

IRAN'S NUCLEAR HEDGE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM AND
WHY IT KEEPS THE NUCLEAR OPTION ON THE TABLE

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Abstract

Since its genesis in 1957, the Iranian nuclear program has been the subject of worldwide attention. Two successive Iranian regimes, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's authoritarian monarchy (1941-1979) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-present), have maintained the argument that, as a signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Iran has a right to a civilian nuclear program. Evidence suggests, however, that both regimes maintained a nuclear hedging strategy in an attempt to keep the nuclear weapons option open. Iran's reluctance to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency resulted in international sanctions that have been severely detrimental to both its economy and political standing in the world. This thesis aims to explain why these two regimes sought, and arguably still seek, the nuclear option. In addition to the security model and the domestic politics model, this study will introduce the strategic culture model as a new framework to apply in the Iranian case. For the purpose of this analysis, strategic culture is defined as the set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and narratives that shape the strategic decision-making process of a state. This thesis identifies three key elements of Iranian strategic culture that influence its drive for nuclear technology and a nuclear hedging strategy. These three elements include: [1] Iranian nationalism; [2] a ubiquitous sense of vulnerability; and [3] a love/hate relationship with modernity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What is dignity? What is respect? Are they negotiable? Is there a price tag? Imagine being told that you cannot do what everyone else is doing, what everyone else is allowed to do. Do you back down? Would you relent? Or would you stand your ground?... We expect and demand respect for our dignity. For us Iranians, nuclear energy is not about joining a club or threatening others. Nuclear energy is about a leap, a jump towards deciding our own destiny, rather than allowing others to decide for us. For us, nuclear energy is about securing the future of our children, about diversifying our economy, about stopping the burning of our oil, it's about generating clean power. It's about the Iranian nation moving forward, as an equal, in a new realm defined by peace, by prosperity, by progress. What would you do if you were told this was not an option?

- Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, November 2013

On the eve of continued nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 in Geneva, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif released a video titled “Iran’s Message: There is a Way Forward.” In this video, Zarif passionately and outwardly asserts a common Iranian narrative: That, as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has a “right” to nuclear energy and to enrichment. This conviction, however, is certainly not a new phenomenon. The roots of the current Iranian nuclear program reach back to the monarchy governed by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. In the early 1970s, the Shah enthusiastically launched Iran’s nuclear program, insisting that Iran should enjoy its “full rights” under the NPT. Although Ayatollah Khomeini shut down the program following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, he covertly restarted it several years later. Both regimes adamantly contend that their only objective

is to have a thriving peaceful nuclear energy program for the benefit of the Iranian civilian population.

Evidence suggests, however, that both the Shah and the Islamic Republic of Iran maintain a “nuclear hedging” capability. The concept of nuclear hedging is defined as:

A national strategy of maintaining, or at least appearing to maintain, a viable option for the relatively rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons, based on an indigenous technical capacity to produce them within a relatively short time frame ranging from several weeks to a few years. In its most advanced form, nuclear hedging involves nuclear fuel-cycle facilities capable of producing fissionable materials (by way of uranium enrichment and/or plutonium separation), as well as the scientific and engineering expertise both to support them and to package their final product into a nuclear explosive charge.¹

Throughout the final years of his reign, the Shah held a magnificent vision for Iran’s nuclear program. His proposal outlined plans for a “full-fledged nuclear power industry” with the capacity to generate 23,000 megawatts of electricity. In 1976, its budget was \$1.3 billion, rendering it the second largest public economic institution in Iran after oil. One of the most common misconceptions about this period is that the United States fully supported the Shah’s nuclear ambitions. However, recently declassified documents from the Carter and Ford presidential libraries, the departments of energy, defense, and state, as well as the National Security Council (NSC) reveal that every aspect of today’s discord between the U.S. government and the Islamic Republic was also an issue in the negotiations with the Shah. The U.S. was concerned about the Shah’s interest in processing plutonium—technology that would ensure a much faster route to the bomb than enriched uranium. Meanwhile, the Shah confided to Akbar Etemad, the head of Iran’s nuclear program, that he wanted to build a bomb quickly if any of the surrounding countries did so.²

¹Ariel E. Levite, “Never say never again: nuclear reversal revisited,” *International Security* Vo. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002–2003), p. 69.

² Abbas Milani, “The Shah’s Atomic Dreams,” *Foreign Policy*, December 29, 2010.

Today, the evidence from technical indicators alone, including the uncovering of large-scale covert activities, strongly indicates that the Islamic Republic of Iran is also attempting to employ a nuclear hedging strategy. Iran's longstanding status as a signatory of the NPT has provided it with the justification to develop a fissile material production capability allegedly for civilian purposes.³ However, Iran also has an extended and consistent record of hiding sensitive nuclear activities and facilities from the IAEA. Even when these covert activities have been discovered, Iran has refused to cooperate with all of the agency's demands and investigations. Additionally, Iran appears to have conducted operations related to the development of missile delivery warheads.⁴ These factors have contributed to growing suspicions about the true motivation and purpose behind the program.

Therefore, this thesis builds on the premise that Iran's nuclear program is not exclusively intended for peaceful purposes, and it never has been. Instead, Iran has settled for a nuclear hedging strategy, allowing it to mask its ambiguous intentions under the guise of a purely peaceful civilian nuclear energy program. This decision has not been without consequences for Iran. The United States and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have authorized several rounds of new sanctions against Iran in recent years, primarily targeting Iran's energy sector and its access to the international financial system.⁵ These sanctions have, to put it lightly, wreaked havoc on the Iranian economy. Decades of diplomatic and political isolation have also resulted in a serious brain drain, as millions of educated Iranians have fled to Europe and the United States. Furthermore, Iran has one of the highest rates of opium and heroin addictions in

³ Wyn Bowen and Joanna Kidd, "The Iranian Nuclear Challenge," *International Affairs* Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 2004), pp. 257-76.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran Sanctions," CRS Report Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress, Congressional Research Service, March 18, 2014.

the world. The program's cost, measured in lost foreign investment and oil revenue, has been well over \$1 billion.

Nevertheless, despite its best interests, Iran has consistently refused to make sincere concessions pertaining to its nuclear program, prompting the following research question: *Why, despite the radically different regimes in power, has Iran kept the nuclear option on the table?* Conventional wisdom largely contends that realist theories, such as the security model, and liberal theories, such as the domestic politics model, can explain Iranian nuclear decision-making. These paradigms are certainly important and they will be used in this study as tools for comparison. However, inspired by the scholarly work that has been done in the field of security studies on *strategic culture*, this thesis will examine the development of Iran's nuclear program through this new lens. In broad terms, strategic culture emphasizes the domestic sources of security policy in an effort to identify how the past impacts and forms contemporary policy behavior and decisions. The strategic culture model is different than some of the more traditional approaches (i.e. realist or liberal models) in security studies. Instead, the strategic culture model focuses on each state as a unique entity with its own idiosyncratic history. This approach examines the ways in which collective historical experiences, conveyed through permeating values and beliefs, can influence interests, and thereby, shape the policy decisions of a state, region, or security institution. The goals of this study are twofold: first, to highlight the continuities and discontinuities of the Iranian nuclear program, while demonstrating that both the Shah and the Islamic Republic of Iran exercise a nuclear hedging strategy; and second, to put forth the strategic culture model as a framework in which Iranian nuclear decision-making can be analyzed. The following is a brief overview of the upcoming chapters:

Part I offers a comprehensive history of the Iranian nuclear program. *Chapter 2* focuses on the inception and development of Iran's nuclear program under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, while *Chapter 3* outlines the trajectory of the program following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Both chapters provide evidence to suggest that Iran has continuously maintained a strategy of "nuclear hedging," and therefore, kept its nuclear weapons option open.

Part II offers an extensive overview of three models that will be used to examine the trajectory of Iran's nuclear decision making. *Chapter 4* studies the security model, and assesses Iran's realist motivations with respect to both potential regional and global security threats. The most relevant regional relationships include Iran-Iraq, Iran-Afghanistan, Iran-Gulf States, and finally, Iran-Israel. The global threats section will largely focus on Iran's perceived threat from the United States. Each section will outline the historical relationship between Iran and the respective country. Based on these assessments, it will examine the validity of the security model for explaining Iran's nuclear ambitions and pursuits. *Chapter 5* examines the domestic politics model as it is relevant to the Iranian example. It argues that both the Shah and the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran are personalist leaders. Finally, this chapter will underline the domestic debates and the internal bureaucratic struggles within the current regime. *Chapter 6* provides an extensive literature review of strategic culture theory and its evolution since the 1970s. It then identifies three key elements of Iranian strategic culture that best explain the country's pursuit of a nuclear program and corresponding hedging strategy. *Chapter 7* summarizes the key findings and presents the implications of this thesis for the ongoing nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1.

PART I

The History of the Iranian Nuclear Program

Chapter 2: The Shah's Atomic Dreams

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb over the city of Hiroshima. United States President Harry S. Truman made the decision to use the bomb as a means to end the war, and on that day, the world changed forever. Several years later, an escalating nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, which included the development of thermonuclear bombs, brought President Dwight D. Eisenhower to the United Nations General Assembly. On December 8, 1953, President Eisenhower delivered his famous Atoms for Peace speech in which he was resolute in his intent to solve "the fearful atomic dilemma" by figuring out a way in which "the miraculous inventiveness of man" would not be devoted to his death, but rather, consecrated to his life.⁶ Eisenhower acknowledged the significant capacity of atomic energy in contributing to human welfare. He also recognized the fervency of many nations to utilize nuclear energy in pursuit of these benefits. Thus, his administration concluded that these aspirations should and could be controlled with a program focused on positive international cooperation with safeguard agreements. Meanwhile, there was growing consensus within the United States regarding the benefits of peaceful nuclear technology, in addition to the tremendous amount of potential for U.S. industries to contribute. Consequently, the United States formed a new atomic policy. It incorporated the sharing of peaceful nuclear technology and a plan to establish the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Within the U.S., this policy encouraged the growth of the peaceful nuclear energy industry by allowing such steps as construction and cooperation, under license, of private

⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Remarks by the President of the United States of America to the 470th Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, December 8, 1953.

reactors. A new Atomic Energy Act was implemented to give substance to what became known as the Atoms for Peace Program.

The Atoms for Peace program provided the foundation for the Iranian nuclear program. By providing essential nuclear technology and education, Atoms for Peace helped Mohammad Reza Shah establish Iran's nuclear program in 1957. On March 5th of that year, the United States and Iran announced a "proposed agreement for cooperation in research in the peaceful uses of atomic energy," otherwise known as the Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atoms. The goal of the deal was also to provide opportunities for US investment in Iran's civilian nuclear industries, such as health care and medicine. Another component of the plan was to allow the US Atomic Energy Commission to lease Iran up to 13.2 pounds of low-enriched uranium (LEU) for research purposes.⁷

In 1967, the Shah formed the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC), housed at the University of Tehran, and began to discuss the option of having the United States provide Iran with necessary nuclear technology and materials.⁸ A five-megawatt (MWe) research reactor—the first atomic energy facility of any importance in Iran—was built in the mid-1960s under the auspices of the Atoms for Peace Program. This reactor became the showpiece of TNRC. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Science & Higher Education maintained a relationship with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as well as other foreign atomic energy organizations, while the Ministry of Water and Power began planning for the inauguration of nuclear power. Iran sent many of its students abroad to study nuclear science and engineering. On July 1, 1968, the day it opened for signature, Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation

⁷ Greg Bruno, "Iran's Nuclear Program," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 10 2010.

⁸ More information about the Tehran Nuclear Research Center can be found here:
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/iran/tehran-tnrc.htm>

Treaty (NPT).⁹ Signing the NPT meant that Iran agreed to abandon any pursuit of nuclear weapons, in exchange for easy access to peaceful nuclear energy.

In the midst of a world energy crisis, the Shah of Iran founded the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) in April of 1974. Declassified State Department cables from 1976 mention that the AEOI intended to develop nuclear power in Iran on a “top priority basis.” Within its first two years of existence, AEOI accomplished the following:

- (1) Grown into a bureaucracy of over 1,000 employees, (2) signed letters of intent for four large nuclear power plans, (3) initiated an intensive search for sources of uranium within Iran and abroad, (4) arranged for training of large numbers of Iranians in nuclear sciences and engineering abroad, (5) started development of nuclear research centers at home, (6) entered into bi-lateral relationships with several foreign atomic authorities.¹⁰

The document explains the functions, organization structure, and key personnel involved with the AEOI in great depth. The plans for the organization were both extremely ambitious and highly organized. The AEOI had the authority to carry out seven primary functions:

- 1) To generate electricity from nuclear power plants for the national grid, 2) To carry on atomic research, 3) To train specialists needed in all phases of nuclear science and technology, 4) To promote applications of radioactivity in medicine and agriculture, 5) To study and make recommendations for the development of alternative sources of energy, 6) To represent Iran in international conferences dealing with atomic energy, and 7) To determine participation of Iran in joint projects dealing with atomic energy.¹¹

The Shah held a deep commitment to the success of the nuclear program, and consequently, required that the President of the AEOI report directly to him for all final decisions. He appointed Dr. Akbar Etemad as President and Deputy Prime Minister. The policy-making body of the AEOI, referred to as the High Council of Atomic Energy, was

⁹ Bruno, “Iran’s Nuclear Program.”

¹⁰ U.S. Embassy Tehran Airgram A-76 to State Department, “The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran,” 15 April 1976, National Security Archives, Nuclear Vault.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

composed of six leadership positions.¹² At the time, the internal organization was not fully solidified, but included a long list of committees dedicated to specific components of the program.¹³ With over 1,000 employees, the organization was under special instruction to hire individuals at wage rates above those typical of government employees in Iran, “a sign of the high priority given to the nuclear program.”¹⁴ The government also worked with two local consulting firms founded by influential Iranians for the purpose of assisting the AEOI. The first firm, set up by Mr. Abolfath Mahvi, was the Iran Nuclear Energy Company (INECO). INECO provided an array of services, in addition to collaborating with American companies such as NUS Corp and the Bechtel Corporation on projects pertaining to regulatory matters and training. Reza Niazmand’s firm, URIRAN, undertook the assignment of “prospecting for uranium and its subcontracting with foreign aerial survey firms for a complete radiometric survey of Iran.”¹⁵

One of the biggest challenges facing Iran was a lack of expertise in the field of nuclear power and technology. It was common for educated, upper class members of Iranian society to attend universities abroad after graduating from high school. Now it was the Shah’s mission to attract those individuals already trained in nuclear science and engineering back to Iran. Within two years of founding AEOI, Dr. Etemad claimed that this objective had been achieved, at least to a certain extent. The priority then became to recruit and train more scientists and technicians

¹² Ibid., p. 3. According to the State Department cable, these positions included a Prime Minister, Minister of Energy, Minister of Economic Affairs & Finance, Minister of Agriculture & Natural Resources, Minister of Science & Higher Education, Director of the Plan & Budget Organization, Director of the Department of the Environment, and the President of the Atomic Energy Organization (and four atomic experts).

¹³ Ibid., p. 3. As of December 27, 1975, the internal organization of the AEOI was as follows: President (Dr. Akbar Etemad), President’s Office (Secretary: Ms. Doroud), Public Relations; Committees of the AEOI reporting directly to the President included: The Planning Committee, Research Coordination Committee, Education Committee, Safety, Safeguards, Radiation Protection Committee, Organization & Administrative Committee; Nuclear Safeguards & Safety category included: Nuclear Safeguards and Physical Protection (Eng. Mehdi Sarram), Nuclear Safety (Eng. Mohammad-Hassan Farzin), Radiation Protection (Dr. Parniapour); Other committees included: Legal & International Office (Mr. Aziz Shirazi), Office of Organization & Budget (Mr. Bahman Hekmat), Planning Office, and Information Services (for internal matters), Supporting Services, Research, Industry, Fuel, Energy Sources, and Administration and Finance.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

for the new facilities that were to be constructed. By the spring of 1976, AEOI had approximately 250 students studying at nuclear centers in the United States and the United Kingdom. Iran also successfully negotiated a 1.4\$ million dollar contract with MIT to train two sets of nuclear engineers. AEOI leadership also recognized the importance of training students immediately following their high school education, before they are sent abroad. A building was designated in Tehran for this exact purpose, as a nuclear preparatory school, and discussions were in the works to have the Bechtel Corporation organize and staff it for 8\$ million dollars.¹⁶

There was no doubt that the Shah had highly ambitious goals for the Iranian nuclear program. He announced a plan that would provide 23,000 MWe of nuclear power capacity by 1994—rendering Iran’s program among the largest in the world. In order to reach this hefty goal, the AEOI needed supplies of uranium ore, secure enrichment services, and access to fuel reprocessing facilities. The AEOI openly acknowledged that it intended to develop expertise in all phases of the nuclear fuel cycle so that it could eventually operate independently, without foreign constraints on its program.¹⁷

Major Western powers such as Germany and France fully supported the Shah’s intentions because they sought profitable power reactor sales to Iran. Meanwhile, the United States was slightly more cautious in its support. During the first several months of the AEOI’s establishment, organization officials believed that American companies would be the first to obtain contracts for construction of Iranian nuclear power plants. Later, however, the same officials mentioned that American companies were slow to commit after receiving extensive

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 9

proposals. Iranians pushed for “so-called super-turnkey contracts,”¹⁸ meaning that they wanted the nuclear power plants to be completed in their entirety and ready for immediate use. American companies were hesitant to carry out such projects in an unfamiliar foreign environment. While the American companies hesitated, however, European contractors were eager to get involved. The German firm, Kraftwerk Union (now Siemens) agreed to build Iran two 1,200-MWe light water reactors to produce nuclear energy at Bushehr, to be completed in 1981 and 1982. Immediately following this announcement, Iran made another deal with the French firm, Framatome, which confirmed the construction of another two plants of 900 MWe each, to be finished in 1983 and 1984. Iran also invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the Eurodif uranium consortium based in France as a means to secure the enrichment services that its large program would require.¹⁹

Iran also conveyed its interest in obtaining a domestic reprocessing, or plutonium separation plant to handle power reactor spent fuel—an action that the United States did not support. On May 15, 1974, Iran signed the NPT’s Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, permitting inspections within its borders for the purpose of ensuring that nuclear enrichment for peaceful energy is not diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.²⁰ The Shah was steadfast in his conviction that Iran should enjoy its “full rights” under the NPT, which included a full fuel cycle, and according to the monarch, the right to process plutonium. However, there was never a shortage of mixed signals from the Iranian government. In June of 1974, shortly after the Indian “peaceful nuclear explosion,” the Shah of Iran made a shocking

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 10. AEOI proposals included “not only construction of plants per se but also training of the personnel to man them, provision of the enriched uranium to fuel them, and construction and operation of all the local infrastructure necessary to build and run them.”

