

# How US Foreign Policy affects Iran's Identity: Implications for the Nuclear Issue

Written by Amy Rose Townsend

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## How US Foreign Policy affects Iran's Identity: Implications for the Nuclear Issue

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AMY ROSE TOWNSEND, MAR 21 2012

**What effect has the relationship between the USA and Iran had on Iran's Identity?  
How has this affected the nuclear issue?**

### Introduction

*What effect has the relationship between the USA and Iran had on Iran's Identity? How has this affected the nuclear issue?*

This dissertation aims to establish the cumulative effect that the interactions between the USA and Iran have had on Iran's identity, both the one constructed for it by the USA and the one it constructs for itself. These findings in turn will be applied to the nuclear issue. I will start by charting the relationship pre-1979 and assessing what role the USA played the 1979 revolution as this lays the foundation for the current situation. I will then explore the events between the end of the revolution and 1997 before looking at the reform period of 1997-2005 to see how the relationship changed. Finally I will examine the effect Iran's identity has had on its dealings with the USA over the nuclear issue.

### Statement of the problem

Iran and the USA have had a tense relationship since the 1979 revolution. The revolution overthrew the ruling Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a strong ally of the USA, and resulted in the establishment of an anti-western revolutionary government under Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran holds an unfavourable view of the USA and as I will argue even uses the USA as a tool to reinforce its own revolutionary identity. The USA also views Iran negatively. In 2002 for example President George Bush of the USA classed Iran as part of the 'axis of evil' because he claimed it 'aggressively pursues these weapons [of mass destruction] and exports terror.'<sup>[1]</sup> Supreme leader Khamenei still refuses to engage with the USA despite the attempts of new President Barak Obama. He explains that to enter into talks with the USA would be 'naive and perverted' and that when America tries to broker relations with Iran 'we notice that they are hiding a dagger behind their back...They have not changed their intentions.'<sup>[2]</sup> In order for this defective relationship to improve its origins must be explored.

### Significance of study

There is much literature exploring why Iran and the USA have such a poor relationship but much less that recognises the cumulative effect of USA's actions on Iran's identity and thus Iran's behaviour toward the USA. Bennis for example charts the historic reasons why Iran-USA relations are so dysfunctional. She explains that Iran has consistently opposed the USA's foreign policy objectives in the Middle East region.<sup>[3]</sup> Rather than just identifying matters on which the USA and Iran disagree as a reason for their tense relationship, I aim to explore the foundations of Iran's behaviour in the context of its revolutionary identity and examine how the actions of the USA have been a

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major factor in defining Iran's identity and seriously hindered any prospect of reconciliation.

## Literature review

Ansari (2006) gives a critical account of how the failure of American foreign policy in Iran has led to the current hostile situation between the two countries. He explores significant historic events between the two countries that have impacted on the current relationship.[4] This critical account of history is of extreme importance to my dissertation and I will be building on this approach to explore how these events impacted on Iran's identity and thus its behaviour.

Frye (2003) explains how Iran has been historically interpreted in the 'mind of the West.' He explains that, before the 1979 revolution, Iran had gone from being a respected enemy to a despised friend.[5] I will develop this research and explore how Iran has been viewed, that is had an identity constructed for it, since the 1979 revolution by the USA and how that has informed the actions of both countries.

Axworthy (2008) gives a coherent introduction to Iranian history from the prophet Zoroaster to the present day. He explains the complex successions of dynasties of rulers of Iran as well as the wider range of ethnic groups that make up modern day Iran.[6] This historical awareness is important. However, because of the significance of the 1979 revolution, the focus of my dissertation will be on Iran's twentieth century history.

The literature I have reviewed here give a broad understanding of the history of Iran and the relationship between the USA and Iran. I intend to build on this research and apply my critical theoretical framework in order to understand how Iran's identity has been constructed through interaction with the USA and continues to inform the contemporary relationship.

## Methodological analysis

For my research I will be using English language sources as English is my only language, it could be argued that in order to properly address this question I must learn Persian, the official national language of Iran,[7] however I lack both the time and the money to undertake this. My research will be conducted on secondary sources. Ideally I would like to travel to Iran and the USA to collect primary data but this is logistically impossible. I will be using a combination of books, journal articles, speeches, reports and media sources where appropriate.

## Theoretical framework

In researching and writing this dissertation I have concluded that the most effective way of exploring the topic is by using critical theories as opposed to taking the more traditional approach. Critical theories emerged as a reaction to the traditional International Relations (IR) theories which assert a single view of human behaviour. Realism is one of the oldest theories of IR. Realists believe in a state centric approach to world politics and that humans are inherently selfish and wish to gain power and survive.[8] Liberalism is also a traditional IR theory. Liberals too believe that the state is the primary frame of reference in IR although they differ from realists in that they believe humans naturally seek peace.[9] These traditional theories are both explanatory, meaning they seek to just explain IR, and foundationalist, meaning they believe things can be proved true or false. I believe in order to properly understand Iran's identity and how this impacted on its relationship with USA assumptions about human behaviour must be abandoned.

It is also important to consider the constitutive effect that applying theories can have on world politics. Alexander Wendt describes critical theory as 'a family of theories that include post-modernists [also known as post-

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structuralists], constructivists, neo-Marxists, feminists and others. What unites them is the concern with how world politics is "socially constructed." [10] I would also add post-colonialists to this definition. This social construction element is key. In order to understand why countries, and indeed their relationships, are the way that they are we must consider their experience. This theoretical framework will be further explored in the first chapter.

## Structure of dissertation

This dissertation will be divided into seven sections, five chapters, an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter will outline the theoretical framework while the other four will each explore a key research question.

- Introduction
- Chapter one: Theoretical framework
- Chapter two: How did Iran's relationship with the USA impact on its identity and how did this contribute to the 1979 revolution?
- Chapter three: What aspects of the Iranian-American relationship affected Iran's identity between 1979 and 1997?
- Chapter four: What effect did the reform period of 1997-2005 have on Iran's identity?
- Chapter five: What effect has this identity formation had on the Nuclear Issue between the USA and Iran?
- Conclusion

## Chapter One

### Theoretical Framework

This chapter will explain the theoretical framework that will inform the argument of this dissertation. I will be taking a critical approach, Cox explains that critical theory 'stands apart from the prevailing order and asks how that order came about.' [11] I will be questioning the prevailing order with regard to the relationship between Iran and the USA through the examination of identity with consideration of both post-colonial thinking and foreign policy. Critical theory is also a 'theory of history' [12]; this is of vital importance to my study. I need to re-examine what effect actions of the USA had on Iran's identity and how this effect continues.

