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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

"Understanding the Iranian Motivations

For Possessing Nuclear Capabilities"

**A Thesis Submitted to the Public Policy and Administration Department
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Global Affairs**

By

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December, 2013

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ABSTRACT

- University:** The American University in Cairo
- Thesis Title:** "Understanding the Iranian Motivations for Possessing Nuclear Capabilities"
- Student Name:** Tamer Said Mahboub
- Advisors:**
- * Allison Hodgkins, Ph.D.
 - SamehAboul-Enein, Ph.D.
 - Ibrahim Awad, Ph.D.

Research Question: *Why would Iran insist on pursuing its nuclear ambiguity policy despite its status as a party to the NPT and international sanctions?*

The study findings indicate that although there is no conclusive proof that Iran has a weapons program, Iran could be pursuing a strategy of a nuclear ambiguity; the possibility it may have a weapons program acts as a deterrent against potential existential threats to its national security.

These findings were based on evidence gathered through interviews with various experts, and conducting a comparison between the conventional weapons possessed by Iran and those possessed by neighboring countries in light of the nature of the existential threats that face Iran. Iran feels that it lives in a hostile environment in the region, and faces collective threats from its adversaries which threaten its national security. Hence, nuclear weapons, or the threat of, could balance nuclear threats that cannot be dealt with through conventional weapons.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEOI	: The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran
AP	: The Additional Protocol
CIA	: The Central Intelligence Agency
GCC	: The Gulf Cooperation Council
HEU	: High Enriched Uranium
IAEA	: The International Atomic Energy Agency
IRGC	: The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
LEU	: Low Enriched Uranium
NATO	: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	: The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NWFZ	: Nuclear weapons of Free Zone
TNRC	: The Tehran Nuclear Research Center
UNGA	: The United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	: The United Nations Security Council
WMD	: Weapons of Mass Destruction
FATF	: The Financial Action Task Force

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INTRODUCTION

The Iranian nuclear file is one of the most controversial issues on the International scene. In the 1950s, Iran started to develop its nuclear program, while in the 1970s USA expressed its concerns that the Iranian nuclear program might have a military dimension, and the implications of this program will negatively affect the nuclear non-proliferation efforts. The Iranian issue also will affect the stability and USA influence in the region. The Iranian nuclear activities have generated significant concern that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon despite the Iranian claims that its program is limited to peaceful uses (K. Kerr, 2012).¹

The goal of this thesis is to investigate the reasons that Iran may have for pursuing a nuclear weapons program. Although there is no conclusive proof of that Iran is pursuing a weapons program, this project treats its pursuit as an assumption based on concerns raised by the IAEA that Iran's nuclear program might have a military dimension.

In 2007, there was a work plan between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran, as it's a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), in order to clarify the unsettled questions regarding the Iranian nuclear program. Most of these questions have been resolved except the remaining major question, which causes concerns that the Iranian nuclear program might have a military dimension.²

The IAEA concerns were based on Iran's building of gas centrifuges for enriching uranium, especially that the Article IV of the NPT gives the right to the

¹ Kerr, P. K. (2012). Iran's nuclear program: Status. Retrieved from Congressional Research Service website: www.crs.gov

² The Secretariat, (2007). Understandings of the Islamic republic of Iran and the IAEA on the modalities of resolution of the outstanding issue, (INFCIRC/711). Retrieved from IAEA website: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/2007/infirc711.pdf>.

states parties to the treaty to develop nuclear programs for peaceful purposes. These centrifuges can enrich both low enriched uranium (LEU) as well as high enriched uranium (HEU), which is the major element of developing nuclear weapons and, consequently, the nuclear proliferation.

Moreover, Iran received external assistance from China, Pakistan North Korea, and Russia in order to construct its nuclear facilities. For instance, Russia signed an \$800 million contract with Iran in 1995 to build the Bushehr nuclear reactor (The Arms Control Association, 1997).³

Why would Iran insist on pursuing its nuclear ambiguity policy despite its status as a party to the NPT and international sanctions? There are two major perceptions in the literature that may encourage Iran to develop its nuclear weapon namely the deterrence against potential threats, and the goals of the Islamic revolution. I will discuss both arguments to assess which one is more persuasive.

First, Iran claims that it faces threats from its neighboring countries such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the existence of USA forces in the Middle East. These threats may be a possible motivation to possess nuclear weapons. Hence, Iran may want to possess a nuclear weapon, as a deterrent weapon in order to meet these threats; especially that most of these states, excluding USA and probably its ally Israel, have only conventional weapons. In addition, this project examines the Iranian claims which assume that Iran faces external threats from its adversaries in the region.

³ (1997). Russian-Iran ties remain issue at Gore-Chernomyrdin meeting. Retrieved from Arms Control Association website: http://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997_09/gcc2sept.

It also examines Iran's aspirations to own nuclear capabilities in order to overcome these threats, something that cannot be done with conventional weapons, by discussing Iran's relations with each state, the conventional capabilities of each state, and whether or not these states pose an existential threat to Iran.

Second, Iran may have a grand strategy which aims at expanding its goals in the region, and recreating the Persian Empire. Continuing the Islamic revolution of 1979 has been the main Iranian goal for decades. Tehran believes that this ideology requires a powerful weapon such as the nuclear bomb in order to reach its target without facing obstacles. The nuclear weapon would constitute the first step in accomplishing such expansionist goals. The nuclear weapon, as a powerful tool, would enable Iran to balance the power in the Middle East, and reduce the influence of some states in the region such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain as well as USA presence, which would not be achieved with the conventional weapons.

The study findings indicate that Iran wants to possess a nuclear weapon as a deterrent against existential threats, especially the threat posed by the only nuclear state in the Middle East; Israel, as well as the threat of the U.S potential military action. Iran cannot deter these threats with conventional weapons, of course. The findings also refute the perception that Iran wants to possess a nuclear weapon as a means to achieve its strategic intention of recreating the Persian Empire in the Gulf; this perception is not supported by the evidence collected.

The Iranian Nuclear Puzzle

Iran claims that it is developing its nuclear program for peaceful purposes using its right according to the Article IV of the NPT, denial. However, there is significant concern that it is actually seeking nuclear weapons. Iran's action is puzzling because it is a party state to the NPT, which places Iran under international sanctions and condemnation. This part will put this puzzle within the context of the history of Iran's nuclear program and its status as a member state in the NPT.

In 1968, Iran signed the NPT with the commitment not to seek to acquire a nuclear weapon; however, many countries including the United States as well as the IAEA have expressed their concerns that Iran violated the NPT despite its status in the NPT. Iran signed the NPT as a long-term strategy to develop its nuclear capabilities, and access the nuclear threshold. Iran did not follow the policy of India, Pakistan and Israel because it did not have a strong ally to depend on, especially a nuclear state. Hence, Iran preferred to develop its nuclear program under the umbrella of the NPT. This explains why Iran signed the NPT, yet seemingly it seeks a nuclear weapon.

Iran's endeavor to possess nuclear weapons has entailed harmful economic sanctions by the United States, Europe, which strongly affected the Iranian economy. However, Iran insists on pursuing its policy of nuclear ambiguity despite all sanctions and pressures. Iran is acting suspiciously by following the policy of nuclear ambiguity and building underground nuclear facilities until declaring its withdrawal from the NPT after getting the nuclear weapon. Iran follows this policy because it feels that it lives in a hostile environment; accordingly, if Iran declares its withdrawal from the NPT, and makes announcements regarding its nuclear activities, it would face a pre-emptive military action against its nuclear facilities. Working under the umbrella of

the NPT provides Iran with the strategic ambiguity regarding the extent of progress of the program until it reaches the nuclear threshold. In addition, as an NPT member state, Iran's ambiguity policy protects the country from declaring its activities within the NPT obligations. The military surveillance and the existential threats make Iran insists on following the nuclear ambiguity policy in order to avoid a military attack if it declares its real nuclear capabilities.

Until now, Iran has not changed its behavior either to announce that it does not possess a nuclear weapon, or to declare its withdrawal from the NPT. Iran knows that the threats that face it are not from the Gulf States because it has enough conventional capabilities to deter the conventional threats of these states. Iran believes that the real threats come from the West and its ally Israel. However, Iran follows the classical deterrence because it does not have enough conventional capabilities to challenge the United States. That is why Iran might seek nuclear weapons through its program in order to make the cost of any potential military action against it too high.

It is almost impossible to convince Iran to dissuade its nuclear program which costs billions of dollars to be achieved. Iran will continue developing its nuclear policy, especially the full fuel cycle technology, as long as the military presence is continuing behind its borders. No offer has yet been sufficient to dissuade Iran from continuing its nuclear policy of ambiguity, not even USA offer to lift the sanctions on some banks. Thus, Iran will keep the ambiguity as it neither intends to withdraw from the NPT nor proves that it is not developing a nuclear weapon.

Iran and the Article IV of the NPT

The Article IV of the NPT emphasizes the inherent right of all parties to the Treaty to conduct research and produce nuclear energy for peaceful uses in accordance with both Article I and II of the NPT. In addition, all Parties to the NPT have the right to exchange materials or scientific information for the peaceful purposes on nuclear energy. The cooperation between parties also includes providing further development to the peaceful uses on nuclear energy from states or international organizations, especially for the non-nuclear weapons states and the developing countries.⁴

In this regard, the Iranian undeclared nuclear activities including the uranium enrichment have raised questions regarding Iran's commitment to its obligations, as a party, toward the NPT. Greater concerns came from the nuclear fuel cycle which includes installations for the uranium enrichment process. This process could produce high-enriched uranium for nuclear weapon. The NPT is framing legal regulations to be followed by the parties to the treaty in order to achieve the main purpose which is preventing the nuclear arms race.

New concerns have been expressed when the IAEA has issued a report in 2003 declares that Iran was working secretly on developing nuclear weapons. Iran's failure to meet its obligations to the NPT, and report its facilities such as building underground reactors for uranium enrichment and constructing power plants for heavy water.

⁴(1970). Treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (INFCIRC/140). London, Moscow and Washington: International Atomic Energy Agency.

In other words, the Article IV of the NPT gives the right to all parties to cooperate and exchange the nuclear technology with the nuclear states for the peaceful purposes. However, Iran follows the nuclear ambiguity regarding its nuclear activities which entails the IAEA reports and the UNSC resolutions, followed by strict economic sanctions.

The hostility between Iran and the U.S., which is evident in the mutual assertive rhetoric between the two states, encourages Iran to follow the policy of nuclear ambiguity regarding its activities despite what the Article IV provides. This policy is due to the Iranian feeling of being surrounded with threats, especially from the U.S. military presence in the region. This feeling forced Iran to mask its nuclear activities in order to deter its adversaries.

In addition, Iran, as a party to the NPT, has the right to develop its nuclear program for peaceful purposes according to Article IV. However, although the considerable amount of reports, sanctions and resolutions on Iran from the IAEA and the UNSC, Iran is always negotiating with the UN and the nuclear states to reduce the sanctions on Iran. How does a state have the right to develop its nuclear program according to the provisions of the NPT negotiate on its right asking for reducing the sanctions imposed on it? Hence, if Iran is really working under Article IV, it would refuse negotiating on its right.

All in all, the reliance on the policy of nuclear ambiguity is the only way for Iran to get the nuclear threshold and avoid being attacked in the same time.

