Nuclear Apartheid?: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Iranian Nuclear Program

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the events that transpired on September 11th, 2001, themes from Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' (Huntington, 1993) argument began to resonate loudly and appeared far and wide in the news media and public opinion. In line with Huntington's assertions, the perpetrators of the violence were framed as being antithetical to modernity by media members and statesmen alike. Despite the repeated efforts of political leaders emphasizing that the attacks which took place on September of 2001 in New York and Washington did not represent a "clash of civilizations", the events that unfolded still reified the idea of a "geopolitics of cultural differences" (Reuber; Wolkersdorfer, 2003: 41). The perpetrators were constructed as being misguided members of a culture that was not only fundamentally alien to an American way of life, but to progress, reason, and every other supposedly Western value. To be clear, Huntington is certainly not the only person responsible for the creation of such a narrative. But he did, however, breathe new life – by giving it a certain intellectual or academic patina - into an underlying discourse of cultural difference that had been permeating for several decades. In doing so, Huntington merely picked up and updated the discourse of the "Self" and the "Other" from the perspective of the "modern" west and the "Orientalism" (Said, 1979) which has been a central focus of western thought since, at the very least, the era of colonialism.

Nevertheless, the geopolitical scripts of 9/11 could have been framed quite differently. For instance, the events could have been interpreted as a disaster, an act of madness, or perhaps most obviously, and as was the case in other countries which suffered attacks on their territory, such as Norway, Spain, England, and even Iran, as a criminal act that requires the work of law enforcement organizations both domestically and internationally. Simon Dalby, however, argues

any effort that would have entailed a solely diplomatic and law enforcement initiative would have required a different set of assumptions concerning the nature of world order, in other words the centrality of states in the structure of the international system, as well as the proper political responses under international law (Dalby, 2003: 65). He writes: ”it would have required a specification of matters in terms of overarching authorities beyond the United States and consequently a specification of complex political obligations other than an immediate invocation of the right of self-defence on the part of a single state” (Dalby, 2003: 65). Therefore, prior to any sort of military retaliation on the part of the United States (US) government, it was imperative for Washington to rhetorically transform “the enemy” from “a spatially diffuse terrorist network acting internationally” to a territorial (ie. state-centric) project (Ruber in Murphy et al., 2004: 631). In other words, to transform the fight against terrorism into a war against states that accommodated and supported terrorists. In addition, as Kevin McMillan explains, the amorphousness and invisibility of the enemy was also used as a pretext for the broad and seemingly endless scope of military action, which in fact dovetailed with the simultaneous “statisation” of the response in the sense that by including those who “sanctioned”, “supported” or “harbored” terrorists implied a massive expansion of those who could reasonably be targeted for military action and intervention (McMillan, 2012). This seemed to be necessary because “the modern geopolitical reasoning…operate(s) in terms of a political ontology of states” (Dalby, 2003: 64). Therefore rather than adopting a different set of assumptions concerning the nature of the attacks and world order in general, the notion of “American Exceptionalism” - of the US as a moral, virtuous and innocent nation in the face of an evil world - was added to the sense of violation that permeated among the citizenry to demand retribution and military action (Dalby, 2003: 70). As Dalby explains, the sheer scale of the event and the

invocation of an "evil Other" (non-modern brutes) shaped the structure of the narrative in ways that left little to no room for discussions regarding the complexity of the event in question or even considerations of the reasons that might have caused the violence in the first place (Dalby, 2003: 70). Such questions and arguments challenge the overarching script of the US as the "innocent victim" by suggesting that the events that transpired on 9/11 are part of a larger and more complex historical process, including assumptions on the political ontology of states, in which responsibility is difficult to determine (Dalby, 2003: 70).

As the above paragraphs illustrate, geopolitical scripts or meta-narratives - including the epistemological and ontological assumptions they adopt and the political interests they serve - are significant and have an impact on the world and therefore demand further academic inquiry. The words of Steve Smith come to mind when contemplating this subject matter. Smith purports that the discipline of International Relations (IR), and like-minded scholarly disciplines more broadly, helped "sing into existence" the world of September 11th (a post 9-11 world) by reflecting the interests of the dominant in what were presented as being neutral and universal theories and discourses (Smith, 2004).

If similar tragedy is to be avoided, a critical discourse analysis, or put differently a critical geopolitics, of the Iranian nuclear issue seems to be a good place to start for a variety of reasons. First, as a truly global geopolitical issue, the Iranian nuclear issue has attracted a great deal of attention in news media outlets all over the world yet has garnered very little in the way of academic studies, particularly those that seek to provide a critical discourse of the issue. Second, it is widely being treated by the international community as a major international security issue - and not just for the actors involved in the dispute. The Iranian nuclear issue is a multilateral one in that it affects the interests and foreign policies, directly and indirectly, of a

whole slew of states and geographical regions, such as the US, Iran, Israel, France, England, Germany, China and Russia. This point is further compounded by the years of mutual demonization, political distrust and diplomatic tensions between the two protagonists, namely the US and Iran. Thus, if the events of September 11th thought us anything, and if Smith's warning is to be heeded, the assumptions presented through geopolitical discourses, scripts and (meta) narratives as being "neural" and/or "universal" by American news media and political elites, must be investigated for their roots in international hegemony (ie. imperial dominance), societal domination (eg. curtailing of civil rights, domestic political opposition and criticism, expansion of executives powers) and threats to global security (eg. war, nuclear proliferation) among other reasons.

Accordingly, my case study looks at a very salient and contentious issue in international relations, both in its practice and theory, the Iranian nuclear program. Historically, American policy makers and statesmen alike have repeatedly emphasized Iran's imperative geopolitical and strategic position in the region of the Middle East. In fact, as recently as 2001, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in regards to Iranian-American relations: "There are few nations in the world with which the United States has less reason to quarrel or more compatible interests than Iran" (Kissinger, 2001: 197). However, judging by media reports and statements by officials in Washington, the US is seriously considering taking military action against Iran if Tehran refuses to relinquish its legal right to enrich uranium for its nuclear energy program, which Washington alleges is a nuclear weapons program. The effects of such an attack on Iranian society would be devastating and the political ramifications beyond Iran's borders would be far reaching. Thus, in spite of any real or perceived "compatible interests", over thirty years of bitterness, hostility and mutual demonization has come to characterize the relationship

between the two nations. Nowhere is this more evident or palpable today than in relation to issues surrounding nuclear matters.

The objective of this MRP, therefore, is to deconstruct the discourse(s), scripts and/or associated narrative(s) framing the Iranian nuclear program in the US. In order to do so, I have chosen to focus on both the discourse and scripts of senior officials of the US government as well as those emanating from the general populace analyzed through the writings of editorials in elite American newspapers. Adopting such as research methodology will allow for a more thorough and comprehensive analysis and enable this MRP to investigate the correlations that exist between the discourses and scripts of senior government officials in regards to a particular geopolitical issue and the public understanding and opinion of said issue. More precisely, it will allow me to demonstrate how the specific ways in which the discourse around the Iranian nuclear program is framed by senior members of the American government directly influences and is very much in-line with the general public's understanding of the issue. Accordingly, the two research questions driving this MRP forward ask: What are the associative discourses and scripts in the United States in regards to my case study of the Iranian nuclear program? And subsequently, how do said discourses and scripts affect the public understanding of this geopolitical issue in the US?

Towards that end, this MRP argues that geographical space is something which is represented by various people or groups in different ways. It is, however, those representations, and the domination of certain representations over others that get excluded or marginalised, that are intrinsically interest-serving, exclusionary, political (reflective of relations of power and domination) and therefore non-neutral. Thus, part of the very point of highlighting the arbitrariness, non-neutrality and highly optional/relative quality of dominant discursive

representations – which is often done by drawing attention to marginalised and excluded alternative representations – would be to illustrate that geographical space itself is not necessarily or intrinsically as it gets portrayed in those dominant representations. Rather, there are other equally or perhaps far more valid ways of interpreting or representing said discourses. Those dominant representations (meta-discourses) are ideological therefore they may be outright false, or at the very least, highly misleading and interest serving.

Accordingly, my paper argues that a brief examination and understanding of the history of the nuclear issue between the US and Iran would reveal that Washington's current objection to Iran's nuclear program has less to do with any real or perceived threat of a "weaponized" program, but rather the nature of the political system that has ruled Iran since 1979 (Tarock, 2006: 651). The tension that exists between Iran and the US is a postmodern cultural conflict. It is centered not on substantive differences or even a real conflict (ie. war), but rather on symbolic discourse and ideology. Both nations construct an evil "Other" to fit a caricatured picture of an enemy through a process of mutual demonization. Perhaps Huntington was right about an on-going clash, however the conflict is not centered around cleavages of culture and civilization as Huntington purports. Rather, the clash is between a superpower intolerant of a perceived dissident and "rogue state", and an old but gloriously rich civilization that has the 'temerity' to challenge that superpower for regional hegemony. On the hand, the US helps countries mindful of Washington's geopolitical and economic interests with their nuclear program, on the other, it tries to prevent those countries which do not agree with US foreign policy or ideology (neoliberalism, open market economy) from acquiring or mastering nuclear technology (Tarock, 2006: 656).