Identity can be described as both a basis for, and product of, social and political action. [13] It is also both shaped and reinforced by interaction. [14] This is of huge importance to my argument as I will explore how the identity of Iran has both been informed and shaped by its interaction with the USA. Wendt states that 'Identities are the basis of interests.' [15] To that end we must understand identity to understand interests and why actors behave in the way they do. Ruggie explains that as the identity of a state evolves so do its interests. [16] It will be important in this dissertation to note how Iran's identity changes and whether this impacts on its relationship the USA.

Identity can be described as 'the individual characteristics by which a person or thing is recognized.' [17] On an international level these characteristics must be ascribed to actors, which are often a collection of individuals. Piven calls this 'collective identities' and explains that they derive from a primal need to belong to a group for survival. She describes how 'collective identities' are constructed through 'common traits and common interests, and inherit and invent shared traditions and rituals.' [18] I will explore how the shared revolutionary tradition stemming from 1979

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continues to inform Iranian identity.

Vertovec explains that identity is the 'ways in which people conceive of themselves and are characterised by others.'<sup>[19]</sup> This is a particularly important definition as it highlights the fact that actors are not solely responsible for their identity construction. I will also explore how the USA has constructed an identity for Iran on the international stage which informs how it interacts with it. Huntington explains that 'people define their identity by what they are not.'<sup>[20]</sup> This dissertation will explore how Iran has defined itself post-1979 in relation to the USA and how this binary oppositional identity construction continues today. Due to the transient nature of the concept, identity can be seen as a subjective term. There is some contention over whether identity is primordial or constructed. Primordial identity is scientific, in other words we are who we are because of the way we are born. Constructed identity is a product of our upbringing and environment.<sup>[21]</sup> Guibernau states that 'all identities emerge within a system of social relations and representations.'<sup>[22]</sup> For this dissertation my argument rests on the idea that identities are constructed, both by the actor themselves and by other actors.

It is also appropriate in this study to use post-colonial thinking. Post-colonial thinking explores not only the period of colonialism but also the ongoing domination of a state by the coloniser after the official period of colonialism has ended.<sup>[23]</sup> Although Iran was not officially colonised it was occupied in both World War One and Two, attempts were made to make it a protectorate and it was tied into unfair oil contracts by Britain. If colonisation is thought of as '[the] control of other people's land and goods'<sup>[24]</sup> I believe this makes the application of postcolonial thinking supremely relevant. Said states the West, or Occident, purport a romanticised and homogenous image of Asia and the Middle East, or the Orient, which it uses to justify their imperial ambitions. He explains that 'Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.'<sup>[25]</sup> Speaking in 1980 on the USA, Said explains that 'Muslims and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Moslem life [is understood]... What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression.'<sup>[26]</sup> It is important in this dissertation to explore the impact that this 'Orientalist' thinking has had on Iran's identity formation.

When looking at identity from a post-colonial stance it is psychological and cultural impact that is central to the analysis rather than the material and economic. <sup>[27]</sup> Fanon explains that the colonial experience left the colonised with an 'inferiority complex', so the identity of the imperial power was seen as preferable to the indigenous.<sup>[28]</sup> Nandy states that 'colonialism is first of all a matter of consciousness and needs to be defeated ultimately in the minds of men.'<sup>[29]</sup> That is, the imperialism can become so ingrained that it becomes part of the identity of those previously colonised and in order to address this it needs to be identified and rejected. This leads on to the idea of resistance. Resistance can take many forms from independence movements to re-writing the history of colonialism and telling the story from the point of view of the colonised; the 'empire writes back' as Abrahamsen calls it. It is clear that in order to break the dominating post-colonial relationship the discourse must be challenged. I will argue that Iran did this through the anti-Western nature of its revolution, which will be explored in Chapter Two, and by constructing its current identity in opposition to those who tried to dominate it in the past.

Grovogui explains that 'the representations of "international reality" and "international existence" have remained grounded in Western institutional and discursive practices so as to reflect and affirm parochial structures of power, interest and identity.'<sup>[30]</sup> This is an important point and helps to unpick the reason that Iran and the USA have such a tense relationship. If Iran's identity is contrary to what is seen as acceptable by the USA then this will inform the USA's reaction to it.

In order to assess how the identity of Iran has contributed to its behaviour one must consider their foreign policy; that is the way they deal with external actors. Hill describes foreign policy as 'the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually the state) in international relations'. He explains that the policy is 'foreign' due to the fact the world is split into distinctive communities rather than being a homogenised mass and actors must have strategies to cope with this.<sup>[31]</sup> Indeed it can be stated that 'foreign policy is at least in part an act of construction; it is what the actors decide it will be'.<sup>[32]</sup> Messari expands on this to say that foreign policy is 'an identity-making tool that erects boundaries between the self and other.'<sup>[33]</sup> She explains that these '*others* can be

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divided into two different groups: allies and enemies.'[34] Through interaction with the enemies an actor's identity is reinforced due to an awareness of what it is not; that is its identity is defined in opposition to its perceived enemies. However identity is also reinforced during dealings with allies through affirmation of the links and characteristics shared. [35] To that end I will be examining the foreign policies of both Iran and the USA especially in regard to the nuclear issue in order to assess how the concept of Iranian identity differs between them and informs their behaviour.

## Chapter Two

*How did Iran's relationship with the USA impact on its identity and how did this contribute to the 1979 revolution?*

This chapter aims to establish the factors that led to the 1979 Iranian revolution and how this shaped Iran's identity. When considering the role of the USA in this study it is important to realise that the revolution also impacted on the identity that the USA has constructed for Iran. It is therefore appropriate to examine to what extent the USA's involvement in Iran contributed to the revolution. Iran's experience in the First and Second World Wars which encouraged it to turn away from its traditional ally Britain are examined, followed by the USA's role in the 1953 coup and its close relationship with the Shah.

The 1979 revolution refers to a political and social movement that culminated in the downfall of the Iranian monarchy under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.[36] Adib-Moghaddam explains how the revolution 'radically questioned Iran's historical consciousness, the country's self awareness and *Jahanbini* (world view)' (emphasis original).[37] It is appropriate to examine the causes as its world view will have been shaped by its revolutionary identity.