¹⁹ Semira N. Nikou, “Timeline of Iran’s Nuclear Activities,” in *The Iran Primer*, ed. Robin Wright (US Institute of Peace Press, 2010), p. 243.

²⁰ International Atomic Energy Agency, *Agreement Between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency for the Application of Safeguards in Connection with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, May 15, 1974.

remark when he was asked by a journalist whether Iran would have nuclear weapons: "Without any doubt, and sooner than one would think."²¹ Iranian officials did not hesitate to deny this statement. Instead, they claimed that, "HIM (His Imperial Majesty) actually said Iran is not thinking of building nuclear weapons but may revise its policy ... if other non-nuclear nations do." In another statement, this one to *Le Monde*, the Shah ridiculed the nuclear arms race:

I am ready to repeat what I have proposed several times, that is, to declare our zone—a geographic zone whose borders could clearly be delimited—non-nuclear. Because, honestly, I believe this nuclear armaments race is ridiculous. What would one do with them? Use them against the great powers? One could never have parity. Use them to kill each other? A country which would procure this means to attack would not wait long before being crushed by another country which would be in the *avant garde*.²²

In this statement, the Shah goes as far as to suggest the creation of a nuclear-weapons free zone in the Middle East. He provided a caveat, however, when he noted that if other nations in the region acquired nuclear weapons, "then perhaps the national interests of any country at all would demand the same."²³ Ambassador (and former CIA chief) Richard Helms was satisfied with the amendments offered by the Shah and his advisers. In a cable to the Acting Secretary of State, Helms wrote that, "I want to emphasize to you personally that there has been no change in Iran's declared policy not to acquire nuclear weapons."²⁴ Meanwhile, the government of Iran continued to assure the United States that it had no intention of becoming a nuclear weapons state.

²¹ U.S. Embassy Paris cable 15305 to Department of State, "Interview with Shah," 24 June 1974, National Security Archives, Nuclear Vault. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb268/doc01a.pdf>

²² U.S. Embassy Paris cable 15445 to Department of State, "Further Remarks by Shah on Nuclear Weapons," 25 June 1974, National Security Archives, Nuclear Vault. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb268/doc01b.pdf>

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ U.S. Embassy Tehran cable 5389 to Department of State, "Iran's Intentions in Nuclear Matters," 1 July 1974, Confidential, National Security Archives, Nuclear Vault. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb268/doc01d.pdf>

A summary of nuclear negotiations between the United States and Iran is also critical to understanding the trajectory of Iran's nuclear program under the Shah. On April 20, 1976, President Gerald Ford issued National Security Decision Memorandum 324 in support of Iran's plan to build 23 nuclear power reactors. In sum, the U.S. was concerned about Iran's interest in a reprocessing plant and the IAEA's ability to sufficiently monitor such a plant. Alternatively, Ford's memorandum urged Iran to participate in a multinational plant or return the plutonium to the U.S.²⁵ In response, the AEOI expressed doubt that Middle Eastern nations would be able to successfully cooperate with one another on owning and overseeing such a complex venture. Accordingly, the mandate would also allow the Iranians to buy and operate an American-built nuclear reprocessing plant for extracting plutonium from reactor fuel, otherwise known as the "buyback" option—an alternative supported by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Interviewed by *The Washington Post* in 2005, Mr. Kissinger referenced the deal: "They were an allied country, and this was a commercial transaction. We didn't address the question of them one day moving toward nuclear weapons."²⁶

The American presidential elections put negotiations with Iran on hold until President Jimmy Carter assumed power. Throughout the second half of 1977, the Carter administration resumed negotiations with the Shah, and by mid-1978 the two sides had come to an agreement. Similar to the 1976 draft, the agreement maintained a U.S. veto on reprocessing. This time, however, there was no mention of a buyback option or a multinational plant. All options would be "subject to U.S. law which includes determination of no significant increase in the risk of proliferation associated with approvals for reprocessing." It would be feasible to return recovered plutonium as fabricated fuel to Iran, but only "under arrangements which are deemed

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Dafna Linzer, "Past Arguments Don't Square With Current Iran Policy," *The Washington Post*, March 2005, p. 27.

to be more proliferation resistant than those which currently exist.”²⁷ The agreement clearly limited Iran’s freedoms in making certain decisions, but the Shah and his advisors were inclined to compromise for the sake of sustaining amiable relations with the United States. As the Shah’s grip on power weakened, Iranian officials still kept up their position, adamantly, that they were eager to work with the U.S. nuclear industry and that “the bilateral relationship would certainly not be scrapped.”²⁸ Neither Carter nor the Shah would ever sign the agreement.

Evidence of Nuclear Hedging

Although Iran has always been a signatory of the NPT, it was one of the first countries to be suspected of having nuclear weapons aspirations. During the Shah’s rule, Iran undertook a large-scale program of purchasing nuclear reactors. This included approximately twenty 1000-megawatt reactors by the end of the 1980s, reactors with enough plutonium output to build hundreds of nuclear weapons per year. Experts at the time believed that this investment was premature and unnecessary to meet any realistic estimation of civilian need, especially considering that Iran is a nation rich in petroleum.²⁹ The electric power consumption for the entirety of the country was only 14,000 megawatts in the 1970s; therefore, the forecasted nuclear power production was more than enough to match the output. Moving beyond the reactors, the Shah declared plans to invest in domestic plutonium reprocessing facilities, an action that prompted concern in the U.S. government. The reprocessing facilities would permit Iran to

²⁷ State Department cable 125971 to Embassy Tehran, “U.S.-Iran Nuclear Cooperation Agreement,” 17 May 1978, Confidential, National Security Archives, Nuclear Vault.

<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb268/doc31a.pdf>

²⁸ Statement referenced by William Burr in “The History of Iran’s Nuclear Weapons Program,” *Bulletin of Atomic Sciences*, January 19, 2009.

²⁹ George H. Quester, “The Shah and the Bomb,” *Policy Sciences* Vol. 8 (1977), pp. 21-32.

prepare plutonium for reuse as fuel in the next set of electricity-producing reactors.³⁰ However, reprocessed plutonium can also be used to create weapons-grade materials, readily usable to build atomic bombs.

Another cause for concern came after the Iranian government hired an admiral from Argentina, and the former head of the Argentinian nuclear program, Oscar Armando Quihillalt, to advise the Iranian Atomic Energy Commission. At the time, the international community was wary about Brazil's inclination towards building peaceful nuclear explosives, which it feared would quickly be matched by Argentina. Therefore, cooperation between Iranians and Argentineans was viewed as "an interest in explosives in Buenos Aires and Tehran."³¹ The Shah's remarks in the May 1974 interview with a French journalist only served to make matters worse.³² Despite the Iranian government's insistent denial of his statements, the U.S. and the international community were particularly concerned about Iranian intentions in the aftermath of the Indian detonation of what amounted to be an atomic bomb. India had also been a "threshold nation," on the verge of a nuclear capability, and it broke the threshold, which some worried would set a precedent for its neighboring countries. Consequently, between its geographic proximity to India and its material capability and intense desire to develop an advanced nuclear program, Iran and its nuclear program became the focus of international attention and ultimately, apprehension.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

³¹ Ibid.

³² As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Shah was interviewed by a French journalist soon after the Indian detonation of a "peaceful nuclear device" in May 1974. When asked whether Iran would also soon obtain nuclear weapons, he responded: "Without a doubt, and sooner than one would think." The statement was denied by the Iranian government several days later, and a statement was released stating that Iran had no intention of acquiring nuclear weapons as long as other smaller countries did not do so either.

Chapter 3: The Islamic Republic and the Resurrection of Iran's Nuclear Program

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran shocked the world and transformed the dynamics of global politics. Amidst an unstable Cold War environment, the revolution was one of several events in the Middle East that captured the attention of the United States, along with the rest of the world. Demonstrators—which included left-leaning university students advocating for more freedoms, as well as radical Islamists opposed to the monarchy's Western-leaning policies—took to the streets of Tehran demanding that the Shah relinquish power and leave the country. The ouster of Iran's monarch and the rise of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established the Islamic Republic of Iran, “an ignominious strategic, diplomatic and intelligence defeat”³³ for the U.S.

Iran immediately suspended its nuclear program because Khomeini starkly objected the notion of weapons of mass destruction, a concept that will be further explored in the strategic culture chapter. U.S. President Ronald Reagan also imposed an international embargo on nuclear cooperation with Iran; hence, its nuclear partnership with the United States also ended with their breakup in bilateral relations.³⁴ Construction on two semi-finished reactors at Bushehr and plans for two reactors to be built by France at Ahvaz were abandoned.

Less than a year later, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, starting a devastating war between the two countries that would last for eight years. Iranians responded to the invasion

³³ John B. Oakes, “Iran's Tidal Wave,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 1979.

³⁴ John Chipman, *Iran's Strategic Weapons Programmes: A Net Assessment*, Ed. Gary Samore, (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), p. 12.

by uniting against him and under the Islamic regime. The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), which was formed after the revolution as the principle internal security force, transformed into a second military and rushed to confront the invading forces. Thousands of volunteers were incorporated into both the IRGC and the regular military. They were driven to defend the country, the revolution, and the Islamic Republic by a potent combination of nationalism, revolutionary mission, and religious zeal that was stoked by the foreign threat.

It is argued that the devastating Iran-Iraq war had a profound influence on Ayatollah Khomeini's decision to re-start Iran's nuclear program. According to a 2009 internal IAEA working document report, in April 1984, then President Ali Khamenei notified top Iranian officials that Khomeini had decided to reinitiate the nuclear program as the only way to secure the Islamic Revolution from the schemes of its enemies, specifically the United States and Israel.³⁵ In 1983 and 1985, the French supported Iran in building a facility for uranium conversion and fuel fabrication at the Esfahan Nuclear Technology Center (ENTC). Concurrently, Iran was also believed to have obtained uranium enrichment knowledge and technology vis-à-vis the black market network led by Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan in 1987.³⁶ The resurrection of the Shah's nuclear program was originally presented to the public as necessary to diversify Iran's energy sources. Nuclear technology, and ultimately, independence, was considered a symbol of development and essential for any self-respecting power. The revival of the nuclear weapons program was merely one component of Iran's broader struggle to gain self-reliance in arms and technology.

In 1989, following the death of Supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's attitude towards the use of nuclear energy shifted yet again. Under the guidance of the new Supreme

³⁵ Julian Borger, "IAEA Secret Report: Iran Worked on Nuclear Warhead," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2009.

³⁶ Richard P. Cronin, Alan Kronstadt, and Sharon Squassoni, *Pakistan's Nuclear Proliferation Activities and the Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission: U.S. Policy Constraints and Options*, January 25, 2005, p. 11-12.

Leader Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, and the presidencies of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammed Khatami, the country renewed its nuclear ambitions and resumed the acquisition of nuclear related technology.³⁷ By the early 1990s, Iran was beginning to recuperate from the war with Iraq, and it continued to move forward with its nuclear program with support from Russia, China, and Pakistan. Persuaded by the United States, Germany, India, and Argentina refused to support the Iranian program; instead, Iran signed two nuclear cooperation protocols with China, one in 1985 and another in 1990. China provided Iran with small research reactors, vital enrichment and fuel production equipment, and more than one ton of natural uranium.³⁸ Following a 1997 agreement between the U.S. and China, however, the Chinese halted their nuclear technology transfer to the Islamic Republic. Russia also demonstrated its willingness to support Iran's nuclear pursuits by signing a nuclear cooperation deal in 1992, and in 1995, Iran finalized a protocol of cooperation with Russia to finish the construction of the Bushehr reactor, in addition to potentially supplying a uranium enrichment plant. Frustrated by this collaboration, U.S. President Clinton pleaded with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, asking him to immediately cancel fuel assistance to Iran. Nevertheless, by 1998, Russian contracting companies were still offering unauthorized assistance to Iran. They helped to build a heavy-water production plant and a heavy-water reactor at Arak, in addition to uranium mining facilities at Ardakan.³⁹ Throughout the remainder of the decade, China and Russia continued their support of the Iranian program, notwithstanding promises from their respective governments to limit nuclear assistance.

Iran's nuclear deals—both official and illegal—assumed by the regime throughout the 1990s helped it to make significant progress in its nuclear effort. Meanwhile, Western

³⁷ See IISS Dossier, p. 12.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁹ Ibid.

intelligence agencies noticed early signs of Iranian nuclear activities, and Iran offered voluntary visits by the IAEA to its facilities in 1992 and 1993. However, there was still no evidence of any violation of Iran's NPT and IAEA Safeguards obligations. By 1999, it was reported that the Iranians had begun testing at the enrichment facilities, which were eventually moved to the newly built enrichment facility at Natanz.⁴⁰

During the summer of 2002, Iran attracted international attention when an Iranian resistance group, Mujahidin al-Khalq, exposed the undercover construction of two nuclear sites at Natanz and Arak.⁴¹ The revelation coincided with U.S. wariness about the spread of weapons of mass destruction to rogue regimes and extremist non-state actors. By February 2003, the scope of the Iranian nuclear program had become clear, but at this point, Iran had already made important headway towards mastering the technology required to produce enriched uranium⁴², one of the necessary components used to fuel a nuclear weapon. The Iranian program was further along than U.S. intelligence had anticipated. Iran had already finished 164 centrifuges, and was in the process of building 1,000 more. Additionally, Iran was in the process of constructing its Natanz facility to accommodate 50,000 centrifuges meant to purify uranium—the amount necessary to manufacture enough bomb-grade material for as many as twenty crude weapons per year. At Arak, to the west, inspectors discovered construction of a heavy-water plant and reactor meant to make plutonium.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴¹ Alireza Jafarzadeh, “New Information on the Top Secret Projects of the Iranian Regime's Nuclear Program,” Remarks at the National Council of Resistance of Iran, August 14, 2002.

⁴² International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Report by the Director General, GOV/2003/75, November 10, 2003, p. 6-7.



Source: Iran Primer

Furthermore, many of Iran's nuclear experiments were administered in violation of its inspection agreements with the IAEA. Because of this, Iran was forced to provide new information on its activities and clarify the purpose of its program. Iran's explanations, in addition to the results of the IAEA's inspections, were published in a series of Agency reports beginning in June 2003. The report found that the Iranian government was unable to explain the presence of uranium metal in its nuclear fuel cycle, as "neither its light water reactors nor its planned heavy water reactors require uranium metal for fuel."⁴³ In an attempt to explain this, the Iranian government proclaimed that such metal was contamination on equipment purchased from Pakistan. However, this was a contradiction to its earlier claims that their enrichment program was completely indigenous. Based on the available information, it appears that Iran developed centrifuge enrichment by utilizing technology acquired from Pakistan. During this time, IAEA inspections also found traces of bomb-grade uranium at other Iranian nuclear sites, and

⁴³ Report by the IAEA Director General on the implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran titled "Nonproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, A G-8 Declaration," June 6, 2003. The document was found in *Iran's Nuclear Programme: A Collection of Documents*.

discovered that Iranian scientists had experimented with Polonium-210, a substance used to start the chain reaction leading to the detonation of a nuclear weapon.⁴⁴

As a result of immense international pressure, and to avoid exacerbating the situation, President Mohammad Khatami gained consensus in the Supreme National Security Council to meet concerns halfway. Britain, Germany, and France, otherwise known as the EU-3, convinced Iran in the fall of 2003 to verifiably halt its uranium enrichment activities and implement the NPT's Additional Protocol.⁴⁵ These two steps significantly bolstered the IAEA's ability to inspect Iran's nuclear program and guarantee that it did not have undisclosed nuclear sites. In 2004, Iran and the EU-3 signed the Paris Agreement, which prolonged the temporary suspension of Iran's nuclear activities until a long-term accord was agreed upon. Within several weeks, the IAEA confirmed Iran's suspension of its enrichment activities with the exception of its request to use up to 20 sets of centrifuge parts for research and development.⁴⁶

In mid-2005, senior American intelligence officials confronted the International Atomic Energy Agency with the contents of a stolen Iranian laptop.⁴⁷ In this laptop, the U.S. government found over one thousand pages of computer simulations and records of experiments related to the creation of a nuclear warhead. The intelligence reports indicated that Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was in charge of certain segments of Iran's weaponization program, referred to as Project 110 and Project 111. The documents failed to prove the existence of an Iranian bomb; however, they provided credible evidence that, despite Iran's insistence that its nuclear program is peaceful, the country is attempting to develop a compact warhead

⁴⁴ Gary Samore, *Future of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime*, (Brussels: International Institute for Strategic Studies), March 3, 2003.

⁴⁵ Brenda Schaffer, "Iran at the Nuclear Threshold," *Arms Control Today*, Washington, D.C.: November 2003.

⁴⁶ Elaine Sciolino, "Iran Claims Draft Accord with Europe on Uranium," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2004.

⁴⁷ William J. Broad and David E. Sanger, "Relying on Computer, U.S. Seeks to Prove Iran's Nuclear Aims," *The New York Times*, November 13, 2005.

compatible with its Shahab missile.⁴⁸ Some experts had doubts about the validity of the intelligence, arguing that factions of Iranian opposition or an adversarial nation may have falsified the evidence. Despite this, the U.S. led a successful campaign at the IAEA and passed a resolution against Iran for "a long history of concealment and deception" and repeated failure to live up to its NPT obligations. The resolution also mentioned that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) would review Iranian actions and consider economic consequences for its failings. In response, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki discredited the resolution as "illegal and illogical" and as the product of a "planned scenario determined by the United States.

