclear disarmament and made “continued, explicit references to the grand bargain of non-proliferation for disarmament”. Brazil also refused to sign the AP, arguing that it placed

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884 Ibid., 221.
886 Text of the Iran-Brazil-Turkey deal,” The Guardian.
887 Ibid., 143.
unnecessary burdens on NNWSs in a context where the NWSs were not fulfilling their disarmament obligations.890

The May 2010 Agreement also demonstrated that Iran had strengthened its relations with a range of regional and extra-regional actors. For example, Iranian-Turkish relations expanded between 2002 and 2011, when the Syrian crisis tremendously complicated their efforts. The Erdogan AKP government pursued a policy of “zero problems” with its neighbours, seeking to “leverage Turkey’s geostrategic location in the center of Eurasia, as well as its historical Ottoman ties and Muslim affinities, to give Turkey ‘strategic depth’ and wider influence”.891 Turkey and Iran notably expanded their trade and economic cooperation.892 The Brazilian governments of President Lula da Silva (2003-2011) repeatedly expressed hopes of expanding economic, scientific, industrial, technological and cultural cooperation with Iran – a call the Ahmadinejad administration welcomed.893

Within this context, the Turkey-Brazil-Iran deal was also a reflection of changing power dynamics within the international system. The substantial and growing capabilities of the rising powers were matched by their increasing political assertiveness in regional and global fora. While they repeatedly emphasised key principles, such as multilateral diplomacy, international law, state sovereignty or reform of the UN, they also grew more vocal in their criticisms of the Western core powers’ practices, especially US behaviour, and manoeuvred for greater influence over decision-making processes.894 Thus, while the AKP pursued the overall ambition to strengthen Turkey’s regional and international visibility and influence, it saw an opportunity to position itself as a crucial mediator in the context of the Iranian nuclear issue. In Brazil, the eight-year presidency of Lula da Silva presented a substantial and proactive shift towards “South-South relations” in an attempt to

890 Ibid., 54.
892 Ibid., 169-71.
improve the country’s economic situation, relative autonomy and international influence.  

In sum, the May 2010 Tehran Declaration represented an opportunity for Turkey and Brazil to demonstrate their individual and collective aspirations for greater influence over international challenges, as well as their ability to lead high-stake negotiations. Ultimately, however, their inability to prevent the passing of a new UNSC Resolution against Iran showed that the Western core powers continued to exert significant influence over political dynamics. In this respect, China and Russia’s approach to the Iranian nuclear issue illustrates both the opportunities and the constraints of these emerging global dynamics.

Before I move to this point, it is worth emphasising that Warnaar similarly observed that “the international environment was not uniformly hostile to the Iranian regime.” Emerging and aspiring powers were increasingly challenging US hegemony during the Ahmadinejad presidency, “demanding their share in determining who [was] ‘in’, who [was] ‘out’, and on which conditions.” While these powers created “important” international opportunities for Iran, these remained “limited” only, in large part due to the preponderant power and influence of the US (see chapter 6).

**Limits of the changing global power dynamics.** China and Russia shared a range of interests with Iran and proved both willing and able to delay and soften the coercive diplomatic strategy against its nuclear activities. However, for reasons related to the structure and power dynamics of the international system on the one hand, and their rivalrous relations with Iran and the other, they did not use their permanent seats on the UNSC to veto Resolutions. Instead, they repeatedly instrumentalised a range of conflicting pressures that emanated from Iran and the Western powers to secure significant concessions and increase their own benefits.

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896 On 9 June 2010, in a public display of anger, Brazil and Turkey voted against the sanctions against Iran in the UNSC. This was Brazil’s first vote against a UNSC Resolution that was approved.
897 Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad*, 164.
898 Ibid., 165.
899 Ibid., 164.
Three main factors brought China and Russia closer to Iran during the Ahmadinejad presidency. First, they shared deep grievances with the structure and power dynamics within the international system, particularly regarding the Western core powers’ practices (e.g. interference in sovereign states’ affairs). They shared a desire for a more multipolar world and resented the “hegemony” of the US. During the Ahmadinejad presidency, China and Russia asserted their (wish for) a greater role within the international system and “bringing new rules of the game”.\textsuperscript{900} In particular, China tried to expand its authority in the Pacific by interfering with American ships, objecting to US-Korean military exercises and restricting military-to-military cooperation in protest at US arms sales to Taiwan. In addition, China and the US increasingly engaged in cyberattacks and state-sponsored espionage activities. As for Russia, President Obama had initially come into power with the ambition to “reset” relations with the Kremlin, but the two states widely disagreed on the presence of American missile defence systems in Eastern Europe and Russia’s 2008 military incursion into Georgia.

Second, China and Russia did not share the Western core powers’ sense of urgency regarding Iran’s nuclear programme. They continuously argued in favour of a diplomatic solution, particularly since NNWSs had a right to peaceful nuclear energy and the Western core powers had repeatedly employed double standards vis-à-vis nuclear proliferators.\textsuperscript{901} China and Russia also refused to impose unilateral sanctions against Iran.

Third, China and Russia both expanded their relations with Iran. In the early 1990s, China began to seek new long-term solutions to its growing domestic energy demands.\textsuperscript{902} Over the years, Iran became one of its major suppliers, providing over


\textsuperscript{902} Z. Hong, “China’s Dilemma on Iran: Between Energy Security and a Responsible Rising Power,” Journal of Contemporary China 23, no. 87 (May 2014): 409. For a more general overview of China-
10 percent of China’s total oil imports in 2011 (China, for its part, was Iran’s largest oil export market and trading partner). Additionally, China benefited from the US and EU sanctions on Iran, which provoked the departure of international companies and enabled it to substantially increase its foreign direct investments in the country, especially in the oil and gas sectors. According to the International Crisis Group, Iran pursued a “binding strategy” in its energy relationship with China:

Underpinning this strategy is a belief that the more its companies are embedded in Iran, the more likely China will be to attempt to delay, weaken, or block sanctions. Moreover, Chinese investment in infrastructure, particularly in the construction of refineries, increases Iran’s ability to produce its own petrol, minimising the potential impact of sanctions on that commodity. Iran tightened bilateral energy bonds in 2009 by awarding multiple major oil and gas deals to Chinese companies. It also actively sought deeper involvement in refining and distribution channels by offering Chinese companies tax breaks and discounts on raw materials purchased in Iran.

Crucially, Iran offered long-term energy security to China thanks to its substantial hydrocarbon resources, pivotal geographical location, and its potential to both counter US influence in the Middle East and Central Asia, and reduce China’s dependence on the Malacca Strait.

Iran shared a long and complicated history with Russia, not least because its territory was effectively divided between Russia and Great Britain in the nineteenth century. Russia, however, played an important role in the development and (much-delayed) completion of the Bushehr nuclear plant and considerably expanded its energy and security cooperation with Iran. Despite their deeper and broader cooperation, their bilateral relations became severely strained after Russia voted in favour of UNSC Resolution 1929 in 2010 and subsequently refused to sell its advanced S-300 air defence system to Iran.

Hong, “China’s Dilemma on Iran,” 409.
Ibid., 414.
This last point illustrates an important limitation in Iran’s relations with Russia and China: both had to balance their interests with and in Iran against other considerations, especially their relations with the US and their reputational concerns. This was particularly true of China, which was repeatedly criticised by the Western powers for refusing to behave responsibly.\(^{908}\) As Garver examines:

There is a strong tension in China’s contemporary relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). On the one hand, Beijing views Iran as an important country with whom China may advance its interests in a number of areas by expanding cooperation. On the other hand, China’s remarkably successful post-1978 development drive has been predicated on maintaining positive relations with the United States (US), and Washington has frequently objected to aspects of Sino-Iranian cooperation. Beijing must continually balance maintenance of positive relations with Washington, against expanded cooperation with the IRI.\(^{909}\)

Interestingly, the International Crisis Group observes that Russia and China’s votes at the UNSC tended to be complementary, thus attesting to their shared concerns over isolation.\(^{910}\) However, they both voted in favour of Iran’s referral to the UNSC and the subsequent UN Resolutions. As such, they approved of the increasingly stringent multilateral sanctions, as well as the request that Iran suspend its enrichment activities and implement the AP. Importantly, they tended to pursue “a delay-and-weaken strategy” with regards to the Resolutions.\(^{911}\) They sought concessions from the US, the UK and France (and Germany) to try to ensure that their own economic interests would not face great restrictions.\(^{912}\) At the same time, the increasingly coercive sanctions reduced Iran’s relative bargaining power \textit{vis-à-vis} China and Russia.\(^{913}\) Thus, while Iran shared substantial long-term interests with China and Russia, and received important support from them, the two rising powers used the Iranian nuclear issue as an opportunity to assert themselves \textit{vis-à-vis} the Western core powers, test their range of options in a changing international system.

\(^{908}\) Hong, “China’s Dilemma on Iran,” 409-10.


\(^{911}\) This expression is used in the International Crisis Group’s report “The Iran Nuclear Issue: The View from Beijing” (p. 1). For more information on Russia’s position on the UNSC resolutions and sanctions against Iran, see M. N. Katz, “Iran and Russia,” in \textit{Iranian Foreign Policy since 2001: Alone in the World}, eds. T. Juneau and S. Razavi (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 169-74.

\(^{912}\) See for example the negotiations over what became the March 2007 Resolution 1747 in Garver, “China-Iran Relations,” 81.

\(^{913}\) China, for example, seemed to have taken advantage of the EU embargo against Iran to negotiate significant discounts on Iranian oil. See Harold and Nader, “China and Iran,” 12.
and expand their leverage over Iran at a time when it had become more dependent on them.

I have so far examined how Iran sought to broaden the scope of the nuclear issue by contextualising it within wider debates revolving around the NWSs’ (lack of) compliance with their NPT obligations. I have argued that Iran portrayed its determination to defend its own and other NNWSs’ rights to peaceful nuclear energy (Article IV) and total nuclear disarmament (Article VI) as a reflection of its identity as a constructive, peaceful and inclusive state actor within the international system. Additionally, Iran was particularly keen to challenge injustice in the field of nuclear technology, and help the developing nations of the NPT produce peaceful nuclear energy if they so wished.

Within this context, Iran’s anti-status quo nuclear policy contributed to the reinstatement and reproduction of key principles of the Revolution. Iran’s devaluation of the NWSs’ attitudinal and behavioural practices, especially those of the US, its self-portrayal as a force of good and justice and its emphasis on principles of sovereign equality and multilateralism, helped the regime win some external recognition and legitimacy for its nuclear stance. While Iran’s ability to nurture and receive discursive and strategic backing prevented neither its referral to the UNSC nor the imposition of stringent sanctions, it nevertheless demonstrated that Iran was not an isolated rogue state. Additionally, its relations with China and Russia imposed constraints and limits on the Western core powers’ approach to the Iranian nuclear issue, both within and outside the UNSC. In other words, Iran challenged these states both directly (through its strategy of non-compliance with the UNSC and IAEA resolutions) and indirectly (via proxy support).

But Iran did not limit itself to discrediting its significant Others and asserting itself in opposition to them. In their negotiation proposals to the EU-3 and the P5+1, the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad administrations repeatedly included various security matters that were of profound concern to both Iran and the Western powers. Alongside its attempt to broaden the scope of the Iranian nuclear issue, the Iranian leadership thus also sought to transform the controversy into a broad geopolitical opportunity for Iran and its long-term adversaries.
Iran’s Negotiation Proposals: Similarities, Differences and Significance

The negotiation proposals of the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad administrations included offers of cooperation on a wide range of issues unrelated to the nuclear question. I use a thematic perspective to identify potential similarities and differences in the areas where Iran suggested stronger engagement. I also highlight whether the administrations emphasised different modalities of interaction.

Overview of the Khatami Administration’s Negotiation Proposals

The Khatami administration submitted three key negotiation proposals to the EU-3 in 2005, on 17 January, 23 March and 29 April. These systematically included calls for discussion and cooperation between Iran and France, Germany and the UK in areas unrelated to the nuclear issue. The proposals also emphasised core principles of interaction with the IRI.

Key themes. The Khatami administration’s proposals suggested wider cooperation to combat terrorism, such as exchanging information regarding the actions, movements and resources of terrorist individuals and groups. In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on US soil, and those of March 2004 in Madrid and July 2005 in London, terrorism figured high on European governments’ agendas. For Iran, processes of cooperation against this “dilemma of common aversion” would have had three main benefits: recognition of its legitimate security concerns (e.g. al-Qaeda), acknowledgement of its critical geopolitical location and influence, and erosion of its image as a rogue state.

The proposals further made recommendations for the security and stability of the Persian Gulf region, an area of crucial importance to both Iran and the Western powers. Iraq and Afghanistan were systematically singled out as the two countries where Iran and the EU could collaborate to strengthen internal and external

stabilisation. Additionally, the proposals included the objective of establishing “democratic, stable and broad-based governments”, thus indicating that Iran was pursuing similar values and political aims to the EU (and the US).\(^9\text{15}\) In suggesting broader and deeper cooperation in the Gulf, Iran attempted to position itself as a constructive, legitimate and significant regional actor. It also implicitly acknowledged that extra-regional actors would continue to play an important role within the Middle East. In the January 2005 proposal, the section pertaining to the Gulf region was tellingly titled “Sustainable Partnership on Regional Issues”.

The proposals also called for wider security and defence cooperation to promote peace and security at the global level. The Khatami administration advocated a balance between recognition of Iran’s legal rights to self-defence (and, therefore, its legitimate need to acquire the means to provide for its security) and the necessity of mutual defence cooperation. In particular, the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism was identified as necessitating broader cooperation between Iran and the EU. The January 2005 proposal thus stated that “The E3/EU recognise that Iran should be supported as a country in a region which is highly affected by drug-trafficking and terrorism.”\(^\text{916}\)

Finally, the proposals included a number of suggestions regarding wider economic cooperation between Iran and the EU, mainly in the form of guarantees for Iran’s access to EU markets and EU recognition of Iran as a major source of energy for Europe. As highlighted in the previous chapter, economic and energy cooperation were key elements of the Iran-EU “Critical Dialogue” and “Comprehensive Dialogue”.

**Chief principles of interaction with the IRI.** The Khatami administration’s negotiation proposals included important details on how Iran and the EU ought to interact with each other in order to develop and maintain “strong and mutually beneficial relations”.\(^9\text{17}\) There were three chief considerations.


\(^9\text{16}\) Ibid.

\(^9\text{17}\) The expression is used in Iran’s 23 March 2005 negotiation proposal to the EU-3, Appendix 3.
First, the proposals frequently referred to the necessity of respecting states’ inherent right to choose and develop their own political, social, economic and cultural systems. They also rejected the threat, or use, of force, and emphasised the inviolability of states’ territorial boundaries. Iran thus placed paramount importance in non-interference with states’ physical integrity and sovereignty. While this can be understood in light of Iran’s generally negative relations with the Western powers since the Revolution, the politicisation of its nuclear programme and the Bush administration’s shift to hard power regime change policies likely profoundly heightened these concerns. As such, Iran’s January 2005 proposal included the principle that

The E3/EU and Iran will refrain from engaging in, supporting or assisting any intervention, direct or indirect, individual or collective, in their respective internal or external affairs, regardless of their mutual relations. They will in all circumstances refrain from any act of military, or of political economic or other coercion designed to subordinate to their own interest the exercise by another party of the rights inherent in its sovereignty and thus to secure advantage of any kind. Accordingly, they will refrain from direct or indirect assistance to terrorist or subversive activities against each other.\(^{918}\)

Second, the proposals continuously referred to the importance of abiding by, and engaging within the limits set by, international law and bilateral and multilateral treaties. These were portrayed as essential regulating principles of the international system, which further illustrates the argument that Iran viewed international norms and agreements as a cornerstone of security and stability.

Third, the proposals called for several “working groups” or “task forces” to be set up to discuss defence cooperation, counter-terrorism or the exchange of expertise in the area of export control.\(^{919}\) Such an approach could have strengthened shared expertise and accelerated progress in areas of mutual concern. In addition, repeated meetings between small groups of Iranian and European officials could have helped build mutual understanding, trust and confidence.


\(^{919}\) These expressions are used Iran’s 23 March and 29 April 2005 negotiation proposal to the EU-3, see appendices 3 and 5. Copy of the April 2005 Iran Proposal accessed on 23 August 2015, http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Iran_Proposal_Apr292005.pdf.
In sum, the Khatami administration’s negotiation proposals identified several areas where further collaboration between Iran and the European countries was not only possible but also desirable in order to achieve greater regional and international security and stability. In his memoir, Mousavian states that Iran had decided to both pursue “a long-term strategy of ‘turning threats into opportunities’” and to “resolve some long-standing problems […] especially with regards to economic, technological, security, political, and nuclear cooperation with the West, including the US”.\footnote{Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 99.} In a way, Rouhani’s 18 July 2005 message to the EU-3/EU ministers confirms Iran’s attempt to transform the nuclear negotiations into a broader geopolitical opportunity:

> For twenty-five years, I have focused on security issues surrounding Iran and the region. Never have I seen such potential for commonality of purpose and concern about mutual sources of threat in significant areas. Today, in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon, I find strong and inescapable reasons and elements that bind us in shaping and establishing durable stability.\footnote{Message from Dr. Rohani to E3/EU Ministers, 18 July 2005, accessed 23 August 2015, \url{http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Iran_Rowhani_EU3_Jul182005.pdf}. For a copy of the Message, see Appendix 6.}

However, the Khatami administration’s negotiation proposals also specified important conditions of engagement and interaction between Iran and France, Germany and the UK. Engagement would benefit Iran’s national interests as long as specific conditions were met. In particular, its sovereign independence and equality had to be recognised.

**The Ahmadinejad Administration’s Negotiation Proposals**

strategies towards the P5+1 and the UNSC, the regime also attempted to reach out to its negotiation partners, the Western core powers in particular. As Foreign Minister Salehi declared prior to the April 2012 Istanbul talks:

If the intention of dialogue is merely to prevent cold conflict from turning hot, rather than to resolve differences, suspicion will linger. Trust will not be established [...] In the upcoming talks, we hope that all sides will return to the negotiating table as equals with mutual respect; that all sides will be committed to comprehensive, long-term dialogue aimed at resolving all parties’ outstanding concerns; and, most important, that all sides make genuine efforts to reestablish confidence and trust.  

During my interviews with Iranian officials, I systematically sought clarifications on the reasons why Iran had included a range of issues that were unrelated to the nuclear question in its successive negotiation proposals to the P5+1. Their answers varied. Ambassador Soltanieh, for example, explained that Iran had wanted the nuclear issue to remain a technical matter. Since the IAEA was the only organisation mandated to inspect and verify its nuclear activities, Iran could not discuss such matters with its negotiation partners. Additionally, Iran was opposed to the idea of discussing these issues with France, Germany and the UK (and the US) because of its experience during the period 2003 to 2005. Sonboli, for his part, gave a different explanation: “The reason is clear, we want to make the cake bigger”:

I have seen this trend within Iran of using the nuclear issue as an opportunity to solve problems with the EU and the US. When Iran proposed consortiums, what did it mean? It meant that we wanted more of US and EU presence, to strengthen cooperation [sic] [...] I think that the question of the Iranian nuclear issue is between Iran and the US [...] And we have to solve this problem with the US directly. It is a waste of time to discuss these issues with the IAEA, Russia, China and the EU.  

**Main characteristics.** Five main features characterise the Ahmadinejad administration’s negotiation proposals. First, Iran identified several political and security issues of regional and global dimensions, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal immigration, organised crime and environmental issues. The administration’s proposals tended to be broader in scope and reach since they also often suggested the need for cooperation with the Balkans, Africa, Latin America and East Asia. This

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924 Author interview with Nabi Sonboli, Berlin, Germany, 30 April 2013.
attested to the regime’s interests in diversifying Iran’s relations at a time of global power diffusion and rising assertiveness on all continents.

Second, the proposals incorporated a range of economic issues, such as the possibility for energy, trade and investment cooperation. Unlike the Khatami administration, they emphasised a Third World and social justice priority, identifying, for example, the necessity for “a common effort to help fight poverty in less developed countries and to reduce the divide between social classes”.925 The proposals also reflected new developments such as the financial crisis and recommended “Combating underground economy, economic corruption, financial frauds and organized crime activities that are detrimental to economic security.”926

Third, Iran clearly articulated how nations ought to interact with each other in order to nurture sustainable peace and security. In its 2008 package to the P5+1, Iran emphasised the following principles:

- respect for the principles of justice, abidance by law, recognition of the rights of nations, respect for the sovereignty of states, reinforcement of regional and international peace, abstaining from monopolistic actions and threat, respect for democracy, human values and cultures of different nations; and rejecting the injustice and lawless behaviors towards the rights of nations.927

In general, Iran proposed more multilateral and inclusive approaches to international security. It advocated reform of the UN to improve its effectiveness and ensure that principles of sovereign equality and international justice be respected. Democracy was also frequently mentioned as a key dimension of a peaceful and stable international system.

Fourth, Iran’s proposals stressed the notion that new modes of interaction between states were both desirable and a prime necessity in light of the increasingly interconnected international system and the changing nature of threats. Its July 2008 proposal, for example, noted that, “in view of the developments that have unfolded

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925 Iran’s May 2008 negotiation proposal to the P5+1, Appendix 7.
926 Iran’s September 2009 negotiation proposal to the P5+1, Appendix 9.
927 Iran’s May 2008 negotiation proposal to the P5+1, Appendix 7.
internationally and across the region, there is a need for a new and a more advanced plan for interaction.”

Similarly, the September 2009 offer stated:

There is no doubt that our world is at the threshold of entering a new era. The difficult era characterized by domination of empires, predominance of military powers, dominance of organized and interrelated media networks and competitions on the basis of offensive capability and the power from conventional and non-conventional weapons is coming to an end. […] Many of the predicaments facing our world today, such as the unprecedented economic crisis, political and security dilemmas, and the mushrooming of terrorism, organized crimes and the illicit drugs are the products of the fading era of domination of ungodly ways of thinking prevailing in the global relations and the ominous legacy for present and future generations of humanity [sic].

In other words, the status quo was unsustainable, detrimental to security and needed to be replaced by new collective approaches. Stronger multilateral engagement and cooperation were necessary.

Fifth, and linked to the previous point, Iran positioned itself as a crucial actor in this changing system and an upholder of the values and principles which would serve its security and stability. It frequently referred to itself as “a peace-loving nation that has spared no efforts to contribute to global peace and stability”. This positioning was part and parcel of Iran’s attempt to portray itself as a constructive and legitimate actor able to offer sustainable solutions. In May 2008, Iran thus called its negotiation proposal to the P5+1 “The Islamic Republic of Iran’s Proposed Package for Constructive Negotiations”. In his letter to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Foreign Minister Mottaki positions Iran as a voice of authority:

the Islamic Republic of Iran, following thorough and proficient studies and considerations, has carefully prepared a package containing important initiatives and proposals in different political, security, economic and nuclear fields, to be submitted to countries of the 5+1 Group […] We are of the firm belief that the present package will provide an exceptional opportunity for real and serious cooperation among the concerned parties.

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928 Ibid.
929 Iran’s September 2009 negotiation proposal to the P5+1, Appendix 9.
931 See Appendix 7.
Similarly, in its September 2009 proposal, “Cooperation for Peace, Justice and Progress: Package of Proposals by the Islamic Republic of Iran for Comprehensive and Constructive Negotiations”, Iran argued:

The Iranian nation is prepared to enter into dialogue and negotiation in order to lay the ground for lasting peace and regionally inspired and generated stability for the region and beyond and for the continued progress and prosperity of the nations of the region and the world. Our desire to enter into this dialogue and cooperative relationships proceeds from our inherent national, regional and international capacity and strength, our principled and historical commitment in applying this capacity to foster peace, tranquillity, progress and well-being for nations in our region and beyond.\footnote{Iran’s September 2009 negotiation proposal to the P5+1, Appendix 9.}

The leadership systematically positioned Iran as a key regional power and a part of the solution to the many crises that were affecting the Middle East. In one of his last declarations, Foreign Minister Salehi presented Iran as “the anchor of security, stability and peace in its region”, and clarified that “cooperation for expanding bilateral and multilateral ties is the key defining concept [of Iran’s foreign policy], especially in issues related to regional security. Iran is a responsible regional player with legitimate security concern.”\footnote{“A Conversation with Ali Akbar Salehi,” Council on Foreign Relations.} As previously explored, this was not a new claim since Iran had continuously perceived itself as a natural and legitimate power in its regional environment. The nuclear negotiations, however, provided a platform to put these claims forward with renewed vigour.

\textbf{Modalities of interaction with Iran.} Much as under the Khatami administration, Iran’s negotiation proposals between 2005 and 2013 emphasised key principles of interaction and engagement with the IRI. However, there were several differences, such as the fact that some of the regime’s expectations were now quite abstract. For example, the 2009 negotiation package showed that specificities were left aside:

our world today needs mechanisms that come from divine and godly thinking and an approach based on human values and compassions. The new mechanisms should pave the way for the advancement, full blossoming of the talents and potentials of all nations and establishment of lasting world peace and security.\footnote{See Appendix 9.}

\footnote{933} Iran’s September 2009 negotiation proposal to the P5+1, Appendix 9. 
\footnote{935} See Appendix 9.}
The Ahmadinejad administration’s proposals were more concrete on other points however: rather than advocating “working groups” and “task forces”, Iran now put forward much clearer outlines regarding the various stages of potential negotiations with the P5+1. The July 2008 non-paper, “The Modality for Comprehensive Negotiations”, identified three stages (preliminary talks, start of talks and negotiations), a timeline of steps to be taken, and issues to be discussed at each stage. The July 2012 proposal, “A Framework for Comprehensive and Targeted Dialogue for Long Term Cooperation among 7 Countries”, was divided into five parts, which respectively outlined the guiding principles of those countries’ interaction, the talks’ objectives, the issues to be discussed (nuclear and non-nuclear), the structure of the process and the reciprocal steps all sides should take. Importantly, the proposal stated that

For the purpose of broadening the dimensions of trust and confidence and working on the common grounds of interest in non-nuclear areas, parties agree to start their cooperation on the following issues;
• The Islamic Republic of Iran’s priorities: Regional issues especially Syria and Bahrain
• 5+1 priorities: combating Piracy and counter narcotic activities.