In view of that, my case study reveals that in the case of Iran's nuclear program, the issue of trust, specifically in regards to the kind of political regime that governs the country, plays a more central role than the actual existence of evidence for Iran's alleged possession of a clandestine nuclear weapons program. Moreover, there is indeed a correlation that exists between the discourse and scripts of government officials in regards to a specific geopolitical issue, and the public perception or understanding of said issue. Both the Fouad Izadi and Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria (2007) and the Jason Jones (2010) studies presented in my case study find that in the American news media, be it broadcast news, print, radio, or opinion pieces in the form of editorials, the Iranian nuclear program is framed predominantly through the use of Orientalist arguments. Furthermore, the studies reveal there is an underlying assumption among American government officials and public that first, Iran has a clandestine nuclear weapons program, second, that the Islamic nature of its government (ie. theocracy) is a threat, and third, that Iran should not be trusted with sensitive nuclear technology (untrustworthy), regardless of international law or past treatise, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Lastly, the analysis provided by my case study will reveal that the discourse emanating from American government officials aimed to shape the knowledge and information American citizens would use to deliberate over the dispute between the US and Iran, as it pertains to the Islamic Republic's nuclear program, in a context more favorable to the US's geopolitical interests and general stance toward Iran (Jones, 2010: 138). Ultimately, as my case study will demonstrate public understanding of this geopolitical issue has been framed and swayed accordingly.

To achieve the objectives set forth above, this MRP will proceed in the following manner. The second and third chapters will look at the theoretical and conceptual side of notions such as geopolitics (critical versus classical) and ideology (Orientalism, media). The former will

survey various authors and look at prior literature that relates to this subject matter as well as examine the reasons one must delve into deeper meanings of discourse and context to locate the prevailing elitist view of the world. The latter looks at the literature that focuses on the subject of how the news media frame ideology in the interests of elites (dominant economic and political group) and how that subsequently affects public understanding of particular geopolitical issues. An examination of Orientalist ideology will also be provided as well as the specific instances in which Orientalism has played a role in regards to Iran's relations with the West, namely the US and Britain. Chapter four will provide a historical overview of the Iranian nuclear issue and the role the US (and Britain) has played in the development of this geopolitical issue - both pre and post-revolutionary Iran will be studied. The Iranian perspective in regards to this political conflict (eg. double standards of selectivity) will also be examined. Having studied theoretical and ideological concepts, as well as delineating the underlying history that has shaped the current state of affairs that relate to the Iranian nuclear issue in previous chapters, chapter five will look to a couple of empirical studies to further delve into the question of, first, how this geopolitical dispute is framed in the US (associated discourses, scripts), and how the framing of the issue has swayed public understanding. Accordingly, various empirical studies will be studied in order to properly answer the research questions posed in this MRP. The first study is a critical discourse analysis of elite American newspaper editorials conducted by Fouad Izadi and Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria (2007) that supports previous findings by scholars such as Karim (2000) and McAlister (2001), that Orientalist depictions of Muslim countries and their political issues concentrate around the idea that Islam is a source of "threat". The second is undertaken by Jason Jones (2010) who through his seminal study examines the language of nine interviews conducted over the course of 2005 with former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Complementing

Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) research, Jones' work examines Rice's discourse to explain the extent to which it embodies Said's theory of Orientalism in regards to Iran and its nuclear program. In addition, this section will point to the correlation that exists between the discourse and scripts of government officials in regards to the Iranian nuclear program and the public perception or understanding of said issue. Finally, my conclusion will look back at the research question and explore avenues for future research in regards to this geopolitical issue.

Lastly, and for clarification purposes, this project chooses to focus solely on the language of American political leadership and media, as opposed to examining the mutual demonization between the rival states, because of the vast disparity in their respective means for acting on such a discourse. This point is compounded by the fact that the US has led two regime changes in two separate countries bordering the Islamic Republic in a time span of a little over two years, namely Afghanistan in November of 2001 and Iraq in March of 2003. In addition, this MRP is not to be taken as a definitive account of the relationship between the two protagonists and rival states. Although results and conclusions of this study do indeed point to a correlation between a the discourse surrounding a geopolitical issue and the public opinion or understanding of said issue, there does exist some scholarly evidence (Soroka, 2002) that suggests, conversely, that public opinion can affect geopolitical discourse (ie. foreign policy) as much as the other way around. Therefore, this MRP is simply meant as an initial inquiry into the kind of discourses that characterize the geopolitical issue of the Iranian nuclear program specifically and seeks to determine whether said discourse(s) have the ability to sway public opinion one way or the other.

Chapter 2: Geopolitics

Geopolitics, broadly speaking, is the intersection of space and politics. However, it should be noted the term has had shifting and unstable meanings since it was first coined by Rudolf Kjellen in 1899 (Hepple, 1986). As a result, a certain amount of obscurity and ambiguity have accompanied the use of the word and critics have commented that "it is conceptually so broad that it can and does mean all things to all people" (Haglund, 1986: 223). The term geopolitics is understood and used in a variety of ways. Political geographers and scholars of IR typically invoke it with reference to the geographical assumptions and understandings that influence international affairs. In contrast, Alexander Murphy argues that outside the spheres of academia: "the term often connotes a conservative or right-wing political-spatial calculus associated with strategic designs of the likes of Henry Kissinger, Zbignew Brzezinski, Aleksandr Dugin and the followers of *Geopolitik* in Nazi Germany" (Murphy et al, 2004: 619).

However, the intellectual discipline of geopolitics, for all its variants, can be ultimately divided into two broad categories, those being classical and critical geopolitics. The former's modernist ontology finds reality "out there" and thus distinct from the observer, making an objective approach possible. Its epistemological stance favors the empirical formulation of facts into theory based upon probability. The "rational-actor" assumption is not only pertinent but indeed essential to the classical. The assumption holds that statesmen and leaders will naturally maximize their interests by pursuing their states' interests, which will ultimately be predicated upon geographical realities (Kelly, 2006: 26). By contrast, advocates of critical geopolitics dismiss the "rational-actor" assumption by contending that the pursuit of a state's interests is subjective and fits the individual ambitions of decision-makers more than the perceived collective needs of a nation (Kelly, 2006: 26-7). In short, critical geopolitics believes its classical

counterpart opens itself up to criticism for omitting closer scrutiny of the decision-making aspects of foreign relations.

With my own epistemological and ontological assumptions leaning towards a postmodern, post-positivist vision of "reality", my MRP will adopt a critical geopolitical lens of analysis in regards to the Iranian nuclear program. Therefore this research paper advocates the transformation of the current world toward providing more favour to marginal peoples, with a particular interest in deconstructing foreign policy (geopolitical) scripts and other textual materials, confident that such a process will reveal, first, the exploitation being done within the existing international hegemony, and second, the use of Orientalist ideology and narratives to frame particular issues in favour of the interests of dominant (hegemonic) states.

To that effect, John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge argue modern geopolitical discourse began in the encounters between Europeans and "others" during the so-called Age of Discovery (circa early 15th Century to early 17th Century) (Agnew; Corbridge, 1995: 49). It is at that point, argue the authors, when a "modern/backward" and "European/non-European" schema for dividing up the world came into use. Similarly, Simon Dalby suggests geopolitical discourse is the division of space into "our" place and "their" place. For him, the political function of a certain geopolitical discourse is to incorporate and regulate "us" or "the same", by distinguishing "us" from "them", "the same" from "the other" (Dalby, 1991: 274). Gearoid O Thuathail echoes much of the same sentiments when he writes the struggle over geography is also a conflict between competing "images and imaginings". He writes, geography is "a contest of power and resistance that involves not only struggles to represent the materiality of physical geographic objects and boundaries but also the equally powerful and, in a different manner, the equally material force of discursive divisions between an idealized "Self" and a demonized "Other",

between “us” and “them”” (O Tuathail, 1996: 14-15). From this perspective, O Tuathail argues that, ultimately, geography is a contest between different ways of envisioning the world (O Tuathail, 1996: 15).

Critical Geopolitics

In the late 1980s, Agnew and O Thuathail sought to address the concept of geopolitics in more comprehensive terms. They began from the Foucaultdian premise that ‘geography’ as a discourse is a form of power/knowledge. They argued that geography should be critically reconceptualised as a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft “spatialize” international politics in such a way as to represent a world characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas: “In our understanding, the study of geopolitics is the study of the spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states” (Agnew, O Thuathail, 1992: 192). To that effect, according to Agnew and O Thuathail, to describe a foreign policy is to engage in geopolitics, for one is implicitly and tacitly normalizing a particular world (Agnew, O Thuathail, 1992: 194). Similarly, Leslie Hepple argues that “the texts of (classical) geopolitical discourse are not free-floating, innocent contributions to an ‘objective’ knowledge, but are rooted in…’power/knowledge’, serving the interests of particular groups in society and helping to sustain and legitimate certain perspectives and interpretations” (Hepple in Kelly, 1992: 139).

Critical geopolitics originated from postmodernist and specifically critical theory scholars. More specifically, critical geopolitics’ origins stem from the critical theories of the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, most prominently by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno

(Horkheimer; Adorno, 1947) and Jurgen Habermas (Habermas, 1962). Broadly speaking, these critical theory scholars have sought, in Richard Jones's words, to bring about a "process of emancipatory social transformation" with a particular focus on the "emancipatory potential inherent in communications" (Jones, 2001: 6). In postmodern fashion, the aforementioned theorists reject the possibility of locating an objective reality and a value-free (non-normative) social science. They highlight the importance of discourse and context to showing partisan motivations in the scripts and discourses of decision-making elites and ultimately desire the substitution of the cultural, economic and political authority of the capitalist hegemonic powers with more balanced benefits to marginal populations (Kelly, 2006: 28). Thus, critical geopolitics became devoted to the study of how geographical space is represented and given significance by political agents as part of a broader project of accruing, managing and aggrandizing power (Bassin in Murphy et al., 2004: 620). Within this perspective, geographical space is no longer seen as an objective or neutral entity. Instead it is understood as a "cultural complex of practices and representations" in which space in effect is a discursive subject (Bassin in Murphy et al., 2004: 621). As a postmodernist project, critical geopolitics assumes an apprehensive view of the political status quo and seeks to deconstruct its rhetoric of power. On the subject, O Thuathail writes:

> "The focus of critical geopolitics is on exposing the plays of power involved in grand geopolitical schemes…Fundamental to this process is the power of certain national security elites to represent the nature and defining dilemmas of international politics in particular ways…These representational practices of national security intellectuals generate particular 'scripts' in international politics concerning places, peoples and issues. Such 'scripts' then become part of the means by which (great power) hegemony is exercised in the international system" (O Thuathail, 1992: 439).