Meanwhile, the political environment in Iran was in flux, as both the executive branch and parliament were controlled by hardliners. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the former mayor of Tehran, was elected president, and he quickly became known as a divisive and notorious character in global politics. He championed the development of the Iranian nuclear program notwithstanding orders from the UNSC to stop it, called for Israel to be "wiped off the map," and referred to the Holocaust as a "myth." In January 2006, Iran reinstated uranium enrichment at the Natanz facility after a series of failed negotiations with European and American officials.⁴⁹ In addition, Iran stopped voluntarily implementing the Additional Protocol, and failed to sufficiently respond to the IAEA's inquiries regarding past or ongoing experimentation on nuclear weapon activities and the development of nuclear warheads for missile delivery systems. As a result, the IAEA approved a resolution to report Iran's nuclear program to the Security Council, citing:

Iran's many failures and breaches of its obligations to comply with its NPT Safeguards Agreement and the absence of confidence that Iran's nuclear programme is exclusively for peaceful purposes resulting from the history of concealment of Iran's nuclear

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Steven R. Weisman and Nazila Fathi, "Iranians Reopen Nuclear Centers," *The New York Times*, January 11, 2006.

activities, the nature of those activities and other issues arising from the Agency's verification of declarations made by Iran since September 2002.⁵⁰

In August of 2006, President Ahmadinejad resumed activity at the Arak heavy-water production plant.⁵¹ Despite claims that the heavy-water reactor would be used to produce radioactive isotopes for medical treatments, the IAEA declined Iran's request to support its program due to concerns regarding the dual-use of plutonium.⁵² By the end of the year, the UNSC unanimously approved sanctions intended to contain Iran's nuclear program. The sanctions banned the import and export of materials and technology used in uranium enrichment and reprocessing and in the production of ballistic missiles.⁵³

The next several years were characterized by public and private efforts to halt the Iranian Program. Privately, the Bush administration increased its intelligence sharing with Israeli officials in an effort to curb their growing concerns about the progression of the Iranian program. The two countries collaborated with one another on a cyber attack operation, code-named Olympic Games, which targeted and crashed the computer system at Natanz. Publicly, however, the U.S. decided to give diplomacy a chance. President Bush sent Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William J. Burns to negotiations in Geneva, one of the most significant interactions between Iran and the United States since relations were severed three decades prior. It was also a demonstration of unity among the six negotiating partners—the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China—who urged Iran to compromise.⁵⁴ Specifically, the negotiating team asked Iran to accept a formula known as “freeze-for-freeze” to break the

⁵⁰ International Atomic Energy Agency, Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, GOV/2006/14, February 4, 2006.

⁵¹ Mark Landler, “Atomic Energy Agency Opts to Snub Iran's Request for Help With Reactor,” *The New York Times*, November 23, 2006.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Elissa Gootman, “Security Council Approves Sanctions Against Iran Over Nuclear Program,” *The New York Times*, December 24, 2006.

⁵⁴ Elaine Sciolino, “Nuclear Talks With Iran End in a Deadlock,” *The New York Times*, July 20, 2008.

impasse. Under the formula, Iran would not move forward with its program, and the U.S. and other nations would not pursue new international sanctions for six weeks, allotting time for further negotiations.⁵⁵ The proposal was offered to Iran as a part of a new plan to provide Iran economic and political incentives if it pledged to stop producing enriched uranium. Ultimately, Iran responded with a document that failed to address the uranium enrichment issue. The negotiations ended in a deadlock.

With the election of President Barack Obama, the United States rejoined talks with Iran, along with France, Britain, Germany, Russia, and China. These talks were ultimately fruitless, and in September 2009, the U.S., France, and Britain publicly divulged the existence of a secret uranium enrichment site being built underground near the holy city of Qom. The facility's disclosure led to concern that Iran intended to build a potential breakout facility where it could quickly produce weapon-grade uranium for a bomb.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in February 2010, UN nuclear inspectors revealed evidence of "past or current undisclosed activities" by Iran's military to develop a nuclear warhead. The report cited new evidence that indicated an intensive drive in Iran toward a weapons capability, highlighting enrichment up to 20%, recognition of an undisclosed enrichment plant in Qum, efforts to metalize uranium, and rejection of a deal to enrich uranium outside of the country as reasons for concern.⁵⁷ Due to its failure to halt enrichment and cooperate sufficiently with the IAEA, the U.N. Security Council passed four rounds of economic sanctions against Iran between 2006 and 2010. The sanctions focused

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "U.S. and Allies Warn Over Nuclear 'Deception,'" *The New York Times*, September 25, 2009.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

specifically on entities and officials connected to the nuclear program, as well as Iran's illegitimate banking, shipping, and trading activities that support its nuclear program.⁵⁸

Later that year, unknown attackers on motorcycles bombed two of Iran's top nuclear scientists.⁵⁹ One of the individuals, Majid Shahriari, was killed in the attack. He led a major project for Iran's Atomic Energy Organization. His colleague, Fereydoon Abbasi, was injured in the attack, and is believed to have played an even bigger role in the program, as he is listed on the UNSC's sanctions list for links to the Iranian nuclear effort.⁶⁰ Neither the United States or Israel have admitted to carrying out such attacks, but both are widely believed to be pursuing covert operations in an effort to sabotage Iran's nuclear program. From 2010 onward, Iran increased the level of enrichment at the Natanz plant from 3.5% to 20%, while claiming that it would be used to fuel the Tehran Research Reactor. Skeptics worried that Iran's root motivation was to learn to enrich even further, to 90%, or weapon-grade. Halfway through the year, estimates put Iran within a year of being able to build a crude nuclear weapon, and even longer to produce a reliable warhead for a ballistic missile. The United States, along with other Western nations, continued to take steps to isolate Iran from the international financial system, declaring coordinated sanctions targeted at the country's central and commercial banks. The U.S. also applied sanctions on companies linked to Iran's nuclear industry, in addition to its petrochemical and oil industries.⁶¹ Moreover, the UN Atomic Energy Agency released an updated report in November of 2011 that stated the following:

The Agency has serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme. After assessing carefully and critically the extensive information available to it, the Agency finds the information to be, overall, credible. The information

⁵⁸ Neil MacFarquar, "U.N. Approves New Sanctions to Deter Iran," *The New York Times*, June 9, 2010.

⁵⁹ William Yong and Robert F. Worth, "Bombings Hit Atomic Experts in Iran Streets," *The New York Times*, November 29, 2010.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mark Landler, "United States and its Allies Expand Sanctions on Iran," *The New York Times*, November 21, 2011.

indicates that Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device. The information also indicates that prior to the end of 2003, these activities took place under a structured programme, and that some activities may still be ongoing.⁶²

It is believed that by December 2011, Iran resumed its production of enriched uranium at the Natanz facility. Although the U.S. and Israel never assumed responsibility for the Olympic Games cyber attacks, some experts predict that it set back Iran by at least two years.⁶³ Nonetheless, Iranian news agencies announced in March 2012 that the country was building 3,000 advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges at the Natanz plant.⁶⁴ Around the same time, IAEA inspectors were attempting to gain access to the Parchin site to determine whether tests have been conducted on nuclear bomb triggers.⁶⁵

Negotiations the following year also did not bring about any positive outcomes. Following a short period of optimism, talks between Iran and the six world powers are unsuccessful in Baghdad. The U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany called for a freeze on Iran's production of 20% enriched uranium, while the Iranians asked for an easing of the harsh economic sanctions imposed by the West, as well as recognition of their "right" to enrich.⁶⁶ Iran's chief negotiator and the secretary of Iran's National Security Council and the personal representative of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Mr. Saeed Jalili, echoed this long-standing Iranian sentiment: "This is our right, and it is clearly irrefutable... If the six powers accept such a right, we will, of course, welcome some offer to cooperate on."⁶⁷ Meanwhile, an embargo imposed by the European Union aimed at Iran's oil industry began to take effect. By January

⁶² International Atomic Energy Agency. Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Report by the Director General, GOV/2011/65, November 8, 2011, p. 10.

⁶³ Guilbert Gates, "How a Secret Cyberwar Program Worked," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2012.

⁶⁴ "Iran Says 3,000 Centrifuges Being Built," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2013.

⁶⁵ Alan Cowell, "UN Nuclear Official Seeks Access to Iranian Site," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2013.

⁶⁶ Steven Erlanger and Rick Gladstone, "Iran Nuclear Talks End With No Deal," *The New York Times*, May 24, 2012.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Quoted in Erlanger and Gladstone, "Iran Nuclear Talks End With No Deal."

2013, Iranian oil minister Rostam Qasemi publicly acknowledged for the first time that petroleum exports and sales had dropped by 40%, costing Iran approximately \$4 billion to \$8 billion per month.⁶⁸ As a result, the Iranian population also suffered tremendously from the decline of Iranian currency, the *rial*.⁶⁹

During the first several months of 2013, Iran met with the six global powers in Kazakhstan in another attempt to find a mutually agreeable compromise. Unfortunately, however, the talks ultimately ended without an agreement.⁷⁰ In the aftermath of the talks, President Ahmadinejad announced plans to expand Iran's uranium production and alluded to other atomic energy advances. During a speech commemorating National Nuclear Technology Day, a holiday he established himself in 2006, Ahmadinejad boldly asserted: "Iran has already become a nuclear country and no one is capable of stealing this title."⁷¹ These audacious declarations spurred a response from Israel, to point which Israeli defense and military officials issued explicit warnings of a "red line," proclaiming that Israel was prepared to launch a lone military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.⁷² Further complicating matters, the IAEA released another report in June 2013 stating that Iran made significant advancements across the board in its nuclear program. The report provided details regarding Iran's most recent development in plutonium production, as well as the significant progress it had made with the Arak heavy-water reactor.⁷³ Accordingly, the Obama administration imposed additional

⁶⁸ Rick Gladstone, "Iranian Oil Minister Concedes Sanctions Have Hurt Exports," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2013.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Steven Erlanger, "As Negotiations Ease Demands on Iran, More Nuclear Talks Are Set," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2013.

⁷¹ David M. Herszenhorn and Rick Gladstone, "After Talks End, Iran Announces an Expansion of Nuclear Fuel Production," *The New York Times*, April 9, 2013.

⁷² Isabel Kershner, "Officials in Israel Stress Readiness for a Lone Strike on Iran," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013.

⁷³ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "Iran is Seen Advancing Nuclear Bid," *The New York Times*, May 22, 2013.

punishments against Iran, yet again, blacklisting a global network of front companies that were used as a way to evade sanctions.⁷⁴

In June of 2013, Iranians elected Hassan Rouhani—a pragmatist who promised increased personal freedoms and a more appeasing approach toward the world—as the president of Iran. President Rouhani appointed a new foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, who would serve as a chief negotiator on behalf of Iran during talks with the world powers. Mr. Rouhani also removed the conservative nuclear scientist leading Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization, and replaced him with the former foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi. Furthermore, IAEA inspectors reported that Iran slowed down its collection of enriched uranium that can be rapidly turned into fuel for a nuclear weapon.⁷⁵

President Rouhani’s conciliatory rhetoric was seen as a sign by Western leaders that there may be a window of opportunity for cooperation with Iran. At the United Nations General Assembly, he advocated for tolerance and understanding, and condemned Western sanctions as a form of violence. He also asserted that nuclear weapons have no place in Iran’s future.⁷⁶ In September 2013, a truly monumental event took place when President Obama and President Rouhani spoke on the telephone, after a three-decade long ruptured relationship between the United States and Iran. The discussion was the first between Iranian and American leaders since 1979 when President Jimmy Carter spoke by telephone with Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi shortly before the Shah went into exile. The leaders agreed to expedite talks aimed at resolving the dispute over Iran’s nuclear program, and later conveyed optimism at the prospect of a

⁷⁴ Rick Gladstone, “U.S. Bans 37 Firms in Dispute with Iran,” *The New York Times*, June 4, 2013.

⁷⁵ William J. Broad, “Iran Slows its Gathering of Uranium,” *The New York Times*, August 28, 2013.

⁷⁶ Rick Gladstone, “Iran’s First President Preaches Tolerance in First U.N. Appearance,” *The New York Times*, September 24, 2013.

reconciliation that would transform the Middle East.⁷⁷ During a White House press conference, President Obama elaborated upon the details of the conversation: “Resolving this issue, obviously, could also serve as a major step forward in a new relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, one based on mutual interests and mutual respect. It would also help facilitate a better relationship between Iran and the international community, as well as others in the region.”⁷⁸

On November 24, 2013, Iran and the P5+1 announced a landmark agreement that temporarily froze Iran’s nuclear program, laying the foundation for a more long-term agreement. The deal’s objective was to provide international negotiators with enough time to pursue a more comprehensive agreement that would guarantee that Iran’s nuclear program could only be utilized for peaceful purposes.⁷⁹ Prior to the deal, Iran possessed enough uranium enriched at lower levels and centrifuges to create a nuclear weapon within several months, otherwise referred to as a nuclear breakout capability. Under the interim deal, Iran agreed to halt its uranium enrichment beyond the 5 percent level that is adequate for energy production. In addition, Iran agreed to dilute or convert the country’s stockpile of 20% enriched uranium to oxide, which will ensure that it cannot be turned into weapons-grade fuel usable for weapons creation. In return, the U.S. agreed to offer approximately \$6 billion in sanctions relief, including \$4.2 billion in oil revenue that had been frozen in foreign banks.⁸⁰ The implementation of the deal was delayed until January 2014 while the negotiating parties finalized the details.

⁷⁷ Peter Baker, “U.S. and Iran Agree To Speed Talks to Defuse Nuclear Issue,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 2013.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ David E. Sanger, “A Step, if Modest, Toward Slowing Iran’s Weapons Capability,” *The New York Times*, November 23, 2013.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

The fourth round of negotiations began between Iran and the P5+1 in early May of this year in an attempt to draft an agreement by the July 20th deadline. Both sides left negotiations disheartened due to a lack of accord regarding the issue of uranium enrichment.⁸¹ Iran maintained that its position that it seeks to expand the number of centrifuges it has for refining uranium, while the U.S. and the other world powers ask that Iran decrease its numbers. Among other points of dispute, Iran refuses to close any of its nuclear facilities, which it views as synonymous with its national pride and accomplishments. Iran also considers the end of international sanctions to be a prerequisite to any long-term accord.

⁸¹ Justyna Pawlak and Fredrik Dahl, "U.S. Warns 'Time is Short' as Iran Nuclear Talks Make Little Progress," *Reuters*, May 16, 2014.

PART II

Why Iran Keeps the Nuclear Option on the Table:
An Assessment of Three Explanatory Models

Chapter 4: The Security Model

In order to devise the best policy for preventing, or perhaps dealing with, the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran, it is important to understand why Iran—both prior to 1979 under the rule of the Shah and post-1979 under the leadership of the Islamic Republic—would want to keep the nuclear option available. An academic framework for answering this question presents several theoretical explanations. The realist family of models concentrates on power and security within the international system; liberal models highlight domestic political influences, and constructivist models underline questions of identity and perception.⁸² These models will provide a starting point to evaluate potential explanations for the Iranian nuclear program.

Introduction & Literature Review

Realism is a model of international relations in which “self interested states compete for power and security” vis-à-vis the use of coercive power and diplomacy.⁸³ The realist family of models—which includes classical realism, neorealism, offensive realism, and neoclassical realism—is arguably the most prevalent model used to explain the Iranian nuclear option. Classical realism asserts that while each state is different internally, all states must strive to acquire power in order to safeguard and further their national interests in the international system. Humans are believed to be naturally inclined to rule, and consequently, there is a perpetual conflict among states to obtain power in an effort to avoid subjugation. Contrastingly,

⁸² Scott D. Sagan, “Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb,” *International Security* 21 (Winter 1996/ 1997), pp. 54-86.

⁸³ Jack Snyder, “One World, Rival Theories,” *Foreign Policy*, November-December 2004, p. 59.

neorealists contend that human nature is not the problem; rather, the international system defined by anarchy compels states to obtain power for the sake of their own security. This model asserts that a state only requires enough power to defend itself. Accordingly, there will not be an endless struggle for power. Similarly, offensive realists assume the same structural foundation as neorealists. They do, however, argue that some states undertake revisionist goals. Finally, the neoclassical realism model argues that state and individual characteristics influence how a state's government discerns the international balance of power and the method in which it can use its own power.⁸⁴

The neorealist model is often applied in the Iran case due to its emphasis on nuclear weapons as a deterrent mechanism. In other words, this assertion concludes that Iran pursues the nuclear option in order to advance its defense capabilities.⁸⁵ However, a more extensive and comprehensive assessment of realist theories helps to explain the potential that some states have offensive-leaning security goals. States value nuclear weapons because they provide both defensive and offensive security guarantees: The defensive deterrent aspect protects the state from another state's potential aggression, while an offensive coercive component gives the state an option to conduct its own aggressive actions if it chooses. This offensive element incorporates two parts: the threat of first use and the threat of retaliation. The threat of retaliation serves to decrease the risks identified with conventional forms of aggression. Sagan contends that, based on the security model, states, which all exist in a self-help system, must ensure their survival and protect their sovereignty and interests. He also differentiates between strong states and weak states, arguing that strong states are capable of acquiring credible deterrent forces on

⁸⁴ See Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb."

⁸⁵ Dong-Joon Jo and Erik Gartzke, "Determinants of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51 (February 2007), p. 173.

their own while weak states seek alliances and hope to benefit from extended deterrence agreements. The security model, as an explanation for nuclear weapon proliferation, leads to an international system that forces states to a policy of balance of power and status quo, while the security dilemma increases the risk of nuclear arms races and conflict.⁸⁶

Accordingly, this chapter will be divided into two parts: First, it will assess Iran's realist motives with respect to both potential regional and global security threats. The most relevant regional relationships include Iran-Iraq, Iran-Afghanistan, Iran-Gulf States, and finally, Iran-Israel. The global threats section will largely focus on Iran's perceived threat from the United States. Each section will outline the historical relationship between Iran and the respective country. Second, based on these assessments, it will examine the validity of the security model for explaining Iran's nuclear ambitions and pursuits.

