The Rise of Iran: An Identity Fight to Challenge the Existing Power Establishment Contesting US Hegemony, Israeli, and Sunni Powers in the Middle East.

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Abstract
Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran is actively engaged in challenging the existing establishments to include the United States, Israel, and pro-American Sunni powers. The Iranian political maneuvering produced a ripple of waves over the years, specifically as Iraq became the first Arab-Shiite dominated state, the alliance and support of Hezbollah in its 2006 war with Israel, and its cunning management of its nuclear energy program. Amidst the current Middle East geopolitical restructuring; Iran continues to pose as a major regional player. This paper argues that Iran's strategies has been based on three main identity narratives: (1) the global fight of the Oppressed against the Oppressor; (2) the regional discourse of Islamism; and (3) the particularistic dialogue that empowers the Shiites of the region following Khomeini's contemporary Velayat-e faqih concept. Bridging Constructivism and political psychology, we analyze Iran's Identity narrative to highlight its impact on world politics.

Key Words: Iran, constructivism, identity, narratives, political psychology

1- Introduction:
        The geostrategic significance of Iran puts it on the agenda of major competing powers regionally and globally. No doubt, Iran's geostrategic location, nuclear ambitions, security challenges, and oil are the highlights of high and low international diplomacy. But what makes the Islamic Republic of Iran stand out today is the way Iran presents itself on the global stage and how it is perceived by its allies and competing

powers. In this article, we will demonstrate how Iran's Islamic identity narrative challenges the United States hegemony and its allies by undermining regional stability and peace as Iran is vying to become the regional power player in the Middle East. We gathered Iranian speeches from Fars News, Mehr News, Press TV, and Tehran Times that reflect the Islamic Republics identity and narrative. We will decipher the narratives constructing Iran's identity and how it shapes its foreign policy. We will focus on three narratives: (1) how Iran's narrative oscillates between the global fight of the Oppressed against the Oppressor; (2.) the regional discourse of Islamism that unites the people of the Middle East; and (3) the particularistic dialogue that empowers the Shiites of the region following Khomeini's contemporary Velayat-e faqih concept. Those ideological narratives are important because they explain Iran's political strategies, and prove a context for both regional and global issues as well as the power restructuring of regional and global power.

2- Iran's Foreign Policy Dominant Narratives: Constructivism and political Psychology theoretical perspectives.

This study bridges constructivism and political psychology linking norms and ideas to identity along with highlighting the salience of language, interactions, perceptions, and beliefs in shaping Self-Other behavior, goals, and choices (Katzenstein, 1996; Barnett, 1998; Kowert, 2012; Larson, 2012; Onuf, 1998; Shannon, 2012) to analyze Iran's experiences in shaping its political identity and the perception of itself in relations to Others; and hence, how Iran makes sense of the social reality in everyday life (Kreidie and Monroe, 2002; Perinbanayagam, 2000). For many Iranians and in particular, Ayatollah Rohallah Khomeini and his revolutionaries, Iran's contemporary narrative is not only an accumulation of past and current memories and experiences, but also its socio-cultural experiences based on their own interpretation of events and perception of Others. Past events such as Operation Ajax and the decades-long American meddling into Iran affairs during the Pahlavi period to America's support for Israel and Sunni Monarchies (Nasr, 2007; Takeyh, 2006) have shaped the Iranians beliefs, behavior, and stories. The perceptual view and interpretation by the Iranians of the Other are formulated 'on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them' (Blumer, 1969: 2). The meaning-making process is important to the Self and Other as meanings are produced out of social interaction (Blumer, 1969); hence, we learn the significance of things from others and society. These meanings can differ from one another as meanings are negotiated through an interpretive process by those who encounter in dealings with the Other (Blumer, 1969). By applying meaning towards the Other, it helps us makes sense of things and develops how the Self will act, behave, and interact in situations. These factors are important in understanding what makes the Islamic Republic who they are and what they stand for.

