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THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF US-IRANIAN RELATIONS

by

Mariah Levison

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Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
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The United States and Iran have not had official diplomatic relations for thirty years. Why is this the case? During the entirety of the Cold War the US maintained diplomatic and often intense diplomatic relations with the USSR. The US maintains close relations with Pakistan regardless of the fact that it developed nuclear weapons and was responsible for nuclear weapons proliferation under the auspices of the founder of Pakistan's nuclear program, Abdul Qadeer Khan. It maintains relations with Syria and Libya even though they are on the State Department's *State Sponsors of Terrorism* list. Before the 2003 war against it, the US provided material support to Iraq even though it invaded two of its neighbors, used illegal chemical weapons, and brutally repressed its own people. Furthermore, the US has propped up a number of dictators who were responsible for murder, torture, and repression. Among these unsavory characters are Augusto Pinochet of Chile, Mobutu Sésé Seko of Zaire, the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, the Somozas of Nicaragua, and many others. While it is true that Iran has sponsored international terrorism, obstructed the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, created spheres of influence in other Middle Eastern countries, and may be developing nuclear weapons, its crimes are on par with many regimes that the US not only has official diplomatic relations with, but that the US supports.

The US severed diplomatic relations with Iran following the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent seizure of the US embassy and hostage crisis. Before the Iranian Revolution, the US and Iran were staunch allies. This relationship was a central pillar of the US's Middle East policy. Since the revolution, relations have remained poor. A number of events have reinforced the mistrust and anger between the two nations. Iran

is upset about the US's patronage of the Shah despite his repressive policies (the revolution was partially a response to this repression), US support of Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war that left one million Iranians dead, economic sanctions, the US's unconditional support of Israel, and efforts by the US government to instigate regime change in Iran (Weiner, 1996). The US is upset with Iran about its support of international terrorism, its interference in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, its creation of spheres of influence in other Middle Eastern countries, and its pursuit of nuclear power. These concerns are valid. However, the threat that Iran poses has been considerably overestimated and the consequences of the failure to normalize relations widely underestimated. Iran has engaged in actions that are threatening to the US; however, Iran is not the threat that it is conventionally thought to be. The popular conception of Iran is oversimplified, one-sided, decontextualized, and in some cases, inaccurate. Conventional accounts of the conflict often frame it in inaccurate ways. Three misperceptions are especially common.

The first misperception is that contentions originate overwhelmingly from Iran. The reality is that the United States is a partner in the conflict. The United States has a long history of illegal and unethical interference in Iranian affairs. During World War II Iran was occupied by Allied forces, and in 1953 the US engineered a coup that overthrew the democratically elected prime minister of Iran. It takes two to Tango; both the US and Iran fuel the conflict.

The second misperception is an inaccurate image of Iran as 1) an irrational, 2) undemocratic country that, 3) hates America. First, Leverett and Leverett (2008) and Milani (2009) argue that Iran is not irrationally or ideologically driven and that Iran's

actions can be understood in terms of its national interests. Leverett and Leverett (2008) state that “Since the death of the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, Iran has been increasingly capable of defining its national security and foreign policy in terms of national interests,” (para. 10). Milani (2009) makes a strong argument that Iran’s actions are logical (though not necessarily ethical or legal) based on its needs and interests and its perception of US-Iranian relations. Second, Iran is a partially democratic country with a complex and little understood political system made up of some elected and some unelected officials (Takeyh, 2006). Third, culturally Iran is exceptionally pro-Western. Slavin claims that, “No other country is so fixated on the United States. No other foreign government so aspires to and fears a U.S. embrace,” (2007, p. 9). Following September 11th, while some countries hosted anti-America protests, the streets of Tehran spontaneously filled with candle light mourning vigils (Slavin, 2007, p.11; Takeyh, 2009, p.206). Iran’s leaders were among the first to make public statements condoning the acts of terrorism (Slavin, 2007). Milani (2009) claims that anti-Americanism in Iran is really about opposition to US policies, not to the existence of the US.

The third misperception is that since the Iranian revolution the two countries have been at a complete diplomatic impasse with few opportunities for rapprochement. The reality is quite different. Iran and the US are not at a diplomatic impasse. Over the last thirty years both the US and Iran have made efforts to improve their relationship. These efforts have occurred since formal diplomatic relations were terminated and continue today. Serious opportunities for rapprochement began with the presidency of the pragmatist Rafsanjani in 1989. Efforts from both sides were intensified during the presidency of the reformist Khatami and were redoubled following September 11th.

Given the fact that Iran's behavior has a rationale and given the fact that Tehran and Washington are not so far apart diplomatically as conventional wisdom holds, why are US-Iranian relations in such an egregious state? I argue that the answer to this question lies in the social-psychological dynamics of the relationship.

The social-psychological perspective is a different lens than that provided by more traditional approaches to peacebuilding that focus on material or strategic factors. It helps to explain and address aspects of conflict that material and strategic analyses cannot account for. Social psychology explains the subjective elements of conflict: perception, cognition, attitude, emotion, needs, and values. Subjective conflict is caused by misperception, misattribution, miscommunication, disturbed emotions, thwarted fundamental needs, and other phenomenological processes. I argue that the material and strategic factors underlying the US-Iranian relationship do not add up to the actual level of conflict between the parties and that a social-psychological analysis can explain why there is so much conflict between the parties.

In chapter one, I document that since 1989, the US and Iran have had a number of opportunities and made a number of attempts to improve their relationship – disproving the conventional account of US-Iranian relations as being at a hostile impasse since the Islamic Revolution. In chapter two, I explicate the role that social psychological factors play in international conflict and expound on some of the specific processes that are common in international conflict. In the third and final chapter, I apply these social-psychological phenomena to US-Iranian relations. The social psychological dimensions of US-Iranian relations are almost completely ignored in both academia and policy. In investigating them I make a unique contribution to the literature on Iran and the social

psychology of conflict. I demonstrate that it is these factors, rather than objective, irreconcilable, material issues, that cause the egregious state of US-Iranian relations.

Chapter One: The surprising history of US-Iranian relations: 1989-2003

Iran is not a country of Mad Mullahs anymore than the US is a country of Great Satans. Both countries act and react to the threat that they feel the other to be. Over the last thirty years both the US and Iran have made efforts to improve their relationship. The failure of both sides to capitalize on these efforts has needlessly tragic and dangerous consequences for not only the US and Iran, but also Iran's neighbors and the whole world. These efforts have occurred since formal diplomatic relations were terminated and continue today. In this paper I use the efforts that were made and failures that occurred by both sides from 1989 to 2003 as an example of the possibilities and pitfalls for rapprochement that have always existed and continue to exist. While both sides made both conciliatory, cooperative moves and aggressive, threatening moves during this period, I focus on the propitious events to illustrate the point that US-Iranian relations are not as bad as the common wisdom holds. I have broken this period down into three eras: The Era of Pragmatism: the presidency of Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, The Era of Reform: the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, and The Era of September 11th: September 11th and its aftermath.

Era of Pragmatism

The first serious opportunities for rapprochement came during the presidency of Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani was elected in 1989 and remained

in office until 1997. Rafsanjani is one of the most powerful members of the political establishment. In addition to the presidency, he has held a number of key positions in Iranian politics including Chairman of Parliament, Chairman of the Assembly of Experts (the body responsible for electing, monitoring, and dismissing the Supreme Leader) , and Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council (the body responsible for resolving legislative conflicts between the parliament and the Council of Guardians). He is also one of the wealthiest men in Iran.

Rafsanjani is a centrist and is often described as among the pragmatic leaders of the revolution. Although Rafsanjani has been a member of the pragmatic-conservative Combatant Clergy Association, he has a close bond to the reformist Kargozaran party. He is seen as flip-flopping between conservative and reformist camps. He supported the reformers in the 1997 election of Mohammad Khatami, but went back to the conservative camp in the 2000 parliamentary elections. Economically he supports a free market, favoring privatization of state-owned industries. His position on international affairs is moderate, seeking to avoid conflict with the United States and the West (Ramazani, 1987). Brumberg (2001) describes his administration as economically liberal, politically authoritarian, and philosophically traditional. Slavin (2007) states that Rafsanjani is a pragmatic leader who sees reconciliation with the United States as the ultimate guarantee of regime survival.

At one time Rafsanjani had a reputation for authoritarianism. In 1999, he delivered a sermon at Tehran University praising government use of force to suppress student demonstrations. In more recent years, Rafsanjani has advocated freedom of expression, tolerance and civil society. Following the 2009 post-election crisis,

Rafsanjani gave a speech at Friday prayers in which he criticized restriction of media and suppression of activists, and put emphasis on the role and vote of people in the Islamic Republic constitution (Daragahi and Mostaghim, 2009). Some analysts consider the event the most important and most turbulent Friday prayer in the history of contemporary Iran. One and a half to two and a half million people attended the speech in Tehran.

Rafsanjani's presidency overlapped with the terms of three US presidents – Regan, Bush, and Clinton. Rafsanjani began reaching out to the Regan administration during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Iran was desperate for parts for its US weapon systems. The result was Iran-Contra – the scandal in which the United States agreed to trade weapons for American hostages held by Iranian-backed militants in Lebanon, and then used the profits to fund anticommunist guerillas in Nicaragua. The event became the second incident, after the hostage crisis, to nearly bring down a US president. The grave impact of these events on the Carter and Regan presidencies respectively teaches subsequent US presidents about the perils of dealing with Iran.

Despite this fact, the administration of George Bush Senior was eager to improve relations with Iran (Slavin, 2007). Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor, and Bruce Riedel, director for Persian affairs on the National Security Council, have both stated the willingness of the administration to engage Iran. On the subject of getting talks going, Scowcroft said, “We were happy to do it. We could have it official, public, or private citizen to private citizen, any way you want it” (Slavin, 2007, p. 179). He said that in 1990 they got as far as agreeing to meet in Switzerland but that at the last moment the Iranians canceled the meeting. Scowcroft said that, “My judgment at the time was that the situation in Iran was delicate enough that nobody was prepared to stick his neck

out and actually have a conversation with the Great Satan” (Slavin, 2007, p. 179). Likewise, Riedel said that, “the President and Brent very much wanted to do more to open the door to the Iranians and they asked me for options” (Slavin, 2007, p. 180). Indeed in his inaugural address, Bush promised Iran that “goodwill begets goodwill,” an indication that Iranian help in freeing US hostages in Lebanon would be rewarded (Bush, 1989).

Two other forces – trade and the Persian Gulf War – pushed US-Iranian relations in a positive direction. Despite sanctions barring the sale of US arms and items with potential military use, US trade with Iran in other areas was substantial. US oil companies had become the largest buyers of Iranian oil (Slavin, 2007, p. 179). Bush’s central role in organizing the coalition of forces for the Persian Gulf War in which Iran’s traditional enemy, Iraq, was routed from Kuwait, laid another brick in the foundation for an improved US-Iranian relationship.

Not only was the Bush administration interested in rapprochement, but Rafsanjani was a moderate, pragmatist. Furthermore, his “top priority was reconstructing Iran’s shattered infrastructure following the destruction of the Iran-Iraq war” (Slavin, 2007, p. 178). To do so he needed investment from the United States. The two administrations made incremental progress by crafting a deal in which the US backed a UN Security Council resolution blaming Iraq for starting the Iran-Iraq war in exchange for the release of US hostages in Lebanon. Riedel reports that Bush and Scowcroft were eager to build on this progress (Slavin, 2007, p. 180). Unfortunately, not long after, Iran backed a series of assassinations of regime opponents in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin (Slavin, 2007, p. 180). Following these events no further progress was made between Bush and Rafsanjani. This

event is emblematic of a pattern in US-Iranian relations. Some progress is made and then a terrorist attack, arms shipment, or nasty statement is used as a justification for ending cooperation and dialogue.