Regional Threats

Iraq. Prior to 2003, the most imminent threat Iran faced was that of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. From 1990 to 1998, Iran fought an incredibly violent and costly war against Iraq. Iran was worried that a revived Saddam may seek to devastate the Khuzestan region of Iran, otherwise known as the center of vital Iranian oil fields and home to much of Iran's ethnic Arab population. The determining impact of this war on the current generation of Iranian leaders should not be underestimated, specifically on their perception of threats to national security. This impact is evident in a statement by IRGC member Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani: "With regards to chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons, it was made clear during the war that these weapons are very decisive. We should fully equip ourselves in both offensive and defensive use of these

⁸⁶ See Sagan, p. 57.

weapons.”⁸⁷ Having been afflicted by Iraqi chemical weapons attacks in the 1980s, Iran was wary about the possible restarting of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction programs. Iranians realized during this merciless eight-year period that there are strategic advantages conferred by weapons of mass destruction.⁸⁸ Nuclear negotiations during the Ahmadinejad presidency were plagued with abrasive rhetoric and resistance, which can at least partly be blamed on the composition of his cabinet. All of his appointees came from the IRGC, and they were all directly involved in the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the ensuing war with Iraq.⁸⁹

Afghanistan. Historically, Iran has played a pivotal role in influencing the internal dynamics of Afghanistan. One of the primary languages in Afghanistan, otherwise known as Dari, is a dialect of Persian, and is commonly spoken by Afghan intellectuals and the elite. Moreover, Herat was a part of Iran until the 1857 Treaty of Paris when Iran gave up its claim to this territory. Between the Afghan independence in 1919 up until 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's relationship with Afghanistan was amiable. In more recent years, however, Iran’s relationship with Afghanistan has been plagued by inconsistencies and turbulence. According to Mohsen Milani, following the 1979 revolution, Iran’s policy towards Afghanistan has gone through four distinct phases.⁹⁰

- i. *Phase One: The Soviet Occupation.* During the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1988, Iran demanded that the Soviets leave the country while they supported Afghan Shiites. At the same time, however, the Islamic Republic was cautious in its approach, as it did not

⁸⁷ Cited by Wyn Bowen and Joanna Kidd, “The Iranian Nuclear Challenge,” *International Affairs* 5, no. 1 (March 2004), pp. 257-76.

⁸⁸ Ray Tayekh, “Iran’s Nuclear Calculations,” *World Policy Journal* 20, no. 2 (2003), p. 22.

⁸⁹ Elliot HenTov “Understanding Iran’s New Authoritarianism,” *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2007), pp.163-79, at 166, 169.

⁹⁰ Mohsen Milani, “Iran and Afghanistan,” *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*, Ed. Robin B. Wright, (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace, 2010.)

want to antagonize Moscow. The regime believed that the Soviet Union acted as a competing force to U.S. influence in the region. After the Soviet Army withdrew, Afghanistan became a battleground between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran. Iran assisted the non-Pashtun ethnic groups in creating a united front, while the Saudis hoped to use Afghanistan as a foundation in their efforts to spread Sunni Islam throughout Central Asia. Meanwhile, Pakistan sought to establish a Pashtun-ruled government and gain a strategic advantage over India. Iran's United Front included the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Shiites, under the leadership of legendary Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. The alliance ultimately ousted the government, which turned out to be a significant achievement for Iran.

- i. *Phase Two: Afghan Civil War.* The Iranian triumph was fleeting, as soon after, Afghanistan deteriorated into a crippling civil war. The local Pashtuns, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia denounced the new realignment of power favoring Tehran. The regime was undermined by in-fighting among its proponents, as well as its unwillingness to share power with the other ethnic groups in the country. Furthermore, the Afghan warlords, who gained momentum as they fought against the Soviets, encouraged the continuation of fighting. Throughout the duration of the civil war, Iranian policies were, at best, incoherent. On one hand, Iran bolstered the reigning Afghan government, while on the other hand, it supported Shiites who worked both for and against the regime. It also financed rival

warlords, including Ismail Khan from Herat, a Tajik; General Abdul Rashid Dostom, an Uzbek; and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pashtun.

- ii. *Phase Three: Iran vs. the Taliban.* After the Taliban acquired power in 1996, Iran refused to recognize the government and instead offered military support to the Northern Alliance opposition group. The violent Salafists viewed Shiites as heretics, even despite their shared anti-Western perspectives. Iran's relations with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia also broke down as a result of their critical support of the Taliban. In 1998, Iran almost engaged the Taliban in a full-fledged conflict. The Taliban was responsible for executing Iranian officials in Mazar-i-Sharif, in addition to their continued persecution of the Afghan Shiite minority.⁹¹ In response, Iran deployed 200,000 troops to the borders of Afghanistan.⁹² Although the Taliban was not nearly as dangerous as Saddam Hussein, they were believed to be perfectly capable of inflicting serious harm.
- iii. *Phase Four: Post-9/11.* In the fourth and current post-Taliban phase, Iran has established a friendly relationship with the Karzai government.⁹³ This constructive encounter between the United States and Iran since 1979—was to plan for an Afghan future free of the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations. Although Iran advocated for the return of President Rabbani, the regime ultimately agreed to support Hamid Karzai. The prudent and calculated instance of cooperation between the U.S. and

⁹¹ Manochehr Dorrage, "Behind Iran's Nuclear Pursuit?," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 18, no. 3 (2006), p. 327.

⁹² Barnett Rubin and Sara Batmanglich, "The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: Policy Gone Awry," MIT Center for International Studies, October 2008, p. 2.

⁹³ See Mohsen Milani, "Iran and Afghanistan."

Iran ensued until 2002 when President George W. Bush listed Iran as a member of the notorious “axis of evil.”

The Gulf States. Although Iranian relations with surrounding Arab nations are less than ideal, the regime is not currently directly threatened by any of them. Modern Iranian leaders—from the shah to the ayatollahs—have sought a predominant role in the Gulf region because of Iran’s economic and demographic clout, in addition to the value of Persian Gulf oil shipping lanes. In 1968, Britain announced its intention to renounce all military outposts in the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi hoped to fill the British vacuum by proclaiming its role as the dominant regional power. Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s, Iran was the dominating Gulf power and guarantor of U.S. national interests in the region.⁹⁴ The U.S. supported Iran in its endeavor by adopting a “twin pillar” policy, determining that both Iran and Saudi Arabia would assume roles as guarantors. However, despite the fact that they were all pro-Western governments, the Iranian monarchy had moderately strained relations with the Arab sheiks throughout the Gulf. In 1968, the Shah proclaimed that Bahrain is a historic Iranian territory. After a U.N. mission found that Bahrainis favored independence, the Shah was forced to retreat. Furthermore, in 1971, Iran seized three strategic Persian Gulf islands: Abu Musa, the Greater Tunbs, and the Lesser Tunbs. These islands had been recently claimed by the newly established United Arab Emirates. The Shah also dismissed any form of participation in the Arab oil embargoes of 1967 and 1973. He continued to sell oil to the West and Israel, which served as a source of disagreement between Riyadh and Tehran.

The 1979 Islamic revolution drastically transformed the geopolitical dynamics in the Persian Gulf. Ayatollah Khomeini declared his intent to overthrow Gulf monarchs, and as a

⁹⁴ Afshin Molavi, "Iran and the Gulf States," *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*, Ed. Robin B. Wright, (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace, 2010.)

result, Iran was implicated in a coup plot in Bahrain, turmoil in Kuwait, and assaults on U.S. facilities in the Gulf states. In an effort to prevent the newly formed Islamic Republic from inspiring a Shiite uprising in his own country, Saddam Hussein attacked Iran in 1980. Consequently, the Iran-Iraq War is ultimately a defining feature of Iran-Gulf Arab relations throughout the rest of the decade. In 1981, the five smaller states of the Gulf—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—banded together with Saudi Arabia in what was deemed a security and political alliance, recognized as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC largely supported Iraq in the war, with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait providing Saddam with an estimated \$40 billion in financial assistance.

The conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, and the ascendance of slightly more pragmatic leadership in Iran mitigated tensions between Iran and the Gulf Arab states. When Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani assumed the presidency in 1989, he insisted that, “Iran needs to stop making enemies.” President Rafsanjani’s foreign policy doctrine indicated that Iran was moving away from its stance as a hostile revolutionary state. Instead, Rafsanjani supported a policy of coexistence that focused specifically on potential economic relations between Iran and the GCC states. Not long after, Saudi Arabian foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faisal proposed that the two nations could see “a future of positive relations.”⁹⁵ As a result, trade increased, direct flights were reinstated, and money began flowing more freely across borders.

The 1997 election of Mohammad Khatami brought about a new era in Iranian outreach. As a part of an attempt to introduce a “dialogue of civilizations,” Iran hosted the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in December 1997. Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia attended, a clear indication that the Iran-Saudi détente was gaining momentum. Meanwhile, the

⁹⁵ Ibid.

1991 and 2003 Gulf War weakened Iraq, and in turn, bolstered Iran's relative regional power. Over the next two years, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as its ministry of intelligence, initiated a sophisticated campaign taking advantage of both hard and soft power. Iran's increasing influence worried the GCC states, as expressed by the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal: "We fought a war together to keep Iran from occupying Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait. Now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason." Rising oil prices also provided Iran with economic leverage, and accordingly, Iranians were searching for new regional investment opportunities, which eventually led to the creation of a longstanding economic relationship with Dubai. By the close of Khatami's presidency in 2005, the majority of the GCC states remained cautious when it came to relations with Iran. The Islamic Republic maintained substantial influence in Iraq, causing concern among Sunni Arab states including Egypt and Jordan. The state of affairs in the Gulf was continuously changing.

The dynamics of the region changed yet again following the 2005 election of populist president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Instead of maintaining the moderate approach of his predecessors, Ahmadinejad shifted Iranian foreign policy back towards the uncompromising and hard-line positions of the early revolution period. The regime promptly broadcasted the restarting of uranium enrichment. Unsurprisingly, the Iranian nuclear program immediately became the focus of worldwide attention, and the Gulf countries became increasingly alarmed by Iranian regime's newfound public hostility. The period of détente quickly became a distant memory, as Saudi Arabia and Iran began competing for regional influence in proxy battles in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Iran focused on supporting a variety of Shiite groups, along with the two major Kurdish parties, in an effort to influence the

developing Iraqi state. Simultaneously, the Saudi Arabian monarchy attempted to protect the Sunni minority. The disputed results of the 2010 Iraqi elections reflected the success of Iranian efforts. In fact, soon after, three of the top four candidates traveled to Tehran to “consult” with Iranian officials.⁹⁶

Today, Saudi Arabia hopes to maintain its status as the religious leader of the Islamic world, but it recognizes that it does not have the military capability to launch an offensive challenge beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Furthermore, the country’s dependence on oil exports also inhibits its desire and ability to initiate a conflict because any threat to the eastern oil fields would be detrimental to its survival. The GCC does not have the capability to legitimately challenge Iran. Even further, it has been argued that the smaller states within this coalition, including Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar, are wary of their lack of power compared to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, any offensive challenge against Iran would simply serve to increase Saudi Arabian influence, and in effect, replace one security threat with another.⁹⁷

Israel. What may surprise some is that, prior to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Shah maintained a relatively positive relationship with Israel. This even includes de facto recognition of the state of Israel by the year 1951.⁹⁸ During the Shah’s monarchy, Iran and Israel shared a close relationship mostly due to their shared interest in containing the influence of pan-Arabism led by popular Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the young Reza Shah Pahlavi hoped to gain favor with the United by forming a friendship with Israel. He recognized that Jews held a powerful influence on American policy. As the dimensions of the relationship

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Marina Ottaway, “Iran, the United States, and the Gulf: The Elusive Regional Policy,” *Carnegie Paper* No. 105, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2009.

⁹⁸ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 27.

⁹⁹ Steven Simon, “Iran and Israel,” *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*, Ed. Robin B. Wright, (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace, 2010.)

expanded, thousands of Israelis traveled to Iran to work in the country's defense, health, and technical industries.¹⁰⁰

After three decades of maintaining a cordial and strategically advantageous relationship, the Iranian-Israeli relationship degenerated soon after the Islamists came to power in Iran and the Soviet Union collapsed. The theocratic government sought to expand its regional influence by replacing the Arabs as Israel's primary adversary. As Steven Simon notes, "Iran's real-politik hostility toward Israel was reinforced by ideological and obsessive enmity." Yet, notwithstanding its ideologically motivated hatred toward Israel, Iran still purchased weaponry from Israel soon after Iraq's 1980 military invasion. Sales ended in the mid-1980s, and the relationship rapidly worsened from there. Since then, the IRGC has been charged with training and arming Lebanon's Hezbollah, and supporting Palestinian aggression on Israel from Gaza and the West Bank. In 2006, Hezbollah engaged Israel in a prolonged conflict, and by 2010, hostility had reached unprecedented levels.¹⁰¹ The current levels of mistrust and animosity can be attributed to the combination of Iran's historically suspicious nuclear program, in combination with its malevolent rhetoric towards Israel. In 2005, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad went as far as to deny the Holocaust and make sweeping declarations about wiping Israel "off of the map." Consequently, the notion of a nuclear-armed Iran is widely seen as an existential threat. Israel has since contemplated taking unilateral military action to disrupt and dismantle Iranian nuclear facilities. Netanyahu has publicly stated several times that he expects the United States to take all necessary steps to halt Iranian progress toward a threshold or weapons capability.¹⁰² Today, Israel poses a security threat to Iran, but it is one that stemmed from the Iranian

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

leadership's provocative rhetoric and actions toward Israel. In other words, the threat was not initiated by Israel; rather, it is a response to Iran's offensive aims.

Global Threats

The United States. Foregoing the 1979 Islamic revolution, the Shah of Iran and the United States had a unique relationship, a product of interaction dating back to World War II and included a U.S.-British covert operation in 1953 to remove Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh and reinstate the Shah into power. Prior to this, President Richard Nixon and his foreign policy adviser, Henry Kissinger, had formed a remarkable and unmatched alliance with the monarchy. As a part of the Twin Pillar policy, the Shah was considered one of the primary guardians of U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf, along with Saudi Arabia. In exchange, the Shah was allowed to purchase non-nuclear U.S. military technology for his ambitious nuclear energy program.¹⁰³ The rapidly rising oil prices in the preceding four years drastically boosted Iran's economy, and the Shah used this money to fund immense economic and military buildup. Meanwhile, there was an influx of American technicians into Iran to help install and maintain an enormous arsenal and to train Iranians on how to utilize it. It was not long, however, until the Iranian population's disapproval of the Shah took a dramatic turn.

The contemporary Islamic Republic—a regime that came to power in large part by villainizing the West—feels especially threatened by the United States. Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran has inflicted several attacks against the U.S. that may cause Islamists to dread potential American retaliation. From the seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979, through the bombings, kidnappings, and murder of Americans in Kuwait and Lebanon in the 1980s, to

¹⁰³ Gary Sick, "Iran and the United States" *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*, Ed. Robin B. Wright, (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace, 2010.)

the 1996 Khobar Towers attack, as well as the arming, training, and funding of insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2003, Iran has supported an undeviating state of hostility towards the United States.

Some analysts argue that the election of Mohammad Khatami presidency provided a unique window of opportunity for US-Iranian cooperation. These analysts point to several more recent examples: Iranian diplomatic support in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2003, the May 2003 “grand bargain” allegedly offered by Tehran, as well as Iranian negotiations with Britain, France, and Germany, otherwise known as the “EU-3” in 2003 and 2004.¹⁰⁴ As mentioned before, between 1997-2005, President Khatami attempted to apply a more pragmatic approach to Iranian foreign policy strategy. Ultimately, however, the unwavering IRGC clerics and their allies countered his efforts to alter policy toward the United States. As will be explained in Chapter 5, authority in the Iranian political system is concentrated in the office of the Supreme Leader, not the presidency. By the year 2001, the Iranian government resumed its oppressive domestic policies by cracking down on reformists and student protestors.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Iran continued its support of terrorism, as demonstrated by the January 2002 Israeli seizure of the *Karine A.*, a ship carrying approximately 50 tons of weaponry from Iran to the Palestinian Authority. Iran’s May 2003 offer of a so-called “grand bargain” is also commonly referenced in an attempt to demonstrate Khatami’s revived vision of Iranian foreign policy.

This is problematic for several reasons, including but not limited to the fact that no Iranian officials ever endorsed the correspondence; the document contradicted Iran’s actual actions; and the substance of the offer was merely a vague notion of a future pledge to comply

¹⁰⁴ David Hastings Dunn, “Real Men Want to Go to Tehran: Bush, Pre-Emption and the Iranian Nuclear Challenge,” *International Affairs* 83 (2007), p. 24; also Suzanne Maloney, “U.S. Policy Toward Iran: Missed Opportunities and Paths Forward,” *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 32 (Summer 2008), pp. 30-31.

¹⁰⁵ Abbas Milani, “U.S. Foreign Policy and the Future of Democracy in Iran,” *Washington Quarterly* 28 (Summer 2005), p. 45, describing President Khatami as the “epitome of political impotence.”

with international law in exchange for the easing of US sanctions. Simultaneously, evidence was found to support the claim that al Qaeda members who were residing in Iran were responsible for plotting the terrorist attacks against Westerners in Saudi Arabia, indicating that the Iranian leadership was not eager to change its policies.¹⁰⁶ Finally, in 2003 and 2004, Iran participated in negotiations with the EU-3, even after the IAEA noted Iran's breach of its safeguards agreements. As a result of the talks, the IAEA postponed reporting Iran's breach to the UN Security Council in violation of its rules.¹⁰⁷ In late 2003, Iran pledged to suspend its uranium enrichment activities, in addition to ratifying the IAEA's Additional Protocol; yet, the regime failed to abide by either promise. Iran signed and broke a similar deal in 2004. Interestingly enough, in September 2005, the chief Iranian negotiator was current president Hassan Rouhani. At the time, he admitted that these negotiations had provided Iran with extra time to continue its nuclear activities. In other words, Rouhani acknowledged that Iran was simply extending the talks in order to buy time.¹⁰⁸ Skeptics of the current nuclear negotiations reference these instances as evidence that Iran has a history of utilizing delaying tactics. Even as recently as 2009, Iran agreed to exchange the majority of its enriched uranium for internationally fabricated fuel rods, but eventually reneged from the deal yet again.

