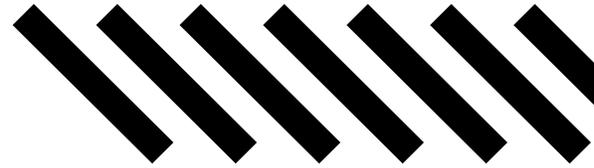


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04



Why states pursue nuclear weapons programmes?

The Iran case

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Abbreviations:

NNWS	Non nuclear weapon state(s)
NP	Nuclear programme(s)
NPT	Non proliferation treaty
NW	Nuclear weapon(s)
NWFZ	Nuclear weapons free zone
NWP	Nuclear weapons programme(s)
NWS	Nuclear weapon state(s)
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Abstract:

Iran's nuclear programme has been top of the non-proliferation agenda for more than a decade. A nuclear armed Iran could trigger a nuclear arms race in the fragile Middle East Region and may also cause irreparable damage to the young indefinitely extended NPT. Further understanding of the root causes of Teheran's nuclear programme is therefore of high global importance. By analysing different IR-theories in explaining nuclear proliferation one assumes that nuclear proliferation is a question of multicausality. States pursue several competing goals on international and domestic levels. Applying theories on both levels provides a more complete picture of the Iranian case and reveals inner parameters behind Iran's nuclear ambitions. Structural Realism explains the impetus of the Iranian nuclear programme in the 1980s, whereas theories of political survival and beliefs of individuals explain Teheran's nuclear ambitions since the presidency of Ahmadinejad. The theocratic regime formed a nationalist coalition with the Iranian people by framing the nuclear programme in terms of state identity and thereby assures regime survival. Teheran is entrenched in a nuclear hedging strategy and President Ahmadinejad's beliefs regarding the NPT are dominated by a perception of illegitimacy. These beliefs could favour withdrawal from the non-proliferation regime. Thus, Counter-policies have to focus on inner parameters, viz. the decision-making process and the beliefs of individual leaders, as well as the Iranian people, in order to resolve the nuclear issue.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Outline

Since the end of the US-monopoly on nuclear weapons (NW) in 1949 and the start of the Cold War many policy makers and analysts have predicted a fast spread of nuclear weapons around the globe. The main assumption of Structural-Realist theory is that states in an anarchical system try to maximize their minimum, hence, seek to maximize self help and therefore rely on NW in order to assure their existence.¹ Contrary to predictions of a fast spread of nuclear weapons reality has shown that the pace of nuclear proliferation has been slow and today we believe only ten states (China, France, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, UK and USA) pursue NW activities.² In total 37 states since 1945 initiated NW programmes, however, the majority pulled back from their nuclear ambitions.³ One of the states accused of pursuing nuclear weapons is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran has been on the top of the non-proliferation agenda for more than a decade. Especially after the revelations of two opaque nuclear sites at Natanz and Arak in 2002 the international community remains highly alert about the Iranian nuclear programme. The political leadership of Iran tirelessly emphasises that its nuclear programme has only peaceful purposes. The regime has repeatedly highlighted its right under the NPT to produce indigenous nuclear energy. Moreover, in 2010 Iranian president Ahmadinejad claimed the establishment of a NWFZ of the Middle East, a proposition already made by Iran and Egypt in 1974.⁴ The Iranian nuclear programme was already launched under the Sha's regime before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It was backed by the West and the East in order to assure peaceful ambitions. Russia assisted in the construction of the Bushher reactor, which should start producing

¹ K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. (New York: Random House, 1979)

² H. Müller and A. Schmidt, "The Little Known Story About Deproliferation. Why States Give Up Nuclear Weapons Activities." In *Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st century, The Role of Theory*, Vol. 1, eds. W. C. Potter with G. Mukhatzhanova, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 124 - 158.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ E. Solingen, "Domestic Models of Political Survival, Why Some Do and Others Don't (Proliferate)." In *Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st century, The Role of Theory*, Vol. 1, eds. W. C. Potter with G. Mukhatzhanova, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 38 - 57.

nuclear energy by the end of 2011. The USA provided Teheran with a light water reactor under the „Atoms for Peace“ programme, in exchange for the commitment not to develop nuclear weapons.⁵

Considering the programme's long standing opaque character (after the Iranian Revolution), the development of a medium range missile system and its reluctance to fully collaborate with the IAEA it is understandable that the international community calls into question Teheran's motives. It is assumed for this paper that Iran's nuclear programme has a military component, but the nuclear threshold has not yet been passed.⁶

The question about the root causes behind the Iranian nuclear programme becomes highly important as Iranian nuclear weapons could challenge the already fragile security situation in the Middle East, one of the most unstable regions of the world. A nuclear Shiite Iran might trigger a nuclear arms race in the dominantly Sunni Gulf Region, where the main rivals for regional dominance – Egypt and Saudi Arabia – are not only Sunni States, but also US allies. Moreover, NW acquisition of a NPT member State – such as Iran – could cause irreparable damage to the young indefinitely extended NPT. Due to the above mentioned reasons, understanding the root causes of Iran's nuclear ambitions is of high global importance.⁷

1.2 Scope & Methodology

The aim of this paper is to analyse why states pursue nuclear weapons in general and in particular will try to reveal causes behind the Iranian nuclear programme. The outcome is aimed at helping policymakers to understand Iran's position and to better plan counter-policies in order to avoid a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. To run the analyses we will borrow from the extensive qualitative literature which has been

⁵ A. Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat. President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

⁶ M. Fitzpatrick, "Assessing Iran's Nuclear Programme." *Survival* 48/3, (2006), 5 - 26.

J. Phillips "Nuclear Program: What is known and unknown." *Backgrounder* 2393, (2010), 1 - 11.

Office of the Director of National Intelligence. *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*, 2007.

http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf (accessed September 7, 2011).

J. Simpson, "Iran's Nuclear Capability and Potential to Develop Atomic Weapons" In *Iran's Nuclear Program, Realities and Repercussions*. (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006), 11 - 36.

⁷ This paper is based on the assumption that nuclear technology has a dual-use; it can be used for civilian purposes (to produce electricity or for medical purposes) or military purposes (production of nuclear weapons).

published thus far. The starting point is the three models of Sagan (1996), which challenges the structural-realist argument that security is the exclusive motivation for states to go nuclear. Sagan argues that besides security, domestic actors and norms serve as nuclear incentives and disincentives.⁸ However, Sagan's models are not fully fledged in linking causes and effects. We lend from further scholars who researched within different IR paradigms to define nuclear motivations in three realms: 1) Realism and Structural-Realism 2) Liberalism and Organizational theory, and 3) Belief Systems. Out of the discussions within these realms working hypotheses will be established. Benefitting further from the results of Ogilvie-White, who analysed shortcomings of theories when predicting dynamics of nuclear proliferation, one assumes that a single theory cannot explain the complex puzzle of nuclear proliferation.⁹ A multi-theoretical approach might be key in understanding why states go down the nuclear path. In a second step the Iranian nuclear programme will be traced in the search for evidence to verify the working hypotheses. This hypothesis testing process will be divided in two levels: 1) international system level and 2) domestic level.

1.3 Literature overview

The (non-) proliferation literature has undergone changes in the last decade. Whereas the major part of research is dominated by qualitative analysis in recent years some quantitative studies have entered the research field. Qualitative studies serve mainly to identify independent variables, but are not able to quantify how much they matter in relation to each other. This is where quantitative studies can contribute to the proliferation puzzle. Singh and Way¹⁰ and Jo and Gartzke¹¹ rely both on multivariate statistical analysis to study security determinants of proliferation. However, the security situation of a country might be more a question of perception than of measureable quantitative parameters. Moreover, another problem of quantitative

⁸ S. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb." *International Security* 21/3, (1996), 54-86.

⁹ T. Ogilvie-White, "Is there a theory of nuclear proliferation? An analysis of the contemporary debate." *The Nonproliferation Review*, (1996), 43 - 60.

¹⁰ S. Singh. and C. R. Way, "The Correlates of Nuclear Proliferation: A Quantitative test." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48/6, (2004), 859 - 885.

