

Dr. Zoë I. Levornik  
School of Political Science, University of Haifa, Israel

## **‘Every Me and Every You’ National Identities, Security Perceptions, and Nuclear Policy**

The purpose of this article is to explore the effect of national identity on states' security perceptions and policies. The effect of national identity on states' security perceptions and policies is often neglected and most of the emphasis is usually placed on geostrategic considerations. Nevertheless, national identity effects security perceptions and policies in two ways. First, it has a constructive effect, meaning it shapes the state's security perception. In other words, who we are (as individuals or as a society) determines what we perceive as a threat. Second, national identity is also used as a driver to gain legitimacy and support for certain policies. That is, decision makers frame certain issues as a matter of national identity because they recognize that national identity is an emotional trigger for societies and therefore it is effective in gaining public support. It is important to note that these two aspects are not mutually exclusive and most often both aspects are at play.

While some studies examine the constructive effect of national identity on foreign policy<sup>1</sup> less attention has been given to the use of national identity in political discourse as a mean of gaining support and legitimacy and promoting certain policies and agendas. One exception is Bloom's identification theory which examines the link between national identity, domestic politics, and foreign policy. According to Bloom if a policy is framed as necessary for protecting or bolstering the national identity it is more likely to gain the support of the people.<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that any use of national identity narratives in political discourse is intentionally manipulative but that framing issues in terms of national identity tends to increase public support of those issues.

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the power of national identity narrative in political and security discourse. This is something that decision makers have always been aware of but that scholars, as well as the public, fail to recognize.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, BERGER, Thomas U. *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, Baltimore, Md. ISBN 08-0185-820-8; CAMPBELL, David. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. University of Minnesota Press, 1998, Minneapolis. ISBN 08-1662-222-1; GILLIS, John R. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton University Press 1996, Princeton, N. J. ISBN 06-9103-200-9; MITZEN, Jennifer. Ontological Security in World Politics: States identity and the security Dilemma. *European Journal of International Relations*, 12(3) 2006. 341-370. ISSN 135-4-0661; MCSWEENEY, Bill. *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, Cambridge. ISBN 052-1661-773.

<sup>2</sup> BLOOM, William. *Personal identity, national identity, and international relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. ISBN 052-1373-166.

However, in order to change security perceptions and policies we must first understand how they are constructed within a society.

This article focuses on the nuclear policies of Israel and Iran in order to demonstrate how national identity is used in political discourse in order to gain legitimacy and support for their nuclear policies. Therefore, the first section provides a historical overview of the national identity of each state. The following section examines how national identity shaped the security perception of Israel and Iran, specifically as it relates to each state nuclear policies. The final section of this article examines how national identity is used in the political discourse of Israel and Iran to justify the nuclear policies in these states. Despite the many differences between these two states this article finds quite a few similarities in how national identity affected their security perceptions and in how it was used to gain support for their nuclear policies. Understanding how nuclear policies are framed in the political discourse of different states can help established more effective nonproliferation policies and initiative.

## **Rainy Days in Israel**

Israel has never acknowledged having a nuclear capability and therefore public discourse on the topic is limited. Nevertheless, we do have records of private debates that took place both domestically and with foreign delegates about the nuclear option. Moreover, in the last two decades Israel public discourse regarding Iran's nuclear program offer some insight into Israel's position on nuclear proliferation in the Middle East (ME) and its own nuclear policies.

### *Israel's national identity and security perception*

The national identity of Israel was shaped by several historical traumatic events that are inscribed deeply in the collective memory of the Israeli people, most of all the Holocaust. The trauma of the Holocaust lives on daily in the collective memory of Israelis and is dominant in the historical narratives of the Israeli nation. The battle of Tel Hai, the Bar Kokhba revolt, and Masada are also significant events in Jewish history that have become part of the Israeli nation collective memory and dominant narratives.<sup>3</sup> These commemorative narratives generate the perception of a persistent existential threat to the Jewish people and evoke strong feelings of fear and insecurity.<sup>4</sup>

The Never Again narrative represents the lessons learned from the above-mentioned historical traumas for the Israeli society. The narrative requires Israel must be strong, self-reliant, and never allow a second Holocaust to happen to the Jewish people. The 'Never Again' narrative was (and remains) incorporated into Israel's security perception. Even though, objectively speaking, today Israel is much stronger military and economically than its enemies, the perception of existential threat persists.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the memory of the Holocaust has shaped the Israeli security

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<sup>3</sup> The collective memory of the Israeli society is based to a great extent on the long history of the Jewish people and Jewish historical narrative (this is the case for the majority of Israeli Jews but not for other ethnic Israeli minorities).

<sup>4</sup> ZERUBAVEL, Yael. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. The University of Chicago Press, 1995, Chicago, p. 195. ISBN 022-6981-576.

