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## **Ontological security interpretation of Iran's nuclear energy program: a multidisciplinary approach**

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**Abstract:** *This article takes a multidisciplinary approach to the exploration of recent debates on Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program. Numerous Western scholarly studies suggest that the international community perceives this program as a source of threat, but available Iranian literature indicates that the peaceful use of nuclear energy of Iran is to enhance energy supply and that indicates an honor-driven action as it is suggested in Steele's ontological security. On top of that, the Iranian public supports their government's stance on peaceful nuclear energy as part of Iran's indisputable right to modernize. For them, this is a matter of national honor and their subjectivity reveals their ability to affect politics and to contribute to Iran's honor in the international arena. It should also be noted that honor-driven actions have not received much attention from scholars of International Relations. The fact that honor arises as a source of conflict allows us to explore a possible connection between Iran's nuclear energy program and International Relations theories. This article concludes that Iran's development of nuclear energy opens prospects for both self-identity and collective identity in the international arena by virtue of the nexus that binds honor to conflict.*

**Key words:** *Iran's peaceful nuclear energy, ontological security, honor, subjectivity, the Self and the Other concepts, multidisciplinary approach*

### **1. Introduction**

Nearly all scholarly works in the West view the Iranian nuclear energy program as a source of threat. Germany, the United States, and Spain perceive a big threat, while China, Japan, and Russia classify it as moderate. Smirnova (2009: 79-90) believes that Iran's main intention in gaining nuclear capability is to harm the international community. Detailed existing studies have appeared on such topics as the Iranian nuclear energy issue and its latest developments, the strategic implications of a nuclear-armed Iran, the axis of

evil, nuclear insecurity, and understanding the threat from rogue states (Caravelli, 2008: 94-130; US Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2007: 5-61; Schake and Yaphe, 2001: 1-17; and Segell, 2005: 153-224). All these studies characterize Iran's nuclear energy project as harmful – the acquired nuclear knowledge would certainly enhance her energy supply but would also allow her to formulate and achieve other goals. It is also necessary to take into account the possible reactions of Iran's neighbors and other Middle Eastern states to Shia nation's becoming a nuclear power in the Muslim's world.

On the contrary, it is illuminating to examine what Iranian literature tells us about Iran's use of nuclear energy.<sup>1</sup> Such an examination may reinforce and reveal a possibility for us to analyze the subject from a different perspective. Before proceeding further, an important caveat is appropriate. This study concentrates on Iran's use of peaceful nuclear energy to enhance her energy supply and its implications as an honor-driven action, as manifested in available Iranian literature. There is *no* attempt to contribute to further arguments, nor are they included in this study. The two major questions in this article are "How does ontological security inform Iranian honor in the context of her peaceful nuclear energy plans?" and "How has the public's support of peaceful nuclear energy contributed to the Iranian honor in international context?"

To answer those questions, I postulate a multidisciplinary approach that allows us to bring several fragmented disciplines together (Aalto, Harle, Long, and Moisio eds.,

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<sup>1</sup> Using Iranian literature, this article focuses on Iran's nuclear energy for peaceful purposes to enhance her energy supply. Further research is needed by other scholars to examine other arguments but they are not in the scope of this study. My objective in making this study was to examine the subject from as many viewpoints as possible, thus producing research findings in a novel way. I read Steele's 2008 book two years ago and was interested in the work on honor that I looked for a suitable research topic in the Persian Gulf region, my chosen area for study. After considering various cases and literature about Iraq, Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council, Iranian literature on her peaceful project demonstrated an action driven by honor, especially as that term appears repeatedly in the literature.

2011: 20-25) and examine the subject from a novel perspective. Most of the data needed to achieve this objective have been collected from available Iranian literature, including statements and online resources. To provide a balance, some data from Western literature have also been analyzed. Furthermore, some secondary data were collected from the Arab Documentation Unit, Common Research and the Main Library in the University of Exeter in June 2011.