¹¹ D.-J. Jo and E. Gartzke, "Determinants of Nuclear Proliferation." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51/1, (2007), 167 - 194.

studies is one of operationalization. How for example operationalize the measurement of the NPT's influence on a state's decision to go nuclear in a certain year? Bleek believes that in proliferation studies this represents an „*insurmountable challenge*“.¹² Lastly, the secret character of nuclear programmes makes data quality – especially for quantitative studies – questionable. Müller and Schmidt in their recent study try to overcome shortcomings of quantitative studies by using simplified dichotomy parameters and running higher time intervals.¹³ We will therefore from time to time draw from their results. However, due to the previously mentioned shortcomings of quantitative studies we will mainly rely on qualitative research. It is more important for a single case study to know what the motivations are, and in second place to understand which independent variable has more weight over the other. A new contribution to proliferation studies has been made by supply-side literature. Several scholars reveal that nuclear civilian assistance is a new independent variable in explaining why nuclear weapons proliferate, which to date has been given little attention.¹⁴ These researchers claim not to focus only on states' motivations (demand-side), but also research supply side parameters. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this further. However, in light of an indefinitely extended NPT the role of nuclear civilian assistance merits further research.

¹² P. C. Bleek, "Why Do States Proliferate? Quantitative Analysis of the Exploration, Pursuit, and Acquisition of Nuclear Weapons.", In *Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st century, The Role of Theory*, Vol. 1, eds. W. C. Potter with G. Mukhatzhanova, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 161.

¹³ H. Müller and A. Schmidt, *Op.Cit*

¹⁴ M. Fuhrmann, "Spreading Temptation, Proliferation and Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation Agreements." *International Security* 34/1, (2009), 7-41.

M. Kroenig, "Importing the Bomb: Sensitive Nuclear Assistance and Nuclear Proliferation." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53/2, (2009), 161 – 180.

M. Kroenig, "Exporting the Bomb: Why States Provide Sensitive Nuclear Assistance." *American Political Science Review* 103/1, (2009), 113 – 133.

2 Theories: Why states pursue nuclear weapons programmes?

2.1 Security

Security concerns have long been advocated by Realism as the exclusive reasons for nuclear weapons proliferation. Realism assumes the state as a unitary and rational actor who responds to outside pressure, and that power in an anarchical system is a zero-sum game.¹⁵ States rely on self help in order to assure their survival in the international system. Furthermore relative gains and the balance of power are responsible for the stability of the international system.¹⁶ Hence, if one state acquires nuclear weapons other states follow suit in order to restore the balance of power and assure their survival. This explains the initial history of nuclear proliferation as a chain reaction starting during World War II. None of the main rivals were sure if the development of NW was possible, however the fear that adversaries could already be

	Explicit nuclear threat	Military conflict with NWS	Indirect nuclear threat	Conflict with proliferator
United States				X
USSR/Russia		X		
UK		X		
France	X			
China	X			
Israel				
India	X		X	X
Pakistan				X
South Africa			X	
Iran	X	X		

Table 1: Nuclear threats and proliferation

Source: Own elaboration according to H. Müller and A. Schmidt, 2010, 137.

Müller and Schmidt reinforce this argument by concluding that in each of the critical cases with nuclear weapons activity- except Israel - “the nuclear threat played a direct or indirect role” (see also Table 1).¹⁸ Sagan in his security model also points out, that a

working on the development of NW drove the United States, the UK, the Soviet Union, Germany and France down the nuclear path.¹⁷ By that same token the nuclear programmes developed later by China, India and Pakistan can be explained.

¹⁵ H. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. (New York: Knopf, 1973)

¹⁶ K. Waltz, 1979, *Op. Cit*

¹⁷ S. Sagan, *Op. Cit*

¹⁸ H. Müller and A. Schmidt, *Op. Cit*, 137

state might pursue nuclear weapons “*against overwhelming conventional military threats or as coercive tools to compel changes in the status quo.*”¹⁹ In short, nuclear neighbours or main adversaries with high conventional military capability create new nuclear weapon states.

However, existential security threats can also be created through isolation.²⁰ Betts recognizes the importance of different types of states and their threat perception. He argues that „Pariah status“ is a determinant for going nuclear. Isolation or expulsion from the international community reinforces existential security threats and decreases adherence to international community policy. Thus, especially isolated autocratic regimes are more prone to paranoid attitudes that allow them to adhere to positive nuclear postures.²¹

Nuclear restraint is explained by flipping the security argument around. The re-evaluation of security threats may reverse nuclear weapon programmes. The cases of Brazil and Argentina are often cited in this framework. Brazil and Argentina, who had not fought a war since 1828, abandoned active nuclear weapons programmes in a joint declaration in 1990 as they did not represent an existential security threat to each other.²²

From the previous discussion the following hypothesis follows:

H 1: States pursue nuclear weapons programmes when facing existential security threats.

2.1.1 Prediction of nuclear proliferation in the international system

As with all theories, a prediction of future behaviour is expected of nuclear theory. It follows from the previous discussion that Realism sees nuclear weapons as instrument to state security. However, due to the destructive nature of nuclear weapons, states will not use them, but acquire them to use them as a deterrent.

¹⁹ S. Sagan, *Op. Cit.*, 57

²⁰ R. K. Betts, “Paranoids, Pygmies, Pariahs and Non-Proliferation Revisited.” *Security Studies* 2, (1993).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² S. Sagan, *Op. Cit.*

According to deterrence theory nuclear weapons should have spread around the globe and stabilized the international system. Hence, structural-realists and nuclear optimists argued „*more may be better*“.²³ However, nuclear weapons have not spread in a hasty manner around the world and some states facing existential security threats have not decided to acquire nuclear weapons. Countries like South Korea, South Africa, Taiwan and Egypt after initiating nuclear weapons programmes reversed from going down the nuclear path; still under the risk of military attacks from their adversaries. In other words, countries facing more or less constantly the same security threat restrained from their nuclear weapons programmes. Why?

Waltz argues that military leaders dislike uncertainty and therefore are less prone to develop nuclear weapons.²⁴ He thereby admits that individuals and organizations influence the nuclear decision and this undermines the classical realist assumptions, which see states as unitary actors. Hence, the black box of the state has to be opened to better understand states' nuclear motivations. Ogilvie-White (1996) like Waltz (2002) suggests that nuclear proliferation is too complex to be explained by one single theory. The proliferation puzzle can only be understood by taking into account external and internal factors, hence, considering several theories in parallel.²⁵ Sagan (1996) in conclusion to his three models – security, domestic actors and norms – sides with the argument of Ogilvie-White (1996) by stating “...*I have no quarrel with the argument that the largest number of past and even current active proliferant cases are best explained by the security model. But the evidence [...] strongly suggests that multicausality, rather than measurement error, lies at the heart of the nuclear proliferation problem.*”²⁶

To summarise thus far: Existential security threats explain nuclear weapons programmes and their reversal. However, predicting nuclear proliferation in the past has shown Realism and Structural Realism to have had flaws. Thus, it is not sufficient to focus only on the security situation within the international system. Switching to a lower level of analysis – to the domestic level - might prove to provide a more complete picture of the nuclear puzzle. States pursue several parallel

²³ K. Waltz, “The spread of nuclear weapons: More may be better.” *Adelphi paper* 171, (1981).

²⁴ K. Waltz In S. Sagan and K. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A debate Renewed*. 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002)

²⁵ T. Ogilvie-White, *Op. Cit*

²⁶ S. Sagan, *Op. Cit*, 85

competing goals, on an international and domestic level, and systemic theories are not suitable to explain goals on a domestic level. Different political leaders or groups of decision-makers, with different political ideologies may decide differently or the same in identical security situations. Thus, inner parameters need to be identified.

2.2 Inner Parameters

Inner parameters focus on domestic determinants of nuclear proliferation by opening the black box of the state. When paying attention to inner parameters Meyer points out the process of decision-making as being crucial.²⁷ He divides the process into three stages to understand why states pursue nuclear weapons. The first stage is the decision to develop a latent capability, secondly the decision to convert this capability into an operational one and thirdly the decision to start a nuclear weapons programme. Cases, where a state has not taken the final decision – a fluctuation between stages two and three – Meyer argues, would explain clandestine nuclear programmes; it might not be in the interest of the state to make something public which has not been finally decided. Other scholars refer to a similar strategy as “nuclear hedging”.²⁸ Nuclear hedging is a national strategy of “...*maintaining, or at least appearing to maintain, a viable option for the relatively rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons, based on an indigenous technical capacity to produce them within a relatively short time frame ranging from several weeks to a few years*”.²⁹ This strategy can either be used during the process of developing nuclear weapons, or during the rollback process, having the possibility to restart a dormant programme.

The following provides an analysis of the role of parties involved in the process of decision-making, viz. individuals and domestic organizations.

²⁷ S. Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984)

²⁸ A. E. Levite, “Never Say Never Again.” *International Security* 27/3, (2002), 59 - 88.

