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"Iranian foreign policy and the JCPOA. Perceptions, narratives, and justifications concerning the nuclear deal"

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the perception of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in the Islamic Republic of Iran and its significance for Iranian foreign policy. It analyses how and in which manner the JCPOA forms a part of Iran's foreign policy "rationale of justification". This rationale of justification, defined as the main framework against which policy decisions must be judged, will serve as the basis of analysis. The research conducted for this thesis is based on the following research question: "In what ways is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action related to the Iranian foreign policy rationale of justification?"

This question is clearly politically relevant as the Iranian nuclear deal of 2015 is still a highly important document with far-reaching implications. Even after US President Donald J. Trump announced that the USA would withdraw from the JCPOA, the nuclear accord still serves as example for successful negotiations with countries such as Iran. Furthermore, its consequences are still far-reaching in a regional context. Mr Trump's decision to withdraw from the accord did not just influence other members of the P5+1 group, but also Iran, its foreign policy, its nuclear programme, and international actors such as the DPRK. Therefore, it is essential to understand the Iranian point of view, and to develop a model to explain why certain states react in a particular manner to international policy measures.

This thesis' research question is based on a constructivist understanding of the international relations system and Iranian foreign policy as it puts perceptions, ideas, ideologies, and narratives into the centre of attention. The concept of the rationale of justification follows this theoretical strand. The challenge with respect to this concept is defining it, its terminology, and to examine the way in which it manifests itself. These problems influence the manner in which information about this concept and the JCPOA's relation to it is collected, analysed, and interpreted.

In order to analyse how the JCPOA relates to the rationale of justification, it is necessary to adapt the research design according to the particular nature of the research question. As a consequence, the methodological approach of this thesis is to conduct qualitative expert interviews and qualitative content analysis to collect data, as well as qualitative content analysis to extract and analyse data.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Wahrnehmung des Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in der Islamischen Republik Iran und seiner Bedeutung für die iranische Außenpolitik. Sie analysiert, wie und in welcher Weise der JCPOA Bestandteil der iranischen außenpolitischen „Rechtfertigungslogik" ist. Diese Rechtfertigungslogik, definiert als der hauptsächliche Rahmen, anhand dessen politische Entscheidungen beurteilt werden müssen, wird als Grundlage dieser Analyse dienen. Die im Rahmen dieser Arbeit durchgeführte Forschung basiert auf folgender Forschungsfrage: „Inwiefern hängt der Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action mit der iranischen außenpolitischen Rechtfertigungslogik zusammen?"

Diese Frage ist zweifellos politisch relevant, da das iranische Atomabkommen aus 2015 nach wie vor ein äußerst wichtiges Dokument mit weitreichenden Implikationen ist. Selbst nachdem US-Präsident Donald J. Trump den Austritt der USA aus dem JCPOA angekündigt hatte, dient das Atomabkommen nach wie vor als Beispiel für erfolgreiche Verhandlungen mit Ländern wie dem Iran. Darüber hinaus sind dessen Folgen im regionalen Kontext nach wie vor weitreichend. Trumps Entscheidung, sich aus dem Abkommen zurückzuziehen, beeinflusste nicht nur die anderen Mitglieder der P5+1-Gruppe, sondern auch Iran, die iranische Außenpolitik, sein Nuklearprogramm, und andere internationale Akteure wie beispielsweise Nordkorea. Daher ist es essentiell den iranischen Standpunkt zu verstehen und ein Modell zu entwickeln, um zu erklären, warum bestimmte Staaten auf eine bestimmte Art und Weise auf Maßnahmen der internationalen Politik reagieren.

Die Forschungsfrage dieser Arbeit basiert auf einem konstruktivistischen Verständnis des Systems der internationalen Beziehungen und der Iranischen Außenpolitik, da sie Wahrnehmungen, Ideen, Ideologien und Narrative ins Zentrum der Aufmerksamkeit rückt. Das Konzept der Rechtfertigungslogik folgt diesem theoretischen Zugang. Die diesbezügliche Herausforderung ist jedoch, dieses Konzept und seine Terminologie zu definieren und herauszufinden, wie es sich manifestiert. Diese Probleme beeinflussen die Art und Weise in welcher Informationen über dieses Konzept und dessen wechselseitige Beziehung mit dem JCPOA gesammelt, analysiert und interpretiert werden.

Um analysieren zu können, wie der JCPOA und die außenpolitische Rechtfertigungslogik des Iran zusammenhängen, ist es nötig, das Forschungsdesign an die spezifische Natur der Forschungsfrage anzupassen. Der methodologische Ansatz dieser Arbeit kombiniert daher qualitative Expertinnen- und Experteninterviews mit qualitativer Inhaltsanalyse, um Daten zu sammeln, zu extrahieren und zu analysieren.

Table of contents

Abbreviations

AEOI	Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran
AIOC	Anglo-Iranian Oil Company
APOC	Anglo-Persian Oil Company
BATNA	Best alternative to a negotiated agreement
BP	British Petroleum
CBRN	Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization (otherwise known as the Baghdad Pact)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CW	Chemical weapons
CWC	Chemical Weapons Convention
DoD	Department of Defense (USA)
DoS	Department of State (USA)
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
E3+3	France, Germany, the UK and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5+1)
FM	Foreign minister
FTO	Foreign terrorist organisation
G20	Group of twenty
G77	Group of 77 (An interest group within the UN framework. Its membership count has increased significantly. The G77 has 134 members)
G8	Group of eight
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HEU	High-enriched uranium
HR	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IR	International Relations
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MEK	Mujahedin-e Khalq (People's mujahedin of Iran; PMOI/MKO)
MFA	Ministry of foreign affairs
MoD	Ministry of defence
MOIS	Ministry of Intelligence and Security (Iran)
NAM	Non-Aligned-Movement

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons)
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
P5+1	Five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (E3+3/ EU3+3)
PM	Prime minister
R&D	Research and development
SAVAK	Sāzemān-e Ettelāʾāt va Amniyat-e Keshvar (Organisation of National Intelligence and Security)
SNSC	Supreme National Security Council (Iran)
SPV	Special-Purpose Vehicle (The EU mechanism to continue trade with the Islamic Republic of Iran)
TNRC	Tehran Nuclear Research Centre
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

What a piece of work is man!

How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties!

in form and moving, how like an angel!

in apprehension, how like a god!

William Shakespeare

Hamlet act II, scene ii

Chapter 1 — Once upon a time, a nuclear deal

It was to a large extent relief that was felt on 14 July 2015. On that day in Vienna, Iran and the P5+1[1] reached a ground-breaking agreement[2] in what had been a pressing issue and at the top of the international agenda for more than a decade.[3] This agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), effectively hindered Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons in critically limiting Iran's enrichment and R&D capabilities. On the other hand, the sanctions that had crippled Iran's economy, which has vehemently and repeatedly denied that it had pursued a nuclear weapons programme, were lifted. Moreover, Iran could secure its "inalienable right" as enshrined in Art. IV of the NPT[4] to maintain a nuclear programme. In brief, the JCPOA ended the Iranian nuclear crisis.[5]

The conclusion of the JCPOA was pre-dated by long and tortuous negotiations. The E3 and subsequently the P5+1 negotiated with Iran about its potential solution since the beginning of the crisis in 2002. Hence, it is not surprising that Iran's foreign minister Javad Zarif expressed cautious optimism when the conclusion of the JCPOA was announced: "I believe this is a historic moment. We are reaching an agreement that is not perfect for anybody, but it is what we could accomplish, and it is an important achievement for all of us. Today could have been the end of hope on this issue but now we are starting a new chapter of hope."[6]

This "new chapter of hope" was brief. On 08 May 2018, President Obama's successor in the White House, Donald J. Trump, announced that the USA would officially withdraw from the JCPOA, which would be "defective at its core".[7] In a press conference, Mr Trump said that the USA could not "[…] prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb under the decaying and rotten structure

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[1] cf. **Keating**, Joshua (2009): You say P5+1, I say E3+3. http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/30/you-say-p51-i-say-e33/, last access on 28 November 2017

[2] cf. **Borger**, Julian (2015): Iran nuclear deal reached in Vienna. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/14/iran-nuclear-deal-expected-to-be-announced-in-vienna, last access on 13 April 2018

[3] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran. The Birth of an Atomic State, p. xii. London/New York, I.B. Tauris (Kindle version)

[4] cf. **IAEA** (1970): Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, p. 3. https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infcircs/1970/infcirc140.pdf, last access on 10 September 2017

[5] cf. **BBC News** (2015): Iran nuclear crisis: Six key points. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32114862, last access on 13 January 2019

[6] **Mogherini**, Federica/**Zarif**, Javad (2015): Iran nuclear deal reached in Vienna. (video of press conference, posted on 14 July 2015), from minute 00:29. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/14/iran-nuclear-deal-expected-to-be-announced-in-vienna, last access on 13 April 2017

[7] **Liptak**, Kevin/**Gaouette**, Nicole (2018): Trump withdraws from Iran nuclear deal, isolating him further from world. https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/08/politics/donald-trump-iran-deal-announcement-decision/index.html, last access on 26 May 2018

of the current agreement".[8] Eventually, on 2 November 2018, President Trump announced that the "last set of sanctions lifted under the terrible nuclear deal will come back into force, including powerful sanctions on Iran's energy, shipping, and shipbuilding sectors, and sanctions targeting transactions with the Central Bank of Iran and sanctioned Iranian banks."[9] These sanctions entered into force on 5 November 2018,[10] thus marking the end of the JCPOA for the USA.

Mr Trump's decision did not come as a major surprise, despite its curious timing. Mr Trump has been an outspoken critic of the JCPOA, which was featured prominently during his 2016 presidential campaign.[11] Mr Trump particularly criticised the deal for allegedly being unbalanced and unfair, even downright dangerous.

> "The Obama Administration's agreement with Iran is very dangerous. Iran developing a nuclear weapon, either through uranium or nuclear fuel, and defying the world is still a very real possibility. The inspections will not be followed, and Iran will no longer have any sanctions. Iran gets everything and loses nothing."[12]

Moreover, the Republican party had heavily criticised the JCPOA. Indeed, Republican Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell "accused the White House [under President Obama, note by author] of 'reaching the best deal acceptable to Iran, rather than actually advancing our national goal'."[13] After Mr Trump had referred to the JCPOA as "disaster" and the "worst deal ever negotiated",[14] he refused to re-certify the sanctions waivers in January 2018.[15] A few days later,

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[8] **CNBC** (2018): President Donald Trump Delivers Remarks On Iran Deal – May 8, 2018 (Video of a speech by US president Donald Trump, posted on 8 May 2018), from minute 06:30. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QiMvernIL0, last access on 1 January 2019

[9] **White House** (2018): Statement by the President Regarding the Reimposition of Nuclear-Related Sanctions on Iran. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-regarding-reimposition-nuclear-related-sanctions-iran/, last access on 25 December 2018

[10] cf. **US Embassy & Consulates in France** (2018): President Donald J. Trump is reimposing all sanctions lifted under the unacceptable Iran deal. https://fr.usembassy.gov/president-donald-j-trump-is-reimposing-all-sanctions-lifted-under-the-unacceptable-iran-deal/, last access on 25 December 2018

[11] cf. **NBC News** (2018): Trump kept his promise on Iran. But was it the right promise? https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-kept-his-promise-iran-was-it-right-promise-n872546, last access on 13 January 2019

[12] **Trump**, Donald (2015): Statement by Donald J. Trump on the Iran agreement. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=113840, last access on 13 April 2017

[13] **Lewis**, Paul/**Siddiqui**, Sabrina/**Jacobs**, Ben (2015): Republicans fume over Iran nuclear deal but hope of undermining accord is slim. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/14/republicans-iran-nuclear-deal-reaction, last access on 10 April 2018

[14] **Torbati**, Yeganeh (2016): Trump election puts Iran nuclear deal on shaky ground. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump-iran-idUSKBN13427E, last access on 9 April 2018

[15] **Manson**, Katrina (2018): Donald Trump unlikely to certify nuclear deal with Iran. https://www.ft.com/content/e2231a0e-f0cf-11e7-b220-857e26d1aca4, last access on 9 April 2018

he re-certified them "for the last time".[16] These waivers are exemptions of sanctions for Iran, subject to regular re-certification by the US president.

Indeed, as Mr Trump contemplated cancelling the JCPOA, he had then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson prepare a presentation in which he "[…] read a prepared list of all the grievances against Iran: ballistic missile testing, 'the world's leading sponsor of terrorism', threats to Israel, human rights violations, cyber-attacks, arbitrary detention of foreigners including U.S. citizens, harassing U.S. Navy ships, jailing or executing political opponents, 'reaching the agonizing low point of executing juveniles,' and support to the 'brutal Assad regime in Syria.'"[17] In this respect, Mr Trump uses the nuclear deal as mere bargaining chip. His goal is to either dissuade Iran from its aggressive regional policy, or to democratise the Islamic Republic.[18] According to the points of view of various experts on international and Iranian affairs, these efforts by the USA would most likely not be successful.

> "'Iran's oil production is down, its revenues are down, and the country is more isolated than it was' before Mr. Trump withdrew from the deal, said Richard N. Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations and a former State Department and National Security Council official under several Republican presidents. 'But there is nothing about the history of sanctions that suggests they can coerce any country into doing something big and dramatic,' he said. 'And this is a government that is unlikely to want to be seen as being coerced. That goes against the DNA of the Iranian revolution.'"[19]

The final decision to withdraw from the JCPOA did not only alienate the EU and the Iranians, but also set off a diplomatic race by EU High Representative Mogherini to save the deal.

> "'We are working on finding a practical solution … in a short delay of time,' Mogherini told a news conference. 'We are talking about solutions to keep the deal alive,' she said, adding that measures would seek to allow Iran to keep exporting oil and for European banks to continue to operate. We have a quite clear list of issues to address. We are operating in a very difficult context … I cannot talk about legal or economic guarantees but I can talk about serious, determined, immediate work from the European side.'"[20]

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[16] **BBC News** (2018): Trump to approve Iran nuclear deal for last time. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42670577, last access on 9 April 2018

[17] **Woodward**, Bob (2018): Fear. Trump in the White House, p. 131. London, Simon & Schuster

[18] cf. **Sanger**, David (2018): Reimposing Iran Sanctions, Trump Places 3 Bets (One a Long Shot). https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/04/us/politics/trump-iran-sanctions.html, last access on 25 December 2018

[19] **Sanger**, David (2018): Reimposing Iran Sanctions, Trump Places 3 Bets (One a Long Shot)

[20] **Reuters** (2018): Europe seeking quick solution to save Iran nuclear deal: Mogherini. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-europe-mogherini/europe-seeking-quick-solution-to-save-iran-nuclear-deal-mogherini-idUSKCN1IG36S, last access on 26 May 2018

Subsequently, the European Union started preparations to set up a Special-Purpose Vehicle (SPV) in order to safeguard non-US trade with Iran.[21] This had become necessary as the Iranians threatened to withdraw from the JCPOA should the EU not compensate for Iran's losses due to the US withdrawal.[22]

These changes within the US position, their threats to cancel the JCPOA, and the EU and Iranian response make it even more interesting to take a look at the Iranian side. In contrast to the USA, the Iranians did not threaten to cancel the JCPOA, despite the initial opposition against even talking to the "Great Satan".[23] As a matter of fact, even Iranian conservatives had remained committed to the JCPOA. This is even more surprising as those very same conservatives who had weighed heavy critique[24] of the nuclear deal spoke in favour of keeping it intact.

> "'We consider the nuclear accord a done deal and will remain committed to it unless the US officially withdraws from it,' Mr Zakani, who led opposition to the nuclear deal in parliament, told the Financial Times. […] Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the powerful mayor of Tehran and the other top hardline candidate, said on Monday that he would safeguard the nuclear accord because it had been backed by the Islamic establishment. But he also used it to criticise Mr Rouhani's record."[25]

The same hard-line faction, after the announcement of the US' withdrawal, set ablaze a US paper flag in the Majles, the Iranian parliament, in an arguably astounding display of support for an agreement they initially opposed.[26] Others interpreted this as have been interpreted as a sign that Iranian conservatives "rejoiced"[27] over Mr Trump's decision to back out of the deal.

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[21] cf. **Financial Times** (2018): Europe struggles to protect Iran trade as US reimposes sanctions. https://www.ft.com/content/644d3400-e045-11e8-a6e5-792428919cee, last access on 13 January 2019

[22] cf. **Khamenei**, Ali (2018): To remain in JCPOA, Imam Khamenei announces conditions to be met by Europe. http://english.khamenei.ir/news/5696/To-remain-in-JCPOA-Imam-Khamenei-announces-conditions-to-be, last access on 13 January 2019

[23] **Tehran Times** (2018): Hatami: 12 years of talks breached by 'Great Satan'. https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/426320/Hatami-12-years-of-talks-breached-by-Great-Satan, last access on 13 January 2019

[24] **Sharafedin**, Bozorgmehr (2015): Iran's conservatives are now criticizing the country's nuclear deal. http://www.businessinsider.com/irans-conservatives-criticize-the-countrys-nuclear-deal-2015-7?IR=T, last access on 13 April 2018

[25] **Bozorgmehr**, Najmeh (2017): Iran hardliners committed to nuclear deal, says top conservative. https://www.ft.com/content/fdfedfa6-2e79-11e7-9555-23ef563ecf9a, last access on 10 April 2018

[26] **CNBC** (2018a): Iranian lawmakers set paper US flag ablaze at parliament. https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/09/iranian-lawmakers-set-paper-us-flag-ablaze-at-parliament.html, last access on 27 May 2018

[27] cf. **Ensor**, Josie (2018): Iranian MPs set US flag ablaze in parliament as hardliners rejoice over US withdrawal from nuclear deal. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/09/iranian-mps-set-us-flag-ablaze-parliament-shouting-death-america/, last access on 27 May 2018

Furthermore, main political figures in Iran claim that the JCPOA should be cancelled if "[…] there is no economic benefit and major banks continue to shun the Islamic Republic […]".[28]

At the very moment this thesis is written, it is unclear whether Iran will remain in the deal and whether the EU, to whom this is a question of paramount importance, can convince them to. On the one hand, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said Iran would "shred to pieces"[29] the JCPOA should the USA withdraw from the deal. On the other hand, President Hassan Rouhani pledged commitment to the JCPOA even if the USA pulled out, if the EU would remain party to the deal.

> "'We will stay in the JCPOA (nuclear agreement) as long as our interests are observed. The US staying in or out of (the accord) will not be the main criteria for our decision,' Mr Rouhani said. 'We have principles and will continue (our commitment to the deal) based on our principles.'"[30]

Why even hard-liners were committed to the JCPOA

The Iranian conservatives' position was, in fact, the starting point of this paper. Why would any politician that opposed even negotiating with the USA in the first place, arguing that they could not be trusted, remain committed to the resulting treaty? Why would they celebrate or not celebrate the cancellation of the JCPOA by the USA? Why would they work to keep the deal? These questions lead to another, fundamental, question, why the Iranians would talk to the USA in the first place. Many would argue that it was primarily the economic pressure that was exerted on Iran due to the sanctions. This alone, however, would not explain the conservatives' commitment to the deal as there were still sanctions in place. Indeed, this commitment cannot be understood without taking into account how the Iranians perceive the USA, and the JCPOA. The question is what the deal means to Iran.

Understanding this is inherently linked with understanding perceptions and narratives, and with the theory of constructivism. The main idea of this theory is that narratives and perceptions of the world, of international politics, and of policymakers' own states form the very basis of foreign policy formulation. The USA, for instance, has spent more than a decade on negotiating a framework agreement with the Iranians on the Iranian nuclear programme, a situation they would have never had with, say, France or Canada. This is due to the fact that the USA would

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[28] **Sharafedin**, Bozorgmehr (2018): Iran says may withdraw from nuclear deal if banks continue to stay away. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-usa-nuclear/iran-says-may-withdraw-from-nuclear-deal-if-banks-continue-to-stay-away-idUSKCN1G610S, last access on 13 January 2019

[29] **Batchelor**, Tom (2017): Iran nuclear deal: Tehran threatens to 'shred' agreement if US withdraws support. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/iran-nuclear-deal-latest-trump-tehran-us-support-withdraw-agreement-international-a8006561.html, last access on 10 April 2018

[30] **Bozorgmehr**, Najmeh (2018): Iran pledges commitment to nuclear accord even if US withdraws. https://www.ft.com/content/82d19910-0b4e-11e8-839d-41ca06376bf2, last access on 27 May 2018

perceive these states differently than Iran. Iran, on the other hand, repeatedly reiterated its intentions to maintain an exclusively peaceful nuclear programme which they would not have needed to would the USA perceive them as reliable partners.

Another example for the importance of perceptions is the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1962, the USA discovered medium-range ballistic missiles on Cuba, where a revolutionary movement led by Fidel Castro had overthrown the nationalist regime of Fulgencio Batista. These nuclear weapons led to an intense crisis and almost to a nuclear war between the USA and the USSR. Clearly, **Cuban** nuclear missiles seemed far more threatening for the US mainland than the same or similar **Canadian** missiles would have seemed. The perception of policymakers at the time was that these missiles constituted a major threat to the US mainland.

With Iran, there was a comparable situation. The nuclear programme of the Islamic Republic would probably not have been considered dangerous if it would have been clear that Iran cannot obtain nuclear weapons. The same would be true if Iran would have been an ally of the United States, or if it was no Islamist, autocratic state. These examples show how closely the issues of nuclear weapons, nuclear non-proliferation and national security are intertwined with perceptions, narratives, and ideologies—in brief, with constructivism.

Furthermore, what is true for the USA and its allies is also true for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Had certain events in the past not had taken place, for instance the coup against Mr Mossadegh or the Iranian revolution, Iran would very likely have played a very different role in international relations. Its perception of the United States or the Soviet Union would have been different and, as a consequence, so would have its foreign policy. As a result of this, the Iranian nuclear programme might have been perceived differently by the USA and others.

All of this means that it had to be logical for Iran and Iranian hard-liners to support the JCPOA. As a matter of fact, Iranian political decisions follow a logic which adheres to certain narratives, certain frames, certain ideologies, certain perceptions, and other factors. It is these factors that form the basis of any policy decision and the background against which each foreign policy decision must be judged. The question, therefore, is how the JCPOA is linked to these factors and in which ways it is in conformity or in contradiction to these factors.

Research interest

This is precisely what makes this analysis of the JCPOA politically relevant. Understanding how the Iranians perceive any deal and how this deal would fit in the ideological and cognitive

matrix of their foreign policy is essential in order to understand how, when, and why a deal with Iran is possible. This matrix, the "rationale of justification", will be described in greater detail and defined later. This analytical approach could be helpful not only to understand how Iran perceives treaties and agreements, but also to understand foreign policy itself. Each policy of any country is based on specific factors. Finding a way to identifying these factors, weighing them, and analysing any decision in this context could essentially contribute to constructivist analyses of any foreign policy.

As a consequence, the following research question will be posed: **In what ways is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action of 2015 related to the Iranian foreign policy rationale of justification**?

This research question aims primarily at understanding the Iranian rationale of justification in the context of foreign and security policy decision-making. This means that the primary unit of analysis is Iranian policymakers. This specification is essential as, theoretically, the unit of analysis could be the Iranian population itself, non-Iranian decision-makers, scholars dealing with Iran, and others.

Prior to dealing with the research question at hand, it is necessary to deal with some other aspects first. In chapter 2, the history of various Iranian narratives and ideologies will be dealt with. This will subsequently be put into perspective in chapters 3 and 4, which will deal with Iranian foreign policy and nuclear policy formulation, respectively. Chapter 5 will deal with theories of International Relations, while chapter 6 will deal with methodology. The findings of this thesis will be presented in chapter 7. Eventually, a conclusion will be drawn in chapter 8.

Chapter 2 — A Persian history

This thesis argues that perceptions, ideologies, and narratives serve as the foundation of any states' foreign policy. These could be seen as "leitmotifs" within foreign policy formulation, as the sum of collective experiences. They, in any case, must not be seen as completely separate from one another but often as linked, intertwined, and overlapping. Frequently, these are linked with events in the past and other historical aspects of a states' history. This could be, for instance, ahistorical foundational myths such as the legend of Romulus and Remus, or way more specific events in the past such as the coup against Iranian PM Mossadegh. In theory, this could be any meaningful event, document, or policy measure. As a consequence of their liquid nature, these narratives could be seen as linked with virtually all policy fields.

As a consequence, it is necessary to deal with Iran's history and its political culture—in the broadest sense—before analysing its foreign and nuclear policies. This is necessary in order to fully grasp the extent of influence these factors still have on Iranian foreign policy. The goal of this chapter is precisely this, it aspires to shed light on certain perceptions and narratives. In this chapter, the most important and persistent narratives, perceptions, and ideologies in recent Iranian history will be identified. These form political factors which, in turn, form the rationale of justification.

When dealing with Iranian narratives, it is crucial to distinguish the pre-1979 from the post-1979 Iran but, at the same time, keep looking for continuities. Put differently, the 1979 revolution changed Iran and its narratives, as well as its political behaviour and its orientation. Nevertheless, the modern Islamic Republic cannot be understood without taking into account, for instance, the shah's regime and Persia's ancient past. While the revolution of 1979 might be considered one of the key events in recent Iranian history, other narratives and perceptions pre-date this pivotal event.

The factors described in this chapter are delicate to characterise. They are, sometimes, ideologies, paradigms, or politico-cultural trends. They often are overlapping and intertwined, but, due to their different natures, they also are hard to compare. They sometimes are even not comparable whatsoever. These factors can roughly be categorised as "Islamist", "third-worldist", "revolutionary", and "pragmatist". This means that some factors are, bluntly, Islamist factors, whereas others are linked to Iran's third-world ideology. Of course, these factors could be covered by or linked to more than just one of these broad and sketchy categories. Other factors are not classifiable in these three categories in the first place. These include, for instance, legalism or power politics.

Due to the fluid nature of these factors, this chapter could never be entirely complete. The reason for the selection of factors that will be presented here is that they already had influenced Iranian foreign policy decisions in the past. Moreover, they were identified prior to the empirical research in dealing with Iranian history and foreign policy concepts.

Islamism

Islamism is a political ideology which is based on the principles of the religion of Islam. The main distinction between these is that Islam as religion offers a theological and philosophical path for alleged personal salvation. It, in itself, does not contain any preference for any specific policy or political system. Islamism, or political Islam, in contrast, contends that politics must be based on "Islamic principles". Groups advocating this ideology, however, have not come up with a general political programme on how such a political system would have to look like.

This opened up potential for Ayatollah Khomeini to develop a programme for a new political system for Iran, that of the *velayat-e faqih*. This political system is linked with the political thinking of Mr Khomeini and the concept of *Gharbzadegi*. These concepts will be described later in greater detail. Moreover, it is Islamist in nature and characterised by Iran's past and its version of Islam, Shiism. This is highlighted again when delving into the revolution's narratives and slogans. One example for this is the narrative of the martyrdom of Hussain, the son of the first imam Ali, who was killed by the Umayyad caliph Yazid. Mr Khomeini had compared the shah to Yazid, who had killed the third imam Hussain in the battle of Kerbala. This religious narrative is embodied in the revolutionary slogan "Every day is Ashura"[31] again evoked this Islamist narrative.

This Islamist notion played an important role both during and prior to the Iranian revolution. The fact that other opposition groups such as the Communist party "Tudeh" have been oppressed after the 1953 coup channelled virtually all opposition against the shah's policies in the Islamist movement. This significantly strengthened the Islamist opposition against the rule of the shah. The shah had set in motion a series of reforms to modernise the country, the "White Revolution", which was seen highly critical by the clerics, the most important of which being the late Ayatollah Khomeini. The White Revolution, a reform package including industri-

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[31] cf. **Afkhami**, Gholam Reza (2009): The Life and Times of the Shah, p. 465. Berkeley, University of California Press

alisation, land reform, literacy reforms, and women's rights reforms,[32,33] was bound to face resistance, in particular by the clergy and the landlords. [34]

Khomeinism

The term "Khomeinism" means the political ideology, the thinking and writing, and the political legacy of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Often, the political system of the Islamic Republic itself is seen as Ayatollah Khomeini's political heritage. The system of the velayat-e faqih was created by Mr Khomeini. Despite some debates about this political heritage, the significance of Khomeinism for Iranian political thinking is evident. Mr Khomeini's political thinking is deeply rooted in Shiism. This is curious as Shiism does not originally promote any political system as such. One of its core beliefs, however, is that the only legitimate ruler, the twelfth imam (*Mahdi*), went into hiding. Therefore, no government could be legitimate, as they would simply usurp the Mahdi's rightful position.

> "Although the Shii clergy agreed that only the Hidden Imam had full legitimacy, they differed sharply among themselves regarding the existing states — even Shii ones. Some argued that since all rulers were in essence usurpers, true believers should shun the authorities like the plague. […] Others, however, argued that one should grudgingly accept the state. They claimed that bad government was better than no government; that many imams had categorically opposed armed insurrections; and that Imam Ali, in his often quoted *Nahj al-Balaghah* (Way of eloquence), had warned of the dangers of social chaos."[35]

In the 16th century, after the Safavids had established a Shiite monarchy in Iran, this view changed significantly. The monarchy was to be accepted and the role of the clerics in society and state was that of a legal advisor. This original concept of the *velayat-e faqih* was essentially apolitical.[36] In this very tradition, Ruhollah Khomeini himself did not oppose government as such, despite early critique directed toward Reza Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah. Even during the 1963 turmoil and his subsequent being exiled, Mr Khomeini remained a supporter of the monarchy.[37]

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[32] Ibid., p. 227

[33] **Halliday**, Fred (2010): The Middle East in International Relations, p. 104. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 7th edition

[34] **Afkhami**, Gholam Reza (2009): The Life and Times of the Shah, p. 227f.

[35] **Abrahamian**, Ervand (1993): Khomeinism. Essays on the Islamic Republic, p. 18. Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, University of California Press

[36] cf. Ibid., p. 19f.

[37] cf. Ibid., p. 20f.

> "Khomeini did not develop a new concept of the state, or of society, until the late 1960s. It is
> not clear what intellectual influences brought about this change. Khomeini himself was reluc-
> tant to admit formulating new notions. He was not in the habit of footnoting his works and
> giving credit where credit was due — especially if the sources were foreign or secular. What
> is more, in the crucial years of 1965-70, when he was developing these new ideas in his Najaf
> exile, he was conspicuously silent, rarely giving interviews, sermons, and pronouncements."[38]

In his time in exile, Mr Khomeini formulated his concept of government, government by the *velayat-e faqih*, which meant that it should be Islamic jurisprudents and not the shah who rule the country. As a matter of fact, Mr Khomeini drafted the Iranian political system as it is today, with adjustments made in 1988—9. The result is that today's political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran is Ayatollah Khomeini's political legacy.

