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The Curious Case of the Iran Nuclear Deal: A Practice Approach to Understanding Norm Productivity of Diplomacy

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International Relations

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Declaration

I, Ali Mozaffari, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for the award of any type of academic degree.

Signature 

Date: May 31, 2022

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Any errors and shortcomings in this thesis are entirely mine.

Abstract

Iran's nuclear programme has long been a nuclear proliferation controversy. In 2015, a historic agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was achieved that addressed the international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear programme. In 2018, however, the US pulled out of JCPOA. Much to the surprise of many, JCPOA did not immediately fall apart. In fact, JCPOA persisted for quite a long time. I made a hypothetical distinction between JCPOA as a material agreement, and JCPOA as a norm to explain the unexpected survival of JCPOA. In order to substantiate my claim, I foregrounded the role of diplomacy in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm. I drew on post-structuralist and social constructivist elements as well as constructivist norm scholarship to inform my empirical analysis.

My empirical analysis comprised two main parts. In the first part, I focused on diplomatic practices that took place from 2015 to 2016 corresponding to the time JCPOA was achieved until the implementation day. I identified discursive traces in the diplomatic practices that could contribute to constructing JCPOA as a norm. In the second part, I identified the patterns in the diplomatic practices that were involved in the reproduction of JCPOA as a norm, even though the contestations were building up progressively during the second time span from 2017 to 2020.

I presented an innovative explanation for the surprising survival of JCPOA. I demonstrated that diplomatic practices were involved in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm which in turn helped it persist against the contestations. I also uncovered a cooperative relationship between these diplomatic practices, and the structural/material factors in norm productivity.

The findings of this thesis provide empirical insights into understanding the constitutive and agentic capacity of diplomacy. This thesis supports the non-instrumentalist/critical view of diplomacy as opposed to the instrumentalist/rationalist view. It is concluded that diplomacy in itself can be consequential for world politics.

Abbreviations

AIPAC: American Israel Public Affairs Committee

AP: Additional Protocol

CISADA: Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010

EU: European Union

IAEA: International Atomic Energy Agency

ICJ: International Court of Justice

INSTEX: Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges

IR: International Relations

IRGC: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

JCPOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NPT: Nonproliferation Treaty

UN: United Nations

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Theoretical Framework.....	16
Table 2. Summary List of Collected Speech Acts	19
Table 3. Representative Quotes for JCPOA Made the World Safer	22
Table 4. Representative Quotes for a Collective Product.....	24
Table 5. Representative Quotes for JCPOA Backed Up by Science.....	25
Table 6. Representative quotes for Rectifying Iran's Notoriety	27
Table 8. Representative Quotes for the World is Less Safe without JCPOA.....	32
Table 9. Representative Quotes for the Collateral Damage	33
Table 10. Representative Quotes for a Delivering Agreement.....	34

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Abbreviations.....	vii
List of Tables.....	ix
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Persistence of JCPOA despite US Withdrawal.....	1
1.2. Bringing Diplomacy into Picture.....	2
1.3. Objectives and Research Questions.....	3
1.4. Significance and Originality of Study.....	3
1.5. Overview of Thesis.....	4
2. All about JCPOA.....	4
2.1. What does JCPOA entail?.....	4
2.2. JCPOA and Liberal Institutionalism.....	6
2.3. JCPOA and Realism.....	7
2.4. JCPOA and Other Approaches.....	8
3. Diplomacy and IR Schools.....	10
3.1. Instrumentalist Views on Diplomacy.....	10
3.2. Alternative Perspectives on Diplomacy.....	11
4. Methodological and Theoretical Framework.....	14
4.1. My Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions.....	14
4.2. Theoretical Framework.....	15
4.3. Discourse Analysis.....	16
4.4. Data Collection.....	17
5. Production and Reproduction of JCPOA as a Norm in the First Component: 2015-2016.....	20
5.1. Discursive Representations in the First Component.....	20
5.2. Beyond Language Performativity.....	27
6. Production and Reproduction of JCPOA as a Norm in the Second Component: 2017-2020.....	28
6.1. Discursive Representations in the Second Component.....	29
6.2. Beyond Language Performativity.....	34
7. Discussion.....	36
7.1. Normative Commitments to JCPOA.....	37

7.2.	Diplomacy and its Norm Producing Effects on JCPOA	39
7.3.	Theorizing Curious Persistence of JCPOA	40
7.4.	Other Possible Explanations for JCPOA’s Survival	42
7.5.	Theoretical Implications for Understanding Diplomacy	43
8.	Conclusion.....	47
	Reference List.....	49

1. Introduction

Iran's nuclear programme has stirred much controversy since the early 2000s following the disclosure of two undeclared nuclear facilities that aroused suspicion surrounding Iran's ambitions with its programme. (Frantz, 2003). Multilateralism was actively and increasingly utilized especially through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to mount the political and economic pressure on Iran so that it would agree to address the concerns (See for example, European Union, 2010; IAEA, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2006; United States, 2010; UNSC, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011). After so many years of deadlocked negotiations, a historic agreement was eventually reached in 2015 which temporarily put an end to this drawn-out controversy.

The struck deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), placed significant restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, 2015). The negotiations that resulted in JCPOA, involved five UNSC Permanent Members and Germany on the one hand and Iran on the other (Usher, 2015). Even though it took over a decade including two years of intensive negotiations in order to arrive at this agreement, the US, following the election of Donald Trump, decided to pull out of JCPOA. The decision came only three years after its achievement and two years after its implementation.

1.1. Persistence of JCPOA despite US Withdrawal

After the US withdrawal, the Trump administration spared no effort to obliterate JCPOA, especially through its so-called maximum pressure policy (Strategic Comments, 2019b). It is noteworthy that the material implementation of JCPOA cannot be practically possible without having the US on board. The US was an essential JCPOA participant.

As a matter of fact, Federica Mogherini, EU's former High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, described the survival of JCPOA as a "*miracle*" (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2019). It was surprising to Federica Mogherini that over a year had passed and JCPOA was still around. Today, it has been four years since the day the US withdrew from JCPOA. Undoubtedly, JCPOA is barely hanging since every single JCPOA participant has long been violating its provisions. Yet, it has persisted as a highly relevant topic in today's world politics.

JCPOA and the US withdrawal from it have garnered significant academic attention. For example, JCPOA has been the topic of empirical studies looking at how multilateralism works for achieving the objectives of the states at the global level (Alcaro, 2021; Constantin-Bercean & Stretea, 2018; Cronberg, 2018; Matera & Matera, 2019; POP, 2020; Schwammenthal, 2018). JCPOA also has been the empirical focus of studies investigating how states would act based on the rationality of pragmatism (Kamel, 2018; Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018; Zaccara, 2021). The researchers have also been interested in studying how JCPOA implicated the material conditions such as the regional influence of Iran in favor or against the regional actors (Bahi, 2017; Kroenig, 2018; Quamar, 2018; Rezaei, 2019; Shah et al., 2019) and how it has affected the economic and political interests of domestic actors in Iran (Behraves, 2018). I review these empirical studies and more in Chapter Two, but a quick look at the content of these studies reveals that they are predominately based on rationalist assumptions.

1.2. Bringing Diplomacy into Picture

In this research endeavor, I intend to look into the role of diplomacy in explaining the unexpected survival of JCPOA. I problematize with the narrow and reductionist perspectives of rationalists on diplomacy. They view diplomacy as a tool at the disposal of states that can be used instead of other more aggressive tools to achieve a common solution (See Chapter Three for a detailed overview of the rationalist perspectives on diplomacy). I appreciate and acknowledge the fact that the concerned states used diplomacy as a tool to address a controversial nuclear programme. Unequivocally, diplomacy was able to bring together adversaries such as Iran and the US and many others in a room to enhance their mutual understandings through communication and negotiation that eventually resulted in the agreed JCPOA. I argue that diplomacy which is instrumentally used to produce, *inter alia*, an agreement, might also go beyond an instrument of statecraft. I draw on critical, non-rationalist perspectives on diplomacy and constructivist norm scholarship to address the empirical puzzle that I pinpointed earlier.

I make a claim that a hypothetical line must be drawn between JCPOA as a material agreement and JCPOA as a potential international norm that may exist without material properties. Norms are regarded as standards of appropriate behavior by providing direction to the (state) actors (Checkel, 2012; Elster, 1989; March & Olsen, 1998). Norms are not fixed and stable but rather subject to change, transformation, and even death that could happen through (re-)interpretation, meaning-negotiation, and contestation (Wiener, 2014). Various factors are highlighted when it

comes to norm construction. In line with what constructivists hold, I similarly argue that structural and agency-related factors are both important in the birth (and/or death) of norms (See, for example, Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Florini, 1996).

In this thesis, I pay close attention to the role of diplomacy in norm construction for JCPOA. I intend to substantiate that diplomacy might have transcended its instrumentalist function and contributed to the production of JCPOA as a norm. I embark on an empirical exploration to investigate in what ways diplomacy was involved in producing and reproducing JCPOA as a norm. Such a distinction, I argue, may explain why and how JCPOA has persisted until today.

1.3. Objectives and Research Questions

The main objective of the thesis is to provide empirical insights for a nuanced understanding of norm productivity of diplomacy. Through an empirical journey, I follow three objectives related to my case study. First, I aim to explain JCPOA's surprising survival by substantiating that JCPOA was turned into a norm. Second, I seek to foreground the role of diplomacy in the production of JCPOA as a norm. Third, I explore how the US withdrawal and other contestations did not stop JCPOA from being reproduced as a norm. The following research questions are pursued within the scope of this thesis:

Main Research Question: How did the norm-producing effects of diplomacy contribute to the survival of JCPOA?

Sub-question 1: How was diplomacy involved in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm after its achievement?

Sub-question 2: How was diplomacy involved in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm despite the progressive contestations?

1.4. Significance and Originality of Study

The thesis presents an original approach to understanding the unexpected survival of JCPOA. It foregrounds the importance of diplomacy in the production and re-production of JCPOA as a norm. It is hoped that it provides empirical insights into the norm productivity of diplomacy. It can, therefore, enrich the existing literature on diplomacy from a critical and non-rationalist point of view. The empirical findings can also elucidate how and in what ways diplomacy can implicate

world politics through the production of normative structures that can potentially influence the behavior of state actors based on the logic of appropriateness.

This thesis is innovative in three respects. First, it makes an original distinction between JCPOA as a material agreement and JCPOA as a norm. Second, it provides a nuanced understanding of the norm productivity of diplomacy in a non-rationalist view based on empirical evidence. Third, it offers an innovative explanation for the unexpected survival of JCPOA.

1.5. Overview of Thesis

This master thesis comprises nine chapters. After the Introduction, there is **Chapter Two** which reviews JCPOA and the relevant literature to show that the previous knowledge has not answered my research questions. **Chapter Three** elaborates on different theoretical standings on diplomacy and demonstrates how rationalist approaches have been predominant, despite the recent turns to alternative approaches. **Chapter Four** provides details on the theoretical framework built for this thesis for empirical analysis. In **Chapter Five**, I present my findings about the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm after its achievement. **Chapter Six** displays my findings about the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm despite the progressive contestations. In **Chapter Seven**, I broadly and more theoretically discuss and interpret my empirical findings and draw implications for understanding diplomacy. Finally, in **Chapter Eight**, I summarize the main findings and discussion points of the master thesis.

2. All about JCPOA

2.1. What does JCPOA entail?

JCPOA is a 159-page action plan detailing the provisions and commitments for the JCPOA participants. It contains a preface, a preamble, nuclear-related provisions, sanctions-related provisions, implementation plan provisions, a dispute resolution mechanism, and five attached annexes. In this section, I briefly get down to the nitty-gritty of what JCPOA entails.

First, as stipulated in the preface, JCPOA is primarily about ensuring Iran's nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful. To that end, several nuclear-related commitments have been meticulously defined. They include restrictions on Iran's enrichment. Iran's enrichment capacity is reduced to 5060 IR-1 centrifuges at Natanz for 10 years (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Paragraph 2, 2015). IR-1 centrifuges are the least advanced centrifuges compared to other centrifuge generations under Iran's nuclear programme. Iran's Research and Development activities related

to enrichment are limited to ten years too (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Paragraph 3, 2015). For 15 years, Iran will enrich uranium only up to 3.67% and only in the Natanz Enrichment facility (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Paragraph 5, 2015). Uranium needs to be highly enriched (above 90%) to be considered weapons-grade uranium (Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 2021). For 15 years, Iran will keep its uranium stockpile under 300 kg (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Paragraph 7, 2015). Iran had a stockpile of 9284 kg of enriched uranium in 2013 (IAEA, 2013). Another major limitation placed on Iran's nuclear programme under JCPOA is about modifying the Arak Heavy-Water Reactor (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Paragraph 8, 2015).

