WHY ISRAEL FEARS A NUCLEAR IRAN: REALISM, CONSTRUCTIVISM & IRAN'S DUAL-NATIONAL IDENTITY

Christopher Whyte

ABSTRACT: *This work compares and contrasts the theoretical models of realist and constructivist thought within international relations theory as they relate to the subject of Iranian nuclear proliferation. The spread of nuclear weapons to Iran and to the Middle East represents a unique international security dynamic that has not otherwise existed in the brief history of proliferation. Stratification of political, economic and cultural power at the regional and national levels alters the nature of traditional assumptions about deterrence and balances of power between states. This work is meant to contribute to the understanding of the rationales behind both past and future policy actions by Iran and its neighbours as both the region and the world struggle to cope with the diffusion of nuclear capabilities.*

KEYWORDS: Israel, Iran, nuclear proliferation , realism, constructivism, geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that the incorporation of nuclear weapons as strategic components of national defence policies has, at times, altered the course of international affairs. The destructive power of atomic devices, from the smallest tactical shells to thermonuclear strategic warheads, has transformed the ultimate potential of states when it comes to war-fighting capabilities to the point that there are numerous instances of such weapons acting as stabilisers in affairs between oppositely-polarised countries. However, the presence of nuclear weapons or development programmes has, on many occasions, triggered concern in the international community as to their control and use beyond the level of deterrence. The concentration of such large amounts of destructive power causes leading states

in the international system to ask pointed questions at those who would build nuclear weapons. Why are nuclear forces necessary? Will the arsenal be secure? How will this affect neighbouring actors or enduring conflicts in the international system?

These are all valid concerns, both for the international community as a whole and for the security calculations of individual states. The dangers of proliferation are many; as states must decide how likely fledgling nuclear powers are to use their new capabilities in war alongside concerns about the loss or illegal sale of devices to terrorist groups, rogue states and other non-state entities. Since the late 1960s, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has attempted to enforce the peaceful observation of nuclear affairs in the world, requiring nuclear weapons-possessing signatories to refrain from aiding the proliferation of nuclear know-how while at the same time encouraging the formation of a collaborative international regime aimed at complete atomic disarmament. However, many states have continued to develop nuclear weapons programmes under the guise of civilian nuclear energy projects, the right to which is guaranteed by the last major component of the NPT, and so the international community must regularly confront the potential implications of new nuclear powers in different geopolitical positions around the system.

While much of the early scholarship on the ways in which nuclear weapons affect affairs on the international stage was performed by those of the realist school of thought,[1] it is clear that the institutionalisation of nuclear weapons (from the idea of mutually assured destruction (MAD) to the norm of the "nuclear taboo"[2]) in the system merits a broader analysis of how proliferation might assert itself in behavioural relations between states and other political actors. This work aims to critically examine nuclear proliferation in the modern international system by comparing facets of both the realist (particularly neorealist) and constructivist paradigms. Proceeding initially with a discussion of the short history of proliferation, I aim, primarily, to apply key concepts of both schools to the subject of Iranian nuclear development. Use of various components of realist and constructivist thought can illustrate the existence of vastly different doctrinal and national mindsets between Iran and other proximate countries, particularly Israel. The dynamics that emerge from such a comparative theoretical examination of the

geopolitical realities in the Middle East enables this work to suggest that, given the internal mechanisms of Iran's internal sociopolitical apparatuses, a future Iranian nuclear capability may lead to regional instability not observed in previous cases of nuclear proliferation, even in cases of enduring conflicts such as between India and Pakistan or North Korea and the South Korean-American security alliance.

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Proliferation Since World War II

World War II officially ended on 15 August 1945, barely a week after the US dropped two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The important role that the weapons played in ending the conflict brought them immediately into the public and strategic spotlight as a new method of fighting wars. After all, any state armed with atomic bombs, no matter the condition of its conventional forces, would be difficult to defeat and could inflict a high cost in lives to any aggressor. As a result, and despite America's initial monopoly on the technology, the next twenty years saw the relatively speedy acquisition of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and China.

Throughout that early period of the Cold War between the US and the USSR, nuclear weapons were consistently a topic of extreme caution. The relative costs of outright conflict between the two states, or between any combination of their nuclear allies, continued to rise as developments in nuclear technology increased bomb yields dramatically and the emergence of rocket technology introduced newer, faster, stealthier and more numerous delivery systems. Nevertheless, the absolute costs of atomic conflict were sufficient to maintain a balanced deterrent atmosphere and, despite early crises in Cuba and Korea, nuclear weapons became one of the key factors allowing for a thawing of relations in the latter days of the Cold War.

Since the fall of the USSR, there has been a marked decrease in the number of nuclear weapons-possessing states, with South Africa giving up its small nuclear arsenal and three of the four nuclear successor states to the USSR (Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan) liquidating or returning all stockpiles to the fourth, the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the US has partially been responsible for persuading

many countries – from Egypt to Brazil and beyond – to give up their nuclear programmes, often in exchange for economic aid or support in the development of light-water reactors for civilian nuclear energy production. As a result, the scope of proliferation of nuclear weapons in countries outside of the original five signatories of the NPT can be reduced to three primary regions of the world: the Indian sub-continent, the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East. Though there is a high level of focus on the nuclear ambitions of non-state groups like terrorist cells or insurgents, the state capacity and infrastructural level of sophistication required to initially build bombs indicates that focus on these state-level sources of proliferation will lead to a fuller understanding of these asymmetrical concerns.

