

The Obama and Securitization of Iran's Nuclear Energy Program

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Abstract

Developments relating to the Islamic Awakening in the Middle East, especially in 2011, influenced and intensified, more than ever, the efforts made by the Obama Administration to securitize nuclear activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In fact, these activities have always been one of the major preoccupations for the foreign policy the USA. Obama followed up seriously on what George Bush did, especially during his second term. The approach of both US presidents, predicated on considering the Iranian nuclear energy programme as a threat against the US and its interests, has its root in the security-oriented approach, and its adverse consequences, towards the Iran. Therefore, a major part of Iran's foreign policy has been influenced by nuclear activities. This paper proposes to consider the process of securitizing Iran's nuclear file, especially under Obama's administration, on the basis of the conceptual pattern provided by the Copenhagen School and from speech act and action perspectives. This paper seeks also to answer the question as to what methods Obama has used to securitize Iran's nuclear file. It presupposes that the attempts to isolate Iran have been made through speech act and actions.

Keywords: Securitizing, Copenhagen School, threat, I R Iran's nuclear activities, Obama foreign policy, speech act, action, soft policy

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Introduction

Bush's era was different from the time Obama took office. Bush assumed office at the time when the country was in a suitable situation between his election and the 9/11/2001, (the beginning of enormous changes in the US foreign policy). Whereas President Obama inherited a country, which grappled with financial and political crises, mainly due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a country with a damaged image in the world. Moreover, unemployment was already a major topic for discussion in the domestic politics in the preceding 15 months and fundamentalism was gaining growing importance (Berkowitz, 2011: 4). Under such circumstances, Obama was of the view that change in the US foreign policy was imperative and he entered into the presidential campaign with 'change' as his main motto. Bush's foreign policy in the Middle East and especially vis-à-vis Iran was different from Obama's foreign policy in many aspects.

The US is mainly preoccupied with Iran acquiring nuclear capability and mastering uranium enrichment. In the view of the US Government, Iran is able to produce 8 to 10 kilos of plutonium per year, which is enough for making one to two nuclear bombs (Bown & Kidd, 2004: 259-260). Thus, with a view to bringing Iran's nuclear activities to an end, Bush resorted to a kind of hardware system and physical coercion, as its main choice, to persuade Iran to stop these activities. Nonetheless, it appeared that such foreign policy not only could not fulfill the US need and preserve its interests in the Middle East, but it provoked protest against the US. Conversely, Obama has



tried to ensure US interests in the Middle East by adopting a software approach. In its efforts to oppose a nuclear Iran, Obama gave priority to diplomacy. The policy announced by the Obama administration seemed peaceful and pacifistic, however, all US presidents always aimed, in principle, to ensure US interests in the Middle East by resorting to any possible means. To attain this objective, Iran's nuclear energy program has been the major impediment in the way of American Middle Eastern policy that the US Government needed to remove. Equally, finding a solution for this problem is the most important objective that could play a major role in the upcoming US presidential election.

In the US National Security Strategy, issued on 16 March 2006, Iran is referred to as a serious challenge for the national security and interest of the US, to the point that some distinct parts of this document are allocated to Iran. Claims against Iran include Iran's attempt to expand its influence in the Middle East, providing support to terrorism and trying to acquire uranium enrichment and nuclear weapon capability. Nonetheless, after Obama assumed office and while he relied on 'change' as his central motto, the shift in US foreign policy with regard the Islamic countries, especially Iran, could lead to securitizing the issue of Iran through new speech act (Semati and Rahnavard, 1388, 91 and 92). Under Obama Administration, Iran's nuclear program has become the most important issue in the US foreign policy after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whereas, due its preoccupation with Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush administration was too busy to focus on Iran. On the other hand, the sanctions on Iran expanded under the Obama administration to the point that Obama could talk of Iran becoming further isolated.

In this respect, we may use the analytical framework of the Copenhagen School to understand and explain the process of securitizing Iran's nuclear energy program by the USA. Because, despite broadly interpreting security and given the emphasis by this School on speech act and action, five aspects of security could



influence Iran's nuclear activities. Thus, the central point in this paper consists of considering the securitization of Iran's nuclear activities by the Obama administration and the way Obama proceeded to securitizing these activities. In this respect, we refer to speech act and action and soft policy in the US foreign policy, which aims to securitize Iran's nuclear activities. Thus, the US in its foreign policy relies on 1) Speech act, which includes diplomatic negotiations and attempts by the media to portray Iran's nuclear energy program as a threat. 2) Actions based on especial efforts aimed at building an expansive international consensus about threats emanating allegedly from Iran's nuclear activities, and 3) Efforts, within the framework of economic sanctions, to securitize Iran's nuclear energy program.

I- Conceptual Framework

In a world with no central authority, threats emanating from international environment include threats against interests of states – interests that include first and foremost the existence of state and extend to the preservation of environment. Meantime, security relates directly to the existence of state; despite the fact that sometimes security is only defined in relation to government and not people (like what the realists believe in). Nonetheless, security is the point of focus for governments. Security studies assume the task of identifying threats and propose, as much as possible, solution to do away with threats. On the other hand, security studies are based on recognizing international borders as criteria for distinguishing countries from each others. As a result, geography is still a major factor in security studies, and government is the most important actor in international relations. The closing years of the 1980s must be recognized as a turning point in the evolution of the concept of security; as in this period, governments faced the weakening of national sovereignty, the increase in global interdependence and sporadic, anarchic conflicts (Mandel 1379: 10). The demise of bipolarity and a degree of relative freedom for governments led to dispersing of power. Under such



condition, regional security created an intermediary level for analyzing the international system, which constituted, for *Buzan* and *Waever*, the best level for considering security. This way, the foundations of the Copenhagen School were laid by focusing on a broad interpretation of security.