The other part of Mr Khomeini's ideology, his political legacy, is the ideological foundations of policy in the Islamic Republic. Mr Khomeini stressed the importance of clerics in the interpre-tation of Islamic law and rejected Western, or "colonialist", influence.[39] Furthermore, he em-braced modernity in principle, albeit a different type of modernity than the Western model and spoke of classes such as the *mostazafin* (oppressed) and the *mostakberin* (oppressors).[40, 41] In addition to this, his ideology encompassed a certain populism, i.e. appeal to the lower clas-ses. This ideological framework still serves as foundation for political ideology in the Islamic Republic and for Iran's foreign policy.

Gharbzadegi

The term "Gharbzadegi" might roughly be translated as "Westoxication".[42] The interesting as-pect about this concept is that it attempts to reconcile Islamism and Marxism, despite the fact that its "godfather", Jalal al-e Ahmad, was a secularist. The idea of Gharbzadegi encompassed a specific form of critique of the West which allegedly "stole" Iran's culture. This combination of an Iranian cultural narrative with the narrative of being oppressed by the West, i.e. essen-tially an anti-imperialist ideology, made it possible to combine left ideologies with Islamism. As such, Gharbzadegi is closely linked with the notion of "imperialist meddling" or "oppression" by the West. In this sense, "Gharbzadegi" was a concept that overlaps with both Anti-Imperialism and Islamism.

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[38] Ibid., p. 21f.

[39] cf. **Afkhami**, Gholam Reza (2009): The Life and Times of the Shah, p. 121

[40] cf. **Abrahamian**, Ervand (1993): Khomeinism. Essays on the Islamic Republic, p. 21f.

[41] cf. Ibid., p. 26f.

[42] cf. **Afkhami**, Gholam Reza (2009): The Life and Times of the Shah, p. 443

> "Their [Ahmad Fardid and Zabihollah Behruz] argument intimated that a Western conspiracy had robbed Iran of the ethical and political grandeur that had been hers and that the time had come for Iranians to reconceive and reappropriate the spirit that had once made their country grand. Spirituality was an indispensable ingredient of such a reconception."[43]

While Mr Afkhami argues that the intelligentsia or the general political public never seriously adopted this concept, Gharbzadegi seemed pertinent and had a certain appeal. This concept, in the end, prevailed and became the *Zeitgeist* to such an extent that "[c]olonialism was no longer the British coveting Iran's oil; it now was the West stealing Iran's culture."[44] "Westoxication" served as catalyst for the amalgamation of "red and black", the left and religion. The reason for this was that religion became something different for the Iranian left.

> "It was religion in the sense of believing in God but refusing to define God in terms of some revealed scripture: religious chic. Now the 'indigenous culture' became another version of religious chic: undefinable, but ideologically anti-West, anti-colonial, and anti-shah. And here it was that the foundations were laid for the future political convergence of the secular left and the religious right, an amalgam that in later years Morteza Motahhari, Khomeini's disciple, and after him the shah, would call 'Islamist-Marxist', the unholy alliance of the red and the black."[45]

In addition to this, the shah and the Iranian secret intelligence service SAVAK allowed an Islamic preacher, Ali Shariati, to spread his ideology, which fostered the convergence of Islam, and left ideology. His particular style of public speaking and his charisma made him a very popular figure. SAVAK probably speculated that his ideology would help to diminish the influence of more traditionalist clerics such as Ruhollah Khomeini.[46] Instead, this laissez-faire approach "[…] facilitated the convergence of Islamism, nationalism, and Marxism, begun in the 1960s, and consolidated under the Khomeini flag in the late 1970s."[47]

Third-Worldism, anti-colonialism, and Iranian revolution

The idea that Iran is a developing country and a revolutionary country informs the narratives as identified below. These include Iran's distinct anti-imperialist stance as well as the defensiveness of the Iranian regime. These factors overlap to a large extent. National dignity, Iranian

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., p. 444

[45] Ibid.

[46] cf. Ibid., p. 446

[47] Ibid.

revolution, anti-imperialism, and, in part, defensiveness should not be seen as isolated but rather as linked factors.

Imperialist meddling

Just like the concept of "Gharbzadegi", the notion of "imperialist meddling" is to be associated with the Iranian-Western relationship. This idea is not new, albeit being frequently evoked by Iranian officials and media.[48] Supreme Leader Khamenei, for instance, said that he seriously believed that "the government can overcome the problems and **foil the US plots** […] [Emphasis by author]".[49] It is difficult to identify an origin of this notion as the relationship between Iran and the West has often been complex and indeed complicated.

In any case, the narrative of imperialist meddling is often seen as linked with British economic policy towards Iran, which in turn is linked with the AOIC oil concession,[50, 51] and the coup to oust Iranian PM Mossadegh. Even Muhammad Reza Shah could be seen as a product of this meddling. Indeed, he could ascend the throne just with the help of the British and the Soviets, who forced his father to abdicate.[52] Furthermore, he also fled the country in 1953 and would it not have been for the coup against Mr Mossadegh with British and US assistance, the shah would not have returned. Of course, Iranians see this coup as prime example for British and US "imperialist meddling".

> "The coup date, 19 August 1953, in the Persian calendar 28 Mordad, acquired iconic status in Iranian political discourse. For the Shah it became a date to celebrate as a national holiday; for his opponents it was a day of betrayal. August 1953 was a decisive moment in Iranian politics and in Iran's relation to the Cold War. It settled for a generation the instability that had begun with the invasion of 1941. The opposition bloc of nationalist and communist forces was destroyed, and power came increasingly to be held by the Shah.'"[53]

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[48] **Press TV** (2018): US, Israel, Saudi, UAE plotting against Iran: Analyst. https://www.presstv.com/DetailFr/2018/11/11/579768/US-Iran-Trump-hook-UAE-israel-plot, last access on 08 December 2018

[49] **Fars News Agency** (2018): Iran's Leader Asks Gov't to Improve Economy Regardless of Europe's Guarantees. http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13970424000968, last access on 16 July 2018

[50] cf. **Abdelrehim**, Neveen Talaat Hassan (2010): Oil Nationalisation and Managerial Disclosure: The Case of Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, 1933-1951, p. 6. http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/1417/1/PhD_thesis.pdf, last access on 25 December 2018

[51] cf. **Shahnavaz**, Shahbaz (2005): Britain and South-West Persia 1880-1914. A Study in Imperialism and Economic Dependence. Abingdon/New York, RoutledgeCurzon, pp. 182—188

[52] **Bakhash**, Shaul (2016): Britain and the abidcation of Reza Shah, p. 326f. In: Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 52, No 2, pp. 318—334, https://www-tandfonline-com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/doi/pdf/10.1080/00263206.2015.1119122?needAccess=true, last access on 08 December 2018

[53] **Halliday**, Fred (2010): The Middle East in International Relations, p. 102

Subsequently, the shah started to oppress dissent to his rule by the means of SAVAK. The significance for this "imperialist meddling" narrative is even more obvious when taking into account that SAVAK was founded with US assistance and maintained good ties to the Israeli secret service from the very beginning.[54] As a consequence, not only the shah but also his intelligence service and the resulting oppression and alleged *en masse* torture were closely associated with the USA.

This is particularly relevant when it comes to the "subtle methods"[55] of interrogation, which SAVAK allegedly learned from the CIA and Israel's Shabak.[56] These "subtle methods" basically were torture. This torture took place in various SAVAK facilities, most notably the still notorious Evin prison in Tehran.[57] The shah, however, claimed not to have known about these "petty" affairs.

> "Muhammad Reza Shah: In matter of fact, we heard it mostly from outside. In the inside they would never come to me and say, well sir, we have tortured this fellow to make him talk. No. That was not my business, that was not my job. The reports that I had received from these intelligence services were very top … reports for the high stakes of the security of the state. […] I was receiving the head of the security, say, twice a week for 20 minutes, 25 minutes, and he would have his reports on important things to me, not just petty details like that. He would come with reports, for instance, on Afghanistan, for instance, on deep penetration, or at least trying to penetrate deeply of either students' or Mullahs' organization outside, this and that, but he wouldn't come me and say that today we have tortured this fellow or that fellow."[58]

In the years before the Iranian revolution and during the revolution itself, SAVAK was known as, basically, the torturers of the shah's regime. SAVAK, and conjointly the shah, were seen as oppressors, as servants to the USA, as those who tortured the Iranian people. Pro-Khomeini elements claimed in 1979 that the shah's regime and SAVAK had killed at least 100,000 people. [59] While the shah seemed genuinely taken aback by this claim and rejected it as "ridiculous", the simple fact that such a rumour could spread cemented the image of the torturing and killing shah regime who was supported by the USA and the West.

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[54] cf. **Afkhami**, Gholam Reza (2009): The Life and Times of the Shah, p. 385

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] **Sale**, Richard T. (1977): SAVAK: A Feared and Pervasive Force. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/05/09/savak-a-feared-and-pervasive-force/ad609959-d47b-4b7f-8c8d-b388116df90c/?utm_term=.cd16c630a154, last access on 7 May 2018

[58] **Frost**, David (1979): Shah of Iran's Last Interview with David Frost. (Video interview by journalist and TV host David Frost, posted 20 July 2017), from minute 17:15. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6ypxsi8Qlk, last access on 7 May 2018

[59] **Frost**, David (1979): Shah of Iran's Last Interview with David Frost, from minute 11:00

In addition to this, it is interesting to note how the perception of the USA, and in fact Britain, has changed in Iran over the course of the past 90 years. While the Iranians were originally very fond of the USA as a potential protective power against the "colonialist" states Britain and the USSR, this drastically changed during the Iranian revolution. As a matter of fact, Iran is a country at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia, hence it has been subject to the interests of regional or global powers. Hence, Iran was, therefore, prone to foreign intervention and colonialist attitudes. This has shaped its policies and its perceptions, which became clear during the revolution when then US president Jimmy Carter allowed the shah, who had fallen ill with cancer, to enter the United States. While this does not excuse the subsequent 1979—81 hostage crisis, it certainly explains some of its aspects.

> "While most likely in the dark before the fact, Khomeini gave the hostage taking *a posteriori* approval. The kidnapping of diplomats violated all international norms of diplomacy, enraged the USA, weakened moderates such as Bazargan and strengthened the Islamists, who believed that the **hostage taking was payback for the years the USA had supposedly spent plotting against Iran**. 'You have no right to complain', a hostage taker told one of his protesting American captives. '**You took our whole country hostage in 1953**.' […] The Islamic Republic raised its flag to the world with the Hostage Crisis, which destroyed any hope of good relations between Tehran and Washington and nationally humiliated Carter." [Emphasis by author][60′]

After the Iranian revolution, the notion of "imperialist meddling" resulted in a pronounced non-alignment by the newly founded Islamic Republic: "neither East, nor West, but Islamic Republic."[61] This narrative forms the foundation for a foreign policy that explicitly lied *between* the USA and the USSR, which, in turn, made the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) essential for Iran's foreign policy and multilateral strategy. Walter Posch highlights the importance of this notion which he labels "Third World rhetoric".

> "Most studies seeking to explain the true nature of Iran and how it functions stress the role of Islam, specifically the dominant Shiite confession (in its revolutionary form), or the distinctly Persian features of Iranian culture. What they often overlook, however, is a political discourse that is central for Iranians, namely, the Third World rhetoric from which the Iranians derive their identity and their self-image as the spearhead of developing countries."[62]

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[60] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 106

[61] **Bohdan**, Katya (2017): Today it's "Neither East, nor West — but the Islamic Republic". https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/410972/Today-it-s-Neither-East-nor-West-but-the-Islamic-Republic, last access on 08 December 2018

[62] **Posch**, Walter (2013): The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism. The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy, p. 6. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin. SWP-Studie 4/2013. https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2013_RP03_poc.pdf, last access on 11 May 2018

Intertwined with this notion is the dichotomy of oppressed/oppressor. Ayatollah Khomeini him-self essentially shaped this and other aspects of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy.

> "'We will not play the policeman of the Persian Gulf', said Khomeini with disdainful reference to the Shah's foreign policy, two weeks before he returned to Iran. His worldview was con-spirational and it was binary: Manichean in tone, Islamic in expression, Third Worldist and historical in construction and not nuanced. Good versus evil; the oppressor (*Mustakbarin*) versus the downtrodden (*Mostazafin*); the realm of peace and belief (*Dar al-Islam*) versus the realm of war and disbelief (*Dar al-Harb*) and truth and justice (*Haq va Adalat*) versus falsehood (*Batel*). In a Cold War world further sundered by the struggle between the USSR and USA, in which communism battled capitalism, Iran was the only 'true' independent state. Never again would it look to the 'godless East' or 'the tyrannic (sic) blasphemous West, instead it would look skywards, to God'."[63]

An "imposed war": regime's defensiveness

Many high-level politicians in the Islamic Republic, including former President Mahmoud Ah-madinejad and Ali Larijani, have an IRGC background. This does not only mean that they have a certain mind-set or particular interests, but they witnessed the effects of the Iran-Iraq war at first hand. It is not difficult to imagine that both this "imposed war" and the US meddling in internal Iranian affairs would lead to a certain culture of defensiveness of the regime's elites.

> "Many of their [the governing elite] foreign views, including those of Iranian President Mah-moud Ahmadinejad, were shaped by the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. '(Many of) the first-gener-ation revolutionaries of Iran are still pursuing an ideological or kind of a defensive strategy to maintain the country's revolution,' said Mahmood Sariolghalam, a professor of international relations at the National University of Iran, at a recent CFR meeting."[64]

This "defensiveness" does not mean that Iran would not behave aggressively whatsoever, on the contrary. Should an aggressive policy be necessary to protect the system of the Islamic Republic, Iran would behave aggressively. Moreover, Iran very much tried to "export" its revo-lutionary ideologies, in particular to Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as to the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas. In addition to this, the example of the Arab Spring of 2011—2 showed that Iran supports its ally, the Syrian regime, no matter the cost. This is due to the fact that Syria was the only Arab country to support Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. Fur-thermore, should the claim by Israeli PM Netanyahu be accurate that Iran indeed maintained

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[63] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 94

[64] **Beehner**, Lionel (2006): Iran's Multifaceted Foreign Policy. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/irans-multifaceted-foreign-policy, last access on 09 December 2018

a nuclear weapons programme,[65, 66] this would make Iran appear even more aggressive. How-ever, the notion of "defensiveness" of the Iranian regime aims at the regime's very survival.

This narrative might be seen as defensiveness, i.e. defence of the revolution, but it might as well be interpreted as being a part of a larger "sovereignty" narrative. This narrative is under-scored by Iranian nationalism, and Iran's stance toward Israel and the United States, as well as Iran's anti-colonialist stance. This likely also feeds into a "Third World" narrative, the notion that Iran is a developing country, in contrast to what the shah would have liked to achieve. Iran, as a consequence, strives for a different kind of modernity, a non-Western modernity that is closely linked with Westoxication, with anti-colonialism, with an ideology that is somewhat left-ist, and with the regime's defensiveness against the "imperialist" West.

Persian nationalism

Nationalism was linked to Persia's ancient past and great power aspirations during the Pahlavi era. Under the Islamic republic, the notion of "Persia" has become less important but national-ism itself remained a key factor in the politics of the Islamic Republic. As a consequence of nationalism, Iran pursues power politics in the region, i.e. the Middle East. Nationalism has, in this context, to be seen as contrasting Islamism to a certain extent. While Islamism would, for instance, emphasise the role of the *umma*, the Islamic community, nationalism emphasises the role of the Iranian nation. This, however, is in turn linked to Islamism as Iran is ethnically highly diverse.

Iran's foreign policy is, beyond doubt, a complex policy field with numerous influences. Iranian foreign policy drivers and influences are often not straightforward but complex and interrelated. Very often more than just one single factor influences Iranian foreign policy decision-making and these factors might even contradict one another. As such, identifying factors that could or would realistically influence Iran's foreign policy, or other policies, is more of a process than a single task. However, nearly forty years after the revolution, some general characteristics of the Islamic Republic have evolved.

> "Twenty years after the Islamic revolution, Islam remains the characteristic that receives the
> most attention, with Persian nationalism often cited as competing source of Iran's inspiration.
> While Islam and nationalism are important drivers, their importance has diminished, and

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[65] cf. **McLaughlin**, Eliott (2018): Netanyahu says he has proof of secret Iranian nuclear programme. https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/30/middleeast/netanyahu-iran-nuclear-program/index.html, last access on 11 May 2018

[66] **Holmes**, Oliver/**Borger**, Julian (2018): Nuclear deal: Netanyahu accuses Iran of cheating on agreement. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/30/netanyahu-accuses-iran-cheating-nuclear-deal, last access on 11 May 2018

evolved, as Iran's revolutionary enthusiasm has given over to the pragmatic concerns that all states must take into account. Geopolitics has reasserted its importance, and economics has grown from a foreign policy irrelevance to a leading factor. Ethnicity and other communal considerations also drive Iran's foreign policy, leading the Islamic Republic to adopt far more conservative policies than its Islamic and nationalist ethos might otherwise dictate.'"[67]

The formulation of Iran's policy could not be thought of without taking into account Iran's role as a rising power in the Middle East, and its self-awareness as a great nation. This perception is of course informed by its ancient Persian heritage. Iran's role in the modern Middle East cannot be fully understood without understanding its aspiration to be a force that shapes the region, the leading Muslim country, and its aspiration to represent and defend developing countries.

> "The elites of the Islamic Republic perceive Iran to be the natural, indispensable, and leading power of the Middle East, or even the Muslim world. Iran's perception of its own unique centrality is informed by a strong sense of Iranian identity and awareness of the country's role as one of the region's historical powers. From the time of the first Persian Empire (550–330 BC) to the present era, Iran has played a vital role in shaping the Middle East, but it has also been shaped by outside forces. Although Iran ceased to be a great power in the 18th century, its current size, population, strategic location, energy reserves, and perception of its central role in global politics propel it to claim the vital role it once played."[68]

This aspiration is essential in understanding the foreign policy formulation of Iran as well as its strategic culture. This complex structure of narratives, ideologies, aspirations, and self-perceptions, in fact, informs Iranian foreign policy making to a large extent. Indeed, it sometimes is argued that these are inseparably interconnected with foreign policy.

> "A distinction is often drawn among internal security, the preservation of the revolution, and Iran's broad foreign policy aims. Closer examination, however, reveals this distinction is at best blurry and at worst dangerously misleading. All of Iran's major policy decisions — how to ensure security against Iraq, whether to improve relations with Washington, how much support should be given to the anti-Israel effort, and so on — involve a complex calculus of Iran's overall vulnerability, the need to ensure the regime is strong, and Iran's commitment to revolutionary ideals.'"[69]

Other factors, without which Iran's foreign policy and its great power aspiration could not be understood, are its Shiite identity, and its nationalist stance. After all, Iran is a national state as

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[67] **Byman**, Daniel et al. (2001): Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era, p. 7. Santa Monica/Arlington/Pittsburgh, USA, RAND Corporation

[68] **Buchta**, Wilfried (2000): Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic, p. 46. Washington, DC, USA, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy/Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

[69] **Byman**, Daniel et al. (2001): Iran's Security Policy, p. 99

many others are, but its decisions are informed by its past experiences. This, for instance, concerns both its Shiite, its Persian, and its revolutionary identities, but also its rationality in terms of regime survival and its firmly legalist stance.

Appraising these narratives

As is often the case with ideologies and narratives, Iran's ideologies and narratives are not necessarily coherent and consistent. They might contradict one another, they might overlap, and they might sometimes be not as important as they appear initially. The question is how to appraise them appropriately, i.e. how to gauge their importance in relation to others. Walter Posch, for instance, argues that oftentimes ideology and narratives are portrayed in an exaggerated manner in order to gain advantage in negotiations.[70] Indeed, Iranian policymakers tend to justify their policies ex post facto in light of their respective ideology. Mr Posch highlights this notion in arguing that the Iranians would be surprisingly "opportunistic"[71] in their choice of ideological justification. As an example, Mr Posch instanced the Iranian-Syrian relations.

> "[…] Tehran employed different ideological approaches to justify the Iranian-Syrian alliance: nationalistically in the first phase, when it was a case of defending against an Iraqi invasion, and pan-Islamistically in the second, with the Axis of Resistance (which, especially in South America, president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad described in Third-World terms, as a kind of global revolutionary project). Finally, in the last years of its Syria policy, Iran was reduced to its Shia identity, which prompted Tehran again to use nationalist arguments to justify its commitment to its own population."[72]

The same is true for the justification of the nuclear programme. The Islamic Republic of Iran justified the maintenance of a nuclear programme, as with its Syria policy, with different ideological aspects, depending on which best suited its interest. The Syrian example is, indeed, a good example for **Iran's ideological flexibility** when it comes to its policy formulation. In contrast to its reaction to the Arab Spring in other Arab countries, Iran continued to support the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad.

> "According to *Kayhan*, the popular stirrings in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen – and subsequent protests in Bahrain, Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, Oman, Libya and Kuwait – represent a wave of 'Islamic awakening' which is long overdue and now represents an unstoppable force. […] This view was articulated by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, during a

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[70] **Posch**, Walter (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 August 2018

[71] Ibid.

[72] **Posch**, Walter (2017): Ideology and Strategy in the Middle East: The Case of Iran, p. 86. In: Survival, Vol. 59, No 5, pp. 69—98. https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2017.1375256, last access on 02 August 2018

rare appearance at Tehran's Friday prayers in February. […] Claiming that Tehran would never interfere in the domestic affairs of other states, the Ayatollah nonetheless noted that the 'Islamic awakenings' in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and elsewhere were inspired by Iran's own Islamic Revolution and that they also represented the gradual realisation of the late Imam Khomeini's prophecy."[73]

As a consequence, the ideological trends and narratives as presented above, albeit existent, should not be seen as aspects that are always present and important when it comes to foreign policymaking. Depending on the subject matter, not all narratives and ideologies are equally important. Whereas economic policy, for instance, might not be seen as of paramount ideological importance, diplomatic relations with some states might very well be. In addition to this, Iran identifies three important geographical theatres.

> "[…] Tehran uses a logical pattern of when and how to apply elements of its ideology depending on geography. Four ideological pillars are applied, with different levels of emphasis, to three geographic areas. The four ideological pillars can be explained with reference to the history of Iran and of the Islamic movement in Iran, and they are, in some respects, contradictory. They are: Iranian nationalism, traditional Shi'ism, *tiers-mondialisme* (or Third-Worldism), and non-confessional, revolutionary Islamism (or Khomeinism). The three regions are the immediate neighbourhood, the Islamic world (especially the Middle East) and the wider international community of the so-called Third World. The ideological pillars are not of equal importance to each region: 'global' Shi'ism does not play a role in Iranian Third World policy, while Third-Worldism carries no relevance in Iran's immediate neighbourhood. Often, a number of ideological approaches are resorted to in order to justify the same policy, as in the case of Syria. As a rule, the boundaries between the ideological approaches and the regions are blurred."[74]

As a consequence, experiences in the past led to narratives and ideological trends that now influence Iranian foreign policy. In addition to this, facts and interests are relevant for analysing its foreign policy. These both influence policy outcome as well as political strategies, which, in turn, influence concrete policies. The factors as described in this chapter form the basis of the analysis as conducted for this thesis. Of course, this list is not exhaustive. Besides, political factors may change over time. Some ideologies or narratives might change, might become more, or less important than others.

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[73] **Parchami**, Ali (2012): The 'Arab Spring': the view from Tehran, p. 37f. In: Contemporary Politics, Vol. 18, No 1, pp. 35—52 https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2012.651272, last access on 6 August 2018

[74] **Posch**, Walter (2017): Ideology and Strategy in the Middle East: The Case of Iran, p. 78f.

Chapter 3 — "Neither East, nor West": Iran's foreign and security policy

Foreign and security policy are, not only in Iran but, as a matter of fact, generally intertwined. Security policy depends to a large extent on foreign policy and foreign policy often takes place in relation to the security sector. Having a dysfunctional military, for instance, or being a superpower should normally lead to genuinely different foreign policy decisions under similar circumstances. This interrelation between foreign and security policy could mean that either of those sectors could be dominant, or that they are balanced. Israel, for instance, often relies upon its strong military rather than its diplomacy. In this respect, security policy would be dominant. Austria, on the other hand, would heavily rely on its diplomacy in order to avoid conflict. Nonetheless, security policy decisions and foreign policy decisions, in any case, have consequences for one another, respectively.

The same is true for Iran. Iran's foreign and security policy formulation is subject to intense debates about the origins of power within the Islamic Republic. While some scholars would argue that the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic is the main source of power in Iran, others sketch a different image. As a matter of fact, the key institution formulating Iran's foreign and security policy is the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). In this council, debates about foreign policy decisions are taken without the outcome being pre-determined. This is due to the fact that both moderates as well as hard-liners are represented in the SNSC.

> "In positions of power are moderates as well as militants, reformers as well as revolutionaries. The result is a foreign policy that, experts say, is muddled and far from monolithic. 'Although Iran's hard-line leadership has maintained a remarkable unity of purpose in the face of reformist challengers, it is badly fragmented over key foreign policy issues, including the importance of nuclear weapons,' wrote Kenneth Pollack of the Brookings Institution and CFR Senior Fellow Ray Takeyh in a 2005 *Foreign Affairs* article."[75]

However, while the SNSC may form the centrepiece of Iranian foreign policy formulation, other institutions may play an important role as well. The goal of this chapter is to assess the relations among the institutions that are involved in foreign policy formulation. These institutions are the president, the supreme leader, the above-mentioned SNSC, and the Iranian MFA. Other institutions that are not involved in the foreign policy formulation process will not be taken into account in this chapter.[76]

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[75] **Beehner**, Lionel (2006): Iran's Multifaceted Foreign Policy

[76] cf. **Ehteshami**, Anoushiravan (2014): The Foreign Policy of Iran, p. 270. In: **Hinnebusch**, Raymond/**Ehteshami**, Anoushiravan (eds.): The Foreign Policies of Middle East States, p. 261—288. Boulder, Colorado, USA/London, Lynne Rienner

The essential part in understanding Iran's political system, and hence its foreign policy process, is to understand how the institutions of the supreme leader and the president share power. The position of the supreme leader is somewhat "strange" in the sense that it formally is "above" the president. Without the supreme leader, the Iranian political system would be parallel to the French political system. As such, the supreme leader is the highest religious, legal, and political power in the Islamic Republic.

In terms of foreign policy, this status of the supreme leader means that he has significant influence on foreign policy. As such, he limits the powers of the president himself. As a consequence, the president is not the key character in formulating foreign policy, but the supreme leader. Nonetheless, according to some interviews by the author of this thesis, the main institution to decide on foreign policy is the SNSC which safeguards a certain influence on foreign policy by the president.

> "[President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad has some influence over foreign policy—he appoints the cabinet and the head of the SNSC—but power remains mostly in the hands of the SNSC and the supreme Leader. '(Ahmadinejad) is a small piece of the puzzle and can be influential on the fringes, but certainly not (by) steering Iranian foreign or nuclear policy,' [Karim] Sadjadpour says. Experts say Ahmadinejad's controversial statements calling for Israel's elimination should not be construed as official foreign policy."[77]

One of the essential aspects about Iran's foreign policy and security policy system is that these two domains cannot be thought as being independent from one another.

Supreme National Security Council

The SNSC is of particular interest for this thesis as both Iran's nuclear policy and its foreign policy are decided upon in this institution. Furthermore, The SNSC is the one institution where political factors influencing decisions take full effect. Unfortunately, the SNSC is an opaque institution, its decisions are not transparent. As a consequence, it is not accessible for scholars, which means that it is, at the same time, the most important and the most challenging research subject for this thesis. As such, it is not possible to analyse the discussions within the SNSC but only the policy outcome. This makes it impossible to assess whose opinion, whose political stance prevailed and why which political factors prevailed.

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[77] **Beehner**, Lionel (2006): Iran's Multifaceted Foreign Policy

The only indication of how the SNSC decides and which factors play an important role in decision-making is the representation within the SNSC and their political views. After all, "Iranian decision-making reflects the interaction among the formal power structure (instruments of state), informal networks, and *maslahat*. [expediency, note by author]"[78]

The formal role of the SNSC is to serve as consultative body for the supreme leader in national security matters. This means that matters of national security will be referred to the SNSC. In case of the Iranian nuclear file, the Islamic Republic defined the referral of the matter to the UNSC as a matter of national security. Tehran sought to avoid the referral to the UNSC under any circumstances. Therefore, the SNSC was tasked with preventing the file from being transferred to the UNSC.

> "The purpose of the SNSC is to help establish consensus among the elites on various issues related to foreign policy, national security, defense, and domestic security. The supreme leader appoints two members; other members include the president, the foreign minister, the minister of defense, the minister of intelligence, the minister of the interior, the chairman of the joint chiefs, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the head of the judicial branch, and the speaker of the *Majles*, among others. While the president heads the SNSC, the secretary of the SNSC wields great power. All the decisions of the SNSC are submitted to the supreme leader for approval. After the supreme leader approves them, they become the official policy of Iran. Those policies are then sent to various ministries or departments for implementation."[79]

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Vis-à-vis the SNSC, the Iranian MFA is not as important and as powerful. The Iranian minister of foreign affairs, currently Javad Zarif, and the MFA would conduct the daily business of foreign and diplomatic affairs, which includes, for instance, the non-security related aspects of the Iranian nuclear programme. As long as it would not concern Iranian national security, the MFA could deal with the matter. Nonetheless, once the matter had been referred to the SNSC, the MFA played a subordinate, political role.[80] Of course, Mr Zarif, once he had been appointed chief nuclear negotiator for Iran by President Rouhani, became more influential but, in general, there is little to no institutional influence by the MFA in security policy.[81]

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[78] **Lim**, Kevjn (2015): National Security Decision-Making in Iran, p.150. In: Comparative Strategy, Vol. 34, No 2, pp. 149—168. https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2015.1017347, last access on 09 December 2018

[79] **Kazemzadeh**, Masoud (2017): Foreign policy decision making in Iran and the nuclear program, p. 202. In: Comparative Strategy, Vol. 36, No 3, pp. 198—214. https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2017.1338478, last access on 10 December 2018

[80] cf. **Lim**, Kevjn (2015): National Security Decision-Making in Iran, p.155

[81] cf. Ibid., p. 161

In general, the MFA Is in a difficult position between the supreme leader and the president.

