# THESIS

MADINA PLIEVA
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Budapest Corvinus University
Faculty of Social Sciences and International Relations
Institute of International Studies

# Ideology and perceptions: non-pragmatic factors in US-Iranian relations

*Case study: 2001-2003*

*Madina Plieva*
BA International Relations
Supervisor *Kinga Dévényi*

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## 1. Introduction

The bilateral relationship of the USA and Iran is one of the most complicated and at the same time, crucial relationships of today's politics. The nuclear issue is high on current political agenda, and this is to no surprise: the matter of security is too important to only consider it en passant. However, knowing the history of Iran's ties with US, one can find this concern to have many more underlying layers.

That said, the need to differentiate between so-called 'pragmatic' and 'non-pragmatic' factors might remain unclear. I made a decision to only deal with the 'non-pragmatic' side of the question while delving into the story of unleashing of the Iranian revolution and the years that followed. What aroused my interest was the fact that for practical reasons, Iran could not achieve many of its goals in politics by keeping its revolutionary ideology. The book by Trita Parsi, *'Treacherous Alliance'*, had a purpose to present the interactions within the triangle of Iran, Israel and US in purely geopolitical terms, and it produced a description of these relationships proceeding in a pretty realist-type environment, which I found very convincing. After comparing this impression with my initial expectations to reveal a significance of the cultural differences in the problematic communication between Iran and the US, I asked myself a question: just how important these actually are, if there is a way to present this riddle in the light of geopolitics alone?

Soon it turned out that I was not the first person to raise this question. Robert Jervis, an American scholar of international relations, discussed the role of perceptions and misperceptions in political decision-making extensively. Through the lens of his research, it becomes clear that seemingly rational, like in a game of chess, political choices, are often based on the false perceptions and are impacted by psychological patterns, common in people. Further in this study, I am going to apply the hypotheses he made to my chosen period of time, using his work as an analytical basis.

Besides the questionable rationality of decision-makers, there is another thing that makes situation difficult to assess. While numerous books, written by Western, mainly American, scholars are available on the subject, the lack of material that would deal

with picturing the conflict 'from within Iranian culture, society, and, most importantly, the Iranian policy-making system' creates a gap which 'has been the cause of misanalysis, followed by the adoption of US establishment policies that have failed to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, these policies have elevated hostilities between the two countries while creating and perpetuating a state of non-compromise between them.' (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014, p.4) The books, however, are not sufficient to dispel the ignorance rooted in the minds of those adopting policies. The abundance of material reflecting the Western perspective does not guarantee the raising awareness on the Iranian side. Indeed, this is not the case. Iranian decision-makers do not normally have a grasp of the Western culture; nor do they understand well enough how the American government functions. Although same disagreements occur within the government of Iran, '..the majority of Iranian policy-makers become confused by contradictory statements from the Obama administration on the one hand, and from the US Congress on the other' and '..they view it as a clear manifestation of hypocrisy and duplicity.' (Ibid.) The deficit of information is a problem per se, but the ability to accept, interpret that information and infer the correct conclusions is a distinct issue of equal, if not bigger, importance.

In gathering the data for my work, I looked primarily for resources that would give insight into the thinking of Iranian people, of all groups and opinions, as the Western accounts could be readily acquired at any time. Naturally, images of the others are forming over a long time, are strongly influenced by historical events and hugely impact political decisions. Since the day when the staff members of American embassy in Tehran were taken hostage by the revolutionaries, diplomatic ties between the countries were frozen, and this frosty veil of distrust remains until today, although many interactions and shifts took place during this period. That move was also, in turn, provoked by the preceding events and previously formed image of USA in Iran as of a country meddling in Iran's internal affairs for its own self-interested ends.

The tracing and detalization of the evolution of perceptions would be quite a serious challenge, especially when applied at a time as long as from 1979 until now and such a complex relationship as the one in question. Having considered this, I have chosen a strategy of case study: I am going to observe the interaction between Iran and the USA closely during the years 2001-2003, starting from the tragically known date 9/11 and

until another terrorist attack in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, following which the Geneva Channel was closed. In spite of focusing on this brief period, I nevertheless want to put it into a wider context where it belongs: in a row of failed attempts at rapprochement between the countries, when the breakthrough appeared probable but was never realized. I find those cases to be of a particular interest as they show how significant perceptions and ideological premises may be and how serious of an obstacle they may pose even in those circumstances when urgent geopolitical reasons require cooperation, or, at the very least, how powerless the brief moments of mutual assistance are in shattering the long-formed views of the two sides on one another. Of course, Iran was never equal to US in its political weight; in most cases, it was Iran who sought to restore the relationship. However, Americans could also be better off cooperating with Iran and having no fear or suspicions of its motives. The complex intertwining of cultural discrepancies, historical interactions, political steps and added to that a lack of informational transparency and desire to truly understand each other all contributed to a formation on both sides of certain images, that impede the progress of this relationship.

Among many situations which could be described as promising but eventually disappointing in the US-Iranian relationship record, such as Iran-Contra affair (1985-7), Rafsanjani's détente and Madrid conference (1989-1991), Khatami's détente and 'soccer diplomacy' (1997-8) and later developments, the period of 2001-2003 years might come across as unobvious and requiring clarification. It is true that each of these cases has something peculiar to it. Iran-Contra affair is a perfect case to examine the distribution of views on Iran within the American establishment. Cases of détente allow to investigate how substantial can domestic political shifts and declarations of changing values be for this relationship and what can prevent them from being so. American policy in the Middle East, including its attempts to keep Iran isolated and handle the situation together with the allied states of the region, be it Israel or the states of Persian Gulf, is a kind of red thread stretching through the years after Nixon's Twin Pillars policy was abandoned in 1979. However, I find the case of a joint involvement in a common security threat management of US and Iran, that nevertheless did not result in any political gains for the latter, to be exceptionally intriguing. Iran expected to be given a favor in exchange for the favor it delivered while helping US with taking out Taliban. In reality, for various reasons, among them diverging views on Iran within US administration, overall suspicion of Iran's ties to the terrorists and its continuing

violation of human rights et cetera, this was not the case; moreover, Iran was publicly proclaimed one of the countries constituting an 'Axis of Evil' (Address by George W. Bush, 2002). The destiny of Geneva Channel and Iran's comprehensive proposal to US, that followed the swift defeat of Saddam Hussein in 2003, are equally interesting in the larger context of events that occurred. In a way, the case I have decided to focus on combines features of Iran-Contra affair and the ones of détente: as in the first, frictions within the American establishment were apparent and just like in the periods of thaw, a minimal collaboration and willingness to compromise were observed. The ultimate failure of this attempt is described by various authors as a missed opportunity for strategic rapprochement.

Now, I want to draw attention to the fact that although ideology and perceptions are united in the title of my work under a common name of 'non-pragmatic factors', these are not the same things. I have talked a lot about perceptions, but where is the place of ideology in this picture? While the Iranian revolution was definitely made in the name of certain beliefs and shortly after, an ideological correction was carried out by the rulers to make the functioning of society conform to what was deemed right (Farhi, 2004), later on ideology gradually lost its value. It remains in place rhetorically, for the purpose of keeping the people under control and is occasionally used for some external political ends, too, such as leaving Israel alienated and thereby pleasing and attracting (or, at least, pacifying) the Arab states in the region. Yet it is not followed blindly and uncompromisingly. With regard to the US, employing the word 'ideology' may seem confusing, but it is fair to say that the doctrines adopted by different American administrations often played a role similar to that of ideology; common practices and widely perceived views all also push policy formulation in a certain direction. Thus, while word 'ideology' is not literally applicable, its general meaning is not irrelevant. In fact, the question of how to define ideology is a controversial one; its scientific definition does not coincide with the immediate widely received associations. It must not necessarily be injurious and distorting; I prefer to embrace the description of ideologies as 'imaginative maps drawing together facts that themselves may be disputed' or 'human and social products that bind together views of the world <..> and enable collective action in furthering or impeding the goals of a society' (Freeden, 2006). The scope of this characterization is broad enough and clarifies the application of the same term to seemingly different realities. Ideology might, to some extent, shape

perceptions, but the distinction is clear: ideology is a deliberately applied filter on perception, which is, due to its artificiality, not necessarily reckoned with and can be lifted or manipulated by the government.

In the beginning of the chapter, I pointed out that there are multiple levels of meaning, multiple factors that affect this relationship. The need to take all the aspects into account is something rendering my topic difficult to deal with. Behind every move, there is a certain prehistory, both political and perceptional. The move itself is an outcome of the intergovernmental confrontations, that often leave some departments or personalities dissatisfied and motivated to retaliate. More than that, assuming the total control of the government over every political incident would be a mistake in itself, and this mistake is not only the one which can be committed by researchers, but also is the one frequently committed by the sides concerned. Outside actors, domestic developments, unpredictable sudden occurrences do sometimes intervene and change the course of events.

For the purpose of delivering the fullest possible analysis of the years 2001-2003, I will first introduce the background. On the one hand, I am going to show, how the Iranian image of America was being formed, and a coverage of the revolutionary ideological struggle is indispensable to this end. On the other hand, I will go through all the major political engagements of the USA and Iran, intending to give an idea of the moods towards one another prevailing in the respective governments of these countries. After all the necessary context will be laid down, I will move on to the case study with special attention to the non-pragmatic factors at play in the eventful years 2001-2003.

## 2. The roots of anti-Americanism in Iran

When the US first appeared on the Iranian geopolitical horizon, it enjoyed a drastically different attitude from what we have now. It all started at the end of the 19th century, when Iran was an arena of British-Russian competition for land and resources. US was seen as a potential protector of Iran's sovereignty against aggressors, which under the

Truman Doctrine provided Iran with military and financial aid packages (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, p.23). But when the newly elected Prime Minister Mossadegh decided to nationalize oil industry, of which previously British were the largest beneficiaries, a special relationship with Britain and a need to hold back USSR played its role. In 1953, Eisenhower ordered CIA to back the overthrow of Mossadegh and the Shah was restored to the throne. According to Mousavian and Shahidsaless, two distinguished scholars of Iranian origin, 'the coup d'etat was the single most pivotal event in shaping Iran-US relations for decades to come', because it 'changed the psyche of Iranian society and destroyed Iranians' positive image of the United States' (Ibid., p.24) Being a country with a victorious history and a heir of a centuries-long civilization, Iran is a traditionally proud nation with a deep sense of self-dignity. Therefore, the claim that the frustration and humiliation Iranians felt at the time of the coup 'laid the foundation of the anti-Americanism that ultimately produced the 1979 Islamic Revolution' does not seem like an overstatement (Ibid.)