The Copenhagen School focuses on security studies in the aftermath of the Cold War. *Bill Mc Sweeney*, *Ole Waever*, *Barry Buzan* and *Jaap de Wilde* are the theorists of this school of thought. *Buzan* believes that this School employs a sort of realist method, and this is perhaps for this reason that it still considers government as the most important actor in the international system and pays attention to concepts such as security and power. From *Ole Waever's* perspective, security and focusing on it is a reaction to the understanding of threat (*Friis*, 2000: 3). For him, security becomes meaningful at a time when the threatened actor forms an understanding of the threat and reacts to it. Only in this case, we can say that the actor's security is threatened. This school is characterized from an ontological point of view by its historical look at social phenomenon and its emphasis on the role of norms, rules and culture. For *Buzan* and *Waever* government emanates from society, as security is an intersubjective concept (*Eftekhari*, 1381: 342-343). They consider security to be a speech act, which brings about quick reaction, and as far as it relates to issues of vital importance, it could not avoid leading to political differences. (*Harris*, 2008: 40) For this reason, political differences constitute an inseparable part of security. The Copenhagen School uses different variables for considering and analyzing events, especially at the regional level, which could be divided in two parts: speech act and action.

Speech act is one of the most important variables that attract attention when it comes to securitizing an issue. Therefore, it attracts attention as a key to the lock of action. Speech act by the actor who securitizes an issue and uses language to this end leads to success in action. In fact, speech act is that much important as, in the



securitizing process, it can portray an issue as a gravely threatening one; while, in fact, it is not the case. Or, conversely, it could reduce an important and threatening issue to an ordinary and trivial phenomenon. Securitization is one of the most pivotal concepts in the Copenhagen School and defining security as speech act is the point of focus for this School (Ebrahimi, 1386: 446). A successful speech act is a complex of language and society, which the school of interpretation also pays attention to, a school that influences Buzan and his colleagues. Nonetheless, for the Copenhagen School, securitization is not only a speech act or a social structure, but it is a sort of political act too, which could extend to other zones (Willams, 2003: 514).

After considering speech act, we should focus on securitization, which is the most important variable for the Copenhagen School. Securitizing is a process that leads to place some issues within the framework of security; while they were not within this framework in the past. Securitizing is possible in all military and non-military fields (Friis, 2000: 3). It may begin from one field and extend to other fields. The main part of securitizing and de-securitizing processes is shown at the regional level (Buzan and Waever, 1388: 55). Because in the securitizing process time and space, dimensions become important. We should also bear in mind that those actors, who act at the global level, could enter into these regional security complexes without paying attention to time and space dimensions. The most important commonality among all security theories is the attention they pay to the concept of threat; in a way that, for Luther Brock, what finally defines security is an existential threat (Shihan, 1388: 81).

Another variable that the Copenhagen School emphasizes is the regional security complexes, which gained considerable importance following the end of the Cold War. These security complexes are defined on the basis of security mutual interdependence. Buzan and Waever categorize security complexes on the basis of friendship and enmity among these complexes and their different kinds (Lemake,



2005: 198). Meanwhile, geographical borders still serve to distinguish actors incorporated in one complex and for the Copenhagen School, borders preserve their importance up to the deepest layer of relationship. For this School, regional security is a security system in which countries located in the region, first, share security preoccupations, second, from a historical, geographical and cultural perspective have relatively common destiny and its constituting units, to preserve themselves, agree about specific regulations and mechanisms based on similar concerns and shared perception of threats (Ebrahimi, 1386: 451). Regional security complexes include standard and centrifugal complexes. In standard security complexes, there are two or more regional powers, enjoying their own military and political zones of influence, which are mainly defined on the basis of different forms of confrontations. Centrifugal security complexes are those in which a global power or any other big state intervenes (Lemark, 2005: 198). For example, the Middle East has always been a zone of influence for such big powers as Britain and super powers as the Soviet Union and the USA.

Finally, we should refer to action as the final period in the securitizing process. Action is also one of the most pivotal variables for the Copenhagen School. On the basis of this variable, the second step following securitizing through speech act and portraying an actor or a part of its policies as a threat is to isolate and marginalize this actor. This isolation may affect a broad spectrum of the actor's activities from military to economic and cultural ones. Action complements speech act to restrict the opposing actor. Success in actions by securitizing actor may lead to the total isolation of the securitized actor. That is why the securitized actor always tries to avoid securitizing.

II- Obama and Iranian Nuclear “Threat”

Following the assuming of presidency by Obama in 2009, change became the main objective of the US foreign policy. Obama, first,



tried to ostensibly take the path of cooperation with Iran. This cooperation was mainly characterized by the fact that changes in declared positions overtook changes in actual and strategic policy (Mottaghi, 1388: 11). The policy of change that Obama pursues should be analyzed within the framework of smart power. This has a unique and multi-dimensional nature and has the capacity of linking diplomatic, security and strategic instruments together (Mottaghi, 1387: 55). The Obama administration paid much more attention to change its tone rather than its behaviors, with a view to reducing tension. While George Bush was indifferent, to a great extent, to such a discursive act.