From the regime’s perspective, discussions and cooperation on non-nuclear issues could pave the way for a better understanding of one another’s interests, intentions and strategies. Additionally, by expanding their areas of mutual cooperation, Iran and the Western core powers could demonstrate their trustworthiness and goodwill towards each other. The inclusion of Syria and Bahrain in the July 2012 proposal also illustrated the salience of new regional developments which had somewhat overshadowed and become more urgent than Iraq and Afghanistan.

Finally, the Ahmadinejad administration’s proposals often clarified the objectives of the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1. The July 2012 proposal defined four:

1. To normalize Iran’s nuclear file in the UN Security Council and in the Board of Governors by total termination of the UNSC, unilateral, and multilateral sanctions against Iran.
2. To assure and guarantee the Islamic Republic of Iran of practically enjoying all its nuclear rights within the framework of the NPT and regulations of the IAEA, in exchange for implementing its safeguard obligations.

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937 Iran’s proposal presented in July 2012 technical talks with the P5+1, Appendix 10.
938 Ibid.
3. To achieve a sustainable nuclear cooperation for transferring advanced technologies.
4. To conclude a comprehensive agreement on collective commitments in the areas of economic, political, security and international cooperation.

Iran’s preference for clarifying objectives prior to entering into negotiations can be interpreted in light of its profound lack of confidence in the P5+1, the Western countries in particular. Iran feared that its legal right to peaceful nuclear energy would not be recognised and would be held hostage to other disputes, such as human rights or the recognition of the state of Israel. As such, its proposals clarified that the “end-game” of the Iran-P5+1 negotiations revolved around the return of the nuclear file from the UNSC to the IAEA Board of Governors. The July 2008 non-paper, for its part, identified the timeframe of each stage of the negotiations (e.g. “a maximum of 3 rounds of talks” during the “preliminary talks”). This arguably translated the regime’s worry that the discussions would be endless and jeopardise Iran’s interests. Thus, while Iran required security guarantees, it did not oppose a comprehensive agreement that encompassed economic, political and security issues with the P5+1 countries and, thus, with the US, the UK, France and Germany.

**Concluding Observations**

The nuclear issue provided paradoxical threats and opportunities for Iran, which can be divided into shorter- and longer-term considerations. In the short term, the Western-led opposition against what Iran viewed as its legal and legitimate nuclear activities enabled the regime to denounce the Western core powers’ double standards and the perpetuation of international injustice and dependency. In so doing, the regime was able to reaffirm and demonstrate its identity as a legitimate and constructive actor within the international system at large, and a proactive force of resistance defending the rights of developing nations in particular. Iran sought to show that it was guided by the legal and normative principles that regulated the international system as well as a justice-driven ethics. In addition, the Ahmadinejad administration’s attempt to broaden the scope of the nuclear issue partly aimed to

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939 Mousavian explains this concern within the Iranian leadership in greater length in his memoir. See *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis*, 451.
strengthen external legitimacy and support for its assertive nuclear resistance policy. This was all the more important since Iran was confronted with increasingly severe and hard-hitting unilateral and multilateral sanctions, and was once again depicted as a rogue state with abhorrent internal and external policies. Iran’s framing of the nuclear issue and firm nuclear stance received the support of a variety of states, whose relative power and influence within the international system varied but nevertheless helped the regime devalue its opponents and assert itself.

In the longer term, the negotiations over Iran’s nuclear programme provided the regime with opportunities to engage with the countries of the EU-3 and the P5+1 and present suggestions on issues of mutual interest. A striking commonality in the negotiation proposals of the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad administrations lay in their articulation of “dilemmas of common interests” and “common aversion”. These were country-related (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria) and issue-specific (e.g. terrorism, narco-trafficking). From Iran’s perspective, these shared dilemmas affected both sides’ ability to secure their national interests unilaterally and created a profound strategic incentive for multilateral cooperation and coordinated strategies. This was particularly the case for the Ahmadinejad administration, whose negotiation proposals systematically emphasised that the international system was changing and that new multilevel threats and opportunities were emerging. They also asserted that Iran had a crucial and legitimate role to play in these various areas and was seeking sustainable and constructive cooperation with its nuclear negotiation partners. However, and much in line with Wendt’s argument that “self-restraint” is a permissible cause of collective identity formation, Iran’s proposals always emphasised that principles of international law, especially states’ sovereign equality and right to territorial integrity, were crucial.

Thus, although Iran continued to dispute the US-dominated international order and identify (and portray itself) as a protesting actor, it did not reject engagement with the Western core powers. The two roles were not conceived as incompatible: Iran could continue to exist as an anti-status quo power and a protector of developing nations, whilst simultaneously advocating new forms of cooperation with its traditional rivals which would produce better responses to several pressing transnational and
complex security challenges. In the following chapter, I explore Iran’s US policy and further engage with this seeming contradiction.
In the previous chapters, I noted that the Ahmadinejad administration firmly believed that the US was largely responsible for manufacturing and sustaining the nuclear issue. From Iran’s perspective, the problem of US-Iran relations lay at the core of the crisis: it was a covert struggle between an immoral superpower and a fiercely independent and justice-seeking nation. I also observed that Iran repeatedly included a range of security issues unrelated to the nuclear question in its successive proposals for negotiation with the EU-3 and the P5+1. Its proposals also clarified how Iran and its negotiation partners ought to engage and interact with each other.

These various aspects of Iran’s approach to the nuclear issue led me to conclude that Iran presented two main role-identities. On the one hand, the leadership instantiated and reproduced Iran’s identity as an anti-status quo power that denounced and resisted the illegal and illegitimate practices of the Western powers within the hierarchical international system. In so doing, Iran presented itself as an actor that shared the grievances, concerns and priorities of oppressed and developing nations. On the other hand, the leadership used diplomatic negotiations to pinpoint areas of increasing interdependence and common vulnerabilities between Iran and the prominent powers of the EU-3 and P5+1. In sum, Iran’s nuclear diplomatic strategy included elements of conciliation and estrangement vis-à-vis the Western core powers, including the US.

In this chapter, I focus on Iran’s policy towards the US during the Ahmadinejad presidency. The subject of US-Iran relations occupied a central place within Iranian decision-making circles, offering the possibility of critically engaging with common understandings of Iran’s interests and preferences. I am particularly interested in how (and why) Iran conceived of its relationship with the world’s superpower and whether (and why) its logics of representation and interaction persisted or were challenged during the Ahmadinejad presidency.
Potential patterns of continuities in Iran’s US policy could shed light on deeply held beliefs and perceptions, strategic values and consensus within the Iranian leadership. Conversely, possible shifts could indicate important particularities of the Ahmadinejad administration, which may or may not be related to external developments. I am particularly intrigued by the fact that, at first glance, the regime debunked several conventional wisdoms on both Iran’s foreign policy interests and the more conservative factions of the Iranian political spectrum.

First, the Ahmadinejad administration assumed power after the nuclear talks between Iran and the EU-3 had failed to secure recognition of Iran’s rights under the NPT and diplomatic stalemate had confirmed the Western core powers’ untrustworthiness, disrespect and animosity. Second, Iran’s geopolitical situation had improved considerably by June 2005: Afghanistan and Iraq were no longer ruled by hostile regimes, oil prices had risen significantly, and attempts to isolate Syria and marginalise Hamas had further consolidated Tehran’s strategic position. Third, President Ahmadinejad embraced a very condemnatory rhetoric, which repeatedly denounced the Western core powers’ policies and favoured strong relations with developing nations and emerging powers. Finally, Ahmadinejad’s election consolidated the power of the principlists and military-security stratum of the IRI.

Yet, it is during the Ahmadinejad presidency that fundamental developments occurred, including the first direct contacts between senior Iranian and American officials. Quite strikingly, the question of engagement with the US ceased to be a taboo within Iranian political debates: it was “no longer [a question] of whether but of how – and to what end.” Enmity with the “Great Satan” no longer seemed to constitute an uncompromising pillar of the IRI, without which the regime would experience a profound identity and legitimacy crisis. Understanding the sources of Iran’s (conditional) strategy of engagement with the US (i.e. where does it come from? Who is it supported by?), and its characteristics (i.e. under which conditions could Iran pursue better relations with the US? Which factors would preclude policies

942 Ibid., 6.
943 Parsi, A Single Roll of the Dice, 216.
of engagement?), sheds light on deep dynamics of national identity and interest formation.

To this end, I first engage with the broad structures of relations between Iran and the US since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. I present a succinct analysis of their patterns of representation and interaction in order to identify key factors and dynamics that pre-existed, and likely constrained, the Ahmadinejad administration. As such, I pay particular attention to the indirect, but prominent, role the US played in the *raison d’être* of the Revolution and its long-term structuring effects on the IRI’s conception of its identity and interests. The Wendtian-constructivist perspective also enables a strong contextualisation of the factors that underlined the permanence of the institutionalised enmity between the US and Iran: it sheds light on the constitutive dynamics between their endogenously constructed role-identities on the one hand, and their behavioural practices towards one another on the other.

Second, I turn to the fact that, despite their profoundly internalised and stabilised negative patterns of representation and interaction, and a plethora of internal and external status quo interests, Iran repeatedly responded to US offers of engagement and attempted to reach out to the superpower. These moves became more prominent during the Khatami presidency, which sought to “altercast” the US through both symbolic and concrete gestures. Such conciliatory signals, which became more frequent after 9/11, produced few tangible results for Iran however. Nevertheless, the Ahmadinejad presidency witnessed important developments, such as backchannel negotiations between Iranian and US officials, and the mobilisation of prominent personalities within the Iranian leadership in favour of less antagonistic relations between the two actors. Ultimately, however, the nuclear issue, the Syrian conflict and the Obama administration’s increasingly coercive approach to Iran, reproduced and perpetuated the institutionalised enmity between the two nations.

Third, I conclude that Iran’s Janus-faced US policy, which oscillated between condemnation and defiance, and carefully calibrated engagement and attempts at conciliation, must be understood in light of Iran’s situation of discursive and strategic dependency on the US. A transformation of US-Iran relations, away from enmity and towards more collective identity information, would play an important role in enabling
Iran to secure the long-sought recognition of its legitimate interests, security concerns and role within its regional environment. Additionally, it would strengthen its ability to deal with a range of pressing security challenges which increasingly required multilateral strategies. Less conflictual relations would thus reduce Iran’s security dilemmas and help bridge the gap between its perception of its legitimate interests and its ability to play a role commensurate with its geopolitical aspirations. I also argue that the ebb and flow of Iran’s US policy must be interpreted in light of the Supreme Leader’s complex calculations and evolving views regarding the superpower and Iran’s interests.

The US-Iran Culture of Anarchy Since the Revolution

Iran’s US policy cannot be studied independently of the superpower’s own attitudes and behaviours towards the IRI, not least because its foreign policy interests and opportunities were profoundly affected by the superpower’s priorities and behaviour on its western (Middle East) and eastern (Central Asia) borders, as well as its specific strategies towards the IRI. In this section, I focus on the main aspects of their mutual grievances (negative images) and policies of estrangement (enmity practices) towards one another. I also outline the key internal and external factors and dynamics that participated in reproducing their structure of anarchy for over three decades. In so doing, I shed light on the culture of mistrust, insecurity and defiance that existed prior to the Ahmadinejad presidency.

Logics of Representation and Interaction

The US played a crucial, indirect, role in the Revolution and became an important actor against which the new Iranian regime reconfigured its identity and interests. The embassy hostage crisis epitomised this revised pattern of representation and interaction, and led the US to profoundly readjust its beliefs and interests regarding its former Iranian ally. After explaining why and how Iran and the US transformed their culture of anarchy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I outline the main characteristics of their processes of interaction since. In particular, I note that, despite very different capabilities, Iran and the US systematically sought to contain, deter and delegitimise each other’s influence and practices.
The role of the US in the raison d'être of the Revolution. The Revolution significantly affected how Iran came to define its national interests and foreign policy practices. Guided by its formative slogans, “Neither West nor East, only the Islamic Republic” and “independence, freedom, Islamic Republic”, Iran aspired to fundamental cultural, political and economic independence. It advocated firm resistance of foreign interference in both internal politics and regional dynamics, and shifted to a self-reliant foreign policy. This led it to fully reconfigure its relations with the Western powers, the US in particular.

Over a short period prior to the Revolution, the US had exercised a profoundly domineering and exploitative influence over Iran’s internal affairs, thus showing considerable disregard for a nation whose sovereignty and independence had already been profoundly harmed by external powers. The US disappointed many Iranians who had initially sought in it a “third force” to counter the debilitating influence of the Soviet Union and Great Britain. The 1953 coup against the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh had “transferred Iranian suspicions from the historic Anglo-Russian axis towards the Americans”. The US’ active support for the authoritarian Shah further consolidated its image as a corrupting and malevolent external influence. The 1964 Treaty that granted legal immunity to US military advisers in Iran symbolised the country’s capitulation to US power and the Shah’s betrayal of Iranians’ dignity and independence. While the Shah was increasingly represented as “a puppet”, Ayatollah Khomeini contended that the Treaty had “reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog”.

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945 Farhi and Lotfian, “Iran’s Post-Revolution Foreign Policy Puzzle,” 121.
946 Cited in A. Goldoust, “Understanding as the Ultimate Medium to Resolve Mistrust: Re-Imagining a New Narrative between the United States and Britain” (PhD thesis, University of San Francisco, April 2009), 42-43. Also see A. Ansari, Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust (London: C. Hurst, 2006).
947 Ramazani notes that Iran’s strategic importance to the US dramatically increased in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of three main and simultaneous factors: the US’ increasing reluctance to commit forces abroad in light of the Vietnam War, the withdrawal of British forces east of Suez and the dramatic transformation of the world oil market. The Shah had also shown an interest in increasing American involvement in Iran as early as 1941, in part to help resist domestic political pressures. For more information, see R. K. Ramazani, Independence without Freedom: Iran’s Foreign Policy (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 52-56.
Revolutionary Iran came to reject the structure of the international system, particularly its core-periphery dynamics between the *mostazafin* (the oppressed) and the *mostakbarin* (the oppressors). The IRI advocated an anti-status quo and pro-Third World foreign policy to undermine global hierarchy and injustice. It also rejected the categorisation of countries according to economic or military capabilities and favoured, instead, spiritual and moral features as sources of national and international legitimacy and power. Consequently, the US ceased to be perceived and treated as Iran’s greatest ally. It became the “Great Satan” and the greatest threat to Iran’s national dignity and independence, and to a just and stable international system. The US thus played an indirect but crucial role in the *raison d’être* of the Revolution and the IRI’s founding principles.

In the aftermath of the Revolution, the US also came to re-evaluate its interests vis-à-vis the nascent IRI. The Shah’s overthrow represented the loss of a crucial ally in its containment strategy of the SU in strategic areas of the Middle East and Central Asia. The US’ failure to perceive the substantial domestic challenges faced by the Pahlavi monarchy also raised pressing questions about the CIA’s efficacy. All in all, US officials had largely failed to understand the extent to which their role was both a source of resentment and a driving force of the revolutionary processes.

The seizure of US diplomats and personnel for 444 days was experienced as a “national humiliation” of the US (Arjomand) and a “trauma” (Sick). For Iran, however, the hostage crisis acted as a founding moment that demonstrated its independence and emancipation from external tutelage. As Ayatollah Khamenei declared in 1993, “The matter of the den of spies cut the last possible thread

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949 Farhi and Lotfian, “Iran’s Post-Revolution,” 118.
951 Analysts have frequently referred to President Carter’s speech of 31 December 1979 to illustrate the profound disconnect between US assessment of Iran’s domestic politics and the emerging reality on the ground. President Carter declared that “Iran, because of the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, Your Majesty, and to your leadership and to the respect and admiration and love your people give to you.” Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, 24-25.
connecting the revolution and America.” To add insult to injury, the US rescue mission (Operation Eagle Claw) failed and more American citizens were seized in Beirut by Hezbollah.

The significance of these episodes cannot be understated: they all profoundly complicated the lenses through which the US would view the IRI. As Ansari identifies in his 2006 *Confronting Iran: the Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust*, while the 1953 coup against Prime Minister Mossadegh “began the transformation of the relationship from mutual trust to mutual suspicion” and “coincided with the dramatic growth in political consciousness in Iran”, the 1979 hostage crisis produced a similar “political myth of victimisation” whereby the televised trauma ensured that the Iranian regime remained a prominent factor of domestic political concern. The events of 1953 and 1979, in other words, “bounded Iran and the United States in an intimate ideological relationship, defined by a collective and shared traumatic experience.”

Successive US administrations continuously denounced Iran’s support of terrorist groups and organisations, its assumed pursuit of WMDs, non-recognition of the state of Israel and systematic violation of human rights. The US also remained profoundly preoccupied with Iran’s regional ambitions and assertive foreign policy, particularly from the mid-2000s onwards. In sum, from the US’ perspective, the IRI supported abhorrent internal and external policies, and was a threat to regional and international peace and security.

The Revolution thus produced a profound transformation of the structure of US-Iran relations, which, as per Wendt’s argument that “anarchy is what states make of it”, shifted from relative trust and friendship to mutual incomprehension, mistrust and worst-case assumptions. According to Limbert:

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955 Cited in Ganji, “Who is Ali Khamenei?”.
956 A. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: the Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust* (London: C. Hurst, 2006), 5. See also pages 70 to 72.
957 Ibid., 70.
959 The Reagan administration’s decisions to place Iran on its terrorism list and to hinder conventional arms sales to Iran, share battlefield intelligence with Iraq and directly intervene against Iranian naval
For the American side, the Islamic Republic of Iran became suicidal, a rogue state, a regional hegemonic power, a threat, and the world’s number-one sponsor of terrorism. For the Iranian side, America became the great Satan and the leader of world arrogance calling for military action against Iran and for regime change in Tehran by subversion, bribery, and ethnic strife.\footnote{Limbert, Negotiating with Iran, 122-23.}

US-Iran relations since the late 1970s also demonstrate that cultures of anarchy tend to have self-perpetuating qualities: while practices play a crucial role in the creation, instantiation and perpetuation of relatively stable structures of identities and interests, actors both passively and actively perpetuate social institutions.

**The unknown Other: trust deficit and policies of estrangement.** Four key characteristics of US-Iran relations since the Revolution demonstrate that their endogenously constituted culture of enmity predominantly acted as a coercive social fact on US and Iranian policymakers.

First, Iranian and US officials enjoyed limited and intermittent, usually low-level, communication.\footnote{J. Rydqvist and R. Parsi, “Introduction: The Converging and Diverging Interests of Iran and the West,” in Iran and the West: Regional Interests and Global Controversies, eds. R. Parsi and J. Rydqvist, Swedish Defence Research Agency, March 2011, 12, accessed 10 April 2015, http://www.foi.se/ReportFiles/foir_3168.pdf.} In the absence of interests sections in each other’s countries, messages between their governments were mainly mediated by third parties, notably the Swiss government. As such, Iran and the US ceased to know each other directly. They mainly apprehended each other through the intermediary of their vitriolic discourses, antagonistic policies and “invented myths [...] filtered through thick layers of normative and institutional structures.”\footnote{Adib-Moghaddam, On the Arab Revolts, 154-55.} For Beeman, the Iranian and US publics were presented with “very stark mythological representations of the other side designed to play as much as possible to their sense of villainy and evil.”\footnote{Beeman, “US-Iran Relations,” 199.}

ships during the Iran-Iraq war, all symbolised the extent to which the US had re-evaluated its interests. For the Iranian regime, these various actions confirmed that the US was antagonistic and intrusive. Additionally, the accidental shooting down of Iran Air Flight 655 on 3 July 1988, which caused the deaths of almost 300 Iranian civilians, heightened the Iranian leadership’s grievances against the US. The delay of the UNSC to condemn the Iraqi invasion of Iranian sovereign territory also deepened Iran’s resentment of the supranational institution responsible for dealing with challenges to international peace and security. See for example Zarif, “Tackling the Iran-U.S. Crisis,” 74.
Second, this socially constructed enmity situation complicated officials’ attempts to assess and understand their counterpart’s interests, aims, strategies and concerns. In December 2004, President George W. Bush declared that the US was relying upon others for its Iran policy because “we’ve sanctioned ourselves out of influence with Iran.”\(^{964}\) The US knowledge gap was aggravated by the fact that the government had not significantly renewed its cadre of expertise following the Revolution.\(^{965}\) Tellingly, this intelligence void came under increasing criticism during the Ahmadinejad presidency, including from former CIA officers.\(^{966}\) On the Iranian side, the Supreme Leader and other central forces within the political spectrum remained largely inaccessible to foreign policymakers.\(^{967}\) Their travel abroad also rarely included Western countries, which widened the gap between myths and first-hand experiences.

Third, the absence of formal diplomatic ties and opportunities for engagement, and the difficulty of understanding the Other’s aims and preferences, produced great insecurity and led to worst-case assumptions. In particular, both sides repeatedly struggled to ascertain whether periodic offers of engagement were “a strategy or a tactic” (i.e. was the Other seeking a genuine resolution of outstanding issues or was it just a façade for realpolitik motives?).\(^{968}\)

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\(^{965}\) Limbert, *Negotiating With Iran*, 11.

\(^{966}\) Riedel attributes US policy failures regarding Iran to the absence of a “well-grounded understanding of what motivates and inspires Iranians” and the over-reliance on biased third parties. Giraldi similarly warns that sources of information which are not directly under the control of the CIA can be “altered, enhanced, or completely fabricated”, and difficult to verify. Murray observes that the gaps in “human intelligence (HUMINT)” and “signals intelligence (SIGINT)” widened considerably during the three decades of hostilities. Although US policymakers knew a lot about Iran (i.e. facts, figures, political structures), they understood it all too little. For more information see B. Riedel, “America and Iran: Flawed Analysis, Missed Opportunities, and Looming Dangers,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 15, no. 1 (Autumn-Winter 2008): 101; P. Giraldi, “The World’s Hardest Target: United States Intelligence on Iran,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 16-17, 22; Murray, *US Foreign Policy*, 9-10.

\(^{967}\) Sadjapour has repeatedly made the point that one of the key challenges in negotiating with Iran “is that those Iranian officials who are accessible to us […] are not powerful and those Iranian officials who are powerful are inaccessible to us.” See “Iran’s Nuclear Program,” TV/radio broadcast on *Charlie Rose*, 31 March 2015, accessed 13 April 2015, [http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/03/31/iran-s-nuclear-program-charlie-rose](http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/03/31/iran-s-nuclear-program-charlie-rose).

Fourth, these uncertainties led US and Iranian policymakers to opt for policies that confirmed, rather than undermined, their pre-existing beliefs and expectations of one another. Limbert is thus quite right to argue that “hostility begets hostility.” Their institutionalised enmity constrained their patterns of interaction, reinforcing certain behaviours and discouraging others. It acted as a coercive social fact on policymakers, deeply embedded as it was in individual and collective consciousness and routinised practices, a point to which I now turn.

**Mutual strategies: contain and deter versus resist and divide.** Following the end of the First Gulf War (1990-1991), successive US administrations labelled Iran a “rogue state”; a categorisation that was primarily linked to “external behavioural criteria”, especially sponsorship of terrorism and presumed pursuit of WMDs. States like Iran, North Korea and Libya had failed to comply with international norms of behaviour and, consequently, posed a critical challenge to US interests and international security. The beginning of US Executive Order 12957 is telling in this respect:

I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, find that the actions and policies of the Government of Iran constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States, and hereby declare a national emergency to deal with that threat.

The Clinton administration shifted to a “dual containment policy” that paved the way for systematic policies of sanctions and deterrence against Iran, which remained excluded from the regional security architecture and the international economic and security environment.

As Litwak convincingly argues, the rogue state category “distorted policy” since diplomatic engagement with such states became nearly impossible: “Once a state was relegated to this category ‘beyond the pale’, the default strategy was...

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969 Limbert, *Negotiating with Iran*, 188.
971 Litwak points out that the term “rogue state” has no standing in international law and was selectively applied by successive US administrations (Ibid., 11).
comprehensive containment and isolation." Ferrero similarly argues that “the Iran Narrative”, “a collection of myths, frames, themes, characterizations, and over-simplifications which depicts the Islamic Republic as uniquely evil and beyond the pale”, significantly increased the political costs and reduced the normative desirability of pursuing policies of engagement with Iran. In particular, the idea that the Iranian regime was “irrational and fanatical as a function of its DNA” prohibited successive administrations from viewing Iran as a “normal” actor with legitimate security concerns and geopolitical aspirations.