Soon after the September 11th terrorist attacks, the United States identified Iran as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. This proclamation naturally incited fear among the Iranian regime, as they worried that the War on Terror could potentially result in a military invasion of Iran. The U.S. amplified Iran's strategic insecurity in two regards: First, despite

¹⁰⁶ Barbara Slavin, "Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S. and the Twisted Path to Confrontation" (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), pp. 203-204.

¹⁰⁷ "Europe: 'Our Discussions with Iran Have Reached an Impasse,'" *Middle East Quarterly* 13 (Spring 2006), p. 65.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Coats and Charles S. Robb, *Meeting the Challenge: U.S. Policy Toward Iranian Nuclear Development*, Report of the Independent Task Force, Bipartisan Policy Center, September 2008, p. iv.

transpiring as the supposed least of three “evils,” in comparison with Afghanistan and Iraq, the Iranian regime feels rightly threatened by the substantial U.S. military presence in these two countries.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, in addition to sizable presence of American military forces in Iran’s periphery, the Bush doctrine also served to incite fear among the ayatollahs. The Bush Doctrine advanced the notion of preemption, and established a precedent for utilizing force against any nation deemed as a threat to U.S. national interests and security. The combination of Iran’s status as a member of the axis of evil and the U.S. military invasion of Iraq provided Iranian leaders with sufficient grounds for fearing the implications of preemptive American power projection. Ray Tayekh contends that, “with Saddam gone, America has emerged as the foremost strategic problem for Iran and the primary driver of its nuclear weapons policy.”¹¹⁰ Thus, this line of argument deems that, in order to avoid the same fate as Iraq—that of regime change—Iran felt the need to pursue deterrent nuclear capabilities.

However, by 2004, it became blatantly clear that neither the U.S. Congress nor the American public would support another U.S. military engagement after the questionable endeavors in Afghanistan and Iraq. Iranian leadership was aware of this reality, as evidenced by the IRGC’s continued support of Iraqi insurgents.¹¹¹ Since 2004, there has been no serious debate of U.S. military action against Iran in a response to its terrorist activities abroad. However, discussion has existed pertaining specifically to its controversial nuclear program and enrichment activities. It is unclear why the Iranian regime would be willing to assume the risk of U.S. or Israeli military action in order to pursue a nuclear option. Accordingly, in an effort to gain a better understanding of Iranian motivations, it is imperative to look beyond the defensive

¹⁰⁹ Manochehr Dorraj, “Behind Iran’s Nuclear Pursuit?,” p. 327.

¹¹⁰ Ray Tayekh, “Iran’s Nuclear Calculations,” *World Policy Journal* 20, no. 2 (2003), p. 22.

¹¹¹ Department of Defense, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” December 2007, p. 17-19; Arshad Mohammed, “U.S. Sees Attacks by Iranian-Backed Groups Up in Iraq,” Reuters, February 7, 2008.

objectives put forth by neorealists by also reviewing and examining Iran's potential offensive goals and strategic objectives.

Since the 1979 ousting of the Western-leaning Shah, the Iranian regime has maintained a deeply rooted ideological desire to become the foremost power in the region.¹¹² Its success largely requires opposition to the existing Western-dominated power structure in the international system. In light of this notion, Iran has harmed U.S. interests in the region by supporting terrorist organizations, undermining the Arab-Israeli peace process, and often times, sabotaging American efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Islamic Republic of Iran refuses to give up these policies because it would threaten the foundation of its existence. George Kennan explained this phenomenon with his evaluation of the autocratic Soviet ideologues more than sixty years ago: The Iranian regime is dependent on the existence of an external enemy to justify its despotic rule.¹¹³ This was seen as recently as the summer of 2009, following the fraudulent president elections, when the regime accused the West for inciting protests. The Iranian national media went so far as to broadcast interviews with imprisoned men and women who claimed they were being "provoked" and "influenced" by the British Broadcasting System and Voice of America.¹¹⁴ Additionally, the regime also claimed to have a confession from an anonymous CIA agent, which led to the incrimination of Iranian opposition leaders in an alleged Western-backed plot to overthrow the regime. The deputy prosecutor of Iran claimed that the involved parties included the U.S. government, the Soros Institute, Freedom House, and Stanford University.¹¹⁵ In other words, America is more of an ideological enemy rather than a state. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati of the Guardian Council asserted in 2007, that, "When all is said and done, we are an

¹¹² Barry Rubin, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*.

¹¹³ George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, July 25, 1947.

¹¹⁴ Zahra Hosseinian and Fredrik Dahl, "Iran Says Courts Will Teach Protestors a Lesson," *Reuters*, June 23, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Erdbrink, "100 Iranians Tried for Disputing Election," *Washington Post*, August 2, 2009.

anti-American regime. America is our enemy and we are the enemies of America.”¹¹⁶ This notion was reaffirmed in 2009: “If we are to assure that the Islamic establishment, the revolution and Islam are to stay and the people are to live comfortably, the flag of the struggle against America should always stay hoisted.”¹¹⁷

Assessment of Iranian Motivations

The primary strategic argument explaining Iran’s nuclear ambitions contends that Iran’s need to address and mitigate its regional insecurities has historically presented the country’s leaders with a powerfully strategic incentive. It is important to examine whether the Islamic Republic of Iran views the acquisition of nuclear weapons as beneficial to its security against Saddam Hussein or the Taliban. The regime may have believed that nuclear weapons would act as a deterrent against these adversaries. It was widely known that Iraq had, at least at one point, been working towards obtaining nuclear weapons. It had also used chemical weapons against the Iranian population, which was a devastating blow to the regime. Thus, it is not irrational that Iran would seek a nuclear deterrent capability for defensive purposes. Furthermore, as Volker Perthes mentions, surrounded by “two nuclear armed states, Pakistan [nuclear by 1998] and Israel...of which the former is a direct neighbor and fragile state with strong Sunni fundamentalists currents [and] anti-Shiite violence, and the latter an enemy,” Iran was encircled by a nuclearized and unfriendly environment. This reality, in combination with Saddam’s blatant aggression, puts Iran in a desperate position. Iranian motives as an attempt to rectify

¹¹⁶ Amir Taheri, *The Persian Night: Iran under the Khomeinist Revolution* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), p. 189.

¹¹⁷ “Iran’s Struggle with America Should Continue,” *Reuters*, November 13, 2009.

strategic weaknesses by means of a nuclear deterrence, at the outset, appear to be well founded.¹¹⁸

However, with the 2003 ouster of Saddam Hussein, this threat disappeared. Since then, Iran has been collaborating with the primary Shiite groups in Iraq, including the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, the Islamic Dawa Party, and Moktada al-Sadr. With this cooperation, Iraq no longer presents a meaningful security threat to Iran. Even in a scenario in which relations between Iraq and Iran go sour, it is increasingly improbable that Iraq will restart a nuclear program. Consequently, as Shahram Chubin and Robert S. Litwak note, “with the demise of Saddam’s regime in neighboring Iraq, an Iranian nuclear weapons program has lost any compelling strategic rationale.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Iranian conventional military capability greatly surpassed the Taliban’s arsenal. Thus, a nuclear capability would not necessarily enhance Iranian security against this threat. If anything, the Taliban presents merely an ideological counterweight to Iran. The Gulf States also do not pose a legitimate military or security threat to Iran. Even Israel developed a nuclear program decades before Iran’s post-revolutionary nuclear program. Therefore, the Shah’s nuclear program was not meant to counter Israeli strength, as Israel was allied with the Iranian monarchy, but perhaps to establish regional hegemony and prestige.

When it comes to the United States, Iran’s threat perception has changed drastically over the years. During the Shah’s regime, the U.S. was cooperating with Iran, and supporting its pursuit of a civilian nuclear energy program. In the post-1979 era, Iran may have been endangered immediately after 9/11, and with the introduction of the Bush Doctrine, when it was

¹¹⁸ Volker Perthes, “Ambition and Fear: Iran’s Foreign Policy and Nuclear Programme,” *Survival* 52, no. 3 2010, p. 97.

¹¹⁹ Shahram Chubin and Robert S. Litwak, “Debating Iran’s Nuclear Aspirations,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4, 2003, p. 102.

labeled as a part of the axis of evil and identified as the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism. However, it soon became clear that this notion had no teeth. Since then, the rhetoric and action of the Iranian regime has been largely motivated by its perception of the United States as an ideological threat to its existence. Thus, in addition to the realist theories put forth, the Islamist nature of the regime supports a domestic politics explanation for the decision to keep the nuclear option available. The next chapter will address this possible explanation.

Chapter 5: The Domestic Politics Model

Introduction & Literature Review

While realists contend that nuclear weapons are pursued when states face a significant security threat, liberal theories of international politics refuse to accept the unitary actor assumptions of systemic theories; rather, proponents of liberal theories highlight the significance of domestic politics. Therefore, nuclear weapons are more than just national security tools. Scott Sagan introduces three main domestic actors in connection with a state's decision to pursue nuclear proliferation: first, the nuclear energy establishment of a country, including scientific institutions and companies; second, the military as a domestic bureaucratic actor; and finally, political leaders who take advantage of the nuclear weapons issue for the benefit of their political party or as a way to garner public support. According to Sagan, understanding the internal domestic debates between political leaders are essential to understanding that state's decision to proliferate or practice nuclear restraint. The notion of emerging or diminishing threats can be used in the internal debate to create momentum either for or against nuclear weapons.¹²⁰ This leads Sagan to argue that decisions pertaining to nuclear armament or disarmament are not only made in agreement with these alleged threats but also due to internal political changes and power struggles.¹²¹ Sagan concludes: "Nuclear weapons programs are not obvious or inevitable solutions to international security problems; instead they are solutions looking for a problem to

¹²⁰ Scott D. Sagan, Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb. *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3. (Winter, 1996-1997), p. 65.

¹²¹ Sagan, p. 69.

which to attach themselves so as to justify their existence.”¹²² For example, India’s 1998 nuclear test was perceived by some as an attempt by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to generate domestic public support for his nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.¹²³ Decisions such as this one are often disguised as necessary for meeting security threats; however, rational analysis of the threat environment can help to expose alternative motivations.

There is also an extensive amount of literature focusing specifically on the relationship between domestic political institutions and nuclear proliferation. The most notable democratic peace literature has concentrated on the differences between democracies and autocracies. First, several scholars have argued that democracies are less likely to pursue nuclear weapons. Chafetz contends that democracies are able to curb the security dilemmas that can cause nuclear aspirations. With the spread of democracy comes a reduced threat of nuclear proliferation.¹²⁴ Sasikumar and Way argue that democracies are more transparent, which may serve to diminish the ability of security elites to support a nuclear program in a sheltered “strategic enclave.”¹²⁵ By joining the NPT, democracies make a commitment to non-proliferation, and as a result, these commitments are more durable.¹²⁶ Finally, Cirincione points out that citizen campaigns against nuclear weapons may also have an influence on policy and that these campaigns are more likely to be effective in democratic societies.¹²⁷

¹²² Scott D. Sagan, Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb. *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3. (Winter, 1996-1997), pp. 54-86.

¹²³ Peter Beckman et. Al, *The Nuclear Predicament: Nuclear Weapons in the Twenty-First Century*, third ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), pp. 214-215.

¹²⁴ Glenn Chafetz, “The End of the Cold War and the Future of Nuclear Proliferation: An Alternative to the Neorealist Perspective,” in *The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread (And What Results)*, eds. Z. S Davis and B. Frankel, Portland: Frank Cass & Company, 1993.

¹²⁵ Karthika Sasikumar and Christopher Way, “Testing Theories of Nuclear Proliferation: The Case of South Asia,” in *Inside Nuclear South Asia*, Ed. Scott D. Sagan, Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies, 2009.

¹²⁶ Steven E. Miller and Scott D. Sagan, “Nuclear power without nuclear proliferation?” *Daedalus* 138 (2007), pp. 7-18.

¹²⁷ Joseph Cirincione, *Bomb Scare: The History and Future of Nuclear Weapons*, 1st ed. Columbia University Press, 2008.

A second camp of scholars argues that regime type has little to no effect on nuclear proliferation. This is based on the premise that motivations for proliferation are largely similar among all states, regardless of whether the state is democratic or autocratic.¹²⁸ For instance, studies focusing on the role of specific leaders have not associated leader characteristics to regime type.¹²⁹ Additionally, there are studies that have concentrated specifically on “strategies of regime survival,” asserting that economically inward-looking leaders are prepared to endure the costs of proliferation in an attempt to maintain power.¹³⁰ Lastly, Snyder insists that democracy can actually encourage proliferation because democratic governments might be inclined to accommodate nationalist populations as they hope to broaden their support networks and retain power.¹³¹ This can be seen when looking at countries ranging from France to India to Pakistan, where nuclear weapon programs have strong public support. This suggests that even more democratic governments with transparent political systems may desire nuclear weapons.

Similarly, empirical studies have also failed to prove that democracies and autocracies have different rates of nuclear proliferation. Singh and Way conducted a cross-national statistical analysis of nuclear proliferation in 2004 where they found no clear effect of democracy on either the exploration or pursuit of nuclear weapons.¹³² Jo and Gartzke also find that democracy has a trivial effect on both nuclear pursuit and acquisition, and they deduce that an emphasis on regime type is not necessary.¹³³ In a study of the spread of military technology,

¹²⁸ Alexander H. Montgomery, “Ring in proliferation: How to dismantle an atomic bomb network,” *International Security* 30 (2007), pp. 153-187.

¹²⁹ Jacques E. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹³⁰ Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia & the Middle East*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ: 2007.

¹³¹ J.L. Snyder, *From voting to violence: democratization and nationalist conflict*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.

¹³² Sonali Singh and Christopher Way, “The Correlates of Nuclear Proliferation,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48 (2004), pp. 859-885.

¹³³ Dong-Joon Jo and Erik Gartzke, “Determinants of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51 (2007), p.167.

Horowitz finds no relationship between a country's Polity score and its likelihood of launching a nuclear weapons program.¹³⁴ Comparably, Fuhrmann examines the link between civilian nuclear technology and proliferation, and finds no relationship between democracy and weapons proliferation.¹³⁵ Qualitative methods have produced similar conclusions. By using comparative case studies, Campbell, Einhorn, and Reiss find mixed evidence that democratic institutions affect a state's pursuit of nuclear weapons.¹³⁶ Sasikumar and Way proclaim that, "democracy... does not promote nuclear restraint."¹³⁷ Similarly, but with a focus on East Asia and the Middle East, Solingen concludes that differentiating between democracies and autocracies does not explain variations in proliferation.¹³⁸

Other scholars, however, are unconvinced by the above conclusion because they argue that regime types were not conceptualized appropriately. In other words, there is considerable variation of institutions among both democratic and autocratic governments that needs to be examined. The growing literature on the politics of authoritarianism has revealed great variation in the domestic institutional structure of dictatorships, with major repercussions for a range of domestic and international outcomes. This includes nuclear proliferation. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the potential relationship between regime type/domestic politics and nuclear policy, Christopher Way asserts that we need to move beyond the Polity scale's focus on democracy/dictatorship distinction. Moreover, Way argues that in addition to economic,

¹³⁴ Michael Horowitz, *The diffusion of military power!: causes and consequences for international politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

¹³⁵ Matthew Fuhrmann, "Spreading Temptation: Proliferation and Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation Agreements," *International Security* 34 (2009), pp. 7-41.

¹³⁶ Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell Reiss, *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, Brookings Institution Press, 2004.

¹³⁷ See Sasikumar and Way.

¹³⁸ See Solingen.

environmental, and technical factors, political factors play a large role in understanding the “likelihood, extent, and dynamics of the nuclear energy revival.”¹³⁹

One of the most important ways that authoritarian regimes differ is the ability of domestic institutions to constrain individual leaders, and the extent to which an individual leader holds the level of power. Barbara Geddes identifies a certain type of authoritarian regime, often referred to as despotic, personalistic, or sultanistic, in which the supreme leader maintains control over government decision-making to an extent far beyond that of a typical dictatorship. In personalistic regimes, nominal institutions such as the military or political parties have negligible independent power because one individual controls the state structure.¹⁴⁰ These leaders are unrestricted in the policy decision-making process—a concept akin to the idea of neo-patrimonialism in that personalist regimes may have well-developed bureaucracies, but only if the regime structure is ultimately commanded by a single individual.¹⁴¹ Even further, their motives are different than other leaders. Psychological analysis of tyrant leaders reveals that the types of leaders who become personalistic in nature are often incredibly narcissistic with splendid ambitions.¹⁴²

It is for these reasons, Christopher Way argues, that personalist regimes are likely to have more recognizable patterns of nuclear technology policy. The motive of prestige is linked to the pursuit of nuclear energy. Personalist leaders are motivated by status goals and the desire for

¹³⁹ Christopher Way, “The Politics of Nuclear Renaissance,” in *The Nuclear Renaissance and International Security*, Ed. Adam N. Stulberg and Matthew Fuhrmann. Stanford University Press, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and sand castles!: theory building and research design in comparative politics*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.)

¹⁴¹ Alexander H. Montgomery, “Stop Helping Me: When Nuclear Assistance Impedes Nuclear Programs,” in *Nuclear Renaissance and International Security Workshop*, February 2010.