During Clinton's first term in office, US-Iranian relations deteriorated. Clinton began with a review of US policy towards Iran. His administration came up with a strategy that became known as "dual containment." The goal of the strategy was to deal with threats from both Iran and Iraq. The policy stopped short of advocating regime change. It focused on economic pressure. Martin Indyk, the top Middle East adviser on the National Security Council, announced the policy in a 1993 speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Clinton's National Security Adviser, Tony Lake (1994), went on to label Iran a "rogue state," and the State Department branded Iran as the country most actively sponsoring terrorism. Then Assistant Secretary of State Edward Djerejian argued that it was a mistake to lump Iran and Iraq into the same category. He protested the use of the term dual containment, arguing that it, "was a rhetorical flourish that confused more than clarified," (Slavin, 2007, p.181). Iraq had invaded two of its neighbors, used Chemical weapons on its own citizens, and was ruled by a totalitarian dictator. Iran, on the other hand, is a semi-democratic country. "With Iran, we also had very serious concerns, but there was always the possibility of an opening," Djerejian said (Slavin, 2007, p. 181).

Indyk said that the administration was willing to talk to Iran but that Iran was not interested (Slavin, 2007). Indyk admitted that the administration did not try very hard. Clinton's first Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, had been the top negotiator for the

Carter administration during the hostage crisis. That experience colored his perception of Tehran.

Iran retaliated for US efforts at containment by redoubling its efforts to sabotage the Israeli-Palestinian peace process (Slavin, 2007). Iran supported Palestinian militants. It also interfered with the Israeli-Syrian peace process by encouraging Hezbollah to fire rockets into Israel (Slavin, 2007).

At that point the Clinton administration imposed two drastic sets of sanctions – one of them illegal under international law. The first set was a total embargo on US-Iran trade and investment prohibiting all commercial and financial transactions with Iran over Iran's sponsorship of terrorism, pursuit of nuclear weapons, and hostility to the Israel-Palestinian peace process (Slavin, 2007, p. 183). The second, illegal set, was the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (Slavin, 2007, p. 183). It called for the US government to penalize foreign companies that invested more than \$20 million in the Iranian oil industry. These sanctions both hinder economic development in Iran and increase the price of oil and gas in the United States. They are the exact opposite of the policies that the US had used in the 1970s to repair relations with China.

In this climate a misunderstanding occurred that caused the two countries to miss an opportunity for improving relations. That same year, 1995, the Rafsanjani government offered a billion-dollar contract to Conoco, a US oil company, to develop two offshore oil fields. The contract was meant to improve US-Iran ties (Slavin, 2007, p. 183). Instead it embarrassed the US by drawing attention to the fact that US companies were doing business with Iran while it was pressuring other countries to curtail their business there. That same year the Republican speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich,

pushed for an additional \$18 million to be appropriated to the CIA for use in undermining the Iranian government (Weiner, 1996). Given the CIA's track record in Iran and the regime's insecurity, this move further damaged US-Iranian relations while having no significant impact on weakening the regime.

Era of Reform

The unanticipated, landslide election of Mohammad Khatami as president in 1997, began an era of reform in Iran. Takeyh (2009), a preeminent scholar of Iran, said that, "Iran gave birth to one of the most intellectually vibrant democratic movements in the contemporary Middle East" (p. 182). Khatami's seventy percent landslide victory gave him a robust mandate for reform. Voter turnout was nearly eighty percent. Despite limited television airtime, most of which went to conservative Speaker of Parliament and favored candidate Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, Khatami received the vast majority of the vote. Even in Qom, the center of theological training in Iran and a conservative stronghold, seventy percent of voters cast their ballots for Khatami (Frontline, n.d.). Khatami had run on a platform of liberalization and reform.

During his two terms as president, Khatami advocated freedom of expression, civil society, rule of law, and constructive diplomatic relations with other states. His economic policy supported a free market and foreign investment. Democracy was central to his reformist agenda. He attempted to strengthen Iranian democracy through the "twin bills". These two pieces of proposed legislation would have introduced small but key changes to the national election laws of Iran and also presented a clear definition of the president's power to prevent constitutional violations by state institutions. Khatami

described the twin bills as the key to the progress of reforms in Iran. The bills were approved by the parliament but were eventually vetoed by the Guardian Council. His economic agenda targeted several of Iran's key problems by promoting industrialization, privatization of several important industries, and a reduction of the massive government subsidies. The reformist mandate was strengthened by the 2000 parliamentary election in which liberals and supporters of Khatami won a majority over the conservatives for the first time since the revolution.

Khatami is known for his proposal of Dialogue Among Civilizations. Following earlier works by renowned philosopher Dariush Shayegan, President Khatami introduced the theory of Dialogue Among Civilizations as a response to Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington's theory of Clash of Civilizations. Huntington's popular theory was that the post-Cold War new world order would be dominated by cultural rather than ideological differences. That, while during the Cold War, conflict occurred between capitalists and the communist, it would now occur between the world's major civilizations. Khatami introduced his concept at the United Nations and other international organizations. The theory gained a lot of international support and consequently the United Nations proclaimed the year 2001 as the United Nations' Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations, as per Khatami's suggestion (CNN, 2004).

US president Bill Clinton's second term in office overlapped with Khatami's term for three years, 1997-2000. President Clinton's foreign policy objectives shared common ground with Khatami's central international policy of greater engagement. Clinton's central foreign policy objective is known as "enlargement." The goal of enlargement was

to expand the community of politically democratic and economically market based countries (Walt, 2000).

The serendipity of liberal presidents in the US and Iran at the same time, both interested in engagement was a monumental opportunity to improve relations. Tragically very little progress was made. Both administrations made courageous moves to address the fears and pride of the other. In his inaugural address, Khatami (1998) said that Iran was willing to have “relations with any state which respects our independence (p. 50).” It was also in this speech that he first called for a dialogue of civilizations with all nations. He continued this trajectory with his landmark interview with CNN in 1998. In that interview he sent greetings to “all of the followers of Jesus Christ...particularly to the American People.” He expressed regret that Americans’ feelings had been hurt by the hostage crisis – the closest any Iranian official has come to apologizing for the hostage crisis of 1979. He praised the Puritans who landed on Plymouth rock as visionary, and called Abraham Lincoln “a strong and fair-minded president.” Khatami claimed that Iran had an “intellectual affinity with the essence of American civilization: because its system is based on the same pillars of “religiosity, liberty, and justice.” Later that same year, in a visit to the United States, Khatami rescinded the fatwa against the British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie and praised the “industriousness, innovation, and creativity” of Americans (Slavin, 2006, p. 186).

The Clinton administration made analogous statements. In a speech at the United Nations, Clinton said that those who believe a clash between Western and Muslim nations was inevitable were “terribly wrong” (Slavin, 2006, p. 184). Clinton said, “We believe that Iran is changing in a positive way, and we would like to support that” (Burns,

1998). He said that, “What we want is a genuine reconciliation with Iran,” (Burns, 1998). Albright called for Iran and the US to work together in devising a “roadmap to normalized relations” (Crossett, 1998). Two years later, in 2000, Secretary of State Madeline Albright publicly apologized for the CIA role in overthrowing Prime Minister Mossageh in 1953, and for reinstalling the shah who, she said, brought economic progress to Iran, but also “brutally repressed political dissent.” She also called US support for Saddam Hussein, in the Iran-Iraq war that killed or injured nearly a million Iranians, “regrettably short-sighted.” Furthermore, she acknowledged that the US has “cordial relations with a number of countries that are less democratic than Iran.” She highlighted areas of mutual interest and potential cooperation such as Afghanistan, whose refugees and narcotics were a huge burden for Iran. She also discussed the US’s grievances with Iran, but said that the question was whether, “to allow the past to freeze the future” or to strive for a new relationship. “Certainly, in our view, there are no obstacles that wise and competent leadership cannot remove,” she said.

These statements led to some policy shifts. In his CNN interview, Khatami said that while Iran was not yet ready for its diplomats to meet with American officials, he proposed an exchange of “professors, writers, scholars, artists, journalists, and tourists” to chip away at what he called the “bulky wall of mistrust between us and the US administration.” Clinton embraced Khatami’s idea. He attempted to replicate the “ping-pong” diplomacy that preceded US rapprochement with China in the 1970s by facilitating the participation of five US wrestlers in an international competition in Iran (Slavin, 2007, p. 185). The wrestlers were given an extremely warm welcome. Additionally, the US gave visas to Iranian filmmakers and university professors and permission to Iranian

officials to travel in the United States beyond the twenty-five mile limit outside of the United Nations allotted to foreign nationals whose governments lack formal diplomatic relations with the United States (Slavin, 2007, p. 185).

Contacts began to take place at higher levels too. The Clinton administration sent midlevel State Department officials to conferences that Iranian officials were attending in New York and foreign cities to discuss issues of mutual concern (Slavin, 2007). In 1999, Albright attempted to meet with Iranian foreign Minister Kharrazi at the Six plus Two forum to address concerns about Afghanistan. Iran sent a deputy instead and it was not until 2000, when the Clinton administration was on its way out of office, that the two finally met face to face. Also in 2000, Iranian and US legislators met for the first time since the revolution. A group of five Iranian members of parliament, including the then speaker, met with four US members of congress, including Arlen Specter, at an Iranian art exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. At the United Nations a month later, UN officials arranged – at US request- to have Khatami speak soon after Clinton, and Clinton stayed to hear the speech – a clear sign of respect. For its part, Iran ceased its provocative behavior toward patrolling US vessels and shut down Iraqi oil smuggling activities that had long been carried out in its ports. The government also agreed to respect any peace agreement that the Palestinians themselves supported, though it did not end its support of Hezbollah and Hamas.

Khatami had three foreign policy objectives: normalize relations with Saudi Arabia, normalize relations with the European Union, and improve relations with the United States (Takeyh, 2009). Early in his tenure he accomplished his first two objectives. As far as the United States was concerned, Khatami had to be more cautious

because the conservative elements of the government were skeptical about the United States. Takeyh (2009) argues that Khatami's strategy was to elicit economic and confidence building measures from the United States. He would then use those concessions to disarm his critics at home. The United States, in pattern that persists to this day, was unwilling to undertake confidence building measures. It became a chicken and egg situation in which Khatami needed the US to make gestures before he could make substantial changes while the US wanted to see changes before it would make any gestures. By the time the Clinton administration got serious the reform movement in Iran was in retreat.

Era of September 11th

September 11th actually created a series of conditions that were fortuitous for a breakthrough in US-Iranian relations. The US and Iran found themselves on the same side of the fence when it came to the Taliban and Iraq – Iran's traditional enemies. In this period Iran and the US cooperated on many issues involving the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. US and Iranian interests overlapped in many instances on issues regarding Afghanistan and Iraq. Saddam Hussein initiated the Iran-Iraq war that led to the loss of one million Iranian lives. Iran was also grappling with a tidal wave of refugees and drugs from Afghanistan (Slavin, 2007; Takeyh, 2009). Takeyh (2009, p. 206) claims that the clerical leaders grasped that in the post-9/11 world, their involvement with terrorist organizations and their nuclear program would be seen in a different light. Furthermore, the US would now have a significant military presence in the region. Need and fear motivated both sides during this period. The tactical cooperation could have chipped

away at the wall of mistrust and led to a more global improvement in US-Iranian relations, but this was not to be.