The Shah began introducing policies favored by the US and openly orientated towards US in social, economic and cultural respects. Iranian society, though quite fragmented in opinions as to what kind of ideology suits best to alter the current unsatisfactory situation, was finally united under Ayatollah Khomeini. Iranian revolution of 1979 brought into power a theocratic regime which strongly relied on opposing American influence while emphasizing Iran's different and incompatible with America's imposed values, cultural heritage. Khomeini's strategy of positing US as a major source of a nation's grievances was matched by a wide-spread xenophobia many Iranians felt towards numerous foreign workers in the country (Keddie, 1983, p.592). The newly introduced political system was not exclusively religious; instead, it was marked by complexity and originality, combining both secular and theocratic bodies. Its actual functioning, however, frequently made it clear that the upper hand belongs to the clergy.

From the American perspective, these events seem to have brought about a profound anti-American sentiment in Iran, manifested by the burnings of American flag, chanting 'Death to America' in the streets and the accusations pronounced by the top leaders from the tribunes. However, there is plenty of room for debate. For example, Mossadegh, who is claimed to have been overthrown by the US, had lost in domestic support, as well, by the time of coup, owing to popular dissatisfaction with his overly

harsh measures. In particular, clerical establishment was hostile to him, and this pattern of disagreement between secularists and theocrats is recurrent in the more recent history of Iran, too (Clawson, 2004, p.19). Clerics can decide many things and are able to reverse liberalization. Besides that, sectors of Mossadegh's own party - the National Front - withdrew around that time, and stopped supporting him.

The nationalists, who stood behind Mossadegh, were indeed skeptical of US, but were still willing to engage in a constructive cooperation. The only condition they set was that the US recognize Iran's sovereignty and treat it with due respect. These people wanted to see a liberal secular government in Iran, and in this way, the Islamic clerics, who had to fight against them, also fought against their very inclination to engage with the US and have it as a partner. Anti-Americanism was used by the hardline clerics and the leftists, who favored more profound changes than the liberal nationalists did, to undermine the popularity of this movement. Thus, the root causes of an uneasy attitude to US did not only lie in America's own behavior, but also originated in domestic power struggles.

Other forces' interpretation of American role in Iran damaged the relationship even more seriously. Third Worldism, a mixture of socialism and anti-imperialism, was of a considerable importance to the intellectual life in Iran between 1963 and 1988. Its main power lied in the capacity to offer a better, more equitable reality than the one created by the West and based on exploitation of the underprivileged classes in underdeveloped countries.

It is impossible to discuss Iranian intellectuals of that time without mentioning Ali Shariati, who drew up an essentially Iranian philosophy, although inspired by the Western thinkers. In his lectures, that were extremely popular in 1970s, he offered a vision of Islam as a remedy against 'the evils of capitalism', and antagonized the rigidity of the clerics and the true, modern and encouraging, version of religion. Naturally, he soon became a chief enemy of the radical clergy. Khomeini, however, recognized the influence he had on the young people and integrated third worldist concepts in his own narrative. The act of espousing Marxism to Islam yielded an ever more powerful rhetoric, that now was not only based on the supremacy of Islamic

values, but also embraced the fight for the rights of the common people. Anti-Americanism was firmly woven into the canvas of revolution (Clawson, 2004, p.21).

Employing elements of leftist rhetoric did not, however, mean entering an alliance with them. Consolidation of power required elimination of all the rivaling factions, and many leftists, primarily those belonging to the Mojahedin (the People's Mojahedin of Iran) were murdered or thrown into jail. Political figures such as Mehdi Bazargan and Abolhassan Banisadr, who formed part of Iranian government after the revolution, had to step down in the heat of the clergy's attacks, as they sticked to their own, more liberal, views. While anti-Americanism remained a tool of the hardliners, intellectual circles in Iran came to see the cleric establishment as their main enemy and the US, consequently, was regarded more favorably (Ibid.)

Another key movement, and the one that might have come in handy for my goal of assessing cultural discrepancies, was nativism. This tradition is known in Iran since long time, its main theme is that Iran should seek to preserve its unique heritage, and not to worship the West and try to copy it. The book by Jalal al-Ahmad, 'Westoxication', published in 1962, happened to reflect an overall flourish of the nativist moods among Iranian intellectuals in 1960s and 1970s. The book did not specifically attack America, but the implication of its critique was evident. Just as Ali Shariati, al-Ahmad was a secular thinker who recommended making use of Iranian religious traditions to liberate from the Western grip. This is to say that Iranian intellectuals did not consider secularism an inherently Western value: the richesse of Iranian culture was not born out of religion alone and the future could well be a logical continuation of the past achievements.

I have described the situation in details for the reader to be able to make sense of the fragmented ideological composition of Iranian society on the verge of revolution. As the revolutionary state was back on the international stage, it faced geopolitical realities that did not undergo such a serious kind of change as Iran's identity did, and thus, the rules of the game did not transform to fit with the newborn country's ideology. After some failed attempts at keeping these two in accordance, most significantly, a decision to continue a war of attrition with Iraq, Iranian rulers recognized the supremacy of strategic considerations over ideological claims. An official fatwa was issued by

Khomeini to inform the public about this newly introduced hierarchy, so that the governmental actions would not be attacked on the grounds of betraying the revolutionary ideology (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016, pp.618-619). Thereby, the debate on this question was over already in 1980-81, and the importance of ideology in the following years declined considerably. From this point on, in the next chapter, I am going to focus on the happenings in political realm alone.

## 3. After ideology: the scars of geopolitics

While the first significant encounter of Iranians with US took place in 1953 with the CIA-directed coup, born of fear that hot-headed, disorganized government in Iran would enter an alliance with Soviet Union, 'the first time most Americans became aware of the existence of a country called Iran was during the hostage crisis in 1979-81, when American viewers were treated every night to televised images of Iranian crowds chanting anti-American slogans in the streets and burning US flags, as bound and blindfolded American Embassy personnel were paraded before them.' (Maleki and Tirman, 2014, p.7) The editors of a book named 'US-Iran misperceptions: a dialogue', unsurprisingly, label this reality 'one of the many unfortunate ironies of US-Iran relations.' (Ibid.) Indeed, they were poisoned from the very beginning, the first impressions from one another turned out to be deeply negative.

On October 23, 1979, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who had by that time passed through many countries fleeing his home state in search for the personal safety, was admitted to the US for medical treatment. Khomeini wanted the shah to stand trial in Iran for the crimes he committed against the people, but many revolutionaries had, in the first place, an objection to having shah in the US. The 1953 coup, when the shah, in the same manner, travelled to America to consult his ally, loomed in their memory; they feared its reprisal. Shortly after this news spread, on November 4, around 400 students attacked the gigantic American embassy in the center of Tehran. Under the guidance of a group called 'Students following the Imam's line', they stormed the embassy and took

51 Americans hostage. The condition for releasing the captives was that the US extradite the shah back to Iran (UPI, 1979).

Contrary to what the name of the group would make people think of and to what one of the cognitive bias, that Robert Jervis distinguishes, namely the tendency to see the other side's behavior as more centralized and planned than it is, would lead a decision maker, ayatollah Khomeini did not order the embassy takeover; it took him by surprise. After-fact, however, Khomeini gave the students his blessing; the Islamic Republican Party endorsed their initiative and 'ensured their political prominence for decades to come.' (Secor, 2016, p. 40) As a result, Bazargan and his secular government did not have a choice other than to resign: their foreign policy of maintaining friendly relations with US was over. Islamists, who now had a total control of government, seized an anti-imperialist platform from the secular left, 'spectacularly outflanking Iran's opposition of longest standing.' (Ibid.) In his final address, Bazargan expressed his fears that in the future, Iran's people sovereignty might be infringed by the rule of clergy. A month later, the new Constitution was adopted, which cemented the notion of a so-called *velayat-e faqih*, an Islamic state, governed by a single member of the *ulema*. In the words of Laura Secor, '..the decade that followed would consolidate one of the more unaccountable and autocratic regimes of its time.' (Ibid.)

Since the diplomatic ties between US and Iran were cut off, the latter, in its quest for gaining international recognition, sought to reach out to US via Israel, American key partner in the Middle East, particularly important as a Western side's bulwark against the Soviet influence in the region. In fact, when the revolution unleashed, both Tehran and Washington were still willing to preserve a minimum engagement with each other; US did not want to see Iran falling under the Soviet influence. Khomeini himself appointed moderate politicians who favored continued ties with America, although now seeking a different kind of relationship. This move was not destined to hide the internal battle between the moderates and hardliners for long. As the radical students attacked American embassy, violating all international norms, the mutual agenda of moderation came to an end. 'Humiliated, Carter severed all diplomatic ties with Tehran, and America never looked at Iran with the same eyes again. <..> Conversely, the Iranians began to view Washington as a threat - not necessarily a direct military threat but a long-term political threat stemming from America's refusal to accept Iran's revolution

and thus Washington's determination to jump on every opportunity to reverse it.' (Parsi, 2007, p.96).

The American conduct during the wars, such as, in the first place, Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980 and an ongoing fighting for 8 years that followed, influenced the Iranian perception of America, too. Mostafa Zahrani asserts that ' this tragic event created a culture of resistance and a certain school of thought among Iranians, which continues to impact how they regard their national security and defense, and how they behave in both domestic and foreign policy arenas' (Zahrani, 2014, p.2). Some thought that the US benefits from Iraqi aggression towards Iran; Israel, on the other hand, wanted the US to agree to negotiations with Iran, as Iraq posed a greater danger to Israel's own security. At that time Iran, burdened by a sudden Saddam's assault and an international isolation, moved even further away from ideology to rely on pragmatism; its main foreign policy question: whether it should support Israel to counterbalance Arabs or the other way around, not to acquire new enemies among Arab states, was solved unconventionally. Iran decided to make a distinction between its operational policy and rhetoric, verbally supporting the Arab cause while covertly dealing with Israel. However, when in 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon to wipe out the Palestinian stronghold there, Iran managed to export revolution to Lebanon and a pro-Iranian Shia militant group, Hezbollah, emerged. Iran proved to be a fickle, self-interested partner for Israel, but anyway, Israel was forced to seek Iran's backing in a Muslim-dominated region the Middle East is, while Iran only needed Israel as a mediator between the US and itself. American soldiers, captured in Lebanon by Hezbollah, were used by Iran as a card in negotiations with US - the opportunity to get them back was enticing for Americans and became what eventually triggered an infamous Iran-Contra affair. When the Iranians came up with another argument, portraying the USSR as a common enemy of both Iran and the US, president Reagan was convinced and the sales of arms to Iran via Israel, unauthorized by either State Department, Pentagon or CIA, began.

