In Other Wor(l)ds: The establishment of and withdrawal from the JCPOA analysed through the discursive construction of US Self and Iranian Other identities in US foreign policy discourse

Lutz, Eden

In Other Wor(l)ds

The establishment of and withdrawal from the JCPOA analysed through the discursive

construction of US Self and Iranian Other identities in US foreign policy discourse

MA Thesis

MA International Relations: Global Conflict in the Modern Era

Leiden University

Eden Lutz (s2304821)

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Gawthorpe

21/01/2022

Word count: 14987

Abstract

In the past decade, the relationship between the United States and Iran has been through significant changes, particularly playing out in the realm of nuclear proliferation. The establishment of the landmark Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) under the Obama administration, thought to be the start of a new chapter of US-Iran relations, was uprooted by the Trump administration almost immediately after the change in leadership. In order to understand how this radical policy shift is possible, this thesis analyses and compares the policy discourses on Iran of the Obama and Trump administration in terms of Self-Other identity construction. Taking a poststructuralist approach to policy discourse analysis, the ontological link between discursive identity and policy decision making is the central subject of study. The thesis concludes that the decisions to establish and withdraw from the JCPOA are constituted by discourses which in fact construct a highly similar radical Self-Other relationship between the US and Iran, within which the US is positioned as having to change the behaviour of the Iranian regime as arbiter of the Middle East and ally of the Iranian people. Crucially, they differ when it comes to the use of orientalist binaries, the capacity for change attributed to the Iranian regime (temporal identity) and the position of the US vis-a-vis the international community (ethical-spatial identity), which is congruent with the diverging policy decisions on the JCPOA.

Table of contents

Introduction

" I am convinced that whoever is our next president will see the wisdom of this agreement and they will leave it in place." - John Kerry, July 14, 2015

In July 2015, a historic step was made in the global pursuit of nuclear non-proliferation when the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United Nations Security Council P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and the European Union reached an agreement under the title "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" (JCPOA). More commonly referred to as the "Iran deal", "Iran nuclear deal", or برجام (*BARJAM*), the plan contained a detailed roadmap according to which Iran was to dismantle much of its nuclear program and give inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) extensive access to its facilities in exchange for a rollback of economic sanctions. Given the deep antagonism that had characterised the relationship between the US and Iran since the 1979 Iranian revolution, the JCPOA was a remarkable gear change by then-president Barack Obama, sparking controversy and resistance both within the US and outside. However, the deal did not last: in 2018, president Donald Trump announced a unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and the reinstatement of sanctions. The remaining signatories have since attempted to keep the agreement alive, but the deterioration of relations between the US and the Iran over the last few years, as well as the hegemonic power of the American economic sanctions, have led to a gradual erosion of the progress made under JCPOA (Laub & Robinson, 2020). As of 2022, the JCPOA is under renegotiation under newly elected presidents Joe Biden and Ebrahim Raisi, but its future is growing ever more uncertain.

How is it possible that such radical policy shifts occur? It is not satisfactory to just point towards partisan differences of perspective without inquiring where they originate. Between 2015 and 2018, no major changes took place in the Iranian political landscape, and there was no

suggestion of transgression of the limitations placed on the nuclear program or unwillingness to cooperate with the IAEA (Fitzpatrick, 2019), so it could not just be an issue of changing strategical calculation - especially since those critical of the JCPOA already voiced their concerns at the moment of its establishment. Mainstream IR approaches, which focus on the power balance between sovereign states and operate on positivist assumptions, can thus not conclusively answer this question.

To understand the change in perspective between the Obama and Trump administration, policy discourse and security narratives are key. Their policy decisions regarding the JCPOA are accompanied by different, competing narratives about Iran as a security actor. This thesis is based on the argument that different discursive constructions of identity can produce and/or legitimise different courses of decision making in the geopolitical policy arena. It will dissect and compare the policy discourses on Iran produced by the Obama and the Trump administration in order to understand how it is possible that the JCPOA was established, and, just three years later, discarded.

In order to do this, this thesis answers the following research question: What are the continuities and changes in the discursive construction of Self-Other identities within the foreign policy discourse on the United States-Iran relationship between the Obama and the Trump administration? The thesis is structured as follows: the literature review provides an overview of academic literature investigating this relationship, paying special attention to the JCPOA. Next, the methodology section introduces the poststructuralist approach to policy discourse analysis, which provides the theoretical framework for this research, and describes the specifics of the methods of data collection and analysis. The analysis comprises three chapters: the first devoted to historical context and representations, the second to the Obama administration discourse, and the third to the Trump administration discourse.

Finally, the conclusion summarises and weighs the main argument of this thesis, which is that that the decisions to establish and withdraw from the JCPOA are constituted by discourses

which construct a very similar radical Self-Other relationship between the US and Iran, within which the US is positioned as having to change the behaviour of the Iranian regime as arbiter of the Middle East and ally of the Iranian people. Crucially, they differ when it comes to the use of orientalist binaries, the capacity for change attributed to the Iranian regime (temporal identity) and the position of the US vis-a-vis the world community (ethical-spatial identity). These differences are congruent with the respective policy decisions to establish and withdraw from the JCPOA.

Literature review

This literature review summarises and categorises contemporary IR scholarship on the US-Iran relationship, with a special section devoted to research pertaining to the JCPOA, specifically, because it is the policy event that this thesis focuses on. Through this overview, it becomes clear how this thesis builds on existing knowledge about the discursive Self-Other structure of the US-Iran relationship by dissecting and comparing the discourse of the Obama and Trump administration on specific dimensions. In this way, it analyses how the continuities and changes in identity construction constitute and are constituted by particular policy making decisions: the establishment and the withdrawal of the JCPOA.

The US-Iran relationship in contemporary scholarship

In analyzing future possibilities for US grand strategy in the Gulf region, and towards Iran in particular, Wolf (2018) takes four primary interests for the US in the Middle East as a a point of departure: energy security (specifically the extraction and distribution of oil), nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and the security of the state of Israel. He outlines various options for future US foreign policy, ranging from rollback to engagement. Similar strategic analyses have been produced over the course of the last 15 years by a variety of authors, both from academia and military intelligence (including but not limited to: Albarasneh & Khatib, 2019; Davari, 2020; Edelman & Takeyh, 2020; Jesse, 2011; Joobani & Daheshvar, 2020; McFaul, Milani & Diamond, 2007). Overall, these treatments of U.S.-Iranian relations are quite narrowly focused on advising U.S. policymakers. What unites these assessments is how they take American and Iranian interests as a (material) given, and naturally at odds. Their overall point of departure is that US strategy towards Iran is not only concerned with its foreign policy, but also with its regime type and internal affairs, and the interaction between the three. Moreover, whatever policy choices are recommended, from maximum pressure to sanction relief and restoring full diplomatic relations, they ultimately seek to

achieve a similar end in terms of US interests: far reaching changes in Iran's behaviour, both internally and externally.

More post-positivist appreciations of the US-Iran relationship have enriched this body of knowledge, going beyond questions of power balance, military capacity, the effectiveness of sanctions and diplomatic dialogue, and the desirability of regime change. They focus instead on the representation of Iran within the context of foreign policy making, recognizing that security and interests are not just material givens, but discursively constructed. Kadkhodaee and Tari (2019) describe, by means of a critical discourse analysis of post-JCPOA US Congressional hearings on sanctions relief, how Iran is discursively constructed, Otherised and securitised as a "irrational", "radical" and "barbaric" entity in order to justify and legitimise sanctions and other unilateral policy decisions. Their observations are indicative of the role discourse on Iran plays in US foreign policy making, as well as the character of that discourse: a subject that has gotten a fair share of attention over the past few decades, mostly in the post-9/11 context. Examples include but are not limited to: the role of emotions in the US-Iran relationship (Reinke de Buitrago, 2016); the securitisation of Iran by American media (Amin, 2020); the friend-enemy conjunction in representations of the US and Iran (Adib-Moghaddam, 2009); the role of terrorism in the respective national narratives (Tirman, 2009); and the process of securitisation in connection with orientalist discourse (Murray, 2014).

Altogether, this variety of post-positivist approaches to understanding the US-Iran relationship establish the relevance of studying the various discourses and security narratives in US public discourse about Iran, and how it is structured by Self-Other dichotomies. Going beyond assumptions about pre-given, opposed interests, these discursively constructed identities thus play an important role in shaping shared understandings of the US-Iran relationship. This thesis expands the understanding of this notion by dissecting and comparing the discourse of the Obama and Trump administration in a more detailed way, in order to not just uncover these discursively constructed identities, but also theorise their link to policy making.

JCPOA

When it comes to scholarship focusing on the JCPOA itself, the same rough epistemological divide can be made as in the previous section. A variety of analyses are available dissecting the negotiations, the details of the agreement and its advantages and vulnerabilities (for example Fitzpatrick, 2019; Norell, 2015; Samore, 2015; Sebenius & Singh, 2012; Tertrais, 2015). However, given that this thesis takes a post-positivist approach, it is most important to highlight previous instances of this type of scholarship on the establishment of and the withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Sonnevend (2019) notes the central role that foreign minister Javad Zarif played in attempting to influence the US public opinion about Iran with the diplomatic technique of a 'charm offensive', demonstrating the importance of images and narratives in political decision making. Opperman and Spencer (2017) analyse 2015 Congressional debates to explicate the structure of the competing narratives that constitute the Iran nuclear deal as a US foreign policy success or failure. Arena (2021) builds on the analysis by Opperman and Spencer to specify how Obama successfully used certain arguments, not to establish a completely new narrative, but by presenting the deal in a stark contrast to the alternative: war. These analyses hold a great deal of valuable insights on the social construction and discursive contestation of this foreign policy issue. However, they do not explore the specifics of the construction of Iran's identity as an antagonist or a negotiating partner, but rather focus on the internal political debate and the way the proponents and opponents construct themselves, each other and the specifics of the JCPOA.

Solomon (2020) comes closer to the issue of identity, as he explores the role of emotional beliefs in the establishment of JCPOA, particularly regarding status: he notes the importance of the historical traumas between the two countries, how nuclear weapons can be felt as an important status symbol, and how status is linked to identity and ontological security. This analysis explains why nuclear proliferation has been an area in US-Iran relations in which the link between identity and policy has become especially salient, and again emphasises the importance of discourse in

complementing our understanding of material realities and interests. Of course, this can also be said with regard to Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA: Nourani et al. (2020) show, with their analysis of tweets and speeches, how Trump used strategies of moral evaluation and rationalisation in his effort to delegitimise the JCPOA. However, their analysis again focuses more on the discourse about the deal itself, rather than the discursive construction of the identity of the US and Iran along the Self-Other structure.

It is thus established that the JCPOA is discursively contested, but the theoretical link between identity and policymaking in this area is underdeveloped. When it comes to the withdrawal by the Trump administration, the relative novelty has also meant an overall lack of analysis. This thesis rectifies this by comparing the discourse from the Obama and the Trump administration, not just focusing on the JCPOA as an internal American policy issue, but analysing it as a policy event constituted by the discursive construction of the US and Iran in terms of Self-Other identities.