²⁹ A. E. Levite, *Op. Cit.*, 69

2.2.1 Individuals

Psychological approaches focus within the black box of the state on individuals' beliefs in general and in particular on their beliefs about norms. The beliefs of leaders influence their actions in the decision-making process.³⁰ Lavoy (1993) discusses the questions of beliefs on group level and develops a model he calls „myth-makers“.³¹ He tries to explain, why countries go nuclear, despite the accompanying uncertainty of nuclear weapons. „Myths“, he explains are unverifiable beliefs about relationships between nuclear weapons and a state's security. These myths are unverifiable because they are based on perceptions on what brings security. Hence, myths can be believed, but not known. The main argument is that national elites, who want their country to go for nuclear weapons, exaggerate security threats to create a „nuclear security myth“. If well-placed individuals within a state's system are able to convince the ultimate decision-maker that nuclear weapons are indispensable for a state's security, a state is likely to pursue nuclear weapons. Lavoy concludes: *„The real world does matter. Nuclear myths and the existence of genuine security threats are closely correlated.“*³²

Flipping the general argument around a myth can also be used to avoid or reverse such a process. Lavoy refers to „insecurity myth“. The insecurity myth makers may try to convince state leaders that nuclear weapons will deteriorate a state's security situation. Thus, Lavoy's model can be used to explain proliferation and deproliferation. These two myths' can exist in parallel in a competing position. At the end of such a competing process, which myth making faction prevails will decide if a country acquires nuclear weapons or not.

From this logic the following hypothesis flows:

H 2: When individual elite members (who support nuclear weapons) are strong enough to influence the final decision-maker nuclear weapons programmes arise.

³⁰ S. Smith In Little, R. & S. Smith, *Belief Systems and the Study of International Relations*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988)

³¹ P. R. Lavoy, „Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation.“ *Security Studies* 2/3, (1993), 192 - 212.

³² P. R. Lavoy, „Nuclear Proliferation Over the Next Decade. Causes, Warning Signs, and Policy Responses.“ *Nonproliferation Review* 13/3, (2006), 436.

Sagan in his third model adheres to the idea that whether a state seeks nuclear weapons or not depends on the prevailing norms in the international system and their perception through state leaders.³³ Nuclear norms have changed over time. Whereas during the 1950s and 1960s joining the nuclear club was „on vogue“, after the entry in force of the NPT in 1970 being a NNWS was simply what a good international citizen did. Sagan illustrates his argument through two examples (France, Ukraine). France acquired nuclear weapons, because of French leaders' „perception of the bomb's symbolic significance“.³⁴ The fact that the P5 are all nuclear weapon states underlines the idea that nuclear weapons yield political influence and prestige. Furthermore nuclear programmes – not necessarily with a military component – show a certain level of scientific development and modernization. Sagan frames this symbolic character also in terms of „grandeur“ and „independence“.³⁵ Contrary to this notion, newly independent Ukraine, which inherited a nuclear arsenal after the disintegration of the Soviet Block returned its weapons to Russia and joined the NPT. According to Sagan, this is because Ukraine's leaders believed in the prevailing norm – it's what a good international citizen had to do.³⁶

From this the next standing hypothesis follows:

H 3: States pursue nuclear weapons programmes when leaders perceive them as significant symbols for state identity.

To summarise: In belief systems nuclear weapons are seen as significant symbols of state identity and prestige rather than instruments for state security. Psychological determinants highlight the role of individuals in the decision-making process due to their beliefs. To focus on the beliefs of individuals allows explanation of irrational behaviour; the flip-side of belief systems may not be able to verify the causes of those same beliefs.

³³ S. Sagan, *Op. Cit*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 78

³⁶ *Ibid.*

2.2.2 Domestic Organizations

Sagan (1996), in his general critique of structural realism claims to take into account sub-state parameters. He argues that acquiring nuclear weapons might serve the parochial interests of particular domestic groups.³⁷ These groups can include the state's nuclear energy establishment, important units of the military forces and politicians in states where individual parties or the mass public strongly favour nuclear weapon programmes. These parties often manipulate and try to control information and exaggerate threat perceptions. Thus, these parties might be interested to find reasons and exert pressure to justify their existence. Hence, *„...nuclear weapons programs are not obvious or inevitable solutions to international security problems; instead nuclear weapons programs are solutions looking for a problem to which to attach themselves so as to justify their existence“*.³⁸ Sagan supports this model by analysing the Indian and South African case under the prism of organizational theory. Solingen (1994) sides with Sagan's organizational theory and also focuses on domestic actors. Her main argument is that ruling domestic coalitions take decisions that please their ultimate goal to remain in power. She distinguishes between „inward-looking“ and „outward-looking“ coalitions and establishes a link to economic preferences.³⁹ In what follows her model of political survival will be discussed.

2.2.2.1 Theories of Political Survival

According to Solingen (1994) the character of leaders and ruling coalitions can explain nuclear postures. Ruling parties take decisions that best serve their interest to remain in power. In other words, domestic leaders and coalitions adopt different domestic models of political survival.⁴⁰ Who is a political „hardliner“ or „moderate“ is endogenous to this argument. Solingen's argument relies on Liberalism and advocates the idea that ruling leaders or coalitions, which pursue a politic of economic liberalization and internationalization are less prone to go for nuclear

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 65

³⁹ E. Solingen, „The Political Economy of Nuclear Restrain.“ *International Security* 19/2, (1994), 126 - 169.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

weapons to assure their political survival. Liberalizing coalitions include bank and export company representatives and other highly skilled workers. Members of these constituencies rely on global markets and therefore seek good international relations. Liberalizing coalitions aim to send unambiguous signs about their nuclear intentions in order to have access to the global economy, foreign markets, technology and capital to serve their constituencies. Such coalitions are also interested in limiting state power and unproductive investments. This may help to curtail the influence of secret state bureaucracies in control of nuclear weapon programmes. Solingen illustrates her argument by applying it to „internationalizing“ East Asia and other continents. (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Egypt under Sadat, South Africa, Brazil, Libya after 2003). South Korea for instance, decided to reverse from its nuclear path and moved towards internationalization even under unchanged security threats from North Korea. North Korea, an inward-orientated autocratic regime opted for nuclear weapons as a sign of independence from global parameters.

On the other side of the spectrum inward-looking nationalist coalitions are formed of state industries, businesses which are in competition with imported goods, and mainly less skilled workers. These constituencies are less interested in participating in global markets. Often, as Solingen points out, these regimes favour extreme nationalism, religious radicalism and national self-sufficiency.⁴¹ Most political regimes in the Middle East relied on inward-looking and self-sufficient ideologies for political survival. Egypt (under Nasser), Iraq, Iran, Libya (before 2003) and Syria fit the model of an inward-looking regime that was or is pursuing the nuclear option. In general Solingen found the domestic survival model to fit all cases in the Middle East and East Asia.⁴² However, she states that her model needs to be taken alongside other independent variables and should not be used in isolation. Solingen states that her model can explain why security is sometimes ranked higher or lower, and why sometimes NWP were initiated when there was no need for them. Müller and Schmidt contest Solingen's thesis by arguing that no „internationalizing“ nuclear

⁴¹ E. Solingen, 2010, *Op. Cit*

⁴² E. Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Alternative Paths in East Asia and the Middle East*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007)

weapon state who ratified the NPT abandoned its nuclear weapons programme, even obliged to do so under Article VI of the NPT.⁴³

Taking this into account, domestic models of political survival at least are able to explain several things:⁴⁴ a) why different political actors within the same state have different nuclear postures, and b) why nuclear postures vary over time within a state, due to change in power of different political ideologies. Considering an existing nuclear programme, it could explain why one nuclear programme makes progress while another does not. When inward-looking politicians are in power a nuclear programme makes progress. The opposite may occur if liberal politicians are in power. From the previous discussion we establish the following hypotheses:

H 4: States pursue nuclear weapons programmes when domestic actors need them to justify their survival.

H 5: Nuclear weapons programmes progress when inward-looking politicians are in power and stop when outward-looking politicians are in power.

To summarise: It has been shown that domestic actors, organizations in particular, influence nuclear proliferation. Models of political survival may help explain different nuclear postures within a state over time (despite a state's general nuclear posture). However, these theories also have some shortcomings. Nor Solingen's (1994) neither Sagan's (1996) model pay attention to the role of individuals in decision-making procedures. This is where psychological approaches - as discussed in chapter 2.2.1 - contribute to the proliferation puzzle by analysing the role of individuals.

