

**IDENTITY AND LEGITIMACY: IRAN'S
NUCLEAR AMBITIONS FROM NON-
TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of Iranian elites' conceptions of national identity on decisions affecting Iran's nuclear programme and the P5+1 nuclear negotiations. "Why has the development of an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity in Iran, especially since 2002 following the revelation of clandestine nuclear activities"? This is the key research question that explores the Iranian political elites' perspectives on nuclear policy actions. My main empirical data is elite interviews. Another valuable source of empirical data is a discourse analysis of Iranian leaders' statements on various aspects of the nuclear programme. The major focus of the thesis is how the discourses of Iranian national identity have been influential in nuclear decision-making among the national elites. In this thesis, I examine Iranian national identity components, including Persian nationalism, Shia Islamic identity, Islamic Revolutionary ideology, and modernity and technological advancement. Traditional rationalist IR approaches, such as realism fail to explain how effective national identity is in the context of foreign policy decision-making. I thus discuss the connection between national identity, prestige and bargaining leverage using a social constructivist approach. According to constructivism, states' cultures and identities are not established realities, but the outcomes of historical and social processes. The Iranian nuclear programme has a symbolic nature that mingles with socially constructed values.

There is the need to look at Iran's nuclear intentions not necessarily through the lens of a nuclear weapons programme, but rather through the regime's overall nuclear aspirations. The Iranian government, military, and people broadly support the peaceful nuclear programme. However, neither the officials nor the people advocate acquiring a nuclear weapon capability, as they say, it is against Islamic rules. Iranian officials always support their claim of having a peaceful nuclear programme by a fatwā issued on 3 June 2008, by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei forbidding the development and use of nuclear weapons. The domestic reality about Iran's nuclear programme is that the nuclear case is a national issue and thus, all political factions, parties, groups, and politicians with different perspectives agree on Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear programme and a nuclear fuel cycle.

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To my parents, Batoul & Ali Asghar Mohebali

my siblings, Parvaneh and Parviz Mohebali

my partner, Jonathan Szostak

For all you have sacrificed for me, I am eternally grateful to you!

Thanks for all your encouragement!

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June 2017

Declaration

I declare that this thesis I have presented for the examination for the Ph.D. degree from the University of York is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

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Pupak Mohebali

June 2017

Chapter 1. Introduction – From Legitimation to Acceptance: What Makes the Iranian Nuclear Programme a Matter of National Identity?

1.1 Introduction

As the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has argued, the respect and dignity of the Iranian people as well as the fundamental issue of the progress of the Iranian nation should always be preserved and protected (Khamenei 2015). Moreover, whilst security issues characterised by self-defence, deterrence, and uncertainty are the main issues for some countries in developing a nuclear programme (Tellis 2013), for Iran, it is national beliefs and values that have framed the core of its nuclear policy (Cardinal 2016). For the Iranian government, the nuclear programme has been the cornerstone of its efforts to modernise the country and close the technological gap with the West (Jain 2011).

This Ph.D. thesis examines the perception of national identity as well as self-interest over time to illustrate why Iran is insisting on pursuing a nuclear programme. Three central questions guide an analysis of Iranian political elites' perspective on the nuclear policy outcomes: Why has the development of an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity in Iran, especially since 2002? And following the revelation of clandestine nuclear activities, how has it affected Iran's highest formal decisions and policy-making processes? How can one explain the paradoxical implications of the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear behaviour? In answering these questions, there are several issues that must be addressed. In the first instance, what are the components of Iranian identity and how do they shape Iran's nuclear narrative? This is important because it establishes not only who Iran and Iranians are, but also the relationship between national identity and the state's major foreign policy decisions in general. A better understanding of Iran's nuclear ambitions should provide a foundation upon which to build a better answer to the overall research questions. This chapter aims to present the basic dimensions of the research by outlining its central issue, research aims and strategy, justification, the statement of the problem, its argument and contribution to knowledge, the limitations of the study and the outline of the thesis. The following chapters demonstrate that the

stance taken by the actors with respect to symbolic identity aspects reflects their various political or technological ambitions.

1.2 The Research Project

(i) The central issue

The whys and how's of Iran's nuclear decisions and the narrative of its nuclear ambitions drawing on the wider constructivist scholarship, make the case that the shaping and implementing of a country's foreign policy can originate from a nation's values and beliefs. The social construction of the environment in which the Iranian political elite makes decisions regarding the nuclear programme is therefore of paramount importance. The question here is how does the social environment influence political decisions? Assessing this question will illuminate issues of resistance, competition, convergence, norm reinterpretation and reformulation. The central issue of the thesis is thus an investigation of the effect of national identity conceptions on Iranian nuclear decision-making

The common understanding of Iranian nuclear intentions is based on a traditional realist approach; this traditional approach emphasises the systemic distribution of power and hence, does not consider the influence of social agents and structures (Wendt 1987a). Furthermore, the emphasis is on materialistic structures and does not pay attention to the effective roles that non-material and non-traditional structures play in shaping politics (Mohammad Nia 2011). In order to delve further into the non-traditional aspects of Iranian nuclear behaviour, this thesis examines the impact of national identity conceptions on Iranian nuclear decision-making from the social constructivist point of view that is generally missing from dominant traditional approaches.

The thesis argues that the main goal of Iran's nuclear programme has stretched beyond merely security issues and towards non-material factors, such as ideas, cultures, identities, and beliefs. In so doing, the thesis argues that discursive frameworks, connecting conceptions of national identity, national rights and national technological advancement, constitute the Iranian nuclear programme. In order to implement this point of view, theory of social constructivism in international relations will be carried throughout the thesis to better understand the role of Iranian identity

conceptions in Tehran's nuclear ambitions in a non-material sense. The thesis uses primary sources including statements made by Iranian elites, to examine the role played by discourses of national identity in decisions and policy-making regarding the nuclear programme. It argues that the norms of identity including religion and ideology, culture and nationalism have become embodied in the ideational framework of nuclear strategies in Iran (Bowen *et al.* 2016).

(ii) Research aims

The main purposes of this research are as follows:

- To examine ways in which conceptions of national identity(ies) have affected Iranian nuclear policy by identifying the presumptions of Iranian national identity and its construction and interpretation over time; thus, the research does not hypothesise based upon a fixed identity.
- To develop a constructivist scholarship by applying it to the case of Iranian nuclear ambitions and further demonstrating the ways in which the foreign policy of a country is heavily influenced by national identity.

(iii) Research strategy

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a grounded understanding of the Iranian elites' nuclear intentions by answering the following questions: Why has the development of an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity in Iran, especially since 2002, and following the revelation of clandestine nuclear activities? How has it affected Iran's highest formal decisions and policy-making processes? To what extent do discourses of identity explain the paradoxical implications of the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear behaviour?

(iv) The justification for the research

I began this thesis seeking an answer to a very specific question: Why has the development of an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity in Iran, especially since 2002, and following the revelation of clandestine uranium enrichment facilities? This is the key question of the research, which will be answered the Iranian political elites' perspectives on nuclear policy actions. The moment Iranian secret nuclear activities were revealed in 2002, catchwords such as 'religion', 'Islamic revolutionary ideologies', 'dignity' and 'technological advancement' gained superiority over deterrence and security.

Justifying the Iranian nuclear programme in the name of national identity can be interpreted as what Ali Asghar Soltanieh¹, Iran's former ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), referred to as "the borders of identity and dignity of Iran."

Answering this question is important, first of all for policy-makers and then for policy experts and academics. Understanding the origins of Iranian national identity and how it affects policy making, especially about nuclear policies could make an important contribution to understanding and resolving the conflict. This puzzle led me to a more general version of the question motivating this research project. That is, how is Iranian identity constructed and understood in relation to the nuclear programme; and why is Iranian identity deployed in the way that it is. My research objective is to specify the relationship between the Iranian elites' perception of national identity and nuclear policies.

To discern the impact of Iranian elites' conception of national identity on decisions affecting Iran's nuclear programme and nuclear negotiations, a discourse analysis of elites' interviews, speech and media analysis has been carried out. The thesis focuses on the period from Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2005 to Rouhani's presidency and the negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the P5+1 in 2015. Nuclear policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran results from complex, multifaceted interactions occurring between various actors. These actors pursue different and often conflicting goals, whilst also promoting a series of aims relating to the Islamic identity of the government and its interaction with wider Iranian identities.

One cannot begin to understand the impact of national identity conceptions on Iranian elites' nuclear decision-making without taking identity politics into account. Iranian identities explain the relatively smooth processes of decision-making to a large degree. For the purpose of this research, this thesis examines contemporary nuclear policies and the way Iranian national identity conceptions have been shaped and

¹ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 12 November 2015

interpreted through nuclear policies and decision-making. As for the theoretical paradigm, the thesis utilises the constructivist approach to examine Iranian nuclear behaviour.

The nuclear programme has been a matter of national identity for both Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations. While different administrations pursue the nuclear policies in their own unique way, Iran's nuclear policies are not the mere posturing of a single president or leader. In other words, official state policies affect the way each administration grasps the politics of Iran's nuclear programme. As a country with nuclear technology, both the Ahmadinejad and the Rouhani administrations have been of the opinion that Iran will be able to meet its own energy demands. The scientific and technological outcome of the nuclear programme also regarded as providing the national basis for a modern Iranian symbol. Tehran's determination to have a uranium enrichment capability may have aroused less suspicion in the West if understood as demonstrating to the world Iran's technological sophistication, skill, ability and competence. So, for the Islamic Republic, technology has assumed symbolic importance. Additionally, it is connected to an Iranian desire to take the country in the same direction as travelled by Turkey, China, Japan, and those Asian countries that fell behind Western Europe following the European renaissance and enlightenment. At various times, these countries were humiliated by the advanced Western nations, but are now catching up. There is a very powerful motive for Iranian decision makers to take Iran back into the ranks of leading Asian powers and states and this thesis argues that the nuclear programme is very intimately connected to that.

The Western powers have toughened economic sanctions and applied pressure to isolate Iran in order to deny Tehran the possibility of developing nuclear weapons. However, not only did sanctions fail to stop Iran's nuclear activities, but they also strengthened a policy of resistance to the West. Ahmadinejad stated that although the West is waiting for Tehran to retreat from its nuclear activities, Iran would not proceed in talks with anyone about the inalienable right of the Iranian nation to enrich uranium indigenously (Ashrafi and Soltani Gerdframazi 2018). Ahmadinejad being determined that the Iranian nation will stand by their leader in awareness and faith, acting in opposition to the arrogant Western powers. Iranians will not let the West prevent them from reaching the peaks of scientific research and they will defend their

rights to the end without any negotiation. I argue that putting more pressure on Iran has not only been unable to prevent Tehran from pursuing its nuclear activities but also strengthened the nationalistic sense, in a way that emphasises the symbolic aspect of the nuclear programme. The West, for example, during the presidency of George W. Bush in the U.S. assumed that the Islamic Republic was vulnerable to pressure (Coats and Robb 2008). However, their efforts to coerce Iran into altering its nuclear policy were not completely successful due to a lack of understanding of the extent to which Iranian national identity affects the country's decisions on nuclear development and its openness to cooperation with Western powers. In order for any diplomacy towards Iran to be successful, a give-and-take policy is necessary (Hadley 2012). There is the need to look at Iran, not necessarily through the lens of a nuclear weapons programme, but rather, through the lens of the regime's overall nuclear aspirations. There is a lack of understanding for Iran's political and cultural dynamics in the West, especially by the United States' government. As the issue of national identity is not well established and understood within policy circles, there is no real appreciation of the Iranian national identity; there is mostly just a black and white perception of Iran, one that has persisted over the course of the past four decades.

1.3 Literature Review

(i) Non-traditional security studies

The field of identity politics urges the scholar to pay equal attention to the decision-making process and the policy outcome as well as focus on the subjective issues influencing the policies. This thesis decidedly does not examine traditional strategic and realist explanations of the Iranian nuclear programme, such as the security issues in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, for these have been covered at length by many other experts and Western government officials. On the surface, mostly from a Western point of view, Iran's quest for indigenous uranium enrichment has been seen as a cover for developing a nuclear bomb, which is a threat to the United States and its allies in the region, especially, Israel. It also increases Iran's power over the Arab states in the Persian Gulf (Mousavian and Mousavian 2018). Traditional rationalist theories, such as realist approaches, can explain this point of view. Theories are not necessarily right or wrong in identifying a specific theme. However, in comparison to each other, some theories have gaps in directing our attention to better grasp the key elements, which shape our understanding of the world. When we come to the

understanding that our ideas, memories, choices and experiences are socially constructed, then we realise that realism has some fallibilities in dealing with them (Copeland 2000). In light of this, one demonstrates whether realism or neorealism cannot adequately explain the rather paradoxical implications of the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear behaviour. Realism is not so clear about the constitutive forces of states, and the ways it develops state social structures, or the ways it is constituted by social structures in turn, politicises its historical and cultural interests and constructs its foreign policy. Realist (neorealist) perspectives posit that Iran's nuclear ambitions are mostly a result of its rivalry with Iraq, desire to become hegemonic in the Persian Gulf, threat to Iran from Israel's and Pakistan's nuclear weapons, and recently the threat from the United States' military presence in the region, following the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Solingen 2009). Realists' core insight, as argued by Hans Morgenthau (1973), is that we must see the world as it is, rather than as we want it to be. Realism in its political core believes that politics, like society, is governed by objective rules (Barkin 2010). The classic critique of this stance, coming from the constructivist corner of IR theory, is now well known: material facts do not speak for themselves but acquire meaning through social interaction. People act on the basis of intersubjective meanings.

Identity conceptions are largely absent from mainstream literature on this issue. For the purpose of this research, I chose to analyse Iranian elites' conception of national identity and the impact on nuclear decisions using the framework of social constructivism. This is because there is a gap in this regard that realist theories cannot address. Constructivism makes a very strong case for the relationship between ideational factors and policy-making, and within discourses of identity, this is central. Here are the reasons why rational choice theories do not explain the relationship between ideational factors and policy-making like constructivists do. Firstly, rationalist theories emphasise the systemic distribution of power and ignore the effect of human agents, social structures and social institutions in determining state's foreign policy priorities (Wendt 1987b). Secondly, rationalist theories concentrate on self-oriented materialistic structures and ignore the independent and effective role of non-material structures and capabilities in shaping states' foreign policy (Mohammad Nia 2011).

Social constructivism can better explain the oversights and gaps that realism is unable to explain using its mere materialistic approach. Recent writings, such as Benedict Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities*, with focus on collective political identities such as nation, ethnicity, and race insist that these qualities are imagined communities, discursively constructed through the definition of who we are and who we are not. This viewpoint draws upon the constitutive effects of mapping, naming, and imagining our community, our nation, and our world, and by the processes through which our identity is constructed, as well as through our differences (Pettman 2005). Other works, such as neoclassical realism perception of identity only offer a surface examination of the issue and none undertake to discuss the intersubjective aspects of the debate. Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy explain the importance of identities alongside interests of the state (Kitchen 2010). In so doing, they depart from Wendtian constructivism. In so doing, most of the relevant body of work centres on the regime's efforts to use conceptions of national identity to legitimise their nuclear ambitions via the energy needs of the country (Chubin 2010a), or that the threat of war is justified by manipulating the politics of identity. Mary Kaldor (2007) has written extensively on this subject. Some other scholars argue that the religion-centric devising of the Iranian identity was also of great use for the Iranian regime when it came to identifying their nuclear ambitions (Crane *et al.* 2008).

(ii) Normative effects on security and the concept of identity

The previous part of the literature review discussed why the social constructivist theory of international relations could better explain Iran's nuclear ambitions. In the following, I examine the ideational nature of Iran's nuclear ambitions with examples from other scholarly works, arguing that it shapes and constructs Iran's nuclear behaviour, based on national identity conceptions. The goal is thus to trace the social, political, and cultural life of Iran's nuclear programme. This goal arose from the realisation that much scholarship focuses on the material drivers of Iran's nuclear programme, and hence, interprets it as a threat to international security (Hecht 1998). National identity consists of unique components and conceptions by which people and elites in society define themselves and the way they choose specific policies and decisions. Accordingly, the values, ideologies, identities and symbols that constitute nuclear policies are reinterpreted over time. Gabrielle Hecht (1998), for example,

believes that technological advancement leads to social progress. Therefore, it can be seen to act as a unique vehicle for state elites when making national policy decisions.

Originated from Zoroaster's teachings, the Iranian philosophy of identity that considers human beings as the principle and the truth has existed since the dawn of civilisation and the culture of Iran (Ahmadi and Mahmoodi 2015). According to C.F. Whitley (1957), Zoroaster, the Iranian religious reformer/ prophet was the first who introduced the battle between good and evil in philosophical terms. Similarly, in Iranian Islam (or Shia Islam) there has always been an emphasis on the battle between right and wrong. In other words, Iranian Islam requires humankind to fight with the perdition in the world in order to live honourably and victoriously (Mojtahedzadeh 2012). The spirit of pride and endurance as another indicator of Iranian identity serves various functions in science, politics, technology, social issues, sports, etc., and designs a strategy for eliminating threats and turning them into opportunities to promote national pride (ISNA 2018). Some other ways to measure this indicator include the extent to which a nation is proud of their country and nationality, the importance of religion in people's lives, and whether they think there is a clear boundary between right and wrong.

Along with other components of Iranian national identity, such as language, history, nationalism, and religion, there is another newer component called Islamic Revolutionary ideology. The Islamic Republic and its ideals, principles and values are of paramount importance in understanding the discourses of Iranian national identity since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Thus, the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran contains elements of Islamic identity, the Islamic Republic, and Iranian nationalism. The Islamic Revolution in Iran had its own identity and ensuing cultural effects. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran has been interpreted as a movement that originated from national awareness of the Iranian nation along with the nation's history of durability, longevity and greatness (Keddie and Richard 1981). As Thaler et al. (2010) argued, Iran's sense of pride and greatness is influenced by feelings of victimisation, insecurity, and inferiority arising from historical exploitation by outside powers. A noticeable feature of the Revolution is that this movement turned rapidly to a narrative of Iranian history, for within a decade it had been re-defined as an Iranian Islamic Revolution. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic

Republic and the first Supreme Leader of Iran from 1979 to 1989 was totally aware that in order to frame the revolutionary narrative, it was necessary to classify it as an inspiring narrative (Ansari 2012). The nuclear programme has also been a symbol of Iran's self-sufficiency and independence from the West. Thus, the history of Iran's nuclear programme is also a narrative of the history of technological advancement in Iran. Nuclear engineering choices must be recognised as part of Iran's struggle towards modernity. When nuclear technology becomes iconic or symbolic, it becomes a matter of national identity (Reardon 2012). In the case of Iran, regaining its former glory and independence from the West is not just about the past, rather, the nuclear programme as a narrative of national identity has constructed a bridge that connects the country's past with its future.

Despite the rich volume of scholarship on the strategic and objective dimension of security in dealing with the concept of identity, there are not many academic resources that pay attention to the non-material and ideational aspects of security from a constructivist point of view. The relationship between identity and security has been approached in different academic resources and with regard to various ranges of case studies. The concept of identity has also been constituted from dominant theories of IR (Williams 1998). Williams stresses the absence of identity concerns in rationalist theories of IR, with a focus on neorealism. He disclaims that this absence of identity happened because of the materialist ontology of neorealism, while in critical theories such as constructivism, scholars emphasise normative and intersubjective elements as well as material ones. In William's argument, two implications can be made using neorealist and critical perspectives. First is the place of liberal sensibility in the origins of security, which is a fundamental source of materialism and objectivity. And the second implication is that neorealism does not inherit "a neutral and non-political orientation toward the world", but it attempts to "transform the theory in order to transform the practice" (1998, pp. 216–217).

Whether or not the appeal to identity is helpful in understanding state behaviour, one can say that identity involves the creation of boundaries that separate self and others (Chafetz *et al.* 1998). In order to understand a state's behaviour and preferences, we need to consider both the domestic and international factors that shape states' identities (Bozdağlıoğlu 2007). The self-schema, which is the cognitive basis for

identity, is the most highly resistant of all schemas because a stable self-concept is so important to an actor's stability and well-being. The main implication of this resistance is that international actors tend to change their concepts regarding their roles only reluctantly and with difficulty. Two factors impede change, each arising from identity defence mechanisms. First, at the individual level, is the need for predictability and consistency. Second, at the group level, neither government bureaucracies nor society at large can function without a minimal level of stability of expectations. To an actor, the importance of a given identity depends on two factors: the relevance of the situation's salience and the overall psychological significance of an identities centrality. There is a criticism of realists' understanding of national interests and identity that claims that realists, reviewing past state policies, may declare these policies to have been in the national interest because they were executed by the state. For the concept of national interest to mean something, realists and other proponents must be able to derive its existence independently of outcomes. The same criticism applies to the concept of identity (Chafetz *et al.* 1998).

(iii) The case of Iran

In the last section, I reviewed the existing social constructivist literature on the impact of identity on Iran's decision-making process. This section of the literature review focuses on the scholarly social constructivist works that examined the impact of identity on Iran's nuclear decisions in particular. The scholarly literature discussing the ideational drivers of Iran's nuclear decision-making is extremely limited. This is due to the complex, multi-faceted, and interdisciplinary nature of the enterprise. According to Homeira Moshirzadeh (2007), Iran's nuclear policy can be explained via changes to the structure of the state's identity. These kinds of changes can be explained by a constructivist approach rather than rationalist approaches to the IR. Therefore, she uses the constructivist approach in order to explain the identity of Iran following the Islamic Revolution and beyond. Hegemonic and revolutionary discourses are the two main discourses that shaped and redefined the Islamic tradition and the domestic and foreign policy behaviour of the Islamic Republic respectively (Karimifard 2012). Iran's nuclear policy and the identity that constitutes it become meaningful via constructivism.

The constructivist approach helps us understand the changes and resistances in Iran's

nuclear policy. Moshirzadeh (2007) declares that the three elements of independence, justice, and resistance, which have constituted the identity, interests, and priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, are the main discourses that are understandable using the constructivist approach. This context is able to explain the legitimacy of a state's resistance in following a particular policy and also its elites' decisions towards this policy because these elites are the main actors in the system. Without taking domestic issues into consideration, one cannot effectively analyse foreign policy (Ibid.). In Moshirzadeh's words, there are three main discourses – independence, justice, and resistance – that form the identity of the Islamic Republic. The discourse of independence has long been a very important discourse in constituting Iran's identity as an independent state. There are three main elements, which have formed the discourse of independence: Iran's glorious past, historical victimisation by invaders, and (semi)-colonial/imperial encounters leading to Iran's dependence and underdevelopment. These three elements that originate from Iranians' historical experiences form the basis of the discourse of independence, which can be a part of Iran's national identity. There is also the discourse of hyper-independence which has two aspects: one of these with a negative dimension is to confront foreign dominance, the influence of hegemonic powers, and cultural, political, and economic dependence; and the other, with a positive dimension, is about seeking self-definition, self-reliance, and in general, self-control (Moshirzadeh 2007).

Khamenei's quote summarises Iran's identity of independence and development who says, "if we had continued to rely on others and beg them for our basic necessities as it was the case for many years under the former regime, the situation would still be the same today and we would not be independent and self-sufficient" (Khamenei 2006a). If dependence originates from and reproduces weakness, becoming independent requires power. Therefore, an independent country has to be powerful. According to the document known as 'Iran's Strategic 20-Year Vision Document' ([1384] 2005), in 2025, 'Iran is a developed country ranking the first in the region economically, scientifically, and technologically'. It is within this discourse and in the context of these rules and norms that Iranian nuclear policy has been formed and is represented as a step towards actualising Iran's potential as the prominent regional actor. There is an analogy between Iran's nuclear policy and the Oil Nationalisation Movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Oil Nationalisation Movement was

a successful step towards nationalisation of the oil industry in Iran. The nuclear issue is another nationalist matter that demands national support and sacrifice. On the other hand, there is an analogy between any withdrawal from the country's nuclear programme and the Treaty of *Turkmanchāy* (1828),² the most notorious example of withdrawal by Iran in terms of its sovereign rights in the country's modern history, and which affected Iran's sovereignty and independence. Such analogies help to delegitimise any efforts aimed at compromise. Thus, according to the discourse of independence, following the nuclear programme gives legitimacy to Iran's ambitions and subsumes it as part of Iran's national identity (Golshani and Jadidi 2014).

Iranians' aspirations for justice also have their roots in historical nationalist narratives and religious discourses. Justice has always been important in both Zoroastrian and Islamic narratives. In the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79, one of the most important elements in Iran's confrontation with the West was the necessity of resistance against foreign forces that might jeopardize Iran's sovereignty and independence. During Khatami's presidency (1997-2005), the nuclear policy was mostly based on cooperation. But it is the 2005 presidential election that can be regarded as reviving the discourse of resistance and also the reinforcement of the idea of hyper-independence in foreign policy. Nuclear discourse, Moshirzadeh believes, has been understood through the main elements of these discourses. Therefore, Iran's nuclear policy turned out to be a matter of identity. A study of the discursive resources of Iranian foreign policy explains "how the nuclear issue has gained significance in Iran's foreign relations, how its priority has been justified within this meaning structure, and how it has enjoyed a significant degree of popularity inside Iran" (Moshirzadeh 2007, p. 523).

In analysing the impact of Iranian national identity conceptions on nuclear policies in Iran, Moshirzadeh (2007) discusses the main points of Islamic Republic identity, while this research examines the entirety of Iranian national identity conceptions, of

² The Treaty of *Turkmanchāy* (1828) concluded a war between Iran and Russia that Iran initiated in 1826 with the aim of recovering territory in the Caucasus region that it had lost to Russia in 1813. The war went very badly for Iran, which was forced to accept unfavourable peace terms in the treaty signed in the village of *Turkmanchāy*, about 80 miles southeast of Tabriz, on 21 February 1828. Under the treaty, Iran ceded its remaining provinces north of the Aras River (Yerevan and Nakhichevan) to Russia; extended preferential trade rights to Russian subjects; recognized Russia's exclusive naval rights in the Caspian Sea; accepted the application of Russian law to Russian subjects in Iran involved in civil or criminal legal cases; and agreed to pay Russia an indemnity of 20 million rubles.

which the Islamic Revolutionary ideology is just one. Iranians' aspirations for justice also have their roots in historical nationalist narratives and religious discourses. Justice has always been important in both Zoroastrian and Islamic narratives. According to some scholars, justice-seeking is considered as one of the components of Iranian national identity. Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseinizadeh (2016) suggested that the embrace of Shiism in Iran is due to the justice-seeking spirit of Iranians. One can see this reflected in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, which constitutes another aspect of Iran's identity. Countries such as Israel, India, and Pakistan, all of whom have been nuclearised against international norms, and more or less been accepted as nuclear powers, now condemn Iran for its nuclear programme. Therefore, on the basis of the discourse of justice, the Iranian nuclear policy is considered as a justice-seeking effort.

In the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79, one of the most important elements in Iran's confrontation with the West was the necessity of resistance against foreign forces that might jeopardise Iran's sovereignty and independence (Moshirzadeh 2007). In its entirety, the Islamic Republic's foreign policy is based on resisting subjugation and defending the rights of all Muslims worldwide (Karimifard 2012). The discourses of independence, justice and resistance have become very significant, especially in terms of Iran's contemporary history and in constituting its national identity. Iran's desire to be a powerful regional actor is deeply rooted in its history and this can be seen as evidence for Iran's persistence regarding nuclear technology. These elements, according to Moshirzadeh (2007), were formed in the course of Iran's modern history, and particularly in the constitution of the identity of the Islamic Revolution and later the Islamic Republic. Nuclear discourse has also been articulated within these main discourses. Therefore, Iran's nuclear policy has become a matter of identity. These discourses can explain how the nuclear issue has been proposed in Iran's foreign relations, and how it has become popular within Iran. Furthermore, they can explain the variances of Iran's nuclear policy in different periods.

Iranian leaders' ambition for processing the nuclear programme is part of Iran's national identity, given the desire, they have for survival; this comes from the threats made against Iran and also Iran's pride and historical self-conception as a great civilisation, which is a significant issue in this regard. During Mohammad Khatami's

presidency (1997 to 2005), Iran's nuclear policy was mostly based on cooperation. But the 2005 presidential election can be regarded as reviving the discourse of resistance as well as reinforcing the idea of hyper-independence in foreign policy (Ibid.). Cooperation in Iran's nuclear policies between Iran and the IAEA and resuming nuclear talks are good news. But the bad news is that the West does not trust Khatami's descendant, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, no matter how close his nuclear policies are to those of his descendant, Hassan Rouhani.

Moshirzadeh's work on the status of Iran's nuclear ambitions remains one of the few comprehensive attempts to assess the topic. However, while she discusses some very significant aspects of Iran's nuclear decisions based on three ideational discourses, the author herself falls short in offering a complete image of the impact of national identity conceptions on Iran's nuclear ambitions. Discussing Iran's foreign policy and nuclear programme, Volker Perthes (2010) talks about shaping Iran's foreign policy and relations with the West, the Middle East, neighbouring countries and others like Russia, China, India, as well as actors in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Perthes evidences the use of constructivism by discussing policy-makers' behaviour and decisions. According to him, Iran's ambition to pursue a nuclear programme stems from serious geopolitical competition for predominance in the Middle East (Perthes 2010). Shahram Chubin (2006) also argues that Iran's nuclear ambitions collide with its neighbours' interests. Tehran's nuclear rationale plus the nature of the Islamic Republic is a source of concern for the West and for Iran's neighbours.

There are two types of policy-makers in Tehran: those with little trust of the outside world and those with no trust at all. Two drivers can determine Iran's political development in this time period: 'regime strength', which is largely a function of regime legitimacy, cohesion, and the availability of material resources; and 'external conflict'— mainly, but not exclusively, the nuclear dispute. Then, one can imagine four scenarios: circling the wagons, dysfunctionality, military rule, and dual détente. None of these scenarios is predictable and there are other outcomes that can be imagined. The United States, Europe and other countries should consider broader policies than just resolving Iran's nuclear issue. This means that while they try to resolve this issue, they should also regard their future cooperation with Iran. This kind of policy has four key elements. Firstly, the West should prepare the conditions for

more far-reaching future negotiations. Secondly, the West should concentrate more on human rights issues in Iran. Thirdly, they should not just focus on resolving the nuclear conflict but should explore the possibilities of cooperation. Finally, the West should answer the question asking, what if Iran crosses the line and gains a military nuclear capability? The point that the U.S. has troops in the Persian Gulf demonstrates that they will enhance the security of Israel and small Arab Gulf countries, but the U.S. still has a message for Iran arguing that despite Washington's stance for its friends, they do not want to lose the possibility of engaging and further cooperating with Iran (Mousavian and Toossi 2017).

The behaviour of states towards each other and their fears and ambitions affect their decision-making. According to social constructivism, although states want to focus on self-help and deter each other from becoming more powerful and hegemonic, they are also committed to developing their cooperation (Wendt 1992). This means that changes in actors' behaviour are always possible and that the idea of the self is shaped by the idea of the other. The political elites in Iran are influential people who make strategic decisions and define the country's political norms and values. Thus, Iranian leaders' acts and speeches determine their will in terms of becoming a major regional power and the amount of trust they offer to the international community. Therefore, it is the desire of political elites to elevate a particular problem to some level of legitimacy (Perthes 2010). In another debate on Iran's nuclear ambitions, Shahram Chubin (2010a) discusses the U.S.-Iran relationship and the U.S.-West's fear of a nuclear Iran in the Middle East and also the inefficiency of threats, punishments and also inducements, mostly following the June 12, 2009, presidential elections in Iran. Chubin argues about ambitions, regime identity and the function of threats, punishments and inducements. He expresses the efforts of the Iranian regime, since the June 12, 2009 elections, to legitimate its nuclear ambitions and to empower itself as a regional power. He believes there is a gap for the role of Iran in the international community; there are those who see Iran as a normal state who respects international concerns and those who consider Iran as an equaliser aimed at confronting the West by acquiring nuclear weapons. Chubin believes that the nuclear issue is just an excuse for regime change in Iran because the West has been unable to trust the Iranian regime for more than 30 years, which is because of the regime's behaviour and nature during that time. Chubin claims that the U.S. considers Iranian moderates as

ineffective. However, these moderates wish to normalise Iran's relations with the world on the basis of mutual respect (Geranmayeh 2015). As a regional power, Iran's aspirations are to be respected and honoured, meaning it is treated as a leading player in the region and in the Islamic world. This claim for being honoured is supported by both the nation and the elites in Iran (Guldimann 2007).

The Iranian regime benefits from strong popular support for its argument that as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) it has an inalienable right to develop an indigenous civil nuclear industry, stipulated in Article IV (Blackstock and Milkoreit 2007). The reason Iranians feel singled out and punished is that they compare themselves with non-signatories of NPT such as Israel, India and Pakistan, countries that are not penalised despite possessing nuclear weapons (Miller 2012). The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic has used two approaches; one being to consider the interests of the Islamic nation all over the world, and the other to consider the interests of the Iranian nation. There has always been fluctuation in the government's preferred foreign policy behaviour. The nuclear policies of Iran have been challenging for the international community, becoming a source of distrust. Unlike different nuclear policies of compromise from Khatami and Ahmadinejad's more radical nuclear behaviour, Iranian elites have not appeased the West's demand to halt its nuclear programme (Soltani and Amiri 2010). As Chubin (2010a) declares, for revolutionary regimes like Iran, foreign policy is a way to express their values and also validate their struggles. Foreign policy, therefore, is at once an extension of domestic politics, an expression of the regime's identity, and a barometer of its intentions. He disclaims that the U.S. needs to balance its concern to halt Iran's nuclear programme and its objective of stabilising the Middle East. Iranians in Iran also have to determine their own future. They seek both independence and freedom, which is consistent with U.S. values. Constructivists believe that international relations are defined by norms and ideas and the international structure leads actors to redefine their interests and identities in the process of interacting. In this article, the author claims that Iranians' independence and freedom-seeking is consistent with U.S. values and very much in the interest of both countries. In his hypothesis, Chubin (2010b) argues for the acknowledgement of the potential that values and ideas have in harmonising international relations, Iranians' will to normalise their relations with the world and the U.S. goal to settle stability in the Middle East. Thus, he advises the

U.S. to consider the goal of stabilising the Middle East while dealing with Iran's nuclear issue.

According to constructivists, the international system only exists as a common understanding among people. Therefore, if ideas and values change, then the international system itself will change. Constructivism argues that the study of international relations must focus on the ideas and beliefs that inform the actors on the international scene as well as the shared understandings between them (Wendt 1992). Disclaimers notwithstanding, the decision to negotiate with Iran today inevitably confers a degree of recognition on the regime, which it is not slow to exploit domestically. There is no doubt that the price of engaging Tehran involves selling out the people who hope for change in Iran and are the United States' natural interlocutors. The United States should be careful to ensure that any engagement with Tehran does not imply endorse nor confer any form of legitimacy on the Iranian regime. It should rightly be conceived as a process, and not a goal, intended to encourage a change in behaviour. Indeed, since a meaningful change in behaviour would require a change in the regime, engagement should be seen as a means of encouraging regime evolution, eventually empowering those elements in Iran who are most interested in mutually respectful relations. For this purpose, the U.S. should intensify its public diplomacy in communicating its goals and policies to the Iranian people, including any inducement packages offered and refused by the current regime (Chubin 2010a).

'European Union discourses and practices on the Iranian nuclear programme' by Ruth Hanau Santini (2010) attempts to analyse different European security discourses related to Iran's nuclear issue post-2003. The EU has played a fundamental role in finding a diplomatic solution to resolve disputes over Iran's nuclear programme by investing remarkable energy into helping Iran and the EU-3+3 (the P5+1) to achieve a comprehensive and long-term agreement via diplomatic negotiations (Meier 2013). There are three main discursive themes that exemplify the main identity representations of Iran and Europe, the main stances towards Iran, and the representations of the nature of European foreign policy. These three themes include securitisation, democratisation and cultural diplomacy. The author evidences the use of constructivism by proposing these three themes. Over the years, securitisation was

the dominant discourse, but these days, there is much more consideration of democracy promotion and cultural diplomacy-inspired discourses. In this article, the author aims at making sense of an actor's foreign policy decisions and their evolution vis-a-vis another actor. This means, in order to account for European foreign policy vis-a-vis the Iranian nuclear programme, one can establish links between discourses and identity representations and also establish a relationship between these elements and the policies adopted by the European Union in this field (Hanau Santini 2010).

There are three historical views about the historical genealogy of Western and European perceptions and depictions of Persia and Iran. One mainstream view throughout Western historiography dates back to the Greeks, whose encounters and confrontations with the Persians lasted centuries. To Greeks, Asians were people ruled by tyrants, almost socially immobile, with an immense gap between ruler and the ruled (Lockman 2009). The second view is an alternative reading based on "French travel biographies portrayed an image of Iran as an opulent, joyful and sophisticated country, with whom France has always sought to deepen cultural and economic relations" (Christou and Croft 2014, p. 133). A third perspective was offered by British historians, who, since when the Indo-European language family has been discovered at the end of the eighteenth century, emphasised the resemblance between Persia and Europe, referring to 'noble' Persians of European descent as though those 'noble Persians' were close to Europeans by race (Ibid.).

'Orientalism' a term Edward Said (1979) introduces it is a practice immersed since the eighteenth century by Western scholars to understand and describe the inhabitants of the East, including the Middle East, India, and China. Said examined what has come to be a binary relationship of the dominant 'Occident' [the West] and the inferior 'Orient' [the East], or the other (Burney 2012). According to Alam Saleh (2013), since the second half of the eighteenth century, Orientalism had a profound impact on Iranians' self-identification. Grounded on Edward Said's 'Orientalism' and Benedict Anderson's 'Imagined Communities', Mostafa Vaziri (1993, p. 63) also discussed that Iranian national identity was a product of Orientalism's authoritarian and nationalist paradigm that links language, history, and geography to construct a continuous and uninterrupted historical narrative.

By looking at the debate in Europe over the Iranian nuclear issue from 2003 onwards,

three discursive themes can be identified that indicate the main structural positions. The first discursive theme includes an image of untrustworthiness towards the Iranian regime and its foreign policy, in particular, its nuclear policy. The second discursive theme portrays an image of the Iranian regime as authoritarian with reference to human-right violations, lack of respect for civil liberties and political repression. The third theme focuses on Iranian rights and resources. This theme has historical roots and is culturally inspired, referring to acknowledgements of Persia as a rich and sophisticated country (Christou and Croft 2014).

As mentioned above, three discourses emerged at the beginning: one underlining the dangers posed by an aggressive and often seemingly irrational Iranian foreign policy, one focusing on Iranian domestic concerns, especially human-rights violations, and the last stressing Iranian resources and demands, from its great civilisation to its geopolitical perceptions. Each discourse has had consequences: strong coercive diplomacy and securitisation of the issue in the first case, democracy promotion and engagement with civil society in the second, and cultural diplomacy and the search for a more comprehensive approach considering Iranian security concerns in the third (Moshirzadeh and Masoudi 2010). The first discursive theme became hegemonic at the EU level with the departure of British Foreign Minister, Jack Straw, who had consistently opposed military intervention against Iran. At the discursive level, Iran as a complex domestic and foreign policy actor disappeared from the analysis, while the discourse iterated claims of the regionally and internationally dangerous consequences of the nuclear programme. At the policy level, this enabled securitisation logic with the representation of an aggressive and irrational actor situated an opponent to a peaceful and restrained international community and Europe (Christou and Croft 2014).

Nina Tannenwald (1999) argues that it is necessary to use a normative element to explain the reason for states not using nuclear weapons since 1945, that is because the U.S. used them to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She asserts these ideas in her article on 'The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use'. Thus, this article's case study analyses and compares U.S. decision making on nuclear use in four historical cases: Japan, 1945; the Korean War, 1950– 53; the Vietnam War during the 1960s; and the 1991 Persian Gulf War. According to

Tannenwald, the investigation of reasons for non- use of nuclear weapons, which is in the context of deterrence, has some incentives. First, when there is no fear of nuclear retaliation; second, when we pose the question why nuclear weapons, as deterrent weapons did not prevent non- nuclear states from attacking nuclear states; third, the security situation of small, non-nuclear states having not been considered as a hazardous situation in the nuclear age. Finally, one faces the following question: when states are sure about deterrence, why don't non-nuclear states attempt to develop nuclear weapons?

Realist arguments, which say the U.S. nuclear umbrella is sufficient for non-nuclear states, are not justified reasons because the U.S. does not assure all of these states that they can be sheltered under the U.S. umbrella. Thus, we feel the need for a normative element that prohibits states from using or developing nuclear weapons. A taboo is one of the elements, which can explain nuclear non-use post-1945, but realists, especially structural realists, argue that this is not an acceptable reason for nuclear non-use and instead believe in material forces. The nuclear taboo is accepted among nuclear policy analysts as revulsion against nuclear weapons and thus, non- use of them. The taboo is a normative belief about the behaviour of nuclear non- use, which means this behaviour is right or wrong. Tannenwald discusses three types of normative effects in order to show the role of taboo: regulative (or constraining), constitutive, and a subset of constitutive effects which has been called 'permissive'.

Regulative effects, emphasised by rationalist approaches, refer to how norms constrain or regulate existing activities; whereas constitutive effects, emphasised by constructivist perspectives, refer to how rules and norms, through actors' practices, create or define forms of behaviour, roles, and identities. The taboo can have two forms: first, it can enter instrumentally into a decision- making process, which is cost-benefit reasoning; second, it can be a form of non-cost-benefit reasoning which acts according to the values and what is not good to do. Norms work through three pathways: force, self-interest, and legitimacy. In this context, the taboo operates both as a constraint on self-interested decision makers, and as reflected in beliefs about the growing illegitimacy of nuclear use. It is worth noting that there was no nuclear taboo in 1945, but from the Korean War onwards, the taboo has emerged to restrain states from using nuclear weapons. Thus, states have to consider moral issues and use an

alternative technology in wars in order to be considered civilised states and nations. The core analytical distinction of this article is between how norms constrain and how they constitute. The analysis highlights the mutual shaping of norms and interests. Norms enter into, and change, the cost-benefit calculations of interests (constraining), but they also help to constitute interests, identities, and practices (Tannenwald 1999).

1.4 How the Argument Proceeds: Chapter Outline

It is essential to organise and clarify the subjects and parameters at the outset. Chapter 2 allocates the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework of this research depicts the connection between conflict, security, prestige, bargaining leverage and nuclear proliferation. I will investigate the theoretical commitments underpinning the different explanations, including most importantly, theories of identity in international relations as a means for identifying and refining a specific research question for this thesis. The research benefits from the social constructivist approach to international relations to examine the main questions.

Chapter 3 proceeds with the epistemological implications and methods, outlining the choice of media outlets, semi-structured elite interviews and the application of the case study, addressing the discursive and analytical issues of the thesis. Discourse analysis of speeches, interviews and literature is the method chosen to conduct this research. All the approaches to political identity, with the exception of some studies of nationalism, are constructivist in that they consider the actors' identities, whether individual, subnational, national, or supranational, are affected by social interactions. In this regard, some scholars argue about different cases. There is a distinction between the internal and external treatments of identity (Abolhassani 2008). One can discuss the concept of the public sphere, which refers to both the real and the metaphoric places where political actors can argue, negotiate, and discuss, and which includes the media, the Internet, diplomacy, and other means of communication. When it comes to the concept of 'identity' and its origins, social constructivism attempts to explore it by taking an ideational approach. According to constructivism, identity does not merely exist objectively; rather, it is intersubjectively constructed, like all other social realities. To sum up, security and identity are not only related, but they mutually reinforce each other. Realist approaches are flawed in their denial of the role of intersubjectively constructed identities. While identities are

intersubjectively constructed and can change over time, they remain relatively fixed entities, which means they are essential reference objects for security.

Chapter 4 explores a policy analysis of the history of Iran's nuclear programme. It describes the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the key figures and authorities involved in nuclear decision-making. Accordingly, authority in Iran is not one dimensional, but a shared responsibility between the Supreme Leader, the President, the clergy, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Parliament (Majles), and other influential bodies. It then explores in detail the foundations and processes of the nuclear programme in Iran, providing a history of the main nuclear sites and their activities, cyber-attacks on the programme, the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, the imposition of sanctions, the negotiation process, the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) or the interim agreement, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran deal.

Chapter 5 proceeds with presenting the conceptions of Iranian national identity, their importance in Iran's foreign and domestic policies and in what way(s) Iran's nuclear programme has been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity. Drawing upon the literature from the previous chapters, chapters 6, 7, and 8 apply this discursive information to examine the nuclear behaviour of Iranian elites during the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations. In doing so, using interviews and speeches, these chapters examine on the one hand, how the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been affected and thus, constructed by its normative discourses at both domestic and international levels. And on the other hand, these chapters analyse how identity formation at both the domestic and international levels shape Iranian foreign policy behaviour and in particular, its nuclear decisions.

1.5 Originality of the Study

It is worth mentioning that newspaper articles and speeches for the previous governments are not online and the majority of them no longer exist even in hard copy. However, I overcame this barrier and conducted this research by travelling to places where I could find Iranian officials, such as Washington DC, Vienna, during the final round of nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 over signing the Iran Nuclear Deal, as well as Brussels for the EU Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Consortium following the signing of Iran Nuclear Deal (The Joint Comprehensive

Plan Of Action). I thus gained access to Iranian and Western diplomats and experts and could conduct my research interviews. I expanded the social constructivist approach to international relations for this topic on the implications of the Iranian elites' conceptions of national identity regarding nuclear policies and nuclear negotiations. This is a new and original work that has not been undertaken in an academic area before.

1.6 Conclusion

This study looks critically at the perception of national identity and also self-interest over time to illustrate why Iran is insisting on pursuing a nuclear programme. As Suzanne Maloney (2002) explains, any dominance of the discourses of national identity in Iran (especially after the 1979 Islamic Revolution) occurred as a result of the defining and shifting perceptions of self and others by the Iranian elites. The elites of the Islamic Republic see Iran as the essential, and driving force of the Middle East, or even the Muslim world. This perception stems from a solid belief in Iranian identity and the country's historic role as a regional and world power. Iran's sense of uniqueness and importance comes from the feelings of victimisation and the sense of insecurity that are the result of being conquered by other powers over time. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 greatly influenced Iran's strategic culture and identity by formalising its sense of victimisation, whilst introducing a radical Shia ideology of *moqāvemat* [resistance] against *zolm* [injustice]. The Islamic Republic's elites' conception of national identity is based upon the following factors: the Islamic character of Iran's social and political system; Iran's insistence on independence (Thaler 2010) and self-sufficiency, which is also the basis for technological advancement in all aspects of energy and science. Normative-value conflicts between Iran and Western powers started to become more obvious, particularly following the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and after raising concerns over Iran's nuclear programme. The identity differences between Iran and the West do not allow too much compromise on many policies, including Iran's nuclear policy. The domestic reality about Iran's nuclear programme is that the nuclear case is a national issue and thus, all political factions, parties, groups, and politicians with different perspectives agree on Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear programme and a nuclear fuel cycle.

1.7 Translation, Transliteration, and the Persian Calendar

For the purpose of this research, I have carried out all translations from Persian to English. Transliterations from the Persian language into English are based on the Iranian Studies scheme outlined in the International Journal of Middle East Studies transliteration chart (IJMES Transliteration chart). All transliterated terms will be in italics. The Persian/Iranian calendar is a solar calendar that starts on the 21st of March. To convert a solar date to a Gregorian date, we need to add 2/21/21 to the months/days/years' figures respectively. Whenever a specific date is given in the Iranian calendar in the thesis, it is converted into the Gregorian date.

Chapter 2. Theorising Identity and Foreign Policy

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the theoretical approaches informing and shaping my analysis of Iran's nuclear behaviour, specifically during the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations. The sequence of this chapter flows from a focused discussion of constructivism's contribution to security studies through what is perhaps its strongest offshoot – i.e. securitisation theory and its constructivist underpinnings. It proceeds on a few sections and subsections, each dealing with a significant aspect of the theoretical orientation the thesis will pursue, thus providing the reader with the necessary knowledge of, and insight into, the themes which constitute its analytical underpinnings. First, beginning with a review of social constructivism, the chapter attempts to discuss the role of interests and norms in shaping state identities. Second, it dismisses the realist approaches to IR, arguing why realist approaches are not enough to analyse Iran's nuclear ambitions. This provides, third, the baseline to advance a more coherent, i.e. pragmatic, approach for examining Iranian nuclear ambitions from a constructivist standpoint.