Iran was occupied in both World War One (WW1) (1914 to 1918)[38] and World War Two (WW2) (1939 to 1945).[39] Despite Iran's declaration of neutrality during WW1, it was occupied by a number of forces including the British, Russians and Swedish.[40] This can be identified as the first instance of imperialism on which Iran has come to base its post-colonial identity. Indeed after the war in 1919 there was an attempt to make Iran a British protectorate. The Anglo-Persian agreement would have signed over Iran's fiscal, governmental and military responsibilities. This can be cited as an attempt to effectively 'colonise' Iran. The British made it an attractive proposition with promises of security, infrastructure development and cash loans and the Shah initially accepted but as the details emerged and British bribes were discovered, all sectors of opinion went against the agreement.[41] This can be seen as a form of resistance because although Iran had been occupied without consent during WW1, the Iranian people would not consciously agree to imperial domination. It can also be cited as the first of many times in the Twentieth Century that the Iranian people opposed the Shah because he operated in a way that was seen to be contrary to the Identity of a proud and independent Iran. The attempt by the British failed.[42] Axworthy explains how Iran suffered a severe famine from 1917-1918 partly as a result of the disruption to trade and agriculture caused by the war:[43] It is estimated that up to a quarter of the population in the north of Iran died as a result.[44] It had a huge effect on the Iranian people and marred their relationship with Britain. After WW1 many Iranian nationalists looked to US President Woodrow Wilson's new post war philosophy of self determination. They thought of the USA as Iran's best hope amongst the great powers of the time.[45]

In WW2 Iran again declared itself neutral but despite this it was invaded and occupied by the British and Soviet Union, in 1941. The British justification for the invasion was '[to ensure] the security of the British position in this area; a desire not to rebuff the Russians; the expulsion of the Germans from Iran; and the question of the supply route'. The British wanted to ensure the Soviet Union were adequately supplied as the Germans attacked them in June of 1941.[46] Axworthy explains how Iran was humiliated by this second occupation and it caused a rise in political activity and nationalist feeling. This nationalist feeling is another example of resistance and a reaction to the humiliation of another imperialist occupation. As in WW1, Iran turned to the USA. The Shah appealed to pro-USA feeling among the Iranian people and to the USA for support. He compared Iranian nationalism and its struggle for independence directly with the American nationalism and declaration of independence from the British Empire in the eighteenth century.[47] This can be seen as an example of Iranian identity being defined as akin to that of the USA. Under an agreement signed during the occupation the British and the Soviets were required to leave Iran within six

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months of the end of the war. The British did withdraw but the Soviet Union decided to remain to try to exploit the social democratic tradition in the region, encourage pro-Soviet secession movements and create a 'sphere of influence.' The USA helped persuade the Soviets to leave in 1946 and used this opportunity to strengthen its presence in Iran.[48] Within a few years it became clear that the USA's apparent affinity with Iran was simply a matter of self interest as its involvement in the 1953 coup demonstrates.

In order to explain the significance of the 1953 coup it is appropriate to briefly explore the background. Before the discovery of oil in Iran in 1908, Britain's primary interest had been defending its Indian territory.[49] In 1909 the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was set up [50] and the British switched from using coal to oil to power its Navy as it was less bulky to transport. By 1914, the British government had purchased a majority share in the company. At the time of the company's inception the Iranian government agreed to allow the British to extract the oil for a modest 16% royalty. This was later raised to 20% to appease the Shah and the population, who were unhappy with the original terms that were agreed by a previous government. Despite this increase, due to taxation, the British government's profits were much greater than the revenue gained by the Iranian government. Indeed many ordinary Iranians viewed the company as a British arm of the Iranian government.[51] This unequal distribution of profits as well as claims by the Iranians that they were treated like colonised subjects by the British led directly to the nationalisation of the company in 1951.[52] This nationalisation can also be seen as a sign of resistance feeding the construction of Iranian Identity in opposition to Britain.

The election of Mohammad Mosaddeq as president in 1950 reflected the popular dissenting views against perceived imperialism and reinforced the idea that Iranian identity was being constructed in defiance of Britain. Mosaddeq had left the country in 1919 in protest at the Anglo-Persian agreement and it was he who had spearheaded the campaign to nationalise Iranian oil.[53] Indeed this has been called the 'Nationalisation Movement' with its aims being to end the economic exploitation of Iran by foreign powers.[54] President Mosaddeq had to deal with the fallout of the oil nationalisation in the form of an unofficial boycott of Iranian oil which effectively cut off the country's oil revenue.[55] His support of the nationalisation of Iranian oil was centred on preserving national sovereignty by removing the influence of Britain.[56] Mosaddeq expected the USA to be sympathetic and provide loans to sustain the oil company and compensate for the oil revenue deficit. Indeed if one considers the comparison between Iranian nationalist identity and the USA's identity defined by its struggle for independence from the British, one would expect the USA to be supportive. Instead the USA joined the boycott.[57] This dealt a huge blow to the hopes of Mosaddeq and the Iranian people of finding an ally in the USA.

Despite this setback Mosaddeq remained popular. In the latter half of his presidency, he began to instigate reforms to benefit ordinary Iranians. However there was increasing dissent against the President amongst the Western powers, encouraged by the ruling Shah who was threatened by the power of Mosaddeq. This manifested itself in attempts by Britain and the USA to destabilise the government through covertly supporting opposition groups as well as organising fake demonstrations.[58] Adib-Moghaddam explains how the USA intelligence services also planted a fake study in an American newspaper which, when reprinted in Iran, fed the 'war of nerves' against Mosaddeq. [59] Throughout the build up to the 1953 coup the USA played on the idea that Mosaddeq was a 'communist danger.' This was a rhetoric device as they knew that he distrusted the Soviet Union and even complained of his neutrality. [60] On the 19th of August 1953 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the USA and the MI6 intelligence bureau of Britain successfully orchestrated a coup against Mosaddeq. Baxter and Akbarzadeh explain that this is a clear example of direct foreign interference which violated Iran's sovereignty to protect the economic and political interests of the USA and Britain.[61] Grovogui identifies Mosaddeq's actions as a resistance to 'European notions of 'imperial sovereignty.' [62] Chomsky explains that after the coup forty percent of Iran's oil revenue went from Britain to the USA.[63] This completely undermined the desire to sustain an Iranian Identity that resisted imperialism. As Iran's perceived ally, the USA, was instrumental in removing a popular president who had been fighting for Iranian freedom, to satisfy its own imperial desires. The oil nationalisation and the coup still have a great effect on the minds of the Iranian people today. The anniversary of the former is still marked by a national holiday.[64] It has been said that 'the coup tarred America with the British brush: being perceived as the "colonial power," a perception that created deep distrust between Iran and United States'.[65] This arguably marked the beginning of Iranian identity being constructed around opposition to the USA, at least in the minds of ordinary Iranian people. The continued celebration of the oil nationalisation, a symbol of resistance to imperialism, can be cited as proof of the continuing weight of this

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event as a defining factor in Iran's post-colonial identity.

