

FRAMING IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM: A
CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO
IRAN'S 2019 URANIUM ENRICHMENT
ANNOUNCEMENT

A Master's Thesis

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Ankara
September 2025

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2019 URANIUM ENRICHMENT ANNOUNCEMENT Bilkent University 2025



To the Öke Family

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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

of

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by

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By Arda Öke

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Political Science and Public Administration.

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ABSTRACT

FRAMING IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM: A CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO IRAN'S 2019 URANIUM ENRICHMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

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This thesis analyzes how the United States, Russia, and China frame Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment differently. The literature on nuclear nonproliferation mostly rests on traditional security thinking, which expects that nuclear weapon states show similar behavior towards a civilian nuclear program with uranium enrichment to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Despite their similarities, the US, Russia, and China responded to Iran's 2019 announcement differently. To study this puzzle, this thesis uses a critical constructivist approach to examine how the case countries constructed their identities of Self and Other, and how the identity construction affected their framing of Iran's nuclear move. This thesis uses articulation and interpellation as analytical tools and discourse analysis to analyze the authorized state officials' official statements, interviews, and presidential

speeches during 2019. The US attached exact opposite meanings to the representations of itself and Iran, constructing the identities of Self and Iran as Other through juxtaposition. The US framed Iran's 2019 announcement as a security threat. Russia constructed Self and Other identities in a hierarchical position vis-à-vis Iran. Russia framed Iran's 2019 announcement not through a security framing, but rather considered it a reaction to the unilateral acts of the US. China's construction of identities mainly focuses on the representations of Self that it did not construct an identity of Iran as other, rather it represented Iran as a rational and legitimate actor. China did not consider Iran's 2019 announcement through a security framing but saw it as a reaction based on a cause-and-effect relation with the US. Thus, the US, Russia, and China differently constructed identities of Self and Other vis-à-vis Iran and had divergent responses to Iran's 2019 announcement, which is overlooked by the literature on nuclear nonproliferation.

Keywords: Nuclear nonproliferation, Iran, identity, framing, critical constructivism, discourse analysis

ÖZET

İRAN NÜKLEER PROGRAMININ ÇERÇEVELENMESİ: İRAN'IN 2019 URANYUM ZENGINLEŞTİRME DUYURUSUNA ELEŞTİREL İNŞACI BİR YAKLAŞIM

Öke, Arda

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Hatice Pınar Bilgin

Eylül 2025

Bu tez, ABD, Rusya ve Çin'in, İran'ın 2019'daki uranyum zenginleştirme duyurusunu nasıl farklı şekilde çerçevelediklerini analiz etmektedir. Nükleer silahların yayılmasının önlenmesi üzerine yazılmış literatür çoğunlukla, nükleer silah devletlerinin nükleer silahların yayılmasını önlemek için uranyum zenginleştirme içeren sivil bir nükleer programa karşı benzer davranışlar göstereceğini bekleyen geleneksel güvenlik düşüncesine dayanmaktadır. Benzerliklerine rağmen, ABD, Rusya ve Çin, İran'ın 2019 duyurusuna farklı tepkiler vermiştir. Bu bulmacayı incelemek için bu tez, örnek ülkelerin Benlik ve Öteki kimliklerini nasıl inşa ettiklerini ve kimlik inşasının İran'ın nükleer hamlesini çerçevelemelerini nasıl etkilediğini incelemek için eleştirel inşacı bir yaklaşım kullanmaktadır. Bu tez, analitik araçlar olarak eklemler ve özdeşleştirme ve devlet yetkililerinin 2019 boyunca yaptıkları resmî açıklamaları, röportajları ve konuşmalarını analiz etmek için söylem analizini

kullanmaktadır. ABD, kendisi ve İran'ın temsillerine tam zıt anlamlar yüklemiş ve Benlik ve İran'ın Öteki kimliklerini zıt bir şekilde inşa etmiştir. ABD, İran'ın 2019 duyurusunu bir güvenlik tehdidi olarak çerçevelemiştir. Rusya, İran'a karşı Benlik ve Öteki kimliklerini hiyerarşik bir konumda inşa etti. Rusya, İran'ın 2019 duyurusunu bir güvenlik çerçevesi üzerinden değil, ABD'nin tek taraflı eylemlerine bir tepki olarak değerlendirdi. Çin'in kimlik inşası, esas olarak Benlik temsillerine odaklanıyor; İran'ı 'öteki' olarak değil, rasyonel ve meşru bir aktör olarak temsil ediyor. Çin, İran'ın 2019 duyurusunu bir güvenlik çerçevesi üzerinden değil, ABD ile neden-sonuç ilişkisine dayalı bir tepki olarak değerlendirdi. Dolayısıyla, ABD, Rusya ve Çin, İran'a karşı Benlik ve Öteki kimliklerini farklı şekilde inşa ettiler ve İran'ın 2019 duyurusuna farklı tepkiler verdiler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nükleer silahsızlanma, İran', kimlik, çerçeveleme, eleştirel inşa, söylem analizi

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The US, Russia, and China are the key actors of the nonproliferation regime, the permanent members of the UN Security Council, nuclear weapon states, and parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The literature on nuclear proliferation mostly rests on traditional security thinking, which expects that nuclear weapon states show similar behavior towards a civilian nuclear program with uranium enrichment to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Despite their similarities, after Iran announced in 2019 that it would enrich uranium above the JCPOA cap of 3.67%, the US, Russia, and China framed it differently. This thesis seeks to address the puzzle of “How do the US, Russia, and China differ in their framing of Iran's nuclear program?” This chapter begins by explaining how the US and the Soviet Union established the nonproliferation regime during the Cold War by sharing similar concerns over nuclear weapons. The next presents Iran's nuclear program, starting from Iran's involvement in the Atoms for Peace program in 1957 to Iran's announcement on uranium enrichment exceeding 3.67% in 2019. The third section explains the research design by introducing the puzzle in detail, the aim of the research, and the methodology. The relevance

of the study is also discussed and linked with the nonproliferation regime.

Finally, the research outline tells the organization of the thesis.

1.2 Establishment of the Nonproliferation Regime

Nuclear proliferation was not problematized during the early years of the Cold War. After the Soviet Union carried out its first nuclear test in 1949, the US and the Soviet Union prioritized nuclear deterrence (Popp, 2016, p.22). Their approach to nuclear weapons was ideologically driven, as they both increased their nuclear arsenal and supplied nuclear technology to their allies. The Eisenhower administration provided nuclear assistance to its allies through the Atoms for Peace program from the beginning of the 1950s. The program was launched after President Eisenhower's speech at the United Nations General Assembly on December 8, 1953. President Eisenhower underlined the dual use of atomic energy: the peaceful use and the military use of nuclear power. In this regard, President Eisenhower expressed his concerns over the military dimension of nuclear energy, its possible consequences, and the nuclear arms race between the US and the Soviet Union (IAEA, n.d.-a). Under this program, the US provided technical assistance, research and development of technologies, education, and scholarships for students and scientists, and resources to the signatories for the purpose of peaceful and civilian nuclear energy (Kibaroğlu, 2007, p. 225).

As a product of the Atoms for Peace program, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was established in 1957 to create international safeguards on nuclear programs (IAEA, n.d.-b). At the same time, the Soviet

Union was assisting its close allies with nuclear technology and know-how. China tested its first successful nuclear device in 1964, with the help of the Soviet Union (Popp, 2014, p. 196). The US and the Soviet Union both prioritized their allies' acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Beginning in the late 1950s, the priorities of the US and Soviet thinking on nuclear weapons shifted from an ideological approach to the issue of nuclear nonproliferation. There were several motives behind this shift in priorities. Initially, the US and the Soviet Union did not want China and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to acquire nuclear weapons. Otherwise, they would become states with an "independent nuclear deterrent" (Popp, 2016, p.27; Popp, 2014, pp. 196-197). After China became a nuclear power in 1964, it made the US and Soviets rethink the results of multiple nuclear weapon states and raised concerns about the necessity of establishing an international regime to prevent proliferation (Popp, 2016, pp. 29-30; Wenger & Horovitz, 2016, p.256). Thus, China's nuclear development forced them to think beyond their Cold War-centric approach to nuclear weapons, and they began to consider the effects of nuclear proliferation beyond deterrence. This concern was built on the lessons learned from the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. After the incident, the US and the Soviet Union realized the danger of how multiple nuclear weapon states and their decision-making could result in the use of nuclear weapons (Popp, 2014, 196). Thus, the need to centralize vertical and horizontal proliferation pushed two superpowers to a system change (Wenger & Horovitz, 2016, p.255).

Another motive was the rapid technological development in the field of nuclear weapons, including building hydrogen bombs by the US, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain in the 1950s, and intercontinental ballistic missiles (Popp, 2016, p.23). The spread of nuclear technology and its rapid advancement led the US and the Soviet Union to consider their positions in an international system, which might damage their relations with their allies (regarding nuclear reassurance), nuclear deterrence between them, and their regional influence. Lastly, there was societal pressure to eliminate nuclear weapons due to their harm to humans and the environment during testing. The Non-Aligned Movement also supported this pressure in the international arena (Popp, 2014, p. 196). Thus, these motives made the interests of the US and the Soviet Union converge on nuclear nonproliferation. In 1960, the US expressed its opinion on preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons to the Soviet Union, and it reacted positively to cooperation (Popp, 2016, p.23). Even though both sides showed interest in the issue, progress was limited until 1963 (Popp, 2014, pp. 196-197).

The Limited Test-Ban Treaty (LTBT) was signed by the US, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom on August 5, 1963, which banned nuclear tests in the atmosphere, space, and underwater (U.S. Department of State, n.d.-b). The treaty can be considered the superpowers' first cooperation regarding nuclear nonproliferation since the beginning of the Cold War. Still, the LTBT was discriminative since, while it aimed to prevent, to a certain degree, vertical proliferation, it created room for nuclear weapons states to increase their arsenal (Popp, 2016, p.28). In 1965, the US and the Soviet Union

drafted their versions of nonproliferation treaties (Popp, 2016, p.30). UNGA Resolution 2028, adopted on November 19, 1965, outlined five principles as a pathway to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). These principles concerned “an acceptable balance of mutual responsibilities and obligations,” “achievement of general and complete disarmament,” “ensuring effectiveness of the treaty,” and promoting regional treaties for nonproliferation (UNGA Resolution 2028). Until 1967, the negotiations over the nonproliferation treaty were held confidential and bilateral, and the US and the Soviet Union agreed on Articles I and II. The priority was on nonproliferation. Peaceful use of nuclear energy and disarmament were not considered when drafting the treaty. The US and the Soviet Union emphasized the IAEA safeguards and worked to extend inspections (Popp, 2016, p.32). The non-nuclear weapons states, led by the FRG, demanded peaceful use as a right in the treaty. The US was against the demand. Still, it became an inalienable right in Article IV of the treaty (Popp, 2016, p.36). The final version of the treaty, the NPT, was signed by the US, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and 50 other countries on July 1, 1968, and came into force on March 5, 1970, after being ratified by the signatories (UNODA, n.d.).

Although the NPT is considered a cornerstone of the nonproliferation regime, the NPT and the regime it created have specific problems that arise from the nature of the agreement. The NPT created a regime in which there is a particular imbalance between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states (NWS and NNWS). The NPT created an asymmetric nonproliferation regime, and the asymmetry arose from violating the norm of sovereign equality for NNWS

signatories. The top-down approach in the formation of the NPT ignored middle- and small-powers and put strict discrimination between NWS and NNWS. While the right to a peaceful nuclear program was included in the treaty in the latest phase, with the efforts of NNWS, preventing vertical proliferation was left to the “good faith” in the negotiations between NWS and NNWS, based on Article VI of the NPT (Gusterson, 1999, p.113; Biswas, 2001, pp. 492-493; Popp et. al., 2016, p.13).

While the NPT legitimizes NWS to have nuclear weapons, it prohibits NNWS from acquiring nuclear weapons. Therefore, if you were able to have nuclear weapons before January 1967, you are considered a “legitimate owner” of nuclear weapons (Biswas, 2001, pp. 492-493; Popp et. al., 2016, p.251). At the same time, NNWS’s motivation to acquire nuclear weapons was curbed through assurances and guarantees by NWS, such as providing them with a nuclear umbrella as an assurance for nuclear deterrence, assisting in establishing peaceful nuclear programs, and providing specific economic support that comes with sharing nuclear technology (Biswas, 2001, p.492). Otherwise, acquiring nuclear weapons creates a high political and economic cost through isolation, sanctions, and pressure. The NPT regime’s hierarchical structure between NWS and NNWS created “nuclear apartheid” between “privileged white” Western states of NWS and “colored Third World countries” of NNWS (Biswas, 2001, pp.494-496). Based on that, while “privileged white” Western states have the right to have nuclear weapons, “colored Third World” countries are not eligible to have them, just like cases of India, Pakistan, and Iraq (Gusterson, 1999, p.113; Biswas, 2001, pp. 492-

496). This highlights the Otherness of the Third World countries, which originates from Edward Said's orientalism; the Third World is not "rational, modern, and honest" to have nuclear weapons (Gusterson, 1999, p.114). The "nuclear orientalism," the nonproliferation regime created, produces binary and opposite representations of NWS as states "that can be trusted with nuclear weapons," and Others as NNWS that cannot be trusted (Gusterson, 1999, p.133). This reflects the racialized and discriminatory characteristics of the nonproliferation regime (see Gusterson, 1999 and Biswas, 2001). The discriminatory and asymmetrical nonproliferation regime overshadows the three foundations of the NPT and the nonproliferation regime: nonproliferation, disarmament, and peaceful nuclear energy.