Iran's nuclear activities is so important for the US foreign policy that Obama's advisers always recommend that he should use the report 2025 as one of the bases for policy making, and, given the threats the US faces in the few years with Iran's nuclear question figuring as a major one, release the future national security strategy document of the country (Semati and Rahnavard, 1388: 110). It seems that the US uses the 5+1 group with a view to raising Iran's nuclear activities at the global level and international organizations, thus demonstrating its probable threat to all countries. However, Iran tries to reduce the importance of its nuclear program via its own speech act, thus preventing it to become a security issue. Whereas protracting negotiations with Iran on the nuclear issue could be just playing with time, as Obama and other American politicians believe, and Iran could be the winner in this game. These negotiations let Iran buy time to direct them towards the path it prefers. Obama believes that he should employ the policy of pressure before negotiations in dealing with Iran, exercising a range of pressure from political, psychological and economic, aimed at forcing Iran to negotiate with the USA and agree to fully suspend its nuclear activities. The most reliable means to bring pressure to bear on Iran would consist of working with the members of the UN Security Council, with focusing mostly on Russia, in order to increase sanctions against Iran.



Building a global consensus against Iran is one of the major issues on the agenda of the Obama administration. In this respect, the main reason for the relative success that Obama has won in comparison with the Bush administration is the former's less emphasis on military option than the latter and Obama's more focus on diplomatic means. This way, Obama could decrease the cost of its foreign policy and bring other members of the UN into Iran's nuclear game. Through a series of speech acts in the media and during formal negotiations and delivering speeches, Obama has endeavored towards proving that Iran's nuclear program is a threat. Then, he took operational steps for isolating Iran and pressurizing it towards suspending its nuclear activities through building global consensus within the NATO, the Security Council and creating convergence with the Arab states about the perceived threat emanating from Iran against the Middle East regional security complex, including Israel, and imposing unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions. Of course, it should be also born in mind that the Islamic awakening in the Middle East regional security complex temporarily overshadowed Iran's nuclear energy programme. Given the developments in the Middle East, the Obama administration awaits the advent of new governments in the region before entering into negotiations with Iran. Whereas the directions these new developments in the region are taking and their relatively leaning towards Iran are a matter of concern for US politicians.

The US considers Iran to be a threat to international peace and security and advances proofs to substantiate its claim. Beyond old enmity dating back to the wake of the Islamic revolution in Iran, which has political dimension, the US tries to prove its claim against Iran's nuclear energy program by referring to what it terms as Iran's failure to fully report its nuclear activities to the IAEA, failure to announce its goal of pursuing a nuclear program, failing to allow the IAEA's inspectors to thoroughly inspect Iran's nuclear installations and failing to implement UN Security Council resolutions on Iran's



nuclear activities. These claims led Bush and Obama to adopt an almost similar policy with regard to Iran's uranium enrichment. Support provided by the western countries, which view Iran as a common threat, has made the US Presidents more resolute in pursuing their policy.

As reiterated in the section on conceptual framework, speech act is the first and most important factor employed by the securitizing actor against the seemingly threatening actor. In speech act and action, an actor is portrayed as a threat, whereas it may not be a threat. Similarly, a threat may become de-threatening through a speech act. What Obama is doing in regard to Iran and Israel is a double-standard approach towards nuclear activities aimed at securitizing and de-securitizing. On the one hand, Iran's nuclear activities, no matter how much they are peaceful, are portrayed as threatening. And on the other hand, Israeli nuclear policy is de-securitized and considered to be benign no matter how much it is military oriented. While this US policy was announced in the Bush era, nonetheless, Obama followed it up strongly. In the first step, Obama placed negotiations with Iran on his agenda. Thus, he sent two letters to the Iranian leaders, and proposed that the two countries sat and resolved their differences, including Iran's nuclear activities (Mattair, 2010: 54). Iran strongly rejected the idea of any retreat from its positions.

Obama declared in April 2010 that Iran's nuclear activities are harmful to the national security interest of the United States. He in his speech in Paraguay stated that all countries should fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, whereas some countries, such as Iran, fail to comply with the provision of this Treaty. Laws should be bounding on all and violence should be punished. If the international community, especially the US, fails to deal with the non-compliance on the part of Iran, the integrity of the non-proliferation regime would be threatened and the US efforts towards a world free from nuclear weapons will be



compromised. From Obama's point of view, a nuclear Iran would amount to a spark that would blow away the non-proliferation regime. Obama, in his interview with CBS news network, stated that: "Iran's nuclear weapons would be harmful for the US national security and for the world in its entirety, because it would lead to extensive instability in the region, adversely affecting the regional security and triggering arms race in the Middle East. The concern of US officials over the arms race in the Middle East is a reference to the enmity between Iran and the Persian Gulf rim Arab State and the possibility that these states may turn to acquiring a nuclear program, due to their historical and current differences, including over the three small islands. This in turn may compromise the access to oil of the region and jeopardize the US's major ally in the Middle East, namely, Israel.

Obama introduced two major changes about Iran, which could be considered as the most important part of Obama's speech act. In the first step, he did not include Iran in the so-called 'axis of evil' raised by Bush and adopted the approach of negotiating with Iran. Second, Obama undermined considerably Bush's policy maintaining that the suspension of enrichment was the precondition for negotiating with Iran. This policy culminated in his televised messages and his speech in Cairo University on 9 October 2009. Moreover, Obama focused on multilateral approach and shared policy in the framework of the 5+1 Group much more than Bush did. He also tended further towards negotiations and sanctions than branding military option. The Washington meeting on nuclear activities, especially Iran's nuclear program, held in April 2010, maintained that a nuclear Iran would create instability in the Middle East—a region of vital importance for the US. From Obama's point of view, Iran's acquiring weapons of mass destruction would damage the peace process between the Arabs and the Israelis due to the assistance that Hamas and Hezbollah receive from Iran, and the Fordow nuclear installations demonstrate Iran's violation of its international



obligations.