From the first Indian nuclear test in 1974, codenamed "Smiling Buddha," to the confirmed development of Pakistani weapons in 1998, the nuclear standoff between India and Pakistan has garnered constant attention from the international community. Enduring conflict between Islamic Pakistan and secular (though predomi-natly Hindu) India since their partition in the post-colonial period consistently brings an added amount of uncertainty to relations be-tween the two countries. However, a relatively stable standoff de-veloped, likely based on basic nuclear deterrence and probably aid-ed by India's declaration to never engage in nuclear conflict without direct nuclear provocation. The outcome of that relative stability is that, in terms of nuclear matters, most international attention in that region is aimed at maintaining the integrity and safety of Pakistan's stockpile amidst fears of rogue state elements and the presence of volatile non-state groups nearby.

Though completely different in character, the nuclear situation on the Korean Peninsula exhibits some of the same stabilising char-acteristics that have emerged on the Indian subcontinent. Interest-ingly, the division of the Peninsula between North and South has its roots in the nuclear intrigue of the early days of the Cold War when a newly-nuclear US under Harry Truman moved a dozen atomic bombs to South Korea in order to prevent Chinese involvement in the initial phases of the Korean War. The failure of this defensive de-terrent action, something that scholars like Waltz would likely have predicted,[3] led to a conventional war that ultimately left the Penin-sula divided under a long-term cease-fire. North Korea's eventual de-velopment of a nuclear device, demonstrated twice since 2006, has
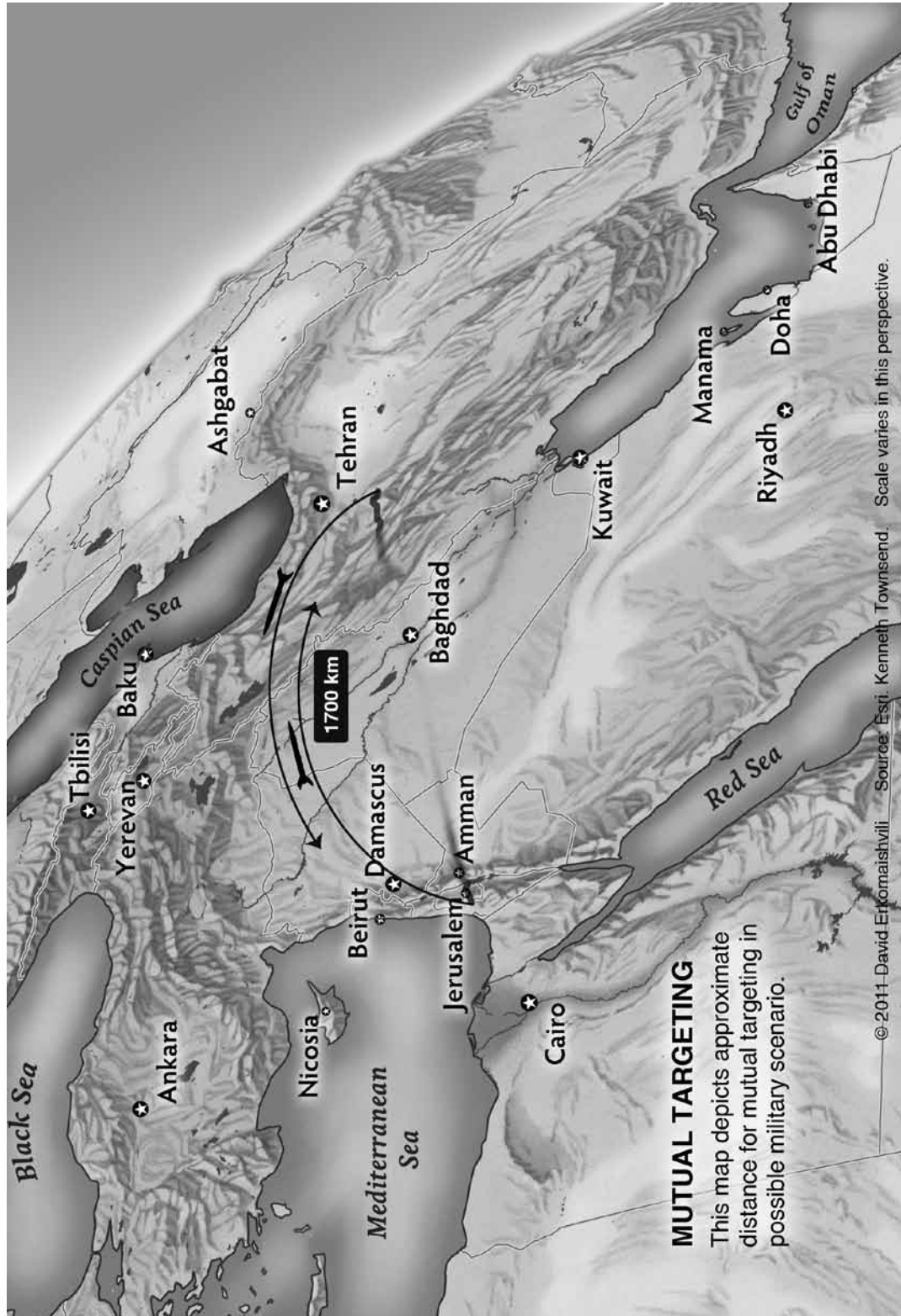
MUTUAL TARGETING

This map depicts approximate distance for mutual targeting in possible military scenario.