1.3 Background of Iran's Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear program began in cooperation with the Atoms for Peace program. In 1957, Iran and the US signed the Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atoms. Two years later, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi established the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) at the University of Tehran, and the US supplied the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) with its fuel to TNRC in 1967 (Nuclear Threat Initiative, n.d.-c).

Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on July 1, 1968, and the Iranian Parliament ratified it in 1970. In 1974, "the Agreement Between Iran and the Agency for the Application of Safeguards in Connection with the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons" was signed with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding the Comprehensive

Safeguards Agreement (CSA) (IAEA, n.d.-c). The Shah founded the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) in the same year. The Shah had explicitly declared the long-term intentions for an extensive nuclear energy program, including energy generation, construction of nuclear power plants, and a full nuclear fuel cycle (Kibaroğlu, 2007, pp. 225-226).

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was overthrown after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Meanwhile, the hostage crisis occurred in November 1979 when the Iranian students seized the US Embassy in Tehran and took 52 US citizens hostage for more than one year (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). These events, as well as the ideological shift, altered the relationship between the US and Iran. While the relationship with the West became tense, the new regime halted the nuclear program.

Iran's clandestine nuclear activities at Natanz and Arak were disclosed in 2002 by the National Council of Resistance of Iran. This event raised concerns about the potential military dimension of Iran's nuclear program. The IAEA sent a team of inspectors, including the director general, to visit the site in February 2003, with several other visits. The report stated that Iran failed to declare certain nuclear facilities and nuclear-related activities (IAEA, 2003; Kibaroğlu, 2007, p. 237; Sahimi, 2013, pp. 65-66).

During the 2003 G8 Summit, the member states, including the US and Russia, issued a joint declaration that explicitly stated, "We urge Iran to sign and implement an IAEA Additional Protocol without delay or conditions" (2003

G8 Evian, n.d.). In October 2003, Iran voluntarily agreed with the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (E3) to suspend enrichment activities and signed the Additional Protocol in December, which allowed the visit of the IAEA inspectors without prior notice (IAEA, 2003a; IAEA, 2003c).

In November 2004, the E3 and Iran signed the Paris Agreement, in which Iran agreed to suspend enrichment and reprocessing activities voluntarily. The agreement also emphasized the importance of continuing negotiations for a long-term agreement to ensure the peaceful purposes of Iran's nuclear program (Villemur et al., 2004). At the end of 2004, the E3 stopped the negotiations after Iran started to produce uranium hexafluoride, and the IAEA declared Iran's breach of compliance with the NPT Safeguard Agreement (IAEA, 2005).

On 4 February 2006, the IAEA adopted a resolution and referred the nuclear program of Iran to the UN Security Council. The resolution consisted of suspending uranium enrichment activities, reconsidering the construction of a heavy model research reactor, ratifying and implementing the Additional Protocol, and transparent cooperation with the IAEA (IAEA, 2006).

On June 6, 2006, the US, Russia, and China joined the E3 and formed P5+1 (representing the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) and proposed a framework for suspending Iran's enrichment program. Iran rejected the proposal but still indicated its willingness for further negotiations (De La Sablière & United Nations, 2006; Aras & Ozbay,

2006, p. 142; Arms Control Association, n.d.). The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1696 on 31 July 2006, which included adopting measures unless Iran stopped its enrichment and reprocessing activities by 31 August 2006. Resolution 1696 explicitly emphasized the proliferation risks of the nuclear program of Iran (UNSC Resolution 1696). As a result of Iran's noncompliance with the previous resolution and continuing with the enrichment program, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1737 on 27 December 2006. It prevented countries from transferring sensitive nuclear-related technology, any technical assistance or training related to prohibited items and technology to Iran, and it also froze the assets of Iranian organizations and individuals related to Iran's nuclear program (UNSC Resolution 1737). The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1747 in 2007 and Resolution 1803 and 1835 in 2008 for further sanctions on Iran's nuclear program targeting transfer, entities, and individuals in addressing Iran's enrichment activities (UNSC Resolution 1747; UNSC Resolution 1803; UNSC Resolution 1835).

After multiple rounds of meetings over the years without any result, the election of Hassan Rouhani as President of Iran in June 2013 and the Obama administration's willingness for political dialogue fostered the negotiations. After several rounds of talks, P5+1 and Iran signed the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) on 24 November 2013. It was an interim deal for a 6-month period until a comprehensive framework was agreed by the parties. The JPOA began to be implemented on 20 January 2014 after the IAEA approved Iran's compliance with the agreement. Under the terms of the

agreement, Iran would limit its uranium enrichment, diminish its stockpile, suspend activities at certain facilities, and not construct any new enrichment or reprocessing facilities (UNSC Resolution 2231). In other words, Iran would halt its nuclear program until the final deal (Tabatabai & Dolzikova, 2019, p.125).

Iran and P5+1 continued the negotiations for a permanent and extensive deal before the JPOA expired. On 14 July 2015, Iran and P5+1 announced the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Six days later, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2231 to implement the JCPOA (UNSC Resolution 2231). The Implementation Day was on 16 January 2016, after the IAEA confirmed Iran fulfilled the steps required for implementing the deal. The JCPOA was a 10-year deal and required all parties to take measures on Iran's nuclear program. The deal limits the uranium enrichment activities of Iran up to 3.67% for 15 years, limits the stockpile of UF₆ to 300 kg, prohibits spent fuel reprocessing and its research and development, and prohibits constructing additional heavy water reactors. It also put strict measures in place for inspection and compliance monitoring. In return for Iran's compliance, P5+1 lifted the nuclear-related sanctions (UNSC Resolution 2231).

The terms of the JCPOA put specific limitations on Iran's nuclear program. Until 2019, Iran complied with all obligations of the JCPOA and the IAEA safeguards. In May 2018, President Trump announced that the US would withdraw from the JCPOA unilaterally and began to implement unilateral

sanctions on Iran (The White House, 2018). The parties to the deal expressed their concerns and disappointment over this decision. Iran continued to comply with the obligations for more than a year after the US withdrawal, whilst urging the parties to comply with their commitments and ease the US unilateral sanctions (Zarif, 2019a). Iran criticized the unilateralism of the US and expected political support from the remaining parties to protect Iran's economy from the unilateral sanctions of the US and to protect Iran's rights under the JCPOA. On July 7, 2019, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi announced in a press conference that Iran would begin to exceed the 3.67% uranium enrichment limit restricted by the JCPOA after the situation remained unresolved by the parties of the deal (Al Jazeera, 2019; BBC News, 2019; IAEA, 2019a). Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif stated that the acts of Iran could be reversed if the remaining parties fulfilled their obligations under the deal (Zarif, 2019 a; Zarif, 2019 b).

1.3 Research Design

The literature on nuclear proliferation is largely grounded in traditional security thinking, which the analyses adopt a traditional (mostly (neo)realist) and positivist approach to the cases of nuclear (non)proliferation. The literature mostly discusses 'how' and 'why' states acquire nuclear weapons. It focuses narrowly on the material capability of nuclear weapons in the self-help and anarchic international system in which states acquire nuclear weapons to survive and increase their national security against direct threats in the region or international threats for nuclear deterrence (Waltz, 1981; Waltz, 1990; Davis, 1993; Betts, 1993; Thayer, 1995; Sagan, 1996; Ogilvie-

White, 1996; Hymans, 2006; Bell, 2016). This understanding sees proliferation as a negative-sum game that, while nuclear weapons increase the security of one state, they threaten the security of another (Abraham, 1998, p. 15). From this perspective, if a state is capable of developing a nuclear weapon, it will certainly do so for its survival. Security dilemma and multipolarity also increase the risk of proliferation.

In this sense, the literature discusses that NWSs use different strategies to prevent nuclear proliferation. NWSs use economic and political sanctions as a threat or imposition to deter NNWS from acquiring nuclear weapons (Miller, 2014). NWSs also use positive (a NWS guarantees to defend a NNWS against a nuclear attack) and negative security assurances (a NWS guarantees not to use nuclear weapons against a NNWS) to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons (Knopf, 2012). The studies show that states are less likely to proliferate if they are receiving positive security assurances (Singh & Way, 2004; Jo & Gartzke, 2007; Monteiro & Debs, 2014; Bleek & Lorber, 2014).

Transferring nuclear technologies and materials is another pathway to acquire a nuclear weapon, as providing nuclear assistance to civilian nuclear programs under bilateral nuclear cooperation increases proliferation (Fuhrmann, 2012), and the nuclear market is the most common way for proliferation (Gheorghe, 2019). NWSs control and regulate (if not form a cartel) the nuclear market, which prevents the transfer of sensitive nuclear technologies between suppliers and buyers (Gheorghe, 2019), but strategic

reasons may attract them to transfer sensitive nuclear technologies (Kroenig, 2010). Sensitive nuclear technologies include uranium enrichment facilities, and the dual use of atomic energy poses a threat to the nonproliferation regime. The dual use of atomic energy means that a civilian nuclear program with enrichment or reprocessing technology is able to acquire a nuclear weapon with a short breakout time. In this case, based on the literature on nuclear proliferation, an NNWS's civilian nuclear program with a uranium enrichment center is considered a possible pathway to becoming an NWS and a possible future threat to the nonproliferation regime (Miller & Sagan, 2009; Yudin, 2010; Schneider & Thränert, 2014; Herzog, 2020).

Based on the theoretical assumptions of the literature on nuclear proliferation, nuclear weapons are direct threats because of the negative-sum game. The dual nature of atomic energy poses a threat to possible proliferation. A civilian nuclear program with uranium enrichment facilities is a pathway to acquire nuclear weapons and therefore poses a security threat. Traditional security thinking and the literature on nuclear proliferation's focus on a security-based understanding, treating nuclear weapons and development as an objective threat, which is taken for granted by the international actors homogeneously. The traditional security thinking treats the great powers as like units and expects them to behave through their 'sameness' (Bilgin, 2008, p.10). Based on this theoretical implication, it is assumed that the NWSs should act similarly to prevent proliferation.

In practice, the US, Russia, and China, as the 'great powers,' share many similarities; they are all nuclear-weapon states, leading actors of the nonproliferation regime, the permanent members of the UNSC, and parties to the JCPOA. Thus, based on their shared institutional roles, it is expected that their behaviors towards NNWSs' nuclear programs with uranium enrichment to converge and consider them as security threats. However, the US, Russia, and China framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment differently. While the US framed the announcement as a security threat, Russia and China did not consider it under security framing. The US, Russia, and China's distinct responses raise the puzzle of how the US, Russia, and China, despite their many similarities, differed in framing Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement.

The divergent framings of Iran's 2019 announcement reveal that the expected responses based on the literature on nuclear proliferation do not overlap with the responses of the case countries. This shows that traditional security thinking is not able to go beyond assessing material capabilities and is not sufficient to explain the divergence in theoretical and empirical implications. To address this gap, it is necessary to go beyond the materialist security-based understanding by examining how identity plays a role in the framing of nuclear proliferation. Examining the construction of identities through discourse is a way of analyzing how states interpret particular domestic and international events. Their framings are shaped based on how states construct their own and others' identities and what meanings they attach to the identities. This reveals how one understands and interprets

what security is. Thus, identity and its interrelation with framing provide a deeper understanding of framing nuclear proliferation beyond considering it as an objective security threat.

This study aims to analyze how the case countries framed Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement. This study adopts critical constructivism as an interpretivist approach. Critical constructivism challenges the objective and neutral understanding of reality and knowledge, which it attempts to denaturalize what is assumed to be self-evident, natural, and unquestionable. Based on a critical constructivist approach, reality and knowledge are constructed through meanings, representations, and identities. Through representations, identities are constructed by attaching meanings. This reveals how one understands the world by attaching meanings and constructing identities. Jutta Weldes' approach to national interest, following critical constructivism, considers national interest as socially constructed through identities. According to Weldes, states construct their national interest through discourse based on their representations of themselves as Self and the other states as Other (Weldes, 1999, pp. 1-19). Following a critical constructivist approach, this thesis adopts Weldes' application to analyze how the US, Russia, and China constructed their own identities as Self and Iran's identity as Other by constructing different representations and how the US, Russia, and China framed Iran's 2019 announcement, whether a security framing or not. This thesis also utilizes articulation and interpellation as analytical tools. Articulation is producing meaning through discourses, while interpellation is creating subject-positions for states and

hail them into these positions. Articulation and interpellation also reveal how states make sense of the world. In this thesis, articulation is used to show how the case countries construct meanings and attach them to the identities of Self and Other through representations. Using interpellation reveals how states create representations of Self and Other through repeated articulation. This thesis also studies the relationship between identity construction and the case countries' framings of Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement, which are intertwined. Lastly, the case countries' identity construction and their framing of Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement are analyzed through discourse analysis. For discourse analysis, the thesis uses presidential speeches, official statements, and interviews from authorized state officials of the US, Russia, and China during 2019, including the heads of state, ministries of foreign affairs, and related spokespersons. The US, Russia, and China's representatives' discourses during UNSC 8564th, 8600th, and 8695th meetings in 2019 are also used.