Setting as such, the first section employs a multidisciplinary theorizing approach to allow the application of International Relations (IR), Sociology and Psychology theories in the context of Iran's use of nuclear energy. After a brief history of nuclear energy in Iran in the second section; the concept of internal and external honor in this context is examined in more detail in the third section. I assert that internal honor may be applied to a state in a constitutive relationship with self-identity, and that external honor is a sense of what will be deemed honorable by a community applying its own common principles. Both internal and external identities reinforce the sense of honor (Steele, 2008). The next section connects Iran's use of nuclear energy and her sense of honor to IR, and the last section considers the way in which Iranian public subjectivity supports and affects the nuclear energy program in the international arena. This article ends with some concluding remarks.

## **2. A multidisciplinary theorizing approach to Iran's use of nuclear energy**

McSweeney (1999) has contributed to ontological security theory by practicing both IR and social disciplines. The idea of ontological security is grounded in the secure or trusting relationships which respond to the fundamental interest from which other needs are derived. The concept refers to practical consciousness and according to Giddens (1991) "to the bracketing presumed by the natural attitudes in everyday life" (p. 38). For Giddens (1991), trust that rests on confidence in the reliability of people is what creates a sense of ontological security. McSweeney (1999) applies the concept in a similar way by arguing that "ontological security

or existential trust is grounded in the secure or trusting relationships which respond to the fundamental want or interest from which other needs are derived" (p. 154). In this context, then, ontological security is the security of a social relationship. The application of the concept of ontological security in this article is based on Steele's (2008) discussion on agency–structure relations and self-identity in line with who we are and who we want to be, although he limits the analysis to state agents. Whereas Hobbes (1950) starts from the concept of fear for the state to feel secure, Steele's (2008) uses of ontological security and a variation of glory open new windows of analysis. Steele (2008) agrees with Giddens's ontological security (1991) and the argument that the state agents must be able to tell a consistent story of what they are and what they want to be – if they could not, they would feel shame.

Following Steele (2008), it is suggested that states desire something more than mere survival in IR. They pursue social actions to meet self-identity demands, although these actions contrast with their physical existence. In other words, ontological security is achieved by actions chosen by states reflect their self-identity (Steele, 2008). According to Steele (2008), states might adopt three forms of social actions as the motives for their actions: moral, humanitarian and honor-driven; this article examines honor-driven action. The ontological security process considers matters such as self-identity, the creation of meanings for actions, the way in which actors decide upon certain actions to promote a prospect of Self to others, and the way in which the internal Self overcomes insecurity. Critical situations threaten the identity of the state agents, who must be able to transform, alter and change them so that they no longer threaten their identity. Iran sees the US demands to stop her nuclear energy program as a critical situation for the Iranian self- and collective identities; and resistance is her chosen transformation method.

Ontological security becomes relevant when state agents consistently choose actions that they feel reflect their sense of self-identity. The extent to which the issue of self-identity has been a focus of IR theory, is shown by the fact that

Steele (2008) applies McSweeney's (1999) ontological security where the 'Self v. Other' nexus addresses the formation of self-identity. A very important part of the state's sense of Self is built by assigning certain individuals or collectives to confront foreign threat. In other words, state identity is linked to what threatens the state, so identity and threats are juxtaposed (Steele, 2008). The Self identifies itself in terms of the Other, so our self-identity depends on our opinion of the Other. Harle (2000) elaborates on this idea in a way that I make use of in this study, stating that one cannot know oneself if one has no image of what one is not. This makes sense of the perception that the Other is not more than just a foreigner or a physical entity, so a hostile relationship is apparent between the Self and the Other. This is well exemplified by the hostile relationship between the US and Iran concerning the nuclear energy program; the Self-Other nexus is clear to see, with each agent state perceiving the other as the Other.