Since its inception, Iran is the locus of attraction with an Islamic background. Iran is the sample model of an Islamic government of the region that took 32 years for other states such as Tunisia and Egypt to follow as the world witnessed a wave of uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa region known as the 'Arab Spring' or 'Islamic Awakening.' Arab nationalism has collapsed (Rubin, 2006) and subsequently, Islamism became the dominant ideology of the region and this dominant ideology in government came from Iran—it was the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran as they positioned themselves on the map by challenging the influence, oppression, and policies of the United States, the West, and Israel. By not yielding to the West, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces for Basij and Defense Culture Brigadier General Massoud Jazzayeri argued 'despite the high hopes of the hegemonic states, the US in particular, the scenario of sanctions and exertion of pressure on Iran has not only failed to yield a result but also acted as a factor which has boosted the Iranian nation's resistance and persistence against the enemies of the revolution and the Islamic ruling system' (Fars News, 2012). Outlining the political history

between the Islamic Republic and the West, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei declared 'in the last three decades, the Iranian nation has stood against all plots and sanctions… and made progress in a way that today we are 100 times stronger than 30 years ago' (Fars News, 2012) noting that 'the main reason for all these pressures is the independent status of the Iranian nation and the fact that it is not bowing down to the hegemonistic system' (Tehran Times, 2012a). The progress Iran has made since its inception and its rise in power of the region has created a great challenge for the United States and its allies. This is evident as former United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed, 'there isn't a doubt that Iran constitutes the single most important single-country strategic challenge to the United States and to the kind of the Middle East that we want to see' (Wright, 2007).

What factors produce a rising Iran and challenge to the United States? According to the Director of the Global Research and International Affairs Center, Barry Rubin (2006), the rise of Iran is contributed to its: geopolitical assets; Islamism; nuclear ambitions; the expansion of influence in areas of Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territory; fomenting regional stability by supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other indigenous Islamist groups; and a power vacuum in the Middle East. This paper underscores the support Iran receives from Russia, China, Syria and members from the Non-Aligned Movement to the Islamic Republics commitment to the resistance of the Oppressed against the Oppressor narrative that constitutes the strategic foundation of Iran's politics as a rising regional power. Addressing the role of Iran's Oppressed-Oppressor narrative, narratives are stories that 'are created for different purposes' and 'do different types of work' that are told by people to make sense of either their lives or others (Loseke, 2007: 661). Narratives are social constructs that have socio-cultural and psychological functions that are evaluated and told in their interactional and historical contexts that are believable and important (Loseke, 2007). Iran's resistance of the Oppressed against the Oppressor narrative is best manifested in Iran's stance against the West in general and the United States and Israel in particular. Known as the "arrogant powers." As Chairman of the Iranian Parliament, Ali Larijani explained, 'campaigning against the arrogant powers and also resistance against the United States and the Zionist regime are the principles of the Islamic Revolution'…'it is Iran's policy to fight against the global arrogance and support the Oppressed' (Tehran Times, 2011).

The reality of the relationships between Iran and the United States-Israel-the West in stories told is based off of distrust, hostility, and confrontation. When the Self produces an understanding of their reality and Others, it shapes their beliefs, perceptions, and how they process and interpret incoming information (Shannon, 2012; Sterling-Folker, 2006). For example, in reference to President Barack Obama signing into law more sanctions on Iran, he stated 'with these sanctions, along with others, we are striking at the heart of the Iranian government's ability to fund and develop its nuclear program' (Baker, 2010). The incoming information and how Iranian officials decipher the language constructs their beliefs and perception of the 'arrogant powers' that is best explained by former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as he argued, 'the truth is, they [arrogant powers] oppose Iran's ideals, existence and policies and intend to resist and impede the progress of the Iranian nation by any means' (Press TV, 2012a). Ahmadinejad continues the narrative by 'those who want to dominate the world are working on causing trouble in our region in order to achieve their goals,' adding that 'they don't allow us to develop because they want us to be in need of them' (al-Manar, 2012).