© 2011 David Erkomaishvili   Source: Esri, Kenneth Townsend.   Scale varies in this perspective.

certainly returned much international attention to the stability of affairs on the Peninsula. However, unanimous regional opposition to North Korea's programme has led to cooperative efforts on the local international stage to the point that there is general agreement on the need to disarm and rehabilitate that state. North Korea has consistently shown signs of calculating rationality with its willingness to use disarmament as a bargaining chip for inducing capital and aid inflows. Alongside the unique concentration of collaborative coordination surrounding Korea, not to mention the deterrent standoff between the North's fledgling arsenal and the US's nuclear umbrella guarantees to the South, this has certainly helped maintain local stability in the ongoing Cold War-style standoff between the two Koreas.

The dynamics of nuclear relations on both the Indian subcontinent and the Korean Peninsula are far different from those in the emerging nuclear situation in the Middle East. At the most basic level, a constructivist examination would show that, unlike relations between Iran and Israel or Iran and some other Arab states, both India/Pakistan and South/North Korea share common ethnic and historical heritages, with common history for both ending as recently as the 1940s. Furthermore and as a realist may point out, both of those situations are inherently bipolar, with even the involvement of countries like the US or China aimed at addressing the specific interactive ties between the two Koreas and thus remaining unconcerned, in that smaller theatre, with each other. These situational geopolitical differences between nuclear power politics elsewhere in the world and those in the Middle East are important to consider, as they lend themselves well – for both realists and constructivists – to examining the unique intra-regional dynamics of a future nuclear Iran alongside existing enduring conflicts and relationships in the region.

Realism, Constructivism and the Normative Geopolitik of the Middle East

Iran's history of involvement with nuclear capabilities is decade's old, stretching back to the early 1960s when British and US agencies encouraged the development of civilian nuclear energy production projects for use under auspices of the Western-inclined regime of

the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. However, the events of the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1979) saw both the rise of a theocratic state to replace the monarchy and the withdrawal of support and material for nuclear projects from the US, Britain, Russia, China, Germany and others. While this was initially of limited concern for the fledgling Islamic Republic, recent years have seen the resumption of nuclear infrastructure development as the demand for energy production has, according to Iran, increased.

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It is important to note that the overall nature of Iran's involvement in the intra-regional politics of the Middle East has changed dramatically since 1979. Notably, while relations with countries like Saudi Arabia and Turkey have certainly soured, it is Iran's focus on its patronage of Islamic movements in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine that seems to have truly defined both its cultural and political priorities in international affairs. Both Hamas and Hezbollah received initial militant training from Iran's Revolutionary Guard at the direction of Ayatollah Khomeini, and the religious and cultural ties that both movements share seem to largely be inspired by the specifically-nuanced Islamic teachings of the higher echelons of Iran. Both movements continue to receive Iranian funding and aid to this day and both operate, in a regional capacity, as militant representatives of anti-Israeli national groups.

With regard to Israel, which enjoyed close relations with Pahlavi before 1979, the transition to theocracy was something of a shock to the already-tenuous geopolitics of the region. The Supreme Leaders of Iran, Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khomeini, variously remarked that Israel is an abomination and that its existence is an affront to both Islam and the political environment of the greater Middle East. Iran's current president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has similarly taken a sharp anti-Israeli stance, consistently commenting on the deceitful machinations of the Zionist movement and even going so far as to publicly doubt that the Holocaust occurred. From Israel's perspective and given the public stance of Iran, it is easy to see why the level of concern for homeland security is acute.

Iran's provocative regional stance on many issues, from Israel to shipping interests in the Persian Gulf to disagreements with its Sunni neighbours, has become of greater concern to the leading states in both the regional and international systems as Iran's efforts to produce fissionable material have clearly increased. From

the early-2000s onwards, the international intelligence community has consistently released reports suggesting that Iran's failures to completely comply with the requirements of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,[4] which it is a signatory of by inheritance from the Shah's regime, indicate a nascent nuclear weapons programme being developed that would work in conjunction with the civilian enrichment programme at the Tehran Research Reactor and other facilities currently under construction. This perspective has much support in the international community and has been strengthened both by Iran's continuing failure to admit weapons' and nuclear inspectors to all of its facilities and by the recent launch of satellites on suspected dual-use rockets that could otherwise be utilised as weaponised delivery systems. The limited effect of international sanctions and Iran's ongoing denial of any wrongdoing have largely stymied successful collaboration in the last few years, meaning that future efforts to deal with a nuclear Iran are as yet at an unknown juncture. Foreign policies for this issue may yet have to cope with any task from preventing Iranian weapon's development to dealing with an aggressive nuclear Iran to containing the internalised threat of a nuclear Iran, or possibly even dealing with the aftermath of a conflict triggered by Iranian nuclearisation.[5] However, through analysis of Iran's geopolitical, historical and cultural positions, the applied concepts of both the realist and constructivist schools can bring some insight to future interactions between Iran, Israel and others in the international system.