Methodology

This methodology section comprises three parts: first, it introduces poststructuralist policy discourse analysis; then, it outlines the specifics of the analytical framework; and finally, it explains the method of the data collection and analysis of this thesis.

Discursive construction of identity and foreign policymaking

This thesis is situated in the critical post-positivist research tradition that focuses on the constitution of meaning and the production of spaces of (im)possibility for political action (Doty, 1993, pp. 298-300). Central to the question it aims to answer is the social construction of Iran and the US and how this relates to US foreign policymaking (for a similar argument, see Renner & Spencer, 2013). Thus, its primary theoretical interest is in the investigation of discourse, which is understood to be the central constitutive category of social reality, as "[i]t is through discourse that individuals, societies, and states make sense of themselves, of their ways of living, and of the world around them" (Epstein, 2008, p. 2).

Specifically, following the poststructuralist work of Hansen (2006), this thesis focuses on the discursive stability between (foreign) policy and identity. Identity is conceptualised as being discursively constructed and inherently political, as well as relational (given through reference to something it is not) and social (constituted collectively) (Hansen, 2006, p. 6). To understand identity in this way implies that foreign policy discursively constructs a *Self* and a series of *Others*: with regards to security discourse, specifically, this juxtaposition is informed by the delineation between the national (Self*)* and the international (threatening Others) (id., p. 30). This thesis focuses on the identities of the US Self and the Iranian Other as constructed by US policy discourses, which can be linked to the policy outcomes of the establishment of and withdrawal from the JCPOA.

It is important to specify that the relationship between identity and policy should be characterised as constitutive or performative rather than causal, "as representations of identity are

simultaneously the precondition for and (re)produced through articulations of policy" (Hansen, 2006, p. 9). In other words, the post-structuralist approach understands there to be an ontological link between policy and identity, which is enacted through discourse (id., p. 24). In order to be able to present a foreign policy that appears legitimate and enforceable to its relevant audience, a link between policy and identity is constructed that makes the two appear consistent with each other (id., p. 25). It is this link that is under investigation in this thesis.

Defining identity in relational terms: a theoretical framework based on linking and differentiation

The poststructuralist approach to policy discourse analysis as developed by Hansen (2006) takes the explicit articulation of the Self and Others' identities within a web of signs as its methodological starting point (p. 37). In order to map this out, it makes use of two analytical dimensions conceptualised by Laclau and Mouffe's logics of equivalence and difference (1985): the positive *process of linking* and the negative *process of differentiation*. These occur simultaneously in identity construction, as demonstrated in Figure 1.1 and 1.2 with the example of "man" and "woman".
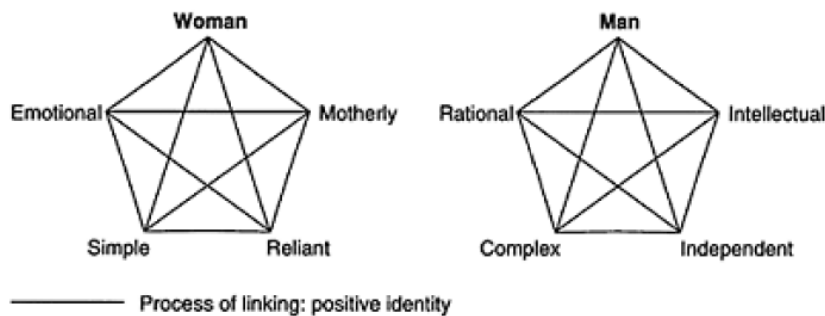

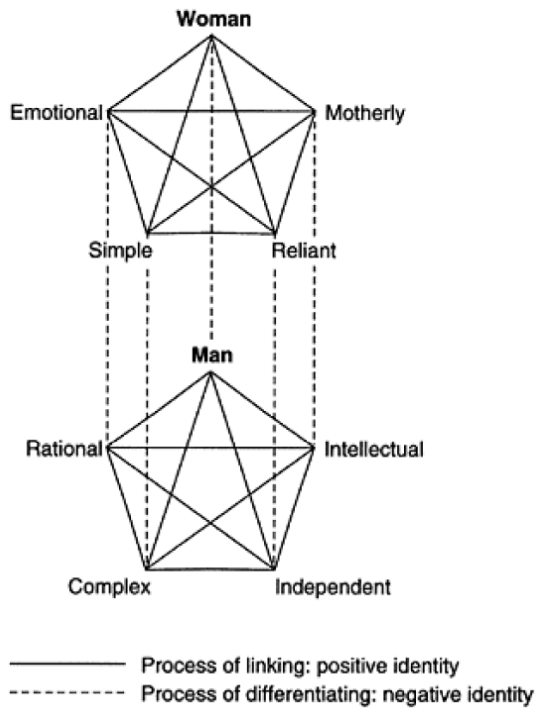*Figure 1.1: Process of linking (Hansen, 2006, p. 17)*

Figure 1.2: Linking and differentiation (Hansen, 2006, p. 18)

These figures illustrate how identities are discursively constructed within a web of signs, which are linked or juxtaposed to construct the Self and Other.

In order to develop this process of identity construction into a theoretical framework for policy discourse analysis, Hansen (2006) points out that it is important to allow for different 'degrees of Otherness' instead of assuming radical difference construction *a priori* (p. 36). This means that the Self-Other dichotomy in foreign policy discourse can draw upon more ambiguous or complex constructions of difference, rather than one of static, radically opposed existential threat: the dynamics of antagonism, superiority and inferiority, and other related identities can vary and change (ibid.). In order to make analytical sense of identity construction, then, the dimensions of spatiality, temporality and ethicality are key (id., p. 41).

The *spatiality* of identity refers to the understanding that it is always relationally constituted, and thus involves the construction of boundaries and thereby the delineation of space: spatial identities can thus be territorially bounded, such as 'Iran', or more complex, 'the Middle

East', 'the West', but can also refer to abstract political space, boundaries and subjectivities, such as 'the international community', 'civilization', 'terrorists' (id., pp. 42-43). The *temporality* of identity draws focus to themes such as development, transformation, continuity, change, repetition, and stasis: often, the possibility for (political, civilizational, etc.) progress or the quality of intransigence are central to identity construction, such as that of global development discourse (id., pp 43-44). Closely linked to this is the *ethicality* of identity, which is based in the argument that foreign policy discourses always involve a discursive construction of ethics, morality, and responsibility: this is central to understanding legitimisation of foreign policy and identity construction, the moral force of a representation such as 'humanitarian intervention', and "the Self's articulation of (non)responsibility toward the Other" (id., pp. 44-45).

Combined, the analytical concern with degrees of difference and Otherness and the three dimensions of identity construction form a theoretical framework that allows for a meaningful understanding of foreign policy discourse and the continuity and change within it. By focusing on the way Selves and Others are constituted, how radical the difference between them is, and how this difference is constituted through the articulation of spatial, temporal, and ethical identity, discursive differences, similarities, and changes in the link between identity and policy can be studied.

Research design

This thesis focuses on the discursive construction of Iran during the Obama and the Trump administration, but the discourse of these administrations is not isolated: in order to be able to dissect it, awareness of the historical discursive construction of Iran prior to the period under investigation is essential. It is possible to identify historical articulations of spatial, temporal, and ethical identity as well as constitutions of the Other and its relationship to the Self using historical material (Hansen, 2006, p. 47). However, it is beyond the scope of this research to include seminal historical texts in the analysis or conduct a comprehensive critical genealogy using primary

sources. Rather, the first chapter of the analysis uses historical overviews and existing discourse analyses from academic literature in order to establish a basis for the primary analysis. This will provide vital context, as these historical discourses provide an intertextual foundation for the basic discourses identified within the primary study.

The selection of texts for the primary research is governed by three criteria: they are characterised by the clear articulation of identities and policies, which makes them suitable for analysis; they are widely read and attended to, which ensures that they occupy a central role in defining dominant discourses; and they have the formal authority to define a political position, which signals the position of power of the speaker that is key to the policy dimension (Hansen, 2006, p. 76). By using only speeches, press conferences and statements by either the presidents themselves or high ranking officials from their administration (Vice President, Secretary of State etc.), the second and third criteria are met. These were taken from two sources: the largest part was obtained from the American Presidency Project Archives, which holds collections of presidential documents. For both the Obama presidency (January 20, 2009 - January 20, 2017) and the Trump presidency (January 20, 2017 - January 20, 2021), I searched the database using only the term "Iran". From the results, an initial selection was made based on title/subject (only those specifically on Iran or Middle East foreign policy and by the president or his administration). I further optimised this by examining the content, taking into consideration factors like length and relevance in accordance with the first criterion for textual selection: clear articulation of identities and policies. It was then supplemented with resources taken from the respective administration's archived State department websites, in order to include relevant speeches from key government officials such as the secretaries of state. Altogether, this resulted in a collection of 66 texts for analysis, which can be found in Appendix A.

From these texts, key phrases and passages were collected and thematically grouped for the analysis. For each administration (chapter 2 and 3 respectively) the analysis seeks to map out how identities are constructed through processes of linking and differentiating and analyse them in terms

of degrees of otherness and their spatiality, temporality and ethicality. The analyses of the discourse through this framework are compared and contrasted in order to recognise the continuity and the change between the discursive representations of Iran and the US from the Obama administration and the Trump administration and link this to the policy decisions of establishing and withdrawing from the JCPOA.

Chapter 1: Historical representations

This section makes use of historical overviews and existing discourse analyses from academic literature in order to establish a basis for the primary analysis. The discourses of the Obama and Trump administration do not exist in a vacuum: they build upon existing themes and structures and should be understood in historical and geographical context. The chapter starts out with a section explaining the relevance of orientalism to the discursive construction of identities in the US-Iran relationship through the application of three orientalist Self-Other dichotomies: civilised-barbaric, decent-rogue, and rational-irrational. The second section positions the US-Iran relationship in its regional, global and ideological context, by discussing the Middle East as a regional security complex, the way the US positions itself vis-a-vis this region and as part of the international community, and how the War on Terror contributed to the development of an ideological dimension to this dynamic.

Orientalism

The critical concept of orientalism is central to the analysis of the construction of the US and Iran. Coined by Said (1978), this concept is used to dissect the discursive relationship between the West and the East, as produced and perpetuated by the West since the emergence of imperialism and colonialism. The following quote highlights how this power relation is manifested in the production of knowledge on the East:

> "Many terms were used to express the relation […]. The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal." But the way of enlivening the relationship was everywhere to stress the fact that the Oriental lived in a different but thoroughly organized world of his own, a world with its own national, cultural, and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence. Yet what gave the Oriental's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West. […] Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world." (Said, 1978, p. 40)

Some previous analyses of the discursive construction of Iran that employ the lens of orientalism have been discussed in the literature review, but the purpose of this chapter is to synthesise and contextualise the discursive signs they have flagged, in order to be able to consider intertextuality in the primary analysis. The Self-Other structure of US-Iran identity construction in the US public discourse has a clear orientalist dimension (Duncombe, 2015). Three dichotomies that express this are civilised-barbaric, decent-rogue and rational-irrational.