These interventions by Britain and, more significantly for this study, the USA, ensured the revolution had a distinctly anti-Western nature. However it is appropriate to briefly examine other domestic factors that helped spark the revolution to overthrow the ruling regime. It must be remembered that the Shah was a close ally to the USA. This can be seen through the move by the USA to remove President Mosaddeq who had threatened his power. Although a level of corruption was normally tolerated in Iranian society the increases in oil revenue from 1973 highlighted the massive excesses and corruption in the ruling regime that were viewed as obscene by the Iranian people. There were allegations that the regime had purchased unnecessary amounts of weaponry at the behest of the USA's arms industry, harming economic prosperity and providing further proof that the Shah was a puppet of the West. Although wealth disparity was not a new phenomenon the reforms implemented during the White Revolution, a series of reforms designed to strengthen the Shah's power, meant that the poorest in society could no longer turn to the landed aristocracy for financial assistance or loans as they had done previously.[66] These domestic factors fed into the hatred of the Shah and his regime and ultimately culminated in the 1979 revolution. In terms of identity it has been stated that 'military and economic dependence were matched by progressive westernisation of Iranian education and society. Religious and lay people shared a common concern about cultural alienation.'[67] Therefore the revolution can be seen as a reassertion of perceived Iranian identity which had been threatened under the Shah.

The secular nationalism of Mosaddeq had failed to deliver change in Iran. The Iranian people, secular and religious, instead turned to political Islam to achieve their goal of regime change and removing Western influence in the form of the exiled religious leader and politician Ayatollah Khomeini.[68] This is an example of political Islam which can be described as 'form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives'.[69] Indeed Axworthy states that 'the revolution of 1979 was not solely and perhaps not even primarily a religious revolution... but the revolution drew strength from its Shi'a form... which lent cohesion and a sense of common purpose... from the clarity and charisma of Khomeini.' [70] Khomeini established a political system that was Islamic in character however more importantly it was also 'anti-western [and] anti-Israeli.' [71] I will argue that this assertion of revolutionary identity continues to inform Iran's behaviour to date.

In conclusion it can be seen that Iran's identity was impacted by its quasi-colonial experience through occupation in the First and Second World Wars as well as a supremely unjust oil contract with the British. These incidents led Iran to define its identity in opposition to Britain and instead construct it in relation to the USA. This was due to the USA's experience of gaining independence from Britain and the consequent expectation that the USA would be sympathetic to Iran's plight and support it through the oil nationalisation. However the USA proved itself to be, in the Iranian mind, akin to imperialist Britain. Not only did it fail to support the oil nationalisation, it also removed the popular president who had backed it, choosing instead to sustain the power of the Shah and a corrupt regime. The oil nationalisation and 1953 coup led to the beginning of Iran's identity being defined in opposition to the USA. The Shah did not share his people's view. His regime was supported by the USA and seen as out of touch, a 'puppet of the west'. This, as well as domestic factors, led to the 1979 revolution, the establishment of an anti-western system and more importantly a revolutionary identity.

## Chapter Three

### *What aspects of the Iranian-American relationship affected Iran's identity between 1979 and 1997?*

This chapter aims to establish how a series of events widened the gulf between the USA and Iran after the 1979 revolution and contributed to Iran's current identity as seen within Iran and as perceived by the US. This period is significant as it marks the first tentative steps of the new 'Islamic Republic' under Supreme Leader Khomeini. We can see during this time how Iran reinforced its revolutionary identity through exploiting perceived atrocities committed by the USA. It is also important to understand that during this time the USA established a new identity for Iran. The USA constructed this identity for Iran in the wake of a supremely anti-western and specifically anti-USA revolution and this context contributed to the USA's actions toward the country especially during the Iran-Iraq war. I will explore the

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effect of the hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq war, the case of Iran Air Flight 655 and Iran's response to Israel.

The first major test of Iran in defining its identity in opposition to the USA after the revolution was the hostage crisis. In 1979, in support of the revolution, a group of students occupied the American embassy holding dozens of US citizens hostage for 444 days. The hostages were seen as a symbol of the USA's imperialism on Iranian soil.[72] This was an act of post-colonial resistance that proved that Iranian identity no longer accommodated the USA, as it had under the Shah. This caused huge tension and hostility between the two countries and the legacy of this event continues to undermine relations. As the hostage crisis unfolded, President Jimmy Carter of the USA made it clear that Iran faced military intervention if the hostages were harmed or put on trial. On 20th January 1981 the hostages were released after an agreement was reached. Khomeini had demanded that the USA, relinquish all claims to Iran, release all frozen assets and no longer interfere in the internal affairs of Iran. Afterward the US Secretary of State claimed they had only given back a little of what rightfully belonged to Iran and instead it was Iran who made the majority of concessions.[73] The hostage crisis resulted in the severance of diplomatic links and the CIA still states today that 'US-Iranian relations have been strained since a group of Iranian students seized the US Embassy.'<sup>[74]</sup> The resulting threat of military intervention by the USA intensified anti-USA feeling and helped to strengthen the revolutionary Iranian identity. Despite the issue being resolved 'the Iranian regime found it useful to keep alive the spectre of an outside threat to the revolution... The United States provided a very convincing threat'.<sup>[75]</sup> Hunter explains that the legacy of this crisis makes reconciliation and improved relations very difficult.<sup>[76]</sup> It can be seen how the ruling regime in Iran used the USA to define its own identity and strengthen the revolution and revolutionary government.

The next significant event in Iran-USA relations was the Iran-Iraq war. The USA supported the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein in an effort to contain Iran which was believed to threaten regional stability and its oil interests. This event was yet another reason for Iran to define itself in opposition to the USA. It reaffirmed the justifications for the revolution and its revolutionary identity. The war, in which Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded Iran, lasted from 1980 to 1988, and had its roots in regional tension including border disputes.<sup>[77]</sup> There was also a fear that the Islamic nature of the revolution would cause an uprising by the suppressed Muslim Shi'a majority in Iraq. It is the involvement and support by the USA however that defines it as a key event in Iran-USA relations.<sup>[78]</sup> Until 1982 the Western powers had a neutral stance;<sup>[79]</sup> however it must be considered that when Saddam Hussein invaded Iran there was no uproar or calls for a US embargo by Western powers as there was just over ten years later when Hussein invaded Kuwait.<sup>[80]</sup> It can be argued that this is due to the 'pariah' identity ascribed to Iran by western powers and in particular the USA. Despite the declared position of neutrality, shared by most European powers, Donald Rumsfeld of the USA visited Iraq in 1983; Ansari argues that this visit consolidated American support for the war which had been growing since its inception.<sup>[81]</sup> A report stated in 1983 that the USA would do 'whatever was necessary and legal' to stop Iraq losing to Iran. They believed that if Iran won it would threaten its important oil producing ally Saudi Arabia and create regional instability.<sup>[82]</sup> The USA provided support to Saddam Hussein both economically and militarily as well as defending his regime on the international stage.<sup>[83]</sup> The war which ended with Iran agreeing to a ceasefire, had a heavy human and material cost on both sides.<sup>[84]</sup> More importantly for this argument 'The sense of distrust this engendered toward the West was enormous.'<sup>[85]</sup>