From the Iranian leadership’s perspective, the US never came to terms with the IRI and Iran’s legitimate role within its regional environment. It systematically engaged in policies devised to undermine and weaken the IRI’s stability and influence, both directly (via sanctions and covert actions) and indirectly (via proxy support of internal and external opponents or the instrumentalisation of the nuclear issue). According to Mousavian, the Iranian leadership embraced the belief that the US, no matter the cost, was determined to change the Iranian Nezam (political establishment) [...] The Iranian Nezam believes that, for its part, the US as the global superpower has applied almost all possible instruments at its command, short of an outright military intervention, to attain the goal of bringing down the Islamic Republic.

Additionally, the superpower’s superior technological capabilities, global network of military bases and regional security partnerships all raised the spectre of a possible military intervention in Iran’s national territory. This possibility increased in the aftermath of 9/11 when the Bush administration shifted to policies of regime change and identified Iran as a member of an “Axis of Evil.” As such, US interests and behaviours towards Iran in particular, and within its regional environment in general, remained a source of profound preoccupation for the Iranian leadership: “the “America question” or what kind of traditional or soft threats the United States poses

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973 Litwak, Outlier States, 11.
975 Ibid., 127.
976 S. H. Mousavian, Iran and The United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), Kindle edition.
for Iran’s strategic ambitions and how to counter them plays a very large role in Iran’s foreign policy discussions.”

Iran’s preoccupation with the US, and the power discrepancy between the two actors, also placed Iranian policymakers in a reactive position vis-à-vis the superpower:

due to the hostile relationship with the United States, the Islamic Republic “has gradually reached a situation in which the shadow of an enemy has covered its interests and these interests are defined in a passive way.” Hence in every issue, instead of giving attention to what its national interests are, it has to give attention to America’s position and frantically work to create an international front to counter the US pressures.

As the two previous chapters demonstrate, Iran systematically attempted to impose enforcement costs on US coercive policies. In general, to maintain its physical security and increase its relative autonomy, the Iranian leadership pursued internal and external balancing strategies:

Iran is improving its retaliatory capabilities by developing the means to pursue asymmetric, low-intensity warfare, both inside and outside the country; modernizing its weapons; building indigenous missile and antimissile systems [...] Although it is being careful to avoid a military confrontation with the United States, Tehran is maneuvering to prevent Washington from leading a united front against it and strategically using Iran’s oil and gas resources to reward its friends.

Asymmetric warfare and capabilities enabled Iran to compensate for its inferior conventional military forces. Its financial, political and military support of non-state actors, including Hamas, Hezbollah and its Quds force, also formed critical components of its deterrence strategies.

To conclude, the institutionalised structure of representations and interaction between Iran and the US since the late 1970s created significant order, predictability and ontological security. Iranian and US officials held well-established images of and

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977 Farhi and Lotfian, “Iran’s Post-Revolution,” 117.
978 Ibid., 134.
beliefs about one another, making change a remote and challenging possibility. Instead, officials repeatedly resorted to strategies that confirmed and reified their negative representations, thus producing a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is interesting to note that Iranian and American officials regularly represented each other as “enemies”. Analysts, specialists and journalists also resorted to discourses of “enmity” to capture their bilateral relations. In practice, however, the two states were locked between a Hobbesian and a Lockean culture of anarchy. They viewed one another as threatening enemies and engaged in a highly competitive security system that made each assume the worst of the Other’s intentions, practices and material capabilities. Additionally, they profoundly mistrusted one another and were wary of cooperative moves. Nevertheless, Iran and the US never operated on the principle of *sauve qui peut* and kill or be killed: although they continuously sought to deter, contain and delegitimise one another, they also limited the use of violence in their processes of interaction. This was partly down to the fact that they did not profoundly dispute their mutual right to sovereignty and primarily sought to revise one another’s behaviours. From Iran’s perspective, however, the threat perceptions were much greater since the US was accused of interfering in its internal affairs and seeking to overthrow the IRI. As I subsequently argue, the fact that Iran and the US shared crucial components of a Lockean culture of anarchy helps explain their repeated attempts to cooperate on issues of mutual concern. It must be noted, however, that a range of internal and external actors strongly favoured and actively sought the perpetuation of the status quo in US-Iran relations.

**Internal and External Factors Sustaining US-Iran Enmity**

In chapter 2, I indicated that, while states partly acquire and transform their identities and interests through processes of interaction, the transformation of cultures of anarchy towards more collective identity formation tends to be complicated by two domestic factors and one systemic dynamic.

With regard to Iran-US relations, I have so far engaged with the systemic constraint and one of the domestic variables. On the one hand, the transformation of

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981 In this respect, the US-Iran conflict confirms the importance of cognitive predispositions. See Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, 169, 175-76.
intersubjective structures strongly depends on how much slack exists for dynamics of collective identity formation to develop. The greater the conflict, the more states are fearful and prone to engage in relative gains thinking. On the other hand, actors have strong interests in maintaining relatively stable role-identities due to their affective and cognitive inclination towards ontological security. As seen above, both dynamics considerably influenced the shape of US-Iran relations.

The transformation of conflictual relations is further complicated by the commitments that states make to domestic and foreign actors. In this respect, the perpetuation of the US-Iran conflict, despite important changes within their respective domestic politics as well as the regional and international environments, was partly attributable to internal and external status quo interests.

**Domestic pressure groups.** The absence of formal diplomatic relations and profound tensions between Iran and the US benefited a number of actors within both countries:

For three decades, politicians and bureaucrats in both countries have made careers out of demonising each other […] The hostility has been institutionalised because either too many forces on both sides calculate that they can better advance their own narrow interests by retaining the status quo, or the predictability of enmity is preferred to the unpredictability of peace making.  

Any attempt at addressing the question of US-Iran relations would incur domestic political costs and risks.

Within Iran, three broad factors favoured a perpetuation of estrangement between Iran and the US. First, some individuals and groups were firmly opposed to any form of rapprochement with the US. Farhi and Loftan, who identify five categories of foreign policy perspectives within the Iranian leadership, argue that the “offensive regional power balancers” and the “global rejectionists” feared that improved relations would pave the way for (further) US attempts to transform Iran’s domestic politics (e.g. an influx of Western cultural influence) and its foreign policy strategies

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(e.g. subordination to US priorities), thus jeopardising the heritage of the Revolution and the regime's survival.\textsuperscript{983}

Second, Iran adapted to the sanctions against its economy, some individuals and groups developing international trade routes with competitors of the US and expanding their activities on the black market.\textsuperscript{984} Improved relations could thus threaten their interests, especially if they led to the scaling back of the sanctions and a firmer integration of Iran into the global economy. Third, domestic factional divides and competition for power made the transformation of US-Iran relations extremely difficult. Rivals were unwilling for their competitors to get the credit for reducing tensions or decide the contours of a strategic rapprochement between the two states.\textsuperscript{985} By the same token, any official seeking to improve relations with the US always had to “walk a fine line between being seen as promoting national interest and standing accused of engaging in “collusion” (sazesh) and giving in”.\textsuperscript{986}

Important political constraints also existed on the US side. While “the Iran narrative” repeatedly served to sideline and delegitimise those who wished to engage Iran, the political space in which to attempt mending ties was often too narrow and costly for policymakers to either take the risk or actively pursue their forward-leaning strategies.\textsuperscript{987} Moreover, the American media often raised the costs of reaching out to Iran. In their analysis of \textit{Time} and \textit{Newsweek}, Fayyaz and Shirazi find that representations of post-revolutionary Iran and Iranians over a ten-year period largely reflected Orientalist perspectives.\textsuperscript{988} Iran was presented as “a problematic nation-state”, whilst its people were depicted as the victims of the “mullahs” and their government’s ideologies and behaviours.\textsuperscript{989} Finally, powerful interest groups proved particularly efficient at denouncing, and even derailing, cooperative policies towards

\textsuperscript{983} See Amuzegar, “The Islamic Republic of Iran,” 31; Farhi and Lotfian, “Iran’s Post-Revolution,” 126, 135-36.

\textsuperscript{984} Milani, “Tehran’s Take,” 48-49; Amuzegar, “The Islamic Republic of Iran,” 31-32.


\textsuperscript{986} Farhi and Lotfian, “Iran’s Post-Revolution,” 121.

\textsuperscript{987} Parsi, \textit{A Single Roll of the Dice}.


\textsuperscript{989} Ibid., 56, 58-59.
Iran. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), for example, was effective in creating a sense of urgency around the nuclear issue ("time is running out") and keeping the military option open. Its position was echoed throughout Congress, letters to the President and legislative amendments.

**Ideological and strategic commitments to third parties.** Iran and the US both developed a range of alliances and strategic commitments with external third parties which remained fundamentally opposed to each other. Their respective policymakers thus faced both domestic and external constraints when weighing their options. Little is known, however, about the ways in which Iran's allies, especially Syria and Hezbollah, may have attempted to increase the Iranian leadership’s costs of engaging the US. Interviews with Iranian officials by prominent think tanks and analysts also contain little information regarding these potential pressure points. By contrast, a considerable amount of research exists on the positions of Israel and the Arab Gulf states, the US' key strategic partners within the Middle East region.

Parsi, who provides one of the most thorough analyses of Israeli-Iranian relations since the Revolution, contends that the transformation of those relations from relative friendship to profound enmity was the result of geopolitical shifts. Both instrumentalised the ideological framing of their conflict to pursue *realpolitik*, especially in the aftermath of the First Gulf War and the Cold War. Additionally, since the 1990s, both states repeatedly undermined any US initiative they deemed beneficial to the other side’s interests. Iran thus partly opposed the Middle East Peace Process on the grounds that it could increase its isolation. Israel, for its part, resisted US-Iran talks, fearing that a rapprochement would strengthen Iran’s strategic significance at its own expense. These concerns and manoeuvres became particularly prominent during the Obama presidency (see below). Mearsheimer and Walt, whose work complements Parsi’s analysis, emphasise that

991 Milani, for example, notes that these organisations “have created effective lobbies in Iran that thrive on this animosity.” He does not, however, substantiate his argument with examples or evidence. See “Tehran’s Take,” 49.
994 Ibid., 261.
995 Ibid.
shared values also explain why Israel received great attention and largely unconditional support from US policymakers, thus influencing the superpower’s foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction.996

In The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A Cultural Genealogy, Adib-Moghaddam shows the role that “political norms, institutions, values, identities and other cultural artefacts” played in shaping key political dynamics within the Gulf region, such as the adversarial relations between Iran and Iraq, and Iran and Saudi Arabia.997 The shared knowledge that they were rivals often led them to reproduce their regional culture of anarchy. Additionally, he notes that

One of the undervalued consequences of “Operation Desert Storm” is the “security transaction” that took place between the Persian Gulf region and the United States. By linking the security of the Gulf monarchies to its own, and by stationing large numbers of troops in these countries, the United States created fundamental interdependence between its own security and the security of the region.998

The US remained deeply involved in the Middle East to protect Israel and its Gulf allies, secure the free flow of oil and counter several transregional threats such as terrorism and WMD proliferation. During the Obama presidency, the Arab Gulf states’ dependency on the US for the provision of external security became a point of profound contention (see below).

To conclude, the Revolution profoundly transformed Iran-US relations and locked the two actors into a culture of anarchy balanced between Hobbesian and Lockean dynamics. Two broad factors participated in the instantiation and reproduction of their antagonistic representational and behavioural logics. First, both sides’ individually and collectively held negative perceptions of their enemy’s identity, interests and aims had constitutive effects on their logics of action to contain and

996 J. J. Mearsheimer and S. M. Walt, The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 5, 7. It must be noted that Mearsheimer and Walt are highly critical of US policies towards Israel. They consider that “Israel has become a strategic liability for the US” as its actions have largely undermined US strategies in the Middle East.
998 Ibid., 89. More recently, Ehteshami made the argument that outside powers, especially the US, remained “supreme interventionists” in the Persian Gulf region, and that “regional actors have found it extraordinarily difficult to act collectively, despite their many shared problems and common interests.” See Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf: Political Economy, War and Revolution (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8 and Chapter 11.
deter those threats. Second, their routinised mutual patterns of representation and interaction became all the more entrenched, and challenging to overcome, so that the US-Iran conflict produced internal and external status quo interests.

I now turn to another crucial aspect of Iran’s US policy. For all its criticisms and condemnations, Iran repeatedly attempted to engage the world’s superpower. Analysts and policymakers alike often paid little notice to these strategies, focusing instead on Iran’s enmity towards the US as a function of regime legitimacy. However, Iran’s conditional offers of engagement, and its increasingly public debates on the subject of US-Iran relations, shed light on crucial processes of identity and interest formation.

**Beyond the Condemnatory Rhetoric and the Antagonistic Policies, the Repeated Engagement Efforts**

Despite its resentment and profound mistrust of the US, and its multi-pronged deterrence strategies, Iran repeatedly advocated and engaged in targeted discussions on bilateral and regional issues. These became more prominent after the US launched its War on Terrorism and increased its involvement in the Middle East and Central Asia. They also accelerated during the Ahmadinejad presidency, when a conflagration of internal and external dynamics heightened Iran’s incentives to foster less conflictual relations. After analysing the main features of Iran’s forward-leaning strategies towards its significant Other during the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad presidencies, I contend that these patterns of continuities in Iran’s US policy can be interpreted in light of its discursive and strategic dependence on the superpower.

**Frequent Attempts to “Altercast” During the Khatami Presidency**

While the Iran-Contra affair revealed complex forms of contact between Iran and the US, President Rafsanjani’s 1995 offer to the US Conoco company to operate two Iranian oil fields seemingly indicated the Iranian leadership’s willingness to consider some forms of economic rapprochement between the two actors. These two well-

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999 The Iran-Contra Affair concerns the US administration of President Reagan’s attempt to facilitate the sale of weapons to the Iranian regime in the 1980s in exchange for the release of US hostages held in Lebanon.
known examples, however, remained relatively rare exceptions to the otherwise conflictual relations between Iran and the US from the late 1970s to the 1990s.

The Khatami presidency, for its part, inaugurated a range of symbolic and practical gestures that aimed to lay down a path for constructive engagement. Iran repeatedly attempted to “altercast” the US by taking on a less antagonistic and friendlier role-identity vis-à-vis the superpower. President Khatami’s call for a “dialogue of civilisations”, Iran’s multilevel cooperation with the US in Afghanistan and its unprecedented May 2003 negotiation proposal all constituted attempts to create new intersubjective meanings between the two actors, both willingly and out of necessity.

**A symbolic call for a dialogue of civilisations.** President Khatami’s dialogue of civilisations was a powerful slogan and a strong rebuke to the clash of civilisations thesis. One of its most important aspects was the fact that it signalled an awareness of the Western states’ prominent power in the interdependent system: “Today’s world is Western in its orientation, techniques, and thoughts, such that if one lives outside the geographic boundaries of the West, one must incorporate the West into one’s values and life.”

Iran, in other words, could neither escape nor afford to ignore its influence.

President Khatami’s call also articulated a demand for the theoretical and practical recognition of states’ sovereign equality: “Dialogue among Civilisations’ means equality between peoples and nations. In other words, one conducts a dialogue only when one respects the other party and considered [sic] the other party as equal to oneself.” President Khatami advocated friendly relations with all states on the condition that they recognised Iran’s independence and did not pursue aggressive ambitions.

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1001 Ibid., 8. Holliday contends that Khatami’s dialogue articulated a discourse of resistance against perceived Western hegemony in the international system on the one hand, and dominance of the West and Western perspectives in the discipline of IR on the other.
civilisations illustrated Iran's relative dependence on the West, the US in particular, and its non-negotiable expectation that its sovereign equality be respected.

Particularly significant too was the fact that President Khatami first proposed his dialogue of civilisations during an interview with CNN in January 1998.\textsuperscript{1003} He chose an American cable and satellite television channel to spread his message, thereby ensuring high visibility amongst US policymakers and public. President Khatami also used this opportunity to reflect on the origins of American civilisation and its main sources of success, especially its balance between religion and liberty.\textsuperscript{1004} Additionally, he established parallels between American and Iranian civilisations in a likely attempt to downplay the differences between the two actors. As Ansari observes, from Khatami’s point of view, potentially shared interests needed to be identified and articulated as a means to deconstruct the culture of mistrust between Iran and the US, and replace it by more constructive means of engagement.\textsuperscript{1005}

Additionally, while expressing regret for the US Embassy take-over and disapproval of the burning of US flags, President Khatami highlighted that “these slogans symbolise a desire to terminate a mode of relationship between Iran and America.”\textsuperscript{1006} His CNN interview, an illustration of his détente foreign policy agenda and his strategy of communication targeted towards “expatriate Iranians, the international media and the foreign intelligentsia,” was followed by several soft power diplomatic initiatives, including the visit of a US wrestling team to Tehran and the end of Iran’s support for Salman Rushdie’s assassination.\textsuperscript{1007}

The Khatami administration’s US policy was “successful” to the extent that the Clinton administration reciprocated and made symbolic gestures of its own.\textsuperscript{1008} President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright thus expressed “hope”

\textsuperscript{1004} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1005} Ansari, Confronting Iran, 154-55.
\textsuperscript{1006} A. Ansari, “Iranian Foreign Policy Under Khatami,” in Iran and Eurasia, ed. A. Mohammadi and A. Ehteshami (Reading: Ithaca, 2000), 44.
\textsuperscript{1007} Ibid. Riedel, “America and Iran,” 106.
\textsuperscript{1008} President Khatami was elected in May 1997, about six months after President Clinton was re-elected for a second term in office. The latter’s legitimacy was thus reaffirmed, giving him some leeway to explore new foreign policy options.
and “intrigue” regarding the possibility of better relations with Iran.\textsuperscript{1009} They also acknowledged the role the US had played in harming Iran’s interests. President Clinton famously declared in April 1999:

> Iran [...] has been the subject of quite a lot of abuse from various Western nations. And I think sometimes it’s quite important to tell people, “Look, you have a right to be angry at something my country [...] did to you 50 or 60 or 100 or 150 years ago.”\textsuperscript{1010}

Albright, for her part, declared in March 2000 that the 1953 coup against Prime Minister Mossadegh “was clearly a setback for Iran’s political development”.\textsuperscript{1011} High-level US officials thus publicly recognised Iran’s legitimate grievances with their government. The Clinton administration also took several practical steps to demonstrate its interest in transforming US-Iran relations, including adding the People’s Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK) to its list of terrorist organisations and relaxing trade sanctions to allow the sale of food and medicine in Iran.\textsuperscript{1012}

Several prominent individuals and groups were similarly inclined to pursue forward-leaning policies towards the Khatami regime in the early years of the Bush administration. While Secretary of State Colin Powell wished to “re-set the clock”, Richard Haass, the new Director of the Policy Planning Office, advocated a two-year delay for the renewal of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act so the administration could first complete a thorough assessment of US-Iran relations and the sanctions policy.\textsuperscript{1013} In the aftermath of 9/11, spontaneous demonstrations of solidarity with the

\textsuperscript{1009} Murray, \textit{US Foreign Policy}, 102, 105.  
\textsuperscript{1011} She also explained that “it is easy to see now why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs. Moreover, during the next quarter century, the United States and the West gave sustained backing to the Shah’s regime [...] 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.” See M. K. Albright, “US-Iran Relations,” Asia Society, 17 March 2000, accessed 10 April 2015, http://asiasociety.org/us-iran-relations.  
\textsuperscript{1012} Murray, \textit{US Foreign Policy}, 111. The MEK is an exiled Iranian cult dissident group that Saddam Hussein had invited into Iraq to fight on his behalf during the Iran-Iraq War. Between 1997 and 2012, the US designated the MEK a foreign terrorist organisation because of both its alleged killing of US personnel in Iran during the 1970s and its ties to Saddam Hussein. The group remains committed to the overthrow of the IRI.  
\textsuperscript{1013} Ibid., 119.
American people were seen within Iran.\textsuperscript{1014} Firm condemnations of the attacks astounded American and European officials, perhaps unsurprisingly since the regime was commonly accused of supporting terrorism. In addition, Iran was exonerated of involvement in the Khobar Towers bombing, which “brought a degree of closure to one of many outstanding issues in US-Iranian relations”.\textsuperscript{1015}

**Afghanistan: an opportunity for joint cooperation.** President Khatami’s call for dialogue and improved relations between Iran and the US was supplemented by the substantial assistance it brought to the US-led military operation against the Taliban in Afghanistan. In an unprecedented gesture, Iran allowed US aircraft to take off from its airfields and to offload cargo in the port of Chabahar.\textsuperscript{1016} It also agreed to rescue any American military personnel in distress within its sovereign territory.

Additionally, the regime played a critical role in the November 2001 Bonn Conference, during which the various parties negotiated the shape of the future Afghan government.\textsuperscript{1017} The Iranian delegation reportedly lamented the omission of commitments to hold democratic elections and cooperate with the international community on terrorism (shared values) in the first draft of the declaration to establish an interim government. Javad Zarif, Iran’s representative at the Conference, was also able to influence the composition of the interim government, especially the power sharing between the various factions. This demonstrated Iran’s historic ties with Afghanistan and its factions.

Iran’s provision of intelligence and military and political support to the US-led operation in Afghanistan took place before the nuclear-related sanctions were implemented against its nuclear programme. This point is noteworthy: Iran’s supportive policies were not prompted by coercive measures but by the (likely)

\textsuperscript{1015} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1016} “U.S.-Iranian Engagement,” International Crisis Group, 3.
assessment that both actors shared common interests in Afghanistan and that these could be better served through enhanced cooperation. Indeed, since the 1998 murder of eight of its diplomats and a journalist in Afghanistan, relations between Iran and the Taliban had been profoundly conflictual. From the Iranian leadership’s viewpoint, the Taliban were a threat to domestic and regional stability. In addition, hundreds of Afghan refugees had settled in Iran. The end of the Taliban regime would have thus eliminated a threatening regime on Iran’s eastern border, alleviated the burden of refugees within its territory and increased prospects of greater influence within Afghanistan.

Although Iran and the US quite successfully interacted and cooperated in Afghanistan, the January 2002 Axis of Evil speech considerably delegitimised the Khatami administration. It is nevertheless within this context that Iran submitted an unprecedented comprehensive negotiation proposal to the US.

**Iran’s May 2003 proposal.** Towards the end of President Bush’s first year in office, neoconservatives Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz and Vice-President Dick Cheney held increasing authority over the foreign policymaking machinery. US neoconservatives, who distinguished between forces of good and evil in the international system, believed that the US should act against those whose identities and interests were “morally abhorrent”.

Profoundly distrustful of international law and institutions, they advocated the use of military force to pursue the US’ national interests. Their beliefs were inscribed in the 2002 National Security Strategy, which identified hostile states against which the administration could use both pre-emptive and preventative actions. 9/11 had focused attention on the nexus of WMD proliferation (capabilities) and terrorism (intentions): “irredeemable rogue states and undeterrable terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, whose only constraints were practical and technical, not moral or

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1020 A pre-emptive policy is a response to an imminent threat. Its usage is consistent with international law. A preventative policy is an action taken before a potential threat materialises. Scholars and analysts have questioned the legal foundations of such an act (i.e. a dubious case of self-defence) as well as its implications for states’ relations.
political”. From the Bush administration’s perspective, a change of strategy was thus needed, “from a pre-9/11 emphasis on containment [and deterrence] to a post-9/11 emphasis on regime change.”

It is within this context, two months after the beginning of the US-led preventative war against Iraq, that the extremely wary Iranian regime delivered its most comprehensive negotiation proposal to the US. Not only had the US conducted regime change policies in Afghanistan and Iraq, and expanded its military presence on Iran’s western and eastern borders, but the Bush administration also never clarified whether it aimed to change Iran’s regime or conduct.

The May 2003 proposal only became public in 2006 and was reportedly drafted by Sadegh Kharrazi, Iran’s Ambassador to Paris, refined by Zarif, Iran’s permanent representative to the UN, and endorsed by Ayatollah Khamenei. It clarifies how the leadership viewed the contours of a strategic realignment between Iran and the US, and the conditions under which, and ways in which, Iran could renegotiate its role-identity vis-à-vis the US.

First, Iran was willing to address four key sources of US concern. These included its nuclear activities, relations with terrorist organisations, influence within Iraq and position on the Middle East Peace Process. Of particular significance were Iran’s offers to pressure Palestinian opposition groups, especially Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to cease violent actions against Israeli citizens, and to help transform Hezbollah into a political organisation. In effect, Iran indicated a willingness to transform its long-established resistance strategies and use its substantial political capital to improve the US’ (and Israel’s) security environments. Important too was Iran’s offer to work with the US to support Iraq’s political stabilisation and the process of democratisation. Iran, in other words, was inclined to use its enhanced soft power

1022 Ibid., 2.
1023 Ibid., 14-15. Iran also initially feared that post-Saddam Iraq would become a US ally, normalise relations with Israel and “act as security guarantor of Western interests in the Persian Gulf as well as the wider Middle East”, leaving it highly vulnerable and exposed. See Ehteshami, “The Foreign Policy of Iran,” 275, 277.
capabilities over post-Saddam Iraq to achieve common aims with the US. Such developments would, in turn, legitimise its *de facto* role and influence in its neighbour’s domestic politics. Finally, in accepting the Arab League’s Beirut Declaration, Iran would agree to formally recognise a two-state approach to the Israel-Palestine question and tacitly accept peace with the Jewish state. In sum, the May 2003 proposal signalled no less than Iran’s readiness to profoundly revise its foreign policy to render it much more amenable to the US.

Second, in return for these far-reaching actions, Iran expected the US to engage in “a dialogue in mutual respect” and halt its hostile behaviours. This included the demand to “rectify [the] status of Iran in the US” and desist from making references to “axis of evil” and “terrorism list”. Such depictions contradicted Iran’s self-image and were humiliating. Additionally, Iran’s demand for “a dialogue in mutual respect” must be understood in light of the Afghanistan experience.