Evidence of an Iranian Intent to Pursue a Nuclear Weapon

Iran's official position claims that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes using its inherent right according to the Article IV of the NPT. Ramin Mehmanparast, a spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry, claimed that Iran does not seek nuclear weapons, referring to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's Fatwa that bans nuclear weapons. Tehran is always trying to reduce USA suspicions by stating such Fatwa as a tool to decrease sanctions. Mehmanparast mentioned that there is a culture gap between Iran and USA, saying that the West does not realize the importance of Fatwa (Eisenstadt & Khalaji, 2011).⁵ Iran also claims that its nuclear program is for peaceful uses as a strategy to gain the support of the other members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Nonetheless, there is a widely held belief that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons. For instance, there is no doubt among the intelligence bodies of the United States, Europe and Israel that Iran is enriching uranium, and working on required infrastructure to become a nuclear state. In a Senate session in 2012, the chief of intelligence James Clapper claimed that Iran is certainly in its path, but it has not yet taken the decision to make a nuclear weapon. American and European analysts believe that Iran has passed the hardest step into building a nuclear weapon. The IAEA's inspectors have issued reports clarifying that Iran started to enrich uranium in an underground installation (Risen & Mazzetti, 2012).⁶

⁵ Eisenstadt, M., & Khalaji, M. (2011). Nuclear fatwa: Religion and politics in Iran's proliferation strategy. Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

⁶ Risen, J., & Mazzetti, M. (2012, February 24). USA. Agencies see no move by Iran to build a bomb. The New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/us-agencies-see-no-move-by-iran-to-build-a-bomb.html?_r=3&.

Officials said that Iran seeks increasing its influence in the region by following the strategy of nuclear ambiguity. Iran is acting suspiciously to show its power regarding its nuclear aspirations. They believe that Iran follows the same policy of India and Pakistan as they were secretly working on the nuclear weapons until they got the nuclear bomb (Risen & Mazzetti, 2012).⁷ The UK Minister of Foreign Affairs claimed that Iran has secretly tested missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, in defiance to the United Nations resolution. He added that Iran is enriching more uranium than the required for peaceful energy. USA also has concerns that Iran has long-range missiles after the Iranian declaration that Iran has successfully tested missiles during military maneuvers (CNN, 27, 9, 2011).⁸

Another act of suspicion done by Iran was when the IAEA received a report confirming that there was an underground installation on a military facility, while Iran denied that this facility contains any nuclear materials. Iran also claimed that there is no goal to make nuclear weapon, which does not explain why they work on a civil program underground (CNN, 2009).⁹

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Iran testing missiles that could carry nuclear weapon, UK's Hague says. (2011, Jan 29). CNN. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/06/29/iran.missiles.tests/index.html>.

⁹ Iran nuclear official says IAEA can inspect new plant. (2009, Sep 27). CNN. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/09/26/iran.nuclear/>.

In addition, an Iranian opposition member claimed that there is a secret underground nuclear enrichment facility, while USA nuclear experts said that they were not convinced. The speaker of the National Council of Resistance, Alireza Jafarzadeh, said that he got this information from the Mujahedeen Organization of Iran that discovered Natanz site in 2002. (Ure, 2010).¹⁰

The IAEA has issued reports on Iran regarding its non-compliance with the agency and, consequently, with the NPT. Iran challenges the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) by pursuing its program for uranium enrichment and heavy water activities. The IAEA is spending efforts to overcome the concerns regarding the potential military dimension of the Iranian nuclear program, but Iran is not cooperating fully with the Agency (Carlson, 2011).¹¹

Iran has failed to declare its activities and safeguards agreement with the agency since 1980s. These activities include the nuclear experiments. In 2004, the IAEA issued a report on Iran clarifying the entire Iranian program with the NPT violations. (Shire & Albright, 2006).¹²

¹⁰ Ure, L. (2010, Sep 9). Iranian secret nuclear site disclosed, opposition group claims. CNN. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/09/09/iran.nuclear.site/index.html>.

¹¹ Carlson, J. (2011). Iran nuclear issue – considerations for a negotiated outcome. Washington, DC: Institute for Science and International Security.

¹² Shire, J., & Albright, D. (2006). Iran's npt violations – numerous and possibly on-going? The Institute for Science and International Security.

The IAEA reports stated that Iran failed to declare many activities. First, Iran failed to declare that it had imported natural uranium from China in 1991, and had acknowledged this deal in 2003. Second, Iran did not inform the IAEA that it used the imported uranium in the uranium conversion processes and produced uranium. Third, Iran failed to declare that it had used imported UF₆ to test centrifuges at Kalaye Electric Company (IAEA, 2004).¹³ Fourth, Iran failed to report the existence of uranium enrichment installation at Kalaye Company and laser plants at Tehran Research Center. Fifth, Iran failed to declare the importation of 50 kg of natural uranium in 1993, and made experiments at Tehran Research Center. Sixth, Iran did not declare that it had conducted plutonium Experiments, and failed to declare the transfer of waste resulting from these activities. Iran acknowledged all these breaches in 2003 (IAEA, 2003).¹⁴

There is a fear that Iran would declare its withdrawal from the NPT after completing the nuclear fuel cycle under cover of civil program, just like what North Korea did. Given the Iranian unwillingness to increase cooperation with the IAEA, the refusal of enriching uranium in Russia, and the Iranian threats that it will withdraw from the NPT, the actual withdrawal cannot be excluded in the future (Kubbig, 2006).¹⁵

¹³Board of Governors, (2004). Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Islamic republic of Iran (GOV/2004/83). Retrieved from International Atomic Energy Agency website: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-83.pdf>.

¹⁴Board of Governors, (2003). Implementation of the NPT Safeguards agreement in the Islamic republic of Iran (GOV/2003/75). Retrieved from International Atomic Energy Agency website: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-75.pdf>.

¹⁵ Kubbig, B. W. (2006). Policy Department External Policies, Iran and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Frankfurt: European Parliament.

The Impact of Sanctions on Iran

U.N. Secretary-General mentioned that the Iranian citizens were negatively affected by the sanctions which resulted in rising inflation, rising unemployment and shortage in lifesaving medicines. He stated that Iran's 'Rial' has lost about 40 % of its value against the American Dollar. It is worth mentioning that the UNSC has imposed rounds of sanctions to dissuade Iran from continuing its nuclear program, while Iran insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes (Fox News, 5, October, 2012).¹⁶ The increase in food prices in Iran has been followed by rising public discontent. Meanwhile, the Iranian former President Ahmadinejad condemned the West of launching hidden war that negatively affected the Iranian ability to export oil. Ahmadinejad added that there are obstacles in transferring money and selling oil despite his previous statements that Iran will resist the imposed sanction: "we have oil and the world needs it". The IAEA evaluations claimed that the Iranian oil exports had been reduced to one million barrels instead of three millions (Blomfield, 2012).¹⁷

The West insists on punishing Iran for its nuclear aspirations, but it is the Iranian residents who are seriously affected by each round of sanctions. An Iranian citizen said that he is working so hard, but he cannot save enough money. He added that the latest round of sanctions that were imposed by the United States on the

¹⁶ Un chief ban says sanctions are hurting Iranians as inflation takes its toll. (2012). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/10/05/un-chief-ban-says-sanctions-are-hurting-iranians-as-inflation-takes-its-toll/>.

¹⁷ Blomfield, A. (2012). Mahmoud Ahmadinejad concedes Iran sanctions hurting economy. The Telegraph, Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9523230/Mahmoud-Ahmadinejad-concedes-Iran-sanctions-hurting-economy.html>.

Central Bank of Iran caused tremendous inflation; the food prices rose by up to 50 percent (Bozorgmehr & Basu, 2012).¹⁸

Tehran has testified the first public outcry against the collapse of the Iranian currency and the economic crises. Economic analysts and politicians stated that these protests reflect the great impact of the severe USA economic sanctions imposed on Iran due to its nuclear policy. Iran faces great obstacles in exporting oil, and re-increasing the value of the Iranian Rial against foreign currencies because Iran is economically isolated from the global banking system. That is why the Iranian government has failed to control the increasing economic crisis (Erdbrink& Gladstone, 2012).¹⁹

Other explanations for the Iranian aspirations

There are other explanations for the Iranian aspirations. It has been argued that politics in Iran depends mainly on the religion principals. These principals play a fundamental role in determining the state's approach to a lot of issues. In this regard, during the Iran-Iraq war, Iran's military tried to enhance the human and logistic support in the front lines. Nonetheless, calling more soldiers would pose undesirable reaction from the Iranian people unless there is a high morale among the forces. Hence, the Iranian leaders used the Islamic Fiqh (religious law) by employing some clergies and rhetoric in order to legitimize the war and encourage mobilization (Eisenstadt & Khalaji, 2011).²⁰

¹⁸ Bozorgmehr, S., & Basu, M. (2012). Sanctions take toll on ordinary Iranians. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/23/world/meast/iran-sanctions-effects>.

¹⁹ Erdbrink, T., & Gladstone, R. (2012). Violence and protest in Iran as currency drops in value. The New York Times, Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/04/world/middleeast/clashes-reported-in-tehran-as-riot-police-target-money-changers.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&_r=1&_r=1.

²⁰ Eisenstadt, M., &Khalaji, M. (2011). Nuclear fatwa: Religion and politics in Iran's proliferation strategy. Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

The religious beliefs, doctrines and values influence the political decision making inside Iran. This religious doctrine is likely to critically affect the decisions regarding Iran's nuclear program.

Relations between Iran and Bahrain were determined by the Iranian attempts to export the Islamic revolution to the Gulf countries, especially in 1980s and 1990s. Bahrain claims that Iran interferes in its internal affairs, while Iran condemns the Bahraini regime for oppressing Bahrain's Shiite (followers of the Iranian Islamic sect). The former Iranian parliament member Ali Akbar Nouri claimed that Bahrain was an Iranian governorate and had a delegate in the parliament which led to more tensions in their relations, and suspended the negotiations regarding the energy sector (Fulton & Wellman, 2011).²¹

In addition, there is an ideological conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia due to the Saudi accusations to Iran that it tries to influence the Shiite people who live in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia and create its leverage in the Gulf. Moreover, the ministers of the Arab states condemned Iran, during the Arab Foreign Ministers Meeting in 2001, due to its interference in their internal affairs, especially after the call of the Iranian President Ahmadinejad for Saudi Arabia to withdraw its military forces from Bahrain (Teitelbaum, 2011).²²

²¹Fulton, W., & Wellman, A. F. Foreign Relations, Middle East. (2011). Bahrain-Iran foreign relations. Retrieved from Iran Tracker website: <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/bahrain-iran-foreign-relations>.

²² Teitelbaum, J. (2011). Saudi Arabia, Iran and America in the wake of the Arab spring, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.

However, the above explanations are far from convincing. First, they sound like normal bickering between Sunni and Shiite, just like any conflict between the two different communities. These conflicts are amplified by the media as a means of pressure on Iran (Zahran, personal interview, 8 April, 2013).²³

Second, the Shiite sect has its radical groups which pose no more than 1 % of the population; this percentage cannot represent Shiite domination or justify Iran's position. However, the moderate Shiite does not seek the domination of the region or spread their Shiite credo (Abushady, personal interview, 1 April, 2013).²⁴

Third, the Iranian nuclear ambition is related to its history, as a former empire, more than the spread of the Shiite doctrine (Anonymous source, personal interview, 18 April, 2013).²⁵

²³ Zahran, M. (2013, April 08). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub, "Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities".