1.4 Thesis Outline

The thesis has six chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis by presenting critical security studies (CSS) and critical constructivism. This chapter also outlines the conceptual framework and analytical tools used in the thesis. Chapter 3-5 examines how the US, Russia, and China frame Iran's Announcement of Uranium Enrichment in 2019. They are structured similarly; each begins with the background of the case country's relationship with Iran's nuclear program until 2019. Then, these chapters analyze how the case countries constructed their identities of

Self and Iran as Other. Lastly, these three chapters examine the case countries' framing of Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. Chapter 6 summarizes the analyses, compares the UNSC 8564th, 8600th, and 8695th meetings held in 2019 in terms of how the case countries framed Iran's 2019 announcement, and concludes the thesis.





CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical background and analytical tools of the thesis. The first section introduces critical security studies (CSS) by discussing its critiques of the traditional approach to security, the purpose of theory, and its epistemological and ontological assumptions. The next section introduces critical constructivism, its epistemological and ontological assumptions, and its emphasis on the construction of meanings and identities. The third section introduces discourse analysis and its implications for the thesis. Finally, articulation and interpellation are presented as analytical tools.

2.1 Critical Security Studies

Critical security studies (CSS) arose as a critique of traditional security thinking during and after the Cold War. According to Ken Booth (2005), the traditional approaches (particularly realism or political realism) emphasized a “top-down, statist, power-centric, masculinized, ethnocentric, and militarized world view of security” (p. 9). On the other hand, CSS is an approach that studies security with a comprehensive understanding and a multi-referent

and multi-dimensional approach by challenging dominant structures and orthodoxies and aims to provide a deeper understanding of current attitudes and behavior to offer alternative ideas for addressing the insecurities of people (Booth, 2005, pp. 15-16). Regarding this definition, the main critique of CSS is the narrow military focus and state-centric understanding of the security of the traditional approach in which the state is the primary referent object to be secured from military threats and the primary actor to provide security to the people (Booth, 2002, p. 106). Another critique is the questions the traditional approach deals with. The traditional approach deals with 'why?' questions and explains the issues in this regard. Particularly, the constructivist branch of CSS focuses on 'how?' questions and attempts to explain the social constructed-ness of threats, responses, and subjects of security (Krause, 1998, pp. 317-318; Weldes, 1999, pp. 15-16). Moreover, CSS has challenged the traditional approach by rethinking security on two questions. 'What is security?' necessitates reconceptualization of security, and 'Whose security?' necessitates deepening and broadening of the security agenda (Bilgin et al., 1998, pp. 153-154).

From the perspective of CSS, "security is what we make it" (Booth, 2002, p. 106); security is a 'derivative concept' that political and philosophical ideas forming one's worldview also shape his/her understanding of what security is and what should be secured. (Booth, 2002, p. 106; Bilgin et al., 1998, p. 151; Bilgin, 2018, p. 62). Accordingly, this underscores how security is intersubjective, and its understanding depends on how people see the world differently and interpret the events around them (Booth, 2002, p. 106).

Reconceptualizing security emphasizes that the understanding of security is a by-product of different worldviews and political orientations. This allows the students of CSS to explore and analyze the implications and consequences of security not as an objective and narrow-focused concept but as a social construction (of threats and insecurities) by asking 'how' questions. In this regard, the scholars of CSS have been focusing on constructions of threats and responses and the construction of the objects of security (Krause, 1998, pp. 309-314). Thus, the main purpose is not to deal with every issue as a security issue but to deal with security issues from the perspective of politics, which the students of CSS call 'politicizing security' (Booth, 2005, p. 14).

An epistemological shift that CSS necessitates is significant for the rethinking and reconceptualization of security (Krause, 2002, p. 49). The shift from positivism to post-positivism widens the consideration of different referent subjects. Deepening the understanding of security brings an epistemological shift in the consideration of subjects of security and threats. Further, post-positivism rejects the objectivity of knowledge and takes knowledge as socially constructed. This understanding enables the adoption of more interpretive approaches like discourse analysis.

Following the CSS approach, securitization theory, developed in the 1990s by the Copenhagen School (CS), provides a new framework for security studies. Concerned with broadening, CS proposed that securitization is the process of framing an issue "as an existential threat, requiring emergency

measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure” (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 23-24). CS argues that securitization takes an issue from the political realm (in which the state deals with the issue through ordinary governmental procedures) to the security realm that necessitates urgent and extraordinary measures (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23). When an issue is securitized, it is no longer dealt with by regular political processes in the political realm. Instead, it requires an approach beyond politics and “established rules of the game” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23).

The securitization process begins with a speech act which is “a combination of language and society, of both intrinsic features of speech and group that authorizes and recognizes that speech” (Wæver, 1995, p. 55; Buzan et al., 1998, p. 32). Ole Wæver’s argument on security vis-à-vis reality is that “the word ‘security’ is the act; the utterance is the primary reality” (Wæver, 1995, p. 55). The reality of an existential threat or a security issue depends on the framing of the threat through the speech act. Securitization is conditioned on the success of the speech act. Discourse during the framing process necessitates highlighting the unbearable and irreversible consequences of the threat, which makes the issue significant to securitize in the eyes of the audience. The process provides legitimacy to use extraordinary means to the securitizing actor in case securitization is successful. The process of securitization is a political choice because security does not refer to any objective threat or referent object due to its constructivist nature (Buzan & Wæver, 1997, p. 246; Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 23-25).

2.2 Critical Constructivism

Critical constructivism is another kind of CSS and shares similar epistemology and ontology. Epistemologically, critical constructivism follows the post-positivist approach of CSS, which rejects the objective and value-neutral understanding of reality and knowledge that the traditional approach has. The critical constructivist approach aims to denaturalize what is taken for granted. The constructed meanings through discourses make the audience and identities understand the world or reality as natural facts (Weldes, 1999, p. 9 & 20). Through denaturalizing, critical constructivism reveals how the subjectivity of reality stands on the construction of meanings vis-à-vis representations and identities, as well as power contestations. Accordingly, critical constructivism sees reality as socially constructed, which reflects and embodies power relations. Like CSS, it puts emphasis on the construction of intersubjective knowledge regarding reality, which depends on one's understanding of the world and the knowledge system to which it was exposed.

Regarding ontology, critical constructivism focuses on the relationship between the meanings, identities, and interests of actors. Unlike the traditional approach, critical constructivism does not take the interests of states as fixed but socially constructed and intertwined with meanings and identities. This approach offers a deeper understanding of how actors (predominantly states) construct meanings and identities by making sense of the world and how they produce national interest by aligning these meanings.

For example, Jutta Weldes' (1996) reframing of national interest follows a critical constructivist approach. According to Weldes, national interest, a key notion of realism, is a social construction (Weldes, 1996, p. 4). The construction of national interest results from the production of representation of how the state authorities understand both domestic and international contexts. The national interest shows how the state makes sense of the world, the international system, and its place in this system (Weldes, 1996, p. 10). Thus, the state's national interests and its place in the international system are not objective realities, but they are constructed by state authorities through the articulation of cultural and linguistic materials that already exist in that society.

The process of constructing national interest begins with authorized state officials creating representations of different objects in the world. These representations emphasize the production of the Self and Other, given identities with characteristics. After the authorized state officials construct the representations of objects and their identities, the national interest appears and materializes because constructed representations present how the state makes sense of the world, as well as other objects (the others) in the international system vis-à-vis its representation and identity, the self (Weldes, 1996, p. 14).

Following the critical constructivist approach, identities and national interests are constituted intersubjectively. Identity is established on the differences and defines itself in relation to others by articulating "what one is not" (Weldes et

al., 1999, p. 11). In this process of constructing identity, the Self, commonly the state, differentiates itself from the Others. The differentiation may take place through juxtaposition. During the Cold War, the US constructed its identity as “the democratic, advanced, peaceful West” while constructing the identities of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc as “totalitarian, backward, aggressive” (Milliken, 1999, p. 94). However, the differentiation of the Self does not have to be juxtaposed as two opposite characteristics. The construction through otherness may take various positions for the Self, such as the self can position itself as superior, favorable, or inferior to the Other (Hansen, 2013, p. 35). Still, identity construction necessitates a certain degree of differentiation of the Self from the Other (Weldes et al., 1999, p. 11).

In this thesis, I will use Weldes’ application to study the relation between identity construction and the case countries’ framing of Iran’s 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. This study adopts Weldes’ framework to examine how identity construction shapes the case countries’ framing of Iran’s 2019 uranium enrichment announcement. In this regard, this study aims to analyze how the US, Russia, and China constructed different representations for their own identity as Self and for Iran’s identity as Other. Then, this study reveals how identity constructions shape the US, Russia, and China’s framings of Iran’s 2019 uranium enrichment announcement and whether they have ‘security framing’. This process can also take place in a different order. Identity construction can happen before and after Iran’s 2019 uranium enrichment announcement. Therefore, Iran’s announcements can

prompt states to construct new representations for identities of Self and Other.

2.3 Analytical Tools

Critical constructivism explores how meanings and identities are constructed, shaping the case countries' framings of Iran's 2019 announcement. This reveals different structures and processes, including discursive and non-discursive elements shaping the framing of the case countries. Further, critical constructivism allows the exploration of power dynamics or structures between the actors. Articulation and interpellation delve into how identities are constructed discursively, and this brings a more profound understanding than securitization theory for framing the issue in the case countries. For this purpose, the Copenhagen School and securitization theory do not provide what this thesis seeks. Comparing the case countries on securitizing the issue may not reveal contextual differences like political and cultural differences between the case countries, and cannot sufficiently emphasize how their long-term relationship affects their framing. Thus, by embracing the critical constructivist approach in the thesis, the aim is not only to examine whether the case countries securitize Iran's nuclear program but also to critically analyze the construction of identities that shape the framing of the issue.

The thesis uses discourse analysis to investigate how the case countries frame Iran's nuclear program. In this thesis, discourse analysis is used as a post-positivist approach following the epistemological foundation of CSS.

Discourse analysis reveals the narratives, patterns, and predications in the language to understand to explore how the case countries differ in framing the issue. It enables the examination of how the case countries construct meanings and identities, and how their construction of meanings and identities shapes their framings of the issue. Therefore, discourse analysis reveals how Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment was articulated, and the case countries were interpellated into assigned roles if they were. Examining the construction of identities reveals how articulation takes place, whilst analyzing the attached meanings to identities, including the Self and Other, explores interpellation of the case countries. This process also brings the power dynamics between the identities and how they shape the framing of the case countries.

Articulation and interpellation are the two analytical tools for this thesis.

Articulation is how the meanings are produced by making use of "cultural raw material or linguistic resources" (Weldes, 1996, p. 98). Through combining and repeating the cultural and linguistic resources, articulation (re)constructs the meanings. The construction of meanings is built on the shared language of the state officials and the audience (Weldes, 1996, p. 4). Articulation utilizes the cultural resources in the society successfully to make the meaning sense to that society, and it should overlap with common sense. If so, the produced meanings seem natural and a part of reality to society (Weldes, 1996, p. 99). Otherwise, articulation may fail to produce meaning and connect them to the representations. Also, articulation attaches meanings not only to the representations and identities but also to specific

events. During this process, the authorized state officials interpret the situation and the identities of the others, then decide on how to act based on the shared language. Weldes (1996: 229-230), in her *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, explains how the US constructed identities through articulation for the people of the US and Latin America and Latin American governments. One of the representations was “as a powerful yet concerned family member,” committed to “the solidarity of the Western Hemisphere,” and to “the integrity and virtue of the American family and its common values.” The US articulation aimed to construct identities in which the meanings of representations were similar for the US and Latin American people to make a connection between them against the Soviet threat.

Interpellation refers to individuals being hailed into the subject positions already created by the state authorities (Weldes, 1996, p. 103). The subject position depends on the interpretation of the event. In each event, the subject position varies regarding understanding the world, positioning itself in different power relations and interests attached to it. When individuals (may also be states or nations) are ‘hailed’ into these subject positions, they receive these representations as natural and real regarding their previously embraced common sense (Milliken, 2001, p. 149). Following Weldes’ example on the Cuban Missile Crisis, the American and Latin American people were hailed into subject positions created through articulation. It aimed to create a common sense for the American and Latin American people to share similar values like democracy and honesty. Through

interpellation, the US assigned them moral responsibility to protect the hemisphere against the Soviet threat by uniting the American and Latin American people.

This thesis will use articulation to examine how the US, Russia, and China constructed their identities. This will reveal what meanings they attached to their representations of Self and Other, and how the case countries articulated identities of Self and Iran as Other. Using interpellation will show what subject positions the case countries constructed for Self and Other and how they interpellated themselves or Iran into the subject positions through articulation.