Without doubt, the Other threatens state self-identity, as each state convinces itself that it is under threat of elimination from an identified source. Considering of the Other in the mirror image of the United States, the US Congressional Record reports:

Let us be clear. Iran is a country with huge oil and natural gas reserve. They do not need nuclear power for energy consumption. Iran's nuclear program contains a *threat* to the world. [emphasis added] (US Congressional Report, 2005: 76)

Another way of studying the tension between the Self (or rational) interest and collective (or moral) interest is to examine honor-driven action. This study makes use of both viewpoints. To aid discussion in this area, it is necessary to establish the relationship between honor and identity and "identity takes on a social component and the concept of honor is a collective good to be shared and acknowledged" (Steele, 2008). To do so, I make a close examination of honor so that I can sharpen the concept of honor-driven action. It is useful to take Lebow's (2003) definition into the analysis of the relationship between internal and external honor. External honor is achieved by striving for a hegemonic power

while internal honor is related to the set of self-imposed rules within a state that is beneficial to itself. From a Western perspective, the Iranian nuclear energy program seeks hegemony (external honor) in the Persian Gulf region,<sup>1</sup> a viewpoint contradicted by Iranian literature and discussed later in this article. For Lebow (2003), honor becomes more political than personal and therefore a cause of conflict. External honor could be achieved through membership in society (Islamic society in the case of Iran) and behavior in conformity with its values.

At the external level, the meaning of “honorable” is based upon common principles and the relationship between external honor and social identity. Steele’s (2008) analysis of self-identity and collective identity therefore opens up an option towards external honor. Internal honor, on the other hand, for both individual and state, exists in a relationship with self-identity. What becomes honorable here is the performance of any action that fulfills a commitment to what we are and what we want to be in the future. Taken together, both internal and external honor types are pivotal to Iran’s nuclear energy program and both will be taken into consideration in subsequent sections. In the context of ontological security, note that neither internal nor external honor can be acquired without cost – both must be earned and paid for. For example, Iran pays for her honor by tolerating sanctions and continuing with her nuclear energy program. Iran also declares that her progress in nuclear energy research is progress for other Islamic nations; and external honor is demonstrated to the wider (some) Islamic societies.

Iran’s international progress in nuclear energy appears to benefit from the support of the public, and it is therefore worthwhile to examine the public’s subjectivity that result in this mindset. To do this, belief system theory as suggested in the discipline of Psychology may reveal the way in which the public affects politics. At its core, belief system theory implies the key notion that people are rational and goal-oriented; it also provides information on how they see the

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<sup>1</sup> For examples, see the existing studies in the introduction.

world and develop tangible prospects. Under the belief system concept, memories, beliefs, feelings, and statements show the internal property of individuals. People possess beliefs that allow them to interact successfully with the outside world and guide their interactions. A belief system mediates between the individual and the outside world and performing two functions: as a filter to determine what kind of information about the outside world is selected for examination, and as a set of rules to determine how that information is interpreted (Little & Smith eds., 1988). That Iran's nuclear progress is supported by the public reflects the way in which public's mental map has directed the interpretation of information they have chosen to accept. In the presence of this open-ended belief-system spectrum, the analyses are not confined merely to Iranian public subjectivity; and the mind map of the state's representatives is fleshed out too.

This synthesis of theory fragments from International Relations, Sociology, and Psychology into a multidisciplinary theorizing approach opens up a new window on the study of Iran's nuclear energy program. By such an approach, *multidisciplinary* refers to "multiple and disparate site of disciplinary knowledge, though the collective aggregation and coordination may indicate a more cohesive development" (Long, 2011: 39). Multidisciplinary in a single study can combine empirical findings and thus help solve a complex puzzle.

### **3. Iran's nuclear energy, past and present**

Iran's first effort to achieve nuclear technology dates back to the 1950s, with the US being the first country to assist her. In 1975, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran was established supervising the Atomic Research Center in the University of Tehran. Iran then initiated nuclear cooperation with Germany, France, and the UK (Iran Nuclear, 2011a). After the successful victory of Islamic Revolution of 1979, all nuclear energy assistance contracts with the assistance with the West were suspended and the US refused to transfer any nuclear equipment or technology to Iran.