Unlike in some Arab countries where September 11th was celebrated publicly, in Iran there was an outpouring of sympathy and solidarity from both the public and officials. The streets of Tehran were filled with spontaneous demonstrations and candlelight vigils (Slavin, 2007, p.11; Takeyh, 2009, p.206). Khatami immediately and publicly condemned the attacks and expressed his “deep sympathy to the American nation” (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2001). Iran’s foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi, wrote a letter to Powell that said, “The United States should know that the Iranian people and the Iranian government stand with the United States in its time of need and absolutely condemn these vicious terrorist attacks” (Slavin, 2007, p. 194). A high ranking Iranian diplomat reported that,

The general impression was that this was a national tragedy for the United States and that success in addressing that national tragedy was extremely important for the US public in general and administration in particular. There was not another moment in US history when there was more of a psychological need for success on the US part. That is why we consciously decided not to qualify our cooperation on Afghanistan or make it contingent upon a change in US policy, believing, erroneously, that the impact would be of such magnitude that it would automatically have altered the nature of Iran-US relations. (Slavin, 2007, p. 197)

Iran's cooperation was more than symbolic. In addition to the possibility of improving relations with the United States and bolstering its goal of being seen as a powerful, legitimate international player, Iran was dealing with a flood of refugees and drugs from Afghanistan. Iran allowed the use of its airspace and ports and agreed to rescue downed US pilots (Takeyh, 2009, p. 212). Iran encouraged the Northern Alliance to join forces with the US troops and allowed the US to use its Revolutionary Guard's Quds brigade as an auxiliary force (Takeyh, 2009, p. 212). Following the war, Iran supported the US's efforts to install a democratic government. It was instrumental in getting the leader of the Northern Alliance, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and the warlord Abdul Rabb Rasul Sayyaf, to relinquish their claims to power in favor of the US-supported Karzai and to agree not to use force against the new government (Slavin, 2006; Takeyh, 2009). Iran also donated \$530 million for reconstruction (Takeyh, 2009, p. 213). Talks between the US and Iran continued on a monthly basis through May 2003 (Slavin, 2007, p. 204).

In his 2002 State of the Union Address, Bush referred to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as The Axis of Evil. He stressed that in a post-9/11 world, the United States, "would not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most dangerous weapons." In retrospect, it appears that the administration was laying out its argument for attacking Iraq and was uncritical about the impact that the remarks would have on Iran. David Frum, the White House Speech writer who suggested the notion of an axis, said that he did not know who decided that Iran, which holds regular if flawed elections, should be in the same category as Iraq and North Korea (Slavin, 2006). Rice stated that, "The idea that it was some kind of conscious phrase that was supposed

to describe a policy shift is just not right” (Slavin, 2006, p. 200). If true, this is a frustrating oversight. Iranian officials who had taken serious risks in calling for dialogue and improved relations with the United States were made to look foolish and naïve. “It is very strange for us, and shocked everyone, why Americans, after all this cooperation in Afghanistan, came up with this notion of the ‘axis of evil,’ said Foreign Minister Kharazi in an interview at the United Nations (Slavin, 2006, p. 200). While, Iranian’s were frustrated and humiliated that the US would make such insensitive and inaccurate remarks after they were so cooperative in the Afghan war, they continued to work with the US. Despite the impact of these remarks on Iran, dialogue continued. The fact that Iran continued to dialogue with the US is a weighty indication of the reformers’ dedication to their goal of reconciliation with the US. Takeyh claims that, “Given the fact that reconciliation with the United States had been an important pillar of reformist international policy, they were unwilling to relinquish it even in the face of America’s belligerence (2009; p. 216).” The conservatives, on the other hand, were likely motivated by fear. Khamenei declared that the “axis of evil” speech “could put Iran in the firing line of a US war on terror” (Takeyh, 2009, p. 216).

As in the war in Afghanistan, the US and Iran had some overlapping interests in Iraq. The Iran-Iraq war was a horrific tragedy for Iran. Furthermore, a democracy in Iraq would bring the Shiite majority to power. Tehran pledged to assist downed pilots and provided humanitarian assistance (Takeyh, 2009, p. 216). Iran also pressed its Shiite allies in Iraq to cooperate with the Americans (Takeyh, 2009, p. 216).

Then in May 2003 Iran put everything on the table. The American Iranian Council facilitated a semi-official negotiation process between Iran and the US that

culminated in a document that came to be known as ‘The Grand Bargain’ (Kristof, 2007, April 29). The American Iranian Council is an organization that promotes dialogue and understanding between the two countries and has played a role in high level diplomatic ventures including Albright’s 2000 apology speech (Amirahmadi, 2007). ‘The Grand Bargain’ “wasn’t just one faxed Iranian proposal but an entire peace process” (Kristof, 2007, April 29, para. 4). The process grew out of cooperation over the Afghanistan war and fears about the US military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kristof, 2007, April 28). High level politicians participated in these meetings. They included former US ambassadors Thomas Pickering, Frank Wisner, and Nicholas Platt; then ambassador Ryan Crocker; Dr. Zalmeh Khalilzad, Special Assistant to President Bush in the National Security Council; Iranian ambassador to the UN, Javad Zarif; Iran’s foreign minister, Dr. Kamal Kharrazi; and Rutgers professor and head of the American Iranian Council, Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi (Amirahmadi, 2007; Kristof, 2007, April 29). These meetings consisted of high level negotiations. According to Amirahmadi’s notes, Kharrazi stated at one of the meetings that, “Yes, we are ready to normalize relations,” provided that the US made the first move (Kristof, 2007, April 29, para. 7). His notes also show that Pickering stated that he had been advised by the state department that “the Bush administration was prepared to normalize relations in some circumstances” (Kristof, 2007, April 28, para. 7).

The document lays out what would be required of both Iran and the US. For Iran’s part, it discusses ensuring “full transparency” and other measures to assure the US that it will not develop nuclear weapons (Iran’s 2003 offer to the United States, 2003, para. 9). Iran offers active “Iranian support for Iraqi stabilization and the establishment

of democratic institutions and a non-religious government” (Iran’s 2003 offer to the United States, 2003, para. 11). It mentions an end to “any material support to Palestinian oppositions groups,” while pressuring Hamas “to stop violent actions against civilians within” Israel (though not the occupied territories) (Iran’s 2003 offer to the United States, 2003, para. 12). Iran would support the transition of Hezbollah to be a “mere political organization within Lebanon” and endorses the Saudi initiative calling for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Iran’s 2003 offer to the United States, 2003, para. 12). In return, the United States would need to accept “a dialogue in mutual respect” about Iran’s concerns (Iran’s 2003 offer to the United States, 2003, para. 1). It would need to recognize Iran’s legitimate security interests in the region,” halt “hostile behavior” toward Iran, end economic sanctions, allow Iran access to peaceful nuclear technology, clampdown on the MEK (an Iranian opposition group with whom the US sometimes cooperates), and make a statement that Iran did not belong in the axis of evil (Iran’s 2003 offer to the United States, 2003, para. 2-7).

Unfortunately, the United States never responded to this document. The Bush administration never made a formal statement about its decision to ignore the proposal. There are several theories about why it did not respond. There have been some claims that the document was never received. However, Kristof (2007, April 28, para. 4), claims that Iran faxed it to the State Department and sent it, through an intermediary, to the White House. Kristof (2007, April 28, para. 6) does say that he can’t verify that the documents were received. The Bush administration does acknowledge having received a paraphrased version that came via the Swiss ambassador (Kristof, 2007, April 28, para. 5). The Swiss embassy has been used by both sides to communicate since diplomatic

relations were terminated. Though the Swiss version is less comprehensive, it still merited a response. Another theory is that the administration questioned whether the proposal had the support of key decision makers in Iran. According to Mazia Bahari and Seymour Hirsch of Newsweek, Richard Armitage, then Deputy Secretary of State, stated that he had seen the proposal but thought that it reflected the wishes of the Swiss Ambassador more than the positions of Iran or the US (Amirahmadi, 2007). Kristof (2007, April 28, para. 4) argues that Ambassador Zarif edited it and that “it was approved as the master statement of the Iranian position.” Amirahmadi (2007) states that he assured Khalilzad and Hillary Mann, National Security Director for Iran and Iraq, that Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi “would not have made a gesture of such magnitude without the knowledge and consent of the leader (“Meeting in NSC,” para. 1). He goes on to say that he was, “referring to the statement by the FM in the September meeting in which he said Tehran was ready to normalize relations if conditions permitted” (“Meeting in NSC,” para. 1). A third theory is that the US ignored the proposal because it felt that the Iran was being uncooperative on terrorism. At one of the meetings,

Zalmay Khalilzad had told Ambassador Zarif that the US had information of a forthcoming terror bombing in the Gulf area. Mr. Khalilzad reportedly asked Iran to interrogate Al Qaeda members in Iranian prisons for information about the incident. Iran apparently dropped the ball (it says it didn’t have enough information) and did not generate any useful intelligence. (Kristof, April 28, para. 12)

This incident turned out to be a suicide truck bombing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on May 12, 2003. The bombers attacked a compound where Americans and other foreigners

lived. Thirty-four people including Saudis, Americans, and citizens of seven other countries were killed (Slavin, 2007, p. 203). Perhaps the Iranian's failure to produce intelligence shook the US's confidence in the credibility of 'The Grand Bargain' or perhaps it was just a convenient excuse. No one but the decision makers themselves know. However, this incident is representative of a pattern in US-Iranian relations in which a troubling incident (such as the assassinations of Iranian dissidents in Europe in the late eighties and early nineties, the 2002 Karine A arms shipment, and the 1996 Khobar Towers terrorist attack) is used as a pretext to halt diplomatic progress. Regardless of whether or not Iran did anything wrong in regards to the Karine A arms shipment or the Khobar Towers or the Riyadh bombings, diplomatic efforts should have continued because improving US-Iranian relations is more important than any single incident and because the poor state of relations is one of the causes of such incidents. Whatever the reason, Zarif showed up at a meeting in Geneva that had been planned to discuss next steps, Khalilzad did not (Amirahmadi, 2007). This was the sad end of 'The Grand Bargain' proposal.

Neither the administrations of Rafsanjani and Bush, nor Khatami and Clinton were able to establish a dialogue towards normalizing relations. September 11th and its consequences made a dialogue on tactical issues between Khatami and Bush issues possible. That dialogue ended in May 2003, following a pattern of using difficult events as a justification for quitting the hard and crucial work of normalizing relations. This event was three explosions near Western housing complexes in Riyadh that were masterminded by Al-Qaeda from within Iran. The bombings raised troubling questions about the nature and direction of Iran's foreign policy. There are a number of sound

reasons to believe that Iran did not play a significant role in this attack (Takeyh, 2009). First, one of Khatami's most prized accomplishments was the normalization of relations with Saudi Arabia. It is hard to imagine that he would put that in jeopardy. Second, the al-Qaeda personnel were operating in eastern Iran where government control is lax at best. Therefore, whatever sanctuary they enjoyed may have been without authorization. Third, since Iran is a Shiite theocracy and al-Qaeda a Sunni terrorist organization they are more likely to be at odds than to be co-conspirators. Fourth, it is plausible that radical elements of the government supported al-Qaeda against the government's wishes (Takeyh, 2009). Whatever its cause the Bush administration ended its dialogue with Iran at this time.

Conclusion

The Iranian parliamentary election of 2004 marked the resurgence of the conservative movement. Thousands of reformist candidates were disqualified by the hardline council of Guardians, and the conservatives regained control of parliament. This trend was solidified by the election of the ultra-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005. If the US had taken advantage of the reformers' desire to normalize relations with the US and the areas of tactical cooperation presented by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it would have strengthened the reform movement and could have played a role in preventing a consolidation of power by hard-line conservatives. Ahmadinejad might not have been elected president and Iran might not be as close to achieving the capacity to build nuclear weapons. The United States could have acquired

a strategically situated Muslim ally against al-Qaeda or at least lessened Iran's motivation to play the spoiler in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

The era of pragmatism, the era of reform and the era of September 11th provided countless opportunities for rapprochement between Iran and the US. Both Bush and Rafsanjani and Khatami and Clinton wanted improved relations. Both sides at times made significant overtures and gestures. Furthermore, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq provided ample common interests and thereby grounds for confidence building. Cooperation on those issues could have lead to more global improvements in the two countries' relations. So what happened? As with any case in international affairs there were many causes. Neither country was courageous enough to make the concessions needed to reassure the other. Domestic politics, history, timing, and misunderstandings have all contributed to the US and Iran's failure to improve their relationship. In addition to these factors, social psychological elements played a highly significant role in the US and Iran's failure to improve their relationship. In the next section I will address the social psychological elements in detail.