An important breakthrough occurred while the deal was still on - Iran proposed to resume the diplomatic relationship, and officials of the two countries met in Tehran, where Americans expressed their acceptance of the Iranian revolution. However, the final move was not realized due to the disagreements within Iranian government; later, when the deal was disclosed and an investigation started in the US, it turned out to be

detrimental, rather than beneficial, to the relationship. The political elite in America concluded that the whole Iranian system is rotten and negotiation with duplicitous people is not an option, while Iranians were discouraged to hear one American official publicly stating that he lied every time he met Iranian partners. According to some accounts, 'The events of 1986 ultimately contributed to mutual feelings of distrust and paranoia that set the stage for conflict the very next year in the Persian Gulf.' (Mehochko, 2013, p.30)

Iran emerged weakened and more isolated than ever out of an exhausting war with Iraq. The new president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, sought to change that situation, to revitalize the economy and restore ties with the West, 'while still protecting society and Islam against "decadent" Western values.' (Parsi, 2007, p.149) With regards to US in particular, besides the already unwelcome siding with Iraq, a tragic incident, when the USS Vincennes shot down an Iranian airliner in 1988, during the last two bitter years of competition for oil fields, left a deep trace and continued to haunt the relationship for the next decade.

When soon after, Iraq invaded Kuwait, Iran maintained a policy of 'positive neutrality', but covertly assisted the US. Despite that, in 1991, Iranian outlook changed: 'Fearing Washington's increased maneuverability against Iran as a result of the end of the Cold War, Iran made ties with Moscow a priority. Russia was no longer a threat but a partner.' (Ibid.) Indeed, while fighting a war with Kuwait with a coalition of Arab states, US worked to spoil their relationships with Iran by portraying this country as a threat to their security. Obviously, US wanted to play a bigger role in the Middle East while keeping a suspicious and ambitious Iran at a distance.

Iran, however, moderated its ambitions and its main priority became the Persian Gulf, regarded as a strategically significant area. With this adjustment of pretensions, Iran could normalize relationships with GCC states, and that would put America's leadership at risk. Having recognized this threat, US offered the Gulf states a choice: either to construct a security framework with Iran or cooperate with US. The offering by US of bilateral arrangements was deciding: US managed to keep Iran isolated.

This was a major blow to Iran's reasonable requests. As Trita Parsi formulates in his book, 'At a time when Tehran believed that its opportunity had come to be accepted as a regional power and be included in Middle East decision-making, Washington dashed Iran's hopes by refusing to invite it.' (Parsi, 2007, p.160) Needless to say, this neglecting attitude of US towards Iran further troubled their already severely damaged relationship. It was exemplified, in particular, by non-invitation of Iran to an important Madrid peace conference in 1991, where some Iran's allies, such as Syria, were invited. The decision to pursue this approach in itself was a matter of perception and of how the question, whether Iran's primary intentions are defensive or offensive, was answered by the American side. The rationale behind this choice is clear from another quote of Parsi: 'Washington failed to pick up on Iran's readiness <to have peaceful process with Israel> because of the image of Iran as an inherently anti-American nation, formed by a decade of tensions between the two countries.' (Ibid.)

The perception in Iran grew that Rafsanjani's course for detente was not welcomed by Washington: whatever positive Iran did, the response was always the same - deepening isolation. As a result, Rafsanjani started to express disagreement with American designs, a reconciliation of Israel and Palestine in particular.

As the Soviet Union ceased to exist, US together with Israel wanted to create a new order in the Middle East, based on a peace process between Israel and Palestine and an isolation of Iran, the country with a hostile regime and striving for becoming a major regional power. Naturally, Iran did not have a choice other than to support the Palestinian cause and act to undermine the design of the two. Israel, in its turn, made everything in its power to prevent the dialogue between Iran and US, as it feared that US would at some point turn a blind eye to Israeli security concerns, upon concluding economically and otherwise beneficial agreements with Iran. With this aim in mind, it portrayed a conflict between itself and Iran in terms of values and ideology, rather than picturing it the way it actually was: a competition for military preeminence and political weight in the Middle East. Iran was presented to the Western world as the greatest danger to its security and very existence (Neff, 1996).

Both Clinton administration and the regional Arab states were skeptical of Israeli rhetoric and found this depiction to be of little credibility. In 1992 the only major

change that occurred in the Middle East was the elimination of Iraqi threat, and Iran could not automatically turn into a threat due to this reality only. In 1992, when Israel launched this propaganda, Iran was relatively unengaged and paradoxically, by 1995, it became a staunch backer of a Palestinian cause, as if it was a consequence of Israeli mendacious rhetoric.

By that time, US felt itself so comfortably installed in the Middle East, that a new, more self-confident strategy was proposed. As Parsi writes, 'Traditionally, Washington sought to balance Iran and Iraq against each other to maintain a degree of stability. Now, Indyk argued, America's strength had reached such levels that it did not need to balance the two against each other - it could balance both without relying on either.' The policy was 'designed to reassure Israel that the US would keep Iran in check while Jerusalem embarked on the risky process of peacemaking.' (Parsi, 2007, p.163)

Not surprisingly, Iranian clergy felt to have been unduly neglected and found Iran's isolation an unjust and unnatural situation. Consequently, Iran extended support to those opposing all achieved between Israel and Palestine agreements, and in 1994, Iranian parliament even signed a statement for a need for annihilation of Israel from the world map. All this, however, was not to hamper the peace process itself, but rather, a way to hinder Israeli-American effort to isolate Iran - depict it as a threat and exclude it from regional decision-making. Iranian officials confessed of their willingness to contribute to the peace process shall Iran be given an appropriate role from the outset, instead of expecting Iran to comply with whatever the other players come up with.

From all this, the major role of Israel in worsening the relationship between US and Iran is obvious. In the light of America's strength, however, its own priorities indeed were different from focusing on Iran. Another Parsi's line puts it bluntly: 'The Clinton administration was willing to go to great lengths to convince the Israelis and Palestinians to remain on the path of peace, even if it meant escalating tensions with Iran.' (Ibid., pp.184-5)

Perhaps for this reason, US did pay attention to Israeli requests, even when the last yet untouched by the sanctions sector was targeted by the Jewish lobby in America: trade. Rafsanjani had for years fought to reopen Iran's oil industry to foreign companies, and

an amount of trade between the countries was significant. However, another major deal between US and Iran was cancelled due to Israeli efforts and soon, all trade with Iran was prohibited, when an ILSA, Iran and Libya Sanctions Act, was passed in the Congress in 1996.

When it became clear that terrorism puts a peace process at a serious risk, and as a number of terrorist attacks grew, Israeli people wanted to see a change in their country's policies. As another political party, Likud, under the leadership of Netanyahu, won the Israeli elections, Oslo road for peace was gradually abandoned. The change was manifested by the fact that while Israel continued pressing US, EU and Russia to prevent Iran from acquiring weapons that would put Israel within Tehran's reach, at the same time it also tried to revive a periphery alliance with Iran - a doctrine that remained active for many years in the past (Ellsworth, 2014, pp. 48-49). This new outlook also included a slightly different approach to a possibility of an Iranian-American dialogue: as it was getting harder to prevent, the opportunity of relations between Iran and Israel remaining cold while a thaw in US-Iranian relationship occured would certainly be a detrimental prospect for Israel, and thus needed to be avoided.

In 1997 in Iran 'a second revolution' took place: a liberal president Khatami was elected. This politician ran with a program that encompassed the rule of law, democracy, improved relations with the outside world and an inclusive political system, all things new to Iran. Once inaugurated, Khatami addressed the Americans. As Parsi describes, 'Khatami went on to express regret for the 1979 embassy takeover in Iran and distanced himself from the burning of the US flag - a common scene at hard-line rallies in Iran. Both the flag burning and Iran's anti-American slogans must be viewed in the larger context of the 'wall of mistrust' that existed between the US and Iran', said Khatami. Even though he called for more respectful language, Khatami insisted that these slogans were not meant to insult the American people. Rather, the statements served to express the desire by Iranians 'to terminate a mode of relationship between Iran and America.' (Parsi, 2007, p.231)

The dialogue seemed to begin. The US repeatedly declared that it holds nothing against the Islamic Republic of Iran. In Parsi's words, 'The Clinton administration soon became infatuated with Khatami and the idea of finally putting an end to the two-decade enmity

between the two countries.' Clinton himself acknowledged, 'I think it is important to recognize, however, that Iran, because of its enormous geopolitical importance over time, has been the subject of quite a lot of abuse from various Western countries.' (Ibid.)

Despite the promising signals, unfortunately, another attempt at rapprochement was doomed to failure. Neither soccer diplomacy nor loosened visa restrictions nor softer rhetoric succeeded in changing a general mood of the bilateral relationship. The economic sanctions and the heightened rhetoric put in place by Clinton administration in its first term turned out to be the major insurmountable obstacle. And even though the primary responsibility for the ultimate failure lays with miscommunication, missed signals, and Iranian overconfidence, Israeli lobby continued to play a negative role as well.

Meanwhile, some changes within Iran did take place. Iran managed to somewhat break free out of isolation by establishing stronger ties with the Arab governments and EU. With this happening, peace process was not anymore regarded as a serious threat to Iran's posture. Another novelty was a recognition by the reformists that a terror is not only an immoral political tool, but in some respect Iran is one of the key victims of this method. Unfortunately, but already predictably, these changes were not noticed and appreciated by the US. Most strikingly, Iran's approval of the two-state solution - something Iran could never afford to agree with previously - did not result in any rapprochement. 'By recognizing a two-state solution, Iran would grant Israel indirect recognition. Few in the West paid attention to this subtle but crucial shift. This frustrated the Khatami government immensely, which came to view the oversight as yet another indication of Washington's inflexibility toward Iran.' (Parsi, 2007, p.233) This is a good example of misunderstanding which led to a failure of an attempted Khatami detente.

In any case, Israel was getting nervous because of the very existence of communication channels between US and Iran. Clinton administration was more eager, than the previous one, to directly engage with Iran. But things changed in 1999, when Ehud Barak assumed office in Tel Aviv and instead of pushing for a dialogue, declared Iran to be a threat, in preparation for withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon in May 2000 -

the war grew too costly for Israel, there was no other way out (Speech to the National Defense College by Ehud Barak, 1999).