In a similar fashion, Marcus Power and David Campbell write that critical geopolitics did not seek to develop a theory of how space and politics intersect but rather is "concerned with

developing a mode of interrogating and exposing the grounds for knowledge production and of seeking to analyze the articulation, objectivization and subversion of hegemony" (Power; Campbell, 2010: 243). Accordingly, critical geopolitics scholarship seeks to radically reconceptualise "geopolitics" as a complex and problematic set of discourses, representations and practices (Power; Campbell, 2010). Nevertheless, it is perhaps O Tuathail, one of the main scholarly pioneers of the discipline that best encompasses all the different components that are crucial for proper assessment and understanding of critical geopolitics. He writes:

> "…no more than a general gathering place for various critiques of the multiple geopolitical discourses and practices that characterize modernity. One initial vector of critique was the recovery of textuality within practices which are represented as objective or practical, as 'beyond the text'. Geopolitics is inescapably cultural. A second was the displacement of state-centric readings of world politics and the recovery of the many messy practices that constitute the modern inter-state system. Geopolitics is inescapably plural. A third was the development of critical histories of geopolitical thinkers and discourses. Geopolitics is inescapably traversed by relations of power and gender". (O Tuathail, 2009: 243)

Today, approximately three decades since its emergence, critical geopolitics now constitutes an ever-growing body of research aimed at deconstructing geopolitical discourses and disclosing the hidden power relations behind them. Central to this research, as O Tuathail explains in the above quote, are three important characteristics associated with critical geopolitics. The first is that the field of study is cultural, meaning that its epistemology is postmodern and therefore truth claims are deemed to be subjective, meaning that they are not finite "truths", but rather "claims" to truth (ie. ideological). The second characteristic is its plurality. By shifting the focus of study away from state-centric perspectives, as dominated by traditional IR theories as well as classical geopolitics, critical geopolitics casts a wider net and adopts a more inclusive, all-encompassing attitude in regards to studying the modern inter-state system and the myriad of actors (both traditional state and non-state actors) that help shape its

dynamics. Lastly, since critical geopolitics has an emancipatory end goal, it is concerned with relations of power and uncovering and disclosing the hidden relations behind their existence.

Klaus Dodds echoes much of the same sentiments as Hepple, O Tuathail, Agnew, Campbell and Power when he writes that critical geopolitical scholars maintain that "geopolitics is a discourse concerned with the relationship between power/knowledge and social and political relations" (Dodds, 2000: 33). For Dodds, and the aforementioned like-minded scholars, an understanding of world politics must be acquired through an interpretative basis rather than simply blindly accepting a series of divine "truths" (objective reality) (Dodds, 2000: 33). Thus for these scholars, the really important task for the individual who studies critical geopolitics is to interpret the contexture (narratives, discourses, scripts) within the theories of world politics rather than simply "repeating often ill-defined assumptions and understandings of politics and geography" (Dodds, 2000: 33). Thus, one must delve to deeper meanings of discourse and context to locate the prevailing elitist view of the world. By doing so, the primary focus of study is therefore placed upon the deconstruction and contextualizing of discourses and scripts, as well as the decision-making processes and personal interests of political leaders and other senior government officials.

Taking my cues from the aforementioned critical geopolitics scholars, it is therefore my aim to deconstruct, unravel and bring to light these perspectives and interpretations in regards to how they relate to the Iranian nuclear issue. Ultimately, a critical geopolitical perspective (ie. critical discourse analysis) is particularly, perhaps even uniquely, well suited and appropriate for analytical and empirical research purposes. As previously alluded to, my own epistemological and ontological assumptions lean towards a postmodern, post-positivist vision of "reality". Adopting a critical geopolitical lens of analysis in regards to the study of the Iranian nuclear

program will enable a deconstruction of foreign policy (geopolitical) scripts and discourses and reveal the exploitation, double standards and instances of selectivity being done within the existing power structure of the international system. In addition such a perspective is well suited, through the deconstruction of language and discourse, to reveal the ideological taint (eg. orientalism) that frames geopolitical issues in the favor and interests of dominant (hegemonic) states. Classical geopolitics, could not fully explain why, for instance, the US not only supported but actively encouraged Iran in its quest for nuclear technology prior to the Iranian Revolution in 1979 or why Washington supports Pakistan, India and Israel as nuclear powers but not Iran. Critical geopolitics can best answer these questions through an examination of the decision-making process and ideological inclination of senior US government officials since it is the critical variation of the discipline of geopolitics that contends the pursuit of a state's interests is subjective and fits the individual ambitions of decision-makers more than the perceived collective needs of a nation (Kelly, 2006: 26-7). As Gerard O Thuathail argues, since these "representational practices" (concerning the nature of international politics) of national security intellectuals generate particular "scripts" in international politics concerning places, peoples and issues - and then such "scripts" become part of the means by which (great power) hegemony is exercised in the international system (O Thuathail, 1992: 439) - then it follows that a critical geopolitical perspective is best, perhaps even uniquely, suited to study the "major international security" issue of the Iranian nuclear program due to its emphasis on the role of language as well as its insistence on examining the various (subjective) representations of "reality". It is only by delving into the deeper meanings of discourses, scripts and context that we can locate the prevailing elitist (dominant) view of the world and ultimately work toward the emancipation of marginal peoples and states.

Chapter 3 – Media, Ideology and Orientalism

Media and Ideology

The following section will elaborate upon prior literature and the numerous scholars who have written on the subject of how the institutions of mass media frame ideology in the interests of elites (dominant economic and political group) and how that subsequently affects public understanding of particular geopolitical issues.

Understanding the ideological functions of mass media, and the news media in particular, has been the subject of much scholarly interest. For instance, in order to be meaningful, Antonio Gramsci believed any notion of the state would also have to include the underpinnings of the political structures, or social institutions, in civil society (Cox, 1983: 164). Gramsci thought of these in concrete terms, for instance, the church, the educational system and most notably, the news media. For Gramsci, these institutions help to create in people certain modes of behaviour and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order, namely the dominant class (Cox, 1983: 164). The ruling class in democratic societies, Gramsci maintains, achieve dominance through a double process of coercion and persuasion. Accordingly, he believes the media is one of the chief social institutions of persuasion in modern societies (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 142).

Similarly, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman argue that commercial media institutions form and define people's norms and beliefs according to the prevailing social, political and economic interests of the time (Chomsky; Herman, 2002). As a result, the authors argue that the media shape public opinion, whether consciously or unconsciously, to support the interests of the elite, be they economic or social.

Likewise, Todd Gitlin writes that "in liberal capitalist societies, no institution is devoid of hegemonic functions, and none does hegemonic work only" (Gitlin, 2003: 254). In a similar fashion to Chomsky, Herman, Gramsci, and Nye, Gitlin believes mass media have become the dominant source of hegemony in modern capitalist states. However, he considers this hegemonic process to be subtle and indirect. He writes: "Every day, directly or indirectly, by statement and omission, in pictures and in words, in entertainment, news and advertisement, the mass media produce fields of definitions and association, symbol and rhetoric, through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete" (Gitlin, 2003: 4).

Consequently, with "ideology" defined as "the ways in which the meaning conveyed by symbolic forms serves to establish and sustain relations of power" (Oktar, 2001: 320), Lutfiye Oktar argues that far from being neutral or unbiased agents, "the media perform a function that is both ideological and political" (Oktar, 2001: 320). To that effect, much scholarly work has been done to empirically support the hypothesis that any media criticism aimed toward the ruling class or group is ultimately bound by parameters deemed to be tolerable by said class or group (Bennett, 1990; Lee, 2003; Entman, 2004).

Orientalism

Broadly speaking, Orientalism functions as a Eurocentric, and subsequently American, ideology for media representations of Islam and Muslims. As Edward Said explains, Orientalism is both a way of thinking about the Orient as well as a geopolitical strategy of developing knowledge and language about the Orient with the end goal of domination (Said, 1979; 1981).

This process of strategic geopolitical representation can be, Said maintains, either conscious or unconscious.

Throughout the years, numerous academics including, but not limited to, Said (1979, 1981, 1994), Sardar (1999), Karim (2000), and Little (2002) have argued that Orientalism is the dominant ideology of Western relations with states that are of primarily Muslim orientation. Orientalism uses a particular narrative about the Orient, which assumes a distinct social and cultural reality, a reality that is not only different but is in binary opposition to its Western counterpart (Said, 1994; Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 143).