While intimately familiar with 19th and 20th century Western imperialism, it is important to acknowledge that Iran is not a postcolonial state. Rather, its origin myth relates back to the pre-Islamic Persian empire - of which the history and imagery was emphasised and utilised by not only the Pahlavi shahs, but also many Iranian nationalists today. The 1979 Iranian revolution and the resulting Islamic regime are constructed in juxtaposition to this history: the contrast between the "Persian greatness" embodied by the shahs' Iran and the religious extremism of the Islamic republic is emphasised, as if the two are completely distinct entities of which only the first is legitimate and authentic (Duncombe, 2015, p. 632). This dynamic of authenticity is also transferred to the juxtaposition between the Iranian government and the Iranian people (ibid.). Key to this 'authentic', 'Persian' historical representation of Iran/the Iranian people are the implied discursive signs 'civilized/civilization' and 'progressive/modern', and the way in which it subverts the importance of Shi'ism/Islam in Iranian history and identity (ibid.). For example, a discussion on the issue of human rights in Iran today can explicitly or implicitly relate back to the Cyrus cylinder - 'the world's oldest human rights charter'. Thus, the civilised-barbaric dichotomy is not only present in the spatial construction of the US Self and the Iranian Other, but also reinforced by the temporal narrative of a 'once great civilization'.

Another strand of discourse that should be highlighted is that which Homolar (2011) terms the 'rogue states' security narrative. The concept 'rogue state' is mostly associated with post-9/11 defence policy (often being linked directly to Bush's 'axis of evil' speech), and refers to the US's singular focus on "a security threat represented by militarily inferior and economically weak

developing states" (Homolar, 2011, p. 706). It originated and evolved in the post-Cold war context of the late 1980's and 1990's, during which the US defence policy's existential narrative was heavily contested, with the Persian Gulf crisis of 1990-1 representing one of two catalytic events (id., p. 707). As Chin-Kuei (2014) details, the construction of Iran and Iraq as rogue states in US terrorism discourse took shape during the Clinton administration, in conjunction with its development of a 'dual-containment strategy', which designated Iran and Iraq as the main post-Cold War enemies of the US in the Middle East. He traces the genealogical development from Reagan's "outlaw states" (vs. the US as "frontier hero") to "backlash states", to Clinton's "rogue states", to Bush's "axis of evil" (Chin-Kuei, 2014, pp. 3-13).

To denominate the Other as a 'rogue state' heavily implies the Self to be the opposite: i.e. lawful, straight, decent. The consequences that this ethical juxtaposition has for the organisation of the international order are considered by Corrias (2014), who argues that in the international legal order, which presumes equality between sovereign states, 'rogue' states in fact have considerably fewer rights than 'decent' states. Most interestingly, their external sovereignty is questioned by the way in which their internal sovereignty is exercised (Corrias, 2014, p. 46). This notion is also known as 'Third World Sovereignty': as Natarjan (2011) explains through the case of Iraq, the heritage of imperialism/colonialism lives on in the international legal order through the continued dynamic of relating to the Third World or periphery ('failed' and 'rogue' states) through efforts of construction and reconstruction. The US interference in Iranian domestic politics of 1953 and the post-9/11 'regime change' line advocated by neoconservative US politicians should thus also be mentioned in this context. Furthermore, Corrias details how the associated discourse locates rogue states not just within the realm of 'otherness', but specifically in that of 'strangeness' or 'alienness', as the alien is "outside our categories in spite of the fact that it is clearly there, thus questioning the order we deem vital for living a decent (or a better) human life" (Roermund, 2006, p. 335, as cited in Corrias, 2014, p. 39).

The rogue state label is discursively linked to a number of other orientalist Self/Other dichotomies. Especially relevant is that of rational-irrational, although this should again be understood in the context of the Third World Sovereignty dynamic. As Homolar (2014) concludes:

> "What lies at the core of the US conception of rogue states as irrational actors is not their behaviour in international affairs per se, such as the development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring or engaging in terrorist acts. Rather, in the contemporary US defence policy context, how states treat their own populations has evolved as the crucial marker to determine whether they are recognized by US policymakers as 'rational' actors in international affairs." (Homolar, 2014, p. 721)

This rational-irrational dichotomous structure is one of the most important discursive signs in the US construction of Iran. As Duncombe (2015) explains, it is especially salient within the context of nuclear proliferation: with sanctions as its primary strategy as a great power, the US is preoccupied with trying to understand the cost-benefit calculation Iran makes with regard to its nuclear programme - for which is makes considerable sacrifices in terms of state welfare, which appears irrational to many (pp. 630-631).

What becomes clear from the discussion of these dichotomies, is that orientalist markers such as civilization, rogueness, and rationality are key to the otherisation of Iran in US public discourse. They are also expressed in the distinction between the Iranian regime and the Iranian people, as well as the structuration of the international order, which is explored further in the next section.

Regional, global and ideological context

A key spatial marker for Iran is the Middle East as a regional security complex. It is thus also important to discuss US foreign policy and security narratives on this region as a whole, and important identities within it. Hassan (2020) establishes with a historical overview how the rise of the US as an imperial power (which seeks to control its external environment) is contingent on its ontological construction, and domination, of the Middle East, first by indirect rule supported by

regional authoritarians (such as the Iranian Shah) and later through "informal or free trade imperialism":

> "Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this logic of domination has structured the construction of the Middle East as a strategic object to be controlled. It has provided a modality of great power imperialism and provided an arc of continuity within the US rise to power." (Hassan, 2020, p. 125)

Moreover, Sinkkonen (2020) adds another layer of understanding to this by focusing specifically on order-building narratives in the post 9/11-era, which are characterised by "a rhetorical commitment to liberal hegemony - to America's continued engagement in the Middle East as a superpower guarantor of order, and to democratic principles as the foundational building blocks for achieving a sustainable order." (Abstract). US policy towards and identity construction of Iran is thus related to the context of the Middle East as a regional security complex, and how the US role in this context is constructed in terms of ethics, morality, and responsibility.

Duncombe (2015) notes that this ethical dimension is closely intertwined with the extension of the Self in the Self-Other dichotomy from the US to the 'international community'. Presenting itself as a 'world leader', a representative of the 'international society', the US positions Iran as isolated from that international community, defying international norms (Duncombe, 2015, p. 631). Casting itself in the role of a world leader in this ethical dimension, the US thus also assumes the power to determine the spatial boundaries of immorality, deviance, irrationality or threat (ibid.). This dynamic becomes extra salient in the context of nuclear proliferation, of which the stakes are inherently securitised.

The ethical-spatial deliniation and the rogue-decent dichotomy described above can be linked to the context of the War on Terror. Despite the primary military focus being on Iraq and

Afghanistan, it is also important to discuss the position that Iran takes in this discursive system. The aforementioned 'Axis of Evil' State of the Union address by George Bush in 2002 is a key speech act within this context, so it is important to regard the full quote here:

> "North Korea is a regime armed with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens. Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens, leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections, then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.

> States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic." (Bush, 2002, January 29)

A great variety of analyses of the War on Terror discourse are available. Khalid (2011) details the gendered and orientalist binaries that are invoked by situating the 'West' against the 'East', and how these function to legitimise military intervention. When it comes to Iran specifically, it is also important to highlight the way War on Terror discourse constitutes political Islam. Mullin (2011) dissects how the modern rationalist paradigm in US policymaking manifests itself in three ways in the production of the category of an islamist Other: it has the tendency to 'ideologise terror'; the tendency to conflate Islamist movements and view them solely within a security/counterterrorism framework; and the tendency to employ double standards when distinguishing between what is regarded as legitimate and illegitimate uses of political violence (p. 266). The Self-Other dynamic

that is expressed in the spatial-ethical delineation between the US/international community and Iran thus takes on the ideological good-evil dichotomy, primarily linked with the sign 'terrorism'.

This overview has clarified how the historical relationship of the US and the Middle East is characterised by US interference, and how this transformed over the decades into an ethical-spatial construction in which the US, as leader of the international community, positions itself as an establisher of order in the Middle East. The War on Terror discourse has solidified and securitised this narrative by linking the good-evil dichotomy to the US Self and the Islamist, terrorist Other, and moreover explicitly linked Iran to the latter category.

Conclusion

This chapter has emphasised two aspects of the historical formation of the discourse on the US-Iran relationship. First, it has explained how orientalist dichotomies such as civilised-barbaric, decent-rogue, and rational-irrational are key to the otherisation of Iran in US public discourse. Second, it has explored the regional context of the Middle East, the way in which the US relates to this region and the international community, and the ideological dimension that was explicitly linked to the US-Iran relationship by the War on Terror discourse. Altogether, this establishes a basis for the analysis of the Obama and Trump administration's policy discourse, which inherits these historical representations. When it comes to the discursive construction of the Iranian Other, the analysis must focus on orientalist dichotomies and the distinction between the Iranian people and the regime, as well as the use of the sign 'terrorism'. The discursive construction of the US Self must primarily be investigated with regard to the way it is positioned vis-a-vis the international community and it constructs (moral) responsibility towards the Middle East or Iran.

Chapter 2: Obama administration

This chapter deals with the policy discourse of the Obama administration. In two separate sections, the discursive construction of the key identities of Iran and the US are outlined. Quotes taken from the data are labelled with the speaker/author, date, and the number allocated to them in Appendix A. When a single word is mentioned, it is labelled with the number of one of the texts it occurs in for reference. As the first chapter concluded, the main points of attention when it comes to the otherisation of the Iranian Other are orientalist dichotomies, the distinction between the Iranian people and the regime, and the use of the sign 'terrorism'. To the US Self, it is the positioning vis a vis the international community. This analysis establishes how the Obama administration's discourse partly deradicalizes the Iranian Other with regard to its temporal identity, and spatially positions the US Self as leader of the world community, to the point where the JCPOA becomes a viable strategy to deal with the Iranian nuclear threat.

Iran

As was already established, when it comes to the manner in which Iran is constructed as an Other in US foreign policy, a very clear delineation is made between 'the Iranian government' 'the regime' or 'the Iranian leaders' on the one hand, and 'the Iranian people' on the other. The difference between them, and their position vis-a-vis the Self (the US), structures much of the discourse and is often explicitly stated, as exemplified by these quotes:

> "...even as we continue to have differences with the Iranian Government, we will sustain our commitment to a more hopeful future for the Iranian people." (Obama, March 20 2010, no. 2)

> "...the Iranian Government has responded by demonstrating that it cares far more about preserving its own power than respecting the rights of the Iranian people." (Obama, March 20 2011, no. 6)

> "Now, our quarrel has never been with the Iranian people, and we realize how deeply the
>
> nuclear-related sanctions have affected the lives of Iranians." (Kerry, July 14 2015, no. 52)

These show not only the separation of government and people into two Others, but also how they are allocated different degrees of Otherness, expressing a different relationship to the Self. When the identity is just 'Iran', more often than not, it can easily be derived from the context that it is meant as a stand-in for the Iranian government.