²⁴ Abu-Shadi, Y. (2013, April 01). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub. " Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities".

²⁵ Anonymous. (2013, April 18). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub . Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities.

Argument

Iran believes that it lives in a hostile environment and therefore must follow a strategy of nuclear ambiguity. This strategy means that they can work under the umbrella of the NPT, avoid the announcement of their nuclear activities and get protection against the possible hostile reaction. This policy provides Iran with the ambiguity of the progress in its nuclear program until it produces the nuclear weapon. Moreover, this policy protects Iran from more pressures because it is a member in the NPT and has obligations to announce its nuclear activities. The military surveillance encourages Iran to follow this policy to avoid exposure to any potential military action.

Since Iran has enough conventional capabilities to deter the conventional threats of the Gulf States, Iran knows that the threats it faces are not from these states; the real threats come from the West and its ally Israel. As Iran's conventional weapon capabilities are insufficient to challenge or defend itself against the United States, Iran is possibly trying to develop nuclear weapons through its program in order to make the cost of any potential military action against it too high for USA to risk. There are no possible allies to support Iran in case of exposure to military action except Syria, which is now unable to offer Iran any aid due to its ongoing civil war. These threats make it unlikely that Iran will abandon or dismantle its nuclear program.

The policy of nuclear ambiguity enables Iran to hide its nuclear activities and, consequently, avoid being exposed to more threats. Keeping its membership in the NPT helps Iran avoid the increasing international pressures until it produces the nuclear bomb.

Evidence that Iran is Pursuing Nuclear Ambiguity

The hypothesis that "Iran is pursuing a strategy of nuclear ambiguity" will be tested through strategic assessment of the situation in the Gulf. The assessment will include the historical accumulation of events that led to USA-Iranian hostility such as the 1953 coup in Iran, Iran hostage crisis and Carter's mission, USA support of Iraq against Iran, USA rhetoric support of Israel against Iran, the UN resolutions against Iran driven by USA and sanctions driven by USA through IAEA and NPT.

In addition, this research will discuss the further threats coming from the possible support from NATO to launch military action against Iran, USA support of the Gulf States against Iran and USA military presence in the Gulf, which poses threats to the national security of Iran.

This project will also compare the conventional weapons capabilities of Iran and other states in the region to assess whether Iran actually needs a nuclear weapon to protect its national security against existential threats.

CHAPTER I: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this literature review the Iranian nuclear aspirations, will be assessed through the presentation of three important factors:

- I- Different views regarding the motivations of states to possess nuclear weapons.
- II- Approaches related to the nuclear deterrence theory.
- III- How states may be prevented from possessing nuclear weapons. Consequently, the Iranian nuclear policy will be discussed; the reasons why Iran insists on continuing its nuclear ambiguity policy, despite its status as a party to the NPT, will be investigated as well.

Motivations for Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon

There are two main explanations of why states seek nuclear weapons: These are the military security and the protection of sovereignty. The military security is the crucial factor for the states who are not allied to one of the nuclear states, or who do not have satisfactory conventional capabilities to guarantee their military security and achieve deterrence against a rival nuclear state, such as Iran for instance. (Epstein, 1977).²⁶ Some scholars believe that such strategies should be adopted by a given government to protect its national security against any potential threats (Maoz, 2003).²⁷

²⁶Epstein, W. (1977). Why states go -- and don't go -- nuclear *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science*.

²⁷Maoz, Z. (2003). The mixed blessing of Israel's nuclear policy.

The domestic politics in both India and Pakistan pose difficulty for them to abandon their nuclear weapons. However, on the international level, both states believe that their policy of strengthening the nuclear capabilities is essential for achieving the nuclear deterrence which provides a protection for their security. Each state follows this policy to deter the other rival or to prevent it from taking action (Hagerty, 1993).²⁸

The political prestige, powerful economy, and independent status are the prevailing motivations for the states allied to one of the nuclear superpower countries (Epstein, 1977).²⁹ The tendency of destruction could be hidden behind the desire of owning nuclear weapons and, consequently, launching nuclear wars. Many studies revealed that war is not economically useful, even in the case of victory, as the most common reason for war and the continuing development of military capabilities is the greed and the self-interest (Kull, 1983).³⁰

However, I don't think that this applies to Iran because if Iran has the tendency of destruction or self-interest, it will be fighting in more than one front as it has many adversaries in the region. Another concept on seeking nuclear weapons focuses on the role of domestic politicians who affect the decision-making to develop nuclear weapons. A third concept sees that nuclear weapons possession reflects the identity of the state, and serves its symbolic functions (Sagan, 1997).³¹

²⁸Hagerty, D. T. (1993). The power of suggestion: Opaque proliferation, existential deterrence, and the south Asian nuclear arms competition, *Security Studies*.

²⁹ Epstein, W. (1977). Why states go -- and don't go -- nuclear *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science*.

³⁰Kull, S. (1983). Nuclear arms and the desire for world destruction, *International Society of Political Psychology*.

³¹ Sagan, S. D. (1997). Why do states build nuclear weapons?: Three models in search of a bomb *International Security*.

Neorealist theories of nuclear arms racing argue that countries in conflict prone regional systems seek self-reliance in order to protect their sovereignty and national security. If the country has a rival with a nuclear weapon, the tendency is for balancing (Sagan, 1997).³² Israel has an interest to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon because the current single nuclear state in the Middle East poses unstable security circumstances in the region. Israel is a unique case in this regard; accordingly, this single power will be removed if Iran becomes a nuclear state (Waltz, 2012).³³ States seek nuclear weapons, and bear the international censure, even if they will remain a mini-nuclear arsenal, in order to pursue nuclear deterrence. For instance, the Indian-Pakistani rivalry has become more stable after conducting nuclear tests, and proving that they have nuclear capabilities, which led to a stable nuclear deterrence (Carolyn C. James, 2000).³⁴

There are both external and internal reasons for the arms race. Externally, the arms race is a reaction done by the states in order to meet the threats coming from the rival's military buildup. Internally, states tend to meet their military requirements through creating powerful political institutions in order to serve and pursue their interests. These institutions help the state to achieve its international aims including the enforcement of military technology, as the technological advancement poses an impetus into the arms race (Glaser, 2000).³⁵ In this regard, Iran started to develop its nuclear technology with creating strong governments over the years, controlled by the Iran's Revolutionary Guards, to support its policy.

³² Ibid.

³³ Waltz, Kenneth .Personal Interview. 8 Jul 2012. <http://thediplomat.com/2012/07/08/kenneth-waltz-on-why-iran-should-get-the-bomb/>.

³⁴ Carolyn, J. "Coping with Proliferation in a World of Changing Rivalries." Trans. *Array Nuclear Arsenal Games*.: Canadian Political Science Association, 2000, 723-746.

³⁵ Glaser, C. L. (2000). *The causes and consequences of arms races*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

The lack of nuclear or conventional security poses a motivation for acquiring a nuclear weapon to launch conflicts or to achieve balance of power with adversaries. States may face internal turmoil by developing nuclear program as a manner to divert public opinion, as both India and Pakistan did during the development of their nuclear programs (Jo & Gartzke, 2007).³⁶ States see that nuclear weapons have unique destructive characteristics that changed the nature of warfare rather than depending on conventional capabilities. These characteristics motivate the states to own a nuclear weapon in order to raise the costs of any potential threats. (Horowitz, 2009).³⁷

Nuclear Deterrence Theory

Many states use nuclear deterrence as a means to protect their national security and keep their sovereignty. The deterrence theory is a kind of coercion used by states in order to deter their adversaries from taking military action by convincing them that the cost of taking action would be higher than a possible gain. If a country prevents its adversary from attacking it through waving that the costs will be serious, the country will be diminishing potential risks. This strategy does not mean that the state has a strong defensive mechanism. The state cannot face the threats; however, it succeeded in forcing its adversary not to attack it (Powell, 1990).³⁸

The indications concerning the efficiency of nuclear weapons as a deterrent are different. Some analysts believe that clashes between nuclear and non-nuclear states are mostly in favor of the non-nuclear states. Others think that acquiring a

³⁶ Jo, D., &Gartzke, E. (2007). Determinants of nuclear weapons proliferation The Journal of Conflict Resolution.

³⁷ Horowitz, M. (2009). The spread of nuclear weapons and international conflict: Does experience matter? The Journal of Conflict Resolution.

³⁸ Powell, R. (1990). Nuclear deterrence theory: The search for credibility Cambridge University Press.

nuclear weapon does not give an advantage in confrontations with non-nuclear states indicating that the classical theory of nuclear deterrence is defective (Geller, 1990).³⁹

Kenneth Waltz argues that there are three basic elements to achieve a stable and rational nuclear deterrence. First, avoid launching a preventive war, throughout the transitional phase, when one state is nuclear-capable and the other state is building a nuclear capability. Second, two rival states must develop their ability to cause unacceptable destruction, and improve the efficiency of the second strike in order to retaliate in case of vulnerability to attack. Third, the nuclear weapons must not be liable to unofficial use (Sagan, 1994).⁴⁰

The nuclear deterrence strategy has a specific purpose; it prevents the state's adversary from doing a harmful action using the nuclear weapon, and threatens of nuclear retaliation. The deterrence has its components such as sufficient military tools to deter the adversary in specific ways and avoid thinking to start the attack. Deterrence is effective when a state has the political will and credibility to be able to deter its adversaries (Charles W. Durr, 2002).⁴¹ The strategy of deterrence depends on the use of direct or indirect threats to force the other party to keep the status quo.

The 'immediate deterrence' and the 'general deterrence' are the two major types. The immediate exists between rival states when one party intends to attack, while the other is increasing the threats of retaliation to deter the first party. The general deterrence

³⁹ Geller, D. S. (1990). Nuclear weapons, deterrence, and crisis escalation *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

⁴⁰ Sagan, S. D. (1994). The perils of proliferation: Organization theory, deterrence theory, and the spread of nuclear weapons *International Security*.

⁴¹ Charles W. Durr, C. W. D. (2002). Nuclear deterrence in the third millennium *Pennsylvania, USA. Army War College*.

concerns rival states which keep their forces to organize their ties (Quackenbush, 2010).⁴²

In the 1990s, Israel, for example, faced potential attack from Iraq; hence, the Israeli decision makers launched a number of explicit threats to retaliate. These threats were a defensive mechanism, or recognition of the failure of Israel to achieve nuclear deterrence, to reduce the significance of the military capabilities of Iraq. Accordingly, many Israeli officials think that Iran did not attack Israel using chemical weapons due to the fear of the Israeli nuclear retaliation (Maoz, 2003).⁴³

States exposed to a potential nuclear attack must follow a strategy of nuclear deterrence. Dealing with nuclear weapons entails the dependence on deterrence policy which is better than alternative policies such as coercion. For instance, USA President Obama said that the danger of nuclear war has been reduced, while the threat of nuclear attack has grown, indicating that the deterrence is important if we seek a reduction of this danger (Long & Ellsberg, 2012).⁴⁴ The nuclear deterrence is keeping the nuclear arsenals because it is rarely to come under attack. The spread of confusion regarding the nuclear deterrence comes from the idea that the deterrence does not have credibility unless the use of nuclear weapons is considered (Long & Ellsberg, 2012).⁴⁵

⁴²Quackenbush, S. L. (2010). General deterrence and international conflict: Testing perfect deterrence theory University of Missouri.