Apart from these imposed restrictions, intrusive transparency measures have also been thought of under JCPOA. Iran's acquiescence to the Additional Protocol is one of the most important measures in this connection (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Paragraph 13, 2015). The IAEA Additional Protocol provides enhanced verification tools for ensuring the peaceful use of nuclear material (IAEA, n.d.). Iran also agreed under JCPOA to allow IAEA to make the necessary inspections to clarify Iran's Past and Present Outstanding Issues (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Paragraph 14, 2015).

In exchange for the above-mentioned restrictions, JCPOA would produce a comprehensive lifting of sanctions. Sixteen paragraphs of JCPOA were dedicated to specifying the sanctions that would be lifted under JCPOA. Since it is not the focus of this research, I do not go through them. JCPOA's attached annexes also provide detailed descriptions of the agreed provisions of JCPOA.

Despite being a technical nuclear non-proliferation action plan, JCPOA has been a contentious topic of discussion since the day it was born. It has had its proponents and critics. Pundits and analysts have viewed JCPOA, or the withdrawal thereof, as a success or a failure, typically basing their observations on the material outcomes JCPOA has produced or would have produced for different stakeholders (See, for example, Abdul-Hussain, 2021; Belal, 2020; Geranmayeh, 2020; Ghasseminejad & Jahan-Parvar, 2021; Hannah, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2021; Mallett, 2021; Ross & Zarate, 2021; Singh, 2020; Taleblu & Davidson, 2020).

JCPOA has also garnered ample academic attention due to its highly political topic. In the subsequent sections, I briefly review some of the research studies that have had JCPOA as their empirical focus. The following studies are not meant to be taken as an exhaustive literature review

on JCPOA but rather are intended to indicate some of the general trends of scholarship that exist today on JCPOA.

2.2. JCPOA and Liberal Institutionalism

Considering JCPOA was a product of multilateral diplomacy and the UN system, liberal institutionalism has been a common approach for studying JCPOA. By liberal institutionalist theoretical assumptions, JCPOA was used as empirical evidence to demonstrate how multilateralism can effectively solve global proliferation problems (Cronberg, 2018). The achievement of JCPOA was an empirical example of their approach to world politics. JCPOA was referred to as a successful engagement policy, instead of a containment strategy, that would have created more stability, especially in the long run while Trump's decision to exit the deal resulted in escalation between Iran and the US (POP, 2020). The role of the EU has been highlighted as an enabler of diplomacy which eventually resulted in a global outcome such as JCPOA which coercively and less aggressively managed to both alleviate the EU's (and perhaps the international community's) security concerns while ensuring the EU's commercial/energy interests (Constantin-Bercean & Stretea, 2018). Of course, this balanced steering of affairs by Europe concerning Iran was seriously sabotaged after Trump decided to exit the deal (Constantin-Bercean & Stretea, 2018). The so-called transatlantic disagreements over Iran have rendered Trump's pressure on Iran ineffectual as the US tried to re-define the terms of JCPOA, especially considering Iran's alleged ambitions in the region (Schwammenthal, 2018). This demonstrates the potency of multilateralism which is again in line with what liberal institutionalists claim. The transatlantic cooperation (US-EU) was generally praised for being able to effectively coerce Iran into agreeing with JCPOA (Matera & Matera, 2019).

Some other studies also explored other aspects related to JCPOA basing their assumptions on liberal institutionalism. For example, it was argued that Iran agreed to JCPOA because of Iran's pragmatism. Iran, as a seemingly revolutionary /pariah state, also would act rationally and for its interests (Kamel, 2018), so the engagement policy would integrate Iran into the international community and therefore the chances of having shared interests would go up, and conflicts would be less likely to occur. In the same line of reasoning, it is argued that JCPOA was made possible only when the main parties of the deal agreed to compromise their main bargaining chips (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018). In this perspective, diplomacy was used as a tool for reaching a compromise (JCPOA) that would ensure the basic interests of all the involved states.

The implications of the achievement of JCPOA on non-proliferation issues between Iran and Europe have also been of research interest including regional conflicts and counter-terrorism activities as well as humanitarian topics (see, for example, Osiewicz, 2018), which support the ideals of liberal institutionalism again. In a rationalist reasoning, it is argued that diplomacy could bring about an outcome that can potentially and gradually change the behavior of a given state (through the carrots or sticks negotiated via diplomacy and/or other means).

Meanwhile, Europe's diplomatic and political capital has been shown to be effective in encouraging Iran to not choose a pathway to nuclear weapons (Alcaro, 2021) which is important to show why Europe's general unwillingness to cooperate with the US unilateralism kept the door of diplomacy and Iran-US re-engagement alive (Alcaro, 2021). It shows the relevance and soft power of Europe as far as the peaceful resolution of conflicts is concerned, even though Europe is occasionally portrayed as lacking relevance in this respect.

2.3. JCPOA and Realism

Realism has been also a common approach for JCPOA-related studies. JCPOA has been explored to show how it has affected the power politics of the Middle East, especially with the Iran-Saudi rivalry for dominance over the region. It was argued that JCPOA temporarily might have favored Iran over Saudi Arabia, especially because it gave Iran economic means to project more power while the Arab states became less certain of the US support against Iran's allegedly expansionist behavior (Bahi, 2017). In the long run, however, JCPOA was seen as having the potential to force regional players into dialogue and an agreed balance of power in the region (Bahi, 2017). It has been also argued that JCPOA had major political and economic implications for the Middle East and therefore Trump's decision to scrap it would also expectedly affect regional competition for domination (Shah et al., 2019). Growing geopolitical tensions following Trump's decision to withdraw from JCPOA and also the US being less interested in the region as a whole have made regional players including Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel more assertive in their behavior to ensure that their security and state interests were safeguarded as one can expect based on realist assumptions (Quamar, 2018). Using nuclear negotiations as empirical evidence, it was argued that the decisions were made by the different domestic individual and collective actors in Iran, but the objective has been the same: making Iran a regional power which is in line again with the realist perspective (Zaccara, 2021).

Furthermore, JCPOA has been censured for only delaying Iran's pathway to nuclear weapons (Kroenig, 2018). It is argued that JCPOA elevated Iran's geopolitical position, improving its economy while the conditions the US could use as leverage were removed such as the prospect of a military strike and economic sanctions (Kroenig, 2018). It was concluded that it would only be rationalistic to increase the pressure on Iran and encourage a regime change rather than using diplomacy-produced outcomes such as JCPOA that could increase the resilience of the Iranian regime (Kroenig, 2018).

Drawing upon a realist approach, the positions of the major states in the region have been scrutinized which can suggest that if one country, here Iran, acquired nuclear capabilities, other states would race up to acquire one to keep the power balance intact again constituent with the realist-rationalist security dilemma. JCPOA was shown to have avoided such a dilemma in the volatile Middle East, even though a non-compliance might trigger one, as the states are self-interested and would have to take measures to ensure their security (Rezaei, 2019). Finally, based on a realist understanding of the structural dynamics of politics in Iran and the US, it was anticipated that JCPOA could be salvaged but any significant détente between Iran and US seemed most likely off the table (Mousavian & Mahmoudieh, 2021; Strategic Comments, 2020).

In general, the past research inspired by rationalist reasoning failed to look beyond the material dimensions of JCPOA and overwhelmingly overlooked the unexpected survival of JCPOA. With that being said, there have been a few studies with an empirical focus on JCPOA that have adopted a kind of non-rationalist approach to JCPOA.

2.4. JCPOA and Other Approaches

JCPOA was used as empirical evidence for linguistic/post-structuralist approaches. Depending on what narrative was employed, JCPOA was presented as a failure or an achievement through discursive contestation. It was argued that a foreign policy could be regarded as successful or a failure depending on how it was narrated and if that narrative was able to get dominant and marginalize other narratives in political discourse (Oppermann & Spencer, 2017). It was also suggested that foreign policy might change as political meanings could go through a process of contestation in which discursive strategies were used to de-construct and de-legitimize other narratives in favor of a certain narrative as was the case with the review of JCPOA in the US Congress debates (Arena, 2021). Drawing upon Foucault's *alethurgy*, it was demonstrated that

narrative alignment could occur which in turn would facilitate peace-building and diminish possibilities of confusion and conflicts by an empirical investigation into how verification mechanisms under JCPOA were constructed to overcome Iran's identity as untrustworthy and bring Iran's actions into public view (Miskimmon, 2020).

Digital tools have also affected the diplomatic processes. For example, the Obama administration used Twitter as a digital platform to influence domestic politics in a way to gather support for JCPOA in the US (Bjola & Manor, 2018). Theo van Leeuwen's legitimation model was also used to demonstrate how Trump's tweets used moral evaluation and rationalization to de-legitimize JCPOA (Nourani et al., 2020).

Rynhold used a constructivist agency-oriented approach to explaining the failure of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in blocking the achievement of JCPOA because the issue was framed in a way that minimized identity dissonance while the opposition to it was closely associated with partisan interests (Rynhold, 2021). On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that sentiments of Iranophobia were also constructed in the US foreign policy through new McCarthyism, state identity and speech acts to try to change Iran's behavior domestically and regionally (Soleimanzadeh et al., 2018). The findings of a corpus-based study also revealed the importance of persuasive language by providing quantitative evidence about interpersonal and contextual differences in the metadiscourse used by President Trump and President Obama about JCPOA (Mirzaeian, 2020). Trump's decision to withdraw from the deal was also presented differently by the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, even though similar frames were used to censure, commend or simply report the decision and the associated aftermath (Khanjani, 2020).

Certain studies also highlighted the domestic factors in enabling JCPOA or the withdrawal thereof. For example, Lantis (2019) demonstrated that the decision-making processes in foreign policy were significantly influenced by power competition among different domestic actors within a state. It was argued that JCPOA was scrapped because the coalition that supported the engagement policy with Iran was seriously challenged and undermined by the competing coalition which eventually led to the shifting balances of power in favor of the other coalition that was against JCPOA (Lantis, 2019).

The role of human agency and domestic politics have also been highlighted against the reductionist understandings that realists offer when it comes to proliferation policies as Iran decided to adopt a nuclear reversal policy after Rouhani was elected and JCPOA was then made possible (Kitchings, 2018). JCPOA has also been looked at as an outcome that also elevated the dispositional characters of Rouhani through a Leadership Trait Analysis (Dinler & Balci, 2021), which can have implications for personal gains and interests or party interests which could shape a state's behavior or policy.

Overall, the previous studies have chiefly adopted rationalist approaches to JCPOA exploring the questions of power, interest, and multilateralism. The other studies that had alternative approaches did not try to answer my empirical puzzle in this thesis. Nor did they look into the role of diplomacy in JCPOA's persistence. In the next chapter, I briefly review how diplomacy is viewed by rationalist and non-rationalist approaches.

3. Diplomacy and IR Schools

3.1. Instrumentalist Views on Diplomacy

In general, realists find the role of diplomacy inconsequential in world politics. Based on their positivist and rationalist assumptions, realists highlight the role of material conditions as key resources for bestowing a given state things that can determine global outcomes. These material conditions may include a big military power or a large economic size which provide a given state the sources that can be used to produce effects in world politics in a way that favors the state in a zero-sum game point of view. In other words, the richer the resources, the better ability the state has to get what it wants in an anarchic states system (Mearsheimer, 2001). They, therefore, assign little to zero credit to diplomacy for determining the way global outcomes are achieved. At best, diplomacy is merely an instrument commonly used by the states to pursue, for example, their foreign policies. Diplomacy is regarded as a tool to ensure one's state interests (Sharp, 1999). The emphasis is largely placed on materialism. In short, the existence of diplomacy or the lack thereof leaves no eventful impact on world politics (Mearsheimer, 1994; Spiro, 2004).

Institutionalists similarly do not regard diplomacy as a powerful agent as they also share the anarchy and the states system view. They may view diplomacy as a tool that can influence the interests and behavior of the states through bargaining mechanisms (Keohane, 1984). They argue that diplomacy can be used as a coercive tool as an alternative to war to pursue the objectives of a

state (George, 1991). So diplomacy per se does not have implications for world politics but as a tool can contribute to the way global outcomes are determined on the world stage. The emphasis is mainly on how some states possess certain sources which indicate their soft or hard power to determine global outcomes, leaving no room for the agentic capacity of diplomacy (Nye, 1990, 2004). Simply put, they view diplomacy as a tool of representation i.e. diplomatic practitioners represent their respective states with instructions they have been previously given from their capitals to see how they can find common ground with other representatives and their given instructions (Ross, 2007).