Beyond Obama's speech act, the role of the media, as the social dimension of securitization, should not be overlooked; as the US media, given their strength, played an important role in this regard. We may categorize the media and the role they play as the social and cultural dimension of securitization, following the Copenhagen School's jargons, along with the speech act. In fact, media are one of the most important elements in the age of globalization, which could have important impact on currents and direct them along the paths they wish. Media, as strong instruments, are at the service of cultural imperialism, which develops in the light of a perceived prevailing ideology, i.e. liberalism, which aims to prove itself and has a new structure and epistemologically and structurally threatens the world (Amiri, 1388: 49). Although at the present time, the main part of the global media companies are European, the American media companies invest more than others. These companies benefit largely from the extensive national and international markets and the availability of capitals in these markets (Jafarzadeh, 1385: 14). With the passage of time, this element will be able to affect more and that is way it will be considered as a separate variable; whereas it could be generally categorized as belonging to speech act category. Bush and Obama assaulted Iran's nuclear energy program through the media with a view to shaping world public opinion and portraying it as not being peaceful and as a threat against the whole world. Of course, they have been successful, to a great extent, in shaping world public opinion.

As explained earlier, Obama tried to use soft and smart power against the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the media as one of the most important instruments in this field. As in the field of hard power, the focus is on military means, using soft and smart power is influenced by normative, motivational and static environment. Naturally, media play an effective role in activating smart power; when concepts are transferred by media, mind and perception of



citizens in different countries get affected (Calin, 2008: 301) and move in the direction of political goals set by politicians, as it was the case before the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan. In the smart power environment, media target the will and identity of human beings (Mottaghi, 1387: 60). To clarify the point, we refer to a number of cases, which show the role of the media in securitizing Iran's nuclear activities. Following the information provided by the Mujahidin Khalq Organization on the Natanz nuclear site, which marked the beginning of the new phase of controversies over Iran's nuclear energy program, CNN aired on 12 December 2002 a report on the basis of an article published by the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), which was documented by satellite images showing Isfahan, Natanz and Arak sites. In the report, it was claimed that Iran's nuclear activities were clandestine and aimed to produce atomic bombs (Falahi, 1386: 56). In 2010, the New York Times announced that Iran is building a new nuclear site in the city of Qom. Following the release of this news, Obama claimed that the size of this site is in conflict with the nature of a peaceful nuclear program and Iran tries to build nuclear installations, which go beyond its need, and that proves that Iran's nuclear program is not peaceful. He further claimed that had Iran sought to produce electricity, the already built nuclear installations would have been sufficient. US Congress in 2010 allocated 120 million dollars for propaganda and radio programming against the Islamic Republic of Iran and set aside 60 to 70 million dollars for Iranian clandestine opposition groups, all reflected in Obama's speech act and showed his covert activities for destabilizing the Islamic Republic of Iran (Veris, 2011: 7).

In the same vein, Obama tries to embark on social, cultural and psychological attack at the same time with a view to changing the behaviors of those in charge of nuclear diplomacy. He resorts to psychological and media acts and soft activities in order to undermine Iran's assertion about the peaceful nature of its nuclear program. In this respect, American security institutions emphasize the following:



Focusing public diplomacy instruments on cartoon-style security based on aggrandizing weaknesses, mainly through the media; and trying to link the development of Iran's ballistic missiles to its nuclear program. As an example, the US intelligence community tries to perturb Iran's aerospace program and the development of Shahab 3 ballistic missile by raising false claims against them through employing media and psychological warfare. At the same time, General James Wright, acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US armed forces, claimed on 3 February 2009 that the development of Iran's capability to launch satellite pave the way for Iran to acquire intercontinental ballistic missiles. Thus, Washington claims that Iran could threaten the existence of the US by acquiring long-range missiles and developing its nuclear program in parallel and linking them together.

Obama, like Bush, feels duty-bound to clash with Iran over its nuclear program. For him, the issue should be resolved peacefully through negotiations "without precondition but with pressure." One of the most important confrontations between these two actors at the high level took place in October 2009. Following Iran making clear that it does not forgo its nuclear program, Obama put on agenda its policy of big stick that he had promised from the beginning (Murray 2010: 221). Obama first tried to recognize Iran as a regional power. He also tried to establish closer relationship with Iran similar to what was the case during the Bush second term. To this end, he always referred to negotiations as the most important means to achieve his goal. (The US efforts to negotiate with Iran on Afghanistan in March 2009 were a case in point.) For him, any success in these probable negotiations requires getting to know those who take decisions on Iran's nuclear program. While Obama, like Bush, presupposes that Iran's nuclear program is not peaceful, his first priority is to negotiate with Iran. He pursues a smart policy at the same time, which aims to securitize Iran's nuclear activities and bring pressure to bear on Iran and further isolate it. He believes that Iran has become more isolated



during his term in office.

Moreover, Obama has announced that any country that fails to comply with the NPT will be isolated. He tries not only to isolate Iran but also delegitimize it in one way or another. He has taken up efforts to isolate Iran both within and outside the country. He tries to widen the gap between the government and people by encouraging propaganda against the government. At the same time, he endeavors in the international system to build consensus against Iran and isolate it by raising claims against Iran's nuclear program and accusing Iran of terrorist acts and the like. Obama resorts also to balancing in foreign policy, which is in harmony with the approach of Ernest Haas towards the balance of power in shaping relations. He uses indices that, first, reflect balance of power. Second, he looks at multilateralism as inevitable, and, third, he stresses stability and peace through cooperation and partnership. And finally, what Obama knows as signs of change in foreign policy could be reconcile with politics of power, referred to by Haas.