2.4 Conclusion

CSS challenges the narrow military-focused and state-centric understanding of security during and after the Cold War. According to CSS, security is a 'derivative concept' and one's worldview shapes what one understands from security. This highlights the intersubjectivity of security. The constructivist branch of CSS deals with how threats, responses, and subjects of security are socially constructed. Critical constructivism, as a branch of CSS, does not treat reality and knowledge as objective, but they are socially constructed through meanings, representations, and identities. It focuses on how the meanings and identities are co-constitutively constructed. Following critical constructivism, Jutta Weldes studies national interest as socially constructed by attaching meanings to the identities. State officials interpret the domestic and international context and make sense of the world based on their

worldviews. This shapes what meanings they attach to the representations and how they construct Self and Other through these representations. This thesis adopts a critical constructivist approach and Weldes' application to study how the US, Russia, and China constructed identities of Self and Other through representation and how they framed Iran's 2019 announcement. To reveal the construction of identities, articulation and interpellation are used to examine the meanings the case countries attached to the representations and how they constructed identities of Self and Other through these representations. The construction of identities also shapes how the case countries frame Iran's 2019 announcement. This thesis uses discourse analysis to examine the discourses of state officials of the US, Russia, and China throughout 2019.

This chapter presented the theoretical and conceptual framework by introducing CSS, critical constructivism, discourse analysis, articulation, and interpellation as analytical tools. The next chapter will analyze how the US constructed identities of Self and Iran as Other and how it framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment.



CHAPTER 3: US FRAMING OF IRAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF URANIUM ENRICHMENT IN 2019

Chapter 3 begins with the background of the US and Iran relationship on nuclear-related issues until Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment exceeding 3.67% in 2019. Next, it examines how the US constructed identities of Self and Iran as Other through producing representations. Then, the third section analyzes the US framing of Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment through the US discourses around the announcement. Finally, it concludes the chapter by presenting how the US constructed identities of Self and Other and how it framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment.

3.1 US-Iran Nuclear Relationship Until 2019

Under the Shah Pahlavi period, Iran had strong ties with the US, and its support for the nuclear program of Iran. The US highlighted the peaceful nature of the program and the desire for modernization and self-reliance of Iran by creating alternative energy resources (Kibaroğlu, 2007, pp. 223-226). The US did not see Iran's nuclear program as a threat until the end of the 1980s, since the program was halted by the new regime. Iran's nuclear

program was started by the end of the 1980s in consequence of the Iran-Iraq War that Iraq's usage of chemical weapons, attacks on nuclear facilities, and self-reliance on energy had impact on restarting Iran's nuclear program. The US began to be concerned about Iran's nuclear program due to the dual use of nuclear energy. After Iran's tense relationship with the US, Iran started to develop ties with Russia and China, particularly cooperation on nuclear technology.

President Clinton labeled Iran and Libya as "rogue states" in his speech in January 1994 due to Iran's nuclear ambitions and expanding nuclear capabilities (Clinton, 1996). The US implemented the Iran Sanctions Act Of 1996 (also referred to as the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996) as one dimension of President Clinton's containment policy, which targeted the energy sector of Iran by imposing restrictions on trade, foreign investment, and finance (Kibaroğlu, 2007, p. 237). It was the first unilateral sanction implemented by the US targeting Iran's nuclear program (Clinton, 1996; U.S. Congress, 1996).

In January 2002, President Bush labeled Iran in his speech as a part of the "axis of evil" by underlining its intention to acquire weapons of mass destruction and threaten world peace (Bush, 2002). In August 2002, the two undisclosed nuclear facilities at Arak and Natanz were revealed. The disclosure further increased US concerns about Iran's 'covered' intention to acquire nuclear weapons (Kibaroğlu, 2007, pp. 237-238). The meetings between Iran and the E3 mostly revolved around pushing Iran to stop its

enrichment program, and the US did not officially participate in the negotiations until 2008 (Tabatabai & Dolzikova, 2019, p.123).

In 2010, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA) stated the illicit nuclear activities of Iran and its desire to acquire nuclear weapons. It explicitly expressed “the serious and urgent nature of the threat from Iran” and added human rights violations and support for terrorism as the reasons for the act (U.S. Congress, 2010). CISADA was the expanded version of the earlier act of 1996, targeting the Iranian energy sector by restricting export and import, particularly petrol-related products, and its access to the international financial system. Another unilateral sanction of the US was the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2012, which targeted the Central Bank of Iran to isolate it from the international financial system due to the posing of terrorist financing, proliferation financing, and money laundering risks. It also aimed to limit Iran's oil exports through multilateral diplomacy. The effects of the sanctions were so severe on Iran's economy that its oil export was reduced after 2012 and could not recover until the deal was reached in 2015 (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2013; CEIC, 2018).

On 25 September 2013, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif met at the UN General Assembly in New York, as well as P5+1 foreign ministers. The next day, President Obama had a phone call with President Rouhani to discuss a comprehensive resolution, which was the first presidential-level contact since 1979 (Tabatabai &

Dolzikova, 2019, pp. 123-125). The dual-track policy of the US emphasized political dialogue and diplomacy for further negotiations with Iran while imposing sanctions to bring Iran back to the negotiations and put it in a more vulnerable position during the negotiations (Tabatabai & Dolzikova, 2019, p.124). The dual-track policy of the US lasted until the JCPOA. The Obama administration saw the JCPOA as an essential act to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Under the terms of the deal, the US would ease the unilateral sanctions against Iran starting from the implementation of the deal.

The parties to the deal complied with the obligations of the JCPOA until 2018. The election of President Trump in 2018 shifted the US stance on the JCPOA. President Trump declared the unilateral US withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018, which was also part of his election campaign. In his announcement, President Trump highlighted that allowing Iran to enrich uranium and lifting the sanctions paved the way for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Also, President Trump discussed that the deal was one-sided, benefiting Iran, and even “if Iran fully complies, the regime can still be on the verge of a nuclear breakout in just a short period of time” (The White House, 2018). President Trump started the ‘Maximum Pressure’ campaign in 2018, and the campaign targeted Iran’s economy and its nuclear program. The US reimposed the sanctions lifted by the JCPOA and aimed to bring Iran back to the negotiations for a new deal that would impose more restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program (U.S. Department of State, n.d.-a). Thus, the Trump

administration expected Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program for the renegotiations and imposed further unilateral sanctions.

3.2 Constructing Self and Other

Since President Trump's speech on the withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA in 2018, the US discourse's focal point was Iran's ambition to acquire a nuclear weapon (The White House, 2018). President Trump considered the JCPOA as a facilitator for this process rather than limiting the capacity of Iran's nuclear program. The US grounded its discourse on the threat of Iran becoming a nuclear state and underlined its danger to regional stability, international peace, and the nonproliferation regime. Also, according to the US, the economic relief the JCPOA provided was used by Iran to fund the other illegal and destabilizing activities of Iran in the region and the international arena. According to President Trump, the JCPOA expanded Iran's field of influence and aggression. Therefore, since the beginning of the Trump administration, Iran's nuclear program was articulated with the threats the program posed. Secretary Pompeo's speech in 2018, outlined 12 demands from Iran, which were about revealing the military dimension of its previous clandestine nuclear program, halting uranium enrichment, and plutonium reprocessing, the IAEA inspection of all sites, halting its missile program, releasing detained citizens of the US and its allies, stopping sponsoring its proxies and aggression in the region (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Thus, the US discourse on Iran's nuclear program was linked with these demands, and they were articulated together.

To begin with, the construction of Iran as Other, the dominant discourse was that the US authorities called on Iran to “behave like a normal nation” (U.S. Department of State, 2019b; U.S. Department of State, 2019k; The White House, 2019a; The White House, 2019d; The White House, 2019e). In this representation, the US related Iran’s behaviors to the previously constructed representations of Iran, such as “mafia,” “terrorist regime,” and “the world’s leading state sponsor of terror,” which were linked with the issues articulated by the state authorities. The US also attributed Iran’s ‘abnormal’ behavior to its revolutionary cause (U.S. Department of State, 2019g). However, for the utterance of “behaving like a normal nation,” “normal” is not defined, but it is associated with the 12 demands of the US from Iran (U.S. Department of State, 2018). The US urged Iran to meet the demands, defined them as “simple requests” and added, “What we’ve asked the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran to do is to behave like a normal country – grow your economy, take care of your own people, stop arming proxy forces that are killing people all around the world and threatening American interests around the world” (U.S. Department of State, 2019b). That is to say, the US calling on Iran to behave like a “normal” nation was a rhetoric used in the discourse to interpellate Iran into a subject-position of abnormal.

The US constructed its Self by juxtaposing what it constructed for Iran. The US constructions of the Self and Other has binary positions. The US was what Iran was not. While it accused Iran of being revolutionary, Representative Hook said, “And Iran faces a choice they have to decide whether they want to be a normal country or a revolutionary cause” (U.S.

Department of State, 2019g). In this case, a country could be normal or revolutionary in binary positions, and the US constructed its representation as a normal nation, unlike Iran.

Further, the US discourse frequently highlighted that Iran was “the world’s leading state sponsor of terror.” Secretary Pompeo on May 21, 2018, based the accusation on Iran’s support for terror as “Hizballah is now armed to the teeth by Iran...In Yemen, Iran’s support for the Houthi militia fuels a conflict...The IRGC has also given Houthi missiles to attack civilian targets in Saudi Arabia...And in Afghanistan, Iran’s support to the Taliban in the form of weapons and funding leads to further violence and hinders peace and stability for the Afghan people.” (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Then, Secretary Pompeo further said, “Today we ask the Iranian people: Is this what you want your country to be known for, for being a co-conspirator with Hizballah, Hamas, the Taliban, and al-Qaida?” (U.S. Department of State, 2018). The US discourse linked a wide range of acts by Iran and labelled those acts as Iran’s support for terror in the region. According to the US, the listed acts of Iran fueled conflict and instability while undermining peace in the area. Through linking acts of Iran in the region and frequent articulation of Iran as “the world’s leading state sponsor of terror,” the US constructed the representation as part of Iran’s identity.

Robert Wood, U.S. Permanent Representative, on May 6, 2019, said that “Iran also continues to pose a serious proliferation challenge. We have been clear why we ended U.S. participation in the JCPOA... Given Iran’s long

history of noncompliance, thorough IAEA verification in Iran is essential. We call on all NPT Parties to help share the burden in supporting the IAEA's critical role in verifying and monitoring Iran's implementation of its nuclear-related obligations and commitments" (United States Mission to the United Nations, 2019). Further, on June 24, 2019, Brian Hook, U.S. Special Representative for Iran, stated, "Permitting Iran to enrich itself endangers the nonproliferation regime that everyone has worked so hard to advance in the region" (U.S. Department of State, 2019m). From the US perspective, Iran's uranium enrichment was a threat to the nonproliferation regime. By calling the parties to the NPT, the US was 'policing' and trying to enforce the NPT and the IAEA rules over Iran's nuclear program. The US constructed a representation of Self as a guardian of international law, including the NPT and the nonproliferation regime. Based on the US representation of Self, the US was responsible for protecting international law, which Iran's uranium enrichment posed a threat to. Mr. Hook on May 8 stated, "We call on the international community to hold the Iranian regime accountable for its threat to expand its nuclear program" (U.S. Department of State, 2019l). The US regularly called on the international community to follow its unilateral acts that put pressure on Iran. According to the US, Iran's reduction in nuclear-related commitments violated international law and was a threat to the nonproliferation regime. The US, as a guardian of international law, interpellated the international community to protect the nonproliferation regime by pressuring Iran to halt its enrichment program.

The US discourse highlighted that the US attempted to promote peace and stability in the Middle East and in the international community. While doing this, the US constructed its binary opposition as a “peace-loving” country against Iran’s representation as “the world’s leading sponsor of terror.” The US reinforced this representation of Iran by emphasizing Iran’s threat to peace and stability (The White House, 2020; U.S. Department of State, 2019e). The threat posed by Iran was not only limited to its nuclear program but also included “the missile program, Iran’s regional aggression and its arbitrary detention of dual nationals,” as Representative Hook stated (U.S. Department of State, 2019f). In contrast, the US represented itself as a peace-loving country, as President Trump noted in his 2019 UNGA remarks, “The United States does not seek conflict with any other nation. We desire peace, cooperation, and mutual gain with all. But I will never fail to defend America’s interests. One of the greatest security threats facing peace-loving nations today is the repressive regime in Iran.” (The White House, 2019e). The next day, Secretary Pompeo made a similar statement: “We want peace. We want a peaceful resolution with the Islamic Republic of Iran. We’re hoping we can get that way. In the end, it’ll be up to the Iranians to make that decision, whether they’ll choose violence and hate — and the President said in his speech yesterday to the General Assembly — if their bloodthirst will continue.” (The White House, 2019f). Through the discourse, the US emphasized its willingness as a “peace-loving” country to achieve peace and security in the Middle East.

The US directly associated its efforts for peace and security with the demand of the Iranian people to live a better life. Secretary of State Pompeo particularly underlined the political, social, and economic struggle the Iranian people suffered under the regime (U.S. Department of State, 2018; The White House, 2019b; The White House, 2019c). He blamed Iran for choosing to sponsor terror and aggression in the region instead of taking care of its people and meeting their needs. Secretary Pompeo further stated that the efforts for peace and security are not only against the regime but also for advocating the rights of the Iranian people who live under difficult conditions. Thus, the interests of the US matched with the interests of the Iranian people, as Secretary of State Pompeo said, and added, “We are looking for outcomes that benefit the Iranian people, not just the regime.” (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Protecting and advocating for the Iranian people in the US discourse appeared regularly, starting from President Trump’s speech of withdrawal from the JCPOA and articulated throughout 2019. The US discourse created a moral ground and responsibility to protect and advocate for the Iranian people. According to the US, the Iranian regime put its people in a difficult situation; economic struggle through sponsoring terror rather than providing for its people; political oppression; and social unrest by arresting citizens during anti-regime protests. (The White House, 2019b; The White House, 2019c). This constructed the US identity as a guardian of international law, not just in terms of the nonproliferation regime but also in terms of protecting peace and human rights.