A large part of IR scholarship treats diplomacy at best as an instrument with inconsequential or limited capacity (e.g. representation or negotiation that we witnessed during the diplomatic process on Iran's nuclear programme) to influence or achieve global outcomes. Such materialist and positivist understandings of diplomacy have been criticized. In the next section, I review these alternative perspectives about diplomacy.

3.2. Alternative Perspectives on Diplomacy

Diplomacy can have direct implications for the production, interpretation, and re-interpretation of international law, principles, and norms. It matters in world politics since international law, norms, and principles, instead of state interests and purposes, have been leaving impacts on how international relations are governed (Kristiotis, 1998). For example, diplomacy can influence the way morality as a filtering device is conceived by the general public. Li, for example, argues that the public conception of morality defines and defends the political conception of justice, which has implications for diplomacy as it affects the way morality is conceived by the general public (Li, 2016). In general, public reason can play an important role as a filtering device influencing the way the states may behave (Rawls, 1996).

Diplomacy has been explored as a communicative action that can advance the logic of arguing. Unlike logic of consequentialism which is often associated with rationalist IR schools and logic of appropriateness which is often associated with sociological institutionalism or social constructivism, the logic of arguing is based on argumentative rationality which has implications for international relations when there is no common lifeworld. For diplomacy, it means those diplomats who have a better argument can simply better pursue their state interests through the

logic of arguing alongside other factors at play such as the logic of consequentialism and the logic of appropriateness (Risse, 2000).

Argumentation is intimately interconnected with what some diplomats and practitioners do in world politics. It is argued that the very reason why the states in the first place are interested in participating in legal discourses in international organizations among others is to back up their positions and behaviors with legally-supported arguments. The discursive interactions that take place between interlocutors influence the way the international order is shaped and therefore the (neo-realist) claim of inconsequentiality of diplomacy for the world order is refuted (see, for example, Bjola & Kornprobst, 2011; Johnstone, 2011; Muller, 2004). If diplomacy is, therefore, looked at as a communicative action, we can expect it to be able to grant legitimacy to actions through deliberation and norm-constitution (Bjola, 2005). In short, diplomacy can influence the way international law is operated through a justificatory discourse it can produce and re-produce. In this understanding, diplomats have much leeway to advance their argumentation which is found reasoned within a certain interpretive community based on the theory of communicative (Johnstone, 2003).

But some argue that diplomacy and the language of legality are not about influencing for example the general public or convincing other parties with a better argument. Hurd (2015) asserts that diplomacy uses international law as a language understandable to an external environment in order to provide an explanation for certain state behaviors and interests and at the same has constitutive potential to produce legal positions under which its behavior is understood. In this kind of understanding, diplomacy is more of interconnecting a given state with the international environment through the language of legality rather than being a tool of representation for negotiations between the states or being about persuading others (Hurd, 2015).

In addition, diplomacy has been shown to be crucial for manipulation and framing purposes, especially through the social construction of norms that can ensure a given state's interests. So instead of persuading other actors or producing legal/reasoned explanations for a certain behavior, diplomacy is viewed as being about manipulating and framing realities in a certain way so that the interests and purposes of a state are secured (see, for example, Payne, 2001). In addition, similarly, it has been argued that rhetoric plays a central role in political processes and outcomes as it reinforces. For example, Krebs (2007) illustrates how rhetorical coercion operates, explains why

it works, and identifies key scopes and conditions for it to work. Or Gheciu (2005) empirically demonstrates that NATO has been involved in socialization practices to advance liberal-democratic norms in Central and Eastern European countries. Diplomacy is involved in all of these processes. This perspective suggests that diplomacy can have constitutive effects on world politics in different ways.

Furthermore, Sending et al. (2015) argue that even political entities have no prior ontological existence and are constituted through relations. With such a perspective, diplomacy is a phenomenon that socially emerges and has its own agentic efforts on world politics (Sending et al., 2015). Drawing upon constructivist assumptions, Adler (2005) argues that world politics like everything else is continuously in the process of becoming rather than having a static, fixed and non-dynamic status as materialists and positivists claim it does. He also refutes the idealistic and post-structuralist/post-modernist claims that look at world politics as it can be imagined linguistically/ discursively constructed, as he finds epistemic value only in certain statements rather than all statements. According to Adler, meanings can cognitively evolve and then become institutionalized within a certain community that can influence the tendencies and assumptions for the members of that community. He, for example, demonstrated how self-restraint was morally and rationally expected within a group of practitioners for NATO and Central and Eastern European countries in the 1990s (Adler, 2008).

Bourdieu has been also a source of inspiration for several IR scholars. Adler-Nissen (2008) came up with a theoretical framework by which she was able to empirically explore national diplomacy in the EU and demonstrate the ways Danish and British diplomats handled the stigma associated with their state behaviors when they were thinking of opting out of the EU. With a different analytical framework yet embedded within a Bourdieudian approach, Pouliot (2010a) demonstrates that diplomacy is made possible when dispositions sited within practitioners are in accordance with the physical and non-physical conditions of their states. He presented an argument called hysteresis which he borrowed from Bourdieu which is a condition in which there is a mismatch between the dispositions of the two sides based on their perceived possession of resources. With an empirical focus on NATO-Russia relations, he argued that the symbolic power struggles would not allow security community development because of the mismatch in their dispositions (Pouliot, 2010a). This is a different understanding of material resources than when

rationalists place importance on them as a determining factor. Materials do not necessarily enable or constrain diplomatic practices unless they are seen as so. For example, Pouliot (2010b) argues that materials can get mixed up with natural and cultural or other objects to take on a new form of life and meaning as was the case with nuclear warheads affecting the relations between NATO and Russia.

In conclusion, in this thesis, I have obviously adopted a non-instrumentalist approach to diplomacy. I expound on my view of diplomacy in more detail in the next chapter, when I present my methodological and theoretical framework.

4. Methodological and Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I build my theoretical framework and discuss the methods that I have used to collect and analyze my empirical data in order to address the research questions outlined for this thesis. First, I present the ontological and epistemological premises of my general approach in this study. Then, I explain the main conceptual elements that constitute the theoretical/analytical framework of this study. Lastly, I present my methodological considerations including my sampling method, and justify the choices I made to collect the necessary empirical data for this research study.

4.1. My Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

I have already discussed in Chapter 3 that I am taking a non-instrumentalist approach to diplomacy. Such an approach can help me explain how diplomacy made the survival of JCPOA possible. I argue, following Sending et al. (2015), that diplomacy should be viewed as a process that constitutes, and is constituted by social relations which make up the world politics. Simply put, agents (for example state actors, diplomats, state representatives, etc.), objects (treaties, agreements, etc.), and structures (for example norms, international law, value systems, etc.) have no prior ontological existence to these social relations necessarily but they are generated through the way these social relations are defined, put together and utilized that form and reify political entities as such (see also, Jackson & Nexon, 1999). Based on such ontological assumptions, I thereby take an immensely interpretive epistemology as opposed to epistemic realism in a practice approach that I outline in the next section (Campbell, 1993).

4.2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of my study comprises two main components. In the first component, I scrutinize how diplomacy was involved in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm. In the second component, I looked into the way diplomacy produced and reproduced JCPOA as a norm despite the progressive contestations. I have incorporated theoretical premises of post-structuralism, social constructivism, and constructivist norm scholarship into my practice approach to inform my empirical analysis. It is called a practice approach in the sense that the main objects of my study are diplomatic practices.

One of the post-structuralist premises which was incorporated into my framework was an acknowledgment that material objects do not have inherent meanings but rather acquire meanings as people construct meanings for them through language (Campbell, 1993). This premise directs me to language practices performed by diplomats which might create potential capacities for discursive productions of JCPOA (See also, Shapiro, 1989).

Another important premise within post-structuralism that helps me delve into the subtleties of my empirical case had to do with the issue of legitimacy. Discourses are not only generative of the social world but also, more importantly, they define who the authorized actors are and what can be considered common senses (Milliken, 1999). A certain act might be judged as illegitimate, illogical, senseless, and so on within a social context simply due to the dominant discourse.

The third premise in my theoretical framework was the instability and unfixity of discourses including the hegemonic ones and that they need work in order to become and stay dominant (Milliken, 1999). This premise was particularly important for addressing the empirical puzzle as to why and how JCPOA survived despite being progressively contested.

Furthermore, I incorporated insights from social constructivism to overcome the overemphasis on language performativity in my analysis. My analysis was informed by the insights offered by Hurd (2015) and Sending et al. (2015) on diplomacy that explains diplomacy should be viewed as a social practice conducted by states on the world stage. Diplomacy, therefore, involves social interactions that are influenced by and influence the existing structures (Hurd, 2015). Apart from language practices, I also look into the structural/material factors that might have enabled/constrained discourse and norm productivity of diplomacy.

Finally, I included some insights from constructivist norm scholarship. I assumed that norms are not fixed and stable but rather always contested and subject to change or death (Wiener, 2014). This assumption allows me not to treat JCPOA as a norm for eternity after supposedly being produced as such.

4.3. Discourse Analysis

I used discourse analysis informed by the theoretical framework I built above in order to interpret my collected data. In my discourse analysis, I paid close attention to language performativity, discourse productivity, legitimation and authorization claims, norms construction as well as structural and material elements to demonstrate how JCPOA as a norm was produced and reproduced during the period selected for this study.

Within my discourse analysis, I asked the following questions to guide my empirical analysis:

Incorporated concepts	Questions	Relevance
Language performativity	What language acts were used by diplomats concerning JCPOA after its achievement? What discursive representations can be identified in their speech acts? What language acts were used by diplomats concerning JCPOA after the US withdrawal? What discursive representations can be identified in their speech acts?	Reveals the discursive productions of JCPOA relevant to norm construction
Legitimation and authorization claims	Who can be allowed to make authority claims concerning JCPOA? How are they determined? How can discursive representations gain legitimation?	Goes beyond post-structuralism and reveals the differential norm and discourse productivity of the speech acts
Structural and material factors	How do the structural factors enable/constrain norm productivity of the speech acts?	Reveals the role of structural elements in enabling and constraining the norm-producing effects of diplomatic practices

Table 1. Summary of Theoretical Framework

4.4. Data Collection

I adopted a fixed purposive sampling strategy to identify my primary data for analysis (Bryman, 2015). The criteria for my purposive sampling did not change over the course of this research. At the outset of this research, I established my sample. Overall, the sampled data came from two main time spans.

For the first component, I was interested in investigating how diplomatic practices were involved in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm. Accordingly, in the first time span, I have collected diplomatic practices that took place from the day JCPOA was achieved until around the Implementation Day. This time span roughly corresponds to mid-2015 to early 2016. I did not need longer period for the purposes of the first component because there was no new development happening and this period was deemed long enough to give me adequate empirical data.

For the second component, I was looking into the way diplomatic practices reproduced JCPOA as a norm despite progressive contestations. Accordingly, in the second time span, I have collected diplomatic practices that took place from around the time JCPOA was existentially threatened by Donald Trump as a US presidential candidate until mid-2020 when the US failed to extend the UN arms embargo on Iran through the UNSC. This time span roughly corresponds to late-2017 to mid-2020. The time span for the second component was longer than the first one because the contestations against JCPOA built up gradually. First, it was only a threat by a potential US presidential candidate, then it was the US president pledging to scrape JCPOA. Afterwards, the US withdrawal actually happened, and finally Iran's step-by-step breaches came in.

Even though the focus of this study is on diplomatic practices, for practical reasons, it was not feasible for me to directly access them. As explained above, the timeframes that these diplomatic practices took place were in the past, so ethnography or participatory observations were not possible options as methods of data collection. Because of the time constraints, qualitative interviewing was not considered either.

In order to overcome the challenge of accessing diplomatic practices, following Pouliot's advice (2013), I decided to look for proxies that can provide me with data about diplomatic practices. I had a few options such as diaries, autobiographies, social media like Tweets, etc. but I found the speech acts performed by diplomats on various occasions as suitable proxies to access diplomatic practices. The speech acts contained adequate discursive traces to

After making decisions about the timeframes and the entry points for analysis, I also had to choose which diplomats to focus on. To collect the relevant data for the purposes of my study, I needed empirical data that could give me adequate discursive traces that I could use to access diplomatic practices. The speech acts by the diplomats were mainly chosen from four diplomats: John Kerry, Wendy Sherman, Federica Mogherini, and Helga Schmid.