⁴³ H. Müller and A. Schmidt, *Op. Cit*

⁴⁴ E. Solingen, 2010, *Op. Cit*, 48

2.3 Conclusions

Theories which aim to explain nuclear proliferation have been discussed. One might assume that security threats are the main motivation behind nuclear weapons programmes. Other theories, however, suggest that nuclear proliferation is multicausal. States pursue several parallel and competing goals, on an international and domestic level. Hence, the “black box” of the state has to be opened to examine the inner parameters of the state. Further theories, which focus on inner parameters have been discussed. Through these discussions several working hypotheses have been established, which will be tested against a single case – Iran. The overall idea is to apply several paradigms to the Iranian case in parallel in order to get a more complete picture of the proliferation puzzle.

The following is an outline of the drawn hypotheses:

H 1: States pursue nuclear weapons programmes when facing existential security threats.

H 2: When individual elite members (who support nuclear weapons) are strong enough to influence the final decision-maker nuclear weapons programmes arise.

H 3: States pursue nuclear weapons programmes when leaders perceive them as significant symbols for state identity.

H 4: States pursue nuclear weapons programmes when domestic actors need them to justify their survival.

H 5: Nuclear weapons programmes progress when inward-looking politicians are in power and stop when outward-looking politicians are in power.

3 The Iran case

This section is divided in three parts. First, a brief overview of the history of the Iranian nuclear programme will be given. Second, Iran's security environment will be analysed and finally the domestic level will be scrutinised.

3.1 Overview of Iran's nuclear programme

Below is an overview of chronological developments selected to aid understanding of the following chapter.⁴⁵

1950s: Shah Mohamed Reza Phalavi launches Iran's first nuclear programme.

1970s: Iran's nuclear plans include the construction of twenty nuclear power reactors. At this time cooperation agreements were signed with France, South Africa, Argentina and the US.

1979: After the Iranian Revolution Ayatollah Khomeini cancelled contracts and stopped the nuclear programme.

1980s: Restart of the nuclear programme.

2002: Revelation of an undeclared enrichment facility and an undeclared heavy water reactor; Iran stopped enrichment after the case went public.

2003: Start of negotiations with the EU3 (UK, France, Germany)

2004: Paris Agreement, the EU3 recognize Iran's right under the NPT to produce nuclear energy, Teheran in turn voluntarily keeps enrichment and reprocessing halted, as long as the negotiations take place.

⁴⁵ Information has been compiled from:

W. Q. Bowen and J. Brewer, "Iran's nuclear challenge: nine years and counting." *International Affairs* 80/2, (2011), 923 - 943.

A. Farzammnia, *Irán. De la Revolución Islámica a la Revolución Nuclear*. (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 2009)

Congressional Research Service. *Iran's Nuclear Program: Status*. RL34544, 2009.

G. Mukhatzhanova, "Pride and Prejudice. Understanding Iran's Nuclear Program." In *Forecasting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st century, A comparative perspective*, Vol. 2, eds. W. C. Potter with G. Mukhatzhanova, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 42 - 75.

2005: The EU3 present a proposal for a long-term agreement. This framework seeks the following concessions from Tehran: Iran needs to make a binding agreement to not pursue fuel cycle activities or withdraw from the NPT and to ratify the additional safeguard protocol by the end of the same year. In return, the EU3 would offer fuel supply guarantees, cooperation in nuclear safety and security and economic cooperation. Furthermore the EU would support Iran's membership in the WTO and discuss regional security arrangements.

In the same year, new hardline president Ahmadinejad was elected. He dismissed the proposal and shortly after his swearing in ceremony uranium conversion was restarted.

2006: IAEA refers the case to the UN Security Council. UNSC releases first sanction resolution.

2007: IAEA Director General El Baradei establishes a workplan for further negotiations with Iran.

2008: EU3 offers further incentives linked to the ceasement of fuel cycle activities, which Teheran rejects.

2009: Iran informs the IAEA that a new pilot fuel enrichment plant is under construction and announces plans to construct two more nuclear power plants.

President Ahmadinejad gets re-elected; however, there remain doubts about the regularity of the election process.

3.2 International System level

Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the US embassy hostage crisis, Iran has been labelled by the US as a terror supporting regime. Neither US president Carter, nor US president Reagan found a formula of rapprochement with new Supreme Leader Khomeini. Since this time the US is seen as Iran's main enemy.⁴⁶ In 1987 Iran was involved in a naval shooting with the United States, however, this is the only

⁴⁶ A. Farzamnia, *Op. Cit*

confirmed physical combat between the two countries.⁴⁷ Iran has been internationally isolated through political, economic and military embargos. The Iranian Army in pre-revolutionary time was considered the third largest in the world and due to the imposed isolation, lead by the US, could not provide its army with new equipment and spare parts during the Iraq – Iran war.⁴⁸

The most hostile neighbour of Iran was Iraq, against which Teheran fought a long and destructive war from 1980 – 1988. The secular Baath Regime of Sadam Hussein during this war used biological and chemical weapons against Iran with little attention from the international community or other countries of the Gulf region. This bitter asymmetric experience in terms of military power combined with a lack of international support may have been a driving force to balance power in the region and sides with the structural-realist argument. In fact Iran's NP was restarted (the programme was suspended by the Supreme Leader immediately after the Islamic Revolution) in 1982.⁴⁹ Already in 1984 a new nuclear research laboratory at the Isfahan Nuclear Technology Center (INTC) was built and in 1985 China provided the first of four small research reactors. Activities at the INTC involved uranium enrichment experiments of clandestine imported uranium from 1982.⁵⁰ In this period there were also efforts to establish contacts with the A.Q. Khan network to acquire nuclear technology.⁵¹

However, following the 1991 Gulf War Sadam Hussein's regime was weakened and in 2003 removed from power. Teheran since 2003 has started to intensify its diplomatic relations with Iraq in order to compete with the US influence.⁵² The most prominent sign of these efforts was the first state visit of an Iranian leader (Ahmadinejad) in 40 years to Iraq in 2008.⁵³ Moreover, Teheran has increased its influence in the Shiite southern region of Iraq.⁵⁴ The 2003 regime change in Iraq has reduced the security threat of this hostile neighbour, but at the same time may have

⁴⁷ H. Müller and A. Schmidt, *Op. Cit*

⁴⁸ A. Farzannia, *Op. Cit*

⁴⁹ Congressional Research Service, *Op. Cit*

⁵⁰ A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*

⁵¹ J. Simpson, *Op. Cit*

⁵² A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*

⁵³ A. Ehteshami, "Irán bajo Ahmadinejad." *Anuario Asia Pacifico CIDOB* 2009, (2010), 111 – 118.

⁵⁴ J. Noyes, "Iran's Nuclear Program: Impact on the Security of the GCC." In *Iran's Nuclear Program, Realities and Repercussions*. (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006), 63 - 91.

fuelled the security threats from its long time enemy - the United States. Teheran in 2003 wrote a letter to the United States offering cooperation and regarding the Nuclear Intelligence Estimate halted its military nuclear programme at the same time.⁵⁵ This might be interpreted as concessions to the US and the perception of existential security threats and the fear of being next on the invasion agenda. After 9/11 G.W. Bush included Iran in the "axis of evil", together with Iraq and North Korea. Whereas Iraq has been invaded by the United States led coalition, North Korea did not suffer any consequences. Hence, the conclusion made by the Iranian leadership might have been that nuclear deterrence avoids regime change and provides political survival. With the election of Obama in 2008 and the change in US foreign policy, relations with Iran have improved.⁵⁶ One official sign of this was Obama's congratulations for the Iranian New Year (*noruz*) in March 2009.