⁴³Maoz, Z. (2003). The mixed blessing of Israel's nuclear policy.

⁴⁴Long, A., & Ellsberg, D. (2012). Nuclear deterrence in the 21st century: Lessons from the cold war for a new era of strategic piracy Rand.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Why might states be prevented from possessing nuclear weapons?

Some states such as Belarus and Ukraine have been persuaded to join the NPT, as non-nuclear states, after the Soviet Union's collapse (Kimball, 2013).⁴⁶ The idea of nuclear weapons free zones has emerged as a result of the states that have capacity to develop nuclear weapons and, consequently led to the arms race (UN Secretary-General Report, 1991).⁴⁷ This concept shows that if states do not have the capacity, they will not be enabled to possess nuclear weapons.

Some states signed the NPT to achieve a long-term peace which reflects on their national security, and accomplishes the principle of the nuclear non-proliferation. Other states would sign the NPT for strategic purposes, especially if they have nuclear programs for peaceful purposes that can be potentially developed. Each state member in the NPT has different purpose to join it; this purpose is either political or otherwise, but there is no specific reason that encourages the state to work on its nuclear program (Fahmy 2006).⁴⁸ Some scholars argue that states, such as Iran, prefer to adopt offensive doctrine, especially if they do not have strong allies (Mayer, 2004).⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Kimball, D. G. (2013). Nuclear weapons: Who has what at a glance? Retrieved from The Arms Control Association website:

⁴⁷ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, (1991). Effective and verifiable measures which would facilitate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. New York: United Nations.

⁴⁸ Fahmy, N. Center for Nonproliferation Studies, (2006). An assessment of international nuclear non-proliferation efforts after 60 years. The Monterey Institute of International Studies.

⁴⁹ Mayer, C. C. (2004). National security to nationalist myth: Why Iran wants nuclear weapons. California: Naval Postgraduate School.

The Iranian president Ahmadinejad threatened to wipe Israel from the map, while, in exchange, Netanyahu claimed that Iran is a new model of Nazi Germany. These statements are a defensive mechanism or a deterrent tool to deter and prevent each other from posing potential threat, especially that there are suspicions that both states have nuclear capabilities. (Karpin, 2009).⁵⁰

USA believes that Iran must be prevented from possessing a nuclear weapon because it is mainly targeting USA, threatening its ally Israel, and supporting international terrorism. This belief encourages USA to impose sanctions on Iran due to its nuclear activities, while Iran is developing its nuclear program, and using the nuclear deterrence in order to avoid potential military attack from USA (Barzashka & Oelrich, 2012).⁵¹

Before the Gulf War, and after the Iraqi missiles threat to Israel, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir claimed that Israel has very strong military capabilities. This policy was to achieve the deterrence, compensate the Israeli small size and to respond to the potential threats in the region until it gets a deterrent weapon such as the nuclear weapon to be able to deter its rivals. (Carlson, Hooton & Page, 2013).⁵²

⁵⁰ Karpin, M. (2009). Deep in the basement: Israel's harmonious nuclear ambiguity The MIT Press and the World Policy Institute.

⁵¹ Barzashka, I., & Oelrich, I. (2012). Iran and nuclear ambiguity. Retrieved from Cambridge Review of International Affairs.

⁵² Carlson, J., Hooton, P., & Page, J. (2013). The state of play: progress on the issues Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

The Iranian Nuclear Policy

Nobody has compelling evidence that Iran owns a nuclear weapon, while Iran may be developing the nuclear weapon. Iran is still continuing its policy of nuclear ambiguity to prevent its adversaries from posing threats (Barzashka & Oelrich, 2012).⁵³ Iran depends on the nuclear ambiguity in its strategy until gets the nuclear weapon. Iran adopts the nuclear ambiguity through denying any interest in obtaining a nuclear weapon, while working, as much as possible, on developing its capabilities. (IAEA, 1970).⁵⁴

This policy explains why Iran insists on continuing its nuclear policy despite its accretion to the NPT. The nuclear ambiguity policy of Iran comes from its feeling of vulnerability. Iran might aim to collect all needed components to create the nuclear weapon which helps Iran to be a nuclear state once it faces an imminent attack from USA or Israel (de Bellaigue, 2005).⁵⁵ Iran seeks the know-how technology. It believes that no state should be banned from acquiring the nuclear technology. It has been argued that Iran signed the NPT to get access to such technology.

Some Iranian supporters think that Iran should declare its withdrawal from the NPT even if it has to pay the costs of sanctions (Kemp, Eisenstadt, Farhi & Hadian, 2004).⁵⁶

⁵³Barzashka, I., &Oelrich, I. (2012). Iran and nuclear ambiguity. Retrieved from Cambridge Review of International Affairs.

⁵⁴NPT, IAEA Information Circular, INFCIRC/140 (Geneva: 22 April 1970), 3. Article IV assures all states party to the NPT can develop all aspects of peaceful nuclear power.

⁵⁵De Bellaigue, C. Foreign Policy, (2005). Iran. Washington post. Newsweek Interactive, LLC.

⁵⁶Kemp, G., Eisenstadt, M., Farhi, F., &Hadian, N. (2004). Iran's bomb: American and Iranian perspectives THE NIXON CENTER.

Regarding the IAEA reports and USA sanctions, Iran depends on procrastination and deflects attention from its program. This ambiguity is to achieve the nuclear hedging and, consequently, reach the nuclear threshold (Mayer, P.42, 2004).⁵⁷ An official in the State Department stated that "The Iranians don't necessarily have to have a successful nuclear program ... they merely have to convince USA, others, and their neighbors that they do" (de Bellaigue, P.19, 2005).⁵⁸ Although the IAEA reports did not prove that Iran owns a nuclear weapon, IAEA showed how its reports raised concerns regarding the Iranian activities and the strategies Iran would follow in future such as cheating and retreating, posturing and blustering or waiting and moving forward. The Iranian ambiguity policy in the past shows how much it is cautious and does not provide conclusive evidence or clear effort regarding its program (Cordesman & Al-Rodhan, 2006).⁵⁹

Iran believes this policy is due to its perception of vulnerability to threats as well as the international pressure imposed on the state (Milani, 2009).⁶⁰ Iran follows the strategy of ambiguity as a means to magnify its political intentions. This policy could remain for years until Iran intends to declare its possession to the nuclear weapon. The Iranian nuclear ambiguity poses a great challenge to the states concerned by the Iranian nuclear issue (Barzashka & Oelrich, 2012).⁶¹

⁵⁷ Mayer, C. C. (2004). National security to nationalist myth: Why Iran wants nuclear weapons. California: Naval Postgraduate School.

⁵⁸ De Bellaigue, C. Foreign Policy, (2005). Iran Washington post. Newsweek Interactive, LLC.

⁵⁹ Cordesman, A., & Al-Rodhan, K. (2006). Iranian nuclear weapons? The uncertain nature of Iran's nuclear programs. Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

⁶⁰ Milani, M. M. (2009). Tehran's take: Understanding Iran's USA. policyCouncil on Foreign Relations.

⁶¹ Barzashka, I., & Oelrich, I. (2012). Iran and nuclear ambiguity. Retrieved from Cambridge Review of International Affairs.

CHAPTER II: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this project, the research methodology depends on the qualitative analysis based on data collection in order to examine the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities. These data are used in an attempt to answer these questions:

1. Is Iran developing a nuclear weapon?
2. Does Iran have a real expansionist ideology that would not be achieved without nuclear weapons?
3. Are there existential threats facing Iran and, is it forced to follow the policy of nuclear ambiguity, since it is not as conventionally powerful as its adversaries?

Methods utilized in the study

First: Interviews have been conducted with professors, diplomats, scholars, nuclear technicians and analysts in different fields such as international security, political science, or nuclear energy in order to determine whether or not Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon, the real motivation of Iran to possess nuclear capabilities, the existential threats Iran is facing, and whether Iran has conventional capabilities strong enough to protect its national security. These interviews helped to assess which one of the two explanations is more plausible, and, consequently answer the main research question of the study, which is: "Why does Iran insist on pursuing its nuclear program despite its status as NPT signatory and international sanctions?"

Second: Some events surrounding Iran have been analyzed in order to identify patterns of behaviors threatening Iran. These analyses are to assess whether Iran is facing existential threats that would harm its national security. These threats include the existence of foreign armed forces surrounding Iran, which poses security threats to

its national security. The nature of relation between Iran and its neighboring countries, and the allies of these countries, has also been analyzed in order to assess whether Iran does really live in a hostile environment, and consequently, seeks nuclear weapons. These analyses also assess the international sanctions and resolutions against Iran in order to dissuade it from pursuing its nuclear activities.

Third: A chart that compares Iran and other Middle East countries, that may pose threats to Iran on the level of conventional weapons, has been provided. This comparison includes also the conventional capabilities of Iran's allies in the region. The purpose of this comparison is to assess the conventional capabilities of Iran and whether these capabilities are powerful enough to protect the Iranian national security. This chart also assesses the conventional capabilities of Iran's allies to determine whether these states can support Iran in protecting its sovereignty. The main purpose of this chart is to assess the Iranian needs of a nuclear weapon to protect its national security, and whether its conventional weapons are not capable of deterring external threats.

Rationale for Choice of a Method

First: In addition to sources and pieces of evidence surveyed, personal interviews have been conducted with experts from different fields and backgrounds in order to assess whether Iran is arming and to identify the Iranian nuclear motivations. These specific experts have been selected because they have wide experience regarding the Iranian nuclear file from different perspectives. Their opinions helped to assess the real nuclear intentions of Iran and whether it is actually developing a nuclear weapon and the reasons behind the Iranian insistence of pursuing its nuclear

program despite the international sanctions and its status as a signatory state to the NPT.

Second: The reason why events surrounding Iran are brought to light here is to understand how these events could affect the Iranian strategic intentions regarding its nuclear program. These events determine the expected behavior from Iran in the future and whether or not it will stop its nuclear program and how the international community will deal with this dilemma if it continues. The relationship between Iran and the other countries in the Middle East, or between Iran and the states that have interests in the region, will determine whether or not Iran seeks nuclear weapons. Iran's attitude of indifference towards the international sanctions and resolutions explains its insistence on developing nuclear program.

Third: The conventional weapon chart is a means to assess whether Iran needs to possess a nuclear weapon to protect the security of its territories. This becomes clear after knowing the conventional capabilities of the other countries of the region that could pose threats to Iran, assessing whether these states have conventional capabilities stronger than Iran and, consequently, Iran seeks a nuclear weapon to overcome these threats. This chart also shows capabilities of the Iranian allies and whether they can help Iran in case of exposure to external threats. Hence, the conventional weapon chart shows the extent of Iran's needs for a nuclear weapon.

What procedures did I use for each?