¹⁴² Betty Glad, “Why tyrants go too far: Malignant narcissism and absolute power,” *Political Psychology* 23 (2002), pp. 1-2.

national autonomy¹⁴³, in addition to magnificent self-perceptions that can be validated by large-scale technological projects.¹⁴⁴ Thus, it makes sense that such regimes would pursue nuclear technology. However, personalist regimes tend to eviscerate institutions that promote alternative sources of power. As a result, Alexander Montgomery argues that they are likely to be unbelievably incompetent and inefficient in their attempt to conduct large-scale technological projects. Consequently, although personalist regimes have a serious interest in developing nuclear programs, they are incapable of managing such projects effectively. Way and Week conclude:

Leaders of *personalist dictatorships* are particularly likely to view nuclear weapons as an attractive solution to their concerns about regime security, and that they face fewer constraints in following this strategy than leaders in other types of regimes (both democracies and non-personalist authoritarian regimes). By lumping together personalistic dictatorships with other regimes that have both weaker motives to proliferate and face greater constraints, scholars have underestimated the effects of domestic institutions on proliferation decisions. Moreover, they have underplayed an important motive – maintaining the security of the incumbent regime– that we argue plays an important role in personalists’ quest for nuclear weapons.¹⁴⁵

Identifying Regime Types in Iran

Based on the above notion, it is apparent that understanding how to classify Iran’s regimes is an important component of answering the research question. Geddes explains that since 1925, two successive autocratic regimes have ruled Iran, with no democratic intervals.¹⁴⁶ The first was originally led by Reza Shah Pahlavi, and later by his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. In this regime, the Shah made virtually all decisions about internal politics, national

¹⁴³ See Hymans, 2006.

¹⁴⁴ Jerrold Post, “Current Concepts of the Narcissistic Personality: Implications for Political Psychology,” *Political Psychology* 14 (1993), pp. 99-121.

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Way and Jessica Weeks, “Making it Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation,” July 2012.

¹⁴⁶ Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, Erica Frantz, “Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: New Data,” (2013), p. 7.

security and foreign policy strategy, and the oil industry, in discussion with a small group of personal advisors. The second regime, the Islamic Republic, came to power in 1979 and still holds power today, forming a new type of dictatorship: A theocratic ruling system controlled by a Supreme Leader. Since 1979, an inner circle made up of elite clergy members and Republican Guard leaders have occupied powerful decision-making positions. These individuals determine Iran's domestic and foreign policy. Following the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, Ali Khamenei assumed the role.

Thus, the basic rules for deciding who can obtain top leadership positions and who determines Iranian policy has not changed. Both regimes can also be classified as *personalist*, as both the Shah and the Ayatollahs have demonstrated their vested interests in sustaining their respective regimes. As an authoritarian leader, the Shah launched Iran's nuclear program primarily due to his quest for power and regional hegemony. This concept will be further explored in the strategic culture chapter.

The Politics of Nuclear Weapons in Modern Iran

As the highest authority in the Islamic Republic, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei offers the final say on all Iranian foreign policy decisions. The nuclear issue especially is considered to be an extremely vital matter, meaning that it is discussed only within a close circle of regime leadership. The core decision-making body is composed of the Supreme Leader, the president, the chief nuclear negotiator, and the head of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), in addition to a subset of individuals who sit on the SNSC.¹⁴⁷ Beneath this level,

¹⁴⁷ Quote by the former IAEA negotiator and current Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in Mehran Kamrava, "Iranian National Security Debates: Factionalism and lost Opportunities," *Middle East Policy* 14 (Summer 2007), p. 96.

substantive and technical discussions take place at the SNSC and the Foreign Ministry and include a more extensive group of policymakers and experts. The president holds the most powerful position in the executive branch and the second most powerful in the nation. He also serves as the chairman of the Supreme National Security Council. Since assuming power, Ayatollah Khamenei has transformed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) into a tremendously influential force within the regime with vested economic and political interests.¹⁴⁸ It is also a multidimensional military establishment, including an army, air force, navy, and an intelligence unit. As one of the predominant champions of Iranian nuclear ambitions, the IRGC has established itself as the organization at the helm of the program, under the control and guidance of the Supreme Leader.¹⁴⁹

The Islamic Republic takes advantage of any opportunity to distract the Iranian population from the growing list of economic, political, and social problems it faces. By the mid-1990s, the Islamic regime no longer benefited from overwhelming support for its revolutionary values. It had failed to provide economic opportunities for Iranians, and as a result, it had no performance legitimacy on which to depend. The nuclear program serves the purpose of bolstering the regime's support and legitimacy,¹⁵⁰ as it redirects attention away from tangible issues to questions of identity, principles, and virtue. The regime also effectively portrays the issue in terms of nationalism. Concerns over the Iranian nuclear program, as well as international efforts to enforce the requirements of the NPT, have been depicted as Western disrespect and discrimination. Consequently, public opinion in Iran is generally supportive of

¹⁴⁸ Mehdi Khalaji, "Report: How Iran Makes Decisions," *Iran Primer*, April 11, 2014.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Mohsen Sazegara, "The Point of No Return," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus*, No. 54 (April 2006), pp. 7, 10.

the country's nuclear program.¹⁵¹ For example, during the 2009 Iranian presidential elections, the opposition denounced former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and criticized his failing policies, but still proclaimed their support for the nuclear program.¹⁵² Reformist candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi commended Iran's technological achievements, further demonstrating its role as a symbol of nationalism: "Nuclear technology is one of the examples of the achievements of our youth."¹⁵³ Thus, the right to pursue a peaceful nuclear energy program is generally agreed upon and supported in Iran.

It is also important to establish that the legitimacy of the current government in Iran is based on its Islamic ideology. Since the formation of the Islamic Republic, an Iranian identity based on revolutionary principles and ideals has been vital to maintaining public support for the regime. Although regime elites fight among themselves for power, they ultimately rely on the preservation of the Islamist system for their survival. In support of this argument, Geoffrey Kemp provided a scholarly examination of Iranian regime change as a non-proliferation variable. Kemp developed a matrix mapping each form of Iranian regime to a corresponding policy approach towards nuclear weapons. His findings reveal that a "moderate" regime was no more likely to forego nuclear weapons than a "radical" regime. Kemp concludes that, "most reformers show a remarkable congruence with the conservatives in their assertion of Iranian nationalism. This is reflected in the fact that some of the staunchest critics of Iran's participation in international arms control regimes have moderate reformist perspectives on domestic politics."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Alan Fram, "Poll: Iranians Support Nuclear Weapons," *Associated Press*, July 10, 2007; "Public Opinion in Iran," *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, April 7, 2008, pp. 14-16 (found that 81% of Iranians believe it is "very important" for Iran to develop its own nuclear fuel cycle); Mohamed A. El-Khawas, "Iran's Nuclear Controversy: Prospects for a Diplomatic Solution," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 16 (2005), p. 32.

¹⁵² Thomas Erdbrink, "Another Key Politician to Run Against Ahmadinejad," *Washington Post*, March 11, 2009, p. A8.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Farideh Farhi, "To Have or Not to Have? Iran's Domestic Debate on Nuclear Options," in *Iran's Nuclear Weapons Options: Issues and Analyses*, Ed. Geoffrey Kemp (Washington, DC: Nixon Center, 2001), pp. 35-53.

This conclusion, however, is far too simplistic. The internal dynamics of the Islamic regime are nuanced and largely unknown to the outside world, and differences in nuclear posturing throughout the past several decades indicate that not all factions of the leadership share the same opinion on the country's nuclear program.

The nuclear dilemma has served to uncover some of the competing factions that exist within the Islamic Republic. Continuities and discontinuities in Iran's nuclear posturing indicate that domestic political shifts certainly have had an impact on foreign policy, at least to a certain extent. This is evident by examining the stark contrast between President Khatami's conciliatory nuclear policies and President Ahmadinejad's outright noncompliance and escalation of the program. During his term, President Khatami, a pragmatist, focused solely on the peaceful dimensions of the nuclear program for energy purposes, which helped Iran improve its relationship with Saudi Arabia and diminish tensions with Jordan and Lebanon.¹⁵⁵ His administration eventually garnered criticism from domestic opponents who argued that Iran was making too many concessions and that it should adopt a more resilient posture towards the West. In contrast, President Ahmadinejad, a hard-line conservative, managed the nuclear issue provocatively by resisting the UNSC and its resolutions. Elected during the aftermath of the "axis of evil" speech and the hawkish "Bush Doctrine," Mr. Ahmadinejad took advantage of a rise in anti-American sentiment among the Iranian population and aggressively argued for Iran's right to accelerate its nuclear program and to enrich uranium. Ahmadinejad frequently referenced his resistance to international pressure to justify enrichment, mobilizing his domestic political base, and in turn, that of the hard-liner group more broadly. Chubin contends that, "differences in the elite exist not only on how diplomacy is conducted, but also on the price to be

¹⁵⁵ R.K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal* Vo. 58, No. 4 (2004), p. 558.

paid for this program and its relation to other needs, including relations with the international community.”¹⁵⁶ It became very clear during Ahmadinejad’s presidency that regime hard-liners did not support the idea of completely engaging with the international system or adhering to its corresponding norms and regimes. Indeed, even a partial settlement with the West would potentially be viewed as jeopardizing to their political credibility and their grip on power.

Furthermore, according to a 2011 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate, there is “an increasingly heated debate” in Iran “over whether to move further toward developing nuclear weapons.”¹⁵⁷ The report mentioned disparities within the regime. Certain factions are concerned with the worsening economic situation in Iran, resulting from internationally imposed sanctions that could fuel domestic opposition. It was within this context that pragmatist Hassan Rouhani was elected president during the summer of 2013. Since then, there have been undeniable differences in Iran’s foreign policy posturing; namely, the public declaration that the regime is open to compromise regarding the nuclear program. On September 24, 2013, President Rouhani delivered an address at the Sixty Eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly. As a part of the speech, he stated that:

Iran's nuclear program - and for that matter, that of all other countries – must pursue exclusively peaceful purposes. I declare here, openly and unambiguously, that, notwithstanding the positions of others, this has been, and will always be, the objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nuclear weapon and other weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran's security and defense doctrine, and contradict our fundamental religious and ethical convictions. Our national interests make it imperative that we remove any and all reasonable concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear program.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Shahram Chubin, “The Iranian Nuclear Riddle after June 12,” *Washington Quarterly* Vol. 33, No. 1 (January 2010), p. 165.

¹⁵⁷ Greg Miller and Joby Warrick, “U.S. Report Finds Debate in Iran on Building Nuclear Bomb,” *The Washington Post*, February 19, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ Hassan Rouhani, Statement by H.E. Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President of Iran, at the Sixty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Islamic Republic of Iran Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, September 24, 2013.

Within several months of making this speech, Iran and the P5+1 signed a landmark interim nuclear accord that would provide additional time for the parties to draft a long-term agreement. This deal came after more than three decades of ruptured relations between Iran and the United States, further indication that a moderate leadership can potentially influence nuclear policy-making. In May 2014, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif echoed this sentiment:

Iran has no interest in nuclear weapons and is convinced that such weapons would not enhance its security. Iran does not have the means to engage in nuclear deterrence -- directly or through proxies -- against its adversaries. Furthermore, the Iranian government believes that even a perception that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons is detrimental to the country's security and to its regional role, since attempts by Iran to gain strategic superiority in the Persian Gulf would inevitably provoke responses that would diminish Iran's conventional military advantage.¹⁵⁹

Thus, while reasonably strong political consensus remains among Iranian leaders that the country has a right to develop a civilian nuclear energy program for peaceful purposes, discord appears to exist on its potential military dimensions. President Rouhani continues to emphasize his desire to reach a long-term, mutually agreeable, nuclear accord with the P5+1 powers. Thus far, Ayatollah Khamenei has exhibited cautious support for Rouhani's efforts at negotiating a nuclear agreement with the P5+1. Ultimately, however, the Supreme Leader's decision will most likely be determined based on political expediency and to ensure the survival of the regime.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Mohammad Javad Zarif, "What Iran Really Wants: Iranian Foreign Policy in the Rouhani Era," *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2014.

¹⁶⁰ See Khalaji, "Report: How Iran Makes Decisions."

Chapter 6: The Strategic Culture Model

Introduction & Literature Review

In previous chapters, realist models and the domestic politics model have been used to explain why two successive Iranian regimes—the monarchy of Reza Shah Pahlavi and the ruling Islamic Republic— have both maintained a nuclear hedging strategy, and effectively, kept a nuclear option open. These models, however, are insufficient and do not adequately explain the trajectory of Iranian nuclear decision-making. This thesis does not seek to replace realist or liberal theories, but to supplement them. In neorealist explanations, structure only produces broad outcomes, leaving room for variations in specific choices among a range of possibilities.¹⁶¹ Additionally, liberal/neoliberal theories underline the causal role of domestic politics and the specific configuration variables relevant to each outcome;¹⁶² yet, these theories fail to explain policy continuities when there are changes in the configuration of domestic politics.¹⁶³ Thus, in order to analyze Iran’s nuclear policy decision making, it is necessary to use an intermediate structure that takes changing internal and external factors into account. The strategic culture of a state is a critical starting point for understanding its potential actions and decisions because it is “a structure of beliefs and practices crystallized over time, narrowing the range of choices and

¹⁶¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979.)

¹⁶² Michael W. Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics Revisited,” in Charles W. Kegly, Jr., ed., *Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge*, New York: St. Martin’s, pp. 83-106; Ethan B. Kapstein, “Is Realism Dead? The Domestic Sources of International Politics,” *International Organization* 49, Vo. 4, (1995), pp. 751-754.

¹⁶³ John G. Ikenberry, “Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,” *International Security* 19, Vo. 4, No. 3 (Winter 1998/99), pp. 32-64.

inducing continuity even when there is a changing environment, whether external or domestic or both.”¹⁶⁴

Dating back to the 1970s, the notion of strategic culture is not a new one. The term “strategic culture” was originally coined by Jack Snyder, and was used in the context of assessing Soviet nuclear strategy during the peak of the Cold War. The concept was triggered as a response to the U.S.’ failure to predict Soviet actions, and the introduction of the term was part of the reaction seen in the late 1970s to counter the primacy of game theory and rational actor models in strategic studies. Several scholars concluded that each individual country had its own unique way of interpreting, analyzing, and reacting to international events. This brought the question of a state/national culture back to the forefront and inspired a new wave of literature which focused on the development of a new tool of analysis, notably that of strategic culture. According to Ian Johnston, there have been three generations of strategic culture scholars thus far.

Jack Snyder falls into the first generation category. The concept of strategic culture, as defined by Snyder, is “the sum of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community share with regard to nuclear strategy.”¹⁶⁵ Iain Johnston also notes that strategic culture is “an ideational milieu which limits behavior choices.” He continues by stating that this milieu is comprised of “shared assumption and decision rules that impose a degree of order on individual and group conceptions of their relationship to their social, organizational or political environment.”¹⁶⁶ Colin S. Gray was another first generation scholar with similar ideas. In his piece *Nuclear Strategy and National*

¹⁶⁴ Rajesh M. Basrur, “Nuclear Weapons and Indian Strategic Culture,” *Journal of Peace Research* (March 1, 2001), p. 185.

¹⁶⁵ Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 1977.)

¹⁶⁶ Ian Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture,” *International Security* Vo. 19, No. 4 (1995), p. 45.

Style, Gray defines strategic culture as “referring to modes of thought and action with respect to force, which derives from perception of the national historical experience, from aspirations for responsible behavior in national terms.”¹⁶⁷ Gray’s argument is that there are distinctive national styles in nuclear politics, based on national history and culture, and that the United States consistently misinterprets the U.S.S.R. One of the primary ideas behind the concept of strategic culture was to explain ideas and actions that seemed to be in conflict with what would be considered rational. Iain Johnston asserts:

Rather than rejecting rationality per se as a factor in strategic choice, the strategic culture approach challenges the ahistorical, non-cultural neorealist framework for analyzing strategic choices. The neorealist framework discounts the accumulated weight of the past in favor of a forward-looking calculation of expected utility... Most of the proponents of the strategic culture approach, however, would fundamentally disagree with this conclusion. In their view, elites socialized in different strategic cultures will make different choices when placed in similar situations.¹⁶⁸

Thus, as far as strategic culture scholars are concerned, there is no universal model of rationality. In other words, what is rational for one state can be irrational for another. Proponents of the strategic culture model argue that it is the history and experiences of each state that determine the state’s political decision-making. Specifically, “different states have different predominant strategic preferences that are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree, by the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites.”¹⁶⁹ Based on similar ideas, Ken Booth wrote a book titled Strategy and Ethnocentrism, in which he uses historical examples in an effort to prove that culture can have certain falsified effects in the study and practice of strategy. Booth argues that, as a result, there are adverse impacts when it comes to IR analysis.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Colin S. Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton, 1986.)

¹⁶⁸ See Johnston, p. 35.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁷⁰ Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979.)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the study of strategic culture went beyond its original nuclear field of study to examine many other security related issues. It also distinguished itself by raising questions about the relationship between strategic culture and behavior. The strategic culture model was greatly enhanced by scholars such as Kerry Longhurst who sought to utilize strategic culture as an analytical tool. Longhurst describes this new notion of strategic culture more broadly than Snyder:

A distinctive body of beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the use of force, which are held by a collective and arise gradually over time, through a unique protracted historical process. A strategic culture is persistent over time, tending to outlast the era of its original inception, although it is not a permanent or static feature. It is shaped and influenced by formative periods and can alter, either fundamentally or piecemeal, at critical junctures in that collective's experience.¹⁷¹

As Johnston notes, the second generation of strategic culture literature “started from the premise that there is a vast difference between what leaders think or say they are doing and the deeper motives for what in fact they do.”¹⁷² Moreover, the study of strategic culture can also be used to assess the influence of deep-rooted values and beliefs as it relates to decision-making in security matters more broadly. According to Longhurst, “the logic of strategic culture then, resides in the central belief that collective ideas and values about the use of force are important constitutive factors in the design and execution of states' security policies.”¹⁷³ In his later works, Colin Gray explains strategic culture as “the persisting (though not eternal) socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, habits of mind, and preferred methods of operation that are more or less

¹⁷¹ Kerry Longhurst, “The Concept of Strategic Culture” in *Military Sociology*, ed. G. Kummel and D. P. Andreas (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft 2000).