While the US articulated different representations of Iran, such as “revolutionary,” “the world’s leading state sponsor of terror,” and “abnormal,” the US constructed Iran as Other through these representations. On the other hand, the US constructed its Self identity by juxtaposing the representations of Iran. It constructed by articulating itself as “normal nation,” “peace-loving,” and “guardian of international law.” Thus, the US constructed binary identities of itself against Iran through articulation and interpellated Iran in a subject position in which the US was what Iran was not.

3.3 US Discourse on Iran’s Announcement of Uranium Enrichment in 2019

President Trump’s speech of withdrawal from the JCPOA and Secretary Pompeo’s speech of “After the Deal: A New Iran Strategy” in 2018 called on Iran to stop enriching uranium, but they did not provide a reason for the call except its threat to peace and stability (the White House, 2018). At the time, Iran was enriching uranium at the level of 3.67%, which was the limit set by the JCPOA. The subject of enriching uranium was first mentioned in a briefing by Brian Hook, U.S. Special Representative for Iran, on May 8, 2019, when a reporter asked about Iran’s announcement to enrich uranium to 20%. Representative Hook framed this as “nuclear blackmail.” Another question was about Iran’s compliance with the nonproliferation regime. Representative Hook answered, “We have said repeatedly that we are seeking a change in the regime’s behavior. And it is true that Iran has been in compliance with these reports, but we should be surprised if they’re not in compliance. The bar for compliance was set so low by the Iran Nuclear Deal that we expect them to stay in compliance” (U.S. Department of State, 2019g).

Representative Hook also stated on June 24, 2019, that Iran's enrichment of uranium posed a threat to the nonproliferation regime (U.S. Department of State, 2019f). The US' initial framing of Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment was "nuclear blackmail," and a threat to the nonproliferation regime. Based on the US discourse, the JCPOA was not comprehensive enough to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. According to the US, this situation put Iran in a favorable position that enabled Iran to use its uranium enrichment program as a means to pressure the parties of the JCPOA.

The US also expressed its concerns over the role of uranium enrichment in the breakout cycle and had regularly emphasized that it was a path for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Accordingly, Representative Hook said that "If we can get to no enrichment, we don't need to worry about breakout cycles" (U.S. Department of State, 2020a). Representative Hook pointed out the United Arab Emirates' nuclear program as an example. The United Arab Emirates has a peaceful nuclear program without uranium enrichment (U.S. Department of State, 2020a). The US made a direct link between enriching uranium and the ambition to have a nuclear weapon for Iran as a NNWS. Iran's enrichment of uranium above the JCPOA cap was a pathway to acquiring nuclear weapons. According to the US, if Iran were to begin to enrich uranium above the JCPOA cap, the breakout time would shorten. Thus, Iran's uranium enrichment led Iran to become an NWS. In this case, Iran's nuclear program would become an urgent security threat that would threaten the nonproliferation regime, regional stability, and global peace.

Based on these arguments, the US framed Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement as a security threat.

In the 8564th Meeting of the UNSC, Mr. Cohen, the US representative, highlighted Iran's announcement of enriching uranium and expanding the stockpile of low-enriched uranium beyond the JCPOA cap. Mr. Cohen called the UNSC to take action against Iran's acts by pointing to Resolution 2231 and the mechanism it provides to address non-compliance with the JCPOA (UN Doc S/PV.8564). On July 1, 2019, Secretary Pompeo made a press statement and called on Iran to stop enriching uranium. Secretary Pompeo states that Iran, as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, should not have the right to enrich at any level in its territory, not even under a deal like the JCPOA. The US tried to justify the call for halting Iran's uranium enrichment by referring to the UNSC Resolutions passed in 2006, which suspended enrichment and reprocessing activities on Iran's soil (U.S. Department of State, 2019a). Secretary Pompeo stated that, "The Trump Administration calls on the international community to restore the longstanding nonproliferation standard of no enrichment for Iran's nuclear program." (U.S. Department of State, 2019a). In the UNSC meeting held on August 20, 2019, Secretary Pompeo again stated Iran's non-compliance with the JCPOA limits of uranium enrichment and stockpile of low-enriched uranium, and how Iran used its nuclear program as nuclear blackmail (UN Doc S/PV.8600). From the US perspective, Iran, as an NNWS, did not have the right to enrich under its civilian nuclear program. In this regard, Iran's uranium enrichment was a violation of international law. Even though the

NPT or other agreements that established the nonproliferation regime do not specify the prohibition of enriching uranium for NNWS, it is restricted through the inspections and monitoring of the IAEA. Still, the US referred to Resolution 1737, passed in 2006, which prohibited enriching uranium on Iran's territory. The US also called on the international community to take action against Iran's behavior as a moral duty and stressed the urgency of the issue by emphasizing Iran's short breakout time and its unlawfulness under international law.

On September 19, 2019, Dr. Christopher Ashley Ford, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, presented the "Strategic Logic of the US Iran Policy." It officially problematized Iran's exceeding the limits of the JCPOA uranium enrichment (3.67%) and stockpile of low-enriched uranium (300 kilograms). It claimed Iran could acquire a nuclear weapon with or without the JCPOA. The economic relief provided by the JCPOA only fueled the "malign behaviors" of Iran and made Iran "a more dangerous actor than before." Thus, the US suggested a solution that prevented Iran from practicing with fissile material (U.S. Department of State, 2019j). In another briefing in September 2019, Representative Hook again referred to the previous UNSC resolutions and stated that the right policy was not to allow Iran to enrich. Otherwise, Representative Hook claimed Iran's breakout time to acquire a nuclear weapon was one year. Both statements underlined the urgency to address.

In November 2019, Secretary Pompeo said, “President Rouhani recently announced that Iran will begin uranium enrichment activities at the Fordow facility... The right amount of uranium enrichment for the world’s largest state sponsor of terror is zero.” (U.S. Department of State, 2019i). He criticized Iran’s uranium enrichment program in a formerly secret site and questioned the necessity of Iran’s continuation of uranium enrichment (U.S. Department of State, 2019i). He framed this as a “method of nuclear brinksmanship” to convince other states that Iran’s malign behavior was lawful (U.S. Department of State, 2019i). The US representative at the 8695th UNSC Meeting, Mrs. Craft, again underlined Iran’s enrichment of uranium at the Fordow facility and highlighted its illegitimacy because the Fordow facility was part of Iran’s clandestine nuclear program at the time. Mrs. Craft also added that “The United States rejects Iran’s use of nuclear brinksmanship to normalize its destabilizing behavior.” (UN Doc S/PV.8695). As reflected in the US discourse, Iran’s announcement of uranium enrichment above the JCPOA cap was to instrumentalize its nuclear program to put pressure on the international community for turning the illegitimate act of uranium enrichment into a legitimate behavior. The US discourse established a connection between one of the previously constructed identities of Iran as Other, “the world’s leading state sponsor of terror,” and its act of uranium enrichment. Thus, the US framed Iran’s announcement as a “nuclear brinksmanship,” which Iran attempted to threaten the US and coerce international actors by using its nuclear program as leverage.

The US called on other countries to take responsibility for stopping Iran's enrichment program, since the US highlighted the danger Iran's nuclear program posed to the international community, the unlawfulness of the program, and how it violated international norms. While the US urged the rest of the international community to label Iran's nuclear program as illegitimate, the US hailed them to the subject-position in which the US attributed to them the responsibility to protect peace and international security by halting Iran's uranium enrichment. The US interpellated the international community to the subject that standing with the US against Iran's abnormal and illegitimate behavior was a moral responsibility.

3.4 Conclusion

The US constructed its Self as a "normal nation," "peace-loving," and guardian of international law. The US' Self construction was articulated in binary position through the previous representations of Iran, such as "the world's leading state sponsor of terror," and "abnormal." Thus, the US constructed identities of Self as the exact opposite of the identities of Iran as Other. The juxtaposition between the construction of identities reinforced the security framing of the US. The US combined its security concerns over Iran, prior to and after Iran's announcement. Then, the US discourse was built on this combination after Iran's announcement. The US framing of Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement was within a security discourse. When the US discourse on Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment exceeding the JCPOA limit is analyzed, the focal point is how the US framed it as illegitimate and unlawful by constructing different representations, such as

“nuclear blackmail,” “nuclear brinksmanship,” and ‘threat to nonproliferation regime.’ The US articulated this framing regularly and linked it with the previously constructed representations of Iran, such as a country with “abnormal behavior” and “the leading sponsor of terror”. The issue became one of the threats that were linked with the previous threats through articulation. The US framed Iran’s 2019 uranium enrichment announcement as a security threat.

This chapter examined the US’s identity construction of Self and Iran as Other and how the US framed Iran’s 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. The next chapter will analyze how Russia constructed identities of Self and Iran as Other and how it framed Iran’s 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment.



CHAPTER 4: RUSSIA'S FRAMING OF IRAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF URANIUM ENRICHMENT IN 2019

Chapter 4 begins with the background of the nuclear relationship between Russia and Iran until Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. The second section examines Russia's construction of identities of Self and Iran as Other in 2019. Next, it analyzes Russia's framing of Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment, whether it was a security threat or not. Lastly, it concludes the chapter by presenting Russia's construction of identities of Self and Other and how it framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment.

4.1 Russia-Iran Nuclear Relationship Until 2019

After Iran reinitiated its nuclear program in the late 1980s, following the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran developed ties with Russia on nuclear technology. Iran and Russia signed a protocol in August 1992 on reconstructing the Bushehr nuclear power plant (which was built by Germany and damaged during the Iran-Iraq War), developing cooperation in the field of peaceful

nuclear technology within the framework of international law and evaluating the constructions of new nuclear power units (Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation, 2014; Orlov & Vinnikov, 2005, p. 50). In January 1995, the Russian-Iranian Nuclear Cooperation Accord was signed. The terms of the agreement were to cooperate in completing the construction of Block No.1 at the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran and to train the AEOI scientific personnel and graduate students at Russian academic institutions (Eisenstadt, 1996). This agreement was revised in 1998 when Russia agreed to complete two blocks of the nuclear plant and to provide uranium (without enrichment) to Iran (Aras & Ozbay, 2006, p. 133).

After the clandestine nuclear sites of Iran were revealed in 2002, Russia backed Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear program. According to Russia, Iran, as a signatory to the NPT, complied with the obligations under international law, and the disclosure of Iran's clandestine nuclear sites was not a violation of international law (Tabatabai & Esfandiary, 2018, p. 77). Against the criticism from the US and international actors, Russia has officially declared that its intention is not for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons but to continue its nuclear cooperation on civilian nuclear energy (Aras & Ozbay, 2006, pp. 136-142). Russia was against the unilateral sanctions implemented by the US and the EU and did not comply with those sanctions. Russia saw unilateral sanctions as illegitimate and outside of the international nonproliferation regime (Pieper, 2017, p.107).

Russia got involved with the negotiations in 2006 and offered to move Iran's uranium enrichment activities to Russia under a joint facility. Russia's offer aimed to prevent Iran from enriching uranium and accessing and enhancing enrichment technology (Pieper, 2017, p. 102). The US, E3, and China supported the offer, but it was rejected by Iran. Iran declared that it would continue enriching uranium (Aras & Ozbay, 2006, p. 140). Iran's rejection tensed its relationship with Russia, and Russia supported the ensuing UN resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran.

In June 2011, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov suggested a 'step-by-step' approach to Iran's nuclear program. According to Minister Lavrov, the dual-track approach of the US to Iran (international pressure and negotiations) did not produce any concrete results on the issue. He criticized the sanctions for not matching the purpose of the negotiations. Russia aimed to change the sanctioned environment by encouraging further negotiations. Minister Lavrov called the approach "action for action." Whenever Iran would take steps to address the concerns and requirements of the IAEA, sanctions on Iran would be eased or suspended (U.S. Department of State, 2011; Russian Mission Vienna, 2011). Reciprocity and gradualism were the aspects of the approach; the steps should be taken reciprocally by P5+1 and Iran, the sanctions on Iran should be eased gradually, and a concrete outcome should be expected in the long term. Minister Lavrov's statements related to these aspects emphasized that instead of settling the issue with a single document or resolution, a mutual process should be followed by all parties (Lavrov, 2011).

Even though the proposal was received positively by all parties, it was not implemented (Katz, 2010).

Russia supported diplomacy and political dialogue with a multilateral approach to settle the dispute on Iran's nuclear program until the adoption of the JCPOA in 2015. Russia's approach overlaps with its framing and historical stance. After the JCPOA eased international sanctions and US sanctions, it provided economic gains to Russia and improved its bilateral relations with Iran. Russia benefited from lifting certain trade restrictions with Iran, including supplying technology, materials, and equipment for the reconstruction of the Fordow facility (Khlopkov, 2016, pp. 2-3).