Realism and Brinksmanship in the Middle East

The realist school of thought in international relations theory has its roots in the writings of various authors in the post-World War II period. Realists primarily focus on the state as the primary arbiter of power in the international system, viewing all other examinations of international affairs below the level of the state as unnecessary for an understanding of inter-state relations and behaviours.[6] As a result, realists focus on the implications of the condition of anarchy in the international system as the impetuses for all interaction and change in state behaviour. Waltz was the first to suggest that states act to protect their own security relative to other states in the system, as opposed to seeking absolute gains over others.[7]

This inevitably leads to conflict as the security of one state rises and falls in a direct ratio with the security of other states. Though more recent works in the field have suggested that states seek to maximise power relative to others in the system, as opposed to security, and that states engage in security calculations that are derived from different understandings of the offensive and defensive natures of capabilities among actors,[8] the basic premises of neorealism have remained fairly constant – states approach international affairs from a power political perspective, ultimately aiming to secure their own survival and prosper relative to other states.

In the case of Iranian nuclear ambitions, a focused look at the way in which realists analyse power, communication and cooperation could shed some light on the possible consequences of proliferation in the Middle East. Along this line of thinking, this work argues that the contrast between realist and constructivist perspectives on each of these areas should be a crucial part of any researched understanding of the dynamics of these affairs, since both have different models for determining national priorities and the interests of the parties involved.

In terms of power political considerations, Iran's nuclear ambitions may simply derive from a desire to maximise its own abilities to survive and thrive in the system in the future. Mearsheimer is noted among neorealists as positing that states seek hegemony, not just a balanced status quo, in order to endure in international affairs.[9] Mearsheimer's statement that all states naturally seek hegemonic power does not necessarily mean that Iran thinks of nuclear forces as necessary for fighting in future conflicts, but the perceived ability of nuclear weapons to stabilise tense relations is fairly well documented and the Iranian leadership may put stock in the idea that the mere presence of this capability could protect the integrity of the regime. Beyond this basic desire to use a deterrent stockpile as a stabiliser, it is also possible that Iran seeks to gain legitimacy and respect from going nuclear. This effect would initially be most evident in dealings with those countries in the region that are targetable with an Iranian bomb. Mearsheimer would argue that this is the most important area of concern for a hegemony-seeking Iran, as regional hegemony is the farthest a state can truly reach in any case.[10] Adding weight to this nuclear legitimacy argument is the well-documented "prestige effect" for fledgling nuclear powers.[11]

This implied effect can be described as any situation in which the possession of an arsenal legitimises the central state authority in dealings with outside entities, as well as symbolically implying that the state in question is a primary actor on the international stage. Similarly, nuclear backing can significantly heighten the level of caution in dealings with other states, a fact that would strengthen Iran's ability to bargain in the regional system.
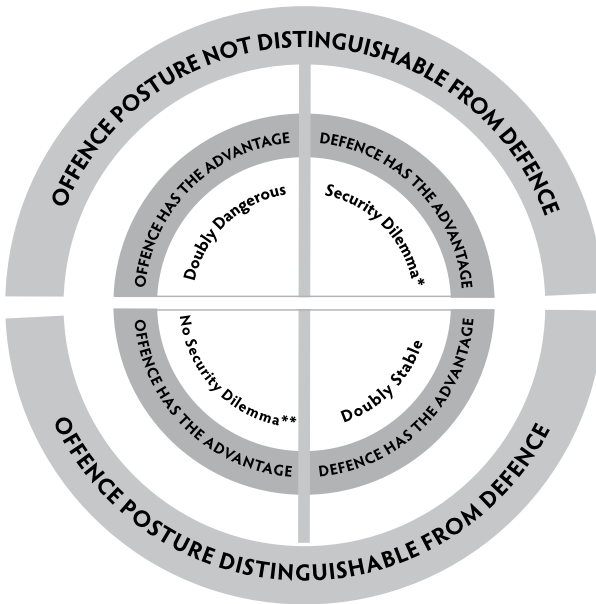
Each of the above abilities that Iran may hope to gain from going nuclear represent different forms of power, at least as realists see it. In his *Power and Powerlessness*, Gaventa argues that power, much like Waltz's levels of analysis, is three-dimensional.[12] States can achieve power through a variety of methods, but that power manifests itself in different ways. The first dimensional power is essentially the power to make others do what they otherwise would not. The second and third dimensions of power refer, respectively, to the ability to either control another's access to decision making structures (an institutional type of control, like influence in the UN) or to actively shape the wants and interests of other states (essentially using cultural and economic influence to manipulate the politics of other sovereign units). While the second and third dimensions of Gaventa's model clearly refer to the effects that institutional and normative factors have on international politics, all three are relevant to both the realist school of thought and the case of Iranian nuclearisation. It is certainly the case that possession of a nuclear weapon could force other countries to enact policies and interact with Iran in a way that they would not otherwise do. However, a realist may argue that Iran actually has more to gain from seeking power as it is defined in the second and third dimensions of Gaventa's model. Mearsheimer argues that states have two types of internalised power, the "hard" military kind and latent power that essentially is a measurement of the level of economic potential and the size of the population as it refers to future hard power capabilities.[13] When latent power and hard power are merged with Gaventa's dimensions, it is clear that Iran stands to gain from an increase in systemic stability, a rise in the respect it receives and the attractiveness of its cultural prestige (as a nuclear great power). Such relative gains, a realist would argue, should eventually translate into hard power as stability in relations and economic prosperity leads to more advanced capabilities while, at the same time,

diminishing the strategic willingness of other states to attempt to dominate such a balanced power in the system.