Since 2009, Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, tried to highlight what he refers to as Iran's nuclear threat. This means that, under such circumstances, the way is being paved for concrete actions and aggression against Iran's nuclear installations. Many conservative groups in the US support the Israeli stance and emphasized that Iran's capabilities for producing nuclear bombs were limited and this could not be materialized earlier than 2011. Such report, published by American conservatives, shows that Obama's policy with regard to Iran's nuclear program could unfold within the framework of the following strategies: Propaganda by American and other western media against Iran's nuclear activities for preparing for psychological operations against Iran will continue. American elite supports mutual and multilateral cooperations. The USA under Obama opposes any nuclear proliferation and considers it as one of the factors and breeding contexts for threats against American regional and international interests. The US diplomacy pursues the aim of



containing Iran in part through cooperating with Russia. Such restrictions may acquire an aggressive nature and be imposed through UN Security Councils resolutions. Obama's security policy rests on the assertion that any nuclear proliferation, which leads to nuclear test, paves the way for setting the nuclear domino in motion in the Middle East.

Beyond the Persian Gulf littoral Arab countries and the European countries, the US endeavors to involve the NATO in this file as well. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of the unipolar world, the US has progressively expanded the NATO's zone of responsibility towards a sort of global responsibility, and tried to establish a steady relationship between peace and stability in different regions and the NATO's interest. As a result, this organization considers its presence necessary in strategic locations under the excuse of combating international terrorism, illegal immigration, maintaining energy security and providing security. The agreement between the NATO and Bahrain on 24 March 2008 could be referred to as an example. This agreement deals with preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. If this agreement extends to other Persian Gulf littoral states, it may present the NATO as supervising arm tasked with overseeing the good execution of relevant UN Security Council resolutions or Bahrain, relying on its agreement with the US and the NATO to embark on restricting the freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf. Through widening consensus against Iran, Obama has reduced cost of its foreign policy and may justify its future actions vis-à-vis Iran and expand its power.

Following the failure of the negotiations with Iran and having received assurances that sanctions were to substitute the war, Europe, Russia and China agreed to go along with sanctions. The US officials made clear many times that if Europe, China and Russia didn't wish to get involved in the war in one way or another, they should support the sanctions. The assumption that sanctions are substitute for war was not only discussed between the US and other countries, it was



first raised within the US domestic politics, between war-mongering parties and the Obama administration (Zahrani, 1389: 60). Israeli hawkish elements and some neo-conservative hard-liners inside the US and their lobbyists dealing with Congress and working in the media were among those who tilted towards war. Nonetheless, not everyone who talks of war is really pushing for war. Many of them are waging a psychological war against Obama, aiming to extort concessions from him. As David Key put it: "Netanyahu's push for war on Iran seeks to either have Obama go on war against Iran or cave in to Israeli demands on the Palestinian front." To prepare for a possible war against Iran, speech act and portraying Iran as an international crisis is the first step. A group in the US seeks to point to Iran as the source of crisis and limit the measures that the government may take, aiming to induce everyone towards the final question about the war. As Michael Moulin, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US armed forces, said a war on Iran would immeasurably destabilize the region and this is something that the US and Israel understand very well.¹ Kristol, one of the pro-war, neo-conservative says: Obama even abstain from alluding to war and military actions² (Zahrani, 1389: 60-66). The reason for this attitude may be the damage it may cause to the international consensus against Iran – a consensus that the US Government spent long time and incurred enormous financial cost to bring about.

The Obama Government tends towards multilateralism in dealing with Iran's nuclear programme and wishes to use all strategic assets, such as Russia and China, in this respect. To have Moscow and Beijing come along and cooperate, the Obama administration needed to go easy on the eastern powers, as Washington knows that the containment policies on such matter as nuclear and aerospace

1. Washington Times, 29 June 2010.

2. Jamie Fly and William Kristol, 2010.



activities in Iran and missiles, nuclear programmes in North Korea and energy security could be dealt with only through cooperation among the five Permanent members of the UN Security Council. From Obama's perspective, Iran is buying time for advancing its agenda in the region and undermining sanctions. The US believes that Iran becomes dangerous when it denies access to the IAEA's inspectors and the only way to deal with this situation is to thwart Iran's bid for dominating the region. To begin with, Obama believe that pressure emanating from sanctions should increase. The international consensus about human rights issues is another point of divergence between the two countries, (Carafano& others, 2011: 2) and this is one of the means Obama uses to isolate Iran as an international threat.

In view of the US, the 5+1 Group's negotiations with Iran have not only led to nowhere, but they made Iran move more resolutely towards nuclear technologies. The first round of negotiations focused on Iran's enrichment program and the proposed package, containing economic proposals. The second round dealt with regional security and Iran's non-compliance with the resolutions. And the third round touched upon the complaints that Iran and the US raised against each others (Ben-Meir, 2009: 74).

With the Cold War coming to an end and the structure of the international system and the bipolar system collapsing, regional security complexes replaced the global structure and gained considerable importance. These complexes are different in terms of their importance and could not be dealt with in a uniform way. The Middle East is one of these complexes, which is of more importance due to its energy resources. Moreover, the Middle East, as a centripetal region setting, is important for various interests and policies of big powers. That is why many trans-regional powers are involved in this security complex. The US is one of those powers that claim interest in the region. While it seeks to ensure its interest in this region, it faces challenges from a big regional power, i.e., Iran, which



emphasizes its rights in the complexes. Thus, on the one hand, the US has the largest interest in the Middle East and on the other its biggest enemy is located in the same region, and Washington needs to find a solution to neutralize this regional rival.

Following the failure of the negotiations, the US embarked on a different path. It tried to gain cooperation from other countries in the region by aggrandizing Iran's nuclear program and portraying it as a threat. Moreover, the US, disguising as a benevolent for the region, harshly criticized Iran's nuclear policy. Given the importance of this issue, we should note that the Middle East has had a pivotal place in the US foreign policy under the Obama administration. A review of security and foreign policies processes since 2006 clearly shows that most geopolitical clashes took shape in this region. Changes in the geographical environment in the aftermath of the Cold War demonstrated instances of conflicts in this region. The US security challenges were not only a reflection of crisis-creating processes in foreign policy, but they could be viewed as signs of geographical changes in the region (Mottaghi, 1388: 15).