Russia expressed its disappointment at the US withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018. It underlined the legitimacy of the nuclear program of Iran and the importance of the JCPOA for the nonproliferation regime. Russia highlighted its support for the JCPOA and dialogue channel and continued its cooperation with Iran (Foreign Ministry Statement, 2018).

4.2 Constructing Self and Other

Russia's discourse emphasized the importance of preserving the JCPOA and how Russia put effort into achieving this. While it articulated how Russia performed for the implementation and its full commitment to the JCPOA, Russia also called on the signatories to show "political will and a collective response" to reach the goal (MID, 2019m). In this regard, Russia considered abiding commitments a performative act by stating it as a "political will." It

underscored its duty to preserve the deal. This also reflects that Russia presented itself as a responsible actor in the international arena, which does not violate international law but tries to preserve it. This shows the Russian representation of Self as a guardian of international law and the nonproliferation regime. Russia also underlined the multilateral nature of the deal and tried to make the signatories responsible for preserving the deal. Russia's articulation of "collective response" underlines the need for multilateral effort and diplomacy among the signatories, which criticized the unilateral act of the US (MID, 2019h; MID, 2019j; MID, 2019m). The Russian representative, Mr. Nebenzia, at the 8695th meeting of the UNSC on December 19, 2019, stated, "The only practical step that can be taken to save the JCPOA is the remaining parties' implementation of their obligations under the agreement. We must abandon fear and selfish motives and prioritize the tasks of maintaining the viability of the JCPOA, which is a vital achievement of multilateral diplomacy" (UN Doc S/PV.8695). Russia stressed the requirement of working together and fulfilling the parties' obligations under the deal, by referring to the unilateral acts of the US. According to Russia, the unilateral acts of the US violated international law, and the JCPOA should be preserved. A multilateral approach was the key to preserving the deal. This reflection of Russia emphasized how Russia attempted to abide by international law and called on the other parties to do the same by highlighting the importance of multilateralism and diplomacy in the international arena. Therefore, this reinforced Russia's Self identity as guardian of international law and the nonproliferation regime to preserve the deal and put the actors in a responsible position to fulfill their obligations.

This representation underlined Russia's efforts and taking responsibility to protect the nonproliferation regime and international law as a law-abiding country in the international arena.

Another representation Russia constructed for Self identity was being a balancing actor between Iran and other signatories, particularly the US and the European actors. Russia did not directly involve itself in the dispute between Iran and the US. Still, Russia condemned the unilateral acts of the US and found them to be illegitimate under international law. Russia's discourse focused on legitimizing Iran's reduction in commitments by underlining enriching uranium as an inalienable right (MID, 2019g).

Therefore, by criticizing the US acts and justifying Iran's, Russia embraced a role of balancing actor against the US hegemony and the US-constructed dominant narrative against Iran. The Russian representative, Mr. Nebenzia, at the 8695th meeting of the UNSC on December 19, 2019, said, "The current report constitutes clear evidence of Washington's violations (resolution 2231 and the UN Charter). We believe that those actions should be condemned as well as deplored by the international community. We are in effect encountering the paradoxical situation in which a permanent member of the Security Council is not only failing to comply with a resolution...but is actively threatening all other Member States with unilateral sanctions for implementing the resolution's provisions. We do not quite understand how it is possible to strengthen international peace and security by directly undermining Security Council resolutions" (UN Doc S/PV.8695). According to Russia, the US acts were represented as lawful, while Iran's reduction in

commitments was considered a violation of international law and a pathway to proliferation in the eyes of the US. This representation of Russia shows itself as a great power in the international arena, which counters the hegemony of the US, both in narrative construction and practice. In this regard, it created subject positions for the US and European actors and interpellated them into the subject by articulating their unilateral acts and failure to implement the deal. The construction of this subject position is essential for Russia not only to counterbalance the dominant narrative constructed by the US but also to reinforce Russia's other representations.

Russia constructed Iran as Other in representations of a legitimate and rational actor regarding its nuclear program and nonproliferation regime. Russia did not differentiate Iran from itself in a binary position, but its construction emphasizes the hierarchy between the two states. Russia has been emphasizing Iran's volunteer commitments under the deal, its cooperation with the IAEA in terms of inspections, and compliance with the nonproliferation regime. Russia stated that Iran's announcement of exceeding the JCPOA cap of uranium enrichment was a reaction to the unilateral acts of the US and did not violate international law because fulfilling obligations of the deal was voluntary (MID, 2019b). It also stated the irreversibility of Iran's actions after the signatories' fulfillment of their commitments (MID, 2019l). In this regard, Russia constructed Iran as a legitimate and rational actor that abides by international law and complies with the nonproliferation regime unless Iran was forced to take such steps.

Still, Russia's construction of identities did not place Russia and Iran on the same level in the international arena. From the Russian perspective, Iran was being treated unfairly, and Russia was voicing its situation and seeking its rights in the international arena. This creates a hierarchical relationship between Russia and Iran in which Russia's position is more of a balancing actor and guardian of the nonproliferation regime and international law, which Russia seeks to protect the rights of those who are wronged. Further, Russia's other representation of Iran was that Iran was restrained by the unilateral acts of the US and European actors. According to Russia, this situation put Iran in a vulnerable position that it could not fully defend and exercise its rights (arising from international law) in the international arena. Thus, Russia's construction of Self and Other has hierarchical subject positions in which Russia interpellated both itself and Iran through constructing asymmetrical and non-binary representations.

4.3 Russia's Framing of Iran's Announcement of Uranium Enrichment in 2019

Russia's discourse on Iran's nuclear program underlined its legitimacy and transparency under the JCPOA. It reflected how Iran was abiding by the limits of the deal, the IAEA requirements and inspections, and international law (MID, 2019a). Russia also put emphasis on unilateral withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA by stating how the US violated the UNSC Resolution 2231 and Article 25 of the UN Charter (MID, 2019a).

Russia's approach to Iran's reduction in commitments is twofold, which is closely linked. Initially, according to Russia, Iran's announcement of

exceeding the JCPOA cap of uranium enrichment was the right originating from the JCPOA. Russia's first reaction to the announcement was stated by Minister Lavrov on May 13, 2019, as "I'll note that the JCPOA contains very clear provisions, which say, firstly, that Iran's commitments are voluntary. Secondly, Tehran has the right to suspend observance if other parties to the agreement do not fulfill their obligations" (MID, 2019b). That is to say, the parties to the JCPOA were voluntarily implementing the obligations, and Iran had the right to suspend its commitments and obligations when the parties do not fulfill their obligations. Minister Lavrov, on November 6, 2019, elaborated on this situation: "It (Iran) is reducing the level of commitments that are voluntary under the UN Security Council resolution and are directly linked with other countries' commitments to ensure Iran's legitimate economic interests." (MID, 2019l).

At the end of May 2019, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova explained the situation in terms of international law: "The question is whether Iranians have the right to take such steps. In our opinion, and according to international law, logic and an understanding of the recent years' developments, of course they have the full right to take such steps on the basis of UNSC Resolution 2231, which approved the JCPOA in 2015. Its Article 26 says that 'Iran has stated that it will treat re-introduction or re-imposition of the sanctions as grounds to cease performing its commitments under this JCPOA in whole or in part.' So the issue of whether or not Iran has such right can be considered closed and not subject to discussion. So no complaints can be made against Iran in the context of the JCPOA." (MID,

2019d). Russia saw Iran's actions as a counter-response to the unilateral acts of the US. Iran had the right to reduce its commitments due to the parties' failure to fulfill their commitments. Its non-violation of international law and the reversibility of suspending commitments made Iran's nuclear program legitimate and legal in the eyes of Russia, within the context of Iran's reduction in commitments. In this regard, Russia's discourse repeatedly attempted to justify Iran's acts under international law. Russia framed Iran's announcement as a reactive act rather than a threat to nonproliferation.

Further, Russia's justification was based on the US acts that violated international law. Russia's discourse underlined the acts of the US, which limited Iran's economic relations and framed Iran's announcement as a natural consequence of not fulfilling the voluntary obligations of the JCPOA (MID, 2019e). After a meeting with Foreign Minister of Iran Javad Zarif, Minister Lavrov told, "We fully realise that the steps that Iran has to take on the partial suspension of its voluntary commitments under the JCPOA are a direct consequence of the United States' unacceptable moves as regards this highly important document that was approved by the UN Security Council." (MID, 2019i). Russia regularly stated the Maximum Pressure campaign by framing it as 'thoughtless' US acts (MID, 2019n). US sanctions on Iran's economic relations, particularly targeting its oil exports, were contrary to the obligations of the deal (MID, 2019b). Also, the US restrained the countries from buying an excessive amount of low-enriched uranium and heavy water that Iran produced (MID, 2019c). According to the deal, the excessive

amount of LEU and heavy water beyond the JCPOA limit should be exported, and this was implemented until 2019 (MID, 2019c). Russia framed the event as a consequence of unilateral acts of the US. According to Russia, these acts of the US led Iran to suspend its voluntary obligations under the JCPOA, since the US not only failed to fulfill its obligations but also prevented other countries from doing so by running the Maximum Pressure campaign. Russia framed Iran's announcement of exceeding the JCPOA cap of uranium enrichment as a natural consequence of the US acts and considered that it was Iran's right to suspend its voluntary obligations.

Another topic in Russia's discourse was Iran's right to enrich uranium and its causes in relation to the NPT and the IAEA safeguards. Minister Lavrov, on July 17, 2019, stated that one of the essential topics of the JCPOA was that "Iran wanted to guarantee its right to uranium enrichment technology. This is an inalienable right of any signatory of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The fact that it was made part of the agreement was a key element in the compromise." (MID, 2019g). Russia advocated Iran's right to enrich uranium and declared that the right to enrich does not violate international law because the NPT or other multilateral agreements (besides the JCPOA and the UNSC resolutions) do not limit the right to enrich (MID, 2019n). Still, to eliminate the concerns over enriching uranium, there should be monitoring by the IAEA to ensure its compliance (MID, 2019n). In this regard, Minister Lavrov said on July 9, 2019, enriching uranium above 3.67% did not violate the NPT, the IAEA Safeguards Agreement, or the Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement. Further, the IAEA reports on Iran's

partial suspension of its voluntary commitment indicated that it did not pose a threat to the nonproliferation regime (MID, 2019f). According to Russia, Iran's enrichment of uranium was not a pathway to acquiring nuclear weapons. Iran's partial suspension was under the IAEA supervision and in full compliance with the IAEA obligations (MID, 2019k; MID, 2019o).

4.4 Conclusion

Russia's framing of Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement is not a security framing. Russia's representations of Self and Iran as Other are directly linked with how Russia framed Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement. Russia's Self identity as the guarantor of the nonproliferation regime tried to promote a multilateral approach to the dispute between the US and Iran. Russia called on the parties to fully implement the deal and settle the dispute through diplomacy. This was also a result of Russia's representation of Iran as a rational and responsible actor, but with constraints. Russia's perception of Iran as being rational and Iran's nuclear program as legitimate led Russia to consider the event outside of security framing. Russia's balancing role also affected its framing in a way that Russia held the US responsible for Iran's act of enriching uranium. In this regard, Russia did not frame Iran's nuclear program as a security threat within the context of Iran's 2019 uranium enrichment announcement.

This chapter analyzed Russia's identity construction of Self and Iran as Other and how Russia framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. The next chapter will examine how China constructed identities of Self and

Iran as Other and how it framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment.





CHAPTER 5: CHINA'S FRAMING OF IRAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF URANIUM ENRICHMENT IN 2019

Chapter 5 begins with the Chinese-Iranian nuclear relationship until Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. Next, it examines how China constructed its Self and Iran as Other through discourses. Then, the third section analyzes China's framing of Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment based on China's discourses in 2019. Finally, it concludes the chapter by showing how China constructed identities of Self and Other and how it framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment.

5.1 China-Iran Nuclear Relationship Until 2019

Iran's search for new partners to revive its nuclear program starting in the 1980s established a bilateral relationship between Iran and China on nuclear technology (Bahgat, 2006, p.311). Particularly in the 1990s, Iran and China had different agreements on large- and small-scale nuclear research projects. In 1990, Iran signed an agreement with China to acquire a miniature neutron source reactor and a small calutron (EMIS) device for the Esfahan Nuclear Technology Center (Davis et al., 2012, p.25; Gill, 1998, p.369). Although the export of China aroused concerns about the peaceful purposes

of nuclear technology, the IAEA inspection of the site in 1992 highlighted no proliferation efforts of Iran's nuclear program (IAEA, 1992; Davis et al., 2012, p.26). In the meantime, Iranian president Rafsanjani visited Beijing, China, in 1992 and declared a '10-year nuclear cooperation agreement' with China (Sciolino, 1992; Calabrese, 2006, p.5; Davis et al., 2012, p.28). With respect to the agreement, they agreed to build two power reactors at a site near Darkhovin in Iran (Sciolino, 1992; Koch & Wolf, 1997, p.129; Kibaroglu, 2007, p.235; Davis et al., 2012, p.28). The close cooperation between China and Iran also included sharing knowledge on nuclear issues, such as providing assistance for design and construction and training Iranian students, engineers, and scientists (Pieper, 2017, p.138). During the same period, China began to comply with the international norms of nonproliferation more strictly, such as signing the NPT in 1992 and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. China also became a member of the Zangger Committee and the Nuclear Suppliers Groups in 1992 and limited its trade of dual-use nuclear technology (Lanteigne, 2009, p.79; Gill, 1998, p.377). These developments curtailed China's nuclear-related trade and cooperation with other countries. China suspended other nuclear-related deals with Iran unilaterally in 1995, after the US-China rapprochement about the nuclear issues in the same year (Shen, 2006, pp.59-60; U.S. Department of State, 1997; Bahgat, 2006, p.310; Gill, 1998, pp.370-371).