From the leadership’s viewpoint, the US had pursued tactical cooperation since Iranian cooperation was only solicited where, and for as long as, it could benefit the US:

> Washington simply asked us to take specific steps without seeking to understand Iran’s overall position, as if it were possible to isolate the things we can do to help the U.S. from Iran’s broader regional role […] For us, that kind of dialogue symbolises the unequal relationship the U.S. has sought to impose under cover of mutual respect. Iran was invited to participate only to the extent it had something to offer to the U.S. – not because it had something to say.

As Wendt highlights, the realisation of joint gains between rivals entails “the risks of being ‘the sucker’” when cooperative practices are not rewarded. In the case of Afghanistan, Iran had failed to gain recognition of its legitimacy as a fully fledged regional actor.

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1025 Ibid.
1027 Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 416.
Furthermore, the May 2003 proposal included demands for an end to all US sanctions, respect for Iran’s legitimate national interests and role in Iraq, recognition of its legitimate security concerns in its neighbourhood, as well as active support against anti-Iranian terrorist organisations. In sum, it reflected the leadership’s long-term demand that its security concerns and geopolitical role be recognised by its significant Other.

Third, the proposal included a step-by-step approach to start the negotiation process and move towards a long-term, mutually acceptable agreement. This calibrated approach was revealing of Iran’s profound mistrust and insecurity towards the US: the negotiation structure had to be devised in such a way that the two sides would be compelled to move forward together. Within this context, Iranian concessions would not (and could not) be met by ever-increasing US pressures and demands which would undermine its corporate needs.

To conclude, the Khatami administration engaged in rhetorical and behavioural types of communication to signal its interest in less conflictual relations between Iran and the US. While this was a strong personal ambition of President Khatami, the geopolitical ramifications of the 9/11 terrorist attacks also led the regime to accelerate, diversify and strengthen its positive gestures towards the US. If Afghanistan represented an alliance-making opportunity on an issue of common interest, the 2003 US-led military intervention against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq heightened the need for a comprehensive, yet carefully calibrated, negotiation proposal. Indeed, in the midst of great turmoil and uncertainties regarding US policies in the Middle East and Central Asia in general, and towards Iran in particular, the regime offered a negotiation proposal that had the potential to create a profound strategic realignment of Iranian policies towards the US and its allies. Iran, however, clarified the specific conditions under which it would be willing to alter its behaviours. The leadership continued to view resistance of US pressures (and threats of future military intervention) as in its national interest until the world’s superpower changed its attitude (discourses) and policies (practices). Independence
and collective self-esteem could not be bargained away. I now turn to Iran’s US policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency, which pursued and deepened conciliatory gestures within an overall framework that emphasised red lines and resistance strategies.

**Shifting the Red Lines During the Ahmadinejad Presidency**

Iran’s US policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency broke away from its previous patterns in two chief ways. First, Iran made repeated offers of direct negotiations and held several high-level public and “off the radar” meetings with its significant Other. Second, domestic debates about Iran’s US policy and desirable US-Iran relations changed considerably. In particular, prominent Iranian political figures and institutions came to support and legitimate direct talks and less conflictual relations between the two actors. Despite these dual shifts (external engagement, internal public discussions), the nuclear issue, the Syrian conflict and the Obama administration’s dual-track diplomacy profoundly reified Iran’s grievances *vis-à-vis* the US.

**Offers of direct talks, high-level meetings and backchannel negotiations.**

While the Ahmadinejad presidency observed several direct encounters between Iranian and US officials, their public and private meetings were accompanied by Iran’s repeated signals that the Iranian leadership wished to engage the US.

President Ahmadinejad, whose rhetoric towards the US tended to be fiery and condemnatory, emerged as “probably the most eager closet advocate of resuming diplomatic relations with the Great Satan”. He wrote unprecedented letters to President Bush and President Obama and, in 2009, became the first President of the

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1028 The Bush administration rapidly rejected the Iranian negotiation proposal of May 2003. Tellingly, US policymakers and analysts did not believe the document was authentic and a serious Iranian overture. Secretary of State Powell said that the Bush administration did not view the proposal “as a big deal”, whilst his Deputy suggested that it was considered “too forward leaning” and “too good to be true” (cited in Murray, *US Foreign Policy*, 126). Their beliefs and expectations of the IRI were such that they were disinclined to believe the negotiation proposal. Furthermore, the conjunction of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 2002 US National Security Strategy, the initial success of the US-led military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and revelations of Iran’s concealed nuclear facilities and activities all meant that speaking to evil forces was no longer in the national interests of the US.

IRI to congratulate an American President on his election.  
He repeatedly articulated Iran’s readiness to hold discussions with the US, especially during his trips abroad. Following the 2010 NPT Review Conference, for example, he gave several high-profile interviews with renowned media channels in which he systematically stressed Iran’s interest in advancing direct talks. He also tried to implement measures to facilitate mutual contacts and better understanding. In 2008, he ordered the creation of an office within the Foreign Ministry specifically devoted to the US, and expressed interest in the prospect of opening an American interests section in Iran. In so doing, he alluded to an Iranian knowledge gap on the US. In September 2011, he also welcomed the establishment of a hotline between Iranian and American naval units in the Persian Gulf to avoid strategic misperceptions, thus signalling an interest in preventing conflictual relations, mutual mistrust and worst-case assumptions triggering rapid escalations of tensions.

The tone of President Ahmadinejad’s letters to President Bush and Obama demonstrated his continuing attempt to position himself as a spokesperson for developing nations. His 2006 letter to Bush was, for example, repeatedly characterised as “strange” in the Western media because of his moralistic tone on issues as varied as the motives for and management of the 2003 Iraq war, Guantanamo and secret prisons in Europe. In his 2008 congratulatory letter to President Obama, President Ahmadinejad also claimed to articulate worldwide popular aspirations when he encouraged Obama to profoundly change US foreign policy:

People in the world expect war-oriented policies, occupation, bullying, deception and intimidation of nations and imposing discriminatory policies on them and international affairs, which have evoked hatred toward American leaders, to be replaced by ones advocating justice, respect for human rights, friendship and noninterference in other countries’ affairs.

As previously argued, President Ahmadinejad repeatedly used foreign policy as a vector of influence for his own persona (an ethical leader) and Iran’s role within the international system (a prosecutor and a peace-seeking nation).

It was often unclear whether President Ahmadinejad’s US initiatives had received the Supreme Leader’s backing. As such, his relative activism may have been part of his determination to expand his domestic influence. However, President Ahmadinejad’s US agenda existed within a wider domestic context that witnessed repeated offers of direct engagement with the superpower and several meetings amongst high-level US and Iranian officials. As such, it is possible that President Ahmadinejad was given a freer hand than his predecessors to reach out to the US. This is an argument that Mousavian has put forward (and that Parsi echoes, see below):

In my view, even though the Iranian leadership was still sceptical about Obama’s ability to break many long-standing U.S. policies, it believed in his personal intentions. For that reason, Iran’s leaders decided to test the possibility of a breakthrough by granting a freer hand to Ahmadinejad in managing the relationship with Washington.1035

On several occasions between late 2005 and May 2006, Iran expressed an interest in pursuing direct talks with the US.1036 IAEA Director El Baradei transmitted a message from Ali Larijani, the Secretary of the SNSC, to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in May 2006, expressing this wish. Iraq, Afghanistan, Hezbollah and Hamas were all up for discussion, thus further illustrating Iran’s perception that regional security cooperation could be beneficial to both.1037 Slavin also reports in Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies that Larijani, whom she interviewed in early 2006, explained that Iran had “no limitation” to negotiating with the US as long as its rights were respected.1038 President Ahmadinejad, Mohammad Javad Jaffari and other political figures similarly emphasised during her visit to Iran that the regime was willing to enter broad-based negotiations with the Bush administration. Iran’s February 2006 referral to the UNSC and the adoption of Resolutions under Chapter

1036 Murray, US Foreign Policy, 134; Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 241-42.
1037 Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis, 241.
1038 Slavin, Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies.
VII of the UN Charter may have played an important role in these repeated offers of direct engagement.

In May and July 2007, US and Iranian diplomats met in Baghdad, marking their first public and formal talks since the rupture of diplomatic relations. Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Hassan Kazemi-Qomi and his American counterpart, Ryan Crocker, discussed the country’s deteriorating security situation. Iran proposed the creation of “a trilateral security mechanism that would include the US, Iraq, and Iran”, thus positioning itself as an influential actor in Iraq and tacitly recognising the US’ de facto role in its neighbour’s domestic politics. Tellingly, Qomi called the May meeting “the first step in the process of negotiations between the two sides”. In early April 2008, Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, also conveyed a proposal for comprehensive talks with the US through Iraqi President Jalal Talebani.

However, it was the nuclear issue that provided the basis for most bilateral and multilateral encounters between Iranian and US officials during the Ahmadinejad presidency. In July 2008, William Burns, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, attended the P5+1 negotiations with Iran, thus meaning that a US official was involved in a process that did not require Iran to end its enrichment activities up front. Additionally, on the sidelines of a meeting in Geneva in 2009, Jalili and Burns held bilateral talks, which marked the highest-level encounter in three decades between Iranian and US officials. Additional covert meetings in “the Hague, Geneva, Vienna, Sweden, Tehran, Munich and New York” reportedly followed.

Last but not least, shortly after President Rouhani’s coming to power, evidence came to light that, in mid-2012, the Obama administration had launched secret talks with Iran. The first undisclosed meeting took place in Oman in March 2013 and was followed by several more encounters until the November 2013 interim nuclear deal between the Rouhani administration and the P5+1. William Burns (Deputy Secretary of State and US lead negotiator for the Iran-P5+1 talks), Jake Sullivan (National Security Advisor to Vice-President Joe Biden) and Puneet Talwar (National Security Council Senior Director for Iran, Iraq and the Gulf States) led the US diplomatic effort. Less information is available on the Iranian delegation, which was led by Deputy Foreign Minister for European and American Affairs Ali Asghar Khaji. Khaji had served as Iran’s envoy to the EU from 2008 to 2012. In March 2009, he became the first Iranian official to meet with NATO in almost three decades to discuss Afghanistan.

These meetings between US and Iranian officials were reportedly prompted by the Obama administration’s message that the US “would be prepared to accept a limited Iranian domestic enrichment program as part of a nuclear agreement in which Iran would take concrete and verifiable steps to assure the world its nuclear program would remain exclusively peaceful”. As such, it is very likely that Iran’s positive response to this offer of secret engagement was prompted by the fact that the superpower recognised its right to peaceful nuclear energy.

It is also worth noting that the US and Iran went to some lengths to keep their backchannel meetings off the radar, a by-product of their three decades of

1045 “Obama Wrote Khamenei on ISIS Threat,” United States Institute of Peace.
1046 Ibid.
1047 Charbonneau and Hafezi, “Special Report.” According to Parsi, Burns had advocated frequent and regular meetings between Iran and the US during their first high-level talks in October 2009 since, in his view, episodic encounters were unproductive. See A Single Roll of the Dice, 129-30.
1049 Ibid.
animosity. Secret negotiations allow for bargaining to take place in the shadows and protect the negotiators from media attention and manifold pressures: “parties can make breakthrough agreements before subparties or third parties have a chance to mobilise to work against negotiation, agreement, or implementation.” Iranian and US officials likely sought to protect their exploratory talks from the spoiling effects of a highly politicised audience. Secret negotiations can also help parties reduce the uncertainties of entering into negotiations (i.e. problems of genuine intentions) and managing image problems (i.e. perceptions of weakness or surrender). As such, they enable parties “to maintain an adversarial public posture while secretly seeking ways to de-escalate the conflict.” Finally, top leaders can authorise greater creativity and flexibility in such negotiations. Although little information emerged regarding the content of these backchannel negotiations, they reportedly played a substantial role in enabling Iran and the P5+1 to reach the November 2013 nuclear agreement.

To conclude, Iran’s repeated assertions that it wished to engage with the US, and the manifold public and secret meetings between Iranian and US officials during the Ahmadinejad presidency, shifted the deeply institutionalised processes of interaction between the two nations. While direct encounters were allowed to take place, Iran simultaneously observed unprecedented domestic discussions on the taboo topic of US-Iran relations. Change was thus manifested both externally and internally through novel rhetorical and behavioural practices.

Public Discussions about desirable US-Iran relations. A potent sign that public debates on the question of Iran’s relations with the “Great Satan” had become somewhat less dramatic and more legitimate was demonstrated by the fact that every candidate in the Iranian presidential election of June 2009 agreed that direct talks with the US would be desirable. Additionally, officials close to the Supreme

1051 Rozen, “Three Days in March.”
1053 Ibid., 126.
1054 Ibid., 128.
Leader came to publicly advocate stronger US-Iran relations, often towards the end of the Ahmadinejad presidency.

Salehi and Velayati, two of his foreign policy advisors, thus expressed their support for reaching out to the US in February and March 2013 respectively. In an unprecedented gesture, Salehi wrote two letters to Ayatollah Khamenei in which he advised that Iran enter into “broad discussions” with the US.¹⁰⁵⁷ Velayati, for his part, publicly highlighted the benefits of possible US-Iran talks.¹⁰⁵⁸ Rouhani echoed those positions, clarifying that:

> It is not the Supreme Leader’s view that Iran and the United States should not have negotiations and relations until the Day of Judgment […] If there is a situation where the country’s dignity and interests are […] served, he will give permission for dialogue.¹⁰⁵⁹

Such arguments by high-level Iranian officials may have aimed to prepare (i.e. legitimise) domestic audiences for a potential shift in the Supreme Leader’s public stance on Iran’s US policy. Tellingly, Ayatollah Khamenei had increasingly emphasised the importance of showing flexibility in dealing with enemies, often referring to Imam Hassan and Ayatollah Khomeini as sources of inspiration.

Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security’s November 2012 report, “Reasons and Obstacles of a Military Attack by the Zionist Regime against Iran”, also indicated high-level deliberations over the positive consequences of better US-Iran relations. The report differentiated the perspectives and roles of Israel and the US on the nuclear issue. It argued that President Obama hoped for a diplomatic solution to the conflict, did not believe that Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme posed an imminent threat and favoured a dual-track approach.¹⁰⁶⁰ It also contended that Israel’s concerns vis-à-vis Iran’s nuclear programme were not related to ideological

¹⁰⁵⁷ Charbonneau and Hafezi, “Special Report.”
¹⁰⁵⁸ Rozen, “Iran Intensifies Debate on US Talks.”
¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid.
factors but geopolitical dynamics. Finally, it concluded that diplomacy was the best way forward and highlighted the benefits of negotiations with the US to resolve the nuclear issue. This report was significant since the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, whose head is approved by the Supreme Leader, reports directly to Ayatollah Khamenei. In other words, the Ministry had produced an intelligence assessment for Iran’s ultimate arbiter that advocated negotiations with the US.

Parsi notes that debates within Iran on the profoundly controversial topic of US-Iran relations took place after President Obama had repeatedly signalled his personal interest and political determination to transform US-Iran relations (i.e. a reactive position). However, if his diplomatic agenda intrigued and stirred discussion within Iran, no substantial transformation in the overall structure of the US-Iran culture of anarchy occurred during the Obama-Ahmadinejad era.

Iran and the Obama administration: failed hopes, reified grievances. When President Obama assumed office in January 2009, the US was in the midst of the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression. It was also struggling with two very unpopular wars with no end in sight in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the North Korean and Iranian nuclear challenges. Additionally, a global transition from concentrated power to multipolarity was occurring, which raised crucial questions as to the sustainability of US primacy and its future relations with rising powers.

Within this context, President Obama came into power with the ambition to conclude the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, and avoid getting dragged into international crises. A consistent element of his foreign policy approach, as Quinn argues, was

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1061 Marashi and Namazikhah, “Tehran Looks Ready to Tango.”
1062 Ibid.
1063 Parsi, A Single Roll of the Dice, 36.
1064 The 2008 US National Intelligence Council’s report estimated that the “most salient characteristics of the ‘new order’ will be the shift from a unipolar world dominated by the United States to a relatively unstructured hierarchy of old powers and rising nations, and the diffusion of power from state to nonstate actors […] although the United States is likely to remain the single most powerful actor, the United States’ relative strength – even in the military realm – will decline and US leverage will become more constrained”. See “Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World,” US National Intelligence Council, vi.
its “strategy of restraint and circumspection in the use of American power”, and “caution, self-restraint and consciousness of limits”.\textsuperscript{1066} He ended President Bush’s democracy and freedom agenda, and addressed the substantial reputational discredit of the US within the Middle East region (“To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect”).\textsuperscript{1067} He also emphasised the critical role of international institutions in regulating states’ behaviours and promoting international stability. Observing that “power, in an interconnected word, is no longer a zero sum game” and that “America cannot meet the threats of this century alone”, Obama advocated stronger international engagement to deal with issues of global interest.\textsuperscript{1068} A “rules-based international system” which would emphasise the rights and responsibilities of all nations would be most effective in serving US interests.\textsuperscript{1069}

On his Iran strategy, President Obama significantly distanced himself from his predecessor. He abandoned the “rogue state” categorisation and advocated engagement with those he called “outlier states”, famously declaring during his inaugural address that the US “will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist”.\textsuperscript{1070} In an August 2007 address to the Woodrow Wilson Center, the then Senator Obama had already articulated his favour for engaging adversaries:

> The lesson of the Bush years is that not talking does not work […] It’s time to turn the page on Washington’s conventional wisdom that agreement must be reached before you meet, that talking to other countries is some kind of reward […] President Kennedy said it best: “Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.” […] As President, I will work with our friend


\textsuperscript{1067} “President Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address,” The White House, 20 January 2009, accessed 12 April 2015, \url{http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address}. As Gerges notes, the images and information regarding Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, the CIA secret prisons and extraordinary renditions all considerably weakened the US’ reputation and the legitimacy of its War on Terror. Within this context, President Obama attempted to change perceptions that the US was either at war or seeking to weaken and dominate states within the Middle East region and the Muslim world. See \textit{Obama and the Middle East: The End of America’s Moment?} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 66.


\textsuperscript{1069} Ibid., 12. The 2010 US National Security Strategy, for example, advised that the US work through international institutions, traditional alliance partners and deepen its partnerships with other key centres of influence.

\textsuperscript{1070} “President Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address,” The White House.
and allies, but I won’t outsource our diplomacy in Tehran to the Europeans, or our diplomacy in Pyongyang to the Chinese. President Obama also eschewed regime change rhetoric and offered “a clear choice” to adversarial governments:

abide by international norms, and achieve the political and economic benefits that come with greater integration with the international community; or refuse to accept this pathway, and bear the consequences of that decision, including greater isolation.

He took several steps to signal his personal interest in engaging Iran. He wrote several letters to Ayatollah Khamenei (two in 2009, one in 2012) and reached out in an unprecedented move during his March 2009 Nowruz message. By releasing the video online with Persian subtitles, he was able to address Iranians directly and bypass any potential interference. He also became the first US President to acknowledge the IRI by its name. Finally, his call for engagement included no preconditions, no threats, and used the language of “honesty” and “mutual respect”, all of which could have appealed to the Iranian leadership.

Iran’s 2009 election crisis, however, cast a long shadow over President Obama’s agenda. In this respect, the diplomatic mismatches during the Ahmadinejad-Obama era were symptomatic of the two states’ history of missed opportunities. As Marashi contends, “The great tragedy of this relationship is that when one side was ready for a rapprochement, the other was not.” Murray makes a similar observation, labelling their history of misunderstandings and bad timing a “dialogue of the duff”.

1072 “National Security Strategy,” The White House, 11. As Litwak notes, the abandonment of the objective of regime change is “a key condition for coercive diplomacy because the target state’s leadership will perceive no self-interest in behaviour change if the US remains committed to [this] maximalist objective”. See Outlier States, 16.
1073 “Obama Wrote Khamenei on ISIS Threat,” United States Institute of Peace.
1074 Parsi, A Single Roll of the Dice, 63.
1076 Murray, US Foreign Policy, 152.
Iran’s electoral crisis presented complex immediate challenges to the recently elected Obama administration.\textsuperscript{1077} First, President Obama never received a response to his second letter to Ayatollah Khamenei, thus effectively delegitimising his personal attempt to engage the Supreme Leader.\textsuperscript{1078} Second, the upsurge of violence and repression, and the increasing securitisation of Iran’s domestic politics, reduced his administration’s room to manoeuvre. Not only was the Iranian regime conforming to its long-standing reputation as a violator of human rights, but the magnitude of the election protests also pointed to depleted legitimacy. Engaging Iran could be immoral and counterproductive, whilst applying pressure could further weaken the regime and strengthen the more democratic forces. Third, the Iranian regime’s sudden rejection of the October 2009 fuel swap deal “frustrated” the Obama administration and weakened its political capital.\textsuperscript{1079} A year and a half into his mandate, President Obama shifted to a pressure track that remained in place until the end of the Ahmadinejad presidency. In his January 2010 State of the Union Address, he made no mention of engagement and focused on Iran’s international isolation instead. In a September 2010 interview with BBC Persian, he distinguished between the Iranian regime and the Iranian people: “this is not a matter of us choosing to impose punishment on the Iranians. This is a matter of the Iranians’ government [sic] I think ultimately betraying the interests of its own people by isolating it further.”\textsuperscript{1080} Crucially, the Obama administration had come under substantial pressure from internal and external status quo actors.

\textsuperscript{1077} Election years also considerably narrowed the political space available for each administration to reach out to one another. While the Obama administration entered its presidential electoral campaign in the first half of 2012 and carried the momentum until November of that year, Iran began its own electoral campaign in the early part of 2013 until the June polls. Consequently, both administrations struggled to prioritise Iran-US talks or create the necessary political space for a potentially costly agreement. \textsuperscript{1078} In his first letter to Ayatollah Khamenei, which was sent via the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, President Obama had expressed his administration’s interest in direct dialogue with Iran on a broad range of mutual issues. The Supreme Leader responded to this letter within two weeks. \textsuperscript{1079} Rozen, “Three Days in March.” \textsuperscript{1080} “Interview of the President by Bahman Kalbasi, BBC Persian,” The White House, 24 September 2010, accessed 12 April 2015, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/09/24/interview-president-bahman-kalbasi-bbc-persian.
Domestically, Obama faced growing challenges from Congress, pro-Israel supporters and sceptics within his own administration.\(^\text{1081}\) Externally, the US was confronted by the acerbic criticisms and security concerns of its regional allies, especially Saudi Arabia and Israel.\(^\text{1082}\) Their regimes continuously framed Iran’s nuclear programme as a security threat and were greatly concerned about the Obama administration’s seeming willingness to allow the regime to retain its dual-use technologies. Additionally, they feared that the US “strategic pivot” towards the Asia-Pacific region would weaken its regional security commitments and lead it to retreat from the Middle East.\(^\text{1083}\) Last but not least, President Ahmadinejad’s statements also considerably complicated the Obama administration’s initial engagement agenda.\(^\text{1084}\)

Iranian officials reacted very negatively to the Obama administration’s dual-track diplomatic approach. In February 2013, for example, Ayatollah Khamenei declared: “You [the Americans] point the gun at Iran and say either negotiations or we pull the trigger! You should know that pressure and negotiations don’t go together, and the [Iranian] nation will not be intimidated by such things.”\(^\text{1085}\) From their perspective, this approach was disrespectful and counterproductive.\(^\text{1086}\) It was also the Obama administration that oversaw the enforcement of the most comprehensive sanctions against Iran, a development that President Obama himself framed as an achievement:

Through the power of our diplomacy, a world that was once divided about how to deal with Iran’s nuclear program now stands as one. The regime is more

\(^{1081}\) According to Oren, Congress often played the role of “bad cop” against the President’s “good cop” strategy on the sanctions issue. See “Why Has the United Stated Not Bombed Iran?,” 664.

\(^{1082}\) The Netanyahu administration was particularly virulent in its public criticisms of the Obama administration. It continuously emphasised that a nuclear-armed Iran was an existential threat to Israel, that Iran could not be allowed to proceed to (and then maintain) enrichment activities and that Israel reserved the right to act alone to preserve its security. In his September 2012 declaration at the UN General Assembly, the Israeli Prime Minister even produced a cartoon time bomb to illustrate his view that time was running out to curb Iran’s nuclear programme.

\(^{1083}\) WikiLeaks released several US diplomatic cables which showed the concerns and demands of officials within the Arab Gulf states. See the WikiLeaks cables in the bibliography as well as R. Colvin, “‘Cut off Head of Snake’ Saudis Told U.S. on Iran,” Reuters, 29 November 2010, accessed 12 April 2015, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/11/29/us-wikileaks-iran-saudis-idUSTRE6AS02B20101129.

\(^{1084}\) See for example “Interview of the President by Bahman Kalbasi, BBC Persian,” The White House.


isolated than ever before; its leaders are faced with crippling sanctions, and as long as they shirk their responsibilities, this pressure will not relent.\textsuperscript{1087} The US also pursued and expanded covert actions against Iran.\textsuperscript{1088} In particular, President Obama accelerated the Bush administration’s Olympic Games programme and “repeatedly used cyberweapons to cripple […] what until then could be accomplished only by bombing a country or sending in agents to plant explosives”.\textsuperscript{1089} The Obama administration also removed the MEK from its Foreign Terrorist Organisation List in September 2012. Within this context, Iran complained of a continued discrepancy between the US’ proclaimed intentions and its actual practices:

Various American officials and administrations usually act contrary to their declared stances […] Praising Iran for its help in establishing a national and democratic government in Afghanistan on the one hand and placing Iran in the so-called axis of evil on the other hand […] they violate all legal, moral and international laws by imposing the most unprecedented unilateral sanctions […] they collaborate in the assassination of our scientific elite or arrest our innocent citizens such as our university professors […] and after all these actions against the Iranian nation, they raise the issue of direct negotiations.\textsuperscript{1090}

Confronted by immoral practices and substantial differences between words and deeds, Iran unsurprisingly renewed its resistance strategies against the superpower (processes of self-assertion). For example, it established a Cyber Command headquarters under IRGC command and infected major Israeli and American

\textsuperscript{1087}“Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address,” The White House.