Chapter two: Social psychology of international conflict

The outbreak of World War I undermined liberal optimism that the spread of democracy and economic expansion would lead to a peaceful world. The Great Depression, the rise of fascism, and the devastation and atrocities of World War II were further impetus to develop a new approach to the study of conflict and conflict resolution. Over the last fifty years there has been an explosion in approaches to the pursuit of peace. These approaches come from a variety of sources. Contributors include international

relations, peacebuilding, social-psychology, and conflict resolution. The study of the social psychological dimensions of conflict has roots in each of these disciplines.

The social psychological approach is best articulated in conflict resolution theory. The field of conflict resolution itself draws from a variety of disciplines. The goal of conflict resolution is not to avoid or suppress conflict, but rather to address it constructively or even creatively. Conflict resolution aims to minimize violence, arrive at mutually acceptable outcomes, and reach settlements that are enduring (Kriesberg, 2007). While there is much overlap between the two, the discipline of peacebuilding is distinguished from the discipline of conflict resolution by its emphasis on structural, objective elements of conflict. Peacebuilding includes nation building, peacekeeping, infrastructure development, DDR (demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration) programs for combatants, among others. Conflict resolution focuses more on the subjective elements of conflict. However, conflict resolution approaches are often integrated into peacebuilding approaches and vice versa.

Sources of Conflict: Objective and Subjective

Conflict has both rational and irrational, objective and subjective, real and imagined sources. Some social scientists believe that conflict is caused by objective differences in the material world. Examples of this type of conflict are resource or position scarcity. Position refers to the level of influence in terms of power, representation, and other factors, that a group has relative to another group. Unrealistic or subjective conflict arises and exists primarily or solely in the minds of those involved. This type of conflict arises from the subjective realities of the parties – their perceptions,

cognitions, attitudes, emotions, needs, and values. Subjective conflict is caused by misperception, misattribution, miscommunication, disturbed emotions, and other phenomenological processes that create conflict where there are no objective incompatibilities.

Realism is the dominant theory of international relations. Realism's take on international conflict is also the dominant view of the causes of war and peace. Realism holds that international relations is a struggle for power among self-interested states. Realists clearly view conflict as caused by objective factors. Fisher (1990) argues that social psychologists have also come down on the side of real conflict. While, social psychologists acknowledge the legitimacy of realistic conflict they do not see it as the sole variable in conflict. The dominant paradigm in social psychology holds that while conflict arises from objective differences, subjective elements play a crucial role in the development, escalation, and intractability of conflict. Objective differences lead to aggressive conflict behavior which leads to misperception, misattribution, miscommunication, and strong emotions that transform the conflict into a mix of objective and subjective factors.

Realism is based on the idea that individuals and organizations make rational decisions based on a rational calculation of their self-interest. An alternative paradigm for looking at conflict explores the nonrational elements of conflict. Scholars have begun to explore the way in which subjective factors constrain rational decision making. The nonrational aspects of conflict make them more amenable to resolution in some ways because they are not based entirely on a clash of objective interests.

Early research on nonrational elements examined scapegoating and other kinds of displaced feelings, susceptibility to propaganda, the personal attributes of leaders, and the manipulation of powerful political symbols (Lasswell, 1930). Jervis (1976), Lebow and Stein (1985), and Janis (1972) investigated the subjective and nonrational components in foreign policy decision making and crisis behavior. Scholars were also investigating the nonrational elements of the resolution of conflicts. Research on race and ethnic relations led to the conclusion that equal-status interaction between members of different groups reduces prejudice and hostile behavior (name). Sherif (1966), demonstrated that a superordinate goal can facilitate cooperation among groups that are in conflict. Druckman (1977) and Zartman (1978) examined the subjective factors in the negotiation process.

Realistic Group Conflict Theory

Realistic group conflict theory (RCT) is based on anthropological, sociological, and social psychological studies. As its name illustrates, RCT falls in the camp of objective sources of conflict. However, its name is misleading because the theory is more than a theory of objective conflict. RCT partially integrates the objective and subjective sources of conflict in a sequential way. The basic premise of this approach is that real conflict of interests causes intergroup conflict (Campbell, 1965). RCT assumes that group conflict is rational in the senses that groups do have incompatible goals and are in competition for scarce resources. Levine and Campbell (1972) conducted anthropological studies of conflict in traditional societies. From these studies they extrapolated four principles of realistic conflict.

1. real conflict of interest and real threat cause perception of threat
2. real threat causes hostility to the source of threat
3. real threat causes in-group solidarity and awareness of in-group identity
4. real threat increase ethnocentrism

RCT is a theory that ties several elements of conflict together. It illustrates how conflict begins over objective conflicts of interests. It then shows how real conflict of interests activates subjective elements via group identity. The theory does not further elaborate on the subjective elements that are involved in group identity. Other theories, such as Social Identity Theory (which will be discussed later in this paper), pick up where RCT leaves off.

The Social Psychological Approach

The social-psychological approach is based on the philosophy of phenomenology. Phenomenology claims that humans develop their picture of the world through the senses and that our subjective experience thereby provides the reality out of which we operate (Fisher, 1990). Therefore, the perceptions, cognitions, attitudes, and values held by individual actors in intergroup conflict are important influences on their behavior in relation to the other party and the conflict. Since intergroup conflict is a collective phenomenon, the focus is on collective social perception, cognition, and motivation. Therefore, while not without its objective causes, subjectivity is a salient factor of conflict.

Objective and subjective factors both contribute to the causes of conflict and are related to each other in a circular fashion (Kelman, 2007). Not only are they important in

and of themselves, but psychological factors often help to explain objective factors because the subjective factors underlie the objective ones. Conflicts over objective factors, such as resources or political participation, reflect and magnify subjective concerns about security and identity. Subjective concerns about basic needs and existential fears play an especially salient role in the escalation and perpetuation of conflict. For example, a conflict over a natural resource may be motivated by the psychological need for a sense of security. The objective dimension of the conflict may be difficult to resolve because only one group can win control of the resource. However, the subjective dimension of the conflict may be easier to resolve. The sense of security that both parties need may be met through a variety of means, not just control of the natural resource. Similarly, a conflict over power may be motivated by the psychological need for a sense of control and efficacy in a chaotic world.

Social psychological phenomena also underlie nationalism and national interests. Nationalism is partially driven by the need for group identity as well as pride and esteem needs. National interests are traditionally understood in realist terms as a self-interested struggle to maximize power and resources. A social psychological analysis illuminates the underlying motivation for this behavior. The pursuit of power and resources is driven by the physiological needs for sustenance and safety and the psychological needs for security, efficacy, esteem, and identity.

Social psychology also helps to explain ideological conflict and identity based conflict. Examples of ideological conflict include struggles for democracy such as the American and French revolutions and the Cold War struggle between democracy and communism. It is easy to see that these ideological conflicts have material aspects. The

French were not just motivated by their passion for democracy, but also by feudal abuses and widespread famine. Likewise, the United States did not only want to stop the spread of communism for ideological reasons, but for the economic motivation of having access to markets and the power motive of retaining a sphere of influence in Western Europe . Just as there are material causes to ideological conflict, there are also social psychological causes. The willingness to go to war over ideology is partly explained by the human need to order the unknowable universe. Worldviews or belief systems are the result of humans' effort to create order in the world. Worldviews are made up of ideology, religion, culture, and tradition. Psychology has shown that belief systems are highly resistant to change. Ideological conflict is also fought because of esteem and security needs.

There has been an explosion of identity based conflicts in the post-Cold War era. Regehr defines identity based conflict as follows: "Identity conflicts emerge with intensity when a community, in response to unmet basic needs for social and economic security, resolves to strengthen its collective influence and to struggle for political recognition" (1993). Identity groups help to make human experience more manageable, provide norms, a sense of meaning, and belonging.

I break the cause of conflict into three main categories: material, ideational, and psychological. Material conflicts are conflicts over material resources such as territory, water, minerals, and livestock. Conflict is also caused by ideational factors such as culture, religion, political ideology, and group identity. A variety of psychological factors also cause conflict. Cognitive elements of conflict include stereotypes, misperception, and misattribution. Emotional factors such as fear, grief, pride, and

shame play a role in conflict. Another psychological factor is human needs. Human needs include the needs for security, identity, belonging, and esteem. In any type of conflict, be it interstate, intrastate, separatist, liberation, nationalistic, ideological, or identity based, all three of these causes play a role. In order to understand, and thereby prevent and resolve, conflicts we must be able to identify the salience of each of these three causes in a given conflict, the way that these factors interact, and in what sequence.

Psychology provides the knowledge of individual psychological processes such as cognitive functioning and the role of emotion. These processes explain the behavior of decision makers and other individual actors in conflict. However, these psychological processes and the behaviors they trigger take place in a social environment. Individual actors are influenced by social structures. Therefore, social psychology provides the most appropriate framework for analyzing the psychological dimensions of conflict because it explains the intersection of the individual psychological processes with the cultural and institutional systems in which the social process of conflict takes place (Kelman, 2007, p. 62).

The social-psychological perspective is a different lens than that provided by more traditional approaches to peacebuilding that focus on structural or strategic factors. Therefore, it helps to explain and address aspects of conflict and reconciliation that structural and strategic analyses cannot account for. However, the social-psychological approach is meant to complement, not replace, other approaches of what is a multidimensional issue. That said, the social-psychological dimension should be included as an integral part of and not merely an afterthought in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The psychological processes at both the individual and collective level

are highly influential factors in conflict and reconciliation. A social-psychological analysis addresses these issues explicitly, critically, and systematically. It provides an appropriate framework because it addresses the intersection between psychological and institutional processes.

History of Social Psychological Approach

Scholars have been applying principles of social psychology to international relations since at least the 1930s (Kelman, 2007, p. 61). A few of the seminal contributions include: Holsti (1989), Fischhoff (1991), and Farnham (1992) have done research on the cognitive, group, and organizational factors that affect international relations. Druckman and Hopmann (1989) and Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim (1994) have explored the social psychological factors behind negotiation and bargaining. Holt and Silverstein (1989) investigated enemy images. Russett (1989) studied public opinion in the foreign policy formation process. Stein (1991) researched deterrence and other forms of influence in international politics. And Bar-Siman-Tov (2004) did seminal work on reconciliation.

Group Identity

The activation of group identity is a salient factor in any type of inter-group conflict. There are a variety of elements and processes that play a role in the activation of group identity. Group identity may take the form of religious, ethnic, or national identity. Group identity is important because it meets several psychological needs. Historically, group membership has played a significant role in physical survival because it took an

entire group to provide food and shelter. Historically and currently, protection has been provided based on group membership whether tribal, national, or some other type of group. Group membership also meets the human need for belonging. Groups are an important source of norms and guidelines that help to meet the human need for order in a large and sometimes overwhelming world.

Social Identity Theory.

Social categorizations or the perception of belonging to a group, create and define an individual's place in society and thereby provide self-reference. Social groups provide their members with identifications that define their social identity. Their social identity is the aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he or she belongs and the emotional and value significance of such membership.

Because individuals strive to enhance their self-esteem, they evaluate the groups that they belong to in positive ways. Groups evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to other groups. SIT can be summed up in four points (Fisher, 1990).

1. individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity
2. membership in groups contributes to an individual's social identity
3. evaluation of an individual's own group is based on social comparison with other groups
4. a positive social identity is based on favorable comparisons

Therefore the central message of SIT is that pressures to gain distinctiveness for and to evaluate one's own group positively through social comparisons lead to intergroup discrimination. This process involves behavior at the individual and group level. SIT's

integration of these levels is appealing. Self-esteem, self-concept, social identity, and social comparison all play a role in this dynamic. On the individual level, people have a need for positive self-esteem. Also, on the individual level, people have a need for group membership because it meets several human needs.

On the group level, groups derive their positive sense of self-esteem through social comparison. Without another group to compare themselves to, a group is left without the means of bolstering its self-esteem. The social comparison necessary for this process automatically lays the foundation for discrimination. Discrimination lays the foundation for misperception and misattribution which lead to conflict.

