

A Critical Analysis of the Post 9/11 US-Iran Relationship:

By

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Abstract:

Theories of international relations is the most suitable lens to see the relationship among states. As relationships are based on foreign policies of states, so according to realism the primary factor of foreign policy are national interests. In contrast, according to constructivism identity plays important role in shaping foreign policies. And the States always construct, deconstruct and reconstruct relations with other states to pursue their national interests. This research study focusses the significant relationships between Iran and America after 9/11 incident as well as the consequences.

Keywords: 9/11, Iran, America, Foreign Policy, Relationships etc.

Introduction:

The United States of America always took attention in the politics of Middle East to gain their economic and political interests. On the other hand, Iran with a huge natural resources always sought to become the regional hegemon and had being took assistance from the external powers. The relation of the US with the ME countries remained changing. Regarding US-Iran relations we know that once Iran was the influential ally of the US in Middle East but the role of identity can be seen during the Islamic revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini which brought a major shift in the relationship of Iran with the US. Khomeini overthrew Shah of Iran with the Anti-American and anti-monarchy sentiments declaring the US as Great Satan. Aftermath of the revolution had converted them into worst enemies. The US response after the 9/11, the nuclear enrichment programs of Iran, and declaration of Iran as irrational rogue state by the US added a big contribution to this relationship. The dangerous attitude of the leaders of both the countries against each other had been posed a serious fear to the world of possible

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future war. The nuclear enrichment program of Iran started in 1990s and the US economic sanctions initially made the relation worse, later with the changes in policies and regimes in both the countries a paradigm shift has been taken by conducting the current nuclear deals. Ideational factors played vital role in the paradigm shift of the relationship of the US and Iran after the game changer events of 1979 (Islamic revolution) and 2001 (9/11 attacks). The state's interests, practices and feelings were shaped meaningful by using ideas, norms, images, languages, vocabularies, belief system and other rhetoric by both the states. The policy makers used various techniques to legitimize their policies and to get popular support. Policy makers use social construction, discourses and articulation in construction of the state identity.

Inter-national relations are built up on the basis of the shared interests, similar culture, similar ideology, same identity and given history of the states. According to Karl Marx, "Man makes their own history, but they don't make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by them, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past." Relations are not happenings but are constructions. In the way men made states, sovereignty and anarchy, relationship are also built up. Different theories of international relations help us to analyze the relations between different states.

Realists thought that in the world of anarchy; to protect the sovereignty and territory of the state are the basic national interest. For this purpose, security and power are the foremost need of states. Further realist argues that every state is rational in foreign policy making and used to analysis on the basis of cost and benefit. For example, the US does not see the British nuclear weapons as threat while the nuclear programs (though Iran claims it is for peaceful purpose) of Iran is considered as threat not only for the US but threat for the world peace. In such a way rational states construct threats from others. Identification of the threat is the most important phase for policy makers because it gives way to ensure security which is the foremost interest of a state.

According to the Post structuralism threats are constructed and deconstructed through speech acts by dominant actors (usually leaders). Through speech acts a problem becomes security problem when they declare it to be. By intelligent way policy makers shapes the threat and then the perception of the masses.

After identifying the national interest state uses ideational factors to legitimize their actions and practices. According to constructivism the world politics and international relations are constituted and constructed through meaningful practices, discourses and articulations. For Social constructivists, international relations consist of social facts that have no

meanings and practices associated with them. And identity plays vital role in understanding self which is dependent on an 'other'. States uses the concept of otherness by comparing 'we' versus 'them' where 'we' always seems 'good' and 'them' always 'bad'. For instance, in the era of the Cold War both the US and the USSR used to declare themselves as the champion of 'kindness' or 'goodness' while the rival as the leader of 'evil'. For the US, the Soviet was the totalitarian, aggressive, deceitful, and subversive, and for the USSR, America was imperialist and interventionist. Both the US and USSR used to make alliances with different countries to strengthen their block and against others block. Iran was not directly involved in any mission of the Cold War but its tilt has been towards the Soviets in various occasions.