After P5+1 was formed, China began to take a mediator role between the US and Iran during the negotiations. In the role of mediator, China tried to convince Iran to compromise on the level of uranium enrichment to continue

the negotiations (Pieper, 2017, pp.155-156). China was still against international sanctions, while Iran was referred to the UN Security Council in 2006. China succeeded in its policy of “delaying, deflecting and weakening” for the resolutions starting in 2006. In this regard, China weakened Resolution 1696 in 2006 by agreeing to take measures rather than imposing sanctions on Iran (International Crisis Group, 2010, p.12). China also delayed Resolution 1737 in 2006 and put reservations about the mandate on restricting technology transfer so that the parties could decide which technologies could fulfill the criteria (International Crisis Group, 2010, p.12). Despite the successful Chinese efforts to ‘delay, deflect and weaken’ sanctions of the UN Security Council, China eventually complied with the international sanctions, particularly after 2006, indicating Iran’s unwillingness to transparent cooperation with the IAEA (Pieper, 2017, p.142).

After China partially and reluctantly supported the international sanction regime, the trade volume between China and Iran decreased after 2009. After the implementation of the JCPOA, their bilateral relationship was enhanced when President Xi visited Tehran in January 2016, and 17 agreements were signed related to trade, industry, and energy sectors. The visit emphasized a new chapter of long-term bilateral relations (MFA PRC, 2019a). One of the significances of this visit was that it was the first presidential-level visit to Iran since 2002 (Glenn, 2016).

The bilateral relationship between China and Iran is mostly based on economic relations, where energy plays a crucial role (Lanteigne, 2009,

pp.142-143; Pieper, 2017, p.158). The US is China's biggest partner in trade volume. China's votes on the UNSC resolutions have practical implications for its bilateral relations with the US and Iran separately (Shen, 2006, p.63). In this regard, China has been following the sanctions and various policies of the US, not discursively but at the behavioral level. That is to say, even though China condemned the unilateral sanctions of the US on Iran and its nuclear program, China still followed the unilateral sanctions of the US such as reducing oil imports from Iran after the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and (Pieper, 2017, pp.157-159; "China Tells State-Owned Giants to Halt Iran Oil Buying," 2018).

After the US announced its withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018, China expressed its concerns and regret over the US decision. China underlined the importance of the multilateral agreement on the dispute for the nonproliferation regime and peace and stability in the region. In this regard, China indicated that it would continue to implement the JCPOA and oppose any unilateral sanctions (Bloomberg News, 2018). This stance of China stemmed from Iran's full compliance with the obligations of the JCPOA and the IAEA safeguards until 2019.

China's framing of Iran's nuclear program until 2019 still emphasizes principles of non-intervention and sovereignty of Iran, and China's stance on opposing unilateral sanctions can be considered as the ground for that. However, there are still divergences between China's discourses and acts. Iran's full compliance with the JCPOA and the international nonproliferation

regime makes China support Iran's peaceful nuclear program and frame it as a non-security issue. On the other hand, the unilateral sanctions of the US have still impacted China's bilateral relations with the US and Iran individually.

5.2 Constructing Self and Other

China put emphasis on the importance of "dialogue and consultation" to solve the Iranian nuclear issue (MFA PRC, 2019a). China also highlighted the multilateralism of the JCPOA and how vital it was to protect the deal for a peaceful settlement (MFA PRC, 2019a). In this regard, China called on the parties to fully implement the deal and condemned the US for its unilateral acts. Mr. Wu Haitao, Chinese representative in the 8564th meeting of the UNSC on June 26, 2019, stated that "China calls on the parties concerned to remain calm and exercise restraint, resolve disputes through dialogue and consultations, and refrain from any action that might escalate tensions. Ensuring the full and effective implementation of the JCPOA is not only a requirement in resolution 2231 (2015), but also a realistic and effective way to defuse tensions in the Middle East and resolve the Iranian nuclear issue" (UN Doc S/PV.8564). Further, Mr. Wu Haitao also stated that China promoted and facilitated "political and diplomatic means" for the resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue and added "China will continue to work in an objective, impartial and responsible manner. We will work tirelessly, alongside the international community, to uphold and implement resolution 2231 (2015) and the JCPOA." (UN Doc S/PV.8564). China was consistent in its discourse on impartiality that Mr. Zhang Jun, the Chinese representative, at the 8695th

UNSC meeting on December 19, 2019, said, “We will continue to be objective, impartial and responsible in our tireless efforts to uphold and implement the JCPOA and resolution 2231 (2015)” (UN Doc S/PV.8695). The discourse of China constructed its Self representation as a neutral and rational actor in the international arena, while discrediting unilateral moves. China constructed a subject position of Self that presents China as a facilitator of consensus among the parties. China interpellated itself into this subject position after regularly repeating the discourse, including “dialogue and consultation,” to reinforce this image. In this regard, consultation also represents its Self identity, a neutral actor to be consulted to solve the dispute. Based on China’s discourse, it is difficult to infer that the discourse constructed Self representation of mediator. Nevertheless, China attempted to ease the tension and settle the dispute between the US and Iran through dialogue and multilateral diplomacy; China did not directly intervene in the dispute and take an active role.

Mr. Zhang Jun, Chinese representative in the 8600th meeting of the UNSC on August 20, 2019, stated that “China has always closely followed peace and security in the Middle East and has upheld an objective and impartial position advocating for a new security concept featuring common threads of cooperative and sustainable security in an effort to build a community with a shared future for humankind... China has always been committed to playing a constructive role in facilitating political solutions to hotspot issues in the region. We maintain contact and communication with the countries concerned in the region, support mutual confidence-building, and promote

peace talks.” (UN Doc S/PV.8600). China’s speeches in the UNSC in June and August show how China represents itself as a facilitator actor for the resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue. The emphasis on impartiality and objectivity for approaching this issue frames itself as a neutral actor while reinforcing its facilitator representation. Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang on August 27, 2019, stated, “China has been stressing all along that dialogue and consultation is the only right approach while confrontation and conflict will lead nowhere. On the Iranian nuclear issue, China always stands for deescalation through dialogue and communication.” (MFA PRC, 2019b). China’s discourse represents its Self as a stabilizing actor that seeks to ease the tension between Iran and the US.

Another aspect of China’s discourse is China’s emphasis on the protection of the JCPOA and multilateralism. This aspect also reinforces China’s Self-representation as a stabilizing actor in the international arena. While China condemns unilateral acts of the US against Iran, its discourse focuses on the significance of the JCPOA for the international nonproliferation regime. Mr. Zhang Jun, Chinese representative in the 8695th meeting of the UNSC on December 19, 2019, stated, “Dialogue and negotiation point to a realistic avenue to settle the Iranian nuclear issue. The full and effective implementation of the JCPOA is the only correct and effective way to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue and ease the current situation. All the parties concerned should work together to restore the balance of rights and obligations under the plan... China is a negotiator of and participant in the JCPOA, as well as its staunch defender and enforcer. China will continue to

work with all the parties to make new progress in the modernization of the Arak heavy-water reactor. We will continue to be objective, impartial and responsible in our tireless efforts to uphold and implement the JCPOA and resolution 2231 (2015)” (UN Doc S/PV.8695). By underlining its continuing commitment to and desire to protect the deal, China represented itself as the law-abiding actor in the international community.

Based on China’s construction of identities as Self and Other, China’s discourse does not construct a clear subject position for Iran as Other.

Rather, These representations are not in binary positions vis-à-vis Iran and its representation. China constructed its Self identity through different representations, but it did not construct an Other identity for Iran.

Construction of Self and Other identities takes binary positions like dichotomy or hierarchy, as the US and Russia did, respectively. Rather, China focused on articulating its representations as Self, and it attached different meanings to Iran and its nuclear program. China represented of Iran as a responsible state. To elaborate, China’s discourse repeatedly uttered that Iran complies with the NPT and the IAEA safeguards, and it fulfills its voluntary commitments under the JCPOA (MFA PRC, 2019d). On June 26, 2019, the Chinese representative, Mr. Wu Haitao, stated at the UNSC 8564th meeting, “The International Atomic Energy Agency has verified on 15 consecutive occasions Iran’s compliance with its nuclear-related commitments and the JCPOA. The coordination between the Council and the procurement channel has been going well. China appreciates Iran’s efforts to implement resolution 2231 (2015) and the JCPOA and hopes that Iran will continue to implement

it" (UN Doc S/PV.8564). China's recognition of Iran's cooperation is not limited to Iran's nuclear program. Since the Maximum Pressure campaign of the US began, China has criticized the unilateral acts of the US, which put Iran in a difficult position. The campaign also put restrictions on China-Iran trade relations, which China saw as an unlawful act. Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang stated on April 24, 2019, after a question about China's purchase of Iranian oil, "...China firmly opposes the unilateral sanctions and so-called 'long-arm jurisdictions' imposed by the US. The normal cooperation under international law between Iran and other members of the international community, China included, is legitimate and lawful; thus, it must be respected and protected." And added, "the cooperation between China and Iran is legitimate and lawful; thus, it must be respected and safeguarded. We urge the US to refrain from undermining China's rights and interests, and we will continue to safeguard the lawful and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese businesses." (Chinese Embassy Vanuatu, 2019). China considers Iran a legitimate and responsible actor in the international arena, unlike the US representation of Iran. This representation of Iran not only covers China's support to implement the JCPOA, and their shared benefits from the deal, but also China-Iran trade relations and Chinese businesses in relation to Iran.

China's Self representation as a facilitator of consensus also constructs a subject position for Iran. Mr. Fu Cong, Director-General of the Department of Arms Control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China on "JCPOA: Possible Steps to Prevent Further Escalation and Sustain the Deal on November 10,

2019, stated that “Iran is forced to reduce its nuclear commitments since it cannot enjoy the economic benefits embedded in the nuclear deal.” (MFA PRC, 2019d). In this regard, Iran’s reduction in commitments was its only way to warn parties (the US and Western states) of their failure to fulfill their obligations. Since Iran was “forced” to act that way. This created a subject position representing Iran as a constrained actor.

5.3 China’s Framing of Iran’s Announcement of Uranium Enrichment in 2019

China’s framing of Iran’s uranium enrichment above the JCPOA limit was first brought up in detail by Mr. Fu Cong on November 10, 2019. Mr. Fu Cong articulated that “the root cause of the current tension of the Iranian nuclear issue lies with the US policy of maximum pressure against Iran. The situation was originally calm until the US reimposed unilateral sanctions on Iran and impeded the implementation of the JCPOA by others through long-arm jurisdiction. As a result, Iran is forced to reduce its nuclear commitments since it cannot enjoy the economic benefits embedded in the nuclear deal. This is the logic behind the Iranian nuclear crisis.” (MFA PRC, 2019d). Further, Mr. Fu Cong added that the current acts of Iran do not present a nuclear proliferation threat since Iran still complies with the NPT and the IAEA safeguards, and Iran has already declared that reduction of its commitments is reversible (MFA PRC, 2019d). China framed Iran’s reduction in commitments as a political consequence, rather than a type of security threat, like regional or proliferation. China identified the issue as a cause-and-effect relationship in which the unilateral acts of the US forced Iran to take such steps. China officially recognized the breach of the JCPOA by

Iran's enrichment of uranium above the JCPOA cap. Still, the reversibility of the reduction in commitments played an important role in China's framing.

After framing the Iranian nuclear issue, Mr. Cong explicitly discussed several points to follow for de-escalation, based on China's approach. He highlighted the significance of multilateralism as a fundamental principle of the deal, the balance between the rights and obligations, dialogue and consultation, and peace as the overriding objective in the region (MFA PRC, 2019d). China's discourse saw Iran's reduction of its nuclear commitments as a reaction to the US policy of maximum pressure against Iran. It highlighted that Iran's act was not taken willingly, but it was "forced" to take such a decision. China condemns the unilateral acts and the Maximum Pressure campaign of the US. China framed Iran's reduction of its nuclear commitments as a reversible response. Still, China's discourse did not support or justify Iran's act, but it shows that China comprehended Iran's motivation behind its noncompliance. Thus, China's discourse did not target any of the parties; it identified the problem and its cause-and-effect relation. Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's statement on November 5, 2019, noted that "We urge the relevant sides to move toward the same direction, make greater diplomatic efforts and work for de-escalation. China will continue to work with other parties towards this end." (MFA PRC, 2019c). China kept itself at a certain distance from the parties of the deal. China regularly and repeatedly called on all parties to fully implement the deal and fulfill their commitments.

China's discourse on Iran's reduction in commitments was consistent throughout 2019. Iran's uranium enrichment above the JCPOA limit did not alter China's framing. While China did not escalate the tension, it put distance between itself and the parties to the tension. It also clarified its reasoning behind Iran's reduction in commitments. China regularly called on the parties to fully implement the JCPOA and to solve the dispute through diplomatic and dialogue channels. China's discourse did not frame Iran's reduction in uranium enrichment as a proliferation threat or any security threat; it rather framed it as a moderate response to the unilateral acts of the US.