The realist literature on cooperation closely follows the literature on power in international relations. Robert Jervis, in his *Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma*, proposes that there are different ways to look at the capabilities of states in the anarchical state of affairs that previous realist works described. These different lenses for viewing system dynamics essentially focus on the idea that a state can, depending on its sophistication of its military and its geopolitical position relative to other states, have an advantage over other actors in either its offensive or defensive capabilities.[14] Jervis attempts to predict proneness to conflict based on which set of capabilities is dominant and whether or not that information is public, or in other words, whether or not states are aware of each others' abilities. As a result, there are four possible modulations of that dynamic:[15]

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INFO-GRAPH I.

OFFENCE POSTURE NOT DISTINGUISHABLE FROM DEFENCE

OFFENCE HAS THE ADVANTAGE — Doubly Dangerous

DEFENCE HAS THE ADVANTAGE — Security Dilemma*

OFFENCE HAS THE ADVANTAGE — No Security Dilemma**

DEFENCE HAS THE ADVANTAGE — Doubly Stable

OFFENCE POSTURE DISTINGUISHABLE FROM DEFENCE

* Security requirements may be compatible
** Aggression possible, warning would be given

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Based on Jervis's model of cooperation under the realist conditions of anarchy, if Iran were to test and deploy nuclear weapons there are two likely possible outcomes - a doubly stable environment in which Iranian and Israeli and possibly other nuclear forces deter each other successfully in the full knowledge that any attack would invite high costs, or a doubly dangerous, unstable environment in which regional parties communicate ineffectively, thus making an offensive posture indistinguishable from a defensive one and inviting security calculations that emphasise the need for action due to uncertainty. Scholars like Barry Posen have suggested that, in the case of an Iranian nuclear test, Israel or the United States could preemptively "out" Israel's nuclear capabilities, making the defensive nature of any future standoff with Iran known.[16] This argument is similar to Waltz's overall realist critique of nuclear weapons as stabilising factors in the system, so long as states can efficiently broadcast information about their deterrent capabilities.

Another of Jervis's options, in which defence has the advantage in an atmosphere of indistinguishable capabilities, cannot exist in this scenario, simply because an Iranian nuclear test, or lack thereof, either sparks first strike offensive calculations or, if a country like Israel publicises its own capabilities, means that the balance favours defensive measures. Again, a realist following Jervis's model of offence-defence-based calculations would argue that, ideally, any declaration of nuclear capabilities on the part of Iran should be answered by the Israeli acknowledgement of its own nuclear deterrent forces and second strike delivery systems. In this way, Israel raises the uncertainty involved in engaging in conflict so high that Iran is unlikely to take the risk of attacking the Jewish state since even a complete strike against all known Israeli military and civilian targets could not guarantee non-retaliation.

The basic precepts of realist (and especially neorealist) thought clearly highlight the fact that the high costs of an unsuccessful first strike in a nuclear conflict forces a balance of power between competing states. Scholars like Waltz would go farther yet, arguing that this deterrent balance would hold up even in the case of a multipolar standoff between naturally competing states.[17] Both scenarios would, of course, require the effective transfer of information about capabilities between the states involved in order for this balance

to be struck and maintained (something not difficult with modern methods of testing and detecting the detonation of a nuclear device). Therefore, a realist would likely argue that a nuclear Iran could be successfully contained and balanced against, thereby precluding the need for America, Israel or anyone else to preemptively strike against the developing military-nuclear complex.[18]

However, the above-mentioned case of America's failure to deter a non-nuclear China should be taken into account in overarching models such as this. China's lack of industrialized infrastructure or centralized population at the time are good examples of factors that can affect the formulation of tactical behaviours in waging war, and so it is clear that the realist school of thought must consider the effects that doctrine and geostrategic positioning have on state behaviour during the opening rounds of any conflictual situation. With this in mind, the case of Iranian nuclear proliferation and the possible effects that it is having and will have in affecting existing regional relationships would clearly benefit from a constructivist analysis of the sub-state factors that affect national priorities and form the third-level political designs of the state.

Constructing the Israeli-Iranian Relationship

Constructivist thought in international relations theory developed in direct response to the dominance of realism and the failures of both the neorealist and neoliberal paradigms in explaining the period of detente and non-conflictual crisis at the end of the Cold War. The strong presence of national and pan-national identity-based political commentary during that time period caused many political scientists to question the nature of the supposed self-help system in international relations. Starting with Onuf in 1987,[19] this led to the rise of the subfield of constructivism.

The Middle East is perhaps the most relevant place for the regional application of constructivist methodologies and ontologies, as they could enable the formulation of policies that take into account material factors alongside wide-ranging normative variables that affect state and non-state activity. This is further true of the study of nuclear proliferation in this region. As mentioned above, the Middle East and the potential nuclear standoff between Iran and Israel and Iran and other neighbouring countries lacks a number of

the similarities of culture or doctrinal mindset that have dominated nuclear balances of power in the past.