Figure 1: Iran's security environment as of June 2010

Source: <http://israelmatzav.blogspot.com/2010/06/iran-surrounded-by-us-troops-in-ten.html> (accessed, September 7, 2011)

shares borders with a nuclear weapon state, viz. Pakistan (holding nuclear weapons since 1998). Israel, also a nuclear weapon state (one might assume Israel has a nuclear arsenal) is located in the neighbourhood and pre-emptively attacked nuclear installations in Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007). Iran has had disputes with its nuclear

Teheran has few friendly relationships in the region and sets itself apart from Arab states by emphasizing its great history as an ancient Persian civilization. A closer look to the map of the Middle East Region shows that Iran is encircled by US troops or US friendly regimes (see Figure 1). Moreover it

⁵⁵ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Op. Cit*

⁵⁶ L. Mesa, "Las políticas de Bush y Obama hacia la República Islámica de Irán. La centralidad del factor nuclear." *Foro Internacional* XLIX/4, (2009), 832-863.

neighbour Pakistan; however these disputes have not been intense enough to represent existential security threats.⁵⁷ Moreover, Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is dedicated to balance power against India in the Kashmir conflict.⁵⁸ Hence, Pakistan might not have the "energy" to fight on two fronts. Israel, a state with an ambiguous policy about its nuclear arsenal, has been repeatedly included in hostile rhetoric regarding its existence and double standards of the West due to its nuclear weapons ambiguity. However, this anti-Israel rhetoric may be used to please domestic conservative demands.⁵⁹ There have been no military disputes between Iran and Israel, most likely due to Iran's use of proxy parties (Hezbollah, Hamas) to address the Palestinian case.⁶⁰ Afghanistan, to which Teheran had hostile relations due to its radical Sunni Taliban regime, does not present an existential security threat anymore. After 9/11 Teheran partly assisted the United States in removal of hostile Taliban forces in Afghanistan, assuming the trade-off of having US troops at its borders.⁶¹ Since 2011 coalition forces – with an open deadline – are pulling out of Afghanistan, reducing security threats for Teheran. At the same time, Teheran's closest ally – Syria – has to fear for its political survival. Baschaar al-Assad's regime is shooting down its own protesting civilians and the international community could intervene under a humanitarian rationale. Regime change or international troops in Iran's proximity could once more raise security concerns for Teheran. The Arabian Spring of 2011 has introduced a new variable, which no one would have predicted in size. From the previous discussed ups and downs and uncertainty about the future follows a fragile security environment for Teheran, at least at a latent level.

Regarding the „Pariah status“ Chubin and Litwak argue that Iran may not be considered a Pariah state as there exists no large scale sanctions of the UN against Teheran, as was the case for Iraq.⁶² One could argue the contrary. Firstly, this might have been true for 2003, but not for today, as several UN sanctions are in force. Secondly, UN sanctions are not a necessary condition for isolation. Other forms of

⁵⁷ S. Chubin and R. S. Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations." *The Washington Quarterly* 26/4, (2003), 99 – 114. G. Mukhatzhanova, *Op. Cit*

⁵⁸ G. Perkovich, "Dealing with Iran's nuclear challenge." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003. <http://www.iranwatch.org/privateviews/CEIP/perspex-ceip-iraniannuclearchallenge042803.pdf> (accessed September 7, 2011).

⁵⁹ A. Ansari, "Iran under Ahmadinejad: populism and its malcontents." *International Affairs* 84/4, (2008), 683 – 700.

⁶⁰ S. Chubin and R. S. Litwak, *Op. Cit*

⁶¹ J. Noyes, *Op. Cit*

⁶² S. Chubin and R. S. Litwak, *Op. Cit*

sanctions, like economic embargos serve as isolators. Moreover, a permanent desire of the world's superpower to achieve regime change in Iran may be perceived as isolation. By the same token, while Iran was a NPT member in good standing (1980s) the United States had continuously encouraged other states not to assist Iran in its legal aspirations to acquire nuclear technology. That the international community stood by in the 1980s when Iraq invaded Iran and used chemical weapons could also be perceived as isolation. Such an experience may shape a mindset of perceived isolation for decades. In other words, isolation may be more a question of perception of informal actions than of official sanctions.

Iran fits several parameters established as existential security threats in the theory part of this paper.⁶³ The following evidence has been found:

a) Theoretical argument: Balance of power against a rival (Waltz 1979)

Evidence 1: Iran – Iraq war, with biological and chemical weapons, 1980 – 1988

Evidence 2: USA since 2003

b) Theoretical argument: Conflict with a nuclear power state (Müller and Schmidt 2010)

Evidence: Iran's naval battle with the USA in 1987

c) Theoretical argument: "Pariah Status" (Betts 1993)

Evidence: international isolation through different types of embargos, sanctions and interventions, since 1979

Hence, to verify hypothesis H1 we conclude: Iran pursues a nuclear weapons programme due to existential security threats. These threats were especially faced in the 1980s after suffering the first experiences with chemical and biological weapons in an asymmetrical war with Iraq. Iran's nuclear weapons programme was restarted in 1982; the Iraq war was the impetus to re-balance power against

⁶³ See chapter 2.1 of this paper

Bagdad. The nuclear arsenal of Iran's nuclear neighbour Pakistan is dedicated to India and no large disputes exists with Islamabad. The strategic environment from 2003 onwards - after the Iraq invasion - might have again fitted the structural realism argument. But, the easing of tension since president Obama took over office should at least have reduced Iran's threat concerns to a level that does not justify a NWP. The current security strategy is fragile; however Teheran has improved relations with its neighbours. Hence, by today Iran is not facing any imminent existential security threats that would justify a nuclear weapons programme. However, security in the Middle East Region has proven to be characterized by ups and downs, which would justify a latent nuclear capability.

3.3 Domestic level

In this section the two different levels involved in the decision-making process – the individual and the organizational level – will be scrutinised. At the risk of repetition, this paper assumes that Iran has not taken the final decision to go nuclear yet. Furthermore it assumes a nuclear dual-use technology. The non declaration of the opaque sites in Natanz and Arak allows the interpretation that Iran had not made a final decision and sides with Meyer's (1984) argument that Teheran is pending between stages two and three of the decision-making process.⁶⁴ Moreover, the military component of the programme was rolled back in 2003 and as yet has not been restarted.⁶⁵ Teheran has repeatedly insisted that the negotiations about its nuclear programme have to exclude the indigenous fuel cycle capacity.⁶⁶ This capacity is Iran's "red line" for negotiations with the international community. From this insistence to have its indigenous fuel cycle one might conclude that Iran is adopting Levite's (2002) nuclear hedging strategy.⁶⁷

3.3.1 Iranian leaders

The beliefs of individual decision-makers within the domestic context might be key to understanding Iran's nuclear motivations.⁶⁸ Belief systems suggests that nuclear programmes can be seen as symbols for state identity.⁶⁹ Sagan argues that nuclear programmes can be viewed by their leaders as symbols of prestige, independence and scientific modernization.⁷⁰ Lavoy in his myth maker model identifies individuals who create the belief that nuclear weapons bring security.⁷¹ Thus, the role of individuals during the programme's restart in the 1980s, and after the second restart in 2005 (after the election of president Ahmadinejad) will be analysed.

⁶⁴ See chapter 2.2 of this paper

⁶⁵ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Op. Cit*

⁶⁶ A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*

⁶⁷ See chapter 2.2

⁶⁸ S. Smith, *Op. Cit*, see chapter 2.2.1 of this paper

⁶⁹ See chapter 2.2.1 of this paper

⁷⁰ S. Sagan, *Op. Cit*

⁷¹ P. R. Lavoy, 1993, *Op. Cit*

3.3.1.1 The restart in the 1980s

As outlined in the theory part perceptions about security threats shape the decision about “going nuclear”. Applying Lavoy’s (1993) myth-maker model to Iran means searching for evidence of influential elites. These elites exaggerate security threats to influence the ultimate decision-maker that nuclear weapons are the best solution to existential security threats. The final decision in nuclear issues in Iran has to be taken by the Supreme Leader. Iran’s inner politics are a very complex and redundant network of elites and long standing politicians. To examine this network goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, to understand how influential individuals could bring about decisions with the Supreme Leader we will outline some basic assumptions. There exists no open political process with checks and balances to limit the influence of elites. Iran’s inner politics are managed by informal networks, where decision-making is a kind of bargaining process and consensus building.⁷² Exercising personal influence through family and cleric networks in order to achieve good posts or personal goals is a common practice in Iranian politics.⁷³ A culture of influence is a two-way street; individuals get used to exerting influence and being influenced. This represents a fertile ground for myth-makers to exercise their power, especially, when they are long serving clerics and politicians like they are in Iran. Lavoy states that Iranian myth-makers are politicians turned clerics, who come from the early years of the revolution and adhere to nationalist norms.⁷⁴ Mayer (2004) in his work identifies two main myth-makers who influenced former Supreme Leader Khomeini to restart the nuclear programme after the Iraq invasion in 1980s.⁷⁵ This might indicate the strong influence these myth-makers had, as he himself had stopped the nuclear programme when taking over power in 1979. Khomeini referred to the nuclear programme as “unislamic”.⁷⁶ The main security myth-maker at this time was the speaker of the *majlis* Ayatollah Rafsanjani. He later was appointed head of the armed forces and had two terms as president of Iran from 1989 till 1997. Rafsanjani till his resignation from the Assembly of Experts in 2011 was considered the most important

⁷² Byman et al. *Iran’s Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*. (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001)

⁷³ A. Farzamnia, *Op. Cit*

⁷⁴ P. R. Lavoy, 1993, *Op. Cit*

⁷⁵ C. C. Mayer, “National Security to Nationalist Myth: Why Iran wants nuclear weapons.” (Master thesis, Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, 2004).