Saud al-Faisal, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, basing himself on unproven assumption of Iran seeking to acquire nuclear weapon, stated in the Washington meeting, dated April 2010, that "Iran's nuclear weapon motivates others to proliferate and in the future the region will be full of nuclear weapons." Obama believes that Iran's prestige will be on the rise in case it could acquire nuclear weapons, thus threatening US allies and US interests in the region. He also maintains that the Sunni Arab states, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, are concerned over Iran's nuclear program. He proposes that the Arab-Israeli conflict be dealt with after Iran's nuclear threat is resolved and Arab states must view Israel as the best government that could be a bulwark against Iran's nuclear ambitions. For dealing with Iran's nuclear program, Obama is in need of forging closer relationship with Israel. In addition to efforts aimed at building consensus with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia against Iran, lending



support to the peace process with Israel, reducing fear from Israeli and de-securitizing this country, Obama also tried to push Syria, Iran's main ally in the region, towards peace process with Israel, thus advancing the US policy of isolating Iran.

Before recent developments in the Middle East and the collapse of a number of pro-West governments during the Islamic awakening in 2011, lending support to the peace process between Syria and Israel was part of aggressive peaceful approach conducted by Obama. Supporting peace between Syria and Israel could have impacted seriously on Hezbollah, Hamas and the relations between these two groups and finally expedited Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Israeli deep concern over Iran's nuclear program made it willing to come to terms with Syria. Nonetheless, the recent developments in the Middle East and US Government's financial and political support for the Syrian oppositions adversely impacted Syria-US relationship and mostly ended the US earlier plan to help Syria and Israel close gap. For Obama, the severing Iran's links with the Mediterranean shores requires the rupture in the Iran-Syria relationship, which makes the Iranian access to international markets very difficult. Washington believes that Iran seeks to become a dominant power and it could turn into a de facto regional power through pursuing its nuclear programme. That is why American forces are permanently stationed in the region to keep the balance and impose containment policy against Iran (Kordsman & Torkan, 2010: 10).

The imposition of sanctions by the US on different countries is an old-age practice. It began in the aftermath of Second World War and developed in the 1980s and 1990s. The US has extensively imposed sanctions on 12 countries, which include the Balkan countries,, Burma (Myanmar), Cuba, Iran, Iraq (under Saddam Hussein), Liberia, Ivory coast, Libya (Under Qaddafi), North Korea, the Sudan, Syria, Zimbabwe (Rarick, 2007: 66). There are signs indicating that the US pressure against Iran has been on the rise. Old-age enmity between Iran and the US in the past three decades went



on without direct military clash between the two sides, (except for a limited clash between the navies of the two countries in the 1980s in the Persian Gulf) Despite the length and the depth of concern of the US over Iran, US politicians from both republican and democratic parties have relied on other means, mostly economic ones, in lieu of military might.

It seems that sanctions are the only and most effective means at the US disposal against Iran's nuclear activities (Maloney, 2010: 108). Iran's nuclear programme found its way on the agenda of the UN Security Council for the first time in 2006, which followed the resolution adopted by the IAEA's Governing Council that accused Iran of non-compliance with the IAEA's Statute. The Security Council has so far adopted resolutions 1696, 1735, 1745, 1803 and 1929. The latest one was adopted in 2010 during the Obama administration and contains the toughest sanctions on Iran. These resolutions were adopted under chapter 7 of the UN Charter. In a report put together in February 2010 by Yukia Amano, the Director-General of the IAEA, it is stated that Iran continues to enrich uranium in Natanz and plan to set up 40 new nuclear reactors (El-Masri, 2010: 95).

On the other hand, many members of US Congress, elites of US foreign policy and some of the officials of the Obama administration insist on the need of imposing crippling sanctions on Iran. They propose that even those companies that export gasoline to Iran should be sanctioned (Weitz, 2010: 3). Whereas the European Union seeks to impose sanctions that could hurt the Iranian Government. These restrictions include financial sanctions as well. By expanding economic sanctions, Obama tries to stop Iran's nuclear and infrastructural activities. He uses sanctions to damage Iran's economy, as Iran's Achilles' heel; because he believes that Iran's economy faces many difficulties. In his view, any sanctions could aggravate these difficulties and lead to the expansion of popular discontent. This method is first and foremost employed to derail Iran's nuclear



activities.

In August 2011 more than 90 US senators wrote to Obama on the need to impose sanction on the Iranian Central Bank. As the Wall Street Journal reported, Iran' financial system was completely separated from the world's financial system and the Iranian Government fails to receive billions of dollars that it is due from oil export. This report indicates that Iran's nuclear program is the reason for which many in the US believe that the extension of sanctions to cover the Iranian Central Bank is necessary. The same reports states that, "in our view, the US should devise a comprehensive strategy for bearing pressure to bear on Iran's financial system and impose sanctions on Iran's Central bank." US Congress passed an act in 2012, which threatens to impose sanctions on every foreign company that deals with Iranian sanctioned banks, Iran's energy sector and companies belonging to or dealing with Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps.

Other than nationally imposed sanctions by the US, we must also refer to internationally imposed sanctions as well. UN Security Council resolutions against Iran considerably expanded the scope of sanctions. They include: export ban on every military armament by Iran, freezing most of Iranian assets outside Iran and travel ban on individuals linked to Iran's nuclear programme (Alam, 2011: 44). Barak Obama, while supporting direct talks with Iran and implementing the teachings of containment doctrine and deterrence, attempts to increase Iran's difficulties in the field of nuclear industry. The US has adopted various policies with the view to portraying Iran as a threat and to isolate Iran, using international forums.