Delineating the prevalence of various Orientalist representations of the Middle East for a period of over half a century, from 1945 to 2000, Melani McAlister argues such demonization "has been a consistent feature, from policymakers' disdain for Nasser to the public outrage against 'oil sheiks', 'terrorists', and ultimately Islam itself" (McAlister, 2001: 270). Similarly, Karim H. Karim (2000) examines the various ways in which the transnational media of Western countries have sustained a global narrative (meta-narrative) on Islam that reconstructs the Middle East as the prime rival of the West. He argues that in the post-Cold War era, Western media narratives present Islam as the source of developing states' instability and violence against Western states (Karim, 2000). In his study, Karim (2000) discovers the prevalent use of Orientalist images in the depiction of Islam and Muslims among Western media, and argues that the construction of the image of "Islam as a threat" has developed into a dominant global discourse.

As Said points out, a key characteristic of Orientalist discourse is its reliance on binary, or dichotomous, language (Said, 1979: 16). As a distinct way of thinking, Orientalism, Said

contends, is a dichotomous Western worldview based on "an ontological and epistemological distinction" between the Orient and the Western world (Said, 1979: 2). Building on the work of Said, Sardar writes that such a dichotomy is "the life force of Western self-identification" and that "The Orient of Orientalists is a constructed artefact through which the West explains, expounds, objectifies and demonstrates its own contemporary concerns" (Sardar, 1999: 13). In addition to the use of a dichotomous language, Said explains that Orientalism uses an essentialist discourse, attaching specific universal traits and characteristics to the Islamic world and the Orient more broadly (Said, 1979: 320). To be specific, he identifies various scholars, novelists, journalists and economists as "Orientalists"; individuals who take for granted the binary opposition of the West versus the Islamic world as the foundation for their work concerning the Orient. On the subject, he writes: "The Middle East experts who advise policymakers are imbued with Orientalism, almost to a person" (Said, 1979: 321). To that effect, Orientalism has come to signify an ideology that justifies Western imperialism, "an instrument of Western imperialism" (Macfie, 2002: 4).

Said argues the process of identity formation and maintenance in every culture entails the existence of "another, different and competing alter ego" (Said, 1979: 331). In regards to the "identity maintenance" dimension, the words of Said imply that the stability or persistence of that identity over time is not natural, or spontaneous or even automatic, rather it is constantly being influenced, shaped by external forces (McMillan, 2012). In the process of how the West creates its own identity, Orientalism is constructed as the West's alter ego.

Orientalism and Iran

Much has been written throughout the years in regards to how the ideology of Orientalism has historically played a role in Iranian-American (and British) relations. Mary Ann Heiss provides one such historical example when she highlights the role Orientalism played in Iranian-American/Anglo relations during Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh's time in public office in the early 1950s (Heiss, 2000).

Between 1951 and 1953, Iran struggled and fought to gain control of its oil industry, and the considerable wealth it generated, from the British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). In doing so, Iran became the first country in the Middle East to gain control of its oil industry (Heiss, 2000: 179). The AIOC and its predecessor, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), had controlled Iran's oil industry since the beginning of the 1900s. However, the relationship between the Iranian government and the oil company was never particularly harmonious. As Heiss explains, "financial arrangements, especially the very low level of royalties the company paid to Iran, the almost total lack of Iranians in high ranking-positions within the company, and the overall aura of secrecy that pervaded the company's operations", all contributed and ultimately led to a significant amount of discontent among Iranian state officials, and more broadly among the general population (Heiss, 2000: 178). It was, however, the inability of the Iranians and the British to resolve the oil dispute on their own that ultimately brought the United States into the conflict. Influenced by long-standing stereotypes that "justified" Western superiority and sought to maintain Western control, Heiss maintains Anglo-American policy makers were consistently guided by Orientalist ideology, whether conscious of the fact or not, when dealing with Mossadegh, whom they considered "inferior, childlike and feminine" (Heiss, 2000: 183). On the subject, she writes: "The end result of the Orientalization

of Mossadegh was an increasingly rigid Anglo-American position on the oil crisis that eschewed compromise or concessions and ultimately saw removing him from office as the only acceptable course of action" (Heiss, 2000: 183). In august of 1953, at the behest of Winston Churchill, a CIA led coup d'état, code named Operation Ajax, led to the overthrow of Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh. This singular act remains important in world history for a couple of reasons. First, it was the first of what proved to be many such CIA actions, overthrowing or assassinating democratically elected world leaders whose interests did not conform to the American perspective. And second, in Iran and among the Iranian diaspora, it is widely considered to be the root cause of anti-American/Western sentiments.

In *Covering Islam*, Said (1981) writes about the prevalence of Orientalist depictions of Islam and Muslims. In a chapter entitled "The Iranian Story", Said identifies and delineates American news media's coverage of post-revolutionary Iran as a case in point concerning the pervasiveness of Orientalist depictions and ideology (Said, 1981). Similarly, Melani McAlister contends that since the events of the Iranian revolution of 1979, the threat of "Islam" and "terrorism" (McAlister, 2001: 275) is what has supplied the logic of US foreign policy against the Islamic Republic. Iran is not an Arab country, but as McAlister argues: "Anti-Iranian sentiment in the United States drew heavily on the stereotyped representations of the Arab Middle East that had become so prevalent in the 1970s, particularly the image of 'Arab terrorism'" (McAlister, 2001: 214). One central theme that emerges from Said's writings on Orientalism is that "Islam" is often manipulated to mean what the particular source wants it to mean. For instance, labels such as "Islam", "Muslim", "Islamic", or "Islamist" are generally used in undefined manners by Western observers, particularly among the news media, who tend to portray the over one billion Muslims of the world as a monolithic entity (Karim, 2000). This

point is especially true for Iranians, who are largely of Persian and Azeri descent (over 80%) and who are members of a different sect than the vast majority of Muslims (Shia as opposed to Sunni). Orientalism, however, fails to recognize the thousand years of mutual disdain and conflict between Persians and Arabs, Shia's and Sunni's and instead presents a singular image, perspective or way of imagining of the entire region.

Chapter 4: Historical Overview

There are many thorny issues which have throughout the years prevented even an ostensible rapprochement between Iran and the US. But the most recent one, which has received prominent media coverage over the past few years, has been Iran's nuclear energy program. What is ironic about the on-going dispute between the two rival nations is that for three decades leading up to the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Americans and Europeans helped, in fact earnestly encouraged, Iran in the development of its nuclear program (Tarock, 2006: 645). However, Iran's nuclear program, including the assistance and encouragement it received from the West and the eventually withdrawal of that assistance, has a long and complicated history. To fully understand the current dispute between Washington and Tehran over this issue and the discourse which surrounds it, as well as to provide a more thorough and comprehensive analysis, a brief discussion of that history is necessary.

Historical Overview

On June 25th, 2003, President George W. Bush declared the US "will not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran" (Beeman, 2005: 156). Over the subsequent months, the widespread notion that the Islamic Republic had developed a nuclear weapons program became conventional thinking among the intelligentsia in Washington. It was cited as a virtually proven fact. The evidence, however, for a nuclear weapons program in Iran simply does not exist. On November 26th, 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) adopted a resolution that condemns Iran's attempts to "cover-up" its nuclear program, but welcomed Iran's new found openness and willingness to cooperate (Beeman, 2005: 156). The IAEA resolution was based on an earlier

report released on November 10th, 2003, which said that there was "no evidence" of a covert arms program (Beeman, 2005: 156). To that effect, the *Wall Street Journal*, published an article on June 19th, 2003, arguing that a major challenge to the Bush administrations accusations is the fact that Iran's nuclear program is "being built not in the shadows but in plain sight, and just inside most of the rules designed to foil nuclear proliferation" (Beeman, 2005: 233). The IAEA resolution was passed, much to the chagrin of the Bush administration, who tried to get Iran brought before the UN Security Council for violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to which Iran was a signatory (Beeman, 2005: 156). Sanctions imposed by the Security Council would have resulted in international economic sanctions against Iran, something nations were not willing to support.

Iran had been working toward developing the capacity for uranium enrichment since before the revolution. Progress in achieving this goal had been concealed from nuclear weapons inspectors until, in November 2004, Iran signed a temporary agreement with Germany, France and Britain to cease uranium enrichment and the IAEA issued Iran a clean bill of health, effectively avoiding Security Council intervention (Beeman, 2005: 157). The European powers hoped to persuade Tehran to abandon uranium enrichment altogether in exchange for technology aid and economic concessions. The US, meanwhile, continued to press the Germans, French and Brits to pressure Iran to cease all nuclear development activity, while refusing to engage with Iran in any kind of direct negotiations. In April of 2005, Iran finally lost patience and insisted that nothing would stop her from exercising her rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which it is a signatory, to enrich uranium for peaceful purpose (Beeman, 2005: 157).

Pre-Revolutionary Iran

A little known or discussed fact about the roots of Iran's nuclear program in the American news media, and more broadly among the American citizenry, is that it was initiated with the full backing of the US government in the mid-1960s. In 1967, the first nuclear facility was established at Tehran University with the US supplying Iran with a 5-megawatt nuclear research reactor to establish the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (Tarock, 2006: 651). One year later, Iran signed the NPT in which "Article IV of the treaty recognises the signatory's "inalienable right" to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination, and to acquire equipment, materials and scientific and technological information" (Tarock, 2006: 651-2). Iran's logic and initial motivation for starting a nuclear facility, Roger Howard explains, was based on a study conducted by Stanford University that "recommended the building of nuclear plants capable of generating a 20, 000 megawatt nuclear energy program" (Howard: 2004, p.98). It was the US government that had since the late 1950s encouraged Iran to expand its non-oil energy base (Beeman, 2005). As Tarock explains, the US encouraged Iran to expand its non-oil energy base "because Iran needed not one but *several* nuclear reactors to acquire the electrical capacity for its industrial development" (Tarock, 2006: 652). Consequently, the US suggested that Iran needed nuclear reactors in order to acquire the electrical capacity that the Stanford Research Institute had suggested, and ultimately, the US even expressed strong interest in providing technical and educational support for the Iranians in their quest to build nuclear reactors (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 145). With the political, technical and educational support of the US, France and Germany, which included contracts to train Iranian nuclear scientists, the Shah began a nuclear program to

build as many as 23 nuclear reactors that were scheduled to be operational by the 1990s (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 145).