As Clinton's term was coming to an end, historical Camp David talks were carried out between Israelis and Palestinians. Iran's calm reaction to the suppression of Intifada signalized its more strategic, than ideological concern for this ongoing conflict. With regards to US, Iranians' perception of the Clinton administration's activity is summarized in the book as follows: 'Rightly or wrongly, the Iranians believed that Clinton's greatest mistake was that he let Israel dominate America's foreign policy in the Middle East and that he unnecessarily linked Iran's long-standing but resolvable problems with the United States to Iran's bitter rivalry with Israel.' (Parsi, 2007, p.234)

The events that came next are a subject of my more in-depth case analysis, where I am going to focus on perceptions of the two sides. What is important to retain from this historical passage is the number of times when the attitudes on the both sides changed, the amount of crushed hopes, mutual disappointments and sensitivities, failures to get the message across the partner. The struggle for power, happening in a condition of uncertainty about culturally different other's true intentions and capabilities, is destined to be a kaleidoscope like this, especially in the light of the distorted patterns of perception human beings are prone to.

## 4. Case study: 2001-2003

### 4.1 Theoretical background: Robert Jervis on misperception

The complex nature of this relationship requires a correspondingly sophisticated theoretical approach. It is easy to see that both Iran and the US often judge each other's actions based on certain assumptions, which do not necessarily hold true, but are deeply embedded in the minds of political elites. In the words of Robert Jervis, 'If images of others, once established, are hard to dislodge, it is especially important to try to understand how they are formed.' (Jervis, 1976, p.12)

This proposition suggests that we are going to deal not only with the theory of international relations, but with human psychology, to a large extent, too. This distinction might sound strange, and I am convinced that its existence is a very unfortunate fact. It shall not be possible to theorize on the international communication without incorporating essential psychological features of the players into analysis. There is, of course, a concept of human nature, on which the classical realism is based, but it seems to be quite unscientific, in the modern understanding of science. Yet, the beliefs hold by the representatives of different schools with regard to the human nature influence their theoretical outlooks a lot, even though they refuse to acknowledge this fact or consider it insignificant. J. M. Goldgeier and P. E. Tetlock in an article named 'Psychology and International relations theory', published in 2001, tackle this problem and point out, what literature in psychology can be of interest to different theorists of IRs. And while my focus will be on a 'path-breaking work of Jervis on cognitive constraints on rational decision making', that was elaborated 'within a realist framework', I find it useful to first take note of psychological assumptions, underlying realism as such (Goldgeier and Tetlock, 2001, p.68). This move can make clear the certain bias this approach might hold and hence, push the researcher to look for more objective outlook, which is always a good aspiration in science.

Realism, as any other theoretical approach, is not homogeneous: it is fragmented. Thus, there is a vast difference between 'strict structural realists', such as Waltz, Mearsheimer and Layne, on the one hand, and so-called liberal realists, such as Hedley Bull, Martin Wight and Barry Buzan, on the other. The former group normally regards states as security maximizers in an anarchic state system, where they either simply pursue balance-of-power politics to stay safe or have higher ambitions and seek to become hegemons. However, even this extreme, relying heavily on the role of the structure, stream within realism reveals implicit psychological assumptions. States, when observed through the lens of strict structural realism, have propensity to be deeply suspicious and find it reasonable to take into account worst-case scenarios when making decisions, as in a self-help environment, penalties for being wrong are so serious. Further, security-maximizing paradigm of a self-defensive state implies that there is a possibility for the state to eventually become satisfied with its position. Once this is achieved, the states would not want to lose this condition, and would turn into status quo powers, ‘loss averse and disinclined to pursue expansionist policies’ (Ibid., p.70).

An offensive view of the state also assigns to it certain qualities in the long-term development: power-maximization has no limit, and hence, such states can never become satisfied.

Goldgeier and Tetlock go on to discuss the contribution which the prospect theory, the work on endowment effect, the dilution literature, the psychological literature on judgment and choice, evolutionary psychology, works by spiral theorists, experimental psychology, behavioral economics, behavioral game theory etc. could make to the research in international relations. I find political psychology to be an enormously intriguing and appealing subject, but for the purposes of my work, I will only pick the theses suggested by these different subjects and mentioned in this paper, and put them in one row with hypotheses on decision-making process proposed by R. Jervis. Even though his work is not new and was written several decades ago, and as it is put in the paper, many new things were discovered since the time he produced his work of a 'seminal influence', I did not find a more appropriate for my goals literature to rely on. In the end, Jervis directly tackles the issue of distorted perceptions, which manifest themselves so harshly in US-Iranian relations. The confrontation, prevailing in this relationship, the many differences in cultural and political terms between these countries, and the big-scale geopolitical disputes they are engaged in all pointed in the direction of a realist framework. Most frequently, this is the approach favored by those delving into the history of this bilateral relationship. And on the second level, my choice of a Jervis-proposed outlook was determined by the observation of numerous misunderstandings that often resulted in troublesome policies.

## Hypotheses on misperception by Robert Jervis

What exactly are the patterns of our tendency to perceive the environment and the actions of other players in that environment inaccurately? In what ways does environment determine the steps taken by the decision-makers, and by what means do the internally formed images and convictions influence the ultimate measures decision-makers choose?

Jervis puts forth a number of observations, supported by historical examples and formulated as hypotheses. There are altogether fourteen of them, some consisting of two

or more subparts. I am going to go first introduce the list, then closely observe them one by one and in the end, use them for my analysis in the next chapter.

Hypothesis 1. *Decision-makers tend to fit incoming information into their existing theories and images. In other words, actors tend to perceive what they expect.*

> 1a. *A theory will have greater impact on an actor's interpretation of data, the greater the ambiguity of the data and the higher the degree of confidence with which the actor holds the theory.*

Hypothesis 2. *Perceptual hypotheses tend to fixate after a minimum of confirmation. It means that actors tend to establish their theories and expectations prematurely, resolving the above mentioned 'openness' dilemma in favor of being too closed to new information rather than being too willing to alter their theories.*

Hypothesis 3. *It is easier for decision-makers to assimilate the contradicting information into their established image of another actor when the information is arriving bit by bit and considered in parts rather than when it comes all at once.*

Hypothesis 4. *Misperception is hardest to correct if your mind completely lacks a certain category, and is least difficult to correct if an actor is miscategorized, but the category exists in perceiver's mind.*

Hypothesis 5. *Misunderstanding is likely to occur, if messages are sent from a different background of concerns and information than is possessed by the receiver.*

Hypothesis 6. *People tend to think that the more time and effort they invest in drawing up a plan or elaborating the policy, the clearer their message will be to the addressee, since this is what happened to them as a result of their own studiousness.*

Hypothesis 7. *An action might not project the intended image or achieve a desirable effect if it does not practically turn out as it was originally planned, and this is often not realized by those in charge of the planning.*

Hypothesis 8. *Decision-makers tend to see other states as more hostile than they are.*

Hypothesis 9. *Actors tend to see the behavior of others as more centralized, disciplined, and coordinated than it is.*

Hypothesis 10. *States are inclined to treat the stance of the other state's foreign ministry as representative of the government as a whole.*

Hypothesis 11. *When other states act in accordance with the actor's wishes, the actor tends to give herself too much credit for getting them to do so; but when the behavior of the other is undesired, it is mostly attributed to internal (domestic) forces.*

Hypothesis 12. *When actors do not conceal their intentions from others, they tend to assume that others accurately perceive them.*

Hypothesis 13. *If it is hard for an actor to believe that the other can see him as a menace, it is often even harder for him to see that issues important to him are not important to others.*

Hypothesis 14. *Actors tend to overlook the fact that evidence consistent with their theories may also be consistent with other views.*

The above list is broadly based on Jervis, 1986.

Hypothesis 1.

To say that this tendency has place is not to accuse the decision-makers of irrationality. Pure empiricism is impossible; in a highly sophisticated environment, theories that are able to explain a significant part of observable reality, are of a great value. The desire to keep the paradigm despite the incoming conflicting evidence is not necessarily due to the psychological pressure to stay consistent: the dilemma of how 'open' to be to new information is 'essential to the logic of inquiry' as such (Kaplan, 1964, p.86). The decision-makers, who are in a position when they must constantly keep in mind a possibility that the other state intends to deceive them, naturally apply the same mode of suspicion towards revising their already existing and previously helpful approaches.

Hypothesis 2.

Even though it is tempting to attribute this commonality to the frequent urgency of action in politics, the same phenomenon is demonstrated on the unconscious level, too. However, politics does have certain distinguishable features that preclude labelling the case a cognitive distortion.

First, as Jervis puts it, 'The evidence available to decision-makers is almost always very ambiguous since accurate clues to others' intentions are surrounded by noise and deception.' (Jervis, 1986, p.460) Therefore, with duration, depth and objectivity of analysis reinforced, the resulting interpretation will not necessarily get more precise and closer to the truth. It is natural that people can interpret the same set of data differently, when it allows for various interpretations.

Another reason why the concept of cognitive distortion should not be applied to the reality described in the hypothesis is that the distinction between perception and judgment in the making of inferences in international politics is minimal. The rejection by decision-makers of pieces of information contradicting their pre-established views is often made on conscious and explicit grounds. In order to be able to infer from evidence containing contradictory elements, it is indispensable to either ignore some of them or provide an extensive and involute interpretations. The politicians cannot afford not to act while redesigning their positions and trying to bring all the diverging evidence together – the price of doing so might be too high.

Although this reflection is not shaped as a hypothesis, I find it meaningful to touch upon Jervis' commentary on the importance of expectations in influencing perception. It is often claimed that affect can seriously impact and alter the way we perceive and behave (Bower, 1983; Isen, 1990; Swiss Medical Weekly, 2013), but the author points out that even though emotions and desires do exert a certain influence, they do so primarily by changing expectations, that are also influenced by many other factors and thus, play an overall greater role, than desires themselves. This is also proved by the fact that when desires and expectations confront each other, the latter tend to prevail. It might be partly attributed to the need to maintain a sharp sense of reality when dealing with a dangerous

environment. Jervis does not present this observation as a hypothesis, but for the purpose of my topic, it is useful to emphasize this statement: *'Actors are apt to be especially sensitive to evidence of grave danger if they think they can take action to protect themselves against the menace once it has been detected.'* (Jervis, 1986, p.462)

### Hypothesis 3.

This way, in the first case, the conflict of each piece of the discrepant data with the dominant paradigm will be insignificant and can easily be disregarded, while in the situation when a fully-formed competing theory is delivered in a block, the contradiction is bound to be much more visible and has a chance to provoke a major cognitive reorganization.

### Hypothesis 4.

The fourth hypothesis has to do with the concepts and their presence or absence in the actor's mental picture. Jervis distinguishes three conditions a category may enjoy. It can be either completely missing; be known, but not acknowledged (there is no belief in actual existence of a phenomenon it represents); and finally, a recognized category might not be regarded as applicable to another actor at a current moment.