All these efforts are made by Obama with a view to securitizing Iran's case and bringing pressure to bear on it in order to have it forgo its nuclear program. As explained earlier, Washington uses speech act and actions to isolate Iran. Reciprocally, to prevent isolation, Iran tries to desecuritize its nuclear programme and prove that it is peaceful, as explained hereunder.



III- Iranian Response

This part of the paper is allocated to explain very briefly Iran's efforts in confronting actions and policies, which aim to securitize its nuclear activities by the Obama administration. Reviewing these efforts is out of the scope of this brief paper. Undoubtedly, facing the activities by securitizing actor, the targeted actor tries to de-securitize itself and avoid isolation. That is way in most cases de-securitizing actor is on the defensive and tries to make things transparent and allow verification of its nuclear activities. The degree of its success depends on its capability in the five areas, namely, political, military, economic, social and environmental areas. Usually, the actor, which ably embarks on securitizing, is in a position to de-securitize with ease, when necessary. On the basis of such preliminary remarks, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always sought to reject allegations about the non-peaceful nature of its nuclear programme.

To rebuff the concepts 'threat' and 'war' advanced by the US in relation to Iran's nuclear programme, Iran tries to depict this programme as normal and bring forth concepts 'peace' in order to de-securitize its nuclear programme. As there is no diplomatic relationship between Iran and the US, Iran endeavors to prove the peaceful nature of its programme in the course of its negotiations with the EU and especially with Germany, Britain and France. Iran also endeavors towards de-securitizing its activities through cooperation with the IAEA, diplomacy and speeches by the leaders of the I R Iran and through economic activities. All in all, Iran has always maintained that its nuclear programme is peaceful and doesn't present any danger to the Persian Gulf states, the Middle East and the world. Conversely, Western and, especially American, sources have consistently sought in the past decade to inculcate that Iran's nuclear programme is not peaceful. In this process, Iran too has tried mostly to reject allegations though its own speech act and diplomatic relations. This objective is pursued as it corresponds to the provisions



of the Twenty-Year Vision Document – a document that requires the establishment of constructive relations with regional and world countries. It is reiterated in this document that, up to the year 2026, Iran should forge constructive and effective relations with the outside world on the basis of the principles: dignity, wisdom and expediency (Sajadpour and Nourian, 1389: 53-55). Moreover, the Document states that gaining access to regional and world markets is among the objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran for achieving the higher objective of de-securitization.

Iran has always reiterated that its nuclear programme is peaceful and announced that it is prepared whatever it takes to remove any ambiguity in this respect. Iran has also classified the objectives of its nuclear programme, which consist of producing the needed electricity, using the products in medical and agricultural fields. Producing electricity is the most important objective of Iran's peaceful nuclear programme. With the increase in Iran's population, the need in electricity increases. If the current growth rate persists, it is forecasted that the production of nuclear electricity will increase from 368 gigawatts in 2005 to 416 gigawatts in 2030, even to 519 if more appropriate measures are adopted. Given the concern over the increase in the price of oil, nuclear energy could play an important role in meeting the increasing electricity need in the future (ahadi, 1387: 411-12). For this reason, the production of nuclear electricity is one of the most important of objectives of Iran in the field of nuclear activities.

To keep pace with economic growth and in accordance with an act of the Parliament, Iran should produce 20000 megawatts of nuclear electricity, and accordingly develop its nuclear reactors (Gharibabadi 1388: 58). The use of nuclear energy is one of the requirements in the world and is inevitable. According to statistics, in 2000 there were 438 nuclear plants in the world, which could produce 351 gigawatts of electricity. Another piece of statistics indicates that there are 542 nuclear plants in the world, out of which 147 plants are



located in the US and 146 plants in Europe, which amount to 54/06 per cent of the whole nuclear plants in the world. There are also 250 nuclear plants are being constructed or are being planned or proposed (Rostami, 1386: 122-23).

Beyond producing electricity, Iran is also preoccupied with the process of its development. Acquiring legally nuclear capability not only opens a new horizon in the field of science and technology, but it also could help reduce and finally eliminate international pressures, threats and sanctions against Iran, leading to growth and development (Hadian, Hormozi, 1389: 197-99). At the present time, one of the research and scientific activities carried out by Iran's Nuclear Energy Organization is exploiting the Tehran research reactor. This reactor, which has various radiating facilities, enables basic research in the fields of reactor physics, neutron physics and the impact of various radiations on material. It is worthy to note that, at the present time, most Iranian industries use radio isotope systems. The activities of the Radio-isotope branch of the Iranian Nuclear Energy Organization consist of the following: Leakage detecting operation in oil pipes, using radio-active tracing techniques, Constructing and producing light fountains in different shape and size for industrial application, Design and construction of isotope system, including contiguous level meter, incontinuous level meter, thick meter for glass, Inspection of the glass-melting furnace, using radioactive tracing techniques, Installation and using new system in industries, Replacing charges of extant fountains in extant systems in factories, Repairmen and reconstruction, calibration and using and maintenance of different nuclear systems in industries (Yousefpoor and Rahimi, 1381: 40-42).

In its peaceful activities, Iran more than anything else focuses on its population growth and their increasing need for electricity for people's well-being and for meeting the needs of industries. The most important objective of Iran in its nuclear activities is to generate needed electricity for the country. Its other priorities consist of application of nuclear technology in medical and agricultural fields.