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companies in July and November 2012. It also conducted several naval exercises and military drills in the Strait of Hormuz, and emphasised significant progress in its indigenous defence industry.

Finally, the Obama and Ahmadinejad administrations opposed and alienated one other over the Syrian conflict. While the US firmly opposed President Bashar al-Assad and backed the opposition, Iran brought active (and growing) support to its long-time ally. The Iran-Iraq war inaugurated a strategic alliance between the two actors when President Hafiz al-Assad provided critical intelligence and military support to the revolutionary regime to outmanoeuvre its Ba'athist rival. After the war, Iran and Syria continued to cooperate and position themselves along an “Axis of Resistance” to the Western core powers and Israel. Their important ideological, financial and tactical backing of Hezbollah further bound their strategic interests together. Finally, 9/11, the War on Terror and the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq had resulted in frequent high-level visits between Iran and Syria. In an attempt to diversify Syria’s economic relations and avoid dependence on the West, President Bashar al-Assad had also pursued an eastward strategy that included Iran.

Iran and Syria thus shared significant ideological, financial and strategic interests. Should the Syrian regime fall or Syria disintegrate, Iran would likely find itself in a much more vulnerable geopolitical position. Consequently, Iran provided political,

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1091 Adib-Moghaddam persuasively remarks that the cyberwar against Iran proved to be “a form of enhanced US-Iranian technology transfer with unintended consequences [...] In the cyber-world as well, Iran and the US (and its allies) cannot escape interdependencies of structures, networks and systems.” See On the Arab Revolts, 173-74.


1094 For more information about the relations between Syria and Iran, see: A. Ehteshami and R. Hinnebusch, Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System (London: Routledge, 1997).

1095 Hunter, Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era, 109.

financial, military and intelligence support to the Syrian regime, which increased over
time, as the conflict changed and expanded into “an arena for the struggle of
external forces, all seeking to shift, through it, the regional balance of power in their
favour”.1097 During the Ahmadinejad presidency, Iran’s relations with non-state actors
proved crucial to keeping the Syrian regime in power.1098 Hezbollah, in particular,
considerably expanded its presence in Syria to fight against the takfiris (Sunni
fundamentalists).1099

Russia’s position also greatly benefited Iran since it opposed a forcible external
intervention, warning against the presence of a credible alternative to the regime and
the rise of Sunni extremist groups within and beyond Syria. As such, Russia used its
veto right at the UNSC to avert any Resolution that could pave the way for a military
intervention in Syria. Russia also repeatedly welcomed Iran’s involvement in the
international conferences on Syria; a position strongly opposed by the US.1100 As
previously mentioned, Syria featured in Iran’s negotiation proposals to the P5+1 from
2011 onwards. The regime claimed that it could (and should) play an important role
in resolving the conflict and offered several initiatives in the form of transition plans
and peace conferences.1101 It also attempted to reach out to regional states,
including Brotherhood-led Egypt.1102

In sum, the Syrian conflict acted as a platform where the US and Iran vigorously
opposed one another. While Iran condemned US interference in Syria’s sovereign
affairs, the US rejected the rogue state that, once again, supported acts of terror and

1097 Ibid., 111.
1098 See for example S. Al-Salhy, “Iraqi Shi’ite Militants Fight for Syria’s Assad,” Reuters, 16 October
idUSBRE89F0PX20121016.
1099 “Syria’s Metastasising Conflicts,” International Crisis Group, Middle East Report no. 143, 27 June
1100 T. Grove, “Russia Says Iran Must Take Part in Proposed Syria Talks,” Reuters, 16 May 2013,
1101 See for example “Syria VP Says Neither Side Can Win War,” Al Jazeera, 17 December 2012,
1102 B. Slavin, “US Should Heed Russia, Include Iran in Syria Talks,” Al Monitor, 17 May 2013,
violation of human rights both directly and via proxy groups. At the same time, the Syrian conflict made Iran and the US more interdependent, a point I now turn to.

Concluding Observations: Iran’s Dependency on the US

I have argued that the US was a crucial actor against which the IRI defined its identity and interests. For over three decades, Iran perceived the superpower as the main threat to its national independence and to a just and stable international system. The US never ceased to be a prominent factor of concern for the leadership, who systematically responded to its attempts at isolation and containment with multipronged strategies of resistance and deterrence. I have also noted that the US-Iran culture of anarchy acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy since their discourses and practices often confirmed and reified their grievances and animosity towards one another. Their mutual mistrust, insecurity and scepticism made the reproduction of their collective knowledge all the more likely, as did the fact that their enmity was profoundly institutionalised in individual and collective consciousness, routinised practices and status quo interests. I have also highlighted that, beyond the vitriolic discourses and resistance strategies, the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad administrations both repeatedly attempted to lessen the spoiling effects of their conflictual relations and pursue forward-leaning strategies. Although President Khatami engaged in more conciliatory rhetorical communication, the question of US-Iran relations shifted more deeply during the Ahmadinejad administration.

I suggest that Iran’s Janus-faced interests and strategies towards the US must be understood in light of its discursive and strategic dependency on the superpower. Developments within its regional environment and the global system made the latter increasingly prominent. Furthermore, the Supreme Leader, whose position must be integrated to contextualise the ebb and flow of Iran’s US foreign policy, increasingly moved away from Manichean conceptions of the “Great Satan” and Iran’s national interests vis-à-vis the US.

A Situation of Discursive Dependency
Following the Revolution, Iran and the US opposed narratives that devalued the other and asserted their own legitimacy and moral authority.\textsuperscript{1103} The US, for example, continuously positioned itself as a defender of international peace and security, and the leader of the free world, standing against tyrannical regimes and terrorist groups. Iran’s “Westophobic” and “anti-Western” discourses, for their part, represented the West as “satanic, unreliable, crafty, suppressive, and terrorizing”, and enabled the regime to define itself as “divine, reliable, honest, emancipatory, and reassuring”.\textsuperscript{1104} Such dichotomous representations helped assert positive self-images.

In so doing, however, Iran became “entirely dependent on invented images of the US in particular and the west more generally”: “the political independence of Iran [was] achieved via a discursive dependence” on the US.\textsuperscript{1105} Ansari, whose work has partly investigated Iran’s (construction of its) history and relationship with the West, highlights that the US became “the priority for the revolution”:

\begin{quote}
[For] all the success of the practical eviction, the Islamic Republic now found itself defined against the very foe it had sought to remove. Arguably, it was the beginning of a mutual obsession. The point to be made, and regularly overlooked, is that whether as friend or foe, Iran enjoyed an intimate relationship with the West and its epitome, the United States. The counter hegemony that it had sought to construct was defined and hence related to the hegemonic challenge posed by the West.\textsuperscript{1106}
\end{quote}

In chapter 4, for example, I highlighted that Ayatollah Khameini had defined Iran’s ethical principles (i.e. normative condemnation of nuclear weapons) and scientific interests in juxtaposition to the US. The Supreme Leader had thus found it relevant to explain Iran’s interests by comparing and contrasting its position with its significant Other. More generally, Warnaar observes that the representation of the US in Iran’s foreign policy discourse makes possible both its “identification as its opposite (moral, democratic, etc…),” and its “identity as resistant and an example to other countries.


\textsuperscript{1105} Adib-Moghadam, \textit{On the Arab Revolts}, 169.

\textsuperscript{1106} A. Ansari, “Civilizational Identity and Foreign Policy in Iran,” in \textit{The limits of Culture}, ed. B. Shaffer, 256-57.
Iran can only be resistant and defensive is there is something to be resisted; Iran can only defend the victims if there is a culprit.”

This discursive dependence on the US created a dilemma for Iran. The world’s superpower was able to profoundly shape narratives of the IRI as a rogue state with abhorrent internal and external policies, and these depictions contradicted Iran’s self-perception as a legitimate actor and a force of good within the international system. Mousavian alludes to this situation when he writes that Iranians “fear deception and humiliation by what they perceive as a powerful propaganda machine, without any opportunity to defend itself or confront such propaganda on an equal footing.”

As such, Iran was discursively dependent on a state that recurrently humiliated and disregarded its identity and interests (negative self-images). In this respect, Farhi and Lotfian argue that Iran remained a “conflicted aspiring power”:

Throughout the twentieth century and more so since the 1979 Revolution, Iran has not been a “comfortable” state as its legitimacy and even survival have continuously been challenged by [...] external players perceived to have alternatively had Iran’s containment, isolation, or at times destabilization and disintegration on their agenda. This lack of comfort has kept the general nationalistic emphasis on political sovereignty, military preparedness, Persian identity, and now Islamic identity.

Iran struggled to be recognised and integrated as a legitimate and constructive power because it was not acknowledged and treated as such by the world’s superpower. The transformation of Iran’s international status thus strongly depended upon a shift in US discourses, attitudes and behaviours towards the IRI. This situation of dependency explains why Iranian officials systematically stressed that the US needed to review its rhetoric and attitude towards Iran. It also justified Iran’s insistence that the US recognise its national interests, security concerns, and place and role within its regional environment.

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1107 Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad*, 104.
1109 Farhi and Lotfian, “Iran’s Post-Revolution,” 117.
1110 Not being as discursively dependent, the US placed more importance on Iran’s behaviour (e.g. ending its support for terrorist organisations).
De Facto Strategic Dependency, Rising Interdependence and Common Fate

Despite their absence of formal diplomatic relations and considerable geographical distance, Iran and the US never ceased to take each other into account. For four crucial reasons, they continuously had to assess whether their counterpart’s strategies would challenge, increase or reduce their own (and their allies’) relative security, a danger that was particularly acute for Iran in light of the power discrepancy between the two actors.

First, as previously highlighted, Iran was repeatedly affected by the US’ containment policy which severely constrained its involvement in the regional security architecture and the international economic and security environment. From the Iranian leadership’s viewpoint, the nuclear issue also illustrated the US’ considerable influence over both international institutions (e.g. IAEA, UNSC) and third parties (e.g. EU-3).

Second, the US and Iran both advocated strong involvement in world affairs, particularly within the Middle East region. Importantly, the US was likely to remain the most prominent state actor in the international system for years to come. While it faced increasing constraints to its ability to lead and shape outcomes, the US’ soft and hard power capabilities remained unmatched. Additionally, US officials emphasised that the US will continue to act, both directly and indirectly, in Iran’s regional environment. As Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta declared in 2011:

The Middle East is a vital interest to the United States, and we will not let our commitment to its security and stability waver. That is why we maintain a significant military presence throughout the region to defend our partners, to counter aggression, and to maintain the free flow of resources and commerce that are so vital to the fragile global economy.

Despite global power shifts, the US was thus expected to sustain its direct and indirect influence within Iran’s neighbourhood in order to attend to its own and allies’

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1112 See G. J. Ikenberry, “The Illusion of Geopolitics,” Foreign Affairs 93, no. 3 (May 2014): 80-90. Ikenberry notes that the US had decisive advantages over all other states in the international system. Whilst its wealth and technological advantages remained far out of reach, its economy was strengthened by massive new natural gas resources; all of which allows the US to maintain a global military presence and credible security commitments.

Iranian officials would thus continue to be preoccupied with the US and to define Iran’s national interests reactively, in light of the superpower’s behaviours.

Third, Iran is located in an area of great strategic interest to the US. It has, for example, direct access to the Caspian Sea, the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea. It also shares borders with Iraq and Afghanistan, and substantially increased its relations with their respective central authorities and subnational groups in the aftermath of the military interventions of the early 2000s. Iran was thus in a de facto position to disrupt the flow of oil exports and subvert regional stability and US interests if it so wished.

Fourth, Iran and the US shared several de facto security challenges, such as nuclear non-proliferation, energy security, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and counterterrorism. Although the US and Iran may have disagreed on the end goals or strategies to deal with such threats, they both had strong interests in containing and reducing them. During the Ahmadinejad presidency, for example, Iran and the US both aimed to maintain a unitary Iraqi state powerful enough to withstand internal and external shocks, but not strong enough to pose a renewed threat to its neighbours. From Iran’s viewpoint, the US also had to recognise the inevitability and legitimacy of its role and influence, given the two states’ geographical proximity, shared history, cultural and religious ties, and economic and commercial links. In Afghanistan, Iran and the US both aimed to maintain the country’s stability and keep the Taliban at bay. They also sought to curtail the flow of drug trafficking, within and across Afghan borders. This was a particularly pressing issue for Iran, which held the world record for drug use in 2012. As was the case with Iraq, Iran also expected the US

1115 Marashi, “Obama’s Moment of Truth on Iran.”
1116 “U.S.-Iranian Engagement,” International Crisis Group, 10, 12.
1117 The Khatami administration had suggested that the fight against drugs be an element of the dialogue among civilisations between Iran and the West. In February 2011, the Ahmadinejad administration similarly attempted to use Afghanistan as a platform for further cooperation, asking Marc Grossman, the US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, to visit Iran in order to discuss this matter. For more information see J. B. Christensen, “Changing Drug Policies: Institutionalising a New Social Order,” in Navigating Contemporary Iran: Challenging Economic, Social and Political Perceptions, eds. E. Hooglund and L. Stenberg (London: Routledge, 2012), 142; B. Slavin, “Former Iranian Negotiator Faults his Nation’s Nuclear Diplomacy,” Al Monitor, 6 June 2012, accessed 10 April 2015.
to recognise its legitimate role and influence in Afghanistan, a country it shared a 936-kilometre-long border with and it long viewed as a vector of cultural, economic and political influence throughout Central Asia. On the question of the Syrian war, Iran’s inclusion in the multilateral negotiations increasingly appeared to be a *sine qua non* and started to become more of a political reality during the Rouhani administration:

Keeping Tehran from Geneva will not lessen its role in Damascus [...] the West ought to overcome its reluctance to include Iran. In any event, the negotiations themselves are to be held among Syrians with the UN acting as mediator; keeping Tehran out would be tantamount to denying the unmistakable fact of its involvement, not altering it.\(^{1118}\)

Iran and the US thus shared country-specific issues and broad transnational challenges. These *de facto* realities created “dilemmas of common interests” (Wendt’s concept of “interdependence”) and “aversion” (notion of “common fate”), which increased their “objective vulnerability and sensitivity [...] to each other”.\(^{1119}\)

Crucially, the above analysis of Iran’s US policy during the Khatami and the Ahmadinejad presidencies demonstrates that geopolitical developments, particularly the US’ deeper penetration in the Middle East and Central Asia post-9/11 and the nuclear issue, had reduced Iran’s incentives to hang on to egoistic identities and conflict-ridden relations. Instead, they had created a preference for reduced tensions and (conditional and carefully calibrated) cooperation on several issues. This development was more clearly visible during the Ahmadinejad presidency, when high-level officials spoke of Iran-US relations in novel terms. In a nutshell, better understanding of one another’s interests, priorities and concerns, and potential cooperation on issues of common interests, could reduce Iran’s security dilemmas and help bridge the gap between Iran’s perceptions and understandings of its legitimate interests on the one hand, and its ability to play a role commensurate with its geopolitical aspirations on the other. A less security-oriented relationship could pave the way for greater regional and international integration and feed “positive self-images”. As such, I agree with Warnaar that Iran’s foreign policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency strongly focused on developing and strengthening relations

\(^{1118}\) “Syria’s Metastasising Conflicts,” International Crisis Group, 39.

\(^{1119}\) Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation,” 389.
with “like-minded states in an effort to circumvent US unilateralism and build an alternative power structure.” I dispute, however, the observation that Iranian officials acted “within the framework of a world without US hegemony.” Iran’s relative discursive and strategic dependence on the US strongly influenced and shaped how it defined its national interests. More specifically, this dependency situation provided the context for Iran’s repeated forward-leaning strategies towards its significant Other, whose de facto influence increased over time. However, Iran’s US policy must also be analysed in light of the Supreme Leader’s position, not least because he possessed ultimate authority over the country’s foreign policy.

**Ayatollah Khamenei’s Beliefs and Calculations**

Ayatollah Khamenei held largely negative views of the US, a fact which must be understood in light of his direct knowledge and experience of Iran’s significant Other:

He lived through – as a participant, not an observer – every dark chapter he cites in his speeches, from the hostage crisis to the Axis of Evil speech. His skepticism of U.S. intentions, rightly or wrongly, is a product of the four decades of baggage he carries on his shoulders.

From Khamenei’s perspective, the US had repeatedly harmed Iran’s national interests and proved “wicked” and “unreliable.” In his 2009 response to President Obama’s Nowruz message, he thus recalled that “Before the Revolution, Iran was in the hands of the United States” and, since the IRI’s inception, the US had supported domestic dissidents, confiscated Iranian property with no compensation, “showed the green light” to Saddam Hussein’s war against Iran, destabilised the Persian Gulf region, unconditionally supported “the cruel Zionist regime”, and “insulted the Iranian nation, the Iranian government, and the Iranian president, over and over again”.

As Ganji observes, Ayatollah Khamenei rapidly concluded that the US was determined to overthrow the IRI “whether through internal collapse, democratic

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1120 Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad*, 127.

1121 Ibid., 88.


revolution, economic pressure, or military invasion”.¹¹²⁵ He repeatedly drew parallels with the Soviet Union, whose collapse he partly attributed to US manipulation of the media, “cultural invasion”, and political and economic pressures.¹¹²⁶ As such, he remained profoundly concerned about the capabilities of US soft power and the threat of Western cultural invasion.

The Supreme Leader also held the US responsible for much of the regional and global instability and insecurity. The Centre for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei has an entire section on “The Supreme Leader’s View of Global Arrogance”, which seeks to unpack its meaning, tools, and the rationale and means for fighting it.¹¹²⁷ The American government, not its people, is identified as “the symbol of arrogance” and “an enemy” of Iran. The superpower is condemned for considering itself “above justice”, pursuing “unfair” and “discriminatory” policies, and using its disproportionate capabilities to “bully”, “humiliate” and interfere in other states’ sovereign affairs, even as it preaches democracy and human rights.¹¹²⁸ Violation of states’ sovereignty is a major source of concern and contention for the Supreme Leader.

However, despite his criticisms and profound mistrust of the US, Ayatollah Khamenei seemingly came to view engagement as neither necessary nor intrinsically negative: dialogue was “a function of political circumstance rather than ideological purity”.¹¹²⁹ His statements became more nuanced and less Manichean over time:

The discourse depicting the United States as an absolute enemy with which it would be absurd and naive even to think about negotiating has given way to a discourse about the United States as a potential interlocutor with which it might be possible to discuss acceptable terms of negotiations over such issues as the nuclear program and security in Iraq. It appears that for Khamenei, the United States has gone from being the monstrous absolute other to a powerful regional presence with a domestic political system plagued by the painful consequences of two recent failed military adventures in the Middle East.¹¹³⁰

¹¹²⁶ Ibid.
¹¹²⁸ Ibid.
In a 2008 speech in Yazd, Khamenei thus declared that “relations with America have no benefit for the Iranian nation now [...] undoubtedly, the day the relations with America prove beneficial for the Iranian nation I will be the first one to approve that.”\(^{1131}\) Unless his core and non-negotiable expectations of how the US ought to treat and interact with Iran were met, the country’s national interests were better served by its long-standing policies of resistance and defiance. One interviewee echoed this position: “If principles and values are respected, then a relationship [between Iran and the US] could exist. However, we’ve lived without a relationship with the US for 35 years.”\(^{1132}\)

The Supreme Leader’s response to President Obama’s 2009 Nowruz message epitomised this nuanced position. While he expressed interest in the US’ offer of engagement, Khamenei voiced his scepticism and questioned the President’s sincerity: “They say that they extended their arm towards Iran. What kind of a hand? If it is an iron hand covered with a velvet glove, then it will not make any good sense.”\(^{1133}\) In questioning whether President Obama would be able to transform the US’ Iran policy, he also implicitly acknowledged the presence of internal and external status quo actors: “I would like to say that I do not know who makes decisions for the United States, the President, the Congress, elements behind the scenes?”\(^{1134}\) Within this context, he asked that the promises of change be followed up and supplemented by concrete actions:

Where is the change? What has changed? [...] Has your enmity toward the Iranian nation changed? What signs are there to support this? Have you released the possessions of the Iranian nation? Have you removed the cruel sanctions? Have you stopped the insults, accusations, and negative propaganda against this great nation and its officials? [...] this change cannot be in words only. It should not come with unhealthy intentions. You may say that you want to change policies, but not your aims, that you will change tactics. This is not change. This is deceit.\(^{1135}\)

In sum, verbal communication and stage management were insufficient: words needed to be supplemented by deeds. Khamenei’s comment that “We do not have any experience with the new US President and Government. We shall see and

\(^{1131}\) Cited in Sadjapour, “Reading Khamenei,” 18.
\(^{1132}\) Author interview with Iranian official 1 based in an Embassy in Europe, 15 January 2013.
\(^{1133}\) Cole, “OSC: Khamenei’s Speech Replying to Obama.”
\(^{1134}\) Ibid.
\(^{1135}\) Ibid.
judge. You change, and we shall change as well”, also confirmed Iran’s relatively reactive position vis-à-vis the US. The superpower was expected to make the first move since Iran required strategic guarantees. The US could not (be allowed to) pursue tactical cooperation and self-interested policies again. According to Mousavian,

In [the Supreme Leader’s] eyes, seeking reconciliation with the US before ensuring that their enmity has changed to a real desire for a mutual, respectful relationship, would ultimately end in Iran’s humiliation and would be interpreted as our weakness and our fear of the Americans.

As an Iranian official also explained, Ayatollah Khamenei had “more than fifty years of experience dealing with the US, including before the Revolution. It’s therefore not easy to deceive him, it’s also not easy to convince him. If you want to convince him, you need clear signals.”

In his 2009 response to President Obama, the Supreme Leader thus warned against the dual-track diplomatic strategy that was then being considered, which led Farhi to observe that

Clearly from his view, engagement in talks must be accompanied with some concrete steps that show Iran that the United States is interested in a process and give and take and not a process based on “either deception or intimidation.” Deception because the objective remains the same while the softer language is a mere tactical change. Intimidation because talks are combined with further squeeze of Iran. He leaves no doubt that further squeezing of Iran leading up to talks and during the talks will be seen as a sign that President Obama’s rhetoric of change is a farce. As such the speech should really be seen as a carefully calibrated attempt to shape the debate in Washington on how to go about talking to Iran [sic].

From the Supreme Leader’s viewpoint, Iran needed to know whether the US was seeking behavioural or regime change. This can be understood in light of its past experience with the US (e.g. covert actions) and its deeply held belief that the

1136 Ibid.
1138 Mousavian, Iran and The United States, Kindle edition.
1139 Author interview with Iranian official 3 working in an Embassy in Europe, 30 April 2013.
superpower never accepted the identity of the IRI. Additionally, as I explained in chapter 2, states have needs by virtue of their corporate identities and must be certain that their individuality will be respected (i.e. fear of being engulfed). Iranian officials thus needed to know that the US would treat Iran as an equal state and exercise “self-restraint”. As Wendt highlights, while this is the “permissible cause” that enables the emergence of collective identity formation, it is crucially important because it signals the Other’s “respect for difference”.

In interview, an Iranian official thus emphasised that “interference” was Iran’s biggest concern with the US:

This is the first and most important issue for Iran and it is historically rooted [...] we have a deeply rooted negative impression of foreign interference in Iranian domestic politics. Many people also say that Iran is surrounded by the US; sometimes we say the US is our biggest neighbour. I don’t think this is our biggest concern. This can be negotiated and dealt with. The US is present in Iraq and Afghanistan. We do not agree with this but we have accepted it. Their presence is not directly against us and we can’t do anything about it. But our main concern, I think, is interference in Iranian politics because if it happens, it has some consequences. It may lead to disintegration, invasion, etc.

Domestic political calculations also likely affected Ayatollah Khamenei’s public stance on the US in two chief ways. First, his long-standing preference for balancing a multiplicity of competing interests and preferences may explain why he allowed forward-leaning strategies to be pursued whilst not fully supporting them in public. This carefully calibrated positioning enabled him to preserve his political capital regardless of how developments in US-Iran relations fared.

Second, for purposes of domestic legitimacy, the Supreme Leader would need to be able to both claim ownership of any substantial development in US-Iran relations and frame it as a success for the IRI. No transformation of one of the most central aspects of Iran’s identity and interests since the Revolution (i.e. enmity with the “Great Satan”) could occur unless it was able to strengthen Ayatollah Khamenei’s own personal and the system’s legitimacy. As such, domestic considerations, including Khamenei’s relations and political brinkmanship with the President, likely affected whether he could allow policies of rapprochement to occur and/or move forward. Tellingly, Iranian officials were able to offer bilateral talks and engage

\[1142\] Wendt, *Social Theory*, 357-63.
\[1143\] Author interview with Iranian official 3 working in an Embassy in Europe, 30 April 2013.
directly with their US counterparts at a time when the Majles, the Presidency, the judiciary, and the military and security establishments were all in the control of the more conservative factions, and the reformist proponents of “the dialogue among civilizations” were isolated. The US-Iran backchannel negotiations from 2012 onwards may also have been useful to Ayatollah Khamenei in preventing the then isolated and challenging President Ahmadinejad from attempting to dominate the headlines.