⁷⁶ A. Farzamnia, *Op. Cit*

person after the Supreme Leader.⁷⁷ The second myth-maker, who influenced the 1980s decision to restart the NWP was prime minister Asgar-Khani, who is seen as the “father” of Iran’s nuclear programme.⁷⁸ In 2003, together with IRGC commander Rahim-Safavi they formed the inner circle surrounding the Supreme Leader and promoted the nuclear weapons programme due to the following rationales:⁷⁹ a) Iran is at risk from Aggressive Zionist/Israeli and American nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, b) Iran has no great-power alliance options, c) Iran’s destiny is to lead the Persian Gulf, and d) a self-reliant deterrence is the only way to meet the Zionist/imperialist threat. These myth-makers are hardly heard outside, their discussions are held behind closed doors, where only few people have access.⁸⁰

To summarise: There is evidence that security myth-makers exist in Iran, who have influenced the decision of the Supreme Leader to restart the dormant nuclear programme after the invasion by Iraq. These nationalist myth-makers are long serving and well established nationalist clerics and politicians who still promote the idea of a nuclear weapons programme. Hence, in verification of hypothesis H2 we conclude:

H2: In general Iran’s political culture favours influential behaviour. Due to the secret character of myth maker discussions it is difficult to give a definitive result. However, strong evidence exists that elites (who favour nuclear weapons) have been strong enough to influence the beliefs of the final decision-maker to start a nuclear weapons programme in the 1980s. Some of these individuals are still advocating a nuclear security myth to this day.

⁷⁷ E. Abrahamian, *A history of modern Iran*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

⁷⁸ C. C. Mayer, *Op. Cit*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

3.3.1.2 The restart in 2005: Ahmadinejad

Before the revelations of the two opaque nuclear sites in 2002 the Iranian nuclear issue was not high on the international community's agenda. The same is true on a domestic level; the Iranian population was not preoccupied with the nuclear issue.⁸¹

At the time of the revelations of the opaque facilities the reformist president Khatami was in power. In 2003 – under pressure of the international community – Teheran suspended its enrichment activities and signed the additional safeguard protocol, which has not yet been ratified. In turn the IAEA did not refer the case to the UN Security Council, to which it would have been obliged to under article XII.C of the IAEA statutes.⁸² This additional safeguard protocol allows IAEA inspections without prior notice. Since 2004 Teheran adopted a strategy of reconciliation and accepted negotiations proposed by the EU. The beginning of negotiations was conditioned by a commitment to keep enrichment halted during talks. In exchange the EU promised to offer “carrots” to Teheran.⁸³

With the election of conservative-hardline president Ahmadinejad in 2005 Iran's political landscape changed. Ahmadinejad positioned himself as the solution to economic problems and social injustice. In his election campaign he promised to distribute more of the oil revenues to the Iranian people. Not only was there a shift of power in the presidential office, since 2005 the main bodies of Iran's inner politics were in conservative hands: The Supreme Leader, The Guardian Council, the Judiciary and the speaker of the *majlis* came from the conservative nationalist camp. The nuclear decision-making process in Teheran is a complex issue and hard to understand from outside. Some basic assumptions however are:⁸⁴ While the Supreme Leader has the final decision on nuclear issues Ahmadinejad is in charge of the foreign policy. Operational decisions, regarding whether uranium-enrichment and reprocessing are stopped or started are usually taken by consensus. The new hardliners rapidly agreed to restarting enrichment after the election of Ahmadinejad. Only two days after he took over office the IAEA seals were removed and

⁸¹ G. Mukhatzhanova, *Op. Cit*

⁸² G. Perkovich, “Iran's Nuclear Program after the 2005 Elections.” In *Iran's Nuclear Program, Realities and Repercussions*. (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006), 37 - 61.

⁸³ A. Farzamnia, *Op. Cit*

⁸⁴ A. Farzamnia, *Op. Cit*

enrichment activities restarted.⁸⁵ Hence, Teheran broke the deal with the international community. In reaction the IAEA referred the case to the UN Security Council and in July 2006 resolution 1696 demanded Teheran to suspend its enrichment activities.⁸⁶ As Iran ignored this resolution the UNSC launched two sanction resolutions (Resolution 1737 and 1747).⁸⁷ Moreover, several new nuclear research institutes have been created since 2005, strengthening the programme.⁸⁸ To sum up, since 2005, despite all efforts of the international community the Iranian nuclear programme was restarted and has progressed quickly.

Ahmadinejad's "us vs. them" rhetoric is dominated by nationalist revolutionary terms and rejects foreign interference as imperialistic and colonialist.⁸⁹ Official statements of the president refer to Iran's right to produce nuclear energy and to possess its own indigenous fuel cycle. After reaching a 3,5 % level of uranium enrichment for the first time the president announced that Iran is now a "nuclear country", highlighting the exclusivity of this club.⁹⁰ Although the reality was that a lot of the nuclear technology was imported, Ahmadinejad praised a home grown achievement: *"The Islamic Republic has acquired indigenous technology for fuel production thanks to the efforts made by young faithful and revolutionary scientists"*.⁹¹ In a later speech in 2007 Ahmadinejad supports the idea of national unity by stating *"...by the grace of faith in God and the national unity, Iran has moved forward step by step and now our country is recognised as a country with the capacity for industrial scale fuel cycle production for peaceful purposes."*⁹² Sadjadpour (2009) analyses the speeches of Supreme Leader Khamenei. The views of the highest decision-maker are deeply rooted in the fundamentals of the Islamic Revolution, viz. justice, independence, self-sufficiency, and Islam. Moreover the Supreme Leader stresses the need to overcome Iran's scientific retardation. Sadjadpour concludes that the views of the leader establish a link between scientific advancement, self-sufficiency and political

⁸⁵ A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*

⁸⁶ S/Res/1696 (2006) <http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/unscre1696-2006.pdf> (accessed September 7, 2011).

⁸⁷ S/Res/1737 (2006) <http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/unscre1737-2006.pdf> (accessed September 7, 2011).

⁸⁸ S/Res/1747, (2007) <http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/unscre1747-2007.pdf> (accessed September 7, 2011).

⁸⁹ A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*

⁹⁰ A. Farzamia, *Op. Cit*

⁹¹ G. Mukhatzhanova, *Op. Cit*

⁹² Cited in A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*, 193

⁹³ M. Ahmadinejad at the UN General Assembly in 2007: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2007/iran-070926-irna01.htm> (accessed September 7, 2011).

independence.⁹³ Regarding to Jafarzadeh (2008) former president Rafsanjani put Iranian nuclear advancements on the same level with Galileo's discovery that the earth revolves around the sun.⁹⁴ This might be to some extent political rhetoric, however it does show the pride Iranian leaders feel for having achieved nuclear technology. This correlates with Sagan's (1996) argument that countries pursue nuclear programmes as signs of scientific modernization, independence and even "grandeur".⁹⁵

However, nuclear bombs can also be viewed in terms of symbolic significance. The fact that the P5 are all nuclear weapon states show that nuclear weapons yield political influence and this can be a driving motivation to go nuclear.⁹⁶ Hence, possessing nuclear weapons would give Teheran an influential and powerful position in the region. Chubin and Litwak argue that the quest for leadership in the region is an important drive for Iran's nuclear motivations.⁹⁷ The long oppression and isolation the country suffered and to which political leaders make continuous reference could be overcome by possessing nuclear weapons.⁹⁸ Iranian political leaders and the people of Iran have high ambitions for their nation. They want Iran to become an important player, and are driven by the desire to achieve regional hegemony in economic and cultural terms.⁹⁹ Iranian leaders believe that their country can play an important global role just like the United States and want to be treated equally.¹⁰⁰ In other words, Iranian leaders see their country as a great nation and nuclear weapons would increase their influence and power. Iranian leaders naturally do not state that nuclear weapons yield influence, as they deny every military ambition of their programme. However, president Ahmadinejad in his official statements has expressed his discontent with the double-standard of the NPT.¹⁰¹ Ahmadinejad has repeatedly criticised that the P5, especially the US, as not

⁹³ K. Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei: The World View of Iran's Most Powerful Leader*. (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009)

⁹⁴ A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*

⁹⁵ See chapter 2.2.1 of this paper

⁹⁶ S. Sagan, *Op. Cit*; see chapter 2.2.1 of this paper

⁹⁷ S. Chubin and R. S. Litwak, *Op. Cit*

⁹⁸ G. Mukhatzhanova, *Op. Cit*

⁹⁹ S. Mackey, *The Iranians. Persia, Islam and the soul of a nation*. (New York: Penguin, 1998)

¹⁰⁰ P. Miranda "Memoria de investigación. Irán como actor internacional tras el fin de la Guerra Fría: alcance y contexto." (Master thesis, IBEI Barcelona, 2009).