I review how and why a Wendtian-constructivist perspective raises relevant questions and brings crucial insights into the logic and motivation of states' behaviour, at both domestic and international levels. I will describe the limits of realist analysis that dominates mainstream explanations of identity in foreign policy. In order to strengthen the relevance of my theoretical framework, thus I explain why realism is not enough to convey Iran's nuclear behaviour. This thesis does not exclude or ignore the material factors; it is just that these motivations for behaviour are insufficient without an appreciation of the intersubjective, normative elements. Development of peaceful nuclear technology is an expression of social goals such as identity and the interests used by the political elite. Identities shape actors' material as well as non-material interests (Ersoy 2014). As Fukuyama (2006) argues, human beings are not solely economic or material animals, and hence, history is characterised by humans' struggle for recognition, prestige, status and dignity through the seeking of national rights. In other words, human beings can and are willing to sacrifice their material needs for the sake of their ideological, cultural or religious beliefs (Choi 2015).

Domestic and international social environments crucially influence elites' decision-making regarding nuclear policies. In almost all diplomatic efforts to resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear programme, the focus of negotiations has been on the balance of power and security, alongside other material interests such as weapons and relief from the crippling sanctions that have reduced Iran's oil exports (Reuters 2015). However, like his predecessor, the current Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, emphasises the role of national identity as a significant determinant of foreign policy decision-making. A commentary in *The Christian Science Monitor* (2013), for example, claimed that Rouhani asserted Iran's nuclear programme as a "core of Iran's identity". Additionally, Iranian leaders believe that being nuclear is a key component of having energy independence; the Iranian Supreme Leader asserted that with the mastery of a nuclear programme, Iran will be able "to stand up to big powers such as the United States like a lion" (the lion being an ancient Persian symbol of power). Thus, this research uses a constructivist approach to argue for the necessity of engaging with national identity conceptions and examining how they shape nuclear policy actions. Within the discourse analysis, one can explain the meanings, symbols, values and norms that constitute a collective Iranian national identity.

This chapter outlines the thesis' theoretical approach to studying the influence of national identity conceptions on elite nuclear policy making. In so doing, the chapter draws on social constructivism and outlines different ways that social constructivism, in the traditional sense outlined by Alexander Wendt, is a better approach than a realist approach to examining normative and ideational elements affecting elites' nuclear decision-making. It also explains how the constructivist theory connects norms, identity conceptions, interests and actions. This chapter firstly reviews the traditional realist approach and argues why a realist approach cannot address the normative processes of nuclear policies.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Social Construction of Identity in Foreign Policy

The idea that identity is an influential concept to the study of foreign policy decision-making is not a new interpretation. However, for many years identity has been marginalised by state-centric, rational choice theories. These days, the concept of identity receives more attention in theories of IR; as Lapid and Kratochwill (1996)

identify it, 'the return of culture and identity in IR theory'. Although the term 'return' should not be considered as implying a renewed interest in the identity theories of the past, as they have been explored in theories of both feminism and multiculturalism, while new identity theories concentrate on social constructions (Ibid.). According to Ted Hopf (2002, p. 7) "We cannot simply assign identities to people, events, and things as if they were objectively knowable. Instead, we have to reconstruct the phenomenological intersubjectivity that characterises a collection of identities."

Intersubjective relations exist through the ways in which actors engage in the processes of mutual discovery and, in so doing, create identities that are in a process of continuous transformation (Smith 1998). Taking what Martha Finnemore (1996a) terms a 'sociologically standard' approach, this study understands norms as intersubjective understandings of expected behaviour within particular contexts. There is a large degree of intersubjective understanding present in social practices, which is manifest in the interactions between actors and structures. In foreign policy analysis, our focus shifts to the interdependent link between individuals and their social contexts. This addresses the construction of subjects by recognising the mutually constitutive relationship between individuals and their social order (Harré 1980). In order to understand the shaping and interpreting of national identity conceptions and national interest, it is of paramount importance to identify the relevant discourses. Therefore, the argument in this research suggests that for constructivism to be a useful analytical framework for Foreign Policy Analysis, the following is needed: attention to decision makers as agents and the environment in which they perform a particular foreign policy or the structure (Smith *et al.* 2012). In this thesis, I will investigate this relationship in terms of the role played by agents and structures in shaping foreign policy, the process of decision-making, and the effect of elites' conceptions of national identity on nuclear policies. That is, with regard to the impact the international community has on how foreign policy is conducted by states (here, Iran).

According to Hollis and Smith (1990), explanation and understanding in international relations theories fit two basic epistemological approaches. The first approach or the explanatory approach (objectivism), attempts to find causal relations within social reality. On the other hand, and as Hopf (2007) argues, the second approach or

interpretivism relies on reconstructing the intersubjective meaning of existing structures. Hence, the goal of interpretivism is to explain the way in which political elites understand, interpret and reshape the social reality and thus implies symbolic interactionism (Benes 2010). The fact that the social world is intersubjectively constructed is a fundamental principle of social constructivism. This means all the concepts in the social world are determined beyond individuals' understanding (Huysmans 2002), signifying that meaning emerges through interactions (Leeds-Hurwitz 2006). International norms, referred to as the shared expectations of proper behaviour have an intersubjective dimension, meaning that for their development and continued existence, they depend on social interaction and common agreement (Ruggie 1998). According to Jutta Weldes (1996), the identity of states are significantly determined by their foreign policy. While applying constructivism to foreign policy decisions, we should keep in mind that both ideational and material factors can influence decisions (Berman 2001). Moreover, how a particular policy is made depends on collective understanding, the nature of the state, and its identity (Wendt 1994). According to Roxanne Lynn Doty:

“Moving toward construction of reality which is not necessarily the product of a particular individual suggests that the subject may be a social collective, i.e., a group of decision makers, a bureaucracy, or the state. This raises the possibility that the source of meaning, the social register of value, and agent of action may not be the individual. Perhaps subjects in general, whether individual or collective, are themselves constructed (Doty 1993, p. 300).”

2.2.2 Realism and its Shortcomings in Grappling with Identity Dynamics in Foreign Policy

The majority of analysis of the Iranian nuclear programme stems from a realist perspective, but this is not sufficient to explain the aims and ambitions of the Iranian elite in pursuing a nuclear programme. Traditional rational IR approaches fail to explain how effective national identity features in the context of foreign policy decision-making. Investigation of the role of national identity in foreign policy decision-making can demonstrate some links between two schools of thought- realism and constructivism. The absence of identity in traditional rational IR approaches happened because of the materialist ontology of realist approaches, while in critical

theories such as constructivism, scholars emphasise normative and intersubjective elements as well as material ones (Williams 1998). Realists ignore the role of identity and ideational interpretations in shaping the power of political leaders and shaping their interests. Influential political actors can embrace their ideological interests as a political weapon to bring about opportunities (Snyder 1993). Realists attribute both objective and subjective issues to materialism, and hence, for them, identities are nothing more than indicators of the distribution of materialist power (Hopf 2002). Hans Morgenthau (1951) argues that in order to make realistic decisions, policymakers need to pursue national interests based on the assessment of the distribution of power. A criticism of Morgenthau would be that interests based on the predictions of materialistic approaches in realist discourses of decision-making ignore the normative and subjective role of identities.

According to neorealism, the relationship between identity and security is minimal. However, according to constructivism, social facts like 'identity' do not exist in any objective sense (Hopf 1998). Much of the early scholarships on the ways in which nuclear weapons affect affairs in the international community are mentioned by realist approaches. However, the constructivist school of thought explains the institutionalisation of nuclear weapons, including the idea of mutually assured destruction (MAD) and the norm of the nuclear taboo. In the constructivist debate, scholars analyse the way proliferation asserts itself in the behavioural relations between different actors such as state and non-state actors (Whyte 2011). The apparent absence of concern over identity in conceptions of security needs to be understood as a historical legacy that contains a conscious attempt to exclude identity concerns from the political realm. The roots of realism's conception of an objective national interest lie in the liberal sensibility, in an attempt to construct a material and objective foundation for political practice, even though that process is predicated on liberal faith in the power of science to subdue political conflict (Williams 1998). By tracing the influence of identity on foreign policy, Glenn Chafetz, Michael Spirtas and Benjamin Frankel (1998) evidence the use of constructivism by discussing the role of identity in foreign policy. A successful and strong foreign policy is steadily directed by a shared sense of national identity, considering actors' intentions and interests (Hill and Wallace 1996). Dissatisfied with being labelled as materialists, realists have sought to include non-military threats affecting people rather than states. This thus

expanded their security agenda by including concepts such as human security and regional security – together with ideas of culture and identity (Eroukhmanoff 2017).

Jutta Weldes (1996) argues that realists are wrong to believe threats are self-evident; that is why the realist approach to international politics cannot address the construction of threats, and as a result, is unable to explain why certain actions in relation to perceived threats are framed as in the national interest. Challenging traditional approaches to security in international relations, securitisation theory asserts that issues are not essentially threatening in their own nature; rather, it is by referring to them as ‘security’ issues that they become security problems (Eroukhmanoff 2017). Securitisation theory argues that what is said and how it is expressed is not exactly what we see, which is assumed by realists. However, it is constitutive of that social reality (Balzacq 2009). Even if states adhere to specific norms and regimes, the norms perpetuated by them can eventually become part of their nature and thus, constitutive of their own identities and interests (Jepperson *et al.* 1996). Unlike realists such as Kenneth Waltz (1979), who conceive of the structure of the international system as the distribution of material capabilities, Wendt argues that collective identities and interests are both affected and constituted by the international system. Thus, in order to understand states’ foreign policy behaviours, it is necessary for the material and ideational aspects of the system to be problematized. Wendt essentially argues that identities constitute and shape states’ preferences and actions (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Nick Ritchie (2012) argues that collective identities are essentially shaped by the social construction of a relatively stable sets of norms, values and images of ourselves and others. Indeed, political behaviour can be considered to be a process of interpreting the values and ideas that underpin identities through action and interaction.

Given the above argument, a theory of IR that better lends itself to the adequate expression of the subject should be applied to the analysis of Iran’s nuclear ambitions, that is, one that avoids the mere description of events on the surface and instead explores the intersubjectivity underlying Iran’s nuclear decisions. This theory needs to consider the role played by ideational factors and explain how shared knowledge and intersubjective understandings impact on actors’ decisions. Constructivism, this thesis maintains, is the appropriate theory for this purpose. By means of the constructivist

school of thought in IR, this chapter will show the impact of the ontological aspects of security - here national identity - as an important component of decision-making in a country's political arena. International politics is determined and shaped by the beliefs and expectations that states have about each other (Wendt 1999). Therefore, it should be remarked upon that the focus of this research on national identity conceptions does not simply ignore the more traditional and material aspects of security such as power, survival and self-help. As Alexander Wendt (1994) argues, however, it is not a predictable fact that the international environment is a self-help system. Rather, "the international environment is created and recreated in processes of interaction" (Zehfuss 2002, p. 38) among the individuals and the society.

The security environment is an influencing factor on policy-making, whereas the leaders are determining factors in making policy choices. However, in the case of nuclear policies, Khan (2010) believes that leaders' personal proclivities to go nuclear are not enough for a country to become nuclear. Rather, nuclear decisions are part of leaders' national identity conceptions. There are a set of beliefs and experiences among state representatives and the main political currents that connects these contexts and motives. Arguably, the profound formation and transformation of Iran's nuclear behaviour cannot be merely explained by referring to material structures. As Mark J. Smith (1998) argues, the way individuals' view collective communication and interaction is shaped through the ways in which they engage in the process of mutual understanding. In doing this, their identities evolve in a process of continual transformation. Social construction extends not just to the intersubjective development of shared concepts, language and norms of behaviour, but also to the identities of actors in the social realm (Phillips and Malhotra 2008). This chapter aims to use the conceptions of national identity and foreign policy in constructivism to explore the current puzzles in resolving the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme.

2.3 Why Does Social Constructivism Sufficiently Explain Identity Dynamics in Foreign Policy?

2.3.1 Social Constructivism: Definition and Types

Social constructivism has emerged as a metatheoretical criticism of rationalist ontological and epistemological theories, and a powerful model for explaining the way ideational phenomena, such as norms, identities, and beliefs, affect interests and

actions. Nicholas Onuf (2012), as the first theorist to use the term ‘constructivism’ in 1989 demonstrated that, like individuals, states live in a world of our own making, which means that human actions and interactions construct the social world. He emphasised that as opposed to natural kinds governed by unchanging physical laws, social kinds come into being through shared understandings that give meaning to the world in which we live (O’Brennan 2006). As Nicholas Onuf (2012) put it, it could be argued that the most important principle of social constructivism is the belief that all knowledge is socially constructed. This principle, in turn, is based on the realisation that language, meanings and ideas influence all human experience, including knowledge production. Thus, social constructivism does not deny the possibility of material conditions about the world, but it is mainly about interpretation. In other words, the most important aspect of international relations is social, not material (Jackson *et al.* 2005).

Constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: “(1) states are the main units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective, rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are constructed by social structures.” Some of the core concepts of constructivism such as discourses, norms, identity, and culture are frequently used regarding issues like security policy (Checkel 2008). According to Alister Miskimmon *et al.* (2014), social constructivists focus on the way ideas and identities shape the construction of interests. As Nina Tannenwald (2006) mentions, however, ideas do not hold the necessary mechanisms to show the independent effect on policy, and thus, need to be connected to social and political processes, institutions, and organisation.

At its heart, constructivists believe that identity is all about change and dynamism (Adler 2005). Although all constructivists share the above-mentioned views and concepts, there is considerable variety within constructivism. Conventional constructivists such as Alexander Wendt believe that it is possible to explain world events in causal terms, and so they are interested in exploring relationships between norms, interests and identities (Hopf 1998). Critical constructivists, on the other hand, want to reconstruct an identity, since they believe that identity components are created through written or spoken communication among and between people. Language thus

plays a key role in critical constructivists because it is crucial in the construction of social reality (Pouliot 2004). However, for this thesis, I use Alexander Wendt's conventional constructivism, which posits the view that the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction. According to Wendt (1994, p. 385), 'anarchy is what states make of it,' that is, the nature of international anarchy appears to be conflictual if states show conflictual behaviour towards each other, and cooperative if they behave cooperatively towards one another. Whenever there is a mention of constructivism or social constructivism in this thesis, it means conventional constructivism.

Political culture has become an important and controversial explanation for state behaviour (Lantis 2002). According to Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba (1963), political culture is a set of beliefs and societal values that are related to political system decision making. By coining the term 'strategic culture' in the late 1970s, Jack Snyder (1977) suggests that culture can remarkably affect both security strategy and state behaviour through the lens of national identity. Alistair Johnston (1995, p. 46) also defines strategic culture as "an integrated "system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors), which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences."

2.3.2 Agent-Structure

The constructivist approach in IR centres on identity formation in relation to history, culture, and traditions (Lantis 2002). Political science is the domain of various competing ontologies, and as competing approaches, IR theories tell us all about the differences in this realm. Therefore, each theory attempts to answer the ontological question of the nature of the object or reality that is referred to as the agent-structure problem, which is central to Wendt's constructivism. As Wendt (1987a) argues, all social scientific theories imply at least one underlying solution to the agent-structure problem. According to the constructivist approach, while interests are shaped by identities, identities are subject to change in the process of interaction (Adler 2005). The world represented and constructed by the Iranian elite and Iranian society is a world of constitutive norms, values and ideas (Brown 2010). This brings us to a brief discussion of international structures and agents. In line with constructivist thinking, this thesis discusses the idea that agents and structures are mutually constitutive and

that the mutual constitution of agents and structures is essential to an analysis of identities and interests.

Constructivists consider international relations to be socially constructed, and they place centrally state actors as the principal unit of analysis (Wendt 1994). The phrase 'socially constructed' indicates that they give greater importance to the 'social' and consider the world 'as coming into being through a process of interaction' between agents and structure (Clarke 2008). According to constructivist logic, any change in the intersubjective narratives, thoughts and ideas of actors in the international system causes a change in the system itself, since the system is constructed by intersubjective ideas, thoughts, rules and norms (Jackson *et al.* 2005). Alister Miskimmon *et al.* (2014) emphasises the importance of communication and narratives in the process of the construction and reinterpretation of identity. Alexander Wendt (1996) also argues that symbolic actions, dialogues and persuasive and ideological narratives influence identities. If identities were stable, it would be a meaningless analytical tool.

2.3.3 Security: Material Forces

According to social constructivism, the political arena is not where actors struggle to gain power and interests. Constructivism is a social science theory about the relationship between structures and actors in the international system as well as an international relations theory. Thus, according to constructivism, the world is not just made up of material issues, but also thoughts, beliefs, ideas, languages, rules, discourses and shared understandings among human beings (Wendt 1999). As Louis Althusser (2006, p. 88) puts it, "the material existence of ideas is merely useful in order to reveal what every at all serious analysis of any ideology will immediately and empirically show to every observer, however critical."

The constructivist theory claims that the thoughts, ideas and values of political actors are determined through mutually constitutive discourses with others, thus, a state's foreign policy is defined beyond mere power-seeking purposes and security-seeking incentives (Ferrero 2009). Others perceive each entity or state in this way, clarifying their domestic attitudes and the interaction between nation-states. Unlike the underlying tenets of rational choice theories, constructivism casts doubt on using objective rationality to explain the behaviour of states. It asserts that rationality is

relative to each actor or society's social goals and norms and that value-oriented behaviour differs between and within states in the international system (Slaughter 2011). Hence, the idea of an Iranian nuclear crisis cannot be regarded as an objective reality. Instead, the ideologies, identities and interests of an actor are related to its ideational structure, influencing its interactions with other actors or states (Lebow 2003). The key point in this argument is that, according to Alexander Wendt (1996), actors' identities are not a given but are shaped or changed through interaction (Zehfuss 2001). Wendt asserts that identities are the foundation for interests and that different forms of anarchy are constructed through interaction between states (Wendt 1999). Constructivism is perceptive to the role of social norms in international politics; thus constructivists distinguish between a 'logic of consequences or rationality', where in order to maximise the interests of a state, actions are chosen rationally, and a 'logic of appropriateness', where rationality is excessively affected by social norms (Slaughter 2011). Olsen (2008, p. 193) describes "the logic of appropriateness as a perspective on human action. To act appropriately," he argues, "is to proceed according to the institutionalised practices of a collectivity and mutual understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good. Actors seek to fulfil the obligations and duties encapsulated in a role, an identity, and a membership in a political community. Rules are followed because they are perceived to be adequate for the task at hand and to have normative validity."

2.3.4 Intersubjectivity

Constructivism considers international relations as a complex sphere of interaction, which shapes a state's identities and interactions. Due to this complexity, international relations should not ignore human consciousness, values, ideas, identities, interests and beliefs (Jackson *et al.* 2005). State interests and identities do not merely depend on the structure of the system, but also upon the shared meanings and ideas embodied in the structure and which reconceptualise the national interest (Wendt 1992). According to the constructivist school of thought, the international system can be regarded merely as a common understanding among actors. Accordingly, the international system is affected by ideas and values; in other words, changing the ideas and values of the actors or societies results to shifts in the nature of the international system (Reus-Smit 1999). Constructivism indicates that the focus of international relations should mostly be on the ideas and beliefs of the actors in

international society as well as the shared understandings between them (Jackson *et al.* 2005). However, this does not mean that Alexander Wendt ignores or denies the objectivity of social reality. Indeed, he argues that some intersubjective understandings can become so embedded, or reified, as to appear to all intents and purposes as real or objective (Wendt 1992).

In order to provide a clearer understanding of the structure of debates between (neo) realist and social constructivism, and also to try and show that these debates have had dubious concepts of the relationship between identity and security, one could assess the rethinking of critical analysis in relation to security studies. Identity and security are two intertwined concepts, but there is a difference in the neorealists and constructivists accepting this issue. The dominant realist/neorealist approaches ignore the relationship between identity and security, while social constructivism considers that identity is intersubjectively constructed (Steans *et al.* 2005). According to more classic realist approaches such as neorealism, there is a minimal relationship between identity and security. However, according to constructivism, identity as a social reality with subjective sense does not exist in any objective rationale (O'Bryan 2011).

The main point asserted by Alexander Wendt is that discursive social practices which help states to redefine their view of self and others over time mostly depends on the cultural identity which they hold (Guzzini and Leander 2005). Maaïke Warnaar (2013, pp. 25–26) argues that “constructivists in their analyses often move beyond mere questions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ and look at how interests are socially constructed in the context of worldviews that go beyond matters of identity.” According to constructivism, realism's shortcoming lies in marginalising the role of ideational structures in power politics by focusing on the deterministic role of international anarchy and defining state identity and interests with material structures (Jung 2013). Security and deterrence are the most common themes within mainstream IR literature on the Iranian nuclear programme. These two themes, which have been used to identify Iran's nuclear ambitions, have received substantial attention from academics, policymakers, and analysts alike (Milani 2009). When it comes to the concept of ‘identity’ and its origins, social constructivism attempts to explore it by taking an ideational approach. According to constructivism, identity does not merely exist objectively; rather, it is intersubjectively constructed, like all other social realities.

Constructivists point to the importance of identity, culture, norms, regimes, and ideas (Hansen 2013). Unlike constructivism, which acquires its central analytical leverage through subjective capabilities, such as norms, perceptions and preferences, realism derives its fundamental analytical dominance by elucidating social constructions through variations in the distribution of objective material power capabilities (Legro and Moravcsik 1999). Contrary to the realist schools that focus on material forces in empirical analysis, constructivists believe that shared ideas should also be considered alongside material forces. Thus, as Wendt (1999) states, no matter if a system's function is conflictual or peaceful, it is still a product of a shared culture, which has been created through discursive social practices rather than anarchy and power (Ibid.).

Whether states' intentions towards conflict are driven by security or non-security factors, one can explain the reason for conflict not just via material structure, but also through ideational structures, including intersubjective shared ideas, interests, norms, and values (Copeland 2000). While rationalist theories like neorealism reflect on the persistent role of interests and identities in order to identify the causal role of power, constructivism offers an explanation of how actors define and shape their behaviour through ideational structures (Onuf 2012). Whether national identities have a foundational basis or they are constructed with the conceptions changing over-time have long been debated. Constructivists point to the importance of identity, culture, norms, regimes, and ideas (Hansen 2013). Cohesion and solidarity within societies and nations have generally been attributed to several factors. These have ranged from real or constructed myths regarding ethnic origin and history to the all-important virtue of shared values and cultures (Hunter 2014). Thus, one needs to know about the norms, cultures, identities and interests that constitute the interaction of actors and structures. Identities matter as they tell others who you are and you who others are. Social constructivism assumes that identities depend on the social, political and historical context of a society. Constructivism, however, does not ignore material power, but it says "both material and discursive power are necessary in understanding and explaining world affairs" (Hopf 1998, p. 177). According to the historical and social context of a society, constructivism can tell how and where change may occur. In this context, as Hopf (1998, p. 181) states, "state interests are part of the process of identity construction". Sending a message to others about who we are related to, our reputation, and value. A good or bad reputation is a reflection of how actors introduce

themselves and how others interpret their identity (Balmer *et al.* 2006). Moreover, identities demonstrate the nature, intentions, attitudes and interests of each state in different social, historical, political and cultural contexts. Actors share their understandings of the world and therefore construct social reality according to their interpretations (Hopf 1998). Thus, constructivism attempts to explain the ways that actors acquire their identities and how these identities shape the actors' interests, whether material or ideational (Van Wyk *et al.* 2007). Identities can simultaneously secure and strengthen a society's sense of solidarity as well as threaten or jeopardise their well-being (Gilchrist *et al.* 2010).

2.3.5 Interests

In order to proceed with the discussion of identities and the significant role they play in shaping nuclear policies, this section addresses the role of identities in shaping and reshaping interests. The essence of rationalism is that states have selfish identities and interests and their ultimate goal of survival imposes interests upon them (Halabi 2004). On the other hand, constructivists claim that actors' identities and interests are an interpretation of social norms and ideas rather than material conditions (Jackson 2004). By bridging the divide between domestic and international systems and structures, social constructivism explains how intersubjectively shared ideas constitute actors' identities and interests (Bozdağlıoğlu 2007). In determining that state identities are not pre-given, Wendt (1994) argues that identities have subjective as well as intersubjective features and thus, states' understanding of their identities is related to their interaction within their own system as well as with other actors. Also, identities shape interests in a way that helps interpret situations and whether or not the available options are legitimate.

According to Alexander Wendt (1994), the social identity of actors develops from four basic interests: first is physical security, distinguishing actors from each other; second is ontological security, creating an appealing environment where actors can predict their relationship with others; third refers to recognition, which is the way actors are recognised by other actors and concerns their status rather than their survival; and fourth relates to development, in the sense that actors aspire to a better life by means of their humanity, thus defining the range of subjective interests of actors (Ropp and Sikkink 1999). As Wendt (1992) notes, identities form the principal

constituent of interests. In other words, actors do not have a set of solid interests, which is separate from their social circumstances; rather their interpretation of interests is constituted in the process of shaping the social context (Weber 2005). The relevance of identity to security in a constructivist approach, according to Matt McDonald (2008), consists of two central elements: the first of those is the way ideational factors are of paramount importance in the construction of security within global politics, and second is the way interests are understood in terms of norm compliance, which is necessary in order to reproduce certain conceptions of an actor's identity. Social constructivists argue that foreign policy can be a product of socialisation, meaning that states can decide on which norms to follow, because they calculate their costs and benefits, or because norms become internalised. Therefore, identities and interests are central determinants of foreign policy for constructivists, as they rely on ideational factors in explaining foreign policy and the structure of international politics (Finnemore 1996b).

2.3.6 Norms

From a constructivist perspective, norms shape the conceptualisations of interests through the social construction of identities (Katzenstein 1996). Therefore, "actors comply with norms in order to validate their social identities" (Price and Tannenwald 1996, pp. 124–5); it is in the process of validating identities that interests are constituted (Tannenwald 2007). Actors acquire identities that are based on their expectations and understanding of their specific roles, which constructs shared behaviours and motivations (Zehfuss 2001). Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p. 891) refers to a very simple definition of norms, citing them as the 'standards of appropriate behaviour'. Based on the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, equality, respect, non-intervention and self-determination have been states' key behavioural norms (Held 2002). Institutions embody rather stable structures of identities and interests; while there are actors that codify the norms and rules of an institution by their interpretation of social reality which is based on a common understanding (Wendt 1992). Rational theories claim that the interests of states or actors develop and dictate the structure of the international system and its norms. That is, as Michael Desch (1998) puts it, ideas and norms only matter when they coincide with the interests of powerful states. Hence, constructivists view the development of international norms as the mutual constitution of agents and structures (Dixon 2013). However, according

to identity-based theorists, states' action would be meaningless without constructivist norms (Griffiths *et al.* 2014). Constructivist scholars believe that norms are not mere byproducts of the balance of power or a reflection of converging state interests, but link the ideational realm with real-world actions and the interactions of actors. Thus, norms become a crucial concept that help us understand how certain actions in international relations become conceivable, meaningful and legitimate to begin with (Florini 1996).

To understand the international social environment for states seeking nonproliferation, Maria Rost Rublee (2009) focuses on the normative and non-material incentives for states in a socially constructed international system. The strategic aim of nonproliferation policy, as George Perkovich (2004) argues, should be to acquire comprehensive compliance with the norms of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. As Reus-Smit (1999) argues, states are mostly restrained by more than just material factors, such as the balance of power, and therefore, it is international norms that set out the meanings and rules for explaining foreign policy choices. Nina Tannenwald (1999) distinguishes how norms constrain and how they constitute. The analysis highlights the mutual shaping of norms and interests. Norms enter into, and change, the cost-benefit calculations of interests (constraining), but they also help to constitute those interests, identities, and practices (Tannenwald 1999). This research aims to understand Iranian leaders' decisions about the nuclear programme by means of interpreting the crucial dimensions of Iranian national identity within a socially constructed, ideational framework.

2.4 National Identity- Definitions and the Chosen Model

2.4.1 Constructivism, Identity and Nationalism

In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln emphasised national unity, expressing the American nation's expectations of a democratic government by simply defining it as the government of the people, by the people, for the people (Lincoln 1994). From his address, one can see the importance of a nation who forms expectations. Hence, the underlying question is, how do we define the nation? According to Hans Kohn (1961, p. 10), "nationalism is first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness." The process of identity formation is accompanied by interaction with or against the other (İnaç and Ünal 2013). As Derrida (1978) argues, identities are

always being distinguished or identified by others.

Philip Allott (1992, p. 1363), addresses the matter of identity as a constitutive element, arguing that “human beings still struggle to be persons, full of projects, of love, of suffering, of anger, of despair, of hope. Human beings still transform the natural world through the application of ideas. Human societies still struggle to survive and prosper in the name of ideas.” Allot (ibid. p. 1368) believes that “A salute, a religion, a royal palace, an epic poem, a national anthem, a law, a life of self-sacrifice, a surgical operation, a death in battle, the burning of a witch, a nuclear weapon, the genocide of a people, world war, and global warming are all actualisations of the human mind.” All these issues need to be defined and thereby understood. As Alexander Wendt (1994) defines it, social identities are shaped in their relations at the international level with other states, and thus are open to redefinition and transformation. Identity has been conceived as ‘normative’, or composed of norms of behaviour. These norms are essentially constitutive rules that define a nation’s collective identity and lead other nation-states to recognise it; identity is thus linked to behaviour through the performance of roles.

If we consider identity as a social, historical, dynamic, and multidimensional entity, then we need to define what affects or influences identity as a social entity. According to Smith (1991), two elements form and define identity: the objective and the subjective. Objective elements are those shared by groups of people or nations and include values, symbols, myths, religion, ethnicity, language, geography, common history, traditions, etc. Subjective elements, on the other hand, are depicted as the extent to which the internalisation process of objective elements is carried out, as the subjective elements are of paramount importance in shaping national identity. In other words, a nation can be defined as a group of people who have a homeland, share common myths and historical memories, and have legal rights (Telhami and Barnett 2002). Thus, national identities are conceptions that individuals have developed over time in order to define the collective socio-political values and common will of society (Toffolo 2003). This is about the way nations construct themselves and their decisions based on their ideas, ideologies, and values. Burger and Luckman (1991) likewise view society consisting of both objective and subjective realities. When Smith refers to socially constructed webs of objective-subjective meaning, some of

his critics, such as Montserrat Guibernau (2004) believe he failed to capture the full meaning of nations and national identity in modern societies. Aletta Norval (1996) or Umut Özkirimli (2003) also seem to have interpreted the notion ‘socially constructed’ exclusively in terms of modern inventions or fabrications, which is contradictory to the constructivist account of nationalism. In that way, they neglect the fact that all socially constructed realities are not deliberately made up or crafted to serve a function for society, but might instead be the unintended consequences of various historical processes. Therefore, these critiques’ understanding of the concept of socially constructed realities is too narrow. Such an understanding conceives of social construction in an abstract way, while the concept of social construction is not limited to fabrications.

My argument is that this criticism is a misinterpretation of Smith’s theory. Social constructivism posits that actors interact within their social world and therefore influence each other with common knowledge that consists of socially constructed and legitimised rules, roles, norms, and beliefs (Martin and Gynnild 2011). Identity is the central notion through which to understand action within social contexts. Identity can be thought of as a set of relatively stable definitions of self and others, without which most social action would either be chaotic or simply impossible (Wendt 1992). To understand that social actors depend in part on an understanding of who/what social actors are, as Hall (1993) argues, analysts need a ‘we’ before they can know what ‘our’ interests are (Bokszański 1995). Alexander Wendt (1994) attempted to further analyse state identity into ‘corporate’ and ‘social’ forms. Corporate identity is seen as inherent to all states, constructed at the domestic level, and implying basic ‘survival’ needs such as physical security. Social identities, on the other hand, form in states’ relations at the international level and are open to redefinition and transformation (Ibid.).

This thesis’ point of departure regarding the notion of identity is that identity, as well as its significations—nationalism and sense of belonging to a nation—are a cultural relic (Anderson 2006). This leads to what Benedict Anderson calls imagined communities. For Anderson, the question is how community or identity is imagined and has got its shape. Hence, Anderson (Ibid.) argues that nationalism and national identity have underpinnings in real material environments (Calhoun 2017). William

Wallace (1991) argues that nationhood and national identity represent necessary myths which underpin foreign policy. They constitute the distinction between a national community, which the government represents abroad, and the foreigners with whom it deals; more than that, they legitimise the actions of the government in defence of the national interest. According to Wallace, states cannot survive without a sense of identity; an image of what marks their government and their citizens from their neighbours, of what special contribution they have to make to civilisation and the international order. Thus, foreign policy partly reflects that search for identity. Although the constructivist approach to identity is research-intensive and theoretically parsimonious, “once one has uncovered a prevailing discourse of national identity, one can expect that discourse to both persist over time and explain a broad range of outcomes, regardless of who is making foreign policy in that state” (Hopf and Allan 2016, p. 11).

2.4.2 Iran’s Nuclear Programme: A Constructivist Standpoint

In the nuclear realm, constructivists take a particular interest in how states’ shared meanings, understandings and expectations of nuclear technology affect their nuclear policy (Searle 1995). A Wendtian constructivist approach makes it possible for this research to explain how Iran’s identities and interests are interconnected and a central focus. Iran’s foreign policy, including its nuclear policy behaviour, cannot be adequately understood if it is not contextualised within an ideational structure. One crucial dimension of Iranian identity is its strong sense of nationalism. Constructivism focuses on the symbolic importance of specific historical events, for example, in the case of Iran one can refer to various policies with symbolic importance, such as the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1906), the Oil Nationalisation Movement (1951-1953), the 1979 Islamic Revolution, as well as the peaceful nuclear programme. In other words, a country with peaceful nuclear technology sees itself as a technologically advanced and independent power that deserves special recognition on behalf of the regional and international community. Understanding national identity and nationalism requires a consideration of the historical and contemporary importance of prestige in the formation of nations, their perceptions and evaluations of other nations, that thus shape their behaviour and state policy (Wood 2014). Alexander Wendt (1994) considers four basic interests or appetites for social actors: first, their need for physical security or survival; second, their need for ontological

security or predictability in stable relationships with other actors; third, their need for recognition by other actors; and fourth, their need for development and progress. This research focuses on the third basic interest of actors, i.e., the need for a distinguished actor's recognition by other actors. This need is beyond the level of survival and material interests (Muppidi 2004). Sherrill (2012) also argues that states endeavour to attain honour and prestige.

While actors seek recognition by defining themselves, there is no unanimity among historians about the definition of nationality. Ethnicity and race are given different weights by various scholars (Dahbour 2002); some like Liah Greenfeld (1993) have rejected ethnicity as a central determinant of national identity; while Ross Poole (1999) has defined nations using Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community'; and Paul Gilbert (2018) sees the connection between national identity and nationalism as a political ideology. National identity as a category simultaneously contains historical, cultural, social, and political dimensions (Smith 1986). Which one of these dimensions is the dominant one at any particular time depends on how much socio-political pressure is put upon each of them (İnaç and Ünal 2013). The dominance of each of these dimensions of identity, therefore, can be manifested in different ways: individual, cultural, social, and political (Giroux 1995). "The multicultural and multi-societal character of the identity requires the necessity of a plurality of people, groups, social confrontations, mutual challenges and profound interactions, and finally, a strong possession is needed for the gained identities and these identities may be redefined in accordance with the conjuncture" (Ibid. p. 224). In so doing, it can be said that one of the most important motivations for Iran to continue being a nuclear power are national ideological reasons.

In order to secure its independence, Iran seeks a dominant role in the knowledge and technology of nuclear capabilities. This could be an influential response to sanctions by the international society; and Iran's supreme leader believes these economic sanctions lead Iran to be self-reliant, never changing its foreign policy regarding its nuclear programme as it remains a matter of national pride (Mohammad Nia 2011). Iran's foreign policy represents a logical reaction to the insecurities in the region that come from neighbours like Iraq during Saddam Hussein who invaded Iran in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the presence of the U.S. in Iraq,

Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf region and countries with nuclear weapons in the Middle East, including Israel, India and Pakistan, as well as the Iranian collective identity which has been formed throughout history.

The combination of Iranian cultural elements and Islamic values, coupled with Western norms, has produced a complex and multi-dimensional identity for the Islamic Republic, which is well reflected in the miscellaneous positions and role structures that constitute the basis of Iran's foreign policy, including its nuclear policy. One of the major discursive repertoires it has drawn on to construct such an identity of self is Shiite Islamic ideology while indulging in a post-colonial struggle to advance the universal cause of 'oppression' by outside invaders (Javadi Arjomand and Chaboki 2010). The term 'post-colonial' is used to describe certain types of states and politics. Iran was never formally colonised. However, the evolution of institutions similar to other post-colonial states is undeniable in Iran. Despite the fact that Iran has never been directly colonised, it has suffered from foreign intervention and numerous invasions (Helfont 2015). Foreign intervention sheds light on issues of independence and modernity in the foreign policy of modern Iran, especially after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 that emphasised total independence from the West in general and the US in particular. National identity played a major role in this act, with the Islamic revolutionary leaders in Iran describing themselves as opponents of the Western international order (ALDosari 2015). According to Itty Abraham (1998), another aspect of post-colonialism, which helps in our understanding of the nuclear ambitions of certain countries, such as Iran and India, is the 'fetish'. Fetish in this context means a country that looks for modernity via scientific and technological advancement, with this desired form of modernity bringing about fundamental changes to the countries' national and international status.

A constructivist analysis of Tehran's insistence on being a nuclear power would examine the ideational structures that shape Iran's subjective identity. Iranian national identity, which has been shaped by its historical heritage and idealisation, asserts that the Islamic Republic will continue pursuing its nuclear ambitions despite economic sanctions and the international society's rigour. Due to these international stringencies, Iran's desire to acquire nuclear technology in order to be a developed economy (Gladstone and Castle 2012) has turned into a symbol of national pride,

independence, and resistance. A useful way to understand Iranian leaders' nuclear policies and their way of thinking, is to place it in the context of their views on the role of identity and ideology in nuclear policy. The use of a constructivist approach in this thesis explains the Iranian identity since the beginning of the Iranian nuclear programme and with a focus on the Islamic Revolution and later. On this basis, Iran's nuclear policy and the identity that constitutes it are made meaningful via constructivism, as the constructivist approach helps us understand the changes and resistances in Iran's nuclear policy. The fact that Iran wants to be a powerful regional actor is deeply rooted in its history and this may be evidence for Iran's persistence in having nuclear technology. Since it has been argued that Iranian national identity conceptions play a significant role in nuclear decision-making, it is necessary to determine what Iranian national identity conceptions are. We need to ascertain how they function with regard to the impact of Iranian elites' conceptions of national identity with regard to decisions affecting Iran's nuclear programme and EU-3+3 nuclear negotiations. This will be explored in detail in chapter 4, which considers national identity formations and the impact of Iranian elites' conception of national identity on nuclear policies.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter mapped the epistemological underpinnings and conceptual outfit of identity politics based on social constructivism, discussing the shortcomings of applying realist theory to identity politics and the promises of constructivist foreign policy analysis. Despite its high analytical potential, the realist approach to IR does not address the ideational and normative construction of policies. Social constructivism explains foreign policy behaviour and the reshaping of national identities by exploring the roles political elites play in their domestic and foreign policies. A Wendtian constructivist approach to Iran's nuclear policy can bring to the fore factors that have been ignored or misinterpreted within the realist or rational framework such as national identity components. The research methodology and techniques can be used to map out the dynamics of national identity formation over long periods of time. This could advance IR knowledge in many ways, but the most effective theory to explore the impact of national identity conceptions on decision-making processes would be the constructivist approach. This is since it would enable

systematic evaluation of key constructivist teachings on what makes policymakers create policies based on symbolic values that unite the nation.

The impact of culture and identity is to a large extent marginal in realism and its branches. Yet, despite the disagreement of so many scholars, the two concepts of security and identity are deeply intertwined. The dominant neo-realist paradigm relinquishes the role of identity in security issues, while neoclassical realism considers the role of identity in foreign policy issues. Rather than going along with the interests of the international community and following the consensus, a realist expectation for Iranian nuclear policy focuses more on how Iran's interests are affected by nuclear policy decisions. To constructivists, social context is remarkably important in examining agent and structure behaviour. According to a constructivist understanding of Iranian nuclear policy, the perception and influence of national identity components can lead to trends in nuclear decision-making. This, of course, leaves the central question of the thesis to be answered: Why has the development of an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity in Iran, especially since 2002, following the revelation of clandestine nuclear activities? Based on this chapter, the theoretical literature on the normative and ideational approaches points out various ways that a conception of national identity may affect political elites' foreign and nuclear policies through a constructivist framework. However, this will be discussed in detail in chapter 5, which considers national identity formation and the internal determinants of Iran's nuclear ambitions. In this thesis, I examine the main question of the research with regards to the Wendtian constructivist approach, taking an additional focus on the role of identity, which helps understand the creation of social meaning. Identities have subjective and intersubjective qualities and help us interpret situations and preferred options, which are defined against the backdrop of justice and legitimacy. The next chapter will discuss the methodological approaches and methods that are being used to address the questions of this thesis.

3.1 Introduction

This research project analyses areas of importance that have been neglected in understanding the nuclear behaviour of Iranian elites. In the previous chapter, I drew a general image of the ontological and epistemological platforms of social constructivism. It has been argued that it is necessary to draw on normative elements to understand and interpret Iran's nuclear ambitions. Nina Tannenwald (1999), for example, argues that it is necessary to use a normative element to explain the reason why states have not used nuclear weapons since 1945. According to Tannenwald, the investigation into the reasons for non-use of nuclear weapons, which exists in the context of deterrence, has some incentives. An important incentive is why non-nuclear states didn't attempt to develop nuclear weapons. Realist arguments, which say the U.S. nuclear umbrella is sufficient for non-nuclear states, are not justified reasons because the U.S. does not assure all these states that they can come under the U.S. umbrella. Thus, we feel the need for a normative element that prohibits states from using or developing nuclear weapons. It is these normative beliefs that help us understand what behaviour is right or wrong. One type of normative effect discussed by Tannenwald is the constitutive effect, emphasised by constructivist perspectives, which refers to how rules and norms, through actor practices, create or define forms of behaviour, roles, and identities (Ibid.).

In this chapter, I move further towards the practical means of operationalising the theoretical frame behind specific research question(s). Based on a variety of qualitative evidence, this thesis seeks to explain the main research question, '*why has the development of an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity in Iran, especially following the revelation of clandestine uranium enrichment facilities in 2002?*' While this research explores the historical background of the Iranian nuclear programme, from its inception, during Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign, until Iran and world powers signed a nuclear deal in July 2015, the focus of this thesis is on the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations; in the case of Rouhani only until signing the Iran nuclear deal (so, 2013 to 2015). The thesis argues that an analysis of Iran's national identity is crucial to understand the motivation for pursuing a nuclear programme. Regardless of the custodians of each

historical period, whether Mohammad Reza Shah or leaders of the Islamic Republic, the nuclear programme has been a symbol of national and international prestige, modernity and state identity for both of them (Amul 2012a). The thesis seeks to provide evidence for how relevant the impact of Iranian national identity conceptions on nuclear decision-making has become. It does this through an interpretive case study. The aim of an interpretive case study is not theory-building, but discovering patterns and correlations between social phenomena by means of discourse analysis. As Nick Ritchie (2013) argues, they are discourses that shape our understanding of nuclear policies and, thereby determine how the policies are made.

Constructivism shares a basic epistemology that according to George Lee Cheu-Jey (2012, p. 409) “rejects this view of human knowledge” that says “meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness.” There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. This type of epistemology is compatible with the qualitative research method. In accordance with the constructivist epistemology, Iranian identity has been conceptualised as a process that has been constructed and interpreted over time according to the interpretations and interactions of Iranian elites. Thus, there is a need to define and develop the notion of national identity as a discourse. Discursive approaches share a strong social constructionist epistemology, i.e., discourse is of utmost significance in constructing the ideas, social processes, and also phenomena that shape our social world (Nikander 2008). Therefore, we can use the discourse approach as a framework to analyse national identity (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). This chapter explains the research methodology, which draws on a constructivist approach to guide data collection and analysis through interviews and primary and secondary documentary sources. An understanding of the notion of ‘discourse of national identity’ will be developed through this thesis and the conceptions of Iranian national identity will be described. The reasons for a discourse approach will be established and through a discussion of the existing scholarship on discourse, an argument presented whereby discourse is the means by which ideology can be seen to be transferred, articulated or communicated. It is argued that the way a nation’s identity is constructed reflects a particular ideology or ideologies. The final section of the chapter discusses the methods used in the research. This includes an explanation of the sources. The section concludes with an overview of ethical considerations relevant to the current study.

This study needs to develop source material about non-traditional approaches towards security in the context of Iran's national identity. This section covers two major areas. Firstly, it provides an overview of the discourse approach in order to conceptualise the methods chosen for this study. To explore the interconnectedness of discursive practices, socio-cultural structures, and political (here, nuclear) decisions, this research uses an interdisciplinary approach combining socio-cultural, political, and historical perspectives. Secondly, it looks at the research approaches or methods that are best suited to this research.

3.2 Concept of Identity

For the purposes of this research, I conceptualise Iranian national identity conceptions as a sequence of categories that define the ideas and beliefs of the Iranian nation. I then argue that conceptions of national identity that are constituted by societal discourses took their shape by the common knowledge among nations. Scholars like Alexander Wendt (1994) look at social identities as the sets of shared meanings in which these identities can be attributed to one's self as well as to the perspective of others. In this research, I use the concept of identity that has been proposed through the social constructivism of Wendt, and which focuses on states as the main units of analysis. The construction of national identity expands by emphasising both a shared history and a collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs' (1992) notion of 'collective memory', which is the selective recollection of important events from the past, makes it possible for us to identify a connection between theoretical discourses on national identity and the myths, symbols, traditions, culture, and rituals of everyday life (De Cillia *et al.* 1999). As Hall proposes:

“A national culture is a discourse, a way of constructing meanings, which influences and organises both our actions and our conceptions of ourselves. National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ with which we can identify; these are contained in stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past and imaginings which are constructed of it” (Hall 1996, p. 613).

I conceptualise the national identity conceptions of a country as discursive formations such as the ideas, norms, ideologies, and values that shape perceptions of the national

identity. While a state's foreign policy interprets, shapes, and protects national identity, and therefore presents itself as an intertwining link between individuals, society, and the international community, the national identity contains shared meanings that influence the framing of political action (Vertzberger 1990).

3.3 Qualitative Study

The research design for this study is a descriptive and interpretive case study that is analysed through the use of qualitative methods. The qualitative research process reflects a constructivist epistemology, which claims that social reality is a process that we construct and reconstruct over time with our understandings, interpretations and acts. To conduct qualitative data analysis, this research uses different methods such as:

a) Case study method or design: This is often conducted to learn more about a specific case and we cannot generalise the results obtained to all other cases with similar issues. In this study, the question is about the role and influence of national identity and its different aspects of foreign policy decision-making in general and on developing a nuclear programme in particular. I have chosen Iran or the Iranian nuclear programme as a case study for my research. Therefore, the research seeks to demonstrate that Iranian national identity (with all its Persian, Islamic and Modern aspects) contributes to Iranian leaders' insistence on developing Iran's nuclear programme.

b) Interpretation: The fundamental philosophical assumptions of the current research originate from the interpretive tradition. This entails a subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed. Interpretation involves contextualising historical events reconstructed from data that find their place and significance within broader historical and political narratives (Riessman 2008).

This research examines the extent to which the foreign policy of a country is influenced by national identity. In so doing, the national identity of each country shapes its foreign policy. In addition to the objective issues such as geopolitical position, economy, etc., the subjective factors, which give direction to states' political choices, influence foreign policy formation (Prizel 1998). In the next chapter, I will first describe and clarify the components of Iranian national identity. Then, using discourse analysis, I will examine the interaction between national identity and foreign policy in the case of Iran's nuclear programme. The factors that have played a

major role in the formation of Iran's nuclear policies and expectations demonstrate the triumph of intersubjective issues over mere objective policies. Given the blend of culture and politics in Iran, the country's foreign policy has always reflected ideational goals that are beyond the defined national interest, such as economic prosperity (Ghattas 2015). Regardless of the importance or dominance of Iran's cultural and religious identities, mostly in relation to the pre-Islamic and pre-Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Revolutionary regime, now stepping out into the world stage, is desirous of showing how its national identity, rising from the country's rich culture, is able to shape its foreign policy within the region and the world.