To conclude, the more conciliatory and forward-leaning aspects of Iran’s Janus-faced US policy showed that, from the leadership’s perspective, reduced threat perceptions and increased cooperation within an overall dialogue of mutual respect could help strengthen Iran’s collective need for self-esteem and relative security position, and pave the way for the recognition and acceptance of its national interests, security concerns and geopolitical role. In its 2009 study, the International Crisis Group highlighted that the leadership envisioned a wide-ranging strategic dialogue with the US which would cover both bilateral and regional issues, as well as targeted cooperation on specific issues, all of which would occur against the backdrop of enduring competition and differences.  

In other words, Iran aspired to neither the full normalisation of US-Iran relations nor the abandonment of its Third World and anti-status quo identity and behavioural commitments. Instead, it sought long-term dialogue to minimise the risks of confrontation, isolation and humiliation on the one hand, and to advance areas of mutual interest on the other. Additionally, Iran’s attempts to expand relations with energy-hungry states were not “a temporary stopgap as Iran await[ed] restored relations with the U.S. and the end of sanctions; it reflect[ed], rather, a strategic decision aimed at bolstering independence vis-à-vis the West.” The more partners Iran had, the more it could balance external threats and engage with the US on a more equal basis (i.e. negotiate from a position of strength).

1145 Ibid., 15.
CHAPTER 7
Conclusion

My interest and exploration of the polarising subject of Iran’s foreign policy began with the nuclear issue. I became intrigued by the fact that the Western and Iranian narratives had continuously evolved alongside one another, depicting the nature of Iran’s nuclear programme and its significance for international security in diametrically opposed ways. While Iran’s nuclear weapons ambitions were taken for granted by a wide range of policymakers, academics and analysts, Iranian officials persistently insisted that their nuclear programme was peaceful and in line with their international obligations.

Additionally, while the former portrayed Iran’s nuclear activities as the latest in a long line of challenges posed by a profoundly subversive regime for regional and international stability, Iranian officials persisted in their claims that the IRI was the victim of political conspiracies. These parallel narratives became more entrenched during the Ahmadinejad presidency, when Iran’s domestic politics and foreign policy appeared to be under the firm control of ideologically zealous and anti-Western forces. Within this context, my interest was also strengthened by the fact that the unilateral and multilateral sanctions seemed to have little effect on the regime’s nuclear calculus. In sum, the two broad parallel narratives that shaped the nuclear issue produced policy results that widened the gap between the Iranian position and that of its nuclear opponents.

Both the strong assumption that Iran was covertly pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions and the depiction of its nuclear activities as a threat to international security were strongly conditioned by the IRI’s rogue status (see chapter 1). The contention that Iran’s foreign policy behaviour had repeatedly defied pragmatic logic was strongly attributed to the resilience of a range of ideological factors that had shaped the Revolution and the raison d’être of the IRI. This ideological legacy was, in turn, upheld differently and with varying intensity by various Iranian forces and factions, thus explaining the ebb and flow of its more or less rational foreign policy behaviour since the late 1970s. From the viewpoint of many policymakers and
analysts, the diplomatic language and policy agenda of the Khatami and Ahmadinejad administrations had exposed these contrasts, thus justifying the growing securitisation of Iran’s nuclear activities from the summer of 2005 onwards. Indeed, while the reformist administration appeared to prioritise reintegration in the international system and lesser conflictual relations with Iran’s neighbours and the international system’s core powers, the principlist regime seemed anxious to revive revolutionary principles. From the viewpoint of many policymakers, academics and think-tank analysts, the threatening nexus of revolutionary intentions (that the Ahmadinejad administrations embraced) and deadly capabilities (that Iran’s nuclear programme and developments posed) needed to be contained and curtailed.

I argued that the Iranian nuclear issue highlighted that the juxtaposition of ideologically and pragmatically driven foreign policy behaviour was profoundly problematic, both theoretically and empirically. At the theoretical level, this dichotomisation tended to produce decontextualised analyses that judged Iran’s rationality of action against sets of predefined expectations. Whether or not, and the extent to which, Iran diverged away from these requirements determined how pragmatic and optimal its foreign policy behaviour was. In the case of Iran’s nuclear policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency, for example, the regime’s non-compliance with the demands of the EU-3/P5+1, the IAEA and the UNSC, and its decision to endure increasingly stringent unilateral and multilateral sanctions, demonstrated that Iran was behaving ideologically and sacrificing Iran’s national interests. Left unexplored were questions pertaining to how and why resistance to these demands, and how and why acceptance of the material costs of this strategy, constituted Iran’s interests. Equally troubling were the practical consequences of this paradigm: while Western policymakers widely attributed Iran’s non-compliance strategy with the UNSC resolutions to the strength of ideological factors, they were left with few options other than a military intervention or the pursuit of a quasi-default sanctions strategy that was visibly failing to curb Iran’s nuclear programme.

I contended that an approach that made Iran’s identity and interests a central subject of enquiry would be better placed to analyse and understand why the regime pursued its nuclear programme despite increasing and objectively painful economic and political consequences. It would also shed much-needed light on how (and why)
Iran both conceived of the range of opportunities and constraints created by the nuclear issue, and how it sought to respond to them. This thesis therefore set to examine how Iran understood and pursued its national needs and interests in the context of the nuclear issue.

I was particularly interested in how Iran defined the situation, framed its objectives and policy decisions, and attempted to legitimise its stance. It also appeared that Iran pursued a complex nuclear policy that was neither limited to, nor solely defined *vis-à-vis*, its interaction with its EU-3/P5+1 negotiation partners and the IAEA. I focused extensively on how and why Iran sought to generate external support for its nuclear programme, and how and why it attempted to transform this issue into multifaceted geopolitical opportunities. A Wendtian-constructivist approach enabled me to identify and contextualise the motives that justified Iran’s unaltering commitment to its nuclear programme, especially full fuel-cycle activities, as well as its defiant responses to successive UNSC resolutions and rounds of sanctions. It also allowed me to shed light on certain seemingly contradictory aspects of Iran’s nuclear policy, particularly with respect to both the instantiation of its culture of mistrust and animosity *vis-à-vis* the Western core powers and its repeated expressions of interest for strategic cooperation on issues of mutual interests.

A key underlying rationale of this thesis thus lay in the need to depart from realist-type approaches which struggled to both account for Iran’s rationality of action (questioning the very premises of its foreign policy behaviour instead), and capture the multifaceted aspects of its interests and strategies (focusing on its anti-status quo intentions instead). As such, chapter 2 was devoted to discussion of Wendt’s social constructivist approach in order to highlight how and why his argument challenges neo-realists’ assumptions and provides valuable insights into states’ behavioural logics.

States’ identities have “subjective” and “intersubjective” qualities: they are rooted in processes that are both related and unrelated to interaction with other actors. I highlighted that the IRI’s subjective “type identity” acted as both a source of pride and anxiety, in large part due to its enemy “role identities” with the Western core powers, the US especially. The concept of “role identity” was central to this thesis.
since it underlines the argument that states’ behaviour towards their Others depends on the perceived meaning of their beliefs about them. This argument must nevertheless be nuanced for not all Others are equally significant in constituting a state’s identity: power relations and dependency relationships play an important role. This is a point I developed in chapter 6, when I argued that Iran’s Janus-faced US policy could be explained largely in light of its discursive and strategic dependence on the superpower.

Furthermore, the Wendtian-constructivist perspective sheds light on the causal and constitutive dynamics between identity and interests: the former defines the latter since it shapes preferences and conceptions of legitimate (and unacceptable) policy options. This further demonstrates that interests are not given and exogenously defined: they are endogenously constructed and contingent. Chapter 4 thus argued that Iran’s nuclear resistance strategies were strongly conditioned by perceptions of appropriate and necessary responses in the context of a three-year-old politically manufactured crisis that had already severely harmed the country’s national interests.

The concept of “national interests” is considerably enriched by a Wendtian-constructivist perspective that goes beyond the traditional realist concerns with territorial integrity (“physical survival”), freedom (“autonomy”) and wealth (“economic well-being”). The notion of “collective self-esteem” transposes human beings’ need for respect and recognition to the state level. It explains why states are sensitive to perceptions that (their significant) Others disrespect and humiliate them, and why they are likely to react by “self-assertion and/or devaluation and aggression”. This dynamic of self-compensation is particularly useful to contextualise how and why Iran sought to respond to its perceptions that the Western core powers were disregarding its legal nuclear rights and legitimate energy interests. During the Ahmadinejad presidency, Iran prioritised its “collective self-esteem” needs over considerations for its “economic well-being”, a decision whose pursuit the regime believed was legitimate, necessary and possible.

\[^{1146}\text{Wendt, Social Theory, 237.}\]
This brings me to the key argument that “anarchy is what states make of it”: structures of relations between states are always socially constructed and do not exist independently from their conceptions and practices. Practices play a fundamental role since they are the medium through which states signal their identities and interests, create their “role identities” and “collective knowledge”, and perpetuate or challenge their stabilised culture. Crucially, however, social structures tend to have self-fulfilling qualities. In this respect, the dynamic of “supervenience and multiple realizability” is useful (although incomplete) to understand why policymakers are likely to engage in patterns of aggregate behaviours. Chapter 6 showed that the US-Iran enmity was a socially constructed process that often acted as a coercive fact on policymakers and acquired a dynamic of its own from the late 1970s.

As such, I also engaged with the Wendtian argument that self-help is not a constitutive feature of the international system. The “Hobbesian”, “Lockean” and “Kantian” cultures of anarchy show the causal and constitutive effects of beliefs and expectations on states’ processes of interaction and interpretation of material realities. They are useful to understand and unpack the underlying drivers and motives of states’ foreign policy behaviours, both with respect to short- and long-term considerations. Additionally, Wendt’s discussion on the differences between “friends” and “allies” is particularly useful for “rivals” can cooperate with one another in response to a specific threat (e.g. the Iran-US multilevel cooperation in Afghanistan in the early 2000s).

This, in turn, paves the way for the argument that structural change is always possible. Rival states can, for example, develop more collective identity formation, which can be spurred by cooperative practices. In this respect, Wendt’s four systemic “master variables” (“interdependence”, “common fate”, “homogeneity” and “self-restraint”) proved particularly useful in contextualising Iran’s negotiation proposals to the EU-3/P5+1 and the US specifically. These offers repeatedly indicated that, from its leadership’s viewpoint, Iran shared several “dilemmas of common interests” and “common aversion” with the Western core powers. The regime communicated this assessment both discursively (rhetoric) and practically (behaviours), but within limits: it demanded that its sovereignty be recognised (“self-
restraint”) and its cooperative practices reciprocated (risk of being “the sucker”). These limitations, in turn, illustrated that structural change remains difficult and exceptional.

In chapter 3, I analysed the main characteristics of Iran’s domestic politics during the Ahmadinejad presidency. While chapter 2 explained the need for such domestic-level considerations, I also wished to understand how (and why) the two, largely interconnected and mutually reinforcing, dynamics of securitisation and polarisation may have impacted upon Iran’s foreign policy priorities and decision-making processes during the period 2005-2013.

The June 2005 election of President Ahmadinejad both illustrated and accelerated the domestic power shift towards Iran’s more conservative factions. A nexus of internal (i.e. the reformist administration) and external circumstances (i.e. the Bush administration’s preventive regime change policies and the January 2002 “Axis of Evil” speech) had resulted in institutional and informal strategies to paralyse the Khatami government and consolidate the levers of power in the hands of more conservative forces and figures (e.g. the 2003 municipal and 2004 Majles elections).

Additionally, the multi-level rise in power of the military-security stratum heightened the securitisation of Iran’s domestic politics. The IRGC, in particular, considerably expanded its areas of responsibility, reach and influence. As such, the contested June 2009 re-election of President Ahmadinejad demonstrated the ability of the military-industrial complex to diffuse popular protests and assert strategies of repression, control and violence. The events of 2009, however, also constituted the most profound domestic challenge the Iranian regime had faced since the late 1980s. The bottom-up protests were supported by unprecedented elite-level criticisms which were partly directed against the Supreme Leader.

Within this context, I argued that Iran’s domestic politics was also characterised by the profound polarisation of its political elite, along three chief lines. First, divisions between and within the conservative factions dominated Iran’s political debates during the Ahmadinejad presidency. While the “old” and “new” guards opposed each other on meritocratic and other grounds, President Ahmadinejad and his followers
faced systematic competition from figures affiliated with the military-security stratum and were never in full control of the policymaking process. Second, elite-level criticisms of the Ahmadinejad administration’s threats to Iran’s national interests coalesced around two interconnected issues: economic performance and foreign policy results. Domestic condemnations were repeatedly followed by institutional and ad hoc strategies to both limit the administration’s influence over the policymaking process and manage the fall out of certain decisions/statements.

Third, the very personality and behaviour of President Ahmadinejad profoundly heightened the polarisation of the Iranian elite. To understand how and why he deviated from the normative expectations that were associated with his role, his modus operandi was analysed. President Ahmadinejad systematically attempted to carve out opportunities to expand his own influence, both within and outside Iran, including when institutional avenues were unavailable. He relied on catchy (mediatised) statements, tit for tat and publicly challenged the Supreme Leader, thus showing that he had little regard for consensus building and Iran’s constitutional power-sharing agreements. Instead, he exploited conflicts and tensions in order to remain at the centre of Iran’s politics. President Ahmadinejad quite successfully managed to intertwine Iran’s foreign policy with his persona, often seeking to present himself as a man of principles and solutions, and as a spokesperson for developing and oppressed nations. His views, however, frequently proved more complex and less Manichean than commonly assumed. This, in turn, can shed light on his proactive US policy, a point analysed in chapter 6.

I concluded that the extreme securitisation and polarisation of Iran’s domestic politics during the Ahmadinejad presidency likely had two main consequences on its foreign policy. Insights into Iran’s policymaking processes remained limited and, as such, I based my assessments on theoretical models and circumstantial evidence. The diversionary theory of war was probably of some relevance to Iran’s approach to the nuclear issue, particularly in the aftermath of the disputed 2009 presidential election. Faced with unprecedented public displays of domestic criticism, the nuclear issue provided a platform to revive the guiding principles of the IRI, particularly its independent, justice-seeking and anti-imperialist principles. The framing of the nuclear issue as a Western-led politically manufactured crisis to undermine a regime
with which the core powers had never come to terms and a nation that they had so often attempted to keep dependent may have aimed partly to heighten feelings of national solidarity and support for the regime in the face of externally induced injustice.

Additionally, the profound polarisation of the Iranian political elite, including the Supreme Leader’s weakened domestic legitimacy, could have affected Iran’s ability to adapt, shift and transform its foreign policy strategies. As such, it cannot be excluded that Iran’s remarkably consistent nuclear strategies of resistance were partly down to the regime’s inability to create sufficient consensus for potential strategic shifts. In this respect, the failure of the 2009 Vienna Agreement also illustrated that influential Iranian personalities may have been profoundly averse to the possibility of a diplomatic breakthrough while President Ahmadinejad remained in power.

In chapter 4, I began the analysis of Iran’s nuclear policy. I took a narrow approach to examine how (and why) Iran chose to respond to its multilateral negotiation partners (the EU-3 and the P5+1) and the international organisations involved in the management of the situation (the IAEA and the UNSC). To do so, I first explored Iran’s interpretation of its nuclear programme and noted that its quest for nuclear energy was embedded within a structure of meaning that emphasised the legality and legitimacy of its programme. In the official narrative, Iran was complying with its rights and obligations under the NPT and profusely abiding by the principles of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Additionally, it was seeking an alternative source of energy that would secure its corporate needs of economic well-being, autonomy and collective self-esteem. Processes of analogical reasoning also explained Iran’s insistence that its nuclear programme needed to remain under indigenous control (i.e. “history matters”).

Iran’s approach to the nuclear issue during the period 2003-2005 revealed that the Khatami administration had decided to pursue a goodwill, confidence-building approach that included the temporary suspension of its enrichment activities in the hope that Iran’s “inalienable” nuclear “rights” would be recognised and Iran itself treated like the other NNWSs of the NPT. The paralysis of the Iran-EU-3 diplomatic
process following the November 2004 Paris Agreement had several important political consequences, however. First, it demonstrated that the nuclear issue was a proxy in a wider struggle between Iran and the Western core powers, especially the US. The Ahmadinejad administration’s threefold narrative pointed to their intentions to undermine the IRI, prevent the development of the Iranian nation and increase their intelligence-gathering activities within a country they despised. Second, the failure of the diplomatic negotiations between Iran and the EU-3 paved the way for Iran’s quasi-sacralisation of its enrichment activities (a red line never to be compromised again) and its firm rejection of the AP.

In pursuing a Wendtian-constructivist approach, I was able to analyse why the Iranian leadership interpreted the events of the period 2003-2005 as a national humiliation ("negative self-esteem") and how this perception, in turn, called for strategies of compensation. Crucially, however, I showed that the Khatami and Ahmadinejad administrations pursued the same objectives but different strategies to secure Iran’s nuclear rights. Iran’s more assertive approach during the period 2005-2013 was profoundly based on the “lessons learnt” during the Khatami presidency. One key “lesson” was that Iran had no alternative other than to give up on its nuclear rights or to pursue its programme in defiance of foreign actors’ concerns.

The Ahmadinejad administration thus pursued an assertive nuclear policy that was bent on resisting illegal and immoral external pressures on the one hand and, on the other, reinstating Iran’s reputation and honour as a force of resistance and a role model for developing nations. As such, Iran decided to return to the letter of the law by exercising the full spectrum of its rights under the NPT and no longer accepting measures that singled it out. Additionally, it systematically refused to comply with the UNSC Resolutions it deemed illegal, illegitimate and, therefore, unbinding. It also retaliated against the coercive diplomatic manoeuvres of the UNSC, the P5+1 and the IAEA. In particular, the regime accelerated and expanded its nuclear programme, thus creating new nuclear realities on the ground that imposed enforcement costs on its nuclear opponents.

Although Iran’s resistance strategies resulted in the adoption of six UNSC Resolutions and the enforcement of increasingly stringent unilateral and multilateral
sanctions, they also brought substantial benefits to the regime. On the one hand, Iran achieved considerable scientific and technological progress, which strengthened a sense of national pride and dignity. They also revived confidence in the righteousness of the IRI’s principles of independence and resistance against hegemonic policies. On the other hand, the creation of new nuclear realities forced the P5+1 negotiators to adjust their parameters. From the Iranian regime’s perspective, by not giving in to (illegal and immoral) external pressures, by sticking to its rights and by staying true to its identity, it was able to protect Iran’s national interests.

In chapter 5, I analysed in greater depth how and why Iran attempted to present itself as a security-seeking and morally driven actor profoundly committed to the NPT. Iran’s resistance strategies and its efforts to impose enforcement costs on its nuclear opponents partly revolved around an attempt to situate the nuclear issue within the wider context of global debates around access to peaceful nuclear energy and the sustainability of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. As such, the Western-led opposition to Iran’s nuclear activities provided the regime with a platform to expose, denounce and articulate its long-standing grievances against key power dynamics and behavioural practices within the international system.

On the one hand, the regime framed the politically motivated crisis as the latest of many attempts on the part of the (Western) NWSs to prejudice the right of the NNWSs “to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes”, and to receive support from those “in a position to do so” (Article VI of the NPT). In other words, the Iranian nuclear issue illustrated the (Western) NWSs’ discriminatory practices and imbalanced interpretation (and enforcement) of the rights and obligations enshrined in the NPT in an attempt to retain the NNWSs dependent and under-developed. On the other hand, the Ahmadinejad administration exposed and vehemently condemned the (Western) NWSs’ lack of compliance with their own nuclear disarmament obligations (Article VI) and the double standards in their dealings with nuclear armed states that were not signatories of the NPT (Article I). In so doing, Iran argued, the nuclear armed Western core powers were threatening the bargain at the core of the non-proliferation regime and undermining the prospects of international security.
Both narratives, captured in the motto “nuclear energy for all, nuclear weapons for none”, enabled Iran to position itself as a constructive state party to the NPT that was acting in the interests of developing nations and international security. Of particular relevance was Iran’s articulation that compliance with international law and treaties was a *sine qua non* to states’ sovereign equality and international security. Iran, in other words, had internalised international norms and accepted them as legitimate. Also of crucial importance were Iran’s attempts to proactively address the issue of unequal access to peaceful nuclear energy and to delegitimise those who possessed and relied on nuclear weapons in their security doctrines.

Iran’s framing of the nuclear issue brought discursive and strategic benefits to the regime. Its grievances against the prejudiced interpretation and enforcement of the rights and obligations of the NPT echoed those of other developing nations, including countries of the NAM. Statements that supported Iran’s right to peaceful nuclear energy and denounced the enforcement of stringent sanctions helped the regime counter the argument that it was isolated and pursuing rogue behaviours. In this respect, the May 2010 Tehran Declaration was particularly symbolic for it signalled the concerns that Brazil and Turkey also shared over the NNWSs’ ability to access peaceful nuclear energy. Additionally, it signalled the growing political assertiveness of the Brazilian and Turkish governments within international fora. However, the way in which China and Russia decided to manage the Iranian nuclear issue also allowed me to warn against a simplistic view that global power shifts had either necessarily or automatically benefited Iran. The fact that these two rising powers continued to account for, and be constrained by, the US’ interests and strategies in their approach to the Iranian nuclear issue showed that the Ahmadinejad regime could neither completely ignore nor bypass the superpower’s role and influence.

This brings me to another aspect of Iran’s approach to the nuclear issue, which was unpacked in chapters 5 and 6. A component of Iran’s dual-track strategy *vis-à-vis* its negotiation partners, the Western powers in particular, lay in its repeated offers of cooperation and engagement on a range of security matters. These were unrelated to the nuclear issue *per se* but were of mutual concern to all. As such, Iran did not limit itself to discrediting its significant Others. Instead, it attempted to transform the
nuclear issue into a broader geopolitical opportunity whereby Iran and its rivals could collaborate on several “dilemmas of common interests” (e.g. Afghanistan, economic and energy cooperation) and “common aversion” (e.g. terrorism, drug trafficking).

In comparing and contrasting the negotiation proposals of the Khatami and Ahmadinejad administrations, I was able to show that they often pursued the same objectives but their tone and emphasis differed. While they identified similar dilemmas for potential cooperation, they also systematically articulated Iran’s expectation that its sovereignty and independence be respected, that the coercive policies cease and its international rights be recognised. During the period 2005-2013, however, Iran articulated a stronger concern for social justice and the Third World, putting forward suggestions for more multilateral and inclusive approaches to transnational challenges. Such propositions were presented as all the more necessary since the status quo was untenable and new multilevel threats had emerged. This also enabled the Ahmadinejad administration to present Iran as a “peace-loving nation” that was seeking comprehensive and constructive negotiations on issues where it had a de facto role to play.

Crucially, however, while the Khatami administration had often recommended “working groups” and “task forces” to foster deeper understanding of the stakeholders’ respective interests, the Ahmadinejad regime clearly identified both the various stages and the ultimate objectives of their potential collaboration. This, I argued, reflected its profound mistrust of the Western core powers’ intentions towards the IRI and its concerns that its security and dignity would be jeopardised through unrewarded potential collaboration and compromises. Iran thus required certain guarantees before it could commit to engaging with its significant Others.

In chapter 6, I pursued this analysis through the prism of Iran’s approach to the US during the Ahmadinejad presidency. Not only did the administration firmly believe that the US was responsible for manufacturing and sustaining the nuclear issue, but the subject of Iran-US relations also came to occupy a central place within Iranian (public) political debates. Crucially, while officials widely reproduced Iran’s longstanding grievances against the superpower, the question of engagement with the “Great Satan” ceased to be a taboo. Additionally, through both discursive and
carefully calibrated behavioural practices, Iran indicated a (conditional) interest in less conflictual relations. How and why Iran’s US policy shifted during the Ahmadinejad presidency thus needed to be carefully scrutinised, not least because it challenged several pieces of conventional wisdom on both Iran’s foreign policy interests (i.e. enmity with the US as a condition of regime legitimacy) and its domestic politics (i.e. the principlists and the military-security stratum of the IRI as intrinsically opposed to any form of rapprochement).

To understand how and why Iran’s US policy differed during the Ahmadinejad presidency, I first examined the main characteristics and policy consequences of the US-Iran culture of anarchy since the Revolution. The Wendtian-constructivist perspective was particularly useful to identify (and contextualise the effects of) key internal and external factors that underlined and reproduced their institutionalised enmity for three decades. In particular, it was highlighted that the US played a crucial role in the *raison d’être* of the Revolution and the IRI’s founding principles. The superpower became Iran’s significant Other, the greatest threat to its national dignity and independence, and to a just and stable international system.

Additionally, the transformation of their culture of anarchy in the late 1970s had a profound influence on how the US and Iran came to define their interests and policy orientations towards one another from then on. In this respect, the US-Iran culture of enmity acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy: not only did their negative mutual beliefs lead them to adopt practices that confirmed the relevance of these expectations, but their role identity and collective knowledge often acted as a coercive social fact on US and Iranian policymakers. Having ceased to know each other directly, officials of both countries approached each other via the (biased) medium of historical experiences and myths, vitriolic discourses and routinised practices of estrangement. This fed their respective sense of mistrust, insecurity and worst-case assumptions, leading them to pursue policies that confirmed that they were enemies.