<sup>5</sup> SHLAIM, Avi. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. W. W. Norton 2001, New York, p. 238. ISBN 039-3321-126.

perception and influenced policy-making and policy-reasoning of Israeli decision makers in the past and in the present.

### *The nuclear option*

According to Cohen "Israel's nuclear project was conceived in the shadow of the Holocaust, and the lessons of the Holocaust provided the justification and motivation for the project."<sup>6</sup> David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, was a central actor in shaping Israel's security perception and the person mainly responsible for Israel's nuclear program (along with Ernst David Bergmann, and Shimon Peres). Ben Gurion believed Israel only option to address its security problem was a strong deterrence. He feared that because of the Arab nations strategic and demographic advantage any military victory Israel achieves would be temporary. In the long run Israel could not withstand the ongoing conflict which would drain its society of its already scarce resources and men-power. Ben Gurion believed that Israel's security should be based on its own strength and not rely on others for its security ("the doctrine of self-reliance"). He also believed that Israel should base its security on science and technology, the only field where it had a significant advantage over its enemies.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in the Israeli security perception nuclear weapons were constructed as Israel's ultimate insurance policy for the "worst case scenario," the only weapon that could protect it against the constant threat of annihilation.

For example, in a meeting at the Ministry of defense in 1955 Ben Gurion stated that:

*"Our security problem could have two answers: if possible, political guarantees, but this is not up to us. But on what depends on us, we must invest all our power, because we must have superiority in weapons, because we will never achieve superiority in manpower. All those things that have to do with science, we must do them."<sup>8</sup>*

Similarly, in his speech farewell to employees of Israel's National R&D Defense Laboratory, (Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd) Ben Gurion stated that:

*"I do not know of any other nation, whose neighbors declare that they wish to terminate it, and not only declare, but prepare for it by all means available to them. We must have no illusions that what is declared every day in Cairo, Damascus, Iraq are just words. This is the thought that guides the Arab leaders... Our numbers are small, and there is no chance that we could compare ourselves with America's 180 million, or with any Arab neighboring state. There is one thing, however, in which we are not inferior to any other people in the world – this is the Jewish brain... Jewish science does not disappoint... I am confident... that our science can provide us with the weapons that are needed to deter our enemies from waging war against us. I am confident that science is able to provide us with the weapons that will secure the peace, and deter our enemies"<sup>9</sup>*

### *Israel worst kept secret*

Israel's official policy with regard to its nuclear capability has always been a policy of opacity. Israel is the only nuclear power in the world that maintains an undeclared status regarding its nuclear capability. Israel's nuclear opacity developed in the 1950s

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<sup>6</sup> COHEN, Avner. *Israel and the Bomb*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 10. ISBN 023-1104-820.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 11, 149.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

and 1960s to avoid and later in response to international pressure. Specifically, U.S. pressure to prevent Israel from developing nuclear capability and the desire to avoid a nuclear arms race in the ME. Israel has maintained its opacity policy in recent decades despite geopolitical changes in the region. Maintaining opacity suggests that nuclear weapons were not perceived by Israeli decision makers as symbols of power or influence (as they are in most states). Opacity is not an optimal policy to achieve credible deterrence. However, since nuclear weapons fulfilled an internal psychological need to feel safe and secure there was never a need for Israel to put them on display.

#### *Arms control and disarmament*

Israel is not party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It is an active member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and has signed but not ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Officially Israel has always supported the general notion of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. Nevertheless, when it comes to its own nuclear capability Israel has always linked its willingness to discuss nuclear disarmament to comprehensive peace and stability in the region.<sup>10</sup>

For example, in 2004 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated during a meeting of the Likud Party:

*"It could be one day when we arrive at a comprehensive peace and everyone disarms completely, we will also be ready to consider taking steps."*<sup>11</sup>

It's important to mention here that while Israel is not ready to discuss its own disarmament it is nevertheless not willing to accept the nuclear proliferation of other countries in the ME. According to the Begin Doctrine Israel will act to preserve its nuclear monopoly in the ME and prevent countries in the region that are hostile to Israel from developing nuclear weapons.<sup>12</sup>

## **The Driver Side**

So far, we discussed the constructive effect of national identity on Israel's nuclear policy. However, as mentioned above, national identity is often used by decision makers to shape security perceptions and to gain support for certain policies. Since the first decade of Israel's independence, Holocaust references and the 'Never Again' narrative have been common and frequent themes in Israel's political discourse and

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<sup>10</sup> For example, a poll conducted in 2013 found that 71 percent of Israeli Jews said Israel should not sign the NPT and only 21 percent said Israel should sign. Israeli Public Opinion Polls, 2013. Available at:

[https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society\\_&\\_Culture/ponuke.html](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/ponuke.html)

<sup>11</sup> Sharon Links Regional Peace to Israel's Willingness to Give Up "Deterrent Capability," *NTI* 2004: Available at:

<http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/sharon-links-regional-peace-to-israels-willingness-to-give-up-deterrent-capability/>

<sup>12</sup> YADLIN, Amos. The Begin Doctrine: The Lessons of Osirak and Deir ez-Zor. *INSS Insight* No. 1037, 21 March 2018. Available at: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/the-begin-doctrine-the-lessons-of-osirak-and-deir-ez-zor/>

have been utilized for political purposes by countless decision makers and politicians.<sup>13</sup> This was particularly common when it came to Israel's nuclear option.