Raza Shah Pahlavi was a big loyal to the USA, he with the help of the US assistance has grown the Iranian economy but Iran had become too much dependent on the US that every matter of Iran had become a puppet of the US. In 1977 with the help of the US, the shah possessed the fifth largest military force in the world with 410,000 armies with 7.3-billion-dollar budget. Shah build-up its military power rapidly by getting assistance directly from the US between 1970-78 he got military hardware of 20 billion dollars from the US. More than 10,000 American's were working in military related projects in Iran.

Ayatollah Rohollah Khomeini a Shia scholar who was exile in France was observing the whole situations in Iran. He with the help of his followers in Iran started a campaign against the Shah. his revolution was basically against the American modernization and liberal values. The revolutionaries consolidate their power by restoring of the Islamic Government that existed during the rule of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Imam Ali (as). They put down the oppositions by preventing anyone against 'Ayatollah-ul-Uzmah' or the chief mulla. The revolution was deep rooted in the Shi'ie thought of the arrival of the Hidden Imam (as). Constructing Iran as the Islamic Republic after the revolution of 1979, Khomeini first of all created the biasness of 'we' and 'they'. As the former Iran was the favorite ally of the US, so to over throw the Shah, Khomeini used the anti-American sentiments declaring the west and its culture as the base of all evils. He then used the belief system to get the popular support of the masses. Actually Khomeini feared that the western modernization is suppressing the Islamic views because he thought that the western modernization seems charming and one can adopt it easily but having lot of drawbacks. But the people of Iran were too modernized and tilted towards the West, and he thought Shah and America responsible for that. His critics about the thought of the, "Making a trip to England, France, USA or Moscow enhances one's dignity while going to Mecca to perform the hajj or visiting other holy shrines is considered backward and old fashioned." Here he

differentiates Islamic world with Western world, further he devalues the western countries. Comparing them with others Khomeini upgrades the morale of Iranian people by declaring them as the soldiers of God, “We are all soldiers of Islam”. On another occasion he says, “The party of God is always victorious over the party of Satan”. According to him Iranian belongs to the party of God and the Satan is for the US. The leaders of the revolution and other Shia clerics used such vocabularies most famously ‘Great Satan’ for the US.

To encourage the efforts made by the revolutionaries and the scarifies of the martyrs, he used to deliver speeches. On an occasion after the revolution he said proudly, “Our people have proved that they can do things if they want to.” This type of sentences was to glorify the actions and practices of the revolutionaries. Other Shia clerics and political elites also use the examples of the Islamic revolution of Iran and its events to encourage the practices of their followers. Not only the speeches and vocabularies helped the revolutionary movements of Iran but the multicolored posters, photographs of martyrs, paintings of Ayatollah Khomeini, audio-cassette tapes and leaflets also played critical role in politicizing and facilitating mass participation in the movement. The magazines and newspapers used to publish political cartoons. Amirahmadi and Parvin mentioned that Annabelle and Ali examined 1253 images from twenty-four issues of *Imam Magazine* from June 1980 to December 1984 where they depicted 150 images related to the US, all of which were portrayed in a bloody manner showing America as the perpetrator of violence, false morality, imperialism, capitalism, crime, cruel clandestine, voice of devil, harmonious to Zionism and against Islam. On the other hand, Iran was glorified by showing it as the heart of Islam, Iranian soldiers as brave, ready for martyrdom and prepared to defense themselves.

The role of identity can be seen also in the constitutional process of Iran. According to the article 152 of the constitution of the Islamic republic of Iran

“The foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran shall be based on the negation of exercising or accepting any form of domination whatsoever, safeguarding all-embracing independence and territorial integrity defense of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with domineering powers, and peaceful and reciprocal relations with non-belligerent states.”

The Iranian Constitution allows it to intervene in any state for the sake of the defense of the interests of the Muslims. Same as the US justifies their interventions, Iran also intervene in the name of the rights of Muslims and oppressed people. Similarly, the article 154 claim that

Iranian will supports the struggle of oppressed people against oppressors anywhere in the world.