<u>The Iranian government</u>

First, and most importantly, the discursive construction of the Iranian leadership is mapped out. Some quotes can be highlighted to characterise the discourse:

> "And a nuclear deal reinforces our efforts to push back against Iran interference and aggression.
>
> Because as dangerous and difficult as Iran is today, just imagine what and how emboldened, a
>
> nuclear-armed Iran would be and what escalation it would sponsor in support of terrorism and
>
> militancy." (Obama, April 30, 2015, no. 21)

> "And I keep on emphasizing, we don't trust Iran. Iran is antagonistic to the United States. It is
>
> anti-Semitic. It has denied the Holocaust. It has called for the destruction of Israel. It is an unsavory
>
> regime." (Obama, August 28, 2015, no. 23)

Other signs linked to the regime are 'outlandish' (no. 4) 'increasingly desperate' (no. 9), 'isolated' (no. 24), 'twisted' (no. 23) and 'defiant' (no. 5). There is a clear ethical dimension to these descriptors, which recurs when certain actions of the Iranian government (i.e. the way Iran manifests itself in the region) are described as 'nefarious' (no. 23), 'mischief' (no. 21) 'destabilizing' (no. 21) and 'bullying' (no. 21). They function to communicate a certain level of immorality attributed to the Iranian government, reinforced by the emphasis placed on the

'responsibility' they have towards their people and the international community (no. 8).

Important related signs that bridge into spatiality are Iran's 'sponsorship' (no. 20) or 'support' (no. 22) for terrorism and its 'human rights abuses' (no. 55), which are almost always mentioned when establishing the Iranian threat in the region. These place Iran outside of the international community and outside the norm of liberal democracy, as demonstrated in these quotes:

> "These are not the behaviors of a responsible international actor, and they are not the actions of a government committed to peaceful diplomacy and a new relationship with a willing and ready partner." (Jones, April 21 2010, no. 3)

> "[This deal is] not contingent on Iran suddenly operating like a liberal democracy." (Kerry, September 2 2015, no. 53).

These spatial delineations are crucial for the discursive construction of (the government of) Iran as a radical Other. It thus becomes clear that the Obama administration does not challenge the narrative of ideological antagonism that the US-Iran relationship historically has taken on, especially through the sign 'terrorist'. However, the discourse does not employ or suggest terms like barbaric, rogue or irrational; in its construction of the Iranian regime, these orientalist dichotomies are notably uncommon.

Another important spatial identity that Iran is part of, is the Middle East, which is described as 'the most volatile region in the world' (no. 56) or 'a uniquely fragile region' (no. 53). Often with an explicit connection to the security of Israel, Iran is thus constructed not just as a part of, but also as a key actor and instigator within this region with such a specific political identity: one of 'conflict and chaos' (no. 56). However, this identity has a specific temporal quality:

> "However, I believe that we must continue to test whether or not this region, which has known so

much suffering, so much bloodshed, can move in a different direction." (Obama, July 14 2015, no. 22)

The potential for change and progress is a key theme in the Obama administration's discourse on the Middle East and Iran, which bridges into the dimension of temporality. When it comes to the temporal identity of the Iranian government, specifically, two quotes stand out.

"…it is the Iranian Government that has chosen to isolate itself and to choose a self-defeating focus on the past over a commitment to build a better future." (Obama, March 20 2010, no. 2)

"But faced with the opportunity to find a new way forward, one that would benefit its own people, the Iranian Government has chosen instead to remain a prisoner of the past." (Obama, June 9 2010, no. 4)

There is a clear picture of intransigence painted here in two early speeches, which is inherited from the historical discourse. However, later, surrounding the negotiation and establishment of the JCPOA, this temporal dichotomy becomes instead linked to the concept of choice: a returning emphasis is placed on the choice that the Iranian government must make between two paths: war and peace, the past and the future, deterioration and progress, rigidity and tolerance, etc. The capacity for change thus becomes central:

"And I will continue to work toward a new day between our nations that bears the fruit of friendship and peace." (Obama, March 18 2013, no. 10)

"It is our hope that the Iranian government will heed the will of the Iranian people and make responsible choices that create a better future for all Iranians." (Obama, June 15 2013, no. 11)

So while in terms of temporality, the Iranian government is certainly constructed as inferior, a capacity for change lies enclosed in this discursive construction of a binary choice - a rational

choice which, crucially, is being offered by the US.

This binary choice does not just mirror the separation between the Iranian government and the Iranian people, but also a certain level of complexity allowed within the identity of the Iranian government. The following quotes demonstrate this appreciation of internal political dynamics:

"It's not a bet on Iran changing its stripes. All of you know that Iran is not a monolith. There is significant debate within Iran about its future. Some want to dominate the region via militant proxies. Others want more normal relations with the outside world." (Biden, April 13 2015, no. 21)

"We should pause for a minute to contemplate what voting down this agreement might mean for Iran's cadre of hardliners, for those people in Iran who lead the chants of "Death to America," "Death to Israel," and even "Death to Rouhani," and who prosecute journalists simply for doing their jobs." (Kerry, September 2 2015, no. 53)

Interestingly, this element of complexity and agency becomes less prominent after the JCPOA is established - especially in speeches which seek to defend the agreement to its critics in the US. Then, it is again mostly the ethical dimension of trustworthiness that becomes emphasised - or rather the lack thereof, as these quotes demonstrate:

"The second argument I hear is that no deal is worth the paper it's written on, because Iran will simply cheat. And it's true that Iran could try to cheat, whether there's a deal or not. Now they didn't cheat under the interim deal —— the Joint Plan of Action —— as many were certain they would. But they certainly have in the past and it would not surprise anyone if they tried again. However, if they did try to cheat, under a deal that we're talking about, they would be far more likely to be caught." (Biden, April 30 2015, no. 21)

"Critics tell us over and over again, "You can't trust Iran." Well, guess what? There is a not a single sentence, not a single paragraph in this whole agreement that depends on promises or trust, not one."

(Kerry, September 2 2015, no. 53)

Still, the overall otherisation does become notably less radical once the negotiations start (around 2013), i.e. the point in time where this moment of 'choice' is located according to the policy discourse. This can be seen in the diplomatic descriptors used for Iranian government officials ('serious and constructive', no. 52), or the switch to more technical, factual language (detailed descriptions of the JCPOA, the actions and compliance of the Iranian government).

Overall, the identity of the Iranian government that is discursively constructed by the Obama administration's policy discourse is one of radical Otherness and does not contest historical representations, especially when it comes to the ethical and spatial dimension. Crucially, however, the discourse does not employ orientalist dichotomies, and constructs the Iranian regime temporally as capable of rational choice, and change: this is key to the establishment of the JCPOA, as it demonstrates how space for political possibility is opened up.

The Iranian people

When it comes to the Iranian people, they are naturally not part of the Self in US policy discourse, but they are also distinctly separate from the regime: they thus represent a separate Other with its own ethical, spatial and temporal identity. The dichotomy between the government and the people structures these identities in a way that is rather similar to Self-Other configurations. Whereas the Iranian government is discursively linked to the "past" in terms of temporality, the discourse positions Iranian people towards the future, as the source of progress, promise and hope, as the following quotes demonstrate:

"...within Iran, there is great potential for the Iranian people to forge greater prosperity…" (Obama, July 01 2010, no. 5)

"... you--the young people of Iran--carry within you both the ancient greatness of Persian civilization

and the power to forge a country that is responsive to your aspirations. Your talent, your hopes, and your choices will shape the future of Iran and help light the world. And though times may seem dark, I want you to know that I am with you." (Obama, March 20 2011, no. 6)

"...the Iranian people can finally fulfill the greatness of the Iranian nation." (Obama, June 09 2010, no. 4)

Interestingly, as those last two quotes demonstrate, there is a simultaneous temporal-spatial aspect of the identity of the Iranian people that in fact does draw from the past: the "great and ancient civilization" of the pre-Islamic Persian empire, a theme that was already introduced in chapter 1.

Obama makes these types of references to Persian culture in combination with the orientation towards the future in his addresses commemorating Nowruz (Persian new year) in particular. He also uses some Farsi phrases, such as *dorood* (greetings) (no. 10) and [*nowruzetan*] *pirooz* (happy new year) (no. 19) (Trump uses this configuration as well: no. 51). It is worth noting that *dorood* and *pirooz* etymologically originate from Persian, rather than their commonly used equivalents *salam* and [*nowruz*] *mubarak*, which are Arabic loan words. There is of course no way of knowing whether this is a conscious choice, but it harbours quite a powerful signal: the Persian language is a heavily contested domain, and the use or avoidance of Arabic (and European) loan words has been politicised by Persian nationalists since the 19th century (Kia, 1998). Persian nationalist discourse presents Iran as an ancient and unified nation with one history, one culture and one language, which was "polluted" after the Islamic invasion, and thus should be "purified" from foreign influences (id.). This spatial and temporal identity and the notion that it is the most authentic is thus also found in US policy discourse:

"...that place cannot be reached through terror or arms, but rather through peaceful actions that demonstrate the true greatness of the Iranian people and civilization." (Obama, March 20 2009, no. 1)

Furthermore, when it comes to ethicality, the Iranian people are constructed as the subject of the responsibility of not just the Iranian government, but also of the US and the international community. The emphasis on their unfilled potential and lack of rights carries a particular moral force that facilitates a move from strategic, self-interested motives to the notion of the greater good, especially when it comes to appeals to the 'universal rights' (no. 8), 'values that are universal' (no. 6), and 'this precious humanity that we all share' (no. 1). This invokes a logic of equivalence, as these quotes exemplify:

"But let us remember the words that were written by the poet Saadi so many years ago: "The children of Adam are limbs to each other, having been created of one essence."" (Obama, March 20 2009, no. 1)

"Within these celebrations lies the promise of a new day, the promise of opportunity for our children, security for our families, progress for our communities, and peace between nations. Those are shared hopes; those are common dreams." (Obama, March 20 2009, no. 1)

The identity of the Iranian people in the Obama administration discourse thus inherits the temporality and spatiality discussed in chapter 1, combining the potential for progress and the history of the pre-Islamic Persian empire into one mode of Iranian authenticity. Its ethical identity opens up space for US and international responsibility on the basis of universal human rights discourse. Together, this makes up a very different relationship to the Self compared to the Iranian government, governed by the logic of equivalence, rather than difference. When it comes to the establishment of the JCPOA, this relationship is key to the legitimation of the agreement: put simply, the Iranian people are constructed as part of the reason *why*.