> "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is headed by the foreign minister, conducts the routine and mundane issues related to foreign policy. The constitution explicitly states that the foreign minister is nominated by the president, and has to be confirmed by the *Majles*. According to the constitution, the president can dismiss the members of the cabinet, including the foreign minister. At the same time, the constitution stipulates that the supreme leader is the ultimate power in foreign policy. It is not clear in practice whether the foreign minister answers to the president or the supreme leader."[82]

The president and the supreme leader

As mentioned beforehand, the main institutions involved in the foreign policy formulation process are the supreme leader, the president, the SNSC, and the MFA. One of the most pressing issues in this context is the question of how the supreme leader and the president share power. The key principle is that the supreme leader, the central institution in foreign policy matters, is more powerful than the president and it is him, currently Ayatollah Khamenei, to make strategic decisions. The president, on the other hand, is responsible for implementing policy, including foreign policy. However, this does not mean that the president would be powerless, on the contrary. Nonetheless, it seems as if Supreme Leader Khamenei would be the dominating force in Iranian politics.

> "Mr Khamenei has won every power struggle he has faced, including with Mr Rohani's predecessors as president, the hardline Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the reformist Muhammad Khatami (whose name he still bans from appearing in print). But the leader seems crankier than before. Mr Rohani enjoys the support of Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the veteran kingmaker. After the latest testing of ballistic missiles, timed to undermine one of Mr Rohani's trips abroad, Mr Rafsanjani tweeted that Iran would be better engaging in dialogue than conducting missiles tests. 'Those who say the future is in negotiations not missiles are either ignorant or traitors', snapped back an irked Mr Khamenei.'"[83]

Understanding how and why the supreme leader took a decision, and how far the president may go in his decisions, is, therefore, essential in understanding the Iranian foreign policy process. Anoushiravan Ehteshami confirms this notion of a more powerful supreme leader.

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[82] **Kazemzadeh**, Masoud (2017): Foreign policy decision making in Iran and the nuclear program, p. 201

[83] **The Economist** (2016): Who's in charge? https://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21699462-supreme-leader-clipping-wings-reformist-president-whos, last access on 9 May 2018

> "Iran's dual political institutions embody a two-headed executive that divides responsibility for foreign policy. Procedurally, Iran's foreign policy processes have changed little over the years, with the president responsible for implementing the country's national policies through the executive branch of the government, which includes the foreign ministry and its agencies. Evidence suggests that since the late 1990s the Spiritual Leader and his elaborate bureaucracy have become central to the crafting of state strategy […]. Once outlines crystallize, priorities are then debated and agreed in the country's supreme national security council.'"[84]

As a consequence, it seems impossible to circumvent the supreme leader in any foreign policy decision, at least when it comes to the general direction, the overall strategy of Iran's foreign policy. Wilfried Buchta argues that his power cannot be overestimated as it is the most important institution within Iran's political system.

> "By far the most powerful institution in Iran is the Office of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, which is inseparably linked to the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's politico-religious theory of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurisprudent). Accordingly, in Iran the terms *rahbar-e enqelab* (leader of the revolution) and *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurisprudent) are generally used synonymously. Khomeini's followers implemented the velayat-e faqih against all opposition and, by means of Article 107 of the 1979 constitution, established it as a state principle inseparably linked to the person of Khomeini. In this way they created an office whose power far exceeded even that granted to the shah in the 1906 constitution."[85]

However, instead of comprehending the supreme leader as excessively powerful, dictatorial ruler, would not do justice to the often-consensual formulation of Iranian foreign policy. This occurs primarily in the SNSC, in which the heads of the ministries of foreign affairs, intelligence, and interior, and the heads of the armed forces and the revolutionary guards (IRGC) discuss foreign and security policy matters.[86] As a matter of fact, the capacity of the supreme leader to decide is rooted in the structure of Iran's political system. The two main ideological stands, moderates and hard-liners, both can accept decisions by the supreme leader if they debated the matter at hand first. This, in part, takes place in the SNSC.[87]

Foreign and security policy process

Other groups involved in foreign and security policy formulation, as identified by Mr Posch, are the office of the supreme leader, the Majles, various splinter groups, the clergy, the three

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[84] **Ehteshami**, Anoushiravan (2014): The Foreign Policy of Iran, p. 269f.

[85] **Buchta**, Wilfried (2000): Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic, p. 46

[86] **Beehner**, Lionel (2006): Iran's Multifaceted Foreign Policy

[87] cf. **Fasslabend**, Werner (2019): Interview by author. Vienna, 03 January 2019

councils, and think tanks.[88] How these institutions, and the institutions mentioned above, interact with one another depends to a certain extent to the power relations within the Iranian political system, and in part to personalities within the system. The late Ayatollah Rafsanjani, for instance, had a close relationship to Supreme Leader Khamenei but served as mentor to President Rouhani, too.

It is necessary to bear in mind what was stated initially in this chapter. Foreign policy matters are often closely linked to matters of security policy or matters of national security. This is not unusual or confined to Iran, this nexus of foreign and security policy exists in other states as well. This connection between foreign and security policy and, in case of the nuclear file, nuclear policy makes the SNSC an essential player in both foreign and security policy. It would, furthermore, appear that the president would be involved in all security matters. This, however, largely depends on the office holder.

> "As Iran's formal second-in-command, the president focuses primarily on the country's domestic management and the economy. Officially, the president is involved, or at least kept abreast of, national security matters, but this depends on the incumbent. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was clearly a prime mover in many ways and a key national security figure during the 1990s (an era often dubbed the Second Republic, following the revolutionary war-time fervor of the 1980s), and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's neo-conservative outlook gave unprecedented impetus to the rise of the IRGC in domestic politics, irrespective of whether he himself played a central role in security decisions."[89]

Mr Posch argues that Iran's foreign policy is formulated in several steps.

> "In practice the problem of unclear allocation of competencies between state and revolutionary institutions is regulated by a three-step convention. This is based on a mechanism of intensive preliminary consultations in which the Supreme Leader is assigned a central role.
> 1. Foreign policy analysis and the real *opinion-forming process* take place within the formal institutions.
> 2. The *decision-making process* takes place formally (institutions) and informally (political networks) within the political elites to which not only active but also former politicians belong, as do 'non-political' clerics.
> 3. The final *decision* is formulated by the Supreme Leader as a consensus reached by the political elite"[90]

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[88] cf. **Posch**, Walter (2013): The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism, p. 7—13

[89] **Lim**, Kevjn (2015) National Security Decision-Making in Iran, p.152

[90] **Thaler**, David E. et al. (2010): Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads. An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics, p. 5. Santa Monica, USA, RAND Corporation

One of the most important aspects of the political system of Iran, however, is its informality and its being determined by informal networks. Of course, Iranian political institutions essentially are the forums to determine foreign policy but the informal networks in the Islamic Republic are the real centres of decision-making. That is, in these informal networks consensus is created and then implemented on a formal level. Of course, this gives additional, or less, weight to key institutions such as the supreme leader or the president.[91] This, for instance, explains the oversized influence, in terms of his official post, of the late Ayatollah Rafsanjani on political decision-making.

However, while there are powerful personalities such as the Supreme Leader, none of them is omnipotent. Instead, a complex network of power and decision-making is in place in the Islamic Republic. Political decisions such as the formulation of Iran's foreign policy consequentially are a product of consensus-building among various centres of decision-making and political influence. Furthermore, the essential point about the Iranian political system, according to Mr Posch, is the institutionalisation of its consensus-building capacity. Even more so, as any matter concerning Iran's national security will automatically be referred to the SNSC. In the SNSC, everyone concerned in the matter, for instance the Iranian nuclear programme, will discuss Iran's policy and will seek consensus. This does not necessarily happen in a particularly ideological manner.[92]

Nuclear policy formulation

Given the fact that nuclear decision-making often is security policy decision-making in Iran, the institutions involved in security policy formulation are also involved in nuclear policy-making. As mentioned above, the SNSC, as security institution, and the MFA are both involved in nuclear decision-making. So are the supreme leader and the president. Moreover, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) should be mentioned.[93] Furthermore, the IRGC is central for the Iranian nuclear and missile programmes.

> "[…] [T]he IRGC's ideological fealty to Khomeini's Revolution has made it, rather than the *Artesh*, the custodians for the country's most sensitive weapons systems. Iran's missile program, which began in response to Saddam Hussein's Scud attacks, is the largest of its type in the Middle East and has come to encompass a solid-fuel, intermediate-range ballistic component under the remit of the IRGC's Air Force. But the more critical linkage lies in its use as

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[91] cf. Ibid., p. 75

[92] **Posch**, Walter (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 August 2018

[93] cf. **Lim**, Kevjn (2015) National Security Decision-Making in Iran, p.153

delivery systems for any potential unconventional offensive capabilities, including a nuclear program with possible military dimensions."[94]

As a consequence, Iran's nuclear policy is both linked to foreign policy, and security policy. This makes these policy fields hard to distinguish. This fact is a challenge for this thesis as it focuses primarily on foreign policy. As a matter of fact, this is not necessarily problematic. The factors influencing foreign, security, and nuclear policy are fundamentally the same. While some of these factors may vary, the overall trend in factors remains the same.

Significance for this thesis

Understanding Iran's foreign policy formulation is essential for this thesis as this determines whose perspective is that of an "insider". Those who formulate and those who implement foreign policy, for instance the Foreign Minister or Ambassadors, are the ones who have a unique "insider" perspective on foreign policy. It is they who understand Iran and Iranian foreign policy formulation, hence they are the ones whose remarks should be highly valuable for this thesis.

In addition to this, it is necessary for the interviewer to bear in mind the position of the respective interview partner in the foreign policy formulation process. For instance, the point of view of an ambassador might be very different from that of the President or the speaker of the Majles. Lastly, it is essential to know what the interview partners would talk about when they speak about the formulation of Iran's foreign policy. Knowing the structure of Iranian foreign policy formulation means knowing how certain remarks need to be weighed and interpreted.

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[94] Ibid., p. 160

Chapter 4 — The Islamic atom

Understanding the Iranian nuclear programme is paramount for understanding the significance of the JCPOA. Without taking into account the history, the political importance, and certain narratives and ideological aspects in relation to the nuclear programme, it would be impossible to analyse the JCPOA properly. The question is, for instance, how and why the Islamic Republic justified the re-starting of the programme, how such a programme could be in conformity with its ideology, and why, subsequently, the JCPOA was eventually acceptable. This means that the history of the programme should be reviewed in light of narratives and ideology. Therefore, the origins of the nuclear programme, the post-Cold War phase, and the nuclear crisis will be dealt with in this chapter.

Origins of the nuclear programme

Iran's nuclear programme, perceived as a matter of international security at least since the nuclear crisis of 2003, was originally started under the shah in the 1950s.[95] Iran's first research reactor began operating in 1967,[96] and the country signed the NPT in 1968.[97] In 1974, the AEOI was established.[98] At some point, the shah considered acquiring nuclear weapons but ultimately decided against going nuclear.[99] The reason for this was the shah's fear how this would negatively affect his image among Western states and, in particular, the USA.[100] Mr Patrikarakos argues that "throughout the meandering 60-year history of the nuclear programme from 'Atoms for Peace' to Obama's White House today, the USA has remained the single most important factor in deciding whether Iran goes nuclear or not."[101]

After the ousting of the shah in the Iranian revolution, the newly established Islamic Republic had to decide whether to continue or to abort the programme. They chose the latter, explaining this by the extraordinarily high costs of the programme and thereby distinguishing themselves

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[95] cf. **The Guardian** (2013): Timeline of Iran's nuclear programme. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/iran-nuclear-timeline, last access on 26 May 2018

[96] cf. **Inskeep**, Steve (2015): Born in the USA: How America Created Iran's Nuclear Program. https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/09/18/440567960/born-in-the-u-s-a-how-america-created-irans-nuclear-program, last access on 26 December 2018

[97] **Pan**, Esther (2005): IRAN: Curtailing the Nuclear Program. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/iran-curtailing-nuclear-program, last access on 26 December 2018

[98] **AEOI** (s.a.): A brief introduction to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. https://www.aeoi.org.ir/portal/home/?47317/%D8%B5%D9%81%D8%AD%D9%87-About-us, last access on 26 December 2018

[99] **Quester**, George H. (1977): The Shah and the Bomb, p. 22. In: Policy Sciences, Vol 8, No 1, pp. 21—32

[100] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 65

[101] Ibid., p. 66

from the allegedly financially irresponsible, corrupt Pahlavi regime. The main reason for this decision was ideological in nature. The newly established regime sought to distance itself from the Pahlavi era and from the nuclear programme, which had been one of the shah's favourite enterprises as it was emblematic of westernisation, Westoxication, or *Gharbzadegi*, and alleged financial irresponsibility. The nuclear programme was seen as essentially Western in nature, hence to be rejected.[102]

> "'Ayatollah Khomeini famously said the unfinished nuclear power plants in Bushehr should be used as silos to store wheat,' says [Ali] Vaez [, the International Crisis Group senior analyst for Iran]. Ultimately, 'they were abandoned as a costly Western imposition on an oil-rich nation.' This attitude lasted into the 1980s. But by then, Iran was fighting a brutal war against neighboring Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein. As part of that war, Saddam repeatedly bombed the Bushehr nuclear facility, which was not operational at the time."[103]

The fact that Iran continuously denounced Western influence in Iran and the US embassy hostage crisis 1979—81 led to the loss of Western support in all policy fields,[104] including that of nuclear energy. As a consequence, the construction of the Bushehr power plant was put to halt.[105] Furthermore, an agreement with the United States concerning the USA providing high-enriched uranium (HEU) to Iran, was terminated. Eventually, Supreme Leader Khomeini cancelled the nuclear programme.[106, 107]

> "The construction of these reactors, started by the former regime *on the basis of colonialist and imposed treaties*, was harmful from the economic, political and technical points of view, and *was a cause of greater dependence on imperialist countries*. These contracts were stopped after the victory of the revolution."[108] [Emphasis from the original]

Nonetheless, economic determinants and political factors, for which the shah had launched the programme in the first place, remained unchanged. Therefore, it does not come as surprise that the regime, soon after having cancelled the programme, contemplated about re-starting it. However, the government's "[…] previous anti-nuclear stance had been so adamant that the

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[102] cf. Ibid., p. 94ff.

[103] **Inskeep**, Steve (2015): Born in the USA. How America Created Iran's Nuclear Program

[104] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 106—108

[105] cf. **IAEA** (2007): Islamic Republic of Iran. https://www-pub.iaea.org/mtcd/publications/pdf/cnpp2007/countryprofiles/Iran/Iran2007.htm, last access on 6 August 2018

[106] cf. **The Guardian** (2013): Timeline of Iran's nuclear programme

[107] cf. **Anadolu Agency** (2015): Timeline of Iran's nuclear program. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/timeline-of-irans-nuclear-program/26498, last access on 15 May 2018

[108] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 98f.

government couldn't contradict it too egregiously without a loss of face."[109] Such a juxtaposition of pragmatism and revolutionary orthodoxy required a delicate balancing act by the government in order to both appease conservatives and to address Iranians' energy requirements.[110] Before long, the Islamic Republic had re-started the programme, this time portraying it as in conformity with its principles, thus displaying an astounding extent of ideological flexibility.

Iran-Iraq war

After the decision was taken to re-start the nuclear programme, its implementation was delayed by the war with neighbouring Iraq. The "imposed war" required a channelling of funds to the military instead of the civilian nuclear programme. As a consequence, it was not before 1984 that Iran re-started the nuclear programme.[111] This, however, did not run smoothly. The fact that Iranians were still in need of international assistance but were unable to convince former partners to cooperate contributed to the feeling of being internationally isolated.[112, 113] The German contractor who was tasked with building Bushehr refused to continue construction prior to the end of the war, for instance.[114]

Albeit these problems being self-inflicted, Iran began to act as if international organisations, such as the IAEA, served as mere tools of Western hegemony.[115] Ironically, this contributed to the image in the West that Iran had become an irrational actor. This assessment has not changed since, and even if it had, it would be unclear for the USA or others to correctly predict Iran's behaviour.

> "More importantly, even if we were to conclude that the Iranian regime is a rational actor, we would not necessarily be able to predict its decisions or behavior. We have a poor understanding of how the regime sees its interests, what it perceives as costly and beneficial, what information is available to its leader, and therefore what it would consider the best decision in a given circumstance. And of course, even otherwise rational actors are prone to the occasional

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[109] Ibid.

[110] cf. Ibid., p. 104

[111] cf. **Sinha**, Shreeya/**Campbell Beachy**, Susan (2015): Timeline on Iran's Nuclear Program. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/11/20/world/middleeast/Iran-nuclear-timeline.html#/#time243_7204, last access on 16 July 2018

[112] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 108

[113] cf. **Soltanieh**, Ali Asghar (2017): Miscalculations dealing with Iran on nuclear issue. Short Glance of the past and look for better future. Harvard University, Belfer Center for Science and International Studies. Personal notes by Amb. Soltanieh for a lecture on 10 May 2017

[114] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 108

[115] cf. **Soltanieh**, Ali Asghar (2017): Interview by author. Vienna, 10 August 2017

— and sometimes very consequential — irrational decision. And in an authoritarian state with an aging and increasingly isolated leader, this risk goes up exponentially."[116]

Post-Cold War

The end of the Cold War was an event without precedence and of enormous gravitas for the international system. The same is true for Iran but partly due to other reasons. In 1988, the Iran-Iraq war, a conflict that had determined the entire existence of the revolutionary Islamic Republic, ended. Furthermore, Ayatollah Khomeini died in 1989, thus leaving Iran in the need of determining a new Supreme Leader. Eventually, the late Ayatollah Rafsanjani served as kingmaker and helped then President Ali Khamenei, who actually had lacked the religious credentials required by the Iranian constitution, ascend the supreme leadership.[117, 118]

The effects of the end of the Cold War and subsequently of the Iran-Iraq war on the nuclear programme were most likely limited. Starting a nuclear weapons programme would have required time and it is extremely unlikely that Iran would have finished construction of a workable prototype of a nuclear device prior to the end of the war with Iraq, and even thereafter. In any case, it would have been logical for the Iranians to work on a nuclear weapon in the phase 1980—8. The war demanded a high toll,[119] Iraq used chemical weapons,[120] and the infamous "war of the cities"[121] inflicted terror on both the populations of Tehran and Baghdad. Nonetheless, without the information that is available today, it had to remain unclear to outsiders whether Iran really maintained a clandestine nuclear weapons programme.

> "In 1981 at both the Tehran Nuclear Research Centre and at the Isfahan Nuclear Technology Centre Iran began laboratory and bench scale experiments to produce the materials important to uranium conversion – without declaring this to the IAEA. Critically, these experiments went on for over a decade and Iran only decided to stop domestic research and development on UF6 in 1993, in expectation of help from China with the construction of a uranium-enrichment plant and a uranium conversion plant."[122]

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[116] **Singh**, Michael (2012): Is the Iranian regime rational? https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/23/is-the-iranian-regime-rational/, last access on 27 December 2018

[117] cf. **Thaler**, David E. et al. (2010): Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads, p. 45

[118] cf. Ibid., p. 50

[119] cf. **Kurzman**, Charles (2013): Death Tolls of the Iran-Iraq War. https://kurzman.unc.edu/death-tolls-of-the-iran-iraq-war/, last access on 22 May 2018

[120] cf. **Ali**, Javed (2001): Chemical Weapons and the Iran-Iraq War: A Case Study in Noncompliance, p. 43, p. 47ff. In: The Nonproliferation Review, Vol 8, No 1, pp. 43—58

[121] **Francona**, Rick (1999): Ally to Adversary. An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall from Grace, p. 13f. Annapolis, Naval Institute Press

[122] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 122

In 1995, Iran reached an agreement with Russia to complete the construction of the nuclear reactor in Bushehr.[123] While Tehran would have preferred China, which had become Iran's most important nuclear trading partner[124], to complete the construction of Bushehr, the Russians were the best partner the Iranians could get. Due to an intervention by US President Bill Clinton, the Chinese stepped back from the partnership with Iran.[125] Therefore, it was with the USSR and later Russia that Iran entered a partnership of convenience: "Iran needed Russia for technology and expertise and Russia (as it was now called following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991) needed Iran's money."[126]

The Nuclear Crisis

The fact that neither the USA nor Iran had a favourable image of one another was the keystone of the 2002—3 nuclear crisis. Whereas the USA considered Iran an unpredictable, irrational country, Iran thought of the USA as an imperialist force that had subjugated and oppressed Iran and its interests. In such a situation, Tehran might have maintained a civilian nuclear programme which would not have been problematic per se. The fact that it acquired *dual use* components from Russia and China meant that it could theoretically work on a nuclear weapon. Moreover, the clandestine nature of the nuclear programme that was revealed later led to distrust.

Furthermore, the IAEA might have conducted inspections but, in the end, the inspectors were mere guests in Iran. The sites they could inspect were determined by the AEOI, thus leaving space for speculation about the quality of IAEA inspections. After all, there could not be an absolute guarantee of Iran disclosing all of its nuclear sites. Nonetheless, the IAEA expressed general satisfaction with Iran's compliance. Nevertheless, the Iranians conducted parts of their nuclear programme in secret. This foremost included uranium enrichment activities.

> "The first stage – the extraction of uranium ore to produce yellowcake – was publicly pursued at Saghand and other declared sites. Iran also tried to pursue the second stage of the fuel cycle – the conversion of yellowcake into UF_6 – with China, only for Washington to step in and veto co-operation. And US suspicion of Chinese–Iranian nuclear relations was, it seems, justified. In 1991 China secretly exported natural uranium to Iran (though uranium ore is not

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[123] cf. **Anadolu Agency** (2015): Timeline of Iran's nucelar program

[124] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 135

[125] cf. Ibid., p. 135

[126] Ibid., p. 138

covered by NPT safeguard agreements and Iran did not necessarily need to report its import from China; China certainly had no need to report it), which was subsequently used in experiments to test parts of the uranium conversion process at locations not reported to the Agency."[127]

In addition to this, the Iranian missile programme was a major concern. Combining dual use technology with missile technologies, while Iran received assistance by Russia, China, and the DPRK raised suspicions.[128] At the end, there could be two different, yet not competing, narratives, that of the West and that of Iran. The West now perceived Iran as an irrational country that could potentially acquire nuclear weapons. At that time, however, it was not publicly known yet that Iran maintained a clandestine nuclear programme. Iran, on the other hand, maintained its claim that its nuclear programme was exclusively peaceful, arguing that it was the victim to the USA's imperialist oppression.

Revelation by the MEK

In 2002, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), an organisation the USA considered a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO) until 2012,[129] made public the secret parts of the Iranian nuclear programme. This move by the MEK was the starting point for the nuclear crisis. The element of clandestineness was perhaps enough to raise suspicions. In addition to this, it became publicly known that Iran had developed the capacity to produce plutonium, a by-product of the nuclear fuel cycle, that could relatively easily be used to build nuclear weapons. In combination with prior perceptions of Iran, this could lead to the impression that Iran maintained a clandestine nuclear weapons programme.

> "He [Alireza Jafarzadeh, the MEK's spokesperson, note by author] then proceeded to publicly expose the full details of the uranium-enrichment site at Natanz and the construction of the heavy-water plant at Arak, which, once operational, would be capable of producing plutonium. Neither of these activities is illegal *per se*, as Article IV of the NPT sets out the 'inalienable right' of all State Parties to develop, research and produce nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. But Tehran was obliged by a 1974 comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA to be transparent about all its nuclear facilities (although Iran was only required to declare the existence of any facilities six months prior to feeding nuclear fuel into them). […] Jafarzadeh had the exact location of the Natanz and Arak sites, the coordinates of the

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[127] Ibid., p. 157

[128] cf. Ibid., p. 159

[129] cf. **Masters**, Jonathan (2014): Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK). https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/mujahadeen-e-khalq-mek, last access on 25 May 2018

buildings, their size, the range of activities going on. Everything. The conference ignited international uproar, the nuclear crisis had begun."[130]

After this revelation by the MEK, the IAEA inspected Iran and Tehran informed the Agency of its new sites, Natanz and Arak. "In essence, Iran publicly admitted that it was pursuing the indigenous nuclear fuel cycle. More pertinently, of course, uranium enrichment (at Natanz) and plutonium production (at Arak) are the two paths to producing nuclear weapons."[131] Given the fact that Iran covered up some of its activities in inspections[132], it is not surprising that, eventually, the IAEA Board of Governors requested then Director General Mohammed ElBaradei to report all IAEA resolutions and reports to the UN Security Council in 2006.[133]

In this context, the 2003 invasion of Iraq in order to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime should be borne in mind. Whereas Iran and Iraq had been rivals for a long time, the fact that the USA would invade two of Iran's neighbouring countries to bring about regime change showed that the Bush administration had little hesitations about invading other countries and doing away with regimes hostile to Washington. This war in Iraq could have been seen as a new US approach to international relations which could repeated as necessary.[134] As Gudrun Harrer poignantly wrote: "Syria next, Iran next."[135]

It is hardly surprising that Iranian policymakers were highly nervous about this. Even more so, as they had been put on the defensive with the revelation of their clandestine nuclear programme. Abandoning the programme as, for instance, Libya did was seen as in direct contradiction to the regime's interests, however. [136] As a consequence, it was one of Iran's primary goals to keep this matter from the attention of the UN Security Council.[137] In addition to this, it was important for Iran to face the West from a position of strength.

> "The belief in Iran's need to face the world from a position of strength drove nuclear policy; the situation was now dangerous but this only made the need for strength more critical, from which the achievement of the indigenous nuclear fuel cycle could not be divorced. To

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[130] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 176

[131] Ibid., p. 179

[132] cf. Ibid., p. 177

[133] cf. **IAEA** (s.a.): IAEA and Iran: Chronology of Key Events. https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/chronology-of-key-events, last access on 26 December 2018

[134] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2003): Kriegs-Gründe. Versuch über den Irak-Krieg, p. 5. Vienna, Mandelbaum

[135] Ibid.

[136] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 180f.

[137] cf. **MacAskill**, Ewen/**Traynor**, Ian (2006): Iran nuclear crisis sent to security council. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/01/iran.foreignpolicy, last access on 6 August 2018

compromise would mean to compromise on the regime's existence itself, which was self-evidently unacceptable."[138]

IAEA diplomacy

In September 2003, the IAEA Board of Governors passed a resolution on the nuclear issue, "calling on Iran to accelerate cooperation with the IAEA and provide the full transparency needed for the Agency to complete its verification job".[139, 140] Iranians, given the concerns about US policy in the region, were worried about these developments. In October 2003, IAEA Director General ElBaradei received reassurances by the Iranian chief negotiator and current President, Hassan Rouhani, that Iran would indeed increase its cooperation with the IAEA.[141]

Even more importantly, three European Foreign Ministers, that of Britain, France, and Germany, visited Tehran in October 2003 in order to discuss the matter with the Iranian chief negotiator, Mr Rouhani. On 21 October 2003, an agreement was reached after Mr Rouhani guaranteed that Iran would suspend enrichment activities for the duration of the negotiations on the nuclear file.[142] Thereafter, the matter was referred back to the IAEA.

> "The meeting ended with an agreement, to universal relief (though nothing had yet been signed), that Iran would suspend uranium enrichment for the length of negotiations; again Rowhani emphasized that these should move fast and last no more than a few months. No agreement on the 'zero centrifuge' formula was possible; the subsequent declaration merely made reference to 'enrichment and other matters' and declared that the definition of the scope of the suspension would be left to the IAEA (a diplomatic swerve to allow for an agreement). ElBaradei was furious when he heard. Defining the scope of enrichment is complex: the limit is more or less where one wants, so it is a political not a technical choice and it placed a political responsibility on the IAEA, but he agreed nonetheless – what else could he do?"[143]

This outcome was largely seen as success as Iran subsequently signed the additional protocol to the IAEA nuclear safeguards agreement which allowed IAEA inspectors greater access to Iranian nuclear sites. For the Europeans, Iran's agreeing to the suspension of enrichment activities was a diplomatic success, and Iran could be optimistic about the potential of reaching

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[138] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 182

[139] **IAEA** (s.a.): IAEA and Iran. Chronology of Key Events

[140] cf. **IAEA Board of Governors** (2003): Implementatoin of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Resolution adopted by the Board on 12 September 2003. https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2003-69.pdf, last access on 25 May 2018

[141] cf. **IAEA** (s.a.): IAEA and Iran

[142] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 198

[143] Ibid., p. 198f.

an agreement on the matter.[144] Negotiations between the Europeans and the Iranians continued, and a subsequent agreement that was negotiated at the French MFA, at the Quay d'Orsay in Paris, was reached.

> "E3/EU diplomatic efforts peaked with the Paris Agreement of 15 November 2004, which extended to cover broader issues, such as terrorism, whilst retaining the NPT issues and Iran's voluntary cessation of enrichment activities as the Agreement's central objectives. Immediately after signing the Paris Agreement the Iranian government came under immense domestic pressure as the anti-reformist opposition forces regained the political initiative which they had lost to the reformist coalition during the two Khatami presidencies. The nuclear issue became the linchpin of the country's technological progress and international standing, hence Iranian sovereignty and dignity."[145]

Both the Tehran declaration and this Paris Agreement, which is not to be confused with the Paris climate accords, served as prelude for an envisaged long-term framework agreement. This should specify guarantees that Iran's programme would be exclusively peaceful, nuclear, technological, and economic cooperation, as well as guarantees on certain security aspects.[146]

> "But, again, a major diplomatic 'coup' contained the seeds for future conflict. The Paris Agreement, just as the Tehran Agreement before it, was meant as a precursor to negotiations on a mutually acceptable long-term arrangement, and also side-stepped the core of the dispute: Iran's asserted right to enrich. To maintain Iranian face (always a central concern), the EU-3 recognized the suspension as a 'voluntary confidence-building measure'. Throughout the negotiations, Iran stressed its desire to resume uranium conversion and requested that the IAEA remove the seals at the Isfahan facility in preparation. […]"[147]

Enter Ahmadinejad

In 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected President of Iran. Mr Ahmadinejad is, in stark contrast to Hassan Rouhani, a principlist. This means that his ideology is shaped by the values of the revolution, by Islamism, and by the war against Iraq, or, as it is known in Iran, the "imposed war". As a consequence of these experiences, principlists believe that they ought to protect the Iranian revolution against "Western imperialists".[148] During Mr Ahmadinejad's first term in office, this condensed in a tougher Iranian stance toward the nuclear negotiations. On

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[144] cf. Ibid., p. 199

[145] **Posch**, Walter (2013): The EU and Iran, p. 182. In: **Biscop**, Sven/**Whitman**, Richard G. (eds.): The Routledge Handbook of European Security. London/New York, Routledge, pp. 179—188

[146] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 208f.