The initial research supporting SIT was experiments that indicated that the mere perception of belonging to a group – social categorization- is sufficient to produce intergroup discrimination favoring the in-group. In a series of studies, individuals were randomly classified as members of two groups and then made decisions awarding small amounts of money to in-group and out-group members. Subjects consistently discriminated in favor of their own group (Billig and Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel, Flament, Billig, and Bundy, 1971). In contradiction to RCT, this intergroup discrimination occurs without real conflict of interest, a history of antagonism, or any intergroup interaction. Since this discrimination is not based on incompatible group interests or any form of hostilities, Tajfel concluded that minimal intergroup discrimination is inherent in intergroup relations. It is important to note that these studies indicated only in-group favoritism and not the other side of the coin – out-group rejection (Brewer, 1979).

The need for self-esteem leads individuals to evaluate their group as better than another group. Evaluating one's own group as better than another group lays the foundation for conflict. Once one views members of another group as less than themselves, they may be able to justify taking harmful actions against that group on those grounds. This type of thinking can be extended to dehumanization and its horrible consequences. This erroneous thinking can also play a role in the escalation of a conflict. If one group already sees the other as less than themselves, it is a short jump to accept that this group is taking all kinds of negative actions during the conflict. It may also contribute to the security dilemma in which each group sees their actions in defensive (positive) terms and the actions of the other group as offensive (negative).

Human Needs Theory

One of the most compelling social psychological explanations for conflict is Human Needs Theory. It was developed by an Australian diplomat named John Burton. Social psychologists Herbert Kelman and Ronald Fisher expanded upon Burton's initial insights.

In the context of conflict and its resolution, human needs theory posits that "conflict is a process driven by collective needs and fears, rather than entirely a product of rational calculation of objective national interests on the part of political decision makers" (Kelman, 2007, p.64). In contrast to more traditional explanations of the individuals' motivation in conflict, such as the concepts of "aggressive man," "power-seeking man," "rational man," or economic man," Burton proposes "necessitous man" as key to understanding the individual's role in conflict (Mitchell, 1990).

Needs theory has its roots in humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology is concerned with the full development of human potential, individually and collectively. In the search for full potential, humanistic psychology advises that individuals take full responsibility for their own lives, adopt a here-and-now perspective, accept expression of the full range of human emotions, search for mutuality and authenticity in social relationships, and adopt a growth orientation to their experiencing of life (Mallmann, 1980). Therefore, humanism prescribes an open, collaborative approach to conflict, as opposed to the typical strategies of dominance, suppression, and avoidance (Fisher, 1990). Humanistic psychologists have developed various theories about human needs. The most famous of these is Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow believed that all human behavior is motivated by the desire to meet a basic need and that these needs are universal. He organized the needs into a hierarchy and posited that lower level needs must be at least partially satisfied before higher level needs become motivators (Feist and Feist, 2002). The basic human needs according to Maslow are:

1. **Physiological needs** – basic physical needs including food, water, oxygen, etc
2. **Safety needs** – these include both physical and psychological needs for a sense of security, physical safety, stability, protection, structure, and order
3. **Love and belongingness** – needs that are satisfied by social relationships including: family, friendship, and the need to belong to groups such clubs and nations
4. **Cognitive needs** – the desire to know, to understand, and to satisfy one's curiosity
5. **Aesthetic needs** – for beauty and aesthetically pleasing experiences

6. **Esteem needs** – divided into reputation, the perception of recognition and status in the eyes of others, and self-esteem, the individual's own sense of worth, confidence, and achievement
7. **Self-actualization needs** – full realization of one's potential

Several other psychologists including Alfred Adler, Erich Fromm, and Carl Rogers espoused some form of needs theory. Galtung has criticized Maslow's model as Western-centric in its use of hierarchy, a linear conception of time, and an analytic conception of epistemology (Galtung, 1980). Humanistic social psychologist, Hadley Cantril developed a model which aims to transcend hierarchy and other elements particular to certain cultures, societies, or political systems. His list of human needs includes the following:

- Humans require the satisfaction of survival needs.
- Humans want security in both its physical and psychological meaning.
- Humans need sufficient order and certainty to be able to predict the effects of their actions.
- Humans continuously seek to enlarge the range and enrich the quality of their satisfactions.
- Humans are creatures of hope and are not genetically designed to resign themselves.
- Humans have the capacity to make choices and the desire to exercise this capacity.
- Humans require freedom to exercise the choices they are capable of making.

- Humans want to experience their own identity and integrity.
- Humans want to experience a sense of their own worth.
- Humans seek some value or system of beliefs to which they can commit themselves.
- Humans want a sense of confidence that their society holds a fair degree of hope that their aspirations will be fulfilled. (Cantril, 1967)

When individuals have reason to believe that their needs will not be met they experience fear. Human needs and fears are acted out in powerful ways. Both individuals and groups such as religious, ethnic, and social groups, communities, and nations have needs. In the case of intergroup conflict, be it ethnic or international, the needs of individuals are articulated through important identity groups (Kelman, 2007). Even in peaceful contexts, needs are often fulfilled within a group including ethnic, religious, and national groups.

In order to address these needs and fears, Burton (1993) argues that it is important to distinguish between the terms *dispute* and *conflict* and *settlement* and *resolution*. According to Burton (1993), *disputes* involve negotiable issues, while *conflicts* concern issues that are not negotiable: ontological human needs that cannot be compromised. Correspondingly, *settlement* refers to negotiated or arbitrated outcomes of disputes, while *resolution* refers to outcomes of a conflict that satisfy the inherent needs of all. Therefore, resolution has been defined by Mitchell (1990) as providing “durable, long-term and self-supporting, solutions to disputes by removing the underlying causes and establishing new, and satisfactory, relationships between previously antagonistic parties” (p. 150). Such a resolution is possible because, not only conflict, but also reconciliation

is a partially subjective process by which the perception and valuing of issues and needs is subject to change allowing parties to modify priorities. Resolution based on the mutual satisfaction of needs is not a zero sum proposition as is the resolution of a territorial or ideological dispute. Fulfillment of the needs of one group does not limit, and may enhance, the fulfillment of the needs of another group.

Chapter three: Fundamental Human Needs: Understanding Iran's Motivations

As I argued in chapter one, the state of US-Iranian relations is not as bad as conventional wisdom holds. Earlier in the last century, Iran and the US were allies. I demonstrated in chapter one that over the past twenty years both the US and Iran have taken significant steps toward improving their relationship and that there are ample areas where Iran's and the US's interests overlap. So why have US-Iranian relations not improved significantly over this period? There are many answers to this question. The reasons are material and psychological, historical and political. In this chapter I argue that the social psychological aspects are a highly salient cause of the poor state of US-Iranian relations and the failures to improve them.

As far as I can tell the social psychological aspects of US-Iranian relations are almost completely neglected. In my research I found almost no serious investigation of them in academia, policy, public discourse, or diplomacy. These social psychological factors are not the only problematic issues in US-Iranian relations, however, they are crucial elements and until they are addressed no lasting solution to US-Iranian problems will be found. In any conflict a wide variety of social psychological factors are operating. They include cognitive factors such as perception and misperception, stereotypes, oversimplified national images, and belief systems; emotional factors such as

fear, guilt, shame, humiliation, and grief; and motivational factors such as fundamental human needs. Trauma is another social psychological phenomenon that can have a significant impact on many aspects of conflict including cognitive abilities, emotional management, and physical functioning. Group identity, a dynamic that I outlined in chapter one, is a factor in any type of inter-group. It is certainly present in the US-Iranian conflict. In this conflict a number of group identities have been activated. They include national identity (Iran versus the US), religious identity (Muslim versus Judeo-Christian), and regional identity (East versus West). In this chapter I explore the relevance of one dimension of the social psychology of conflict, Human Needs Theory, to US-Iranian relations.

In this conflict both the United States and Iran are motivated by the imperative to meet fundamental needs. For two reasons, I focus on Iran's thwarted needs. The first reason is simply space. I decided to use the limited space that I have to give a more in-depth treatment to Iran's needs, rather than address both Iran's and the US's needs in a more limited way. The second reason is that, in the US at least, Iran's motives are more misunderstood than the US's. The image of mad mullahs and the labels of rogue state and Axis of Evil paint Iran in overly simplistic and somewhat inaccurate terms. These labels portray Iran as irrational, illogical, menacing, and backward. The following needs based explanation illustrates the logic of Iran's behavior.

Human needs theory

Two assumptions are fundamental to my understanding of international relations. The first has to do with the motivation of individual and group behavior. The second has

to do with how conflict is created and resolved. First, I hold that all behavior is motivated by the drive to meet a basic need. Adler (1946), Murray (1953), Fromm (1955), Rogers (1961), Cantril (1967), and Maslow (1987) all theorized that human behavior is motivated by the drive to meet a basic need. In this way all behavior can be considered rational. Many theories of foreign policy hold that state actors are rational, meaning that they react rationally to reward and punishment in the international environment (Tetlock, 1998). Another way of stating this principle is that actors make decisions based on what choices will best meet their needs. However, it often appears that actors are making irrational choices. An example is Iran's choice to use inflammatory rhetoric even though it isolates the country and reinforces the perception that Iran is not a legitimate player in the international system. The issue is that which choices best meet the actor's needs or what actors consider to be satisfaction of their needs is elusive. States and individuals base their decisions on their subjective representation of reality (Malici and Buckner, 2008). Therefore, it is within these empirical boundaries, and not a fictional objective reality, that rationality must be judged.

Second, I hold that conflict is the product of thwarted needs. Therefore, the key to solving conflict is to correctly identify which needs have been thwarted and find ways to fulfill those needs. The needs must be met in ways that are compatible with the fundamental needs of the other party to the conflict. Fisher (1990), Ury (1992), Christie (1997), Kelman (2007,) and Kriesberg (2007) are among the conflict resolution theorists who hold this view. Therefore, in order to solve the conflict between the US and Iran we must first identify which needs are being thwarted.

A number of psychological theorists have proposed the existence of fundamental needs or motives or beliefs. Freud held that people are motivated by sex, aggression, and pleasure (1938). Freud's student Adler agreed that people are motivated by the impulse to fulfill basic drives or needs, but disagreed with Freud on what these needs are. Alder held that they are overcoming inferiority and maintaining self-esteem (1946). Rogers (1961), Epstein (1993), Janoff-Bulman (1992) are among the many psychological theorists who believe that human behavior is motivated by efforts to fulfill fundamental needs. The first theorist to use the term needs was H.A. Murray in 1938 (Klineberg, 1980). Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is the most popular theory of needs. A number of social and behavioral scientists have developed these initial theories into Human Needs Theory (Christies, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Maslow, 1987; McCann & Perlman, 1990; Murray, 1938; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Kelman (2007) and Burton (1993) use needs theory to explain intractable conflict. Staub (1989) uses it to explain genocide. Empirical evidence for needs theory can be found in Burton (1990), Renshon (1974), and Staub (2004).

There is some variance in the human needs that these scholars identify and the importance that they assign to each one; however, there is far more consensus than discrepancy. I summarize them in four categories: (1) security, (2) self-esteem and positive identity, (3) effectiveness and control, and (4) connection and belonging. There are two other categories that are widely agreed upon. They are physiological needs and self-actualization needs. I will not address physiological needs because my argument is about the nonmaterial aspects of conflict. I will also not address self-actualization needs because they are beyond the scope of my argument. Finally, Davies (1973) has modified

this list in a way that is worth mentioning. He holds that there are four substantive needs: physical, social-affectional, self-esteem, and self-actualization, plus three implemental needs – security, knowledge, and power – which are pursued primarily (though not exclusively) as means to achieve the four substantive needs.

Just as individuals seek to fulfill these needs, so do groups (Kelman, 2007). Both individuals and groups such as religious, ethnic, and social groups, communities, and nations have needs. In the case of intergroup conflict, be it ethnic or international, the needs of individuals are articulated through important identity groups (Kelman, 2007). Even in peaceful contexts, needs are often fulfilled within a group including ethnic, religious, and national groups. Each of these needs plays a role in the US-Iranian conflict. Both sides are motivated by these needs.