For example, in the 1950s and 1960s when confronted by foreign leaders about its nuclear program Israeli officials would often use the Holocaust as justification for Israel fear and need to guarantee its security by whatever means necessary. They often draw analogies between the threat Israel faced from its neighbors and the holocaust.

In a statement from the early 1950s Ben Gurion stated that:

*"They [the Arabs] could slaughter us tomorrow in this country... We don't want to reach again the situation that you were in. We do not want the Arab Nazis to come and slaughter us."*<sup>14</sup>

In April 1963, in a letter he sent to President Kennedy, Ben Gurion stated:

*"The 'Liberation of Palestine' is impossible without the total destruction of the people of Israel, but the people of Israel are not in hapless situation of the six million defenseless Jews who were wiped out by Nazi Germany... I recall Hitler's declaration to the world about forty years ago that one of his objectives was the destruction of the entire Jewish people. The civilized world, in Europe and America, treated this declaration with indifference and equanimity. A Holocaust unequalled in human history was the result."*<sup>15</sup>

### *The opposition*

Not everyone in Israel supported the nuclear option and despite the secrecy regarding the issue some debate did take place. The use of national identity narratives was common during this debate. In 1962 Eliezer Livneh (former Mapai<sup>16</sup> leader) circulated a petition to ban the introduction of nuclear weapons to the region. Those opposing the project argued that it was costly, useless, and not feasible and that it could jeopardize Israel security, will isolate it in the international system, and will risk its relationship with its most important ally – the U.S.<sup>17</sup> Those in favor of the nuclear option used the collective memory of the Holocaust to gain support for their agenda.

For example, Ernst Bergmann, the science adviser to the Minister of Defense, and the founder and first chairman of Israel Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) stated in a letter to Meir Ya'ari the leader of Mapam,<sup>18</sup> who opposed nuclear weapons:

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<sup>13</sup> ZERUBAVEL, Yael. "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death: Masada and the Holocaust as Historical Metaphors." *Representations* 45, Winter 1994. P. 89, 90; NAOR, Arye. "Lessons of the Holocaust Versus Territories for Peace, 1967-2001," *Israel Studies* 8(1), Spring 2003. P. 133; OFER, Dalia. "The Strength of Remembrance: Commemorating the Holocaust During the First Decade of Israel." *Jewish Social Studies* 6(2), Winter 2000. P. 25.

<sup>14</sup> COHEN, 1998: 13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 120. For more examples see the following documents, meeting with Eisenhower March 10, 1960; letter to Bertrand Russell, May 1963; Meeting with President Johnson June 1, 1964, in SHALOM, Zaki. *Between Dimona and Washington: The Battle over Israel's Nuclear Option, 1960-1968* [Hebrew]. Ben Gurion University Press 2004, Beer-Sheva, p. 42, 74-76, 164. ISBN 965-5100-235.

<sup>16</sup> Mapai was a centre-left political party in Israel.

<sup>17</sup> SHALOM, 2004: 86-89.

<sup>18</sup> Mapam was a left-wing political party in Israel.

*"I am surprised that a man like... is prepared to close his eyes and assume that reality is how we would all like to see it. There is no person in this country who does not fear a nuclear war and there is no man in this country who does not hope that, despite it all, logic will rule in the world tomorrow. But we are not permitted to exchange precise knowledge and realistic evaluations for hope and illusions. I cannot forget that the Holocaust came on the Jewish people as a surprise. The Jewish people cannot allow themselves such an illusion for a second time"*<sup>19</sup>

### *Israel's security perception and policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

Even though Israel's relative power and geostrategic conditions have improved significantly since its establishment the collective memory of the Holocaust and the 'Never Again' narrative are still very dominant in the security discourse of the political elite, as is the perception of ongoing existential threats.