[147] Ibid., p. 209

[148] cf. **Thaler**, David E. et al. (2010): Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads, p. 70f.

the other hand, it is likely that Supreme Leader Khamenei just lost his patience as the negotiations with the Europeans took a long time and he wanted to continue enrichment activities.

> "While Ahmadinejad settled in, things moved forward. The Iranians, frustrated at the lack of progress after nearly two years of suspension, were in no mood to continue along what they considered to be an increasingly fruitless path. Negotiations broke down in early August 2005 with Tehran's frustration at the Europeans' refusal to respond to some new Iranian initiatives, which, while they were good confidence-building measures, involved a resumption of enrichment (even if only its early stages). When, on 8 August 2005, the Iranians announced that they would resume production of feed material for the enrichment process, and asked the IAEA to remove the seals from the Isfahan plant (where the feed material was produced) and restart uranium conversion activities, there was no going back. The change in policy had nothing to do with Ahmadinejad; Khamenei had just lost patience and, despite giving Rowhani his blessing (not to mention protecting him from hardliner attack), decided that Iran should no longer compromise on enrichment. The Iranians rejected the EU-3 package even before Ahmadinejad was inaugurated, and Rowhani made it plain that as far as he was concerned European inflexibility was behind the decision[.]"[149]

Under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the pace of the nuclear negotiations deteriorated. Iran was poised to continue with enrichment, hence the continuation of the uranium enrichment work at Natanz.[150] Furthermore, President Ahmadinejad ignored an ultimatum by the UNSC to either "[…] suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities […]"[151], or Iran would be sanctioned.[152] Instead, the construction of the heavy-water plant at Arak was completed, a step that was even more critical as with a heavy-water reactor, the production of plutonium is possible. In contrast to uranium, it is not necessary to enrich plutonium in order to get weapons-grade material, hence international unease about the Arak site. As Iran failed to comply with the deadline given by the UNSC, the Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran in December 2006.

> "[…] The Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran, 'blocking the import or export of sensitive nuclear material and equipment and freezing the financial assets of persons or entities supporting its proliferation sensitive nuclear activities'. The resolution calls for IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei to report within 60 days 'on whether Iran had established full and sustained suspension of all activities mentioned in the resolution, as well as on the

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[149] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 217

[150] **The Guardian** (2013): Timeline of Iran's nuclear programme

[151] **United Nations Security Council** (2006): Resolution 1696 (2006), p. 2.
https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc_res1696-2006.pdf, last access on 26 May 2018

[152] cf. Ibid., p. 3

process of Iranian compliance with all steps required by the IAEA Board [of Governors, note by author]."[153]

After the resuming of enrichment activities in Natanz, which was considered a breach and an "outrageous refutation" of "everything the UN stood for […]"[154], the most important powers involved in the nuclear negotiations met in London. This meeting was the starting point for the cooperation of Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the USA in the P5+1 format. For the EU, this meant an increase of its political significance.[155] Furthermore, for the other UNSC members, joining the E3 meant forming a united front, an intention that proved successful.[156]

It would be misleading to claim that President Ahmadinejad would be the one and only proponent of such a step, as Supreme Leader "Khamenei was always the prime decision-maker on nuclear policy."[157] In addition to this, the Iranian side became increasingly frustrated by suspending its nuclear programme, foremost Mr Khamenei. The two years of suspension in which the West failed to grant considerable concessions to the Iranians led to Tehran's position of rejecting suspension altogether.[158] Consequentially, when the Iranians refused to suspend their enrichment activities, which could eventually had led to the acquisition of a nuclear weapon, the talks between the West and Iran broke down in 2008.[159, 160] In this situation, Iran had to reveal that it maintained a secret uranium enrichment facility near Qom.

> "[…] [J]ust days before the General Assembly was to meet, Iran informed the IAEA that it had been secretly building a pilot fuel enrichment plant at Fordow near the city of Qom. The announcement caused a perfect if predictable storm; even its revelation was subject to controversy. According to the IAEA, on 21 September 2009, in a letter to the IAEA Director General, the Iranian government informed the Agency of the existence of a previously undeclared uranium-enrichment facility under construction at Fordow near Qom, intended to produce five per cent-enriched uranium."[161]

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[153] **IAEA** (s.a.): IAEA and Iran. Chronology of Key Events

[154] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 227

[155] cf. **Posch**, Walter (2013): The EU and Iran, p. 184

[156] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 227

[157] Ibid., p. 219

[158] cf. Ibid.

[159] **Anadolu Agency** (2015): Timeline of Iran's nuclear program

[160] **The Guardian** (2013): Timeline of Iran's nuclear programme

[161] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 252

After this revelation, Iranian nuclear facilities were seriously hampered by the newly developed computer malware "Stuxnet". Stuxnet is a computer virus targeted at the enrichment facility at Natanz, thereby manipulating the speed of the centrifuges there, eventually leading to their malfunctioning and potential explosion.[162] Ralph Langner, a cybersecurity consultant, argued in 2011 that he believed the main force behind Stuxnet was the USA.[163] After Stuxnet's discovery, Iran worked on removing the worm from their infected devices, but the nuclear programme seemingly suffered a serious blow, being thrown back years.

Path to the JCPOA

Since 2008, the P5+1 met to negotiate a framework deal on the Iranian nuclear programme but failed to reach an agreement. These negotiations were partly overshadowed by EU sanctions on Iranian oil production and Iranian missile tests.[164] In 2013, Iranian President Ahmadinejad left office and Hassan Rouhani, who had been replaced as chief negotiator by the principlist Ali Larijani, was elected President. Both US President Barack Obama and Mr Rouhani were seemingly determined to reach an agreement which even allowed for a high-level contact between them in the wake of the 2013 UNGA.[165] After long and tortuous negotiations that were adjourned multiple times, the JCPOA was agreed upon and signed in Vienna.

Meaning of the nuclear programme

As mentioned above, the nuclear programme had been seen as emblematic for the late shah's modernisation programme and his efforts to transform Iran into a "modern" country. After the revolution, the shah was often portrayed as corrupt and fiscally irresponsible. As the nuclear programme was strongly associated with the shah, it was easy for the new regime to portray the nuclear programme itself as too expensive and fiscally irresponsible.

The Islamic Republic decided to abandon the programme but subsequently realised that it had been in fact economically necessary. Astonishingly, Iran managed to completely reverse the meaning of the nuclear programme. It did so in embedding the programme in a narrative of

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[162] **Langner**, Ralph (2011): Cracking Stuxnet, a 21st-century cyber weapon. (TED talk by Ralph Langner, a cybersecurity consultant, posted in March 2011), from minute 04:52.
https://www.ted.com/talks/ralph_langner_cracking_stuxnet_a_21st_century_cyberweapon/transcript#t-281036, last access on 26 May 2018

[163] cf. Ibid., from minute 10:03

[164] cf. **Anadolu Agency** (2015): Timeline of Iran's nuclear program

[165] cf. **Mason**, Jeff/**Charbonneau**, Louis (2013): Obama, Iran's Rouhani hold historic phone call.
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-iran/obama-irans-rouhani-hold-historic-phone-call-idUSBRE98Q16S20130928, last access on 26 May 2018

self-determination and sovereignty.[166] Had the programme "[…] been emblematic of a modern Western state […]"[167] under the shah, the Islamic Republic made it emblematic for the anti-colonial struggle in the developing world and a matter of national sovereignty. Even more interestingly, the Islamic republic is able to use the nuclear programme for its populist appeal, in a manner the shah never had managed.[168]

The narrative of self-determination had a side effect. Iran still required international assistance and none of its earlier partners aspired to resume cooperation, in particular due to Iran's alleged irrationality, financial constraints, and the war with Iraq. The consequence of this was a distinct feeling of isolation and of being left alone. Of course, these problems were self-inflicted as Iran behaved irrationally and attempted to cancel construction at Bushehr. Another expression of this is Iran's particular policy toward international organisations which it perceived as mere puppets of the West.

Nevertheless, Iran displayed some extent of pragmatism in remaining in those very international organisations it criticised for being tools of imperialism. Indeed, not only did it remain in these organisations, but it also constantly referred to generally accepted rules of the international system and to the norms-based nature of international law, thereby confirming its principal acknowledgement of such rules. The former Iranian ambassador to the IAEA in Vienna, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, stressed this point in an interview with the author of this thesis.

> "After the Islamic revolution, we were well aware, that international organisations are in many cases instrumentally used by superpowers. It was clear for our founder, the late Imam Khomeini, and all other top officials, for sure intellectuals. There is no doubt that the constitutions or statutes of international organisations, for instance the United Nations Charter and the IAEA statute, had been written by them in order to protect their interests. Then, we had two options: either to withdraw from membership of all these organisations and related international treaties, or to stay. Being realistic, it was decided to continue membership but try not to let these superpowers or those who want to manipulate these organisations to do so."[169]

Due to these facts, the Iranian nuclear programme should be seen as an expression of pragmatism, because of Iran's energy requirements, as a matter of national pride, and national sovereignty in Iran.

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[166] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 104f.

[167] Ibid., p. 111

[168] **Afkhami**, Gholam Reza (2009): The Life and Times of the Shah, p. 65f.

[169] **Soltanieh**, Ali Asghar (2017): Interview by author. Vienna, 10 August 2017

Chapter 5 — Theory thought through

Every paper is, in principle, guided by a theoretical approach. That does not necessarily mean that all researchers and scholars make clear their theoretical assumptions. A scholar might very well have made implicit assumptions about their field. Depending on their respective view on their field, they may apply various methods, make various other theoretical assumptions, and achieve various results. A good example for this would be society. Depending on how social scientists see society, they might apply various methods and have, as a result, various theoretical assumptions. It would make a major difference if, for instance, a scholar would see society as a network-like system, following Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, or as a class-based system, following Marxist theories.

Being clear about a scholar's own theoretical stance is essential as theories pre-structure the field and hence their research. Moreover, IR theories do not only help structure and conceptualise the field, they also focus on various aspects thereof. Whereas realism, for instance, focuses on states and inter-state actions, Marxist theories focus primarily on economic relations and modes of production, and constructivism focuses on perceptions and ideologies. As a consequence, not all theories are equally suited to analysing each aspect in international relations. As a matter of fact, these theoretical differences, these various foci on different aspects of international relations constitute a main source of critique among scholars of these schools of thought.

Nevertheless, all of these theories provide analytical frameworks that enable researchers to be clear about what they want to know, what they intend to leave out, and how they see their field. Therefore, applying different theories on the same subject makes it possible to highlight different aspects of this very same subject. This makes some theories unfit to describe certain phenomena. It would, for instance, not be useful to analyse the global distribution of wealth with a realist approach as the realist analytical framework does not encompass the necessary priorities. Instead, a Marxist approach would probably be more fruitful. Therefore, it is essential to choose the right set of theoretical assumptions and hypotheses for the subject and to coordinate both theory and method. Additionally, theoretical assumptions might often pave the way to the formulation of a research question. However, scholars must be careful about not letting their theoretical stance unduly influence their research.

In order to highlight the theory as applied in this thesis and the key differences to other IR theories, the most important theories in this scientific discipline will be discussed in this chapter. The goal in doing so is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of these theories in

relation to the research question and the subject matter. Furthermore, it will be made clear in this chapter, why constructivism was chosen as theoretical approach of this thesis and what added value constructivism has to offer with respect to the research question.

Realism and neo-realism

Realism is a political theory that puts reality and rationality in the centre of attention. The main interest is what reality **is** and not what it **could** be. This means that realism's goal is to describe and analyse reality as it is and not to change it. Realism dates back as early as the 16th century in Europe, one of its pioneers being Niccolò Machiavelli. Realism has informed European statecraft ever since. One essential term in this context, coined by former German chancellor Bismarck, is *Realpolitik*—i.e. the "politics of reality". Since the end of WWII, realism has been developed further. There is, of course, a clear difference between the Machiavellian approach to policymaking and the analytical-theoretical framework that was brought about by theorists such as Kenneth Waltz and Hans Morgenthau. Neo-realists analysed the geopolitical situation after the end of WWII, the Cold War (1948—91) as it was. In a sense, realism has a certain element of normativity as realist scholars often advised presidents and prime ministers.

For this thesis, the modern theory of neo-realism is crucial. Its main category of analysis is the state, the international system is seen as a system of states. As a consequence, neo-realism is a systemic theory as it deals with the systemic aspects of international relations. The international system, according to the realist conception is largely based on a Hobbesian "natural state". There is no "Leviathan" which would be able to force the states to relinquish their sovereignty. As a consequence, the international system is anarchic, and states rely primarily on military power in order to safeguard their survival. This leads to a security dilemma. This dilemma is largely based on two assumptions. The first assumption is that states do act rationally, the second assumption is that they do not have perfect information about one another. States that act **rationally** and try to safeguard their sovereignty by investing in armament might seem like a threat to other states, as these do not know about their potential opponents' intentions. The security dilemma itself, however, is not only a central concept for realism but it serves as starting point for various theories.

> "The security dilemma is arguably the theoretical linchpin of defensive realism, because for defensive realists it is the security dilemma that makes possible genuine cooperation between states—beyond a fleeting alliance in the face of a common foe. For offensive realists, however, the security dilemma makes war inevitable and rational. Realists, moreover, are hardly

the only scholars to utilize the concept. Neoliberal scholars argue that one of the functions of international institutions is to alleviate the security dilemma."[170]

This quote highlights the existence of multiple branches of realism, which becomes even more apparent when diving deeper into the theory. The unifying factor of realist theories is that these assume that states strive for power. Indeed, *offensive realism* even assumes that the ultimate goal of states is to maximise power to a level that allows states to become hegemons.

> "For all realists, calculations about power lie at the heart of how states think about the world around them. Power is the currency of great-power politics, and states compete for it among themselves. What money is to economics, power is to international relations."[171]

Neo-realism is a product of the Cold War period, which means that many aspects of this geo-political period can properly be analysed with neo-realism. However, at first with the end of the first Cold War, and definitely after the collapse of the Soviet Union, neo-realism was increasingly challenged. It could not explain why states would cooperate and try to pursue a policy of disarmament. At the definitive end of the Cold War, its terms and definitions became insufficient. The increasing complexity of world politics made clear that security was not just state security and not just military security. This does not mean that realism would be obsolete, on the contrary. Realist definitions and concepts of international relations still remain relevant today.

The key point for this thesis is that realism and neo-realism focus on power and security, respectively. These would be the main drivers of states in international relations and everything they do, or they should do, should be in accordance with this principle. The key difference to constructivism as applied in this thesis is that constructivism does not surmise that there is a particular driver influencing state action. Instead of assuming that there would be a key driver, constructivists would ask what the drivers of foreign policy are, how they interact with a state's self-perception and the state's rationale of justification. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

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[170] **Tang**, Shiping (2009): The Security Dilemma. A Conceptual Analysis, p. 587. In: Security Studies, Vol. 18, No 3, pp. 587—623

[171] **Mearsheimer**, John J. (2014): The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, p. 12. Updated Edition, New York/London, Norton & Company

Liberalism and institutionalism

The theoretical tradition of liberalism encompasses concepts such as individual freedom, democracy, and scientific rationality. Furthermore, human progress and progress itself plays an essential role. This theory is rooted in the European era of enlightenment which advocated increased personal freedom, as well as self-responsibility.[172] This essentially positive worldview is at odds with the pessimistic worldview of realism. As a matter of fact, both liberalism and institutionalism could be seen as critique toward realism's inability to explain international cooperation. If there was a security dilemma, it would be unclear how could states effectively cooperate internationally in institutions such as the United Nations. Furthermore, leaving aside the hegemonic theorem of offensive realism, it would not explain why democracies tend to be less aggressive to one another and more aggressive toward non-democratic states. Even with taking into account Mearsheimer's hegemonic theorem, there would be a serious lack of explanatory power to explain why these states would not themselves strive for hegemony and, therefore, try to undermine the hegemon.

Liberalism, in contrast, offers some explanations. This theory offers an idealistic worldview and claims to offer instructions how to achieve world peace. In order to achieve this ultimate, and utopian, goal, it would be necessary to cooperate politically, to try to spread democratic values and democracy itself. Furthermore, political problems should be solved jointly within institutions such as the UN. Interdependency theory adds to this, arguing that economic relations between states would be essential to maintain peace.

These two aspects might be seen in a particular historical context. The end of the Cold War led to two significant theoretical developments. First of all, the dissolution of the USSR led to the conviction that liberalism is the ultimate point of human progress. Indeed, it would have lost any significant ideological competitor, i.e. Communism. Therefore, humanity would have reached the "end of history".

"Both Hegel and Marx believed that the evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings. Both thinkers thus posited an 'end of history': for Hegel this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society. This did not mean that the natural cycle of birth, life, and death would end, that important events would no longer happen, or that newspapers reporting them would cease to be published. It meant, rather, that there would be no

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[172] cf. **Burchill**, Scott (2013): Liberalism, p. 57. In: **Burchill**, Scott/**Linklater**, Andrew et al. (eds.): Theories of International Relations, pp. 57—87. 5th edition, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan

further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled."[173]

As a consequence of this, and of the belief that liberal economic policies would also contribute to spreading liberal democracy, liberalism advocates economic globalisation. This coincides with the rise of neo-liberalism in the West, that advocates a strictly market-based liberalism and an ideology of strict de-regulation.[174] Leaving aside whether it is a consequence of this advocacy of free trade or the belief in peace and fundamental freedoms, liberalism is very much linked to modern institutionalism. Institutionalism is rooted in liberalism and tries to explain how and why states might cooperate in specific institutions such as the EU, the UN, or the WTO. Some scholars would certainly argue that these institutions enshrine profoundly liberal paradigms, such as human rights, democracy, and market-based structures.

The specific nature of liberalism, and in part institutionalism, could serve as explanatory theory for this research, indeed. Liberalism could, for instance, ask what drove Iran to the negotiating table, or how and why international cooperation in the case of the Iran nuclear crisis could take place. While these might be interesting questions to analyse, they do not entirely explain what the JCPOA means for Iran and how it fits into Iranian foreign policy. As a matter of fact, the research question of this thesis does imply that the JCPOA is in fact connected to Iran's foreign policy interests and the rationale of justification, thus excluding a liberal theoretical approach.

Critical theory

Critical theories are a bundle of various theories that are unified by their "critical" approach. A critical theory is "critical" because it does not take for granted ostensibly unquestionable facts and verities. This makes critical theories incoherent as there might be more than just one critical theory. In fact, for each "legitimising" theory, that just describes its subject and does not criticise it, there might be a critical theory questioning such an approach.

The starting point for critical theory in social sciences was the Frankfurt School, whose main protagonists were Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. However, this term suggests a coherence that does not necessarily exist. While some scholars of the Frankfurt School shared Horkheimer's and Adorno's points of view, in particular those of their famous book "Dialectic of Enlightenment", there were also those who did not, who even remained on the margins. The

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[173] **Fukuyama**, Francis (1992): The End of History and the Last Man, p. xii. 1st edition, New York, The Free Press

[174] cf. **Burchill**, Scott (2013): Liberalism, p. 75. In: **Burchill**, Scott/**Linklater**, Andrew et al. (eds.): Theories of International Relations

Frankfurt School forms the starting point of other theories, such as the critical security theory, and in particular the Copenhagen, Aberystwyth or Welsh, and Paris schools. These schools of thought focus on different aspects of security, all of which are more or less connected to self-reflection, and to reflection about how knowledge is created. Furthermore, critical theories in international relations tend to reject traditionalist, or legitimising, theories. Examples for this are, inter alia, feminism and post-colonialism.

The main aspect of critical theory that is being criticised by other international theories is that it has a blind spot when it comes to the *international*. That is it would focus too much on internal politics. Instead of analysing the relations between nations, critical theories deal with a different aspect of politics that, albeit being connected to international relations, is not only located on the *international* level. However, "[…] the discipline of International Relations has been transformed, not least because of the theory's critical interventions across a broad range of topics in the study of international relations."[175]

In this sense, critical theory is not just a theory that aims at understanding international relations but also a normative theory that identifies an ostensibly preferable situation. This is profoundly different from other theories such as realism that does not identify any other situation that it would deem preferable. Instead, it claims to describe and analyse reality, the situation as it really is. Of course, this claim is precisely one of the aspects to be criticised by critical theory as it must remain unclear whether it *is* reality that realism analyses. Furthermore, it is critical of realism's occupying reality.

In any case, critical theory's aspiration to change reality is profoundly different from the Constructivist approach in this thesis. Constructivism usually aims at overcoming differences that stem from misunderstandings or different frames of reference. Constructivists, therefore, argue that there is no need for conflict if various actors would understand one another better. This is, however, not the aspiration of this thesis. In leaving aside this Constructivist aspiration, it is not the goal of this thesis to change the international system's attitude toward Iran but to improve the understanding for Iran's foreign policy. Hence, it could be seen, in contrast to *critical*, as *legitimising*. This thesis wants to understand Iran's foreign policy *as it is*.

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[175] **Devetak**, Richard (2013): Critical Theory, p. 162. In: **Burchill**, Scott/**Linklater**, Andrew et al. (eds.): Theories of International Relations, pp. 162—186. 5th edition, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan

Marxism

As a matter of fact, Marxism and critical theory are related insofar as the critical theory's Frankfurt School initially planned to develop Marxism. As a consequence, it is possible to locate critical theory in a Marxist tradition. Nevertheless, Marxism remains preoccupied in economic aspects of international relations. This point of view continued to develop even after the end of the bipolar world order.

"New interpretations of Marxism have appeared since the 1980s: the perspective has been an important weapon in the critique of realism, and there have been many innovative attempts to harness its ideas to develop a more complex, political economy approach to international relations where the aim is to understand the interplay between states and markets, the states-system and the capitalist world economy, power and production. […] For some, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the triumph of capitalism marked the death of Marxism. But in the 1990s, a number of scholars argued that the relevance of Marxism had increased with the passing of bipolarity and with accelerating economic globalization."[176]

Indeed, the relevance of classical Marxist concepts such as class and imperialism, or of principles such as the importance of economic policy should not be underestimated for international relations. However, there is a point in criticising Marxism for its profoundly economic approach that risks ignoring fundamental concepts such as nationalism or international security. Indeed, an example for this is the concept of imperialism, a concept that, to a large extent, ignores other drivers of international politics, e.g. interests, the aforementioned nationalism, and the complexity of international relations. Marxism could, for instance, ask which economic factors, which distributive issues, drove Iran to the negotiation table or which economic consequences of the sanctions or the lifting of these would have.

Constructivism and international relations theory

When dealing with constructivist thinking and constructivist theory, it is essential to deal with two distinct aspects of this theory first. On the one hand, it is required to bear in mind how constructivism came about, that is its history, and, on the other hand, what this theory contains. In order to fully understand constructivism, both aspects will be highlighted before the specific aspects of theoretical content relevant for this thesis, its "body politic", will be discussed.

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[176] **Linklater**, Andrew (2013): Marx and Marxism, p. 113f. In: **Burchill**, Scott/**Linklater**, Andrew et al. (eds.): Theories of International Relations, pp. 113—137. 5th edition, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan

Before dealing with these aspects, it should be made clear that the constructivist claim that social reality is constructed and could be changed is seen critical in this thesis. It is undoubtedly the case that this social reality is subject to change, but the question is whether constructivism as theory is as efficacious to actually change reality. In addition to this, it is not the aspiration of this thesis to change reality. In this sense, it is not a "critical" paper but a paper whose claim it is to analyse and understand the socially constructed interests of Iran's foreign policy and how the JCPOA fits into this foreign policy.

A history of constructivism

The term "constructivism" in its IR context was originally coined by Nicholas Onuf in his 1989 book "World of Our Making".[177] Mr Onuf's take on the term "constructivism" was the rejection of the notion of IR that there would be no rules, i.e. anarchy, in the international system.[178] As a matter of fact, the main argument is that there are indeed rules states in the international system adhere to and, as a consequence, there is no anarchy in IR. In arguing this way, Mr Onuf challenged the foundation of realist theory itself.

> "It is no wonder that scholars already dubious about rules would reject the rejection of anarchy. Yet even the most pessimistic realists have never doubted that international relations are somehow saved from utter chaos, whether by the balance of power, the great powers acting in concert, spheres of influence, or a bipolar standoff. Treating such mechanisms abstractly by reference to a self-equilibrating system relieved anyone from using the language of rule. Doing so had the further virtue of assuring realists that they were engaged in a proper science (Kaplan 1961, 1966). Indeed the abstract notion of a stable international system, even an 'ultrastable system' (Kaplan 1957: 6-8), dominated IR theory for a generation before my book appeared and the fall of the Berlin Wall challenged realist assumptions."[179]

Hence, constructivism challenged realist assumptions about the international system. In doing so, constructivist scholars drew heavily from psychological research in arguing that individuals created and perceived their own social reality. This theoretical development occurred at the end of the Cold War, and into the 1990s. Christian Reus-Smit identifies four distinct factors that fostered the rise of constructivism during this period.

> "First, motivated by an attempt to reassert the pre-eminence of their own conceptions of theory and world politics, leading rationalists challenged critical theorists to move beyond theoretical

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[177] **Onuf**, Nicholas (2014): Rule and Rules in International Relations, p. 1.
http://www.helsinki.fi/eci/Events/Nicholas%20Onuf_Rule%20and%20Rules%20%204-2-14.pdf, last access on 6 May 2018

[178] Ibid., p. 2

[179] Ibid.

critique to the substantive analysis of international relations. […] Second, the end of the Cold War undermined the explanatory pretensions of neo-realists and neo-liberals, neither of which had predicted, nor could adequately comprehend, the systemic transformations reshaping the global order. It also undermined the critical theorists' assumption that theory drove practice in any narrow or direct fashion, as global politics increasingly demonstrated dynamics that contradicted realist expectations and prescriptions. […] Third, by the beginning of the 1990s a new generation of young scholars had emerged who embraced many of the propositions of critical international theory, but who saw potential for innovation in conceptual elaboration and empirically informed theoretical development […]. Finally, the advance of the new constructivist perspective was aided by the enthusiasm that mainstream scholars, frustrated by the analytical failings of the dominant rationalist theories, showed in embracing the new perspective, moving it from the margins to the mainstream of theoretical debate (Katzenstein 1996; Ruggie 1993)."[180]

Mr Reus-Smit holds that there is a division among constructivist scholars that follows the distinction between modernism and post-modernism.[181] He, furthermore, distinguishes several branches of constructivism, that is **systemic constructivism**, **unit-level constructivism**, and **holistic constructivism**.[182] The main distinction between these three types of constructivism is that its systemic form as is to be found by Alexander Wendt focuses on the state-level whereas Peter Katzenstein's unit-level constructivism concentrates on " […] the relationship between domestic social and legal norms and the identities and interests of states […]".[183] While these two strands of theory perpetuate the division between the international and the internal level, holistic constructivism aims at briding this gap.

Constructivist thinking

Constructivism as such is not to be defined easily as there are multiple philosophical views on constructivism itself. On the one hand, it might be identified as a theory about international relations, focusing mainly on the social construction of analytical subjects or social systems. This view would focus on constructivism as an explanatory framework that deals with "social reality" and how this social reality is constructed—nevertheless arguing that these structures are *de facto* real. On the other hand, it may be considered a mere analytical framework, a paradigm that could serve as foundation of other theories. Wendt explains the difference between theories such as realism and liberalism as follows.

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[180] **Reus-Smit**, Christian (2013): Constructivism, p. 223. In: **Burchill**, Scott/**Linklater**, Andrew (eds.): Theories of International Relations, pp. 217—240. 5th edition, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan

[181] cf. Ibid., p. 224

[182] cf. Ibid., p. 227

[183] Ibid.

> "The debate between 'neorealists' and 'neoliberals' has been based on a shared commitment
> to 'rationalism'. Like all social theories, rational choice directs us to ask some questions and
> not others, treating the identities and interests of agents as exogenously given and focusing
> on how the behavior of agents generates outcomes."[184]

To a certain extent, constructivism could be compared to rational choice theory. Rational choice serves as paradigm for several theories in IR, thereby forming the "basis" of understanding. It is assumed in these theories that the subjects of analyses act in a logical manner and in accordance with the theorem of the *homo œconomicus*. This economic person is often seen as a rational utility maximiser who just acts egoistically.

> "Das Paradigma der rationalen Wahl als solches sagt über die inhaltlichen Präferenzen der
> Akteure nichts aus. Diese können sowohl altruistisch als auch egoistisch ausfallen. Allerdings
> hat es sich im Fach Internationale Beziehungen eingebürgert, ‚rational choice'-Ansätze mit
> einer Perspektive gleichzusetzen, die den Akteuren egoistische Präferenzen und instrumen-
> tell-strategisches Handeln im Sinne des homo oeconomicus unterstellt (‚thick rationalism', vgl.
> Green und Shapiro 1994, 17-19). […] Das gleiche gilt analog für den sozialen Konstruktivis-
> mus in den Internationalen Beziehungen. Zwar wird zumeist dem homo oeconomicus von
> ‚rational choice' der homo sociologicus, der in vielfältige soziale Bezüge eingebundene Akteur
> des Sozialkonstruktivismus gegenübergestellt. Um aber herauszufinden, welche sozialen
> Strukturen des internationalen Systems wie auf die Sinnkonstruktionen der Akteure einwirken
> und wie diese wiederum die soziale Struktur durch ihre Praxis reproduzieren und rekonstitu-
> ieren, dazu bedarf es einer substantiellen Theorie."[185]

> "The paradigm of rational choice as such does not say anything about the preferences of the
> players. These might be altruistic or egoistic. However, it has become a part of the discipline
> of international relations to equate rational choice with a perspective that assumes that these
> players have egoistic preferences and apply instrumental-strategic actions in the manner of a
> homo oeconomicus. ('thick rationalism, cf. Green and Shapiro 1994, 17-19). […] The same is
> analogically true for social constructivism in international relations. It might be true that, in
> most cases, the homo oeconomicus is compared to the homo sociologicus, an actor of social
> constructivism that is integrated in manifold social references. However, in order to find out
> which social structures of the international system affect the constructions of meaning, in
> which manner these affect the players, and how these reproduce and reconstitute social struc-
> ture by their practice, it is necessary to adopt a substantial theory." [Translation by author]

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[184] **Wendt**, Alexander (1992): Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, p. 398f. In: International Organization, Vol. 46, No 2, pp. 391—425

[185] **Risse**, Thomas (2003): Konstruktivismus, Rationalismus und Theorien Internationaler Beziehungen – warum empirisch nichts so heiß gegessen wird, wie es theoretisch gekocht wurde. Beitrag für Gunther Hellmann, Klaus Dieter Wolf und Michael Zürn (Hrsg.), Forschungsstand und Perspektiven der Internationalen Beziehungen in Deutschland, p. 3—4. FU Berlin. http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~atasp/texte/030209_risse_forschungsstand.pdf, last access on 6 July 2017

Adler highlights a three-fold structure of constructivism as a "metaphysical stance", a "social theory", and a "theoretical and empirical perspective".[186] This threefold structure makes constructivism structurally ambiguous but at the same time offers connecting points. Constructivism's nature as metaphysical stance is comparable to its nature as different paradigm than rational choice theory. Instead of arguing that the individual acts in a pre-determined manner, constructivism asks how and why the paradigms of decision-making come about in the first place, that is which determinants of decisions exist.