An event that further solidified Iran's opposition to the USA and in turn its revolutionary identity was the case of Iran Air Flight 655. Beeman explains that despite the USA's ongoing support for Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war it was this event that was more damaging to the reputation of the USA.<sup>[86]</sup> In 1988 a US tanker stationed in the Persian Gulf shot down an Iranian civilian airliner killing all 290 people on board. The USA has always maintained they mistook the plane for an Iranian jet fighter and the plane ignored repeated warnings to leave the area. Although the USA has never apologised or admitted responsibility for the incident it paid compensation to all of the victims.<sup>[87]</sup> To add insult to injury the captain of the vessel that shot down the plane received a medal for distinguished service. Ansari explains that this incident convinced even the sceptics in Iran the USA was the 'great Satan.'<sup>[88]</sup>

In order to further understand the relationship between the USA and Iran it is appropriate to examine the issue of Israel. The state of Israel was created in 1948, as a homeland for the Jewish people, following a mandate and support from Britain. Its inception was immediately followed by an invasion by a coalition of Arab countries. Israel has faced continuing hostility from the stateless Palestinian people as well as other Muslim countries in the region.<sup>[89]</sup>



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The USA and Israel have had relations since its foundation[90] however the relationship became close after 1963 under the Kennedy administration.[91]

Iran's hatred of Israel can be traced back to the revolution. The two countries had good relations between 1953 and 1979 because the Shah saw a natural ally in Israel due to Iran's own experience of conflict and tension from its Arab neighbours. An alliance with Israel was also designed to reinforce Iran's relationship with the USA.[92] However post 1979, everything changed. Khomeini viewed the creation of the Jewish state and the displacement on the Palestinian people as an unforgivable sin. He declared that the last Friday of the holy festival of Ramadan should be 'Jerusalem day' to show solidarity with the Muslims of Palestine, something that is still celebrated today.[93] Khomeini had stated that Iran was able to have relations with every country apart from Israel.[94] This is significant as it seriously hampers any hope of reconciliation. Even pragmatists such as the Prime Minister Rafsanjani held a strong anti-Israeli view; it was, he said, the duty of every Muslim to resist Israel.[95] There are also other advantages to Iran's hostility toward Israel. It allowed a new and largely isolated regime to have great influence in the Arab world and gain support for its own causes and legitimacy.[96] It was in Iran's best interest to construct its identity around hostility toward Israel as it lent legitimacy to Khomeini's regime from its Arab neighbours and internally further strengthened the anti-US revolutionary resolve as Israel is an ally of the USA.

Iran has reinforced its hatred of Israel and the fractured Iran-USA relationship by supporting anti-Israeli groups. It 'viewed the success of the Palestinian Islamist movements and Hezbollah as a tribute to its revolution, a manifestation of the spread of its influence and evidence of Iran's regional centrality and Islamic leadership.'[97] It seems natural having held this view that Iran would wish to provide support for these groups. It is of particular importance to focus on Iran's support of Hezbollah due to the large number of American military personnel that have been killed or taken hostage by them. Hezbollah are a political and military organisation made up of majority Shia Muslims and based in Lebanon. The organisation was founded in 1982 as a reaction to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. It has had close ties with Iran since its inception. Iran even sent members of its own security force, the revolutionary guards, to help with the resistance. Since then Iran has continued to provide economic and military help.[98] Takeyh explains that Hezbollah first entered the consciousness of the USA when in 1983 they bombed a US marine barracks and killed 241 soldiers. Hezbollah, persuaded by Iran, took a number of hostages.[99]

The antagonistic stalemate between Iran and the USA hardened further as the US pursued anti-Iranian policies such as economic sanctions and containment' policies that Iran blamed on Zionism and Israel.[100] Hunter explains that Iran was willing to carrying on opposing Israel because the effect of these sanctions was dwarfed by the strategic and ideological advantage afforded to it.[101] I would assert that Iran continues to pursue this policy toward Israel as it is a vital component of their anti-American revolutionary identity. Menashri explains that in most cases where the dogma of the revolution has contradicted state interest, state interest has triumphed. However the case of Israel is significant as it is an example of Iran standing by its revolutionary doctrine despite the conflict with Israel potentially threatening the state.[102] Indeed 'the struggle against the Jewish state was seen as an affirmation of revolutionary identity and Islamic idealism.'[103] Opposition to the state of Israel is another issue Iran has used to strengthen and inform its identity since the revolution.

It is clear that mutual exploitation of a series of events involving both the USA and Iran served to solidify and further polarise attitudes and behaviours in both countries. In Iran, these events strengthened and informed its post-colonial revolutionary identity, legitimised its position with its Arab neighbours and laid the blame for economic hardships squarely on the shoulders of the US further fuelling anti-US sentiments. In the US, Iran's apparent intransigence, religious fundamentalism and support of what was considered terrorism, further reinforced the identity constructed for Iran as a country that was not to be trusted.

## Chapter Four

*What effect did the reform period of 1997-2005 have on Iran's identity?*

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This chapter aims to assert the importance of the reformist President Khatami time in power on Iran's identity. It can be seen that since the revolution Iran has defined its identity in opposition to the USA. The USA had also constructed a negative identity for Iran since 1979. I will briefly outline the context under which Khatami came to power and examine the advances made by him in allowing the Iranian identity to accept dialogue with the USA. I will then explore the steps he took to open up relations, the USA's response and the effect its failure had on Iran's Identity.

It is important to explore the origins of the reform movement which brought Khatami to power as it can be seen how Iran's revolutionary identity was softening allowing the opportunity for a better relationship with the USA. The origins of the reform movement can be traced back to the debates and discussions in universities across Iran in the period that followed the end of the Iran-Iraq war.[104] The roots of these reforms also lie with the previous President Rafsanjani. He had a collection of ministers who for the most part had been educated in the West and retained affection for the USA as a country. This is important as it laid the foundation for reconsideration of Iran's revolutionary identity that had been defined in opposition to the USA. Rafsanjani oversaw a 'flooding' of American goods into the country, nobody wanted to buy products from the East if an American alternative was available. This went against official rhetoric and caused political problems for the President. However it demonstrated that ordinary Iranians were not as opposed to the USA as the official rhetoric dictated. It indicated that Iranian attitudes were softening toward the USA and that its identity could potentially change. Lastly Rafsanjani supported progressive intellectuals in a quest to discover the role of religion in politics and more significantly in Iran's relationship with the West. There was a reconciliation of the Shah's actions. It was decided that he had merely been manipulated by the USA and that one of the reasons the Shah's regime failed was because his relationship with the USA had become too dependent. However a new relationship could now be contemplated.[105] Indeed many asserted the 'Islamic revolution' could be seen in a western historical framework, Iran defined itself in relation to the West.[106] Ansari explains that this intellectual musing 'led to a fundamental re-examination of Iran's relationship with the West and the United States in particular.'[107] This arguably began a process of transition that enabled Iran to build the potential for better relations with the West. Rafsanjani however failed to open up any meaningful relationship with the US. Iran continued to be ignored and contained and this failure prompted a reflection on the nature of the relationship.[108]