For example, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stated in 2006 at the United Jewish Communities General Assembly:

*"Once before, calls to wipe out the Jewish people were appeased by the community of nations. Once before, but never again."*<sup>20</sup>

At his addresses to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Policy Conference in 2012, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that:

*"Never again will we not be masters of the fate of our very survival. Never again. That is why Israel must always have the ability to defend itself, by itself, against any threat... when it comes to Israel's survival, we must always remain the masters of our fate."*<sup>21</sup>

The use of Holocaust and never again narrative is particularly common these days with regard to Iran and its nuclear program. To quote just a few examples:

On May 2009 President Shimon Peres stated in a meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama:

*"We cannot close our eyes to the Iranian nuclear threat. We cannot repeat the same mistakes that brought the horrors of the Holocaust to the world. If Europe had taken Hitler seriously from the beginning, millions of human lives would have been saved."*<sup>22</sup>

On May 2011 prime Minister Netanyahu stated at the opening ceremony of Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day that:

*"We, the Jewish people, cannot ignore the lessons learned from the Holocaust as they apply to the present day. New oppressors deny the Holocaust as they call for our destruction."*

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<sup>19</sup> COHEN, 1998:16.

<sup>20</sup> "PM Olmert addresses the United Jewish Communities General Assembly." *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. 14 Nov 2006. Available at:  
<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/Iran-%20Statements%20by%20Israeli%20leaders%20-%20Nov%202006.aspx>

<sup>21</sup> "PM Netanyahu addresses AIPAC Policy Conference 2012." *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 5 March 2012. Available at:  
[http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/PM\\_Netanyahu\\_AIPAC\\_Policy\\_Conference\\_5-Mar-2012.aspx](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/PM_Netanyahu_AIPAC_Policy_Conference_5-Mar-2012.aspx)

<sup>22</sup> "President Peres meets with President Obama at the White House." *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 6 May 2009. Available at:  
[http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/Iran-Statements\\_Israeli\\_leaders-May\\_2009.aspx](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/Iran-Statements_Israeli_leaders-May_2009.aspx)

*Iran and its pawns, Hizbullah and Hamas, call for the annihilation of the Jewish state and openly act to that end... Iran is even arming itself with nuclear weapons to realize that goal, and until now the world has not stopped it. The threat to our existence, to our future, is not theoretical. It cannot be swept under the carpet; it cannot be reduced. It faces us and all humanity and it must be thwarted. So the first lesson is to take those who threaten our existence seriously.*<sup>23</sup>

On June 2011 Avigdor Liberman, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that:

*"The Iranian regime is not composed of crazy people, but of antisemitic fanatics who have a very ordered world view and a detailed plan, the central part of which, as they declare openly, is the destruction of the State of Israel. The international community does not sufficiently comprehend the great danger posed by the Iranian regime to world peace. Hitler, too, said 'crazy' things and succeeded in carrying out his plan. Today, the situation is different, and the sovereign state of Israel will not permit any Jew to be harmed."*<sup>24</sup>

On May 2011 PM Netanyahu stated during the joint meeting of US Congress that:

*"The threat to my country cannot be overstated. Those who dismiss it are sticking their heads in the sand. Less than seven decades after six million Jews were murdered, Iran's leaders deny the Holocaust of the Jewish people, while calling for the annihilation of the Jewish state."*<sup>25</sup>

## Policy implications

Israel nuclear policy was shaped by the long shadow of the Holocaust and the collective memory of the persecution of the Jewish people. Despite significant changes in Israel's geopolitical situation in the region, Israel's core security perception, that of an ongoing and inevitable existential threat, persists. Since its inception, Israel's nuclear program has been framed, internally and externally, using the never again narrative and the collective memory of the Holocaust. Despite the lack of open and public discourse, Israel's nuclear option was successfully framed as integral for Israel's security in the event of the "worst case scenario."<sup>26</sup> Israel's sense of insecurity and its

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<sup>23</sup> "PM Netanyahu at opening ceremony of Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day." *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 1 May 2011. Available at: [http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/Iran\\_Statements\\_Israeli\\_leaders-May\\_2011.aspx](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/Iran_Statements_Israeli_leaders-May_2011.aspx)

<sup>24</sup> "FM Liberman condemns Iranian VP for anti-Semitic speech." *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 1 27 Jun 2012 Available at: [http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/FM\\_Liberman\\_Iranian\\_VP\\_speech\\_27-Jun-2012.aspx](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/FM_Liberman_Iranian_VP_speech_27-Jun-2012.aspx)

<sup>25</sup> "PM Netanyahu addressing joint meeting of US Congress." *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 24 May 2011. Available at: [http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/Iran\\_Statements\\_Israeli\\_leaders-May\\_2011.aspx](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/Iran_Statements_Israeli_leaders-May_2011.aspx)

<sup>26</sup> For example, a poll conducted in 2007 by The Simons Foundation and Angus Reid Strategies found that more than 70 percent of Israeli respondents think their country would be justified in deploying its purported nuclear arsenal, either during a conflict or as a deterrent, less than 22 percent of Israelis thought the use of nuclear weapons would never be justified. *Global Poll Finds Varied Views on Nuclear Weapons, 2007* available at: [http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/27829/global\\_poll\\_finds\\_varied\\_views\\_on\\_nuclear\\_weapons/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/27829/global_poll_finds_varied_views_on_nuclear_weapons/)

roots must be addressed if we want to challenge Israel's nuclear policy. Pressure of any kind is counterproductive in Israel's case, as it only amplifies the feeling of isolation and threat. A tailor-made policy that addresses Israel perception of insecurity is necessary. A comprehensive approach would include reassurances, guarantees, and confidence building measures. It will also require patience. Perceptions, especially those shaped by identity, take a long time to change, so we will need to prepare for a long-term endeavor rather than expect a speedy solution.