Constructivist explanations of such different situations and the resulting potential consequences start with scholars like Alexander Wendt who argue that self-help, anarchy and the balance of power come from the natural construction of interests and identities in international affairs, rather than being preset, overriding factors that characterize the state of nature.[20] The construction of this political reality thus clearly comes from shifting identities and perceived group interests in human societies.[21] Since states, or rather political structures that represent nations, are themselves socially-based constructs that act as a focal point for power (or perhaps even Hobbesian authority), they necessarily must be subject to ongoing revision. A constructivist like Wendt would thus argue that this occurs, whether through peaceable reformation, revolutionary conflict or third-image warfare, as new "nations" feel the need to revise the political structures that both rule them and represent their desires to maximise national benefits in the international arena.[22]

It is clear that as identities shift and change, due to factors ranging from geographical disposition to religious identity to warfare (or conquest) and beyond, states will be forced to behave and relate with each other in new ways. This was evident, for example, with the fall of the French monarchical state in the late 1800s and with the rise of different forms of revisionist German nationalism in the early 20th century. Both periods of intra-state revision led to immensely wider inter-state conflicts, as the political interests of both new "nations" in achieving overall identity-based priorities (like Germany's pursuit of pan-Germanic irredentism) inevitably contradicted the systemically-constructed balance of power. It is important to note from this that, as Wendt argues, many states have developed strong domestic national institutions that lead to the practice of self-help-style foreign policy as predicted by many realists.[23] This essay would argue that a major cause of intra-system conflict is the contradictory pursuit of nationalist policies from naturally-occurring states and those others that undergo revision from shifting identities. This could be described as competition between conventional nationalism and the hegemonic nationalism that can manifest itself when identities and norms shift sufficiently to cause political revision and the desire to alter the nature of

a "nation's" current political presence in the international system. This of course implies that the emergence of new capabilities and new power poles may spark conflict that is unpredictable through the use of realism's paradigmatic assumptions of materially-based security calculations and balances of power.

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In terms of nuclear proliferation in the case of Iran, this highlights some very unique characteristics of the local system that could help shed light on the reasons both for historically-hardline Israeli stances on any level of neighbourly aggression and for the various levels of involvement that Iran, its neighbours and other international actors have in regional affairs like the Middle East Peace Process.[24]

Using the above summary and critique of the realist position on power and cooperation in the local international system, it is very clear to see how Israel may be unwilling to rely on purely material guarantors of security especially since, as a constructivist would argue, power is based on different nationalist, normative perceptions of what is in the national interest.[25] The beginning of this logic, to apply the above constructivist method, would be to identify those norms and national groups that identify with different power dynamics in the Middle East. In that regard and using that method, Israel is perhaps the most simple actor in international affairs to identify, since the Zionist movement and Judaism are the unique, primary defining characteristics of the Israeli nation.

However, Iran's myriad of different cultural/national concerns and ties complicate the straightforward (for a realist) examination of possible behaviours in the international system. While Iran certainly has a singular central state authority ruling over an ethnically homogenous group of people, there are other factors to consider. The revolution in 1979 severed many of Iran's solid political ties with neighbouring Sunni countries, which the government, with limited exceptions, has never been able to regain. Moreover, the revolution introduced a political system that intentionally stratified the country and the divided interests of the nation based on political, economic and religious grounds.
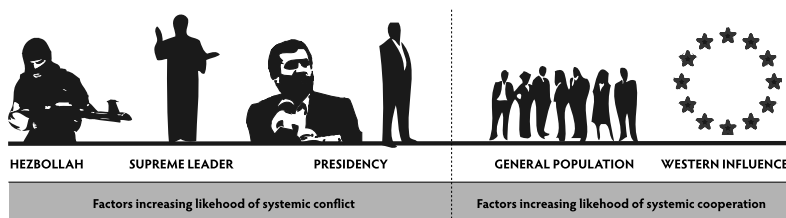
Relative to most political systems, Iran now has two nodes of political power. The presidency and positions in the legislature directly represent the popular electoral opinions of the Islamic Republic while the Supreme Leader, a position that has a significantly greater

say in the appointment and policy of the government, acts as a "jurist" for Islam and the Iranian system, interpreting laws and Islamic law in place of the absent twelfth imam. The population at large are known to have somewhat pro-Western leanings, likely partly to do with the successes of globalising industries in Iran that engage with the outside world. The government, while often critical of the West and cold towards neighbouring countries (especially Israel), have tended to cooperate (if reluctantly) on the international stage, at least insofar as trade and enterprise are involved. Pro-reform politicians have played a more visible role in the *Majlis* (the Iranian parliament) in recent years and, despite hard-liner opposition, have managed to rally support in the population against the volatility of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government.