These diplomats were selected because there were relevant speech acts by them that were publicly and easily accessible to me (for example, TV interviews, panel discussions, press conferences, etc.), and that they were closely involved in JCPOA negotiation process. John Kerry, the then US Secretary of State, and Wendy Sherman, the then US Undersecretary of State, were the leading negotiators from the US as a main stakeholder while Federica Mogherini, the then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Helga Schmid, the then Secretary-General of the EU External Action Service, were the leading negotiators for the EU as the facilitator. Even though Iran was also a major stakeholder in JCPOA, I did not collect any speech acts by the Iranian diplomats because I did not find it relevant to the objectives of this thesis. There were other speech acts by other diplomats that were relevant and accessible so I have also included them in my empirical data. The following table summarizes the speech acts that I have collected for analysis. Full details related to these speech acts can be found in my reference list.

Diplomats	Position at the time	Date and context
John Kerry	former US Secretary of State	July 14, 2015: Press Conference; July 17, 2015: TV interview; July 19, 2015: TV interview; July 20, 2015: TV interview; July 24, 2015: Panel Discussion; July 23, 2015: US Senate; August 11, 2015: Panel Discussion; September 02, 2015: Speech; September 22, 2015: TV interview; October 28, 2015: Speech; January 18, 2016: TV interview
Wendy Sherman	former US Undersecretary	July 15, 2015: Press Conference; July 16, 2015: Press Brief; July 15, 2015: Speech; July 17, 2015: Press Brief; August 05, 2015: Senate testimony; August 06, 2015: US Senate; October 07, 2015: Panel Discussion; October 28, 2015: Panel Discussion; January 19, 2016: Speech; March 10, 2016: Panel Discussion; March 24, 2017: Panel Discussion; September 19, 2018: Speech; September 23, 2018: Speech; October 24, 2018: Panel Discussion; November 08, 2018: Panel Discussion; July 19, 2018: Panel Discussion; February 06, 2019: Speech; February 13, 2019: Interview; August 10, 2019: Interview; September 04, 2019: Panel Discussion

Federica Mogherini	former EU High Representative	July 14, 2015: Press Brief; July 20, 2015: Press Brief; July 24, 2015: Press Statement; September 04, 2015: Press Brief; September 23, 2015: Speech; September 28, 2015: Press Brief; October 18, 2015: Press Conference; October 22, 2015: Press Brief; October 22, 2015: Press Conference; October 23, 2015: Press Brief; November 04, 2015: Speech; November 04, 2015: Lecture; July 28, 2015: Article ; March 03, 2016: Speech; January 17, 2016: Online Diary; January 20, 2016: Speech; February 15, 2016: Press Conference; September 22, 2016: Press Conference; June 07, 2016: Speech; October 04, 2016: Speech; May 09, 2017: Remarks at UNSC; May 09, 2017: Press Brief September 20, 2017: Press Brief; February 10, 2017: Panel Discussion September 25, 2018: Press Conference; September 25, 2018: Press Brief; June 27, 2019: Interview
Helga Schmid	Former Secretary-General of the European External Action Service	November 12, 2015: Speech; October 30, 2017: Speech
Ernest Moniz	Former US Secretary of Energy	July 23, 2015: Remarks at US Senate
Jim Carter	Former US Secretary of Defense	July 30, 2015: Remarks at US Senate
Kim Darroch	Former British Ambassador to the US	September 25, 2017: Panel Discussion
Peter Wittig	Former German Ambassador to the US	September 25, 2017: Panel Discussion
Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall	Former National Security Council staff	July 29, 2018: Panel Discussion
David O'Sullivan	Former EU ambassador to the US	September 25, 2017: Panel Discussion
Antony Blinken	Former US Deputy Secretary of State	July 29, 2018: Panel Discussion

Table 2. Summary List of Collected Speech Acts

Apart from the speech acts that constitute my primary data, I also collected some secondary data including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports.

5. Production and Reproduction of JCPOA as a Norm in the First Component: 2015-2016

My analysis for the first component comprises three sections. In the first section, I present the results of the analysis that I have conducted mainly based on post-structuralist assumptions. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I nuance my findings by bringing social constructivist tenants into my analysis.

5.1. Discursive Representations in the First Component

I present my results about how the diplomatic practices were actively involved in the production of JCPOA as a norm. I have identified several patterns based on discourse analysis: making the world safer, being a collective product, science-based, and verifiability. I elaborate on each of these themes in the subsequent sections.

5.1.1. JCPOA made the World Safer

One of the most obvious themes that was easily identifiable in the speech acts of the diplomats in the first component has to do with the argument they made about the international community's security. JCPOA was represented via language acts as an agreement that has made the world safer. Several reasons were cited to support the safety claim, but three reasons were particularly conspicuous in my empirical data.

First, they argued that the agreement avoided the possibility of a conflict that could take place for addressing a drawn-out controversy over Iran's nuclear programme, and instead it offered a peaceful alternative (European Commission, 2015; Kerry, 2015; MSNBC, 2015; NBC News, 2015; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015; US Department of State, 2015a, 2015e, 2015j).

Second, it was argued that JCPOA enhanced the stability of an already conflict-ridden by precluding a nuclear proliferation in the Middle East especially considering Iran's alleged nefarious activities in the region, and at the same time contributed to the security of the international community (American Jewish Committee, 2016; Dartmouth, 2015; INSS Israel, 2016; Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, 2015; Kerry, 2015; Mogherini, 2015e,

2016b; MSNBC, 2015; NBC News, 2015; Sherman, 2015; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015; US Department of State, 2015a, 2015c, 2015e; US Embassy in Georgia, 2015).

Third, JCPOA opened up a new possibility for resolving other regional and global challenges that may have nothing or little to do with the nuclear nonproliferation per se (European Commission, 2015; Mogherini, 2015a, 2015c, 2015f, 2015h; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015; United Nations, 2016; US Department of State, 2015a, 2015b, 2015e, 2016). In the following paragraphs, I briefly explain each of these sub-themes to better understand their implications.

The first sub-theme had been present in the speech acts of the diplomats from the announcement day of JCPOA until the end of the first time span. It is obvious that JCPOA is a nuclear nonproliferation agreement, and therefore concerns the safety and security of the international community by addressing a nuclear proliferation controversy. Time and again, the selected diplomats¹ recalled what JCPOA was about so that its importance for the security and safety of the members of the international community would be reminded. Aside from nuclear nonproliferation issues in general, it was also emphasized that JCPOA prevented a state in the Middle East from acquiring a nuclear weapon considering how the region was already in turmoil.

In another related sub-theme, the selected diplomats highlighted that JCPOA as a solution to Iran's disputed nuclear program was a key peace-making factor in itself. Iran's nuclear dispute was resolved through peaceful means over a military action that, as pundits had long warned, could end up in a larger conflict in the Middle East and beyond with massive humanitarian catastrophe. Therefore, not only did JCPOA address Iran's nuclear controversy, but also it substantially reduced the likelihood of military action in the region.

The selected diplomats expressed hope that JCPOA would contribute to more stability and safety in the region because it was a historic agreement that eventually broke down the longstanding, once thought insurmountable stalemate between Iran and the US and other Western countries. So with JCPOA in place, it became plausible to imagine addressing other challenges through diplomacy as well. It was highlighted that JCPOA helped establish a direct communication channel with Iran as a regional power. JCPOA was, therefore, represented as a promoter of peace and safety

¹ I use the phrase "the selected diplomats" to refer to the diplomats that have been selected for this study

not only because it was seen to provide a peaceful alternative for addressing the nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, but also because JCPOA offered a better climate of confidence among adversaries including Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the United States among others. Given that EU countries are geographically closer to Iran compared to the US and have more common interests/issues, they were more vocal in their optimism concerning how other diplomatic possibilities could arise after the achievement of JCPOA.

In the table below, there is one representative quote from each selected diplomat illustrative of the sub-themes I have outlined for this part.

Diplomat	Date	Quote
John Kerry	July 17, 2015	<i>I believe that the alternative to what we are doing here is conflict... (they claim) it's time for President Obama to show how tough he is and bomb them. There will be no alternative... the President said it the other day, this is a choice between a diplomatic solution and war (MSNBC, 2015)</i>
Wendy Sherman	October 7, 2015	<i>A de-stabilized Middle East, a chaotic, difficult, a painful Middle East would be even worse if Iran had a nuclear weapon because Iran with a nuclear weapon could project power into the region. That nuclear weapon would be a deterrent, a potential for the nuclear weapon would be a deterrent to the people in the region (Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, 2015)</i>
Federica Mogherini	September 23, 2015	<i>We are actively and constantly working together with the UN on the path that is already in place, difficult as it is, as I said, with our angle –and our angle comes in particular from the strength that we have experienced in finalising the Iranian deal. I refer to that because this gives us a possible channel to work constructively with some of the key actors that have a concrete influence on some of the players of the conflict itself, in particular Iran but also Russia (Mogherini, 2015c)</i>
Helga Schmid	November 12, 2015	<i>The Vienna Agreement opened up a new platform of communication to discuss major crises (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015)</i>

Table 3. Representative Quotes for JCPOA Made the World Safer

5.1.2. A Collective Product

Another key argument made about JCPOA by the selected diplomats during the first time span is about JCPOA being a collective product. It was constantly recalled that JCPOA was achieved through a collective effort. For that, they emphasized four main sub-themes: first, JCPOA was negotiated and finalized not only by Iran and the US but also by other world powers including China, Russia, Germany, France, and Britain, hence E3/EU+3 (C-SPAN, 2015; INSS Israel, 2016;

Kerry, 2015; Mogherini, 2015j; NBC News, 2015; US Department of State, 2015a, 2015b, 2015e; US Embassy in Georgia, 2015). Second, they reiterated that JCPOA was a UN product and that these negotiating countries received a mandate from the UNSC and therefore the whole process and the final product was of the UN (C-SPAN, 2015; Mogherini, 2015e; US Department of State, 2015c, 2015h, 2015i; US Embassy in Georgia, 2015). Third, they warned that noncompliance with JCPOA would isolate the withdrawing state since JCPOA was not an ordinary bilateral agreement that one country could simply withdraw (C-SPAN, 2015; Dartmouth, 2015; MSNBC, 2015; NBC News, 2015; US Department of State, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015i; US Embassy in Georgia, 2015). Fourth, multilateralism was praised as a functioning means to overcome enduring crises (Dartmouth, 2015; Mogherini, 2015a, 2015d, 2015e, 2015f, 2015g, 2016b; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015; United Nations, 2016; US Department of State, 2015h, 2015i). I briefly describe the context of each of these sub-themes.

JCPOA was the result of tireless, complex, and multilateral negotiations involving several world powers, Iran, and the EU as the facilitator. Five of the negotiating parties were also Permanent Members of the UNSC. The selected diplomats made recurrent references to this fact to enhance the credibility of the struck agreement.

From a legal perspective, JCPOA has been unanimously endorsed in the UNSC and thereby making it legally binding for the UN member states. As pointed out by Wendy Sherman, it was and is discouraged to call JCPOA an agreement considering the legal connotations it might carry (US Embassy in Georgia, 2015). The selected diplomats tried to consciously invoke the legal status of JCPOA. Again, the US, and European diplomats, even though perhaps for different reasons, made frequent references to this legal characteristic of JCPOA. Because of US domestic politics, the US diplomats were more vociferously emphatic that JCPOA was not a bilateral agreement signed between the two states.

Lastly, the selected American and particularly European diplomats recognized that JCPOA was proof that multilateralism delivers and can be followed as a model for other global challenges. The Europeans even went on to boast about how multilateralism as a European approach was able to effectively resolve a decade-long controversy.

The above-mentioned sub-themes were articulated through the speech acts performed by the selected diplomats to discursively represent JCPOA as a collective product. The following table

summarizes one representative quote from each selected diplomat illustrative of these interconnected sub-themes.

Diplomat	Date	Quote
John Kerry	July 24, 2015	<i>We have a deal now which six other nations joined us in putting it together, if we unilaterally walk away from that folks, the sanctions are gone, the inspection is gone, the verification gone, Iran starts its program again (US Department of State, 2015a)</i>
Wendy Sherman	July 17, 2015	<i>It was solved by the world in the P5+1 and the European Union facilitating and now will be endorsed in a UN Security Council resolution (US Department of State, 2015h)</i>
Federica Mogherini	September 28, 2015	<i>We endorsed the agreement that we reached in Vienna last week, in parallel with the unanimous UN Security Council Resolution endorsing the agreement itself (Mogherini, 2015i)</i>
Helga Schmid	November 12, 2015	<i>I think you can fairly call it a historic agreement because it not only provides a solution to a nuclear issue, but it's also a victory, it's a victory for diplomacy and the vindication of the EU's approach to conflict resolution which clearly favors diplomacy, a multilateral approach and political solutions over the recourse to military ones (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015)</i>

Table 4. Representative Quotes for a Collective Product

5.1.3. JCPOA Backed Up by Science

JCPOA is subsumed under the nuclear nonproliferation regime and entails many technical issues related to nuclear physics. This provided a good opportunity for the selected diplomats to represent JCPOA as an agreement based on science, and technical knowledge. Before I go into the details of this theme, it is interesting to note that such discursive representations were solely made by the selected US diplomats during the first time span. They referred to the technical restrictions imposed on Iran's nuclear programme to demonstrate how JCPOA was able to make it physically impossible for Iran to have access to any possible pathway to a nuclear weapon and that such claims were backed up by experts and technical knowledge.