¹⁰¹ U. Möller, "Iran's Nuclear Ambitions: What Caused this Multilateral Headache?" (Paper presented at the 7th Pan-European International Relations Conference, Stockholm, Sweden, September 9 - 11, 2010).

complying with their commitment for disarmament under Article VI of the NPT. They criticise that the US denies Iran its legal right for a peaceful nuclear fuel cycle.¹⁰² In his 2005 speech in the General Assembly Ahmadinejad states: *“Some powerful states practice a discriminatory approach against access of NPT members to material, equipment, and peaceful nuclear technology, and by doing so, intent to impose nuclear apartheid.”*¹⁰³ In other words, the nuclear power states and especially the P5 have the power to claim illegitimate actions, which they back through their nuclear weapons. Möller argues that this perception of illegitimacy of the NPT and inequality fuels the idea of sense of righteousness in relation to other states.¹⁰⁴ This perceived illegitimacy of the NPT fosters non-compliance as a strategy of defence of state sovereignty and equality.

To summarise: Evidence has been found supporting the argument that states pursue nuclear programmes when their leaders perceive them as symbols of independence, scientific modernization and influence.¹⁰⁵ The three most important Iranian leaders have linked the nuclear programme to the state’s identity. We will therefore proceed to conclude hypothesis H3:

H3: Iran, since 2005 pursues a nuclear programme as its leaders view it as a significant symbol of state identity. Iran’s nuclear programme is framed in terms of scientific modernization, pride and independence. President Ahmadinejad frames nuclear weapons in the context of being able to exercise (illegitimate) power and influence. Combined with the perceived illegitimacy of the NPT this could favour a final decision to withdraw from the non-proliferation regime and increase Teheran’s regional influence through nuclear weapons.

3.3.2 Domestic coalitions

Sagan (1996) and Solingen (1994) stress the argument that nuclear weapons are pursued to assure the survival of an interest group, in Solingen’s case explicitly the ruling regime. These are nationalist inward-looking regimes who in their goal for

¹⁰² U. Möller, *Op. Cit*

¹⁰³ M. Ahmadinejad at the UN General Assembly in 2005: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2005/iran-050918-irna02.htm> (accessed September 7, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ U. Möller, *Op. Cit*

¹⁰⁵ See chapter 2.2.1 of this paper

political legitimacy and survival favour the nuclear option. Conversely, outward-looking regimes are more prone to negative nuclear postures.

The Iran – Iraq war and the post-revolutionary decade united the Iranian people under the umbrella of nation-building.¹⁰⁶ Since the end of the Iran – Iraq war and the death of Revolutionary leader Khomeini in 1989 the public attention shifted away from these unifying aspects. Pragmatic-conservative President Rafsanjani took over power and favoured economic liberalization. However, in the 1990s the Iranian nuclear programme made the most progress.¹⁰⁷ This would undermine Solingen's (1994) argument that outward-looking regimes do not favour nuclear weapons. Mukhatzhanova (2010), however, links this progress with the fact that the nuclear programme was in hand of the hardline-conservatives. As we have argued in the previous chapter Rafsanjani in the 1980s was the main mythmaker behind the nuclear weapons programme. This inconsistency might be explained with the change of Rafsanjani's responsibilities in his new role as president. In this epoch nuclear decisions might have been left to the hardline-conservatives.

Due to the international isolation Iran suffered poor economic conditions, high unemployment rates and scientific retardation – especially during the 1990s. In 2005, but especially also in 2007 Ahmadinejad again saw himself exposed to public criticism due to socio-economic problems. He was not able to honour his campaign promise to deliver more of the oil revenues to his people.¹⁰⁸ In general the regime was not able to solve these problems and its legitimacy was under threat.¹⁰⁹ Thus, to assure its survival the regime adopted a strategy of framing the nuclear programme not only as a question of state identity – as concluded in the previous chapter – but also as a coalition with the Iranian people. Ahmadinejad adopted a nationalist line of hostility against the long-time enemies USA and Israel to unite the people behind the regime. In other words, the nuclear programme since the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005 fulfils the unifying aspects the Islamic Revolution and the Iran – Iraq war had in the 1980s. In 2008 90% of Iranians believed it was important (including 81% very

¹⁰⁶ E. Abrahamian, *Op. Cit*

¹⁰⁷ J. Simpson, *Op. Cit*

¹⁰⁸ A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*

¹⁰⁹ A. Farzamnia, *Op. Cit*

important) to possess a full fuel cycle nuclear program.¹¹⁰ This would side with Sagan's argument that politicians go for nuclear weapons when the public supports them and so can justify their own existence as politicians.¹¹¹ Sagan in this case detaches nuclear weapons from security threats. He states that nuclear weapons "*present windows of opportunity through which parochial interests can jump*".¹¹²

At this point we will conclude hypothesis H4: Since 2005 the Iranian regime has pursued a nuclear programme to assure its survival and justify its existence. The Iranian regime succeeded in unifying the people behind the nuclear programme by a nationalist line of argumentation and has so derived attention from socio-economic problems. This last hypothesis is complementary with hypothesis H3. Teheran has raised the nuclear issue to a domestic matter of state identity by framing the nuclear programme in terms of pride, scientific modernization, independence and influence; as to assure regime survival.

By adopting a nationalist inward-looking stance, the regime is not interested in rapprochement with the West. A rapprochement would threaten the unifying aspect the nuclear programme and might draw popular attention to inner socio-economic problems. Furthermore, clerics might fear revolutionary and Islamic values could be threatened as Western values – after reconciliation with the international community - would advance into Iran's society.¹¹³ Hence, the nationalist regime is disposed to bear the economic and political cost of isolation in its goal to pursue a nuclear programme. This fact came into focus, when in 2006 Iran rejected a deal which would have brought the country out of isolation. Iran's chief negotiator Ari Larinjeni (a moderate-conservative) initially agreed on a deal proposed by the EU3 (which included support of the US, Russia and China) in accordance with former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The idea was simple:¹¹⁴ Iran would stop enrichment during negotiations and at the same time sanctions would be lifted. Moreover, the international community agreed to Larinjeni's claim to keep a certain

¹¹⁰ WPO, 2008: Iranian Public Opinion on Governance, Nuclear Weapons and Relations with the United States: <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafricara/527.php?nid=&id=&pnt=527> (accessed September 7, 2011).

¹¹¹ S. Sagan, *Op. Cit*; see chapter 2.2.2

¹¹² S. Sagan, *Op. Cit*, 65

¹¹³ G. Mukhatzhanova, *Op. Cit*

¹¹⁴ BBC, Iran and the West: Nuclear Confrontation, Part 3, 21. February 2009. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00hydcg> (accessed August 31, 2011).

amount of centrifuges for research purposes. This was the same condition Teheran made two years earlier. The outcome of the deal should have been announced at the UN General Assembly as a public platform for an official “shake-hands” between state leaders - including President G.W. Bush. The US was willing to publicly show that it had been defeated in its 20 year aim of bringing about regime change and Iran would have come out of its isolation and Pariah status. At the day of the UN General Assembly, however, Larijani did not show up in New York. Instead president Ahmadinejad came to New York with new chief negotiator Saeed Jalili (conservative-hardliner) and rejected the previously closed deal made with Larijani. Thus, the conservative-hardliners won the argument, rejected an already made deal that would have brought them out of sanctions and US embargos.¹¹⁵