> "First, constructivism is a *metaphysical stance* about the reality that scholars seek to know and about the knowledge with which they seek to interpret reality. This position has been applied not only to IR but also to the social sciences in general (for example, sociology, psychology and education), to mathematics and, via the philosophy of science and the sociology of knowledge, to the natural sciences. Thus from an IR perspective in which paradigms are associated with broad world-views of international political life (such as realism, liberalism and Marxism), constructivism is more like a paradigm of paradigms. Second, building on the metaphysical position, constructivism is a *social theory* about the role of knowledge and knowledgeable agents in the constitution of social reality. It is as social theory that, for example, we should understand the role of intersubjectivity and social context, the co-constitution of agent and structure, and the rule-governed nature of society. Finally, constructivism is an IR *theoretical and empirical perspective* that, building on the other two layers, maintains that IR theory and research should be based on sound *social* ontological and epistemological foundations. IR constructivism has led to new and important questions, for example, about the role of identities, norms and causal understandings in the constitution of national interests, about institutionalization and international governance, and about the social construction of new territorial and non-territorial transnational regions."[187]

In this thesis, constructivism will be treated as a theory, and not just as paradigm, which puts systems of beliefs, ideologies, identities, and philosophical movements in the centre of analysis. Such narratives and belief systems are considered by constructivists just as important for the understanding of international relations as the systemic aspects of realist or liberal theories. These aspects apply both to states and to individuals which makes constructivism not an exclusively *international* theory but applicable to even sub-national levels. That is, smaller entities such as societal groups or even individuals socially construct their respective social worlds, thus making them, in principle, accessible for constructivist analysis. Constructivism defines social norms and their development just as real and structural as "material structures".

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[186] **Adler**, Emanuel (2002): Constructivism and International Relations, p. 96. In: **Carlsnaes**, Walter/**Risse**, Thomas/**Simmons**, Beth (eds.): Handbook of International Relations, pp. 95—118, London, SAGE Publications

[187] Ibid.

> "[…] to the extent that structures can be said to shape the behaviour of social and political actors, be they individuals or states, constructivists hold that normative or ideational structures are as important as material structures."[188]

Furthermore, perhaps even more important for this thesis, is the notion that constructivists explain how interests are formed. Reus-Smit argues[189] that constructivism emphasises that "identities inform interests and, in turn, actions". This is probably one of the main differences between realism or neo-realism. These theories see either power or security as main drivers of state interest in an anarchical international system. Constructivism, however, argues that these might not be the main interests of states but it tries to explain how these interests come about. As Mr Reus-Smit argues:

> "Constructivists are not opposed to the idea that actors might be 'self-interested', but they argue that this tells us nothing unless we understand how actors define their 'selves' and how this informs their 'interests'."[190]

The reason for this insisting on constructivism's status as a fully-fledged theory is that constructivism might clearly and to the benefit of the research be distinguished from other international theories such as realism, liberalism, and critical theory. Instead of focusing improperly on either on the international level or on the internal structures of a state alone, constructivism, as explained above, combines these aspects in a quite realistic manner.

Furthermore, which adds to the interpretation of constructivism as fully-fledged theory, it contains a set of theoretical assumptions and hypotheses, for instance that subjects of analysis do in fact *learn*. This is one of the most profound differences to the security dilemma that is to be found in realist theories. Instead of remaining engaged in a game theory situation in which the actors continuously start over and over again, constructivist actors would take into account past experiences in order to inform their future decisions. As a consequence, learning informs the way in which actors see the world and perform their duties.

Such a theory could very well be applied to many different aspects of social life. The main point of analysis in IR is, of course, the decision-makers and their causes of behaviour. The question would, for instance, be why any politician would behave in a certain manner or another and which factors would have contributed to this decision. Additionally, the question of how some

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[188] **Reus-Smit**, Christian (2013): Constructivism, p. 224. In: **Burchill**, Scott/**Linklater**, Andrew (eds.): Theories of International Relations

[189] Ibid., p. 225

[190] Ibid.

individuals would interpret their duties as ambassadors, foreign ministers, or heads of states or governments is essential. As a consequence, it is important for this thesis that these aspects be combined to a holistic form of constructivist theory.

> "To accommodate the entire range of factors conditioning the identities and interests of states, they bring the corporate and the social together into a unified analytical perspective that treats the domestic and the international as two faces of a single social and political order."[191]

The relation between Iran's foreign policy and the formulation thereof as well as the interaction with the international community in this case, expresses the mutual relation between the international level and the state level. This interaction has, of course, to take place within a framework of international relations and international law that has been and probably continues to be dominated by "Western" states, hence by "Western" values. It is also these tensions that form an interesting aspect of analysis.

Rationale of justification

The concept of the rationale of justification as will be applied in this thesis differs profoundly from perceptions, self-perceptions, ideologies, and interests. Yet, it is inseparably linked to these concepts. Instead, it should be understood as sub-structure that lies beneath those concepts and is interconnected with them. Narratives, myths, and political events in the past can form part of this concept. Narratives often are founding myths of states, families, clans, tribes, and others, which were allegedly founded by legendary heroes in the past. A particularly good example for this would be the legend of Romulus and Remus, the two brothers who were descendants of the god Mars and the mythological founders of the Roman empire. Others are linked with history, for instance the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali.

The concept of the rationale of justification as applied in this thesis assumes that there is a framework of reference in each state (hence *rationale of justification*) against which policy decisions must be judged and justified. Various concepts might be a part of this framework, for instance considerations of national security or ideologies. These factors influence the rationale of justification framework in a number of ways. If, for instance, an ideological perspective is more important than national security considerations, or vice versa, the rationale of justification might shift in one or another direction. The result, any policy proposal, must be justified in light of this framework of reference and, depending on the importance of one or another factor, is

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[191] Ibid., p. 228

then implemented, or not. Furthermore, if the policy is implemented, it is, again, judged against this framework. This process might be illustrated as follows.

As is highlighted in the illustration below, the rationale of justification influences decision-makers. In addition to this, there is always a factor x that should be taken into account. This factor, the human factor, can never entirely be disregarded as policy decisions might be seen or justified differently depending on the decision-makers or the particular circumstances. As a consequence, the factor x might influence the decision-making in an unforeseeable way.
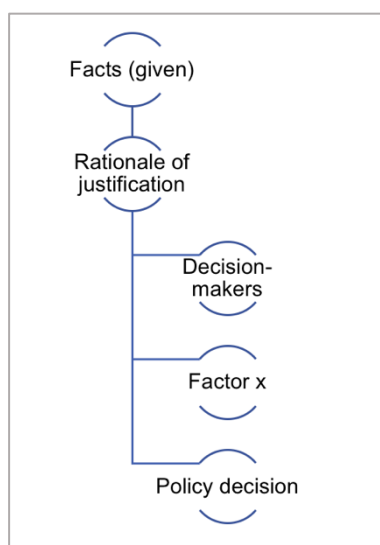

Illustration 1: rationale of justification

In any case, the essence of this concept is that hard facts and interests remain unchanged but their perception, influenced by factors within the rationale of justification, is the reason for any policy decision. In this thesis, it is about foreign policy, hence the given facts and the factors in the rationale of justification are different from, for instance, a health policy decision. This makes it profoundly different from realism and develops an essential point of constructivism. Realism, on the one hand, would argue that either just security or power influence any state's decisions. Constructivism challenged this notion, highlighting the fact that decision-makers have perceptions, ideologies, and biases. This rationale of justification develops this point, arguing that these perceptions are not just individual perceptions but are, to a certain extent, shared with other decision-makers.

Additionally, the rationale of justification might encompass strategic thinking and the formulation of strategies outlining political goals and means to achieve them. At the first glance, strategies and rationales of justification exclude one another as a strategy's main reasoning is that it does not adhere to *ideology*, or *narratives*, but to *rationality*. However, the main point about

strategies and the rationale of justification is that strategies are based on *political will*. This will is formed in light of both strategic and ideological considerations. As a consequence, ideology informs political will, which in turn informs political strategy, resulting in a policy outcome. This outcome is, then, justified against the strategy and is, therefore, automatically justified against the rationale of justification.

The rationale of justification encompasses various factors. Very broadly, this framework could be influenced by a country's self-perception, but it also encompasses ideologies, perceptions of the international system or other states, and narratives. This does not necessarily mean that there are no contradictions or that the rationale of justification would be absolutely congruent with either of these factors. As is often the case with such fluid definitions, various narratives might coexist but, at the same time, contradict one another and both of them might influence the rationale of justification. As a consequence, developing this concept further should encompass a system of weighing various factors.
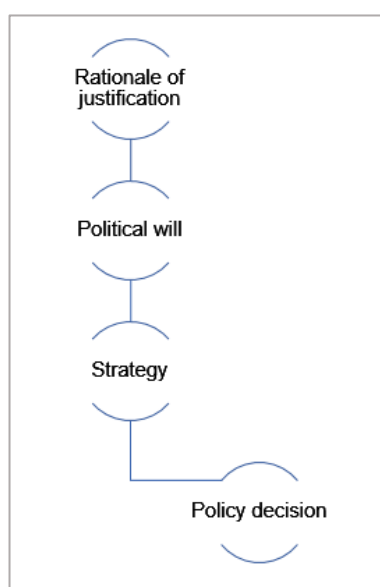
Illustration 2: rationale of justification and strategy

A good example for this concept is Austria's foreign policy. After the end of WWII, Austria was liberated from Nazi Germany and, at the same time, occupied by the victorious allies. After ten years of occupation, Austria and the allies regulated the country's future position in the international system with the State Treaty, to this day a highly valued document and often perceived as basically the Republic's founding document. The State Treaty contains various provisions, one being of particular importance for Austrian foreign policy, that of permanent neutrality. Austria was required to remain neutral, i.e. to assure the international community that it will be able to sustain its independence, its sovereignty, and that it will not join any military alliance.

Neutrality has since become one of the most important factors of Austria's foreign policy. Furthermore, it has influenced other parts of Austria's foreign policy, that of being an independent and impartial country, a mediator, and an honest broker. Most political groups do not question neutrality as such and despite it sometimes being seen as obsolete, neutrality remains an important factor against which foreign policy decisions have to be justified. In this context, a fact that objectively exists, the State Treaty and permanent neutrality, have formed the basis of Austria's rationale of justification. The fact that neutrality is not just a matter of international law but also about Austrian self-perception, about ideologies and interests, makes it part of something that goes beyond simple factors of foreign policy.

Arguably this rationale of justification could be seen as cultural. The fact that it is assumed to be common to various people, for instance to *Austrians* or to *Iranians* makes it inherently cultural as such. However, the rationale of justification is not necessarily linked to culture per se. Of course, a certain commonality is assumed when it comes to Iran's or Austria's rationales. However, there is still potential for individuals to influence the foreign policy outcome, that is the factor x. Individual ideologies, beliefs, perceptions, or convictions, as well as charisma or public appeal might influence the rationale itself, the outcome, or both.

Furthermore, culture is somewhat more static than the rationale of justification. Indeed, Iran serves as case in point for this claim. Iranian culture is influenced by both its Persian past as well as its Islamic history. The notion of Persian-ness, Iranian culture, and some Iranians' national pride might be part of Iran's rationale. However, the rationale of justification of, for instance the nuclear programme, became profoundly different after the 1979 revolution than it had previously been under the shah. While the shah saw the nuclear programme as a sign for development, of a modern country, the Islamic Republic justified its nuclear programme with the need to protect the revolution and to stand up to the USA and its allies. This means that the rationale of justification might shift, depending on the internal circumstances of a country. Whether these shifts are temporal or permanent should, however, not be subject to speculation. A good example is its shifting after the Iranian revolution.

The Iranian rationale of justification

As described above, various factors may influence the rationale of justification. The exact composition of these factors, their connection among each other, and their importance for this rationale is unknown. This depends on the state in question, its history, its past and present leaderships, and its political culture. Relying on previous research, the factors as described in

the subsequent section may be seen as relevant of the Iranian case. Walter Posch, for example, describes the following factors as relevant for Iranian foreign policy.

> "Ideology and pragmatism in fact go hand in hand in Iranian foreign policy. The question of whether the Islamic Republic stands for an ideology that exploits the resources of the Iranian nation for its own ends, or whether the nation-state of Iran is using an ideological construct to boost its status in the international community must ultimately go unanswered, since even in Iran itself no consensus exists on this point. What observers do agree about is that anti-Americanism forms the basis for the ideology and hence for Iranian foreign policy."[192]

This explanation might encompass the most important aspects of Iran's rationale of justification. However, each time a researcher defines an exhausting list of factors to be included in the rationale, they risk excluding other factors, i.e. no list of factors could be complete. Instead, such definitions should be seen as mere approximations. Nonetheless, they may remain relevant and meaningful as this model of the rationale of justification is precisely this, a model. Models usually do not aspire to show complete images of reality but a meaningful part thereof. This means that adding more and more details to a model would bring the model closer and closer to reality, but this would not necessarily enhance its usefulness.

"Unknown unknowns"[193] [194]

This should be borne in mind when it comes to the preliminary definition of the Iranian rationale of justification. This even more so, as the content of the rationale of justification, the factors it is influenced by, are not known entirely from the outset. This leads to the situation in which a researcher may never know whether they have omitted a central, yet evasive, factor, or whether a particular policy is linked to one or another factor. Hence, it must remain unclear whether a policy that is inherently linked with two possible factors is more abundant of one or another. A good example for this is the potential acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran. Iran has had many reasons to acquire nuclear weapons, for instance its national prestige, but also its interest in regional security which was determined by the rivalry between India and Pakistan. Would Iran have decided to acquire nuclear weapons, which of these two factors would have been more important for this decision?

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[192] **Posch**, Walter (2013): The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism, p. 5

[193] **Sueddeutsche Zeitung** (2010): "…es gibt auch unbekannte Unbekannte…". http://www.sueddeutsche.de/panorama/politik-geschwafel-es-gibt-auch-unbekannte-unbekannte-1.667492, last access on 23 June 2018

[194] **CNN** (2002): RUMSFELD / KNOWNS. (Video clip of a press conference with then US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, posted on 31 March 2016). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REWeBzGuzCc, last access on 23 June 2018

> While the Islamic Republic disavowed the Shah's notions of Iranian grandeur, it certainly aspired to a leadership role in the Middle East. Obtaining a nuclear weapon might give Iran a 'prestige' to which the modernizing world was sensitive and, failing this, it certainly had other reasons to go nuclear. Diplomatically isolated, at loggerheads with the world's most powerful nation, at war with an enemy that, moreover, was said to be building its own nuclear capability until nuclear-armed Israel destroyed the Iraqi reactor at Osirak in 1981 (though Saddam's capability to manufacture nuclear weapons was in doubt), not to mention the longstanding problem of India and Pakistan, Iran had very real security worries. States had gone nuclear for less."[195]

Policies, in this respect, could both be seen as binary choices or non-binary choices. If policies are seen as binary choices, i.e. the policy is implemented or not, the rationale of justification may consist of various factors that influence the decision-making to go in one or the other direction. This means that there are factors in favour of implementing the policy, and factors that are against implementing this policy. The decision, in the end, will then depend on the weighing of these factors. If, however, policies are seen as non-binary choices, there is potential for substantial alterations. Factor a, for instance, might influence the policy in a certain way because of one particular aspect. Factor b, on the other hand, might not be affected by a change in this policy, it might just either favour or not favour its implementation.

Additionally, it is necessary to point out a basic, yet highly important point. The rationale of justification is often what different players make of it. While, for instance, one policy-maker might be critical of one aspect and might highlight another, a policy analyst might highlight a third aspect and doubt the importance of another. This might lead to contradictions and to a lack of clarity. In respect of this problem, the thesis will be based on a research design including methodological triangulation.

Various factors

As discussed above, there are multiple factors influencing Iran's foreign policy rationale. The following overview is not to be seen as exhaustive list but as preliminary points the author of this thesis has encountered in previous analyses. These include factors that could broadly be sorted into the following categories: Anti-Colonialism, a distinct Leftist ideology, Islamism, Revolutionary ideals, realism or pragmatism, and an ideology of national sovereignty. These factors will serve as starting points for this thesis. However, the analysis will remain open for other factors to be discovered, the rationale subsequently being adjusted.

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[195] **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 120

Not all of these factors will be explained in great detail at this point, but several aspects should be noted. First of all, Iran's foreign policy is closely linked with the aspiration of a larger leadership role in the Middle East. This may be traced back to a certain narrative of "national grandeur" that has been present since before the end of the monarchy. Nevertheless, a particular sense of vulnerability has evolved during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-8) and, as a consequence, the feeling of a need to protect the revolution came about. Moreover, the revolution led to a distinct "Islamic-ness" that Iran aspired.

Interestingly, when it comes to nuclear policy, the newly founded Islamic Republic of Iran, in spite of the new Islamic rationale against which policies are required to be judged, resorted to a particularly Leftist paradigm in its foreign policy formulation. This included both the dichotomy of the oppressor vs the oppressed and a distinct Anti-Colonialism. As a consequence of this, Iran turned against the USA, its former ally, and Israel. In addition to this, it adopted a Leftist ideology, in particular in its rhetoric, and blended this with Islamism.

> "The Islamic Republic's view on nuclear weapons was spelled out unambiguously, and there was nothing Islamic about it. It was the language of the Sandinistas and Fidel Castro or later of Hugo Chávez. It was also consistent. Throughout the 1980s Iran voted consistently for disarmament measures, urged greater 'bilateral nuclear negotiations' between the nuclear and non-nuclear countries, and urged the introduction of a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty (which it signed but to date has not ratified).[196]

In addition to this, the missing link between all of these factors is rationality. Within this rationale of justification of Iran's foreign policy, various elements can be weighed differently but the resulting decision in this model is rational. This is not to say that, for instance, Islamism or Leftism always is rational, but within this framework of reference for foreign policy, with various factors borne in mind, the policy outcome might be perfectly logical. A good example for this is the stance toward the USA and the international system itself. An Iranian actor's stance might be more positive or negative toward the international system. The outcome of this might either be a pragmatist, or a principlist stance. In both cases, the outcome is perfectly logical.

As a consequence of these theoretical considerations, these previous analyses, the model of the rationale of justification will be operationalised as a set of variables. Some of these variables, that are already known, will serve as background for the following analysis. They are to be found in the table below. Some of these factors might appear familiar, as they already have been subject to an extensive description in chapters II, III, and IV.

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[196] Ibid., p. 119f.

In any case, instead of imagining these concepts as a table or a list, they should be seen as nodes of a network that is internally linked, or as partly overlapping and often inherently contradictory dimensions. This makes an analysis even more complicated but improves the depiction of reality as these narratives or ideological stances, these perceptions, could be contradictory. This contradictory and often counterfactual nature, as is often the case with ideology and narratives, while being a challenge to both the analyst and the reader, might also be productive as it enables scholars to ask for strategies of harmonisation of ideology and fact.

Anti-colonialist logic	*Leftist ideology*	*Islamism*	*Revolutionary*	*Realism, pragmatism*	*Nationalism, Sovereignty*
Stance towards the USA	Logic of oppressor/oppressed	Shiism	Vulnerability, protecting the revolution	Iran's place in the international system	Ancient Persian past
Stance towards Israel	Exploitation	Sharia	Khomeinism	Survival of the regime	Logic of oppressor/oppressed
Meddling in Iranian affairs		Khomeinism	Exporting the revolution		Meddling in Iranian affairs

Table 1: Iranian rationale of justification as identified

prior to the interviews

Chapter 6 — Collecting and analysing narratives

The main difference between science and everyday observation is twofold. On the one hand, there is theory. It is rare that everyday observations are checked for their accordance with a particular theory in a systematic manner. While there might be everyday theories about social structures or phenomena, a scientific theory must be consistent, systematic, and falsifiable. On the other hand, science relies heavily on methods, the "toolkits" of scientific knowledge. While theories deal with questions how or why some phenomena work, scientific methodology deals with how this phenomenon might be measured, captured, or analysed in a systematic and intersubjective manner. The main idea behind such an approach is that, knowledgeable about the methods that were applied, the same result could, in principle, be obtained by different researchers.

This is the essential point about methodology. Scientific research must both be open to new phenomena and to unexpected situations, but it must also adhere to standards. These standards often are identified as intersubjective reproducibility, as well as systematic procedures. It is the conviction of the author of this thesis that any scientific approach should, furthermore, follow the principle of neutrality, i.e. being free from values and judgments, and the principle of empiricism. These principles, in particular that of neutrality is, of course, not beyond dispute. It is often argued that every individual is automatically biased, depending on their cultural background, their education, their social class, and other factors. These factors cannot easily be changed, if at all, and they certainly influence particular aspects of the research before it has even begun, for instance the research question itself. As a consequence, it is paramount to be aware of this. However, the aspiration not to judge is based on the desire to describe reality as it is and the belief that it is not the scientist in their research who is to change reality.

This is closely linked with the principle of empiricism. Reality is the most important framework against which theories, hypotheses, and statements must be checked. Empirical studies, however, are not just studies in which hard facts are collected, analysed and then compared with the theory. Instead, empiricism is also about social facts, social realities, that are just as real as numbers and statistics. The particularity of the rationale of justification is that it postulates a concept of social reality that is not directly observable. Whether this thesis is empirical could, therefore, be debated extensively. Nonetheless, the concept of the rationale of justification offers a framework for the understanding of foreign policy in general, a framework for interpretation. The collected material, however, is, indeed, empirical.

Prior to dealing with any subject matter the researcher should decide whether to pursue an inductive or deductive approach. Both are ways to compare theory and reality. Induction and deduction refer to the manner in which a conclusion is drawn. Inductive approaches form theories according to singular cases, they draw their conclusion from the special case to the general pattern. Deductive theories, on the other hand, draw their conclusions from the general situation to the special case. This means a theory and hypotheses form the starting point for the analysis. While both try to explain reality and to compare reality and theory, scholars are well advised to be very careful about their theoretical stance and how they approach theory, or reality. It is as has been observed by a famous, fictional detective: "It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."[197]

It is important to note two further dichotomies within social sciences methodology. The first is the dichotomy *qualitative* and *quantitative* methods, and the second is *collecting* and *analysing* data. This thesis will follow a qualitative research design. This means that, in contrast to quantitative methods, the research conducted in this thesis will not necessarily be representative and it does not aspire to be representative. With a relatively small number of cases studied, the goal of qualitative methods is to conduct an in-depth analysis of a topic, in this case Iranian foreign policy and the JCPOA. Following an interpretative logic, it is more important for qualitative methods to understand a subject matter. The downside to this, as mentioned above, is that the results of such a qualitative survey are not necessarily representative, i.e. it would not be possible to draw conclusions about a larger number of cases.

Quantitative methods do, on the other hand have an advantage when it comes to understanding the "big picture". In contrast to qualitative methods, quantitative methods, often statistics, work with mathematical models to describe reality. Quantitative research designs aspire to draw conclusions about the basic population, for instance a country's population. The downside to quantitative methods is clearly that, if conducting a mathematical analysis of reality, there might always be aspects that were not taken into account during the research design phase, this means that there might be certain blind spots. In any case, both qualitative and quantitative approaches require different methods of data collection and data analysis. Typical examples for quantitative data collection and analysis are questionnaires, i.e. standardised interviews, and statistical analysis.

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[197] **Doyle**, Arthur Conan (2009/1892): A Scandal in Bohemia, p. 4. In: **Johnson**, Suzanne/**Waldrep**, Mary (eds.): The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Unabridged publication of the work published by Harper, New York/London (1892). Mineola, USA, Dover Publications, pp. 1—20

Research design

The particular nature of this thesis' constructivist approach is that it has some serious implications for applicable methods. Constructivism as such requires an interaction with the subjects of the social construction of the Iranian rationale of justification. This leads to the question of who constructs this narrative, and how to approach them. The rationale of justification can only be analysed by dealing with the actors living by it, whose work it is to formulate foreign or nuclear policies, and who might give particular insight in how this narrative and Iranian foreign policy formulation works. In addition to this, as there are multiple people whose expertise is grounded in understanding and analysing Iranian foreign policy, these are a second category of experts to be interviewed for this thesis.

Furthermore, the question is whether interaction with actors can show each aspect of the rationale of justification. As a consequence, it might be fruitful to take into account other verbal data that go beyond the horizon of experience of the experts in question. This is even more necessary as these experts are not necessarily neutral. They might, depending on their respective experiences, ideologies, and backgrounds, perceive the rationale of justification of Iran differently, maybe even biased. Therefore, in order to make visible such distortions or biases, documents that might grant insights in Iran's foreign policymaking will also be taken into account in this thesis. Both expert interviews and qualitative content analysis of other verbal data form the main methodological basis of this thesis.

As a consequence, the research design consists of two parts, one being data collection, and the second being data analysis. The former will employ expert interviews and the research and retrieval of documents, the latter will employ the method of qualitative content analysis. This methodological triangulation is necessary in order to broaden the focus of the research. As these explanations are not necessarily telling in their own right, the goal of this chapter is, therefore, to detail the principles which these methods follow. Hence, the collection, the preparation, and the analysis of the data will be dealt with in the next section. The subsequent analysis will be deductive, that is it will take the previously formulated theory as a given and will, then, analyse the findings in light of the theory.

Data collection

As mentioned above, the data collection method as applied in this thesis will follow a twofold approach, that of expert interviews and that of document research. These two methods are to be seen as methodological triangulation in data collection. The main idea behind methodological triangulation is that potential biases or mistakes in data collection or data analysis could

be compensated. This might happen by applying various methods in data collection, in data analysis, or if multiple researchers collect or analyse data. In this case, methodological triangulation will take the form of triangulation in data collection. Two methods will be applied that should complement one another, expert interviews on the one hand, and qualitative content analysis of various documents on the other. Both methods will be applied in a parallel manner, i.e. neither interviews nor document research have higher priority. Their conduct will be described in greater detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

Expert interviews

Expert interviews are a special sub-type of interviews. Just as any other interview, expert interviews could be "narrative", "structured" or "standardised", or "semi-structured". All these interview types have particularities that make them more suitable to one or another methodological approach. Narrative interviews, for instance, are interviews in which the interview partner narrates about their lives or their experiences without the interviewer interrupting. Narrative interviews aim at maximising the output by the interview partner and letting them determine the most important aspects about what they recount. After all, the idea is that they are experts for their lives and they would know best which aspects the most important ones are.

"Structured" or "standardised" interviews, on the other hand, are the complete opposite to narrative interviews, in which only few questions would be asked. One of the most well-known examples for a standardised interview would be an opinion survey, which is a questionnaire-based interview. A certain number of standardised questions are asked and, subsequently, analysed according to the respective theoretical approach. This interview type is most suitable for research design in which it is clear from the outset which details the most interesting are and which specific information the interviewer wants. Structured interviews, in stark contrast to narrative interviews, do not give the interview partner much space to respond in a very nuanced manner.

Expert interviews as conducted for this thesis are semi-structured interviews. These are interviews that adhere, in general, to a previously prepared set of questions. Instead of just asking these questions and trying to tick all boxes as structured interviews often do, semi-structured interviews aim at leaving the interview partner enough space to answer the question extensively and in a nuanced manner. Furthermore, if the interviewer sees potential to gain more information about the subject matter, they might deviate from the set of questions and explore a topic in greater detail. In such interviews, there is a certain extent of flexibility and the potential to great detail at the expense of standardisation, hence the comparability of the results.

As the goal of the interviews conducted for this thesis was to collect specific information about Iranian politics, it was necessary to ask for this specific information. However, as face-to-face interviews often offer the chance to explore the topic at hand further, to ask further questions, structured interviews would offer a too narrow focus. As a consequence, the format of semi-structured interviews was chosen. The problem of interview standardisation of course remains crucial if deviating from the interview guide. However, it could be argued that anyone who would have asked the very same questions could have received similar answers.

Selection of experts

For this thesis, three broader types of experts have been identified. These are Iranian officials, as in policymakers, Iranian professionals or activists, and non-Iranian experts for Iranian politics. These three types form the basis of expert selection, which could again be seen as type of methodological triangulation. The results of each of the interviews will be compared to the others and will be checked with regard to consistency, and in the light of the research question. This triangulation of sources is necessary in order to avoid falling into the trap of distorted views of the subject matter. If *only* Iranian officials or *only* US officials would be interviewed about the politics of the Islamic Republic, their responses would, undoubtedly, differ to a major extent. This would, then, lead to a warped image of Iranian foreign policy and the motivations behind it and, as a consequence, lead to the impracticability of the results. In order to balance these views, it is necessary to take a look at Iranian politics from the "inside" as well as from the "outside".

The nature of "experts" should be subject to debate as well. The question why anyone would be an expert for a particular field will always be answered subjectively, that is there is no single authority designating any scholar or any politician an expert for any policy field. Expertise often is something that is attributed to a person by society, by other scholars, or governments. However, this happens on a case-by-case basis, hence there are no intersubjective categories for expertise. As a consequence, the author of this thesis relied heavily on accessibility of people that usually are seen as experts for Iranian politics. Furthermore, their proximity to Iranian politics, whether they deal with Iran professionally, or whether they were involved in the nuclear negotiations themselves was taken into account.

Uwe Flick describes the definition of "experts" as inconclusive as well. These could either be experts in a particular field, experts about their own lives, or experts about certain specific

aspects.[198] The designation as "expert", therefore, depends on the specific research interest and the specific type of information the interviewer is interested in gaining.