One of the central tenants of conflict resolution theory is that the resolution not be zero-sum; which means that one side's gain does not have to be the other side's loss. When parties in conflict move from their position, what they say they want, to their interest, the motivating need that underlies their position, they can find win-win solutions that meet both parties' fundamental needs without compromising the needs of the other side. The first step in this type of problem solving is correctly identifying both sides' needs. Therefore, in the case of US-Iranian relations, it is important that we identify which needs are motivating the US and Iran, overall and in each element of the conflict. I will discuss the three needs that I think are most relevant to the US-Iranian conflict: security, self-esteem and identity, and effectiveness and control.

Security

The need for a sense of security is a profound motivator of human behavior (Adler, 1946; Cantril, 1967; Christie, 1997; Fisher, 1990; Kelman, 2007; Maslow, 1987). Most needs theorists agree that security is the most basic of all the needs (Maslow, 1987; Staub, 2004). Many theorists go farther in arguing that until a sense of security is obtained, security will be the only force motivating a person or group (Maslow, 1987). Security is a very important motivator in US-Iranian relations.

Obviously humans have a variety of biological needs. The needs that I am discussing here are psychological. These needs may be expressed or fulfilled with material means, but they are essentially non-material, psychological entities. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the biological and psychological dimensions of security. The biological dimension of security is safety from death or physical harm and access to the means to stay alive and well such as food, water, and shelter. Psychological security, on the other hand, is the need to *know* or *believe* that we, and people who are important to us – family and group - are, and will continue to be, free of physical and psychological harm (Staub, 2004, p. 54). The key difference between psychological and biological security is the psychological component of knowing or believing.

The primary interest of any organism is its survival. The same holds for Iran. Iran's number one interest is its survival. Milani (2009) states that, "Tehran's top priority is the survival of the Islamic Republic as it exists now" (p. 1). Leverett and Leverett (2008) agree that Iran's top priority is its security.

Since the death of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, Iran has been increasingly capable of defining its national security and foreign

policy in terms of national interests. While it may not be easy for some Americans to acknowledge, most of those interests are perfectly legitimate - - to be free from the threat of attack or interference in Iran's internal affairs and to have the political order of the Islamic Republic accepted by the world's most militarily powerful state as Iran's legitimate government. (para. 11)

Iran's interests in being free from the *threat* of attack and to be accepted and legitimized are psychological needs for security (and esteem). Iran's thwarted need for security helps to explain a lot of Iran's behavior.

Iran feels that its need for security is threatened by the United States. Milani states that, "Tehran views the United States as an existential threat" (p. 1). The US's major grievances with Iran: its sponsorship of international terrorism, its creation of spheres of influence in Middle Eastern countries, its interference in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and its pursuit of nuclear power can be understood as attempts to meet its need for security. In Leverett and Leverett's (2008) words:

As Americans, we may not like some (or many) of the strategic and tactical choices that the Iranian leadership has made in pursuing its interests...(some of which) work against US interests...they are not, however, irrational...in the face of what many Iranian elites believe is continuing hostility from their neighbors as well as the United States to the Iranian revolution and the political order it generated. (para. 11)

Again, Iran's sense that the US is hostile towards it and does not acknowledge the legitimacy of its form of government gives Iran the sense that it is not secure. Iran feels

an existential, material, and ideological threat. Correctly or not, Iran perceives the US to be fundamentally opposed to the existence of the Islamic Republic. This is where the sense of existential threat comes from. It feels threatened materially by US military power and its presence in the region. And ideologically, it feels that its Islamic values are under attack by Western values. This thwarted sense of security motivates the actions that Americans do not like and which work against the US's interests.

Iran thwarts the US's need for security too. More than most countries in the world, the US is able to meet its need for physical security (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002; Kennedy, 2002). This is due to its vast wealth and military power. However, since September 11th, the US's ontological sense of security has been threatened. This threat comes in two forms. One is rogue states. The other is the US's declining soft power. First, the Bush administration used the term rogue states to encapsulate the greatest fear that September 11th evoked and to define the biggest threat of our time: the nexus of terrorism and nuclear weapons. Second, September 11th brought international anger against the US to its attention. A decline in the US's popularity and legitimacy can translate into a decline in soft power, or the ability to influence other countries. Soft power helps a country to meet its need for ontological security. These two issues have significantly diminished the US's sense of security. Iran symbolizes both of these phenomena. It is one of the world's most famous rogue states and it is openly hostile to the US. Therefore, in their relationship with each other, both states are motivated by their thwarted sense of security.

Iran's belief that the US is an existential threat is based on a long history of the US behaving in menacing ways toward Iran. Iranian leaders' hostile perceptions of the

US date back to the 1952 coup, in which the CIA instigated the overthrow of the democratically elected prime minister (Jones, 2008). The US's subsequent menacing actions include direct and indirect interference in Iran's affairs, including US government funding for the regime's opponents (Weiner, 1996) and harsh rhetoric against Iran, such as the Axis of Evil speech and the Bush doctrine of preemptive war. It also includes the imposition of sanctions and the termination diplomatic relations following the 1979 revolution. Another component is the US's support of Iran's rivals. The diplomatic and economic isolation following the Iranian revolution compounded with domestic problems to make the country vulnerable to invasion by Saddam Hussein. During the brutal eight-year war that followed, the US attempted to further weaken Iran by supporting Iraq (Malici and Buckner, 2008) and providing arms and economic resources to pro-Western Iranians who opposed Khomeini (Farhang, 1993). Milani (2009) summarizes the historical forces that thwart Iran's sense of security.

Today Khamenei still considers the United States to be an existential threat. Washington surrounds Iran with bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar and massive troop buildups in Afghanistan and Iraq. It makes friends with the leaders of Iran's neighbors. And its nuclear-equipped naval carriers patrol the Persian Gulf. Khamenei sees the United States as isolating Iran, strangling it with economic sanctions, sabotaging its nuclear program, and beating the drums of preemptive war. He thinks Washington is pursuing regime change in Tehran by funding his opponents, inciting strife among Iran's ethnic minorities, and supporting separatist organizations ... (p. 2)

Malici and Buckner (2008) concur, stating that:

From the perspective of Tehran... the US has, for decades, attempted to forge a regional order in the Middle East that is more favorably disposed to its own interests and those of Israel. These efforts have taken the form of direct interventions, strong support for Israel, and the imposition of sanctions. Taken together, the Iranian... leadership see(s) the US as a threat to the survival of the regime. (p. 792).

This series of actions and policies by the US thwart Iran's need for security. Three events in the last decade have strongly reinforced Iran's perception that the US is a threat to its ontological sense of security. They are: one, the US's failure to respond to the Khatami regime's efforts to improve relations, especially the landmark CNN interview in which Khatami describes the United States as a great nation, calls for a dialogue, and acknowledges the hurt caused by the hostage crisis. The US's failure to capitalize on this development reinforced the perception that the US is a threat to Iran's security by indicating that not even conciliatory moves could achieve security for Iran. Two, the US's decision to ignore the Grand Bargain Proposal. This decision further threatened Iran's sense of security by demonstrating that even when Iran offers to meet *all* of the US's demands (as it did in the proposal) the US still refuses to meet its request for a security guarantee (as it requested in the proposal). And, finally, the inclusion of Iran in the Axis of Evil. The inclusion of Iran in a group of countries that the US considers to be the most dangerous in the world sent a strong message that Iran faced a threat from the US. None of these three incidences was a direct or material threat. None of them was an attack on Iran, injured Iranian citizens, or was even a direct threat to do

so. However, they sent a psychological message that Iran is in danger. Iran's actions are highly influenced by this psychological sense of danger.

Khatami's conciliatory efforts.

In 1997 reform candidate Mohammad Khatami was elected president of Iran. During his two terms as president, Khatami advocated freedom of expression, civil society, rule of law, and constructive diplomatic relations with other states. One of Khatami's three foreign policy goals was to make significant improvements to US-Iranian relations (Takeyh, 2009). In his inaugural address, Khatami (1998) said that Iran was willing to have "relations with any state which respects our independence (para. 27)." Khatami was famous for his call for a "Dialogue Among Civilizations." It was his way of responding to Samuel Huntington's theory and the conventional wisdom that holds that the world is currently undergoing a clash of civilizations. Then in 1998 Khatami gave a landmark interview on CNN. In that interview he sent greetings to "all of the followers of Jesus Christ...particularly to the American People." He expressed regret that Americans' feelings had been hurt by the hostage crisis – the closest any Iranian official has come to apologizing for the hostage crisis of 1979. Khatami claimed that Iran had an "intellectual affinity with the essence of American civilization: because its system is based on the same pillars of "religiosity, liberty, and justice."

This interview symbolizes Khatami's desire and efforts to improve relations with the United States. Unfortunately, it was not until two years later, when Clinton was on his way out, that Albright made a reciprocal speech (Albright, 2000). Though she apologized for the CIA's role in overthrowing Prime Minister Mossageh in 1953 and for

reinstalling the shah and called US support for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war short-sighted, it was too late. The US's failure to respond to Khatami's efforts undermined Khatami, the liberal movement, and the idea that engagement with the US would work. Khatami's diplomatic stance was a departure from Iranian policy and a big risk for the liberal movement (Slavin, 2007, Takeyh, 2006). When such a conciliatory posture failed to produce significant changes in the US-Iranian relationship, it was viewed as evidence that no matter what Iran did, the US would continue to be a threat to it.

The Grand Bargain.

The Grand Bargain was the final document in a track-two peace process between Iran and the US. It outlined what would be required of both the US and Iran. This document is especially significant because Iran offers to give the US what it wants on every issue that the US is concerned about. Iran offers "full transparency that it will not develop nuclear weapons, active support for Iraqi stabilization and development, an end to support of Palestinian opposition groups and endorsement of a two-state solution, and support for the transition of Hezbollah to a political organization (Iran's 2003 offer to the United States, 2003). It is also especially significant because it makes clear what Iran's top priority is. In return, the United States would need to accept "a dialogue in mutual respect" about Iran's concerns (Iran's 2003 offer to the United States, 2003, para. 1). It would need to recognize Iran's legitimate security interests in the region, and halt "hostile behavior" toward Iran (Iran's 2003 offer to the United States, 2003, para. 2).

In this document Iran makes clear that its top priority is its security. By failing to respond to this document, the United States sent Iran the message that it was unwilling to

meet its need for security even if Iran gave the US *everything* it wanted. This is a strong message. It means that no matter what Iran does, even if it does, everything that the US wants it will still not be safe. Not only is Iran's need for security thwarted, but it has no means to remedy this situation.

The Axis of Evil.

In his 2002 State of the Union Address President Bush named Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the three members of the Axis of Evil. He said,

...Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature. ... Iran aggressively pursues these (nuclear) weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. ...States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world...all nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security.

This speech transparently stated that the war in Afghanistan was just the beginning. Bush said in the speech, "Our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun." The speech clearly implied that other countries, such as those in the Axis of Evil, would soon be targeted. It sounded especially ominous coming soon after the unveiling of the Bush doctrine in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America. This doctrine openly advocated preemptive military strikes against countries deemed to pose a potential

danger to the United States. Abrahamian says that this was the first time in history that the US advocated preemptive war, contradicting international law and its own previous policies (2004, p. 97). Arthur Schlesinger (2003) has drawn attention to the fact that even during the height of the Cold War, preemptive war was not considered. “During the long years of the cold war, preventive war was unmentionable. Its advocates were regarded as loonies.”

The paring of preemptive war and a list of targets that included Iran greatly thwarted Iran’s sense of security. No attack was carried out, nor even was any direct threat made. However, the psychological message of danger was quiet clear and deeply felt in Iran. Furthermore, the message evoked the psychological damage done by historical affronts to security. Abrahamian argues that it had the effect of “conjuring up ghosts of the past, especially of the 1953 coup and of two centuries of Western imperialism (2004, p. 94).”