This is a description of how methods have been used. Six personal interviews have been conducted with experts in different fields such as political science and nuclear energy as well as diplomats that have participated in negotiations regarding the Iranian nuclear issue. These interviews have been conducted in person and via

email. About the events that would pose threats to Iran, I have relied on documentary evidence regarding the presence of USA armed forces in the Gulf and the historical events that posed animosity between USA and Iran. There has been focus also on the IAEA reports and the UNSC resolutions on Iran as well as the economic sanctions and embargo. Concerning the conventional weapons chart, the information regarding the conventional capabilities has been obtained from the annual 'Military Balance Report for Middle East and North Africa' issued by the 'International Institute for Strategic Studies'.

Protection of Human Subjects

The Iranian nuclear file is a sensitive issue which requires taking safeguards to avoid potential risk that could happen during the research process or the interviews. The participants in this study were informed that they had the option of making the interview confidential, which guarantees not to record the interview, and not to mention any detailed information about the interview in the bibliography.

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS

These findings, which respond to the major research question, have been reached based on the examination and analysis of the data, There are historical conflicts between USA and Iran; they led to the hostility between the two countries, and forced Iran to follow a strategy of nuclear ambiguity regarding its nuclear activities. The study findings indicate that Iran follows this strategy of nuclear ambiguity in order to protect its program and its national security against existential threats mainly from the United States.

American-Iranian Hostility

The hostility between USA and Iran has historical background. The historical evidence of hostility between the United States and Iran has supported Iran's perception that USA represents a significant threat. One prominent example was USA involvement in the historical coup that toppled the Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq in 1953. The hostage crisis in Iran started when some Iranian students stormed USA Embassy in Tehran and around 66 American citizens were detained for 444 days. USA played a pivotal role in supporting Iraq against Iran in the 'eight-year war'. The American position supports the Israeli rhetoric against Iran and its threats that will take military action against Iran. Moreover, The United States and its European allies in the UNSC lead the imposing of resolutions against Iran and the driving of sanctions on Tehran through the IAEA

The 1953 coup in Iran

In 1953, Iran suffered a coup that toppled then-Prime Minister Mossadeq. This coup was supported by the CIA, which was inconsequential to a big extent as the Iranian military received financial assistance from USA to overthrow the government of Mosaddeq. This CIA operation is called Ajax. In this period, Iran was suffering economic crises due to the oil embargo following the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian oil company. Businessmen and merchants were negatively affected by Mossadeq's nationalization decision. Political plots began spreading with rumors of potential military coup as well as frustrations among the armed forces (Takeyh, 2010).⁶²

One of the coup's planners claimed that the CIA was deeply involved in initiating the coup, and returning the Shah into power. The CIA's document offered background of the agency's involvement in the 1953 coup. The document declared that, first, Britain's concerns regarding Mossadeq's decision of nationalizing its oil company encouraged Britain to press USA to launch the Ajax Operation and remove Mossadeq. Second, the CIA and SIS chose General FazlollahZahedi, who secretly obtained \$5 million, to replace Mossadeq. Third, a cleric's home was bombed by Iranians working for the CIA to turn the religious community against Mossadeq (Risen, 2000).⁶³ This coup represented direct USA interference in Iran's political independence and a violation of its sovereignty.

⁶²Takeyh, R. (2010, August 18). Clerics responsible for Iran's failed attempts at democracy. Washington Post. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/17/AR2010081704944.html>.

⁶³Risen, J. (2000, April 16). Secrets of history: The CIA. In Iran -- a special report.; how a plot convulsed Iran in '53 (and in '79). The New York Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/16/world/secrets-history-cia-iran-special-report-plot-convulsed-iran-53-79.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

Iran Hostage Crisis and Carter's Mission

The 'Hostage Crisis' in Iran, which started in 1979 to 1981, negatively affected the nature of diplomatic relation between Iran and USA for decades. In 1979, around 3000 Iranian students detained 66 USA citizens as hostages in USA Embassy in Tehran.

The demonstrators claimed that they will not release the hostages until the Shah comes back to Iran, and prosecuted for his crimes against the Iranians. Although this siege was expected to take only some days, the hostages were kept for 444 days until they were released in 1980. The former USA President Carter sought to find a diplomatic solution to set the hostages free in conjunction with the intention to launch military action, which led to the death of eight USA soldiers during the rescue mission with failure to set the hostages free (McDermott, 1992).⁶⁴

The hostage crisis was a part of the social, economic and religious revolution that invaded Iran after the Islamic Revolution. This revolution was due to the oppressive policy that was practiced by the Iranian regime. The hostage crisis was an expression from the Iranian revolutionaries of their anger at the United States (Wolf, 2006).⁶⁵

In 1981, the hostages were released after 444 days. The Iranians successfully achieved what they aimed for and did not release the hostages until Ronald Reagan became a president, as they intended to humiliate Jimmy Carter. After this crisis, Iran's concern

⁶⁴McDermott, R. (1992). Prospect theory in international relations: The Iranian hostage rescue mission International Society of Political Psychology.

⁶⁵ Wolf, L. (2006). America held hostage: The Iran hostage crisis of 1979-1981 and USA.-Iranian relations Organization of American Historians Stable.

was from potential USA revenge as a response to the hostage crisis. This crisis increased the hostility between USA and Iran.

American Support of Iraq against Iran

In the eight-year war, USA played primary role to ban Iran from victory over Iraq. USA influence in the Gulf had been diminished, especially in the beginning of Iraq-Iran War. At that time, there were no diplomatic relations between the United States and either Iran or Iraq. The United States lost its position in Iran due to the Islamic Revolution and, consequently, lost a large portion of oil imports from both countries. In 1982, with the emergence of signs of the collapse of Iraq and the triumph of Iran, USA changed its neutral position and gradually started to support Iraq in the war. In 1984, USA escalated its position when it used the Saudi air defenses to shoot down two Iranian warplanes (Stern, 1984, 128).⁶⁶

USA military action during the Iran-Iraq War was a major reason why Iran could not defeat Iraq and its military capabilities. The failure of defeating Iraq was mainly due to USA intervention, which convinced Iran that USA will stand against the defeat of Iraq. The Iranian leaders could not ignore USA military deployment and attacking the Iranian oil facilities, which led to the escalation of antiwar opposition inside Iran.

The UN Resolutions against Iran Driven by USA

The resolutions on Iran driven by the United States have increased the hostility between the two states. International sanctions on Iran have escalated when the UNSC issued a resolution in 2006. USA and its major European allies such as the UK,

⁶⁶ Stern, M. Foreign Affairs, (1984). The Iran-Iraq war, Council on Foreign Relations.

France and Germany played a pivotal role in imposing sanctions on Iran. Moreover, some neighboring countries of Iran joined USA to pose pressure on Iran. This coalition was due to the increasing worries regarding the Iranian nuclear aspirations (Cordesman , Gold, Khazai & Bosserman, 2013).⁶⁷

In 2006, UN Security Council Resolution 1737 (2006) expressed concerns regarding several Director General's reports that spread fears of Iran's nuclear program which could have a military dimension due to the undeclared nuclear activities in Iran. They stated that the gaps in information related to Iran's nuclear program are still the source of concerns; hence, the IAEA cannot determine whether there are nuclear materials. Iran has not suspended all enrichment activities, resumed cooperation with the IAEA within the AP or met the obligations required by the IAEA Board of Governors (UNSC, 2006).⁶⁸ In 2008, the UNSC reaffirmed its obligations to the NPT and its resolutions 1696 (2006), 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), and 1803 (2008). It also reaffirmed its position towards the Iranian nuclear program calling Iran to the full compliance to the UNSC resolutions and the IAEA Board of Governors (UNSC, 2008).⁶⁹

In 2010, the UNSC reaffirmed that the Iranian nuclear issue can be resolved and mutual confidence with the IAEA and UNSC can be rebuilt through responding to their calls. These calls have been going on since 2003 due to the failure of Tehran to report all its activities and facilities under the IAEA safeguards. Ever since, Iran has been ignoring the IAEA attempts to urge it to cooperate fully, and work on signing

⁶⁷Cordesman , A., Gold, B., Khazai, S., &Bosserman, B. (2013).USA and Iranian strategic competition Center for Strategic and International Studies

⁶⁸(2006). United Nations Security Council. Resolution 1737 (2006). Retrieved from UN website: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/{65BF999B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9}/Iran_SRES_1737.pdf.

⁶⁹(2008). United Nations Security Council. Resolution 1835 (2008).Retrieved from website: http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/unscl_res1835-2008.pdf.

and ratifying the Additional Protocol as a measure to build confidence between Iran and the Agency.

Iran also refused the calls for suspending its uranium enrichment and introduced more nuclear materials to Natanz (UNSC, 2010).⁷⁰

The UNSC noted the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in supporting the Iranian nuclear activities, and developing the nuclear weapon system. The UNSC called for the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to exercise vigilance on the Iranian banking transactions, especially the Central Bank of Iran, to halt bank transfers that would contribute to spread of sensitive nuclear activities such as the nuclear weapons (UNSC, 2010).⁷¹

USA Driving Sanctions through IAEA and NPT

The IAEA sanctions over Iran are largely driven by the United States. The Iranian Member of Parliament Mahmoud Ahmadi Bighash said that the IAEA reports on Tehran have been supported by the CIA, and have been serving USA and Israeli interests. Although the IAEA reports must be issued within a legal framework, the reports are issued in contrary to the agency's obligations and commitments (Siasat Daily, 9 November, 2011).⁷²

Iran has expressed its annoyance from USA misguiding the IAEA to issue reports on Iran regarding its nuclear program. The official speaker of the Iranian parliament Ali Larijani claimed that the IAEA has implemented the directives of USA and Israel to issue its reports on Iran. He said that the recent reports on Tehran have

⁷⁰(2010). United Nations Security Council. Resolution 1929 (2010). Retrieved from website:http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaea/iran/unsc_res1929-2010.pdf.

⁷¹Ibid

⁷²CIA dictated new IAEA report on Iran. (2011, November 9). The Siasat Daily, Retrieved from <http://www.siasat.com/english/news/cia-dictated-new-iaea-report-iran>.

been issued after a rough week in USA and Israeli policies, which considered an enmity to Iran (Press TV, 13 November, 2013).⁷³ Larijani stressed that the cooperation between the IAEA and Iran has to be reconsidered, because such cooperation is likely to have an impact on the IAEA reports.

In addition, both USA and Israel condemn Tehran of seeking a nuclear weapon as a pretext in order to persuade the UNSC to pose further round of sanctions on Iran (Press TV, 13 November, 2013).⁷⁴

In 2009, the IAEA Board of Governors reaffirmed the role of the Director General in solving the Iranian nuclear issue stressing that they will continue their diplomatic efforts to solve this problem. The Board expressed its concerns regarding the Iranian challenge of the obligations and the resolutions of the IAEA and UNSC. Moreover, Iran breached the obligations by establishing enrichment facility in Qom without notifying the IAEA (IAEA, 2009).⁷⁵

In 2011, the IAEA Board of Governors issued a report entitled “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in Iran” in order to call for the Director General of the IAEA to continue his offices to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue, and implement the UNSC resolutions. The Board expressed its concerns that Iran is still challenging the IAEA obligations and the UNSC resolutions stressing that the IAEA will not be able to present trusted assurances indicating that the nuclear facilities are for peaceful uses

⁷³ USA, Israel dictated IAEA Iran report. (2011, November 13). Press TV, Retrieved from <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/209818.html>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵(2009). Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in Iran. Retrieved from International Atomic Energy Agency website: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2009/gov2009-82.pdf>.