The actions of Rafsanjani and his failure to broker a detente with the USA as well as the seemingly softening attitude of the Iranian people toward the USA laid the foundations for the election of President Khatami. Khatami was a little known cleric when in 1997 he won a surprise victory over conservative candidates with over 70% of the vote.[109] Sabet-Saeidi explains that Khatami's reformist policies 'brought new hopes for a nation disappointed with Rafsanjani and a country isolated from the West.'[110] Khatami wished to construct better international relationships, built on 'mutual respect and trust' to achieve regional and international stability. He believed this would increase foreign direct investment in the country and open up markets, Iran had faced rafts of sanctions since the 1979 revolution particularly from the USA.[111] Ansari explains that 'central to this strategy was a new relationship with the West and United States in particular' and 'the key to his foreign policy agenda remained in many ways a redefinition of Iran's relationship with United States.'[112] In a speech to the United Nations (UN) in 1998 Khatami said, that for all its flaws, the world could learn a lot from Western civilisation and he called for a 'dialogue between civilisations.'[113] Significantly Khatami explained that 'the first rule of dialogue... is to know yourself and your identity.' This is important as it demonstrates a self awareness and an exploration of Iranian identity. He explained that the second rule was 'to know the civilisation with which you want to maintain a dialogue'.[114] This is monumentally significant as Khatami is highlighting the concept of understanding how the USA's identity has in part been defined in opposition to Iran because of historic incidents and tension. Only with this understanding could steps be made to combat this and build relations.

It is of vital importance to explore how Khatami went about attempting to build a positive relationship with the USA. Unlike previous presidents, including Rafsanjani, Khatami tried to understand how Iran had defined itself in opposition to the USA and why. He also recognised the negative identity that the USA had constructed for Iran and how this was impacting on the USA's behaviour toward the country. It was clear that Khatami wished to practice his rules of dialogue and unpick the tense relationship. In an interview given on the American Cable News Network (CNN) in 1998 he explained that 'there is a bulky wall of mistrust between us and American administrations, a mistrust rooted in improper behaviour by the American governments.' As examples he cited the USA's involvement in the 1953 coup and support of the imposed government, as well as the USA's hostile attitude since the

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revolution and the economic damage that had been inflicted on Iran. He also raised the issue of the Iranian civilian airliner shot down over the Persian Gulf in 1988 by a US marine vessel. This is significant as Khatami is coherently setting out the historic reasons for Iran's hostile attitude toward the USA and leaving the way open for reconciliation of these issues. He also explains that anti-US slogans and flag burning were not intended to insult the USA but merely expressed a desire to change the nature of the current relationship. Significantly Khatami expressed regret for the hostage crisis.[115] It was clear the Khatami wanted better relations with the USA and that he had the support of the Iranian people.

However his words were not entirely conciliatory and this, it could be argued, is one of the reasons why his efforts failed. On the issue of Iran supporting terrorism, Khatami said the killing of innocent people was very much condemned but that people fighting to get land that was wrongly taken from them was not terrorism. He also explained that Iran did not support the peace process as they believe it will not and cannot be successful; peace can only be achieved when the Palestinians right to self determination is recognised. Anti-Semitism, said Khatami, was a Western phenomenon used as a political instrument. He claimed that the USA's foreign policy decisions were made in Tel Aviv and ensured the USA supported 'a racist regime which does not even have the backing of the Jewish people.' [116] Despite the good intentions of Khatami and the steps he made, true reconciliation was not possible without a compromise and apology for Iran's actions in respect of Israel. Indeed as explored in the previous chapter the resistance and hostility toward the existence of Israel remains a defining feature of Iranian identity.

It is important to establish whether these gestures made by Khatami had a significant effect on diminishing the negative identity the USA had constructed for Iran. Relations between Iran and the USA did begin to thaw during the Clinton administration. In 1999 the US president Bill Clinton acknowledged that Iran held legitimate grievances against Western countries and significantly in 2000 US Secretary of State Madeline Albright expressed regret for America's involvement in the 1953 coup and for the 'short-sightedness' that led to the USA supporting Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war.[117] These concessions were hugely important and laid to rest events whose legacy had enforced the Iranian identity and had blocked cordial or at least productive relations. It also showed an acknowledgment that Iran's identity which had informed its actions had been constructed in reaction to the feelings of injustice held against the USA. This in addition marks the start of the USA's understanding that the identity it had constructed for Iran had failed to take into account these injustices and allowed for a reassessment and possible reconciliation.

The key to understanding the importance of the reform period in this study is to explore how it failed. This failure completely undid the work done by Khatami to open up productive relations with the USA. There were a variety of missed opportunities which put strain on this tentative relationship. Khatami missed a chance in 2000 when he failed to respond to a letter sent by President Clinton offering a programme to normalise relations between the two countries.[118] A further blow was dealt to the process with the election of George W. Bush in 2001 who wished to differ from Clinton in all ways and that included with his relationship with Iran.

Perhaps the greatest missed opportunity came when the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred in the USA in 2001. The Iranian government came out in support of the USA, expressing sympathy and suspending the practice of shouting 'death to America' at Friday prayers for a number of weeks. Iranians had long been at odds with Al-Qaeda, who claimed responsibility for the attacks, and wished to support American efforts to combat them. However, instead of accepting this help, President Bush revived allegations of Iranian complicity in the bombing of the Al-Kohbar towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996 despite insufficient evidence.[119] Tension was also caused between the two countries over the issue of Al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives fleeing from Afghanistan into Iran. Initially Iran denied that it had any of these people in the country. However it transpired that a number of them were in Iranian prisons. The USA wanted Iran to extradite these fugitives but Iran refused and chose instead to return many of them to their native countries. It must be considered that Iran would have to deal with the effects of the war in Afghanistan. It could not just withdraw from the region when it was over like the USA; so it was in their best interests to keep reasonable relations with these groups to avoid a backlash. Unfortunately this decision not only continued to unpick the tentative detente between the two countries, Iran became the subject of more rumours and speculation about its involvement and compliance with terrorists.[120] We can see that despite Iran's sympathies and wish to support the 'war on terror' President Bush decided to resurrect the negative identity of Iran.