This idea might be difficult to grasp, but the examples the author provides render them clearer. An illustration of a missing concept can be a trouble China had with picturing and reacting to the West in the mid-nineteenth century. China had been an isolated and self-consumed country for many centuries and lacked instances of similar phenomena before, so it was forced to encounter and deal with it for the first time, and the learning process was slow. According to Werner Meissner, it took China five separate periods, the first starting around its defeat in the Opium War of 1840, to work out the response to the Western threat (Meissner, 2006). For the case of miscategorization, an example of how Hitler was perceived in the years preceding the war is given. Although both British and French statesmen of the 1930s had idea of 'states with unlimited ambitions', they did not believe Hitler belonged in that category until there was no space left for confusion. The second level, at which a category is not taken seriously as is hardly applicable to reality, is placed between the other two levels in terms of ability to be

corrected, according to Jervis (Jervis, 1986, p.467). The difficulty with which modification occurs does not, however, correlate, with the speed of this process.

Three main sources of these concepts, or categories, that determine the 'perceptual thresholds' of statesmen (how easily they recognize the phenomena they come across) are as following: actor's beliefs about his own domestic political system; actor's previous experiences and international history. Jervis here uses a phrase perfectly describing a situation in the course of US-Iranian relationship: 'historical traumas can heavily influence future perceptions' (Jervis, 1986, p.470). However, its meaning here is more general: he is talking about the types of danger, which means that an analogous attitude may form towards a current source of a particular kind of danger as it was in the past. The accuracy of this category attribution, naturally, is not guaranteed.

### Hypothesis 5.

This hypothesis builds on the idea that besides the cognitive structure, there is another factor shaping the way people perceive information: the so-called 'evoked set'. This means that the small part of an actor's memory, the one which is presently active, contributes to the perception in disproportionately strong manner.

This statement is easy to agree with. What the sender of the message was focused on does not necessarily coincide with what the receiver has on its mind, and as virtually any evidence can be interpreted differently, the different focus will surely result in a new interpretation. The author gives an example of a person walking in the dark streets in the late evening: his experiential background (whether his previous walks at a similar place at a similar time had left a positive or a negative impression on him), the affect he is currently under (whether the movie he just watched in the cinema was a horror film or a comedy), the knowledge he has of this particular place and the habits of thinking of it he acquired are all very likely to influence the way he would perceive the surroundings.

The two following hypotheses also draw on the issue of sending messages. It is fair to remark that the incorrect assessment of one's own image and capabilities has a great deal to do with an overall trouble in a given relationship.

Hypothesis 6.

The reason why this happens is that people often 'overlook the degree to which the message is apparent to them only because they know what to look for' (Jervis, 1986, p.474). In other words, it is complicated for us to step out of our own perspective and adopt another one to assess the true readability and efficiency of the intended measure. The amount of imagination and the extent of objectivity this task would involve are not normally exercised in our daily lives.

Hypothesis 7.

This hypothesis demonstrates that an unwanted consequence may ensue with no considerable impact on the part of cognitive structures and various backgrounds. Planning can sometimes be quite abstract and insufficiently attentive to the actual probabilities. A number of notable biases interfering with probability assessment is covered, for example, by Erin Poulton, and the list is impressive (Poulton, 1994). Moreover, people whose responsibility is to implement the plan, can easily commit all sorts of mistakes. The decision-makers tend to underestimate the importance of these two aspects and attribute their own failures to another actor's hostile and obstructive behavior. This in turn leads to deepening misperceptions and miscalculations follow.

Another set of hypotheses focuses specifically on the perspective of the perceiver. It discusses the common patterns of distorted vision, the reasons behind them and their consequences.

Hypothesis 8.

Among the two mistakes: to believe that a state is a potential aggressor when this is not the case and to give into potentially aggressive state's assurances of the opposite, the former is more common. This is the type I error, which sets a stage for a conflict spiral, while incorrectly labeling expansionist powers as status-quo is referred to as the type II error. Realists would claim that the prevalence of the type I mistake can be explained by the state system being 'overwhelmingly populated by expansionist actors', and that the cost of making the opposite error is much higher in comparison, so it is always reasonable to 'play it safe'. Jervis' argument is more on the psychological side:

according to him, type I errors are more widespread ‘as a result of the fundamental attribution error (in which observers are too quick to draw strong dispositional inferences of hostile intent from situationally motivated defensive preparations) and belief perseverance (in which observers are too slow to revise their initial causal inferences in response to unexpected events)’ (Goldgeier and Tetlock, 2001, p.73).

Hypothesis 9.

Undoubtedly, all the statements I am going through now are interrelated. Thus, this hypothesis bears traces of others – the tendency to preserve the theory the actor holds and fit all the complex and distinct events in the same framework (Hypothesis 1) and the proneness to overestimate the inimical intentions of others (Hypothesis 8), to name a few. It might be hard to establish the primacy of one hypothesis over another, that is, to argue, in what direction the influence is the stronger. The given pattern, however, is backed by other seemingly independent reasons.

It is never possible to consider all the factors contributing to a certain occurrence, and both the simplification and unawareness are natural phenomena. To regard a set of actions as a pre-designed coherent policy is an easier exercise than to seek an intricate understanding of the actual linkages between them, to include the occasional spontaneous interruptions and unlikely possibilities into an already complicated analysis. Of course, it would be useful for decision-makers to admit the existence of hidden from them information and its probability to be of a larger significance to an overall situation than the one they possess. This is one of advice, so-called ‘safeguards’, that could reduce the power of misperceptions, but I am not going to go into details on this topic here.

Secondly, as Jervis puts it, ‘actors tend to be unfamiliar with the details of another state’s policy-making processes’ (Jervis, 1986, p.476). All the internal bargaining, bitter debates, non-obedience are often missing from the picture of an external observer. All she sees is the final product, the steps available to her judgment, and constructing a rational explanation for them is what normally done. The problem here is that ‘domestic rationality may produce international irrationality’ and in this way, the eventual policies are often not meant to be interpreted in a rationally consistent way. The explanation an

outside observer might come up with can totally misread the actual situation and assign false motives to the other state.

Hypothesis 10.

While normally this approach would be appropriate and reflecting the actual state of affairs, in situations, when the country is split or there is no sufficient coordination between the governmental bodies and thus, the foreign office acts as it pleases, misperception is likely to happen. For the multicomponent governments with numerous bodies responsible for different tasks whose competences might overlap, the above-mentioned event is logical to expect. Needless to say, a solid understanding of how another state's governmental system functions has a potential to greatly contribute to a healthy relationship.

Hypothesis 11.

If the outcome of the other's action is damaging, the injured is apt to believe that the action had a purpose to hurt her and was derived from the subject's qualities. Psychological research takes this further to say that people frequently blame even those who did not intend to cause any harm, targeting their supposedly inappropriate desires (Inbar, Pizarro and Cushman, 2012). But when another actor displays a positive attitude, the first side takes it as a proof of its own efficiency. This latter tendency can be explained by the sense of gratification provided by such belief as well as by something derived from the Hypothesis 9, namely that the actor is most familiar with his own contribution to another actor's decision and is largely unaware of the other sources of influence. The inclination to attribute the hostile outlook of a certain state to its internal motive rather than to view it as a reaction to the external signals plays a significant and an unfortunate role in the relationship I am examining. Jervis summarizes this point as following: '...common is the failure to see that the other side is reacting out of fear of the first side, which can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and spirals of misperception and hostility' (Jervis, 1986, p.477).

Hypothesis 12.

Therefore, there is little chance for the actors to come to an idea that others might be reacting to a different, sometimes much less inviting, image of themselves than the one they believe to be projecting. Clearly, the probability of getting caught in a spiral of hostility only rises with this additional pattern. The struggle of states' egos is continuously unfolding, as 'For state A to understand how state B perceives A's policy is often difficult because such understanding may involve a conflict with A's image of itself' (Ibid.). Hardly does anyone voluntarily, without being forced by the circumstances, questions one's self-representation.

Hypothesis 13.

The connection between this hypothesis and the Hypothesis 5, which suggests that the similarity of focuses and backgrounds, or at least an approximate comprehension of what is on the other actor's mind, is crucial to the mutual understanding, is evident. However, the task of adopting another person's perspective is described as 'a complex and critical set of cognitive abilities' (Barnes-Holmes, Y., McHugh, L., and Barnes-Holmes, D., 2004, p.23) and overcoming the obstacles preventing people from mastering this skill - 'activating the ability, adjusting an egocentric default, and accessing accurate information about others' - is regarded as a sophisticated problem (Epley and Caruso, 2009, p.298). The acknowledgment of confrontation is an easier task compared to the realization that the game the two sides are playing is not the same for both of them. The more involved in the process, framed by his pre-existing outlook, the actor is, the higher stake in the game he has, the harder it is for him to see the situation objectively.

Hypothesis 14.

The very first hypothesis made it clear that interpretation is only possible when a theoretical framework is applied, and as for many reasons transformation of this already received framework is undesirable and takes time, the wish to keep that framework motivates the decision-makers to find ever new confirmations of its correctness. Taking a look from a different angle to verify if the same bit of evidence can confirm another theory is not the primary concern of theirs. This limitation leads to strategic mistakes,

and in order to avoid it, it might be useful to consider Roberta Wohlstetter's argument that 'a willingness to play with material from different angles and in the context of unpopular as well as popular hypotheses is an essential ingredient of a good detective' (Bonham and Shapiro, 1977, p.163). This skill, however, is not easily acquired, so Neustadt's characterization of a good policy-maker as the one who intentionally creates conflicts among his subordinates and cultivates differing viewpoints, might be more of a help (Jervis, 1986, pp.464-5). Encouraging diversity and flexibility of opinions boosts the ability to assess the situation from different angles.

In addition to these 14 hypotheses, that are going to constitute a basis for my analysis, there are several assumptions which I want to include.