## **Iran, a Country on the Verge**

Iran, as of yet, is not a nuclear weapons state. However, while Iran's leaders have always maintained that its nuclear program is for civilian purposes only the international community has long suspected that Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons. There are various evidence to suggest that Iran is developing a military nuclear capability. Nevertheless, the purpose of this article is not to determine the nature of Iran's nuclear program but to examine how Iran's leaders have framed the nuclear program as a matter of national identity in order to gain support for their policies.

### *Iran national identity: three narratives, one nuclear program*

According to Moshirzadeh, Iran's identity is constituted by three dominant narratives, independence (and even hyper-independence), justice, and resistance. These narratives are also at the heart of the Iranian nuclear program.<sup>27</sup>

Iran's quest for independence is based on a number of historical narratives including Iran's glorious past and its historical victimization by invaders, and (semi)-colonial/imperial encounters. These historical experiences were a source of national pride and self-confidence on the one hand, but also created a sense of vulnerability and suspicion of foreign forces on the other.<sup>28</sup> Iran's glorious history is an important part of its national identity. Iran's role perception is that of the custodian of an ancient and great Persian nation.<sup>29</sup> As a great and ancient civilization, with a long and glorious history, and historical responsibilities in the region, Iranians believe they should have the right to acquire a nuclear capability.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the acquisition of nuclear technology is perceived as a step toward actualizing Iran's potential as the prominent regional actor.<sup>31</sup>

According to Moshirzadeh, the discourse of hyper-independence has two aspects, "a negative one of refusing foreign dominance, hegemonic powers' influence, and cultural, political, and economic dependence; and a positive one of seeking to

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<sup>27</sup> MOSHIRZADEH, Homeira. Discursive Foundations of Iran's Nuclear Policy. *Security Dialogue*, 38 (4), December 2007.

<sup>28</sup> For more on Iranian narratives, see MOSHIRZADEH December 2007; ANOUSHIRAVAN Ehteshami, "The Foreign Policy of Iran," In: Raymond HINNEBUSCH and ANOUSHIRAVAN Ehtesham, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002 Boulder, Colo. P. 284, 285. ISBN 158-8260-208.

<sup>29</sup> TAKEYH, Ray. Iran: The Nuclear Challenge. *Council on Foreign Relations*. June 2012. Available at: <http://www.cfr.org/iran/iran-nuclear-challenge/p28330?excerpt=1>

<sup>30</sup> TAKEYH, Ray. Iran Builds the Bomb. *Survival*, 46(4), Winter 2004/5. P. 58; MOSHIRZADEH, December 2007: 529; ANOUSHIRAVAN, 2002: 287.

<sup>31</sup> MOSHIRZADEH, December 2007: 531.

realize self-definition, self-reliance, and in general self-control.”<sup>32</sup> In the Iranian collective memory, foreign interventions have made Iran a “dependent” country and led to its socio-economic and political underdevelopment. There is generally strong resistance in Iran to any form of dependence on external forces and a deep suspicion of the Western Powers. There is a strong emphasis in Iran on self-sufficiency in all areas including technological, industrial, agricultural, and the nuclear field.<sup>33</sup> For example, the sensitivity to independence is evident in various articles of the Iranian Constitution, like Article 3 which regards “providing self-sufficiency in science, technology, industry, agriculture, military and so forth’ as the major responsibility of the state.<sup>34</sup>

Moshirzadeh finds that having nuclear facilities and being able to supply them with fuel indigenously as steps toward greater self-sufficiency is a common theme in Iranian’s official public statements.<sup>35</sup> There is an almost overall political and public consensus in Iran about its sovereign right to nuclear technology.<sup>36</sup> Iran’s fundamental right to all aspects of peaceful nuclear program has been emphasized by Iranian leaders across the political spectrum, from Iran’s former president Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, reformist officials, and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and his pragmatist supporters.<sup>37</sup>