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Iran decided to continue its peaceful nuclear energy program independently (Iran Nuclear, 2011b). Her activities were hindered to a greater and lesser extent by the opposition of the US and the Western allies, and the issue was discussed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2003. The conflict continues to this day, even though Iranian literature insists on the peaceful nature of the nuclear energy program. In December 2010, the International Atomic Energy Agency (2010) acknowledges that "contrary to the relevant resolutions of the Board of Governors and the Security Council, Iran has not suspended its enrichment related activities" (23 November). The US Congressman Ted Deutch argues in the following way:

...The Iranian nuclear program poses a grave and growing national security threat to the United States, risks a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, threatens our allies in Europe, the Middle East and beyond, and poses an existential threat to our critical ally. (Deutch, 2010, 12 May)

With this regard, the US and the United Nations Security Council have imposed sanctions on Iran, the UN Resolutions being 1737, 1747 and (the latest at the time of writing) 1929 (2006, 23 December; 2004, 24 March, and 2008, 3 March). President Obama's comment on Resolution 1929 demonstrates US determination to stop Iran's nuclear energy program:

The international community was compelled to impose these serious consequences. These are the most comprehensive sanctions that the Iranian government has faced. They will impose restrictions on Iran's nuclear activities, its ballistic missile program, and, for the first time, its conventional military. They will put a new framework in place to stop Iranian smuggling, and crack down on Iranian banks and financial transactions... And we will ensure that these sanctions are vigorously enforced, just as we continue to refine and enforce our own sanctions on Iran alongside our friends. (Obama, 2010, 9 June)

Iran, however, has resisted the sanctions and continues its peaceful nuclear energy program. Her decision provides one important insight for IR theory: her resistance is not merely for survival. Iran's decision to resist for the sake of goals



means that we can look for further interpretations. Firstly, by tolerating sanctions and protecting self-identity, Iran has displayed an example of an honor-driven action. Secondly, even the possibility of a physical attack by the US and her allies did not prevent Iran from pursuing her peaceful goals. This exhibition of determination demonstrates how the state action stabilizes a nation's identity in the international community.

From an ontological security viewpoint, the Iranian case demonstrates that the country's honor is based on national pride; that progress in nuclear energy technology must be maintained to stabilize self-identity, and that the external need to resist the threat reinforces Iran's collective identity and independence. By fulfilling these commitments, Iran received admiration from some NGOs, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Embassy of Iran in Hague, 2011), and some Islamic countries in general.

#### **4. Iran's quest for honor: independence and resistance**

As for the question of why Iran needs nuclear energy, Iranian data reveal the need for an inconceivable amount of energy resources to meet the demand for electricity of its increasing population (Iran Nuclear, 2011c). This idea is in line with the view that state agents provide the discursive interpretation of their behavior and actions in which they are engaged. Afrasiabi (2006) adds, regarding the US sanctions on Iran, that relying on oil for economic needs would set the country on a catastrophic path.

Iran needs access to nuclear energy to enhance her energy supply. The Iranian nuclear program was launched before the Islamic Revolution in the 1970s with the significant help of the US, Germany, and France. Iran and the US established a joint commission in 1974 to strengthen cooperation in the field of nuclear energy. At the same time, a primary agreement was signed to provide fuel for nuclear power. During the Carter Presidency, unresolved problems on nuclear energy were negotiated and new agreements on nuclear cooperation signed. The cooperation continued, with

Iran signing five more contracts with the US in 1976 (Iran Nuclear, 2011a). Further evidence shows that a West German company started the *Bushehr* project in 1975. *Bushehr I* was 90% complete and *Bushehr II* partly built when work was halted after Islamic Revolution of 1979 (Kordesman and Al Rodhan, 2006: 219).

In 1969, the Iranian Economy Minister and the French Atomic Director signed a radioactive research protocol in Tehran. Following the Iran-India non-European nuclear pact, a cooperation agreement on the use of nuclear energy was signed in Mumbai as a pledge to research and gather experimental data in the field of nuclear energy (Iran Nuclear, 2011a). Iran's cooperation agreement with Canada in 1972, Australia in 1977, and England in 1975 on nuclear energy (Iran Nuclear, 2011a) shows that Iran's use of nuclear energy was recognized internationally and that the Western community accepted the Iranian nuclear program. Since 1979, Iran has continued to develop nuclear energy, despite the reaction of the US and her Western allies. Within the context of the Self-Other concept and defining the Others, the Western nations suspended Iranian nuclear assistance program in 1979. Iran's successful independent achievements<sup>1</sup> in nuclear energy since 1979 are evidence of the feasibility of her decision to resist the US and her Western allies. Resistance has been vital to her success.