First, the explanation offered by the prospect theory as to under what conditions the motivation assigned to the states by the structural realists practically applies. It posits that *the state is eager to pursue a riskier course of action than would be justified by rational calculations, when: 1) the state have not made psychological peace with its losses; 2) it underestimates the probability of failure by treating small probabilities as equal to zero; 3) it overestimates the probability of success by treating large probabilities as equal to 1. By contrast, the state would be reluctant to take risk, even the one potentially bringing benefits based on expected-value calculations, when: 1) it has renormalized perceptions of what rightfully belongs to it, in response to recent gains; 2) it overestimates small probabilities of failure by dwelling on them; 3) it overestimates large probabilities of success by painting the worst-case scenarios.* (Goldgeier and Tetlock, 2001, p.70)

Another valuable contribution of the prospect theory is its clarification of the differences between deterrence and compellence. It claims that *it is far more difficult to induce a state to give up something it already possesses than to prevent it from taking something that it does not. Together with the work on endowment effect (increase in value placed on something once it is acquired), the prospect theory suggests that prospective gains need to be about twice as large as prospective losses to be commensurate.* (Ibid., p.71)

Realists argue that the chance of miscalculations increases as the balance within the system gets harder to measure or when the future position of a given state in the system becomes uncertain. Miscalculations, in turn, can provoke wars (Schweller, 2013, p.28).

Revolution is a good and relevant here example of an event that increases international uncertainty. Other actors tend to regard an ideologically alien domestic regime as a prospective threat of an exaggerated scale and thus, react in an erroneous way. Reliance on biased data, self-defeating spirals of suspicion and ideology, which often prevent the actor from accurately assessing other states, all account for a sudden upheaval. Once a regime is defined as an 'ideological outgroup', the motivation and ability to emphasize go down; the lack of evidence does not stop the observers from making hateful inferences, and as the regime abandons its revolutionary aspirations, it is hard to dispel the already established image.

In relation with this, a psychological literature on dilution shows that the more unfavorable the signal-to-noise ratio, the greater the risk that decision-makers will get distracted by irrelevancies. This is particularly true for the complex thinkers, who tend to 'procrastinate when confronted with difficult cost-benefit decisions' and 'try too hard to understand the perspective of the other side' (Rountree, 2013, p.286). The work on information overload distinguishes between four major causes of distraction: multipolarity, periods of hegemonic transition, complex pluralistic polities that send out contradictory cues and gauging the intentions and capabilities of closed states.

The last point I want to make in the theoretical part has to do with the probable origin of error and bias. Most experimental researchers assume that the tendency to rely on simple, easy-to-execute heuristics, common for both individual and collective actors, is what perpetuates deviations from rationality. An important implication, which I will not pay considerable attention to in the following chapter, is that those political, social and economic systems that encourage self-criticism and reflection, are more likely to attenuate the bias than those fostering conformity.

Goldgeier and Tetlock in their paper touch upon two sets of such moderators of rationality: organizational and domestic accountability pressures and competitive market pressures (Goldgeier and Tetlock, 2001, pp.75-6). The structure of

accountability networks within which decision-makers normally work may or may not promote flexibility and complex thinking. With regards to the market pressures, it can be argued that breakdowns in consistency and transitivity, for example, have less chance to survive in an environment with a constant exchange of ideas and immediate feedback for the choices made.

### 4.2 Another missed opportunity

September 11, 2001 was a tipping point in the never-ending story of ups and downs in US-Iranian relations. The US was forced to recognize that the real danger to its security laid, at the moment, not in the Shia Iran, as Israeli officials and lobbies alleged since 1991, but to the East of it, in the rocky valleys of Afghanistan, where Taliban, Al Qaeda and other Sunni extremist elements found safe haven.

As Iran extended regrets to the American people in connection with the attack, it was ready to show the US the strategic benefits of cooperation. The previously conducted talks in the UN framework gradually lost its appeal, and now Tehran favored more direct communication with the US on this issue. Geneva Initiative, which also included Germany Italy and UN, was regarded as a convenient and relatively informal channel. As UN facilitator Lakhdar Brahimi later recalled, 'The Geneva Initiative was really just a cover to allow the Iranians and the US meet' (Parker, 2009, p.182).

The US immediately started building – or, as James Dobbins notes, it is rather more correct to say that it joined the one already in place – anti-terrorist coalition (Dobbins, 2010, p.149). Iran, as the neighbor of Afghanistan and a long-standing bitter enemy of the Taliban, naturally had a lot at stake in this conflict and was an important member of the group. Even though the military burden in ousting Taliban was largely taken on by the US, Iran's indirect role, via support of the Northern alliance, was essential to the ultimate defeat of the Taliban.

What seems to have been a smooth path to the Bonn conference, where Iran played a decisive role in formation of the new Afghani government was, in reality, marked by

internal tensions. As I am proceeding to comment on them now, Jervis' hypotheses will come in handy.

In the US, General Colin Powell proposed a plan that 'called for cooperation with Iran that would be used as a platform for persuading Tehran to terminate its involvement with anti-Israeli terrorist groups in return for a positive strategic relationship with Washington.' (Parsi, 2007, p.226). In the same time, Israel and neoconservatives wanted events to unfold differently: instead of courting Iran and blame Israeli-Palestinian process for igniting 11/9 act of terror, they wished US would put all states linked to any terrorist groups on notice, including Iran. However, at first, these efforts were fruitless, and Geneva Channel brought about an extensive information exchange between Iran and US.

Meanwhile, in Iran, there was no internal consensus on whether to cooperate with US or not, either. Thus, on September 26, 2001, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei declared angrily, 'Over the past 23 years, you [America] have employed everything and all your might to inflict blows on this nation [Iran] and this country. Now you expect us to help you?' (Parker, 2009, p.188). By that time, chanting 'Death to America', temporarily suspended for 11/9 tragedy, was resumed by regime loyalists. Another issue of concern was American military presence along Iranian borders, which will only get more apparent in 2003. Iranian leaders were unhappy about this situation, but nevertheless did not impede US-led Operation Enduring Freedom. At official level, Iran offered US an impressive intelligence data, Iranian air bases, help with search-and-rescue operations for downed American pilots, served as a bridge between US and Northern Alliance forces and occasionally used American information to find and kill Al Qaeda fighters.

I am not going to go further into details of internal debates, but what is important to understand is that the lasting cooperation was proved unattainable because of the previously formed images that were hard to challenge. A generally received negative view on Iran in the US prevented American officials from accepting some of its friendly offers, whereby those who tried to get across a message of Iran's genuine intentions were dismissed.

It is fair to say that there was a certain degree of understanding domestic struggles, at least on the American side. For example, in mid-January 2002, after a new government for Afghanistan, led by Karzai, was established, US envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, reported that the MOIS and the IRGC, subordinated to hardline Supreme Leader Khamenei, were supporting the traditional Iranian allies in Afghanistan militarily and financially while encouraging them not to submit to the central authority. He was, reportedly, contrasting these activities with a friendly posture of the Foreign Ministry, that was controlled by the reformist President Khatami (Parker, 2009, p.194). Interestingly, Javad Zarif, who represented Iranian Foreign Ministry at the conference in Bonn, was the one who suggested to include democratic elections as an article of Afghani Constitution, and implicitly pointed out American double standards: while US was accusing Iran of human rights violations, its Gulf allies had a much worse situation in terms of democratic freedoms.

Similarly, after a terrorist attack in Riyadh in May 2003, Wilkerson acknowledged, 'even if al-Qaeda had come in and out of Iran, it didn't mean the Iranian government was complicit. There were parts of Iran where the government would not know what was going on'. (Parsi, 2007, p.253)

However, in order to appreciate the uniqueness and rarity of this realization, it suffices to have a look at how Karine A incident was treated in Washington. Karine A was a ship detected in the waters of the Read Sea on January 3, 2002. It was captained by a member of Palestinian navy and loaded with various heavy weaponry and explosives. The Israelis who intercepted the ship concluded that it was coming from Iranian island and it was a clear indication that Iran intended to violate Palestinian Authority's agreement with Israel by arming Arafat, the head of the government. Israelis were more than happy to pledge again to undermine the attempted Iranian-American dialogue, and as their lobby had a significant influence in Washington, the latter came to accept their interpretation of the events. Bush administration was now convinced that Iran's ties with terrorists were alive. This was a major setback for General Powell, who called for a dialogue. Simultaneously, the successful operation in Afghanistan 'demonstrated the advantages of neocon foreign policy and reinforced the belief of many in the administration that preemptive, unilateral action was justified; in their opinion, the United States did not need Iran.' (Mehochko, 2013, p.64)

Meanwhile, in Iran, the occurrence came as an unpleasant surprise. Although the existence of rogue elements was known, it was hard to find out who stood behind the incidents, and Khatami went as far as instructing Iranian diplomats to request the US to provide the evidence available to them. Iranians also sent a message via ever functioning Swiss channel, denying their involvement in the affair, but neither attempt was welcome. Considering the victory of a traditional, non-accepting approach towards Iran within the government, Bush administration never took these declarations seriously, and asserted instead that information available to it was sufficient and reliable (Parsi, 2007, p.234).

This episode is a clear example of both how decision-makers tend to fit the evidence into their pre-existing theories (Hypothesis 1), how much more hostile than it actually is one state tends to see the other (Hypothesis 8) and how little statesmen of one country often know about the domestic political process in the other, which results in overestimation of the latter's coherency (Hypothesis 9). It also hints to Hypothesis 14, stating that decision-makers tend to overlook the opportunity for a piece of evidence to be consistent with more than one theory.

Another example that confirms Hypothesis 9 is what James Dobbins says about debates among US officials at that time on 'whether the positive and negative elements of Iranian behavior evident at the time revealed a real split between 'moderate' and 'hard-liner' elements within that regime or were simply two strands of consciously manipulative and implacably adversarial Iranian policy.' (Dobbins, 2010, p.157) He goes on to admit that hardliners tended to advance the latter assumption. Recalling two members of American delegation in Bonn, who left in the middle of the conference to attend a secret meeting in Rome with the staunch opponents of Iranian regime, to discuss the possibility of sponsoring their efforts at overthrowing the regime, Dobbins acknowledges that 'Iranian officials faced a similar puzzle in trying to reconcile my behavior in Bonn with that of my colleagues in Rome, assuming they knew of the latter meeting, which seems quite possible.' (Ibid.)

After a donors' conference in Tokyo, both US special envoy Dobbins and US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill were informed about Iranian desire to open a dialogue that

would cover all the issues dividing the two countries. When this message was conveyed to the senior officials in Washington, however, none seemed to be interested. Iranians never got a private response.

Instead, one week later, on January 29, Bush 'Axis of Evil' address gave a blow to the cooperating momentum. Iranians were angered and closed down Geneva Channel in protest, but there were, equally, people in the US who strongly criticized the comments made by the President (Parsi, 2007, p.236). With this, those in Iran who argued for meaninglessness of entering into collaboration with such an untrustworthy state as US seemed to have won. The favor, offered by Iranians in assisting US with the Taliban was not returned, despite Bush's assurance that 'goodwill begets goodwill' (Inaugural Address by George H.W.Bush, 1989). Iran was 'shocked, disappointed and felt scorned' (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014, p.191), that is, in the light of Iranian national pride, a red flag for moving on with cooperation. Détente was moving to its end now. Hard-liners in Iran concluded: 'If you give in, if you help from a position of weakness, you get negative results.' More than that, they framed the new line in terms of values: 'The slightest flexibility towards America' signified 'disregard for the honor and interest of the Iranian people' (Parker, 2009, p.195). This way, another twist of a conflict spiral was not escaped.