Additionally, despite their very different capabilities, Iran systematically pursued internal and external balancing strategies in an attempt to deter and impose enforcement costs on the superpower. Situations of power asymmetry thus did not condition the behaviour of weaker (i.e. less capabilities) states. From the
leadership’s perspective, the US never came to terms with the IRI and never accepted Iran’s legitimate role within its regional environment. The US posed multidimensional threats to Iran’s physical survival, autonomy, economic well-being and collective self-esteem, thus often placing it in a reactive position to protect its national interests.

The Wendtian-constructivist perspective also enabled me to shed light on apparently contradictory and paradoxical aspects of Iran’s US policy: namely, its repeated forward-leaning strategies and positive responses to US offers of engagement. Starting with the Khatami administration, Iran pursued a dual policy towards the US that oscillated between (and often combined) resistance/defiance and conciliation/engagement. In particular, the Khatami administration repeatedly attempted to “altercast” the US by taking on a less antagonistic role identity vis-à-vis the superpower. President Khatami’s call for a “dialogue of civilisations”, Iran’s multilevel cooperation with the US in Afghanistan and its unprecedented May 2003 negotiation proposal, all constituted symbolic and practical attempts to create new understandings between the two actors in an attempt to transform their structure of relations towards less antagonistic and more trustworthy processes of representation and interaction. Both the call for dialogue and the May 2003 proposal articulated principles that the Ahmadinejad administration reiterated, thus showing strategic consensus on key objectives. These included the theoretical and practical recognition of Iran’s sovereign independence and equality, the abandonment of humiliating rhetoric (i.e. rogue state qualifications) and the recognition of Iran’s legitimate interests and security concerns.

The Ahmadinejad administration, for its part, shifted several red lines on the question of Iran-US relations. Iran multiplied offers of direct talks and several high-level public and back channel meetings occurred. The fact that most encounters between (high-level) Iranian and US officials revolved around the nuclear issue may have showed that both sides perceived that an accord between them was a prerequisite to a broader Iran-P5+1 agreement. Their direct encounters also revealed that Iran’s resistance strategies, its creation of new de facto nuclear realities in particular, had forced the US to shift its position: the suspension of Iran’s enrichment activities was no longer a prerequisite for bilateral and multilateral encounters.
One of the most important aspects of Iran’s US policy during the Ahmadinejad presidency was the fact that influential Iranian officials came to publicly advocate and legitimise direct engagement and dialogue between the two actors. Key foreign policy advisors to Ayatollah Khamenei made these views public. They also sometimes attempted to clarify that the Supreme Leader viewed the inimical relationship between the US and Iran as neither a given nor a necessity. What mattered were the conditions under which Iran could contemplate different processes of interaction with the superpower. The escalation of the nuclear issue and President Obama’s belief that the US would benefit from engaging adversaries may have prompted such internal developments. Both aspects, in turn, were symptomatic of Iran’s relative discursive and strategic dependency on the US.

Iran’s Janus-faced US policy could be understood in light of the IRI’s inability to either escape or ignore the role that the US played in both shaping its external reputation and constituting its foreign policy options. While Iran’s political independence was achieved through and at the cost of a discursive dependence on the US, the superpower was able to profoundly shape external narratives of the IRI as a rogue state with abhorrent internal and external policies. In light of the profoundly hierarchical international system, Iran’s identity and legitimacy were thus likely to be challenged until or unless the superpower revised its patterns of representation and interaction with it.

Additionally, the US and Iran increasingly became “neighbours” through their respective involvement and interests in the Middle East and Central Asia. While this situation forced them to take each other’s actions into account (a necessity that was particularly acute for Iran), they also shared several country-specific (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria) and transnational challenges (e.g. drug trafficking, terrorism). While Iran (like the US) had a limited ability to manage these dilemmas unilaterally, its offers of engagement indicated that the leadership was not averse to cooperating with the superpower on these shared security issues.

Put simply, a transformation of US-Iran relations, away from enmity and towards more collective identity information, could help reduce Iran’s security dilemmas and
bridge the gap between its perception of its legitimate interests and its ability to play a role commensurate with its geopolitical aspirations. However, the Supreme Leader’s position indicated that, in a context where mistrust was pervasive and the US had repeatedly harmed Iran’s national interests and humiliated the Iranian nation, the regime needed guarantees (i.e. demonstration, evidence) that the US would recognise (both discursively and practically) Iran’s independence, equality, interests and concerns. This, in turn, confirmed Iran’s reactive position vis-à-vis the superpower.

In fine, Iran’s complex and multifaceted approach to the nuclear issue showed that the regime had instantiated different role identities. On the one hand, Iran was an anti-status quo power and, as such, it resisted the illegal and illegitimate practices of the Western core powers and sided with oppressed nations and rising powers in the pursuit of its nuclear interests. On the other hand, Iran was a constructive and influential actor that was both able and willing to cooperate with the Western core powers, including the US, on issues of mutual interest. However, “mutual respect” had to regulate their processes of interaction since Iran could neither abandon nor bargain away its independence and self-esteem.

Moving forward, more research is needed on the Supreme Leader’s political legitimacy, particularly with respect to the ways in which he sought to ensure regime survival and preserve the heritage of the Revolution in the aftermath of the 2009 disputed election. While the popular protests had illustrated the depth of the frustration and social malaise within Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei was also chastised by prominent political and religious figures in Iran for his decision to support the re-election of President Ahmadinejad and for allowing the military-security stratum to violently crack down on the protestors. Additionally, if Iran’s nuclear strategies of resistance during the period 2005-2013 provided substantial benefits to the Iranian regime, they nevertheless failed to pave the way for a comprehensive diplomatic agreement between Iran and the P5+1. Instead, the passing of six UNSC Resolutions and the numerous rounds of unilateral and multilateral sanctions raised the spectre of an exhaustion of the diplomatic process. The Arab uprisings also showed that Iran’s western neighbours often struggled to respond to sustained mobilisations for socio-economic and political reform. Within this context, strategies
of repression, coercion and co-optation could “buy time” but not necessarily contribute (sufficiently?) to the persistence of the legitimacy of the IRI. Ayatollah Khamenei’s concerns were arguably visible in his unprecedented call to “those who don’t support the Islamic Republic” to cast their vote in the June 2013 presidential election.1147

It would be worth examining whether, during the first two years of the Rouhani administration’s mandate, the Supreme Leader may have attempted to recast the system’s legitimacy through novel approaches to the interrelated questions of the nuclear issue and Iran-US relations. Indeed, the Rouhani administration has been able to both compromise on Iran’s sensitive nuclear technologies (e.g. the November 2013 Joint Plan of Action, the July 2014 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the October 2015 nuclear deal) and to meet its American counterparts with unprecedented frequency. Tellingly, Ayatollah Khamenei continuously presented the Rouhani nuclear negotiation team as “children of the revolution” and repeatedly called for “heroic flexibility”. He also frequently emphasised that he did not oppose direct talks between Iran and the US, though he was sceptical about their likely results. In so doing, Ayatollah Khamenei helped legitimise the Rouhani administration’s forward-leaning and conciliatory approaches towards the US, whilst preserving his political capital. On 9 April 2015, he also commented that, should the nuclear negotiations with the US be successful, “this will become an experience. If the other side gives up its usual diversionary tactics, this will become an experience for us that, very well, we can negotiate with them on other issues.”1148 Additionally, he specified that he would not interfere in the details of the nuclear negotiations since his personal involvement was limited to setting broad policy guidelines and red lines. In so doing, Ayatollah Khamenei helped legitimise the Rouhani administration’s forward-leaning and conciliatory approaches towards the US, whilst preserving his political capital.

APPENDIX 1
October 2003 Tehran Statement


Full text: Iran declaration

The following is the declaration agreed by the Iranian government and visiting EU foreign ministers regarding Iran's nuclear programme. (Source: Reuters.)

1. Upon the invitation of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany paid a visit to Tehran on October 21, 2003.

The Iranian authorities and the ministers, following extensive consultations, agreed on measures aimed at the settlement of all outstanding IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] issues with regards to the Iranian nuclear programme and at enhancing confidence for peaceful cooperation in the nuclear field.

2. The Iranian authorities reaffirmed that nuclear weapons have no place in Iran’s defence doctrine and that its nuclear programme and activities have been exclusively in the peaceful domain. They reiterated Iran’s commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation regime and informed the ministers that:

a) The Iranian Government has decided to engage in full co-operation with the IAEA to address and resolve through full transparency all requirements and outstanding issues of the agency and clarify and correct any possible failures and deficiencies within the IAEA.

b) To promote confidence with a view to removing existing barriers for co-operation in the nuclear field:

i) having received the necessary clarifications, the Iranian Government has decided to sign the IAEA Additional Protocol and commence ratification procedures. As a confirmation of its good intentions the Iranian Government will continue to co-operate with the agency in accordance with the protocol in advance of its ratification

ii) while Iran has a right within the nuclear non-proliferation regime to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes it has decided voluntarily to suspend all uranium enrichment and processing activities as defined by the IAEA.

Dialogue

3. The foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany welcomed the decisions of the Iranian Government and informed the Iranian authorities that:

a) Their governments recognise the right of Iran to enjoy peaceful use of nuclear energy in accordance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

b) In their view the Additional Protocol is in no way intended to undermine the sovereignty, national dignity or national security of its state parties.

c) In their view full implementation of Iran’s decisions, confirmed by the IAEA’s director general, should enable the immediate situation to be resolved by the IAEA board.

d) The three governments believe that this will open the way to a dialogue on a basis for longer term co-operation which will provide all parties with satisfactory assurances relating to Iran’s nuclear power generation programme. Once international concerns, including those of the three governments, are fully resolved Iran could expect easier access to modern technology and supplies in a range of areas.

e) They will co-operate with Iran to promote security and stability in the region including the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in accordance with the objectives of the United Nations.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/3211036.stm

Published: 2003/10/21 13:06:01 GMT

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APPENDIX 2

November 2004 Paris Agreement

Accessed 17 March 2015 at

Information Circular

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Date: 26 November 2004

General Distribution
Original: English

Communication dated 26 November 2004 received from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Kingdom concerning the agreement signed in Paris on 15 November 2004.

The Director General has received a letter dated 26 November 2004 from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Kingdom, attaching the text of the agreement signed by the Governments of France, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland with the support of the High Representative of the European Union, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Paris on 15 November 2004.

The letter and, as requested therein, the text of the agreement, is reproduced herewith for the information of Member States.
Permanent Mission of France
Permanent Mission of Germany
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Vienna, 26 November 2004

Excellency,

We have the honour to refer to the agreement that the Governments of France, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with the support of the High Representative of the European Union, and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed on 15 November 2004.

We should like to request you to circulate the text of this agreement to all Member States as an Information Circular.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Patrick Villemur
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of France

Herbert Honowitz
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Germany

Pirooz Hosseini
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Peter Jenkins
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei
Director General
International Atomic Energy Agency

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Governments of France, Germany and the United Kingdom, with the support of the High Representative of the European Union (E3/EU), reaffirm the commitments in the Tehran Agreed Statement of 21 October 2003 and have decided to move forward, building on that agreement.

The E3/EU and Iran reaffirm their commitment to the NPT.

The E3/EU recognise Iran's rights under the NPT exercised in conformity with its obligations under the Treaty, without discrimination.

Iran reaffirms that, in accordance with Article II of the NPT, it does not and will not seek to acquire nuclear weapons. It commits itself to full cooperation and transparency with the IAEA. Iran will continue implementing voluntarily the Additional Protocol pending ratification.

To build further confidence, Iran has decided, on a voluntary basis, to continue and extend its suspension to include all enrichment related and reprocessing activities, and specifically: the manufacture and import of gas centrifuges and their components; the assembly, installation, testing or operation of gas centrifuges; work to undertake any plutonium separation, or to construct or operate any plutonium separation installation; and all tests or production at any uranium conversion installation. The IAEA will be notified of this suspension and invited to verify and monitor it. The suspension will be implemented in time for the IAEA to confirm before the November Board that it has been put into effect. The suspension will be sustained while negotiations proceed on a mutually acceptable agreement on long-term arrangements.

The E3/EU recognize that this suspension is a voluntary confidence building measure and not a legal obligation.
Sustaining the suspension, while negotiations on a long-term agreement are under way, will be essential for the continuation of the overall process. In the context of this suspension, the E3/EU and Iran have agreed to begin negotiations, with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable agreement on long term arrangements. The agreement will provide objective guarantees that Iran's nuclear programme is exclusively for peaceful purposes. It will equally provide firm guarantees on nuclear, technological and economic cooperation and firm commitments on security issues.

A steering committee will meet to launch these negotiations in the first half of December 2004 and will set up working groups on political and security issues, technology and cooperation, and nuclear issues. The steering committee shall meet again within three months to receive progress reports from the working groups and to move ahead with projects and/or measures that can be implemented in advance of an overall agreement.

In the context of the present agreement and noting the progress that has been made in resolving outstanding issues, the E3/EU will henceforth support the Director General reporting to the IAEA Board as he considers appropriate in the framework of the implementation of Iran's Safeguards Agreement and Additional Protocol.

The E3/EU will support the IAEA Director General inviting Iran to join the Expert Group on Multilateral Approaches to the Nuclear Fuel Cycle.

Once suspension has been verified, the negotiations with the EU on a Trade and Cooperation Agreement will resume. The E3/EU will actively support the opening of Iranian accession negotiations at the WTO.

Irrespective of progress on the nuclear issue, the E3/EU and Iran confirm their determination to combat terrorism, including the activities of Al Qa'ida and other terrorist groups such as the MeK. They also confirm their continued support for the political process in Iraq aimed at establishing a constitutionally elected Government.
APPENDIX 3

March 2005 Elements of Objective Guarantees

Accessed 27 July 2015 at

Presented by Iran in the Meeting of Steering Committee
Paris- March 23, 2005

Elements of Objective Guarantees

1. Strong and Mutually Beneficial Relations between Iran and the EU/E3

2. Confinement of the Program
   a. Open Fuel Cycle (No Reprocessing)
   b. Ceiling of Enrichment at LEU Level
   c. Limitation of the Extent of the Program
   d. Immediate Conversion of All Enriched Uranium to Fuel Rods
   e. Incremental and Phased Approach to Implementation

3. Legislative and Regulatory Measures
   a. Additional Protocol
   b. Permanent Ban on the Development, Stockpiling and Use of Nuclear Weapons
   c. Export Controls

4. Enhanced Monitoring
   a. Continued Implementation of the Additional Protocol
   b. Continuous On-Site Presence of IAEA Inspectors, Which Can Include E3/EU Nationals, at the UCF and Natanz
### General Framework for Objective Guarantees, Firm Guarantees, and Firm Commitments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Action by Iran</th>
<th>Action by E3/EU</th>
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| 1 - April-July 2003 | • Approval of the Additional Protocol in the Cabinet  
  • Policy Declaration on Iran’s Open Fuel Cycle (No Reprocessing)  
  • Presentation of Legislation on Peaceful Use of Nuclear Technology, including Permanent Ban on Production, Stockpiling and Use of Nuclear Weapons to the Majlis  
  • Resumption of the Work of the UCF  
  • Storage of UF6 Under Agency Surveillance | • Declaration of EU Policy to Guarantee Iran’s Access to EU Markets and Financial and Public and Private Investment Resources  
  • Declaration of EU Recognition of Iran as a Major Source of Energy Supply for Europe  
  • Launching of Feasibility Studies for Building of New Nuclear Power Plants in Iran by E3/EU Members |
| 2 | • Presentation of the Additional Protocol to the Majlis for Ratification  
  • Strengthening of Legal Export Control Mechanisms  
  • Policy Declaration on the Ceiling of Enrichment at LEU Level  
  • Policy Declaration on Conversion of All Enriched Uranium to Fuel Rods  
  • Assembly, Installation and Testing of 3000 Centrifuges in Natanz | • Declaration of EU Policy to Guarantee Iran’s Access to Advanced and Nuclear Technology  
  • Declaration of EU Readiness to Participate in Building New Nuclear Power Plants in Iran  
  • Signing of Contracts for Construction of Nuclear Power Plants in Iran by E3/EU Members |
| | • Joint Commitment to Principles Governing Relations  
  • Cooperation on Security in the Persian Gulf |
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<th><strong>Action by E3/EU</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employing All Appropriate Measures for Adoption of the Legislation on Peaceful Use of Nuclear Technology, including Permanent Ban on Production, Stockpiling and Use of Nuclear Weapons by the Majlis</td>
<td>Normalizing Iran’s Status Under G8 Export Control Regulations</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Presentation and Active Follow up of an EU Initiative to Establish a Zone Free From Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East</td>
</tr>
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<td>Immediate Conversion of the Total Product of the Above to Fuel Rods</td>
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<td>Incremental Manufacturing, Assembly and Installation of Centrifuge Components up to the Numbers Envisaged for Natanz</td>
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<td>Establishment of a Task Force on Strategic Cooperation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immediate Conversion of the Total Product of the Above to Fuel Rods</td>
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APPENDIX 4
January 2005 Proposal to Political and Security Group
Geneva

Accessed 23 August 2015 at

Proposal by Iran
Presented to Political and Security Working Group
Geneva- January 17, 2005

I - General Principles

1. The E3/EU and Iran restate their respect for each other's sovereign equality and the right to freely choose and develop their political, social, economic and cultural systems.

2. The E3/EU and Iran emphasize their rejection of any threat or use of force against each other's national sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence. No consideration may be invoked to justify resort to the threat or use of force in contravention of this principle. They will refrain from participating, assisting or supporting any act constituting a threat of force or direct or indirect use of force against each other individually or collectively.

3. The E3/EU and Iran underline the inviolability of their respective internationally recognized boundaries and will reject any attempt to infringe or alter them.

4. The E3/EU and Iran will settle disputes among them by peaceful means in such a manner as not to endanger international peace and security, and justice. They will endeavor in good faith and a spirit of cooperation to reach rapid and equitable solution to all disputes on the basis of international law and will refrain from any action which might aggravate the situation.

5. The E3/EU and Iran will refrain from engaging in, supporting or assisting any intervention, direct or indirect, individual or collective, in
their respective internal or external affairs, regardless of their mutual relations. They will in all circumstances refrain from any act of military, or of political, economic or other coercion designed to subordinate to their own interest the exercise by another party of the rights inherent in its sovereignty and thus to secure advantage of any kind. Accordingly, they will refrain from direct or indirect assistance to terrorist or subversive activities against each other.

**II. Elimination and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction**

6. Iran and the E3/EU reaffirm their commitment to all relevant international instruments on the elimination and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and underline the imperative of universal adherence to these instruments.

7. The two sides restate their commitment to elimination as well as countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, biological and chemical, through full compliance with their obligations under relevant international disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements.

8. Iran remains committed not to pursue nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction under any circumstances.

9. The E3/EU undertake, individually or collectively, to reject the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against Iran, and to take all appropriate measures, individually, collectively and through the UNSC to prevent it.
10. The E3/EU and Iran underline the inviolability of peaceful and safeguarded nuclear facilities. They reject any direct or indirect attack or sabotage or threats thereof against Iranian nuclear facilities, which would warrant effective and practical action by the Security Council in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

11. The two sides share the concern about proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region and in the Middle East and commit themselves to pursue rigorously establishment of Middle East NWFZ.

III - Combating Terrorism

12. The E3/EU and Iran condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and affirm their determination to combat it.

13. The E3/EU and Iran decide to intensify and accelerate the exchange of operational information, especially regarding actions or movement of terrorist persons or groups, forged or falsified travel documents, traffic in arms, explosives or sensitive materials, use of communications technologies, and the threat posed by possession of WMD by terrorist groups.

14. Iran and the E3/EU will deny safe heaven to those who finance, plan, support, or commit terrorist acts and prevent them from using their respective territories for those purposes and will cooperate to bring them to justice.

15. Iran and the E3/EU will provide one another the greatest measure of assistance in connection with criminal investigation or criminal proceedings relating to the financing or support of terrorist acts.
16. Iran and the E3/EU will cooperate in preventing the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups by effective border controls and controls on issuance of identity papers and travel documents, and through measures for preventing counterfeiting, forgery of fraudulent use of identity papers and travel documents.

17. Iran and the E3/EU restate their commitment to continue to freeze the funds and other financial assets or economic resources of persons who commit, or attempt to commit, terrorist acts or participate in or facilitate the commission of terrorist acts; of entities owned or controlled directly or indirectly by such persons; and of persons and entities acting on behalf of, or at the direction of such persons and entities, including funds derived or generated from property owned or controlled directly or indirectly by such persons and associated persons and entities.

18. Iran and the E3/EU will cooperate, in conformity with international law, in order to ensure that refugee status is not abused by the perpetrators, organizers or facilitators of terrorist acts, and that claims of political motivations are not recognized as grounds for refusing requests for the extradition of alleged terrorists.

19. Iran and the E3/EU express their determination to scrupulously apply the above and all other provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions equally to Al Qaeda and MeK and their affiliates and front organizations.

20. The E3/EU and Iran will establish regular contacts between their intelligence services, individually or collectively as appropriate, to
ensure the implementation of the above decision, exchange information and define particular areas of cooperation.

IV- Sustainable Partnership on Regional Issues

21. The E3/EU and Iran underline that security and stability of the Persian Gulf region can only be attained through cooperation among countries in the region, and will therefore support the establishment of arrangements for security and cooperation in the Persian Gulf Region with the participation of all countries in the region, under appropriate United Nations umbrella.

22. Iran and the E3/EU underline the imperative of respect for principles of international law and bi-lateral and multilateral treaties in the relations among countries of the Persian Gulf, including respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, national unity and political independence, rejection of resort to the threat or use of force, non-interference in the internal and external affairs, and inviolability of internationally recognized boundaries.

23. The E3/EU and Iran will intensify their consultations with respect to other important regional issues particularly Iraq and Afghanistan, in promoting stability and security in the region. They will lend their full support for the finalization of the political process in these countries including holding of nation-wide elections, aimed at the establishment of democratic, stable and broad-based governments which coexist peacefully with their neighbors.
V - Security and Defense Cooperation

24. The E3/EU and Iran will cooperate in promoting peace and security at the global and regional levels. They recognize that destabilization and threats to peace and security particularly in the Persian Gulf region is of direct consequences for security of both parties and should be avoided.

25. The E3/EU reaffirms the inherent right of Iran to acquire legitimate means for self-defense pursuant to Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. The E3/EU decide to remove restrictions against the transfer of conventional armaments and their relevant sensitive dual use goods and technologies to Iran, and ensure that any export control arrangement will not impede bona fide transactions with Iran for legitimate self-defense and civil purposes.

26. Iran and the E3/EU decide to establish a senior expert level group with the participation of their respective military officials to carry out intensive consultations on defense issues, including defense requirements of Iran and the framework of their mutual defense cooperation.

27. The E3/EU and Iran reaffirm that an effective fight against drug-trafficking and terrorism not only require political will but the capacity to do so. The E3/EU recognize that Iran should be supported as a country in a region which is highly affected by drug-trafficking and terrorism.

28. The E3/EU will remove restrictions and provide military, police and border control assistance to enhance Iran’s counter-terrorism and drug enforcement capacities.
29. The E3/EU and Iran will establish a coordination mechanism with the participation of their relevant national and regional agencies including police, enforcement and operational officers responsible for combating terrorism and drug-trafficking, to coordinate their cooperation in these fields and to assess, identify and meet the necessary requirements to enhance Iran's capacities in these areas.

VI- Cooperation in the Area of Export Control

30. The E3/EU and Iran agree that transfer of highly sensitive materials, devices and technology should not contribute to the development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.

31. Iran undertakes to adopt legal, procedural and other measures to prevent unauthorized access to its nuclear capability and enrichment technology by any individual, group or state and uncontrolled export to other states.

32. The E3/EU and Iran decide to cooperate actively in the area of export control and to exchange expertise and knowledge to assist Iran to put in place an effective national export of control related sensitive material, equipment and technology, and containing enforcement procedures with appropriate penalties which could contribute to the development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

33. Iran and the E3/EU decide to establish a high level expert group for the exchange of expertise in the area of export control and to address any possible problem which may arise with respect to the transfer of any item, including through agreement on practical measures to be adopted
by recipient and suppliers to satisfy the legitimate concerns for the purpose of ensuring the transfer and preventing the denial.

VII. Interim Measures

34. The two sides agree that pending an overall agreement, they will form the mechanisms envisaged above for defense, counter-terrorism, counter-trafficking and export control cooperation, to meet periodically in Iran and Europe beginning immediately and as a matter of priority identify specific measures to be reported to the second meeting of the Steering Committee for implementation
APPENDIX 5

April 2005 Proposal to the Steering Committee


Proposal by Iran
Presented to the Meeting of the Steering Committee
London – April 29, 2005

Iran is prepared to continue and intensify negotiations in good faith in the three Working Groups and the Steering Committee and to reach mutually acceptable arrangements on the “General Framework”.

In order to sustain the process, and as envisaged in the “General Framework”, Iran will take the following measures to implement its Phase 1 and is prepared to engage immediately in negotiations on their details and the modalities for their implementation:

A. During May 2005
• Approval of the Additional Protocol in the Cabinet;
• Policy Declaration on Iran’s Open Fuel Cycle (No Reprocessing);
• Presentation of Legislation on Peaceful Use of Nuclear Technology, including Permanent Ban on Production, Stockpiling and Use of Nuclear Weapons to the Majlis.