3.4 Discourse Analysis

At this point, the chapter will explain how the discourse approach could be effectively used to analyse discourses about nations and national identities. Due to the importance of the concept of the nation as 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006), it is of crucial importance to find a way to construct national identities in discourse. According to De Cillia et al. (1999), there is a logical relationship between particular discursive situations and the social structures in which they are embedded: on the one hand, they argue that situational and social contexts shape and affect discourses; and on the other, that discourses influence social narratives and political reality (Shenhav 2006). For the purpose of this research, I use discourse analysis, which is a method to analyse written and oral data beyond mere sentences. These data can be symbolic-interpretive constructs which people use to make their social reality meaningful. Such constructs include beliefs, images or symbols shared by the people in their society. Discourse analysis offers an intersubjective method for reifying national identity conceptions built over time. The general aim of discourse analysis is thus to specifically analyse how social reality is constructed for different social operations (Suoninen and Jokinen 2005). According to Bentley Allan (2014, p. 14) "Discourse analysis is the interpretive study of texts to uncover the intersubjective background that forms the basis of social order." Discourse analysis is an effective way to reveal the shared social knowledge that individuals use to create meanings and beliefs based on it. Discourses do not exist in research data as such, but rather they are the readings or interpretations of social reality which are concerned with the production of cultures and collective identities (Willig 2014).

A discourse analysis approach to the study of national identity is of value because it allows for an analysis of how ideologies are embedded in the construction of national identity (Li 2009). Therefore, it is in terms of national identity discourses that an explanation of how Iranian national identity is constructed can be ascertained. Same as Iran that has been invaded throughout history, Indian leaders from the early decades of the nineteenth century started to question the reason why their country had repeatedly been targeted by foreign invaders. In Parekh's (1994) words, all developing countries including India [and Iran] want to modernise themselves, while retaining much of their culture and their traditions. In this research on the relationship between Iranian national identity and nuclear policies, there is a need to apply the characteristics offered by a qualitative research method to conduct the research project. National identity has been articulated as a discourse, and this allows us to better explain the relations between the different discourses and conceptions of national identity with regard to different policies (Ibid.). Hence, identifying and analysing the discourse of national identity enables us to interpret and decode the ideologies (Gal and Irvine 1995) embedded in the construction of Iranian national identity, as well as to explore how these different conceptions of national identity relate to each other and to policy-makers and policy issues over time.

It is necessary to define the concept of national identity, Iranians' perspectives of their national identity, and the role of Iranian national identity in their nuclear policies. The argument of this thesis is that it is advantageous to recover and analyse the notion of national identity by means of discourse analysis because it demonstrates how we can introduce national identity in ideational rather than material terms. In other words, the Iranian national identity must be examined in order to understand Iranian nuclear decisions. In the context of negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme, as well as the decisions made by the politicians and the implications of politicians' invoking ideas of national identity, the distinction of ideas as discourse can be set out. Identities matter and we recover identities through discourse analysis, integrate that analysis with the political history of the nuclear programme, and develop an argument about how and why identity has shaped, or not shaped, nuclear choices. With regard to Iranian national identity, as will be illustrated throughout the thesis, a discourse approach is a beneficial means for analysing the way in which Iranian national identity is constructed. For example, the historical and intellectual analysis of Iranian

national identity addressed in chapter four is also based on the secondary sources that have addressed these issues. In light of this, there has been an attempt to deconstruct the discourses of national identity. Likewise, as will be demonstrated in chapters six, seven and eight, a deconstruction of how Iranian national identity is articulated at the state/elite level shows the diversity that exists in political identity (Holliday 2013).

As mentioned above, this research adopted two different methods, including the case study method and discourse analysis. Based on the research questions and by means of discourse analysis of the case study that relates to Iranian national identity and Iranian nuclear politics, I conducted interviews with elites. Accordingly, this research focuses on the cultural and religious aspects of identity and their role in the decision-making process of the state. Therefore, in addition to using literature in both English and Persian languages, I analysed chosen speeches of Iranian leaders. The focus of my thesis is on how the political elite/leaders challenge the process of nuclear decision-making by recognising and supporting Iranian national identity conceptions and take risks to develop their nuclear policies based on identity conceptions. These authentic resources are intended to enrich the research and therefore enhance the identity-related values and attitudes of the states based on an ideational and intersubjective approach.

3.5 Methods

The research has analysed a number of primary and secondary sources, by determining how discourse emerges from them. This study will depend on the interpretation and analysis of collected secondary and primary data from different sources. These sources include speeches and articles on Iranian identity in general and its relation to the state's nuclear ambitions in particular. Firstly, the research is reliant on primary sources such as official documents consisting of interview transcripts, declarations and media broadcasts by Iranian officials. These official documents offered the opportunity to observe elite perspectives as well as gain critical access points into the ways in which the Iranian leadership and individual officials understand and interpret particular situations or challenges, presenting their decisions to domestic constituents and/or external observers in the language of national identity. They showed the existence of particular intersubjective understandings (structures of meanings) and their effects on logics of action. In addition to these, informal

discussions with academics and policy-makers have contributed to a deeper understanding of issues surrounding the construction of Iranian national identity conceptions and how they affect nuclear decision-making. The discourses of Shia Islamic identity and Revolutionary ideology are primarily based on the speeches of Khamenei, Rouhani, Ahmadinejad and Khatami. The discourses of Persian identity and modernity are based on a number of sources.

Secondly, the research has relied on the examination of an extensive selection of secondary sources, such as various published research articles and books, newspapers, working papers, briefings, IAEA reports and UNSC Resolutions, blog posts, and academic works on Iranian national identity. With regards to academic articles, it is often the case that Iranian national identity is discussed in terms of the perception of Iranian national identity, rather than a discussion of various approaches to national identity. Policy papers and blog posts, mostly on how the conceptions of Iranian national identity shape the making of foreign policy in general and nuclear policy in particular, were consulted. I also chose a limited number of reformist and conservative newspapers with the highest national circulation figures containing speeches by national political elites regarding the nuclear programme and its normative conceptions. This abundance of material offered critical insights into Iran's intersubjective identities and the structures of its relations with other actors. This was particularly important since the Wendtian-constructivist approach requires a great amount of contextualisation: to understand 'what was there' before President Ahmadinejad came to power and after President Rouhani took office, and also how and why these administrations may have shifted or reproduced existing logic of representation and interaction.

Thirdly, I carried out twenty-one semi-structured elite interviews with individuals in their official or academic capacity. The elite interviews targeted those who are or were directly involved in the process of policy-making. Interviewing these people allowed for an in-depth exploration of policies, considering their insights and knowledge of the subject. The resulting information thus offered more reliable and valid data, giving us a richer understanding and interpretation of the research subject (Beamer 2002). My participants were selected with regard to their involvement in the institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran and their knowledge of Iran's foreign

policy and decision-making. My interview participants fell into the following categories:

- Diplomats and politicians of various nationalities (Iranian, American, European) involved in negotiations surrounding Iran's nuclear programme.
- Experts and analysts of the Iranian nuclear programme and security issues, including academics, policy researchers, and journalists.

Interviews were completely voluntary, and no financial reward was offered for participating in the research. Most of the interviews took place face-to-face and a few of them via Skype. In so doing, I asked open-ended questions to let the interviewees lead; meaning that while the focus was on keeping track of our interview topic, some room is allowed for the respondent to lead the interview and thus give more information (Bernard 2011). The purpose of these interviews has been to understand the perspectives of various actors involved in Iran's nuclear negotiations. The different opinions I gathered from respondents helped in constructing an evidence-based analytical narrative to develop my argument. I chose my interview respondents based on their experience and participation in different stages of Iran's nuclear negotiations. The sample of respondents is not representative but was selected based on their experience of being engaged with Iranian nuclear policies, or in some cases, working in Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs in the U.S. or European countries. Although all EU-3+3 members (U.S., UK, France, Germany, Russia and China) share the same goal of preventing Iran's nuclear development, the U.S. has been the most dynamic actor in the negotiations. The arrangements have kept the U.S. Departments of State, Treasury, Energy, and Defense alongside the national laboratories, members of Congress, research organisations and scholarly circles included in the process for a considerable length of time (Tabatabai 2015a). My reason for carrying out interviews with non-Iranian officials as well as the Iranian elites has been to clarify how non-Iranian elites interpret Iran's nuclear ambitions.

3.6 Data Collection Strategy and Data Analysis

When we are certain about our research questions, then it is the time to focus on how to collect the data, including primary and secondary data sources in order to answer the research questions according to the type of information needed. The purpose of data collection is to obtain relevant information, keep records, and make decisions about important issues. In accordance with the analytical requirements of the study

and the selected theory, I utilised a flexible design to include a package of qualitative methods, both descriptive and interpretive, plus documentary, archival and historical analysis, as well as discourse analysis and elite interviews. In order to conduct the research, or more exactly, to answer the research puzzle and address its problems, it is necessary to gather a wide range of materials including primary, secondary and tertiary data. In reconstructing and interpreting the case of Iran's nuclear policy, I have endeavoured to rely as much as possible on primary source material such as Persian language books, articles and interviews. Thus, this research is mainly based on primary and secondary data, such as qualitative interviews, research papers, documents, journals articles, newspapers, declarations of leaders, internet resources and surveying and archival retrieval of diaries on Iranian national identity and its impact on the Iranian nuclear programme.

To obtain underlying information and to establish the context and meaning of this research, data collection strategy is used as interpretative discourse analysis (Wetherell and Potter 1988). The initial step of this process for this study has been to focus on reading primary and secondary sources on the history of the Iranian nuclear programme, and the definition of identity and Iranian national identity in both the Persian and English language. I also attempted to collect Iranian and international journal articles regarding the Iranian nuclear programme and Iranian leaders' speeches in this regard, for analysis in the next stage. Speeches are important sources of data as they provide us with the framework that leaders use to present their policies (Grove 2015). This research aims to recover collective national identity conceptions to see whether they are constitutive of interests and actions or whether they are used instrumentally by elites to justify policy actions taken for other, non-ideational, reasons. To situate social constructivism's ontology within the debates of current political (nuclear) affairs, it is necessary to know that the concept of discourse cannot be used as an alternative to ideas. Instead of prioritising material and ideational factors over each other, discourse analysis strategy aims to integrate them (Hansen 2013). For the purpose of my research, I have thus worked on contemporary nuclear policies and the way Iranian national identity conception has shaped and interpreted nuclear policies and decision-making. Considering the constructivist, political/social science orientation of my original research, I decided to approach the constitution of

identity by means of discourses via a thorough overview of Iranian national identity components and conceptions of national identity held by Iranian elites.

3.7 Case Study Selection

Armed with the ideational mechanisms and research methods outlined above, this research undertakes to explore the impact of Iranian national identity conceptions on nuclear policies. In this section I review workings of some scholars, including Homeira Moshirzadeh, Michael Williams, Shahram Chubin, Volker Perthes, Nina Tannenwald, and Ruth Hanau Santini. Some of these scholarly works form the basis of my research and provide useful supplementary information for my research into the role of identity in Iran's nuclear ambitions; more generally, these articles have provided me with practices of identity through their discussion of policy-makers' behaviour and decisions. Homeira Moshirzadeh (2007) declares that the three elements of independence, justice, and resistance, which have constituted the identity, interests, and priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, are the main discourses that are understandable using the constructivist approach. This context is able to explain the legitimacy of a state's resistance to a particular policy and also its elites' decisions towards a policy since elites are the main actors in the policy system. Without taking domestic issues into consideration, however, one cannot condense an effective foreign policy analysis (Moshirzadeh 2007). There are three main elements, which form the discourse of independence: Iran's glorious past, historical victimisation by invaders, and the (semi)-colonial/imperial encounters that led to Iran's dependence and underdevelopment. These three elements that originate from historical experiences of Iranians form the basis of the discourse of independence, which can be identified as a part of Iran's national identity. There is also the discourse of hyper-independence, which has two aspects: one of these has a negative dimension that is reliant on confronting foreign dominance, the influence of hegemonic powers, and cultural, political, and economic dependence; while the other, which has a positive dimension, seeks to realise self-definition, self-reliance, self-control, more generally (Ibid.). If dependence originates from and reproduces weakness, becoming independent requires power. Therefore, an independent country has to be powerful. According to the document known as 'Iran's Strategic 20-Year Vision Document' ([1384] 2005), in the year 2025, 'Iran is a developed country ranking the first in the region economically, scientifically, and technologically'. It is within this discourse and in the context of

these rules and norms that the nation's nuclear policy has been formed and is represented as a step towards actualising Iran's potential as a prominent regional actor.

There is an analogy between Iran's nuclear policy and the Oil Nationalisation Movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Oil Nationalisation Movement was a successful step towards the nationalisation of the oil industry in Iran. The nuclear issue is another nationalist matter, which demands national support and sacrifice. On the other hand, there is an analogy between any withdrawal from the country's nuclear programme and the Treaty of Turkmanchāy (1828), the most notorious example of withdrawal by Iran from its sovereign rights in the country's modern history, and one that affected Iran's sovereignty and independence. Such analogies help us to delegitimise any efforts aimed at compromise. Thus, according to the discourse of independence, following the nuclear programme gives legitimacy to Iran's ambitions, making it a part of Iran's national identity (Golshani and Jadidi 2014). Iranians' aspirations for justice also have their roots in historical nationalist narratives and religious discourses. According to some scholars, justice-seeking is considered as one of the components of Iranian national identity and thus, the embracement of Shiism in Iran has been due to the justice-seeking Iranian spirit (Ehteshami and Molavi 2012). One can see this reflected in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, which constitutes another aspect of Iran's identity.

Countries such as Israel, India, and Pakistan, that have 'nuclearised' against all international norms, and have become more or less accepted as nuclear powers, now condemn Iran for its nuclear programme. Therefore, on the basis of the discourse of justice, the nuclear policy is considered as a justice-seeking effort. One can argue that these elements were formed in the course of Iran's modern history, and particularly in the constitution of the identity of the Islamic Revolution and latterly, the Islamic Republic. Nuclear discourse has also been articulated within these main discourses. Therefore, Iran's nuclear policy has become a matter of identity. These discourses can explain how the nuclear issue has been proposed in Iran's foreign relations, and how it has become popular inside Iran. Furthermore, they can explain the variances in Iran's nuclear policy over different periods.

According to Reisigl and Wodak (2009), discourse is viewed as a cluster of context-dependent semiotic units of social and communicative behaviour linked to argumentation about normative validity, such as the legitimation of social action – in this research, the legitimation of the Iranian nuclear programme in elite discourse. The behaviour of the states towards each other and their fears and ambitions effectively impact on their decisions. Although the states want to survive and deter each other from being more powerful and hegemonic, they also attempt to develop some level of cooperation. This means that any change in actors' behaviour is always possible and that idea of the self is shaped by the idea of the other. The political elites in Iran are those influential people who make strategic decisions and shape the country's political norms and values. That is the Iranian leaders' acts and speeches that determine their will in order to be a major regional power and the amount of trust they will give to the international community. Thus, it is within the political elites' capacity to elevate a particular problem to a level of general legitimacy (Perthes 2010).

In another debate on Iran's nuclear ambitions, Shahram Chubin (2010) discusses the U.S.-Iran relationship and the U.S.-West's fear of a nuclear Iran in the Middle East, as well as the inefficiency of threats, punishments and inducements, mostly following the June 12, 2009, presidential elections in Iran. Chubin argues about ambitions, regime identity and the function of threats, punishments and inducements. He expresses the efforts of the Iranian regime since the June 12, 2009 elections to legitimate its nuclear ambitions and to express itself as a regional power. Another priori coding for this research relates to the role of civilisation, respect and leadership in Iran's pre- and post-Islamic era. Iranians perceive themselves to be part of a nation with an ancient civilisation and expect to be respected as such. As a regional power, Iran's aspirations are to be respected, honoured and treated as a leading player in the region and the Islamic world. This claim for being honoured is supported by both the nation and the elites in Iran (Guldimann 2007). As Itty Abraham (1998) argues, it is extremely important for post-colonial decision makers/leaders not to be seen to lose autonomy over their nuclear programmes, for amongst all the other meanings signified by the development of a nuclear energy capability, universal modernity is one of the main reasons for bringing about prestige and respect (Haferkamp and Smelser 1992).

Another important aspect of this research lies in priori codes of distrust, victimisation, and rights of the nation. The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic has used two approaches. One was to consider the interests of the Islamic nations all over the world, and the other to consider the interests of the Iranian nation. There have always been fluctuations in the government's preferred foreign policy behaviour. The nuclear policies of Iran have also been challenging for the international community and a source of distrust. Unlike the different nuclear policies of compromise embedded in Khatami and Ahmadinejad's more radical nuclear behaviour, Iranian elites have not appeased the West's demand to halt their country's nuclear programme (Soltani and Amiri 2010).

3.8 Bias

There are two types of bias particularly relevant to this research: respondent bias and researcher bias. Forms of respondent bias amongst interview respondents for the research may "range from uncooperative behaviour and withholding information (for instance, because the respondent views the research as a threat or [as irrelevant]) to 'good bunny syndrome' in which interview respondents try to say what they feel the researcher wants to hear" (Tryfonos 2014, p. 79). Another bias comes from the researcher's perceptions, assumptions, or partiality, which may in some way affect how they behave in a research setting (Robson 2002). This can undermine the study's internal validity. From a theoretical perspective, an interpretive approach is not only useful in analysing the research data but also considers the position of the researcher and how these experiences affect the research process. In this research, my own status as an Iranian who was born during the Iran-Iraq war and felt the effects of war on the country, and also lived in Iran during most of the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the world powers, meant that I was touched by the impact of nuclear policies on the Iranian nation, something that has consequently affected the process of research.

The purpose of the interpretivist approach is to interpret the ideas and meanings of research participants or case studies in order to develop a hypothesis. However, as the constructivist approach is interpretative, the research hypothesis will be mostly dependent on the researcher's analysis. Therefore, both the researcher, the research case study and participants' viewpoints and understandings are influential in the research context (Charmaz 2006). However, research does not always involve

collecting data from participants. There are huge amounts of data that can be collected through secondary sources. While secondary data saves lots of time, money and other resources, there are certain ethical issues pertaining to secondary data analysis, which should be taken care of before handling them (Tripathy 2013). One of the issues concerning bias in secondary data analysis is whether the data is appropriately coded and whether the researcher has access to those codes. It is not possible to specify a specific procedure, which if followed will systematically eliminate bias. We need, therefore, to use social processes in a way that can keep research honest and fair and also enhance its quality (Norris 1997, p. 174). I used a number of different tactics to prevent the potential of serious bias. Firstly, I read through the data thoroughly to identify areas of overlap and difference, considering issues such as motivation, ambition, barriers, incentives and so on; this helped me to code my data, especially the elite speeches and the elite interviews. Secondly, I tried to verify the analysis by finding other sources of data in support of my interpretations in order to have more confidence in their legitimacy. My postgraduate training in research methods, and most importantly, my supervisors' unconditional support helped me to combine prolonged involvement in the research setting with an ongoing commitment to critical reflexivity. In particular, I acknowledged my own views on the subject matter, as a participant in the final round of nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (EU-3+3), and a researcher in identity politics and nuclear non-proliferation.

3.9 Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study lies in the use of primary and secondary data. For example, newspaper articles and speeches for the previous governments were not all online and neither did the majority of them exist in hard copy anymore. A further limitation was methodological: how the data was collected. Initially, the aim was to carry out far more interviews than the ones that were actually done, especially with more government officials. Over the time I conducted interviews—July 2014 to April 2016—discussions of national identity, while still very sensitive, were more flexible among Iranian officials. This was during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, following the signing of the interim nuclear agreement and the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), known as the Iran deal, between Iran and world powers. As the thesis will reveal, how national identity is dealt with in Iran has varied during different administrations, illustrating that it is a highly sensitive and politicised issue.

Nevertheless, the experience of face-to-face discussions on the issue of Iranian national identity with Iranian authors/scholars such as Hassan Makaremi,³ Mehrzad Boroujerdi,⁴ and Pirouz Mojtahedzadeh⁵ provided excellent insights. My cultural and language abilities enabled me to conduct such research more than adequately as I am a native researcher and familiar with the cultural and historical backgrounds of Iranian society. It is worth noting that these are limitations identified by the researcher; nevertheless, the researcher does not claim that they are the only limitations.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are the principles that help researchers find out what is morally justifiable. Ethics in research involves what is right or what is wrong, and then doing the right thing. Some scholars claim that good quality research is always an ethical piece of research (Spencer *et al.* 2003). According to Pera and Van Tonder (2005) ethics can be defined as “a code of behaviour considered correct”. It is significant for all researchers to be aware of research ethics. They are related to two groups of people; the researchers and the participants (Pera and Van Tonder 2005), whilst working with human participants, ethical requirements such as consent, confidentiality and trust arise (Speziale *et al.* 2011). Therefore, in order to address this issue, the research needs to be conducted with fairness and justice. Throughout my research, I always respected my participants and kept them informed of the results and findings of the study. I also reassured them that the obtained data would be kept in a safe place in order to maintain confidentiality, while the data might be used for further studies (Cohen *et al.* 2007). I received ethical approval for the research interviews from the University and all the interviews were conducted with informed consent.

3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out the methodology and methods I am going to use across the research and have argued that the most valid way to make use of discourses of national identity is to use discourse analysis for texts and speeches by political elites

³ Dr. Hassan Makaremi is a psychoanalyst, human rights activist, artist, calligrapher and author of “Sarzamin-e- Farhangi-e- Iran” [Iranian Cultural Land].

⁴ Dr. Mehrzad Boroujerdi is a Professor of Political Science at Syracuse University and author of “*Tarāshidam, Parastidam, Shekastam*” [I Carved, Worshiped and Shattered: Essays on Iranian Politics and Identity].

⁵ Dr. Pirouz Mojtahedzadeh is a prominent Iranologist, geopolitics researcher, historian and political scientist, as well as the author of “*Democrācy va Hoviyyat-e Irāni*” [Democracy and Iranian Identity].

and scholars. My approach to examining national identity conceptions in the case of nuclear behaviours consists of applying a theory of intersubjective identity through discourse analysis for texts, speeches and elite interviews. As a geopolitical issue, the Iranian nuclear programme has attracted a great deal of attention in domestic and international news media outlets. It has also been examined from a realist perspective; however, it has garnered very little attention in the way of academic studies focusing on the identity politics of the Iranian nuclear issue. Hence, discourse analysis addressing the impact of Iranian elites' conception of national identity and its influence on nuclear negotiations, will be of paramount importance in shedding some light on the constructivist approach taken towards nuclear behaviour in Iran.

In addressing identity politics, I have chosen to blend historical and political discourses in order to provide a clearer picture of the process of nuclear decision-making in Iran. Identity politics place greater importance on the role of culture, ideology and norms of Iranian nuclear behaviours than the other prevailing rational approaches. In order to conduct a discourse analysis of Iran's nuclear ambitions, I analysed elites' interviews, Iranian news media outlets, and elite speeches. The use of interpretive discourse for analysing identity politics enabled me to extract and interpret the data I needed to better understand the case and answer my research questions. The next chapter discusses various elements of Iranian national identity. The main discourses that have been identified for discussion include Persian identity, Shia Islamic identity, Revolutionary ideology, and modernity and technological advancement. The chapter goes on to examine Iran's nuclear narrative in the context of national identity.

Chapter 4. Historical Background of Iran's Nuclear Programme

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the methodological framework for demonstrating some valid ways of making use of discourses of national identity to explain Iran's nuclear ambitions. It did so by establishing that the discourse of national identity determines the ideological aspects used in constructing national identity components. This chapter examines the historical roots of Iranian national identity discourses in different entities within the political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nuclear power has an inherent paradox: it has unspeakably devastating power, and simultaneously, can lift countries into modernity. This generates a combination of fear and pride, which can be deeply held in the conceptions of a nation's identity; Hymans (2006) refers to it as a particularly explosive psychological cocktail. In this chapter, the ideational constitution of the nuclear policy of Iran throughout history is discussed in relation to its role within the norms and narratives of Iranian political elites. This chapter develops a history of Iran's nuclear policies from its outset – including nuclear negotiations and economic sanctions - and examines the process of nuclear policy-making in the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations. It thus shows the changing nature of nuclear policies based on different administrations' discourses of national identity and demonstrates their effect on nuclear negotiations.

At the beginning of the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the new government announced in a radio broadcast, "This is the voice of Tehran, the voice of the true Iran, the voice of the revolution" (Abrahamian 1982, p. 529). This indicated the new elements of the identity the new regime defined as the Islamic Republic of Iran, including elements of being Iranian, being Muslim and being revolutionary, which will be examined in the next chapter. The controversy over Iran's nuclear policies began challenging the West as soon as the Islamic Republic of Iran resumed its nuclear activities. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran halted all nuclear activities in Iran including research and development (R&D) and nuclear construction activities, then during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, Iran decided to resume its nuclear programme. The Iranian nuclear programme that had been supported and supplied mostly by the U.S. during the reign of the Shah no longer had a supporter. At this point, the U.S. blocked all other

countries' efforts to supply nuclear fuel cycles technology to Iran, including France, Germany, Argentina, Spain and Brazil. Therefore, Iran turned to China and Russia to aid its nuclear activities such as providing research reactors to the Isfahan Nuclear Technology Centre and completing the construction of the Bushehr power plant (Heinonen 2014).

This thesis argues that national identity conceptions have an important effect on Iran's nuclear decisions. Therefore, in order to understand the relationship between national identity conceptions and the nuclear choices made by Iranian policy-makers, it is necessary to examine the opaque structure and determinants of nuclear decision making, including the way backbreaking sanctions and UN resolutions have influenced Iran's nuclear policies. It is also important to pry open the process of nuclear negotiations from 2002 to 2015. The triad of identity, ideology, and interaction is central when explaining and analysing nuclear policies in Iran. Thus, the core purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the longevity of Iran's nuclear programme and to identify key periods or decisions where identity conception was a necessary part of the explanation. This will then be the main focus of the discourse analysis chapters.

This chapter firstly outlines the history of Iran's nuclear activities that go back to the Shah's reign from 1957 when for the first time Iran started building nuclear reactors with the help of the U.S. However, the main focus of the chapter will be on the nuclear activities of Iran after the Islamic revolution of 1979. The first part of the chapter describes the hierarchy of the Islamic Republic of Iran's political structure. It also explains which entities are influential in nuclear policies. It is important to fully understand the political structure of Iran in order to see how it contributes to the national and ideational nature of nuclear decision-making. The second part of the chapter elucidates the early history of Iran's nuclear programme that took place during the Pahlavi regime. Finally, the third part of the chapter focuses on a comprehensive history of Iran's nuclear programme following the Islamic revolution of 1979 until 2015 (when Iran and the P5+1 reached a nuclear agreement referred to as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on 14th July 2015). The chapter also covers the different dynamics of Iran's nuclear policies and its development

under various administrations, particularly the administrations of Presidents Ahmadinejad and Rouhani.

4.2 The Islamic Republic of Iran's Political Structure

As it is shown in the title, Iran is a republic. However, there are some differences between the Republic of Iran and other republics. The difference originates in the word 'Islamic' in the title. In order to know the key figures and institutions in the Iranian political system following the 1979 Islamic revolution, it is necessary to understand Iran's power structure. The Iranian political system is composed of its leadership, government and other key institutions. Guardianship of the Jurist is a theory in the Shiite political system that is legitimate in the absence of the twelfth Shiite Imam. The Islamic Republic of Iran was established on the basis of this theory (Feyrahi 2012). The Supreme Leader is the final arbiter and the backbone of the political system in Iran. He serves as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and declares the conditions of war and peace (Iran Project 2013). The Supreme Leader of Iran is also responsible for devising policies and supervising all three branches of the government. All major decisions that are related to the nuclear programme such as the signing of the IAEA Additional Protocol⁶, suspending uranium enrichment activities or suspending and keeping up with negotiations, require his approval (Tağma and Uzun 2012). Iran's government works according to the constitution and to Islam. In other words, the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran expresses cultural, social, political and economic institutions of Iranian society based on Islamic principles that reflect the desires of an Islamic nation (IPRC 1997).

Iran's government functions via three branches: the legislative, judiciary and executive powers. Iran's president is the second highest authority after the Supreme Leader, being the head of executive power. There are two governmental bodies that have legislative power: the Iranian parliament (Majlis) and the Guardian Council. All legislation must first be approved by the Majlis and then be ratified by the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council is a council within the Iranian constitution, which has the authority to interpret the constitution and determine if the laws passed by the parliament comply with the Iranian Constitution and conform to Islam. Iran's

⁶ The IAEA Additional Protocol is the protocol to a safeguarding agreement that provides additional tools for verification. In particular, it significantly increases the IAEA's ability to verify the peaceful use of all nuclear material in states with comprehensive safeguarding agreements (IAEA 1997).

judiciary is an independent branch within the government. The Supreme Leader appoints the head of Iran's judiciary for a period of five years. He, in turn, appoints the head of the Supreme Court and the chief public prosecutor. The Assembly of Experts within the Iranian political structure presides over supervising, dismissing and electing the Supreme Leader, according to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Expediency Discernment Council of the System is an establishment that was formed in 1998 as a consulting and resolving entity of Iran's government. It serves as a consultative body to the Supreme Leader and also helps to resolve differences or conflicts between the parliament and the Guardian Council. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was founded after the 1979 revolution to protect the regime against external and internal threats. The IRGC is the country's premier security institution and is distinct from the military. The military defends the country's borders, while the IRGC protects the Islamic regime (Hamshahri Newspaper 2009). The Supreme National Security Council of Iran was formed to safeguard Iranian national interests, preserve the Islamic Revolution of Iran, along with the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the country. The Iranian president is in charge of the Supreme National Security Council. The Supreme National Security Council formulates the country's nuclear policy. Nuclear policies formulated by the council become effective after the Supreme Leader's confirmation. The secretary of the Supreme Council was Iran's chief nuclear negotiator until 5th of September 2013. Then President Rouhani shifted responsibility for nuclear talks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sharafedin 2013).

4.3 History of Iran's Nuclear Activities

4.3.1 Pre-Revolution Period: 1953-1979

Iran's ambition for a nuclear programme is not a recent one. In fact, the desire to obtain nuclear power began in 1957, during the Shah's reign, when the United States provided Mohammad Reza Pahlavi with nuclear technology and Iran started developing a civil nuclear infrastructure. In general, Iran's main nuclear activities happened across two eras: the first being before the Islamic Revolution and the second after the Islamic Revolution, especially following the end of the eight-year war with Iraq. Iranian political rhetoric during the reign of the Shah gave Iran a mixed feeling about its relationship with history; a combination of pride in its [so called glorious] past and shame at its subjugations (the most recent one was just before

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi became the Shah of Iran, when Iran was occupied by Soviets and British during World War II) (Patrikarakos 2012). For Mohammad Reza Shah, the 1950s were a time of change, a time to turn Iran into a modern society. He wanted a more educated population, a more urbanised country and technological advancement. His dream at that time was a modern and technologically advanced Iran with nuclear-generated electricity. Modernity as a central component of Iranian identity has always been directly connected to its nuclear programme. The development of nuclear technology has made Iran a more advanced country in the region, and a greater power (Barzegar 2008a). By 1957, the U.S. found Iran to be stable enough to be trusted with nuclear technology. Under Eisenhower's 'Atoms for Peace' programme, Iran and the U.S. signed a bilateral agreement to cooperate in the peaceful use of nuclear technology (Ibid.). The equipment, provided by the U.S., included a five-megawatt (MW) light-water research reactor and laboratory equipment; all of which were installed at the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) at Tehran University (Shirazi 2015). This civil nuclear programme was established under the 1953 U.S. Atoms for Peace programme and the intention that the basic five-megawatt reactor was to be used for research so that the Iranian nuclear scientists could advance their knowledge and create a more elaborate nuclear infrastructure in the future.

In 1968, Iran signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and ratified it in 1970 to make Iran's nuclear programme subject to IAEA safeguards. In 1974 the Shah established the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) and along with Iran's scientists became more experienced. He announced he intended to free up Iran's oil and gas export, announcing a goal to produce a target of 23,000 megawatts of electrical power from a series of nuclear power stations within twenty years (World Nuclear Association 2016). In the meantime, the Shah started negotiating with other countries to build nuclear reactors in Iran. In addition to signing nuclear fuel contracts with the U.S., France and Germany, in 1975, the Shah also purchased Sweden's 10% share in Eurodif, a nuclear power plant that was being built in France as part of a joint French, Belgian, Spanish and Italian consortium. In April 1974, the U.S. State Department announced the United States' intention to cooperate with Iran in the field of nuclear energy, arguing that alternative means for energy production was a suitable

area for joint collaboration. However, the U.S. was supposed to build the majority of the reactors (Jahanpour 2006).

President Gerald Ford's administration supported Iranian plans to build a massive nuclear energy industry but also worked hard to complete a multibillion-dollar deal that would have given Tehran control of large quantities of plutonium and enriched uranium – the fissile materials used in nuclear weapons. In 1976, President Ford signed a contract with Tehran, which gave Iran the chance to buy and operate a U.S.-built reprocessing facility for extracting plutonium from spent nuclear reactor fuel. The deal was for a complete ‘nuclear fuel cycle’ with reactors powered by and regenerating fissile materials on a self-sustaining basis (Linzer 2005). By the end of 1978, Iran had acquired the knowledge and basis of civil nuclear technology, which was then developed in two centres in Bushehr; its result was the lessening of Iran’s dependence on oil (Patrikarakos 2012). In ‘*Mission for My Country*,’ the Shah said that atomic weapons were not in Iran’s interest or good for Iran’s peace and prosperity, he only wanted to master civilian nuclear technology (Pahlavi 1961). By the 1970s, France and Germany also joined the United States and provided assistance to the Iranian nuclear programme. This was so the Shah could explore alternative forms of power production. France's Framatome and Germany's Kraftwerk Union were the Western firms that by the mid-1970s had signed contracts with Iran to construct nuclear plants and supply nuclear fuel (Bruno 2010). In addition to the U.S., France and Germany, Iran also signed contracts with Canada, India and the UK in order to expand its nuclear energy (Rouhani 2012).

4.3.2 Post-Revolutionary Period

Iranian national identity has encountered great cultural challenges as it moved through its main social and cultural interpretations, namely Persian, Islamic and modern. As a result of these challenges, different social movements have occurred, the last one being the Islamic revolution of 1979 (Zahed 2005). The reinterpretation of national identity conceptions has led to the clash of cultural values and norms in both a domestic and global context. The context of Iran’s nuclear ambitions after the Islamic revolution changed: with the confrontation between Iran and the United States, and war between Iran and Iraq a year after the revolution. Iran’s anti-Western ideology toughened the confrontation between Iran and the West over Iran’s nuclear

programme. Two of the rallying mottos of Khomeini's 1979 revolution were *Āzādi* (Liberty), *Esteghlāl* (Independence) and *Velāyat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist). And it became important to be free and independent from the U.S. and its Western allies (Cohen 2006). This has been a very significant part of the Islamic Revolution's identity, as discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, ideology became central to the new Islamic Republic. Iran's anti-colonial and anti-Western sentiments, such as Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran and Iran's anti-Western aspirations were used to legitimise the Islamic revolutionary ideologies (Milani 2009). These sentiments have had a special place in Iran's policymaking for its civilian nuclear discourses, which as well are based on historical discursive and material changes.

4.3.3 The Period 1979-2002

As the next chapter will outline, Iranian national identity conceptions went through a huge transition, moving from an emphasis on Persian nationalism during the reign of the Shah to an emphasis on Shia Islamic identity with the advent of the Islamic Revolution, posited by the clerics of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Revolution leaders' point of view had a tremendous effect on political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of Iran's foreign policy decision-making. The Shah's efforts to modernise and secularise Iran were met with opposition from Shia clerics who condemned the Shah for his inclination towards U.S. imperialism (Hoveyda 2003). Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, framed Islam as the oppressed and the Shah and the U.S. as the oppressors, thus creating the ground for the Islamic Revolution (Maloney 2002). The notion of independence as an important means of resisting imperialism was central to the Islamic Revolution. The February 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran halted the nuclear programme for several years because its position towards the principles of the new regime was not clarified. Also, it bound Iran to the West from an economic and industrial perspective. At some point, political independence or independence from external interference became an aspirational way of realising Iranian manifest destiny as a great regional power. The acquisition of nuclear power was framed as one way to achieve it. The acquisition of nuclear power in Iran was historically not just about national security but tied to a sense of sovereignty and Iranian national identity conceptions, which have deep roots in Iranian history. Hence, Iran's president at the time, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who was initially opposed to the nuclear programme, came to the realisation that now that

the country had come so far, it was worth mastering the technology, despite its cost (Patrikarakos 2012). Whilst Iranians were discussing restarting the nuclear programme, Saddam Hussein declared war on Iran. The Iran-Iraq war, which began on 22 September 1980, caused significant damage to Iran's existing nuclear facilities at that time, with Iraq bombing Iran's under construction power reactors in Bushehr (Zargar 2001).

By the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, the world witnessed Iran's increasing isolation from the international community following the hostage crisis of 1980 and the West's support of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war. Therefore, Iran's quest for autonomy and independence appeared in a framework of victimisation⁷ (Patrikarakos 2012). In 1981, Iranian officials decided that Iran's nuclear development should continue. Iran's nuclear programme was revived during the presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the late 1980s when he signed an agreement with Russia on the peaceful utilisation of nuclear materials and related equipment. This contract was signed in July 1989 and ratified in April 1993 by the Iranian Parliament (Jahanpour 2006). According to Hassan Rouhani (2012), Iran's adherence to the NPT continued after the Islamic Revolution; however, the West suspended the implementation of their agreements and contracts, for example, building Bushehr power plant. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who served as Iran's President from August 1989 to August 1997 and the chairman of the Expediency Council, up until January 2017, was an influential driver of nuclear policy in Iran (Perkovich 2003). Rafsanjani, who was the chairman of Parliament in 1986, sent private messages to Iranian nuclear scientists who left the country during the revolution and asked them to come back to Iran and serve their country. He repeated his message again in 1988. At this point, nuclear energy had become a national and political matter for Iran. As Rafsanjani claimed, it was a matter of national service. He believed that Iran could only trust Iranians and they should cut their independence on foreign contractors. At this stage, Iran's nuclear programme turned into a patriotic goal where Iranians could show their strength to their adversaries. According to Jalal Āl-e Ahmad, in his book '*Gharbzadegi*' [Westoxification], it was necessary for Iranians to advocate for their own values and

⁷ For more information on this issue, refer to chapter 5, page 116 on Shia Islamic Identity.

culture and negotiate their rights to modernisation based on their own national and religious terms (Āl-e Ahmad 1962).

Iran decided to have its own indigenous nuclear programme, and identified Abdul Qadeer (AQ) Khan, a Pakistani nuclear physicist and metallurgical engineer, and the founder of the uranium enrichment programme for Pakistan's atomic bomb project (Smith and Warrick 2010). At this point, the Iranian leadership decided to buy all the required facilities on the black market, which was impossible without the help of AQ Khan's network (Montgomery 2005). From 1985, China also became involved in Iran's civil nuclear programme to train Iranian nuclear technicians (Patrikarakos 2012). In its search for technological advancement, Iran received depleted uranium from China in 1977. Laboratory and research work were undertaken to master uranium conversion at both the Tehran Nuclear Research Centre and the Isfahan Nuclear Technology Centre. Contrary to the provisions of its INFCIRC/153 comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA, Iran did not declare its activities to the Agency until 1993, then Iran halted its research and development (Amano 2004). In 1992 Iran invited IAEA inspectors to visit Iran's nuclear facilities and the IAEA report demonstrated that all activities observed were consistent with the peaceful use of nuclear energy under its safeguarding obligations (Wise 1992). Later, in September 1993, China reached an agreement to sell two 300MW Qinshan reactors under a project named '*Esteqlāl*' to the facility of Darkhovin, located south of the city of Ahvaz. Thus China provided Iran with an HT-6B Tokamak fusion reactor that is now installed at the Plasma Physics Research Centre of Azad University (Toukan and Cordesman 2010).

Iran also asked Russia for help in developing heavy water reactors (Jahanpour 2006). It is worth mentioning that from the beginning of the 1990s, Russia had formed a joint research organisation with Iran called 'Persepolis' which equipped Iran with Russian nuclear experts and technical information (Lunev 1998). The United States cut off Iran's supply of highly enriched uranium (HEU) following the 1979 Revolution, but Argentina signed an agreement with Iran in 1987-88 to convert the Tehran Nuclear Research Center from producing highly enriched uranium to producing low-enriched uranium, and also to supply low-enriched uranium to Iran. They delivered the uranium to Iran in 1993 (Barletta and Ellington 1998). But later in a report released in

2006, Argentina claimed that despite the pressure from the U.S., to terminate any nuclear cooperation with Iran, from 1992 to 1994, they entered into negotiations to re-establish their 1987-88 agreements (Porter 2006). After Germany refused to resume the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, Russia confirmed they would help Iran to build the nuclear power plant in Bushehr. In August 1992, Iranian and Russian governments signed an agreement to build a two-unit nuclear power plant. This agreement covered both the construction and operation of the plant. The Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) insisted that all the structures and facilities that were already in the Bushehr plant should be used in the project. Therefore, in 1994, Russia's Minatom agreed with AEOI to complete unit 1 of the Bushehr nuclear power plant with a VVER-1000 unit, mostly using the existing infrastructure (World Nuclear Association 2016).

Despite Iran's desperate need to cooperate with suitable countries and revive its nuclear programme, there were two determinant conditions: the countries should have sufficient nuclear know-how and they should be able and want to stand against the U.S. (Patrikarakos 2012). As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, for Iran, the policy of resistance is a significant trope, popular among both politicians and people (Holliday 2013). It is important for Iranian officials and the majority of the population to have a civil nuclear programme (Hadian and Hormozi 2010). The policy of more sanctions, intimidation, and pressure is considered counterproductive, for it would not stop Iran from developing its civilian nuclear technology (Abdo 2012). When Iran's civil nuclear programme found new partners and got back on track following the Rafsanjani presidency, the international community suspected that Iran might be seeking to develop nuclear weapons (Patrikarakos 2012). In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war, Rafsanjani stated that war taught us that international laws are only scraps of paper. Opposing President Khatami's policy of détente, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Yahya Rahim Safavi, asserted that Iran was unable to withstand the threats and domineering attitude of the U.S. in the region with a policy of détente. At that point, diplomatic confrontation over the Iranian nuclear program began (Simbar *et al.* 2017). In August 2002, Alireza Jafarzadeh, a member of the exiled opposition group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, reported the existence of two nuclear sites under construction: a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy water plant at Arak (Kerr 2005). According to Article IV of the

nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), these activities are legal and part of the inalienable rights of all state parties to the treaty. However, Iran had signed a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA in 1974 obliging them to report the planned development of uranium enrichment and heavy water production facilities. Therefore, the revealing of these two covert nuclear sites had not been reported to the IAEA (though Iran argues they only needed to be reported shortly before they would become operational) by Jafarzadeh intensified the confrontation over Tehran's nuclear intentions and a major crisis thus began (Patrikarakos 2012).

4.3.4 The Period 2003 to 2015

(i) History of Negotiations and UNSC Resolutions regarding Iran's Nuclear Programme

In May 2003, shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the government of Mohammad Khatami confidentially offered an IAEA inspection of Iran's nuclear programme. Tehran offered the inspection in exchange for security assurances from the United States and normalisation of diplomatic relations. State Department counterterrorism expert Flynt Leverett called the proposal a *respectable effort* to start negotiations with the U.S. But the U.S. rejected the proposal without even responding to the Iranians or discussing the proposal's possible merits. Larry Wilkerson, Secretary of State, Colin Powell's chief of staff, referred to the proposal as a significant offer for starting 'meaningful talks' between the U.S. and Iran. However, Vice President, Dick Cheney, who had a strong influence on President Bush did not see it as a starter for normalising relations, claiming that '*We don't talk to evil*' in the post-9/11 context (Leverett *et al.* 2007). Immediately after the revelation of the two hidden sites in Natanz and Arak, the IAEA asked for access to them. IAEA inspectors visited these sites in February 2003 and June 2003, the IAEA report declaring that Tehran had failed to comply with the IAEA safeguarding agreement to report nuclear material, facilities, and activities as required by the safeguarding obligations required under the NPT. This is to ensure that NPT member states do not seek to divert civilian nuclear programmes into weapons programmes (Kerr 2003).

The story of the secrecy about the two nuclear sites was that as part of the safeguarding agreement, it was not obligatory for the agency to be notified about the

existence of the Natanz facility until 180 days prior to introducing nuclear material into it. At that stage, Iran was still far from introducing nuclear material to the Natanz facility, but the story told by the MEK and the West portrayed Iran's intentions for Natanz as evidence that nuclear weapons were being produced clandestinely (Porter 2014a). Still, for many, the question remains that if Iran did not intend to build nuclear weapons, then why did it choose to keep the Natanz facility secret? As Gareth Porter (Ibid.) has argued, the reason for Iran's secrecy was linked to firstly, U.S. political and diplomatic interventions to stop Iran from having an indigenous and peaceful uranium enrichment programme, and secondly, the 1990s threats from Israel to attack Iranian nuclear facilities. All parties to the conflict agreed to work through the IAEA, however, the U.S, UK, France, and Germany focused on Iran's decision to enrich uranium or suspend it. In spite of differences of opinion, the IAEA Board of Governors agreed to refer Iran to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Mazzucelli 2007). Negotiations with the EU-3 (the UK, Germany and France) regarding Iran's nuclear programme commenced in early 2003, shortly after the two nuclear sites in Natanz and Arak were revealed to the public (Singh 2013). Thus, several proposals and diplomatic initiatives were developed in order to resolve concerns over Iran's nuclear programme and build mutual confidence between Iran and the international community (Davenport 2014).

Since 2003, one can observe two levels of negotiations taking place regarding Iran's nuclear programme – with IAEA inspectors at the IAEA Board of Governors in Vienna, as well as with the EU-3 Foreign Ministers and EU High Representative. Iran-EU-3's first meeting, which has been held at the Sa'dabad Palace, Iran, on 21 October 2003, was a meeting including EU-3 ministers and Iran's top negotiator, Hassan Rouhani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council at the time. Iran told the EU-3 that they would suspend all their nuclear enrichment activities (Kharrazi *et al.* 2003). Thus, the Tehran Agreement was reached as a result of talks between France, Germany and the UK with the support of the EU High Representative and Iran, concerning the Iranian nuclear issue. Then, the government of Iran and EU-3 decided to move beyond the Tehran Agreement and rapidly work towards a solid long-term agreement with the support of the EU High Representative (Solana 2004). Because of the tense relations between Iran and the U.S. following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Tehran and Washington had never had any direct

talks over sensitive issues. Thus, when Iran's nuclear programme, specifically its uranium enrichment programme, became an issue of utmost concern, the EU-3 (including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) started negotiations with Iran (Ingram 2005). The EU-3's concern arose from the possibility of Iran's uranium enrichment programme could have dual-uses, for both the production of low-enriched uranium for nuclear fuel for civilian energy generation and the production of weapons-grade highly enriched uranium for use in nuclear warheads. In October 2003, during the three EU ministers' trip to Iran to negotiate with Iran, Tehran announced to the EU-3 that they would suspend their uranium enrichment activities in what is referred to as the Tehran Agreement. In December 2003, Iran signed an agreement to allow IAEA unannounced inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities (Jahanpour 2006). This was a sensitive period for Iran: whilst Iran was not ready for a confrontation with the international community, they also didn't want to give up all their efforts and advantages of the nuclear programme. In order to turn the threats into opportunities, Tehran only accepted suspending its uranium enrichment activities temporarily and voluntarily for the negotiations and to build mutual trust. This was a victory for Iran in preserving its national pride (Patrikarakos 2012). The Tehran Agreement although was only the start, but it contributed to national pride and prestige and brought about a common ground for all political factions in Iran (Posch 2005).