The United States
Now that the identity of the Other has been broken down, it comes to that of the Self: evidently, as

the discourse is structured by the logic of difference, the identity of the US in its policy discourse is largely constructed within a web of signs that communicate the dichotomy between itself and Iran. The following quotes demonstrate this broadly:

> "The Iran agreement is not a panacea for the sectarian and extremist violence that has been ripping that region apart. But history may judge it a turning point, a moment when the builders of stability seized the initiative from the destroyers of hope, and when we were able to show, as have generations before us, that when we demand the best from ourselves and insist that others adhere to a similar high standard – when we do that, we have immense power to shape a safer and a more humane world." (Kerry, September 2 2015, no. 53)

> "At its best, American foreign policy, the policy of the United States combines immense power with clarity of purpose, relying on reason and persuasion whenever possible." (Kerry, September 2 2015, no. 53)

> "But through strong and principled diplomacy, the United States of America will do our part on behalf of a world of greater peace, security, and cooperation among nations." (Obama, November 23 2013, no. 15)

The Self-Other dichotomy ('builders of stability' vs. 'destroyers of hope') is encapsulated in the policy discourse, positioning the US as leader of the international community that is bringing the world into the future with its virtuous "strong principled American diplomacy" (no. 22).

It was already noted how the differentiation between the Iranian government and the Iranian people is, inter alia, structured by temporality. The same can thus be said for the identity of the US, as the following quotes show:

> "We are familiar with your grievances from the past; we have our own grievances as well, but we are

prepared to move forward." (Obama, March 20 2010, no. 2)

"Since taking office, I have made it clear that the United States is prepared to begin a new chapter with the Islamic Republic of Iran." (Obama, November 21 2011, no. 7)

"My message to you, the people of Iran, is that, together, we have to speak up for the future we seek." (Obama, March 19 2015, no. 19)

The discursive construction of the US identity follows the same past-future dichotomy, often explicitly linking the US to the Iranian people. It does note past 'mistrust, suspicion and even open hostility' (no. 3), but constructs the current administration as a clear break from this, oriented towards the future, which links them to the Iranian people. This also positions the US as representative of the progress that Iran should, and will eventually, emulate: Iran is temporally positioned as having not yet reached full development, which the US has.

In terms of spatiality, the discourse firmly situates the US as part of the international community, in contrast to Iran. The following quotes demonstrates this juxtaposition and the role that the US allocates to itself:

"The United States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations." (Obama, March 20 2009, no. 1)

"The world has watched these unjust actions with alarm." (Obama, March 20 2011, no. 6)

Simultaneously Iran outside and itself inside of this world community, the discourse envisions the US not just as a regular member, but also a gatekeeper and spokesperson. It does so by emphasising the international 'responsibilities' (no. 2) and 'obligations' (no. 9) that the Iranian government should live up to, thus attributing a specific ethical character to this international space.

This ethical dimension of the US identity within the international community, and the responsibility that the US constructs for itself and that community, are demonstrated by the following quotes:

> "It's now more than 50 years since President Kennedy stood before the American people and said, "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate." He was speaking then about the need for discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union, which led to efforts to restrict the spread of nuclear weapons." (Obama, July 14 2015, no. 22)

> "And my hope is that building on this deal we can continue to have conversations with Iran that incentivize them to behave differently in the region, to be less aggressive, less hostile, more cooperative, to operate the way we expect nations in the international community to behave." (Obama, July 15 2015, no. 56)

> "To be clear: the deal has not resolved all of our differences with Iran. We continue to be profoundly concerned about human rights abuses that Iran commits against its own people, and about the instability Iran continues to fuel through its destabilizing activities in the region, including repeated threats against Israel." (Power, July 18 2016, no. 55)

The parallel with the Soviet Union is drawn more than once, interestingly: it implies a strong ideological dimension to the antagonistic relationship, invokes the memory of an era-defining existential threat, but also one that the US ultimately crushed and that symbolises its role as a superpower. It is noteworthy that especially in speeches aimed at defending the JCPOA domestically, explicitly securitising language is used. The issue of nuclear politics lends itself well for this given the existential threat that is implied. Thus, while international responsibility and morality is most often invoked, and Iran is described as a 'regional power, not a superpower' (no. 23), the national security of the US also remains a key ethical marker.

The Self that the US identity is within the Obama administration's foreign policy discourse

thus largely follows the logic of difference with regard to the Iranian government: the future that it ought to emulate, equivalent with the international community, and fulfilling its responsibilities towards its own people and rest of the world. This produces the political space for the JCPOA as a policy decision that conforms to the US identity as responsible world leader and arbiter in the Middle East.

Conclusion

While the JCPOA represents a change in foreign policy towards Iran, the Obama administration's discourse does not break with the radical otherisation of Iran - the distinction between the regime and the people is upheld, the link with terrorism remains consistent. Crucially, however, it emphasises the temporal capacity for rational choice and change in the Iranian regime, the universal rights of the Iranian people, and the ethical-spatial identity of the US as responsible leader of the international community. These elements aim to facilitate a stable ontological link between the discursive construction of Iranian and US identity and the policy decision to establish the JCPOA.

Chapter 3: Trump administration

This chapter deals with the policy discourse of the Trump administration. In two separate sections, the discursive construction of the key identities of Iran and the US are outlined and compared to that of the Obama administration. Quotes taken from the data are labelled with the speaker/author, date, and the number allocated to them in Appendix A. When a single word is mentioned, it is labelled with the number of one of the texts it occurs in for reference. The comparison will focus primarily on the otherisation of the Iranian Other through orientalist dichotomies, the distinction between the Iranian people and the regime, and the use of the sign 'terrorism'. With regard to the US Self, emphasis is placed on its position vis a vis the international community. This analysis establishes how the Iranian Other in the Trump administration's discourse is more radicalised through the use of orientalist dichotomies, a stronger emphasis on the sign 'terrorist', and a reframing of its capacity for change, while the US Self is positioned as more isolated from the international community and focused on its own interests, through which the withdrawal from the JCPOA becomes fated.

Iran

The Trump administration discourse continues the distinction between the Iranian government and the Iranian people as two separate Others, as the following quotes demonstrate:

"The Administration's actions are directed against the malign behavior of the Iranian regime, not against the Iranian people, who are the regime's longest-suffering victims." (Trump, May 8 2018, no. 35)

"We grieve to see a calloused and corrupt elite disrespect an ancient and proud people. We grieve to see the Iranian nation sink further into a pit of poverty, because of unjust rulers." (Pompeo, December 19 2019, no. 63)

"The ayatollah and his band of thugs that planted the roots of their rage 40 years ago are going to have to change. In 1979, in their mad zeal, they imposed the Islamic Republic Revolution on the open-minded, entrepreneurial, and amazing Iranian people." (Pompeo, December 19 2019, no. 63)

Thus, this section will also be split in two in order to be able to analyse the difference between the two constructed identities, and their position vis-a-vis the Self (the US).

The Iranian government

The Trump administration discourse most commonly refers to the Iranian government with a variation of 'the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism' (no. 26). Some quotes can be highlighted to characterise the discursive construction of the regime's identity:

"Iran is under the control of a fanatical regime that seized power in 1979 and forced a proud people to submit to its extremist rule. This radical regime has raided the wealth of one of the world's oldest and most vibrant nations and spread death, destruction, and chaos all around the globe." (Trump, October 13 2017, no. 30)

"Now, when authoritarian regimes breathe out vile, anti-Semitic hatred and threats of violence, history teaches that we must take them at their word." (Pence, March 25 2019, no. 46)

"Just yesterday, President Trump drew a distinction between those who think "they are destined to rule over others," or "those people and nations who want only to rule themselves." It is abundantly clear into which camp the Islamic Republic of Iran falls." (Pompeo, September 25 2019, no. 62)

Other qualifications attributed to the regime are 'rogue' (no. 30), 'reckless' (no. 20), 'murderous' (no. 36), 'entering the JCPOA in bad faith' (no. 50) 'violent and unpredictable' (no. 44), an 'outlaw state' (no. 63) and 'the most heinous' (no. 65). This already shows a tonal shift from the Obama administration, as the otherisation becomes more radical, constructs a bigger threat, and is more explicit in its evocation of orientalist decent-rogue and rational-irrational binaries, as well as the archetypal good-evil binary.

Another marked difference is the way persons within the regime are singled out and referred to: Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is often just named 'the Ayatollah' (no. 50), the clergy

are called 'hypocritical holy men' (no. 61), and Iranian leaders in general 'kleptocrats' (no. 59) and 'thugs' (no. 63). A special focus is directed towards the 'tentacles' of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which 'perpetuate[s] the chaos and instability in which it thrives' (no. 29), and the 'sick passion for the death of innocent people' (no. 48) and the 'hands […] drenched in both American and Iranian blood' of Qasem Soleimani, top general of the Quds force until his assassination by the US in January 2020. As a consequence of this decidedly irredeemable quality, the identity of the Iranian regime is constructed as completely homogeneous, challenging the narrative found in the Obama administration discourse about internal political dynamics, as demonstrated by the following quote:

> "The regime's revolutionary goals and willingness to commit violent acts haven't produced anyone to
> lead Iran that can be remotely called a moderate or a statesman. Some believe that President Rouhani
> and Foreign Minister Zarif fit that bill. The truth is they are merely polished front men for the
> ayatollahs' international con artistry. Their nuclear deal didn't make them moderates; it made them
> wolves in sheep's clothing." (Pompeo, July 22 2018, no. 61)

This collection of descriptors gives an impression of the explicit moral dimension derived from the good-evil binary that the Trump administration discourse projects onto the Self-Other relationship between the US and Iran. This ethical identity is primarily reinforced by the ethical-spatial sign 'terrorist', even linking Iran to radical Islamic terrorism (no. 29) through the logic of equivalence - not only Hezbollah and Hamas, but also the Taliban and al-Qaida (no. 59).