The Iranian story-telling explains the political discourse between the Islamic Republic and the United States and its allies. On the other hand, the stories told will have different interpretations and meaning by different Others [for example the United States and Israel] are likely to tell very different stories about past

experiences, historical context on events, and explanations for their actions (Kubálková, 2001). The United States story-telling narrative has succeeded in positioning Iran on the Axis of Evil in that it threaten world security, sponsors terrorist organizations, jeopardizes the Arab-Israeli conflict by turning it Islamic, and gives support to marginalized Shiites by producing the Sunni fear of the Shiite expansion. Iran's Islamic and more specifically Shiite identity has put it on the 'Other' exclusivist camp which the United States uses to attack Iran with. These narratives began when the Iranian people toppled their autocratic leader, Pahlavi Shah in 1979.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution dominant narrative has been based on ending global oppression, under the banner of Islam and Shiism. The Iranian revolution narrative was to shape Iran's Shii identity, piety, and that 'every place should be turned into Karbala, every month into Moharram, and every day into Ashura' (Ervand, 1993: 29; Nasr, 2007). The Revolution was about removing the United States and the Shah out of Iran, to eliminate America's influence of the region, and to liberate their Arab neighbors of oppression (Rubin, 2006). Ayatollah Khomeini asserted 'this rebellion ... is not a nationalist rebellion; this rebellion is a Quranic rebellion; this rebellion is an Islamic rebellion....It was the invisible hand of God which united the entire nation from school children to hospitalized old men' (Milani, 1994: 141). The Khomeini led leadership impacted the global community in the 1979 Iranian Hostage Crisis and when Khomeini labeled the United States as the 'Great Satan,' perceiving them as the enemies of Islam; particularly with their support of Israel (Harik, 2005; Keddie, 2006; Takeyh, 2006). This narrative turned into a double-edged weapon; the Sunni-Shii split shaped by the pro and anti-United States alliances. From direct personal experiences, the Islamic government embraced the Oppressed-Oppressor narrative in their politics as Iranian officials believe it is an Islamic duty to support the Oppressed. It is written in their constitution, under Article 152 declaring to defend the rights of all Muslims and to reject all forms of dominance and submission (Holliday, 2011). This explains the outspoken support for the Palestinians and anti-American-Israeli speeches. Therefore, all forms of dialogues, whether oppositional slogans, speeches, rules, and stories told have been generated to publicize Iran's narratives of resistance, liberation from oppression, and social change.

Narratives explain how political actors think, act, and behave since 'the power of a narrative is the power to persuade' (Conge and Okruhlik, 2009: 359). Khomeini (IRIB, 1979: 233) stated 'Quds Day is the day when the fate of the oppressed nations should be determined. The oppressed nations should announce their existence against the oppressors, and just as Iran rose up and rubbed the noses of the oppressors in the dirt, and will continue to do so.' Clearly, narratives not only affect our perceptions and behavior of our own social reality, but affect our actions in response to or in anticipated events (Patterson and Monroe, 1998). Affected by the regime change inside Iran, Khomeini's speeches, and the dramatic developments of the Iran Hostage Crisis on the United States Embassy in Tehran, the United States President Jimmy Carter introduced his 1980 doctrine, viewing the Persian Gulf as a national security priority and pledged to use force against any state that poses a threat to US interests and its allies (Zunes, 2003). Since that time, the political narrative of the United States and Iran has been mostly on a collision course with brief lulls, as the competing narratives form ripples of change, inspire uprisings, and develop new alliances. Coupled with the sense of disenchantment, Iran's identity is also shaped by the regional discourse oscillating between Islamism on one side and the Sunni-Shii divide on the other (Nasr, 2007). Iranian officials partially accuse America of fomenting this great sectarian divide. The Iranian government claim the Sunni-Shii conflict has been exploited by the United States as 'America is trying to sow discord among Shiites and Sunnis ... they want to create tension between Iran and Arabs,' stated Ahmadinejad (Tayel, 2011). It is imperative to address how Shiism became instituted in Iranian politics and its effect in regional and global politics.