> "Wie andere Methoden auch, kann das Experten-Interview als eigenständiges Verfahren eingesetzt werden, wenn sich die Untersuchung etwa auf Inhalte und Varianten des Expertenwissens in einem Problemfeld bei Vertretern unterschiedlicher Institutionen in einer vergleichenden Perspektive richtet. Dann wird man entsprechende Personen auswählen, Interviews in einer ausreichenden Vielfalt durchführen und analysieren (vgl. hierzu Meuser und Nagel 2002, S. 80–91). Mindestens ebenso häufig wird das Experten-Interview jedoch in Ergänzung zu anderen Methoden eingesetzt […]."[199]

> "Just like other methods, the expert interview may be used as independent procedure. For instance, if the analysis is directed towards certain contents or variants of expert knowledge in a specific problem area and concerns different representatives of various institutions in a comparative perspective. Then, in accordance with this, people might be chosen, interviews be conducted and analysed in sufficient diversity (cf. Meuser and Nagel 2002, p. 80–91). No less frequently, however, expert interviews are applied in combination with other methods […]." [Translation by author]

As the goal of this thesis is to structure the rationale of justification for Iranian policymakers, it is clear that Iranian policymakers themselves are experts. Moreover, those dealing professionally with Iran and Iranian foreign policymaking are to be considered experts in the subject matter.

Interview guidelines

As mentioned above, the interviews conducted for this thesis were semi-structured, that means that for each interview, a questionnaire had been prepared beforehand. This questionnaire took into account various aspects, for instance the position of the expert in question, which knowledge they could have, and how they would remain open and ready to continue answering questions. Furthermore, certain questions were standardised, for instance the initial question whether the interview partners could talk about their personal background. Only in interviews where this was public knowledge and would have taken too much time, this question was omitted.

The formulation of the questions could be seen as somewhere between art and science. How particular people would respond to questions can never been told prior to the interview itself. However, the formulation of the questions followed a logic of descending importance. The most

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[198] cf. **Flick**, Uwe (2014): Qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung, p. 214f. 6th edition, Hamburg, Rowohlts Enzyklopädie

[199] **Flick**, Uwe (2014): Qualitative Sozialforschung, p. 217f.

important questions for answering the research question were asked right at the beginning. However, as it was clear that not many people would answer the research question directly, this question had to be altered and operationalised. Instead of asking for Iran's rationale of justification, for instance, the question was reformulated to whether the interview partner could describe the self-image of Iran when it comes to foreign policy, what they would identify as drivers of Iranian foreign policy, or how Iranian officials would justify Iran's foreign policy at home. Furthermore, answers to questions that were not asked were sometimes even more telling as they implied particular aspects of the rationale of justification for which could have never been asked.

Representativeness

As such, the interviews and the results of the qualitative content analysis cannot be seen as representative. The interviews were conducted with a particular political class and are, therefore, not necessarily generalizable. Any Iranian, for instance, could have a very different opinion about the Islamic Republic's foreign policy and they could be of a profoundly different opinion than the experts that were interviewed. Furthermore, it is not possible to conduct interviews with all those involved in Iranian decision-making.

However, it is not the goal of this thesis to provide generalizable results in the sense that it aims at explaining and highlighting a specific concept of foreign policymaking. The results can very well be accurate without them being verified by a survey or an opinion poll, for instance. On the other hand, as the rationale of justification is formed and constructed by the perceptions of policymakers, as they are the ones adhering to its rules, it makes sense to analyse their view and their take on the rationale of justification, with assistance by those professionals whose task it is to analyse Iran's foreign policy. With other words, its lack of representativeness is not necessarily a downside of this thesis.

Document research

As mentioned above, the second part of data collection for this thesis was document research. This means that documents, containing information about Iranian foreign policy, Iranian ideologies, interests, ideas, and self-perception were researched and retrieved. The kinds of textual sources varied to a great extent, it included, inter alia, articles, transcripts of interviews with Iranian policymakers, research papers, conference notes, or official documents. This diversity of sources makes it necessary to be clear about how these documents initially came

about. For instance, analysing a newspaper article is profoundly different from analysing an official document such as a speech by President Rouhani.

The selection of the documents that were analysed followed a similar rationale to the selection of experts. Those documents that offered insight to Iranian foreign and nuclear policymaking and the information about Iranian self-perception were included in the text corpus. The goal of this was, of course, to complement the information obtained from expert interviews. As a consequence, aspects that were already mentioned by the experts that were interviewed were particularly looked for in the textual material. Furthermore, as it is necessary to bear in mind alternative explanations, new aspects were taken into account as well.

As the method of document collection is not necessarily scientific yet, the subsequent part deals with the scientific method of qualitative content analysis. Both the interview transcripts and the documents that were obtained were analysed with this method, adhering to the quality criteria of qualitative content analysis.[200]

Data analysis

As mentioned above, both interview transcripts and other collected documents were analysed by the means of qualitative content analysis. It is necessary to highlight this fact as mere expert interviews and document research are not necessarily scientific. Expert interviews might adhere to scientific criteria, but the question is how the collected data is proceeded and analysed. The question is what the researcher, after they had collected data, does with this data. The response to this question is qualitative content analysis. The goal thereby is to identify categories that correspond with narratives, ideologies, and concepts of the "official" Iran and play a role in the formulation of Iranian foreign policy. In short, these categories should correspond to Iranian foreign policy making and the Iranian rationale of justification, hence the rationale of justification.

Philipp Mayring's method of qualitative content analysis provides a conceptualised method for category finding.

> "The main idea of the procedure is, to formulate a criterion of definition, derived from theoretical background and research question, which determines the aspects of the textual material taken into account. Following this criterion the material is worked through and categories are

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[200] cf. **Mayring**, Philipp (2015): Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken, p. 123f. 12th edition, Weinheim/Basel, Beltz

tentative and step by step deduced. Within a feedback loop those categories are revised, eventually reduced to main categories and checked in respect to their reliability. […]."[201]

As the categories have not been developed previously, the qualitative content analysis that was conducted for this thesis did not use pre-defined and theoretically grounded categories but developed and derived them from the verbal data. In other words, the coding procedure, as described in the subsequent paragraphs, remained open to new categories and tried not to preclude any potential aspects and categories.

Coding and analysing

Coding is an essential part of qualitative content analysis. In order to scientifically analyse any verbal data, it is necessary to raise the abstraction level of this data. This is achieved by coding the data in question. An example for this would be a word-by-word analysis of a sentence or a series of sentences. Take, for instance the following tweet by US President Donald Trump.

> "The United States will not allow other countries to impose massive Tariffs and Trade Barriers on its farmers, workers and companies. While sending their product into our country tax free. We have put up with Trade Abuse for many decades – and that is long enough."[202]

This tweet is, without any doubt, about tariffs and other trade barriers. As a consequence, the abstraction level could be raised by marking parts of the tweet and add "keywords", i.e. codes, to them. For instance, the word "Tariffs" in the first sentence could be coded with "tariffs", the term "Trade Barriers" with "non-tariff barriers". The term "tax free" could, then, be coded with "tariffs" as well, as particular codes might appear more often than once. As all these codes are somewhat related to trade, they could be combined in a category "trade". Would this tweet be a part of a series of several tweets about different branches of the economy, this method would make intersubjectively clear which economic branches of the economy these tweets deal with. As a consequence, the series of tweets could be categorised as dealing with the economy.

In its own right, this might seem downright banal. After all, it is obvious that this is about the economy. However, coding might reveal the subtext of sentences and it might even allow insights in particular aspects of policy. If Mr Trump would, in this hypothetical series of tweets, always include the political aspect of national security, or if he would compare particular political aspects to others, this would then be coded, hence made visible, and comparable.

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[201] **Mayring**, Philipp (2000): Qualitative Content Analysis. In: Forum Qualitative Social Research, Vol. 01, No 2, 2000, http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089/2385, last access on 7 July 2017

[202] **Trump**, Donald J. (2018): Tweet by Donald J. Trump (9 June 2018), https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1005554429087514624, last access on 10 June 2018

As a consequence, coding is even more useful when applied to longer and more complex text passages than Mr Trump's tweets. So, coding might be useful when applied to several texts such as research papers and policy statements. If these include the economy, for instance, this tells the researcher how foreign policy and economy are linked and which aspects are relevant in this context. This cannot be achieved with just one round of coding, however. Codes might be assigned to multiple terms or parts of sentences, but it needs more than just one round to compare the results of the coding procedure and to harmonise codes. Furthermore, with each round of coding, the abstraction levels were raised. When various trade-related codes, for instance, were found in one document, these were then collected and bundled into a "code group", the code group "trade". In the subsequent round, multiple code groups, if applicable, were bundled into a category, for instance "trade" and "budget" into "economy/economic policy".

Qualitative content analysis

Both the documents that were obtained during the research period as well as the interviews were coded. As interviews are *conversational* verbal data, they had to be transcribed first. If the interview partners agreed thereto, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. In order to make sure that most parts of each interview could actually be quoted in the thesis, the interview transcript was sent to the respective interview partner who, then, was allowed to refine particular parts of specific answers. The author of this thesis compared and kept the original interview transcript, the recording, as well as the authorised version of the interview in order to make sure that the passages that were altered would either not be altered significantly or used in the thesis in the first place. However, sometimes it was rather telling which aspects were altered and which were left as they were. The resulting transcripts were then coded and analysed accordingly.

In summary, the main unit of coding were the single words of each sentence. The process of coding was repeated several times. In each round of coding the level of abstraction was increased. In the end, the specific codes that were relevant for the concept of the rationale of justification and the position of the JCPOA therein were analysed with regard to their frequency, their prominence, and their larger role for the interview partner. If the interview partner would, for instance, have said that nationalism, for instance, would not be important in Iranian foreign policymaking whatsoever, but would have talked about nationalism half of the time, this discrepancy was, then, duly taken into account. Eventually, the results of the interview coding procedure were compared to the results of the coding procedure of the documents.

The relations between the various categories, their respective relations to the JCPOA and the importance attached to these categories was then analysed systematically. The results of this qualitative content analysis, as well as particular problems and conspicuities will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 7 — Analysis

The political-ideological factors and narratives that were elaborated upon in chapters 2, 3, and 5 serve as basis for this analysis. Over a time period from August 2017 to January 2019, interviews with various experts with regard to Iran have been conducted. These interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes each. For each interview, an interview guide-line was prepared first with respect to the expertise of the respective interview partner. The prepared guidelines served as framework for the interviews themselves. However, given the fact that some aspects of the subject matter might require further questions that could not be conceptualised beforehand, the author of this thesis attached great importance to a certain extent of flexibility. Therefore, when it appeared useful, detailed questions that had not been included in the guidelines were asked in the course of the interviews.

In addition to this, close attention was paid to other factors, i.e. narratives, ideological aspects, paradigms, and justification strategies. New aspects that were pointed out during the interviews or came up in secondary sources were included in the analytical matrix of the rationale of justification. Moreover, some factors were pointed out as of particular importance for the JCPOA. These include pragmatism, ideological flexibility, the Iranian revolution, legalism, and power politics.

Pragmatism and ideological flexibility

The most striking feature of Iran's foreign policy is the astounding extent of pragmatism that was displayed with the conclusion of the JCPOA. Pragmatism in this context means that Iran showed the willingness to make a compromise for the sake of regime survival, Iranian's economic welfare, and its energy interests. In contrast to pragmatism, ideological flexibility means the application of various ideological elements to support Iran's stance. As Walter Posch argued, the Iranian political elite is, when it comes to ideology, surprisingly flexible or "opportunistic". Iran's policymakers would, for instance, use different ideological justifications when it comes to nuclear, foreign, economic, or trade policy. This depends to a large extent on the subject matter at hand and the geographical region in question.

> "[…] Tehran uses a logical pattern of when and how to apply elements of its ideology depending on geography. Four ideological pillars are applied, with different levels of emphasis, to three geographic areas. […] The ideological pillars are not of equal importance to each region: 'global' Shi'ism does not play a role in Iranian Third World policy, while Third-Worldism carries no relevance in Iran's immediate neighbourhood. Often, a number of ideological approaches are resorted to in order to justify the same policy, as in the case of Syria."[203]

This ideological flexibility gives the Iranian regime itself enough space to decide about certain matters of high political importance in a more pragmatic, or strategic, manner. Instead of being limited by ideology, by narratives, or principles, the Islamic Republic uses them to its own advantage in justifying certain policy measures. It is noteworthy that ideological flexibility is a feature that is not necessarily always linked to pragmatism. Would the Iranians, for instance, be unwilling to reach a deal on their nuclear programme, they would be ideologically flexible enough to prevent such an agreement. As such, ideological flexibility is more of a paradigm applicable to various circumstances.

In this case, however, ideological flexibility allowed the underpinning of pragmatism by ideological means. Pragmatism in the case of the JCPOA meant compromising on Iran's "inalienable right"[204] to enrich uranium for the sake of a deal, and it meant moving away from a strictly anti-imperialist ideological stance. It meant that Iran considered the price of sticking to some of its ideological foundations as too high.

Legalism

However, the Iranian political elite are not entirely free to be completely pragmatic or flexible. They are not only limited by ideological considerations but also by legal provisions. Iran's political system, despite being described as authoritarian system with democratic elements, is based on a constitution and a legal system, which constrains politicians' actions.

> "There are limits to flexibility, which apply not only to anti-Americanism and 'anti-Zionism', but also to the constitutional articles quoted above. Arms shipments from Israel and later the United States (in the Iran-Contra affair) in the 1980s were always officially denied by Iran, and thus never led to the change of direction in Tehran's foreign policy Washington

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[203] **Posch**, Walter (2017): Ideology and Strategy in the Middle East: The Case of Iran, p. 78f.

[204] **UNODA** (s.a.): Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Art. IV, https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/text, last access on 21 October 2018

and Tel Aviv had desired. A more recent example concerns Iranian-Russian relations: when Russian media reported on Russia's use of Hamadan Air Base, it immediately became a political issue, and led to the Iranian government denying Russia further use of the base. Neutrality, as laid down in the constitution, was thus stronger than the military benefit of cooperation with Russia, despite a comprehensive convergence of interests, especially regarding Syria."[205]

Furthermore, in an interview with the author, Mr Posch highlighted the legalistic nature of the Iranian political elite. The Iranian constitution, which is based on a distinct Islamist ideology, but also on a distinct non-alignment or neutrality policy, would serve as demarcation line for ideological justification strategies.[206] Ambassador Soltanieh evoked such a legalistic notion in an interview with the author as well, highlighting the significance of such legal aspects for Iranian politics. "It is not only religious practice but ruling the country, the interaction with the whole world, international relations, everything is based on [the] constitution."[207]

This legalistic notion is, of course, closely associated with Islamic law and the Iranian constitution. The main point about this is that Iran's political system, as envisioned by the late Ayatollah Khomeini, is, as such, Islamic. However, just because it was planned, drafted, or implemented as "Islamic" does not mean that politics in Iran essentially **is** Islamic. Leaving aside for a moment what this would mean in practice, no state could just simply say that they would be Islamic, democratic, Jewish, or Socialist and this would automatically materialise. Instead, these keywords need to be filled with concrete political measures.

In the case of Iran, this constitutional provision is "filled" by legalistic means. This means that all policy in Iran has to be legally based on Islamic law and Islamic jurisprudence. This is the reason for the Guardian Council's reviewing of all bills passed by the Majles for legal accordance with Islamic law. Despite the fact that this ultimately concerns mostly family and social law, this example shows that Iranian politics is largely based on legalism. Given this, it does not come as surprise that Ambassador Soltanieh highlighted the legal-ideological boundaries of Iran's democratic system.

> "After the revolution, a constitution was written, using the and benefitting from the experience of all other countries, all constitutions, but it was made sure that it will be consistent

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[205] **Posch**, Walter (2017): Ideology and Strategy in the Middle East: The Case of Iran, p. 81

[206] **Posch**, Walter (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 August 2018

[207] **Soltanieh**, Ali Asghar (2017): Interview by author. Vienna, 10 August 2017

with the principles of Islam, particularly enshrined in the holy Qur'an. […] It is not only religious practice but ruling the country, the interaction with the whole world, international relations, everything is based on [the] constitution. The important matter is the vital roles of people, decision-making by people, who are reflect their views and choices through the elections such as Parliamentary elections, presidential elections, even the electing members of [the] [Assembly of Experts], to choose or dismiss the leader, in other words the people have their role everywhere. […] Particularly bearing in mind independence, which is a key element of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is not only a republic, which means democracy, peoples role, the important thing is the notion of Islamic and independence."[208]

Power politics

A major part of Iran's foreign policy is its regional power politics. This political factor, its political and regional power, is connected to other political factors. In an interview with journalist and former special envoy of the Austrian EU presidency 2006 in Iraq, Gudrun Harrer, this became particularly clear. According to Ms Harrer, the Iranian third-worldist ideology and its idea of helping the oppressed of the Earth could not be seen without the context of Anti-Imperialism, Anti-Zionism, and, of course, power politics. The prime examples of this would be Iranian influence in Syria and Lebanon.[209]

Power politics in the Middle East is strongly linked to the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both states try to expand their influence in the region and, at the same time, to curb the influence of the other. The wars in Syria and Yemen, as well as the actions of Saudi Arabia in Lebanon[210] and Iran's interest in Bahrain[211] are to be seen in this light. This game of power politics is not entirely distinguishable from other factors in Iran's foreign policy, for instance its pro-Shia policy in other parts of the world such as Africa. In this respect, it should be stated, according to Ms Harrer, that Mr Khomeini wanted to be not just an Iranian, but an **Islamic** leader, hence exert influence in the region.[212]

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[208] **Soltanieh**, Ali Asghar (2017): Interview by author. Vienna, 10 August 2017

[209] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

[210] **Barnard**, Anne/**Abi-Habib**, Maria (2017): Why Saad Hariri Had That Strange Sojourn in Saudi Arabia. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/24/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-saad-hariri-mohammed-bin-salman-lebanon.html, last access on 20 October 2018

[211] **Mabon**, Simon (2018): Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Struggle for Supremacy in Lebanon and Bahrain. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/06/20/saudi-arabia-iran-and-the-struggle-for-supremacy-in-lebanon-and-bahrain/, last access on 20 October 2018

[212] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

The Islamic Republic, just like any other state, would not openly say that its aspiration is to strengthen its own power base or to enhance their influence in other states. Instead, Tehran evokes the notion of the fight against terrorism or the lawfulness of its actions, for instance as they were invited to join the fight against terrorism in Syria. The fact that these actions do improve Iran's standing within Syria as the Islamic Republic profits from supporting its close ally, Bashar al-Assad, is omitted in public statements.

> "In the same vein, from the very beginning of the crisis in Syria, we have warned against any foreign intervention in the internal affairs of this country and the use of unlawful means, including supporting extremist and terrorist groups in order to exert pressure on the government of Syria, and have *consistently* emphasized that the crisis can only be resolved through intra-Syrian dialogue. To this end, the presence of our military advisors in Syria has been at the request of the Syrian government and consistent with international law, and has aimed at assisting the Syrian government in combatting extremist terrorism."[213]

The JCPOA and Iran's rationale of justification

As laid down in chapter 5, ideological and political-cultural factors in any state form the rationale of justification. This, in turn, influences decision-makers and, eventually, a policy decision. This theory is perfectly embodied in the Iranian institution of the Supreme National Security Council. The SNSC, according to Walter Posch, is the most important forum in Iran to reconcile various factors with one another. This means that various factors influence the decision-making process, embodied in the various members of the SNSC. In this context, the factor x, or the "human factor" comes into play. Decisions depend on the positions of the respective members of the SNSC, as well as on the personal belief or convictions of the supreme leader.
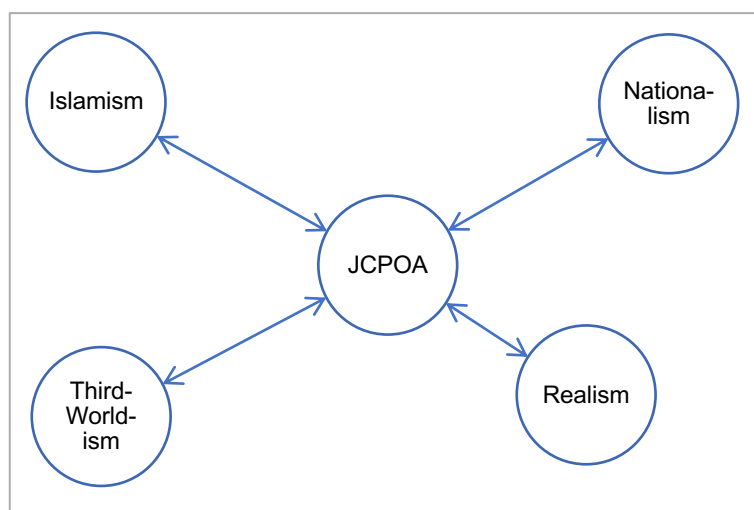
The JCPOA interacts with the rationale of justification as both an expression of Iran's pragmatism as well as an instrument for domestic political discussion. The nuclear deal has to be seen as in direct contradiction to anti-imperialism, as well as in line with both pragmatism and Islamism. While pragmatism and ideological flexibility allowed to start negotiations with the P5+1, Islamism made it possible for Iran to portray itself as the "righteous country" that would stick to its agreements. As the JCPOA seemingly contradicted the third-worldist and anti-imperialist stance of the Islamic republic, the political elite had to

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[213] **Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (2018a): Statement by H. E. Dr. Hassan Rouhani President of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly 25 September 2018 New York. http://en.mfa.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=3&pageid=37002&newsview=536892, last access on 31 December 2018

reconcile third-worldism with negotiations with the USA. They managed to do so in limiting talks with the P5+1 to the nuclear issue, not touching upon other matters such as Iran's missile programme, and precluding talks with the USA on other issues.

The interaction of the JCPOA with the Iranian rationale of justification could roughly be depicted as follows.

Illustration 3: The JCPOA within the rationale of justification

Illustration 3 is a relatively simple illustration of the JCPOA within the Iranian rationale of justification. In this illustration, the JCPOA is at the centre of attention. The factors depicted are related to the JCPOA, either because the JCPOA is in line or in contradiction with the respective factor. The factors as depicted in illustration 3 provide a good, yet superficial overview over the JCPOA's position in the rationale of justification. These relations, however, are not necessarily straightforward and they may contain other factors and ideological trends. This will be detailed in the subsequent section.

Realism and pragmatism

As briefly laid down above, the JCPOA is an expression of the realistic or pragmatic nature of Iran's foreign policy when it comes to its place in the international system or the survival of the regime. The JCPOA, therefore, has to be seen as an expression of Iran's ideological flexibility and its pragmatism. Iran, in general, employs pragmatism, or ideology, depending on their respective usefulness, and for the survival of the regime. The JCPOA was necessary in order to keep the USA at arm's length, to be able to maintain a nuclear power

programme, which Iran considers necessary to meet its energy demands. The main factor in this decision was Ali Khamenei's stance toward negotiations with the USA.

In addition to this, the economic sanctions against Iran were a major reason for Iran to re-start negotiations with the P5+1. The fact that Iran needs the international market in order to sell its crude oil is evident. Without the revenue generated from selling its oil, it would be extremely hard for the regime to finance itself, its political system, and its foreign policy. Furthermore, the economic sanctions established by the international community have caused major economic damage. It was logical for the regime to try to reach a compromise that would ease the economic pressure on Iran.

This meant that any group in Iran that is linked to the economy in the broadest sense has interests in the JCPOA. This depends on how these groups, or any group in this respect, benefit from the sanctions or the lifting thereof. This concerns the IRGC in particular who, as Farhad Rezaei and Somayeh Khodaei Moshiraba argue, have become a tacit supporter of the JCPOA.

> "Although the Revolutionary Guards' role in the nuclear programme itself remains fairly obscure, their stance on the negotiations was relatively centrist. The organization has a history of hardline nuclear nationalism, viewing the nuclear arsenal as a deterrence against adversaries and a protective umbrella for the regime's efforts to export its revolution. As such, the Guards turned into spoilers on the few occasions when the normalizers in the regime tried to negotiate a deal, even after severe sanctions were imposed on Iran. But in a surprising shift, the Guards lined up behind the nuclear agreement.
>
> The empirical analysis supports the conclusion that the Revolutionary Guards' apparent transition from a spoiler to a tacit supporter of the nuclear agreement was primarily driven by economic considerations. But, contrary to some popular assumptions, the decision was not promoted by narrow financial losses due to sanctions. Rather, it stemmed from a broader reconfiguration of the balance of power between the government and the military organization. Having created an economic empire, the military organization has been anxious to preserve it from a challenge by the government, a challenge made possible because of the unpopularity of the sanctions-producing nuclear project."[214]

This transition is partly due to the fact that the IRGC is absolutely loyal to the Supreme Leader Khamenei "who approved the deal".[215] As a consequence, they would not openly

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[214] **Rezaei**, Farhad/**Moshiraba**, Somayeh Khodaei (2018): The Revolutionary Guards: from spoiler to accepter of the nuclear agreement, p. 152f. In: British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 45, No 2, pp. 138—155. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2016.1214817, last access on 21 October 2018

[215] Ibid.

adopt a position in diametrical opposition to Mr Khamenei's stance. This means that there are two main factors behind the IRGC's decision not to spoil the JCPOA. The first is their economic interests. As such, this was a relatively pragmatic, non-ideological decision. The second is the position of Mr Khamenei. Would he not have supported the JCPOA, the IRGC would not have supported the deal in the way they did. This could be seen as ideological choice by the IRGC. The supreme leader, after all, is the highest Islamic and revolutionary authority in Iran.

According to some interviews, the supreme leader's decisions are ultimate, and it would be him who decides which course Iran's foreign policy would take. Other interviewers highlighted that this importance of the supreme leader would be overstated. In any case, realism and pragmatism to a large extent depend on the political will of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as well as that of the incumbent president. Iran's foreign policy was profoundly different under President Ahmadinejad than under President Rouhani. Whereas President Ahmadinejad was a principlist, a conservative who worked for protecting the revolution without a clerical, but with a IRGC background, President Rouhani is known as moderate and pragmatist. Depending on how to assess the relationship between the president and the supreme leader, the respective president's latitude to act politically largely depends on the support of the supreme leader. Without Mr Khamenei's support, it is unlikely that Mr Rouhani would have been able to conclude the JCPOA.

For moderates, the JCPOA was an opportunity to improve the relations with the West. Reaching a compromise in negotiations also means establishing trust between the negotiators and, ideally, between representatives of the respective states. The moderates' aspiration for Iran is, at least, to find common ground, a status quo, with the USA and improve Iran's international standing. In this context, the JCPOA has to be seen as vehicle for improving the US-Iranian relations and Iran's international reputation. After all, President Rouhani expressed cautious hope that trust could be established between these countries. "Trust at the international level is always a relative issue and one can never achieve 100-per cent trust, but we can establish dialogue between two countries with relative trust […]."[216]

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[216] **Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (2018): President in meeting American foreign policy elites: We've worked based on constructive interaction with world / JCPOA a historic test for everybody / US withdrawal from JCPOA losing opportunity / Iran the biggest victim of terrorism, WMDs.
http://en.mfa.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=3&pageid=37002&newsview=536982, last access on 31 December 2018

The interesting aspect about this is that the supreme leader does not appear to be trustful to the USA whatsoever. This can and will be explained later by taking into account Iran's distinct Anti-Americanism, its anti-imperialism, its notion of resistance, and its defensiveness. Nonetheless, Iran displays an astounding extent of ideological flexibility as officials of the Islamic Republic insist on being righteous and pragmatic. **They**, the Iranians, are willing to negotiate—against their better knowledge—and are willing to compromise, in contrast to the United States who cannot be trusted. Arguing in such a manner makes possible to justify why the Iranians in fact **do** negotiate in the first place. They allegedly are righteous, generous, and they negotiate only if their demands are met.

In any case, it seems clear that pragmatic and non-ideological decisions enjoy large support in the Iranian population. Therefore, pragmatic decisions concerning the international standing of the Islamic Republic, such as the conclusion of the JCPOA, do not need to be justified publicly. According to Ms Harrer, the public did not question the JCPOA as such. There would not have been any need to publicly justify the nuclear deal because the population would have welcomed the conclusion of the JCPOA in an exuberant manner. Of course, a certain part of the population, particularly in the state apparatus, did not welcome the JCPOA because they were afraid of giving up the revolution.[217] In any case, the regime displayed both ideological flexibility and pragmatism in deciding to negotiate with the USA in the first place. Ideological flexibility as in employing ideology, as required; and pragmatism as in deciding based on needs and interests.

Expediency

Closely linked with the realism and pragmatism is the paradigm of "expediency", which basically translates as regime survival. This means that, should it be useful or necessary for the regime's survival, the political elites of the Islamic Republic can very well be pragmatic and realistic. This was the main idea behind the creation of the Expediency Discernment Council. Expediency is closely linked with the defensiveness of the regime. This is based on the experience of the Iran-Iraq war.

According to Mr Posch, expediency is part of the institutional framework of the Islamic Republic as it is embodied in the SNSC.[218] The decisions taken in this format are both

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[217] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

[218] cf. **Posch**, Walter (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 August 2018

influenced by the supreme leader and by other institutions, such as the president. Within the SNSC, expediency is a factor that comes into play for foreign policy formulation.

Islamism and Khomeinism

Islamism is an ideology based on religious principles. Islamists' main belief is that the state and society should be based on those religious principles. However, there is a profound difference between Islam and Islamism as the religion of Islam does not necessarily imply a political opinion of any sorts. Islamists' strategies usually implied reforms in the domains of education, law, and social policy but without a clear political objective, without an image of their desired political system.

In Iran, this ideology has become embodied in the 1979 constitution of the Islamic Republic. In this case, Islamism has a distinct form and is shaped by Shiism. This Shiite feature makes Iran's Islamist system, which is shaped by the political theories of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, slightly different from Sunni Islamism as these religions both follow distinct religious teachings and traditions. One of the differences, for instance, is the "typical" Shiite quietism.

> "Initially, the majority of Iran's Shiite leaders chose the traditional course of acquiescence and quietism. They were motivated by the tradition of eschewing political authority, as well as by recognition of Mohammad Reza Shah's superior resources and popular support. Active opposition centered on a small group of middle-rank scholars under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The future leader of the Islamic Republic saw the Shah's reforms as an existential threat. Khomeini led protests against the Shah in 1963 and found himself exiled from Iran for his efforts."[219]

Shiite Islamism and Khomeinism are, therefore, historically linked. Their connection is not so much conceptual as it is historical. Iran's political system was formed by Ruhollah Khomeini; hence it is inherently Shiite. However, an Islamic republic could theoretically have been developed elsewhere as well, based upon a Sunni Islamism. The fact that Shiite scholars in Iran introduced the system of an Islamic republic could, therefore, be seen as "coincidence".