When it comes to the spatial dimension of the Iranian regime identity, the emphasis placed on terrorism is more extreme than in the discourse of the Obama administration, but it follows the same structure in that it couples the threat perception to Iran's position outside the international community: or rather, 'a pariah state in the eyes of freedom-loving people all across the world.' (no. 63), the opposite of 'a normal nation' (no. 50), and often linked in this respect with North-Korea (no. 28). Again, the otherisation through this process of differentiation is more radical

in the Trump administration discourse, which most frequently uses the orientalist binary 'civilisation-barbarism' to this effect, as these quotes show:

"The desire to uphold the Islamic Revolution has especially resulted in gross suppression of the freedom of religion in Iran, often to barbaric ends." (Pence, September 20 2017, no. 28)

"Iran has a long history of unprovoked aggression, 40 years now, against its own people, against its neighbors, and indeed against civilization itself." (Pompeo, September 25 2019, no. 62)

"First, we wanted to deprive the regime of resources, resources it needs to perpetrate its malign activity around the world. And second, we just want Iran to behave like a normal nation. Just be like Norway, right?" (Pompeo, January 13 2020, no. 64)

When it comes to the Middle East as a regional context, the identity of the region is constructed much more directly in conjunction with that of Iran. Whereas the Obama administration's discourse positions Iran as part of an inherently 'volatile', 'fragile' region and does acknowledge Iran as a key actor and instigator within that region, the Trump administration discourse links the 'conflict, terror, and turmoil' in the Middle East almost exclusively to the threat of Iran, as these quotes demonstrate:

"And that to really deal with this threat and to try to bring peace and stability to the Middle East, and to relieve the world of the nuclear threat, you have to go after the whole thing." (Bolton, May 08 2018, no. 34)

"And it was amazing to see leaders from across the region agree that the greatest threat to peace and security in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran." (Pence, March 25 2019, no. 46)

"The idea of the JCPOA as a strategic pillar of stability in the Middle East was captured perfectly by John Kerry when he said, quote, "I know the Middle East that is on fire … is going to be more manageable with this deal," end of quote. Query whether the Middle East is more manageable today than it was when they embarked on the JCPOA." (Pompeo, May 21 2018, no. 59)

Finally, this last quote perfectly encapsulates a thread of continuity between the two discourses and their historical antecedents, which is the construction of the Middle East, and the Iranian threat within it, as something to be managed - preferably by the US, which is the civilised, rational, non-threatening Self constructed through this Iranian Other.

This is expressed most strongly in the temporal dimension of the regime's identity in the Trump administration discourse, which carries direct implications for how the US is supposed to manage that threat. The following quotes can be highlighted:

"Given the regime's murderous past and present, we should not take lightly its sinister vision for the future." (Trump, October 13 2017, no. 30)

 "…the total fulfillment of the revolution at home and abroad is the regime's ultimate goal. It drives their behavior. Thus, the regime has spent four decades mobilizing all elements of the Iranian economy, foreign policy, and political life in service of that objective. To the regime, prosperity, security, and freedom for the Iranian people are acceptable casualties in the march to fulfill the revolution." (Pompeo, July 22 2018, no. 61)

Whereas the temporal identity of the Iranian regime in the Obama administration discourse was also oriented towards the past, this was mitigated by an emphasis on the capacity for choice, and thus change; in contrast, the homogeneity and irredeemability attached to the regime's identity in the Trump discourse results in a narrative of force rather than choice. The following quotes demonstrate this reconstruction:

"Our objective is to force the regime into a clear choice: either abandon its destructive behavior or continue down the path toward economic disaster." (Trump, November 02 2018, no. 41)

"The new sanctions will deliver an unmistakable message to Tehran: Change your ways or suffer the consequences." (Perry, November 5 2018, no. 60)

"The reason that the Secretary of Treasury and I are here this morning is to continue this campaign — our strategic effort to get Iran to behave in a way that doesn't continue their 40-year-long effort to terrorize the world." (Pompeo, January 10 2020, no. 50)

It thus becomes clear that the Iranian regime is constructed by the Trump administration as a more radical Other compared to the Obama administration's discourse. This happens primarily through the use of orientalist and ideological binaries, and the construction of the Iranian regime's temporal identity as intransigent and incapable of change. This constitutes the possibility of threat management through a multilateral agreement such as the JCPOA as impossible, and instead invites a narrative of force, shifting the political possibilities back towards sanctions or even military intervention.

The Iranian people

When it comes to the identity of the Iranian people within the Trump administration discourse, the structure is similar to that of the Obama administration, with some significant nuances. In terms of temporality and spatiality, the Trump administration's discourse echoes the simultaneous orientation towards a 'future of peace and prosperity' (no. 51) and the glorious pre-Islamic past as the 'rightful heirs to a rich culture and an ancient land' (no. 36) that the Obama administration' discourse builds into the Iranian people's identity, as the following quotes demonstrate:

"In this effort, we stand in total solidarity with the Iranian regime's longest suffering victims: its own people. The citizens of Iran have paid a heavy price for the violence and extremism of their leaders.

> The Iranian people long to—and they just are longing to—reclaim their country's proud history, its culture, its civilization, its cooperation with its neighbors." (Trump, October 13 2017, no. 30)

> "I have deep respect for the Iranian people. They are a remarkable people, with an incredible heritage and unlimited potential." (Trump, January 03 2020, no. 48)

A greater emphasis is placed on the spatial marker 'civilization' throughout the Trump administration's discourse, which also juxtaposes the 'not-civilised' or 'barbaric' signs that place the Iranian regime outside of the boundaries of this concept, reinforcing the orientalist binary discussed in the previous section.

It was noted in the last chapter how the discursive construction of the Iranian people's ethical identity opens up space for US and international responsibility, primarily on the basis of universal human rights discourse. This narrative is continued, as the following quotes illustrate:

> "And crucially, we are calling on all nations to lend similar support to the Iranian people, who are suffering under a regime that is stifling basic freedoms and denying its citizens the opportunity to build better lives for their families, an opportunity that is every human being's God-given right." (Trump, January 12 2018, no. 32)

> "In solidarity with the people of Iran, who yearn for a future of liberty, opportunity, and prosperity, the United States of America continues to condemn the dictatorial Iranian regime. We pledge never to turn a deaf ear to the calls of the Iranian people for freedom, and we will never forget their ongoing struggle for human rights." (Trump, March 20 2019, no. 45)

Crucially, however, the element of victimhood and suffering is much more explicitly linked to the identity of the Iranian people in the Trump administration discourse. The use of words like 'yearn' and 'long' reinforces the image of a more passive, or perhaps hopeless condition, in comparison to

the active formulations used by the Obama administration. In addition to this, the discourse (re)introduces a gendered dimension, as the following quote demonstrates:

"As seen from the hijab protests, the brutal men of the regime seem to be particularly terrified by Iranian women who are demanding their rights. As human beings with inherent dignity and inalienable rights, the women of Iran deserve the same freedoms that the men of Iran possess." (Pompeo, May 21 2018, no. 59)

Whereas signs like 'aggressive' and 'violent' linked to the Iranian regime already carry masculine implications with them, positioning Iranian women as victims of the patriarchal regime (with the hijab being a crucial symbol) establishes an explicitly gendered moral responsibility to intervene on behalf of them. This type of discourse knows a long chain of precedent, most significantly in the Bush administration's discursive construction of gendered identities surrounding the post 9/11 US invasion of Afghanistan (Shepherd, 2006). In this way, the Trump administration's discourse opens up a considerably larger space for the moral responsibility of the US and the international community towards the Iranian people, but also more one-way, suggesting a narrative within which they have to be 'rescued'.

Altogether, there is much continuity when it comes to the spatial-temporal construction of the Iranian people between the Obama and the Trump administration's discourse, within which the orientalist civilised-barbaric dichotomy is more prominent in the latter. Moreover, a greater emphasis on victimhood and the reproduction of gendered discourse create an important difference in nuance, within which the future of the Iranian people is constructed as more dependent on liberation by the US, rather than their own potential. This is congruent with the notion that the JCPOA does nothing for the Iranian people, and that withdrawal from the agreement and the maximum pressure doctrine is also in their best interest.

The United States

The otherisation of Iran in the Trump administration's discourse takes a more radical form compared to the Obama administration, which implies that the Self is also constructed differently. The following quotes give an impression of the US identity as constituted by this discourse:

"We stand with the proud people of Iran because it is right, and because the regime in Tehran threatens the peace and security of the world. That is the essence of American leadership, and as the people of Iran now know, the United States is leading on the world stage for freedom once again." (Pence, January 4 2018, no. 31)

"America will always pursue the interests of good people, great people, great souls, while seeking peace, harmony, and friendship with all of the nations of the world." (Trump, January 3 2020, no. 48)

"The United States is a force for good in the world." (Craft, September 21 2020, no. 66)

If the Iranian regime is irredeemably evil, by logic of difference, the US must be unimpeachably good. This is even made explicit by the invocation of binaries such as 'light' prevailing over 'darkness' (no. 31) and the triumph of 'freedom and justice' over 'tyranny' (no. 45) or 'evil and oppression' (no. 51).

When it comes to the temporal identity of the Self in relation to the Iranian Other, the Trump administration's discourse constitutes the same equivalence with the future of the Iranian people as the Obama administration, presenting the US as the temporality to aspire to and emulate. Interestingly, there is another temporal identity that is crucial in the discursive construction of the Trump administration's Self: that of the former Self. The following quotes demonstrate the explicit otherisation of the Obama administration's US:

"The United States has long stood with those who yearn for freedom and a brighter future, and yet the president [Obama] declined to stand with a proud people who sought to escape from under the heavy weight of a dictatorship, issuing only a delayed response condemning the regime's violence." (Pence, January 4 2018, no. 31)

"In other words, at the point when the United States had maximum leverage, this disastrous deal gave this regime—and it's a regime of great terror—many billions of dollars, some of it in actual cash, a great embarrassment to me as a citizen and to all citizens of the United States. [...] Today's action sends a critical message: The United States no longer makes empty threats." (Trump, May 8 2018, no. 36)

The Trump administration thus signals its own identity as a return to the authentic US identity which is closely linked to a more prominent focus on its own security and interests. This identity is primarily constructed along the binary of strong-weak, and takes on a more realist or even masculinist vocabulary, emphasising threat, power and military capacity over international cooperation and universal values.

This break with the Obama administration's discourse is also reflected in the spatial dimension of the US identity. Instead of emphasising its place in the international community, the Trump administration's discourse is much more ambivalent towards this political space, as the following quotes demonstrate:

"Those who, for whatever reason, choose not to work with us will be siding with the Iranian regime's nuclear ambitions and against the people of Iran and the peaceful nations of the world." (Trump, January 12 2018, no. 32)

"What makes America unique is that we stand up for what is right. As we have in the past, we will stand alone to protect peace and security at all times. We don't need a cheering section to validate our moral compass. We do not find comfort based solely on numbers, particularly when the majority has

found themselves in an uncomfortable position of underwriting terrorism, chaos, and conflict." (Craft,

September 21 2020, no. 66)

The spatiality of the US identity in the Trump administration's discourse is thus much more characterised by isolation from the international community, albeit of a very different nature than that it attributes the Iranian Other, which is also constructed as a threat. Instead, the more nebulous spatial value community of 'responsible democracies' (no. 65), 'freedom-loving nations' (no. 46), or the 'civilized world' (no. 49) becomes the nexus along which the logic of difference between Self and radical Other is established. This discursive shift is necessary to accommodate the fact that all other signatories to the JCPOA did not withdraw from the agreement.