The justice discourse emphasizes the right for sovereign equality while criticizing the double standards and the hypocrisy of the Western Powers and the international community towards Iran and other states. It has been argued that the Western Powers, and in particular the U.S., demand that states like Iran comply with international norms, including the nonproliferation norm, while they themselves do not comply with these norms. Iran despite being a member to the NPT strongly object to the discriminatory nature of the nonproliferation regime. President Ahmadinejad’s even referred to it as “nuclear apartheid,” and “scientific apartheid.” The Iranians also disapprove of the inconsistent manner in which the international community is dealing with different countries that have peaceful nuclear programs. They question why is Iran being criticized for its nuclear program and accused of trying to develop nuclear weapons while states like Germany and Japan (and even Iran itself under the Shah) were not? Moreover, states like Israel, India, and Pakistan have not suffered the same criticism as Iran despite the fact that they developed nuclear weapons programs against international norms.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> MOSHIRZADEH, December 2007, p. 528.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 529, 530.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 531.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 531.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 528.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 527, 528; FARHI, Farideh. ‘To Sign or Not To Sign: Iran’s Evolving Debate on Nuclear Options.’ In Geoffrey KEMP, ed. *Iran’s Bomb: American and Iranian Perspectives*. (pp. 32-50). Nixon Center 2004, Washington, D.C. P. 34. Available at: <http://cftni.net/publications/monographs/IransBomb.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> MOSHIRZADEH, December 2007: 533, 534; TAKEYH, Ray. *Hidden Iran: paradox and power in the Islamic Republic*. Times Book 2006, New York, p. 136, 137. ISBN 978-0805-079760. HERZOG, Michael. “Iranian Public Opinion on the Nuclear Program: A Potential Asset for the International Community,” *Policy Focus* 56. June 2006. P. 3. Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus56.pdf>

Subsequently, the resistance discourse emphasizes the need to resist foreign intervention that might undermine Iran's sovereignty and independence and resist submission to the Western Powers. The Iranians believe that the Western powers (i.e. the U.S. and Europe) want to keep Iran dependent and weak, and that they use their monopoly over nuclear technology "as an instrument of domination over nations." Foreign powers that "deny Iran's indisputable right to nuclear energy" are represented as imperialist powers, trying to undermine Iran independence. Any type of outside interference, including IAEA inspections, is considered an act against Iran's independence.<sup>39</sup>

## The Driver Side

Iran's leaders have framed the struggle over Iran's sovereign right for nuclear technology as a matter of national identity and national pride.<sup>40</sup> Iran's right for technological progress and success, which the Western powers are trying to deny the Iranian nation, is a common theme in the rhetoric of Iran's leaders.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, any independently gained achievement in the nuclear field is presented as a major cause for national pride. For the Iranians, mastering the nuclear fuel cycle is presented as national victory. Moreover, the ability of Iran's leaders and the Iranian people to stand strong and not surrender to foreign pressures is perceived as an achievement on its own.

For example, in an opinion piece published in the Washington Post by the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani emphasized the connection between Iran's nuclear program and Iran's national identity perception:

*"This program [Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program] is tied into not only addressing Iran's energy needs but also into establishing its place in the world... To us, mastering the atomic fuel cycle and generating nuclear power is as much about diversifying our energy resources as it is about who Iranians are as a nation, our demand for dignity and respect and our consequent place in the world."*<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, during his phone conversation with president Obama on September 2013 President Rouhani emphasized again that:

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<sup>39</sup> MOSHIRZADEH, December 2007: 531, 532, 536.

<sup>40</sup> FARHI, Farideh "Iran's Nuclear File: The Uncertain Endgame." *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 24 October 2005. Available At: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero102405>

<sup>41</sup> See for example, "President Ahmadinejad speech at United Nations General Assembly." *Quotes from President Ahmadinejad of Iran*. 17 September 2005. Available At: <http://ahmadinejadquotes.blogspot.co.il/>; "The Supreme Leader's View of Nuclear Energy." *khamenei.ir*, 13 April 2011. Available At: [http://english.khamenei.ir/index2.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1442&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=13](http://english.khamenei.ir/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1442&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=13)

<sup>42</sup> "Hassan Rouhani, President of Iran Hassan Rouhani: Time to engage." *The Washington Post*. 19 September 2013. Available At: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe_story.html)

*"The Iranian nuclear program is not only a matter of the Iranian's right to technological development but a matter of national pride."<sup>43</sup>*

Sovereignty and independence are common themes in Iran's political discourse. For example, in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, on September 17, 2005, Iran's President Ahmadinejad explained why Iran needed to produce its own nuclear fuel:

*"What needs our particular attention is the fact that peaceful use of nuclear energy without possession of nuclear fuel cycle is an empty proposition. Nuclear power plants can indeed lead to total dependence of countries and peoples if they need to rely for their fuel on coercive powers, who do not refrain from any measure in furtherance of their interests. No popularly elected and responsible government can consider such a situation in the interest of its people. The history of dependence on oil in oil rich countries under domination is an experiment that no independent country is willing to repeat. [...]"<sup>44</sup>*

The demand for justice, and criticism about the hypocrisy that exists in the international system is another common theme in the public discourse of Iran's leaders.<sup>45</sup> For example, during his Speech at Al-Qods [Jerusalem] International Conference in Tehran, April 14, 2006, President Ahmadinejad said that:

*"...The bullying powers use various excuses to prevent the transfer of science, technology and progress to the nations of the region, and regard [our advancement] as a threat to the corrupt Zionist regime. They do not allow the countries of the region to tread on the path to progress and advancement. They even oppose indigenous technologies in the Islamic countries, and interpret any scientific advancement as a threat to the security of the regime that occupies Jerusalem."<sup>46</sup>*

In an Interview with Der Spiegel Magazine, May 30, 2006, President Ahmadinejad said that:

*"...there are a number of countries that possess both nuclear energy and nuclear weapons. They use their atomic weapons to threaten other peoples. And it is these powers who say that they are worried about Iran deviating from the path of peaceful use of atomic energy! We say that these powers are free to monitor us if they are worried. But what these powers say is that the Iranians must not complete the nuclear fuel cycle because deviation from peaceful use might then be possible. What we say is that these countries themselves*

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<sup>43</sup> "Televised statement by president Rouhani about his conversation with President Obama." *Israel channel 2 news*, 28 September 2013. Available At:

<sup>44</sup> "President Ahmadinejad Speech at United Nations General Assembly." *Quotes from President Ahmadinejad of Iran*. 17 September 2005. Available At: <http://ahmadinejadquotes.blogspot.co.il/>

<sup>45</sup> See also, "Full text of president's speech at UN General Assembly." 23 September 2010. Available At: <http://www.president.ir/en/24129>

<sup>46</sup> "President Ahmadinejad Speech at Al-Qods [Jerusalem] International Conference." *Quotes from President Ahmadinejad of Iran*. 14 April 2006. Available At:

<http://ahmadinejadquotes.blogspot.co.il/> For more examples see, "President Ahmadinejad Interview with Spiegel Magazine," *Quotes from President Ahmadinejad of Iran*. 30 May 2006. Available At: <http://ahmadinejadquotes.blogspot.co.il/>; "President Ahmadinejad Speech at UN General Assembly." *Quotes from President Ahmadinejad of Iran*. 25 September 2007. Available At: <http://presidentahmadinejad.blogspot.co.il/>; "President Ahmadinejad speech to the UN General Assembly." *Quotes from President Ahmadinejad of Iran*. 19 September 2006. Available At: <http://ahmadinejadquotes.blogspot.co.il/>

*have long deviated from peaceful usage. These powers have no right to talk to us in this manner. This order is unjust and unsustainable. [...]*<sup>47</sup>

## Policy implications

For the Iranian people the quest for independence, and the desire to reclaim their place in the world as the great nation they once were, is at the heart of Iran's desire for nuclear technology. Security for the Iranian people means not having to depend on any other nation in any way and to be completely self-sufficient. An independent nuclear program is perceived, as well as framed by Iran's leaders, as necessary for Iran's technological, economic, and social development. More importantly, technological achievements are perceived in Iran as symbols of national independence and prowess.<sup>48</sup> Some in Iran may also perceive nuclear weapons as a means towards independence.<sup>49</sup>

The Iranians perceive the international community and the Western powers as unjust, discriminatory, and hypocritical. The attempts of the international community to stop the Iranian nuclear program are perceived in Iran as an attempt to deny Iran its right for technological success in order to keep Iran weak and dependent as a new form of colonialism. Both the independence and the justice narratives have been used successfully by Iran's leaders in order to gain public support for their nuclear policies. The Iranian nuclear program has been framed as a symbol of national pride and independence and any attempt to limit or dismantle the program is perceived as an unjust, discriminatory, and threatening act against the Iranian nation. Much like the Israelis, the Iranians believe they need to be self-sufficient because they cannot trust foreign powers and do not want to be dependent on them for help. And like Israel, pressuring Iran to give up its nuclear program is counterproductive because it is perceived as an attempt to keep Iran weak and dependent on the Western powers and only reinforces its preconceived notions and its tendency to defy the West.

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<sup>47</sup> "President Ahmadinejad Interview with Spiegel Magazine." *Quotes from President Ahmadinejad of Iran*. 30 May 2006: Available At: <http://ahmadinejadquotes.blogspot.co.il/>

<sup>48</sup> This sentiment is reflected in public opinion polls, for example, in 2006, a survey was conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland in partnership with the Search for Common Ground and the United States Institute of Peace. The survey found 91 percent of Iranian in favor of Iran's full fuel cycle nuclear program, and 96 percent believed there was a "need" to develop nuclear energy. A different poll found 87 percent strongly favored Iranian development of nuclear energy for civilian use, only 3 percent of respondents strongly opposed developing nuclear energy for civilian use. FARHI, Farideh. "Atomic Energy is our Right: Nuclear Policy and the Shaping of Iranian Public Opinion." In Yaphe, Judith S. ed. *Nuclear Politics in Iran. Middle East Strategic Perspectives 1*. Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University May 2010, Washington, D.C. P. 17; ELSONI, Sara B. & NADER, Alireza. "What do Iranian Think? A Survey of Attitudes on the United State, the Nuclear Program and the Economy." National Defense Research Institute. RAND. 2011. P. 11. Available at:

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<sup>49</sup> BETTES, Richard K. "Incentives for Nuclear Weapons: India," *Pakistan, Iran, Asian Survey* 19(11), 1979. P. 1063.