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[219] **Mishal**, Shaul/**Goldberg**, Ori (2015): Understanding Shiite Leadership. The Art of the Middle Ground in Iran and Lebanon, p. 43. New York, Cambridge University Press

Nonetheless, the question is how Shiite Islamism and Khomeinism still influence Iran's foreign policy. As such, the influence of Islamism on foreign policy depends on the influence of traditional Shiite clerics in the formal decision-making process. In a sense, this is linked to Khomeinism. The reason for this is that the political system, as it is today, is very much a conceptualisation of Ayatollah Khomeini's political thinking. Shiite clerics and legal scholars have a certain position within Iran's political system.[220]

Moreover, Khomeinism is inherently linked with the idea of the regime's survival. The survival of the regime equals the survival of Ayatollah Khomeini's political legacy. This means that both pragmatism for the sake of the regime's survival as well as the paradigm of defensiveness as described in chapter 2 are linked with Khomeinism. However, Khomeinism itself does not play a role of paramount importance in Iranian foreign policy. Of course, the political thinking of Ruhollah Khomeini still serves as basis of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as its foreign policy. These have been described above, not as content of Khomeinism, but as separate ideological pillars or paradigms.

The essential point about the JCPOA and Islamism is the fact that Islamism gives Iranian officials the opportunity to portray themselves and the country as guided by god. This "divine guidance" as evoked frequently highlights the Islamist foundation of Iran's political system and enables Iran's officials to portray Iran as a "righteous" country, in contrast to the USA.

Third-Worldism

Furthermore, Third-World ideology as well as the advocated dichotomy of the oppressor/oppressed and Iran's distinct Anti-Zionism are in conflict with concluding or even negotiating an agreement such as the JCPOA. Hard-liners, who are opposed to the JCPOA because of these, their ideologies, do not only oppose the deal because of its contradiction to their ideologies. They do so as well because of the fact that they fear that Iran would have "given too much".[221] If the regime "gives too much", if it "gives in", this could, according to their logic, mean the end of the Islamic Republic.

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[220] cf. **Bruno**, Greg (2008): Religion and Politics in Iran. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/religion-and-politics-iran, last access on 30 December 2018

[221] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

As the JCPOA seemingly contradicted the third-worldist and anti-imperialist stance of the Islamic republic, the political elite had to reconcile third-worldism with negotiations with the USA. They managed to do so in limiting talks with the P5+1 to the nuclear issue, not touching upon other matters such as Iran's missile programme, and precluding talks with the USA on other issues

Related to nationalism, and to a certain extent to third-worldism, is the concept of national pride and dignity. Closely associated with this is the notion of not reacting to threats. The reason indicated for not negotiating with the United States is, in fact, this idea of them trying to pressure Iran into negotiating.[222] This notion has also been supported by Ambassador Soltanieh, who highlighted the reluctance of Iranians to react to threats or pressure. "[…] [I]f we are asked to do something, we try to compromise and find a makeable solution. Had they warned Iran to suspend otherwise face punitive actions, we surely have not accepted at all."[223] [Referring to the negotiations in Sa'dabad palace with the E3, note by author]

This notion of national dignity is closely linked with nationalism, but also with third-worldism. Iran is seen as country that does not want to give in to pressure by "arrogant governments"[224] and as a country that, in alleged contrast to the United States, would pursue the goal of peace and security in the Middle East. As such, Iran sees itself and its foreign and security policy as spearhead of the developing world, a notion that, in the Middle East, is linked to Islamism.

> "We do not negotiate with America on regional issues (M.E. Issues). America's goals in the region are the exact opposite of our goals. We want security and peace in the region. We want the rule of people over their own countries. America's policy in the region is to create insecurity. Take a look at Egypt, Libya and Syria. Arrogant governments–headed by America–have begun a counterattack against an Islamic Awakening which has been created by Middle Eastern nations. This counterattack is continuing to this day, and it is gradually creating a disastrous situation for these nations. This is their (USA's) goal which is the exact opposite of ours. We do not at all negotiate with America on regional issues, nor on domestic issues, nor on the issue of weapons. Our negotiations with the

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[222] cf. **Khamenei**, Ali (2018b): How did Imam Khamenei predict the failure of JCPOA? http://english.khamenei.ir/news/5675/How-did-Imam-Khamenei-predict-the-failure-of-JCPOA, last access on 1 January 2019

[223] cf. **Soltanieh**, Ali Asghar (2017): Interview by author. Vienna, 10 August 2017

[224] **Khamenei**, Ali (2018c): U.S. 'support for Iranian people' is a big lie, has political reasons behind: Imam Khamenei. http://english.khamenei.ir/news/5687/U-S-support-for-Iranian-people-is-a-big-lie-has-political, last access on 1 January 2019

> Americans are confined to the nuclear issue only and on how we can reach an agreement through diplomacy."[225]

This distinct enmity toward the United States is rooted not just in allegedly various goals, which differ insofar as Iran aspires an increase of their influence in the Middle East. It also is rooted in the support of the USA for the Pahlavi regime, in the fact that the USA supported SAVAK, sheltered the late shah, and supported the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq in the war against Iran (1980—8). In this context, Anti-Americanism could also be seen as defensive attitude. This Anti-Americanist and anti-colonialist ideology often appears in two manners, the one is the notion of "resistance", the other is the belief that the USA generally are not trustworthy.

Hence, third-worldism, dignity, resistance, and independence are concepts that are linked to, primarily, anti-colonialism, and, as a consequence, Anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. The notion of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism appears frequently in speeches given by Supreme Leader Khamenei and other hard-line politicians. The nuclear file, not so much the JCPOA, is portrayed as imperialist and rooted in the alleged deep enmity of the USA toward Iran. The JCPOA, on the other hand, is seen as instrument to which Iran adheres to but the USA would not. Iran is righteous, the USA and the EU member states are not. The main strategy to reconcile third-worldism with the conclusion of the JCPOA was to limit the negotiations to the nuclear file. This made possible reaching the nuclear deal and, at the same time, maintain Iran's third-worldist and anti-imperialist stance.

Defensiveness and vulnerability

Given Iran's past experiences in the Iran-Iraq war and the international reaction to this, it is not surprising to discover a certain mistrust among Iranian policymakers vis-à-vis international organisations such as the United Nations. This stance is, in part, influenced by Iran's Khomeinist legacy, but foremost by the reaction of the UN to Iraq's aggression. "For example, many influential people within the Iranian political establishment, as well as in the general public, vividly remember how the United Nations stayed indifferent to Saddam Hussein's invasion and occupation of Iranian territory."[226]

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[225] Ibid.

[226] **Memarian**, Jahandad (2014): Why Iran Doesn't Trust the International Community. https://fpif.org/iran-doesnt-trust-international-community/, last access on 1 January 2019

This defensiveness has shaped Iran's thinking as Tehran now seeks to improve its defensiveness. The fact that its air force is outdated, for instance, leads to its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon. Their rationale is that Hezbollah could launch a series of rocket attacks against Israel, should a conflict erupt between Israel and Iran.[227] In this respect, two other points are noteworthy. The first is the explicitly non-aggressive foreign and security policy in Iran. This was particularly highlighted by Mr Fasslabend.

> "Was militärische Aggressionen betrifft, ist es eine fast stehende Redewendung im Iran, zu sagen, der Iran hat in den letzten 150 oder 200 Jahren kein einziges Nachbarland angegriffen. Das heißt, wir sind keine militärisch expansive Nation, sondern defensiv. Zweitens, das ist auch dadurch dokumentiert, dass der Iran, selbst als Saddam Hussein Giftgas eingesetzt hat, obwohl es im Iran umfangreiche Bestände an Giftgas gegeben hat, diese aus religiösen Gründen nicht eingesetzt hat."[228]

> "Concerning military aggression, it has virtually become a figure of speech in Iran to say that Iran has not attacked a single neighbouring country in the past 150 or 200 years. This means, we are no militarily expansive nation but defensive. Secondly, this is documented by the fact that Iran has not used poison gas for religious reasons, even as Saddam Hussein used poison gas, despite possessing an extensive stock thereof." [Translation by author]

Nationalism

Nationalism as factor of Iranian policy is a curious case. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a state which was set up in contradiction to nationalism. As a matter of fact, post-revolutionary Iran referred back to the concept of the *umma*, the Islamic community.

> "Also eigentlich ist die Islamische Republik in der Negation des Nationalismus entstanden. Sie haben auch den Begriff „Nation" für eine lange Zeit nicht verwendet. Sie haben stattdessen einen islamischen Begriff, den der *omma* verwendet. Die *omma* ist nicht landesgebunden."[229]

> "Well, in fact, the Islamic Republic came about in negation of nationalism. They [the political elite of the Islamic Republic, note by author] did not use the term "nation" for a long time. Instead, they used an Islamic term, that of the *omma*. The *omma* is not linked to a specific country." [Translation by author]

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[227] cf. **Fasslabend**, Werner (2019): Interview by author. Vienna, 03 January 2019

[228] **Fasslabend**, Werner (2019): Interview by author. Vienna, 03 January 2019

[229] **Bayat**, Behrooz (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 21 August 2018

This changed within the last two decades. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for instance, had been elected Iranian president in 2005 with a political programme that today would be described as "Iran first".[230] This reflects a change in the stance of the Islamic Republic insofar as the political elites in Tehran started to utilise nationalism for their own ends. Nationalism now serves as legitimising factor[231] and as foundation for an aspiration of Iran being "great again". This is reflected in Iran's position concerning the correct name of the *Persian* Gulf.[232] Nationalism, of course, is closely linked to the above-mentioned power politics.

However, this nationalist notion was apparent during and after the revolution. Mr Fasslabend highlighted that it was overshadowed by the Islamist nature of the revolution. The fact that the shah "disavowed" nationalism with his pompous and flamboyant celebrations, for instance the Shahanshah ceremony in 1971.[233, 234]

Indeed, it is nationalism that fuels Iran's foreign and security policy. Interwoven with other narratives, paradigms, and ideological trends, nationalism serves as legitimising and unifying factor. Even Iran's highest religious and political authority, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei embraces this ideology in terms of national pride and dignity, linked with other factors such as Islamism, Anti-Americanism, and anti-imperialism.

> "The Iranian nation is an **independent nation**: a dear one. The previous rulers of this nation – Qajar and Pahlavi kings – **took dignity away from it**. They humiliated the people and held the people back. They (Qajar and Pahlavi) made the nation submit to the **imposition of other powers**. They (the Americans and the British) got used to this position and want the same advantage over the Iranian people again. **Now, Islam, the Islamic Republic, the Islamic government, and the Islamic Revolution has arrived** [sic]: this has given back dignity to the people. The people have stood firm--the enemy cannot tolerate it: This is what the fight is about. Thus, some individuals should not ask: 'Why do we insist on such matters?' Some people used to come and ask me the things

[230] **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

[231] **Malekzadeh**, Shervin (2018): What Trump doesn't get about ideology in Iran. It's about nationalism, not theocracy. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/06/25/what-trump-doesnt-get-about-ideology-in-iran-its-about-nationalism-not-theocracy/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4a376e6b1580, last access on 26 December 2018

[232] **Posch**, Walter (2013): The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism, p. 26

[233] cf. **Fasslabend**, Werner (2019): Interview by author. Vienna, 03 January 2019

[234] cf. **Kadivar**, Cyrus (2002): We are awake. https://iranian.com/2002/01/25/we-are-awake/, last access on 6 January 2019

directly. May God forgive them for their mistakes (willfillness to help the enemy). [Sic]"[235]
[Emphases by author]

The cancellation of the JCPOA by the US president perfectly fits in this matrix of factors. Supreme Leader Khamenei reacted with a reference to both anti-imperialism and Anti-Americanism, as well as legalism. He portrayed Iran as being the righteous country, in contrast to the United States whose officials allegedly did not want or could not manage to fulfil their commitments.[236] Moreover, Mr Khamenei seized this opportunity to portray himself and the Iranian system as prescient and wise.[237] This was again confirmed by the former Austrian defence minister and president of the Austrian-Iranian society, Werner Fasslabend in an interview with the author.

> "Wenn Sie im Iran mit einem führenden Politiker sprechen, dann wird Ihnen jeder im Prinzip die gleiche Antwort darauf geben, die besagt: Mit den Amerikanern kannst du nichts ausmachen, sie halten sich nicht daran."[238]

> "If you talk to a high-ranking politician in Iran, each of them will respond in the same way: you cannot agree on anything with the Americans because they do not stick to it." [Translation by author]

Power politics

The essence of seeing the JCPOA in a power politics context is that the JCPOA clearly has some regional ramifications. Seeing the JCPOA in a regional context means seeing it in a context in which Iran's largest enemy, Saddam Hussein, was overthrown by the USA. Hence, Iran's influence did not only lose a counterbalance, a hostile Iraq, but it could even expand its influence to Iraq. Furthermore, as the JCPOA did not include any passage about weapons, missiles in particular, the Saudi conclusion was, according to Ms Harrer, that it was extremely worrying that Iran could "keep its nuclear programme".[239] This even more so, as Saudi Arabia thinks in the long term and sees everything linked to Iran in the context of Iran's aggressive regional policy, or power politics.

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[235] **Khamenei**, Ali (2018): When the bones of US President turn to dust, Islamic Republic of Iran will still be standing. http://english.khamenei.ir/news/5671/When-the-bones-of-US-President-turn-to-dust-Islamic-Republic, last access on 1 January 2019

[236] cf. Ibid.

[237] cf. **Fasslabend**, Werner (2019): Interview by author. Vienna, 03 January 2019

[238] **Fasslabend**, Werner (2019): Interview by author. Vienna, 03 January 2019

[239] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

From an Iranian point of view, the JCPOA does insofar serve Iran's power politics as it serves Iran's strategic interests. These interests imply keeping the USA at bay. The reason for this is, of course, the prevention of hostile action against Iran itself, hence, regime survival. Regime survival undoubtedly is one of the most important rationales of the Iranian regime. As such, it could both be seen as honest attempt to reconcile with the USA, or as stalling tactics. In the latter reading, Iran would be able to re-start its nuclear programme after 10 to 20 years. Therefore, the JCPOA is, indeed, in any case a success for Iran's power politics.

Legalism

After the cancellation of the nuclear deal by President Trump, Iranian officials criticised this decision in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, they portrayed Iran itself as righteous in contrast to the USA. On the other hand, they argued that the USA would have acted unilaterally and illegally. Indeed, the primary arguments against US sanctions and the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, as evoked in President Rouhani's speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), were legalist in nature. This includes the allegation that the USA would maliciously and repeatedly violate international law. This legalist paradigm often was combined with other factors, such as defensiveness and vulnerability, which became apparent in the mistrust vis-à-vis international organisations, and clear anti-imperialism.

> "Based on 12 consecutive reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency – the IAEA – Iran has thus far complied with all of its commitments. However, the United States, from the very beginning, never remained faithful to its obligations. Later, the current administration, resorting to flimsy excuses and in open violation of its commitments, finally withdrew from the accord. The United Nations should not allow its decisions to fall victim to the domestic election and propaganda games of some of its members, and should not allow any Member State to dodge the execution of its international commitments."[240]

This paradigm is evoked frequently. However, it should not just be seen as mere pretence or as a method of concealing Iran's true intentions. Legalism is often linked with other narratives in a manner that leads to the impression that legalist thinking is an underlying factor that appears frequently.

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[240] **Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (2018a): Statement by H. E. Dr. Hassan Rouhani President of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

The former director of the Iranian broadcasting corporation IRIB, Ziaeddin Ziaei, high-lighted this as well. According to him, the practical requirements of international trade and diplomacy are impossible to reconcile with strict adherence to the principles of Iranian foreign policy.

> "Die Hauptdimensionen der iranischen Außenpolitik sind, wie immer angegeben, aber nie praktiziert, Unabhängigkeit, Freiheit und islamische Revolution. Obwohl diese Dimensionen eher innenpolitisch klingen, beeinflussen sie unsere Außenpolitik sehr. Denn eine wahre Unabhängigkeit zu bewahren, den Menschen Freiheit zu gewähren und einen Gottesstaat zu errichten hängen ihrerseits von der Außenpolitik ab, weil man auf der heutigen Welt von anderen Ländern politisch, wirtschaftlich oder kulturell abhängig ist."[241]

> "The main dimensions of Iranian foreign policy are, as always indicated but never put to practice, independence, freedom, and Islamic revolution. Despite them sounding as domestic policy, they have a large impact on our foreign policy. Preserving real independence, granting freedom to people, and erecting a theocracy depends on foreign policy as each country depends on other countries politically, economically, or culturally." [Translation by author]

Given the particular "Islamic" notion of this legalism that has been mentioned in various interviews, it should be mentioned that, while Iran's constitution and its legal practice are inherently "Islamic", any scholar should be careful about linking legalism and Islam. The same is true for other factors, ideological flexibility, for instance. As Ms Harrer pointed out, scholars would tend to explain everything that had happened in Iran with Islam and Islamism. This would be unnecessary as much could be explained by taking into account other revolutions, for instance the Russian revolution of 1917, and revolutionary theories. [242]

Legalism as such is certainly a reason, a strategy of justification, for still supporting the JCPOA. It would be legally required, both by international law as well as by Islamic law to adhere to this agreement. However, this legalistic approach is somewhat relative. Would Iran have preferred to cancel the JCPOA, it is likely that Tehran would have found an excuse, a justification to cancel the deal.[243] Therefore, legalism serves both as means for justifying the Iranian remaining in the nuclear agreement, a pretence for the hard-liners, as well as a genuine paradigm in Iranian political culture.

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[241] **Ziaei**, Ziaeddin (2017): Interview by author. Vienna/Tehran, August 2017

[242] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

[243] cf. Ibid.

Analysis

The factors that play a role in Iranian foreign policy decision-making, the factors that form the rationale of justification, have briefly been presented above. These factors all are linked with the JCPOA and most of them with one another. This means that, while concluding the JCPOA would be contrary to some ideologies, it is convergent to others. The JCPOA itself is, basically, an expression of Iran's pragmatism when it comes to foreign policy. Furthermore, it contradicts Iran's third-worldism, the logic of the oppressor and the oppressed. Furthermore, due to a firm anti-colonialist stance which stems from the meddling in Iranian affairs, negotiating the JCPOA contradicts the stark anti-Americanism of the Iranian regime.

Some principlists and hard-liners might consider the JCOPA as instance where Iran has given in too much, but it could be seen as protecting the revolution itself. The profound damage for Iran's economy because of the international sanctions, combined with the regime's fear about its own very survival made negotiating the JCPOA the logical strategy. Even more so as Europeans, and some Iranians, were thinking about the probability of a US attack on Iran.

> "As I discovered on a recent trip to London, it's not easy for an American these days to convince his European colleagues that the US is unlikely to attack Iran's nuclear sites any time soon. Given the Iraq precedent, and with senior US officials now regularly coming forward with similarly dire warnings about the Iranian threat, Europeans are understandably inclined to believe reports—such as those recently published by Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker—that Washington is getting ready to bomb Iran, possibly even with tactical nuclear weapons."[244]

The fact that the idea of the USA attacking Iran militarily has supporters among the Trump administration[245] is an indication about the potential danger Iran would be facing. Even more so, as President Trump tweeted that the Iranian president should "NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE SUFFERED BEFORE.

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[244] **Gordon**, Philip H. (2006): Will America Attack Iran? https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/will-america-attack-iran/, last access on 22 October 2018

[245] cf. **Beauchamp**, Zack (2018): What Trump's threatened war with Iran would actually look like. https://www.vox.com/world/2018/7/23/17602480/trump-tweet-iran-threat-war, last access on 22 October 2018

[…] [Sic]"[246] Hence it would not have been too far-fetched to assume that the United States would take military action against the Islamic Republic. Therefore, the Iranians had an interest in keeping the USA out of Iran while, at the same time, trying to have international sanctions lifted.

The rationale of justification, consisting of these factors as outlined above, is the background against which any policy measure has to be judged. As such, it is a constructivist in its very nature. The JCPOA, for instance, is perceived, judged, and justified bearing in mind these factors as described above. In comparison to illustration 3, illustration 4 shows a more complex image of the relation of the JCPOA to Iran's rationale of justification.

In illustration 4, the JCPOA is in the centre of attention. The closer the foreign policy factors depicted are to the JCPOA, the more important they were for the position of the JCPOA within the rationale of justification. This does not mean that these factors necessarily played or did not play a central role in negotiations themselves. Instead, it shows what place the JCPOA has in political thinking of Iranian policymakers. In this context, it would be obvious that principlists, such as former President Ahmadinejad, would oppose the conclusion of the JCPOA as revolutionary ideology, Islamism, and, to a certain extent, nationalism would preclude even talking to the USA.
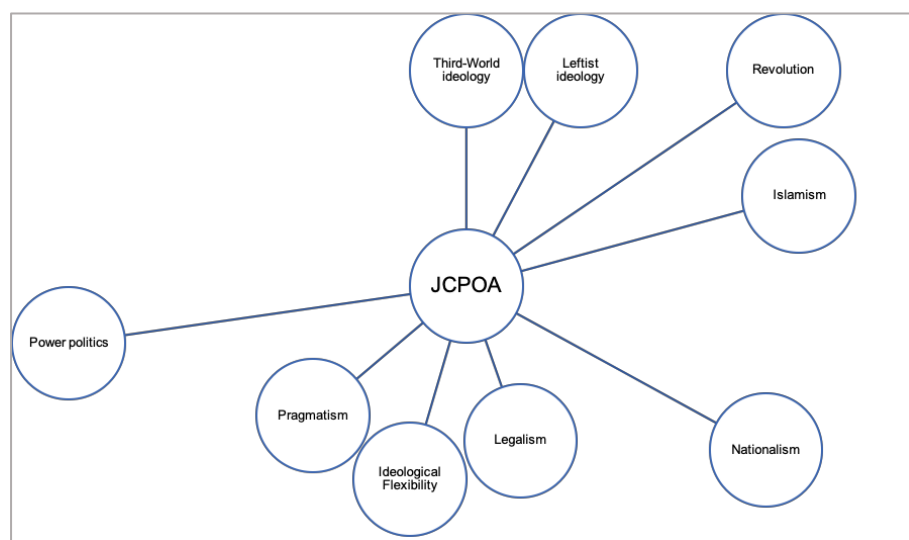
Illustration 4: The JCPOA within the rationale of justification

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[246] **Trump**, Donald (2018a): Tweet by Donald J. Trump (23 July 2018), https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1021234525626609666 last access on 22 October 2018

The JCPOA's relation to the rationale of justification could be seen as a textbook example for the give-and-take mechanisms inherent in Iran's political system and the standing of Iran's supreme leader (factor x). Furthermore, it is exemplary for the necessity to reconcile pragmatism with revolutionary and Islamist ideologies. The give-and-take mechanisms are both the SNSC, as well as the supreme leader. The SNSC has compromise "built in",[247] which makes it an important forum to reconcile both hard-line and pragmatist positions. This has also been an essential capability of Supreme Leader Khamenei. His capacity to balance political success between conservatives and moderates leads to the uncertainty and unpredictability of Iran's political decisions.[248] The fact that Mr Khamenei's decisions are sometimes not transparent for Western observers adds to this and forms the infamous "factor x". Factor x is the human factor which makes all decisions extremely hard to predict.

Another aspect in this respect is that Iran attaches various importance to various factors in different contexts. When it comes to nuclear negotiations with the USA, for instance, other factors are important than in the context of negotiations concerning the Caspian Sea,[249] or the Syrian civil war.[250] It is in the nature of this concept that the importance of these factors in relation to one another is impossible to measure precisely. Moreover, even if this could be done mathematically, the weighing of factors would depend on the respective view, personal ideology, and the assessments of the subjects in question.

Illustration 4 shows that the closer the depicted factors are to the JCPOA, the less contradictory they are. The greater the distance between them, the more contradictory they are. This illustration depicts a somewhat "horizontal" relation between these factors and the JCPOA. In illustration 5, a "vertical" relation, a "hierarchy" of factors is depicted. This shows that some factors are more "fundamental" than others. Khomeinism, for instance, is more "fundamental" than legalism in the sense that legalism derived from the political legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini. This political legacy shaped the political culture and the goals of the Islamic Republic. This is, in part, the reason why Iran still maintains a certain anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist stance. These ideologies are part of Khomeinism which, in turn, forms part of the DNA of the Islamic Republic. On the other hand, regime survival is essen-

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[247] cf. **Posch**, Walter (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 August 2018

[248] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

[249] **Greenwood**, Phoebe (2018): Landmark Caspian Sea deal signed by five coastal nations. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/12/landmark-caspian-sea-deal-signed-among-five-coastal-nations, last access on 22 October 2018

[250] **Dagher**, Sam (2018): What Iran Is Really Up To In Syria. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/iran-hezbollah-united-front-syria/553274/, last access on 22 October 2018

tial for both the Islamic Republic and Khomeinism. Therefore, all these ideological trends and paradigms "derive" from the Khomeinist nature of the Islamic Republic.

The hierarchy of factors as depicted in illustration 4 has to be seen in the context of the nuclear negotiations with the USA and the conclusion of the JCPOA, however. Legalism, for instance, is both a paradigm that is embedded in Khomeinism, but it is also a pretence for hard-liners to be able to accept the JCPOA. As such, it has to be seen in the context of pragmatism and ideological flexibility.
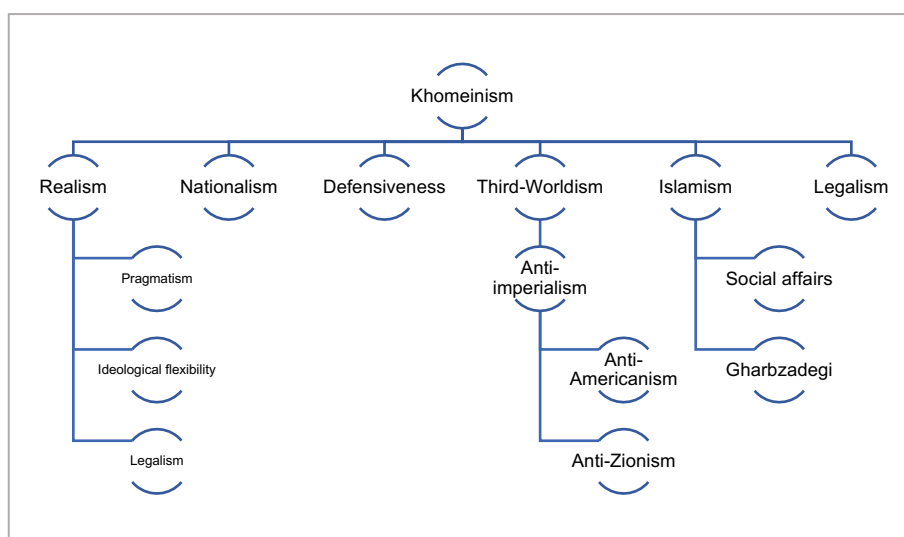
Illustration 5: "Hierarchy" of factors of the rationale of justification

The most important factors with regard to the conclusion of the JCPOA are pragmatism, ideological flexibility, and legalism. These three factors are of paramount importance. Indeed, it seems clear that the justification of the JCPOA for the political elite was the above-shown strand "regime survival—pragmatism—ideological flexibility—legalism". The Iranian regime knew that enduring heavy nuclear-related sanctions did not only pose a threat for the welfare of the Iranian people but also a threat to the Iranian economy. Would these sanctions have remained in force for much longer, they would have caused sustained and substantial damage to the Iranian economy.[251]

Furthermore, it is evident that, in contrast to pragmatism and ideological flexibility, Islamism and Third-Worldism are in direct contradiction to the conclusion of the JCPOA. As such, the conservative political elite, which was in opposition to the conclusion of the

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[251] cf. **Bayat**, Behrooz (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 21 August 2018

nuclear deal, needed a pretence for being able to accept the JCPOA, a chance to save their faces while, at the same time, not spoil the agreement. The way to do so was, clearly, the legalist paradigm.

> "Many intellectuals, parliamentarians, many people involved in the discussion on the JCPOA in Iran had reservations and concerns about parts of the JCPOA, that Iran has made too many concessions. Nobody questioned the negotiations in principle, during the whole period of this file. No matter who the president was, or which government was in power, we continuously had negotiations parallel to our work with the IAEA. The problem was that in this process of give-and-take, it was believed that we have given too much. At the same time, from the very beginning, many, including our leader, warned us that we cannot trust the United States to be committed to its obligations. It is well proved that the anticipation was true. There have been disagreements, and some people associated with different political parties reacted very harshly during the negotiations and particularly at the end. They brought some very logical points about shortcomings and problems in the text. But when it was adopted by the Parliament in a democratic process and then by the Supreme National Security Council, and finally endorsed by our Supreme Leader, with, of course expressions of some concerns and cautiousness about the future, everybody, even those who were strong opponents, respected the decision and that fact that Iran has to comply with [the JCPOA]. […] However, in Iran, after the approval, it is one voice. As you noticed during the recent election in Iran, the candidates stated that, if they were elected, they would continue to respect the commitment to the JCPOA. Because this is establishment, this is the Islamic Republic of Iran, not a [single] person's commitment."[252]

The establishment of the Islamic Republic might not have liked the deal but, after it has been concluded, they had to stick with it. Legalism, however, is a convenient pretence. The essential point in this respect is that, as Ms Harrer said, would the Iranians be willing to break the JCPOA, they would just do so.[253] Nonetheless, according to Mr Posch, it would be surprising how legalistic the Iranians really were.[254] In any case, Iran's legalist paradigm served as main justification for hard-liners to remain in the treaty. Put differently, pragmatism served as main rationale for Iran to start negotiations with the USA and to conclude the JCPOA. Legalism, on the other hand, served as main public justification for those who opposed the JCPOA, as pretence for those who thought that too much was given up with the conclusion of the nuclear deal.

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[252] **Soltanieh**, Ali Asghar (2017): Interview by author. Vienna, 10 August 2017

[253] **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

[254] **Posch**, Walter (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 August 2018

There are two other strategies to reconcile negotiations with the USA with Islamism and third-worldism. The first was the possibility to portray Iran in contrast with the USA in portraying themselves as "righteous" in contrast to the "Great Satan". Iran would be a "good, Islamic" country that sticks to its agreements, unlike the USA. The second strategy consists of limiting negotiations with the West to one single issue, the nuclear file. This made it possible to remain in the role of the anti-imperialist country that only wants what is rightfully theirs.