(IAEA, 2011).⁷⁶ In 2012, the IAEA Board of Governors reaffirmed the importance of talks between Iran and the IAEA regarding the access to Iran's nuclear sites. The Board also expressed its concerns about the expansion of the uranium enrichment in Iran, especially in Fordow plant (IAEA, 2012).⁷⁷

Threat Assessment

Iran is actually surrounded by threats that make it feel unsafe. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has increased the pressures on the United States to put an end to the Iranian nuclear ambitions and make this file on the top of the agenda in the Middle East. Netanyahu said that USA President Obama must show the new President of Iran that the military option is still strongly on the table. He expressed his concerns that Iran would follow alternative strategies to produce its nuclear weapon. Officially, USA approved Netanyahu's calls. However, The United States showed intentions to stop imposing further sanctions on Iran in exchange for confidence building between the two parties (Rudoren & Sanger, 2013).⁷⁸

In conclusion, the findings show that Iran's perception is that its national security is at risk, especially from USA, resulting from historical disputes between the two states. These disputes started with the Iranian coup in 1953 and followed by the Hostage Crisis in Iran from 1979 to 1981. USAA also supported Iraq in its war against Iran when it was concerned with the growing power of Iran, particularly as it is

⁷⁶(2011). Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement and relevant provisions of United Nations Security Council resolutions in Iran. Retrieved from: International Atomic Energy Agency website: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-69.pdf>.

⁷⁷(2012). Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement and relevant provisions of United Nations Security Council resolutions in Iran. Retrieved from: International Atomic Energy Agency website: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2012/gov2012-50.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Rudoren , J., & Sanger, D. E. (2013, July 14). Israel increases pressure on USA To act on Iran. The New York Times. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/15/world/middleeast/israel-calls-for-new-urgency-on-iran.html?_r=0.

working to develop its nuclear capabilities. Accordingly, USA started to increase pressures on Iran through driving the UNSC resolutions, as well as the IAEA reports, against Iran.

In addition, USA increased its rhetoric, and supported Israel in its rhetoric to launch military action, against Iran. Many European allies to USA also adopt the sanctions against Iran and have military bases in the Gulf through the NATO. The United States also increased its military bases in the Gulf area and supported the rhetoric of the Gulf States against Iran. These elements pose threats to Iran's national security, which led Iran to follow the policy of nuclear ambiguity regarding its program in order to deter its adversaries.

USA Rhetoric Supporting Israel against Iran

The USA rhetoric against Iran has become increasingly threatening since 2007; this, in conjunction with Iran's prior history with USA, heightened Iran's sense of threat. Iran has emerged as the most important foreign policy topic in the USA agenda. The rhetoric escalated when the Democratic candidates were discussing whether Bush would deter Iran, while the Republican candidates were arguing who was going to follow a tough policy against Iran, with the possibility of taking military action if needed (Baker, 2007).⁷⁹ President Obama said that USA could take military action against Iran in June. The Israeli TV reported that Obama was going to discuss in the next meeting the possibility of taking military action against Iran, as he was planning to visit Israel in March 2013 to work on potential military attack. Israel has been encouraging USA to take military action against Iran in order to stop Iran's

⁷⁹ Baker, P. (2007, October 19). Bush's war rhetoric reveals the anxiety that Iran commands. The Washington Post. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/18/AR2007101802394.html>.

nuclear plan, which clarifies that USA believes that all options are on the table against Iran (Russia Today, 26 February 2013).⁸⁰

Recently, USA Minister of Defense Chuck Hagel supported the Israeli rhetoric against Iran by saying that USA and Israel face the same threats from Iran. He said that Israel has the right to make the decision of taking military action against Iran to protect itself. Both USA and Israel have frequently condemned Iran on its developing the nuclear program for military purposes (Press TV, 22 April, 2013).⁸¹

A continuation to the policy of hostile rhetoric, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, attacked the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in his speech directed to the U.N. General Assembly. Netanyahu described the Iranian President as a "wolf in sheep's clothing," announcing that Israel will face Iran alone in order to deprive it from possessing nuclear weapons. He also assailed the credibility of Rouhani due to his diplomatic initiatives with the U.S (Charbonneau & Williams, 2013, October 1).⁸² The speech contained only strict sanctions and possible military actions. Netanyahu believes that Iran will be forced to start negotiations regarding the dismantlement of its program. In contrast, the Iranian President did not mention Israel in his speech.

Mr. Netanyahu also maintained that Israel has the right to attack the Iranian nuclear facilities, even if Israel forced to take his step alone. He added that there is no

⁸⁰ Obama to threaten Iran with military strike in June, Israeli media reports. (2013, February 26). Russia Today. Retrieved from: <http://rt.com/usa/obama-israel-military-june-503/>.

⁸¹ USA defense secretary backs Israeli war rhetoric against Iran. (2013, April 22). Press TV. Retrieved from: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/22/299620/hagel-backs-israeli-threats-against-iran/>

⁸² Charbonneau, L., & Williams, D. (2013, October 1). Netanyahu at UN: Don't trust Rouhani, Iran's overtures a ruse. Reuters. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/01/us-un-assembly-israel-idUSBRE9900Z920131001>

difference between Rouhani's policy and the former Iranian Presidents as they all serving the same unforgiving doctrine (Sengupta & Gladstone, 2013, October 1).⁸³

On one hand, I think that the assertive tone in Mr. Netanyahu's speech is a means to put Iran under the pressure of exposure for a potential military attack, especially that the Iranian President Rouhani made diplomatic initiatives to start negotiations with the U.S. This strategy is to gain as much as benefits through the negotiations with Iran. On the other hand I think that Netanyahu's hostile speech reflects two main concerns; first, Iran has become close to the nuclear threshold. Second, the negotiations between Iran and the U.S would lead to reduce the economic sanctions and military actions, especially which the U.S is facing obstacles from the Democrats who have claimed that they will face any efforts to reduce sanctions on Iran.

The bilateral talks between Iran and the U.S. started with a presentation by the Iranian Minister of foreign affairs Mohamad Javad Zarif, which offered new restrictions on the Iranian nuclear program in return for reducing the U.S sanctions that have severely harmed the Iranian economy. Although Iran will provide concessions in order to abate the imposed sanctions, the Rouhani administration still insists on continuing the uranium enrichment process, which opposed by the U.S. In addition, Iran's underground facilities such as Natanz in Qom pose concerns to the U.S and Israel because the airstrikes couldn't reach these facilities (Dreazen & Hudson, 2013).⁸⁴

⁸³Sengupta, S., & Gladstone, R. (2013, October 1). Israeli leader excoriates new president of Iran. The New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/02/world/middleeast/israel-iran-netanyahu-speech.html?_r=1&.

⁸⁴Dreazen, Y., & Hudson, J. (2013, October 15). Democrats, Aipac jeopardize Iran talks. Foreign Policy. Retrieved from http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/10/15/democrats_israel_lobby_threaten_iran_talks.

In addition, Iran may agree to put the uranium enrichment under the international monitoring, but in border areas in the country. The Iranians also offered that the plutonium production could be suspended if a temporary deal was reached. Tehran has expressed its readiness to cooperate with other countries to enrich uranium inside Iran in order to reassure the international community that it would not be transferred to military purposes. In exchange, Iran calls for sanctions reduction, and obtains the right to enrich the uranium. However, the U.S is unwilling to declare the Iranian right to enrich uranium, fearing it would be a motivation for many countries in future and affect the global nuclear non-proliferation (Borger & Sherwood, 2013).⁸⁵

Military Threats facing Iran

There are collective military threats facing Iran. Iran's nuclear position is viewed as a mechanism and not perceived as an attack. In order for Iran to face its regional adversaries alone, there will be need for nuclear weapons. As shown in the Conventional Weapon Chart (*Appendix I*), Iran has conventional superiority over the Gulf States. For instance, in comparison with Saudi Arabia, Iran has the powerful and advanced missile system 'Shahab'. Moreover, Iran has 350,000 troops and around 1,663 military tanks, while Saudi Arabia has 75,000 troops with about 565 tanks. Bahrain has a very weak navy, with 700 troops, in comparison with Iran (The Military Balance, 2012, *See Appendix I*).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Borger, J., & Sherwood, H. (2013, October 14). Iran ready to deal on nuclear programme at Geneva talks. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/14/iran-ready-nuclear-programme-geneva-talks>.

⁸⁶ (2012). The Military Balance: Middle East and North Africa. Retrieved from: The International Institute for Strategic Studies website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tmib20>.

The Bahraini Air Force also has 1,500 troops with two squadrons only, with no air defense. Following its collapse in 2003, Iraq no longer has a strongly army in the region; Iraq's army is weak in comparison with Iran. It will neither help nor pose a threat to Iran. Iran reaped a lot of gains from USA-Iraq War because the collapse of Iraq converted it from a bitter enemy to a neutral country. Accordingly, Iran can now defend itself against any regional adversaries with its conventional weapons (The Military Balance, 2012, *See Appendix I*).⁸⁷

However, this is not the case in the Gulf where the USA presence is pretty heavy. Iran does not have conventional or nuclear superiority over the USA. But having the capacity of a nuclear program would act as a deterrent and make the cost of attacking a nuclear capable state much higher than attacking a non-nuclear capable state. In a sense, Iran is following a modified version of North Korea's strategy (Fahmy, personal interview. 28 Mar, 2013).⁸⁸

According to those interviewed in this study, if Iran attempts to produce nuclear weapons, it will face military action by both Israel and the USA. The UK and France might also join, depending on the circumstances. The attack would be by conventional weapons. No nuclear weapon will be used by either Israel or USA.

The GCC States would join in if they are directly attacked; in which case, they too would unleash their considerable air power against Iran (Anonymous source, personal interview, 5 April, 2013).⁸⁹ All military threats to Iran are featured excluding the nuclear threats because the nuclear attack on Iran not only will harm Iran, but also

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Fahmy, N. (2013, March 28). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub . "Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities".

⁸⁹ Anonymous. (2013, April 05). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub. Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities.

will destroy the whole region and will lead to serious consequences (Zahran, personal interview, 8 April, 2013).⁹⁰ If there is an attack on Iran by USA or Israel, Iran may withdraw from the NPT (Abushady, personal interview, 1 April, 2013).⁹¹

There are no potential threats from the Gulf States because they cannot prevent the Iranian ambitions, neither diplomatically nor militarily. However, Iran faces threats from USA and Israel because the Iranian nuclear aspirations pose a threat to their interests in the region (Abushady, personal interview, 1 April, 2013).⁹²

The following factors helped to free the American hostages in the Gulf: The improvement of the Israeli-Turkish relations, the withdrawal of USA troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, and the dependence on the oil pipeline as an alternative to the passage from the Strait of Hormuz. These factors are also possible steps to launch a war against Iran (Anonymous source, personal interview, 18 April, 2013).⁹³

Further support for launching a military action against Iran

In addition to the presence of USA forces in the area, two more sources of threats to Iran's national security are evident. These are NATO which is led by USA, and the USA support for the Gulf States against Iran.

Possible NATO Support:

There are other parties supporting the military action against Iran besides USA and Israel; NATO is one of these. In 2007, the former USA President Bush called on NATO to increase its troops in Afghanistan. He announced the deployment of about

⁹⁰Zahran, M. (2013, April 08). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub, "Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities".