3- From a local Quiet Shiism under the hidden Imam to the Expansionist Shiism under Velayat-e Faqih

The political dimension of Shiism begins with the Prophet Muhammad as he established the principles of Islam of having no distinction of state power and religious thought as the Prophet himself, was a temporal and religious leader (Rakel, 2007). The historical roots of Shia Islam began with the caliphate succession and governorship of Muslims after the Prophet's death. Sunnis, the majority Muslim sect revere all caliphs selected by the council of close confidents of the prophet to include the fourth Ali, the prophet's cousin and son in law. The Shiites believes that Ali should have been the immediate successor of the prophet and that the three Sunni caliphs usurped power (Keddie, 2006). According to Mirbaghari (2004: 556), 'this governorship issue led to Sunni Shii rivalries and 'continued to have significant ramifications for the Shiites of Iran, as rulers have always had to receive the blessing of religious authorities in the country…failure to secure this often proved costly to rulers, e.g. the late Shah of Iran.'

The beginning of the institutional politicization of Shiism in Iran dates back to 1501, when Shah Esmail I mandated Twelver Shiism as the official state religion of the Safavid Empire (1501-1722) to counter the Sunni Ottoman power and to give Iran a distinctive religious identity (Keddie, 2006; Mirbaghari, 2004). The rise of Shiism continued during the Qajar Dynasty (1796-1921) and now with the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-present) (Nasr, 2007). However, this Shiite sectarian identity is more political than just religious. Although Islam in general is a comprehensive religion that deals with the public and private, Shiism's four traits of politicization are: the Akhbaryoun/Usooliyoon, Ijtihad, Taqlid, and Khoms is institutionalized the governorship accountability between the laity and the clerics (Mirbaghari, 2004). The Usooliyoon[1] follow the principles of the Quran and the Hadith to guide private and public laws putting sovereignty only in God (Mirbaghari, 2004). Ijtihad Jurisprudence another important trait where only the learned and trained is given the right 'to interpret religion' and hence 'allows the jurisprudent to wield much power in providing or withdrawing legitimacy' (Mirbaghari, 2004: 557). The Ijtihad is emboldened by the Taqlid/ Marja as every individual should follow the rulings of the most learned Imam. Khoms (religious Tax) is an obligation for every Shiite to pay one fifth of his/her net profit to the clerics to spend on whatever they see fit for the national interest. This religious financial transaction created the direct link between the people and the clergy allowing a regular exchange of views and preferences on any issue of the day. Shiism's four traits on the institutional process were culminated in Khomeini's Velayat-e faqih concept and it established the position of Supreme Leader, which explains how Shiism impacted Iran's domestic and foreign policy (Mirbaghari, 2004; Rakel, 2007) and became part of the Islamic Republics national identity.

4- Beyond Shiism: Iran's rising identity and the formation of the Axis of Resistance

Khomeini's Velayat-e faqih religious jurisprudence-form of governance moved Iranian Twelver Shiism from its quiet local politics to the era where living Imam; grasp the ultimate authority over all Shiite followers (Hodgson, 1974; Katouzian, 2003). His charisma, interpretation of religious authority and ability to tap into the pride of Iranian people strengthened his support and made him the ultimate Shii champion of justice (Dabashi, 1993). Khomeini's Velayat-e faqih concept gave Iran religious political legitimacy beyond the borders of the Islamic Republic.[2] The Islamic Republic stimulated their efforts to export the Islamic revolution to liberate the alienated and oppressed people in the region, to generate an Islamic revival, and promoted solidarity among Arabs and Muslims by using Islamism (Pelham, 2008; Rakel, 2007). Shias abandoned their leftist and nationalistic ideologies and joined Shia movements—many of which were supported by Iran such as al-Da'wa (the Islamic Call) in Iraq, Tahrik-e Jafaria (Shia Movement) in Pakistan,

and Hizb-e Wahdat (Party of Unity) in Afghanistan (Nasr, 2007). The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon was the turning point in the local and regional politics as it added the Iranian factor to the Lebanese battleground. Hezbollah emerged with close ties from Iran and Syria pledged its support to Iran, provided oversight over Hezbollah, and transported weapons inside Lebanon (Harik, 2005; Nakash, 2006; Nasr, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2010).