Iran's success under sanction has been heavily dependent on her pre-Revolutionary acquisition of knowledge, infrastructure, and material, the hard work of her local experts, and her determination to make independent progress. Her decision to resist Western efforts to stop her program has led to the establishment of both internal and external identity. In other words, in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of where we are going. Such an understanding intensifies Iran's self-identity and her internal honor. Her significant progress in peaceful nuclear energy knowledge represents the path is following. As the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei (2007) acknowledges, "the utilization of nuclear energy, a national achievement of the

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<sup>1</sup> There are some viewpoints that Russia's assistance to Iran should be taken into account too.

Iranian people, is a source of honor for the Islamic world" (8 January).

Three factors have helped to define Iran's nuclear energy stance and have shaped her independence. Firstly, the decision of Western countries to renege on their promises to Iran by canceling the legally-made agreements on nuclear energy cooperation. Secondly, Western pressure on countries that would have liked to cooperate with Iran. Thirdly, a lack of cooperation between the West and Iran. With all those bars to progress, Iran set out on her own, using Iranian literature to achieve nuclear energy with no substantial help from outside. She based her decision to do so on her national interests, economic calculations and the future demand for sustainable energy resources (Iran Nuclear, 2011d) – sufficient reasons for her to resist the demands of the US and her Western allies to terminate her nuclear energy program.

*The responses of international society to Iran's use of nuclear energy*

The US and her allies have warned Iran to end its nuclear energy program and their responses are summarized as follows:

- "The further sanctions against Iran being considered are in the areas of finance, energy and military technology...sanctions are the preferred route to bringing pressure on Tehran." (Brown quotes in Weaver, 2009, 25 September)
- "In adopting resolution 1540, the [Security] Council had sent a warning and an ultimatum to the broad range of facilitators of proliferation. Unfortunately, Iran had yet to heed that warning or make the strategic decision to cooperate with the international community and end its pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability. The Council should be prepared to take additional measures to communicate to the Iran regime that its non-compliance was unacceptable." (UN Security Council, 2007, 23 February)
- "What has been revealed today is exceptional. We can't let the Iranian leaders gain time while the motors are

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running."( Sarkozy quotes in Weaver, 2009, 25 September)

- "The Iranian government must now demonstrate through deeds its peaceful intentions or be held accountable to international standards and international law." (Obama, 2009, 25 September)

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*Iran's response to the demands: question of internal honor and self-identity*

Iran's resistance to the threat of sanctions represents her decision to take a stand and has stabilized her identity in the international arena. Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei – the Iranian Supreme Leader – (2008) in his remark in Shiraz, asserted that the "Iranian nation is determined to *resist* the threats and sanctions" (30 April). More precisely, Ayatollah Khamenei's response to the sanctions is acknowledged in such account:

Iranian nation will turn all threat imposed by the enemies to opportunities and brought development and *pride* for country... pious Iranian nation with reliance on their historical and cultural *honor*...any nation should tolerate difficulties to attained their independence and national dignity. *Resistance against threats as well as economic sanctions* as part of hardships tolerated by the Iranian nation on their right pass... *this great nation is never afraid of economic sanctions*. [emphasis added (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2008, 30 April)]

Moreover, President Mahmoud Ahmadi Nejad states:

The sanctions cannot harm Iran the least. Those economic restrictions have had no impact on the country's economy. (Ahmadi Nejad, 2010, 23 and 24 December)

Analysis of the subjectivity of the Iranian ruling elites sheds valuable light on the way that the Iranian state's

decision to resist the US and her allies demonstrates the duality of honor at both national and international levels. Iran perceives that she must protect her self-identity at two levels – what she is and what she wants to be. Iran's decision to resist the sanctions might not be interpreted as a survival strategy, but rather as a way to cultivate her identity and bolster her honor. By developing nuclear energy independently, she gains a material possession but she also creates an identity commitment. From an ontological security theory viewpoint, the ownership of nuclear energy connects this commitment to the Iranian identity.