Despite the development of Iran's uranium enrichment activities and the U.S. pressure calling for military action and potentially regime-change, the EU continued negotiations with Iran. On 14 November 2004, the EU-3/EU and Iran representatives had a meeting in Paris referred to as the 'Paris Agreement'; here, Iran notified the IAEA of ceasing uranium-enrichment activities during the EU-Iran negotiations and strongly reaffirmed that they were not seeking to build nuclear weapons and would show transparency in their dealings with the IAEA. In exchange, the EU-3 agreed to go ahead with the negotiations to reach a long-term agreement on Iran's enrichment programme (Sinha 2005). The negotiations between Iran and the EU-3 were ongoing and in 2004 they tried to convince Iran to suspend its enrichment activities permanently in exchange for some economic and technological incentives. However, Iranians were not satisfied with this offer. Even in the seventh Majlis on 28 September 2005, the conservatives who were the majority passed a bill to resume

enrichment activities (Vahedi Raad 2013). On 17 January 2005, Iran offered a proposal to the EU-3, consisting of a commitment not to produce weapons of mass destruction, and to cooperate in anti-terrorism activities. In March and April 2005, Iran attended to some negotiations regarding the January proposal and concentrated more on short-term confidence-building measures. But in August 2005, the EU-3 presented a comprehensive proposal focused on a long-term agreement. This proposal consisted of the following items:

- An assured supply of low enriched uranium for light water reactors built in Iran;
- Iran's legal commitment not to withdraw from the NPT;
- Iran to return spent nuclear fuel to supplier countries;
- Iran to be a long-term source of fossil fuel energy for the EU;
- The mutual cooperation of Iran and the EU in different security areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorism, and drug trafficking.

But Iran rejected this proposal and claimed the proposal did not recognise Iran's right to enrichment (Davenport 2014). In February 2005, the Iranian President at the time, Mohammad Khatami, announced that no Iranian government would give up its nuclear technology programmes (Amanpour 2013). In several negotiations in Paris, London and Geneva in 2005, Iranians proposed to resume uranium enrichment and in exchange, let the IAEA inspectors conduct additional safeguarding inspections (Langenbach 2005). The EU-3 did not accept the offer. Meanwhile, on 30 May 2005, Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. Secretary of State, talked to John Bolton, Washington's UN Ambassador at that time, indicating that the U.S. was ready to participate in negotiations and talk to Iran directly. However, their condition for negotiations was that Iran suspended its uranium enrichment programme. Additionally, as it was very close to Iran's 2005 presidential elections, the U.S. and EU-3 preferred to continue negotiations after these had taken place (Patrikarakos 2012).

(ii) Ahmadinejad's Rise to Power

In June 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tehran's mayor, won the presidential election. His populist election campaign was based on Islamic and revolutionary principles. As Patrikarakos (2012) stated, Ahmadinejad, unlike Rafsanjani and Khatami, his predecessors, showed his opposition to the restoration of Iran-U.S. relations. He also

defended the nuclear programme as an inalienable right of the Iranian nation and declared that arrogant powers were seeking to keep Iran from technological advancement. According to Anoushiravan Ehteshami (2010), Ahmadinejad's first presidential term started with a nuclear crisis. In his last executive act in July 2005, the reformist president Mohammad Khatami ended Iran's voluntary suspension of uranium enrichment activities. Ahmadinejad rejected any compromise with the IAEA, which in September 2005 issued a resolution of noncompliance on Iran, with the Ahmadinejad administration calling the resolution illegal and illogical (Dombey and Smyth 2005). In his address to the UN General Assembly on 17 September 2005, Ahmadinejad stated "How can one talk about human rights and at the same time blatantly deny many the inalienable right to have access to science and technology with applications in medicine, industry and energy and through force and intimidation hinder their progress and development?" (Ahmadinejad 2005a p. 5)? Thus, after the June 2005 elections and the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran put an end to the suspension of uranium enrichment and asked the IAEA to remove the seals on its uranium enrichment equipment in Isfahan, saying it had resumed uranium conversion at this plant (Traynor 2005).

In September 2005, Mohamed El Baradei, who was then the IAEA Director General confirmed the existence of this uranium conversion at the Isfahan Plant (Jahanpour 2006). The EU-3 and Iran's negotiations led to confidence building and Iran was supposed to suspend its enrichment activities temporarily. But this rapprochement did not last long and Ahmadinejad called it an insult to the Iranian nation (Payvand News 2005). In September 2005, the new Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, declared in a speech to the United Nations that Iran was prepared to transfer its nuclear know-how to other Muslim countries and also suggested that an international consortium could manage Iran's uranium enrichment, with Iran sharing ownership with other countries. But the EU and the United States rejected this offer immediately (Osborne 2013). Despite the IAEA's report on Iran's failure to meet its obligations with the NPT during its negotiations with EU-3, Iran was obliged to let the IAEA know about all Iran's enrichment activities and permit them to inspect the nuclear sites (Sinha 2005). But Iran denied its promise to allow the IAEA to carry out inspections and resumed its uranium enrichment activities in October 2005 (Haeri 2005). In January 2006, Iran announced they had developed the necessary machinery

to separate uranium from its ore. Later that month, it was reported that Iran removed the IAEA seals at the Natanz uranium enrichment plant and resumed their research on nuclear fuel under IAEA supervision.

The West was not satisfied with Iran's renewed uranium enrichment research and activities on the basis that it could endanger all efforts to reach a compromise (Jahanpour, 2006). On 12 January 2006, the EU-3 foreign ministers held a meeting in Berlin and stated their concerns about the resumption of uranium enrichment by Iran. They claimed it was time for the Iranian nuclear dossier to be referred to the UN Security Council. In their response, Iran stated that their nuclear research activities were based on Article III of the Statute of the IAEA, Article IV of the NPT and its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA. Thus, what was resumed after two years of a voluntary suspension was an integral part of the inalienable rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran as an NPT member. Iran stated that stopping negotiations with Iran and holding a special meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors and any other threatening method would not help resolve the issue, but instead undermine diplomatic processes that should be based on mutual understanding and cooperation (Gharib Abadi 2008). On 4 February 2006, the IAEA Board of Governors decided to report the Iran case to the UNSC, and Iran stopped implementing the Additional Protocol, which it had by then signed and implemented. Tehran's reaction caused an enormous downgrade in the inspection and verification capability of the IAEA (Kubbig 2006). In March 2006, the IAEA Board of Governors called on Iran's understanding that there was a lack of confidence in Tehran's intentions to develop a fissile material production capability, and asked Iran to reconsider its position in relation to confidence-building measures, which were voluntary and non-legally binding, in order to adopt a constructive approach with regard to negotiations. The IAEA Board of Governors asked the Director General to continue with his efforts to implement the Agency's Safeguards Agreement with Iran and also implement the Additional Protocol to that Agreement in pursuit of additional transparency measures. When Iran did not accept the suspension of its enrichment activities, on 4 February 2006, EU-3 and the U.S. held a special meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors and voted to report Iran to the UN Security Council (IAEA 2006).

Announcing the United States National Security Strategy on 16 March 2006, President George W. Bush referred to the proliferation of nuclear weapons as the greatest threat to U.S. national security (Bush 2006). Following President Bush's speech, on 17 April 2006, journalist Seymour Hersh (2006) stated that the United States was planning a military attack on Iran's main nuclear enrichment facilities. On 11 April 2006, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared in a large, carefully staged and nationally televised celebration in Mashhad, that Iran had successfully enriched uranium to 3.5%. He officially announced that Iran had joined the world's nuclear nations. Later in April 2006, ElBaradei asserted in his report that there was no sign of military use in Iran's nuclear activities as the IAEA inspectors investigated the nuclear facilities, however, Iran should cooperate more with the IAEA and be committed to greater transparency (Jahanpour 2006). Later that year, when the report on Iran's non-compliance had been reported to the UN Security Council (UNSC), with Russia and China opposing sanctions to the UNSC, the United States agreed to join the other four permanent members of the Security Council and negotiations from the EU-3 level shifted to P5+1 (or EU-3+3: including three European members, UK, France and Germany plus the U.S., Russia and China, all as five permanent members of the UNSC plus Germany) (Squassoni 2006). Despite the option of a military attack on Iran's nuclear enrichment and centrifuge plant facilities, on 3 May 2006, while President Bush and German Chancellor Angela Merkel discussed Iran's nuclear programme in Washington, Angela Merkel stressed that settling Iran's nuclear issue required patient and step-by-step diplomacy (Amuzegar 2006). On 2 May 2006, the representatives of the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) had a negotiation in Paris to discuss Iran's nuclear programme but did not reach an agreement. This was because Russia and China rejected a draft resolution prepared by the United States, Britain and France to force Iran to suspend all uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities.

The nuclear quagmire with Iran exemplified resistance as well as religious fundamentalism. Resistance to the American threat motivated Iranians to continue their nuclear programme (Sinha 2005). Beyond the concepts of independence, self-reliance and social justice, resistance to the American intervention has become a very important reason for Iran to seek modernising technology following the birth of the Islamic Republic. Continuing the nuclear programme has reflected this basic purpose.

The presence of American military power in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, particularly after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, has been a threat to Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. When Iran's negotiations with Britain, France and Germany (EU-3) proved unproductive and developed into mutual suspicion, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was supported by the Supreme Leader to resume the enriching of uranium (Chubin 2010b). On 6 June 2006, the EU High Representative Javier Solana went to Tehran to talk about the P5+1 incentive package and convince Iran to cease all its nuclear enrichment activities. The alleged package involved both carrots and sticks for Iran regarding what specific decision Iranians should make (Jahanpour 2006). At that time Iran, which was prepared to suspend its uranium enrichment activities in exchange for the non-referral of Iran's case to the Security Council, was not happy with the results. Hassan Rouhani, the chief nuclear negotiator and National Security Advisor to the former President Khatami sent a report to the president in mid-June, arguing for Iran's nuclear programme as an indigenous project coming from its people and belonging to the people. And because it of this national link, no power could take it away from the Iranian nation (Rouhani 2005).

In June 2006, the U.S. offered direct, bilateral talks with Iranians for the first time after the Islamic Revolution. But they had a precondition for talks and it was for Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment. Iranians were ready to accept direct talks with America, however, this precondition was not accepted (Ghassemi 2016). It was during Ali Larijani's responsibility as a chief nuclear negotiator that the IAEA determined that Iran's failures and breaches of its obligations to comply with its IAEA Safeguards Agreement constituted an instance of noncompliance. In September 2005, the Agency enacted a resolution against Iran, emphasising that Iran's actions have given rise to questions within the competence of the UN Security Council (IAEA 2005). Then in a meeting in Paris, ahead of the Group of Eight summits in St. Petersburg on 12 July 2006, Foreign Ministers of the P5+1 agreed to refer Iran's file back to the Security Council. This led to Resolution 1696, under Article 40 of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations by the UN Security Council on 31 July 2006, and a demand that Iran suspends all enrichment and reprocessing-related activities (UNSC 2006a).

President Ahmadinejad appointed Ali Larijani as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and chief nuclear negotiator, replacing Rouhani. According to the International Crisis Group (2005), Rouhani's nuclear-negotiating team were concerned with the nuclear fuel cycle as well as preventing Iran's nuclear dossier's referral to the UN Security Council, while Larijani's team were only concerned with the fuel cycle. In his first UN General Assembly speech, Ahmadinejad blamed Western powers for not recognising the inalienable rights of countries to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes and not allowing developing countries who are NPT member states to develop their nuclear technology for medical, pharmaceutical, agricultural and energy purposes, instead tasking them with the false excuse of pursuing nuclear weapons (Ahmadinejad 2005b). Two months of tough negotiation on the suspension of Iran's nuclear enrichment activities took place, then Iran announced that it was ready to discuss suspension though it would not accept it as a precondition. On 23 December 2006, the UN Security Council unanimously approved resolution 1737. By imposing new sanctions, this resolution attempted to convince Iran to cease its uranium enrichment, resume negotiations and clarify the purpose of its nuclear enrichment activities. According to this resolution, no country is permitted to supply nuclear-related material and technology to Iran. It also froze the assets of 10 key Iranian companies and 12 individuals related to uranium enrichment activities (UNSC 2006b). Iran's UN Ambassador at that time, Javad Zarif, denounced the UN Security Council for imposing sanctions on Iran, while they stayed silent about Israel who had been confirmed as a nuclear power. Therefore, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that this resolution was illegal and unjustifiable and stressed that Iran would continue its uranium enrichment programme under the supervision of the IAEA (Jahanpour 2006). In order to impose further and stricter sanctions on Iran, on 24 March 2007, the UN Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1747. According to this resolution, the UN Security Council prohibited Iran from exporting weapons and froze the assets of 15 additional individuals and 13 organisations involved in Iran's nuclear programme and connected to the Revolutionary Guards. The IAEA was also obliged to report the suspension of Iran's nuclear enrichment activities within 60 days. The Iranian Foreign Minister at the time, Manouchehr Mottaki, called the sanctions invalid and ineffective, emphasising that pressure and intimidation will not change Iranian policy (Shanker 2007).

In April 2007 and for the anniversary of the nuclear enrichment, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that Iran was able to enrich uranium on an industrial scale and for peaceful purposes. In August 2007 and following talks between Iran and the UN nuclear agency, they stated their satisfaction of the progress in talks and later in August, the IAEA announced Iran was proving cooperative and transparent in their enrichment activities. In November 2007, the P5+1 held a meeting in London to discuss reinforcing sanctions on Iran, but could not reach an agreement. On 15 November 2007, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, circulated his report on Iran, announcing the country was cooperative and there had been developments in their inspection processes; however, he acknowledged the difficulty of making a definite conclusion on their nuclear activities all being peaceful and not for military purposes. In November 2007, the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) report on Iran's nuclear capabilities stated the following: "We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons programme; we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons." "We assess with high confidence that until fall 2003, Iranian military entities were working under government direction to develop nuclear weapons." "We judge with moderate confidence that the earliest possible date Iran would be technically capable of producing enough HEU for a weapon is late 2009, but that this is very unlikely." "We judge with moderate confidence Iran probably would be technically capable of producing enough HEU for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 time frame." (INR judged Iran unlikely to achieve this capability before 2013 because of foreseeable technical and programmatic problems.) "All agencies recognise the possibility that this capability may not be attained until after 2015" (NIE 2007, pp. 6, 7).

Iran's new chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili and Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, met in London on 30 November 2007. While Solana expressed disappointment regarding the talks, Jalili claimed the talks were positive. On 1 December 2007, the members of P5+1 met in Paris to discuss a more punitive UNSC resolution against Iran but were not successful in reaching an agreement. There were concerns that Iran might get some advantage from the doubts expressed in the November 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate, which judged *with high confidence* that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program but was

keeping open the option of resuming that programme. The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) analysis supported EU-3's perspective on Iran's nuclear programme that Tehran was not imminently pursuing a nuclear weapons programme. However, there was a fear among European countries and the U.S. that the report could undermine their efforts to gain UN Security Council approval for the third round of sanctions in late 2007. EU-3 members, especially France, argued that the NIE report would not affect the P5+1 decision for further sanctions on Iran, because Iran remained in non-compliance with Security Council demands. As it turned out, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1803 and the third round of sanctions was implemented against Iran (Meier 2013). In March 2008, P5+1 agreed to make some changes in the package offered in June 2006 to show the advantages of this proposal to Iran. This agreement coincided with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1803, the third UN sanctions resolution on Iran which extended previous sanctions to additional persons and entities (UNSC 2008). Before official submission of the package to Iran, Iranians proposed their own issues in order for more comprehensive and cooperative negotiations, but their proposal lacked sufficient requirements to remove concerns regarding Iran's nuclear programme (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran 2008). The P5+1 group, except the U.S., met the Iranian delegation in June 2008 in Tehran and talked about their package. Then the Iranian delegation and the P5+1 including the U.S. had a meeting in Geneva in July 2008. Iran expressed its proposal for the negotiation process and asserted that discussions should be based on Iran and the P5+1 proposal package.

In 2008, Senator Barack Obama from Illinois won the U.S. presidential election. His approach towards Iran was very different from President Bush. He preferred to change American Iran policy from conflict to engagement (Abdi 2011). Following the 2008 U.S. presidential election, President Barack Obama began looking to take milder measures towards Iran, while P5+1 sought to resume their negotiations with Iran (Dehghani Firoozabadi 2011). Obama sought to abandon the previous U.S. policy that had a precondition for negotiations. The precondition required Iran to fulfil UN Security Council demands to suspend its nuclear fuel cycle activities. As it turned out, P5+1 issued a statement in June 2008 which welcomed the new direction of U.S. policy towards Iran and formally invited Iran to negotiations with no conditions this time (Davenport 2014). It is worth mentioning a brief comparison of Donald Trump's

policy towards Iran's nuclear programme comparing how both Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama dealt with the same issue. Despite George W. Bush and Barack Obama's differences in dealing with Iran's nuclear programme, under both the Presidents, the U.S. worked closely with its allies like the UK and France as well as other world powers. They aimed at increasing pressure on Tehran to get it to come to the negotiating table (Mousavian and Mousavian 2018). In contrast, President Donald Trump and the majority of his Republican supporters criticised the Iran Deal and described it as the worst deal ever. Later on 8 May 2018, Trump withdrew from Iran Deal and on 5 November 2018, the U.S. reimposed severe economic sanctions on Iran that the U.S. administration referred to them as 'the toughest sanctions regime ever imposed' on Tehran (Landler 2018).

Referring back to the P5+1's formal invitation for Iran to partake in nuclear negotiations, Iran provided a new proposal in August 2008, but like the previous one, the new proposal did not contain a specific section regarding Iran's nuclear programme and uranium enrichment process, which was a matter of concern for the international community (Kerr 2012). The Iranian nuclear programme played an important role in the traditional debate in the 2009 Iran presidential elections. On 12 June 2009, Ahmadinejad won the election for a second term. His victory in the election was accompanied by vast protests in Iran, with people saying the election results were not true and accusing the government of cheating in the elections. The Iranian regime contained the protesters, while also offering a new package to P5+1; this included global nuclear disarmament, but nothing specific about Iran's nuclear case (Patrikarakos 2012). In June 2009, Iran informed the IAEA that they wanted to refuel the Tehran (five-megawatt) Research Reactor (TRR) for the purpose of producing medical isotopes and they needed assistance. On 21 September 2009, Iran informed the IAEA about the construction of a second enrichment facility at Fordow, twenty-six miles north of Qom (IAEA 2009). In October 2009, Hugo Chávez admitted that Iran and Russia were helping Venezuela with its uranium exploration (Padgett 2009). On 1 October 2009, the P5+1 talks with Iran happened in Geneva and the world powers offered a package of economic benefits to Iran in exchange for a temporary full suspension of its uranium enrichment. Here for the first time, a bilateral talk occurred between the Iranian chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, and the U.S. Under Secretary of State, William Burns (Parsi and Rydqvist 2011). This was

a great opportunity for Ahmadinejad to ease the tensions that had carried on after the elections and reach a deal with the ‘Great Satan’. However, internal politics in Iran did not allow him to do so. Even some of his critics who were supporting a deal (including Rafsanjani, Rezaei and Mousavi), started to accuse him of being a Western puppet (EA World View 2009).

Later in 2009, Iranian nuclear scientists who were working at Natanz realised that the centrifuges were spinning too fast and had started destroying themselves. This happened while their operation was shown as normal in the monitoring systems. This was as a result of putting a computer malware virus into the Natanz computer system, the AEOI head, Ali Akbar Salehi, confirmed on 23 November 2010. The virus called ‘*Stuxnet*’ had been programmed to destroy the centrifuges at Natanz. Stuxnet couldn’t destroy all of the centrifuges, but it did cause a delay in Iran’s enrichment process (Broad *et al.* 2011). The Stuxnet crisis couldn’t stop Ahmadinejad’s defiance policy and Iran continued its enrichment activities and moved onwards the enrichment of uranium of up to 20 per cent (Broad and Sanger 2010). In the spring of 2010, Brazil and Turkey carried out a diplomatic initiative to supply the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) with fuel (Davenport 2014). This initiative led to the 17 May 2010 Tehran Declaration between Presidents Lula da Silva, Erdogan, and Ahmadinejad who agreed on several issues including their commitment to the NPT and the supplying of fuel for TPR. They also mentioned that this nuclear fuel exchange was a positive method for confidence-building and would lead to further cooperation among nations (Borger 2010a).

On 11 February 2010, the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, President Ahmadinejad announced that Iran had successfully produced 20 per cent enriched uranium. This was Iran’s response to the stalemate in delivering enriched uranium for Tehran’s research reactor due to produce medical isotopes (Oelrich and Barzashka 2010). France, Russia, and the United States rejected the Tehran Declaration that was to reaffirm Iran’s commitment to the NPT (Borger 2010a), as they had objections regarding lack of mentioning its 20 per cent uranium enrichment. Thus, they sent a letter on June 9 to the new IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano (Erdbrink and Kessler 2010). On 23 August 2010, Ettelāat newspaper, which is a hardline media outlet in Iran, published an article and informed the Iranian nation on behalf of its

leaders about injecting uranium to Bushehr power plant. The article quoted “the heart of Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant entered the refuelling session. We all know that it would be possible to succeed, and Iranians are a nation that can spell the verb every day to embark on the flourishing beliefs of a nation that refuses to accept any despots (Ettelāāt Newspaper 2010).” Also, Ali Akbar Salehi, head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organisation said: “the Bushehr power plant is a symbol of patience, resistance and stability of the Iranian nation to achieve their aspirations (Ibid.).” From 2010 to 2012, four Iranian nuclear scientists, Masoud Alimohammadi, Majid Shahriari, Darioush Rezaeinejad and Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, were killed (Hasan 2012) and Tehran accused Israel of assassinating them. Although Israel did not comment on this case publicly, Moshe Ya'alon, the Israeli Defence Minister, claimed that Israel would not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran and as an act of self-defence would act in any way to stop Iran from building a nuclear bomb (Cowell and Gladstone 2012).

During a speech in Washington on 12 July 2011, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov proposed a solution to implement the P5+1’s proposed incentives package. The package included four steps: 1) Iran limits its uranium enrichment to the Natanz plant and does not install more centrifuges, 2) Iran agrees to provide the IAEA with early design information, 3) Iran implements the Additional Protocol and instead, P5+1 suspends UN sanctions gradually, and 4) in the final stage, Iran suspends its uranium enrichment activities for three months and P5+1 lifts sanctions on Iran’s nuclear programme (Davenport 2014). In April 2012, P5+1 and Iran resumed diplomatic negotiations in Istanbul. There were two more rounds of negotiations on May 23-24 2012 in Baghdad, and June 18-19 in Moscow. In the Istanbul negotiations, the parties decided to consider the mutual benefits and adopt a step-by-step process (Kerr 2012). These talks did not have a significant practical influence on resolving Iran’s nuclear issue, however, the fact that they resumed at all was very important (Moran and Hobbs 2012). On 26 February 2013, Iran and P5+1 renewed their negotiations in Almaty, Kazakhstan, with P5+1 offering an updated proposal, which was mostly based on the 2012 package. The second round of negotiations between Iran and P5+1 was held again in Almaty on 5-6 April 2013.

From Ahmadinejad’s perspective, his strategy in rejecting the IAEA resolution and declaring it illegal and illogical proved successful, however, the Iranian regime and

society had to pay a high price for his decision (Ehteshami 2010). Ahmadinejad referred to the U.S. and UNSC sanctions against Iran as a great opportunity, allowing Tehran to present its nuclear programme to the Iranian people, the region and the international community as a legitimate symbol of national scientific and technological progress. He emphasised not only the ineffective nature of the sanctions, but the fact of them increasing Iran's regional power, leading Iranians to pursue regional leadership ambitions and showing tough resistance toward Western arrogance (Borszik 2014). Vulgarly, Ahmadinejad said that Iran '*does not give a damn*' about UNSC resolutions, calling them '*pieces of torn paper*' (Ahmadinejad 2005). When the IAEA reported Iran's nuclear dossier to the UNSC in February 2006, Ahmadinejad invented a new phrase '*scientific and nuclear apartheid*' to address the West's hostility towards Iran (Ahmadinejad 2006a). Ahmadinejad condemned the IAEA for being influenced by countries already possessing nuclear weapons. The IAEA could not find any sign of an atomic bomb programme in their investigations of the nuclear facilities in Iran. However, the U.S. still tried to prevent Iran from a peaceful nuclear programme and in so doing, as Nikoo and Sovailami (2017) put it, blemished Iranian national pride.

(iii) Changing of the Guard: Rouhani's Presidency

Hassan Rouhani won the Islamic republic's presidential election on 15 June 2013 after campaigning using the slogan '*hope and prudence*' (Bozorgmehr and Martinez 2013). Rouhani stated that his victory was the victory of wisdom, moderation, growth and awareness, a victory of commitment and religiosity over extremism and ill-temper (Rouhani 2013a). Domestic politics played a prominent role in Iran's decision making and its drive to cooperate with the international community. Rouhani's election in 2013, which was an indication of the empowerment of moderates in Iran, was a sign of this. One of the issues of the moderates' campaign was endorsing an agreement with P5+1 over Iran's nuclear programme (Stein 2015). In September 2013, Foreign Ministers of P5+1 and Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif met on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly. Negotiation delegates of P5+1 countries and Iran met in Geneva on 15–16 October 2013 to discuss possible measures and dimensions for resolving Iran's nuclear programme. On 30-31 October 2013, experts from P5+1 and Iran met in Vienna to exchange detailed information on the so-called measures.

The lead negotiation representatives met again on 7-8 November 2013 for further negotiations but failed to reach an agreement so decided to meet again on November 20, 2013. The European Union and other countries imposed separate sanctions against Iran in order to force the nation to halt its uranium enrichment activities. The United States, China, Canada, Australia, Japan, India, Israel, and South Korea were the countries that imposed separate sanctions on Iran. These sanctions included bans on transactions with some Iranian banks, investments with the Iranian energy sector, an arms ban and an almost total economic embargo, as well as financial sanctions and travel bans on individuals and entities involved in Iran's nuclear activities (Jacobson 2008). According to the U.S. Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Wendy Sherman, the Iranian presidential election focused on the economy and how to engage with the international community on the nuclear file as President Rouhani, a former nuclear negotiator himself ran against candidates including the then-current negotiator Saeed Jalili. Rouhani clarified that failure to reach an agreement on Iran's nuclear programme would devastate the economy (Sherman 2013).

On 11 November 2013, the Director General of the IAEA, Yukiya Amano, and the Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ali Akbar Salehi, met in Tehran and signed a joint agreement on a Framework for Cooperation. According to the agreement, Iran committed to starting the main measures in the agreement within three months. These measures included giving permission to the IAEA to inspect the Heavy Water Production Plant at Arak and the Gchine uranium mine in Bandar Abbas (IAEA 2013). On 20-24 November 2013, Iran and P5+1 met again in Geneva to resume negotiations. On 23 November, the Foreign Ministers from P5+1 joined the negotiations. On 24 November, the Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and Catherine Ashton, leader of the P5+1 negotiation team, signed an agreement called the Joint Plan of Action. The first phase of the agreement contained specific measures for each side to undertake in a six-month period, and an extensive framework for the negotiations, thus ensuring it would result in a comprehensive solution. The first phase of agreements included the IAEA monitoring and access to Iran's nuclear sites, with a limited reduction to sanctions on Iran. They also made a commitment not to impose new sanctions on Iran during the agreement. According to the agreement, a Joint Commission was to be established to monitor the commitments of the agreement

by both sides. On 8 December 2013, the IAEA visited the Arak Heavy Water Production Plant under the terms of the Framework for Cooperation Agreement.

Then on 9-12 December 2013, the P5+1 and Iran met again in Geneva, this time discussing at the technical level, with a commitment to begin negotiations and to implement the November 24th Joint Plan of Action. On 11 December 2013, Iran and the IAEA met again in Vienna to discuss Iran's progress in implementing its commitments regarding the Framework for a Cooperation agreement. They also planned to meet again on 2 January 2014 to finalise their measures, although Iran requested to postpone the meeting to 8 February 2014. On 9-10 January 2014, Iran and P5+1 met for the third time in Geneva to discuss implementing the agreement. On 12 January 2014, Iran and P5+1 announced that implementation of the Joint Plan of Action would begin on 20 January 2014. As announced before, implementation of the Joint Plan of Action began on 20 January 2014, with the IAEA supposed to issue a report on Iran's compliance with the deal. This agreement included suspending uranium enrichment to 20 per cent, reducing half the stockpile of 20 per cent enriched uranium to 3.5 per cent, and halting work on the Arak Heavy Water Reactor.

The IAEA was also supposed to do more in-depth and frequent inspections. The IAEA Board of Governors met on Friday, 24 January 2014 for a special session to consider a report on monitoring the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action in Iran (Amano 2014). To punish Iran over its non-compliance with the IAEA Safeguards Agreement, the United States led an international effort to financially isolate Tehran by blocking its oil exports. This was done in order to raise the cost of developing a potential nuclear-weapons programme and as a result, bring the Iranian government to the negotiating table (Laub 2015). The United States and the European Union asserted that they would take necessary actions to release the specific sanctions outlined in the November 24, 2013 deal and set a schedule in order to pay Iran oil money held by other countries (Davenport 2015). When Iran and P5+1 extended their nuclear talks, the Iranian newspapers reported different reactions to the extension. The *Kayhān* newspaper's headline was 'the result of years of negotiations with the P5+1 was that the village chief was not reliable and sanctions were extended.' The *Javān*, a newspaper close to the IRGC, referred to the extension as 'seven months of artificial respiration to the nuclear diplomacy.' However, the *Shargh* newspaper's headline was

different from those in hardliners, exclaiming ‘Progress, extension and hope, diplomacy does not fail, it continues’ (Tabnak 2014).

Negotiations between Iran and P5+1 on the comprehensive agreement began in Vienna between 17 to 20 February 2014. In these talks, the parties agreed on an agenda and framework to guide the negotiations. The first deadline to reach the final agreement was on 19 July 2014. However, Iran and the world powers missed the deadline, subsequently agreeing to resume talks on August 24, with November 2014 set as another deadline; this was extended again to 30th of June 2015. However, they did make progress on difficult issues. The talks were extended for the last time and Iran and P5+1 reached a comprehensive deal referred to as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on 14 July 2015 (Davenport 2015). The main elements of the JCPOA included converting the Arak heavy water research reactor to a lower power 20 MW heavy water research reactor and using low-enriched fuel instead of natural uranium, as well as committing to ship all spent fuel from Arak out of Iran for the lifetime of the reactor. Another commitment was for Iran not to build any additional heavy water research reactors for 15 years. Thus for 10 to 15 years, Iran became required to remove two-thirds of its installed centrifuges (a total of about 19,500), and only keep about 5,000 IR-1 centrifuges at Natanz and about 1,000 IR-1 centrifuges at Fordow. The Fordow enrichment facility would be converted to a research and development operation site and not enrich uranium for a period of 15 years. The JCPOA also limited Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium. In this regard, for 15 years, Iran cannot maintain a total stockpile of more than 300 kilograms of low enriched uranium in the form of uranium hexafluoride. Between year 11 and year 15 of implementing the JCPOA, Iran is allowed to start replacing the 5,000 IR-1 centrifuges with more advanced centrifuges (Saymore 2015).

There were concerns that Iran might construct covert nuclear enrichment sites such as those at Natanz and Fordow. In order to address these concerns, the JCPOA allowed for inspections of the entire fuel cycle by the IAEA, that is for up to 25 years at some facilities, with the agreement allowing IAEA inspectors to inventory and inspect Iran's uranium supplies from the mining stage through its waste disposal processes plus monitor all centrifuge production facilities and R&D capacities (JCPOA 2015). It has been argued that the sanctions have not been very successful in their strategic goal

of changing Iran's nuclear policy. However, they could limit Iran's ability to assemble nuclear weapons in a short period of time (Esfandiary and Fitzpatrick 2011). In exchange for an outright lifting of draconian economic sanctions, Iran agreed to restrain its nuclear activities and signed a nuclear deal with the six world powers. Both Iran and the U.S. have constantly asserted that the deal is just over the nuclear programme. However, every time when it came to regional issues and to relations between Tehran and Washington, the impact of the nuclear deal became very obvious. Although Iran's Supreme Leader emphasised the anti-American policies of the Iranian regime, his tone became milder and the economy increasingly opened to everyone, including the U.S. (Ghattas 2015). On 16 January 2016, the Director General of the IAEA issued a statement declaring Iran to be in compliance with all its obligations under the JCPOA necessary to declare Implementation Day (Amano 2016). This cleared the way for comprehensive sanctions relief for Iran while allowing IAEA inspectors continued, unprecedented access to Iranian nuclear facilities. For the negotiations to succeed, it was necessary for both parties to perceive the final result as a win-win solution (Goldschmidt 2012).

4.4 Possible Military Dimensions (PMD) of Iran's Nuclear Programme

In addition to the nuclear programme, Iran is developing and producing ballistic missile capabilities and also has a genuine and ambitious space launch programme. Tehran's nuclear, ballistic missile and space programmes have been a matter of concern for the U.S. since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 because they challenge U.S. interests in the Middle East. Shortly following the 2002 revelations of Iran's covert nuclear activities, the IAEA mentioned in its safeguarding reports that some elements of Iran's nuclear programme might be used for military purposes. In its November 2011 report, the IAEA presented an extensive analysis of evidence for Iran's possible weaponisation activities. According to the IAEA, Iran's possible military activities took place before they were halted in 2003. These activities included indications of activities related to the development of a nuclear explosive device that continued after 2003. Iran's PMD dossier indicated that organisations affiliated with the IRGC played a significant role in Iran's uranium enrichment programme, manufacturing of nuclear-related equipment, and design of a missile re-entry vehicle (Gerami 2014). The Islamic Republic's alleged weaponisation attempts were consolidated under the 'ĀMĀD initiative' headed by Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a senior IRGC officer and

nuclear scientist (Ahmari 2014). The ĀMĀD Plan's mission was to procure dual-use technologies, develop nuclear detonators and conduct high-explosive experiments. According to an IAEA assessment, the ĀMĀD Plan was stopped in late 2003, following growing concerns in Tehran about the U.S.-led military campaign in Iraq and because of fear of a possible attack on Iran's nuclear facilities by Israel and the U.S. Thus, Khamenei appointed Hassan Rouhani, then secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, as chief nuclear negotiator to manage the diplomatic fallout (Heinonen 2013).

In August 2007, Iran agreed to cooperate on its PMD activities as part of a work plan with the IAEA, but the discussions ultimately broke down in September 2008 after senior Iranian officials cancelled meetings and visits. This issue remains unresolved. On 3 June 2013, the IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano expressed his concerns regarding lack of progress in clarifying Iran's possible military dimensions at the quarterly meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors (Amano 2012). Iran and the IAEA also announced a schedule for the agency's investigation into possible military dimensions (PMD) to Iran's nuclear programme. Iran agreed to ratify the Additional Protocol, in addition to its comprehensive safeguarding agreement, and enact inspection measures to allow IAEA inspectors access to its nuclear facilities at unprecedented levels. In addition, Iran also signed a "Roadmap for Clarification of Past and Present Outstanding Issues" agreement with the IAEA to resolve any questions concerning the possible military dimensions (PMD) of its nuclear programme. On 15 December 2015, Mr. Yukia Amano (2015) addressed the IAEA's Board of Governors and closed Iran's PMD dossier.

Although the PMD issue did not appear to be a barrier to implementing a nuclear deal, the Supreme Leader asked the IAEA to close Iran's PMD dossier and declare Iran's goodwill on its peaceful nuclear intentions; with the Supreme Leader emphasising mutual respect and trust on behalf of the international community and recognition of Iran's inalienable rights according to international law (Johnson 2016). Analysing Iran's nuclear intentions is impossible without delving into the broader political strategic context that shapes and reinterprets the state's identity and ideology (Bowen *et al.* 2016). Nuclear activities caused major damage to Iran's economy. However, these crippling economic sanctions did not prove to be completely

successful. According to Farideh Farhi (2012), they created a sense of fortification inside Iran, with the nation looking to itself to guard against outside hostilities. In my opinion, even if economic sanctions did bring Iran to the negotiating table, in the case of Iran and the world powers not reaching an agreement, Iran was still committed to continuing its nuclear activities regardless of economic pressures.

4.5 Conclusion

Iran's desire to develop nuclear technology dates back to the 1950s, when the Shah of Iran received technical assistance towards a peaceful nuclear programme from the United States under the President Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace Programme, and it didn't vanish with his overthrow. America's assistance ended with the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, but new Iranian leaders also showed an interest in pursuing a nuclear technology programme. They thus developed an extensive nuclear fuel cycle, including enrichment capabilities that became the subject of intense international negotiations and sanctions from 2002 to 2015. Like the Shah, the Islamic Republic's leaders also emphasised the same nationalism that included Iran's inalienable right to develop peaceful nuclear technology under the NPT. Despite the clash between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the West, Iran's nuclear programme appeared to be a national need. Iran becoming determined that it must confront the West from a position of strength, which was framed as including a self-sufficient nuclear fuel cycle.

The way in which Iranian elites think and act is partly a reflection of these deep-seated cultural and social characteristics. The common belief is that all strategic decisions in Iran, including nuclear decisions, are either made or approved by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. However, this belief would constrain the pattern of decision making in Iran. As Nader Entessar (2009) puts it, this argument does not demonstrate the countervailing factors of decision making and the key decision makers that affect the final outcome of such a course of action. Iran's history of violating IAEA safeguards and possible military links to Iran's nuclear programme, especially until 2003, was of concern to Western countries. This caused them to demand Iran halt its uranium enrichment. However, for Iranians, the right to enrich uranium was not just understood as technological advancement, but also framed as a national concern (Fitzpatrick 2011). Iran has long argued that its nuclear programme

is peaceful, legal and authorised by its membership as a non-nuclear weapon state in the nuclear NPT. Tehran has always claimed that NPT membership guarantees its inalienable right to develop a peaceful nuclear energy programme. However, the United States is distrustful of Iran and emphasised that it does not need nuclear energy because of its vast oil and gas resources and that Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy has been for weaponisation. The U.S. Presidents Bush and Obama always stated that the U.S. and its allies could never allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Negotiations between P5+1 and Iran led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on 14 July 2015, a comprehensive 25-year nuclear agreement that restricts Iran's nuclear capacity in exchange for sanctions relief. On 16 January 2016, all nuclear-related sanctions on Iran were lifted as its progress was deemed to meet key parameters of the nuclear deal.

Regardless of the devastating effect of sanctions on Iran and the political pressure, Iran has continued to seek a nuclear programme. Since the imposition of the first United Nations Security Council sanctions asking Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activities until signing an interim nuclear deal in November 2013 with EU-3+3, Iran was advancing its uranium enrichment capabilities. Iranian officials such as the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hassan Rouhani and Yahya Al-e Eshagh, among others have always emphasised that in spite of sanctions on the country's economy, the country has survived and that by adopting appropriate policies, sanctions won't have any effects (Khamenei 2018). Hence, the ability to tell their audiences both inside and outside the country that Tehran has overcome the obstacles set by the great powers, as well as the conspiracies that were designed to stop its progress in the nuclear energy industry, has become a key endeavour for Tehran. While Iran has limited its indigenous uranium enrichment activities a few times in order to come to an agreement with the West, Tehran has never accepted their demand to halt its enrichment activities. The emphasis on indigenous enrichment has become the symbol of Iran's perseverance and described as the regime's redline (Araghchi 2013). Indigenous uranium enrichment has been described as the key achievement of the Iranian nation, during the reign of the Shah and after the Islamic Revolution, both technologically and politically (Kibaroglu 2006). Iran's nuclear programme continues to be portrayed in nationalistic terms which emphasise the Iranian nation's resistance to the West (Dehghani *et al.* 2009),

highlighting its technological and scientific progress and successful indigenous uranium enrichment programme (Bowen and Moran 2014). Understanding the historical background to Iran's quest for nuclear energy is necessary in order to understand and contextualise Tehran's intentions, and as the final round of talks demonstrated, it pushed negotiations forward to better positions and finally towards success. A closer look at different policy camps in Iran, the political elites' response to sanctions, and the negotiation process itself are key to deconstructing Iranian political elites' nuclear aspirations within the framework of discourses of national identity.

Chapter 5. National Identity Formation: Internal Determinants of Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

“A nation is not defined by its borders or the boundaries of its land mass. Rather, a nation is defined by adverse people who have been unified by a cause and a value system and who are committed to a vision for the type of society they wish to live in and give to the future generations to come (Durotoye 2017).”

— Fela Durotoye

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was a policy analysis of Iran's nuclear programme from its outset. It described Iran's political structure and the government bodies that are a part of or have influenced the country's nuclear decision making. Chapter 4 demonstrated the technological and scientific history of Tehran's nuclear programme. It is now necessary to apply the notion of the discourse of national identity to how national identity in Iran has been constructed. While the aim of this thesis is to consider the constructions of Iranian national identity in the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani periods, in terms of discourses of national identity, the aim of this chapter is to provide the historical context and intellectual background for the construction of Iranian national identity in general. In order to conceptualise the discourses of national identity in Iran during the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani periods, as well as demonstrating the complexity of the issue of Iranian national identity in general, it is of paramount importance to introduce various components of Iranian national identity using a historical approach. The aim of this chapter is to present the various concurrent components of Iranian nationalism, as discourses of national identity that competed with each other for the legitimisation of nuclear policies during the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani periods. This will be done, on the one hand, by illustrating the ideologies embedded in the construction of Iranian national identity conceptions; and, on the other, by highlighting the relationship between different discourses of Iranian national identity and their impact on nuclear decision making.

This chapter contains a description and identification of the core components of Iranian national identity constructed in contemporary narratives. This is necessary for the following chapters consisting of a detailed examination of the role of Iranian elites' conceptions of national identity and their impact on nuclear policies and the nuclear negotiation process. In other words, the ways in which Iran's cultural and political identity comes to define how Tehran's nuclear decisions are shaped. This is with a view to the proposition of the thesis that Iran's nuclear ambitions cannot be fully explained by materialistic approaches in IR theory. Thus, this chapter examines the historical identity of Iran's foundations in order to demonstrate how these contested conceptions of identity are channelled into Iran's nuclear narratives. It is contended that one of the recurring ideologies embedded in the construction of Iranian national identity is 'Persian nationalism', which is what gives Iranians a sense of independence and recognition. The notion of Persian nationalism and being Persian originates from opposition to an Arab and European other. The Aryan tradition is constitutive of a certain vision of superiority, which narrates the Iranian nation via an identity story, carried out by the Oil Nationalisation Movement, a 2500-year celebration of the Persian Empire, and the nuclear programme. According to Natalie Bormann (2013), identity narratives should not just be seen as some stories that happened in the past and used by actors to justify a set of values in contemporary politics. Bormann asserts that these national identity narratives offer a framework that interprets and reinterprets the arguments of the past and the present (Ibid.).

An analysis of Iran's national identity is thus crucial for understanding the motivation to pursue a nuclear programme because apart from the balance of power, the nuclear programme is regarded as a symbol of national and international prestige, as well as modernity and identity of the state (Amul 2012b). However, it must be noted that the priori codes of prestige and modernity are often contested. Furthermore, as will be illustrated, 'national culture', 'historic territory' and 'territorial power' are both constructed and contested. National elites' portrayal of the nuclear programme as a unifying symbol of identity can be described as a 'civil religion' (Rezaei 2014) that can be further defined as a cohesive force, with a shared set of values that strengthens social, cultural, and religious integration (Cristi 2006). For Iranian scholars, Fathali Akhundzadeh and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, pre-Islamic Iran was regarded as a golden age, with Islam characterized as an alien religion, and Arabs described as

inexorable others. Akhundzadeh and Kermani's proto-nationalism, which responded to the traumas of nineteenth-century Qajar elites by positing deep historical ties to Europe and a mythological Aryan race, would later become an integral part of Pahlavi ideology (1925–1979). This ideology has shaped the historical narratives, culture, domestic and foreign policy, nation, and race for generations of Iranians and influenced Iranians' identity and self-perception (Zia-Ebrahimi 2016). In addition to Persian nationalism, Shia Islamic identity and Revolutionary ideology are further sets of values or ideologies that give Iranians a sense of independence and cultural authenticity. The normative and revolutionary dimensions of Iran's foreign policy behaviour make it complicated and thus difficult to understand. Using a discourse approach, this thesis demonstrates that the construction of Iranian national identity after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, in general, and during the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani periods, in particular, is to a great extent a discourse of resistance, at both international and regional levels. This resistance can be seen in the meanings attached to the Islamist-Iranian discourse of national identity (Holliday 2010). Iranian leaders consider both Persian nationalism and Shia Islamic identity as integral and authentic to Iranian national identity (Keyman and Yilmaz 2006). These issues are of particular interest because of their relevance to the discourses of national identity in the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani periods, which are under discussion in this thesis. Considering the impact of Iranian elites' conception of national identity, this chapter explores the way actors acquire their identities, and how these so-called identities shape their decisions affecting Iran's nuclear programme. In so doing, to examine whether conceptions of the Iranian national identity do indeed play a role in the elite's nuclear policy objectives, this chapter will examine the symbolic importance of Iran's nuclear programme for political elites through analysing the policies they design and decide upon. The focus of this chapter is elaborating on a wider discourse of national identity discourses around Iran's nuclear ambitions.

5.2 Components of Iranian National Identity

What and how you define yourself in relation to others is a feature of identity, which is significant in both social and intersubjective understandings. According to Maryam Sanie Ejlal (2005), national identity is the process of a nation's conscious accountability in answering questions about itself, the past, quality of life, time, belonging, origins, civilisation, and the importance of its political, economic, and

cultural values of importance. In other words, national identity is a set of positive attitudes and tendencies that bring together a country's elements, identities and patterns as a political unit (Ibid.). Developments, events and long-term historical processes are effective in shaping a deep sense of attachment and belonging in a country. Memories, events, personalities and historical narratives as well as myths are very effective in shaping national identity (Castro 2006). The historical dimension of national identity is the common awareness of people in society regarding their historical past and attachment to it, and sense of historical identity, as well as the conceptual history linking different generations to one another, thus preventing the separation of a generation from their history (Mowlaei 2008).

Iran is a country where the question of national identity has dominated the public agenda for a long time (KhosraviNik 2007). Nuclear policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran has become a complicated issue in terms of the symbolic and ideological dimensions of the programme. The common attitude towards external realities depends on the angle from which one looks at them, the values and also the specific result and goal. Thus, one needs to have an ideational view of the issues such as the role of culture or cultural identities, national unity and patriotism, and beliefs (Makaremi 2015). It is also of paramount importance to try to understand the main characteristics of Iranian national identity through the theoretical framework assigned to analyse this research. More precisely, as regards the impact of Iranian national identity conceptions on nuclear policies, national identity matters since it provides a context of shared meanings and norms (Cerutti and Lucarelli 2008) within which we can identify the symbolic value of the nuclear programme for political elites in Iran.

5.2.1 Persian National Identity

According to Hamid Ahmadi (2003), the historical concept of Iranian identity has experienced transitions throughout history. The notion of Iranian identity, Ahmadi argues, was constructed during the Sassanid Empire, and then transformed during the Islamic era. Its change to 'Iranian national identity' happened during the Safavid era and in modern times. Gherardo Gnoli (1989) argues that 'the idea of Iran' came into being in the first half of the third century, during the Sassanid Empire, however, religious and ethnic conceptions of Iranian identity existed earlier (Frye 1993). As William Hanaway (1993) puts it, during the medieval period, you could see social,

economic, ethnic, regional, and linguistic differences among the Iranian population. He argues that the medieval Iranian past is the basis of Iranians' sense of identity today, as the majority of the Iranian population spoke Persian, wrote an arabicised form of Persian language, were well educated in the Islamic sciences, and controlled most of the power in medieval Persia. Now remembering and controlling the memory of the past helps Iranians shape the national hierarchy of power. Moreover, images of the past can help Iranians create, legitimise, and maintain their social order (Elling 2013).

Iranian national identity has developed as a result of a long history mixed with religious beliefs. The Zoroastrian civilisation that is the Ancient Persian religion requires humankind to move towards the light in the eternal battle of light and darkness, and pursue his/her never-ending quest to overcome darkness and perdition and reach some glorious victory in battle. Similarly, in the Iranian Islam (or Shia Islam) tradition, there is an emphasis on the battle between right and wrong. In other words, this Iranian Islam requires humankind to fight with the perdition of the world in order to live honourably and victoriously (Mojtahedzadeh 2007). One indicator of Iranian identity is the spirit of pride and endurance. The ways to measure this indicator include the extent to which a nation is proud of their country and nationality, the importance of religion in people's lives, and whether they think there is a clear boundary between right and wrong (Maleki 2013).