Accordingly, to display its good will and the peacefulness of its nuclear program, Iran has tried to cooperate with the IAEA and build confidence in the security complex of the Persian Gulf region. In September 2011 and following the operationalization of the Bushehr Nuclear Power plant reemphasized the peacefulness of its nuclear program and reiterated its objective to connect this Plant to its cross-country electricity transmission network. At the same time conflicting reports emanating from the USA indicated that the US Government was not opposing the operationalization of the Plant under Russian supervision. In this respect, Mehr News Agency, quoting Kiydo News Agency, reported that the US doesn't oppose the operationalization of the first nuclear power plant. According to this report, an official of the US State Department indicated that Bushehr had concluded that the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant was not designed to produce nuclear weapons.¹

Conclusion

The developments relating to the Islamic awakening in the Middle East has influenced many programmes, which aimed to securitize Iran's nuclear activities. American efforts aimed at advancing its schemes in three fields of human rights, terrorism and nuclear activities against the Islamic Republic of Iran may be understandable against the backdrop of these developments in the region in 2011. The pressure brought to bear by the US on Amano, the Director-General of the IAEA, the allegation leveled against Iran regarding the plot to kill the Saudi Ambassador in Washington in October 2011 and remote reporting by the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran's human rights in September of the same year have all come about following the US pressures. However, the fact is that the awful blows from the

1. <http://hamshahrionline.ir/news-113877.aspx>



Islamic awakening to global and regional interests of the US and its all-time and strategic allies in the region, especially Israel, have not slowed down the US efforts towards securitizing Iran's nuclear activities, but intensified them. And it arises from the US and the West perception of the impact of Iran and the Islamic Revolution on this awakening, which is still unfolding. If we refer to the Middle East as a 'centripetal' security complex, in the sense of the term used by the Copenhagen School, in which the interests of big powers crisscross, we should consider the US as the major trans-regional actor in this complex, which clash with its major regional rival or major regional threat against its interests, i.e., the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran, in turn, is the one that could follow up on its nuclear activities and thereby, as the main US rival in the Middle East, challenge the US interests in the region. Therefore, nuclear Iran is portrayed by the US and its strategic ally, Israel, as a threat. Thus, in the first phase, the US embarks on speech act aimed at exposing Iran as a dangerous state, then tries to separate it from the security complex of the Middle East and isolate it.

In the second phase, the US embarks on actions and applies five dimensions of security, which are seriously followed up by President Obama. To achieve its objectives, Obama first began by the motto "negotiations without preconditions." As it was not a real proposal, he did not achieve anything. He continued his comprehensive efforts against Iran, using such instruments media, propaganda, building international consensus against Iran's nuclear activities, especially within the NATO, and the increase in economic sanctions. Security Council resolution, dated 9 June 2010, which put in place the heaviest multilateral sanctions against Iran, is a measure in this respect. Finally, Obama tried to distance Iran from its allies, such as Syria, using diplomatic means, with a view to isolating Iran and preventing it from acquiring nuclear technology. Obama is also trying to block Iran's export and import route from the Mediterranean, which requires rupture between Iran and Syria. Though, following the recent



development in the Middle East and tension in the relations between the US and Syria, this action seem impracticable.

On the other hand, Obama tries, especially within the NATO, to have Russia comply with the sanctions and move towards discontinuing its cooperation with Iran. Moreover, democrats in US Congress push for the imposition of more sanctions on Iran out of formal institutions. Though Obama, compared to Bush, adopted a moderate speech act, however, his moderate policy does not go beyond his declared positions. In fact, he continues Bush's policy about Iran wrapped up in a peaceful literature, as both have been pushing for the suspension of Iran's nuclear activities and refuse to retreat from that objective. Under Obama administration, we witness that sanctions expanded through the Security Council and unilateral acts against Iran. Obama, like Bush, believes that all options against Iran are on the table, though, contrary to Bush, he displays less violent behaviors.

Obama considers Iran, in the first place, as a threat for the security complexes of the Persian Gulf. He fears that nuclear Iran becomes more powerful and tips the balance in detriment to American allies in the Middle East. In the second phase, he looks at Iran as a threat for peace and security in the international community, by referring to Iran's long-range missiles with the capability of carrying nuclear warheads. In this respect, he also refers to Iran's ability to hurt the world's energy network and cause the increase in energy cost for the industrial world. The US Government also tries to securitize Iran in political field, (negotiations with Iran's opponents), in economic field, (imposing multilateral and unilateral sanctions) social field (portraying Iran as a threat through media), military field (imposing sanctions on companies exporting arms and military equipment to Iran and extending sanctions to high ranking commanders of the Revolutionary Guards Corps) and, to lower extent, environmental field (in relation to the danger of nuclear rays for environment) and finally isolating Iran.



Obama has employed all dimensions of securitization, in the sense that the Copenhagen School refers to, with a view to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear capability. It seems that, given the death of Ben Laden and the removal of the US pretext, which had focused the US attention on the Al-Qaeda, as the most important US challenge in the Middle East, and given the US electoral campaign, Obama looks for a solution for Iran's nuclear case as a key issue that could enhance its chance in the election. The Obama administration's pressure on Amano, the Director-General of the IAEA, to present a report against Iran in November 2011 could also be understood as an effort by the US Government in order to resolve Iran's nuclear issue before the US election. For this reason, we may conclude that Obama's focus on Iran's nuclear activities will be on the rise.

Iran, in turn, is also sparing no effort to explain the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme and its objective, which consists of producing electricity and using nuclear product in medical and agricultural fields. Iran is of the view that it should use the same means, which have been used to securitize it, to de-securitize its peaceful activities. While this policy may look passive, however, if successful, it could open up the way for Iran to leave the crisis arising from securitization of the country behind.

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