The diplomats laid out the technical details of JCPOA including the significant reduction of Iran's enriched uranium stockpile (C-SPAN, 2015; Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2015; Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, 2015; MSNBC, 2015; US Department of State, 2015a, 2015b, 2015e), removal of Iran's two-third centrifuges (Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, 2015; US Department of State, 2015b, 2015e), removal of all advanced centrifuges (US Department of State, 2015e), the transformation of Fordow heavy-water reactor (C-SPAN, 2015; Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, 2015; US Department of State,

2015a, 2015e) among others to characterize JCPOA as being able to essentially shut off every single pathway to nuclear weapons including two uranium pathways, a plutonium pathway and also a covert pathway. To validate such details, the diplomats frequently made reference to third parties that already possess recognized expertise in nuclear matters. The following table shows some of the representative quotes from my empirical data.

Diplomat	Date	Quote
John Kerry	July 14, 2015	<i>Iran will not produce or acquire either highly enriched uranium or weapons-grade plutonium for at least the next 15 years... Iran's total stockpile of enriched uranium – which today is equivalent to almost 12,000 kilograms of UF6 – will be capped at just 300 kilograms... no uranium will be enriched beyond 3.67 percent (which is) appropriate for civilian nuclear power and research Fordow will be transformed into a nuclear, physics, and technology research center ... to produce isotopes for cancer treatment (US Department of State, 2015e)</i>
Wendy Sherman	July 16, 2015	<i>It cuts off all of Iran's pathways to fissile material for a nuclear weapon...so we do hope that all Israelis read this agreement, that we have this debate based on facts, because the facts matter here (US Embassy in Georgia, 2015)</i>
John Kerry	July 23, 2015	<i>They are not dumb, they are experts, every one of them in nuclear technology, ratification, in verification are smart people that spent a lifetime at this. They have signed off this agreement (C-SPAN, 2015)</i>
Wendy Sherman	October 07, 2015	<i>You have this phenomenal experts, backed up by teams of experts all over the world including all of our nuclear labs in the US who are bringing those technical details to the table (Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, 2015)</i>
Moniz	July 23, 2015	<i>I want to stress that America's leading nuclear experts at the Department of Energy, our national laboratories, were involved throughout these negotiations. These nuclear experts were essential to evaluating and developing technical proposals and support of the US delegation As a result of their work (experts), I am confident that the technical underpinnings of this deal are solid... ...is based on science and analysis because it is deep grounded in exhaustive technical analysis, carried out largely by our DOE scientists and engineers (C-SPAN, 2015)</i>

Table 5. Representative Quotes for JCPOA Backed Up by Science

5.1.4. Rectifying Iran's Notoriety

Iran as a main participant and the main topic of JCPOA has long been notorious for, inter alia, untrustworthiness, villainy, pariah, and chicanery. This posed a huge challenge for the credibility of JCPOA. The selected diplomats, especially the Americans, used a narrative predicated on three interlinked subthemes i.e. inspection, transparency, and compliance in order to surmount Iran's alleged notoriety (C-SPAN, 2015; INSS Israel, 2016; Mogherini, 2015b, 2016a, 2016c; MSNBC, 2015; NBC News, 2015; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015; United Nations, 2016; US Department of State, 2015b, 2015c, 2015e, 2015h; US Embassy in Georgia, 2015; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2016).

As reviewed in Chapter Two, JCPOA establishes a clearly-defined inspection regime for the IAEA. The selected diplomats described the inspection regime as *measurable, daily, intrusive, robust, anywhere anytime, unprecedented, 24/7, microscopic, constant, and profound* among others to enhance the credibility problem arising from Iran’s untrustworthiness. Simply put, Iran’s notoriety for untrustworthiness was overcome through language acts with reference to inspection capacity obtained in JCPOA.

The second interrelated theme has to do with transparency. The mistrust with Iran could be overcome if the limitations were placed with full transparency. The selected diplomats reiterated that JCPOA was not based on trust but rather on transparency and accountability measures. They even went on to provide technical details concerning transparency measures such as real-time enrichment devices, and live TV cameras that allow IAEA to monitor the imposed restrictions on Iran’s nuclear programme. In addition, they tried to differentiate Iran from North Korea which allegedly pursued nuclear weapons via a covert program, despite the restrictions. The selected diplomats noted that Iran, unlike North Korea, has been a party to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) which bans Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. In line with bringing transparency into Iran’s program, the selected diplomats boasted that Iran had agreed to comply with IAEA’s Additional Protocol under JCPOA which, they reiterate, would eliminate all the possible loopholes. Some of the representative quotes from the speech acts of the selected diplomats for this theme can be found below:

Diplomat	Date	Quote
John Kerry	July 14, 2015	<i>no part of this agreement relies on trust. It is all based on thorough and extensive transparency and verification measures that are included in very specific terms in the annexes of this agreement (US Department of State, 2015e)</i>
Wendy Sherman	August 05, 2015	<i>International inspectors will have unprecedented access to Iran’s declared nuclear facilities and its entire nuclear supply chain. From uranium production to centrifuge manufacturing and operation and if they are suspicious of undeclared sites, no sites will be off limits (US Department of State, 2015b)</i>
Federica Mogherini	September 22, 2016	<i>We have three reports from the IAEA, confirming that Iran has taken all the steps it had to on nuclear-related issues (United Nations, 2016)</i>
Helga Schmid	November 12, 2015	<i>The Agreement also foresees a mechanism that will provide the IAEA with the necessary access to the requested locations of concern (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015)</i>

Ernest Moniz	July 23, 2015	<i>Another thing that we have for perpetuity is their adherence to Modified Code 3.1. which means that they must notify IAEA even before they start building nuclear facilities. This eliminates a loophole one could do something covertly and then say oops we were planning to notify before we brought the nuclear material (C-SPAN, 2015)</i>
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Table 6. Representative quotes for Rectifying Iran's Notoriety

5.2. Beyond Language Performativity

In the previous section, I illustrated how the identified discursive acts represented JCPOA as a verifiable, science-based agreement acquired through multilateralism which has made the world safer and more peaceful. I argue that these themes and patterns embedded within the diplomatic practices contributed to the emergence and domination of a discourse under which adherence to JCPOA was considered appropriate behavior for the members of the international community. In this section, I try to discuss the authority claims of those language practices and then look into how all these hang together in terms of norm productivity in the broader context in which there exist other structural/material factors as well as how the existing structural and material factors would impact norm productivity of diplomatic practices.

5.2.1. Authority Claims

First, it is very much different when JCPOA was described as *verifiable* by a US top diplomat compared to when an Iranian diplomat calls it a verifiable deal. Diplomatic practices performed by a powerful diplomat (powerful because of their relevance, reputation, position, and the like) would have comparatively stronger discourse-producing and norm-producing effects. The discursive representations and language acts during the first time span were performed by the US and EU diplomats who were closely involved in the process of achieving JCPOA. Having proper authority claims over the topic would enhance the constitutive effects of the speech acts.

Second, the selected diplomats made references to other parties with better jurisdiction to buttress their claims. A close examination of the collected speech acts shows that the selected diplomats have referred to four main categories of actors with proper authority claims to support their discursive productions of JCPOA. These categories include the regional state actors, different US bodies such as intelligence or military communities in the US, technical and political experts and specialists, and finally third-party countries endorsing JCPOA (C-SPAN, 2015; Kerry, 2015; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015; US Department of State, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c,

2015d, 2015f, 2015g). Of course, this can be considered a type of language act too, but since it was related to authority claims, I subsumed it under this section.

5.2.2. Other Structural and Material Factors

There are two important factors that were supportive of JCPOA in the first time span: Reports of IAEA in support of JCPOA and verifying Iran's compliance; and the endorsement of JCPOA in the UNSC.

Firstly, the IAEA has acquired institutionalized meanings to be considered as an autonomous international organization that has the expertise to take stands on issues related to civilian use of nuclear energy, nuclear nonproliferation, and nuclear safety. It is important to note the support and verification of Iran's compliance by the IAEA. I looked at some of the key reports and press releases by the IAEA during the first time span. The IAEA with its structural position verified Iran's compliance and explicitly expressed its satisfaction with the access and verification measures. The IAEA claimed that JCPOA would provide them the ability to give assurances to the world that Iran's nuclear program would be exclusively peaceful, especially with the Additional Protocol in place. IAEA's Director-General called JCPOA "*a real success for diplomacy*" (Amano, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016). I argue that the IAEA's unreserved support for JCPOA and clear verification of Iran's compliance with JCPOA paved the way for JCPOA to be produced and reproduced as a norm.

Secondly, JCPOA was unanimously adopted by the UNSC on July 15, 2015 (UNSC, 2015). The UNSC has acquired a very strong institutionalized and legal status in world politics. The UNSC has the ability to make an agreement part of the UN system and hence part of the international law. The unanimous adoption of JCPOA by the UNSC bestowed JCPOA key legal and institutional meanings. Because of the UNSC resolution 2231, it would be considered against the UN system and the international law to violate the provisions enshrined in JCPOA. The UNSC resolution laid the foundation for JCPOA to be regarded as a norm.

6. Production and Reproduction of JCPOA as a Norm in the Second Component: 2017-2020

My analysis for the second component comprises three sections. In the first section, I present the result of the analysis that I have conducted on the empirical data collected during the second time span. In the second section, I bring authority claims into my analysis. In the last section, I take account of the relevant material and structural factors.

6.1. Discursive Representations in the Second Component

In this section, I present the main patterns that I have found relevant to the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm despite the progressive contestations. I, therefore, briefly review the contestations JCPOA experienced in the second time span.

JCPOA was contested from the day it was born if not earlier. But the diplomatic practices, alongside other factors, were able to produce and reproduce JCPOA as a norm during the first time span. The early contestations were comparatively less powerful. This is the reason why I decided to divide my analysis into parts. The second specified time span covers the time JCPOA went through an existential contestation. The contestations continue until today but for analytical reasons I decided to close the time span of the second component in 2020 when Joe Biden had a good chance of winning the presidential election, hence marking a new time span.

It is outside the scope of the study to go into the motivation of the contesters and how they did it especially, the discursive contestations. It needs its own data collection and was not feasible within the framework of this thesis to demonstrate that. But to contextualize, I briefly explain why the contestation escalated over the course of time during the second time span. The contestation became more intense when Donald J. Trump, as a presidential candidate, pledged to withdraw from JCPOA and called it a “*disaster*” (Torbati, 2016). The contestation turned more serious when Trump was elected as the 45th US president. The contestation further escalated once the US decided to unilaterally withdraw from JCPOA (US Department of State, 2018). The last level of contestation during the second time span was when Iran gradually started violating the provisions of JCPOA. By that time, every single party to JCPOA was violating the material provisions enshrined within JCPOA. The subsequent sections illustrate how the identified patterns in the speech acts of diplomats contributed to the reproduction of JCPOA as a norm despite these progressive contestations.

6.1.1. The World is Less Safe without JCPOA

The selected diplomats emphasized that the world would be less safe if JCPOA ceased to exist. It is a theme that is topically similar to the safety argument that I presented in Chapter Five. There were four issues that were often articulated by the selected diplomats in their speech acts. First, the demise of JCPOA would put the US and its allies at risk (Atlantic Council, 2017a, 2017b; CISAC Stanford, 2018; Commonwealth Club of California, 2018; Council on Foreign Relations, 2018; United Nations, 2017a, 2019). Second, it would enhance Iran's ability to pursue its presumably nefarious activities to dominate the Middle East (Commonwealth Club of California, 2018; The Aspen Institute, 2018). Third, it would result in nuclear proliferation and possibly an arms race in the Middle East (Atlantic Council, 2017b; Bourse & Baazar Foundation, 2017; CISAC Stanford, 2018; Commonwealth Club of California, 2018; Council on Foreign Relations, 2018; The Aspen Institute, 2018; United Nations, 2017a, 2018). Fourth, it would escalate the situation in the region into an all-out war (CISAC Stanford, 2018; Commonwealth Club of California, 2018; Council on Foreign Relations, 2018; The Aspen Institute, 2018) and squander the only peaceful alternative (Atlantic Council, 2017b; Bourse & Baazar Foundation, 2017; CISAC Stanford, 2018).