Yarshater (1993) argues that national identity is based on various elements such as geography, language, religion and shared history, etc. However, challenging or endangering any of these elements can cause a crisis of identity (Ibid.). All elements of Iranian identity have been exposed to a variety of dangers and threats, such as the peril of extinction, many times throughout history. Persian/Iranian geographical territory has been repeatedly invaded and conquered by foreign populations, primarily Greeks, Arabs, and Turks. The national religion has also been forced out and even the language threatened, following the Arab invasion. There have been two compulsory religious changes in Iranian history: one from the pre-Islamic religions (Zoroastrianism) to Islam, and the other from Sunni to Shia. These changes, along with historical invasions, caused a kind of historical traumatism for Iranians. As

Mehdi Bazargan⁸ says, a main feature of Iranians in this regard refers to ‘Iranian compatibility’. This means using our intelligence to absorb the invaders to our culture and make them similar to ourselves (Makaremi 2015). Iran under the Shah was seeking a secular national identity to keep the long history of the Persian Empire alive and thus legitimise his modernisation projects (Ashraf 1993). Parekh (2000, p. 254) claims that “national identity can neither be preserved like an antique piece of furniture nor discarded like an old piece of clothing”. It needs to be constantly reassessed, adapted to changing circumstances and brought into harmony with our deeper self-understanding and ideals. Rice (1953) refers to the ancient and deep-rooted Iranian cultural identity and explains that in the cultural field the Arabs’ victory over Iran was short-lived because it was not possible to eliminate Iran’s ancient culture. Iranian arts, ideas, culture, all remained and flourished and prospered in a new way with regards to Islam (Ibid.).

The quiddity of identity is one of the main concerns of modern Iran. Concerning Iran’s specific cultural conditions, the notions of ‘nation and national identity’ have always been important to the country’s historical past. Regarding the custodians of each historical era, one can witness changes in the concept of national identity (Prizel 1998). Factors such as membership of a national community and socialisation processes, historical continuity and shared memory, the effect of nationalistic ideas from the West, the role of political power in the production and restoration of national identity, natural and geographical areas and backgrounds, and the role of intellectuals and elites are all important components in shaping Iranian national identity (Smith 1986). Hajjani (2010) describes different, multidimensional components of Iranian identity according to scholars. Davoud Hermidas Bavand (Ibid.) explains that rationalism, humanism and freethinking, integration, socio-cultural coexistence and tolerance among peoples and nations, ‘Iranianised’ (made Iranian) rivals and migrants. This was especially the case for Greeks in the pre-Islam era, Arabs in the period following the arrival of Islam to Iran, as well as in the Mughal period, with Shiism one of the most important characteristics of Iranian national identity. Mojtabehzadeh describes equality and justice along with religious principles as the

⁸ Mehdi Bazargan was a prominent Iranian scholar, academic, long-time pro-democracy activist and head of Iran's interim government, making him Iran's first prime minister following the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

main factors of Iranian national identity. With his philosophical vision, Elahi Ghomsheii identifies divine light and dealing with the darkness, Unitarianism, divine identity, worshipping the light and loving the arts as the main pillars of Iranian identity. Akhoundzadeh emphasises “all the good characteristics of Iranian nature” before the Arab invasion, including the otherness of the Arab, and the importance of Zoroastrianism, as the significant components of Iranian identity in the golden age of antiquity. Mirza Agha Khan Kermani demonstrates the praising of Zoroastrianism, along with the Aryans and the Persian language as components of Iranian ancient national identity. Mirza Malkom Khan stresses modernisation of the government in Iran; while Kazemzadeh adds praising the King, intelligence and talent in industry, free-thinking and nature-loving, religious spirit, religious sanctity and talent to the main elements of the Iranian national spirit (Ibid.). As Stephen Poulson (2005) puts it, the demise of Sassanid dynasty and the rise of Islam gave Iranians a cultural shock and a crisis of identity occurred to them; therefore, the Iranians began to reconstruct the Persian cultural heritage within the Islamic society.

Persian identity was regarded as taboo for several years in Iran following the Islamic revolution. Referring to Scott Sagan’s work, Karsten Frey states that most countries oppose the possession of nuclear weapons because of the negative attitude towards nuclear weapons, which is referred to as the ‘nuclear taboo’. This nuclear taboo is accepted among nuclear policy analysts as meaning revulsion over nuclear weapons. The taboo is the normative belief about the behaviour of nuclear non-use, which means this behaviour is right or wrong (Tannenwald 1999). The opposite of the ‘nuclear taboo’, which is the ‘nuclear myth’, describes the symbolic conceptions attached to states’ intentions such as their identity and desired international prestige (Frey 2006). The nuclear myth demonstrates the reasons why countries over-emphasise a need to preserve their national security (Lavoy 1993). The main theme of Iran’s mythic personality lies in its sense of cultural, moral and spiritual supremacy; however, Ziemke (2000) argues that Iranians think that the world has almost failed to appreciate Iran’s historical grandeur. This approach prioritises identity narratives as the explanatory variable behind policy outcomes (Hadfield 2007) suggesting that Iran’s nuclear policy decisions are negotiated in an environment where the tension between Iran and policymaking in the West is due to the critical absence of a discernable understanding of Iran’s historical identity (Parsi and Rydqvist 2011).

Understanding the different ways that the various elements of identity are formed and adopted may help us to identify why state actors conduct different forms of foreign policy (Ghahremanpour 2011). The (historical) constitution of identity narratives is an explanatory factor explaining a state's foreign policy behaviour (Zehfuss 2001). In light of this and in deliberating on Iranian national identity, one can think about its multidimensionality and multiculturalism. It can be said that Iranians have a specific collective identity. Farhang Rajaei (2007) argues that Iranians are modern, traditional, Muslim and Persian simultaneously. Thus, there are four sources of Iranian identity: 1) Iranian or Persian identity, 2) Religion (now Islam, before that, Zoroastrianism), 3) Tradition and 4) Modernism (Rajaei 2007). In spite of Rajaei's standpoint on the existence of four sources for the Iranian identity, I believe it is possible to merge Iran and tradition together as it is all about being Iranian, Persian culture heritage, Iranian history and all its components.

Although shared values and cultures are an important part of a society's identity, they are also based largely on religious beliefs. In Iran's long history, identity and religious beliefs have always had a close connection. While encountering Western culture and modernity in the mid-19th century, Iran started the process of modernisation, which created a connection between identity, legitimacy and power through the politicisation of identity, along with the Iranian-Islamic convergence (Hunter 2014). Contrary to the Shah's regime, the Islamic government in Iran tried to wipe out signs of secularism and replace these with a pure Islamic identity for Iranians. Thus, since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Islamic regime in Iran has tried to legitimise its policies with a Shia identity applying Islamic principles. The religious government in Iran endeavours to combine Shia values with Iranian values, however, over time there has been some confrontation between these two values and identities (Saleh 2012). A reason for this confrontation between Iranian and Shia values is due to the secular nature of the Shah's regime, which had no intention of employing religious ideology in Iran's foreign policy (Barzegar 2008b).

5.2.2 Shia Islamic Identity and Revolutionary Ideology

According to H. A. R. Gibb (2013), Iranians have always been inspired by various elements of their pre-Islamic heritage, referred to as Persian cultural heritage. Thus, this sense of national pride at being Iranian or Persian along with such a long history

is a fundamental element of Iranian national identity in current Iranian culture. The Shia tradition is in the centre of Iranian political culture. The event of *Karbalā* in modern Iraq in 680 CE has become a major event for Shia identity; this was when Imam Hussein, the third Imam of Shia Muslims, was killed or martyred fighting against superior forces. In this regard, the Iranian cultural identity views “suffering, injustice and being a victim of illegitimate power as a fundamental motif” (Guldimann 2007, p. 172). Based on powerful identity construction, there is an understanding among some Iranians that the West does not recognise their legitimacy or their national rights (Afary and Anderson 2010). Farzin Vahdat (2015) argues that the (black and white) perception of the West and the great powers about Iran, in general, has birthed a strong desire for self-reliance, independence, and resistance, particularly following the 1979 Islamic revolution. In describing ancient civilisations such as Iran and their peoples’ inclination towards the past, Ryszard Kapuscinski (2002, p. 105) says:

“In historical societies, everything has been decided in the past. All their energies, their feelings, their passions are directed toward the past, dedicated to the discussion of history, to the meaning of history. They live in the realm of legends and founding lineages. They are unable to speak about the future because the future doesn’t arouse the same passion in them as their history. They are all historical people, born and living in the history of great fights, divisions and conflicts.”

Along with other components of Iranian national identity, such as language, history, nationalism, and religion, there is another newer component called Islamic Revolutionary ideology. The Islamic Revolution has its own identity and cultural effects. It is a kind of cultural-religious identity. Its life and the hereafter ideas brought a new identity to the Iranians at the outset of the revolution (Nekoo Rooh 1999). According to McInnis (2015), Tehran’s revolutionary ideology is the underlying foundation for regime legitimacy and a core basis of its nuclear policies. Common amongst all Iranian elites is that the international community’s humiliation of Iran has not been the right way to deal with an honourable nation and revolutionary power. Iran has responded to the humiliation, particularly by the United States, with resistance (Rivera 2016). Despite its irreversible damage to the country’s economy,

Mahmood Sariolghalam (2003) argues that the Islamic Revolution of 1979 emboldened the Islamic foundations of Iranian national identity. In other words, the political Islam that emerged from the Revolution demonstrated a degree of relevance for the broader elements of Iranian identity (Ibid.). In Iran, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 has been interpreted as a movement that originated from national awareness of a history bursting with durability, longevity and grandeur. A noticeable feature of the Revolution is that the movement turned rapidly to a narrative of Iranian history when within a decade it had been defined as an Iranian Islamic Revolution. Khomeini, of course, was totally aware that in order to frame the revolutionary narrative, it was necessary to classify it as an inspiring one (Ansari 2012).

In order to understand Iran's foreign policy in general and Iran's nuclear behaviour in particular, it is necessary to be aware of the Iranian regime's revolutionary ideology, as Iran's foreign policy originates from its revolutionary missions. In addition to the similarities, there has always been some contrast and competition among the various elements of Iranian identity. The politicisation of Islam in the twentieth century came about in response to the pressures and threats of Western modernisation. Shia nationalism has thus been a combination of support for the local economy and culture as well as national independence in response to the expansion of political influence by the West (Bashirieh 2001). With the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the discourse of the Revolutionary ideology supported social discipline, unity and cultural equality in the form of overall identity with an attempt to revive the Islamic identity and Shia traditions against national and non-religious identities (Sarmadi 2017). The discourse of Revolutionary ideology attempted to define and reshape society based on religious values (Moaddel 1992). Hence the anti-West approach that emerged from the post-colonial approach is necessary for continuing the identity that was built on the ideology of the Islamic Revolution (Helfont 2015).

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 changed Iran's nationalist perspectives to a great extent. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Homeira Moshirzadeh (2007) discusses three main discourses – independence, justice, and resistance – that form the identity of the Islamic Republic. The discourse of independence has long been a very important discourse in constituting Iran's identity as an independent state. Iranians' aspirations for justice also have their roots in historical nationalist narratives and

religious discourses. In the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79, one of the most important elements in Iran’s confrontation with the West has been the necessity of resisting any of the foreign forces that might jeopardize Iran’s sovereignty and independence. Different elements shape Iran’s nationalism, which in turn shape Iran’s foreign policy decisions. The first element can be identified as Iran’s fear of external manipulation. Although Iran has never been colonised, it has experienced great and powerful interventions in its internal affairs. This has shaped a politics of resistance against the despots or the interfering powers. Ambassador Wendy Sherman (2018) also refers to the culture of resistance as a crucial factor while negotiating the nuclear deal with Iran. She says Iranians have been told by the colonial powers throughout the history what kind of weapons they can have, and the West also organised a coup against their leaders. Thus, for the Iranian negotiators, “nearly everyone at the opposing table represented the first-world corruption that their revolution stood against (Ibid. p. 40). The second factor is Iran’s lack of any strategic allies in the region. Iran’s nuclear programme is a symbol of its great power status in the region and has thus become part of Iran's identity. Resisting the West's efforts to limit Iran’s endeavour to be a nuclear power has turned into a matter of national pride and respect (Miller 2014).

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Islam as a religion and form of governance became more dominant than nationalism as a component of Iranian identity. The reason for prioritising Islamic or religious identity lies in the theological debate dominating the revolutionary ideology of Iranian leaders, who have looked to modernise Islam by promising to establish a democratic Islamic republic (Bruno 2008). Although religion has redeemed the Iranian nation twice, once at the end of the Iran-Iraq war and later when Mohammad Khatami became President in 1997, with his inclusion of nationalistic themes in his campaign, the idea of being Iranian and Persian became as important as being Muslim and thus reemerged as the dominant narrative (Ansari 2012). The argument here is about Islam, which can access society through the experience of shared cultural values (Makaremi 2015). Iran’s political elites construct national identity in different ways and this has also entered into the social and political discourse. In Iran, because of its long history, debates on national identity raise both national-cultural and religious issues. Because of regime change in Iran, its social and political life underwent profound changes following the Islamic Revolution of 1979 (Smith 1991).

Drawing upon the theoretical framework of social constructivism and the relationship between identities, interests and actions, this section puts theory into practice. Ideational factors, such as identity and norms, can shape and transform state interests, which in turn can transform the norms, rules, and institutions of the international system (Ishiyama and Breuning 2010). Iran's foreign and security policy is a product of Iranian national interest and the ideology of the Islamic revolution (Katzman 2017). Iran's foreign and security policy cannot be comprehended without being separated from its Persian and Shia/Islamic identity or the Revolutionary ideology that shaped inter-subjective conceptions of national identity; these have, in turn, shaped conceptions of the country's national interest (Salimi 2007). Given the Iranian Supreme Leader's decision, these two will be able to surpass each other over time, depending on the nature of the conflict. Looking at Iran's resistance network of proxies and partners, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iraqi Shia militias, one can see the employment of both hard and soft power in Iran's foreign policies. Hence, Iran's behaviour can be interpreted via the politicians' perception of threats to their national interests that are informed by core ideological principles (McInnis 2015).

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has focused on the religious dimension of Iranian national identity in order to demonstrate his support of the nuclear programme and the economic situation of Iran. In the wake of the difficult economic climate in Iran and the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran's president in 2013, Khamenei allowed the nuclear-negotiating team to engage directly with the US. Khamenei explained his strategy of negotiating with the U.S. as an example of 'heroic flexibility', addressing Imam Hassan's peace treaty⁹ (Mahdavi 2014). Ayatollah Khamenei believes in the superiority of Islamic civilisation, calling Western civilisation materialistic and one-dimensional. According to Khamenei, for Western civilisation, progress is mostly composed of wealth, along with scientific, military, and technological advancement. In contrast, the Islamic rationale considers progress to involve the various dimensions of science, justice, public welfare, economics,

⁹ Based on Shia tradition, the blood of martyrs lay in the ink of history (previous seven words make no sense); however, on many occasions, the greater Jihad has lain along the path of peace, rather than war. For instance, Imam Hassan, second Shia Imam realised that in order to confront Mu'awiya, he needed a peace treaty rather than war and bloodshed. He believed the premature death of faithful Muslims in the battle against Mu'awiya would not bring about victory. Hence, Imam Hassan's victory required a peace agreement to keep the light of the original Islam from being extinguished.

international grandeur and status, as well as independence, aspects which are non-material (Ganji 2013).

5.2.3 Modernity and Technological Advancement

As Itty Abraham (1998) argues, there is a major relationship between nuclear power and questions of power, culture, and national identity. That is, in the form of defining indigenous mastery over modern science and technology as a country's national interest. Abraham states that "nuclear power has been an intimate element of India and Pakistan's political, socio-cultural, and technological histories long enough to claim an important place in the shaping of postcolonial South Asian modernity" (Ibid. p.2).

Another important aspect of Iranian nuclear intentions is that for Iranian leaders, producing electricity alone is not the goal; rather, the goal is to lead the country towards modernity. When the nuclear programme was started under the Shah, technological advancement and modernity in the shape of Westernisation had been very important for him (Patrikarakos 2012). In the 1960s and 1970s, the Shah of Iran launched a modernisation plan promoting both state-owned and private firms. Among his plans was land reform, profit-sharing in industry, and, increasing oil and gas exports (Solingen 2009). Before this and in the 1950s, the Shah of Iran received technical assistance under the U.S. 'Atoms for Peace programme', and his interest in nuclear technology made Iran's nuclear programme an essential ingredient in his modernising drive for Iran (Patrikarakos 2012). Yet, under the Islamic Republic, Westernisation was opposed and the Islamic Revolution's leaders emphasised modernity and technological advancement. This was strongly based within narratives of the country's independence and its ability to develop a peaceful nuclear technology on Iranian soil by Iranian scientists; Iranian leaders compared the nuclear programme to landing on the moon and referred to it as the nation's inalienable right, a symbol of modernity and technological advancement (Vaez and Sadjadpour 2013). As Farhad Rezaei (2017) states, for the Iranian elites, nuclear technology has become a symbol of progress, modernity and independence, as it also has for other countries.

Iran's former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, linked the nuclear programme with the technological advancement of the country and for him, any lack of knowledge and

expertise in this field reflected the country's underdevelopment and backwardness (Ahmadinejad 2013). In 2012, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for example, told a group of nuclear scientists that self-respect and dignity were significant results they could gain as a result of their achievements in developing an indigenous nuclear technology (Bowen *et al.* 2016). Khamenei also believes that Iran's nuclear advancement can bring glory, progress, and greatness to the nation and the country (Khamenei 2008a). According to Adam Tarock (2006), Ahmadinejad surprised the world in mid- April 2006 by announcing that Iran had joined the world's nuclear technology club and from now on, Iran could acquire the necessary technology to produce nuclear energy and thus decrease its dependence on oil. Iran's portrayal of reaching to the level of states able to master nuclear technology gives the country greater weight and prestige internationally. Science, technology, and power are interlinked, and peaceful nuclear technology is said to give Iran entry into an exclusive 'nuclear club' (Rouhani 2004).

As reported in the Iranian press:

The last step in the completion of Iran's nuclear cycle which confirms Iran has joined the world nuclear club cannot be considered a small victory and must be properly admired... The Majlis [parliament] should declare an 'Iranian national nuclear technology day' to register this day in Iran's history (Resālat Newspaper 2006).

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has historically and intellectually illustrated the components of Iranian national identity. It has been shown historically, that Iranian national identity in its various forms is in continuous flux in terms of the construction and reconstruction of these identity elements, at both the state and non-state levels. The influence of identity components and their relationship with politics is of significance. Its importance comes from the point whereby identity also has a political dimension and thus, there is a hint of identity in every individual and social action that affects the political behaviour and foreign policy of states (Afzali and Mousavi 2017). The culture and identity of every nation influence their political behaviour on the world's political stage. Due to the geographic location of Iran, Iranian identity has been affected by three areas of civilisation: Iranian, Islamic, and Western (Zahed 2006). Religious

ideology has been a prominent element of Iranian identity since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and shaped Iranian foreign policy. Simultaneously, the Islamic Revolution brought about a sense of identity and unity amongst Iranian people. Consequently, the Islamic Republic of Iran has pursued a policy of ideological confrontation with its perceived enemies in order to shift its policies towards a more pragmatic and interest-driven approach, as well as maintaining its internal cohesion and resistance towards external threats and challenges. Those Iranian elites who want Iran to achieve prominent status in the international community define their opinions on national policy as based on their shared values, history, cultural perception and, generally, on how they wish to be seen in the world. While a country's desire for prestige, respect and dignity influences decisions made at the governmental level, one cannot ignore the effect geopolitics has on strategic interests. The effectiveness of Iranian nuclear negotiations has been a controversial topic for more than a decade. Central to this is the fact that when we look into the negotiation process, we mostly encounter the names of countries, organisations or institutions. The focus is less on the impact of elites' ideologies and perceptions. But this focus would improve the negotiators' mutual understanding of one another. As we have observed in the history of Iranian nuclear negotiations, individuals have an equal and crucial role to play either in making peace or provoking conflict (Rifkind and Picco 2013). Indeed, national pride, technological advancement and international prestige have all played a crucial role in shaping Iran's nuclear policies. Government officials often use identities in a strategic way, where they can adapt to a variety of situations and effectively construct and support their defined concepts (Eminov 2007). Iran's longevity and resilience (Persian Empire) as a great nation and civilisation elucidate Iranian national consciousness. Iran's nuclear decision-making is a complicated issue because Iranian identity has consisted of so many interconnected elements throughout history, including Persian, Shia, and Islamic Revolutionary identities and ideologies, all determining the mix of internal and external policies (as noted above) (McInnis 2015).

Today, the political system in Iran is rooted in religious beliefs and ideals and since the political system is a manifestation of the will of society, religious identity is considered one of the main components of national identity (Zahed 2006). However, in a country with such a deep-rooted civilisation, prioritising religion in favour of

nationalism is not durable. According to Abulof (2014), for instance, Iran's nuclear narrative is fueled by various reasons, including Iranians' patriotic pride in their deep-rooted Persian civilisation, the promise of Islam in the form of Shia Islam, and Iranians' ambition to become technologically modern. Despite the importance of religion (Shiism) as a component of Iranian national identity, Persianism or to be a Persian is still the central core of Iran's national identity. As Shireen Hunter (2014) states "the strength of the Persian identity and culture was such that it exercised a significant attraction for the invading groups,¹⁰ most of whom became culturally Persianised" (Hunter 2014, p. 20).

Some countries acquire nuclear weapons mostly for defensive and military purposes, for example, Israel, but some other countries like India and Pakistan acquire nuclear weapons not only for defensive purposes but also as a symbol of prestige and their own national identity and modernity. There are other countries that acquire peaceful nuclear technology as a symbol of modernism and prestige. Whether a state's incentive is to build nuclear weapons or to develop a peaceful nuclear energy programme, history has shown that national identity is part of the rationale behind many countries' nuclear programmes. As Jo-Ansie Van Wyk *et al.* (2007, p. 23) outline,

"In constructivist terminology, the continued prevalence of nuclear weapons and a state's dominance in the nuclear arena constitutes social facts. These weapons illustrate, among other things, a state's commitment to their constructed social purpose, namely maintaining power and prestige (i.e. identity), and dominance (i.e. identity and interests) – despite the possibility of non-state actors' access and application of nuclear technology and weapons."

Iran's nuclear programme has also contributed to a sense of 'status'. Currently, the nuclear issue is perceived as a matter of technological advancement as well as for reinforcing Iranian identity and status in the region and in the world (Barzegar 2009a). It is, therefore, necessary to acknowledge the importance of national identity

¹⁰ History has seen Iran invaded by Muslims, which led to the end of the Sasanian Empire in 651 and the eventual decline of the Zoroastrian religion in Iran. This was the Muslim conquest of Persia, also known as the Arab conquest of Iran.

conceptions for understanding the nuclear behaviour of Iran. In so doing, elements of Iranian national identity and how they relate to the making of symbolic norms need to be examined. That is, with respect to the way those norms contribute to the process of nuclear policy decision-making in Iran. This chapter has argued that national identity operates discursively to represent both agents and structures if identity narratives are treated as independent variables that precede and thus predispose actions. Hence these predisposed actions can constitute the formation of interests, the construction of policy decisions and types of actor behaviour, all of which have an ideational and historical foundation and are enacted strategically.

This historical and intellectual contextualisation has demonstrated several factors crucial to an understanding of Iranian national identity. First of all, the issue of resistance is a common theme. An important aspect in the construction of Iranian national identity throughout history has been resistance to colonial and imperial powers. There is also an emphasis on the issue of victimisation of Shia Muslims that emerged from a history made up of suffering, injustice and being a victim of illegitimate powers. The goal of the Iranian nation has thus been to achieve independence and self-reliance. Another common theme is the issue of civilisation, which is of paramount importance for both (secular) nationalists and Islamists, citing the superiority of the ancient civilisation over Islamic civilisation. These have brought about the themes of modernity, prestige, respect and justice among others. The toughening of American economic sanctions since 1979, along with the threat of an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, intensified Iranian's sense of victimisation and increased their level of resistance. Iran's motivations to develop its nuclear programme were therefore driven by strategic modernity and national pride. Nuclear energy, as a symbol of strength and power, is giving Iran a sense of identity (Farhamy 2008).

The final and concluding point is that many of the themes articulated in Iran's discourses of national identity have also been reflected in the discourses of national identity during the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani periods. As mentioned before, three main discourses have been identified for discussion: the Persian identity, the Shia identity and Revolutionary ideology, and finally a discourse on modernity and technological advancement. Civilisation, modernity and resistance continue to be

major issues in the construction of Iranian national identity across all discourses of Iranian national identity. The next chapter explores a detailed history of the Iranian nuclear programme, featuring the political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran along with the people and institutions that play a key role in its nuclear policies.

The next three chapters provide a detailed analysis of nuclear discourse under the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations in order to evidence and explain the relationship between particular discourses of Iranian national identity and the trajectory of the nuclear programme outlined in this chapter. The analysis is based on analysis of Ahmadinejad's speeches from various media outlets and interview results related to the subject matter. The following chapters, thus, show the changing nature of Iran's nuclear ambitions based on different administrations' conceptions of national identity and demonstrate the effect of these on nuclear negotiations.

6.1 Introduction

This thesis now turns to the first of three chapters that focus on the case study. The previous chapter contextualised various discourses of Iranian national identity. This was done by highlighting the relationship between different discourses of Iranian national identity and their impact on Iran's nuclear ambitions. It argued that national identity operates discursively to represent both agents and structures if identity narratives are treated as independent variables that precede and thus predispose actions. In order to understand the impact of national identity conceptions on Iran's nuclear ambitions during the time frame covered in this research, the previous chapter examined the historical roots of such identity in different entities within the political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This chapter takes a different approach, moving from policy analysis to discourse analysis, and therefore, builds on the theoretical framework of the first five chapters and turns to the more concrete methodological issues involved in selecting research questions and building research design. In so doing, this chapter places the development of Iran's nuclear programme in the context of the Iranian elite's nuclear decision-making with regards to the impact of discourses of Iranian national identity. The aim of this chapter, as well as the following chapters, is to show how conceptions of national identity are the basis of decision making in Iran. This chapter, in particular, examines the impact of Iranian national identity conceptions on the nuclear decisions made by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. But before entering into any detailed arguments on Ahmadinejad's nuclear ambitions, this chapter starts with an overview of Mohammad Khatami's nuclear decisions, and how these were influenced by the discourses of Iranian national identity.

The first and main step in analysing Iran's nuclear policy during Ahmadinejad's presidency is to analyse his nuclear ambitions and identify his perception of the nuclear programme based on the conceptions of Iranian identity. It is therefore of paramount importance to discursively examine the speeches and actions of the President, the Supreme Leader, the top clerics, and the general political elites who

were involved in nuclear decision making during Ahmadinejad's presidency, that is, in terms of their national nuclear identity conceptions. As explained in chapter 5, according to the ideals of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the national government is defined through a framework of Islamic-Shia ideology and worldview. As Timothy Fitzgerald (2003) argues, 'religion' is an ideologically motivated social construction. For Fitzgerald, the conceptual boundaries of religion are intertwined with the boundaries of non-religious notions that distinguish the country's modern culture and identity (Schilbrack 2012). The Islamic Republic and its ideals, principles and values determine one of the fundamentals of Iranian national identity. Thus, the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran contains elements of Shia Islamic identity, Revolutionary ideology, and Persian nationalism. According to Mohammad Rahim Eyvazi (2008), all new political figures and administrative officials in the world change their foreign policy behaviour in the format of their country's cultural and historical framework. Based on a fundamentalist discourse, geographical borders are to be replaced by ideological borders. As Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader points out, the principles of the Islamic Republic are inseparable from the identity and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Dehghani Firoozabadi and Radfar 2009). According to Ali Asghar Soltanieh (2015) in the interview for this thesis, Iran's former Ambassador to the IAEA, during war imposed by Saddam Hussein, the important issue was to protect the nation's international borders, in fact, to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the state. But in the case of its nuclear programme, Iran began showing some resistance and having a hard time, whilst Tehran worked hard not to make any compromises to its principles, "since they considered these are the borders of identity and dignity of Iran". As argued by Ali Asghar Soltanieh¹¹ (2015) in an interview for this research, this was a matter of 'inalienable sovereign right for peaceful uses of nuclear energy'.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was the hardline, fundamentalist president of the Islamic Republic of Iran from August 3, 2005, to August 3, 2013. Prior to his presidency, he served as the mayor of Tehran. His campaign focus was to outreach poor people by the motto '*religious duty*' (Ahmadinejad 2005c). One important policy Ahmadinejad

¹¹ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 12 November 2015

focused on while taking office was Iran's nuclear policy. He pointed out that the '*arrogant powers*' (referring to P5+1 members), who dominated the United Nations Security Council were trying to put more pressure on Iran by imposing draconian sanctions; however, Tehran would just ignore these sanctions and for Iran, the dispute over the nuclear programme was now over, Ahmadinejad stating that there is no limit to research on nuclear technology in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Additional Protocol (Alexander and Hoenig 2008).

For the first time after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and post-Iran-Iraq war, Iran was experiencing growing political and diplomatic rapprochement with the West due to president Mohammad Khatami's efforts. This was based on Khatami's theory of 'Dialogue Among Civilisations', which was presented to the United Nations General Assembly in 2001, known as the year of dialogue among cultures and civilisations (Khatami 2001). Khatami's strategy was to reassure the West using diplomatic means that Iran's nuclear programme was just for peaceful purposes and for that reason Tehran should act with patience and tolerance to eliminate the fears and concerns of those worrying about the risks of proliferation on behalf of Iran (Shoamanesh 2009). In February 2005, Khatami announced that no Iranian government would give up its nuclear technology activities. After the June 2005 elections and the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the stance of nuclear negotiations in the summer of 2005 became more rigid. At this point, Iran removed the seals from its uranium enrichment equipment in Isfahan and said it had resumed uranium conversion at this plant, while in September 2005, Mohamed ElBaradei (2005), then the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), confirmed the existence of uranium conversion at the Isfahan Plant.

When Ahmadinejad entered office as Iran's president, it soon became clear that his nuclear policy was going to be very different from his predecessor. Ahmadinejad chose the nuclear programme as one of his main policies and made it clear to the world that he was not going to step back and suspend any of the country's uranium enrichment activities. He addressed president Khatami's nuclear-negotiating team as traitors to the rights of the Iranian nation and puppets of the West for their leniency towards the West in nuclear talks (Rivera 2016). This was humiliating for Khatami's team as their national and revolutionary values were ignored. Ahmadinejad made it

clear to the international community that indigenous uranium enrichment was an inalienable right of the Iranian nation. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, supported Ahmadinejad's rhetoric on the nuclear programme because of its defiance to the West, a key component of Iran's nuclear identity discourse (Khamenei 2016). The discourse of the Ahmadinejad administration on nuclear policy can be explained in terms of its confrontational legacy. In this pattern, changes happen mostly based on political actors' interpretations and conceptions of the issues at hand. In Ahmadinejad's case, these beliefs originated from the ideals of the Islamic Republic and led to resistance against Western powers (Salamati 2014). Ahmadinejad combined various themes and discourses of Iranian identity to explain his decisions, based on an anti-hegemonic approach that was combined with Shia identity and a sense of Iranian-ness (Persian identity) while asking for respect and recognition as an equal.

Iranian leaders' appetite for regaining regional power has grown, and they believe that the world powers, particularly the U.S. are unable to accept Iran's rise (Choksy 2011). According to Choksy (2011). Not only memories of the victories experienced by the Persian Empire, but also Iran's active engagement and interaction with its past through historical, political, social and religious references, make the Iranian nation a patriotic one. Like every Iranian leader, Ahmadinejad also had the vision of making Iran the dominant regional power. Mohammad Reza Shah went even further, with the ambition of raising Iran to the level of great world power, because for him being merely a regional power was not enough. However, the Shah was quite satisfied with the 1971 celebrations of Iran's 2500 years of monarchy and did not aim to revive the glory of pre-Islamic Iran (Amuzegar 1991). Iran's current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has always held the vision of Iran as the hegemonic regional power, and able to compete with the great world powers (Friedman 2015). For Khamenei, Iran's hegemony over the region is natural, and since his ruling over the country, he has always tried to further Iran's regional influence, focusing on the shared interests and common enemies of Iran and the Muslim world while projecting Iran's successes as achievements that bring honour and credit to all regional countries and the Muslim world (Sadjadpour 2008).

Iran's response to the international community's concern over its nuclear activities was based on the importance of technology for the country and the nation. The nuclear programme has long been a symbol of Iran's self-sufficiency and independence from the West. As Itty Abraham (2006) puts it, while states are still dependent on others to modernise their technology, especially in the post-colonial era, a state's true independence requires self-reliance and indigeneity. As Maaïke Warnaar (2013, p. 92) discusses, "the self-reliant nature of Iran after the [1979] Revolution means it can defend its rights and dignity and resist outsiders." Throughout the history of Iran's nuclear programme, the country has been trying to master its nuclear enrichment capabilities based on developing an indigenous form of modern science and technology (Bowen and Moran 2014). Thus, nuclear engineering choices must be recognised as part of Iran's struggle towards modernity. When nuclear technology becomes iconic or symbolic, it becomes a matter of national identity (Reardon 2012).

Ahmadinejad escalated Iran's nuclear activities and often inveighed against the West (Gladstone 2013). However, his argumentative approach towards the West aroused world opinion against Iran's nuclear programme. The West, and especially the U.S. and its allies, came to believe that Tehran had secret military nuclear purposes given Ahmadinejad's aggressive policy towards Israel and its resumption of uranium enrichment. Based on reports in the international media, Iran's nuclear issue came to be associated with issues such as the coalition against international terrorism, neoconservatives in the George W. Bush administration (who were at the height of power in Washington) who launched a war with Iraq (Lind 2003), weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and peace in the Middle East. In such a serious situation, Iran's diplomatic apparatus entered one of the most critical periods in its history (Fallahi 2007).

The main argument of the thesis is about how the particular conceptions of Iranian identity were constructed in relation to the nuclear programme and how they affected that programme. Delving into the meaning of the words and expressions used by the Iranian elites demonstrates that they almost share similar views on the intentions of the nuclear programme – whether they are reformists or fundamentalists. However, according to Jason Jones (2011), Ahmadinejad's vulgar and unthoughtful words enabled the international media and leaders to use his language against Iran. Before

delving into Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy, it is necessary to look at the nuclear policies of Mohammad Khatami's administration as these greatly impacted on Ahmadinejad's nuclear policies.

6.2 Diplomacy and Reform: Khatami's Nuclear Discourse

Mohammad Khatami's administration was responsible for the nuclear dossier in its initial stages. In this period, the administration aimed at advancing peaceful nuclear technology. On its way to advance its nuclear technology, Khatami's administration faced several obstacles, especially the U.S.'s warfare strategy in Iraq (Zibakalam and Zamani 2017). To effectively deal with U.S. strategy and the possibility of an attack, Iran decided to suspend its nuclear activities for two years (Ibid). During the presidency of reformist, Mohammad Khatami, the Iranian-Islamic discourse of national identity was very well presented and welcomed. However, the rather harsh tone taken by the nuclear negotiators with their European counterparts led to a failure of negotiations with three European countries (EU-3), the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (Farhi 2010). The failure of these negotiations led to more international sanctions being placed on Iran.

Mohammad Khatami's political strategy focused on 'political deterrence', and therefore, he presented his strategy by means of confidence-building and dialogue aimed at building up and improving Iranian identity (Mortazavian *et al.* 2013). In so doing, he emphasised the three elements of '*Ezzat*' (dignity), '*Hekmat*' (wisdom), and '*Maslahat*' (expediency) (Sadeghian and Mousavi 2017). Given the failure of negotiations with EU-3 to build confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme and avoid confrontation with the West, the *Maslahat* (expediency) argument on the temporary suspension of uranium enrichment began to seem unnecessary, even before the end of the Khatami administration (Sedā-ye Edālat Publication 2002). Conservative newspapers such as *Kayhān*, *Resālat*, and *Jomhuri-e Eslāmi* presented the indigenous nuclear programme as a national project, and while uranium enrichment-related activities were suspended in 2004, these papers called the suspension a heroic sacrifice (Farhi 2010). Like conservative newspapers, reformist papers such as *Shargh* and *Iran* also emphasised the nationalistic nature of the nuclear programme and blamed Europeans for not respecting Iran's sovereign national rights (Ibid.). Scientific victories feature in nationalist beliefs. For example, once,

Gholamreza Aghazadeh, manager of AEOI, mentioned nobody believed Iran could develop an indigenous nuclear technology (Ibid.). The emergence of Mohammad Khatami in the political environment of the Islamic Republic of Iran came about because, as Eric Hooglund (1999, p. 59) puts it:

“[The] Iranian government is one in which the political elite holds varying views on the cultural, economic, political, security, and social issues that have confronted Iran since the revolution.”

This chapter and the next examine how decisions on the nuclear programme were impacted by the Iranian elite’s perception of Iranian national identity, in particular Khatami, Ahmadinejad and Rouhani. One can contend that for the Khatami administration, the determination to stand up for one’s independence in the face of the external other - [the West]- is a fundamental aspect of how Khatami came to perceive the nation (Holliday 2010). However, unlike the Islamic discourse that can be identified as an integral part of this understanding, Khatami championed the ‘Dialogue among Civilisations’. In his ‘Dialogue Among Civilisations’, he captured international attention and directed it towards Iran with the aim of introducing the Iranian-Islamic identity of the nation (Khatami 2008a). In so doing, he also marked the peaceful nuclear programme of Iran as a core of this identity (Rezaei 2014). Khatami’s idea of *Mardomsālāri*, or democracy is within the framework of religious discourse or what he referred to as ‘religious democracy’ (Khatami 2008b). The perception of democracy or *Mardomsālāri*, like other perceptions of Iranian identity, is linked to Iran’s resistance to the West¹². Hence, the concept of ‘Dialogue among Civilisations’ illustrates that the Iranian nation is perceived in terms of its civilisation - whether that is Iranian or Islamic (Holliday 2010). Islamic Shia history that also reinforces a deep sense of victimisation by Sunnis has a special place in Iranian officials’ beliefs. In a speech in 2004, Mohammad Khatami stressed Iran’s legitimate right to nuclear technology and called on Iranians to remember Imam Hossein (the third Shia Imam martyred in the 7th century CE) who taught Shia Muslims to safeguard their dignity and their freedom (Baktiari 2010). The role of Islam in this matter is that of a religion that immerses human beings with dignity and courage and

¹² Khatami, Mohammad. Speech at the Saint Joseph University of Beirut. 14 May 2003.

as a result, guides them on the path to scientific and technological advancement (IDHC 2010). Ayatollah Khamenei (2006a) claims that the scientific and technological progress in the Islamic Republic of Iran achieved under severe economic sanctions is attributed to Islam.

As Farhad Rezaei (2014) puts it, capturing the interest of the international community with his ‘Dialogue among Civilisations’, the reformist Mohammad Khatami made it clear that the nuclear programme is a core marker in Islamic-Iranian discourses of identity. According to various government officials, for the Iranian government, developing a nuclear programme has never been a solution to the country’s security needs. Mohsen Aminzadeh, the deputy foreign minister during Khatami’s presidency, said if Iran wanted to build a nuclear bomb, then there was no need to sign any additional protocol, with all the transparency (Shana 2003). Iranian officials pitched the idea of the civilian use of nuclear energy on the basis of the Iranian Islamic Revolution’s mottos of independence and freedom, as this also embodies the idea of energy self-sufficiency (Farhi 2010).

6.3 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Foreign Policy and Nuclear Diplomacy

Iran’s official discourse on the nuclear issue under Ahmadinejad was inherently consistent among the government officials. Their narrative was that the Iranian regime is pursuing peaceful nuclear energy, which it is entitled to under the NPT. The same narrative asserted that the West was deliberately undermining Iran’s peaceful nuclear progress. However, the Iranian officials, particularly, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad believed Iran could succeed in becoming a self-sufficient nuclear energy power, with or without help from other powers. The notion of national rights was at the centre of Ahmadinejad’s election campaign and a persistent theme in the media outlets and interviews that took place during the presidency of Iran’s former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad’s significant goal, thus, was to make the international community recognise Iran’s ‘inalienable right’ to enrich uranium indigenously (Ahmadinejad 2010a). He discussed justice and the fundamental values of the Islamic Revolution, as well as strengthening the culture of religious management (Sabeti 2005). Ahmadinejad (2006b) also sent a letter to George W. Bush on 8 May 2006 and invited him to choose justice, which is common

to all divine prophets. Hence, it is to Ahmadinejad's speeches and policy actions that we turn in order to identify and evidence the relational systems of meaning that constructed his discourse of Iranian nuclear technology. Maintaining nuclear enrichment activities and the voluntary enforcement of the additional protocol, along with the temporary suspension of nuclear activities has been of paramount importance for Iran in its negotiations with EU-3. Iran's aim was to show good faith to EU-3 members so that they would recognise Iran's national right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. But following Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election in June 2005, Tehran became convinced that the European powers and the U.S. did not agree with a temporary suspension of Iran's nuclear activities and that they wanted Iran to stop all its nuclear enrichment activities permanently (Haji-Yousefi 2010). Hence, Tehran decided to change its nuclear policy orientation and resume its enrichment activities.

6.3.1 National Rights and National Support

For President Ahmadinejad's government, the nuclear issue was the biggest challenge it inherited, a challenge that was very popular among the Iranian people and had broad support. Ahmadinejad's administration kept encouraging the society to support the government and its defence of the country's inalienable right to acquire nuclear technology. To gain the support of religious groups and clerics in Iran, as well as the support of certain sections of society often including influential bazaaris, the Iranian government adopted an Islamic policy and emphasised how this policy empowered Muslims (Bakhash 1989). In an interview I conducted with Mohammad Marandi¹³ during the final talks for Iran's nuclear deal in July 2015, he said, "even so, many Iranians opposed to the Islamic regime now support the development of a peaceful nuclear programme, seeing it as a symbol of pride and honour for Iran and Iranians all across the world (Marandi 2015)." Analysing Ahmadinejad's speeches, one can see the impact of various discourses of Iranian national identity on his foreign policy (Persian nationalism, Shia Islamic identity, Revolutionary ideology, and modernity and technological advancement), and in particular, on his nuclear decisions.

Ahmadinejad's nuclear diplomacy was based on the full implementation of international regulations, equality of nations' rights, compliance with the national will, continuing international cooperation within the framework of the International

¹³ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 29 June 2015

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), willingness to take action based on peaceful means, creating a fair environment for nuclear talks, and emphasis on the fact that Tehran would not retreat from its path of progress in achieving advanced peaceful nuclear technology (Gharibi 2008). Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy was thus based on three main pillars:

1. Excluding the monopoly of Iran's nuclear dossier and negotiations from the prerogative of the three European countries (UK, France and Germany) and the West and therefore, turning to the East, including the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries in the negotiating processes. According to Ahmadinejad, Iran was not just defending its own nuclear rights, but the nuclear rights of all developing countries. Ahmadinejad's belief was that Iran's nuclear policy could become a single policy for all these countries. In so doing, the Ahmadinejad administration paved the way for relationships between Iran and countries that engaged the Non-Aligned Movement in terms of negotiations between Iran and EU-3 (Salamati 2014);
2. Transferring the nuclear dossier from political channels to the legal framework of the IAEA based on the NPT and Additional Protocol;
3. Being determined to keep the nuclear fuel cycle and resume nuclear activities that Iran had voluntarily suspended (Fallahi 2007).

Ahmadinejad also stated that the nuclear programme was not an international crisis as portrayed by the West, but an example of the West's hostility to Iran's Islamic regime (Mousavian 2016). Ahmadinejad started talking about the Iranian nuclear programme in a nationalistic context. In Ahmadinejad's speeches, one can always hear the phrase 'Iran's undeniable right to nuclear technology', and an insistence that the Iranian nation will not surrender to the West's aggression and selfishness. One of Ahmadinejad's foreign policies towards the nuclear issue was his confrontational approach towards the West, believing that taking a confrontational approach in nuclear diplomacy would lead to the inalienable rights of the Iranian nation in acquiring peaceful nuclear technology being recognised (Eyvazi 2008). In September 2005, in a speech to the United Nations asserting Iran's commitment to transferring

its nuclear know-how to other Muslim countries, the new Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also suggested that an international consortium could manage Iran's uranium enrichment, with Iran sharing ownership with other countries. But the EU and the United States rejected this offer immediately (Osborne 2013). Following this rejection, the president stated the problem to be the U.S. seeking regime change in Iran, with the nuclear issue merely an excuse for American military intervention in Iran (Takeyh 2006). In their struggle and effort to gain their rights based on international law, the Islamic Republic leaders resisted being bullied by the West (Sahimi 2015). Addressing the Western powers as the 'forces of darkness' Ahmadinejad stated that no power would ever dare attack Iran for Iranian forces would be ready to oppose them (Ahmadinejad 2009a). In a speech in Bojnourd, the capital city of Khorasan Shomali (Northern Khorasan) province in August 2006, Ahmadinejad addressed the West, saying that, today, it is the Iranian people who own the country's nuclear technology. Those who want to negotiate with the Iranian people should know to which nation they are talking. If some believe they can keep talking to the Iranian nation using the language of threat and intimidation, they need to know that they are making a bitter mistake. Referring to the nuclear programme as a national project for the glory of Iran and Iranians, Ahmadinejad expressed that the West would soon realise that they are facing a vigilant, proud people (Ahmadinejad 2006c).

6.3.2 Shia Islam and Islamic Revolutionary Ideology

Ahmadinejad's foreign policy principles included the application of the notion of nationalism, his passion for the Twelfth Imam (*Mahdaviat*),¹⁴ denial of the Holocaust, and unquestioning obedience of *velāyat-e faqih*¹⁵ (Kisacik 2012). Ahmadinejad introduced a new element into the religious discourse of Iranian identity when, in September 2005, he concluded his United Nations' General Assembly speech with a prayer seeking the hasty re-appearance of the Hidden Imam, the Mahdi, the 12th Imam of Shia Muslims (Coughlin 2007). Upon his return to Tehran, he talked to Ayatollah Javadi Amoli about a divine halo surrounding him during his speech (*Ahmadinejad's Divine Halo* 2005). Given the remarkable domestic and global influence of political

¹⁴ Mahdaviat or Mahdiism is a religious Shia term referring to a 'belief in the Mahdi, the 12th Imam.'

¹⁵ Velāyat-e Faqih, which forms the central axis of contemporary Shia political thought, advocates a guardianship-based political system reliant on a just and capable jurist (faqih) to assume leadership of the government in the absence of an infallible Imam (Mahdi, the 12th Imam).

speeches, it is crucial to interpreting the ideological traits and aggressive tone typical of President Ahmadinejad and the way he incorporated this into his political discourse (Dehghani Firoozabadi and Zabiji 2012). In addition to Iranian/Persian nationalism, Shia Islam and Islamic Revolutionary ideologies also played a fundamental role in Ahmadinejad's speeches on nuclear policies and Iranian regional relations (Maloney 2002). In other words, Ahmadinejad came to power and operated within an intersubjective framework, which was the 'condition of possibility' for Ahmadinejad's specific discourse.

Ahmadinejad, like his predecessor, Mohammad Khatami, sought public recognition and legitimisation for making progress with Iran's nuclear activities. He reflected the national consensus in support of the programme and claimed enriching uranium for peaceful purposes to be an inalienable right of the Iranian nation (Linzer 2005). In this regard, Ahmadinejad's nuclear policies combined Iranian/Persian nationalism with a religious worldview (Ansari 2007a). The importance of religious discourse for Iran's nuclear programme was based on a nuclear *fatwā*¹⁶ issued on June 3, 2008, by the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who declared the production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons prohibited by Islam. Thus, the emergent religious discourse emphasised the peaceful nature of the nuclear programme. Both Ahmadinejad and Rouhani referred to the Supreme Leader's *fatwā* while addressing the peaceful essence of Iran's nuclear programme and Rouhani once declared that for him the *fatwā* is more valuable than the NPT (Tabatabai 2014). American and European officials however, remained sceptical of the good intentions of the *fatwā* and instead, interpreted Iran's nuclear motivations based on the report released by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and focusing on clandestine nuclear sites; although Western intelligence could never confirm that Iran did have a covert weapons' programme (Porter 2014b). Once Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran and former Foreign Minister, asked Khamenei to allow for bilateral negotiations with the U.S. over the nuclear issue, Khamenei said Americans could not be trusted as they have never shown goodwill to Iranians; however, we will give them this opportunity to announce to our people that we tried

¹⁶ *Fatwā* is a religious edict, which, in Shia jurisprudence, is traditionally issued by a mujtahid – a Muslim jurist who is qualified to interpret the Sharia law and answer religious questions.

every opportunity for the peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue within the framework of dignity, wisdom and expediency of our nation and regime. Thus, we will not let them justify their bad intentions (Alef 2014).