¹⁷² Johnston, p. 39.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

specific to a particularly geographically based security community that has had a necessarily unique historical experience.”¹⁷⁴ He furthers by asserting that:

Strategic culture is a toll, which denotes the emotional and attitudinal environment within which the defence community operates. Ideas about war and strategy are influenced by physical and political geography—some strategic cultures plainly have, for example, a maritime or a continental tilt—by political or religious ideology, and by familiarity with, and preference for, particular military technologies. Strategic culture is the world of mind, feeling and habit of behavior.¹⁷⁵

Moving beyond realist and liberal theories of international relations, Peter J. Katzenstein offers a sociological perspective on the politics of national security. In his book *The Culture of National Security*, Katzenstein argues that state security interests are defined by actors. These actors, he argues, react to cultural factors.¹⁷⁶ The book focuses on two understudied determinants of national security policy: First, the cultural-institutional context of policy; and second, the constructed identity of states, governments, and other political actors. Katzenstein, along with Jepperson and Wendt, contend that the security environments in which states are embedded are in important part cultural and institutional, rather than just material. Moreover, cultural environments impact not only the incentives for different forms of state behavior but also the basic character of states, that is, state “identity.”¹⁷⁷ This challenges the idea, in neorealist and neoliberal theory, that there are absolute characteristics of states that are exogenous to their environment, although they do not completely renounce the realist model. More recently, realism has expanded to consider social and cultural factors in association with

¹⁷⁴ Colin S. Gray, “Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back,” *Review of International Studies* (1999), pp. 49–69.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Peter J. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996).

¹⁷⁷ Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter Katzenstein, “Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia UP, 1996).

security policy. Nonetheless, the authors favor a richer view that draws on concepts from sociology and cultural studies such as norms and identity.

The premise of strategic culture is relatively simple: it lies in the primary belief that collective ideas and values about the use of force are important constitutive factors in the blueprint and implementation of states' security policies. Strategic Culture scholars argue that at the core of every state, region, or security alliance—such as Iran—lie an array of shared values and beliefs pertaining to the use of force. Alan Macmillan asserts that, “the decision-making process in matters of defense is not an abstract construct based purely in the present moment but is, rather, steeped in the beliefs, biases, traditions and cultural identity of the individual country—all of which feeds into its strategic culture.”¹⁷⁸ Determining episodes during times of crisis, in addition to experiences of the past, contribute to the formation of culture. Moreover, changes in strategic culture occur slowly. Even when there are gradual adjustments, fundamental values remain intact. Ideologies, feelings, fears, objectives and ambitions are the unobservable characteristics of each strategic culture. Furthermore, whether these experiences were actually lived through or not by all individuals in a given collective determines whether they are points of shared recollection. These factors comprise each state's strategic culture. Consequently, practices and policies result directly from these foundational elements. For the purpose of this analysis, strategic culture will be defined as:

A set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.

This definition inevitably recognizes that strategic culture is a product of a range of circumstances such as geography, history and narratives that shape collective identity, but one

¹⁷⁸ Alan Macmillan, “Strategic Culture and National Ways in Warfare: The British Case,” *RUSI Journal* Vol. 140, Issue 5 (1995).

which also allows it a role in both enabling and constraining decisions pertaining to security. Strategic culture is also a useful tool to better grasp the “reasons, incentives, and rationales for acquiring, proliferating, and employing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by diverse actors under circumstances that differ significantly from those for which previous analytical constructs now seem inadequate or irrelevant.”¹⁷⁹

Key Elements of Iranian Strategic Culture

With a history of over 2,500 years, Iranian strategic thought and culture has undergone many changes throughout the centuries. It is constantly changing and evolving based on relevant domestic, regional, and global influences. Accordingly, this chapter will identify the three fundamental elements of Iranian strategic culture that are most relevant to the Iranian pursuit of nuclear technology and a nuclear hedge strategy: (1) Iranian nationalism; (2) a ubiquitous sense of vulnerability; and (3) a love/hate relationship with modernization.

Iranian Nationalism

“The best way to understand Persians is to think of the most chauvinistic Texan you know and add 5,000 years of history and then you begin to understand just how proud they are.”¹⁸⁰

- Robin Wright

During an interview with Fareed Zakaria in October 2013, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif boldly proclaimed that, “Iran is a proud nation. We believe we have the technological

¹⁷⁹ Kerry M. Kartchner, “Strategic Culture and WMD Decision Making,” in *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Ed. Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, and Jeffrey A. Larsen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁸⁰ Robin Wright, *Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb, and American Strategy*, The Brookings Institution, September 16, 2013.

capability... and the human resources in order to stand on our own feet.”¹⁸¹ This fearless declaration regarding the notorious Iranian nuclear program is not a surprising one for anyone familiar with the Persian culture. Iranians, regardless of their political or religious beliefs, view their history with a sense of extraordinary pride, as they consider Iran to be one of the world’s oldest and greatest civilizations.

From the outset of his regime, the Shah had an impressive vision for Iran envisioned the country as a key regional player with worldwide influence. Starting in World War II and continuing throughout much of the Cold War, his vision was realized, as Iran held a position of strategic importance in the eyes of many of the world’s superpowers. Although Iran was not treated as an equal, the country was regarded with a decent level of respect and prestige. In 1943, President Roosevelt signed a public declaration thanking Iran for its support in World War II, and the State Department regarded the shipment of arms and materials to the Iranian army as a matter of "high priority" throughout the decade. The West’s preoccupation with the Cold War in combination with the West’s conviction in the Shah meant that Iran continued to thrive on the national stage. Rooted in his strong sense of Iranian nationalism, the Shah launched a massive military build-up campaign, mobilized the nation’s oil income, and attempted to implement reforms to modernize the country. During the 1970s, the Shah inaugurated Iran’s nuclear program, and argued, like Iranian leaders today, that the country has a national “right” to pursue nuclear energy capability.

In his quest to modernize Iran, the Shah sought a massive electrical power generating capability. He successfully negotiated nuclear reactor deals with West Germany and France, and hoped to purchase eight additional reactors from the United States. The Shah’s large-scale

¹⁸¹ Shahad Ghoreishi, “The Key to Nuclear Negotiations with Iran is Respecting Cultural Pride,” *The Atlantic*, October 10, 2013.

nuclear ambitions, however, coincided with Washington's growing concern regarding nuclear proliferation spurred by India's May 1974 peaceful nuclear detonation. Although the Shah had publicly renounced any intention of pursuing nuclear weapons, the Iranians proclaimed that they had the "right" to a full nuclear fuel cycle, including reprocessing of spent fuel. Skeptical of the Shah's true objectives, neither the Ford nor the Carter administrations would sign a deal without stringent accountability mechanisms. The Carter administration was determined to curtail the extent to which Iran could develop any of the critical components of a nuclear weapons capability by requiring the tightest possible controls over Iran's ability to use American supplied nuclear technology and fuel for plutonium production. In response, the Iranians made nationalist arguments asserting their "rights" to reprocessing and other relevant activities under the NPT.

When Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the monarchy in 1979, the United States lost a longtime friend as well as strategic ally in the region. For American policymakers, the only glimmer of hope was that an Islamic regime would improve the promise of nonproliferation due to its religiously based opposition to weapons of mass destruction, and at first, it did. Since then, Iranian nationalism has been expressed through the vehicle of Shi'ism, the minority sect of Islam that first came to Iran as a result of the Arab conquests during the seventh and eight centuries. The Iranian Revolution was a perfect expression of that synergy, and Ayatollah Khomeini has since utilized Shi'ism as the constitutional justification for the regime's political decisions, structure, and military practice. As the basic "vehicle" for Iranian national identity,¹⁸² Shia Islam also forms the worldview of Iranian policy-makers.¹⁸³ Khomeini's doctrine emphasizes regime survival as the ultimate service to Islam based on the conviction that the regime is the manifestation of Shia Islam's authority on Earth, and to surrender it would be to surrender the

¹⁸² Willis Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," SAIC project prepared for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, October 31, 2006, pp. 20-21.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23.

will of God. Hence, the survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran is not only an existential necessity, but also a demonstration of self-interest and Iranian nationalism.

Just as the Shah did, The Islamic Republic of Iran also perceives itself as the natural hegemon of the region, albeit the Islamic hegmon, with the desire to become the world's leader of the entire Muslim population. Iranian Ambassador to Germany, Hoseyn Musavian, declared that, "Iran is a powerful country in the region and has the final say in the world of Islam at present, and is a cultural and political superpower... such a country cannot be ostracized."¹⁸⁴ To Americans, these bold proclamations seem absurd when considering Iran's current standing within the international system. To Iranians, however, Iran is a great nation with over twenty-five centuries of history, endowed with a key geographic location, plentiful natural resources, a large economy, and a powerful military.¹⁸⁵ From Iran's worldview, it deserves an esteemed reputation in the world: "More than any other nation, Iran has always perceived itself as a natural hegemon of its neighborhood... By dint of history and the power of its civilization, Iranians believe that their nation should establish its regional preeminence."¹⁸⁶

For Iran, the nuclear issue is a nationalist one, and represents just another example of the international community's disrespect towards its sovereignty. Particularly since Iran initiated its nuclear program under the Shah, Iranians consider access to nuclear capability to be a national right. This powerful nationalist sentiment among the Iranian population has been exploited by the Islamic regime—a regime that seeks to combat the existing Western-led international system. Furthermore, Iran seems to views its program with a sense of entitlement because Israel, Pakistan, and India, countries near in proximity to Iran, already possess nuclear weapons. From

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in Frederick R. Strain, "Discerning Iran's Nuclear Strategy: An Examination of Motivations, Strategic Culture, and Rationality," (Thesis, Maxwell Airforce Base, April 15, 1996).

¹⁸⁵ Amir Taheri, "The World and Iran's Second Revolution," *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 28 (2006), p. 103.

¹⁸⁶ Ray Takeyh, *The Hidden Iran* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006), p. 61.

the Iranian perspective, these countries acquired weapons capability with minimal objections from the United States. Meanwhile, the U.S. is adamant about preventing Iran from achieving this capability, which in turn, reinforces the traditional Iranian perception of victimization and bolsters nationalist rhetoric.

Accordingly, evidence suggests that nuclear weapons are attractive to many Iranians, even those outside the circle of hardliners as it represents a token of great power. According to a December 2011/January 2012 Gallup opinion poll, 57% of Iranians surveyed indicated their support for a civilian nuclear program, while 19% opposed it. It should also be mentioned that 40% of those polled were in support of “Iran developing its own nuclear power capabilities for military purposes,” while 35% were opposed.¹⁸⁷ A 2010 poll administered by the International Peace Institute found that 7 out of 10 Iranians questioned were in favor of “their country developing and possessing nuclear weapons.”¹⁸⁸ The results of this poll indicated that public support for Iran acquiring a nuclear capability had increased by approximately 20% in 18 months. These opinion polls convey that there is social and political support among Iranians, both conservative and reformist, for a civil nuclear program. They also indicate that there is decent support among the Iranian public for the country to develop a nuclear weapons capability.

¹⁸⁷ Jay Loschky and Anita Pugliese, “Iranians Split, 40% to 35%, on Nuclear Military Power,” Gallup Poll, February 15, 2012; A 2005 National Defense University Study also found that: “Support for the acquisition of advanced nuclear technology crosses ideological and factional lines. Few believe that a more-reformist minded government would deny its right to take any measure it deemed necessary for national security. More broadly, press commentaries suggest Iranians increasingly resent foreign efforts to shape their policies on nuclear energy or deny them what is seen as a natural and national right.” This study was cited in Judith Yaphe and Charles Lutes, *Reassessing the Implications of Nuclear Armed Iran* (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University: 2005), p. 11.

¹⁸⁸ “Iran: Public Opinion on Foreign, Nuclear, and Domestic Issues,” *International Peace Institute with Charney Research*, December 8, 2010.

Ubiquitous Sense of Vulnerability

*"Iranian self-image is a contradictory combination of the legacy of great empires and regional dominance on one hand and the history of humiliation and abuse by foreign powers on the other."*¹⁸⁹

Iran's prevailing sense of strategic loneliness and vulnerability is deeply rooted in its past, as well as its geopolitical location as a Persian nation surrounded by non-Persian neighbors. Originally an empire of conquerors, Iran has also been subject to invasion and conquering by foreign forces, time and time again. Throughout its history, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Mongols, and the Turks have, at some point in time, defeated the Iranians. Its persisting sense of victimization is most recently connected to British and Russian domination throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the American interference following the Second World War. Iran has endured a long and vibrant history emerging as one of the greatest empires of the ancient world and ending up today as an isolated "pariah" in the international community.

In the post World War II period, the new Iranian Shah was faced with many of the same issues that the Qajar Shahs and his father had confronted, in addition to the new dynamic of the Cold War. In an effort to combat the influence of the Soviet Union, the United States began to play a more active role in Iranian politics, while the Shah attempted to survive by balancing the two rival forces. Meanwhile, Iran witnessed a revival in parliamentarism in the 1940s. In 1949, Mohammad Mossadeq founded the National Front Party with the objective of upholding the 1906 Constitution. Frustrated by Britain's continued control over Iranian oil and the Anglo-

¹⁸⁹ Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, *Pride and Prejudice: Understanding Iran's Nuclear Program in Forecasting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st Century*, ed. William C. Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.)

Persian Oil Company, the National Front Party aimed to nationalize the industry. In 1951, the Shah appointed Mossadeq as prime minister, and he subsequently followed through on his agenda and established the National Iranian Oil Company.¹⁹⁰ For many Iranians, Mossadeq became a nationalist leader; however, to certain Western powers with economic interests in the region, his actions set an unwelcome precedent.

As Mossadeq acquired more power, he depended on street protests to continue advancing his agenda in 1952 as his support in the *majlis* continued to decrease, until he eventually disbanded it entirely. In addition, Iran's economy was in shambles due to a foreign boycott of Iranian oil in the aftermath of nationalization. Although Mossadeq was supported by the majority of the middle class and by the *bazaaris*, Washington regarded him as a revolutionary with the potential to become a destabilizing force, and destabilization in any country bordering the Soviet Union was perceived as the first step towards Communist subversion. Therefore, after a failed attempt on August 16, 1953, American Ambassador Loy Henderson openly organized continued coup attempts until he succeeded. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and British intelligence role in organizing and assisting the pro-Shah forces is often cited in Iran as yet another example in a long history of foreign interference and an affront to Iranian sovereignty.¹⁹¹ After the 1953 coup, the United States replaced Britain as the foreign power involved in Iran's domestic matters, and consequently, the nationalist movement suffered for the next 25 years, guaranteeing the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi. However, America's unconcealed involvement in the ousting of Mossadeq, who had come to symbolize Iran's quest for national dignity, denied

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ The history of this event is incredibly complicated. See the CIA history of the 1953 coup at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28//index.html>.

the Shah any legitimacy. The widespread knowledge of American meddling in domestic Iranian affairs is one of the major reasons for distrust of U.S. policy in Iran today.

While nationalist leaders decried American interference in internal Iranian politics, the Shah of Iran was concerned with several other sources of strategic insecurity. In 1945-1946, the Shah feared that the Soviet Union was intent on taking possession of Iranian territory. He immediately embarked upon a massive military build-up, with the full support of the United States, and the transfer of aid began in 1948.¹⁹² In 1955, Iran joined the U.S.-led Baghdad Pact (later the Central Treaty Organization)—an agreement created by Britain, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan with the goal of strengthening regional defense and preventing the infiltration of the Soviet Union into the Middle East. Concerns regarding a Soviet invasion remained high on the Shah's list of security threats until 1958. At this point, the Soviets decreased their level of propaganda against the monarchy, and the Shah announced that it would not allow the stationing of American nuclear missiles within Iranian borders. Throughout the remainder of the decade, he made a number of official visits to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, in addition to signing several commercial agreements. The most consequential agreement permitted the Soviets to build a steel mill in Isfahan, in exchange for Iranian natural gas. By 1970, the construction of a gas pipeline from southwestern Iran to the Russian frontier had finished. Even further, the two countries declared a \$110 million agreement to trade Soviet military equipment, such as non-armored vehicles, troop carriers, and anti-aircraft gun, for Iranian natural gas and other raw materials.

While the détente with the Soviet Union was a relief for the Shah, he was also wary about the rising influence of Pan-Arabism and Arab republicanism under Egyptian President Gamal

¹⁹² James A. Bill, "The Politics of Reaction and Pahlavi Retrenchment, 1954-1961" in *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988).

Abdul Nasser. Beginning in the late 1950s, “Cairo replaced Moscow as the center of danger in Iranian eyes—an immediate danger because it was seen as a threat to Iran’s economic life line, the oil trade.”¹⁹³ The Shah worried that if unfriendly forces secured control of the surrounding Persian Gulf nations, they would put an end to the outward flow of Iranian oil, and in turn, detriment his economic development plans which heavily depended upon oil revenues. As a result of these experiences, the shah prioritized the advancement of Iran’s military program. This meant that he stationed his army, navy, and air force operations in the Persian Gulf in an effort to protect Iranian oil installations. The majority of Iran’s 1966 special defense budget was spent on destroyers, frigates, short-range ship-to-air Seacat missiles, British Hovercraft, American F-4s, and Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. Additionally, in 1967, a new Third Army Corps comprised of a paratroop unit was formed and placed in Iran’s southernmost major city, Shiraz.¹⁹⁴ Throughout the remainder of the 1960s, the Shah strengthened Iran’s position in the Persian Gulf by relocating key oil-export facilities and naval bases, in addition to employing a vigorous diplomatic campaign to increase Iran’s influence in the region.

In addition to Iran’s cultural, linguistic, and ethnic dissimilarities from its surrounding countries, a religious distinction also drives its sense of strategic loneliness. The Persian-Arab divide is not a fantasy, and within the context of Islam, the Iranians’ Shi’a sect is unique to the majority Sunni population of the Arab world. This division was significantly exacerbated when the radical, utopian Islamist ideology of Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah. Khomeini regarded Iran as only the first step to forming an Islamic empire that would bring, in the words of his final testament in 1989, “absolute perfection and infinite glory and beauty.” He urged Muslims: ‘Rise up! Grab what is yours by right through nails and teeth! Do not fear the

¹⁹³ Leslie M. Pryor, “Arms and the Shah,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 31 (Summer 1978), p. 59.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

propaganda of the superpowers and their sworn stooges. Drive out the criminal rulers!... March towards an Islamic government!' If only all Muslims cooperated, they would be 'the greatest power on earth.'" In response to concerns that the 1979 Islamic Revolution would inspire similar Shi'a uprisings in Iraq, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran on September 22, 1980, starting a war that would endure for the next eight years.