This shows another variable in the Iranian decision-making process. The power struggle that exists within Iranian inner politics, especially within the hardliners, makes negotiations more difficult. In previous years the political landscape was divided into outward-looking presidencies (president Rafsanjani from 1989 to 1997, president Khatami from 1997 to 2005) and inward-looking presidencies (president Khomeini from 1981 to 1989, Ahmadinejad since 2005). However, in recent years the division between pragmatic-conservatives and hardline-conservatives has become even more accentuated; the pragmatic-conservatives favour a rapprochement with the West, but still under the premise of not giving up the nuclear programme. This explains different nuclear postures within a country as Solingen (2010) suggests, but does not fully support the argument that nuclear weapon programmes progress when hardliners are in power. It becomes even more difficult as the Supreme Leader has shown to change sides regarding the nuclear issue.¹¹⁶ The nuclear programme has made significant progress during the first two years of the Ahmadinejad presidency, however has slowed down in the second part of his first term in office.¹¹⁷ Most probably, because the Supreme Leader has sided with the pragmatic-hardliners since 2007. This would side with Farzamnia’s observation that since 2007 the Supreme Leader has publicly and repeatedly shown his discontent with the

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ G. Mukhatzhanova, *Op. Cit*

¹¹⁷ A. Farzamnia, *Op. Cit*

president's foreign policy and invited him to moderate his approaches.¹¹⁸ The enrichment programme has significantly moved forward since the second restart of the NP in 2005. Whereas in 2003 Teheran possessed 164 centrifuges, by 2009 this had grown to over 8000.¹¹⁹ Applying Solingen's (1994) argument to the overall timeline of the nuclear programme shows a mixed record. During the outward-looking presidencies, especially before the revelation of the opaque sites in 2002, the programme had made huge advancements.¹²⁰ As mentioned earlier, this might be explained by the fact that the conservative-hardliners held the most important positions regarding the nuclear weapons programme. This shows that Solingen's (1994) argument does not apply well to Iran, as the decision making process in Iran is a far too complex issue. It would make more sense to apply her argument to the process of negotiations; From 2005 to 2007, there is at least one instance of negotiations being stopped when the inward-looking conservative faction (hardline-conservatives) won the argument over the outward-looking conservatives (pragmatic-conservatives). However, further scrutiny would be needed for the time after Ahmadinejad's re-election in 2009, which will not be addressed in this paper. At this point we proceed to conclude hypothesis H5:

H5: Due to the complex decision-making structure and internal power-struggles this hypothesis is not suited well to be applied to the Iran case. Iran's nuclear programme has made advancements during outward-looking presidencies, which undermines the hypothesis. However, the nuclear decisions at this time were made under inward-looking decision makers. Since 2005 the programme was restarted and huge progress has been made under the hardline-conservative presidency of Ahmadinejad. Applying the argument to the progress of negotiations, shows that in at least one occasion the negotiations stopped when inward-looking conservatives won the argument over outward-looking conservatives.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ S. Chubin, "The Iranian Nuclear Riddle after June 12." *The Washington Quarterly* 33/1, (2010), 163 -172.

¹²⁰ A. Jafarzadeh, *Op. Cit*

3.4 Conclusions

It has been shown that existential security threats were the impetus for the Iranian nuclear programme in the 1980s, when Iran needed to restore the balance of power against Bagdad. These existential security threats were fostered by the beliefs of influential elites who created a nuclear security myth and influenced the Supreme Leader to restart a dormant nuclear programme. Iran's strategic security situation has improved. However, uncertainty remains regarding future development of existential security threats in the Middle East Region. Teheran has therefore adopted a nuclear hedging strategy; the presence of US troops advocates latent existential security threats. The long standing isolation of the regime has created inner socio-economic problems which the regime has not been able to address. Popular discontent has raised questions about the legitimacy of the theocratic regime. With the election of hardline-conservative president Ahmadinejad, the nuclear programme was elevated to a matter of state identity and unity. The Iranian people have high ambitions for their nation and believe that their country can play an important role in the region. Hence, Ahmadinejad framed the nuclear programme in terms of its symbolic significance (scientific modernization and independence) and has succeeded in forming a nationalist coalition with the Iranian people to assure the political survival of the regime. Furthermore, Ahmadinejad expresses beliefs that nuclear arms can provide states with influential power. The President perceives the NPT as illegitimate and has expressed his discontent about NPT "double standards". These beliefs, combined with Iran's pariah status, might foster a withdrawal from the NPT, once a final nuclear decision is about to take. The internal decision-making process has shown to be a complex matter of bargaining between different political factions, in recent years most prominently between the conservative-hardliners (inward-orientated) and pragmatic hardliners (outward-orientated). The nuclear programme is managed by the conservative-hardliners, and has made considerable progress since the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005. This faction is not interested in reconciliation with the West, since a rapprochement would break up the national coalition and threaten the regime's legitimacy. Since the presidency of Ahmadinejad, negotiations have progressed when the Supreme Leader sides with the outward-

orientated hardliners and slowed down when the inward-orientated hardliners win the argument. Due to this complex decision-procedure theories of political survival - in the case of Iran - are not well suited to predict the progress of the nuclear programme.

It has been shown that the inner parameters are key to understanding Teheran's nuclear ambitions. Hence, by today, it is these inner parameters - the beliefs of individuals and the decision making process - which need to be addressed to find a solution to the Iranian nuclear issue.

4 Conclusions & final thoughts

This paper aimed to discuss causes of Iran's nuclear ambitions and to identify fields to focus counter-policies on. It is of crucial importance to understand more about Iran's nuclear motivations; a nuclear armed Iran could trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and cause irreparable damage to the young indefinitely extended NPT. Hence, the root causes of nuclear proliferation in general, seen through the prism of different IR theories, have been discussed. Existential security threats are the main driving force in states' nuclear ambitions. However, this assumption has been challenged by opening the "black box" of the state and analysing inner parameters. These inner parameters are the decision-making process which is conducted by individuals and domestic organizations. Out of this discussion working hypotheses have been established which were tested against the single case of Iran. Different theories explain different stages of the Iranian Nuclear programme. Whereas Structural-Realism explains the onset of the nuclear programme in the 1980s, theories of political survival and belief systems fit the nuclear motivations since the presidency of Ahmadinejad.

Structural Realism explains the impetus of the Iranian Nuclear programme in the 1980s after the country was invaded by Iraq. Iran is located in a fragile security environment and has long been isolated by the international community as a pariah state. The uncertainty about the security situation in the Middle East and the relations with its long standing rival the US justify a nuclear weapons programme on a latent level. We conclude that Iran is entrenched in a nuclear hedging strategy, which would allow its virtual nuclear capability to turn operational in a short period of time if existential security threats become imminent.

Belief systems and Theories of political survival have been shown to explain an important role in the decision-making process. The beliefs of influential elites have created a nuclear security myth and influenced the decision of the final decision maker – the Supreme Leader – to restart an already dormant nuclear programme in

the 1980s. After the revelation of secret nuclear facilities and the election of conservative-hardline president Ahmadinejad in 2005 the government adopted a nationalist line of argument. To distract public attention from domestic socio-economic problems, Teheran formed a coalition with the Iranian people to assure regime survival. The coalition was created by Iran's political leaders who framed the nuclear programme in terms of its symbolic significance for the country's identity and unity. Ahmadinejad moreover perceives the NPT as unjust and has framed nuclear weapons as symbols of power and influence which nuclear weapon states have used to impose double standards. In general, since 2005, the symbolic significance of a nuclear programme has been promoted to ensure regimen survival.

It has been shown that inner parameters play an important role in explaining Teheran's nuclear ambitions. To focus counter-policies exclusively on Teheran's security concerns might be misleading. Hence, counter-policies will need to address inner politics and beliefs about state identity as well as beliefs about the NPT. The international community needs to foster a debate within Iran to frame the country's identity in terms other than just the nuclear programme. The P5 and especially the US will need to take nuclear disarmament seriously in order to address Ahmadinejad's beliefs about the influential power of nuclear weapons and the legitimacy of the NPT. Teheran needs to be integrated into the international community to avoid any damage to the NPT, as the global consequences of withdraw from the NPT are hard to predict. This reconciliation is difficult to achieve as the conservative-hardliners are not interested in a rapprochement with the West. Approaching and reinforcing the pragmatic-hardliners would help to speed up negotiations and stop the nuclear programme, or at the very least indigenous enrichment of uranium. The next presidential elections are held in 2013, and the international community should attempt to resolve the issue beforehand, as the nuclear programme might again form part of a nationalist presidential election campaign. One light on the horizon is that Ahmadinejad can not be re-elected for a third term. But, as he was surprisingly elected in 2005, it is hard to predict who may appear by 2013 and even more importantly, who will get the support of the Supreme Leader. The situation could improve or get worse.

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