Using these references during his provincial trips and also at international arenas, President Ahmadinejad's motivation could have been to make Iran's nuclear ambitions more appealing to his audience, both domestically and internationally (Lake 2011). For years, Iranian officials argued that the nuclear programme was the most important national asset since the nationalisation of the oil industry in 1951. In Ahmadinejad's speeches as well as his acts, there appear a remarkable number of references to Iranian identity, with the Ahmadinejad administration believing that even merely halting the nuclear programme came as a challenge to the legitimacy of the state. As a principalist (*Osulgarā*), Ahmadinejad aimed at returning to the values of the Islamic Revolution adopted by its founding father, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Takeyh and Maloney 2011).

Ahmadinejad was always looking for opportunities to engage with people all around the world, including the American president, press, and people. The themes of 'Iranian nation', 'the right of our nation' and 'justice' were repeated in his speeches. With his statements, President Ahmadinejad laid the foundation for a new chapter in Iran's nuclear identity discourse. This would display the significance of discourse analysis of speeches in understanding the leader's conceptions of identity reinforced by actions and discourse. Another important point in Ahmadinejad's speeches was his repeated Quranic referencing. He used these references either in the religious discourse on the Iranian nuclear programme, or political discourse. Mohebat Ahdiyyih (2008) argues that Ahmadinejad's using verses from the Quran and referring to the Mahdi (the 12th Shia Imam) is not a tactic; but it is very serious and he has had the support from Shia clerics such as Ahmad Jannati, chairman of the Guardian Council of Iran. The key in using Quranic verses by Iranian leaders, particularly Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is their reference to the umma (nation), which means Iranian leaders consider the interests of all Muslims in their foreign policy (Akbarzadeh and Barry 2016). This demonstrates the importance of religious discourse and identity in Iran's politics and how the leaders perceive the country's policies, including the nuclear programme, as religious in

nature and not simply as benign. Ahmadinejad's aim was to revive the pure Islamic origins of the regime and resist Western oppression.

6.3.3 Persian Identity

Although Ahmadinejad is well known for his bitter religious rhetoric, he was also able to synthesise 'Iranian-ness with his brand of Islam', and treat the Iranian nation by portraying them as a "chosen people" (Ansari 2007a, p. 44). Thus, the fierce president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has evoked Iranian nationalism, strongly reminiscent of pre-Islamic Persia (Jalili 2014). He began stressing nationalistic Iranian themes that became controversial to the fundamentalist and conservative faction. Ahmadinejad's administration initiated the 'Maktab-e-Iran' (the Iranian School), an approach once led by Ahmadinejad's controversial chief of staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei (Tait 2010). Both Ahmadinejad and Mashaei believed that the Iranian School of thought is a compilation of three discourses of Mahdaviat, nationalism and Shiism (Rahim Mashaei 2010). While Mashaei angered Iranian hardliners with his conciliatory statements about the Iranian school of thought, Ahmadinejad supported and defended him:

I also said that Iran is a school of thought, a transcendent culture beyond geography and race, and I have confidence in Mr. Rahim Mashaei (Ahmadinejad 2010b).

Ahmadinejad's concept of Iranian or Persian nationalism is different from that understood by supporters of pre-Islamic nationalists who oppose Islam as a forced religion imposed upon them by Arabs. Ahmadinejad put forth beliefs in an Iranian Islam, which is a combination of all conceptions of Iranian identity. Ahmadinejad's references to religious discourse were based on his loyalty and belief in the Islamic Revolution and the principles of the revolutionary Islamic regime in Iran. For example, he believed in strengthening the guardianship of the jurist (*velāyat-e faqih*) as the most authentic and legitimate spirit of the Islamic Revolution (Arjomand 2010). Shahram Akbarzadeh and James Barry (2016) argue that the dominant historical view in Iran regards the Iranian nation as heirs of an ancient culture and civilisation that, predates Islam, has contributed to the spread of Islamic civilisation. For Iranians, the two conceptions of their identity (Persian and Islamic) may be interlinked, but as

Brenton Clark (2012) argues, they are not identical or considered the same by the nation. For example, during Ahmadinejad's administration, some scholars argued: "Iran was moving away from its Islamic values to revive dormant 'Persian' nationalism" (Ibid. p.76). When Iranian officials, including Ahmadinejad, emphasise Persian identity, it does include all Iranians regardless of their identity and religion (Abdolmohammadi 2015).

During the second period of his presidency, Ahmadinejad focused even more on the Iranian nation's sovereign right to nuclear technology, emphasising his concern about Western conspiracy and the efforts of the West to create a soft revolution that would overthrow the Islamic regime in Iran. In this case, he brought the Iranian people inside and outside of the country into a nationalistic spectrum, while presenting the nuclear programme as part of Iran's historical aspirations to find its rightful place within the global nuclear order (Farhi 2009). In his shift towards the pre-Islamic values of Iranian society, Ahmadinejad made reference to nationalist Persian icons, celebrating, for example, Cyrus the Great and Ferdowsi¹⁷ (Abdolmohammadi 2015). In 2010, the Ahmadinejad administration expounded on the "Iranian doctrine" (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016, p. 212) and invoked an ephemeral passage of the Cyrus Cylinder¹⁸ in Tehran, thus establishing Iran's pre-Islamic passion for human rights. This can be analysed by the social constructivist assumption that the structure of international politics is defined by both material and normative elements, with the latter pertaining to ideas, norms and rules that are socially and culturally produced (Jackson *et al.* 2005). Such an international normative structure or environment also shapes the identities and interests of states, which are the agents that through their practices and interactions re-create that very structure; and essentially, agents and structures are mutually constitutive (Wendt 1987a). Ahmadinejad thus asserted that there was a strong link between the Iranian and Islamic identity of Iranian people in terms of caring about civilisation and the rights of human beings. Although many Iranians converted to Islam, they also embraced a multifaceted identity, with a sense of national identity remaining for Iranians in their continued celebration of traditional

¹⁷ [Ferdowsi](#) is the legendary Iranian poet who remains a hero among Iranian nationalists for his life-long dedication and personal sacrifices to preserve the national identity, language and heritage of his homeland. Although his efforts caused him great hardship during his lifetime, he has always been honoured for producing one of the greatest poetic masterpieces of all time: the *Shāhnāme*.

¹⁸ The Cylinder belonged to Cyrus the Great, the sixth century B.C. Persian king and founder of the Persian Empire. The Cyrus Cylinder has been called 'the first declaration of human rights.'

Iranian holidays like Norouz, the Persian New Year, as well as their religious traditions (Coats and Robb 2008).

In their rhetoric, Ahmadinejad and his circle highlighted nationalism as a concept rooted in Iranian history, especially in the context of the nuclear programme, and pointed out its importance to the Iranian identity, along with the Shiite identity and Islamic identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Under Ahmadinejad's administration, one could see and hear Ferdowsi's poetry in government-sponsored media promoting the country's nuclear programme (Tabatabai 2014). As a country with nuclear technology, the Ahmadinejad administration was of the opinion that Iran would meet its own energy demands. The scientific and technological outcome of the nuclear programme has meant it becoming nationally regarded as a symbol of modern Iran, with Iranian officials and almost the majority of Iranian people thinking that their nation will regain its ancient honour and glory (Kisacik 2012).

6.3.4 Technological Advancement

Ahmadinejad believed if a country backs down even one step from its undeniable rights, that country is a loser. In his televised speech on March 13, 2006 (Ahmadinejad 2005d, p. 8), he said from a position of strength that “Iran would not surrender to the West’s threats and rejects their demands for giving up the Iranian nation’s right to have peaceful nuclear technology.” In his September 19, 2005 UN General Assembly speech, he asserted: “Those hegemonic powers, who consider scientific and technological progress of independent and free nations as a challenge to their monopoly on these important instruments of power and who do not want to see such achievements in other countries, have misrepresented Iran's healthy and fully safeguarded technological endeavors in the nuclear field as pursuit of nuclear weapons (Ibid.).” In his speech for Iran’s ambassadors and head of missions abroad in 2007, President Ahmadinejad announced, “all free nations and justice-seeking people from the oppressed countries, including the Iranian nation are now cooperating to resist against the oppressive system and thought of the West, in particular the U.S. and its allies” (Statement by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad 2007). Western powers then toughened their economic sanctions and put pressure on isolating Iran in order to deny Tehran the possibility of developing nuclear weapons. Ahmadinejad stated that the West should stop bullying Iran and emphasised that imposing economic sanctions

over Iran's nuclear programme only had a psychological effect on society, rather than an economic one (Fallahi 2017). The Supreme Leader also undermined the impact of economic sanctions and called them useless by proclaiming that under sanctions, Iran already acquired nuclear energy and that Iranian scientists had made great progress in uranium enrichment. He stated that sanctions are able to work to Iran's advantage in certain circumstances as they can strengthen Tehran's ambitions (Borszik 2014). Hence, not only did the sanctions not stop Iran's nuclear activities, but they strengthened their policy of resistance against being bullied by the West (Sahimi 2015). Ahmadinejad stated although the West seemed to be waiting for Tehran to retreat from its nuclear activities, Iran would not proceed with talks with anyone about the inalienable right of the Iranian nation to enrich uranium indigenously (Moshirzadeh 2007). He was determined that the Iranian nation would stand by their leader against the arrogant Western powers and act with awareness and faith.

As laid out in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as in public declarations, and actions of Iranian leaders and influential officials, the ultimate aim of Islamic revolutionary ideology is the "the rejection of arrogant and hegemonic discourses and establishment of a new fair international system" (Mohammad Nia 2012, p. 43). On 7 October 2009, Ahmadinejad stated that the Iranian nation had resisted the pressures applied to their nuclear programme and now the time had come for taking advantage of this resistance. In other words, about a quarter of a century of economic deprivation for Iran propelled Iran's nuclear programme based on independence and brought about an indigenous local nuclear programme for Iranians (Salamati 2014). Noting that national identity and pride in one's nation are the foundations of independence, Khamenei addressed Tehran's resistance to the West as the nation's response to its oppressors through national identity, grandeur, and resistance against being bullied (Khamenei 2008b). It appeared that the emphasis of Khamenei and Ahmadinejad was on no longer tolerating or allowing any foreign intervention in its domestic politics. It looks like that Ahmadinejad had similar solutions to the world's problems as those of Khamenei's (Secor 2010). Ahmadinejad's (2005a) focus, however, is not on Islam as a whole, but on a revival of justice, which according to him is not just limited to the Muslim world. According to Mohsen Milani (1994, p. 180), "Ahmadinejad reached out to developing countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa by emphasising their shared identity not just as

victims of arrogant powers, but also as the cradles of culture, civilisation, and of great thinkers and prophets”. He described Asia, Africa, Latin American, and the Middle East as the regions that have been direct targets of the arrogant powers and emphasised the ability of the people of these regions to resist the oppressors who show no consideration and respect for their identity, culture, dignity, honour, and morality (Moaddel 1993). Governments that want to stop Iran’s nuclear programme have only one goal when interfering in Iran’s domestic politics and imposing their will on the Iranian nation. For Ahmadinejad, the nuclear issue was the manifestation of the will of the Iranian nation and indeed the war of wills (Ahmadinejad 2009, p. 50). Some officials claimed that the regime’s red line was ‘UN resolution’. So, if the West wanted to adopt a resolution against Iran, then Iran should suspend its uranium enrichment activities. For some other officials, the regime’s redline was defending the nation’s identity by standing up for their inalienable rights, such as their right for peaceful nuclear energy (Firouzabadi 2015). Ahmadinejad also believed that “the regime’s red line is the Iranian nation’s dignity and further appeasement of Iran would be irreparable” (Ahmadinejad 2009, p. 51). In his speech to the people of Hamedan in 2010, Ahmadinejad stated that Western powers consider other nations, their dignity and identity as their own property and thus, do not respect the dignity and identity of other nations. His belief was that Western powers were still behaving as if other nations were their colonies (Ahmadinejad 2010).

6.3.5 The Policy of Resistance Against the West

Showing defiance or resistance towards Western powers have long been part of Iran’s political culture and a sign of pride for Iranians, showing the world that they do not have to bend in the face of coercion (Guldimann 2007). Neil Macfarquhar (2005) from The New York Times interviewed a selection of Iranians from different classes and positions on Iran’s right to develop nuclear technology or nuclear weapons. He pointed out that the Iranian nation, from nuclear negotiators to academics, bazaaris, clerics, and students all agree that Iran’s right to develop peaceful nuclear technology is a matter of pride, while they all showed opposition to developing nuclear weapons. For example, a seminary student in Iran explained the importance of nuclear technology to Macfarquhar through a quote from Imam Ali, first Imam of Shia Muslims: “They can offer me everything from the earth and heaven, but in exchange if they want me to so much as take the food from an ant’s mouth that is its right to eat,

I won't do it- on that basis- achieving the peaceful use of (nuclear) technology is really a matter of pride (for the Iranian nation) and will not stop for anything" (Macfarquhar 2005, p. 1). Thus, since taking office, Ahmadinejad also took over the conduct of Iran's nuclear policy, presenting himself as an advocate of the nuclear programme; for him, Iran's nuclear programme was a test case for the country's independence and self-determination (Warnaar 2013, p. 139).

Ahmadinejad emphasised Iran's inalienable right to develop nuclear technology under the NPT. Much of Ahmadinejad's discourse was a direct response to the world powers that were accusing Iran of noncompliance. To counter these accusations, Ahmadinejad was emphasizing that Iran's nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes and was insisting on Iran's rights under the NPT that says members who are committed to their obligations have the right to nuclear development, and Iran is not an exception to this (Ahmadinejad 2017a). Therefore, in an interview with CNN Ahmadinejad emphasised that Iran had the right to pursue the full nuclear cycle (Ahmadinejad 2005e). The nuclear issue for Ahmadinejad, like other Iranian leaders was an important notion of national pride, one that could easily bring about national honour and international prestige. However, Ahmadinejad's defiance and confrontational manner hardened Iran's relations with the international community (Naji 2007).

One reason Tehran is so committed to its nuclear programme, according to Max Fisher (2015), is that uranium enrichment has symbolic significance for Iran. Fisher argues that for many centuries Iran has been at the centre of cultural, scientific, economic, religious and political thought, but that Western interference in Iran's domestic affairs took away such a central position (Ibid.). The nuclear programme is a way for Tehran to show its resistance to the West and prevent them from controlling Iran's affairs. It strengthens the revolutionary concepts of independence, freedom and self-reliance. Another reason is that the nuclear programme has become an issue of paramount importance in Iranian domestic politics. As Shahram Chubin (2010b) argues, the nuclear programme initially had broad popular support because of its promise of energy independence and scientific progress. For Ahmadinejad, Iran's scientific development despite the efforts of hegemonic powers is of paramount importance. Resistance against arrogant powers for Ahmadinejad means defending

Iran's inalienable rights in the international sphere, including its right to develop a peaceful nuclear technology as well as standing against injustice (Warnaar 2013).

During a visit to the Province of Zanzan in 2006, President Ahmadinejad said that nuclear energy is a national demand. Emphasising the importance of the Iranian nation in achieving peaceful nuclear technology, he claimed that it could change the world equation. He added that Iran has the capacity to become a superpower if the Iranian nation believes it (Leopold 2006). On another provincial trip, Ahmadinejad stated that with trust in God and loyalty to the Supreme Leader, the Iranian nation was standing to conquer the highest peaks of science and technology and would not be retreating from its nuclear technology (Ahmadinejad 2014). In May 2008, Khamenei pointed out that no threat would hold the Iranian nation back from its right to enrich uranium *for useful purposes* (my italics). Later, in July 2008, Ahmadinejad also declared that Iran would not withdraw even one iota of its nuclear programme (Reardon 2012).

On 9 April 2006, President Ahmadinejad announced Iran's indigenous uranium enrichment technology and the launch of a full enrichment chain at the Natanz plant. This day was marked as *The National Day of Nuclear Technology* (Mousavi and Zahedin Labbaf 2009). For Iranian leaders, this day became a golden day in the history of the Islamic Republic, showing not only the empowerment and diligence of Iranian scientists but also proof that the Islamic Republic had reached a stage of self-reliance whereby no world power could withstand or threaten Iranians' national will (Salamati 2014). On the first anniversary of indigenous uranium enrichment in Iran, April 9, 2007, Ahmadinejad gave a speech at the Natanz nuclear facility, stating Iran's capability for enriching uranium on an industrial scale and proudly pointed out that Iran had entered the cohort of countries producing industrial nuclear fuel. While he repeated his belief that enriching uranium is a non-negotiable right of the Iranian nation, he also pointed out that Iran's nuclear path had now become irreversible (Hitchcock 2009). In his speeches, Ahmadinejad always referred to Iran's nuclear programme as encompassing the nuclear rights of the Iranian nation. In another speech in the city of Qazvin, he stated that Iran would only negotiate in equal and respectful conditions and without any prerequisites. However, he added that the Iranian nation would not negotiate over their basic rights (Ahmadinejad, 2010).

Decisions on the orientation of the nuclear programme are not presidents' decisions. The Supreme Leader makes these decisions (Raji 2013). However, although the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had the final say on all crucial domestic and foreign policy decisions, including nuclear policy, the president's discourse does play a vital role in Iran's foreign relations. Some believe that most of the elites within Ahmadinejad's administration did not have enough knowledge of diplomacy and foreign policy (Roshandel and Cook 2009). The new negotiating team during Ahmadinejad's presidency chose a path to resolve the nuclear issue that meant confrontation with the international community (Rouhani 2013). For example, I interviewed Stephan Klement¹⁹ (2015) - who joined the nuclear negotiations with Iran as soon as the EU was associated in Autumn 2004 and was part of the negotiations from 2004 to 2015 when the parties signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)²⁰ – he said, “I became convinced that Ahmadinejad's nuclear negotiating team was taking a very ideological and dogmatic perspective. He argued that “under Ahmadinejad, Iran's nuclear negotiating team had a very confrontational manner, which was not diplomatic, and that and during negotiations it was obvious to him that they did not want to make progress (Ibid.).”

Ahmadinejad's confrontational approach jeopardised Iran's negotiating leverage to a great extent (Entessar 2009). He once stated in a gathering of Muslim clerics that Iran's nuclear programme was like a train without brakes or a reverse gear. In response, the then U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, expressed that Iran needed a stop button and should suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities for further negotiations (Karimi 2007). In a 2011 annual visit to speak at the UN General Assembly, Ahmadinejad indicated Tehran's intention to reduce the intensity of confrontation with P5+1, offering to stop producing 20% enriched uranium. However, the confrontational and inflammatory arguments of Ahmadinejad and his negotiating team caused the West to not take his offer seriously. According to a State Department spokesperson, “Ahmadinejad makes a lot of empty promises. He knows exactly what has to happen. If Iran has a serious proposal to put forward, it has to put it forward to

¹⁹ Semi-structured phone interview, 2 September 2015

²⁰ JCPOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - an international agreement on the nuclear programme of Iran signed in Vienna on 14 July 2015, and between Iran, P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States - plus Germany), and the European Union.

the IAEA” (Kang 2013, p. 70). In his report on Iran’s nuclear programme, Yukiya Amano, the IAEA Director General, showed his concern about the possible military dimensions (PMD) to Iran’s nuclear activities (IAEA 2011). Ahmadinejad’s reaction to this report was that the IAEA supported the U.S. and other Western countries. He thus stated that the enemies of Iran should know they would never succeed over Iran, while they possess nuclear weapons; they accuse Iran of building nuclear bombs. However, he emphasised that Iranians could build nuclear bombs if it wanted to, but did not need nuclear weapons. According to Ahmadinejad’s statement, the Iranian people act based on a rich culture, logic, morality and seeking of justice (Salamati 2014).

According to the IAEA’s report, since 2009, there have no credible indications of activities regarding the development of explosive devices in Iran (Amano 2015). The argument has, however, been on the importance and accuracy of Khamenei’s nuclear *fatwā*. The critics’ claim is that if the *fatwā* forbids the production, stockpiling, or use of nuclear weapons under Islam, why did Iran continue some activities including the computer modelling of a nuclear explosive device (Goodenough 2015)? Complexity is a theme intertwined with Ahmadinejad’s policies. They constitute a combination of themes such as religious values, modernity, resistance, national rights, justice, and respect. For example, in his 2006 UN speech, Ahmadinejad said, “Today, humanity passionately craves commitment to the truth, devotion to God, quest for justice and respect for the dignity of human beings” (Ahmadinejad 2006).

6.3.6 The Policy of Looking to the East

Ahmadinejad decided that his administration would prefer to be creating alliances and forming new relations across the globe. Proceeding with the policy of ‘look to the East’, the Ahmadinejad government aimed at getting closer to and cooperating with countries that are not among the U.S. allies (Arghavani Pirsalami 2016). So, instead of demanding the EU-3 fulfill their obligations in order to accept Iran’s resumption of its uranium enrichment, Larijani (2007) argued that continuing negotiations with the EU-3 was not useful. Thus, he thought it is important to negotiate with Eastern countries (Russia, China, and non-aligned member states) to reach a better and quicker resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue (Rouhani 2013b). This was based on Iran’s outreach to the East instead of the West and focused on opposition to Western

political values in the region. The discourse of Revolutionary ideology, which requires independence from foreign influence, is popular among non-aligned states (Potter and Mukhatzhanova 2010). Iran has thus tried to champion this cause and galvanise influential states within the Movement in a bid to gain their support for its Revolutionary ideology and make them value the discourse of Islamic identity. With the policy of 'Looking to the East', Larijani stated that Iran preferred to increase the number of negotiating countries and continue nuclear talks with the European countries and the member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) within the framework of the NPT. However, this was not successful and EU-3 stopped negotiations when they did not receive any constructive results from negotiating with Russia, China and the NAM member states (Ibid.).

Mohsen Rezaei, Secretary of the Expediency Council at the time and one of the candidates for the 10th presidential elections, proposed that like the European countries that formed the EU, countries in Asia and the Middle East should form an alliance to serve the interests of every country in the region. Considering that the nuclear programme is considered a national endeavour, transcending the various administrations, Mohsen Rezaei proposed there could be a joint uranium enrichment project on Iranian soil with the U.S., the Europe, and Russia (Donyā-ye-Eghtesād 2015). In an interview for this thesis, Reza Marashi²¹ (2015) stated that “the Ahmadinejad administration’s worldview believed that Iran did not need to interact with the West, economically or socially and instead, could turn to the East, which would enable them to survive.” However, Marashi believes that “their worldview has been not only proven to be incorrect, but a dangerous and miserable failure (Ibid.).”

6.4 The Impact of U.S.’s Iran Policies on Ahmadinejad’s Nuclear Narratives

Iran’s nuclear policy underwent important changes and became bolder following Ahmadinejad’s decision to pursue the nuclear programme full speed irrespective of the international community’s concerns and pressures. Ahmadinejad’s administration believed developing a peaceful nuclear programme was Iran’s inalienable and legitimate right as a member of the NPT. Iranian leaders have always stated that Iran’s nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes, including economic and energy prosperity (Vaez and Sadjadpour 2013). This persistence of Iranian officials in

²¹ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 6 July 2015

referring Iran's rights under the NPT suggests that Iran's insistence on indigenous uranium enrichment is mostly a matter of ideals and integrity; as Maaïke Warnaar (2013) argues, Iran's desire to develop a nuclear programme is not just based on its needs, but also to be recognised by world powers and under international law. Mike Wallace interviewed President Ahmadinejad for his programme '60 minutes'; he asked whether or not he believed President Bush who vowed not to allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons. In response, Ahmadinejad said that Iran is not looking for nuclear weapons, the problem is that President Bush wants to solve every issue with bombs; in Ahmadinejad's opinion, the time of the bomb seemed to be over and in the past, whilst today is the era of constructive thoughts, dialogue among nations, and cultural exchange (CBS News 2006).

George Bush's Iran policy was based on his firm belief in Iran being a sponsor of terrorism and impeding peace and stability in the Middle East. He was also worried that Iran was only a short step away from building nuclear weapons. Therefore, in his State of the Union Address in 2002, Bush described Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the 'axis of evil' (Bush 2002). However, the result of categorising Iran in the 'axis of evil', which was meant to strengthen the position of conservative nationalists in Iran, led to the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a hardline president in July 2005 (Dunn 2007). While the U.S. and its allies were time and time again able to express their concerns about the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear programme, Ahmadinejad wrote a letter to George W. Bush to discuss the undeniable contradictions in the international arena, including the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the bloodshed of innocents, or the failure of Western liberal democracy to meet the needs of humanity (Ahmadinejad 2006b). Ahmadinejad's letter to George Bush did not receive a direct reply from the White House, but according to the *Kayhān* newspaper, it was a symbol of Iran's desire to restore peace in the region and a message to the U.S. that the complex issues in the region could not be resolved without the presence of such a powerful and influential country like Iran (Kayhan News 2006). One of the interesting aspects of Ahmadinejad's letter to Bush, which was written on the verge of nuclear talks between foreign ministers of Iran and EU-3, was that he urged the American leader to return to the 'religious principles' of the government (Hauser 2006). Instances such as this letter and Ahmadinejad's use of religion to lecture Bush was used to fostering a belief in Ahmadinejad's faith in the

constructive role of ideologies. The letter has subsequently been of paramount importance for American officials in demonstrating the mindset of Iranian elites (Slackman 2006).

The assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists has also been a rallying point for the nuclear programme in Iran and promoted as a clear foreign intervention in the inalienable right of the Iranian nation. Iran's nuclear martyrs are symbolised as evidence of Iran's innocence and oppression. According to Khamenei (2012), these have been those scientists with common features and objectives, who worked harmoniously to keep the nuclear cycle alive. The Iranian Supreme Leader believes that the U.S. and Israel assassinated Iranian nuclear scientists in order to stop the country's scientific movement, thus preventing the Iranian nation from the technological and scientific advancement that happened as a result of the blessing of Islam and the Islamic Revolution (Khamenei 2012). For years, the term Iran's 'nuclear martyrs' has become a rallying point for the country's nuclear programme and its right to uranium enrichment, regardless of the high cost of sanctions. When Majid Shahriari, an Iranian nuclear scientist, was targeted and killed by men on motorbikes who attached bombs to the windows of his car, President Ahmadinejad accused the West and Israel of his assassination (BBC News 2010). Manouchehr Mottaki, who was Iran's foreign minister at the time, also accused the UN Security Council of killing and injuring Iranian nuclear scientists. Shahriari was one of the nuclear scientists included on a UN Security Council sanctions list. Mottaki claimed that adopting UN resolutions against Iranian nuclear scientists had led terrorist groups to carry out these assassinations (Borger 2010b). On June 2013 and before the presidential elections in Iran, Ali Bagheri and Mahmoud Vaezi, Jalili and Rouhani's representatives, respectively, attended a debate over the function of both negotiating teams. Vaezi criticised Ahmadinejad and Jalili's diplomatic behaviour during the nuclear negotiations, believing their foreign policy not only caused the country's economy to experience its steepest decline but that it could not resolve the nuclear issue with P5+1. Comparing the Ahmadinejad administration's nuclear-negotiating process with the time when Rouhani was the chief negotiator, Vaezi expressed how dynamic the Rouhani's nuclear-negotiating team was (Shargh Daily 2013a).

For the purpose of satisfying Iran's national pride and also examining the possibilities for exiting from a nuclear stalemate, Ahmadinejad repeatedly asserted that Iran was already a 'nuclear state'. Rouhani, on the contrary, had different motives compared to his predecessor. Rouhani and his charismatic foreign minister, Javad Zarif, decisively worked toward reaching the nuclear deal for ending the nuclear impasse by seeking to stabilise the country's economy, that is, by removal of sanctions and expansion of Tehran's diplomatic horizons, regardless of the final result of the nuclear negotiations (Maloney 2014). However, this does not mean they would have accepted any deal just to improve the economic situation in Iran. In a speech celebrating his victory in the presidential elections, Rouhani claimed that centrifuges must spin, but so must the engines of industry and the economy (Rouhani 2015a); thus, we can find signs of the importance of people's livelihoods as well as the importance of technological advancement to be the right of the nation. It is Stephan Klement's (2015) belief that "the nuclear programme in Iran has always had a strong sense of nationalism. But in an interview conducted for this thesis, he points out he was convinced that during Ahmadinejad's presidency, especially when Jalili was the chief nuclear negotiator, this nationalistic view was used more dogmatically and ideologically, and they could not use it in a credible manner to strengthen their argument." According to Klement, during this presidency, it was really easy to adopt sanctions on Iran, because they could not sell their own story very well." This is because Ahmadinejad's negotiating team had a very confrontational, rather than diplomatic way, of dealing with the nuclear issue.

In another interview for this thesis, Walter Posch²² (2015) also suggests that "there was nothing to negotiate with Jalili, because he was so ideological and had no experience of the international political and diplomatic arena." Posch asserts, "Jalili basically thought that because Iran produces oil, which the West needs, this would be a guarantee of no sanctions, or at least no biting sanctions. With Rouhani, however, who as a cleric has a legalist approach, it has been much easier. The red lines appear the same in both Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations and the grand strategy of Iran can be seen as formulated via a set of important and highly efficient institutions; once approved, Supreme Leader Khamenei will put all his weight behind these. Posch

²² Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 6 August 2015

states that when it comes to implementation, Khamenei is one of the most flexible politicians in Iran, hence the change of political elites to find a solution – or from Tehran’s perspective, to prevail in negotiations.”

It is important to note that many Middle Eastern societies (including Iran) are collectivistic in nature; as Yeganeh Hamid (2007) states, in collectivistic societies, identity is based on the social system. This perception is a demonstration of the impact of identity-based discourse on Iran’s negotiating position. By the end of Ahmadinejad’s presidency, nuclear negotiations with the P5+1 had reached an impasse and Iran’s symbolic nuclear programme remained an obstacle for progressing Iran’s relationship with the outside world, especially the West (Litwak 2014).

6.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the contention that in addition to the Shia Islamic discourse of Iranian identity, the Ahmadinejad period also bore witness to the importance of Persian identity as a pre-Islamic discourse containing the values of Iranian identity. Discourse analysis has also enabled the identification of the ideologies embedded in the constructions of national identity during Ahmadinejad’s period. His discourses of Persian identity, Shia Islamic identity and Islamic Revolutionary ideology can be seen to shed light on the social constructivist notions of values and norms such as resistance to the West or any foreign intervention, victimisation, modernisation, and the rights of the nation. In his nuclear decision-making, Ahmadinejad leaned on the people’s support of the nuclear programme, resistance against Western powers and emphasis of Iran’s legal and non-negotiable right of enriching uranium based on international treaties. His confrontational approach was based on the ideology that the history of the Islamic Republic shows anytime a hegemonic power encounters Iran. Ahmadinejad’s obvious message was that Iran would not retreat from its peaceful nuclear activities, not even one iota.

Ahmadinejad’s narrative signalled the end of a cooperative attitude towards Western demands. Instead, it reasserted the importance of resisting Western pressure and the pursuit of nuclear activities regardless of the consequences (Barzegar 2009b). Iran’s nuclear issue could have been resolved without being referred to the UNSC and without imposing draconian sanctions, however, it turned into a movement

representing national pride and dignity and hallmarked by Ahmadinejad's aggressive approach. His provocative statements were to indicate his firm support for the Iranian theocracy and Islamic Revolutionary ideologies. Therefore, based on the Islamic Republic's objective of cutting the West's hands from Iran's domestic politics and becoming an independent and powerful state, Ahmadinejad aimed to gain theocratic support to make Iran a stronger nation, in spheres domestic, regional and international.

For Iranian elites, including Ahmadinejad, the past will never fade away. There has always been a paradoxical combination of national pride and prestige in Iranian culture and a sense of being a victim of oppressors since the early history of Shia Islam and throughout Iran's history of invasion by several powers (Ramazani 2009). Focusing on Ahmadinejad's foreign policy behaviour in general, and nuclear policy in particular, we can clearly identify the signs of his anti-Western revolutionary ideology, which distinguishes Ahmadinejad from his predecessor, Mohammad Khatami and his successor, Hassan Rouhani. Ahmadinejad made his standpoint clear, his notion of 'Iranian Islam', pioneered by his closest advisor, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, made pre-Islamic Iranian national identity a pillar of the Ahmadinejad administration (Milani 2011). Like other Iranian officials, Ahmadinejad argued that Iran was simply pursuing its national rights in the nuclear issue, and thus, Western attempts to halt Iran's nuclear progress at any time became an assault on its national rights (PANA 2018).

The next chapter investigates Hassan Rouhani's nuclear policy and discourse based on the connection between national security, prestige and bargaining leverage as well as nuclear negotiations. Core themes resulting from a discourse analysis of the data during Ahmadinejad's presidency include national identity, Persian identity and culture, religion, resistance to the West, turning to the East, resistance to economic sanctions, justice, dignity, respect, justice, and rights of the Iranian nation. These themes, however, are not limited to Ahmadinejad and his administration; they can be seen in the speeches of president Rouhani and other Iranian officials.

Chapter 7. Rouhani's Nuclear Policy: Soft but Defiant Rhetoric (2013-2015)

“There are some very important points about foreign policy and the nuclear programme that I need to tell the Iranian people. The government's policy in dealing with foreign affairs is the ‘discourse of moderation’; thus, it does not have to do anything with surrender, compromise, passivity or confrontation.”

— Hassan Rouhani²³

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a discourse analysis of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's nuclear decision-making with regards to his conceptions of the discourses of Iranian national identity. In light of examining Iran's foreign policy regarding its nuclear programme, this part of the thesis examines the nuclear discourse under president Hassan Rouhani, to find out its differences and or similarities with president Ahmadinejad's nuclear discourse. This chapter will shed light on the Rouhani administration's perception of the discourses of Iranian national identity and examine the nuclear programme as a core of Iranian identity. But before discussing president Rouhani's nuclear policies, it is necessary to highlight his background. Born in 1948, Hassan Rouhani and his family were against the Shah's regime and supported Ayatollah Khomeini. His interest in religion began in his teens and he studied with some outstanding Shia clerics of the time. He went on to study judicial law, and his political career following the Islamic revolution of 1979 consisted of being the former commander of the Iranian air defences, former secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, and head chief nuclear negotiator from 2003 to 2005 (Arkin 2013). Rouhani's judicial and religious background, along with his studies in the West,²⁴ made him a moderate diplomat and he earned the reputation of being *the diplomat sheikh* (*A&E Networks Television. Accessed: November 2013*). Solving Iran's economic problems and spinning centrifuges were paramount examples of spiritual rhetoric during the presidential elections of 2013 (Harris 2014). According to Rouhani (2015b), domestic economic issues and spinning centrifuges are two sides of the same coin that are not easy to synchronise due to the concerns of

²³ President's speech on the 35th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Republic, 11 February 2014

²⁴ Hassan Rouhani earned his doctorate in constitutional law at Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland.

the international community on easing economic sanctions [on Iran] whilst the centrifuges continue to spin. This is an example to demonstrate that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been established on the principles of promoting religious and spiritual values, justice, respect, dignity, and also standing against the overbearing powers (Khamenei 2006b).

Ahmadinejad's inflammatory rhetoric increased tensions with other states, led Iran towards marginalisation, and was unable to bring about success in nuclear negotiations. However, Rouhani believes in diplomacy, negotiation and some sort of agreement in foreign relations (Jafari and Janbaz 2016). He has sought international respect for the Iranian nation and stated the only condition in which Iran would resume nuclear talks would be that if the West came to respect the nuclear rights of the Iranian nation (Rouhani 2014a). Rouhani has expressed that the country had a similar strategy on the nuclear programme and other important issues of national security during the Hashemi and Khatami administrations; both presidents' strategies had been to pursue nuclear fuel technology (Rouhani 2013b). As Mohammad Daryaei (2015) mentioned:

“Both Ahmadinejad and Rouhani regarded the same level of importance for national identity. They have the same position with regard to feeling proud of the national identity and preserving the achievements of Iranian scientists. But the difference is on how to tackle the nuclear issue to resolve it. President Rouhani believes in a process of engagement with the world powers, whereas President Ahmadinejad did not.”²⁵

7.2 Foreign Policy and Nuclear Diplomacy: A Policy of Détente and Rapprochement

Since early 2005, Iran had begun to witness the emergence of challenges for power both internally and externally: elections in Europe and the U.S., the election of the Director General for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as well as the presidential elections in Iran. Therefore, Hassan Rouhani (2013b) emphasised the necessity of convincing all influential institutions and organisations in Iran to actively

²⁵ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 9 July 2015

participate in resolving the nuclear issue as an indispensable national issue, that is, regardless of their factional differences. As a former national security adviser and chief nuclear negotiator under Khatami, President Rouhani demonstrated that his administration would alter Iran's nuclear posture. Like Ahmadinejad, President Rouhani is a supporter of the nuclear programme and perceives it as a symbol of Iran's right to sovereignty and national pride, but, unlike Ahmadinejad, he has adopted a constructive and interactive diplomatic strategy with the West, his top priority being to cooperate with Western countries and engage Iran with the global economy. An EU official²⁶ reported to me that the Rouhani government decided to engage with world powers and negotiate a deal, in contrast with before, when there was no willingness to make a deal or to make any compromises whatsoever. To that end, Rouhani accepted the necessity of compromise and thus negotiated with the P5+1 (the permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) over Iran's nuclear issue (Monshipouri and Dorraj 2013). By doing so, Rouhani used a 'key' as his election symbol to show his willingness to solve Iran's problems, including the nuclear crisis. His first aim was to transfer Iran's nuclear dossier away from the UN Security Council and look for full closure of this by the IAEA. This paved the way for negotiations for the JPOA (Joint Plan of Action on November 24, 2013, and finally to the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) on July 14, 2015 (Wastnidge 2016).

In order to achieve the country's goals in international politics, Hassan Rouhani (2013b) has referred to three elements of time, internal peace and confidence, claiming that his government's strategy is to fulfil the goals of the unfinished nuclear programme without crossing the regime's red line(s), regardless of the context of the agreement between Iran and the P5+1. If Iran's capability to indigenously enrich uranium is not included in the conclusion of the agreement, the Iranian leaders and the people will not settle for it (Handjani 2013). Rouhani's strategy has also included stopping the referral of Iran's nuclear dossier to the United Nations Security Council. The development of nuclear technology is the legitimate right of the Iranian nation, whilst additionally, developing such modern and complicated nuclear technology is an element of pride and prestige for Iranians (Rouhani 2013c). A reformist politician

²⁶ Semi-structured phone interview, 2 September 2015

and former legislator, Ahmad Shirzad refers to the reporting of Iran's nuclear dossier to the Security Council in 2006 as an issue jeopardising the country's relations with the international community and undermining the trust between negotiating parties (Sciolino 2006). Emphasising the importance of the peaceful role of nuclear technology in the future of the country and Iran's interaction with the world are among Rouhani's key foundations for the country's growth and development (Rezapoor and Niakoe 2017). This is a fundamental principle of the social constructivism that focuses on changes in performance, behaviour, and interactions of the governments (Jackson *et al.* 2005).

In the early 2000s, Iran witnessed the closing of the reformist administration of Iranian President Khatami with his government's modest progress in the country's nuclear crisis (Kaussler 2008). Khatami's presidency, with its moderate and reformist policies, was largely constrained by opposition from hardline quarters (Mohajeri 2017) and a lack of sufficient support from Supreme Leader Khamenei (Khamenei 2010). Conservatives rather than Khatami loyalists dominated institutions such as the judiciary and the IRGC (International Crisis Group 2003). The conservatives were divided, splitting into traditionalists such as the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and pragmatists like former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the SNSC secretary as well as the current president, Hassan Rouhani. As Shireen Hunter (2014) argues, over the years following the victory of the Islamic Revolution and having come of age in the bases of the eight years war with Iraq, they tended to identify the Islamic Republic less with a revolutionary ideology and a promise of change but with the advocacy of Shia and Persian identities. Many of these Iranian 'neo-conservatives' had links or were members of the Revolutionary Guards (International Crisis Group 2004), who played a prominent role in the nuclear programme (Alcaro 2018) (see section 4.2 on Islamic Republic of Iran's Political Structure in Chapter 4). According to Hassan Rouhani (2017), besides Islamic and Persian discourses of identity, Iranians accepted the reality of this new world. In other words, they began to combine technology, economics, politics and modern culture with their traditional past and religious identity, creating a new mix of identity and livelihood (Ibid.). Iranian people do not see the conflict between being religious, Iranian and living a modern life, so any attempt to impose a single identity on the

Iranian people is ineffective. According to Rouhani, “Iranian people feel religious, moral, Iranian and modern, and they can experience all of these together” (Ibid. p. 2).

To some extent, Iranian leaders’ conceptions of national identity are influenced by other powers’ perceptions of the Iranian nuclear programme. This foregrounds the issues of trust and distrust. For instance, despite supporting the nuclear talks, Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has always been sceptical of the U.S.’ intentions. Khamenei has asserted his distrust of the U.S. and has warned against the U.S. deceit in implementing the nuclear deal (Lob and Mahdavi 2015). Hassan Rouhani (2013b) criticised the previous government’s nuclear policies for not sending a complete expert report to senior officials as well as expressing distrust for the West and international organisations that have always been problematic. Rouhani, with his approach of engagement, was looking forward to overcoming the distrust. Reza Marashi²⁷ (2015) asserted in an interview for this thesis that “following on from the Iran-Iraq war, Iran developed a mentality of self-sufficiency and a mentality of not being able to trust or rely upon other states.” Marashi argues, “what happened during the Iran-Iraq war should be factored into Iran’s self-perception of power and prestige.” He also asserts, “Iran’s nuclear programme after the revolution was first strategic and survival-based imperative and then it became something that was ingrained in this concept of prestige and dignity and because we have to remember the concept of dignity and prestige gain importance when global powers tell you that you cannot have or do something (Ibid.)” All conceptions of Iranian national identity (including nationalism, Shia religion, modernity and Islamic revolutionary ideology) are very important factors with regard to Iran’s nuclear programme and Iran’s negotiations over the nuclear programme; according to Marashi, the Iranian government always takes each of these issues into account (Ibid.).

In the eyes of the moderate government of Hassan Rouhani, negotiation and transparency over the nuclear programme, were perfect subjects for engagement with the world to demonstrate Iran's rationality in order to dissolve the walls of fear that had been built up around Iran, as well as removing the crippling sanctions that had been imposed on the country during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

²⁷ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 6 July 2015

(Center for Strategic Studies of Islamic Education 2015). Hassan Rouhani's election campaign was based on a narrative of prudence and hope. As a moderate religious leader, his beliefs are rooted in diplomacy, cooperation, constructive interaction and the normalisation of Iran's relations with the international community (Dehghani Firoozabadi and Ataei 2014). In his presidential campaign, he blamed Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration for the crippling economic sanctions that were imposed on Iran because of the government's confrontational nuclear policy. Rouhani stated he would restore Iranian national pride and asked the Iranian people to support him in restoring the nation's power and unity (Rouhani 2013d). In his first 100 days' report, Rouhani said: "I do not want to say that all economic problems go back to the economic sanctions, because it was largely a matter of mismanagement. In a situation where more sanctions were ahead of us, and the government knew it very well, the former president [Ahmadinejad] said that the sanctions were just 'torn papers', and that increased the country's dependence on foreign trade in the economic sector" (Rouhani 2013e). Rouhani held Ahmadinejad responsible for putting 'brutal pressure' on people under the pretext of Iran's nuclear intentions (Ibid.).

With regards to Ahmadinejad's confrontational approach to the West, Rouhani argued that you cannot confront the world to gain what you want, but you must resist the world's illegitimate demands (Ibid.). Contrastingly, Ahmadinejad claimed that the sanctions that were imposed on Iran came about due to the activities of the nuclear negotiating team from 2003 to 2005 when Hassan Rouhani was in charge of these negotiations (Ahmadinejad 2017b). Ahmadinejad argued that the sanctions were the cost that the Iranian people would pay because of the dramatic compromises of Mohammad Khatami's reformist government (Ibid.). Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, on the other hand, considered the existing sanctions as an opportunity for Iran to reduce its dependence on oil (Ahmadinejad 2012a). As such, in his budget plan of 2013, he demanded governmental and non-governmental organisations and institutions support Iran's 'national production' and 'economy of resistance' as a way to deal with sanctions (Ahmadinejad 2012b). Thus, Ahmadinejad considered the sanctions as an imperial response (Black 2010) to the exercise of national pride and unity through resistance, and then resistance to the sanctions as a further expression of pride and unity (Kaussler and Newkirk 2012). When the nuclear negotiations came closer to an agreement, a group of Hassan Rouhani's critics held a conference entitled '*We are*

Worried'. They called Rouhani and his negotiating team '*Compromisers*' (Ehteshami 2014). The critics called '*Delvāpasān*' stated that their debate was not about Ahmadinejad or Rouhani, but about the Iranian national interest and resistance to Western demands from Iran. They said the rights of the nation are not for sale; but if you want to sell the rights of the Iranian nation, set a world record price for them (Rouhani 2018a). Hassan Rouhani thinks that *Delvāpasān* favour the economic sanctions, whilst he believes sanctions are a great injustice to the Iranian nation (Rouhani 2018a). According to Rouhani (2013f), his administration is looking to engage with the world, which means believing in equality, shared interests, shared concerns and thus, is adopting a constructive approach to diplomacy based upon engagement whilst not relinquishing one's rights. One of the priorities of the Rouhani administration has been to de-securitise Iran's portrait in the international system. In this regard, the desecuritisation of Iran's nuclear dossier, which had become a security issue for actors in the international system, could be turned into a political issue, and therefore the best option for Rouhani (Ahmadinejad *et al.* 2018). As Khalili (2016) points out, Iran's nuclear intentions until then were entangled with ideas such as 'fear of Iran', 'fear from Shia Islam', and 'Shia Crescent'.

Usually, in diplomacy, talks focus on the balance of interests and security issues, where the negotiating parties discuss material issues such as weapons, oil, and trade. However, after his election, Rouhani argued for the importance of Iranian identity and that understanding the discourses of Iranian national identity would be a key driver in reducing tension. He stated that respecting Iran on equal terms and Iran's respectful behaviour to the international community are intertwined, but it will not happen until the world's countries have a better understanding of each others' identities and cultures (Rivera 2016). This perspective here demonstrates that "states do not enter the international sphere with fixed identities and interests, but rather, their attitudes to political mechanisms of the rule were shaped and constructed through intersubjective engagement in the international sphere" (Chandler 2013, p. 217).

The administrations of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Hashemi Rafsanjani, Khatami, and Ahmadinejad, i.e., the 4th to 9th administrations put a great deal of effort into the nuclear project and played an undeniable role in its progress. However, Rouhani (2013b) was surprised as to why some officials of the 9th administration, from

Ahmadinejad's first term of presidency, attacked those who undertook the responsibility of advancing the nuclear programme. In return, they attempted to introduce themselves as the "main characters of achieving nuclear technology and heroes of the nuclear industry in Iran" (Rouhani 2013b, p. 1193). In response to President Ahmadinejad's announcement to enrich 3.5 per cent U-235, Hassan Rouhani as the former chief nuclear negotiator, criticised his successor, Ali Larijani. Rouhani called for striking a better balance, for more reason and less emotion (Alexander and Hoenig 2008). In an interview conducted for this thesis, Shahin Dadkhah²⁸ compared the two leaders; according to Dadkhah, "While Ahmadinejad aimed at taking advantage of the nuclear programme to weaken his domestic competitors, Rouhani was not seeking to use the nuclear issue to resolve domestic issues, but also he considered resolving the nuclear crisis as a prelude to a détente with the West. Therefore, when he took power as Iran's president in June 2013, his first attempt regarding the nuclear issue was to arrange a plan to resolve the nuclear crisis, and he appointed Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, and his team to be in charge of the nuclear dossier." Further to this point, in another interview for this thesis, Stephan Klement²⁹ (2015) is also of the belief that "the main reason for the success of Rouhani's nuclear negotiating-team was the constructive cooperation of its main players, for Rouhani and Zarif believe in the mutual respect and understanding between negotiation parties as essential to reaching a desirable, yet reasonable agreement."