Numerous factors, all of which are best understood within the context of the Cold War, help explain the reason for which, from an American perspective, the Shah was a deserving candidate for assistance in acquiring the technology necessary for producing nuclear energy and thus reducing its own energy needs for oil reserves. First and foremost, if Iran had an alternative form of energy it would be able to sell greater amounts of its massive oil and gas reserves to the Western industrialized nations. Furthermore, Iran shared a common border with the USSR that stretched over 2000 miles and it was viewed by Washington as, first, an important shield against communism in the region, and second, as armour against the rise of Arab Nationalism, which at the time was thought to be a threat to Israel's security (Tarock, 2006: 651). In addition, Iran had very close and friendly ties with Israel which further cemented the "deserving candidate" label of the Shah to the American political leadership. Accordingly, in the 1960s, and especially in the 1970s, Iran had become a major recipient of US arms in the region (Tarock, 2006: 651). Lastly, from an American and European perspective, Iran acquiring nuclear energy would be advantageous because it would give US and European corporations the opportunity to participate and invest in the construction of nuclear reactors and the associated facilities (Tarock, 2006: 651).

The possibility the Shah would use nuclear technology to develop a "weaponized" program, at that time, was not something that was on the mind of American government officials. As Tarock contends, "there is no evidence to suggest that this question was ever raised with the Shah, or that he gave guarantees or commitments, verbally or formally, to limit his ambitions to producing only nuclear energy and not to make nuclear weapons later on" (Tarock,

2006: 651). However, according to the former Minister of the Imperial Court and Confidant of the Shah, the Shah had indeed intended to develop nuclear weapons and in 1976 even discussed the purchase of uranium with Gabon (Tarock, 2006: 652). As Tarock explains, the first head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Dr. Akbar Etemad, is quoted as saying the Shah's government also obtained materials from South Africa in the 1970s. Moreover, Tony Benn, the British secretary of state for energy in the mid to late 1970s claims that Dr. Etemad explicitly told him Iran was intending on building a nuclear reactor by 1994 that would supersede the program Britain itself had at that time (Tarock, 2006: 652). Even the British Prime Minister at the time, Jim Callaghan, expressed the view that Britain should lead the way in helping Iran's nuclear reactor (Tarock, 2006: 652). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to claim that, had the Shah's regime lasted longer, Iran would by now belong to the exclusive club of nuclear weapon states. Ultimately, when examining the nuclear program issue of Iran through a historical lens, the inconsistencies and instances of hypocrisy and double-standards on behalf of the West, namely the US and Britain, become abundantly clear since no one made the argument then that is so often made today: that with its vast reserves of natural gas and petroleum, Iran has no need of nuclear energy for civilian purposes.

Thus, as my research paper has argued, a brief examination and understanding of the history of the nuclear issue between the US and Iran would reveal that Washington's current objection to Iran's nuclear program has less to do with any real or perceived threat of a "weaponized" program, but rather the nature of the political system that has ruled Iran since 1979 (Tarock, 2006: 651). Prior to the revolution, Iran was ruled a by pro-Western elite which was trusted and backed by the US. During this time, as the sections above illustrate, the US and Western European governments and corporations were earnestly encouraging and assisting the

Shah - which should not be forgotten ascended to power through a CIA led coup that overthrew a democratically elected Prime Minister at the behest of President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill - in building his nuclear program, which the West was aware of but for political reasons chose to ignore could lead to the making of atomic bombs.

However, since the 1979 revolution, Iran has been governed by a political-religious class often described in the US and the West more broadly as a group of "mad and irrational mullahs" (Tarock, 2006: 651). On the subject, Tarock writes, "Worse still, the mullahs continue to refuse to be deferential to the USA or to view it as being 'exceptional' and/or 'indispensable'. For a Superpower unaccustomed to dealing with Third World countries on an equal footing, the mullahs are especially unpalatable" (Tarock, 2006: 651). The narrative has now been changed entirely. The following comments by former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would support the above claim. In rejecting Russia and China's argument that Iran has the right to nuclear technology as long as it is for civilian purposes, Rice asserts: "This is not an issue of rights but of whether or not…Iran can be trusted" (Tarock, 2006: 653). As a consequence of Iran's devastatingly negative international image - largely due to a systematic demonization of Iran and its culture that is wide spread among Western news media (especially pronounced in the US) (Beeman, 2005) - it makes it easy for US policymakers to brush off the Islamic Republic's compromises and assurances, such as accepting additional IAEA safeguards although it is under no obligation whatsoever to do so, as devious or a political ploy (Tarock, 2006: 654).

Post-Revolutionary Iran

Because it is a theocracy, understanding the role of religion in politics in the Islamic Republic is fundamental to a more complete understanding and assessment of Iran's nuclear program. In the vacuum of power that was created after the Iranian Revolution had taken place, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his clerical followers rose to power. Once in power, he decided against the pursuit of nuclear energy and thus not to complete the reactors provided by the US and Europeans (Tarock, 2006: 652). Khomeini believed nuclear energy could one day lead to the creation of nuclear weapons, which he believed to be anathema to Shia Islam and its principles (Eisenstadt; Khalaji, 2011: 9). Upon Khomeini's death, his successor, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, shared his predecessor's views in regards to nuclear weapons. To that effect, in October 2003, Khamenei issued a fatwa forbidding the production and use of WMD in any form (Eisenstadt; Khalaji, 2011: 9). Since then, Khamenei and other officials have repeatedly asserted Iran is not seeking to acquire the bomb because Islam bans WMD (Eisenstadt; Khalaji, 2011: 10). In 2009, Khamenei proclaimed: "They (Western countries) falsely accuse the Islamic republic's establishment of producing nuclear weapons. We fundamentally reject nuclear weapons and prohibit the use and production of nuclear weapons. This is because of our ideology, not because of politics or fear of arrogant powers or an onslaught of international propaganda. We stand firm for our ideology." (Cole, 2012). Again in 2010 Khamenei asserted: "We have said repeatedly that our religious beliefs and principles prohibit such weapons as they are the symbol of destruction of generations. And for this reason we do not believe in weapons and atomic bombs and do not seek them." (Cole, 2012). And finally, in 2012 staying consistent with his message: "The Iranian nation has never pursued and will never pursue nuclear weapons. There is no doubt that the decision makers in the countries opposing us know well that Iran is not

after nuclear weapons because the Islamic Republic, logically, religiously and theoretically, considers the possession of nuclear weapons a grave sin and believes the proliferation of such weapons is senseless, destructive and dangerous." (Cole, 2012). Khamenei's nuclear fatwa is consistent with a corpus of rulings in Islamic tradition that prohibit weapons that are indiscriminate in their effects and therefore likely to "kill women, children, and the elderly" (Eisenstadt; Khalaji, 2011: 10). Despite Tehran's remarkably consistent position throughout the post-revolutionary period in regards to its stance on nuclear weapons, as will be later demonstrated through the use of empirical studies on the related discourse in the US, little to no attention is accorded to such statements made by Iranian officials.

Iran's Demonic Image Abroad

"The image of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the West has far more than two-and-a-half decades been painted in black, simply ugly and demonic…Although the USSR was thought to pose the greatest threat to the security of the West, it is hardly perceived as such a demon as has been the Islamic Republic" (Tarock, 2006: 654). As previously discussed in this MRP, after the Iranian revolution, anti-Iranian sentiment in the United States, and the West more generally, drew heavily on the stereotyped images of the "Arab terrorist" that had become so prevalent in the 1970s (McAlister, 2001: 214). In November 2005, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives in the US, Newt Gingrich, compared Iran with Nazi Germany in the 1930s. He said, "Tehran could be planning for a pre-emptive nuclear electromagnetic strike that would turn a third or more of the country [America] back to a 19th century level of development…The US has no option but to seek regime change in Iran" (Watson, 2005: 1). To that effect, former

Presidential Candidate John McCain once stated that Iran's decision to enrich uranium was "the most grave situation we have faced since the end of the Cold War" (Tarock, 2006: 654). Echoing Gingrich's sentiments, German Chancellor Angela Merkel also compared the Iranian President to Hitler and warned that "the world must not repeat the mistake of appeasing the Nazis" (Tarock, 2006: 654). But as scholars such as Tarock (2006) and Beeman (2005) have argued, to compare Iran with Nazi Germany, one of the leading economies of Europe in the 1930s and arguably the most significant military power, defies logic, rational thinking and ultimately helps perpetuate a demonic image of Iran at the international level (particularly in the West). A crucial consequence of all this rhetoric, Tarock argues, is that "any attempt, however mild, to present a more realistic and balanced view of matters concerning Iran is generally dismissed as an apology for the Islamic Republic" (Tarock, 2006: 655). Yet as my MRP has argued, echoing the sentiments and arguments of Steve Smith, the understanding of the Iranian nuclear issue, considered to be perhaps the single most important issue in regards to international security, requires a rational and dispassionate discussion and analysis if another war, with all of its disastrous consequences, is to be avoided not only in the Middle East but around the world.