⁹¹Abu-Shadi, Y. (2013, April 01). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub []. Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities.

⁹² Ibid, source 91.

⁹³ Anonymous. (2013, April 18). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub []. Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities.

50,000 troops from USA and NATO in the Gulf and other countries such as Lithuania, Norway and Check Republic (CNN, 15 February, 2007).⁹⁴ The increase of USA and NATO troops in the Gulf poses further pressures on Iran. Deploying more military troops makes Iran insists more on its nuclear ambiguity policy as a means to deter these states. USA and NATO military forces are deployed in the Gulf as the United States has embarked on a war against Iran. Both USA and NATO are arming Israel with missile capabilities as a part of planned military action against Iran (Schoenman, 2012).⁹⁵

In 2012, the Italian Minister of Defense Visited Israel to meet Netanyahu and he said that Italy will spend one billion dollars for the Israeli defense industry. This deal was part of NATO's complete support for arming Israel with missile capabilities. The former head of Mossad claimed that this deal is to militarily support Israel against Iran, especially with the Mossad's role of assassinating the Iranian nuclear scientists. He added that the collective deals between USA, Israel, the neighboring countries of Iran and NATO are a means to launch a military assault against Iran (Schoenman, 2012).⁹⁶

The cooperation between the United States and NATO gives the impression that there is a preparation for military action against Iran. Obama gave an order to different USA forces in order to make concentrated existence in two islands namely Socotra,

⁹⁴Bush calls on NATO to increase troops in Afghanistan. (2007, February 15). CNN.Retrieved from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/02/15/bush.speech/>.

⁹⁵Schoenman, R. (2012, April 10). NATO,USA arming Israel over projected, planned Iran war. Global Research. Retrieved from <http://www.globalresearch.ca/nato-us-arming-israel-over-projected-planned-iran-war/30230>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

located in the Indian Ocean, and the Omani Island, which located in the south of Strait of Hormuz (Global Research, 31 January, 2012).⁹⁷

The U.S Support for the Gulf States against Iran:

USA influence over the Gulf States tightens noose on Iran, and makes it lives actually in a hostile environment. The United States made efforts to create an anti-Iranian coalition which consists of the Gulf States. During the rule of the former American President George Bush, USA attempted to persuade the countries members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plus Egypt and Jordan to join this coalition.

However, these states did not agree to join such a coalition to avoid being a party to the conflict between Iran and the United States. President Obama tried to revive the idea of making coalition against Iran, but it failed again because the Arab States preferred to maintain good ties with both USA and Iran, as they have limited military capabilities in comparison with the conflicting parties (Ottaway, 2009).⁹⁸

The Improvements in the Iranian missile program forced the Gulf States to promote their missile capabilities to deter the Iranian system. The Gulf States have their concerns regarding the Iranian capabilities and seek to avoid exposure to attack. USA supports the defense in the Persian Gulf and many Gulf states such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait have purchased missile defense systems from the United States. These systems include Patriot capabilities, Pac-3 as well as long and medium range missiles. The United States also planned to create a regional system to link the entire region

⁹⁷ USA.-NATO-Gulf cooperation council military buildup against Iran. (2012, January 31). Global Research. Retrieved from <http://www.globalresearch.ca/u-s-nato-gulf-cooperation-council-military-buildup-against-iran/28998>.

⁹⁸ Ottaway, M. (2009). Iran, the United States, and the Gulf: The elusive regional policy. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

with an intelligence network provided with defense systems that serve USA forces (M. Cronin, 2012).⁹⁹

Does Iran See Nuclear Weapons as a Deterrent?

Iran believes that the nuclear weapon will effectively deter its adversaries. Iran does not face serious threats from the Gulf States, and has sufficient conventional capabilities to face conventional threats from its regional adversaries. However, the tension Iranians are facing is part of a larger issue in international politics. Iran fears a situation where America or Israel is successful in provoking an American attack. In such situation, if Iran wants to fight America with conventional capability, it will not win. Iran is trying to show people that the cost of attacking Iran is equivalent of lighting a fire in an oil well; so this cost would be too high because Iran has the capacity to retaliate and deter its adversaries (Fahmy, personal interview. 28 Mar. 2013).¹⁰⁰

Threats remain rhetoric and there is nothing physical because the timing of attack must be taken into consideration as the reaction to actual military assault. All parties know that if there is a military action, it will lead to regional disaster. (Anonymous source, personal interview, 12 May, 2013).¹⁰¹

Given the Israeli nuclear weapon superiority and the powerful missile system, Iran will not be able to face Israel. Accordingly, Iran depends on rational behavior, and avoids the risk as a means of deterrence (Bar, 2011, p: 5&6).¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Cronin, P. M. (2012, August 14). Can USA Help gulf shield itself against Iran?. CNN. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/14/opinion/cronin-missile-shield>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, source 88.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous. (2013, May 12). Interview by Tamer. S Mahboub. Understanding the Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities.

¹⁰² Bar, S. (2011). Can cold war deterrence apply to a nuclear Iran? Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

Iran's Nuclear Ambiguity

Nuclear ambiguity is the path of Iran to maintain its security. The feeling that it lives in a hostile environment has encouraged Iran to follow nuclear ambiguity as a strategy to work under the umbrella of the NPT, and avoid the announcement of its nuclear activities. This policy provides Iran with the ambiguity of its progress in its nuclear program until it gets its target which is the nuclear weapon. The nuclear ambiguity also enables Iran to impose its influence in the region. For instance, Iran has threatened that it would close the Strait of Hormuz, and prevent the passage of two-thirds of the world's exported oil until the international sanctions over its oil exports are stopped (Fox News, 17 January 2012).¹⁰³

This policy also makes the states think that Iran already has a nuclear weapon due to the suspicious behavior of Iran. For example, President Obama said that there is a one year distance between Iran and the bomb (Carter, 2013).¹⁰⁴ Moreover, this strategy shields Iran from being in violation of its obligations under the NPT. The military surveillance forced Iran to follow this policy to avoid exposure to any potential military action. Iran also claims that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes as a strategy to gain the support of the other members of the Non-Aligned Movement (Anonymous source, personal interview, 18 April, 2013).¹⁰⁵

Iran thinks that this policy safeguards it from more pressures because it is already committed to the NPT and has obligations to make public announcements, so they work under the umbrella of the NPT. "This policy provides the Iranians with the

¹⁰³ Israel: Nuclear Iran could deter military action. (2012, January 17). Fox News. Retrieved from:<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/01/17/israel-nuclear-iran-could-deter-military-action/>.

¹⁰⁴ Carter, C. J. (2013, March 15). Obama: Iran more than a year away from developing nuclear weapon. CNN, Retrieved from:<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/14/world/meast/israel-obama-iran>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, source 93.

ambiguity regarding how much progress they have actually achieved; they say they have covered one-third, 45 % or 70 % of the way. They will keep giving contradicting information until they get what they want when they want; they have to be ambiguous about how much progress they have made.” (Fahmy, personal interview. 28 Mar. 2013).¹⁰⁶

The Iranian leaders are surely aware that any overt action to actually produce nuclear weapons would spark a pre-emptive military attack by not only Israel, but also the United States. President Obama has repeatedly said that he is not bluffing when he insists that a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. USA would use the air power and missiles to destroy much of what the Iranian leadership values (Anonymous source, personal interview, 5 April, 2013).¹⁰⁷

Iran follows this nuclear ambiguity policy because it faces threats and has adversaries, so Iran does not declare its activities in an attempt to protect its national security (Zahran, personal interview, 8 April, 2013).¹⁰⁸

The USA presence in the Gulf, which poses threats to Iran, forced Iran to follow this strategy of nuclear ambiguity. Moreover, Israel is aware that the Iranian ambition to possess a nuclear weapon will pose a threat to the USA influence in the region and, consequently, to Israel's security; hence, Israel will try hard to prevent any threat to its national security. (Anonymous source, personal interview, 18 April, 2013).¹⁰⁹ Hence, Iran thinks that the only way to develop its nuclear program without exposure to threats is to follow the policy of nuclear ambiguity (Anonymous source, personal

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, source 88.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, source 89.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, source 90.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, source 93.

interview, 18 April, 2013).¹¹⁰ Iran follows this policy because its national security is threatened by the United States which pushes hard to increase pressures on Iran. Meanwhile, Iran wants to achieve the balance of power in the region as a means for achieving its missing security (Anonymous source, personal interview, 12 May, 2013).¹¹¹

Alternative Arguments

The Iranian nuclear program, particularly the military part, started during the Shah of Iran. Iran was aiming at increasing its status in the eyes of the West, in comparison with Turkey, in the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The Iranian motivation was built on its role in the region. The program was stopped after the Shah and now, according to the Iranians, they seek an active nuclear program for peaceful purposes. However, this explanation leaves behind a lot of questions about whether they are pursuing a military program to acquire nuclear weapons (Fahmy, personal interview. 28 Mar. 2013).¹¹²

It is unknown whether the Shah's intentions were innocent or not. The Shah relied, in its peaceful program, on the United States, France, Germany, and imported uranium from South Africa. After the Islamic Revolution, 90% of the Bushehr nuclear reactor was completed. According to Iran, it continued to develop its nuclear program for peaceful uses seeking for nuclear energy. After the abolishing of the nuclear agreements between Iran and the other states following the Revolution, Iran started to

¹¹⁰ Ibid, source 93.

¹¹¹ Ibid, source 101.

¹¹² Ibid, source 88.

illegally obtain the uranium from Pakistan. (Abushady, personal interview, 1 April, 2013).¹¹³

The Iranian nuclear program started when the Shah had a desire to make Iran a powerful state in the region, as an attempt to recreate the glory of the Persian Empire. Recreating the Persian Empire does not mean that Iran has an expansionist agenda, but it is just a desire to be the super power in the region as it used to be in the past ages. After the Revolution, Khomeini cancelled the nuclear program, and then retrieved it once again due to the USA support for Iraq against Iran. Accordingly, Iran started to think once more of developing its program to achieve self-reliance, especially after the declaration of Saddam Hussein about its intentions to start an Iraqi nuclear and missile program (Anonymous source, personal interview, 18 April, 2013).¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Ibid, source 91.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, source 93.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis was developed for the purpose of understanding the possible Iranian motivations for possessing nuclear capabilities. In the 1950s, Iran started to develop its nuclear program for peaceful purposes. However, in the 1970s, the United States started to express its concerns that Iran might seek a nuclear weapon. These concerns were because USA influence would be diminished in the region. After the cancellation of all nuclear agreements between USA and Iran, Iran insists on continuing its nuclear ambiguity policy through conducting secret nuclear agreements with other countries, such as North Korea, China, Pakistan and Russia, leaving behind a lot of questions regarding the Iranian nuclear intentions.

The debate on Iran's motivations for pursuing a nuclear weapon resulted in two different views: One of them is based on the belief that Iran wants to possess a nuclear weapon as a means of supporting the goals of the 1979 Revolution in the region; the other view is based on the idea that Iran seeks a nuclear weapon, as a deterrent weapon, because it lives in a hostile environment in the region, and faces existential threats from its adversaries, which endangers its national security. Accordingly, Iran has motivations to achieve its strategy that cannot be achieved depending on the conventional weapons.