Rouhani's ability to shift Iran's nuclear policy has been tied to the power and will of the Supreme Leader (Shanahan 2015). One of Rouhani's success factors during his presidency according to Bijan Khajepour³⁰ (2015), has been his intelligent presentation. All the advancements to resolve the nuclear issue have happened under Khamenei's guidance, which was not the case for Ahmadinejad and Jalili. Khajepour states that Ahmadinejad wanted to be the champion, while Rouhani and Zarif sidestepped this and demonstrated Khamenei as the champion (Ibid.). In his letter to the Supreme Leader to congratulate him on the victory of the nuclear talks, Rouhani stressed that Iran achieved this victory when the great powers realised that economic

²⁸ Semi-structured phone interview 28 April 2016

²⁹ Semi-structured phone interview, 2 September 2015

³⁰ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 13 August 2015

sanctions could not destroy Iran's society and as such were unable to prevent Tehran from progressing in its nuclear technology; president Ahmadinejad always emphasised Iran's resistance to the West and that Iran would not halt its nuclear programme and not even give up one iota of the rights of the Iranian nation (Ahmadinejad 2008). In addition, Rouhani asserted, the key to Iran's success in this field was the nation's unity, consensus and most importantly, ability to act under the supervision of its Supreme Leader (Rouhani 2015c). In other words, in Rouhani's view, it was about how the policy of resistance to the West and to economic sanctions had proved successful and thus, this understanding of resistance is central to Iran's identity today.

7.3 Portrait of the Dignity of the Iranian Nation

Iran's policies are derived from "the principles of dignity, rationality and prudence" (Zarif 2014, p. 57). This has specifically been highlighted in the duration of the nuclear negotiations and proceeded by the message of the Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, inviting the Western powers to count Iran as equal in negotiations and respect the dignity of the Iranian nation (Zarif 2015a). Strengthening and promoting Iranian-Islamic culture and values and the Persian language is of paramount importance in Iran's policy-making processes. Rouhani's discourse of prudent moderation refers to a vision of Iran that keeps well away from tensions with the international community. Hassan Rouhani's emphasis on moderation and avoiding extremism in addition to constructive and effective interaction with the outside world have been among the central issues of his election campaign (Rouhani and Nahavandian 2013). In so doing, the shift in the views and perceptions of foreign policy-makers, as well as the emergence of new literature in the political arena, all represent a new chapter in Rouhani's foreign policy (Haghgoo *et al.* 2017). Rouhani (2016a) says Iran's ability to produce nuclear energy is related to a country's dignity and commensurate with Iran's status in the world. As stated in his first UN speech after taking office, Iran's drive for nuclear technology is first and foremost powered by a 'demand for dignity and mutual respect' (Rouhani 2013g). This can be explained using Alexander Wendt's (1992) constructivist analysis of identities as the basis of interests. Indeed, actors can collectively define or hold identities about themselves and others, with these identities constituting the structure of the social world. In this way, one can argue that Rouhani seems to reason that nuclear technology is part of

the social construction of Iranian national identity as well as part of the existing international system (Lundberg 2013).

The domain of identity can also be extended to Iran's peaceful nuclear programme. For Iranians, having access to a nuclear fuel cycle and nuclear energy means diversifying energy resources. Iranians demand dignity and respect and the revival of their historical place in the world. Without understanding the role of identity, many of the problems that Iran and the West face remain unresolved (Rouhani 2013h). Hence, taking into consideration the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, Rouhani's government pays attention to realities both domestic and international (Dehghani Firoozabadi 2014). Iran's endeavour is for the West to recognise its national rights and respect Iranians' national dignity, independence and achievements in different aspects of science and technology (Zarif 2014). Interviewed for this thesis, Ambassador John Limbert³¹ (2016) argued that "if we look at the last 120 years of Iran's history, the main feature has been a struggle to assert its identity. Looking at the constitutional period, the reforms of Reza Shah, or the nationalisation of oil, Limbert suggested that they all demonstrate a sense of Iranians wanting to articulate a problem, that they had lost their status and dignity and were being pushed around and occupied; leading to the need to assert their national identity in one way or another." Limbert stated that, "Rightly or wrongly, the reality is that from an economic point of view, most people would say that nuclear power and nuclear-generated electricity does not make a lot of sense." However, according to Limbert, "the reality is that for Iran, the nuclear issue carries great symbolic importance in terms of it being a carrier of national identity, dignity and Iran's place in the world." As Ambassador Limbert put it, "one reason for the success of the sides in reaching an agreement was that the P5+1 representatives began to understand the symbolic importance of the nuclear programme for Tehran." That is, the world powers realised that the negotiations and agreement were not just about legal and technical issues, but that there was a large political and psychological component of Iranian identity to the negotiations (Hajjani and Irvani 2018). Likewise, John Limbert (2016) in the interview for this thesis also indicated, "if we look at the Iranian supporters of the nuclear deal, they stressed the deal guaranteeing their rights and protecting their national dignity." Thus, Limbert emphasises "the

³¹ Semi-structured Skype interview, 7 January 2016

symbolic perspective of the Iranian nuclear programme,” which as he puts it “is clearly an important criterion (Ibid.).”

7.3.1 The Right of the Iranian Nation

Iranian leaders hold a similar conception of the Iranian nuclear programme as a symbol of Iranian national identity. It comes from one of the social constructivist central points on the ways actors acquire their identities and how these identities shape the actors’ interests, whether material or ideational interests (Van Wyk *et al.* 2007). Actors share their understandings of the world and therefore construct the social reality according to their interpretations (Hopf 1998). For example, when Rouhani, for the first time after being elected as Iran’s president, attended the annual opening of the United Nations General Assembly, he argued that the world misunderstood the core of Iran’s identity; for according to him, developing a peaceful nuclear energy programme is at the core of that identity (Rouhani 2013f). In response to journalists in the *Etemād* newspaper, Hassan Rouhani stressed that Iran’s peaceful nuclear programme is a national and non-partisan issue. He also referred to the nuclear programme as the Iranian people’s absolute right, emphasising that his administration will not give up the rights of the Iranian people (Rouhani 2014b).

7.3.2 Persian Identity

Like his predecessors, Hassan Rouhani has also highlighted the progress of Tehran’s indigenous nuclear programme as a core of national identity. In an interview with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria, Rouhani said, for the Iranian nation, nuclear technology is part of national pride and that Iranian people are very sensitive to this issue (Rouhani 2014c). In that same interview, Rouhani emphasised, “it is a part of our national pride, that nuclear technology has become indigenous, and recently, we have managed to secure very considerable prowess with regards to the fabrication of centrifuges and not under any circumstances would Iran destroy any of its existing centrifuges” (Ibid.). In his election campaign, Hassan Rouhani (2013i) emphasised that paying attention to the Iranian culture, the Islamic culture, the Iranian identity, and the Islamic identity is equally important.

In another speech answering the questions of Iranians who live abroad, Hassan Rouhani as a candidate of Iran’s presidential elections for the 11th government promised the Iranians abroad that he will bring respect back to the Iranian passport all

across the world (Rouhani 2013j). While the nuclear programme of Iran was a source of concern and distrust for the West, Rouhani said he will resolve this issue, so the West would recognise Iran's right to the peaceful nuclear programme. He also stated that geographical distance cannot affect Iranian national identity, and Iranians are all their nationality as well as their Islamic culture (Ibid.). The ideology of the Islamic Revolution in Iran has inherently been Islamist; however, Iran's revolutionary leaders always emphasised Iranian nationalism as well as Shia Islam as equally important (Aarabi 2019). For the Western powers in their negotiations for Iran's nuclear programme, understanding the non-material or ideational aspects of Iran's nuclear programme has been very helpful (Sajjadpour and Ejtehadī 2010). Thus, the desire and enjoyment in representations of Iranian identity while introducing Tehran's nuclear ambitions to the world have helped the West, in particular, the U.S. to understand Iran's nuclear ambitions more clearly (Solomon 2016).

7.3.3 Shia Islam and the Islamic Revolution's Ideology

For Rouhani, the Islamic Revolution was the foundation of national dignity and national identity, and the rise of Islam in Iran was a pivotal point for the country's civilisation and the Islamic Revolution has been an important milestone in Iranian history (Rouhani 2018b). Faith is an important theme of the religious discourse on Iran's nuclear policy. On 4 June 2006, in his speech on the seventeenth anniversary of Imam Khomeini's death, Ayatollah Khamenei (2006c) stated that the West was claiming Iran's commitment to building a nuclear bomb. According to Khamenei, this was an irrelevant and false claim. The Supreme Leader stated that Iran does not need a nuclear bomb. Iran does not have any goal to use nuclear weapons against others, with Khamenei asserting that the use of nuclear weapons is against Islamic law. He claimed that Iran does not claim a need to dominate and rule the world, like the U.S., and that is why they possess nuclear bombs and Iran doesn't need them. Khamenei also stated that Iran's explosive power is their 'faith'; Iranian people and Iranian youth who stayed faithful and resisted in the most difficult times would thus stand strong against false Western accusations (Ibid.).

Despite Rouhani's emphasis on retaining Iran's indigenous nuclear programme, like other religious leaders in Iran, he has also addressed the prohibition of developing weapons of mass destruction according to a Fatwā issued by Iran's Supreme Leader

as a Shia leader, which is considered as a social reality. As agents and structures are theoretically interdependent, Alexander Wendt (1987a) argues that the social realities shape the actors' understandings of the world. In an interview with Christiane Amanpour of CNN, Rouhani stated that based on its religious belief system and ethical standpoint, Iran disapproves of the development of weapons of mass destruction (Rouhani 2013). Rouhani emphasised diplomatic skills and patience as the two prerequisites for resolving the Iranian nuclear issue. He addressed impatience and rushing to conclusions as factors leading to internal and external security dilemmas for the regime. On the other hand, he has cited that excessive caution in resolving nuclear issues would delay the exercise of the rights of the Iranian nation and the national authority (Rouhani 2013): "In a sensitive national case, the expectation is that all the authorities and parties support the decisions made by the system"; thus, Rouhani believes this is the pure meaning of responsibility (Rouhani 2013, p. 115). It can, therefore, be seen that Iran's domestic postures have been directed more towards establishing a national identity based on the support of a coherent legitimation strategy.

7.3.4 Modernity and Technological Advancement

This section illustrates how modernity and technological advancement are used in the construction of Iranian national identity. In a televised interview, Rouhani (2014d) commented that Iran and P5+1 came to an understanding that in addition to indigenous enrichment, Iran needs to acquire modern nuclear technology. Hence, he stressed, as soon as the final nuclear deal is reached, world powers should be ready to provide Tehran with this modern nuclear technology (Ibid.). Stating that the two sides (Iran and the P5+1) will eventually come to an agreement on the nuclear issue, with world powers accepting Iran as an equal, Rouhani said: "To the great nation of Iran, I say today that the world has accepted that Iran should have nuclear technology, and this understanding will be win-win" (Ibid.). Peter Jenkins³² (2016) said in an interview for this thesis that he "believes Tehran's resistance and insistence on pursuing a nuclear programme is connected to the very natural Iranian desire to take the country in the same direction as that travelled by Turkey, China, Japan and certain other Asian countries." Thus, as Jenkins puts it, "those nations that fell behind Western Europe

³² Semi-structured phone interview, 5 March 2016

following the European renaissance and enlightenment and were at various times humiliated by the West, are now catching up with it.” Jenkins also said, “post-1991, Saddam Hussein’s uranium enrichment programme was completely dismantled by UN inspectors.” So, Peter Jenkins poses a question, saying, “one has to ask, if Iran’s nuclear programme has been designed for security purposes, then why Iran continued its uranium enrichment activities during the 1990s or after the downfall of Saddam Hussein. According to Jenkins, this is where the idea of prestige becomes especially relevant (Ibid.).”

7.3.5 The Policy of Looking to The West

By the end of Ahmadinejad’s presidency, the West has interpreted Iran's nuclear programme mostly in the form of Iranophobia, Shiaphobia, and the Shia crescent (Khalili 2016). However, Hassan Rouhani put constructive engagement with the world in the core of his nuclear diplomacy, as the centrepiece of the compromise discourse (Rouhani 2013). Hassan Rouhani’s policy of constructive interaction with the world was considered by foreign countries, especially Europe and led to the emergence of a new look by foreign governments towards Iran. The status of European countries in the international system and their influence on important global issues, including Iran's nuclear dossier is of utmost importance in the foreign policy of the 11th government (Sanaei and Rahmati Moghaddam 2015). According to Simbar and Fasihi Moghaddam Lakani (2015), Rouhani's election has been a source of change in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and instilling hope for the international community; for they believe that by adopting a moderate approach, Rouhani's government could overcome the problems, especially the barriers in Iran’s relations between the two countries of Iran and the United States.

In an interview with the *Shargh* newspaper in 2013, Rouhani also talked about his nuclear policy when he was Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator. He stated that during this time, not only did he advance nuclear technology in Iran, but he also improved Iran’s relations with the West, preventing the referral of Iran’s nuclear dossier to the UN Security Council. In that sense, he secured the country from tough sanctions and the possibility of going to war. Rouhani’s narrative is that those in Ahmadinejad’s administration who opposed his nuclear policy might be unhappy with Iran’s technological, economic and political advancements (Rouhani 2013). When Fareed

Zakaria of CNN asked Rouhani about the widespread feeling in the West that Iran should not have any enrichment capabilities on its soil, Rouhani stated that nuclear technology is a very sensitive issue for the Iranian people and thus, Iran is committed to retaining its indigenous enrichment activities, providing nuclear fuel for its power plants inside the country and through the input of local Iranian scientists (Rouhani 2014). At the DAVOS World Economic Forum in 2014, Rouhani also announced that nuclear weapons have no place in Iran's security strategy and that Tehran has no motivation for moving in that direction (Treanor and Elliott 2014).

Trita Parsi (2007, p. 269), President of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), expressed in his book *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*, that "Iranians are well aware that a decision to weaponise would likely weaken rather than advance Iran's strategic position". Parsi (2007) argues that for a country like Iran, weaponisation is not a reasonable strategic choice, as it might cause a nuclear race in the Middle East and Iran would probably have the most to lose from going nuclear. Mohammad Javad Zarif is Iran's leading nuclear negotiator and has been Minister of Foreign Affairs since July 23, 2013. He has also worked as Head of the UN Disarmament Committee in New York and as the Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations from 2002 to 2007, among other posts. Based on his experience, he stated that the nuclear crisis is a cognitive mental problem; because on the one hand, the UNSC is making excuses and on the other, Tehran has limited understanding of the situation and so "acts naively" (Raji 2013, p. 232); Zarif mentioned that reporting the Iranian nuclear case to the UN Security Council has no legal foundation because Iran's peaceful nuclear programme does not jeopardise international peace and security (Ibid.).

Zarif has outlined the elements of Iranian identity as being Iranian, Islamic nature, and revolutionary goals. For him, what distinguishes Iran from other countries is the prominence of the country's Islamic revolutionary goals (Raji 2013). Javad Zarif and his nuclear-negotiating team have also underlined their commitment to protecting the Iranian national interest, especially in the nuclear arena (Ayoob 2014). Zarif has repeatedly talked about the Iranian nation's desire to restore their sense of dignity and respect. In an interview with the New Yorker's Robin Wright (2014), Zarif emphasised trust-building between Iran and the West by showing Iranians that the

West is ready to deal with Iran's nuclear programme on the basis of mutual respect for the rights of the Iranian nation. In the same interview, Zarif highlighted, "Iran also wants to restore Persia's historic standing in the annals of science, and it sees nuclear energy as crucial to modern development. It feels the West wants to block any such advancement." Similarly, in a televised interview with Charlie Rose for his PBS programme on 28 April 2015, Zarif said, "Iran wants to be able to engage with the West based on mutual respect. Tehran does not want to experience animosity with the West but instead enjoy the benefits of interaction. But the Iranian nation still insists on its dignity, on being able to be engaged based on a strong sense of mutual respect. This is extremely important for Iran" (Zarif 2015a).

In the 'Iran and the Nuclear Deal' virtual symposium convened by the Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) in 2015, several speakers, including Scott Sagan³³ and Abu Mohammad Asgarkhani, the so-called father of the Iranian nuclear programme and International Relations Professor at Tehran University, expressed that Iranian nuclear ambitions are more about the moral value imparted by a reinvigorated sense of national identity (Doyle II 2015a). In an interview for this thesis, Mark Fitzpatrick³⁴ (2014) argued that "national identity and prestige are part of the rationale behind Iran's nuclear programme; there are reasons why Iran is sticking to its industrial-scale nuclear programme, with national pride and technological achievements two of the reasons. Its enrichment programme has become part of the Iranian sense of sovereignty and independence (Ibid.)." Fitzpatrick further asserted that he is sure that "Western negotiators have some sense of the 'pride' element that lurks behind Iran's position and its why they are willing to try to find creative solutions that would allow Iran to maintain this sense of pride." From Fitzpatrick's perspective, "the fact that has become a sense of identity that Iranians have been negotiating with Western powers and have been accepted as equals in the negotiating table has become a sense of national identity, which is as a result of their nuclear programme (Ibid.)."

³³ Scott Sagan is Caroline S.G. Munro Professor of Political Science at Stanford University and Senior Fellow at Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation.

³⁴ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 26 May 2015

7.3.6 The Policy of Resistance to the West

In addition to the diplomacy of compromise and engagement with the world, Hassan Rouhani along with his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad believes in resistance against the West; or for that matter, any other power, which is inhibiting Iran's technological progress, in particular its development of a peaceful nuclear technology (Rouhani 2015d). When Hassan Rouhani became Iran's president in 2013, Barack Obama was the sitting U.S. president. During his first term, Barack Obama's administration pursued a policy of reprimand with Ahmadinejad's administration (Castiglioni 2013). However, in his second term, Obama stepped toward a new beginning with Iran's Rouhani and offered to negotiate over Iran's nuclear issue with no preconditions (Mousavian and Toossi 2017). The policy of resistance has especially been strengthened during the presidency of Donald Trump in the U.S. who is against Iran's nuclear deal. For Donald Trump's administration, the choice made was to restrain Iran's nuclear programme further and therefore, confront a nation of almost 80 million Iranian people that according to Camelia Entekhabifard (2018), their national pride and identity speaks louder than their objection to the Islamic Republic's leaders. In his speech for the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Rouhani (2019) emphasised, "our national identity is tied to our Islamic culture and identity; we are pro-negotiation and engagement with the world, but we do not accept any pressure or imposition."

7.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to outline various discourses of Iranian national identity, and to demonstrate that the ideologies and meanings attached to Iranian national identity conceptions can be illustrated through a social constructivist discourse analysis of president Rouhani's speeches and decision-making. Taking this into consideration, Rouhani, through his call for modern-Iranian-Islamic identity, can be considered with regard to his idea of modern Iran. The main concept of Hassan Rouhani's foreign policy or in particular, nuclear policy discourse, is moderation, which can be addressed as a shift away from extremism, the removal of economic sanctions, a balance between the right of the nation and state interests, mutual respect, win-win diplomacy and idealism (Jafari *et al.* 2018). These elements are then reshaped around a constructive interaction with the world. Rouhani entered the presidential election campaign by promising the simultaneous spinning of the

centrifuges as well as sustaining Iranian people's lives (Dabiri 2013). He also promised to promote the national, regional and international dignity of Iran, engage with the international system via diplomacy, promote religious democracy and Islamic values, and contribute to the country's technological development and advancement (Rouhani 2017). In his UN speeches, Rouhani has prioritised the most immediate challenges and issues, and compared to Ahmadinejad, has mostly avoided addressing the interventions or wrongdoings of the world powers (Alemi *et al.* 2018). Instead, he has sought a working solution to the country's technological progress, aiding the flourishing of the economy, and acquiring a higher position for Iran in the international equation, as well as improving the nation's constructive relations with the outside world (Rafati 2017).

In his plan for the 12th government, Rouhani (2017) argued that reviewing the current Iranian century, which will only last for four more years, demonstrates that Iranians, despite anti-colonial efforts and economic, political and cultural reforms, are still far from realising their ideals and aspirations. He stressed that the most important lesson for Iranians is that Persian identity, Shia Islamic identity, and Revolutionary ideology need be kept together and that the Islamic Republic of Iran means the coexistence of all these three discourses of identity. Rouhani has cited the Pahlavis as an example of a bid to eliminate Islamic identity as well as other groups who attempted to eliminate Persian culture and identity, believing in the failure of all of them (Ibid.). In Rouhani's opinion, the Iranian nation needs to proceed by relying on the Persian, Shia Islamic, and Revolutionary ideology of the country, with the backing of the economic and scientific achievements of the modern era to achieve sustainable levels of development (Ibid.). Finally, taking into consideration Rouhani's conception of the discourses of Iranian national identity, his period also bears witness to a discourse of moderation regarding Iranian national identity. But most importantly, the next chapter will examine the results of the thesis to demonstrate how the Iranian elite's conceptions of national identity affect nuclear decision-making.

Chapter 8. The Discourse: Iran's Nuclear Programme, A Narrative of National Identity

8.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters addressed various discourses of Iranian national identity identified for discussion during the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani periods: Persian identity; Shia Islam; Islamic Revolution ideology; and modernity and technological advancement. Through a discourse analysis of texts as well as the leaders' speeches, it has been possible to analyse the sets of identities and values embedded in the decision-making processes relating to the Iranian nuclear programme. Chapters 6 and 7 have also provided extensive findings of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's nuclear decision-making processes, using the theoretical framework outlined in the second chapter. It is, therefore, necessary to gather those findings together into a whole, drawing upon the components of Iranian national identity discussed in chapter five, and, using discourse analysis of the interviews conducted for the purpose of this thesis to assess the impact of Iranian national identity components on decisions made by the Iranian political elites about the country's nuclear programme.

Rational choice theories, such as realism, can explain Iran's nuclear ambitions, but only to a point. To complete the picture, it is necessary to trace such ambitions back to the discursive context in which Iran's nuclear decisions took shape, and to the discourse that enabled those decisions (Sect. 3.7 in Chapter 3). This method of analysis conforms to the social constructivist theory that international relations (IR) are defined by norms, ideas and international social structures that lead actors to redefine their interests and identities (Bozdağlıoğlu 2007). Following Alexander Wendt's work, many IR scholars argue that "behaviour in the international system is not only driven by the distribution of power but also depends on the 'distribution of identities'" (Hopf and Allan 2016, p. 5). In other words, in the field of nuclear policy, whether the behaviour of actors is either cooperative or adversarial, depends less on a rational calculation of objective material resources than on how those actors subjectively perceive themselves and others in the international system. Whilst realism derives its fundamental analytical dominance by elucidating social constructions that vary in their distribution of objective material power capabilities,

constructivism acquires its central analytical leverage through subjective capabilities, such as norms, perceptions and preferences (Legro and Moravcsik 1999). One basic contribution of the constructivist literature is to challenge the notion that state identity and interests are not pre-given or fixed qualities (Wendt 1994). The social constructivist theory emphasises the importance of understanding the process through which actors' identities are constructed by non-material factors (Smit, 2001: .217). Of course, in contrast to the realist tradition, the constructivist approach does not deny the effect of concrete and objective material factors on states' foreign policy (Alexandrov 2003). But as Wendt (1995, p. 73) argues, it rather presumes that material factors "only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded." Therefore, material capabilities should be understood within discursive and social structures.

Heinz Gärtner³⁵ (2015) argues in an interview for this thesis that "according to social constructivism, identity is not a single shot picture, but it is a process, and its interpretation changes over time." This, nevertheless, entails that meanings are not fixed, but they can change over time depending on the ideas and beliefs held by actors (Pardo 2014). Accordingly, this chapter examines how the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been affected and thus, constructed by its normative discourses at both the domestic and international level. This identity formation at both the domestic and international levels in turn shapes Iranian foreign policy behaviour and in particular, its nuclear decision-making. Heinz Gärtner (2015), for example, argues that "traditional approaches, such as realism, have focused on rational decision-making, mainly to provide security, but many recent studies use social constructivism. Not only the emotional aspects, but also many other factors play a remarkable role in decision-making, according to social constructivism. For Iran in particular, national identity has played a very major role, especially after the 1979 revolution when Iran began searching for a new identity." However, Iran's identity as expressed by its political elites derived directly from its history as a revolutionary nation and hence, has elements of both change and continuity (Farhi 2005). Continuity can be found in the Iranian nation's struggle to overcome the injustice by oppressors throughout history (Farazmand 1995). Some change in the dominance of Iranian national identity

³⁵ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 4 August 2015

conceptions, however, came with the 1979 Islamic Revolution that overthrew the Shah (Inafuku 2010). In other words, with the Islamic Revolution, the Shia Islam and revolutionary ideology became more dominant than the Persian identity. As a result, this chapter conducts a ‘discursive review’ based on the conducted interviews that draw from a constructivist revisiting of Iran’s nuclear ambitions. This chapter discusses how narratives of Iranian national identity have influenced Iran's nuclear policy. Having previously considered the components of Iranian identity (Chapter 5), this chapter will provide an overview of the prevailing identity narratives in relation to the nuclear programme that are based on the interviews conducted for the purpose of this research. This section thus looks at the way in which the construction of national identity components impact on the manner in which Iran makes its nuclear decisions.

8.2 Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions: Discourses of Iranian National Identity

Howarth and Stavakakis (2000) argue that the central concept of discourse analysis is that every action and social practice, including political phenomena, is meaningful. In other words, the discourse analysis interprets the data in a certain way, and that data renders and clarifies the social practices (Gee and Green 1998). Discourse creates a common way to make sense of social reality within a given culture (Mohammad Nia 2012). It is through discourse analysis that this thesis could better clarify the impact of Iranian national identity components on the Iranian elites’ nuclear decision-making. Former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami’s discourse of ‘dialogue among civilisations’, and his adoption of detente policy to develop a culture of peace and security; President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s discourse on the ‘Iranian School’ with an emphasis on Islamic Revolutionary ideology; President Hassan Rouhani’s discourse on ‘prudent moderation’, are all discourses which demonstrate how the political elites’ perceptions of national identity influence Tehran’s nuclear decisions. For David Patrikarakos (2012), the development of a peaceful nuclear technology is an important symbol of Iran’s modernity and identity. For Iranian leaders, the country's ability to make nuclear fuel indigenously and by Iranian scientists, is a source of national pride (Reisinezhad 2014). The symbolic importance of Iran’s nuclear programme among Iranian elites and the Iranian nation became even more vivid with the introduction of the new 50,000 rial note in March 2007, as it featured the symbol of a nuclear isotope along with the figure of Khomeini (Kinch 2016).

Iran's nuclear decision-making has been shaped by some important discourses, including Persian identity, Shia Islamic and revolutionary ideology, and modernity and technological advancement (see chapter 5). These discourses give meaning to Iran's foreign policy behaviour in general and nuclear policy behaviour in particular; in so doing, these discourses distinguish Iran's nuclear ambitions from the rest of the world. Overall, the following discourses of Iranian national identity are the main resources directing the country's foreign policy behaviour, especially since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

8.2.1 Persian National Identity

Many Iranians see their historical and cultural achievements as a source of great pride. According to Gregory F. Giles (2003, p. 145), "the culmination of these historical, cultural, religious, and geographic influences is considered to constitute Iran's 'strategic personality' or 'culture'." As R.K. Ramazani (2009, p. 2) argues:

"Iranians value the influence that their ancient religion, Zoroastrianism, has had on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They take pride in 30 centuries of arts and artifacts, in the continuity of their cultural identity over millennia, in having established the first world state more than 2,500 years ago, in having organized the first international society that respected the religions and cultures of the people under their rule, in having liberated the Jews from Babylonian captivity, and in having influenced Greek, Arab, Mongol, and Turkish civilisations — not to mention having influenced Western culture indirectly through Iranian contributions to Islamic civilisation."

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's speech on 'Iranian School of thought' (2010b) that said "Iran is a school, a transcendental culture beyond geography and race", and the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's emphasis that the peaceful nuclear programme will keep Iran energy independent and enable it to resist the great powers 'like a lion', an ancient Persian symbol of power (Christian Science Monitor 2013) demonstrate that leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran have appropriated symbols of Persian nationalism for the purposes of defining their national nuclear policy. As a participant for this thesis, Ali Asghar Soltanieh³⁶ (2015) argued that "during the Iran-

³⁶ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 12 November 2015

Iraq war, the most important issue was to protect international borders, which in fact relates to the sovereignty and integrity of the state. In the case of the nuclear programme, however, Iran has been showing some resistance despite the hard time the nation has had as a result of draconian sanctions.” Soltanieh said that “Iran had worked very hard not to make any compromise in principles because the Iranian leaders considered the principles surrounding the nuclear decisions as ‘the borders of identity and dignity of Iran.” Soltanieh further asserted that this was a matter of “inalienable sovereign right for peaceful use of nuclear energy (Ibid.)” Iran’s nuclear programme has become the country’s key national issue. Therefore, the discourse of Persian nationalism and historical pride has been constructed to form a collective identity for Iranian officials regarding the nuclear programme (Saleh and Worrall 2015).

8.2.2 Shia Islamic Identity

Iran’s nuclear decision-making has been influenced by domestic political legitimacy, nationalism and ideology. There are, therefore, more internal factors than Persian identity that shape Iran’s nuclear policy decision-making. In Iran, Shia Islamic identity and its revolutionary ideology include notions such as resistance, independence, self-sufficiency and victimisation. The discourses of Shia Islamic identity and the revolutionary ideology are very visible in Iranian foreign policy, including in its nuclear decisions. A single individual cannot change the course of events and decision-making process in Iran, but there are coalitions and struggles that result in policies. According to Seyed Hossein Mousavian (2013a), a former diplomat and former member of Iran’s nuclear negotiating group, “the ultimate decision-maker in Iran’s nuclear talks is the Supreme Leader. No Iranian president can ever publicly say that Iran is ready to stop the enrichment of 20 per cent uranium, unless the Supreme Leader has allowed. If the Iranian Foreign Minister officially announced Iran’s readiness to accept the Additional Protocol, he must have agreed with the Supreme Leader beforehand, without the consent of the leader”. Hassan Rouhani (2016b) also repeatedly emphasised his nuclear-negotiating team did not take any steps, unless they consulted the Supreme Leader. In the case of Iran’s nuclear programme, a coalition comprising Supreme Leader, the President, the Atomic Energy Agency of Iran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and the Supreme National Security Council as the key actors was formed to consult on nuclear talks.

Notwithstanding the influence of the coalition, one cannot ignore the effective role of the president, the senior clergy and the parliamentary representatives with regard to the nuclear negotiations (Tağma and Uzun 2012).

8.2.3 Islamic Revolutionary Ideology

The Islamic regime's revolutionary ideology has also shaped the preferences of Iranian elites on the nuclear issue. Iranian political culture and ideology have some of its roots in the 1979 Islamic Revolution in the way that the nuclear programme has become a symbol of Iran's self-sufficiency and independence from the West. As Ayatollah Khomeini said in his book, '*Sahifeh*', the Islamic revolution cut Western hands and the hands of oppressors, particularly the U.S., from Iranian domestic politics and replaced the Iranian monarchy with a system of *velāyat-e-faqih* (the rule of Shia jurisprudence) (Khomeini 1989). While Ayatollah Khomeini was in exile in Najaf, he represented the Islamic Governance and the principle of *velāyat-e-faqih*. In demonstrating Islamic Revolutionary ideology, he first denied the existing sovereignty of the monarchy and questioned the monarchy's dominant values (Mohammadi 2006). However, even among Shia jurists, not everyone was a supporter of Ayatollah Khomeini's notion and practice of *velāyat-e-faqih*. Agha Seyed Ahmad Khansari, one of the greatest Shia jurisprudes and trusted by Ayatollah Khomeini himself, was an opponent of the principle of *velāyat-e-faqih*. He called *velāyat-e-faqih* trans-humane behaviour and believed even Prophet Mohammed and the Shia Imams did not deal with people according to *velāyat-e-faqih* but instead carried out normal human behaviour with people under their rule (Kadivar 2018). Despite his opponents, Ayatollah Khomeini believed that *velāyat-e-faqih* was an acceptable political identity for the Muslim nation and government. In other words, political identity can be seen as a kind of self-consciousness appropriated as a collective consciousness of the citizens of Iranian society (Zahiri 2000).

Iranian leaders express concern at international actions perceived to undermine the nation's rightful place in regional and world affairs (McInnis 2015). They believe that the development of nuclear weapons is against Islamic law and thus Iran's identity perceptions (Mowatt-Larssen 2011). The Islamic identity discourse around the prohibition of development and use of nuclear weapons has gained more attention in the West, especially since the intensification of the disagreements between world

powers and Iran over its nuclear programme. The promotion of the nuclear fatwā by Ayatollah Khamenei can also be seen as evidence of the peaceful nature of its nuclear endeavours (Ansari 2013). In 2003, news of covert nuclear activities was leaked internationally, leading to concerns regarding Iran's possible military dimension. The nuclear programme of Iran thus quickly became one of the most controversial contemporary security issues in the world. To address this concern and assure the world that Iran's nuclear programme was being developed solely for peaceful purposes, the Iranian Supreme Leader presented a nuclear narrative that was above the national legal framework of the State and included a kind of divine law referred to as fatwā (Porter 2014b).

A former Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, stated that the cultural gap between the West and Iran is the main reason the West does not have an accurate understanding of Islamic beliefs and the significance of the edicts, suggesting that the US and its allies must take Khamenei's fatwā seriously (CBS News 2013). According to Gareth Porter (2014b), nobody in Iran questions the authenticity or legality of a fatwā and when the guardian jurist (the Supreme Leader) says something is forbidden, everyone accepts it. Although the fatwā issued by Khamenei forbidding the development and use of nuclear weapons is now a basis for Iran's negotiations with the P5+1, the West does not actually believe it and wants it to be legally formalised (Fitzpatrick 2006). According to Hossein Mousavian (2013b), in 2011, the Iranian government agreed to transform the fatwā into a legally binding document for the UN, but at that point, the distrust between Iran and the West was unable to facilitate such a groundbreaking step. Khamenei's anti-nuclear weapon fatwā was not taken seriously by the West until 2012 when President Barak Obama's administration welcomed it; it was subsequently addressed in his 2013 UN General Assembly speech (Porter 2014b). The Obama administration decided to recognise the fatwā and interpret it as a confidence-building measure, albeit with scepticism, addressing it as the basis for a meaningful agreement (Washington Post 2013).

As discussed in Chapter 4, Iran's desire to obtain nuclear power began in 1957, during the Shah's reign, when the United States provided Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi with nuclear technology and Iran started developing a civil nuclear infrastructure (Bahgat 2006). The February 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran halted the

nuclear programme for several years. The Iran-Iraq war, which began in 1980, caused much damage to Iran's existing nuclear facilities at that time, with Iraq bombing power reactors under construction in Bushehr (Cirincione *et al.* 2011). Ayatollah Khomeini's theological reason (fatwā) in 1984 after the bombing of the reactors by Iraq, forbidding the development and use of chemical, nuclear and all weapons of mass destruction in Islam caused Iran's nuclear programme to progress slowly, and was the reason why Iran did not use any chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war (Porter 2014b). However, following Khomeini's death in 1989, the new Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, decided to expand Iran's nuclear capability based on the need for the country to have sustainable energy in the midst of dwindling oil reserves. In order to replace crude oil and natural gas for electricity generation, Iran needs nuclear energy to be able to export more gas and oil (Salameh 2015).

Evoking the common point among pre and post-revolution Iranian leaders, Peter Jenkins³⁷ (2016) who was interviewed for this thesis notes that “when it comes to the nuclear programme, the Shah and the leaders of the Islamic Republic have very similar ambitions and ideas about the purposes that can be served by the nuclear programme.” According to Jenkins, “the Shah also saw it as a programme of great symbolic significance, because he wanted to demonstrate to the world that his Iran was a sophisticated and rapidly modern country.” “The difference between the Shah and the leaders of the Islamic Republic,” Jenkins asserts, “is that the Shah's regime did not emphasise the Islamic Shia nature of the country. In the Islamic Republic, there is an emphasis on both nationality and religiosity (Ibid.)” Nonetheless, Reardon (2012) argues that both Iranian nationalism rooted in Iran's long history and Shia Islam are the elements of Iranian identity that have shaped the way Iran views itself and the world.

8.2.4 Modernity and Technological Advancement

According to Jo-Ansie van Wyk *et. al* (2007)₂, constructivists believe that actors embark on identifying social facts in terms of their meaning and value. Once the actors have constructed the identity of a particular social fact, they then attribute new meanings to that fact (Zehfuss 2001). The next step for the actors, nonetheless, would be to construct social practices based on mutually constitutive norms, rules and

³⁷ Semi-structured phone interview, 5 March 2016

institutions to engage with that social fact (Wendt 1992). Modernity and technological advancement could be identified as another constructed identity in respect of Iran's nuclear programme. As Ali Asghar Soltanieh (2015) argues in an interview for this thesis, "for Iranians, identity is attached to the part of history occurring in the area of science and technology." That is why Soltanieh believes that "Iran's achievements in outer space, sending satellites into the orbit, and in nano-technology fields, are sources of pride for the nation." Thus, Soltanieh posits that "Iran's background of nuclear science and technology, as well as its rich civilisation, has played a key role in this issue (Ibid.)." In order to say why the development of Iran's nuclear fuel cycle been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity in Iran, in another interview for this thesis, Hossein Mousavian³⁸ (2015) comments; "first, the culture of resistance - in the course of their long history, Iranians have been repeatedly invaded and defeated by foreign enemies including the Greeks, the Ottomans, the Arabs, the Mongols, the Turks, the Ottomans, the British and the Russians. The result of those invasions and defeats has cultured a deep sense of victimisation. It is no wonder that Iranians are often seeking justice, are combatants, and thus resist bullying and outside force and pressure. Second, Iran's adamancy also stems from its strong nationalistic sentiments- i.e., national pride- and this is arguably the programme's driving force. This sentiment endures through their long civilisation and cultural heritage (Ibid.)." Pointing to the relationship between constitutive identities and social facts, Shahin Dadkhah³⁹ (2016) has also argued that "one cannot deny the Iranian people's sensitivity to foreign intervention and thus, the West's opposition to the nuclear programme brought about the perception that again the West was going to prevent Iran from autonomous decision-making" and put Iran's energy self-sufficiency to a halt.

Mohammad Daryaei⁴⁰ (2015) points to the fact that "Iran has always wanted to be at the cutting edge of technology, to be independent, and proud whenever they develop a technology indigenously. For this reason, Iran wished to continue its nuclear fuel cycle activity." The ways and reasons that actors act as they do, Alexander Wendt

³⁸ Semi-structured email interview, 16 August 2015

³⁹ Semi-structured phone interview 28 April 2016

⁴⁰ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 9 July 2015

(1992) argues is fundamentally shaped by shared understandings within a society. From a constructivist perspective, one way to explain the role of nuclear energy self-sufficiency in Iran is through the particular understanding assigned to it in the context of energy independence or independence from other world powers. Mohammad Daryaei (2015) who was interviewed for this thesis argues that “independence is part of Iranians’ feelings and sense of pride culturally, and it is not exchangeable, because it is embedded in the mottoes and ideals that were socially constructed during or after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and anything contributing to strengthening that feeling would be especially appreciated by the Iranian elites.” According to Daryaei, “despite a lot of limitations, pressures and sanctions and without the help of any foreign aid, Iranians have tried hard to have some of their ideas developed by young Iranian scientists, and then, crown it with an achievement like the nuclear fuel cycle. This has created a sense of national pride for Iranians, that is, because Iranian nuclear decision-makers believe they had no outside help, and their young scientists’ achievements were due to hard work. This has become something very precious, to keep, preserve and fight for” (Ibid.). However, “Daryaei also notes that this is not limited to the issue of nuclear energy. Iranians are also very proud of their scientists in the fields of nano-technology and communication. For example, those who developed the satellites sent into orbit are also respected as Iran’s national heroes. Despite the pressures, any new development and any new technology worked on by Iranian scientists are much appreciated, giving Iranians a sense of self-confidence and independence (Ibid.).”

Stephan Klement⁴¹ (2015) is another participant to this thesis who pointed out that Iran’s motivation and desire to develop its nuclear programme indigenously and master nuclear technology was because “the Americans and French did not cooperate in Iran’s nuclear programme after the revolution and that the Russians were not committed to their fulfilment of the Bushehr power plant.” He argued, “it is very difficult for many people in Europe to understand this because here, they have moved towards an anti-nuclear stance where developing nuclear energy is not considered a good investment. But in many developing countries this is completely different.” Therefore, as Klement mentions, “Iran is technically one of the countries where

⁴¹ Semi-structured phone interview, 2 September 2015

nuclear science has a very high value and is well supported.” Also from his impressions of the nuclear talks, Klement notes that “Iran is a country, which is very much striving for high-tech development. Even before the Islamic Revolution, the nuclear programme was seen as a symbol of modern development and technology (Ibid.).”

Another area of interest for constructivists has particularly been shared conceptions of the self and others. This shared conception is the social process of shared identity formation, and the way these identities shape understandings of collective interests (Wendt 1992). Addressing the shared conceptions of self and others, Mohammad Marandi⁴² (2015) has pointed out that “Western companies received a great deal of money to build Iran’s nuclear infrastructure before the Islamic Revolution, but pulled out and left the infrastructure incomplete subsequent to the revolution.” According to Ali Farazmand (1995), after the revolution, Iranians felt a strong sense of sovereignty, especially as the Islamic Republic became a seriously independent country. Furthermore, Marandi (2015) said in an interview for this research that “Iranian leaders and the population as a whole have a strong sense of self-determination, indeed, it was completely unacceptable for Iran to relinquish any part of their sovereignty. This basically has the same status for Iran; land is more touchable or concrete while the nuclear issue is perhaps in some ways less concrete, however, it has the same impact on Iranian mentality, as it is linked to the notion of rights and independence.” The ideas behind the revolution in Iran according to Marandi included “independence, sovereignty, and indigenous values. Thus, following the Islamic Revolution, Iran promoted its own indigenous culture and ideas, such as independence, freedom and dignity, ideas that are extremely valuable to Iranians (Ibid.).”

As seen in the context of the ideological orientations of Iranian identity conceptions, one finds that the concept of modernity that comes from the country’s nuclear energy mastery is underpinned by both religious and nationalistic identities (Akbarzadeh and Barry 2016). Walter Posch⁴³ (2015) who has been interviewed for this thesis also

⁴² Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 29 June 2015

⁴³ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 6 August 2015

argues that “the Iranian nuclear programme has been portrayed as a modernising project, something both nationalists and Islamist nationalists are very fond of.” Posch asserts, “When the nuclear programme in Iran resumed under Rafsanjani, it attracted some Western-educated technicians and scientists” who some of them have been assassinated between 2010 and 2012 (Ibid.). From one point of view, the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists has been a rallying point for the nuclear programme in Iran and a foreign intervention towards the inalienable right of the Iranian nation. Indeed, the assassinated scientists have become known as nuclear martyrs. Martyrdom entitles to Muslims who have died while defending their faith and sacred values (Mohammad Nia 2012) and dates back to when Imam Hossein, the third Shia Imam, and his followers were killed in the battle of Karbalā⁴⁴ by Caliph Yazid's army. Iran's nuclear martyrs are symbolised as the evidence of Iran's innocence and oppression. According to Khamenei (2012), these have been the scientists with common features and objectives, who worked harmoniously to keep the nuclear cycle alive. The Supreme Leader believes the U.S. and Israel assassinated these Iranian nuclear scientists in order to stop the country moving forward scientifically; that is, to prevent the Iranian nation from the technological and scientific advancement that happened as a result of the blessing of Islam and the Islamic Revolution (Khamenei 2012).

Iran's ‘nuclear martyrs’ have thus become a rallying point for the country's nuclear programme and its right to uranium enrichment, regardless of the high cost of sanctions. When Majid Shahriari, an Iranian nuclear scientist, was targeted and killed by men on motorbikes who attached bombs to the windows of his car, President Ahmadinejad accused the West and Israel of his assassination (BBC News 2010). Manouchehr Mottaki, who was Iran's Foreign Minister at the time, also accused the UN Security Council of killing and injuring Iranian nuclear scientists. Shahriari was one of the nuclear scientists included on a UN Security Council sanctions list. Mottaki claimed adopting the UN resolutions against Iranian nuclear scientists led terrorist groups to carry out these assassinations (Borger 2010b). From another point of view, it is Bijan Khajepour⁴⁵ (2015) who believes that “the U.S. government increased the level of sanctions to make it more painful for Iranian society, thus pressurising the

⁴⁴ <https://www.al-islam.org/story-of-the-holy-kaaba-and-its-people-shabbar/third-imam-husayn-ibn-ali>

⁴⁵ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 13 August 2015

regime to stop its nuclear programme.” But Khajepour insists “this was a miscalculation, because U.S. pressure strengthened the importance of the nuclear programme, allowing it to emerge as an issue of dignity for Iranian society, even those who were against the Islamic regime at the time (Ibid.)” In a similar vein, Greg Thielman⁴⁶ (2014) considers the economic sanctions counterproductive, as they could not prevent Iranians from pursuing a policy of resistance against the U.S.

8.3 Representation of Conceptions of Iranian National Identity - Various Factors and Factions

Pointing at the consistency of Iran’s foreign policy behaviour under Khatami and Ahmadinejad, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (2007) attributes this consistency to a culturally constituted solidarity about the country’s role in international affairs that is strong enough to go beyond the various factions of Iranian politics. This, Adib-Moghaddam (2007, pp. 70–71) discusses that “functions as the guardian of identity, represents a web of shared ideals, images, norms, and institutions, and provides for the foreign policy elites a coherent, if systematically abstract, overall orientation in the conduct of international affairs.” Seyed Hossein Mousavian (2012), who previously served as the spokesman for Iran in its nuclear negotiations with the international community during Khatami’s presidency, discussed alternative approaches represented by Iranian decision-makers and political factions for interacting with the IAEA and/or accepting the additional protocol.

The first approach was the ‘*Confrontational Approach*’, with proponents of this believing that signing the additional protocol was humiliating for Iran as it was a sign of Western intention to conduct a military attack on the country. This approach called for a halt to Iran’s cooperation with the IAEA. Hossein Shariatmadari, editor-in-chief of *Kayhan* newspaper, who was appointed as editor directly by the Supreme Leader, was one of the proponents encouraging Iran’s withdrawal from the NPT. The second approach was the ‘*Nuclear Rights Approach*’ that proposed Iran should cooperate and abide by its commitments to the IAEA. Ali Asghar Soltanieh, former Iranian ambassador to the IAEA, was one of the proponents of this approach. The third approach was the ‘*Grand Bargain Approach*’ that emphasised the normalisation of Tehran-Washington relations. The advocates of this approach believed that while

⁴⁶ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 9 September 2014

U.S.-Iran relations remained hostile, the nuclear crisis would not be resolved. Seyed Hossein Mousavian was among the proponents of this approach. The fourth approach was the '*Eastern Bloc Approach*', which believed it was necessary to create a powerful bloc consisting of the Non-Aligned Movement, Russia and China to resist U.S. pressure. Ali Larijani, the current chairman of the Iranian Parliament and the chief nuclear negotiator from 2005 to 2007, was a proponent of this approach. The fifth approach was the '*Conciliatory Approach*' that posited Iran should suspend its uranium enrichment activities. The sixth approach was the '*Pragmatic Approach*' that suggested the nuclear crisis was merely a political crisis with the proponents of this approach believing in the necessity of confidence with the international community. They spoke against expelling any of the IAEA inspectors or withdrawing from the NPT. Rafsanjani, Khatami, Rouhani and Kharrazi were among the supporters of this approach (Ibid.).