Iran has opened up a route to independence from the US and her allies, and has done so to achieve her peaceful nuclear purposes and prove her self-identity. Her resistance to Western demands has also contributed to her sense of honor (Table 1). Without that resistance, both honor and self-identity might have been adversely affected by the unforeseen cancellation of nuclear energy pacts by Western countries in 1979.

The former Head of the Atomic Energy Organization in Iran confirmed Iranian resistance as an honorable option when he said "this nation will resist with all its power to solve the problems and achieve its goals [in nuclear energy]" (Salehi, 2010, 29 November). There is hardly any evidence that the public and the Iranian state agent intend to discontinue the peaceful nuclear energy program. It is an ontological position that the Iranian resistance reflects her sense of self-identity, and this is integral to understanding her sense of honor. Resistance to sanctions determines Iranian rational consideration and her calculated objective to attain peaceful nuclear energy. Note also the influence of Iranian history – all the narratives of the past are components in the structure of the Iranian Self. It has been accentuated by Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei:

a nation that recognized its *honorable past* as well as its indigenous root values would experience a bright future, adding the single most characteristic feature of the Islamic movement was that it could make aware and upbeat the *Iranian nation about its identity*, capabilities, record and history and tore the fake curtain built by enemies aside from those values. [emphasis added] (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2006, 11 November)

*External honor and Iranian independence*

The peaceful nuclear energy program, according to Iranian literature, represents not only the Iranian internal honor, but also her commitment towards her position as an independent country. Iran has been, according to Gonzalez (2007), an independent country for two thousand years. Iranians observe their long history with pride and consider Iran as one of the greatest independent countries in the world. Iran's reply to the sanctions not only represents its resistance but also its independence in the international arena. President Ahmadi Nejad in his speech on the honor of the Fourth Year of Nuclear Energy Day anniversary advocates:

*"[...] truly honorable achievements of our nuclear scientists not only for the Iranian nation but also for all independent nations, and the world is honorable ... the world has become deeply emotional and there is an ideal link between Iranian nation and many nations. They know the progress and achievements of the Iranian people as their accomplishments and celebrate with the Iranian nation to reach the peaks. Every achievement of Iranian nation constitutes a step toward a true independence and liberation of all nations considers it with conformity, compassion and happiness."* [emphasis added] (Ahmadi Nejad, 2010, 10 April)

Iran's responsibility towards both herself and other nations in the world is addressed in the quotation above. President Ahmadi Nejad (2010) summarized Iran's position among many nations by saying that "they know Iranian nuclear energy as their accomplishment" and Iran gains the respect of some other states (10 April). Further accounts arise wherein President Ahmadi Nejad's (2010) goes further, asserting that Iran is not pursuing nuclear energy production for the sake of material acquisition and individual aims. Many nations recognize Iran's peaceful nuclear progress as progress for their own nations too, stabilizing Iranian honor as the honor of many independent

nations. Iran also visualizes nuclear energy as an honor for the future, as can be understood in the statement by Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei:

the issue of nuclear energy is not only the issue of today, but that it is also the issue of tomorrow, that it is an issue related to the country's fate and future, ... those who are waiting to see signs of weakness in the Iranian nation should bear in mind that the Iranian people, treading the path of *honor, independence* and national sovereignty, will show no weakness in the face any threat whatsoever. Our experience over the past 27 years, including the experience of the revolution and the Sacred Defense era, also corroborates this reality and makes it clear that the power of this country and nation should not underestimated [emphasis added] (2006,7 February and 2007, 17 February).

Table 1: Iranian state representatives' reference to honor:

<i>Iranian state representatives</i>	<i>Statement</i>
<i>Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei, Iranian Supreme Leader</i>	"Nuclear energy, as an indigenous achievement, is a source of honor for the Iranian nation as well as the world of Islam" (2007, 8 January).
<i>Mahmoud Ahmadi Nejad, Iranian President</i>	"The Iranian nation has right to use nuclear energy with all capacities. Iranian nation continues its path towards peaks of honor" (2007, 5 May).
<i>Hossein Ebrahimi, Member of National Security and Foreign Policy Commission</i>	"Bushehr power plant is a great honor for the Iranian nation" (2010, 16 August).
<i>Mohammad Hassan Abu Torabi, Deputy Chairman of the House Government</i>	"Iran will continue its nuclear effort under international framework and wish best success for the government in this honorable rout" (2010, 22 August)

Table was proposed by this author

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Iran's decision to resist the sanctions to achieve peaceful nuclear energy prompts the admiration and support of some other nations. Concomitantly, Iranian nuclear energy shows Iranian determination to other societies as what could be called external honor. Iran, as part of a larger community of Islamic states, secures its self-identity or its sense of ontological security by defending its right to nuclear energy. Members of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) (2003) appreciate Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program and welcome the Iranian invitation for developed countries to participate in the nuclear program.