As detailed in Chapter 3, the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War had calamitous impacts on the Iranian state. During the war, Khomeini embedded his hardcore ideology into Iran's war doctrine in an effort to guarantee the survival of the new theocratic Iranian government. While other countries utilized conventional methods of warfare and military structure, the theocracy decided to "rely on its culture of martyrdom and sacrifice, and on the theory that moral superiority and the power of faith were sufficient to overcome Iraq's devastating machine."¹⁹⁵ Although the Iraqi military was significantly more experienced and better equipped than the Iranian military, this reality did not sway the Supreme Leader's decision. The theocratic leaders believed that their faith could protect them against their Sunni enemies, and accordingly, Iran sent an enormous "human wave" of young, fervent, defenseless men into battle.¹⁹⁶ Meanwhile, Iraq massacred the unarmed volunteers and employed chemical weapons to terrify and demoralize the entire population. The war left a lasting imprint on the psyche of Iranian leadership, instilling the clergy with a powerful sense of national vulnerability and insecurity. The massive political, military, and psychological destruction caused by the war certainly influenced Iranian threat perception. It also provided the driving force behind many of its postwar military programs and its hostile attitude towards the West.

¹⁹⁵ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, p. 171. In the book, he states that "Ayatollah Khomeini captured this sentiment by stressing, "Victory is not achieved by swords, it can only be achieved by blood."

¹⁹⁶ Gary Sick, "Trial By Error: Reflection on the Iran-Iraq War," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Spring 1989), p. 237.

Although the Iranian hostage crisis initially impaired U.S.-Iranian relations, American support for Iraq further exacerbated the situation by instilling extreme skepticism towards international norms and regimes in the Iranian culture. As Kartchner contends: “Negative experiences with the international community can affect a state’s confidence in the ability of international norms and regimes to protect its interests, or defend against its violators, thus predisposing it to reject adherence to such regimes or norms.”¹⁹⁷ In Iran’s case, the international community failed to respond to Iranian grievances about Iraq’s use of chemical weapons during the eight-year long war between the two countries.¹⁹⁸ As a result, Iran’s leaders felt victimized and mistreated by the U.S. and other Western powers, and understandably so. Without trust in international regimes, Islamic leaders in Iran may be led to pursue nuclear weapon capability for the purpose of deterrence. As Anthony Cain notes, “The conspicuous failure of the international community to act against Iraq’s overt use of chemical weapons in the war served as a catalyst for the Iranian chemical and biological weapons program.”¹⁹⁹ The Iraq War seemed to have a rationalizing influence on Khomeini’s decision to reinstate the nuclear program. As Kartchner points argues, “painful national experiences can exert strong pressure on a country to deviate from or even reject strategic cultural preferences, leading to the emergence of a new strategic culture.”²⁰⁰ Iran’s isolation in its own neighborhood was further magnified by increased American presence post 9/11. The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (2001 and 2003), followed by President Bush’s classification of Iran as a part of the “axis of evil,” were initially cause of great concern for the Iranian elite. It soon became clear, however, that the United States was incapable of carrying out another invasion in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Iranian

¹⁹⁷ Kartchner, “Strategic Culture and WMD Decision Making,” p. 59.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Anthony C. Cain, “Iran’s Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction,” *Maxwell Paper* No. 26, (Alabama: Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, April 2002), p. 14.

²⁰⁰ Kartchner, “Strategic Culture and WMD Decision Making,” p. 59.

officials spread the rumor that the U.S. was plotting for regime change vis-à-vis a covert velvet revolution.²⁰¹ This uniformly cynical, and oftentimes outright aggressive, attitude toward the West and the United States in particular, still exists among the conservative Iranian leadership.

Therefore, Iranian leaders have portrayed the nuclear dilemma as the most recent attempt by the West to deny Iran its due respect, following American interference in the 1953 coup against Mossadegh, American support of Iraq during the eight-year war, and three decades of U.S.-led isolation after the revolution. These experiences have cemented Iran's sense of isolation and victimization. Accordingly, Iran has prioritized deterrence and self-reliance as the bedrock of its long-term security aims. The catastrophic and outright embarrassing experience of the Iran-Iraq War transformed the regime's war doctrine. Instead of engaging in dangerous offensive operations (i.e. "human wave" attacks), Iran depends upon irregular warfare, terrorism, abrasive rhetoric, and the implicit threat of weapons of mass destruction to deter or impede its adversaries.

Love/Hate Relationship with Modernization

For over a century, Iran has attempted to balance modernity while also maintaining its rich Persian and Islamic heritage. Prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran leaned heavily towards the United States and the West, and sought to revive the glorious days of the ancient Persian Empire and to minimize the role of Islam in the public realm. The Islamic Revolution brought about the opposite extreme. It elevated religion to an unprecedented degree, viewing Islam as the best avenue for social, political, economic, cultural, and even scientific

²⁰¹ Jesse Nunes, "Iran Detains Two on Accusations of Plotting Velvet Revolution," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 23, 2007.

development. Despite the differences between the regimes in power, the Iranian nuclear program has endured as a symbol of the country's modernity and prestige. This is in line with broader constructivist theory asserting that, by obtaining a nuclear capability, states hope to achieve their identity as technologically advanced and independent entities. In other words, states determine their nuclear policies based on their perceptions of norms pertaining to nuclear weapons acquisition and nuclear weapons restraint.²⁰²

While both the Shah and the Islamic Republic associate nuclear technology with power and prestige, neither regime embraces modernity in other realms. Although he was an authoritarian ruler, the Shah of Iran attempted to implement Western-influenced reforms. In 1963, he announced plans for the "White Revolution," a comprehensive program that encompassed land reform, the sale of state-owned enterprises to the private sector, the nationalization of forests, a profit-sharing plan for industrial workers, and the creation of a Literacy Corps to eliminate illiteracy in rural regions. The White Revolution also allowed Iranian women the right to vote, increased women's minimum legal marriage age to 18, and improved women's legal rights in divorce and child custody matters.

The nuclear program, however, was the zenith of modernity for the Shah. Although it was not a pragmatic aspiration, there were legitimate economic benefits that the government used to justify the program's existence. For the Shah, the genuine need for nuclear power was less important than the more far-reaching ideological objectives of the project—the nuclear program represented Iran's leap towards modernity, and arguably, towards the West. It was a symbol of Iran's newly attained power and prestige, and signaled the country's relevance on the international stage. Paradoxically, the nuclear program was an attempt to escape Western influence while simultaneously moving closer towards it. Nevertheless, the Shah's authoritarian

²⁰² Sagan, *Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons*, p. 55.

modernity projects continued and he excluded liberal, moderate, and radical groups, both Islamic and secular, from participating in the political process. The dictatorship continued to tighten its control over society throughout the 1960s and 1970s. This selective authoritarian modernization was ultimately counterproductive as it bolstered the opposition movement that eventually overthrew the Shah's regime.

When Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the monarchy in 1979, the United States lost a longtime friend as well as strategic ally in the region. For American policymakers, the only glimmer of hope was that an Islamic regime would improve the promise of nonproliferation due to its religiously based opposition to weapons of mass destruction. However, it was not long before the Supreme Leader changed his mind on the nuclear issue and reinstated the nuclear program. Particularly in the 21st century, the regime has struggled to adhere to its fundamental Islamic ideology. As the world becomes more and more interconnected, smaller states have the opportunity to benefit by cooperating and working within the international system—an opportunity that Iran has ignored thus far. As Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif asserts, “Since its establishment by a popular revolution in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has grappled with these challenges. The post revolutionary foreign policy of Iran has been based on a number of cherished ideals and objectives embedded in the country's constitution.”²⁰³ Zarif elaborates: “Iran can also leverage its political traditions. It has successfully established an indigenous democratic model of governance, developing and maintaining a rare religious democracy in the modern world. It has an unmatched cultural identity emanating from its dynamic blend of Iranian and Islamic culture, which it can use to promote its mission and message throughout the entire Islamic world.”²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Mohammad Javad Zarif, “What Iran Really Wants: Iranian Foreign Policy in the Rouhani Era.”

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

Zarif asserts that the Islamic Republic exercises a democratic model of governance that is in tune with the modern world. Although this notion may sound reasonable, it is a vision that has yet to be realized. As recently as March 28, 2014, the United Nations Human Rights Council voted to renew the mandate of Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed.²⁰⁵ The vote indicates concern among the international community that the status of human rights has not significantly improved since President Rouhani's election, despite Iranian rhetoric claiming the opposite. This unfortunate reality calls into question much of the rhetoric that has been used by President Rouhani over the past year, including about the nuclear program. Rouhani has repeatedly indicated that Iran seeks to pursue its peaceful civilian nuclear energy program, and that it also wishes to cooperate with the United States and other negotiating parties to address their concerns. Ultimately, the Islamic Republic maintains its legitimacy by adhering to its Shi'a ideology and its consistent opposition to Western interferences. Therefore, its recent willingness to negotiate should be examined cautiously, as it remains to be seen whether this new rhetoric translates into tangible behavioral change.

²⁰⁵ "Iran's Human Rights Showing Little Progress, UN Votes to Approve Special Mandate," International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, March 28, 2014.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

On November 24, 2013, a landmark nuclear accord was agreed upon between Iran and the P5+1 regarding the notorious Iranian nuclear program. Iran agreed to halt several key components of its program in exchange for temporary economic sanctions relief. The goal of the deal was to provide additional time for Iran and the six major world powers to draft a more comprehensive, long-term agreement. Prior to this deal, Iran had historically refused to cooperate with the international community, insisting that it has a “right” to pursue civilian nuclear technology as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty—a message that Iranians have been reiterating since the inception of the country’s nuclear program during the monarchy of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. Evidence suggests, however, that Iran’s program is not exclusively reserved for peaceful purposes. Instead, Iran has settled for a nuclear hedging strategy, meaning that it has retained a viable option for the relatively rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons, based on an indigenous technical capacity to produce them within a relatively short time frame.

Iran’s decision-making calculus regarding its nuclear program is puzzling because it has clearly had more negative impacts for the country than positive ones. In an effort to coerce the Iranian regime, the United States and the international community have imposed harsh sanctions targeting its energy sector and its access to financial markets. The value of the Iranian currency, *the rial*, has plummeted, and the Iranian civilian population has greatly suffered as a result. Sanctions have hurt Iran to the point in which it has become economically, politically, and

diplomatically isolated from many parts of the world. In order to better understand Iran's nuclear posturing, this thesis used three models to analyze the continuities and discontinuities of the Iranian nuclear program. Chapter Four studied the security model, and provided an assessment of Iran's primary regional and global threats since the mid-20th century. Chapter Five examined the domestic politics model and shed light on the internal dynamics of the Islamic regime that may help to explain its nuclear policies over time. Finally, Chapter Six applied the framework of strategic culture theory to Iranian nuclear decision-making, identifying three key elements of Iranian strategic culture that have influenced its policies during both regimes. This concluding chapter will attempt to provide some clarity on the relative significance of these models to explain Iran's nuclear policies over time and across two regimes: [1] The authoritarian monarchy of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and [2] The Islamic Republic of Iran. Furthermore, it will discuss the implications of this analysis and further research questions.

The Shah

Since it received its first nuclear reactor from the United States in the late 1950s, Iran has pursued, what it claims to be, a peaceful civilian nuclear energy program. In 1968, it was one of the first countries to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and by 1974, it had completed its safeguards agreement with the IAEA. Although initially supportive of the Shah's ambitions, both the Ford and Carter administrations began to have doubts about his true motivations for the program. Specifically, the U.S. was concerned about the Shah's interest in processing plutonium— technology that would allow for a much faster route to the bomb than enriched uranium. Nevertheless, the Shah was firm in his conviction that Iran should enjoy its "full rights" under the NPT, which included a full fuel cycle, and according to the monarch, the right

to process plutonium. Yet, there was never a lack of mixed signals coming from Iran. The Shah made several declarations, both publicly and privately, about his desire to keep the “nuclear option” available if need be. Following the 1974 Indian nuclear explosion, he revealed to a French journalist that Iran would have nuclear weapons: “Without any doubt, and sooner than one would think,” although the statement was quickly retracted. In private, he asked Iran’s chief nuclear scientist to keep the nuclear breakout option available incase any surrounding countries decided to acquire nuclear weapons.

During this time, Iran was not seriously threatened by any of its neighbors. However, the Shah did feel a sense of insecurity from the Soviet Union up until the late 1950s. Later, his concerns shifted towards the rise of pan-Arabism in Egypt and other parts of the region. Although it is within this context that the Shah launched the Iranian nuclear program, the pursuit of this technology is largely attributable to his quest for regional hegemony and worldwide influence. Rooted in his strong sense of Iranian nationalism, the Shah argued for Iran’s right to advance its program under the auspices of the NPT, just like any other state signatory of the agreement. Furthermore, for the Shah of Iran, nuclear technology was a critical component of his conception of modernity. The nuclear program symbolized power and prestige, and naturally, the zealous and determined Shah of Iran sought to achieve such power.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

During the immediate aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini shut down the Shah’s nuclear program. From the perspective of the Supreme Leader, the program was incompatible with fundamental Shi’a ideology and it also represented Western domination. It was not long, however, until the program was restarted in

the 1980s. Many experts point to the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war to explain the resurgence of Iran's nuclear program, and this seems to be a viable theory. After suffering horrific losses to the Iraqis, the Iranian leadership may have believed that nuclear weapons would deter any potential adversaries. Certainly, Iraq's use of chemical weapons against the Iranian population was a devastating experience that impacted the strategic calculus of the regime. In other words, the security model applies at least in the initial aftermath of the war.

However, following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the threat from Iraq diminished significantly. Regarding the rest of the Arab world, there is undoubtedly tension between the Shi'a Iranian regime and the majority Sunni surrounding countries. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan have indicated that if Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapon, they would quickly follow suit, which would only serve to increase instability in the region. Furthermore, the United States was entangled in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which meant that it was not in a position to intervene in another Muslim country. Meanwhile, Iran was conducting covert nuclear activities and refusing to comply with the IAEA and the international community. In sum, the Islamic Republic did not face any legitimate threats that would justify a strategic rationale for its pursuit of a nuclear hedge capability. This does not mean, however, that Iran did not feel threatened by these actors. As explained in Chapter Six, there seems to be a pervasive sense of internal and external vulnerability rooted in the Iranian national identity, and therefore, embedded in its strategic culture. Therefore, the Islamic regime considers the United States to be an ideological threat to its interests and argues that the nuclear issue is just another example of Western interference and disrespect towards Iran.

The domestic politics model also provides a useful tool to examine the Islamic Republic's nuclear decision-making calculus. In an effort to distract the Iranian population from the

growing economic and social problems, the regime emphasizes the alleged benefits of its civilian nuclear energy program. This may be used as a strategy for regime survival, especially during the Ahmadinejad presidency when the program was expanded significantly. During this time, the regime also harnessed the strong sense of Iranian nationalism that endures among the population. It appears, however, that the economic aspect of the world's nuclear diplomacy with Iran has driven the Islamic leadership to shift its nuclear policies. Pragmatists in the regime such as President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif recognize that Iran's poorly structured economy cannot outlast the continuation of international sanctions. Even back in 2005, Kenneth Pollack stated at a House Armed Services Committee testimony that "the greatest fear of Iran's more realistic leaders—including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—is that Iran will face international sanctions that will limit or preclude the trade, aid, and investment it so desperately requires to keep its foundering economy afloat."²⁰⁶ He further elaborates:

Khamenei will undoubtedly be the final decision maker, just as he was throughout Khatami's emasculated presidency... while Khamenei is no friend of the United States, he has show a good deal of pragmatism regarding Iran's true strength and position, which has led to somewhat more rational Iranian policies than Tehran's blood-curdling rhetoric has generally suggested.²⁰⁷

Iran's recent willingness to negotiate with the P5+1 reveals that either President Rouhani's pragmatism has had an influence on policy, or that the impacts of international sanctions have been so terrible that the regime has no other choice but to come to the table. Either way, Iran has still maintained the conviction that, as a signatory of the NPT, it has a right to keep its nuclear program.

²⁰⁶ Kenneth Pollack, "The Threat from Iran," Testimony before the House Armed services Committee, Washington, DC., September 29, 2005.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Implications of Analysis

The explanation as to why both the Shah and the Islamic Republic of Iran exercised a nuclear hedge strategy is complicated. While these paradigms offer useful tools for analysis, it is ultimately a combination of factors that determine the decisions of the Iranian regimes. However, the key elements of Iranian strategic culture identified in Chapter Six—Iranian nationalism, a pervasive sense of vulnerability, and selective modernization—are important to consider, as they certainly influence Iran’s pursuit of nuclear technology and potentially a nuclear breakout option. The strategic culture model provided a new lens that shed light on some of the continuities and discontinuities of the Iranian nuclear program since its inception.

As the negotiations move forward, the United States and other involved parties should consider the prevailing elements of Iranian strategic culture. These elements will certainly have an impact on the regime’s demands and negotiation tactics. Experts have stated that it will be far more difficult to agree to the terms of a final deal, as Iran and the P5+1 remain far apart on the acceptable scope of the nuclear program, particularly regarding its uranium enrichment capacity. Ultimately, it will be important for the world powers to demonstrate to Iran that they do respect its right to pursue civilian nuclear technology with one caveat: Iran must also legitimately demonstrate to the international community that it will prove that its nuclear ambitions are exclusively peaceful. Iran must provide indispensable transparency by implementing the IAEA’s Additional Protocol to mitigate the international community’s legitimate concerns that it might covertly return to the nuclear weapon option. Compromise is a two-way street, and both sides of the negotiations must put aside preexisting conceptions of one another if there is any chance of finding a long-term agreement.

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