Analysing the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a difficult task. But given the different approaches adopted by the Iranian political elites, it is worth noting that the political elites in Iran are generally grouped into four political factions: principalists, traditional conservatives, pragmatic conservatives, and reformists (Stein 2015). The principalists and traditional conservatives believe in the ideological principles of the Islamic Revolution. These factions do not believe in an international status quo and most particularly, they see the U.S. as a threat to the regime and to Iran's regional power. The Parliament, the Assembly of Experts and the Guardian Council are among principalists, while the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is identified as a traditional conservative. The principalists and traditional conservatives have the support of hardliners, the IRGC, and Basiji⁴⁷ veterans who themselves support the Islamisation of society and ask for strong state control over the economy. The former President, Ahmadinejad, was also a principalist (Ansari 2007a). He pursued a confrontational foreign policy that was endorsed by the Supreme Leader as well as by hardliners and militarists, but his aggressive foreign policy led to draconian sanctions and international isolation (Rassam 2016). The pragmatic conservatives are ideologically conservative but are more willing to put away their ideological enthusiasm and stick to pragmatic social and cultural policies. They are

⁴⁷ Basij is a paramilitary volunteer militia established in Iran in 1979 on the order of Ayatollah Khomeini, founder and leader of the Islamic Revolution. Basijis are members of the Basij militia.

also supporters of economic liberalisation. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani⁴⁸ was a pragmatic conservative, popular among the *bāzāaris* (the merchant class). The reformists are representatives of the ideological left in the Iranian political system. They support economic openness and liberalisation as well as rapprochement with the West. The Former president, Khatami, with his policy endorsing the ‘dialogue of civilisations’, green movement leaders (Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi) as well as current President, Hassan Rouhani, are reformists (Saikal 2009). The reformist team of Rouhani-Zarif pursued a cooperative way forward with the West that resulted in a solution for the Iranian nuclear crisis (Rassam 2016).

After discussing the Iranian national identity discourses and their effect on decision-making in the realm of nuclear policy in Iran in chapters 5,6, 7 and examining different factions of Iran’s policymakers and their possible approaches in chapter 4, this chapter now unravels the various layers of decision-making enacted by each group of elites. Mohammad Daryaei (2015) argues, that “in order to make decisions inside Iran, it is necessary to tackle different layers. These layers are very much affected by discourse. To talk about the identity or discourse that affects Iranian identity, Daryaei divides the discourse into three different types. These all affect the layers of decision-making in Iran, and are religious discourse, legal discourse, and political discourse.”

One needs to bear in mind that “in the religious discourse, there are many top clerics among them the Supreme Leader who believes while we have our rights and we have to stand with using the technologies, we are not allowed to go for the nuclear weapons because Islam forbids us. This is very important, which again affects the decisions and it really changed the discourse, and also the identity, which would be created in the framework of the social interaction among the religious people.” Daryaei (2015) states that he has had close ties with many of the *Olamā* (clerics) and really senses them as a dominant factor in pushing the fact that Tehran is not allowed to accept any oppression or injustice (*Zolm*). These clerics insist that Tehran is not allowed to compromise, but at the same time, argue that Iran is not allowed to hold nuclear

⁴⁸ Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was an influential Iranian politician and one of the founding fathers of the Islamic Republic. He served as the fourth President of Iran from 3 August 1989 until 3 August 1997. He was the head of the Assembly of Experts from 2007 until 2011 and chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council. Rafsanjani passed away on 8 January 2017.

weapons (Ibid.). Hence, it is likely we can date the birth of political Islam in Iran back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ended Iran's monarchy. Iranian religious and political landscapes were drastically changed under Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Shia Islam became an integral part of the country's political structure, forming a new type of government characterised by *velāyat-e faqih*, or the rule of the Islamic jurist. The reason being was that Khomeini believed the Iranian government should operate according to *Sharia*, or Islamic law, and thus an Islamic jurist—or *faqih*—was established to oversee the country's political establishment.

After the revolution, constitutional changes made way for a governance system upheld by three pillars of power—the executive, judicial, and legislative branches, with Khomeini at the very top of the Islamic Republic's power structure (Bruno 2008). Therefore, religious beliefs started to form the backbone of Iran's political structure. With the increasing role of Grand Ayatollahs (senior clerics) in Iran's political structure, they soon became more and more integrated into top-level decision-making, including in respect of the Iranian nuclear programme. After the Geneva historical agreement in 2013, Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, travelled to the Holy city of Qom to visit the Grand Ayatollahs there and gave them a report of the government's nuclear achievements. It seems that this trip reflected an appreciation for the strong support of religious authorities and the Supreme Leader of the Iranian negotiators (Shargh Daily 2013b). Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi showed his support for the government's recent diplomacy in negotiating with the P5+1. He stressed the need for continued efforts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to neutralise Shia-phobia in the region and in the Islamic world more generally.

Ayatollah Seyed Abol-Hassan Mahdavi, Isfahan's provisional Friday prayer Imam, mentioned that Iran's right to uranium enrichment had been officially recognised in the negotiations; also, that the Islamic Republic of Iran is among 11 countries in the world with nuclear technology. He also stressed that the negotiations were included in the framework accepted by the Supreme Leader, the authorities and parliament. Ayatollah Nouri Tabarsi further stated, “the Iranian Foreign Minister had been shown resistance to the decisions made by the six world powers of the UN Security Council and gained results that were accepted by the leaders of Islamic Republic of Iran. Thus,

Ayatollah Nouri Tabarsi emphasised the result of these negotiations should not be unfairly criticised (Kaviani 2014).” Following the JCPOA, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli referred to success in the negotiations as a divine blessing and recommended the government to be patient. Grand Ayatollah Shobeiri Zanjani appreciated the government’s efforts to achieve major gains and emphasised that trying to please God and serve the people would bring about a final victory (Nazar-e marāje’-e ezām-e taghlid az tavāfogh-e haste’i [Grand Ayatollahs Opinion on the Iran Nuclear Deal] 2016). In addition, Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, Tehran’s substitute Friday prayer leader, backed the country’s nuclear negotiators and as mentioned in *The Tehran Times*, called the negotiators “the children of the nation”. Ahmad Khatami recommended keeping Iranian youth and analysts updated with the political issues and taking a moderate position regarding the ongoing nuclear talks (Tehran Times 2015). These can be seen as directly related to the religious perspective of Iranian identity. Indeed, it is very important for the Iranian government to have the support of the Grand Ayatollahs for their decision-making and policies. As the religious leaders of the Iranian nation, the Grand Ayatollahs have a major role in keeping different political factions in one camp.

The other discourse according to Daryaei (2015) is legal discourse. He argues that those who are working on the development of the discourse are trying to place the framework of the NPT as a main contributor to the decision-making. That means as a legally sovereign country, Iran is allowed to make independent decisions, even withdrawing from the NPT regulations. Hence, in the legal discourse, according to Daryaei, there is the UN charter, sovereign rights, independent states, NPT and based on Article 4 of NPT, which recognises each country’s right and the decisions of the conference reviews, which emphasise that the decisions on fuel cycle activities should be respected. That is why, in terms of legal discourse, nobody is allowed to even compromise minutely on the legal right of the Iranian people based on their rights according to the NPT (Ibid.). This legal discourse is in line with the second approach argued for by Seyed Mohammad Mousavian (2012), that is, the ‘*Nuclear Rights Approach*’ that believes Iran should cooperate and abide by its commitments to the IAEA. Mohammad Daryaei (2015) goes on to discuss a third approach, which is political discourse. As he states, political discourse is very popular and much supported among strategists and those trying to visualise security for the country. In

terms of political discourse, Iran should not do anything to endanger the country's security. According to the supporters of political discourse, Daryaei comments, "you have to work based on our rights, but you are not allowed to go for nuclear weapons, because the introduction of nuclear weapons to the nuclear energy policy of Iran would not really bring Iran security, but rather insecurity." (Ibid.) These three discourses try to reinforce each other and thus, bring about a sense of unity among people, creating the culture or identity of the nation (Ibid.). Daryaei asserts that Iranians want to be independent, to be on top of new technology, and then exhibit pride in this. So, self-confidence and autonomy can be said to be rooted in the social character of Iranians. According to Daryaei, it is unfortunate that the West has not recognised this matter, but it is really a misunderstanding based on misinformation. The majority of Iranians are united and work within the framework of these three main discourses; the Iranian identity is thus socially constructed as a result of reinforcing the interaction among them (Ibid.).

After explaining the different discourses and their view on the nuclear programme, it is time to discuss how various political factions in Iran support the Iranian nuclear programme and the peaceful advancement of the full nuclear fuel cycle. However, these factions have different perspectives towards the relative costs and benefits of the nuclear programme, as well as the West's defiance, including toughening its economic sanctions against Iran. The principalists and traditional conservatives seek domestic legitimacy from the nuclear programme (Naji 2007). Principalists consider reformists as weak and under the influence of the West (Ansari 2007b). On the other hand, pragmatist conservatives and reformists who also support the nuclear programme do not see any advantage in continuing disputes with the West. These two factions instead support rapprochement with the West and believe in pursuing a settlement for the Iranian nuclear crisis by carrying out negotiations with the West

Figure 1 shows the interaction between components of Iranian national identity and the actors involved in nuclear decision-making.

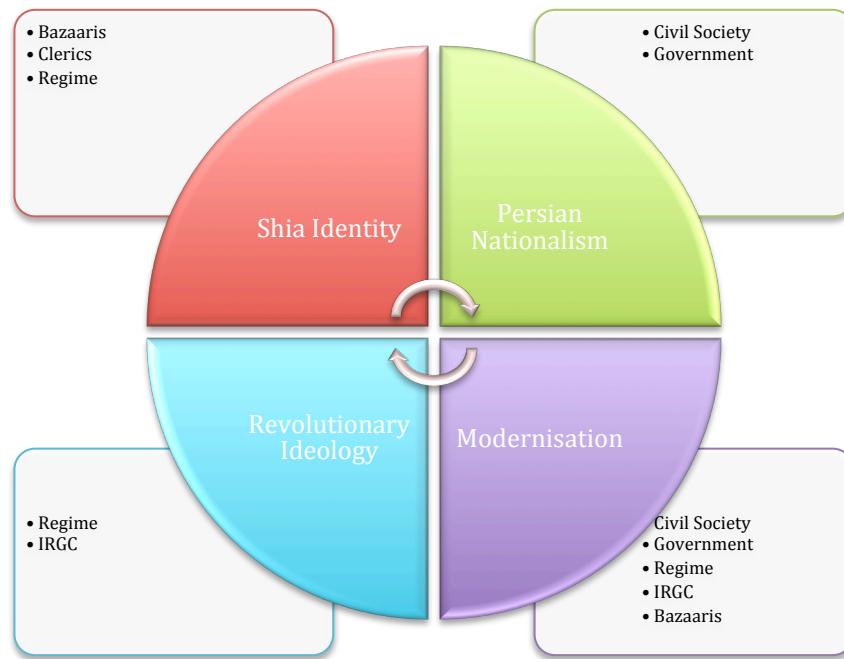


Figure 1- Iranian national identity components and their relationship with actors

8.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explain through discourse analysis of interviews, how the main goal of Iran's nuclear programme has stretched beyond merely security issues. This is because it has caused more insecurity for Iran, both at the domestic and international level and in several fields including defence and the economy. As Arash Reisinezhad (2014) argues, for Iran, the nuclear programme has provided an important symbol of the country's modernity and national identity. Based on the constructivist perspective, identity formation at both domestic and international levels is a continuous process, in which social identities interact with each other, and whereby states shape and reshape new definitions of the identity of themselves and others. Identity formation is an act of the elites in every society that reinterpret the identities and reset their priorities according to intersubjective social reality (Bozdağlıoğlu 2007).

In order to understand the impact of Iranian elites' conceptions of national identity on decisions affecting Iran's nuclear programme and the P5+1 nuclear negotiations, it is primarily necessary to gain a full understanding of the history of the nuclear

programme as set out in chapter 4. This chapter provided a discursive analysis of the Iranian nuclear programme based on different factors including political factions, their approaches, and the impact of Iranian national identity conceptions upon them. It discussed that Iranian leaders, from Mohammad Reza Shah to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the presidents have all had rather similar motivation towards the nuclear programme. Their belief that generating electricity by nuclear power is a more economical way of producing domestic energy means that Iran would be free to increase its oil and gas exports. However, the economic benefit is just one dimension for Iranian leaders, the other and perhaps important dimension being that nuclear technology is able to bring about prestige for the Iranian nation (Patrikarakos 2012). For Iranian officials, acquiring peaceful nuclear technology means ensuring national security, but more importantly, preserving prestige and national pride, some of the main characteristics of Tehran's regime (Kisacik 2012)

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, the symbolic value of the Iranian nuclear programme is another significant element. It has put Iran in an equal position with other countries in the negotiation process, bringing Iran international prestige (Reardon 2012). Discourse analysis of the events regarding the nuclear programme in Iran reveals how Iranian leaders and different camps and coalitions have continuously emphasised the nuclear programme as a symbol of national identity, self-reliance, independence, technological advancement and modernity (Tağma and Uzun 2012). In other words, as Scott Sagan (1996) argues, although these symbols and norms alone do not have any influence, their power comes from the political elites' conceptions of national identity, which is identifiable through the constitutive role of identities and discourses.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

“Achievements in nuclear technology are, in fact, good news for the Iranian nation so that they can move forward over the routes leading to high peaks of science and technology. Therefore, the nuclear programme should never stop or slow down.

Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the role and implications of Iran’s nuclear ambitions in terms of Iranian leaders’ conceptions of the discourses of Iranian national identity. The key question at the heart of this discussion is: why has the development of an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle been portrayed as a unifying symbol of national identity in Iran, especially since 2002, following the revelation of clandestine nuclear activities? Throughout this thesis, it has been argued that the main goal of Iran’s nuclear programme has stretched beyond merely security issues. That is, Iran’s argument about its nuclear programme is based on non-military objectives. In this case, Tehran's nuclear narrative has always been fashioned around three distinct, yet intertwined themes: Persian nationalism, religion, and modernisation. Hence, in order for their quest for nuclear technology to be recognised and to consolidate national unity on the basis of maintaining Iranian prestige, dignity and national honour, Iranian leaders must seek international legitimacy (Lob and Mahdavi 2015). In a profound sense, Iran’s nuclear programme has been tied to the regime’s need for recognition as well as for seeking out respect and international status in a bid to revive Iranian nationalism. One of the fundamental principles of the Islamic revolution in Iran was independence from foreign intervention and influence. And so, the national narrative of the Iranian nuclear programme has bought about a combination of legitimacy and empowerment in terms of the Islamic Republic’s belief in technological advancement (Bowen *et al.* 2016). This chapter engages with the question of how particular elements of Iranian identity shape Iranian nuclear decisions and which values and ideological perspectives play a prominent role in driving the nuclear programme. As Kinch (2016) puts it, Iran’s ambition to develop an

indigenous peaceful nuclear technology is a symbolic intention that comes from its social, cultural, and political identity.

Given the nature of the topic of nuclear technology in Iran, elites from different factions have discussed from their own point of view and based on their own conceptions of Iranian national identity. However, among the elites there seems to be a consensus that the nuclear programme is the inalienable right of the nation and that nuclear weapons are prohibited by the Islamic law (with a fatwā issued by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei). Generally speaking, the notion of national identity is the key driver behind nuclear decisions in Iran. The other questions proposed in this research asked: how has portraying the nuclear programme as a unifying symbol of national identity affected Iran's highest level formal decision-making and policymaking processes? How can one explain the paradoxical implications of the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear behaviour using social constructivism? In response to the first and main question of the research, the thesis has committed to the intricate process of understanding and analysing Iran's nuclear policy from an ideational perspective. Thus, the thesis embodies the examination of the first question initially based on describing Iranian national identity components, including Persian nationalism, Shia Islamic identity, Islamic Revolutionary ideology, and modernity and technological advancement; and then examining the question by analysing elites' nuclear discourse in Iran. Answering this question is an important first step for policy makers and then for policy experts and academics. Knowing the origins of Iranian national identity and how it affects nuclear policymaking, will allow for the addressing of conflicts. This puzzle regarding the complexity of Iran's nuclear decision-making process and its ideational aspects led me to a more general version of the question motivating this project. That is, how Iranian identity is constructed and understood, and why Iranian identity is deployed in the way that it is. The objective of this thesis is to specify the relationship between the Iranian elites' perception of national identity and nuclear politics. Hence, an integral part of the thesis has been to analyse how Iranians in general and Iranian elites, in particular, perceive their national identity.

Most particularly, chapter 2 offered the necessary theoretical framework to answer these questions. This thesis is based on the theory of social constructivism that

centralises the history, identity and norms that shape foreign policy. As Jack Snyder (2004) states, constructivism focuses on ideas, values, culture and identity in societies and it is these elements that shape or constitute international politics. Snyder's (1977) belief was that the political elites articulate a unique strategic culture related to security issues that is also a wider manifestation of public opinion. He asserted that this leads to a socialisation process and in turn, this leads to achieving a set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour patterns with regard to nuclear strategy. The utility of strategic culture showed its importance later on in the work of Alexander Wendt, who argued that state identities and interests are socially constructed by means of knowledgeable practice (Wendt 1992). Valerie Hudson (1997) also argues that constructivism considers culture (and identity) as an evolving system of shared meanings and ideas that governs (elite's) perceptions, communications, and actions (Lantis 2002). I expanded the social constructivist approach to international relations on this topic to include the implications of Iranian elites' conceptions of national identity on nuclear policies and nuclear negotiations. The constructivist approach explains why, given all the sanctions imposed by the West, Iran has refused to stop its nuclear programme. The most significant manifestation of the constructivist approach with regard to Iran's nuclear decisions can be demonstrated, mostly in chapters 6, 7, and 8, which show how the shared meanings, understandings, and expectations of the Iranian elite about nuclear technology affect their nuclear decision-making. This would have not been easily predicted by instrumental rational approaches. Studies of the discursive construction of Iranian national identity have tended toward various approaches (Coe and Neumann 2011): the combination of Iranian cultural elements and Islamic values, accompanied with the Western norms of governance and attitudes towards nation-state building, has produced a complex and multi-dimensional identity for the Islamic Republic (Sadeghi 2007). This is well reflected in the structures that constitute the rationale of Iran's nuclear decision-making process.

Iran's nuclear programme is regarded as a sacred value for many Iranians (Rose 2013), with sacred values those that surpass rational cost-benefit analysis. Finding an equivalent for these in anything material is not possible, as they are purely transcendent ideals (Begley 2006). As such, the West's economic restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme backfired, resulting with Tehran not suspending its uranium enrichment activities. Thus, the Iranian government went on to defend its inalienable

right to enrich uranium indigenously based on sacred political discourse, framing the nuclear issue as an ongoing instance of resistance to the West, and taking place in a deep historical context (Dehghani *et al.* 2010). Iran's attempt to obtain nuclear technology for the sake of recovering its so-called historic greatness is classified in the status discourse (Doyle II 2015b). The major discursive resources Tehran has drawn upon to construct and project such a social identity are Shia Islamic identity, a collective discourse of Persian national identity, and a post-colonial struggle to advance the universal cause of 'the oppressed and dispossessed'. This behaviour can be understood in the framework of the normative system that is governing the contemporary international relations (Ramazani 2004). Why does the use of the Islamic discourse of Iranian national identity matter in shaping Iran's nuclear narratives? In the first instance, Islam has proven to play a major role in the public life of Muslim societies as demonstrated by a Pew survey of Muslim countries (Ghannoushi 2016). Ahmadinejad's presidency reinvigorated Iranian nationalism as an alternative to Islamic narratives and the basis for policy decisions, bringing the complex dynamic between religion and nation back to the forefront of Iranian society and political realities. Moreover, the nationalist and religious components of the nuclear narrative that developed during the Ahmadinejad years continue to shape the Iranian nuclear narrative. These components were inherited by the Rouhani government and used to ornate the Iranian nuclear-negotiating team's narrative during the diplomatic process, serving Tehran's objectives abroad and helping it sell the process and the deal at home. In addition to Iran's national interests, the ideology of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution also continues to shape Iran's foreign policy behaviour (Katzman 2015). It demonstrates that Iranian leaders have not only acted on rational-choice calculations or utilitarian assessments of national concern (Etzioni 2011) but endeavoured to pursue the country's national interests, protecting its national security within a certain cultural and ideological framework and with a particular national identity-image they constructed to protect themselves and their interests (Chandler 2006); this is a significant variable that conventional theories of international relations, realism and neorealism, in particular, fail to take into account.

Chapter 3 provided a methodological approach to better understand the nuclear policy behaviour of Iranian elites. Understanding Iranian foreign and nuclear policy behaviour is difficult, due to its normative and revolutionary dimensions. In order to

explain Iranian nuclear policy in the post-revolutionary era, chapter 3 applied a discourse analysis to demonstrate how Iranian national identity and Islamic Revolutionary ideology are socially constructed. Discourse analysis enables consideration of meaning-making, allowing the researcher to develop an understanding of social roles and their relations with collective identities (Gee and Handford 2012). In so doing, discourse analysis enables us to explain the sets of meanings and values that constitute Iranian national identity. And so, a combination of discourse analysis as the method and social constructivist approach as the theory has been used to study Iran's nuclear policy behaviour. In referring to the nuclear programme as being at the core of national identity, conceptions of the Iranian elite can be seen as influenced by the construction of social and cultural norms and their impact on understandings of national security and national development. Science and technology are the desired forms of modernity for bringing about fundamental changes to the country's national and international status (Abraham 1998).

Chapter 4 provided a historical context of Iran's nuclear programme and the entities that are involved in nuclear decision-making. Chapter 5 discussed the components of Iranian national identity and their impact on nuclear decisions. The next three chapters focused on the discourse analysis of the research. Chapter 6 focused on the discourse analysis of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's nuclear decision-making based on his speeches and the research interviews as well as other primary and secondary sources. Chapter 7 discussed president Hassan Rouhani's nuclear decision-making with regard to his conceptions of the discourses of Iranian national identity. And chapter 8 examined the results of the thesis, demonstrating how Iranian elites' conception of national identity affects nuclear decision-making. A detailed discourse analysis of various speeches and interviews demonstrated that despite the differences between the opinions and actions of the political elite, there are also a number of similarities. One is that for both Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations, the nature of the Iranian nuclear programme has a direct relationship with conceptions of national identity. As a country with nuclear technology, both the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani administrations have been of the opinion that by pursuing a peaceful nuclear energy programme, Iran will meet its own energy demands. The scientific and technological outcome of the nuclear programme has also come to be regarded nationally as a symbol of modern Iran. For Iran, technological advancement has deep roots in

national independence and self-reliance. Hence, the nuclear programme creating a new basis for Iranian identity that demonstrates Iran's level of independence and modernity and its importance for the world, which is referred to as international prestige (Abraham 2006). Another fundamental factor in conceptions of Iranian national identity has been the anti-Western nature of the Islamic Republic, which originated in the primary ideologies of Iran's Islamic Revolution. To discern the impact of Iranian elites' conceptions of national identity on decisions affecting Iran's nuclear programme and nuclear negotiations, these three chapters adopted a discourse analysis of elite interviews. Speech and media analysis was also carried out, focusing on the period from Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2005 to July 2015 and Rouhani's presidency, when the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the P5+1 was achieved.

Analysing the interplay between the Iranian elites' conception of national identity and nuclear policies sheds light on the significance of national identity for the functioning of nuclear policies during the period investigated. However, it is worth noting that this thesis discusses the contemporary constructions of Iranian identity that interpret the past in particular ways. Firstly, Iranian national identity is a product of a long history mixed with religious beliefs. The Iranian philosophy of identity that considers human beings as the principle and the truth has existed from the dawn of the civilisation and resides in the culture of Iran. One indicator of Iranian identity is the spirit of pride and endurance. The ways to measure this indicator include the extent to which a nation is proud of its country and nationality, the importance of religion in people's lives, and whether they think there is a clear boundary between right and wrong. Secondly, the Islamic Republic and its ideals, principles and values determine one of the fundamentals of Iranian national identity. Thus, the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran contains elements of Islamic identity, the Islamic Republic, and Iranian nationalism. For the purpose of this research, I worked on contemporary nuclear policies and the way that Iranian national identity conceptions have shaped and interpreted nuclear policies and decision-making. Even as national identity conceptions shifted in favour of religion and Islamic Revolutionary ideology after the 1979 revolution in Iran, the Persian national identity was never been undermined in society and the current Islamic regime in Iran has been unable to prevent itself from referring to its ancient Persian identity when confronted with issues of legitimacy

(Zia-Ebrahimi 2016). According to David Thaler (2010), the nuclear issue in Iran has revealed certain aspects of factionalism amongst the Iranian elite.

There have been different views among policymakers in Iran regarding how to deal with the nuclear programme on the international scene; these policies have been either to comply or to confront. Whilst reformists and pragmatists alike view the nuclear programme as being a win-win game, the principalists or hardliners are concerned that complying with the West's interests and demands on the nuclear issue would be considered as a retreat that would lead to the loss of legitimacy for the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic's elites determinedly believe that there are three factors underlying U.S. enmity towards Iran: first, the Islamic nature of Iran's regime; second, Iran's constant effort towards independence; and, third, that the U.S. tends to be the dominant power in the region, with control of energy resources (Ibid.). The dynamic interaction of Iranian elites' conception of national identity sheds light on Tehran's nuclear decision-making. Iran's nuclear policies are not the mere posturing of a single president or leader, but official state policies; thus, whether Ahmadinejad or Rouhani or any other individual is Iran's president, the nuclear policies will not change based on their decisions. Nevertheless, the peaking of all negotiating parties' leverage and regional turmoil were equally important in ultimately pushing both sides (Iran and the P5+1) to an agreement. The leaders' conceptions of Iranian national identity based on a shared understanding of Iranian culture and society were of paramount importance in making nuclear policy decisions. Hooman Majd⁴⁹ (2014) believes that political elites in Iran, whether conservative, moderate or reformist, will not surrender the Iranian nation's dignity by giving up to the dictates of Western powers; hence, any deal, including the nuclear deal must take the dignity of the nation into consideration. Majd also argues that the nuclear deal was not a face-saving deal for the Iranian elite, but a matter of affording the Iranian nation the dignity it deserves (Ibid.).

9.2 Key Findings

This research was an attempt to delve into the depths of the nuclear policy-making process in Iran, focusing on the impact of national identity conceptions on nuclear

⁴⁹ Hooman Majd is an Iranian-American journalist and commentator on Iranian affairs; he is the author of *The Ministry of Guidance Invites You Not to Stay: An American Family in Iran*.

decision-making. Even though the literature on this topic is gradually expanding, looking at the process through the analysis of Iranian elites' speech and interviews remains unique, and this is the thesis's core contribution to knowledge. The research represents the connection between national identity, prestige and bargaining leverage, and nuclear negotiations. According to social constructivism, states' culture and identity are not established realities, but the outcomes of historical and social processes (Guzzini and Leander 2005). When Iran and the P5+1 stopped acting based upon the shared understanding of each other that had been in place since 1979, the animosity and hostility present in the negotiations reduced. The constructive diplomatic process they adopted was able to replace the ineffective negotiation process that took place for over a decade.

The identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran is complex due to its claim of a deep connection between the culture of the Persian Empire and Iranians' Shia and Islamic roots. In order to understand Iranian national identity and its effects on foreign policy and relations with others, one needs to learn more about this complexity (Tarzi 2011). There have always been challenges between the main components of Iranian identity - Persian, Islamic and modernisation. Mohammad Reza Shah's concentration on Persian and modern identities caused resistance among a large societal group that was also fond of religious and Islamic values. This identity of resistance has emerged as a remarkable social movement along with the emergence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Castells 2010). Nuclear decision-making in Iran is mostly centralised in the hands of hard-liners and religious political elites (Ashley 2012). With its ties to Shia Islamic, nationalistic, revolutionary and modern identities, the nuclear programme allows the Iranian regime to interpret its image as an anti-Western power that has been victimised by the great powers and now seeks equality and mutual respect (Adebahr 2014). Iran shows resistance to the Western perception of the social construction of Iran's nuclear ambitions (Hecht 1998). According to Shahram Chubin (2014, p. 76) "Iran suffers from a status discrepancy: a gap between its own and others' perceptions of its importance. It wants to sit at the top table with the big boys, not be relegated to dining with its smaller rivals in the Gulf."

Within the circle of Iranian elites, the nature of the nuclear programme has been treated as symbolic - in other words, Iran's nuclear programme with its indigenous

and independent nature for enriching uranium has been referred to as a unifying symbol of Iranian identity. With its goal of scientific and technological advancement, the nuclear programme has been framed as a prestigious entity for the Iranian nation, both at home and abroad. Indigenous technological advancement and self-reliance on Iranian scientists have been the watchwords of Iran's nuclear programme and closely related to the rights of the Iranian nation. Over the past 15 years, Iranian nuclear activities have had their ups and downs. For Iranian leaders, developing nuclear technology has been an important issue regarding the country's independence from the West, that is, retrieving its historic grandeur through the modernisation of the country's technology. Iranian leaders have claimed that Tehran's nuclear activities have solely peaceful purposes, emphasising that the nuclear programme in Iran is a symbolic activity that demonstrates Iran's technological advancement and thus, is an inalienable right of the Iranian nation. At one point, the Iranian leaders moved forward and stated that the nuclear programme in Iran is a gesture of modernity for all Muslim countries (Safarian 2011).

Regardless of the differences in nuclear policies, and foreign policies more generally, all Iranian officials have taken the same stance in relation to the nature of Iran's nuclear programme. This can be identified and assessed in the context of national identity, national interest, regional and international respect, justice and equality. Despite the more anti-Western policy of Ahmadinejad's administration and a more moderate policy of Rouhani's government, their foreign policy preferences have been functions of the country's national priorities. Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif (2015b) emphasised the efforts of Iranian scientists to own the nuclear programme and benefit from the fruits of their own efforts; Zarif called the outcome of the nuclear programme a source of national pride and dignity. As Mohammad Marandi⁵⁰ (2015) argues, regardless of whom Ahmadinejad or Rouhani are and whether Ahmadinejad successfully moved in the direction of resolving the nuclear issue or not, the U.S. needs to recognise that the peaceful nuclear programme for Iranians is not only a matter of technology and decades of investment, nor is it simply about producing medicine and electricity; rather, it is an issue linked to dignity and sovereignty (Ibid.).

⁵⁰ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 29 June 2015

The Islamic Republic's leaders' strategy has been to tie Iranian national identity to the cause of nuclear empowerment, engaging them in a process of constructive diplomacy. Iran's Supreme Leader believes that the Iranian government must clarify for the international community that Iran's nuclear programme is not based on decisions made by different administrations, but rather is determined according to the regime's fundamental convictions. Both the Ahmadinejad and the Rouhani administrations and nuclear-negotiating teams agreed on one important point, that is, expecting Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technologies, including uranium enrichment, to be recognised and respected. However, during governance by moderates, it has always been more amenable for Tehran to compromise on the nuclear issue. Reza Marashi⁵¹ (2015) believes the negatives of the Ahmadinejad approach to nuclear negotiations and policies outweighed the positives; however, Ahmadinejad's positive policy of scientific and technological advancement, in different areas including nuclear technology and space technology, Marashi believes it empowered the Rouhani administration in particular and the Iranian government more generally to negotiate from a position of strength, even though it was reached at a heavy cost (Ibid.). In the same manner, Ali Vaez⁵² (2015) also argues that both the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's negotiating-teams aimed at ending the nuclear crisis, but they also pursued two different approaches. Ahmadinejad's nuclear-negotiating team pursued a confrontational approach with an ideological lexicon that was incomprehensible to Iran's Western interlocutors. Rouhani's negotiators, on the other hand, pursued a more conciliatory approach, comprising of pragmatic and professional diplomats who knew full well how to handle multilateral negotiations. Bar (2004) believes that socio-cultural norms and religious conventions, as the traits of Iranian national identity and character, have a paramount influence on Iranian negotiation tactics. However, I disagree with Bar's analysis of the Iranian negotiators' tendency towards mistrust and conspiracy theories that suggest "any negotiations with Iranians should be based on clear short-term incentives and threats, and not on incremental long-term confidence building" (Bar 2004, p. 45).

⁵¹ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 6 July 2015

⁵² Semi-structured Skype interview, 25 June 2015

Looking at the history of nuclear negotiations with Iran and its final result, we can see how aggressive behaviour and tactics on behalf of Iran and the West did not succeed, while diplomacy, trust and mutual understanding, in addition to respecting each others' rights, produced a successful result, bringing about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). For the Iranian elite, a peaceful nuclear programme has not been solely about technology, resulting from decades of investment, or about producing medicine and electricity; rather it has been linked to dignity and sovereignty. The West's efforts to coerce Iran into altering its nuclear policy have not been successful due to a lack of understanding of the extent to which Iranian national identity affects the nation's attitudes towards nuclear development and openness to cooperate with Western powers. There is a need to look at Iran, not necessarily through the lens of a nuclear weapons programme, but rather via the lens of the regime's overall nuclear aspirations. There is a shocking lack of understanding of Iran's political and cultural dynamics in the West, especially the United States' government, according to Jofi Josef⁵³ (2014). As the issue of national identity is not well established and understood within policy circles, there is no real appreciation of the Iranian national identity; what has occurred over the past four decades is mostly a black and white perception of Iran (Ibid.). In order to understand the complex system of national nuclear policies, we must thus focus on the shared national identities of the decision-making elite (Ritchie, 2008).

The elites of the Islamic Republic perceive Iran to occupy a unique centrality in the Middle East that is shaped by a strong sense of Iranian identity and awareness of the country's role in the region as one of its main historical powers (Mohseni 2015). In the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, national identity was introduced as the centrepiece of Islamist discourse. Other components of national identity have been related to this pivotal component. However, the neglect of each one has become costly. Naturally, in every case of Iranian foreign policy, various elements of national identity have been revealed. For instance, as Rostami *et al.* (2015) put it, the notion of victimisation, which comes from Iran being invaded historically by other powers, shows itself in the elite's desire for modernity and technological advancement. In addition to its culture and worldwide empire (Ghirshman 1971), Iran bears the

⁵³ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 11 September 2014

memory of many defeats and the sense of humiliation and victimisation that comes from being repeatedly invaded, conquered, and humiliated by other powers, including the Arabs, the Mongols, the Turks, and the Greeks. This has created a sense of insecurity and inferiority and led Iranians on a search to regain their historic pride and grandeur (Thaler 2010). The 1979 Islamic Revolution also greatly influenced Iran's strategic culture and identity by formalising a sense of victimisation while also introducing a radical Shia ideology of *moqāvemat* (resistance) against *zolm* (injustice) (Fischer 2003). Therefore, regarding the nuclear issue, the emphasis of the Iranian nation is on respect, dignity, equality and justice, which have historically been the perspective of the nation and culture, as well as on modern and advanced technologies.

Just as this rich history has become part of Iranian culture, in the case of the nuclear issue, it is expected that the international community will consider and respect Iran as well. As Ali Asghar Soltanieh⁵⁴ (2015) argues, in the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the world powers, the historical mentality of Iranians, formed from their culture and civilisation, in no way allows Iran to accept the terms of an opposing party as the superior actor, although this view may harm the country's physical security. Moreover, in terms of the nuclear issue, efforts to achieve independence and self-sufficiency are of paramount importance. The task of the Islamic Republic is to strive for the realisation of this objective by acquiring nuclear technology that gives authority and prestige to the nation, and through which it can serve the components of Iranian national identity.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution also heralded the notion of the Supreme Leadership, which would replace the country's 2500-year-old monarchy. Thus, the requirements for the Supreme Leadership and its authority eventually changed to reflect the shift in regime policy and the revolutionary ideology (Tabatabai 2015b). Iran's newly born national identity as the Islamic Republic of Iran has deepened Iran's quest to become a civilian nuclear power and promote their own conception of modernity (Griffiths 2018). Iran has invested significant resources of time, manpower and money to acquire nuclear capability, which has come at an enormous national cost, resulting in

⁵⁴ Semi-structured face-to-face interview, 12 November 2015

crippling economic sanctions and barriers to international trading (Ladha 2012). In theory, economic sanctions should have brought Iran to the negotiating table and given power to the negotiating parties. In practice, they did not change Iran's nuclear policies but did significantly constrain Iran's nuclear activities, preventing Tehran from the possibility of assembling a nuclear arsenal (Esfandiary and Fitzpatrick 2011). It is worth mentioning that putting more economic pressure on Iran not only did not prevent Tehran from pursuing its nuclear activities, but it also reinforced a sense of nationalistic resolve, turning the nuclear programme into a symbolic and national issue. However, it also reinforced an adversarial self-other construction. The leaders' determination, be it aggressive (Ahmadinejad) or harmonious (Rouhani) may reflect the protective cover for a strengthened national identity, and thus at heart, be an example of psychologically based resistance to external pressure. Iran's presidents have sought to strengthen national identity and combat external intervention throughout the nuclear programme.

The topics identified in this thesis can offer the international community and policymakers a template or blueprint to constructively understand the normative process of Iran's nuclear decision-making at national, regional, and international levels. The underlying argument here is that understanding Iran's nuclear behaviour requires a thorough understanding of first, Iranian national identity conceptions, and second, the Iranian elites' conceptions of national identity and its relation to nuclear policies in a social and historical context. It is worth noting that the constructivist approach is not simply about ideational factors, rather it believes that material structures find their meaning through the shared knowledge embedded in agents' actions and interactions (Wendt 1995). In summary, the nuclear discourses that have been discussed in this thesis relate to the social construction of the Iranian national identity in a number of ways. As such, the ideas and conceptions embedded in various discourses, including those associated with Persian nationalism, Shia Islam, Islamic Revolutionary ideologies and technological advancement, have all been essential to the non-traditional formation of Iran's nuclear policies throughout the critical years of nuclear negotiations. Escalating tensions between Iran and the West over Tehran's development of its nuclear programme in spite of crippling sanctions gives a reason to reconceptualise and reinterpret the non-traditional scope and consequences of Iran's nuclear pursuits. In other words, the non-traditional perspective in this chapter and in

the thesis as a whole is about reinterpreting Iran's nuclear decisions from a theoretical standpoint in which the concept of security is no longer merely related to the military dimension of interstate relations. The non-traditional aspect of security has multiple interpretations that include non-military issues including cultural norms and the values of society (Emmers *et al.* 2017).

9.3 Reflection: The Importance of Key Findings

The use of the Iranian discourse of national identity to shape Iran's nuclear narrative has two key implications. While, in this thesis, these are discussed in the context of respect and resistance, they can also be applied to broader foreign policy issues. First, nationalism plays a key role in shaping identity and galvanising social and political support. Therefore, as demonstrated throughout the thesis, in nationalistic terms, the legitimisation of a given programme or ambition can be a game changer (Goodhand and Sedra 2016). Iranian and Islamic identities have proven to be major forces in the public life of Iranian society (Moallem 2005). Understanding the potential of modernisation as a galvanising factor of identity, Iran has tried to appeal to various audiences by putting forward the idea of a national nuclear ambition - nuclear energy and self-sufficiency - as a rallying point for the Iranian nation. In general, national identity in Iran is shaped around the Persian ideal, which to a great extent has continued to hold Iran together, preserving its political, cultural, and territorial integrity as well as sovereignty (Mozaffari 2014). In Iran, as in other states, language, history, religion, geography, and culture are basic to national identity (Saleh 2013). However, it is the relationship of the people with nationalism and religion that has shaped their attitude toward Iranian and Islamic discourses in the country's foreign and nuclear policy (Berger 2010). Lastly, the attitude of individuals, governments, and regimes toward the international system is also shaped by their views of national identity as a dynamic historical process of social construction, and the place of this within the world (Ting 2008). This idea also describes the consequence of Iran's referral to its particular religious and cultural beliefs at the expense of universal norms. To conclude, Iranian officials view their country's nuclear programme through the lens of national identity components that include Persian nationalism, religion, and modernity.

It is worth noting that there are limitations to the construction of identity in foreign

policy that must continue to pay special attention to the realm of hard or materialistic security. This would appear to suggest limitations in a constructivist approach to foreign policy analysis. While the primacy of security-seeking behaviour has been subsumed within the constructivist view of identity, it is still clear that the policy area is concerned with hard power as well as soft power. However, to concede to realism on this statement and end the matter there would be too simplistic. That is because it would fail to take account of how the various issue areas considered in this research interact with the construction of various discourses of Iranian national identity in order to shape nuclear ambitions faced in each discourse. Security provision must remain important to policy but also to the very identity of a state. Addressing these weaknesses and anomalies requires more comprehensive research.

9.4 Avenues for Future Research

In this thesis, I have offered a theoretical framework to study a particular historical development, Iranian nuclear policy during the administrations of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani (2005-2015), which led to a historical achievement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on 14 July 2015. I believe this framework can be extended to examine further developments in resolving the complex issue of a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East and progress combating nuclear terrorism. As a model for nonproliferation across the region, I believe this framework expands on my doctoral research on Iran's nuclear ambitions from a non-traditional perspective. However, the idea to establish a Middle East WMD Free Zone (MEWMDFZ) has been evolving over the last four decades. MEWMDFZ was first formalised with a mutual resolution offered by Iran and Egypt during the 1974 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (Kane 2015). Establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East has also been stalled for decades because of disagreements among the states in the region regarding different conditions (Foradori and Malin 2012). The MEWMDFZ will not happen unless all the countries in the region engage with global nuclear disarmament and a non-proliferation regime. Improving the effect of regional security dynamics in terms of serving the interests of countries in the region will, in the long term, benefit global interests.

The historic nuclear agreement with Iran can be seen as a path towards further confidence building between Iran and the international community. The US might not

be able to solve all the global problems single-handedly, however, it has the power to motivate other nuclear weapon states to seek global disarmament (Perkovich 2008). A nuclear deal with Iran could not only prevent regional proliferation, but also the civil and proxy wars that cause so much turmoil in the Middle East. Moreover, it could help to increase the likelihood of normalising the relationship between the United States and Iran. Kenneth Pollack (2015) argues that these issues are important in determining whether a nuclear deal with Iran can lead to greater instability in the Middle East. In other words, further research can be allocated to examine whether the momentum built by the JCPOA would be also able to help bring about a constructive dialogue between Iran and its Gulf Arab neighbours. One significant avenue of further research is to examine the effect of the Iran deal in the complex system of international institutions that govern the nuclear world. This includes the IAEA, the UNSC and the EU's diplomatic efforts in balancing Iranian nuclear ambitions within the global nuclear order. The matter, however, is open to political struggle, which is now occurring.

Appendix I: List of Interview Participants

1. **Shahin Dadkhah**- interview date: 28 April 2016- Dadkhah is former adviser to the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Hassan Rouhani and former nuclear negotiator.
2. **Mohammad Daryaei**- interview date: 9 July 2015- Daryaei is a University professor, and senior disarmament researcher with diplomatic engagement on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation issues in Iran.
3. **Mark Fitzpatrick**- interview date: 26 May 2015- London's IISS former Director for its Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Programme. Mr. Fitzpatrick had previously served for four years at the US Mission to International Organisations in Vienna, including working as Charge d'Affairs and Counselor for Nuclear Policy, in charge of liaising with the International Atomic Energy Agency.
4. **Heinz Gärtner**- interview date: 4 August 2015- Gärtner is a Professor at the University of Vienna and Academic Director of the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip). Dr. Gärtner specialises in European, international security, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.
5. **Peter Jenkins**- interview date: 5 March 2016- Jenkins was the UK Ambassador to the IAEA and UN (Vienna) (2001-06) and has been involved in Iran's nuclear negotiations with the EU3 (UK, France, Germany).
6. **Jofi Joseph**- interview date: 11 September 2014- Joseph is an experienced public policy professional and an independent consultant. He has worked at senior levels of the Executive Branch and on Capitol Hill as a former senior advisor and director of White House / National Security Council, and the US Department of State.
7. **Bijan Khajehpour**- interview date: 13 August 2015- Khajehpour is a Strategist, Analyst, and Entrepreneur. He is a managing partner at Atieh International, the Vienna based international arm of the Atieh Group of Companies, a group of strategic consulting firms based in Tehran, Iran.
8. **Stephan Klement**- interview date: 2 September 2015- Klement is the Head of Euratom Co-ordination and International Relations Unit at the European Commission Directorate-General for Energy. Dr. Klement joined the nuclear

negotiations with Iran as soon as the EU was associated in Autumn 2004 and he has been part of the negotiations from 2004 to 2015.

9. **John Limbert**- interview date: 7 January 2016- Ambassador John Limbert most recently served as the highest-ranking official at the State Department dealing solely with Iranian issues, appointed in November 2009 as the first-ever US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iran. He is a veteran US diplomat and a former official at the US Embassy in Tehran, where he was held captive during the Iran hostage crisis.
10. **Mohammad Marandi**- interview date: 29 June 2015- Marandi is an Iranian academic, political analyst and an expert in American studies and postcolonial literature.
11. **Reza Marashi**- interview date: 6 July 2015- Marashi is the Research Director for the National Iranian American Council (NIAC). He came to NIAC after four years in the Office of Iranian Affairs at the US Department of State. He has presented and observed all nuclear talks since 2013.
12. **Seyed Hossein Mousavian**- interview date: 16 August 2015- Mousavian is an associate research scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Dr. Mousavian had previously served as a diplomat in several missions including as Head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council, Spokesman for Iran in its nuclear negotiations with the international community, Foreign Policy Advisor to the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Vice President of the Center for Strategic Research for International Affairs, General Director of Foreign Ministry for West Europe, Chief of Parliament Administration, and other prominent roles.
13. **Walter Posch**- interview date: 6 August 2015- Posch is a senior research fellow focusing on security-related issues of the Middle East with the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management (IFK) of the Austrian National Defence Academy.
14. **Ali Asghar Soltanieh**- interview date: 12 November 2015- Soltanieh is former Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
15. **Greg Thielman**- interview date: 9 September 2014- Thielman is a former senior fellow of the Arms Control Association and member of the Council on Foreign Relations and was previously a US Foreign Service Officer.

16. **Ali Vaez**- interview date: 25 June 2015- Vaez is the International Crisis Group's senior analyst on Iran. Before joining Crisis Group, he headed the Iran project at the Federation of American Scientists in Washington, DC, focusing on Iran's nuclear and missile programmes.

Abbreviations

AEOI	Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran
EU-3	Permanent European Members of the United Nations Security Council, including United Kingdom, France, and Germany
HEU	Highly Enriched Uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAEA INFCIRC	IAEA Information Circular
LEU	Low-Enriched Uranium
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
JPOA	Joint Plan of Action
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MEK	Mujahedeen-e Khalq
MEWMDFZ	Middle East WMD Free Zone
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NCRI	National Council of Resistance of Iran
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
P5+1	Permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, including United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany
PMD	Possible Military Dimensions
POMEPS	Project on Middle East Political Science
SA	Safeguards Agreement
SNSC	Supreme National Security Council
TNRC	Tehran Nuclear Research Center
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UK	United Kingdom
U.S.	United States
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Glossary

Āzādi	Liberty
Bazaaris	The merchant class and workers of bazaars
Delvāpasān	The concerned or worried group, critics of Hassan Rouhani
Esteghlāl	Independence
Ezzat	Dignity
Faqih	Islamic jurist
Fatwā	A religious edict
Ferdowsi	Persian poet and the author of Shāhnāmeḥ (Book of Kings)
Gharbzadegi	Westoxification
Hekmat	Wisdom
Hoviyyat	Identity
Imam Hossein	Third Imam of Shia Muslims
Karbalā	A city in Iraq where Imam Hossein was martyred
Majles	Parliament
Mahdaviat	Or Mahdiism is a religious Shia term referring to a ‘belief in the Mahdi, the 12 th Imam
Martyrdom	Entitles to Martyrs, or Muslims who have died while defending their faith and sacred values
Maslahat	Expediency
Moqāvemāt	Resistance
Nationalism	(Taken from the French) in the sense of prioritising being Iranian or Persian
Norouz	The Persian New Year
Olamā	The clerics
Osulgarā	Principalist, fundamentalist
Persian	The majority ethnic group in Iran and also referring to the ancient Iranian culture and religion
Sharia	The Islamic law
Shia	A branch of Islam, which holds that Prophet Muhammad designated Ali as his successor and the Imam (leader) after him
Supreme Leader	Referring to the Supreme Leader of Iran

Turkmanchāy	An agreement between Persia (Iran) and the Russian Empire
Umma	Nation
Velāyat-e-faqih	Guardianship of the Jurist
Zolm	Injustice
Zoroaster	Ancient Iranian Prophet (Zartosht)
Zoroastrian	Followers of Zoroaster (Zartoshti)

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