Firstly, given the topic of JCPOA, there was an obvious emphasis on how JCPOA prevented Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. They highlighted that their safety and that of their allies that were guaranteed for at least fifteen years as the result of JCPOA, had been compromised. It was also reiterated that the guaranteed safety actually could go on as long as the devised monitoring under JCPOA would continue especially because Iran is a party to NPT and has agreed to implement the Additional Protocol as well.

Secondly, under the same theme of compromised safety, the selected diplomats warned about Iran's projectile power with a nuclear weapon in the Middle East that can get far more difficult to deter. One of the main criticisms placed on JCPOA from day one has been its inability to address Iran's non-nuclear issues. For example, it is argued that Iran and Saudi Arabia have been engaged in a rivalry in the Middle East for more influence and power which has been described as a cold war in the Middle East (Gause, 2014). Iran's growing influence in the region has been described by the regional countries and their international partners and allies as expansionist (Ostovar, 2016). According to the selected diplomats, a nuclear Iran would project more power in the region, exacerbating the already challenging regional conflicts.

Thirdly, a nuclear cascade in the Middle East has been one of the potential threats coming out of Iran’s possible breakout to a nuclear weapon. As explored by Rezai (2019), this danger has been significantly under control through Iran’s compliance with JCPOA. But the selected diplomats argued that, in line with the Security Dilemma Theory, an arms race and a race to nuclear weapons would pursue in the Middle East once Iran acquired a nuclear weapon especially with a reference to Saudi Arabia.

Fourthly, the selected diplomats were wary of the beginning of an escalatory phase as the result of the US withdrawal from JCPOA. They argued that the prospect of a war had increased as the result of more visible hostility and escalation in the Middle East. It is to recall that the US withdrawal of JCPOA inflicted substantial loss to Iran’s economy, contributing to the already enmities in between. Some of the regional players that initially welcomed JCPOA and increased their economic ties with Iran, had to eventually join the maximum pressure campaign led by the Trump administration. Yousef Al Otaiba, UAE’s then-ambassador to US, admitted that his country had to support the US withdrawal from JCPOA because of UAE-US relationship (The Aspen Institute, 2018). The pressure on Iran as the result of these steps led to more increased escalations in the region. The select diplomats also emphasized that JCPOA was the only peaceful alternative especially because the sanctions would not stop Iran’s nuclear program, and military action, apart from its negative consequences, would only delay Iran’s nuclear program since it was impossible to bomb Iran’s nuclear knowledge.

In the table below, there are a few representative quotes illustrative of the interrelated points that I made in this part:

Diplomat	Date	Anchor Quote
Wendy Sherman	September 19, 2018	<i>If this deal truly does fall apart after November, and Iran feels that it has no choice but to go back to its enrichment facilities, its plutonium facilities, to build the material you use for a nuclear weapon in the ways they were doing, to improve their missile program in the ways they were doing that will put us all at much greater risk (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018)</i>
Wendy Sherman	November 08, 2018	<i>The notion was if Iran had a nuclear weapon, their ability to deter our and our allies and partners’ action in the Middle East would be profound. We wouldn’t be able to do anything, they would really own the Middle East (Microsoft Europe, 2019)</i>
Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall	July 19, 2018	<i>If the Iranians do move to breakout... most likely the Saudis will do the same and the Turks will do the same, we could see a nuclear cascade in the Middle East that would create a wholly new landscape in terms of the possibility of all-out war (The Aspen Institute, 2018)</i>

Tony Blinken	July 19, 2018	<i>Pulling out of the agreement was a huge mistake that makes the prospect of conflict greater (The Aspen Institute, 2018)</i>
Federica Mogherini	February 10, 2017	<i>As Europeans, it was important for me to pass here the message that I think it was clearly understood that it's key for our security as we are in the same region with Iran to see the deal being implemented (Atlantic Council, 2017a)</i>
Wendy Sherman	October, 24, 2018	<i>one alternative was to bomb facilities in Iran... but you can't bomb away knowledge... (secondly) the president (Obama) could have decided just to keep piling on sanctions and squeezing Iran but he understood that sanctions don't necessarily change bad behavior... so he (Obama) made this very important decision (JCPOA) which of course is now under siege once again (CISAC Standford, 2018)</i>

Table 7. Representative Quotes for the World is Less Safe without JCPOA

6.1.2. Collateral Damage

The second main pattern that I have identified in the second time span has to do with the collateral damage of the US decision to withdraw from JCPOA. The selected diplomats pointed to two types of possible adverse effects produced as the result of the US withdrawal. It was emphasized how the US withdrawal isolated, and estranged the US from its partners, and how the US credibility was damaged in the international community (Crooked Media, 2019; Microsoft Europe, 2019; Ploughshares Fund, 2019; Politics and prose, 2018; United Nations, 2018). Second, it was argued that the US withdrawal from JCPOA benefited some unintended actors such as presumably hard-liners in Iran or global rivalries like Russia (CISAC Standford, 2018; Commonwealth Club of California, 2018; Council on Foreign Relations, 2018).

The selected diplomats emphasized that the withdrawal from JCPOA would endanger the strategic ties of the US with its allies including the transatlantic relationship. In order to put it in context, the US withdrawal from JCPOA resulted in the imposition of the US secondary economic sanctions i.e. any company that wants to do business with Iran cannot do business with the US. In other words, the companies in European countries were under threat from the US sanctions. EU decided to develop a new mechanism to protect its interests. In addition, the US withdrawal should be viewed as part of a larger trend of US unilateralism that damaged the US credibility and particularly the transatlantic relationship.

The selected diplomats, noticeably Americans, argued that the hard-liners such Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp would politically, strategically, and economically benefit from JCPOA's demise on the one hand and countries such as Russia would enjoy the increased oil price as the result of the oil sanctions on Iran as an oil producer. In Iran's domestic politics, the position

of hardliners who were wary of negotiating with the US were strengthened following the US unilateral withdrawal from JCPOA. Economically, the hardliners and particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were able to develop a sort of monopoly over Iran’s black market that naturally grew substantially under the sanctions (Strategic Comments, 2019a).

The following table displays some of the quotes which are illustrative of the above-mentioned points:

Diplomat	Date	Quote
Wendy Sherman	September 13, 2018	<i>Europe is doing whatever they can to try to hold this deal together and hold it together with Russians and Chinese which is sorta curious Europeans working with the Russians and Chinese and not the United States. What’s wrong with that picture?</i> (Politics and prose, 2018)
Federica Mogherini	November 08, 2018	(the foreign ministers of JCPOA participants discussed) <i>the re-imposition of sanctions lifted under the JCPOA and its Annex II, which they deeply regret</i> (United Nations, 2018)
Peter Wittig	September 25, 2017	<i>That’s very important and goes beyond the Iranian issue that it weakens essentially the nonproliferation regime that we have established over the years That would affect, I believe, our credibility in the West when we are not honoring an agreement that Iran has not violated</i> (Atlantic Council, 2017b)
Wendy Sherman	July 19, 2018	<i>I think we have to be cognizant of the fact that we are asking Europe to act in a manner that goes against all of the rules that we all wrote together after World War II</i> (Ploughshares Fund, 2019)
Wendy Sherman	November 08, 2018	<i>there are hard hardliners really pressing for Iran to get out of the deal, they did not want the deal in the first place because the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp had control of the black market, they’d like to have control over the black market again</i> (Commonwealth Club of California, 2018)

Table 8. Representative Quotes for the Collateral Damage

6.1.3. A Delivering Agreement

The speech acts performed by the selected diplomats contain numerous references to the ultimate goal of JCPOA and how it was delivering on that. In their narrative, the selected diplomats made a distinction between Iran’s allegedly nefarious activities, and Iran’s nuclear programme and clarified that JCPOA was only intended to address a nuclear nonproliferation controversy arising from Iran, and that it was delivering on that purpose.

I did not collect empirical data related to the discursive contestations made by the JCPOA critics including the diplomats under the Trump administration because it was outside the empirical scope of this study. However, it is no secret that one of the main arguments made by the JCPOA critics was that the agreement failed to address Iran’s other challenges. In order to minimize the deconstructive effects of the competing discourse, the selected diplomats made such a differentiation. They emphasized that JCPOA was a delivering agreement that was addressing the

issues that it was supposed to, (Bourse & Baazar Foundation, 2017; United Nations, 2017b) while Iran’s allegedly nefarious activities should be addressed outside the framework of this agreement (Atlantic Council, 2017a, 2017b; Bourse & Baazar Foundation, 2017).

In the following table, I have put some representative quotes from the selected diplomats.

Diplomat	Date	Quote
Helga Schmid	October 30, 2017	<i>These issues (Iran’s malign activities) need to be dealt with outside the scope of JCPOA... we will not be in a better position to address any of these issues by ditching the JCPOA (Bourse & Baazar Foundation, 2017)</i>
David O’Sullivan	September 25, 2017	<i>This agreement is delivering on a very very important objective which is to ensure that Iran does not possess nuclear weapons (Atlantic Council, 2017b)</i>
Federica Mogherini	September 20, 2017	<i>The general sense that we shared tonight with the ministers is that with the difficult times we are living in the world of today with quite good number of conflicts, crises and a nuclear threat coming from another part of the world, the international community cannot afford dismantling on the agreement that is working and delivering (United Nations, 2017b)</i>

Table 9. Representative Quotes for a Delivering Agreement

6.2. Beyond Language Performativity

In the previous section, I identified language practices conducted by the selected diplomats that discursively represented JCPOA as a delivering agreement whose collapse would make the world unsafe and bring about unexpected negative consequences. These patterns were prevalent during the second time span which was from 2017 to 2020. Through an empirical investigation, I illustrated that these patterns and themes embedded within the diplomatic practices effectively sustained the previous discourse as hegemonic despite the increasing contestations. In this section, I again bring in authority claims and other factors to nuance my analysis into norm productivity of diplomacy.

6.2.1. Authority Claims

There are two key points in the second time span that are worth mentioning in respect to authority claims. First, similar to what was observed in the first component, the selected diplomats tried to support their claims by using the authority claim of a third party. My empirical analysis suggests that the selected diplomats continually recalled Iran’s compliance and the IAEA verification reports during this period to legitimize their claims (Atlantic Council, 2017a, 2017b; CISAC Stanford, 2018; Commonwealth Club of California, 2018; Microsoft Europe, 2019; United Nations, 2018, 2019).

Second, it is interesting how Iran's breaches were downplayed by the selected European and US diplomats or justified/legitimized with reference to JCPOA. Wendy Sherman, for example, did not find Iran's initial violations "*alarming*" (Ploughshares Fund, 2019) while Federica Mogherini played down Iran's breaches as reversible breaches, noting that Iran had been until just recently in full compliance with JCPOA (United Nations, 2019). The selected Western diplomats had better authority claims compared to those of Chinese or Russian or other diplomats to soft-pedal Iran's violations, considering the inter-relations of those countries. In addition, Iran's former foreign minister used the text of JCPOA to improve his lack of authority to justify Iran's violations as remedial steps taken under the provisions of JCPOA rather than breaches from JCPOA (Zarif, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020).

6.2.2. Other Structural and Material Factors

For a more nuanced analysis, I took account of some other factors that could improve the analysis of the second component. In this regard, I would like to highlight three structural and material factors that might have cooperated with the identified discursive practices in the continued reproduction of JCPOA as a norm. First, it was Iran's full compliance as certified by the IAEA. Second, it was Iran's gradual, step-by-step material breaches. Third, it was the material steps that EU diplomats and US former diplomats took that are worth noting. In the subsequent sections, I present my findings related to each of them.

Firstly, the IAEA certified Iran's full compliance with the nuclear-related commitments enshrined under JCPOA numerous times (IAEA, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019c). IAEA's numerous verifications of Iran's full compliance during a significant part of the second time span including over a year after the US withdrawal could be obviously regarded as an important structural-material factor supporting the reproduction of JCPOA as a norm.

Secondly, Iran came out of full compliance in a gradual and non-alarming way which did not cause an immediate termination of JCPOA altogether. I review some of Iran's actual breaches here to understand how they went. In May 2019, Iran threatened that it would stop part of its commitments under JCPOA. There were, however, no breaches on Iran's side until July 2019 when IAEA confirmed that Iran had increased its enriched uranium purity from 3.67 percent as agreed in JCPOA to 4 percent (IAEA, 2019b). In September 2019, Iran installed a few advanced centrifuges including IR-4, IR-5 and IR-6 that constituted another relatively insignificant breach of JCPOA by

Iran (IAEA, 2019e). These gradual breaches continued with more advanced centrifuges being installed (IAEA, 2019f). Finally after several months since Iran's announcement that it would not be bound by any restrictions for the enriched uranium stockpile, by July 2019 Iran stockpiled slightly over 300 kg of lowly-enriched uranium (IAEA, 2019d).