Later that year, a special Dual Track policy was introduced as a new framework to deal with Iran. The core of that policy was that US would simultaneously 'continue to oppose Iran's destructive and unacceptable behavior' while 'laying out a positive vision for the Iranian people' (Mehochko, 2013, p.72). The policy was based on one of the four pillars, constituting the Bush doctrine, the so-called 'freedom agenda'. The others were the universal approach to both terrorists and states that sponsor them, anticipatory self-defense, and preventive war. This new doctrine symbolized the shift from realist-type outlook towards the one based on idealistic principles, rigid and uncompromisable.

Returning to Hypothesis 8 and the counterbalancing of two types of errors, one perspective seems to clarify the situation quite well. Numerous sources emphasize that Iran is regarded in the US as an offensive state, while in reality, all Iranian actions are defensive and originate in the fear of US regime change motives. Despite being surrounded by American allies having US military bases on their soil and facing

American involvement with the region at large, Iran seeks to maintain its status as a regional power, and this ambition looks to the decision-makers in Washington as a manifestation of the offensive nature of Iranian policies (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014, p.261). A possible direction for the future research would be to examine the arguments proposed by the thinkers advocating underestimation, rather than overestimation, of Iranian enmity on the part of the US. A vivid example of such position is a book by Dore Gold, '*The Rise of Nuclear Iran: How Tehran Defies the West'*. As a president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and former Israeli ambassador to the UN, Gold puts forth an account most likely affected by the views held in that country, which makes an investigation even more multifaceted.

One source describes the relationship between these two players in the region as a mutual containment, that is in part indispensable in order to prevent a direct adversarial engagement and in part results from an understanding that an outright confrontation would not leave any of them a winner: US and Iran have both overlapping and diverging interests, and each plays a significant enough role to be impossible to defeat. The cooperation on Afghanistan is also considered through this lens: US was trying to undermine Iran's ties with Afghanistan and reduce its influence on the Western borders by increasing its own presence, while Iran's primary motive for entering into collaboration is regarded to be a necessity to have a certain control over situation and count on probable benefits in terms of improving relationship with US (Maleki and Tirman, 2014, p.96).

Despite the strong anti-American statements pronounced among others by Supreme Leader himself, Iranian-American communication channel was resurrected, as Iran realized that Washington is planning another military overture. Consultations continued, although on a less intense footing, right into the months preceding US invasion of Iraq and the period right after. Everyone's attention gradually shifted from Afghanistan to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Iran was of an ambiguous attitude toward the approaching toppling. Foreign Minister Kharrazi said at a UN meeting in October 2002, 'It is not legitimate for others, regardless of how powerful they be, to intervene in other countries in order to change their regime' (Parker, 2009, p.230). Although none wanted to keep Saddam in power, Iran feared not only the regime change example that could lead America to consider intervention in Iran itself in the near future, but also the potential

fragmentation of the state of Iraq, with whom Iran shares a long border, and an instability in the region as a whole, that could disrupt trade and threaten security. In addition, the perspective of being fully surrounded by American forces was not favorably regarded by the theocratic regime. Nevertheless, Iran had little power to alter the decision taken by US and UK and prepared to accept the operation as a fact.

Some authors called the possibility of cooperation on Iraq another 'great opportunity' for overcoming disagreements (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014, p.196). But just as in the case with Afghanistan, the two sides did not want to recognize the other's separate interests and openly discuss them. US feared Iranian influence on Iraq's affairs, and acted in aggressive manner to prevent Iran from engagement with Iraqi political forces. In response, Iran intensified its traditional ties in Iraq which have been by that time active for about two decades. Thus, instead of a badly needed cooperation that would ensure a smooth transition period for Iraq, US and Iran engaged in mutual accusations. The already suffered position of moderates within the Iranian government was further crumbling.

Nevertheless, just as in case of Afghanistan, the two countries had incentives for a minimal cooperation, and in January 2003, according to the author of 'Persian dreams', 'US and Iranian officials reportedly met directly to discuss Iranian noninterference in military operations against Iraq, assistance in search-and-rescue missions, and denial of haven to fleeing Saddam Hussein forces. The American envoys reportedly assured the Iranians that a US military campaign against Iraq would not target Iran.' (Parker, 2009, p.233)

American troops entered Iraq on March 19 and already on May 1, President Bush declared the operation to have been successfully completed. The ease with which the US defeated the Iraqi army greatly impressed and likely, scared politicians in Iran. Most strikingly, the hardline conservatives were now eager to accept the prospect of rapprochement with America. In the first days of May, the Majles in an unprecedented move voted in favor of restoring relations with the US, and one Iranian diplomat even publicly stated, that the country is ready to 'discuss re-establishing relations on the basis of mutual respect' (Slavin, 2003).

The temptation and the need to get along with America were, as always, balanced for Iranians with the threat this country could pose, at that time in particular, and with unpleasant experiences of rejection in the past. President Khatami appealed to the international order by saying that although none opposed the toppling of Saddam, the US went beyond acceptable in occupying the Iraq, as this way, it 'overlooked the UN and belittled the entire world.' (Parker, 2009, p. 235) However, in reality, there was an interdependence between Iran and the US as far as the future of Iraq was concerned, and ultimately, Iran emerged as a winner. US was blinded by the success and believed it could lead the way on its own, without consulting the other key regional players, Iran, in the first place. Soon, it teamed up with the new Iraq. As one scholar argues, 'The political and security developments after 2003 and the creation of the first Shi'ite state in the Arab world increased Iran's role in turning the country into a key player in the region.' (Maleki and Tirman, 2014, p.97) In the face of the two countries with a strong cultural and religious connection, US should have acted very warily. The continuation and unity of a Shi'a majority government in Iraq depended on Iran's support, and therefore, US was in need of Iran's willingness to play a constructive role to ensure stability after US forces would leave. On the other hand, Iran was not fully satisfied with the American influence on the future of Iraq, as a 'vast scale' of it contradicted Iranian interests (Ibid.). An absolute consensus was never reached.

Before I turn to the issue of the so-called 'Grand Bargain' and its unfortunate destiny, I want to address another cause of troubles in the relationship.

When in late May 2003, ABC News announced that Pentagon campaigned for overthrowing regime in Iran 'using all available points of pressure on the Iranian regime, including backing armed Iranian dissidents and employing the services of the Mujahedin-e Khalq', the Iranian concerns, although not for the first time ever, became officially confirmed (Parsi, 2007, p.246).

One researcher opines that 'Outstanding among misperceptions of American policy-makers as well as misanalysis by the analysts is the use of 'coercive diplomacy' to change the behavior of the Iranian government', and he further argues that assumption that Iran can be influenced via methods such as sanctions, intimidation, threat of military action, isolation and forced to surrender is false (Mousavian and Shahidsaless,

2014, p.9). This approach reveals a profound lack of understanding of Iranian national psyche. The frequent use by Iranian officials of the phrase 'mutual respect' and accusing America of being irreverent and self-interested demonstrate the essentiality of equal treatment and acknowledging the worth of the great country of Iran for establishing healthy, reliable ties. As long as this attitude is denied to Iran, and views, that can be summarized in a statement by American senator, 'Demand and coerce; this is how one deals with a regime like the Islamic Republic', prevail, no progress is to be expected (Maleki and Tirman, 2014, p.62). For in order to communicate successfully, one needs not only to speak but to listen and to hear and – no matter how hard it is – to overcome common troubling patterns, described by Robert Jervis.

I would argue that this tendency for introducing coercive policies is related to Hypothesis 11, which indirectly suggests that decision-makers are prone to believe they can influence the behavior of other states. Some American analysts assumed, for example, that moderate turns in Iranian government resulted from American intervention in the elections or from an impact made by American NGOs or Internet propaganda (Nouwrouzzadeh and Miller, 2018). They disregarded the internal developments, that were of a much bigger importance and were completely independent from external actor's activities. Even more than that, for the sake of maintaining their views, they sometimes neglected positive developments which might have been influenced by the US, such as a high percentage of those who in the public polls expressed their wish to see relations with US normalized (Mehochko, 2013, p. 71). Ill-informed or anxious Iranian officials are as well exaggerating the foreign threat, aware of the past events and present probabilities (Critical Threats, 2009). The second half of Hypothesis, which says that we are likely to attribute negative events to internal forces, when we could have actually impacted the situation, is illustrated by the fact that American policy-makers rarely regard Iran's steps as reactionary and resulting from US treatment of the country. Instead, they tend to believe that Iran is evil and has aggressive intentions.

In late April 2003, a draft of a comprehensive proposal for restarting US-Iran bilateral relationship appeared in Tehran, coauthored by Iran's ambassador to France, Sadeq Kharazzi, Iran's ambassador to France, and Tim Guldimann, the Swiss ambassador to Tehran. The draft was first given to the Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, who in his

turn invited top diplomats, such as Iranian UN representative Javad Zarif, to assist in preparing the final version (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014, p.198).

The aim of the treaty was to put an end to hostilities between the countries, and it contained a number of concrete measures to achieve that. Iran, for its part, proposed that it would address such critical for US issues as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, Iran's opposition to the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, and Hezbollah of Lebanon. In exchange, Iran would like to see US ending its hostility towards Iran, both rhetorical and expressed in direct interference in internal affairs; lifting sanctions and abandoning its quest for regime change; respecting Iran's interests in Iraq and supporting the cause of war reparations; acknowledging Iran's right to access nuclear, biological and chemical technology and finally, recognizing Iran's legitimate security interests in the region (Parsi, 2007, p.246). Of particular significance was Iran's suggestion to revise its anti-Israeli stance, not only because it remained unchanged for long years, but also because this far it was aligned with other members of Organization of Islamic Cooperation and questioning it could cause disagreements within the block.

The people who drafted the proposal all agreed that until there was a sign of US eagerness to consider the 'grand bargain', it should not be made official and reported to Ayatollah Khamenei. Otherwise, his reaction would be very predictable: he had long considered any overtures to America to be naïve and those extending the hand of friendship - mistaken about that country's motives. Khamenei would profess a coming humiliation and remind everyone again of the negative experiences with US in Lebanon and Afghanistan, as he used to do in such situations (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014, p.199). Interestingly enough, and this is something I came across many times while working on this research, another source argues that Khamenei was informed about the proposal and endorsed it but insisted on keeping it secret for the fear of losing support from the hardline clerics. However, in the light of his remarks on Afghanistan and the nature of the source which I follow, I tend to stick with the first version of events.