The timing of the remarks reinforced the Iranians’ sense of threat. These remarks followed the period of intense cooperation over Afghanistan and President Khatami’s efforts to enter into his “dialogue of civilizations” with the US. “For the average Iranian, the axis of evil speech came as a bolt out of the blue sky. Relations between Iran and America had gradually but markedly improved in the course of the previous five years (Abrahamian, 2004, p. 95).” The BBC’s correspondent in Tehran, Jim Muir, reported that, “Iranian officials feel genuinely aggrieved that what they regard as their enormous contribution over Afghanistan should be repaid with such hostility... (2002, January 31, para. 7).” President Khatami called President Bush’s speech “bellicose and insulting” and accused his counterpart of “war-mongering” (BBC, 2002, January 30, para. 2). The

timing of the Axis of Evil statement said to Iran that despite both their cooperative behavior and conciliatory attitude, the US would continue to threaten them and their ontological sense of security.

Both historical and recent US actions threaten Iran's sense of security. Iran's need for security is profound and therefore, this need motivates a great deal of Iran's behavior. At times Iran's sense of insecurity has kept it from reconciling with the US. Its sense of insecurity underlies some of its belligerent rhetoric. (Esteem needs also underlie Iran's rhetoric.) Iran's thwarted need for security plays a role in every one of the US's major complaints against Iran: its sponsorship of terrorism, its interference in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and its pursuit of nuclear power. Each of these strategies is, at least in part, a means to meeting Iran's need for security.

Self-Esteem and Positive Identity

“People are very motivated to preserve their self-esteem and good feelings about themselves, and this motive explains a surprising amount of human behavior” (Twenge, 2007, p. 16). Staub explains self-esteem by saying, “The need for self-esteem and a positive identity is the need to have a well-developed self and a positive conception of who we are and who we want to be - which requires self-awareness and self-acceptance...” (2004, p. 56). Branden's (1969) description of self-esteem includes the following primary properties:

1. Self-esteem as a basic human need. It makes an essential contribution to the life process. It is indispensable to normal and healthy self-development and has a value for survival

2. Self-esteem as an automatic and inevitable consequence of the sum of individuals' choices in using their consciousness.
3. Self-esteem is something experienced as a part of, or background to, all of the individuals thoughts, feelings and actions.

Many early theories suggested that self-esteem is a basic human need or motivation. Maslow described two different forms of esteem: the need for respect from others and the need for self-respect, or inner self-esteem (Maslow, 1987). Respect from others entails recognition, acceptance, status, and appreciation, and was believed to be more fragile and easily lost than inner self-esteem. Modern theories of self-esteem explore the reasons why humans are motivated to maintain a high regard for themselves. Sociometer Theory maintains that self-esteem is a gauge of how accepted people feel by other people (Twenge, 2007). According to Terror Management Theory, “people strive to sustain the belief that they are significant contributors to a meaningful universe to minimize the potential for terror engendered by the awareness of their own mortality” (Greenberg, 2007, para. 1). So self-esteem serves a protective function and reduces anxiety about life and death.

Iran, like the United States, likes to think that it is an important country. Its sense of pride, which is a form of self-esteem, underlies many of its important decisions. And it is correct. Iran is important. It is important for many reasons. Geography: Iran is located at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Resources: Iran has the world’s largest natural gas reserves and the second largest oil reserves. Regional influence: Iran has always played an important role in the Middle East and Central Asia. That role has been enhanced by the US ‘s destruction of Iran’s two worst enemies:

Saddam Hussein and the Taliban. Weapons: Iran may soon produce a nuclear weapon. Iran's pride also stems from the fact that it is an ancient and developed civilization. Modern day Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations. There are settlements in Iran that date back to 7000 BC (Houtsma, 1987). It is also a former imperial power. At its height the Iranian empire spanned three continents, including territories of Afghanistan and Pakistan, parts of Central Asia, Iraq, northern Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Libya. The loss of its status as a great power has an important impact on modern day Iran. All of these factors fuel Iran's sense of pride, its sense that it is a great nation, and its desire to have its position in the world legitimated by international society.

In his 1998 CNN interview, former President Khatami indicated that the Iranian revolution helped to fulfill Iranian's need for self-esteem by reversing a humiliating legacy of domination. He said that the revolution was,

the crying out of the people against humiliations and inequities imposed upon them by the policies of the U.S. and others, particularly in the early days of the revolution. In other words, the Iranian nation had been humiliated and its fate was decided by others. You know that a remarkable feature of Imam Khomeini's struggle was his fight against capitulation which the Shah was forced to ratify making the American advisors immune from prosecution in Iran. This was the worst humiliation for our people. They rose up, fought for independence, and emerged victorious. (para. 15)

Iran's history makes it a proud nation. Iran's harsh rhetorical responses to criticism may indicate that it is a nation with an especially strong need to have its self-esteem validated by the international community. Also, Iran has suffered a number of humiliations. These include invasion by the Mongols, Greeks, and Arabs in ancient times; interference by the Russians and British during the Great Game; occupation by The Allies during WWII; the overthrow of Mossadegh, the perception that the Shah's government was a puppet of the US; the perception that the US was rebuffing Iran by failing to respond to the reform movement's efforts to improve relations; and the inclusion of Iran with Iraq and North Korea in the Axis of Evil. These humiliations have made Iran extra sensitive to any affront to its self-esteem or identity.

This combination of pride and heightened sensitivity to the need for esteem underlie Iran's strong desire to be recognized as a legitimate government, regional power, and important member of the international community. The US thwarts this need. It offends Iran's self-esteem by portraying Iran as a rouge state, its government as mad mullahs, by ignoring its conciliatory gestures, and by including it in the Axis of Evil. Iran's thwarted self-esteem explains some of both its cooperative and conflictual behavior. The need for a positive identity motivated Iran to seek the US's support for a UN resolution that condemned Iraq as the instigator of the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Iran cooperation with the US on Afghanistan and Iraq was partially motivated by this same desire. One prime example of conflictual Iranian behavior that is motivated by thwarted self-esteem is Iran's pursuit of nuclear power.

Self-esteem and nuclear weapons.

No one knows for sure whether Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons. What is certain is that Iran is developing a nuclear energy program. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) concluded in March of 2007 that it could neither confirm nor deny that Iran is developing nuclear weapons (Economist, 2007). No other body or country has provided conclusive evidence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. However, it has kept many of its developments a secret and refused to allow the IAEA inspectors the full access that they would require to be certain that Iran's nuclear program is for purely civilian purposes. One cause of suspicion is that Iran developed two nuclear facilities in secret, without informing the IAEA. One of these, in Arak, is a heavy-water reactor, just the thing for making plutonium, which is one way to fuel an atomic bomb. The other, at Natanz, was a facility for enriching uranium, which is the other way of doing it (Economist, 2007).

Iran vehemently denies accusations that it is developing nuclear weapons. It reminds its detractors that the centrifuges at Natanz can also make the less enriched fuel that a nuclear reactor needs to produce electricity. However, Iran does not yet have any such reactors (other than the one the Russians have built at Bushehr, which comes with Russian-supplied fuel). Iran also argues that under the letter of the law, it was not required to disclose the existence of these facilities until uranium enrichment began (which had not) (Economist, 2007). Furthermore, Ayatollah Khamenei has gone so far as to issue a fatwa (a religious decree) declaring the possession or use of WMD in general, and nuclear weapons in particular, to be illegal under Islamic Law (economist). President Ahmadinejad has quoted the regime's founding father, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's

statements that such weapons were “un-Islamic” (Zakaria, 2009, para. 1). Zakaria points out that “...of course, they could all be lying. But it seems odd for a regime that derives its legitimacy from its fidelity to Islam to declare constantly that these weapons are un-Islamic if it intends to develop them” (para. 1). Its leaders also point out that unlike its nuclear neighbors, Pakistan, India, and Israel, Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and therefore has submitted to inspections by IAEA. In response to the accusation that it does not make sense for a country overflowing with oil and gas to pursue nuclear energy, it responds that its reserves will one day diminish and that in the meantime nuclear energy would free more oil for export (Economist, 2007). They also remind the US that it helped the Shah to develop nuclear energy. If it made sense then, why is it thought absurd now? (Economist, 2007).

A number of studies indicate that nuclear proliferation is motivated not just by aggression. Krass (1994) noted that although there is a tendency to attribute aggressive motives to those have-not states that are seeking nuclear weapons, history suggests that the motivations of the haves are related more to the need for security and to motives such as prestige and self-confidence rather than aggression. Wessnells (1995) notes that proliferation pressures are not only fueled by fear but also by motives such as power and prestige.

Iran’s desire for nuclear power is partly motivated by its need for self-esteem. Amanat says that “...Iran’s insistence on its sovereign right to develop nuclear power is in effect a national pursuit for empowerment, a pursuit informed by at least two centuries of military aggression, domestic meddling, skullduggery and , not least, technological denial by the West” (2006, para. 2). Amanat argues that the British and Russians

successful efforts to deprive Iran of the technology to build railroads from the 1870s to the 1920s (essential for development at that time) and the British and the Americans' successful efforts to prevent the nationalization of Iranian oil in the 1950s plays a salient role in Iran's desire for nuclear power. He says that, "For a country like the United States that is built on paradigms of progress and pragmatism, grasping the mythical and psychological dimensions of defeat and deprivation at the hands of foreigners is difficult" (para. 6). These feelings of deprivation and defeat thwart Iran's need for self-esteem and lead it pursue nuclear power as a means of meeting this need. Milani (2009) concurs. He says that "by insisting that its nuclear project is essential for the country's domestic energy needs and scientific development, Tehran has effectively turned US opposition to its program into a nationalist cause...In an attempt to awaken national pride, the government has had the atom symbol printed on 50,000 rial bills" (p. 2). The government's effort to link nuclear power to nationalist pride is an attempt to link nuclear power to national self-esteem.

Pakistan, India, and Israel are all countries that receive staunch support from the United States, despite the fact that they have illegally acquired nuclear weapons. Iran on the other hand is treated as an enemy even though is it a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and has not developed nuclear weapons. Former President Khatami stated in a 1998 CNN interview that,

It is ironic that those who are so concerned about saving humanity from nuclear weapons, fully support Israel which is a nuclear power and is unwilling to join the NPT or accept IAEA safeguards, while leveling

allegations against Iran... We have accepted IAEA safeguards and our facilities are routinely inspected by that agency. (para. 52)

The injustice of the US's favorable treatment of illegal nuclear powers and unfavorable treatment of a signatory to the NPT is a further affront to Iran's self-esteem.

Self-image is also especially important to Americans. Americans like to be liked. Several aspects of US-Iranian relations thwart the US's need for a positive identity. The aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, including the hostage crisis and the rejection of Western values and lifestyle that the revolution embodied, hurt the US's self-esteem. Abrahamian (2004) says that the "revolutionaries added insult to injury by flagrantly humiliating the United States." He adds that, "One should not overlook Occidental sensitivity over losing face." Following the revolution, the media inundated US citizens with images of angry Iranians chanting, "Death to America" and calling America the "Great Satan". The average US citizen was unaware of the source of this anger: the CIA engineered overthrow of Mossadegh and the subsequent support that the US government gave to the repressive Shah. These images shocked and dismayed Americans.

Every country has a set of national beliefs about the nature of their country. Americans believe that US is a beacon of democracy, spreading freedom and prosperity around the globe even when it comes at a high price to ourselves. Writing on the war on terror, Parker and Stern say,

Many Americans seem to have difficulty in understanding that non-Americans do not always share the positive national self-image cherished by US leaders and citizens alike. American power, seen at home as largely benevolent and a source of virtue and security in the

world, is often seen as threatening by others. American interventions in conflicts abroad may well be seen as clumsy, gratuitous, and brutal. Americans may be inclined to see the use of violence as a distasteful duty forced on the United States by international circumstances, whereas others may see these same actions as indications of an imperialistic and arrogant super-powered elephant in the china shop of international affairs (2002, p. 608).

The aftermath of the Iranian Revolution challenged the positive self-image that the US held of itself. It hurt the US's sense of its identity. This feeling continues to color US perceptions of Iran.