The Supreme Leader, on the other hand, takes a hard line against all non-Shi'a states and has taken a strong anti-Israeli position when it comes to international affairs. Though the Supreme Leader is only one part of the Iranian regime, it is important to note that he directly controls the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a paramilitary organisation that is separate from the regular army and is known to provide aid, training and encouragement to militant groups in Palestine and Lebanon, especially Hamas and Hezbollah.[26] The IRGC, while much smaller than the traditional armed forces, control key facets of Iran's military establishment, including the developing ballistic missile corps. The IRGC's important role in the economy cannot be marginalized either. The Corps controls or is involved with most of Iran's financial partnerships abroad and, because of a lack of governmental oversight, has also become crucial to the many regional illegal smuggling operations that allegedly constitute over a third of Iran's imports.[27] It is important to recognize this division of authority and power at the sub-state level in Iran because as different parts of the population, from the general populace to the educated religious class to the military to the upper revolutionary echelons, act to satisfy and maximize different national desires (economic welfare, religious supremacy, international prestige, etc.), the stratification of power structures allows individual parts of the state to engage in actions not representative of the whole. In other words, while the Iranian state may have certain capabilities and may face clear challenges on the international stage, the ceding of unbalanced political powers to different

imagined "nations" within the state, from the upper religious caste of Iran's government to the economically liberalising middle class, will ultimately lead to unpredictable and uncoordinated action in international affairs.

Info-Graph II

HEZBOLLAH	SUPREME LEADER	PRESIDENCY	GENERAL POPULATION	WESTERN INFLUENCE
Factors increasing likelihood of systemic conflict			Factors increasing likelihood of systemic cooperation	

In the case of nuclear proliferation, this is an especially worrying dynamic. If one assumes that there is an equilibrium point that can be achieved through a well-informed mutual deterrent posture, then it also must be the case that an inability to achieve certainty about the behaviour of different actors on the opposing side upsets that balance. It would have to be assumed that different segments of Iran's are inclined to pursue different sets of interests (See Info-Graph II). For example, while the general population may support a nascent nuclear programme as a means to develop energy resources and a basic security-based deterrent, elements of the religious leadership or the militant Revolutionary Guard may seek to actively use such weapons against neighbouring states like Israel. One group's interests are conducive to balance and cooperation whilst the other's aim to existentially alter the system. Even if desires that extreme were not to be the case, the connections that exist between certain parts of Iran's political establishment and militant groups like Hezbollah that have been recently active in conflict with Israel may imply that nuclear weapons could be used as leverage on behalf of those groups, with the unspoken and uncertain implication that hostile dealings with Iran could lead to asymmetrical nuclear consequences.

The result of this level of uncertainty in dealings with a nuclear Iran could suggest, unlike the outcome of the assumptions of realist models that other nations (particularly Israel) should act to prevent the development of a full nuclear weapons capability. There are two

benefits, from the constructivist perspective, for doing so. First, the preemptive aggressor would act to ensure that the more volatile nationalist segments of Iran's political establishment could not use nuclear weapons directly, could not easily supply other actors likely to use nuclear weapons, and could not use those weapons as leverage in negotiation and bargaining. Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, a preemptive attack on Iran's nuclear capability or its military-industrial complex could spark Iranian nationalist sentiment. While this sentiment would surely be one of outrage, coupled with the desire to see that either Iran or the international community punishes Israel, a united domestic political environment and a rapprochement of the conservative and reformist wings of the political leadership in Iran puts more focus on the construction of future weapons projects and their use, as well as on the conduct of the Iranian government in inter-state affairs. This kind of public oversight could possibly, as some have suggested, introduce a level of caution to military and nuclear considerations that would make Iran more likely to balance and deter Israel in a miniature Cold War-style standoff. Furthermore, the presence of pro-Israeli international norms, from international protectiveness of small nations to the universal memory of the Holocaust, would surely provide backing and act to legitimize Israel in its right to exist, even if not in its right to attack others. A riskier path to minimise volatile elements of Iran's political establishment could include an international focus on curbing illegal smuggling operations in the Persian Gulf and placing sanctions on those multinational enterprises that the IRGC is heavily involved in. While such a crackdown risks triggering aggressive activity by the IRGC and other volatile factions in Iran, it is possible that the overall economic stagnation caused by sanctions and a drop in imports may galvanise popular support for reform and a more moderate political strategy of engagement in future administrations. More importantly, a loss of business at any level for companies and groups supported by the IRGC provides opportunities for the legitimate corporations emerging from Iran's planned economic system to grow and supplant the influences and real power of the religious leadership.

The end result of this constructivist analysis and commentary on the consequences of Iranian proliferation certainly suggests that preemptive action may provide for more favourable conditions in

the international system for neighbouring states. The unbalanced centrality of power within the Iranian national political system and the factionalised control of important national military and economic capabilities introduce a level of uncertainty for states dealing with the issue of nuclear weapons development that cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, that imbalance also provides a route to be taken in the pursuit of non-aggressive preemptive action. In other words, engagement with Iran could focus on nurturing prosperous relationships that would influence public sentiment and increase the receptiveness of the government to international negotiation and aid for nuclear energy alternatives. This could alleviate fears of the bomb, and help usher in a more balanced, secure environment in regional dealings with Iran. Similarly, a renewed push to resolve political, cultural and territorial issues in the Middle East Peace Process could ease tensions in the region and lessen the likelihood that an Iranian nuclear capacity would threaten Israeli and other national interests through asymmetrical channels.