By March 2020, however, this amount reached 1000 kg and with more advanced centrifuges being gradually added to Iran's nuclear facilities (IAEA, 2020). In July 2020, Iran announced that it would stop its adherence to the Additional Protocol, but again Iran did not take such action in practice at that time. This was a very short summary of Iran's breaches within the time span specified for the second component of this study. In short, Iran's breaches during that time came gradually. The magnitude of Iran's breaches increased over time which precluded JCPOA from a sudden collapse. Today (which is outside the time limit of this study), these breaches have increasingly continued until the point that Iran's enriched uranium stockpile is over 3000 kg which is 10 times higher than the agreed amount under JCPOA. Iran also enriched uranium up to 60 percent, even though only in a limited amount (IAEA, 2022).

Thirdly, European countries took material steps in response to the US withdrawal that at least had symbolic significance. One of these steps was the attempt to set up a financial instrument to allow Europeans or others to do legitimate business with Iran. As a result of US secondary economic sanctions, nobody could do business with Iran and the US at the same time. This financial instrument, called INSTEX, was eventually founded in 2019 in Paris (Instex Europe, 2019). As anticipated by Wendy Sherman, INSTEX was not able to meaningfully provide a mechanism to support the trade between Iran and Europe even for the humanitarian purposes (Crooked Media, 2019). But the fact that EU was making an effort and that INSTEX was joined by several sovereign powers including France, Germany, Britain, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain had a substantial political significance. In addition to such steps by Europeans, there were also additional steps that were actually taken by the US former diplomats including John Kerry and Wendy Sherman. They kept their contact with the Iranian diplomats to reassure Iranians that Trump's maximum pressure policy would be reversed once a Democrat-led administration came back in power (Commonwealth Club of California, 2018).

7. Discussion

In this thesis, I made three interrelated claims. I claimed that JCPOA was turned into a normative structure. I claimed that diplomacy was involved in the production and reproduction of JCPOA during the time period selected for this study. I finally claimed that the unexpected survival and relevance of JCPOA can be explained through the persistence of JCPOA as a norm.

In this chapter, I first discuss how at the end of the second time span, the states still felt normatively committed to JCPOA. Second, I look at norm productivity of diplomacy for JCPOA despite the contestations. Third, I theorize how JCPOA has persisted against all odds. Fourth, I acknowledge some of the limitations of this study. Fifth, I review other possible explanations for the survival of JCPOA. Finally, I discuss the broader and theoretical implications that can be drawn for diplomacy based on my empirical findings.

7.1. Normative Commitments to JCPOA

I claimed that there should be a distinction between JCPOA as a material agreement, and JCPOA as a norm. The entire discussion of my thesis revolves around this claim. JCPOA as an agreement has an obvious birthdate. It is not, however, easy to determine the birthdate of JCPOA as a norm. JCPOA could have been a norm even before its material existence. Given the multilateral and peaceful nature of the way it was being achieved and the topic it concerned, JCPOA, even before being struck, could have been considered the right thing to do.

In general, it is not easy to claim that JCPOA was actually turned into a norm. Considering that norms are abstract and do not possess material properties, I have to rely on subjective interpretations to substantiate my claim that JCPOA was produced and reproduced as a norm. I thereby review a puzzling situation that can be an illustration of JCPOA as a norm by the end of the second time span when JCPOA was experiencing its most severe contestations. In August 2020, the US tried to extend the UN arms embargo on Iran through UNSC. In order to better understand how we can regard JCPOA as a norm, I provide some contextual and background information for this example.

First, there were several UNSC resolutions adopted against Iran concerning the controversy around its nuclear programme (See for example, UNSC, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). Second, one of the restrictions that was imposed on Iran had to do with an embargo on conventional arms sales. In other words, Iran was banned from purchasing or selling conventional arms. Third, it was stipulated in JCPOA that any JCPOA complaining participant could launch a 30-day process to

snap back all the lifted UNSC resolutions against Iran if the dispute resolution described in JCPOA did not resolve the issue (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, 2015).

Fourth, the US officially withdrew from JCPOA in May 2018, but still the US claimed that it could legally trigger the UN sanctions snapback mechanism defined under JCPOA because it was originally a participant. Fifth, considering the US interpretation that it had legal grounds to trigger that mechanism, the US decided to send the draft resolution, a few months before the UN conventional arms embargo on Iran would be automatically lifted as agreed in JCPOA.

Sixth, the lifting of the UN embargo could potentially provide Iran with stronger means to pursue its objectives in the region which was described as de-stabilizing by several states. Many of UNSC member states, including those that were part of JCPOA negotiations, were highly concerned about Iran's other challenges.

Bearing such context in mind, in August 2020, the US, proposed a draft resolution to UNSC's presidency to extend the UN arms embargo on Iran. This initiative was regarded a huge setback for the US. It was only backed by a single non-permanent member state at UNSC (United Nations, 2020). The voting results shows that the only state that voted in favor of the US resolution was the Dominican Republic. Other members abstained from voting and China and the Russian Federation which had a supposedly more friendly relationship with Iran voted against it.

EU countries such as Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, and the UK were concerned about the issues that the United States brought up such as Iran's allegedly destabilizing activities, but they expressed their strong commitments to preserving the full implementation of JCPOA. China and Russia were more critical of the US decision to withdraw and did not mention anything about Iran's destabilizing role in the region while other UNSC members such as Indonesia, South Africa, and Viet Nam were strongly supportive of JCPOA's full implementation without any reference to Iran's nefarious activities or clear reference to the US withdrawal (United Nations, 2020).

It is highly important to understand the magnitude of the US isolation at UNSC. On the one hand, there was a draft resolution proposed by a superpower who is also a UNSC Permanent Member and on the other hand, there was the lifting of an arms embargo on Iran that is a presumably pariah state with allegedly nefarious activities in the Middle East which have been a concern for many states in the region and beyond. The UNSC members did not support the US initiative not

necessarily because it was not in their interest, but perhaps because it was the right thing to do against the US imperialism.

I argue that JCPOA as a norm was at least partly the reason the UNSC members did not support the US-proposed draft resolution. They were normatively, rather than legally, committed to preserving JCPOA. JCPOA was endorsed by a UNSC resolution, but as the US emphasized, the text of the 2231 resolution (JCPOA) mentions the US as a participant, therefore could have legal capability to trigger the mechanism. Other UNSC member states, especially those that were worried about Iran's regional activities, could have used the same justifications to support the US draft. States can try to interpret international law in a certain way that serves them and then use diplomacy to make that interpretation understood by other states (Johnstone, 2003).

7.2. Diplomacy and its Norm Producing Effects on JCPOA

The main empirical focus of this thesis has been the way diplomacy was productive of JCPOA as a norm. In Chapter Five and Six, I presented the analyses that I conducted on the collected speech acts that were proxies for diplomatic practices. The speech acts provided me with adequate discursive traces to understand how JCPOA was represented in the first and second time spans of this study through diplomatic practices. I argue that the identified discursive acts were generative of a normative structure.

First, I illustrated the language performativity of diplomatic practices. A post-structuralist approach allowed me to argue that language practices performed by the diplomats gave meanings to JCPOA through their discursive representations. These representations were, therefore, able to produce and reproduce JCPOA as a norm. As mentioned earlier, JCPOA has been subject to various kinds of contestations since day one. Notwithstanding, the language performativity that I illustrated previously was able to produce and sustain a discourse under which JCPOA would be produced and reproduced as a norm.

Second, the production of JCPOA as a norm does not mean that it will remain as such for eternity. Norms are unstable and bound to change (Wiener, 2014). Overall, norms can become contested and negotiated and I provided empirical examples to illustrate how the diplomatic practices were performed constantly during the entire time of both components, making it possible for JCPOA to get produced and reproduced as a norm despite the contestations. The diplomatic practices were, therefore, part of the bottom-up processes, as opposed to top-down unidirectional ones, that

socially constructed JCPOA as a norm. My empirical examples support the post-structuralist and critical constructivist claims of norm construction processes (Towns, 2012).

Third, apart from the language performativity of the diplomatic practices that contributed to the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm, I took stock of the issue of legitimization of those discursive representations. I argue that a language practice performed by diplomat A could have very different norm-producing effects from the same language practice performed by diplomat B, depending on their authority. In addition, I illustrated that the diplomats made references to third-party entities to legitimize their discursive representations of JCPOA especially when they lacked proper jurisdiction.

Fourth, I looked at the structural and material factors that were conducive to supporting JCPOA as a norm. Overall, the existing structures such as IAEA's verification reports and UNSC endorsement of JCPOA provided adequate support for the diplomatic practices in their involvement in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm. It is worth noting that material factors and discourses are co-constitutive i.e. the institutionalized meanings (established structures) have considerable stability to facilitate the production and maintenance of a certain discourse and at the same time, the dominant discourse is generative of the social world including who has authority and what can be regarded as logical which constitutes structures. In my case study, the discussed structures were supportive of the production of JCPOA as a norm but simultaneously, the discourse productivity of the diplomatic practices also reproduced the well-institutionalized meanings of IAEA as an independent, international, technical organization and UNSC a legal authority within international law.

7.3. Theorizing Curious Persistence of JCPOA

JCPOA underwent increasing contestations, especially after the US withdrawal from it. As noted earlier, there are two main sets of commitments within JCPOA. First, as it is a nuclear nonproliferation agreement, it contains nuclear-related commitments. A year after the US withdrawal from JCPOA, Iran that was committed to nuclear-related provisions, started breaching them progressively. Second, the sanctions that were placed on Iran as the result of its nuclear programme were supposed to be lifted. Following the US withdrawal and subsequently, the imposition of the US unilateral sanctions including the US secondary economic sanctions, the

sanctions-related commitments were made impossible to implement. Simply put, JCPOA was significantly and progressively in breach by all participants.

The JCPOA violations should not be deemed commonplace. These violations that have been ongoing for five years are highly significant in perspective. It is to be recalled that the breaches committed by Iran have significantly compromised IAEA's ability to verify the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme. Since April 2021, IAEA had a comprised access to Iran's nuclear facilities, affecting its verification and monitoring measures. Iran has openly announced that it has been enriching uranium up to 60 percent and installed additional advanced centrifuges. Also based on IAEA's estimation, Iran has stockpiled over 3000 KGs of enriched uranium. These violations came gradually, but have reached a point in which there is a significantly stronger chance for Iran to break out to a nuclear weapon, if it decides to do so. There is a real danger of a nuclear proliferation in a very volatile region. Such violations should not be taken for granted.

On the other hand, there have been breaches on sanctions-related commitments since the US withdrawal from JCPOA. These breaches have had devastating, crippling effects on Iran's economy. Recently, a UN expert evaluated the effects of the imposed sanctions on Iran in her 12-day visit. She confirmed that the sanctions have had strong humanitarian consequences in Iran (France 24, 2022).

Such strong violations usually do not continue for long before the states decide to let go of an accord or a policy, considering their wide-ranging consequences. It was confidently expected that JCPOA would fall apart and lose its relevance immediately after the US withdrawal. Time and again, Wendy Sherman, one of the JCPOA architects, anticipated the demise of JCPOA (Atlantic Council, 2017a, 2017b; Crooked Media, 2019; Microsoft Europe, 2019; Ploughshares Fund, 2019; Politics and prose, 2018). Federica Mogherini, a strong supporter of JCPOA, also expressed pessimism about the survival of JCPOA. After leaving office as an EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, she was also less concerned about diplomatic considerations and simply called it a miracle that JCPOA survived after a year since the US withdrawal. She acknowledged that she had not said JCPOA would immediately fall apart because of her position, but she was confident that it would soon (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2019).

The material and non-material contestations have not brought an end to JCPOA altogether. The survival of JCPOA is surprising to its proponents and opponents. Even today in almost half way through 2022, JCPOA has not lost its relevance, even though the window of reviving JCPOA as an agreement is almost closing.

The theoretical explanation that I have presented in this thesis cannot and is not meant to explain why JCPOA as an agreement has not been revived yet. It can, however, explain how JCPOA is still relevant in world politics in 2022. The diplomatic practices in cooperation with the material and structural factors have had norm-producing effects on JCPOA. I argue that JCPOA was produced and reproduced as a norm during the entire selected period for this study which made JCPOA survive the progressive contestations at least until 2020. This gave the involved states the opportunity to negotiate a mutual compliance to the material provisions of JCPOA. Even if the negotiators give up today, it is still highly remarkable how JCPOA has persisted up to this point.

7.4. Other Possible Explanations for JCPOA's Survival

I also look at some alternative explanations from other approaches for the unexpected survival of JCPOA. I acknowledge that JCPOA's survival can actually be understood in more than a way. In this study, I made a distinction between JCPOA as a material agreement and JCPOA as a norm and used this distinction to explain why JCPOA has persisted. I foregrounded the role of diplomacy alongside structural/material factors in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm which helped it survive despite the growing contestations especially after the US withdrawal.