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It was arguably the State of the Union speech in 2002 that was the final nail in the coffin, President Bush declared Iran to be part of the 'axis of evil' as that 'pursues these weapons [of mass destruction] and exports terror'; claims Iran completely rejected.[121] Heradstveit and Bonham explain that the 'Axis of Evil' metaphor had a significant effect on Iranian political discourse and seriously undermined the position of reformers, who wished to engage with the USA and thus strengthened the position of conservatives within the Iranian government. The speech came just before the twenty third anniversary of the revolution. This context enabled conservatives to refocus the Iranian people as they demonstrated against Bush's comments and the USA in general. [122] In terms of Identity this seemingly unprovoked, from the Iranian point of view, attack on Iran re-legitimised the use of past American transgressions to define, shape and strengthen the Iranian identity. This was the practice that was seemingly revoked in part by Rafsanjani, through education and wholly by Khatami through seeking reconciliation and dialogue with the USA. The failure of the reform movement and the resurgence of anti-US feeling in Iran arguably contributed to the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a hardliner [123] whose speeches at the UN on Iran's controversial nuclear programme and holocaust denial continue to anger Western countries and arguably reinforce the negative identity that has been purported by the USA.[124]

The Reform Movement in Iran offered real hope that relations with the USA could change and that Iran's post-revolutionary anti-Western identity could be revoked. However it backfired, perhaps as result of entrenched attitudes in each country and a mutual mistrust that could not be expunged by the efforts of Rafsanjani, Clinton and Khatami. The tentative reconciliation process was finally and firmly sabotaged by US President George W Bush and his "Axis of Evil" speech despite Khatami's attempts to support the 'war on terror.' [125] This turn of events 'killed off dialogue with the United States' as well as strengthening the belief the USA is a historic threat to the country. The backlash that followed re-opened old wounds in Iran and paved the way for the election of a new President, Ahmadinejad, whose hard-line approach would restore Iran's post-revolutionary, anti-US identity, harden US attitudes towards Iran and further destabilise Iran's relationship with the USA.

## Chapter Five

### *What effect has this identity formation had on the Nuclear Issue between the USA and Iran?*

This chapter seeks to establish to what extent Iran's Identity has informed its actions over the nuclear issue. The aim will not be to establish whether or not Iran is building nuclear weapons, but rather to explore both Iran and the USA's responses to the nuclear programme. As Beenman explains that in order to understand the nuclear problem between Iran and the USA one must realise that 'Iran's possible development of nuclear weapons is not the principle issue.' [126] Iran's nuclear programme is a highly contentious issue between Iran and the USA and unless it can be resolved it will be almost impossible for Iran and the USA to have productive relations. Reconciliation of Iran's nuclear programme is not just important for Iran-USA relations but also regional stability and security. Many analysts believe that if a resolution is not reached the USA will consider taking military action against Iran to instigate regime change. This is arguably the worst outcome as it would further reinforce the postcolonial aspects of Iranian identity, solidify support for the Supreme Leader and increase Iran's offensive and hostile attitude toward the Western world. I will start by giving a brief history of Iran's nuclear programme and explain why the USA finds its existence so abhorrent. It will then be appropriate to examine how both parties have acted in the way that they have and what aspects of their identity have contributed to this behaviour.

In order to understand the importance of the nuclear issue between Iran and the USA it is appropriate to briefly examine the history of Iran's nuclear programme. Iran wished to acquire nuclear capabilities as early as 1957. In this year it signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with the USA and was provided with several kilograms of enriched uranium and technical assistance.[127] This was at a time when Iran was still ruled by the Pahlavi regime under the Shah. The USA was using Iran to help police the Persian Gulf it was in its best interests for Iran to have a nuclear programme.[128] This was a direct result of President Eisenhower's 'atoms for peace' initiative. He believed that if allies of the USA had peaceful nuclear programmes it would reduce the chance of nuclear war.[129] After the 1979 revolution however Iran's nuclear programme faltered because the new regime had ideological objections to it. The

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Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini even issued a fatwa, a religious ruling, against nuclear weapons.[130] However this position changed after the Iran-Iraq war. El-Masri explains that after this time its nuclear programme was restarted, both as a deterrent but also to satisfy the energy needs for re-building the country after the war.[131] So we can see that the USA played an integral role in the establishment of Iran's nuclear programme both at its inception and through its involvement in the Iran-Iraq war which motivated its re-establishment.

Iran is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as of 1968.[132] This is significant because the treaty is designed to reduce the number of nuclear weapons made and prevent any more from being produced. It also gives states without any nuclear capabilities access to the technology and expertise to have domestic nuclear power. They are able to have this nuclear power technology on the condition that it is not used to develop nuclear weapons. Only the original powers named in the Treaty could possess nuclear weapons.[133] This agreement is hugely important as nuclear technology is 'dual use' meaning it is possible for domestic nuclear technology to be turned into nuclear weaponry.[134] Dual use potential is key to understanding this issue. Although Iran has claimed numerous times that its programme is purely for peaceful purposes the USA continues to argue that Iran has the potential to build nuclear weapons and the desire to use them.

A further argument against Iran having a nuclear programme is its proven reserves of gas and oil, the second and third largest proven reserves in the world respectively.[135] With such significant energy reserves it could be argued that developing a nuclear energy programme is superfluous but the price of gas and oil is such that it is said to be much more financially beneficial for Iran to use nuclear power for its domestic power needs and export the oil and gas. [136]

It is now appropriate to review the USA's response to Iran's nuclear programme. I will argue that due to the 'pariah' status that the USA has constructed for Iran, it cannot comprehend Iran's nuclear programme to be peaceful. The majority of the US population believe Iran to be a long term threat (65%).[137] As such Iran is treated with suspicion with regard to its nuclear programme but the same doubts do not seem to be applied to other countries suspected of developing nuclear weapons countries suspected of developing nuclear weapons. India and Israel are both believed to possess nuclear weapons and are not signatories of the NPT meaning they are under no obligation to declare their weapons or have their facilities inspected. Despite this the USA retains close diplomatic ties with both countries.[138] Hayes explains that the relationship between USA and India is as a result of the USA perceiving it to have a democratic identity, like its own and unlike Iran which is seen as undemocratic.[139] I would argue that Iran being viewed as undemocratic is just a small part of the identity constructed for it by the USA which informs its response to the nuclear issue. For instance the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has long been a strong ally of the USA and is a monarchy not a democracy.[140]

When Iran's cumulative revolutionary identity is considered it can be used to explain its attitude toward its development of a nuclear programme and the way it reacts to the USA's suspicions. An independent poll taken in 2008 suggested that around 90% of Iranians favour having civilian nuclear energy and believe that having a fully functioning nuclear cycle is important.[141] Iran has always maintained that it is not building nuclear weapons and that its nuclear programme is purely for domestic energy purposes. President Ahmadinejad has explained that Iran's nuclear programme is non-negotiable and that any talks should 'be based on justice and respect' and this means that 'you [the West] have to climb down from your ivory towers and put aside your arrogance' [142] Ahmadinejad has also stated that 'We don't need nuclear weapons... it's not a part of our programmes and plans' and that nuclear weapons are 'a fire against humanity'.[143] However Iran has not submitted to the most stringent monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the body that regulates members of the NPT and promotes peaceful nuclear technology. It can be argued that this is a consequence of Iran's mistrust of the USA in particular and the West in general. I believe Iran's attitude toward the nuclear issue can best be summed up in by the words of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei speaking in 2007:

'Why may you ask, should we adopt an offensive stance? Are we at war with the world? No, this is not the meaning. We believe the world owes us something. Over the issue of the colonial policies of the colonial world, we are owed something.... Over the issue of provoking internal conflicts in Iran and arming with various types of weapons, the world is answerable to us. Over the issue of proliferation of nuclear weapons, chemical weapons and biological

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weapons, the world owes us something.'[144]

The power of the Supreme Leader is pervasive, the constitution states that he is in charge of the 'the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran' which means that he sets the direction of all domestic and foreign policy.[145] His words demonstrate categorically that Iran wants to have nuclear power despite the reaction of the international community.