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Conclusion

The challenge that the international community faces from nuclear proliferation is great. The prospect of undesirable parties, from rogue states to terrorist groups, having access to nuclear weapons presents major policy dilemmas to leading states in the international system. It is clear that, in terms of international relations theory; nuclear proliferation must be analysed using a variety of contrasting methodological and ontological tools, so that unique geopolitical and normative circumstances can be viewed in the proper light. In the case of Iran, this is especially true, since the dual-national identity of the Iranian political and cultural system lends itself to a bifurcated balance of power and the un-centralised access to military resources. Though this dual-national identity means that attempts to engage with Iran could be fruitful, it also introduces enough uncertainty that states like Israel may be forced to act. Regardless of the path to stability, concerned states in the international community should approach the subject of Iranian proliferation with the aim of engaging in ways that will ultimately resolve that domestic-level imbalance. Such a resolution, whether coming from the reformation of Iranian political institutions or the

neutralisation of Iran's volatile international relations (with support of militant groups and cold relations with neighbours), would do so in order to affect a more traditional, realist balance of power in which states could deter and cooperate with one another as singular entities in the international system.

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Notes to Pages 141-159

1   See, Glenn Snyder (1961), Deterrence and Defense, Princeton UP, Achen and Snidal (1989), ,Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies,' World Politics, 41:2, and Kenneth Waltz (1990), ,Nuclear Myths and Political Realities,' *The American Political Science Review*, 84:3, pp. 731–745.

2   For more information, see Nina Tannenwald (2005), ,Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo,' *International Security*, 29:4, pp. 5-49.

3   In his opening chapter debating the spread of nuclear weapons with Scott Sagan, Waltz states the the underlying premise of all nuclear deterrence strategies – a successful deterrent, conventional or nuclear, is punitive, not defensive or tactically threatening. The reason for this is that military defences can be overcome tactically, and so the calculation involved in preventing a move for nuclear war is weakened by the presence of surmountable challenges. See Kenneth N. Waltz and Scott D. Sagan (2003), *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, pp. 5-9.

4   The US's stance is that Iran is in violation of Articles II and III of the NPT.

5   These scenarios are laid out in Posen's *A Nuclear-Armed Iran* as the main concerns for states that must deal with Iran and a possible nuclear arsenal. See Barry Posen (2006), A Nuclear-Armed Iran: A Difficult but not Impossible Policy Problem, Century Foundation Report, New York: Century Foundation, pp. 3-5.

6   Waltz is the original scholar of what is now called neorealism. His first book, *Man, the State and War*, developed the idea of separate levels of analysis: first (individual/human nature), second (domestic) and third (systemic). These levels of analysis allow scholars of the field to define the variables and outcomes of their examinations. In his later book,- *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz highlights the importance of the

third level of analysis, stating that the conditions of anarchy and natural competition between states could explain all behaviour in the system. See Kenneth Waltz (2001), *Man, the State and War*, Columbia UP (revised edition), and Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (1979), McGraw-Hill Social Sciences, New York; 1st edition.

7   See Waltz (1979), pp. 116-128.

8   For a discussion of offensive and defensive neorealism, see John Mearsheimer (2001), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W.W. Norton, particularly pp. 29-54, and Stephen Van Evera (1999), *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, Cornell UP.

9   See Mearsheimer (2001), p. 35.

10 Ibid, pp. 234-266

11 The prestige effect of nuclear weapons refers to additional consideration awarded to states with nuclear arsenals as a result of the fairly unique club of great powers that can afford to field them. This idea came from the observation of a noticeable rise in the prestige of the USSR following its first nuclear tests in the 1950s. See Scott Sagan (1997), ‚Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb‘, *International Security*, 21:3, pp. 54-86 and Robert Jervis (1988), ‚The Political Effects of Nuclear Weapons: A Comment‘, *International Security*, 13:2.

12 See John Gaventa (1982), Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley, University of Illinois Press, pp. 1-32.

13 See Mearsheimer (2001), pp. 83-137

14 See Robert Jervis (1978), ‚Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma‘, *World Politics*, 30:2, pp. 167-214.

15 Figure reproduced from: Jervis (1978), p. 211.

16 See Posen (2006), p. 20.

17 See Waltz and Sagan (2003), pp. 3-9.

18 This is Posen’s (2006) argument; essentially making the case that successful proliferation for Iran would enable its neighbours to contain its attempts to strong arm the system through a well-informed balance of power. See pp. 23-24.

19 See Nicholas Onuf (1987), ‚A Constructivist Manifesto‘ in Burch and Denemark (eds) (1987), *Constituting Political Economy*, Lynne Rienner.

20 See Alexander Wendt (1992), ‚Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics‘, *International Organization,* 46:2, pp. 392-395.

21 This assumption is grounded in basic systemic observations, namely of those relationships that make little sense with the application of purely power political models. Good examples would be the "special"

relationship between the UK and US or the dysfunctional one between communist China and the USSR. See Wendt (1992), pp. 398.

22 Ibid, pp. 397-398.

23 Ibid, pp. 396, 399, 403.

24 This dynamic certainly lends credence to, and complements, the arguments of Finnemore who argues that all humanitarian intervention has its roots in norms and cultural phenomena and that exposure to a history of identity-based conflict has constructed a system of values that influences political decision-making in affairs outside traditional self-help calculations. See Martha Finnemore (2004), *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force*, Cornell UP.

25 See Wendt (1992), p. 406.

26 Many experts give credence to the fact that the IRGC actively funds Hamas and Hezbollah. However, most relevant perhaps are the statements of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, confirming the continued Iranian national involvement in and funding of Hezbollah's anti-Israeli activities.

27 See Frederic Wehrey (et al) (2009), *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, RAND Corporation, National Defense Research Institute, p. 64.