This bridges into the question of ethicality: as was already established, the characterization of the Iranian people's identity as victims produces a certain moral responsibility. Whereas the Obama administration's discourse links this mostly to universal rights, the Trump administration constructs its solidarity with the Iranian people as more specific to the identity of the US, as the following quotes demonstrate:

"Those brave protesters looked to the leader of the free world for support." (Pence, January 4 2018, no. 31)

"When we do this, we will be upholding America's legacy as the world's greatest champion of liberty, as we have been since our founding." (Pompeo, January 13 2020, no. 63)

This positions the US in the role of a saviour, and combined with the isolationist turn, as the only one who will stand up for what is right. However, the discourse prioritises the responsibility for the US' interests and security and its capacity to protect those, which is expressed in the following quotes:

"America will not be held hostage to nuclear blackmail. We will not allow American cities to be

threatened with destruction. And we will not allow a regime that chants "Death to America" to gain

access to the most deadly weapons on Earth." (Trump, May 8 2018, no. 36)

"Under my leadership, America's policy is unambiguous: To terrorists who harm or intend to harm

any American: We will find you; we will eliminate you." (Trump, January 3 2020, no. 48)

This emphasis on strength and self-protection again functions to construct a US identity that is constitutive of a foreign policy towards Iran based on military threat and maximum pressure rather than the diplomatic engagement that the JCPOA represents.

Overall, the construction of the US Self in the Trump discourse relies on the same logic of difference as the Obama discourse: the more radical otherisation of Iran thus logically produces a more superlative Self identity. In addition, this Self identity is constructed through the otherisation of the former Self that was the Obama administration, claiming to be a more authentic representation. This results in a different ethical-spatial identity: instead of positioning the US as leader of the international community and protector of universal rights, the US is isolated from the international community, with a bigger emphasis placed on the protection of its own security and interests. This is congruent with the Trump administration's 'America First' foreign policy doctrine, and consequently the decision to withdraw from the JCPOA.

Conclusion

From this analysis and comparison, it becomes clear that there is quite some continuity between the Obama and the Trump discourse, for instance in the distinction between the Iranian regime and people and the temporal-spatial construction of the Iranian people. However, the Iranian regime in the Trump administration's discourse is constructed as a more radical Other through the use of orientalist dichotomies, a stronger emphasis on the sign 'terrorist', and a reframing of its capacity for change; the Iranian people's victimhood is emphasized to produce a different type of moral

responsibility. Meanwhile, the US Self is positioned as more isolated from the international community and protective of its own security and interests, also through otherisation of the former Self of the Obama administration. Together, these changes in the discursive construction of Iranian and US identity constitute the policy shift that is the withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to understand how it is possible that the radical US policy shift from the establishment of to the withdrawal from the JCPOA occurred. In order to confront this puzzle, the following research question was formulated: What are the continuities and changes in the discursive construction of Self-Other identities within the foreign policy discourse on the United States-Iran relationship between the Obama and the Trump administration? To answer this question, a poststructuralist policy discourse analysis of the Obama and Trump administration was conducted into the ontological link between discourse and policy.

The results indicate that the decisions to establish and withdraw from the JCPOA are constituted by discourses which construct a very similar radical Self-Other relationship between the US and Iran, within which the US is positioned as having to change the behaviour of the Iranian regime as arbiter of the Middle East and ally of the Iranian people. Crucially, they differ when it comes to the use of orientalist binaries, the capacity for change attributed to the Iranian regime (temporal identity) and the position of the US vis-a-vis the world community (ethical-spatial identity). These differences are congruent with the respective policy decisions to establish and withdraw from the JCPOA. The Obama administration's discourse partly deradicalizes the Iranian Other and positions the US Self as leader of the world community, to the point where the JCPOA becomes a viable strategy to deal with the Iranian nuclear threat. Meanwhile, the Trump administration constructs a more radical and threatening Iranian Other informed by orientalist and gendered dichotomies, positions the US Self as more isolated from the international community, and explicitly breaks with the 'former' US Self of the Obama administration, constituting the withdrawal from the JCPOA and the maximum pressure doctrine as the only logical strategy.

It should be noted that the scope of this research was limited in a few respects. A more comprehensive oversight of discursive developments could be beneficial, for instance by including the discourse of the Bush administration, in order to get a clearer picture of the way in which the space of political possibility for the JCPOA opened up under the Obama administration. Moreover,

this research restricted itself to official policy expressions, whereas discourses are informed and challenged in a wider public debate, meaning that analysis of identity construction within discursive sources such as media, literature and art could enrich the understanding provided by this analysis. Finally, the addition of a more quantitative approach to the data collected for this thesis could also strengthen the conclusions of the analysis and provide more insight into the chronological developments within the administrations, by tracking the use of signs like 'terrorist'.

When it comes to delineating the implications of the conclusions of this thesis, it is important to stress once more that the poststructuralist approach to policy discourse analysis is concerned with the ontological link between discourse and policy. This means that there is no intention to make claims about causality. Rather, it asserts that discourses and policies are simultaneously adjusted to ensure internal and external stability. What the results of this analysis show, then, is how this ontological stability between the discursive construction of Self-Other identities and foreign policy decisions regarding the JCPOA was constituted within the policy discourse of the Obama and Trump administration. On an epistemological level, this demonstrates how foreign policy making should be understood as a discursive practice, as it articulates and intertwines the material and the ideational to become as one. When it comes to our understanding of the US-Iran relationship, the conclusions of this thesis confirm the importance of the Self-Other binary as an analytical lens, and the way orientalism in particular affects this binary. A tentative argument could be, for instance, that the Obama administrations' discourse was not able to shift the narrative about Iranian identity away from radical otherisation enough, which destabilised the ontological link between discourse and policy, resulting in the policy correction by the Trump administration. It could also be contended that the policy shift primarily should be understood in the light of the Otherisation of the former, 'weak' US Self of the Obama administration, and thus linked with internal discursive political contests of national identity.

When it comes to future avenues for research, these hypotheses could serve as a point of departure. As already acknowledged, extending the scope in various directions would serve as a fruitful extension of the present thesis. The framework provided by the poststructuralist approach has also proven to be a useful analytical tool for understanding policy discourse and decisions, meaning that it could be applied to other cases in a comparative structure. When it comes to the issue of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, this thesis' contribution can be continued upon as long as the fate of the JCPOA remains uncertain: with actors come new identitarian developments, and the most important question remains whether they will be able to breathe new discursive life into the US-Iran relationship.

Bibliography

Adib-Moghaddam, A. (2009). Discourse and violence: the friend–enemy conjunction in contemporary Iranian–American relations. *Critical Studies on Terrorism, 2*(3), 512-526.

Albarasneh, A. S., & Khatib, D. K. (2019). The US policy of containing Iran–from Obama to Trump 2009–2018. *Global Affairs, 5*(4-5), 369-387.

Amin, F. (2020). An 'existential threat' or a 'past pariah': Securitisation of Iran and disagreements among American press. *Discourse & Communication, 14*(3), 233-252.

Arena, M. D. C. P. (2021). Narratives modes and foreign policy change: the debate on the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional, 64*(1),1-20.

Bush, G. W. (2002, January 29). *Address before a joint session of the Congress on the state of the union.* Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union | The American Presidency Project. Retrieved November 15, 2021, from https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union-22.

Corrias, L. (2014). Guises of Sovereignty: 'Rogue States' and Democratic States in the International Legal Order. In Wagner, W., Werner, W., & Onderco, M. (Eds.). *Deviance in International Relations* (pp. 38-57). Palgrave Macmillan.

Chin-Kuei, T. (2014). Framing the Threat of Rogue States: Iraq, Iran and President Clinton's Dual-Containment Approach to Middle East Peace. Prepared for *Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference*.

Doty, R. L. (1993). Foreign policy as social construction: A post-positivist analysis of US counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines. *International studies quarterly, 37*(3), 297-320.

Duncombe, C. (2015). Representation, recognition and foreign policy in the Iran–US relationship. *European Journal of International Relations, 22*(3), 622-645.

Edelman, E., & Takeyh, R. (2020). The next Iranian revolution: Why Washington should seek regime change in Tehran. *Foreign Affairs, 99*(3), 131-145.

Epstein, C. (2008). *The power of words in international relations: Birth of an anti-whaling discourse.* MIT Press.

Fitzpatrick, M. (2019). Assessing the JCPOA. *Adelphi Series, 57*(1), 19-60.

Hassan, O. (2020). Crisis, narratives, and the construction of US-Middle East relations: continuity and change in world history and Trump's America First. *Global Affairs, 6*(1), 121-141.

Hansen, L. (2006). *Security as practice: discourse analysis and the Bosnian war.* Routledge.

Homolar, A. (2011). Rebels without a conscience: The evolution of the rogue states narrative in US security policy. *European Journal of International Relations, 17*(4), 705-727.

Jesse, E. (2011). *Forecasting the future of Iran: Implications for U.S. strategy and policy* (Dissertation). Santa Monica: CA. RAND.

Kadkhodaee, E., & Tari, Z. G. (2019). Otherising Iran in American political discourse: case study of a post-JCPOA senate hearing on Iran sanctions. *Third World Quarterly 40(1)*, 109-128.

Kia, M. (1998). Persian nationalism and the campaign for language purification. *Middle Eastern Studies, 34*(2), 9-36.

Khalid, M. (2011). Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror. *Global Change, Peace & Security, 23*(1), 15-29.

Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Verso.

Murray, M. (2014). *The Threat of Security: Securitization and Orientalist Discourse in United States Foreign Policy towards Iran.* [Doctoral dissertation]. American Lebanese University.

McFaul, M., Milani, A., & Diamond, L. (2007). A win-win US strategy for dealing with Iran. *The Washington Quarterly, 30*(1), 121-138.

Natarajan, U. (2011). Creating and recreating Iraq: legacies of the Mandate system in contemporary understandings of Third World sovereignty. *Leiden Journal of International Law, 24*(4), 799-822.

Norell, M. (2015). A really bad deal: the Iran nuclear deal and its implications. *European View, 14*(2), 285-291.

Nourani, H., Danesh, A., Nouri, M. R., & Latifi, F. (2020). Discursive (De) legitimization of the Iran Nuclear Deal in Donald Trump's Tweets. *Strategic Analysis, 44*(4), 332-345.

Reinke de Buitrago, S. (2016). The role of emotions in US security policy towards Iran. *Global Affairs, 2*(2), 155-164.

Renner, J., & Spencer, A. (2013). De-antagonising the Other: Changing Constructions of the Taliban and the Possibility of Reconciliation. *Global Society, 27*(4), 475-496.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.

Samore, G. (2015). *The Iran nuclear deal: A definitive guide.* Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School.

Sebenius, J. K., & Singh, M. K. (2012). Is a nuclear deal with Iran possible? An analytical framework for the Iran nuclear negotiations. *International Security, 37*(3), 52-91.

Shepherd, L. J. (2006). Veiled references: Constructions of gender in the Bush administration discourse on the attacks on Afghanistan post-9/11. *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 8*(1), 19-41.