5.4 Conclusion

China's construction of identities affected its framing. China did not construct Iran's identity as the Other but attached different meanings to Iran's representations, reflecting Iran as a rational and responsible actor in the international arena. China's emphasis on sovereignty and "dialogue and consultation" affected China's position and prevented it from being a party to the dispute. Its impartial position between the US and Iran implied how China approached Iran's 2019 announcement. According to China, the case was an escalated dispute between the US and Iran, which could be solved diplomatically. Iran's compliance with the NPT and the IAEA safeguards, and the reversibility of its reduction in commitments, shaped Iran's image for China in a way that China did not frame Iran's acts through a traditional security approach. According to China, Iran, as a sovereign state, had the right to take such steps under international law. The reasoning behind Iran's

acts as a sovereign state and China's less emphasis on conventional means of threat makes Iran and its nuclear program a non-security issue.

This chapter examined how China constructed identities of Self and Iran as Other and how it framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. The next chapter will analyze the UNSC 8564th, 8600th, and 8695th meetings and compare the US, Russia, and China's discourses on how the case countries framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. Finally, the following chapter will conclude the thesis by comparing the analysis of how the US, Russia, and China constructed identities of Self and Iran as Other, how they framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment, and how they were different in their framing.



CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter aims to conclude this thesis by presenting analyses of how the US, Russia, and China differ in framing Iran's nuclear program. This thesis specifically focuses on Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. Besides presenting findings, this chapter also analyzes and compares the case countries' framings of Iran's 2019 announcement based on their discourses during the UNSC 8564th, 8600th, and 8695th meetings held in 2019.

The nuclear proliferation literature builds upon traditional security thinking, which has a security-based approach to nuclear weapons. From this perspective, states acquire nuclear weapons to increase their national security in the anarchic and self-help system. The literature considers civilian nuclear programs with uranium enrichment facilities as a pathway to proliferation. In this sense, traditional security thinking assumes that NWSs behave similarly to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. In this case, the US, Russia, and China have similarities like being the permanent members of the UNSC, the key actors of the nonproliferation regime, parties to the JCPOA, and nuclear weapon states. Despite their similarities, the US, Russia, and China differed in framing Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium

enrichment. The incongruity of theoretical implication with practice creates the puzzle of “How do the US, Russia, and China differ in their framing of Iran's nuclear program?” which this thesis seeks to address.

This thesis uses a critical constructivist approach to examine how the case countries differed in framing Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. Critical constructivism does not see reality and knowledge as objective or value-free. Instead, they are socially constructed. According to critical constructivism, representations and identities construct meanings. How the state officials make sense of the world also shape what meanings they attribute to the representations and identities. In this sense, examining identities shows how they are constructed through meanings by articulation. This thesis examines how the US, Russia and China constructed their identities of Self and Iran as Other. To construct identities, the case countries produced representations of Self and Other and attached meanings to these representations through articulation. The US, Russia and China's construction of identities also shaped their framing of Iran's 2019 announcement. Through discourse analysis of the case countries' state officials, this thesis analyzed how the US, Russia and China framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment differently.

Chapter 3-5 looked at how the US, Russia and China constructed identities of Self and Other and how they frame Iran's 2019 announcement. The US, Russia, and China differ in constructing identities of Self and Other. While the US constructed identities based on juxtaposition, Russia and China did not

construct identities in binary positions. The US's representations of Self were anti-Iran's representations as Other. Thus, the US constructed identities based on that the US was what Iran was not. Each representation of the US and Iran had opposite meanings, such as while the US represented itself as a "peace-loving" state, it represented Iran as "the world's leading state sponsor of terror." Russia constructed its Self representations to consolidate its position in the international arena that Russia wanted to be in the same hierarchical position as the US. Russia's emphasis on multilateralism and protecting international law could provide prestige to Russia. Russia's construction of Iran as the Other was also related to this. Russia attempted to protect the rights of Iran under international law. Even though this put a hierarchical positioning between Russia and Iran, Russia's positioning itself as the voice of the oppressed aimed to gain credibility in the international arena. China's construction of identities focused on representations of Self. China represented itself as a neutral, impartial, and objective actor that aimed to settle the dispute through political means such as dialogue, consultation. These representations showed China's willingness to take part in the negotiations for the solution. This stance of China was not limited to the issues around Iran's nuclear program, but China also had the same approach for regional and international security. China did not construct Iran as Other; rather, it attached different meanings through different representations of Iran. Since China emphasized the sovereignty of Iran, it also underlined how the unilateral acts of the US put Iran in a difficult position. According to China, Iran was a rational and responsible actor with a

legitimate nuclear program under international law. In this regard, the US, Russia, and China's construction of identities were distinct from each other.

The distinction in the construction of identities affected how the US, Russia, and China frame Iran's nuclear program. The case countries had different framings. The UNSC 8564th, 8600th, and 8695th meetings were held on June 26, August 20, and December 19, 2019, respectively. The meetings are useful to compare how the US, Russia, and China framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment. While the first and third meetings' agendas were "non-proliferation", the second one was "Maintenance of international peace and security," and in these meetings, all the representatives of the case countries made a speech (UN Doc S/PV.8564; UN Doc S/PV.8600; UN Doc S/PV.8695). In the first meeting, the US representative, Mr. Cohen, stated that "On 8 May, Iran announced that it would take steps to cease performing certain core nuclear commitments — a step that most agree threatens to undermine peace and security in the region and beyond. As a first such step, Iran said it plans to expand its stockpile of low-enriched uranium beyond 300 kilogrammes by 27 June. It also said that, if its conditions are not met, Iran will also start enriching uranium to higher levels in a return to a nuclear-reactor project at Arak that was well suited to producing plutonium" (UN Doc S/PV.8564). Further, Mr. Cohen added, "Iran's defiance of the Security Council and its reckless behaviour threatening peace and security globally must not be downplayed in the name of preserving a deal that does not fully cut off Iran's path to a nuclear weapon" (UN Doc S/PV.8564). That is to say, the US framed Iran's announcement as a threat to

peace and security in the region and globally. The US also saw Iran's reduction in commitments as an ambition to acquire nuclear weapons. In the same meeting, the Russian representative, Mr. Nebenzia, highlighted the importance of the JCPOA for global diplomacy and multilateralism. Also, Mr. Nebenzia stated Iran's full compliance with the JCPOA and added, "We are in favour of preserving the JCPOA, and we want Iran to remain committed to it. But we understand Tehran's deep disappointment with the situation that has developed, whereby its full compliance with its obligations is demanded with nothing proposed in exchange, which was why the deal was made in the first place" (UN Doc S/PV.8564). Russia did not directly refer to Iran's reductions in commitment. Still, Russia underlined that the commitments of the JCPOA were violated unilaterally, which put Iran in a disadvantaged position. Also, the Chinese representative, Mr. Wu Haitao, discussed the importance of preserving the JCPOA and its effects on the nonproliferation regime and peace and stability in the Middle East. While China called on all parties to fully implement the JCPOA and condemned the unilateral acts of the US, it did not state the reductions of Iran in its commitments (UN Doc S/PV.8564).

The next UNSC meeting was held on August 20, 2019. The US representative, Mr. Pompeo, stated "Here is just a short list of what the regime has done since July. On 1 July, Iran surpassed its 300-kilogramme limit on its low-enriched uranium stockpile, in defiance of its nuclear commitments... On 8 July, Iran reached levels of enrichment of about 4.5 per cent, breaching its nuclear commitments, which cap enrichment at 3.67 per

cent. Iran continues to threaten further expansions of its nuclear programme, in defiance of its international commitments” (UN Doc S/PV.8600). Mr. Pompeo labeled those activities as a “terror regime.” The Russian representative, Mr. Polyanskiy, did not refer to Iran’s uranium enrichment but targeted the US by discussing its unilateral acts and sanctions against Iran. The Chinese representative, Mr. Zhang Jun, stated the necessity of preserving the JCPOA but not touching upon Iran’s uranium enrichment.

During the last UNSC meeting on December 19, 2019, the US highlighted Iran’s uranium enrichment activity at the Fordow facility, and the US representative, Mrs. Craft, stated, “Iran originally constructed Fordow as a fortified underground bunker to secretly enrich uranium. There is no legitimate reason for Iran to resume enrichment at that site. Iran must immediately cease its enrichment activity there” (UN Doc S/PV.8695). In the last meeting, the US framed Iran’s uranium enrichment as illegitimate by referring to the revelation of the clandestine facility of Fordow in 2002. This was the first UNSC meeting in 2019 where Russia and China discussed Iran’s uranium enrichment. The Russian representative, Mr. Nebenzia, stated that “Iran has a legal right, enshrined in paragraph 36 of the JCPOA, to take measures in response to United States violations of the Charter or resolution 2231 (2015). Moreover, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been notified about all of Iran’s steps to reduce its voluntary obligations and they have been supervised by the Agency’s inspectors, in full compliance with the provisions of the NPT and the Additional Protocol to Iran’s Safeguards Agreement. All of those measures are reversible under the

entirely logical condition of compliance with the obligations set out under the JCPOA and the Charter” (UN Doc S/PV.8695). Russia discussed Iran’s reduction in commitments from the perspective of international law. According to Russia, Iran had the right to reduce its commitments since the parties to the agreement did not fulfill their obligations. Still, Russia did not directly discuss Iran’s uranium enrichment. Lastly, the Chinese representative, Mr. Zhang Jun, stated, “China has noted that Iran has remained largely restrained in reducing its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA, and that it has stressed that all the steps that it has taken in that regard are reversible and subject to the monitoring and verification of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)” (UN Doc S/PV.8695). China’s position on Iran’s reductions in commitments was that Iran was self-strained, and its act of enriching uranium was not a radical, but a mild move in response. China’s approach also presented Iran as a responsible actor since Iran’s actions were proportionate and reasonable. Mr. Zhang Jun did not elaborate on China’s stance on Iran’s uranium enrichment. Drawing on the last meeting, Russia and China approached Iran’s 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment differently. While Russia framed Iran’s reduction in commitments as legal under international law, China framed it in a way that Iran, as a sovereign state, had the right to respond to the unilateral acts of the US. Still, Russia and China did not consider Iran’s 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment from a security framing.

Based on the UNSC 8564th, 8600th, and 8695th meetings, the US framed Iran’s 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment as a security threat to

peace in the region and the world. The US stated its position since the first meeting and continued its arguments throughout the next meeting by underlining the danger of Iran's uranium enrichment to the peace and security. On the contrary, Russia and China did not frame Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment as a security threat. Still, they had different approaches.

When looking at the discourses of the US, Russia, and China during the UNSC 8564th, 8600th, and 8695th meetings, the US, Russia, and China's framings of Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment overlap with the analysis from Chapters 3-5. The US framed Iran's uranium enrichment as a security threat to international peace and regional security. The US linked Iran's uranium enrichment to the different threats (based on US framing) posed by Iran, such as its missile program and sponsoring terror. In this regard, the US framed Iran's uranium enrichment as one of the "malign behaviors" of Iran and intended to handle it within a security context. Russia and China emphasized the legality of Iran's nuclear program, Iran's compliance with the JCPOA and the IAEA safeguards, reversibility of Iran's reduction in commitments, and unilateral withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA. Hereof, Russia and China acknowledged Iran's reduction in nuclear-related commitments, including uranium enrichment. Rather than considering Iran's uranium enrichment a security threat, Russia and China framed it as a natural and expected outcome of the US' unilateral acts. Still, Russia and China had different approaches in framing. From Russia's perspective, Iran was forced to take steps because of the unilateral acts of the US and the

failure of the parties' fulfillment of their obligations under the JCPOA.

According to Russia, the reductions in commitment, including uranium enrichment above the JCPOA cap, were legal under international law, based on Resolution 2231. Russia's Self representation as a guardian of international law and the nonproliferation regime also reinforced its framing. Thus, Russia framed Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment as a reactive act under international law rather than a security framing. According to China, the unilateral acts of the US forced Iran to take such steps. China considered the tension between the US and Iran as a cause-and-effect relationship. From China's perspective, Iran, as a sovereign state, had the right to response to the unilateral acts of the US. China framed Iran's reductions in commitments as restraint rather than security framing. China's emphasis on its impartial and neutral identity also reinforced its framing.

To conclude, the analyses of how the US, Russia, and China differed in their framing of Iran's 2019 announcement of uranium enrichment show that nuclear proliferation cannot be simply reduced to objective security threats. The case countries produce their framings based on attaching different meanings to the identities of their Self and Other. This reveals how identity and its articulation shape different framings of the same event. Theoretically, traditional security thinking and nuclear proliferation literature ignore the role of discourse and identity while states consider the issues of nuclear proliferation. The empirical implication of this thesis is that the nuclear nonproliferation regime and international system do not consist of homogeneous members that adopt a security-based approach vis-à-vis

nuclear proliferation. In this sense, despite similarities of the actors, approaches to nuclear weapons or nuclear proliferation are not objective and universal. Rather, the different framings of Iran's nuclear move reflect how identity plays an important role in one's understanding of what security is.



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