The Iranian Perspective

As previously stated, the Iranian government denies any intention or desire in developing a nuclear bomb. However, even if one assumes Tehran has ulterior motives, or is simply lying and is in fact engaged in developing nuclear weapons - which according to the CIA would take over 10 years from now to achieve - Tehran in turn wonders how come countries like India, Pakistan and Israel, all nuclear weapon states and non-members of the NPT and beneficiaries of US nuclear assistance and technology, are not on the radar screen of the IAEA or of the countries

(US, Britain, France, Germany) that oppose Iran's nuclear program (Tarock, 2006: 655). On the subject, Tarock poses some interesting questions: "Why is it taken for granted that a nuclear Iran will be more dangerous or will act less responsibly than [countries with nuclear weapons]…And why should it be demanded only of Iran to dismantle its nuclear facilities when other countries receive assistance in the development of their nuclear capability?" (Tarock, 2006: 655). The US's assistance to India is a prime example. In October of 2005, speaking on this very topic, Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter, stated: "The recent US decision to assist India's nuclear programme, driven largely by the desire for India's support for the war in Iraq as a hedge against China has made the US look like a *selective* promoter of nuclear weapons proliferation. This double standard will complicate the quest for a constructive resolution of the Iranian nuclear program" (Brzezinski in Tarock, 2006: 655).

From the Iranian perspective, Bush and Obama's visit to India and the signing of agreements providing the South Asian state with nuclear materials and technology implies it is alright for "selected" countries, such as India, to seek nuclear technology even without being a signatory of the NPT (Tarock, 2006: 655). Moreover, as Tarock argues, Pakistan became an outcast state when it decided to undertake nuclear bomb testing (ie. exploded numerous weapons), but after Islamabad began cooperating with Washington in matters relating to the so-called "war on terror", it became a favored state and all was forgiven (Tarock, 2006: 655). To be clear, the argument often cited by the US, however, that allowing Iran to develop nuclear weapons could encourage other signatories of the NPT to follow suit may be a valid one, but upon closer examination is unconvincing for a couple of reasons. First, as my MRP has argued, assuming a nuclear program will inevitably develop into a nuclear weapons program is incredibly presumptuous, particularly when there is little to no evidence to support the claim.

Second, and more importantly, what makes that argument unconvincing is the US's double standards of selectivity. On the one hand, states (eg. Pakistan, India) that share – or perhaps more fittingly acquiesce to – Washington's interests (geopolitical and/or economical) received assistance from the US with regards to their nuclear program. On the other hand, states that do not conform to Washington's foreign policy or ideology (neo-liberal, open market economy) are prevented from acquiring or mastering nuclear technology (Tarock, 2006: 656). Pre-revolutionary Iran qualified under the former category while the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic qualifies under the latter. Stephen Sunes speaks succinctly on this subject: "There remains a strong bipartisan consensus in Washington that the United States has the right to determine which countries can develop nuclear weapons and which ones cannot, effectively imposing a kind of nuclear apartheid…The United States insists [that it] has the authority to determine compliance with the non-proliferation agreements and how agreements are enforced. According to this view, the IAEA – and the United Nations – as a whole can be useful if its findings and policies support US policy and can be ignored or rejected when they do not" (Sunes in Tarock, 2006: 656).

Chapter 5: Critical Discourse Analysis: Empirical Studies

Numerous scholars, including Henry and Tator (2002), Hall (2000), Said (1979), Cook (1998), and van Dijk (1987; 1991; 1993; 2008), have utilized a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to deconstruct the underlying ideologies of mediated prejudiced representations of minorities, immigrants, and foreigners alike. To that effect, Henry and Tator define CDA to be an academic "tool for deconstructing the ideologies of the mass media and other elite groups and for identifying and defining social, economic, and historical power relations between dominant and subordinate groups" (Henry; Tator: 2002, p.72).

Having examined theoretical and ideological concepts, as well as delineating the underlying history that has shaped the current state of affairs that relate to the Iranian nuclear program, this MRP will now look to a couple of empirical studies to further delve into the question of, first, how this geopolitical dispute is framed in the US (associated discourses, scripts), and how the framing of the issue has swayed public understanding.

Empirical Study 1: Interviews with Condoleezza Rice

As previously alluded to in my MRP, many things have been said in regards to Iran's nuclear program as it has garnered a great deal of media attention in the US for nearly a decade now. Yet, for the most part critical discourse scholars have been relatively silent on the matter. One exception, however, is Jason Jones (2010), who through his seminal study examines the language of nine interviews conducted over the course of 2005 with former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Complementing Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) research, Jones' work examines Rice's discourse to explain the extent to which it embodies Said's theory of

Orientalism. In addition, Jones' study scrutinizes Rice's discursive portrayal of both the US and Iran, and examines the various ways in which American journalists mediated that language for their audiences.

Given that audiences, the American populous in this case, do not all turn to the same places or sources for news, the interviews used for Jones' study took place on television, radio and print. Although one of the weaknesses of Jones' study is its lack of an account for the ways different media affect how the interviews communicate messages to audiences (various influences of the different mediums), the findings of the study, nonetheless, are very interesting. Ultimately, Jones' study finds "Rice used her media access as a way to encourage audiences to see Iran's nuclear program as a weapons program, often with the complicity of her interviewers and always without evidence" (Jones, 2010: 127). In the rare instances when asked to comment on American actions or policies toward Iran, Rice shifted the focus of the discussion to Iranian actions in order to keep the Islamic Republic, not he US, at the centre of attention (Jones, 2010: 128). In addition, Jones finds that rather than trying to provide a more thorough and comprehensive explanation or understanding of the issue at hand, Rice and her interviewers pushed audiences to fear the possibility of a nuclear armed Iran so that they would be concerned with the question of how to prevent such a destabilizing event from happening (Jones, 2010: 128). On the subject, Jones writes: "Enveloping it all is Rice's face-saving effort to rebuild a positive image of the White House as she presented the US as a proponent of multilateral diplomacy with Iran as opposed to her portrayal of the Islamic Republic as a rogue state that set itself apart from the global community" (Jones, 2010: 128).

Secretary Rice as Bush Administration's Political Surrogate

Although Bush was every vocal in regards to the alleged threat posed by Iran, Jones argues the sole voice communicating the idea of Iran's nuclear weapons program could not have been the presidents alone as most of his foreign policy talk centred on the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan (Jones, 2010: 129). Moreover, President Bush's approval ratings were in continuous decline, even after the 2004 elections. Following the departure of Colin Powell, Jones explains, the Cabinet member with the highest approval rating going into 2005, the year in which the series of interviews by Rice took place, was Powell's replacement, Rice. Her approval ratings that year never dropped below the 50% mark, ranking her highest among her fellow Cabinet members (Jones, 2010: 129). With the most favorable Cabinet member discussing Iran's nuclear program in the news media, Jones argues Bush was able to increase the likelihood of a positive reception of his discourse toward Iran among the American news following citizenry (Jones, 2010: 129).

Discursive portrayal of US and Iran

Given Rice's role as Secretary of State, it should be noted that clearly part of her mission was to present the US in the best possible light. However, as Said points out, a key characteristic of Orientalist discourse is its reliance on binary, or dichotomous, language (Said, 1979). Similarly, as critical discourse scholar Teun van Dijk (1987; 1991; 2008) contends, positive portrayals of one's group are often accompanied by negative representations of others. He writes: "positive self-representation is usually combined with negative other-presentation, or derogation, following the well-known social pyscho-logic of ingroup-outgroup polarization" (van Dijk, 2008: 200). This is further compounded by one of the most problematic findings in Jones' study:

Rice's utter lack of self-reflection on American actions (Jones, 2010: 134). Absolutely no mention is made whatsoever of the US's vast and ever expanding nuclear weapons arsenal, or of the hypocrisy and double standards that have come to define American foreign policy, especially pronounced during the Bush presidency. For instance, in order to circumvent the hypocrisy of the US's stance on India and Pakistan's respective nuclear programs, during the rare instances in which one of the interviewers asked her to reflect on American actions and/or policy, Rice would re-shift the focus of the discussion on Iran being a "rogue state" - without ever offering any sort of criteria or definition as to what that entails exactly - to refocus the audience's attention on her negative portrayal of Iran instead of the possible contradictory motivations and interests that have guided the US to treat Iran, an NPT signatory, differently from India and Pakistan, two non-signatories of the NTP (Jones, 2010: 134). Conversely, Rice was anything but ambiguous or unreflective about the "evil" nature of the Iranian government as she drew heavily upon Bush's categorization of Iran as part of an "axis of evil" (Jones, 2010: 136). In doing so, Rice's portrayal of Iran as a rogue state worked to reinforce her favourable representation of the US as a multilateral, diplomatic state. Through a negative portrayal of Iran and a positive representation of the US, Jones argues, Rice sought to rebuild the image of American foreign policy in order to mitigate the overwhelming perception of unilateralism that came to define the US after the invasion of Iraq (Jones, 2010: 136).