The impasse between the USA and Iran over the nuclear issue can, I believe, be attributed to the 'evil' pariah state identity constructed for Iran by the USA and to Iran's anger at the inconsistency of the USA's approach to the development of nuclear programmes in other countries to which they are allied. The USA has continued to pursue a containment strategy, encouraging international sanctions against Iran while applying sanctions of their own. Iran on the other hand has felt victimised by the USA especially in light of the USA's tolerance of the civilian and military programmes of countries who are not signatories of the NPT. This could explain why Iran does not allow the most stringent inspections of its nuclear facilities. It could also explain why Iran continues to pursue a nuclear programme despite international opinion and sanctions. It is seen as their right and duty, indeed it is enshrined in the NPT, and they have no reason to want to give it up especially as the pressure comes from a state that is considered 'the great Satan'.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has tried to stand 'apart from the prevailing order and asks how that order came about'. [146] I have used identity and the origins of its construction to try to understand why Iran and the USA have adopted polarised positions over Iran's nuclear programme. I believe the current situation has its origins in a sequence of events that informed the relationship between Iran and the USA in the twentieth century and that the colonial actions of Britain are also implicated. This cycle of actions informed by identity or perceived identity further reinforcing the identities can be seen as an enduring feature of Iran-USA relations

Britain's imperialist actions during both World Wars and in the Anglo-Iranian oil company. Encouraged Iran to turn away from its traditionally ally toward the USA hoping to find sympathy and support for its post-colonial resistance as the USA too had to fight for independence from the British. We can see proof of this post-colonial resistance in the election of President Mosaddeq who fully endorsed and supported the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian oil company in which the British treated workers like colonial subjects and profited far more from the oil than Iran. However, the expectations of Mosaddeq and indeed the Iranian people that the USA would be sympathetic were misplaced. Instead the US joined a boycott of Iranian oil and later supported a coup to remove the President whose popularity and power was a threat to the Shah. The Shah's increasing closeness to the USA angered the Iranian people who came to see the USA as akin to imperialist Britain. This, as well a corrupt and distant regime, led to the 1979 revolution which overthrew the Shah, removed the influence of the USA and established a new anti-US regime.

The 1979 revolution and the installation of Ayatollah Khomeini as Supreme Leader was a culmination of post-colonial resistance which built the revolutionary identity which continues to inform Iran's actions. It also laid the foundations for the USA to construct an identity for Iran as a 'pariah' state.

In the period of 1979-1997 we can see that Iran actively reinforced its revolutionary identity through the hostage crisis and its continued objection to Israel and support of anti-Israeli groups. These actions intensified the negative identity the USA constructed for Iran and led to the USA supporting Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war as well as its callous response to what the USA claimed was the accidental shooting down of an Iranian domestic airliner killing 290 people. This in turn further strengthened Iran's anti-US revolutionary identity. This repeating pattern of action and reaction continues to fuel the two countries' attitudes and behaviours but at one point it did seem possible that the cycle could be broken.

The reform period and the surprise election of President Khatami over conservative candidates, offered a real

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opportunity to diminish the anti-US nature of Iranian identity and the negative identity ascribed to Iran by the USA. Significantly President Khatami reconciled the USA and Iran's identity by explaining that a lot could be learnt from them and that they were both great civilisations. He appeared on American television coherently explaining the historic reasons why Iran had been hostile toward the US. He also recognised that in order to have constructive dialogue Iran must recognise the past actions that contributed to the USA's negative attitude toward them and he, apologised for, among other things the hostage crisis. Advances were made on the American side with the USA apologising for the 1953 coup and for supporting Iraq against Iran in the war. This presented a real opportunity to normalise relations and unpick the negative identity attributed to Iran by the USA and the anti-US identity that Iran had defined itself by since the revolution. However, the process of reconciliation was brought to a halt by the election of a new US President, George W Bush who had no interest in pursuing relations with Iran. Indeed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, and despite Iran's subsequent attempts to support the President's 'war on terror', Iran's identity was resurrected as a 'pariah' state.

The cumulative identity of Iran, both the one it constructs for itself and USA's interpretation of it, is demonstrated in both countries' actions over the nuclear issue. Iran's nuclear programme was started with the help of the USA during the time of the Shah when Iran was still a strong ally. Ideological objections to nuclear development led to its suspension after the 1979 Revolution but it was restarted after the Iran-Iraq war. The USA, from the perspective that Iran is a pariah state, has condemned Iran's nuclear programme and accused it of building nuclear weapons. Iran on the other hand insists that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes and that it has a right under international law to pursue it. In a clear manifestation of its post-colonial and revolutionary identity which centres on independence and resistance to imperialism, Iran continues with its nuclear programme despite sanctions imposed on it directly or indirectly by the USA. Iran arguably views attacks on its nuclear programme as an imperial attempt by the West, and more significantly the USA, to control its internal affairs. As the Supreme Leader Khamenei stated 'over the issue of proliferation of nuclear weapons, chemical weapons and biological weapons, the world owes us something.' [147] Until this attitude softens and the identity of Iran can accommodate dialogue with the USA, a solution to the nuclear issue cannot be reached. However the USA also needs to understand why Iran is hostile to it and modify its own attitude before steps can be taken towards reconciliation.

This relatively short study can only provide a brief account of how the interactions between Iran and the USA have contributed to both Iran's revolutionary identity and the 'pariah' identity ascribed to it by the USA and hypothesise how this has made cooperation over the nuclear issue impossible. In order to acquire a greater understanding of this issue, it would be appropriate to conduct a longer study, again using the a critical approach, which would also examine the USA's individual identity, both the one it constructs for itself and the one other countries on a world stage have constructed for it. This longer study should include both primary and secondary research in each country and examine further how domestic politics have affected the internal and external identities of both the USA and Iran and consequently their relationship with each other, especially with regard to the nuclear issue. I believe that further study is essential if there is to be any hope of these two countries reconciling their differences.

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