Barnett (1996: 410) points out that 'identity is linked to the construction of the threat and represents a potential source of alliance formation.' This is reflected in the Islamic Republic's strong support of the Palestinian cause, which stresses the only way to liberate the occupied territories in Palestine, is through armed struggle (Moussalli, 2008), and forming alliances between former enemies Arabs vs. Persians under a unifying Islamic identity. The universal characteristic of Islam gave Iran's narrative on resistance a powerful Jihad tool as it inspired many Sunni activists to give them hope in liberating occupied Palestine (Nasr, 2007). Expelled Muslim Brotherhood member, Fathi al-Shiqaqi established the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the group became strong allies with Iran that underlines the use of violent operations against Israel (Moussalli, 2008; Takeyh, 2006). al-Shiqaqi shared beliefs with Khomeini as he stated that 'Islam was the solution and Jihad was the proper means' (Brandenberg, 2010; Tamimi, 2007). After the eruption of the first Palestinian intifada, seven senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood established their organization called Hamas (Tamimi, 2007). With the weakness of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Hamas recognized Iran's strong commitment supporting the Palestinian people, prompting Hamas to declare, 'we are standing by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and with this country we will resist American and Zionist pressures' (Pelham, 2008: 222).

The mechanism of identity established the alliance formation of what is known today as the 'resistance bloc' or the 'axis of resistance' consisting of Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Iran, and Syria. Iran's commitment and financial support to the resistance bloc has played a significant role in destabilizing the Arab-Israeli peace process, a deterrent to attack and along with impacting the region through its influence in the region (Slavin, 2008). This narrative was faced by the challenging narrative used by the opponents underscoring the Sunni- Shii divide to distinguish who is an ally and who is not, stressing an existential threat, digging into history of rivalries on one hand and focusing on recent disenchanted minorities fighting for grabbing power.

5- Dominant identity narrative: Global resistance, regional Islamism, and local Shiism: positioning Iran on the regional map

Self-Other and their relationships can produce friends, enemies, rivalries, and influence in global politics through interactions, ideas, and especially if one group is experiencing social competition and upward mobility to improve their status (Larson, 2012; Wendt, 1999). Iran's identity of resistance, Islamic unity, and Shiism has created competing identities, interests, and rivalries that produced in-group out-group categories. Khomeini condemned Sunni Gulf states by calling monarchy 'shameful' and 'disgraceful' and tried to foment uprisings in neighboring states by oppressive rulers who serve the United States (Takeyh, 2006). The Iranian revolution not only provided Shiite Iran upward mobility in the world, but awakened and emboldened the Shias of the region to protest and riot against their oppressors for greater rights in Shii communities in Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia to attempting a coup in Bahrain to establish an Islamic government (Nakash, 2006; Nasr, 2007). In response to these events and the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States and its Sunni allies tried to contain Iran's rising identity and influence by supporting Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war to the creation of the Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC) (Nasr, 2007; Takeyh, 2006). The GCC was built on an alliance formation of Sunni Gulf states based on goals; norms; ideas; identity, culture; socioeconomic and political interests; and survival seeking strategies as a security measure from the externalized threat of Iran and the internalized threat from Shia's within (Barnett, 1996; Barnett, 1998; Keddie, 1980).

When Iran contested the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over ownership of the Islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb, the GCC states went to the United States for protection and signed defense military and bilateral agreements with the United States (Rakel, 2007). Other steps were taken under the Clinton administration as they attempted to isolate and coerce Iran with its Dual Containment policy (Takeyh, 2006) and the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act. As these attempts have failed, the colliding identities and narratives between the in-group (United States and pro American regimes) out-groups (the axis of resistance) became more heavily contested in the region. The response to Iran's Islamic narrative crystallized in 2004 with Jordanian king Abdullah II of Jordan, warning the international community of the Shiite crescent that begins in Iran, passes through Iraq into Damascus. Fearing of the rise of the rising Shii power, King Abdullah disallowed the construction of Shiite Mosques, believing it will be a nurturing place to incite a Shiite revolution (Pelham, 2008). The actions constructed by the in-group and out-groups are weaved in the narratives exchanged and clearly depict the end goals and the tactics used to achieve them. The colliding narratives reflect a clash of ideas, perceptions, and identities that could ultimately evolve into a military and violent narrative and a conflict that ends with a new reality represented in new power structure. For the United States and Israel, the greatest challenge for them is Iran's nuclear aspirations and from their perspective, it is Iran's deviant behavior of refusing to comply with the United Nations Security Council and the European Union sanctions.