One may argue that the power dynamics of Iran's domestic politics could be the reason JCPOA did not immediately fall apart following the US withdrawal. The Rouhani administration deemed JCPOA as their legacy as it was achieved under his presidency and he paid a costly political price to make it happen. This can explain why Iran did not violate the agreement immediately and therefore JCPOA survived due to a decision made by the Rouhani administration for partisan/personal interests. Based on realist assumptions, another similar argument can be also outlined that Iran as a state, rather than the Rouhani administration, did not find it in its interests to leave JCPOA immediately after the US withdrawal while a Democrat-led administration could simply come to power soon. Iran's immediate withdrawal could have isolated Iran, rather than the US, so Iran decided to stay in the deal which made JCPOA's survival possible. Such arguments, however, fail to explain why JCPOA persisted even after the Rouhani administration was gone or

after Iran started violating JCPOA's provisions progressively. Today, JCPOA has not lost its relevance in world politics yet.

Another key explanation for the survival of JCPOA can be presented from a legal point of view. It can be argued that it was a legal obligation upon the members of the international community to support JCPOA and that is the reason why JCPOA persisted and for example made the states not support the US-proposed draft. I also acknowledged the endorsement of JCPOA in UNSC which has made the countries legally bound to the provisions enshrined under JCPOA, I also considered it among the structural/material factors. The difference is highly subtle. In my theorizing, I argued that the institutionalized structures (e.g. the endorsement in UNSC) and diplomatic practices co-constitutively cooperated in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm that influenced the behavior of the states. In other words, even though I found the legal status of JCPOA in international law contributory to the survival of JCPOA, I did not find a causal link between them. Moreover, the states could always re-interpret international law and justify it via diplomacy. Following the US withdrawal, Iran could easily justify its withdrawal and the legal status of JCPOA could not stop it from staying committed to JCPOA. Following Iran's progressive breaches, other countries could also do the same and still justify it with some legal language.

Liberal institutionalists can also come up with an explanation based on their perspectives. They may emphasize that JCPOA was a multilateral product endorsed by the UNSC, and therefore JCPOA could not fall apart following the exit of one participant. This explanation can offer good arguments for the survival of JCPOA. The role of the EU has been particularly highlighted in keeping JCPOA together (Alcaro, 2021; Schmid, 2022). I also found them important as material/structural factors. But it has to be taken into account that this multilateral product has been in violation by all its participants longer than the time it had been implemented. Such a liberal institutionalist explanation may not fully explain the persistence of JCPOA when there was not much left of JCPOA as an actual agreement, especially after Iran's progressive breaches.

7.5. Theoretical Implications for Understanding Diplomacy

As a concluding section to this chapter, I briefly review what I have discussed so far and then make an attempt to connect the obtained insights in this thesis to the literature. I draw some theoretical implications for diplomacy.

I demonstrated that diplomacy, in cooperation with material/structural factors, was involved in the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm. I, then, argued that JCPOA as a norm was the reason the progressive contestations and breaches have not yet eliminated JCPOA from the face of world politics. I explored the way the normative structure that was produced by diplomacy influenced the behavior of the members of the international community. I found it remarkable that the UNSC members, some of whom had much more in common with the US than Iran and in fact were concerned about Iran's allegedly de-stabilizing activities in the region, decided not to support the US-proposed draft resolution to extend the UN arms embargo on Iran, an embargo that had prevented Iran from acquiring weapons that they could supposedly use to project even more influence against the interests of several UNSC members at the time of the voting.

Even though the majority of the literature on JCPOA is predominated by rationalist approaches, there were a few studies that had adopted more critical approaches to JCPOA. In the subsequent part, I briefly review some of them and try to compare them with my empirical findings.

Opperman and Spencer (2017) previously showed that JCPOA could be regarded as a failure or a success depending on the way the dominant narrative narrates JCPOA. I showed that not only JCPOA can be more than a failed or successful deal, but also can be seen a norm. Through elucidating the cooperative relationship between the discursive patterns within diplomatic practices and other factors, I unraveled the way JCPOA acquired meanings of a normative structure in world politics.

I noted that JCPOA faced progressive contestations, even though I did not go into details especially the discursive contestations produced by the competing discourse. Arena (2021), however, attempted to demonstrate the de-construction of the narrative supportive of JCPOA changed the political meanings and therefore affecting the foreign policy of the US. The dominant narrative, irrespective of how it is produced and reproduced, can significantly influence the way things are made sense of including a foreign policy. What I focused on in my empirical analysis was the way diplomacy was involved in norm construction affecting the state behavior of states. In my findings, the narrative supportive of JCPOA did not become marginalized at any point during the entire time span of this study at the world stage.

One of the key patterns that I identified in my analysis was the way the diplomats were using discursive acts to manage Iran's notoriety. Miskimmon (2020) argued that verification

mechanisms brought clarity to Iran's actions and therefore changed the way Iran was being viewed at the international arena especially overcoming Iran's untrustworthiness. Even though Miskimmon drew on Foucault's *alethurgy* to foreground the way narrative alignment occurred in this case study, I merely focused on the speech acts performed by the diplomats that discursively represented JCPOA in a way that the international community would not have to worry about Iran being untrustworthy because JCPOA is discursively produced and reproduced as verifiable.

I did not collect data on the way diplomats used social media such as Twitter concerning JCPOA. I can assume that digital tools can provide diplomats with various possibilities. It can also facilitate norm-producing effects of diplomacy. Bjola and Manor (2018) demonstrated that the Obama administration used Twitter to gather support for JCPOA inside the US. Nourani et. al. (2020) also illustrated how Trump tried to de-legitimize JCPOA through moral evaluation and rationalization. Digital platforms can also provide good proxy access to diplomatic practices.

Overall, not many attempted to explain the unexpected survival of JCPOA. It was an original puzzle. I adopted an innovative approach to theorizing why JCPOA persisted. My empirical investigation allowed me to delve into the constitutive and agentic capacity of diplomacy. In the next part, I explain how my empirical insights elucidate the way diplomacy can have a constitutive capacity by producing for example norms and therefore can become agentic in world politics.

The findings obtained in this thesis can have important implications for understanding diplomacy. Diplomacy is predominately viewed as an instrument in a larger part of IR scholarship. In this thesis, I provide empirical insights that corroborate critical, non-instrumentalist perspectives on diplomacy. Diplomacy has the capacity to go beyond a facilitating instrument at the disposal of states and assume agency in world politics on its own end.

The constitutive effects of diplomacy, however, must be nuanced by the material and structural factors. I foregrounded the role of diplomacy in the production and reproduction of a norm, but again I acknowledged that the material/structural factors were also noticeably contributory. The constitutive capacity of diplomacy, therefore, can be constrained or reinforced by the existing structures and conditions.

Kristiotis (1998) maintains that diplomacy can implicate the production of international law among other things. It is obvious that diplomacy was used instrumentally to arrive at an agreement

and then again through diplomacy the agreement was endorsed in the UNSC. In other words, it became part of the UN system and by implication international law. But this view, even though different from the instrumentalist view, has much in common. My findings suggest that diplomatic practices were not used as an instrument to produce a normative structure in a sense that they intended to do so. Based on my findings, diplomacy was constitutively involved in the production of JCPOA as a norm. To clarify, the diplomatic practices might have been performed for other reasons, but still they were generative of a normative structure. In addition, Kristiotis (1998) argued that diplomacy would matter because international law, norms and principles influence international relations. I can make a similar argument that the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm implicated world politics in several ways including influencing the state behavior of countries as well as the persistent relevance of JCPOA in world politics.

Risse (2000) argued for the logic of arguing and how diplomacy as a communicative action can advance that. Based on my analysis, diplomacy, in itself, can be generative of discourses under which an action or policy can be regarded as logical. My empirical findings support the idea that diplomacy can produce and reproduce a normative structure which influences the behavior of states due to the logic of appropriateness rather than the logic of arguing. My results also support the claim made by Bjola and Kornprobst (2011) and others that the states participate in discussions in international organizations to support their positions with legal arguments, but in doing so they also influence the international order through discursive interactions.

Based on the communicative theory, it is argued that diplomacy can have norm-constitutive and legitimizing capacity that can also influence how international law is interpreted (Bjola, 2005; Johnstone, 2003). Diplomacy uses international law among other things to make the behavior of a state understandable/justifiable to other members (Hurd, 2015). Even though in this thesis, I did not draw on the communicative theory and did not look at diplomacy as a communicative action, my results generally support these claims. Based on my results, I particularly argue that diplomacy and existing structures are co-constitutive and have a cooperative relationship in producing and reproducing norms.

In the end, the results of this thesis provide elucidating insights for understanding diplomacy. The instrumentalist views of diplomacy by IR rationalist schools are refuted as being inadequate. Undoubtedly, diplomacy is commonly used as a tool available to the states to pursue their

objectives but diplomacy in itself can be more than that. Diplomacy can have norm-producing effects through its discourse productivity. In this sense, diplomacy can assume a kind of agency, implicating world politics. Global outcomes can be influenced by the norm and discourse productivity of diplomacy.

Diplomacy per se, not as a tool, is therefore, consequential in world politics. The constitutive and agentic capacities of diplomacy should be nuanced. Every diplomatic practice would not be equally consequential in world politics. Factors that can enable or disable the constitutive capacity of diplomacy include existing structures, material and contextual conditions as well as the jurisdictional capacity of diplomats.

8. Conclusion

In this master thesis, I presented an empirical puzzle about the highly-anticipated collapse of JCPOA that did not occur at least until the end of the selected time span. I claimed that the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm was the reason that JCPOA surprisingly survived. In order to substantiate this claim, I foregrounded the role of diplomacy in how JCPOA was turned into a norm and was reproduced as such despite the progressive contestations. I adopted a practice approach to diplomacy based on a critical, non-instrumentalist view to elucidate the ways diplomacy was involved in norm-constitution for JCPOA.

In order to better understand the survival of JCPOA against the contestations, I divided my empirical analysis into two main parts. In the first part, I explored the way diplomatic practices contributed to the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm during 2015-2016. In this period, JCPOA was just born as a material agreement and complied by all 3involved parties. In the second part, I investigated how JCPOA was able to be reproduced as a norm even though it was faced with increasing, existential contestations. From 2017 to 2020, there had been increasing violations of JCPOA until the point in which all original participants were noncompliant with the material provisions of JCPOA.

In the first part of my analysis, I illustrated that the diplomatic practices had norm-producing effects through their discursive representations of JCPOA. In addition, I also looked at authority claims and material/structural factors that provided favorable conditions for the production and reproduction of JCPOA as a norm. In the second part of my analysis, I showed that the diplomatic

practices, in cooperation with the material/structural factors, kept reproducing JCPOA as a norm despite the progressive contestations.

There were a few limitations that might have impacted this research study. The first limitation of this study is about my collected empirical data. I did not have direct access to diplomatic practices as performed by diplomats. I decided to select speech acts of the selected diplomats as proxies for diplomatic practices. I, therefore, had limited access to the publicly-available speech acts by the high-ranking diplomats. This confined me to the available speech acts by certain diplomats. More importantly, I had to base my interpretations on discursive traces that I identified in the speech acts of the selected diplomats, instead of actual diplomatic practices.

Second, I did not collect any data from the diplomats under the Trump administration that actually withdrew from JCPOA. I only provided some information as contextualization to demonstrate that JCPOA was contested. I argued that JCPOA persisted against the contestations but I did not identify any distinctive discourses and did not give much insight about how the meaning-producing discourses co-existed and interacted with one another or were received by different actors.

I suggest that future studies can produce further knowledge if they can use methods of data collection such as participant observation, ethnography or even qualitative interviewing to access diplomatic practices instead of relying on secondary data such as speech acts of the diplomats recorded in various contexts. Moreover, I also suggest that the diplomatic practices of lower-rank diplomats from more varied countries are taken into account. This can give richer, deeper and more relevant insights about norm productivity of everyday practices in diplomacy compared to textual analysis of the speech acts by the high-ranking diplomats. That said, I was able to find adequate pieces of evidence to shed light on norm productivity of diplomacy based on the identified discursive traces in the speech acts.

The findings of this master thesis provide an evidence-based and innovative explanation about the curious survival of JCPOA and its remarkable continued relevance in world politics. This thesis also produces empirical insights that can inform our understanding of diplomacy. It builds on the non-instrumentalist, non-rationalist perspectives on diplomacy. It also elucidates the way diplomacy can implicate world politics via its constitutive and agentic capacity.

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