The literature review of this study presented Iran's nuclear motivations by explaining three main elements namely the motivation of states that seek nuclear weapons, the nuclear deterrence theory and why states may be prevented from possessing nuclear weapons. Depending on these elements, the study has explained why Iran insists on pursuing its nuclear activities despite its status as an NPT signatory state.

Moreover, the data collected through interviews, secondary research and an analysis of the military balance confirmed three major things: namely Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon to deter potential attacks from USA and/or Israel, if Iran has an expansionist agenda it does not require nuclear weapons, and Iran is not conventionally as powerful as its adversaries, which therefore forces Iran to follow the policy of nuclear hedging.

Iran follows a strategy of nuclear ambiguity regarding its activities due to its feeling that it lives in a hostile environment. This strategy enables Iran to work under the umbrella of the NPT, and avoid the announcement of its nuclear activities. This policy of ambiguity imposes secrecy on the progress in its nuclear program until it gets the nuclear threshold. The nuclear ambiguity also imposes the Iranian power in the region through deterring the states that pose threats to it, especially the American military presence in the region.

Therefore, the answer to the major research question of the study is that there is no irrefutable evidence that Iran's nuclear program has a military dimension. Iran claims that it uses its right to develop a nuclear program for peaceful purposes under the Article IV of the NPT, and depends on the strategy of nuclear ambiguity regarding its activities in order to deter the potential existential threats to its national security, especially because most of these states, except for USA and its ally Israel, have only conventional weapons.

Recommendations

These suggestions could help in solving the problem of nuclear proliferation in general and the Iranian nuclear problem in particular.

- The Middle East region suffers from conflicts regarding the nuclear proliferation as the Iranian nuclear file poses the main concern for the International community. In order to contain this problem, the IAEA could adopt an additional protocol that combines the Middle East States including Israel, which is considered the main source of threat for Iran; that would encourage Iran to abandon its nuclear program. This protocol calls for Iran to place all its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards, while calls for Israel to sign and ratify the NPT. This additional protocol requires putting all nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. In case of agreement of both states on these terms, this protocol must be with the guarantee of the Security Council.
- The military option should not be considered because it will create more problems than it would solve. The possibility of Iran's possession of a nuclear weapon must be taken into account. In case of launching a war against Iran, the entire region would be destroyed. I think the diplomatic solutions should be the only way to solve this controversial issue, provided that they are not politicized and are in favor of international security, not the interests of certain countries.
- Economic pressures on Iran will not dissuade Iran from its position as long as it feels that it is unsafe. Iran believes that these pressures are not because it is an NPT state. Iran feels that the reason behind these pressures is rather that the Americans feel that if Iran becomes a powerful state, it will affect USA influence in the region. Iran feels that there is a policy of double standards in which Israel

has nuclear weapons and does not face all these considerable pressures because it is just an American ally. I think that making the Middle East a nuclear free zone is the best solution for all parties.

- The NPT is unequal treaty because it puts the nuclear weapon in the hands of the superpower states alone; this policy encourage other states, such as Iran, to seek nuclear weapons, especially if they feel threatened or do not have nuclear states as an ally. This Policy also forced states such as India, Israel and Pakistan not to join the NPT. The nuclear arms race is a phenomenon which began to emerge after the NPT entered into force, although it is assumed that the treaty was established to limit the nuclear proliferation. What I want to say is that the NPT has to be reconsidered and all states, without exception, must dismantle their nuclear weapons and place all their capabilities under the safeguards of the IAEA.
- Establishing a regional organization to manage the Iranian nuclear file could dissuade Iran from its position as the Middle East states are concerned regarding this file. This organization would pose pressure on the United States and make it reconsider its policy regarding the deployment of its forces in the Gulf and, consequently, diminish the pressure on Iran, which would open a new hope for resolving this controversial issue.

Appendix (1): Conventional Weapons Chart

This table shows the comparison between the conventional weapons of the Middle Eastern States and Pakistan

Rank	State	Army	Navy	Air Force	Air Defense	WMD	State's Position
1	Pakistan	Nine Army Corps MBT: 1,500 tanks (Chinese Type: 59, 69, 85) (Ukrainian Type 80UDs) (T54s, 55s & M48A5s)	Submarine force MSL: anti-ship missiles (Harpoon type).	Fighter: (47-F16s) & JF-17	Unclear	90 to 110 nuclear warheads	Ally
2	Israel	Troops: 133.000 MBT: 480 mostly Mercava Missiles: 3 squadron with Jericho 1, 2 / IRBM with Jericho 2 / SRBM with Jericho 1. SF: 3 battalions	Troops: 9.500 Patrol and coastal combatants: 59 Submarines: around 16 variant types	Troops: 34.000 Fighter & F Ground attack: 14 Squadron (F15A ,B,D / F15B,C,D / F15I / F-16A,B,C,D Falcon / F16I Sufa) Anti- Submarine: 1 sqn Transport & Training: 7 sqn	Troops: 3.000 Battery: 27 with Arrow 1&2 / Iron Dome / MIM 23 I Hawk & 104 Patriot)	200 Nuclear Warheads	Adversary
3	Iran	Troops: 350.000 (IRGC) MBT: 1,663 (Zulfiqar, T72Z, M60A1) Artillery: 8,798 variant types SF: 5 battalions Missiles: Sagger / Saeqhe 1,2 / Toophan1,2 / SSM Shahin 1,2 IRGC Ground Forces: 100,000 (incl command, air	<i>Troops:18.000 Patrol and coastal combatants: 68 & 50 craft Mine countermeasures: 5 IRGC Naval Forces &Marines: 25,000</i>	Troops: 18.000 Fighter: 5 Sqn with F-7M, F-14 Tomact, MiG-29 A. Fighter, Ground Attack: 10 sqn with F-1E, F-5E, F Tiger 2& Su-24MK& F-4D, Phantom 2& F-5E, F Tiger 2 IRGC Air Force (Controls Iran's missiles arsenal): MRBM: Shahab 1,2,3/ Ghadr 1/ Sajjil 2. SRBM: Fateh/	Troops: 12,000 Established mainly to assist the Iranian Army, Air Force and IRGC air defense.	Unclear	

		manoeuvre)		Shahab 1,2/ Zelzal			
4	Saudi Arabia	Troops: 75.000 MBT: 565 M1A2, M60A3, AMX30. Reconnaissance: AML60 & AML90 APC: 3,600 Artillery: 855 National Guard: 75,000 Industrial Security Force: 9,000	Troops: 13.500 Principal Surface Combatants: 4 Frigates, 3 Destroyers. Patrol and coastal combatants: 30 variant types Naval Aviation: 34Variant types Marines: 3,000	Troops: 20.000 Fighter: 5 squadron with F15s & F15C, D Eagle Fighter, Ground Attack: 7 sqnwith F15S Eagle / IDS, GR1A Tornado / Typhoon Transport & Training: 10 sqn variant types	Troops: 16,000 Naval: 500 AD Radar: 80 variant types		Adversary
5	Syria	Troops: 220.000 MBT: 4,950 (T72, T72M, T62K, T62M, T55, T55MV) Artillery: 3.440 Reconnaissance: 590 SF: 1 Missiles: 850 SSM: Scud B, Scud C, Frog 7,	Troops: 5.000 Patrol and coastal combatants: 32 (incl Corvettes and) Mine warfare: 7 variant types Naval Aviation: 13 (Ka28, Mi14)	Troops: 100.000 Fighter: 6 squadron (Mig23, Mig25, Mig29A) Fighter, Ground Attack: 13 sqn (Mig21MF, Mig23BN, Su22, Su24) Transport & Training: 6 sqnvariant types Aircraft: 365 combat Helicopters: 14 3 variant types Missiles: ASM, AAM	Troops: 60.000 Missiles: 4,707 SAM variant types		Ally
6	Iraq	Troops: 193.400 MBT: 336 (incl M1A1 & Abrams) 3 Armored brigade 13 Brigade with light weapons Aviation: 7 Squadron with	Troops: 3.600 Patrol and coastal combatants: 6 (2 River Hawk & 4 Fateh) Patrol Boats: 17 Patrol Boat River: 6 (2/200& 4/2010)	Troops: 5.050 ISR: 3 squadron with CH-2000 Sama, Cessna, Combat Caravan and Beech 350 King Air) Transport & Training: 4 squadron 3 combat aircraft	Unclear		Neutral

		Bell 205, 206, T407, Mi- 17SA342M Gazelle					
7	Bahrain	Troops: 6.000 MBT: 180 M60 A3 SF: 1 battalion Artillery: 151 Reconnaissance: 46 (22 AML, 8s25 Shorland, 8 Ferri, 8 Saladin)	Troops: 700 Patrol and coastal combatants: 12 variant types Principal Surface Combatants: 1 Naval Aviation: 2 Helicopters, light Bo-105	Troops: 1.500 Fighter: 2 squadron with F16 Fighter, Ground Attack: 1sqn with F5E, F Tiger 2 Transport & Training: two sqn with Hawk MK-129 & T- 67M Firefly	Unclear		Adversary

Appendix (2): Questionnaire

1. What, in your opinion, could be motivating Iran to continue developing its nuclear program despite all international pressures?
2. During the Shah, Iran signed nuclear agreements with USA to receive nuclear technology. Why these agreements have been cancelled after the change of the regime?
3. Do you think that Iran is motivated by desire to achieve a balance of power, and protect its national security from any potential threats?
4. Do you think that the nuclear ambiguity is a defensive mechanism that could be protecting any state such as Israel from any existential threats?
5. What possible military threats does Iran face? Are their threats from states with only conventional capabilities as well as from Israel?
6. Does Iran have sufficient conventional capabilities to face any potential threats from its adversaries?
7. What is the perception does Iran have towards the sanctions despite the peaceful nature of the program?
8. Do you think that the Iranian society support the Iranian nuclear policy despite the economic sanctions imposed on Iran?
9. Do you think that there is a specific strategy motivates Iran to continue working on its nuclear activities despite the IAEA reports and the UNSC resolutions?
10. Is there any relation between the Iranian support to the Shiite protesters in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and the Iranian nuclear program?
11. What are the possibilities of convincing Iran to freeze its nuclear activities in exchange for certain advantages?

List of Interviewees

1. *Anonymous source*, this participant is a permanent director of an international institution specializes in the nuclear deterrence and arms control; he also served in the USA Department of State for 26 years, 5 April, 2013.
2. *Anonymous source*, this participant is a former Director of the Department of Technical Cooperation in the IAEA. He specializes in the nuclear engineering and he is a current member of the Standing Group of the Nuclear Energy in the, 18 April, 2013.
3. **Ambassador Fahmy** is the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the former Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo. He served as Ambassador of Egypt to the United States from 1999-2008. He specializes in international security and nuclear disarmament, 28 Mar. 2013.
4. **Ambassador Zahran** is a former Egyptian diplomat and was the permanent representative of Egypt to the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons and disarmament, 8 April, 2013.
5. **Professor Abu-Shadi** is a scientist in the nuclear energy, and he is a former Chief inspector of the IAEA and he was responsible for both the North Korean and the Iranian files, 1 April, 2013.
6. *Anonymous source*, this participant is a former Permanent Representative of Egypt to NATO. A Former Member of the Advisory Board of the Secretary General of the United Nations for Disarmament Affairs. He is also a member in the International Commission founded by the IAEA on Nuclear Fuel Cycle, 12May, 2013.

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