## Conclusions

Understanding how national identity effects states' nuclear policies can contribute to the establishment of more efficient nonproliferation policies on the part of the international community. As this article demonstrates national identity has a dual effect as both constructing security perceptions and as a driver used to gain support and legitimacy for certain policies. The use of national identity narratives in political discourse is so common it is usually taken for granted. However, the power of national identity to shape perceptions, policies, and public opinion especially in the nuclear realm has not been explored sufficiently. Decoupling national identity narratives from security perceptions and policies is not an easy task since once an issue is framed as a matter of national identity in the public mind that issue will become a symbol of national identity and any threat to that symbol will be perceived as a threat on the nation itself, its identity and survivability. Nevertheless, acknowledging the role nuclear weapons play in the nation's psych can inform better nuclear nonproliferation strategies, and understanding how decision makers use national identity in their political discourse in order to gain support for their policies can make for a more informed and critical public that is not easily swayed by such tactics.

The two cases discussed in this article are good examples of how counterproliferation policies can be counterproductive when they don't account for how states' security perceptions are constructed and the role of national identity in shaping these perceptions. In both states the nuclear program has been framed by decision makers as a symbol of national identity so any attempt to get them to relinquish these programs is fiercely resisted. To convince either Iran or Israel to consider giving up their nuclear program will require a very different approach than what has been attempted so far. Pressure and sanctions only reinforce these nations sense of insecurity and isolation and strengthen their justification for a nuclear capability.

While this article focused on nuclear policies the use of national identity narratives in political discourse is certainly not limited to this issue. Recognizing the effect of national identity on security perceptions and policies can be useful in international negotiations, conflict managements, and peace initiatives.

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### S U M M A R Y

This article examines the effect of national identity on states' security perceptions and policies. National identity effects security perceptions and policies in two ways. First, it has a constructive effect, meaning it shapes the security perception. In other words, who we are (as individuals or as a society) determines what we perceive as a threat. Second, national identity is also used as a driver to gain legitimacy and support for certain policies. That is, decision makers frame certain issues as a matter of national identity because they recognize that national identity is an emotional trigger for societies and therefore it is effective in gaining public support. While some studies examine the constructive effect of national identity, few studies focus on the use of national identity as a driver, which is the aim of this article. This article examines two cases, Israel and Iran, in order to demonstrate how national identity is used in political discourse in order to gain legitimacy and support for their nuclear policies. Understanding how nuclear policies are framed in the political discourse of different states can help established more effective nonproliferation policies and initiative.

**Key words:** National identity, nuclear weapons, nuclear policy, Israel, Iran.

## RESUMÉ

*LEVORNIK, Zoe: KAŽDÉ JÁ A KAŽDÉ VY V RÁMCI NÁRODNÍ IDENTITY, VNÍMÁNÍ BEZPEČNOSTI A JADERNÁ POLITIKA*

Tento příspěvek se zabývá vlivem národní identity na vnímání politiky a bezpečnosti státu. Národní identita ovlivňuje vnímání politiky a bezpečnosti státu dvěma směry. Za prvé je to konstruktivní vliv, který ve své podstatě znamená, že utváří vjem bezpečnosti. Jinými slovy to, kdo jsme my (jako jednotlivci nebo jako společnost), určuje, co vnímáme jako hrozbu. A za druhé národní identita často funguje jako určující faktor při získávání legitimacy a podpory veřejnosti pro určité politické kroky, což znamená, že ti, kdož mají rozhodovací pravomoc, zasadí určité problémy do rámce problematiky národní identity, neb tato je považována za citlivou záležitost každé společnosti, a tudíž významně ovlivňuje získání podpory národa. Existují studie, které se zabývají zkoumáním konstruktivního vlivu národní identity, a pouze několik málo dalších se zaměřuje na fungování národní identity jako určujícího faktoru, což je i cílem tohoto článku. Tento příspěvek zkoumá dva příklady, a to Izrael a Irán, aby na nich demonstroval, jak je národní identita používána v politickém diskurzu za účelem získání legitimacy a podpory jejich jaderné politiky. Pochopení toho, jakým způsobem je jaderná politika zakoncipována do politického diskurzu té které země, napomůže stanovit účinnější iniciativy a politiku nešíření jaderných zbraní.

**Klíčová slova:** Národní identita, vnímání bezpečnosti, politický diskurz, podpora veřejnosti, jaderná politika, Izrael, Irán.