Efficacy and Control

The need for effectiveness and control is the need to know or believe that (1) we have the capacity to protect ourselves and the people who are important to us from harm, (2) accomplish the things we set out to do (such as fulfilling important goals), and (3) lead purposeful lives that have the potential to impact our society or the world (Staub, 2004, p.56). Renshon, in his 1974 book *Psychological Needs and Political Behavior: A Theory of Personality and Political Efficacy*, uses an in-depth exploration of the personal need for control to shed light on the relationship between psychological needs and political life. He says,

There is within each of us a desire to have some control over the people, events, and processes that impact upon and shape our lives. ...(over)

those aspects of the environment that are perceived by the individual to be important in the ongoing pursuit of this goals, values, or needs. (p. 1).

He attributes the need for personal control to the “existential condition of newborn human life, namely, dependency” (p.6). He posits that it is from the physiological needs, such as food and water, that the need for personal control develops. He goes on to propose that it is “out of the early experiences of trying to satisfy these biological and other needs, that the child develops basic beliefs about the nature of the world” (p. 6).

The US’s need for efficacy is largely met because the US is able to accomplish the things that it sets out to due. Due the strong economy, abundance of natural resources, stable government, overwhelming military power, and significant soft power (or influence) the US is able to accomplish its international objectives. (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002; Kennedy, 2002). Nonetheless, there may be areas such as soft power, the ability to influence or control nonstate actors such as terrorist, or the capacity to spread its values and way of life around the world that thwart the US’s need for efficacy. These factors come into play in US-Iranian relations. However, efficacy is clearly a more relevant issue for Iran.

Both Iran’s and the US’s history play a significant role in the way Iran experiences its efficacy needs today. Iran has a long history of invasion. In ancient times it was invaded by the Greeks and the Arabs. In more recent times it was the scene of the Great Game, in which the Russian and British empires battled for control of Central Asia; was the scene of heavy fighting during WWI despite its declaration of neutrality, and was occupied by the allied forces during WWII. In 1953 the US engineered a coup that overthrew the democratically elected prime minister of Iran and in the 1980s Iraq

instigated a bloody eight year war. This history of invasion causes Iran to be sensitive to any threat to its efficacy. Furthermore, the US's history of ruthlessly pursuing its interests reinforces Iran's predisposition to see the US as a threat to its need for efficacy. The US has a history of instigating regime change, using violence, and applying economic pressure to get what it wants. Examples include the murder of the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende; the foiled Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba; support for the contras of Nicaragua, despite their human rights violations; the Vietnam War, and others.

In addition to history, there are a number of other factors that contribute to Iran's sense that its efficacy needs are being thwarted. The first is the United States' overwhelming power. This power has both material and psychological dimensions. . Kennedy (2002) claims that in his study of the rise and fall of great powers he found that, "Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power; nothing (para. 35)." Brooks and Wohlforth (2002) claim that, "The United States has no rival in any critical dimension of power (para. 12)." By almost any measure the US leads the world. In the military arena, the US is responsible for forty percent of world defense spending (Kennedy, 2002). America's economic dominance surpasses that of any great power in modern history (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002). America's military and economic dominance are rooted in its technological advantage. Figures from the late 1990s show that US expenditure on research and development equaled those of the next seven richest countries combined (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002). The US is dominant in the cultural realm as well. Forty-five percent of all internet traffic takes place in the US. Seventy-five percent of Nobel laureates in recent decades do their research and reside in the US (Kennedy, 2002).

Kennedy notes that were it possible to reliably measure such things, research would likely indicate that American films, television, advertisements, and youth culture are the most popular in the world.

Not only the material aspect of this power, but the psychological sense of impotence in the face of such comprehensive and overwhelming power makes Iran feel that it has little control over the course of its destiny. The US's power enables it to dominate militarily, dictate the economic model that the world uses, and impose its culture and values on the world. This reality thwarts Iran's need for a sense of control over its sovereignty, economy, and culture.

Second, the international order that emerged following World War II is an undemocratic order. The organizations that make the decisions of international consequence are controlled by a handful of powerful nations. The United Nations Security Council, which is (arguably) the sole body that has the right to declare a war legal or illegal, is controlled by just five veto-wielding permanent members. Each of these members is a nuclear power while insisting that other states not develop nuclear weapons. The G8 is a group of the seven richest democracies plus Russia. It is a club, not a governing body, but it gives the impression that it runs the world (Economist, 2008). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) monitors exchange rates and is a lender of last resorts to struggling governments. The World Bank funds large-scale development projects such as the construction of dams. These two organizations play a large role in shaping the international economic order. They are also controlled by a small group of powerful nations. By tradition, the head of the IMF is a European and the head of the World Bank is an American. Fortunately, in 2008 the IMF reformed the

formula by which it allocates votes and financial contributions according to economic size, reserves, and other measures to make it more equitable (Economist, 2008). The World Trade Organization (WTO) is a happy exception. The WTO belongs to all of its members and makes decisions based on consensus. While this system does a much better job at meeting members states efficacy needs, these needs can still be frustrated by the deadlock between developed and developing countries.

The world has changed since the birth of these organizations. When the UN began there were just fifty-one member states. Today there are one hundred and ninety-two (Economist, 2008). Emerging economies now account for more than half of global growth (Economist, 2008). This means that an undemocratic system has become even more undemocratic. In the face of such powerful, undemocratic institutions, small and midsize states such as Iran feel that they have little control over the structures of world politics and economics that greatly impact them. This threatens their sense of efficacy. Not only Iran, but a number of these states have been attempting to meet their need for efficacy by calling for reform of these organizations. Brazil, Germany, India and Japan made a concerted move to join the Security Council's permanent members. A caucus of mostly developing countries called the G77 (but comprising one hundred and thirty members) gains a sense of efficacy by dominating and filibustering in the UN General Assembly ((Economist, 2008).

Self-efficacy and asymmetric warfare.

A number of Iran's actions indicate that its sense of efficacy and control are thwarted. The most indicative of these behaviors is Iran's policy of asymmetric warfare.

Its policy of asymmetric warfare has three parts. One, is international terrorism. The second is its support of proxy groups in neighboring states. The final component is its pursuit of nuclear power. In the face of a power that wields incomparable conventional military power, has bases throughout the Middle East, and is engaged in wars on Iran's borders, Iran knows that its conventional forces cannot compete. In order to maintain a sense of efficacy and control Iran employs strategies that can compete with the US's conventional power thereby giving it some amount of control. These are the three pillars of Iran's strategy of asymmetric warfare.

Candid conversations with Iranian officials confirm what long observation of Iranian policies strongly suggest: lacking significant conventional military capabilities, Iran pursues an 'asymmetric' national security strategy. This strategy includes the use of proxy actors – political, paramilitary, and terrorist- - in neighboring states and elsewhere, to ensure that those states will not be used as anti-Iranian platforms...Iran's asymmetric strategy also includes developing unconventional military capabilities... (Leverett and Leverett, 2008, para. 19)

Iran's support of international terrorism gives it a sense of efficacy because it is strategy that is very hard for the US to combat. Its sense of efficacy comes not only from hard power in the form of violence such as terrorism, but also by increasing its influence in the region. Iran creates spheres of influence in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq by supporting pro-Iranian organizations and networks there. This includes its controversial support of Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hamas. Milani (2009) argues that Iran's support of Hezbollah and the Palestinians was originally ideologically

motivated but has evolved a strategic rationale. It gives Iran influence in Israel's backyard, which translates into a retaliatory capacity against Israel and bargaining power with the United States. And, after centuries of using its influence to defend Shiites, Iran is trying to transcend the sectarian divide by supporting Sunni groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which gives it influence in the heart of the Sunni Arab world and undermines traditional Sunni powers such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Finally, nuclear weapons are the ultimate symbol of the ability to exercise one's will.

Conclusion

While US-Iranian relations are not as bad as is conventionally thought. The stakes are still high. Iran is representative of one of the greatest challenges the world faces today. It is the poster child for rogue states, for the nexus of terrorism and nuclear weapons. A recent Newsweek cover story was titled "End of the Rogue." It argues that the new international order that is being forged by rising powers such as China, India, Brazil, and Turkey does not support the concept of rogue states and that these new powers undermine Western approaches to deal with rogues by engaging with and investing in them. It says that rogue states are the states that are

...unwilling to accommodate themselves to the 'end of history' and conform to U.S. values. The idea of the 'rogue state' assumed the existence of an international community, united behind supposedly universal Western values and interests, that could agree on who the renegades are and how to deal with them. (2010, para. 2).

Perhaps these rising powers are able to see the security, esteem, and efficacy motivations that underlie the behavior of rogue states because they share some of the same motivations.

Labeling countries “rogue states” is not a useful approach to addressing these monumental problems. The term rogue state implies a crazy, irrational state that is beyond negotiations. The concept of rogue states implies that the only way to deal with them is through aggression. Aggression is a very blunt tool which presents all kinds of problems ranging from efficacy to ethics to legality. A more effective approach is to apply the basic principles of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution says that the first step is to get beyond positions to the underlying needs of each party. In this case the US’s position is that Iran cannot develop nuclear weapons and Iran’s position is that it has a right to possess nuclear weapons. The US’s underlying need is for a sense of security and Iran needs a sense of esteem, efficacy, and security. Positions tend to be win/lose while needs are win/win because they are not zero sum.

A social psychological analysis is useful at this point because the underlying needs are not always self-evident and it helps the parties to identify them. Iran’s needs can be met in other ways than through support of international terrorism, interference in the Israeli- Palestinian peace process, by creating spheres of influence in neighboring countries, and nuclear power. The US could work with Iran to meet its needs in ways that do not thwart the needs of the US. It could meet Iran’s need for security by offering it a security guarantee, provided it agrees to certain terms. The Grand Bargain proposal would be a nice starting point. It could meet Iran’s need for a positive identity by abstaining from using language that is an affront to Iran’s esteem such as rogue state,

mad mullahs, and Axis of Evil. It could also publicly affirm Iran for its cooperation in Afghanistan and Iraq and for the conciliatory gestures that the reform movement made. To meet its need for efficacy, the US could support the reform of international institutions such as the UN, World Bank, IMF and others. Making these institutions more democratic would help to meet the needs of many developing countries that have been pleading for the democratization of the institutions that play such a large role in shaping the world order. It is likely that the social psychological factors that are playing a role in US-Iranian relations also play a role in other rogue states and other states that pose problems for the international community.

A number of commentators on Iran have called for the US to engage with Iran the way that Nixon did with China in 1972 (Cohen, 2009; Economist, 2007; Leverett and Leverett, 2008). Despite being staunchly anti-communist, Nixon made an unexpected trip to China in 1972. The result of the trip was the Shanghai Communiqué, a statement of their foreign policy views and a document that would remain the basis of Sino-American bilateral relations for many years. In the communiqué, both nations pledged to work toward the full normalization of diplomatic relations. The statement enabled the US and the People's Republic of China to temporarily set aside the crucial question obstructing the normalization of relations, the political status of Taiwan, and to open trade and other contacts. Engagement with China proved itself to be a highly effective strategy. Engagement does a much better job than deterrence at meeting fundamental human needs. Deterrence is a direct blow to a nation's ontological sense of security. In fact this is one of the primary purposes of deterrence. Engagement not only helps to meet a nation's need for ontological security, but promotes its self-esteem by the recognition

that come from the process of negotiations and enhances its sense of efficacy by strengthening its economy through increased economic ties. A China-style engagement with Iran would be made even more successful by starting with a social psychological analysis of US-Iranian relations and tailoring the engagement process to meet the social psychological needs and issues of the specific context.

Rarely do policy makers make an effort to imagine how international politics are perceived from the Iranian perspective or consider how these perceptions are part of an interactive crisis in which the US is a partner. Understanding Iran's perspective is crucial to improving US-Iranian relations. Beyond fundamental human needs, a social psychological analysis of group identity, cognitive factors such as perception, attribution, and images; and emotional factors such as fear, grief, and pride can illuminate additional causes, motivations, and reasons for intransience. The US will not be able to develop an effective strategy towards Iran without understanding and accounting for its rationale – its interests, perceptions, and motivations. A social psychological analysis can help it to do so.

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