Sinkkonen V. (2020). American Narratives of Order-Building in the Middle East: Dashed Visions on the Nile. In: Mühlberger W., Alaranta T. (eds) *Political Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa. Perspectives on Development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region.* Springer.

Sonnevend, J. (2019). Charm offensive: mediatized country image transformations in international relations. *Information, Communication & Society, 22*(5), 695-701.

Solomon, T. (2020). Status, emotions, and US-Iran nuclear politics. In Koschut, S. (Ed.). *The Power of Emotions in World Politics.* (pp. 130-148). Routledge.

Tertrais, B. (2015). Iran: An experiment in strategic risk-taking. *Survival, 57*(5), 67-73.

Tirman, J. (2009). Diplomacy, terrorism, and national narratives in the United States-Iran relationship. *Critical Studies on Terrorism 2(3)*, 527-539.

Wolf, A. B. (2018). After JCPOA: American grand strategy toward Iran. *Comparative Strategy 37*(1), 22-34.

Appendix A

The American Presidency Project archives

	Obama Administration January 2009 - January 2017
1	Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz - March 20, 2009 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/videotaped-remarks-the-observance-nowruz-1
2	Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz - March 20, 2010 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/videotaped-remarks-the-observance-nowruz-0
3	Remarks by National Security Advisor James L. Jones at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy - April 21, 2010 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-national-security-advisor-james-l-jones-the-washington-institute-for-near-east
4	Remarks on the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Iran Sanctions - June 09, 2010 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-united-nations-security-council-resolution-iran-sanctions
5	Press Release: Remarks of President Barack Obama Signing of Iran Sanctions Act - As Prepared for Delivery - July 01, 2010 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-release-remarks-president-barack-obama-signing-iran-sanctions-act-prepared-for
6	Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz - March 20, 2011 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/videotaped-remarks-the-observance-nowruz
7	Statement on Iran - November 21, 2011 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-iran-0
8	Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz - March 20, 2012 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/videotaped-remarks-the-observance-nowruz-5
9	Statement on Sanctions Against Iran - July 31, 2012 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-sanctions-against-iran
10	Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz - March 18, 2013 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/videotaped-remarks-the-observance-nowruz-4
11	Statement by the Press Secretary on the Election in Iran - June 15, 2013 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-press-secretary-the-election-iran
12	Statement by the Press Secretary on the Inauguration of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran - August 04, 2013 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-press-secretary-the-inauguration

	-the-president-the-islamic-republic-iran
13	Press Gaggle by Senior Administration Officials on Iran - September 24, 2013 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-gaggle-senior-administration-officials-iran
14	Background Briefing by a Senior Administration Official on Iran - September 27, 2013 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/background-briefing-senior-administration-official-iran
15	Remarks on Iran - November 23, 2013 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-iran-0
16	Statement by the Press Secretary on the Implementation of the Joint Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program - January 20, 2014 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-press-secretary-the-implementation-the-joint-plan-action-regarding-the
17	Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz - March 20, 2014 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/videotaped-remarks-the-observance-nowruz-3
18	Statement by the Press Secretary on the Extension of Iran Nuclear Talks - July 18, 2014 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-press-secretary-the-extension-iran-nuclear-talks
19	Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz - March 19, 2015 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/videotaped-remarks-the-observance-nowruz-2
20	Remarks on International Diplomatic Efforts To Prevent Iran From Developing Nuclear Weapons - April 02, 2015 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-international-diplomatic-efforts-prevent-iran-from-developing-nuclear-weapons
21	Remarks by the Vice President to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy - April 30, 2015 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-vice-president-the-washington-institute-for-near-east-policy
22	Remarks on the Multilateral Agreement To Prevent Iran From Developing a Nuclear Weapon - July 14, 2015 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-multilateral-agreement-prevent-iran-from-developing-nuclear-weapon
23	Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session During a Live Webcast on the Multilateral Agreement To Prevent Iran From Developing a Nuclear Weapon - August 28, 2015 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-and-question-and-answer-session-during-live-webcast-the-multilateral-agreement
24	Remarks on Iran - January 17, 2016 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-iran

no.	Trump administration January 2017 - January 2021
25	Press Release - Statement by the National Security Advisor on the Iranian Ballistic Missile Launch - February 01, 2017 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-release-statement-the-national-security-advisor-the-iranian-ballistic-missile-launch
26	Press Release - Statement by National Security Advisor Michael T. Flynn on Iran - February 03, 2017 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-release-statement-national-security-advisor-michael-t-flynn-iran
27	Statement on the Terrorist Attacks in Tehran, Iran - June 07, 2017 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-terrorist-attacks-tehran-iran
28	Remarks by the Vice President to the United Nations Security Council in New York City - September 20, 2017 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-vice-president-the-united-nations-security-council-new-york-city
29	Press Release - President Donald J. Trump's New Strategy on Iran - October 13, 2017 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-release-president-donald-j-trumps-new-strategy-iran
30	Remarks on United States Strategy Toward Iran - October 13, 2017 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-united-states-strategy-toward-iran
31	Op-ed - Vice President Mike Pence: "This Time, We Will Not Be Silent on Iran" - January 04, 2018 https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/this-time-we-will-not-be-silent-on-iran/2018/01/03/d1cfc34e-f0cc-11e7-97bf-bba379b809ab_story.html
32	Statement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action To Prevent Iran From Obtaining a Nuclear Weapon - January 12, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-joint-comprehensive-plan-action-prevent-iran-from-obtaining-nuclear-weapon
33	Statement on the Observance of Nowruz - March 19, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-observance-nowruz-3
34	Press Briefing by National Security Advisor John Bolton on Iran - May 08, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-briefing-national-security-advisor-john-bolton-iran
35	President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation in an Unacceptable Iran Deal - May 08, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states

	-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal
36	Remarks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action To Prevent Iran From Obtaining a Nuclear Weapon and an Exchange With Reporters - May 08, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-joint-comprehensive-plan-action-prevent-iran-from-obtaining-nuclear-weapon-and
37	Op-Ed - National Security Advisor John Bolton: "The Iran Deal Was Betrayed by Its Own Abysmal Record" - May 9, 2018 https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/john-bolton-the-iran-deal-was-betrayed-by-its-own-abysmal-record/2018/05/09/c8f6bc9a-53bf-11e8-9c91-7dab596e8252_story.html
38	Statement by the Press Secretary on Iranian Aggression Against Saudi Arabia and Israel - May 11, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-press-secretary-iranian-aggression-against-saudi-arabia-and-israel
39	Statement on the Reimposition of United States Sanctions With Respect to Iran - August 06, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-reimposition-united-states-sanctions-with-respect-iran
40	President Donald J. Trump is Reimposing Sanctions Lifted Under the Horrible Iran Deal - August 06, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/president-donald-j-trump-reimposing-sanctions-lifted-under-the-horrible-iran-deal
41	Statement on the Reimposition of Nuclear-Related Sanctions Against Iran - November 02, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-reimposition-nuclear-related-sanctions-against-iran
42	Press Release - President Donald J. Trump Is Reimposing All Sanctions Lifted Under the Unacceptable Iran Deal - November 02, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-release-president-donald-j-trump-reimposing-all-sanctions-lifted-under-the
43	Remarks by the Vice President at the 5th Israeli-American Council National Conference in Hollywood, Florida - November 30, 2018 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-vice-president-the-5th-israeli-american-council-national-conference-hollywood
44	Press Release - A Look at the U.S. Strategy for Iran - February 13, 2019 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-release-look-the-us-strategy-for-iran
45	Message on the Observance of Nowruz - March 20, 2019 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/message-the-observance-nowruz-4
46	Remarks by the Vice President at the 2019 AIPAC Policy Conference - March 25, 2019 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-vice-president-the-2019-aipac-policy-conference

47	Statement by the Press Secretary on the 40th Anniversary of the Storming of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran - November 04, 2019 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-press-secretary-the-40th-anniversary-the-storming-the-us-embassy-tehran-iran
48	Remarks on the Death of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Major General and Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani of Iran in Palm Beach, Florida - January 03, 2020 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-death-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps-major-general-and-quds-force-commander
49	Remarks on the Situation in Iran - January 08, 2020 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-situation-iran
50	Press Briefing by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin on Iran Sanctions - January 10, 2020 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/press-briefing-secretary-state-mike-pompeo-and-secretary-the-treasury-steven-mnuchin-iran
51	Message on the Observance of Nowruz - March 20, 2020 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/message-the-observance-nowruz-5

Archived State department websites

	Obama administration
52	Press Availability on Nuclear Deal With Iran by John Kerry - July 14, 2015 https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/07/244885.htm
53	Remarks on Nuclear Agreement With Iran by John Kerry - September 2, 2015 https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/09/246574.htm
54	Remarks on Implementation Day by John Kerry - January 16, 2016 https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/01/251336.htm
55	Remarks at the UN Security Council Briefing on Iran Nonproliferation and the Implementation of Resolution 2231 by Samantha Power - July 18, 2016 https://web.archive.org/web/20161230081736/https://usun.state.gov/remarks/7374
56	Press Conference by the President - July 15, 2015 https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/15/press-conference-president
57	The Case for the Nuclear Deal With Iran (Op-Ed) by John Kerry and Ernest Moniz - July 22, 2015 https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/07/245158.htm
58	Remarks on the One-Year Anniversary of the JCPOA by John Kerry - July 14, 2016 https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/07/259972.htm

	Trump administration
59	After the Deal: A New Iran Strategy by Mike Pompeo - May 21, 2018 https://www.heritage.org/defense/event/after-the-deal-new-iran-strategy
60	The world can live without Iranian Oil (Op-Ed) by Rick Perry - November 5, 2018 https://www.energy.gov/articles/world-can-live-without-iranian-oil
61	Supporting Iranian Voices by Mike Pompeo - July 22, 2018 https://2017-2021.state.gov/supporting-iranian-voices/index.html
62	Iranian Aggression: The World Awakes by Mike Pompeo - September 25, 2019 https://2017-2021.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-remarks-at-united-against-nuclear-irans-2019-iran-summit-iranian-aggression-the-world-awakes/index.html
63	Human Rights and the Iranian Regime by Mike Pompeo - December 19, 2019 https://2017-2021.state.gov/human-rights-and-the-iranian-regime/index.html
64	The Restoration of Deterrence: The Iranian Example by Mike Pompeo - January 13, 2020 https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-restoration-of-deterrence-the-iranian-example/index.html
65	Secretary Michael R. Pompeo at the UN Security Council on the Iran Arms Embargo - June 30, 2020 https://2017-2021.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-at-the-un-security-council-on-the-iran-arms-embargo/index.html
66	Secretary Michael R. Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, U.S. Representative to the United Nations Kelly Craft, and National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien at a Press Availability on Iran Snapback Sanctions - September 21, 2020 https://2017-2021.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-and-treasury-secretary-steven-mnuchin-defense-secretary-mark-esper-commerce-secretary-wilbur-ross-u-s-representative-to-the-united-nations-kelly-craft-and-national-sec/index.html