On the occasion of the Yom ul Quds 31, July, 1981 he said,

“Oh Muslims and deprived of the world! Arise and take your destinies in your own hands. For how long are you going to sit idle and let Washington and Moscow determine your fates? For how long should your Quds be trampled under the boots of usurper Israel, this corrupt remnant of the American regime?

In 1948 Israel became an independent state in the Palestine region. The state was got for the Jews with the help of USA and Britain. On which the people of Palestine protested against the Israeli government, the Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Syria etc. supported the Palestinian cause. The support of non-Arab Islamic states also remained with them, especially Iran stood firmly against the new Israeli state. In the creation of Israel, it was the ideology and the identity of Zionism which played critical role, on the other hand the Islamic ideology is the anti-thesis of Zionism. On the issue of Palestine both the ideology clashed on the belief system regarding the Bait-ul-Muqaddas (Quds). Although the Shah was not neutral on the issue of Palestine but Ayatollah Khomeini took strong stance on this issue and even assisted covert support to the local militant organizations Hezbollah and Hamas. The Shia belief system played vital role in shaping the rhetoric's against Israel.

The construction of identity through the Uses of vocabulary such as depiction of the US as Great Satan, Israel as Smaller Satan and its leaders as Ayatollahs are common practice in speeches, literatures and gatherings. Symbolization of the US as Uncle Sam and its role as imperialist and its close relations with the Jews are also pointed out.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Cold War ended and the world structure converted to Uni-polar and the US lost its enemy or the threat (as the USSR was not remain in the position to counter the US). Although the Cold War was won by the US but with the demise of its threat the US also lost the legitimization of the interventions in other states. The US began to look for another threat for its security and survival so that it could pursue its national interests in the name of that threat. It was challenge for President Carter to write a new script to construct a threat in order to get legitimization of interventions. On the basis of these threats the US construct or deconstruct relationships with other states. Carter administration focused on the domestic issues and economic integrity of the country and promotion of democracy, human rights, and to stop the climate changes throughout the world.

A disastrous event (9/11) occurred in 2001 in the United States which posed huge threat to the security and the sovereignty of the country. Although the incident caused large destruction and losses of more than three thousand innocent lives but for the power elite of America it created easier way to shape the US foreign policy. That time the threat was not posed by any state rather by a non-state actor so it establishes easier way to claim anyone responsible for the event and to polish the Bush Doctrine. The US president initially declared the Islamic militant organizations like Al Qaida and Taliban responsible for the 9/11. President Bush's words shown clearly that the United States new threat was something abstract. According to Bush, "The murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century", means the ideology of the whole Muslims would be the new threat. Initially the US foreign policy makers simply linked the event with Al Qaida and Osama bin Laden then linked the militant organizations with few Islamic states and their leaders with the help of cognitive contextualization. He then articulated the dominant threat as Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan by considering them as the irrational terrorist sponsored states or the 'rouge states'.

The 'other' of the Cold War 'communism' was the best tool for the Bush Administration to link the new threat with. Bush said,

"Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy teaches that innocent individuals can be sacrificed to serve a political vision.... Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy pursues totalitarian aims.... Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy is dismissive of free peoples, claiming that men and women who live in liberty are weak and decadent.... And Islamic radicalism, like the ideology of communism, contains inherent contradictions that doom it to failure. By fearing freedom....by distrusting human creativity, and punishing change, and limiting the contributions of half the population."

After systematically linking the radical Islamic ideology to the ideology of communism bush decided to use same policy which the US had used against the Communism and announced to start the global war on terror.

"America and our coalition partners have made our choice. We're taking the words of the enemy seriously. We're on the offensive. We will not rest. We will not retreat. And we will not withdraw from the fight until this threat to civilization has been removed."