The position of the Bush administration, as espoused through Rice in her series of interviews throughout 2005, argues Jones, became a lot easier to support when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was voted into office in June of that year, particularly in light of his now infamous language towards Israel: "The evil which the Bush administration aligned Iran was no longer an amorphous, unidentifiable Other; now it was embodied by President Ahmadinejad whose face

became virtually ubiquitous in American news outlets" (Jones, 2010: 137). Nowhere is the use of Orientalist ideology more prevalent in the series of interviews given by Rice than in matters and questions regarding Ahmadinejad, for as Said explains, "For what the Orientalist does is to confirm the maniacal, uncivilized Orient in his readers' eyes; he neither tries nor wants to unsettle already firm convictions" (Said, 1979: 65). In June of 2006, however, *The New York Times* ran an article reporting the meaning of Ahmadinejad's words, translated as "wiping Israel off the map", were actually greatly distorted and therefore debatable (Jones, 2010: 137). However, as Jones explains, rather than questioning and further delving into the meaning, and specifically the English translation, of Ahmadinejad's words, "media personalities and journalists alike enabled Rice and other members of the Bush administration to use Ahmadinejad's language to confirm that Iran was seeking a nuclear weapon" (Jones, 2010: 137).

Controlling of the Discourse and its Consequences

As Rice reached out to the American populous in her series of interviews throughout 2005, she was doing more than speaking on behalf of the incumbent president. As Jones contends, Rice was aiming to shape the knowledge citizens could use to deliberate over Iran's nuclear program, and the various disputes between the US and Iran, in a context more favorable to Bush's stance toward the Islamic Republic (Jones, 2010: 138). By the use of Orientalist ideology, whether conscious or unconscious, and by emphasizing those aspects of Iranian policy which run contrary to Washington's interests - while proving no details of the nature of Iran's "international obligations" or of the evidence in support of perceiving Iran as a nuclear weapons proliferator - Rice used her media platform to encourage and persuade audiences to see Iran's

nuclear program as a nuclear weapons program, without providing any corroborating evidence (Jones, 2010: 138).

Throughout her series of interviews, however, Rice was not alone in constructing the knowledge made available to audiences as the interviewees, consciously or unconsciously, cooperated, or at least acquiesced, in the process (Jones, 2010). On the subject, Jones notes: "ABC, CNN, CBS, USA Today and other news outlets should provide communicative environments in which statespersons justify their positions, not serve as spaces in which political leaders can present debatable assumptions as truth and repeatedly reinforce that 'truth' with the help of their interviewers" (Jones, 2010: 138-9). Ultimately, Rice's failures in providing any kind of supporting evidence to her claims about an Iranian nuclear weapons program, combined with the lack of critical journalism, simply replicates the same short-sighted mistakes made leading up to the Invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Empirical Study 2: Discourse Analysis of Elite American Newspaper Editorials

Despite Washington's inability to provide any substantial corroborating evidence as it pertains to its allegations of an Iranian nuclear weapons program, there is, however, mounting evidence that suggests the public understanding of this issue in the US has been influenced significantly. A Pew poll conducted in the US shows over the past 15 years, thus from 1990 to 2005, an average of approximately 6% of respondents rated Iran as the "greatest threat" to the US (Lobe, 2006). However, a survey conducted on January 2006 found the percentage had increased to a surprising 27%, much higher as compared to the percentages of China, Iraq, North

Korea and astoundingly, al-Qaeda/terrorists (Lobe, 2006). The new polls, in fact, indicate that the image of the Islamic Republic is now worse than it has ever been in the US (Lobe, 2006).

Similarly, a CDA of elite American newspaper editorials conducted by Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) echoes many of the same sentiments and general findings of the aforementioned Pew study. In fact, Izadi and Saghaye-Biria study supports previous findings by scholars such as Karim (2000) and McAlister (2001), that Orientalist depictions of Muslim countries and their political issues concentrate around the idea that Islam is a source of threat. In addition, the Izadi/Saghaye-Biria (2007) study also finds that in the case of Iran's nuclear program, the issue of trust, specifically in regards to the kind of political regime that governs the country, plays a more central role than the actual existence of evidence for Iran's alleged possession of a clandestine nuclear weapons program.

Editorials: A Reflection of Public Opinion

The data used in Izadi and Saghaye-Biria's study examined editorials from three leading American newspapers, namely *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The study scans all the editorials on the subject of Iran's nuclear program appearing from 1984, the date of the very first editorial on Iran's nuclear program, to 2004, which marked a change in Iranian commitment to its suspension of uranium enrichment (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 147-8). All three are considered elite newspapers and are among the largest media outlets in the US, ranking second, third, and fifth respectively, in terms of volume of circulation (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 148). As the authors explain, "They are leading newspapers with regard to the coverage of international news and views, drawing readers from

every state and around the world" (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 148). In addition, Guy Goran argues, elite newspapers such as *The New York Times* serve an "inter-media agenda setting function" for other news sources, especially when it comes to the coverage of international events and issues (Golan, 2006: 323). Accordingly, because ideological representations can "express or signal the opinions, perspective, position, interests or other properties of groups" (van Dijk, 1991B: 112) and since the main function of editorials is "the expression and persuasive communication of opinions" (van Dijk, 1996: 13), editorials ultimately make up a relevant body of text for the examination of predominant ideological assumptions in a society (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 148).

To be clear, it should be noted that just because a certain type of discourse is invoked or articulated by an elite government official in regards to a geopolitical issue, it is by no means a given that public opinion will be swayed in the manner in which said government official had anticipated or hoped, or that it will be swayed at all. This is further compounded by the multiplicity of media sources and outlets, which cover all sides of the political and ideological spectrum, available to an individual interested in acquiring knowledge and information about a specific issue. The vast disparity in terms of ideological stance between Fox News and PBS news is one such example. Nevertheless, building from the above statement, that editorials are a relevant body of text for the examination of predominant ideological assumptions in a society, it therefore follows that examining the opinion pieces that make up an editorial is a good way of at least ostensibly measuring the correlation between the scripts and discourse of elite government officials and the corresponding opinions, assumptions and overall ideology of the populous. Thus, if the discourse (assumptions, opinions, recommendations, etc.) of editorials matches or is

similar to that of government officials then one can safely assume a corollary relationship between the two exists.

Conducting a CDA on the editorials of three major US newspapers over the course of two decades, namely, *The New Times*, *The Washington Post* and The *Wall Street Journal*, Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) findings reveal numerous Orientalist themes:

> "The theme of untrustworthiness underlies the belief that the Orientals are by nature untruthful and therefore should not be trusted. The theme of Islam as a threat asserts that the Orientals are threatening because of their adherence to an Islamic ideology. The theme of Oriental inferiority questions the basic humanity of the Oriental as compared to the Westerner. The theme of Oriental irrationality stresses the mystical and irrational nature of the Oriental. The theme of Oriental submissiveness advocates that the Oriental is by nature in a position of submission. The theme of Jews versus Arabs (or Muslims) operates when the significance of a situation is defined in terms of the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation" (Izadi/Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 149).

Although, the more right-wing newspapers, the *Post* and the *Journal*, drew more heavily on Orientalist sentiments than did the more leftist *New York Times*, all three were guilty of consistently using a discursive conception of the Orient (Iran) that involves a binary opposition in which the West (the US) is portrayed as superior to the Orient, which conversely is seen as "mysterious and dangerous" (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007).

The three elite US newspapers, the Izadi/Sahaye-Biria study concludes, have labeled Iran "a rogue nation whose word can never be trusted" (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 151). Iran is considered a threat because of the nature of its government, which is Islamic. From the Orientalist perspective, Islam is a threat, and since Iran is an Islamic Republic, it is considered untrustworthy. Accordingly, in the editorials studied the Orientalist themes of "Islam as a threat" and "Oriental untrustworthiness" have the highest number of instances in terms of detection (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 151).

Moreover, as Izadi and Saghaye-Biria conclude, the problem with the Iranian nuclear program is defined in similar terms in the three newspapers' editorials: The Iranian government is presumed to have nuclear weapons ambitions. It is therefore, unsubstantially, assumed the Islamic Republic does in fact have a nuclear weapons program. Accordingly, the authors find the three newspapers rely on official US and Israeli sources to arrive at this "definitive" conclusion (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 156). Despite the assumed certainty with which Iran is accused of having a nuclear weapons program, *New York Times* reporters Jehl and Schmitt reveal that according to a presidential commission report, "American intelligence on Iran [is] inadequate to allow firm judgements about Iran's weapons programs" (Jehl; Schmitt, 2005: A1). Similarly, Izadi and Saghaye-Biria write that "despite the lack of definitive intelligence, the three newspapers' editorials portray the Iranian nuclear weapons program as a reality and the prospect of a nuclear bomb as a more-or-less certain prospect" (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 156). Thus, as the authors contend, the problem with Iran is not that it has made or is in the process of making a nuclear weapon, rather the problem lies in the fact that Iranian officials (government and scientists) have gained some knowledge that they should not be trusted to have: "The problem is that they know too much and have access to technology that only 'we' can be trusted with" (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 157).

Iran's Islamic regime is deemed to be undeserving of American or international trust and accordingly, the editorials stress that Iran should be denied access to nuclear knowledge and technology, even under the most stringent international safeguards. In this regard, the Orientalist theme of "untrustworthiness", as an assumed property of Iran, is emphasized as fact. This line of argumentation, however, falls apart under scrutiny when one considers the previously cited findings of the CIA which deny the existence of a nuclear weapons program, as well as those of

the International Crisis Group which conclude that there is nothing in "scope and variety of Iran's nuclear program that is exclusively, or virtually exclusively, designed for military use" (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 152). The issue therefore, becomes whether Iran can be trusted with a nuclear capability that is applicable to both civilian and military purposes. Ultimately, the authors contend that many American newspaper editorials over the course of two decades, from 1984 to 2004, argue with absolute certainty that Iran was developing a nuclear weapon, arguments that were grounded in Orientalist stereotypes of Iran as a "threat", or "dangerous", or "untrustworthy" rather than presenting concrete evidence (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007).