This leads to the question how the conservatives and the principlists in Iran reacted to the nuclear agreement. This thesis argues that their reaction reflects their desire for political traction. To these ends, hard-liners use whichever means available and appropriate. When the JCPOA was concluded, they reacted restrained, not as if Iran had been successful in achieving a landmark nuclear agreement.

> "Our Iran watcher, Ahmed Vahdat, says divides have already appeared in the Tehran political establishment over whether the deal should be publicly celebrated. There were suggestions that people should be prevented from parading through the streets hooting their cat horns, which has happened at previous stages of the agreement as residents looked forward to a lifting of sanctions. Celebrations were 'premature and falling into the trap of the enemy', hardliners said. […] The conservative daily, Resalat, has now urged readers to 'neither celebrate nor mourn this deal'[.] 'Our struggle with the global arrogance (US) will continue beyond this nuclear deal. We have just won one diplomatic battle with it but the economic, political and military battles still remain ahead of us. In any case, looking at the list of what we have achieved in this nuclear agreement hardly leaves us with any sense of celebrations. Yet, to sit back and mourn is not also justified as then we would be seen as the losers and taking away any credit from the hard works that our revolutionary children have carried to date'."[255]

This becomes even more apparent when taking into account the reaction of hard-line conservatives in the *Majles* and that of Supreme Leader Khamenei after President Trump had decided to cancel the JCPOA. The hard-line faction in the *Majles* "rejoiced at the US exit"[256] in setting ablaze a paper US flag. These hard-line representatives in the *Majles* of course knew that the JCPOA would be beneficial for Iran and the world in terms of its national interest and nuclear non-proliferation. Without being countered in Syria and in Lebanon,

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[255] **Winch**, Jessica/**Lawler**, David (2015): Iran nuclear deal: agreement reached in Vienna – as it happened. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/11729176/Iran-nuclear-deal-live.html, last access on 27 December 2018

[256] **Dehghan**, Saeed Kamali (2018): Iran's leader lambasts Trump over exit from nuclear deal. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/09/iranian-hardliners-rejoice-over-us-nuclear-deal-exit, last access on 27 December 2018

Iran could act more freely, and it would, in turn, just forgo the possession of nuclear weapons. With Donald Trump cancelling the JCPOA, the hard-liners knew that they got what they wanted, which is a heavy blow to the nuclear deal. Furthermore, their point that the USA could not be trusted had allegedly been proven. As a consequence, their political credibility increased. Supreme Leader Khamenei, on the other hand, had approved the deal and had authorised the preceding negotiations. As a consequence of the cancellation of the deal, Mr Khamenei criticised President Trump vehemently.

> "Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has lambasted Donald Trump over his decision to unilaterally pull the US out of the 2015 nuclear deal, saying that his statement was 'ludicrous and shallow', as hardliners rejoiced at the US exit. 'I say it on behalf of Iranian people, Mr Trump, you can't do a damn thing,' said Khamenei, who wields ultimate power in Iran, a day after the US president broke with European allies over what he said was a 'horrible, one-sided' agreement. The Ayatollah said Trump's statement on the 2015 landmark nuclear deal, also known as the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA), contained 'more than 10 lies'. He said: 'He both threatened the system as well as the nation ... The body of this man, Trump, will turn to ashes and become the food of the worms and ants, while the Islamic Republic continues to stand.'"[257]

In addition to this, the supreme leader was able to show an alleged astounding extent of "wise foresight" as he reiterated initial concerns regarding the USA's "unreliable" nature. Mr Fasslabend compared this to the infallibility of the pope. "The infallibility of the pope also depends on him being actually right."[258] This shows the important standing of Supreme Leader Khamenei. Without his approval of the negotiations, these would not have taken place in the form they did. It is not too far-fetched to assume that Iran would neither have approved the deal. This is exemplified by Mr Khamenei's wish to end suspension of enrichment activities given the inflexibility of the E3.[259]

Basically, it could be stated that the JCPOA was the proverbial "lie of the land". It was clear that Iran would face sustained and sustainable, massive economic damage had the sanctions not have been lifted. In other words, concluding the JCPOA was necessary, which must have been clear to both the Iranian president and the supreme leader. Therefore, the JCPOA can be seen as an instance in which pragmatism, realism, and ideological flexibility as well as "factor x" have come into play. These had been the most dominating

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[257] Ibid.

[258] **Fasslabend**, Werner (2019): Interview by author. Vienna, 03 January 2019

[259] cf. **Patrikarakos**, David (2012): Nuclear Iran, p. 217

factors, given the economic pressure. On the other hand, it was necessary not to give in too easily, bearing in mind the distinct anti-imperialist and anti-American stance of the Iranian regime.

These factors, of course, were important as well in the decision-making and negotiating processes. They did not, however, preclude accepting the JCPOA. In this context, legalism could be seen as the most important factor which balanced these rather contrasting factors. The interesting point about anti-imperialism and the notion of resistance toward the USA is that the JCPOA is, in fact, in accordance with these narratives. The cancellation of the nuclear accords by the USA was used by President Rouhani to portray the USA, the imperialist power, as internationally isolated and not trustworthy. Iran, on the other hand, would adhere to international law. It would be the only trustworthy and righteous country.[260]

Another highly interesting point about Iranian foreign policy and the JCPOA is the power politics factor. From an Iranian perspective, there simply is less to worry about with the USA restraining themselves in order not to jeopardise the deal. It would be much easier for Iran to navigate and pursue their national interest without the nuclear issue being an obstacle for Iran's power politics. The same, however, is true for the United States. The Iranians, aiming at not jeopardising the JCPOA, acted cautiously. This is exemplified by the incident in January 2016, when US Navy sailors were captured in the Persian Gulf.[261]

> "Zarif immediately worried that Obama would address the incident publicly before or during his State of the Union address. Since it was a mistake, the best scenario was for the sailors to be released as soon as possible. If Obama or other senior U.S. officials began commenting on the matter, particularly with threatening language, it would become drastically more difficult for Zarif to navigate the Iranian political system and secure the sailors' swift release. As Zarif likes to say, Iranians are allergic to threats. 'Knowing the United States,' Zarif told me, 'the language they'd use would be 'Iran *must* release our guys.' And then Iran would take it as a threat. And then we would have responded, and then this whole thing would have taken a life of its own."[262]

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[260] cf. **Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (2018a): Statement by H.E. Hassan Rouhani President of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly 25 September 2018 New York. http://en.mfa.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=3&pageid=37002&newsview=536982, last access on 31 December 2018

[261] cf. **Lynch**, Sarah (2016): U.S. sailors captured by Iran were held at gunpoint: U.S. military. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-boats-idUSKCN0UW1Q7, last access on 28 December 2018

[262] **Parsi**, Trita (2013): Losing an Enemy. Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy, p. 3. New Haven/London, Yale University Press

Chapter 8 — Denouement

Eventually, each question in relation to the Iranian nuclear programme leads back to one highly important aspect of international relations, if not the very essence of modern international relations, that of nuclear weapons. Had it not been for the development of nuclear weapons, the international system had most likely not developed the way it did. It is beyond doubt that the relation between the USA and the USSR would have deteriorated to a point at which either of them would have declared war on the other. Seen this way, nuclear weapons in fact would contribute to international stability. Kenneth N. Waltz follows this line of argument in the book "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons".

> "The likelihood of war decreases as deterrent and defensive capabilities increase. Nuclear weapons make wars hard to start. These statements hold for small as for big nuclear powers. Because they do, the gradual spread of nuclear weapons is more to be welcomed than feared."[263]

The rationale behind such thinking is clear. The belief that war with any nuclear power would lead to the maximum damage and maximum loss of life of citizens due to nuclear weapons makes for any deterrent strategy. This theory is not new, and neither is it outdated. Just recently, former DoD Deputy Assistant Secretary for Strategy and Force Development, Elbridge Colby wrote a piece in *Foreign Affairs* with the title "If You Want Peace, Prepare for Nuclear War".

> "Washington's task is clear. It must demonstrate to Moscow and Beijing that any attempt to use force against U.S. friends and allies would likely fail and would certainly result in costs and risks well out of proportion to whatever they might gain. This requires conventional military power, but it also means having the right strategy and weapons to fight a limited nuclear war and come out on top."[264]

According to this deterrence theory, possessing nuclear weapons should stabilise global power structures. The spread of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear states is just the logical continuation of this theory as it would equally trigger a certain logic of deterrence. "Power, after all, begs to be balanced"[265], as Mr Waltz argues. In this light, an Iranian nuclear weapon would mean that

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[263] **Waltz**, Kenneth N./**Sagan**, Scott D. (2013): The Spread of Nuclear Weapons. An Enduring Debate, p. 40. New York/London, W. W. Norton & Company

[264] **Colby**, Elbridge (2018): If You Want Peace, Prepare for Nuclear War, p. 25. In: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 97, No 6, November/December 2018, pp. 25—34

[265] **Waltz**, Kenneth N. (2012): Why Iran Should Get the Bomb. Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability, p. 3 In: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 91, No 4 pp. 2—3. https://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~fczagare/PSC%20504/Waltz.pdf, last access on 23 August 2018

power in the Middle East would be distributed more equally, hence leading to more stability. It is interesting to note that there would be a key difference between **acquiring** and **having** nuclear weapons, as Stephen M. Walt highlights in an article for Foreign Policy.

> "The logic of nuclear deterrence may work well once both sides have reliably survivable forces, but the transition period where one side has them and another is getting close almost inevitably invites consideration of preventive war, with all the attendant costs and risks."[266]

On the other hand, as Scott D. Sagan argues, the thought that nuclear deterrence might lead to stability might be tempting. However, the fact that both the USA and the USSR survived the Cold War would be a "cause of celebration and wonder"[267]. Indeed, as the recent examples of the US President and the DPRK shows, it is not necessarily the case that rational and patient political leaders may decide about using nuclear weapons. Instead,

> "[t]he superpowers' experience with nuclear weapons in the Cold War was like walking across thin ice. The fact that two states performed this feat one time should not lead us to think that other states can safely do it nor that Russia and America can continue walking along that dangerous path forever."[268]

Iran, nuclear weapons, and the JCPOA

This means that the JCPOA has most likely prevented a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia would have felt under pressure to either gain a nuclear advantage or catch up with Iran, should Tehran have worked on a nuclear weapon. Israel, which is said to have from 75 to 400 nuclear warheads,[269] would have to make sure that the Iranians could not trump their first-strike capacity or thwart their second-strike capacity. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, would most likely have to start their own nuclear weapons programme in order not to fall behind.

As such, the JCPOA has had two direct consequences. The first was to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The assertion that Iran had worked on a nuclear weapon would, of course, be met with vehement rejection by Iranian authorities. In any case, the JCPOA's positive impact for nuclear non-proliferation cannot be denied. The second consequence was,

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[266] **Walt**, Stephen M. (2012): Should we give Iran the bomb? https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/26/should-we-give-iran-the-bomb/, last access on 23 August 2018

[267] **Waltz**, Kenneth N./**Sagan**, Scott D. (2013): The Spread of Nuclear Weapons, p. 81

[268] Ibid.

[269] cf. **Kristensen**, Hans M./**Norris**, Robert S. (2014): Israeli nuclear weapons, 2014, p. 102. In: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Vol. 70, No 6, pp. 97—115. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0096340214555409, last access on 30 December 2018

bearing in mind nuclear deterrence theory, the lack of a strategic balance in the Middle East. As Ms Harrer emphasised, Iran's aggressive regional policy should not be seen separate from their nuclear programme, which is the reason for Saudi Arabia to reject the JCPOA.[270] If the nuclear deal is seen in tandem with Iran's regional policy, it is clear why some would argue it had more negative than positive consequences. After all, Saudi Arabia felt obliged to actively counter Iran's influence in the region, for instance in Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon.

Moreover, Israeli foreign and security policy has to be taken into account as well. The main point about Israel's scepticism concerning the JCPOA was Iran not having recognised Israel. The Iranians, in turn, could recognise Israel only if they signed the NPT and made public their nuclear programme.[271]

> "The closed meeting, organized by a prominent U.S. university and held in a small Western European country, revealed drivers of the conflict rarely discussed in public: the Israeli fear that Iran's rise in the region would be accepted by the United States and that it would regard Tehran as a legitimate player in the new regional order without Tehran's accepting Israel's existence. The most potent instrument for ensuring that Washington wouldn't come to terms with Iran was the nuclear issue, which before the breakthrough in November 2013 was viewed as a hopelessly intractable conflict."[272]

The Israeli fears have not been ignored by the USA. Prior to the cancellation of the JCPOA, President Trump demanded that Iran change its aggressive behaviour in its regional policy and that it stop missile testing. However, cancelling the JCPOA has to be seen in a larger strategic context, as former CIA director and secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, argues in a piece for *Foreign Affairs*.

> "Economic pressure is one part of the U.S. campaign. Deterrence is another. President Trump believes in clear measures to discourage Iran from restarting its nuclear program or continuing its other malign activities. With Iran and other countries, he has made it clear that he will not tolerate attempts to bully the United States; he will punch back hard if U.S. security is threat- ened. Chairman Kim has felt this pressure, and he would never have come to the table in Singapore without it. The president's own public communications themselves function as a deterrence mechanism. The all-caps tweet he directed at Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in July, in which he instructed Iran to stop threatening the United States, was informed by a strategic calculation: the Iranian regime understands and fears the United States' military might. […] We do not seek war. But we must make painfully clear that escalation is a losing

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[270] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

[271] cf. **Parsi**, Trita (2013): Losing an Enemy, p. 352

[272] Ibid., p. 353

proposition for Iran; the Islamic Republic cannot match the United States' military prowess, and we are not afraid to let Iran's leaders know it."[273]

The essential argument in this thesis is that Iran is an inherent logical actor. With respect to certain ideological and politico-cultural boundaries and paradigms that are fundamentally different from that of other states, Iran acts completely logically. Ideology determines the goals of the state, according to Behrooz Bayat,[274] and Iran subsequently acts logically to achieve these goals. However, it does not pursue these goals no matter the cost. The JCPOA is a good example that shows that Iran is able and willing to be pragmatic in order to prevent its people from (economic) damage and to protect the regime.

As a consequence, each problem could, broadly speaking, be seen through a pragmatic or ideological prism. It is the specific circumstances and the specific balance of power within Iran that makes a particular outcome more or less likely. The supreme leader, for instance, is an institution who skilfully balances the demands of hard-liners and moderates. Should he have given in at one point to the hard-liners, it is likely that he gives in to the moderates at another. Nonetheless, Supreme Leader Khamenei is not the ultimate and absolute ruler of the Islamic Republic. He is at the centre of power and given the fact that he maintains a vast personal network, it is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to implement policy he does not approve of.

At the same time, the supreme leader cannot be seen as absolute ruler as Iran still has certain democratic elements. The best example to illustrate this is the election of Muhammad Khatami that came as a surprise for international observers and, in fact, Iranians themselves.[275, 276] As a consequence, the Iranian people have some influence through elections—of course, the president's powers are limited and depend on the political will and support of the supreme leader. However, as the 2009 Green Movement as well as the 2018 protests have shown, the political elite of the Islamic Republic cannot completely ignore the will of the people, and neither can Supreme Leader Khamenei.

This might explain various decisions by the supreme leader, most notably a shift in Iran's nuclear behaviour during the presidencies of Muhammad Khatami, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and

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[273] **Pompeo**, Michael R. (2018): Confronting Iran. The Trump Administration's Strategy, p. 66. In: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 97, No 6, November/December 2018, pp. 60—71

[274] cf. **Bayat**, Behrooz (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 21 August 2018

[275] cf. **Kinzer**, Stephen (1997): Moderate Leader is Elected in Iran by a Wide Margin. https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/25/world/moderate-leader-is-elected-in-iran-by-a-wide-margin.html, last access on 30 December 2018

[276] cf. **Maloney**, Suzanne (2013): The Legacy of Reform in Iran, Sixteen Years Later. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2013/05/23/the-legacy-of-reform-in-iran-sixteen-years-later/, last access on 30 December 2018

Hassan Rouhani. During the Khatami presidency, the nuclear issue came up and Iran showed some willingness to cooperate with the West. However, even before Mahmoud Ahmadinejad succeeded Mr Khatami, Supreme Leader Khamenei decided to take an uncompromising stance concerning the nuclear issue. Eventually, Hassan Rouhani, who became president in 2013, managed to strike the deal with the P5+1 which he could not have done without the supreme leaders' support. This means that, depending on the respective presidency, Iran tended to be more or less pragmatic and willing to compromise.

The JCPOA was acceptable for Iran because the preceding negotiations were approved by the supreme leader, and the best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA) was extremely costly in terms of economic damage. In this case, the pragmatic prism and Iran's ideological flexibility prevailed. Subsequently, Iran needed to embed the JCPOA in its ideological foundations—it needed to justify the deal ideologically. In this context, legalism served as pretence whereas regime survival, an expression of Khomeinism, and the Iranians' well-being served as goals to accomplish. It should be noted that this only concerns the Iranian political elite. Conservatives and principlists needed a plausible and face-saving chance to accept the JCPOA and, at the same time, continue to remain on their Anti-Imperialist and Third-Worldist stance. According to Ms Harrer, however, it would not have been necessary to explain anything to the Iranian population themselves who would have exuberantly celebrated the JCPOA in 2015.[277]

The circumstances under which policymakers can deal with Iran and can expect certain outcomes should have become clearer. The USA, opposition against whom is rooted deeply in the Islamic Republic's DNA, could only appeal to Iran's pragmatic side in rendering the refusal to negotiate so costly that Iran simply had no other choice other than agreeing to negotiations on the nuclear matter. At the same time, Iran's anti-imperialist stance and its "allergic" reactions concerning threats[278] make treating Iranians as equal partners central. Moreover, agreements should be fulfilled completely. Agreements that seemingly harshly contradict the Islamic Republic's ideological foundations cannot be concluded without the support of Ayatollah Khamenei, and without taking into account the economic interests of the IRGC. Moreover, should Iran consider negotiating a matter of paramount importance for the regime's survival, it will most likely do so. However, this does not mean that each issue of interest will be considered "negotiable". It would, for instance, most likely not be possible to re-negotiate Iran's regional policy.

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[277] cf. **Harrer**, Gudrun (2018): Interview by author. Vienna, 02 October 2018

[278] cf. **BBC Trending** (2015): 'Never threaten an Iranian!': How one diplomat's outburst blew up. https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-33464560, last access on 30 December 2018

The initially-asked research question, in what ways the JCPOA is related to Iran's foreign policy rationale of justification, is contradictory to some parts of the rationale of justification, congruent with others, and not to be associated with others. The in Khomeinism inherent scepticism toward international organisations does not genuinely preclude or contradict the conclusion of the JCPOA, for instance. Legalism, indeed, is related to the JCPOA but it does neither contradict nor foster the conclusion of such kinds of agreements.

Clearly, Iran's anti-imperialist and Anti-American notion contradict the conclusion of the nuclear deal insofar as the supreme leader expressed clear doubts at the very beginning of the negotiations. The USA would be "untrustworthy" and deals with them would be no first step toward closer relations between them and Iran. On the other hand, Iran required sanctions relief in order not to have their economy sustainably damaged. Therefore, pragmatism allowed the Iranians, despite initial concerns, to start negotiations with the USA. Third-Worldism, the notion of resistance, independence, and dignity required that they portray negotiations as initiated by the West but not enforced onto Iran. Legalism made it possible for hard-liners and others to remain committed to the JCPOA.

Furthermore, the JCPOA itself has been seen as instrument in order to realise the standing of the Islamic Republic among other states in the international system. For the moderates, this meant the first step to building a bridge between Iran and the West whereas hard-liners tend to claim Iran's right to maintain a nuclear programme like other nations. The nuclear deal promised to realise both. However, when Republicans started to criticise the nuclear deal, it increasingly became somewhat of a political bargaining chip within Iran. Moderates, including President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif have been working hard to preserve the deal while hard-liners see it as restriction to Iran's nuclear programme without benefits, and as alleged proof for the duplicity of the West. Iran would be the only righteous country, it would be the only country to adhere to the provisions of the deal.

The JCPOA: a role model?

Prior to the cancellation of the JCPOA by President Trump the nuclear agreement seemed to work. The IAEA has, for instance, repeatedly confirmed that Iran was in compliance with the nuclear deal,[279] Iran's economy had witnessed a slow but noticeable growth,[280] and, last but

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[279] cf. **RFE/RL** (2018): IAEA Says Iran Still In Compliance With 2015 Nuclear Deal. https://www.rferl.org/a/iaea-iran-compliance-2015-nuclear-deal/29461841.html, last access on 30 December 2018

[280] cf. **Laub**, Zachary (2018): The Impact of the Iran Nuclear Agreement. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/impact-iran-nuclear-agreement, last access on 30 December 2018

not least, it has prevented a potential war.[281] Of course, as was mentioned above, the JCPOA had its downsides in terms of regional stability and regional policy. Iran was not required to adapt or to end its aggressive regional policy. This is precisely what Mr Trump criticised the deal for and why he eventually cancelled the agreement.

So, the question is whether the JCPOA could serve as role model for other regional or international agreements, particularly bearing in mind the DPRK. The great success of the JCPOA was precisely its eventual downside. The fact that the USA and Iran managed to de-couple the nuclear issue from Iran's regional policy, its human rights violations, and other issues made it possible to reach a limited agreement. As a matter of fact, the supreme leader himself ruled out further negotiations with the USA other than on nuclear matters—highlighting the necessity of limiting the scope of the nuclear negotiations with Iran.

> "On Friday, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made a significant speech [sic] that categorically ruled out negotiations with the United States beyond nuclear issues. The anti-US rhetoric itself was unsurprising given that the speech marked the 27th anniversary of the death of Iran's first supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. But the content of the speech, an important reflection of how Khamenei is taking stock in the aftermath of the nuclear deal, explicitly underscored three aspects of Iran's foreign policy trajectory."[282]

So, the success of the JCPOA was precisely the fact that it was limited in scope. Combining the nuclear file with the other problems between Iran and the USA that were mentioned above would have made it exceedingly difficult, if not downright impossible, to reach an agreement. As such, it could have served as first step toward confidence-building, would Supreme Leader Khamenei have approved thereof. After all, President Rouhani had hoped that the JCPOA would establish trust between Iran and the USA. "Trust at the international level is always a relative issue and one can never achieve 100-per cent trust, but we can establish dialogue between two countries with relative trust […]."[283] However, as mentioned above, the supreme leader serves as balancer between hard-line and moderate politicians within Iran.

As a consequence, negotiations with Iran serve as example for other states—limiting negotiations to the most pressing issue at hand and creating a BATNA that is too costly not to negotiate. However, the primary downside is the fact that the JCPOA did not even last for more

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[281] **Kerry**, John F. (2017): The Iran deal is working. Here's how we know. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-iran-deal-is-working-heres-how-we-know/2017/09/29/d138b070-a44c-11e7-b14f-f41773cd5a14_story.html?utm_term=.0655999bb846, last access on 30 December 2018

[282] **Geranmayeh**, Ellie (2016): Khamenei on negotiations with US. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_khamenei_on_negotiations_with_us_7042, last access on 30 December 2018

[283] **Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (2018): President in meeting American foreign policy elites: We've worked based on constructive interaction with world

than three years before the USA pulled out. Ambassador Soltanieh highlighted this point in an interview with the author of this thesis. "I can say that it could have been, but I suspect it not to be from now on. Because of the bad experience since 2015."[284] The fact that President Trump repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the nuclear accords and eventually cancelled the agreement, and the uncertainty relating to this made the conclusion of such limited agreements unattractive.

Nonetheless, the regional order in the Middle East depends, to a large extent on Iran. Iran is one of three states which have been involved in major crises in the region, the other two being Saudi Arabia and Israel. Without these three countries' support, without the USA and Russia backing this, without them agreeing to a stable politico-military order in the region, no stable status quo can be achieved in the Middle East.

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[284] **Soltanieh**, Ali Asghar (2017): Interview by author. Vienna, 10 August 2017

Annexe

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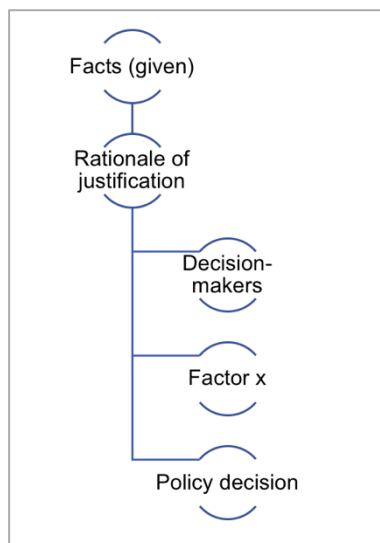
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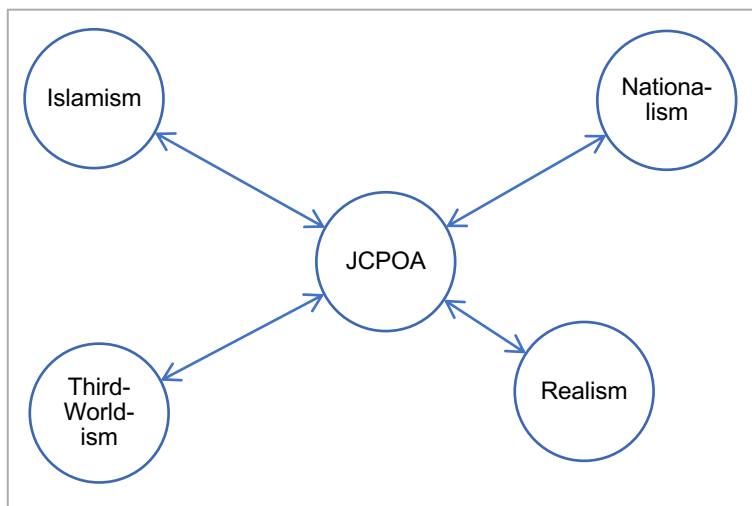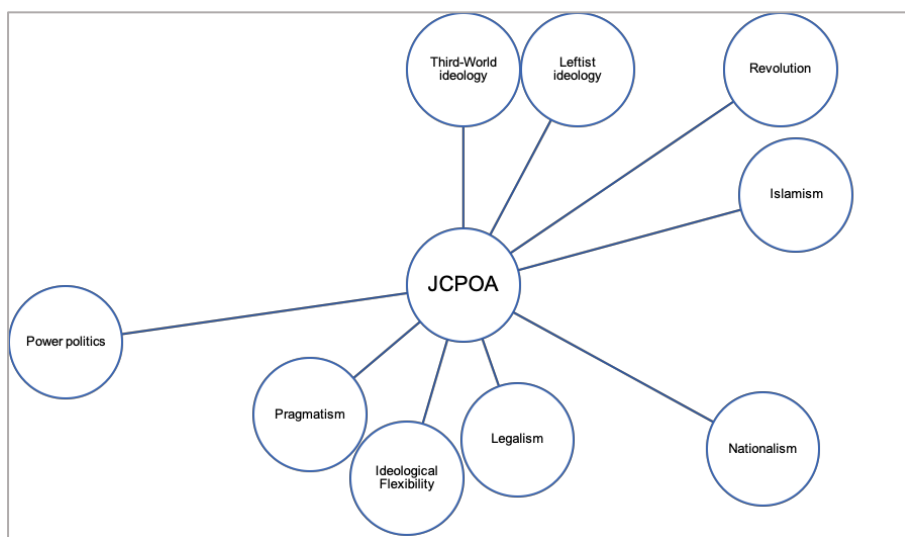
Illustrations and Tables

Illustration 1: rationale of justification, p. 68
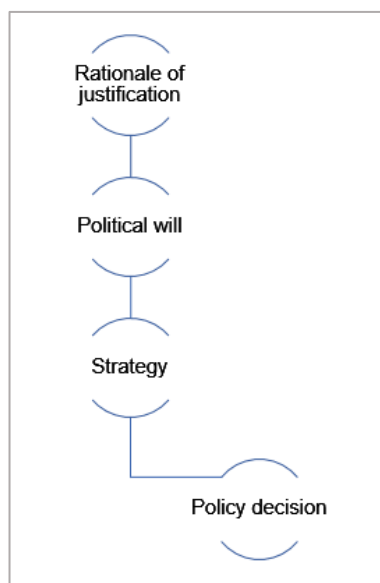
Illustration 2: rationale of justification and strategy, p. 69

Illustration 3: The JCPOA within the rationale of justification, p. 91

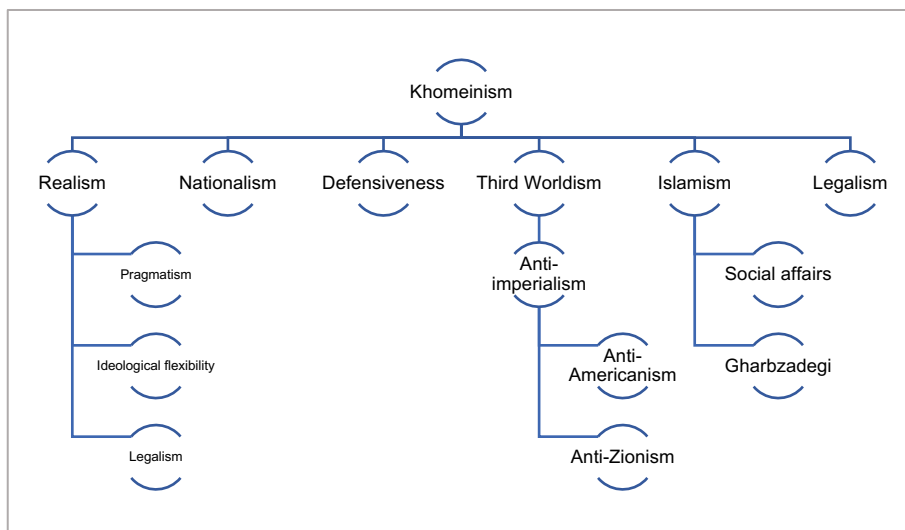*Illustration 4: The JCPOA within the rationale of justification, p. 105*

Illustration 5: "Hierarchy" of factors of the rationale of justification, p. 107

Anti-colonialist logic	*Leftist ideology*	*Islamism*	*Revolutionary*	*Realism, pragmatism*	*Nationalism, Sovereignty*
Stance towards the USA	Logic of oppressor/oppressed	Shiism	Vulnerability, protecting the revolution	Iran's place in the international system	Ancient Persian past
Stance towards Israel	Exploitation	Sharia	Khomeinism	Survival of the regime	Logic of oppressor/oppressed
Meddling in Iranian affairs		Khomeinism	Exporting the revolution		Meddling in Iranian affairs

Table 1: Iranian rationale of justification as identified

prior to the interviews, p. 74