It is useful to note that initially, the idea to draft a roadmap came up in the meeting between Javad Zarif and retired American ambassadors in his residence. Zarif pointed

out that in order to bring about progress, it is first indispensable for US to demonstrate its resolve to normalize relationship. The Americans tried to reach out to the administration but were not given attention. Ultimately, it was Iranian side that took the idea more seriously.

In late April – early May, the proposal was conveyed to different contacts of the authors in Washington. In early May 2003, Guldimann himself flew to Washington, D.C. and hand delivered Iran's official proposal to Congressman Ney (Mehochko, 2013, p.83). State Department never responded to Iranians. It is still unclear, at what point did Americans decide to fully ignore the proposal, but according to some accounts, there was a debate between the State Department and the neocons, led by Cheney and Rumsfeld, and the latter finally won the dispute. Rumsfeld, reportedly, was planning to use MeK for creating uprisings in Iran, and therefore was not interested in other possibilities. State Department understood that it had very little chance of going through with the initiative and wasting the remnants of Powell's political capital for an affair like this would be reckless. In the words of Wilkerson, eventually, 'the old mantra of 'we don't talk to evil'…reasserted itself' and 'the secret cabal got what it wanted: no negotiations with Tehran' (Parsi, 2007, p.248). None was genuinely interested in dealing with Iran, particularly at a time when America's power was strong and Iran's overture could be easily, and not totally incorrectly, interpreted as a sign of weakness. Some in the government asked, 'Why talk to Iran when you could simply dictate terms from a position of strength?' (Collier, 2017, p.303). Regime change scenario was on the table in Washington.

More than that, a blow was given to an official Geneva Channel, as well. After the bombings in the Saudi capital of Riyadh the night of May 12-13, which took thirty-four lives, including eight Americans, the US announced suspension of the talks (Parker, 2009, p.237). Referring to the phone intercepts, US charged Iran with sheltering Al Qaeda fighters who performed a devastating attack. Critical analysts in America argued that the administration should not have used the dubious evidence to cut off contacts with Tehran. But there was no way back – another opportunity for normalizing communication was gone.

The ‘grand bargain’ was only one of the many similar attempts to reach out to US officials undertaken by Iranians in spring 2003 in Europe and elsewhere. And although Iranians had heavy doubts if they would succeed at the beginning, the total non-response, or a response in the form of punishing the Swiss for taking up a role of intermediator, came as an insult. I only discussed ideology a few times in this paper, but it is important to understand, that the very ‘theory’ which decision-makers seek to confirm and stick with against all odds constitutes ideology. The relationship between pragmatic and non-pragmatic factors I focus on in this paper is, in my view, well described by Max Weber: *‘Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men’s conduct. Yet very frequently the ‘world images’ that have been created by ‘ideas’ have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest.’* (Swedberg, 2005, p.130) With time, it becomes hard to judge whether the choice to see the reality through particular lens is deliberate or it got so comfortable and reassuring that Hypothesis 5, concerned with the different background of concerns the message is sent from or received should be employed in this analysis incessantly. Once ideology was a cornerstone of Iranian domestic and external politics, but in those years, an Iranian reformist justly explained American behavior by its implicit bias: ‘These people in Washington don’t see the world for what it is; they only see what they want to see. We used to suffer from the same mindset after the revolution, but we learned very quickly the dangers of an ideological foreign policy. We paid a very high price for our initial mistakes’ (Parsi, 2007, p.255).

In conclusion of this chapter, I would like to note that some of Jervis’ hypotheses are underpinning the whole story and are thereby confirmed, even though I do not focus on them specifically.

Take Hypothesis 4, which talks about miscategorization. It is fair to say that the standoff between Iran and US owes a lot to the revolutionary era, when Iran underwent a radical transformation. A new, alien and fierce country, different and reserved in its religious doctrine, was regarded with suspicion and given the lack of transparency and a limited access from outside to the objective information on internal developments, plus the necessity to be acquainted with historical and cultural background behind the revolution to understand those, the correct categorization would be hard to achieve anyway. Shall the US acknowledge Iranian aspiration to wed democracy and Islam, would the

situation be any better? I believe this to be unlikely, because traditionally, concept of democracy is linked to secularity, rationality and personal freedom, while the one of religion, Islam in particular – to the following of specific rules in the personal life, self-limitation, blind belief. Shall Iran prove that it has nothing to do with terrorism; that human rights violations do not commonly occur in the country and that, indeed, people are satisfied with the way they are ruled, distrust could probably be pacified and a new concept given a chance. This is not, however, the case – geopolitical realities interfered with the revolutionary dream first, and the balance between clerics and secularists in Iran is actually problematic.

The situation with Hypotheses 7 and 10 is particularly curious. To remind the reader of the content of Hypothesis 7, it discusses the influence of a faulty execution of a government-planned policy on the state of the relationship. For both Iran and the US, as for countries with a complex political system and numerous diverging interests therein, interruptions, spontaneous incidents and all sorts of emergencies are common and hence constitute a basic feature of this relationship, as if the trouble with cultural discrepancies and misperceptions was not enough. In connection with this, hardly did any side take the position of the Foreign Ministry as representative of the government as a whole. For US, a rational-minded and international community-oriented Iranian Foreign Office was at best a weak part of the government as a whole and at worst, a façade designed to trick the Americans and cover the real, ill-intentioned figures. For Iran, even if the official position was regarded as the final one and reflecting the true moods of US administration, that very position was either unpleasant or required a careful decoding. None in this relationship trusts the words.

## 5. Conclusion

The valid expectation of my reader would be to learn, as a finishing stroke, what scientific value does my work have, what contribution do I myself, as an author, considered to make? The answer would be: I explored my own path to untying an intellectual riddle of US-Iranian relationship, encouraged by intuition and curiosity. In

reality, much more time and many more pages would be needed to cover many other sides of this topic and to establish numerous internal connections.

My most decisive point, however, would be that psychology can be an integral part of research in international relations, and it is not a coincidence that many scholars either made comments on the psychological nature of the problem as a matter of common sense or wholeheartedly devoted the entire research to elaborating on this topic.

Culture, too, is a key ingredient, frequently underestimated. Although Robert Jervis's approach is generalizing, he briefly mentions the cultural differences' impact on the patterns of perception. The role of religion in the case of Iran is enormous, but its rich and glorious history, followed by the first encounters with the European nation-states probably deserves more attention. The interaction between the cultural and psychological aspects in decision-makers' personalities is a distinct, and undoubtedly relevant, research question.

One interesting cultural difference between Americans and Iranians is that while the first are known to be pragmatists and inclined to pursuing science, an average Iranian is well-read and can cite many verses by heart. An outcome of this distinction is that Americans have a positivistic mindset: they believe any problem can be fixed 'in the same way as the sum of two numbers can be determined.' Iranians, on the other hand, are endowed with poetic sensibility: they feel problems 'deeply, often painfully, but they have trouble determining what to do about them' (Ghaedi, 2009). Science is optimistic, as it renders the world understandable and malleable, while literature is sober, it calls for recognizing limits. I find it hard to make relevant for my topic inferences from these characteristics, but I want to mention a remark made in one source. The authors note that 'Americans, unlike Iranians, do not focus on the history of hostilities, although they might have registered them somewhere in their minds.' (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014, p.34) Naturally, this quality can have a considerable impact on the course of relationship: dwelling on the past grievances too much further burdens the interaction, while nuances mattering to Iranians may escape the sight of a pragmatic-type thinker. Remember Hypothesis 13: *If it is hard for an actor to believe that the other can see him as a menace, it is often even harder for him to see that issues important to him are not important to others.*

In a way that historians and various social scientists attempt to predict and categorize revolutions, it might also be possible to reflect upon the link between the events of the past and the national heritage with what kind of ideology arises in a given place at a given time. Doctrine, as a particular case of ideology, can equally be considered through this lens. There are examples of American doctrines, such as, for instance, the one of Monroe, that outlived some state ideologies. Not the duration is a major determinant of what can be referred to as an ideology.

Non-pragmatic factors are of a serious significance to this bilateral relationship. The mere concept of rationality, lying at the core of pragmatism, is being frequently questioned these days. Misperception, and I would give here one of its definitions, suggested by James L. Richardson, 'faulty, inaccurate or incorrect perception of a situation: it is perceived to have characteristics which are not present, or which are present to a significantly lesser or greater extent than perceived' (Richardson, 1994, p.256), is widely present everywhere, starting from our daily lives and stretching into the highest-level decision-making processes. When this factor is dismissed, an objective description of any communication is unlikely.

Although an outlook advocated by Jervis and some others developed by different scholars, help to shed light on a relationship in question, bearing in mind the peculiar features of it is essential, in order to be careful in applying generalized conclusions to extraordinary realities. Thus, due to the so-called 'wall of mistrust', an assumption that Foreign Ministry is regarded as representative of state, is not operational in the case of Iran and US. Similarly, the method of treating evidence on both sides is unobvious. To illustrate that, Ali Ansari '..highlighted a trend in American foreign policy judgments: where ambiguity existed, the balance of consensus concluded that Iran must be in some way responsible. The development of such a conspiratorial mentality among American analysts paradoxically ensured that the absence of evidence effectively convicted Iran and ascribed guilt, in a manner that overturned traditional western notions of jurisprudence.' (Ansari, 2006, pp.102-103) Under certain conditions, traditional laws cease to function, and an exceptional story between Iran and US provides a plenty of those.

I did not have as a goal to come up with recommendations for establishing peace and mutual understanding between the two countries, but I believe that indirectly, my work serves to this end. The better we understand the roots of miscommunication, the more we are capable of reversing the unfortunate trends. One analyst advised Iran to make peace with the idea of continuous misreading of its own policies on the side of US, and act accordingly. The lessons of failed public diplomacy attempts at a time of Bush presidency (Aghazadeh, 2015, pp.42-8) could have taught the Americans, in their turn. In my view, the pivotal issue here is being able to learn from mistakes, but unfortunately, it takes us a long time to do so, and this is another pattern of cognition I could have included in my analysis on a more explicit basis.

The long-standing confrontation between US and USSR was gradually resolved. And even though the hostility between Iran and US had often elevated to the degree unknown in the Cold War, when diplomatic relations between the adversaries were in place, there are still solid grounds to believe that eventually, an understanding will be found.

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