The US-Iran relationship was already unfavorable; in such circumstances the Bush's rhetoric of Iran made the relationship worst. Just as he triggered the right of self-defense of the US and the responsibilities of the US and its citizens being the 'Manifest Destiny',

to support his actions against the Al Qaida, Saddam and the 'axis of evil' after the 9/11, Bush defined the threat posed by the Iranian Nuclear programs to the world security. Iran has also been assisting the covert support to the Hizbullah and Hamas in Palestine against the US most favorite ally Israel. On the other hand, the US had already declared these militant organizations as terrorist organizations. President Bush repeatedly stressed on the rhetoric by linking the 'new enemies' to the 9/11 and by linking Hizbullah and Hamas to Iran and considering it as the responsibility of the US to end the evil doers. Justifying the war on terror he repeatedly said, "We will rid the world of evil doers" in "this crusade, this war on terrorism". Arguing against the 'terrorist others', Bush says, "They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. They want to drive Israel out of the Middle East. They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa." He not only shown the enemies bad image but also got sympathies of the Christians and Jews to support his argument.

On the other hand, the Iranians were seeking to get the nuclear programs which they claim for peaceful purpose. In the region having issues with a strong rivalry (Israel) Iran also needed nuclear weapons. The Iranian nuclear weapons also have been seen through different lenses. Some scholars argue that Iranian thinks to get nuclear weapons as divine mission of 'Ayatollahs' to complete the Islamic revolution. Former president Ahmadinejad justified it as the "mission from Allah". He also said, "Iran has high capacities and can promulgate Islamic civilization worldwide." He had strong stance against America "...we had a revolution to achieve a lofty goal, on the basis of the expectation of the return". Further "the global oppressor (the US) occupied these countries (Afghanistan and Iraq) with the aim of putting pressure on Iran but God let the fruit of this fall on the lap of the Iranian nation." Even after the 9/11 the Iranian considered the US as the global oppressor and itself as the rescuer of Islamic civilization. Declaring the US intervention of Iraq and Afghanistan as the act to oppressed the Muslim countries, Ahmadinejad defend Iranian position preemptively. Iran also felt threat from the US possible intervention so noticed advance.

Political cartoons, images, caricatures, speeches of the leaders, language discourses, play vital role in creating otherness and patriotic sentiments in the construction of the relationship of Iran and the US. Policy makers and power elites of a state decide when and how these tools should be used. Differences in culture, society, history, norms and values, belief system and socio-political environments help the states to justify their actions in pursuing their national interests. The closed relationship of Iran and America converted them into worst enemies when Ayatollah Khomeini brought a revolution in Iran over-throwing Raza Shah Pahlavi

using anti-American sentiments. Both the US and Iran have interests in each other's politics and territory. The US is thirsty of the Iranian oil resources and to root its influence in Iran which is also located at a strategic position. Additionally, to ensure the survival of Israel in the region the US counters Iranian overt and covert actions against Israel by declaring it 'irrational' actors and the 'rogue state'. In response of the Iranian nuclear enrichment programs the US put various sanctions on Iran declaring it as threat for the world peace. The policy makers, scholars and the media commonly uses to construct identity of the enemy and their practices like, various scholars of the US and Israel propagate that the Iranian are making nuclear weapons in their preparation of the arrival of the *Last Imam*. On the other hand, Iran considers itself the champion of Islamic world, denies western civilizations, and assists organizations like Hezbollah in Palestine and Lebanon against Israel (the US most favorite ally). Iran is the world's second largest gas reserve and third largest oil reserve. Its strategic location in the heart of Asia with the connection with warm water ports Iran is quiet influenced in world politics. Iranian leaders and Shia Muslim clerics use Great Satan for America and oppose the US policies on international forums.

Conclusion:

Iran has been suffering a sick economy because of the US sanctions in response to the Iranian nuclear enrichment programs. For the US Iranian nuclear weapons are threatened while the neighboring nuclear powers like Britain, Russia (the evil of the Cold War) etc. is not. It is considered that Iranian are irrational so would use these weapons for unnecessary and harmful purposes. Now the US is interested in nuclear deals with Iran. This is what threat construction is? This is what construction of relationship is? Both the countries seek again to pursue their interests in one another countries, for this purpose the US-Iran nuclear deal is under process. The initial phase of the negotiations has completed successfully and it can be predicted that the countries who were the enemies of yesterday who used to declare each other 'the Great Satan' and 'the axis of evil' would once again sit in front of each other to pursue their own national interests.

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