The Council of the Foreign Ministers in their Kampala Declaration "firmly supports the stand that Iranian nuclear issue should be settled exclusively by peaceful means" (The Thirty Five Session..., 2011: 3). Qatar has emphasized the Iranian right to be a peaceful nuclear energy holder and on that basis Switzerland acknowledges the diplomatic solutions of the issue ("Qatar Stressed Iran's Right", 2011). From a Western perspective, Iran's progress in nuclear implies a threat to the international community;<sup>1</sup> the Iranian literature, however, reflects that Iran upholds its self-identity and independence.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples, see the existing studies in the introduction.



**Table 2: Nations complement to Iran use of nuclear energy**

<b>Representative of states/Position</b>	<b>Statement</b>
<i>Rajab Tayeb Erdogan Prime Minister of Turkey</i>	"It is the right of each state to have nuclear energy and it is the will of Turkey that Iran needs nuclear peaceful energy" ("Iran Should Have Nuclear Energy" 2011).
<i>Luis Inacio Lula Brazilian President</i>	"Peaceful nuclear energy is the right of Iran and the issue should be solved through diplomatic ways" (Brazil Reemphasized the Right of Iran", 2010).
<i>Member States of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA)</i>	"Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua express support for the Iranian nuclear program" (Giraldi, 2010)

Table was proposed by this author

## 5. Honor and conflict in International Relations

Considering Iran's nuclear progress to be driven by honor alone does not satisfy IR theories. For honor to be connected to IR, it can be a root cause of conflict between groups and states. It therefore becomes more political and a cause of conflict among states (Lebow, 2003). Perhaps Iran's progress in nuclear energy could be more comprehensively understood in terms of such a conflict between the Self and Other – where (since the 1970s), Iran perceives the US (and the US perceives Iran) as the Other. This demonstrates that Iran's self-identity is linked to her identification of the US posture as a threat. Harle's (2000) threat analysis argument, that the Other is totally different from the Self, is borne out by each nation's recognition that the other nation is a completely different entity from herself, and by the state of enmity between the two nations for the last three decades.

Turning to the present time, physical war has not broken out between the US and Iran but heavy sanctions imposed on Iran by the US have prevented the development of friendly relations and have intensified hostility (Khan, 2010). To

respond, Iran has resisted to US demands (Hunter, 2010) as it was discussed in this article. This view stands in contrast with the US action to prosecute her 25-year-old foreign policy to bend Iran to her will or to treat her as an enemy, excluding her absolutely (Harle, 2000) by the imposition of sanctions. During that period, however, the Iraqi war has changed the balance in the Persian Gulf region, and Iran has been given a chance to escalate her identity among some Arab and Islamic states in the region (Chubin, 2006) by her progress in nuclear energy. Overall, the outcome is that Iran's use of nuclear energy progress has been a source of both honor and conflict from an IR viewpoint.

## 6. Nuclear energy and Iranian public subjectivity

Although Steele's argument succeeds at state level, he has not fully considered how public subjectivity could influence and strengthen state decisions in the international arena. In other words, how does public subjectivity affect politics? To help answer that, the concept of everyday time is employed, and the length of time over which people hold their opinions. According to Heller, "everyday life is the aggregate of those individual reproduction factors which, *pari passu*, make social reproduction possible" (Heller, 1984). The discussion below helps us to understand the Iranian public's belief that the nation has an indisputable right to produce her own nuclear energy and that their government deserves their support in the international scene.