Despite advocating different courses of action, the three newspapers agree that Iran should not be trusted with the technology to enrich uranium, essential to producing fuel for the nuclear reactor as well as a bomb (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007). To that effect, *The Wall Street Journal* advocates regime change through covert means, such as supporting opposition groups' struggle to overthrow the government, as well as overt means, such as full-fledged military invasion (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 152). *The Times* and *The Post*, on the other hand, due to the impracticality of the political strategies, argue against the use of force and regime change. Rather, they are proponents of diplomatic measures with explicit multilateral incentives and threats (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 152).

Correlation between empirical studies:

As the two empirical studies, coupled with the Pew polls, presented in this chapter of my MRP demonstrate: there is indeed a correlation that exists between the discourse and scripts of

government officials in regards to a specific geopolitical issue, and the public perception or understanding of said issue. Both the Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) and the Jones (2010) studies find that in the American news media, be it broadcast news, print, radio, or opinion pieces in the form of editorials, the Iranian nuclear program is framed predominantly through the use of Orientalist arguments. Moreover, the studies reveal there is an underlying assumption among American government officials and public that first, Iran has a clandestine nuclear weapons program, second, that the Islamic nature of its government (ie. theocracy) is a threat, and third, that Iran should not be trusted with sensitive nuclear technology (untrustworthy), regardless of international law or past treatise, such as the NPT. More troubling, however, is Jones' conclusions that Rice's discourse was aiming to shape the knowledge and information American citizens would use to deliberate over the dispute between the US and Iran, as it pertains to the Islamic Republic's nuclear program, in a context more favorable to the US's geopolitical interests and general stance toward Iran (Jones, 2010: 138). After examining her series of interviews throughout 2005, Jones arrives at the conclusion that Rice used her media platform to render audiences more susceptible to the US's uncorroborated charges against Iran and its nuclear weapons ambitions. Consequently, as the Pew study and the critical discourse analysis of elite newspaper editorials reveals, public understanding of this geopolitical issue has been framed and swayed accordingly.

Conclusion:

As Paul Reuber points out, the discipline of postcolonial studies, and the criticisms it has raised, has shown repeatedly that presumptuous values of western modernity must be seen more as hegemonic (imperial domination) discursive positioning's than as essentialist values of the human condition (Reuber in Murphy et al., 2004: 634). However, the great paradox in US-Iranian relations is that despite hostile rhetoric and antagonistic discourses emanating from both sides, the two nations have never broken their psychological ties to each other. Accordingly, Beeman argues that after over thirty years since the Iranian revolution of 1979, the two rival countries are in fact growing closer together, even as their respective leaders continue to rant and rail at one another (Beeman, 2005). Echoing Kissinger's sentiments regarding "compatible interests" between the two nations, Beeman provides a very apt and useful metaphor for the existing relationship between Iran and the US: "The paradox of the married couple who can only show their close emotional connection to each other by fighting is a metaphor for this situation" (Beeman, 2005: 189). A couple of practical examples could perhaps better illustrate this point. Thus for instance, despite trade sanctions imposed on Iran in 1987 and 1995, Iranian trade with the US has increased steadily since the 1979 revolution (Beeman, 2005: 189). In addition, Iranian students still constitute a sizeable student group on American soil, a group which is even larger, Beeman contends, when one counts the children of Iranian émigrés: "More than a million Iranians chose to emigrate to the United States, more than half of them to California" (Beeman, 2005: 189). Moreover, the Iranian armed forces, largely American trained, are heavily dependent on US military equipment. Beeman also suggests that there are less concrete compatible interests between the two states that manifests itself through the relationships and overall goodwill between American and Iranian people (ie. people on the street). For instance, he argues that of

the thousands of Americans living in Iran at the time of the revolution, not one of them was physically harmed (Beeman, 2005: 190). In regards to the hostages taken by Iranian students at the American embassy, he writes: "The American hostages in Iran were for the most part persons with extended previous contact with Iran. Their relative lack of bitterness at their captivity and unwillingness to condemn Iranians – even their captors – has puzzled and angered some Americans who have less direct experience with Iran" (Beeman, 2005: 189). Thus, given the natural basis for alliance and reasonable amounts of goodwill reflected through what Kissinger of all people terms "compatible interests", how can we explain the enmity that prevents closer dealings between Washington and Tehran?

As this MRP has argued and illustrated through the empirical examples provided in the case study, it is the ideologically tainted geopolitical scripts and discourse of senior government officials – on both sides of the dispute – that has raised the level of hostility, in terms of rhetoric, diplomacy and strategic foreign policy, between the two countries. This point is further aggravated by the fact the US had for over three decades prior to the Iranian revolution encouraged and actively helped Iran in the development of its nuclear program. It was only after the revolution of 1979, once Iran turned to a theocratic method of social organization, that the Islamic Republics pursuit of nuclear technology was deemed to be a grave international security issue. Through an examination of the history of the nuclear issue between the US and Iran, it becomes increasingly clear that Washington's current objections to Iran's quest for nuclear technology has less to do with any real (imminent) or perceived threat of a "weaponized" program than with the "unfriendly" nature of the political system that presently rules Iran. What gives this point further credibility is the double standards of selectivity Washington employs in regards to nuclear states such as India, Israel and Pakistan - the former two being non-signatories

of the NPT while still receiving American assistance. As Tarock has argued, the US helps states mindful of Washington's geopolitical and economic interests with their nuclear programs, while it tries to prevent states which do not agree with US foreign policy or ideology from mastering nuclear technology.

Furthermore, the two empirical studies presented in this MRP by Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) and Jones (2010) do an excellent job in deconstructing the underlying ideologies of mediated prejudiced representations of Iran and Iranian culture more broadly. The former study, which echoes previous findings from scholars such as Karim (2000) and McAlister (2001), finds that not only is Orientalist ideology prevalent in the American news media when discussing Iran and the nuclear issue, but that the issue of "trust", specifically in regards to the kind of political regime that governs the country, plays a more central role than the actual existence of evidence for Iran's alleged pursuit of a clandestine nuclear weapons program (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007). In addition, the Izadi and Saghaye-Biria study reveals the Iranian nuclear program is framed almost entirely through the use of Orientalist assumptions in the editorials of the leading American newspapers. The Orientalist themes that appeared the most in regards to Iran and its nuclear program are "untrustworthiness", "Islam as a threat", "inferiority", "irrationality" and "submissiveness" (Izadi; Saghaye-Biria, 2007). Complementing Izadi and Saghaye-Biria's, Jones (2010) finds Rice used her media access as a way to encourage audiences to see Iran's nuclear program as a weapons program, often with the complicity of her interviewers and always without providing any evidence (Jones, 2010: 127). In addition, Jones' study reveals Rice's portrayal of Iran is imbued with Orientalist ideology, with themes such as "untrustworthiness", "threat" and "evilness" being most prevalent (Jones, 2010: 136).

When coupling the aforementioned studies with the results of the Pew poll taken in 2006 that lists Iran as the "greatest threat" to the US's security, higher than China, North Korea and even al-Queda, then it becomes increasingly clear that throughout the past two decades Iran's image in the US has gotten substantially worse. Despite Washington's inability to provide any corroborating evidence as it pertains to its allegations of an Iranian nuclear weapons program, there is, however, mounting evidence that suggests the public understanding of this issue in the US has been influenced significantly and in a negative light, painted by the brush of Orientalism.

As this MRP has argued, geopolitical scripts or meta-narratives, including the epistemological, ontological and ideological taint they adopt and the political interests they serve, are significant and can have a very really (even measureable) impact on the world – the nations of Iraq and Afghanistan can attest to that point. As was the case with 9/11, and currently is with the Iranian nuclear program, certain geopolitical scripts reflect the interests of the dominant in what are presented as neutral and universal theories and discourses. The texts of geopolitical discourse are not free-flowing, innocent contributions to an "objective" reality or form of knowledge; rather they find their roots in power/knowledge and serve the interests of particular and exclusive groups (be it of individuals or states) in society and help sustain and legitimizes certain perspectives (eg. foreign policy), interpretations and ultimately political action (eg. war). Accordingly, these geopolitical discourses often do sway public opinion to a significant degree toward the side of the dominant group in spite of the hidden power relations behind them.

Although this MRP has been an initial examination into the dynamic of geopolitical discourses and the ways in which they affect public understandings of specific issues, future avenues for research can and do exist. For instance, one area worthy of future investigation

concerns the news media and the extent to which, despite the near uniformity of their ideological positions, their different policy recommendations affect policy makers. In addition, to delve further into this research subject, future studies could use a comparative approach to examine the nature of the relationship (what direction the arrow points, so to speak) between the discourse of elite news media, public opinion and foreign policy. As Jones puts it: "When the places we turn to for information construct knowledge in a way that is void of reconsideration or rethinking, they have failed in educating the public in a way that enables Americans to realize their potential to check the power of their leaders" (Jones, 2010: 139).

Having said all that, and as alluded to in the introduction, this MRP is not without its limitations. Due to space and time constraints only two to three empirical studies were used to arrive at the conclusions of this paper. Although the studies used in this MRP do in fact point to a correlation between the scripts and discourse of political leaders and the public understanding of a particular geopolitical issue - and therefore help answer the research questions driving this MRP forward - more empirical critical discourse analysis studies should be conducted to further validate and give credence to the findings presented in this research paper. Nevertheless, this MRP takes the first steps in initiating a more academic and critically orientated study of one of the most important issue in international security today, the Iranian nuclear program.

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