B. After May 2005
• Resumption of the work of the UCF;
• Storage of UF6 under Agency Surveillance.

C. Additional Confidence Building Measures:
• For six months, Iran will continue the suspension of all other enrichment related activities and will make every effort in intensive negotiations in the three Working Groups and the Steering Committee to implement each following phase after agreement with E3/EU;
• During this period, Iran will limit the quantity at the UCF to the amount necessary for operation of the facility;
• Iran will begin allowing continuous on-site presence of IAEA inspectors at the UCF, which had originally been envisaged for the Third Phase.
• Iran will allow the Agency to seal the UF6 product if requested by the Agency.

D. Iran is prepared to start the following joint steps:
• Establishment of a Joint Counter-Terrorism Task Force;
• Establishment of a Joint Export Control Task Force.

Iran expects E3/EU to complete the implementation of the following steps before the end of 2005:
• Declaration of EU Policy to Guarantee Iran’s Access to EU Markets and Financial and Public and Private Investment Resources;
• Declaration of EU Recognition of Iran as a Major Source of Energy Supply for Europe;
• Launching of Feasibility Studies for Building of New Nuclear Power Plants in Iran by E3/EU Members.
APPENDIX 6

July 2005 Message to E3/EU Ministers

Accessed 23 August 2015 at

Message from Dr. Rohani to E3/EU Ministers
July 18, 2005

I am conveying this message to you and your leadership through your ambassadors in Tehran in order to help bring this issue to a satisfactory solution.

You are fully aware that in the course of the last two years, I have not hesitated to use all my ability in order to keep the negotiations going and create a climate to enable both sides to resolve this matter.

I did so because I believe that the resolution of this sensitive issue leads immediately to a higher state of relationship, whereby our differences with the West can be transformed to areas of collaboration.

- The events of the last two years, particularly in our region, have only further strengthened his conviction.
- For twenty-five years, I have focused on security issues surrounding Iran and the region. Never have I seen such potential for commonality of purpose and concern about mutual sources of threat in significant areas.
- Today, in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon, I find strong and inescapable reasons and elements that bind us in shaping and establishing durable stability.
- Like you, we wish and need to see established governments in Afghanistan and Iraq to succeed and to prevail over the threats that aim to undermine them. We need as well to see the reformed political structure in Lebanon to move forward with participation of all segments of the polity.
- We also have common concern over the violent and blind misinterpretation of Islam manifested in groups like Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups like MEK who have chosen and practice violence as a mean to achieve misguided objectives.

I believe you share the view that the negotiations, particularly those conducted since the Paris Agreement, have brought us very close to an agreement that both sides may be able to accept.

While we were progressing substantially on the framework proposed by Iran, our suggestion to agree on starting a negotiated implementation of the first phase of our proposal was mistakenly perceived as an ultimatum.

I agreed to come to Geneva because I was confident that we had made significant progress towards a resolution and agreed to extend the period of full suspension for another two months to correct any wrong perception about an ultimatum and to ensure that no opportunity was spared for an agreed settlement.

Statements at that meeting that you intended to present a proposal which, aside from other issues, intended to make a bridge between our positions on the nuclear issues, and previous discussions with President Chirac and Chancellor Schroder were encouraging indications that a mutually acceptable agreement could well be within reach.

We have received information from public and diplomatic channels that following our presidential elections, you have been contemplating to withhold a proposal
which could potentially lead to an agreement on the core issue of our enrichment program.

During the course of the last three weeks, we have held extensive discussions at the leadership level with participation of both the President and the President-elect, the heads of all branches of Government, the Chairman of the Expediency Council, as well as all other high level officials and advisors whose responsibilities are relevant to this issue.

We all agree on the following basic points:

- Iran’s policy on the nuclear issue will remain unchanged.
- Iran remains resolute on making every effort to come to an agreement with Europe, which incorporates the exercise of all its rights under the treaty with guarantees for the exclusive peaceful nature of its activities.
- There is no pretext for any further delay in the implementation of the first phase of our proposal, which is free from any past alleged failures, is nearly proliferation free. With additional proposed arrangements it should leave no excuse for anyone.
- Any agreement arrived at on this important issue will be the firm commitment of the State above and beyond changes in administrations.
- Such an agreement should serve as the basis for long term positive state of cooperation on all issues of interest and concern between Iran and the EU/E3.

After such a long period of negotiations and so much that we have done to restore confidence and the flexibility that we have shown, there is no longer any reason for you to withhold -- presumably due to unrelated domestic political developments in Iran -- a proposal that can be workable for both sides and instead present something which will leave us with no alternative but to reject.

As I assume you are moving to finalize your proposal, I invite you to review the matter carefully once again in light of what I sincerely told you in Geneva.

Issues on security, technology and economic cooperation and related firm guarantees and commitments can be discussed and agreed at the level of senior officials.

On the core issue of nuclear activity, my understanding of the Geneva discussions is that Europe might now be prepared to offer its own nuclear power reactor. Bearing this in mind, I am hoping that we can work together during the remaining time before the end of July to form a solution along the following lines:

- Commencement of the work of Isfahan plant at low capacity and under full scope monitoring, while arrangements for import of the feed material and export of the product are worked out with you and other potential partners.
- It is my understanding that at this stage there is still difficulty on an initial limited operation at Natanz, particularly on the numbers and other specifics. An agreement on this is essential for us, although we are open to further negotiate on a mutually acceptable arrangement or allow the Agency to develop an optimized arrangement on numbers, monitoring mechanism and other specifics for an initial limited operation at Natanz, which would address our needs and allay your concerns.
- Negotiations for full scale operation of Natanz would continue on the premise that it would be synchronized with the fuel requirements of your light water reactor or those offered by Russia.
APPENDIX 7

May 2008 Proposed Package for Constructive Negotiations


Unofficial Translation

Excellency,

13 May 2008

As I informed you in my previous communications, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a responsible Member State of the United Nations Organization, and based on its international rights and obligations, has always emphasized on the importance of multilateralism. Unfortunately, a few countries, with political motivations and objectives, have raised some ambiguities over Iran's exclusively peaceful nuclear program and have used the UN Organs as a tool, thus, undermining the integrity and credibility of the United Nations.

Whereas the International atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has, time and again, confirmed the non-diversion of Iran's nuclear program, and based on the agreed work plan between Iran and the Agency the remaining issues are completely resolved, and while the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all nuclear activities of our country are currently under the full-scope Safeguards of the IAEA, the UN Security Council has persisted on its illegal measures.

I have already brought to Your Excellency's attention, in details, my Government's arguments and reasoning regarding the unlawfulness of the intervention of the UN Security Council in Iran's peaceful nuclear program. Indeed, the Islamic Republic of Iran still maintains that constructive interaction and reasonable and just negotiations, without preconditions and based on mutual respect, is the basic solution for the promotion and improvement of international situations and circumstances. On the same basis, the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to negotiate with the 5+1 Group within a specific framework on issues of mutual interest. The Islamic republic of Iran is of the view that resorting to the two-track approaches that comprise intimidation and negotiation not only will not help resolving issues but will indeed further complicate the situation.

The Iranian nation is a peace-loving nation that has spared no efforts to contribute to global peace and stability. Iran's capabilities and power can contribute to the regional and international peace and stability. The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that sustainable regional and international peace and stability, economic relations, free trade, energy security, combating terrorism and narcotic drugs, as well as peaceful uses of nuclear energy provide appropriate common grounds for long-term and sustainable cooperation.

Given the present circumstances at the regional and international levels, the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the introduction of a new and comprehensive initiative, aimed at achieving sustainable and constructive interaction, as an imperative. On its part, the
Islamic Republic of Iran, following thorough and proficient studies and considerations, has carefully prepared a package containing important initiatives and proposals in different political, security, economic and nuclear fields, to be submitted to countries of the 5+1 Group. This package has been prepared as a basis for comprehensive and thorough negotiations with the said countries based on collective commitments as well as justice, sovereignty and mutual respect. We are of the firm belief that the present package will provide an exceptional opportunity for real and serious cooperation among the concerned parties.

I would like to emphasize on this important point that the principled approach of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards this package is that of a strategic one. Therefore, I hope that the concerned parties would acknowledge the importance of the proposed package and its substance, as a comprehensive solution to the regional and global problems and challenges. The package can be a basis for long-term cooperation. I hope the concerned parties would welcome it and would deal with it constructively.

Manuchehr Mottaki
Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Islamic Republic of Iran

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York
The Islamic Republic of Iran's Proposed Package for Constructive Negotiations

Stressing on the respect for the principles of justice, abidance by law, recognition of the rights of nations, respect for the sovereignty of states, reinforcement of regional and international peace, abstaining from monopolistic actions and threats, respect for democracy, human values and cultures of different nations; and rejecting the injustice and lawless behaviors towards the rights of nations;

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that there is an extensive range of issues such as security issues, regional and international developments, nuclear energy, terrorism, democracy, etc. that provide a substantive potential for cooperation.

To the above are added other fields that include drug control, environmental conservation, and economic, technological, commercial - especially energy – cooperation, that provide other excellent possibilities and avenues for constructive cooperation.

Therefore, in view of the developments that have unfolded internationally and across the region, there is a need for a new and a more advanced plan for interaction. In this new round of negotiations, the main objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to reach a comprehensive agreement, one that is based on collective goodwill that will help to establish long-term cooperation between the parties, and will contribute to the sustainability and strength of regional and international security and a just peace.

We also believe that in its later stages, the negotiations have the capacity to invite other capable and interested states to join it and explore the possibility of cooperation within parameters of the package. The main outcome of this new round of negotiations would be an agreement on "collective commitments" to cooperate on economic, political, regional, international, nuclear and energy security issues.

Therefore, we are willing to start wide-ranging and comprehensive negotiations on the following issues:

A- Political and Security Issues:

1- One of the most important concerns of humanity is the need to protect the rights and dignity of human being and respect for the culture of other nations. A dialogue, for the appropriate realization of this, is necessary.

2- Talks on bolstering a just peace and advancement of democracy in the region and around the world. The talks will be based on:
- Respect for the rights of nations and their national interests.
- Support for the national sovereignty of states based on democratic methods.
- Prevention of terrorism and its contributing factors.

On the above basis, the Islamic Republic of Iran is willing to enter into talks on cooperation to strengthen a just peace and bolster the stability and the advancement of democracy in regions that suffer from instability, militarism, violence and terrorism. Such cooperation can take place in different parts of the world—more specifically in the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa, and Latin America. Cooperation to assist the Palestinian people to find a comprehensive plan—one that is sustainable, democratic and fair—to resolve the 60-year old Palestinian issue can become a symbol of such collaboration.

3- Fighting common security threats, and talks and collective collaborations on combating the factors which contribute to and create security threats, including:
- Terrorism
- Drugs
- Illegal immigration
- Organized crimes

B- Economic Issues:

1. Cooperation on the provision of energy and its security—in the fields of production, provision, transportation and consumption.
2. Cooperation on trade and investment.
3. A common effort to help fight poverty in less developed countries and to reduce the divide between social classes.
4. Reducing the impact of sharp price fluctuations and retooling global monetary and financial arrangements to benefit the nations of the world.

C- The Nuclear Issue:

With regard to the nuclear issue, Iran is ready—in a comprehensive manner, and as an active and influential member of the NPT and the IAEA—to consider the following issues:
1. Obtaining a further assurance about the non-diversion of the nuclear activities of different countries.
2. Establishing enrichment and nuclear fuel production consortiums in different parts of the world—including in Iran.
3. Cooperation to access and utilize peaceful nuclear technology and facilitating its usage by all states.
4. Nuclear disarmament and establishment of a follow up committee.
5. Improved supervision by the IAEA over the nuclear activities of different states.
6. Joint collaboration over nuclear safety and physical protection.
7. An effort to encourage other states to control the export of nuclear material and equipment.

D- Within the parameters of this package, the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to start serious and targeted negotiations to produce a tangible result. The negotiations can be evaluated after a specific period of time (a maximum of 6 months) to decide about its continuation.
APPENDIX 8
July 2008 Modality for Comprehensive Negotiations

THE MODALITY FOR COMPREHENSIVE NEGOTIATIONS
(None paper)

Stage one: Preliminary talks,

1) In this stage, a maximum 3 rounds of talks will take place between Dr. Jalili, representing the Islamic Republic of Iran and Dr. Solana, representing the 3+3.

2) By the end of the above stage, the parties will have agreed on a modality to govern the negotiations. They will have further agreed on the subsequent stages of negotiations, which will include the following:

A- Determination of the timetable and the agenda of negotiations that will take place in the next stage – which will be based on the commonalities of the two packages. Subsequently the committees will be organized and their agendas' will also be determined.

B- Requirements, manner and time of entry into the next stage.

Stage two: Start of talks,

1) With completion of stage one and implementation of the agreed requirements, talks will start at the level of ministers.

2) At the beginning of the above stage, the 7 states will meet the following requirements:

A- The 3+3 will refrain from taking any unilateral or multilateral action – or sanctions – against Iran, both inside and outside the UNSC. The group will further discontinue certain unilateral measures taken by one or some of its members.

B- The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to cooperate with the Agency.

3) In this stage a minimum of 4 meetings will take place between Mr. Solana, the foreign ministers of the 3+3, and Dr. Jalili, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the head of the Atomic Energy Organization, representing the Islamic Republic of Iran.

4) The guiding principles of the meetings that will be attended by the 3+3 foreign ministers, plus Mr. Solana, in which the Islamic Republic of Iran will be represented by Dr. Jalili and the relevant ministers, will be as follows:

A- The parties will abstain from referring to, or discussing, divergent issues that can potentially hinder the progress of negotiations.
B- The parties will start by discussing issues that are considered as common ground.
C- The parties will agree on a timetable, list of issues to be discussed, and priorities of the negotiations.
5) The talks will end by issuing an official joint statement on the agreements reached at the above stage.
6) Following the statement on the completion of the talks, the 3 specialized committees will produce and finalize agreements on comprehensive cooperation.

Stage three: negotiations,

1) Upon the completion of the second stage of the talks, the 6 states will discontinue the sanctions and existing UNSC resolutions. Iran, in turn, will implement the agreed action.
2) With the start of the third stage, the 7 states will start to negotiate to produce and sign a comprehensive agreement relating to their "collective obligations" on economic, political, regional, international, nuclear, energy, security and defense cooperation -- whose proposals will be presented to them by the specialized committees.
3) The negotiations will be conducted within a 2 month period. However, the period can be extended by mutual agreement.
4) Following the conclusion of the comprehensive and long-term agreement on "collective obligations" Iran's nuclear issue must be concluded in the UNSC and fully and completely returned to the Agency. Moreover, the issue must be taken out of the Board of Governor's agenda and the implementation of the safeguards must be returned to normal in Iran.
APPENDIX 9

September 2009 Proposals for Comprehensive and Constructive Negotiations


In the Name of the Almighty

Cooperation for Peace, Justice and Progress

Package of proposals by the Islamic Republic of Iran for Comprehensive and Constructive Negotiations

There is no doubt that our world is at the threshold of entering a new era. The difficult era characterized by domination of empires, predominance of military powers, dominance of organized and interrelated media networks and competitions on the basis of offensive capability and the power from conventional and non-conventional weapons is coming to an end. A new era characterized by cultural approach and rational thinking, and respect for the true godly essence of humankind is flourishing and blossoming. Many of the predicaments facing our world today, such as the unprecedented economic crisis, cultural and identity crisis, political and security dilemmas, and the mushrooming of terrorism, organized crimes and the illicit drugs are the products of the fading era of domination of ungodly ways of thinking prevailing in the global relations and the ominous legacy for present and future generations of humanity.

Resolution of these problems and creating a world filled with spirituality, friendship, prosperity, wellness and security requires reorganization and creating an opportunity for broad and collective participation in the management of the world. The existing mechanisms are not capable to meet the present needs of humankind and their ineffectiveness has been clearly proven in the realms of economy, politics, culture and security. These mechanisms
and structures are the direct products of relations based on brute power and domination, while our world today needs mechanisms that come from divine and godly thinking and an approach based on human values and compassion. The new mechanisms should pave the way for the advancement, full blossoming of the talents and potentials of all nations and establishment of lasting world peace and security.

The Iranian nation is prepared to enter into dialogue and negotiation in order to lay the ground for lasting peace and regionally inspired and generated stability for the region and beyond and for the continued progress and prosperity of the nations of the region and the world. Our desire to enter into this dialogue and cooperative relationships proceeds from our inherent national, regional and international capacity and strength, our principled and historical commitment in applying this capacity to foster peace, tranquility, progress and well-being for nations in our region and beyond. We stand ready to enter into this dialogue on the basis of godly and human principles and values, including the recognition of the rights of nations, respect for sovereignty and principles of democracy and the right of people to have free elections, as well as restraining from imposing pressure or threats and moving forward on the solid foundation of justice and law.

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that within the framework of principles of justice, democracy and multilateralism, a wide range of security, political, economic and cultural issues at regional and global levels could be included in these negotiations with a view of fostering constructive cooperation for advancement of nations and promotion of peace and stability in the region and the world.

As it was clearly stated last year in our proposed package, the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that drawing lessons from the past mistakes and not insisting on futile and pointless paths that have proven to be of no avail is the prerequisite for the success in the upcoming negotiations. Accordingly, the commitment of all parties involved to, firstly, composition of new structure of international
interactions that is free from past errors, and secondly expression of
good intent by all parties both in words and deeds in demonstrating
commitment to justice and law can lead to a new phase in
negotiations for a long-term cooperation with a view to
consolidating lasting peace and security in the region and the
world.

Political, security, economic and international issues are the primary
subjects that have raised shared concerns in the region and the
world for governments and nations. The Islamic Republic of Iran
firmly believes that proceeding from principles and fundamentals
stated above and in light of the present state of affairs in our world
we all need to show compassion and concern for the destiny of
humanity and to turn these shared concerns into collective
commitments for the purpose of paving the way for effective
regional and international cooperation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran voices its readiness to embark on
comprehensive, all-encompassing and constructive negotiations,
aiming at acquiring a clear framework for cooperative relationships
by ensuring the adherence of all parties to collective commitments.
a future free from injustice that promises welfare and progress free
from double standards for all nations of the region and the world.

Proceeding from regional and international priorities, the axes of the
negotiations for peace and prosperity can be included in three
main areas: political-security issues, international issues and
economic issues.

1. Political-Security issues
   1.1 Protecting human dignity, respect for their culture and their
       rights.
   1.2 Consolidating stability and fostering just peace, promotion
       of democracy and enhancement of prosperity of nations
       in regions that suffer from instability, militarism, violence and
       terrorism on the basis of:
First: respect for the rights of nations and national interests of sovereign states.
Second: Consolidating the national sovereignty of countries in the framework of democratic practices.
Third: Refraining from violence and militarism
Fourth: Tackling the root causes of terrorism.

Some parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, the Balkans, parts of Africa, South America and East Asia need to be accorded priority. Joint efforts and interactions to help the people of Palestine to draw a comprehensive, democratic and equitable plan in order to help the people of Palestine to achieve all-embracing peace, lasting security and to secure their fundamental rights could be good examples of these cooperative relations.

1.3 Combating common security threats by dealing effectively and firmly with the main causes of security threats including terrorism, illicit drugs, illegal migrations, organized crimes and piracy.

2. International Issues

2.1 Reform of the United Nations and the Security Council and raising their effectiveness on the basis of principles of democracy and justice.

2.2 Elevating the weight and position of environmental issues in the international relations and fostering collective participation in the management of environmental issues.

2.3 Equitable definition and codification of the rights to space and sharing of all possessors of space technologies in the management and fair use of space.

2.4 Definition and codification of the rights relating to new and advanced technologies.

2.5 Promoting a rule-based and equitable oversight function of the IAEA and creating the required mechanisms for use of clean nuclear energy in agriculture, industry, and medicine and power generation.
2.6 Promoting the universality of NPT mobilizing global resolve and putting into action real and fundamental programmes toward complete disarmament and preventing development and proliferation of nuclear, chemical and microbial weapons.

2.7 Enhancement of ethical and human considerations and their full observance in international mechanisms, ties and practices.

3. Economic Issues

3.1 Energy and its security in production, supply, transport and consumption

3.2 Trade and investment

3.3 Capacity-building for promotion of public welfare, global poverty alleviation, reducing social gaps and bridging the gap between the South and the North

3.4 Finding the root causes of global economic and financial crisis and preventing the occurrence of other manifestations of crisis in the world economy and designing new and just mechanisms

3.5 Combating underground economy, economic corruption, financial frauds and organized crime activities that are detrimental to economic security.
APPENDIX 10


Some Facts regarding
Iran’s Nuclear Talks with 5+1
3 July 2012

In the Name of ALLAH, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

A framework for comprehensive and targeted dialogue

for long term cooperation among 7 countries

A. Guiding Principles

Parties agree and assert on,

1. good will,
2. the spirit of cooperation,
3. mutual respect,
4. avoiding measures which violate good will, spirit of cooperation and mutual respect,
5. giving priority to the issues of mutual interest,
6. considering NPT as the cornerstone of talks,
7. commitment to the rights and obligations specified in the NPT, and
8. avoiding preconditions and agree to continue their talks in a new process which is
   1. comprehensive,
   2. long term,
   3. sustainable,
4. mutually agreed,
5. constructive,
6. of tangible measures,
7. on the basis of step by step approach, and
8. Based on reciprocity.

B. Objectives

1. To normalize Iran’s nuclear file in the UN Security Council and in the Board of Governors by total termination of the UNSC, unilateral, and multilateral sanctions against Iran.

2. To assure and guarantee the Islamic Republic of Iran of practically enjoying all its nuclear rights within the framework of the NPT and regulations of the IAEA, in exchange for implementing its safeguard obligations.

3. To achieve a sustainable nuclear cooperation for transferring advanced technologies.

4. To conclude a comprehensive agreement on collective commitments in the areas of economic, political, security and international cooperation.

C: Issues

Nuclear issues

Non-nuclear issues

D: Structure of the Process

1. Timing:

- Meeting(s) between Dr. Saeed Jalili and Lady Ashton and the representatives of other 6 countries: every 3 months.
- Expert Meeting(s) of the 7 countries chaired by deputies of Dr. Jalili and Lady Ashton: prior to each main meeting.
2. **Agenda:**

- Combination of a set of nuclear and non-nuclear issues based on priorities suggested by the deputies meetings.

3. Agenda for the Moscow Meeting: the Islamic Republic of Iran’s proposals and 5+1 proposal which raised during Baghdad meeting.

E. **Reciprocal Steps**

To materialize the above mentioned objectives, and in order to:

First, legally and technically pave the way for guaranteeing the success of the talks in a short period of time in a way that it respects the legitimate and legal rights and obligations;

Second, define and agree on reciprocal steps in a way that it clearly sets the ultimate outcome of the process of the talks (namely, normalization of Iran’s nuclear file in the UN Security Council and in the Board of Governors along with cancellation of all UNSC and other types of sanctions); and

Third, facilitate and accelerate the definition of “confidence building reciprocal steps” and “desirable options for cooperation” in nuclear and non-nuclear areas;

Parties will commit themselves;

1. to define and implement the confidence building reciprocal steps in a “simultaneous”, “equipollent” and “balanced” manner, and

2. to oblige to the rights and obligations envisaged in the NPT.

Therefore, no agreement shall and can undermine NPT’s rights and obligation, or interpreted in a way that it either restricts or spoils them.

a. **Nuclear Issues**

   **Step One: Guidelines**
Commencement of cooperation and reciprocal steps requires an appropriate context and a clear vision of the process. Within such context, attestation of parties to each other side’s demand indicates the required commitment to conclude the process of talks.

- The Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes once again on its commitments under the NPT and its opposition to nuclear weapons based on the Supreme Leader’s Fatwa against such weapons.

- 5+1 officially recognizes the nuclear rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran based on Article 4 of the NPT, particularly its enrichment activities, and will openly announce it.

Step Two: Transparency Measures

The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue its broad cooperation with the IAEA within the framework of its legal and Safeguard obligations as before. Since baseless accusations and ambiguities have been raised regarding Iran’s past nuclear activities, Iran is asked to answer such allegations beyond its legal obligations;

- The Islamic Republic of Iran will transparently cooperate with the IAEA on the issue of “possible military dimensions” of Iran’s nuclear program (PMD).

- 5+1 will terminate all unilateral and multilateral sanctions (out of the UNSC framework) in order to make transparency on their intentions.

Step Three: Confidence building steps

The Islamic republic of Iran’s enrichment activities providing enriched fuel needed for TRR are under the supervision of the IAEA’s inspectors and cameras continuously. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been asked for taking some additional confidence building measures in this respect, although it has no more obligations in this regard;
• The Islamic Republic of Iran will cooperate with 5+1 to provide enriched fuel needed for TRR.

• In order to build confidence on their intentions, 5+1 will terminate the sanctions and will remove Iran’s nuclear file from UNSC agenda.

Step Four: Strengthening cooperation on mutual interests

In order to enhance assurance and confidence and to fulfill parties interests, parties will agree to start and boost their cooperation on the following issues:

• The Islamic Republic of Iran’s priorities: Designing and building nuclear power plants, and research reactors.

• 5+1 priorities: light water research reactors, nuclear safety and security, nuclear fusion

Step Five: Strengthening joint cooperation

For the purpose of broadening the dimensions of trust and confidence and working on the common grounds of interest in non-nuclear areas, parties agree to start their cooperation on the following issues;

• The Islamic Republic of Iran’s priorities: Regional issues especially Syria and Bahrain

• 5+1 priorities: combating Piracy and counter narcotic activities.

Reviewing and Assessing the Proposal of 5+1

Some of the propositions in the proposal of 5+1 are incorrect, some are ambiguous, some are in contradiction to international documents and some are not in conformity with the realities:
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