The time to act, in Heller's (1984) terms, is the moment that the action yields the optimum result – actions before and after that are ineffective. Picking the right moment is therefore a vital political ability, as it affects the fate of a society. Iran took into account the progress made in nuclear energy since 1979, justified her self-identity and honor, and made it possible for the Iranian people to become a modern society. Given those circumstances, how does Iranian public subjectivity (Little and Smith eds., 1988) interpret Iran's post-1979 stand on nuclear energy, and does their support

influence politics? The subject was not a hot topic until 2001, but general public subjectivity supports the nuclear energy program (Hooglund, 2011).

Two facets of Iranian public subjectivity on nuclear energy development since 1979 merit analysis. The first analysis, of the diverse body of statistic available on Iranian public subjectivity toward nuclear energy, shows strong, nearly universal support. A survey conducted in August 2008 found that 98% of Iranians favor (including 78% who strongly favor) the Iranian government developing nuclear energy. Moreover, 90% of Iranians believe it is important (including 81% very important) for Iran to have a full fuel cycle nuclear program (Richman, 2008). Therefore, the vast majority of Iranians want their country to develop peaceful nuclear energy, particularly as the program was seen as an exercise of Iran's right to become a modern state and would boost the honor of the nation.

The second analysis shows that the Iranian public sees both nuclear energy and independence as bound to national honor (Chubin, 2001: 310) and a national consensus on nuclear energy has supported the government. Some Western scholars have confirmed this: Urquhart, former Secretary General of the United Nations, states that the Iranian government curtailed her cooperation with the IAEA with *the strong support* of the public, who perceived the possession of nuclear energy as an *indisputable right* (Urquhart, 2009). The IAEA has criticized the US for overstating the threat of Iranian nuclear energy program posed to the rest of the world (McCormick, 2010: 512). Such a strong public belief, some Western scholars mean that sanctions will increase public support for the government rather than decrease it as they were designed to do (for examples, see Herzog, 2006). The support of nuclear energy by Iranian public is also acknowledged by Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei:

We are pursuing scientific and economic objectives, *which are in conformity with our national interests. This is what our nation wants... the Iranian nation would not forego its right to*

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*use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.* [emphasis added]  
(Ayatollah Khamenei, 2005, 19 August)

These analyses all demonstrate Iranian public support for the nuclear energy program and for the Iranian state and its position in international relations (Bloom, 1993). Some Western scholarly works hints that this support stems from the fact that Iran has bred a young generation with ambitious aims and that Iran does not really need nuclear energy. (Herzog, 2006; Kairous, 2007: 47-48). To strike a balance, public support of Iran's nuclear energy has contributed to the honor of Iran in the domestic and international arenas; including some Islamic countries, while the conflict with the US and her allies continues unabated.

## **Conclusion**

Existing Western studies, including those of Caravelli, Schake and Yaphe; Segal and Chubin reflect the challenging ambition and threat of Iran's use of nuclear energy to the international community and envision the quest of Iran for regional leadership. They also postulate that her possession of nuclear energy power empowers her to resist US influence in the region and must therefore be stopped. Yet, this study includes available newly-sourced literature from Iran and its results draw upon a multidisciplinary approach, with facets from International Relations, Sociology and Psychology to uncover various aspects of Iran's use of nuclear energy. What leads us to consider honor as the action is that success was by no means a foregone conclusion at the point that Iran took the decision to start her independent nuclear energy program. Success boosts the honor of Iran and the collective honor of some Islamic countries. There is an evidence to support the honor as an action. The ontological security interpretation of Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program is that Iran followed the policy of resistance to the sanctions and continued to make progress – an ontological security success story, in Steele's terms (2008, 113).

Iran's decision to continue her peaceful nuclear energy is an example of an honor-driven action with a conflict nexus in IR that has set up an unresolved puzzle. Connecting those

findings leads to the conclusion that the Self and the Other concept is viable in this arena. As far as the US is concerned, a nuclear-equipped Iran was part of her own Self until 1979, but became the Other thereafter.

The multidisciplinary framework for this study continues to influence local, regional, and global dimensions of analysis. It provides a more comprehensive approach than Steele's (2008), giving an ontological security interpretation of the Iranian nuclear energy program and assessing the extent to which the public can affect politics.

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