5- Colliding global narratives and Iran's fight to challenge the existing global establishment

Patterson and Monroe (1998: 316) points out that a 'narrative is utilized as one of the most widespread and powerful forms of discourse in human communication.' Iran's clear narrative about its nuclear goals is coupled by the United States misperception of Iran's intentions and lack of trust on how Iran sees its political environment or how it goes about its goals. In this situation, the United States has taken robust measures in sanctions in its efforts to derail Iran's nuclear progress and to reduce Iran's influence. United States foreign policy against Iran has ranged from covert Central Intelligence Agency operations and funding tens of millions in the Democracy Promotion Program to incite regime change, cyber warfare, and selling billions in arms sales to the GCC states ($66.3 billion in 2011 alone) (Katzman, 2009; Shanker, 2012; Slavin, 2007). Stressing Iran's role as the plight of the Oppressed against the Oppressor, it is a struggle of independence against the United States and its allies. Iranian officials have repeatedly stated its purpose of its nuclear program. As Ahmadinejad noted 'we need the peaceful nuclear technology for energy, medical and agricultural purposes, and our scientific progress…we need it for the development of our country and we shall carry on with it' (BBC News, 2005).

Ahmadinejad's Senior Advisor, Mojtaba Samareh Hashemi, conveyed the symbolic meaning of its program as he notes the heart of Iran's nuclear energy program is 'the symbol of the Islamic Republic of Iran's technical and political capabilities, the bravery of the nation…its pursuit of dignity, and the Iranian-Islamic national identity'(Tehran Times, 2009). Explicating Iran's choices on its nuclear program in the decision making process is based on their perceptual view and interpretation of the situation in conjunction with their belief system and preferences. Choices are made through preferences, interpretations, interests, desires, and behaviors along with normative constraints and how reality is perceived by the individual

(Kowert, 2012; Shannon, 2012). Therefore, the choice of perusing a civilian nuclear program as Ayatollah Khamenei defined 'is a national obligation and a public demand; any going back is the same as losing the country's independence at a very high price' (Amuzegar, 2006:100) adding that 'if nations are allowed to independently make progress in the fields of nuclear energy, aerospace, science, technology and industry, there will be no room left for the tyrannical dominance of world powers' (Press TV, 2012b). It is apparent the statements and choices made by the Iranian government are reflected in their Islamic identity and how they perceive reality. Choices depend on 'who we are' and 'identity is expected to serve as a guide to what we want and to how we wish for the world to be constructed' (Kowert, 2012: 32).

Iran has demonstrated to the world that states do have the option to comply with the obligations of the international system (Onuf, 1998). On one hand, states are autonomous, act freely, and make choices; but on the other hand, states can be constrained of their own autonomy (Onuf, 1998) by the autonomy and power of other states. The latter is demonstrated by the United States policies on Iran and how United States policies can affect other states own autonomy and their constructed interests. Referring to the United States 2012 oil sanctions on Iran, United States New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez said, 'today, we put on notice all nations that continue to import petroleum or petroleum products from Iran that they have three months to significantly reduce those purchases or risk the imposition of severe sanctions on their financial institutions,' followed by United States President Barack Obama stating, 'I will closely monitor this situation to assure that the market can continue to accommodate a reduction in purchases of petroleum and petroleum products from Iran' (Mason and Rampton, 2012). From the Iranian government's perspective, the statements by Menendez and Obama reinforced the Iranian Oppressed-Oppressor argument, by the United States constraining the autonomy of other states on what they can and cannot do. This explains the colliding acts and behavior between the United States and Iran, particularly as they both define their own situation through social experiences and interactions that produces enhanced security measures to take actions against the Other.

In August of 2005, at the emergency meeting of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); the Islamic Republic of Iran issued a statement affirming its intentions to peaceful production of nuclear capabilities; Khamenei declared in his fatwa that 'the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that the Islamic Republic of Iran shall never acquire these weapons (Mehr News, 2005a). The statement began with an attack on the United States as the violator of international law while Iran the complier with international law and religious dictums is among other states demonized by those who commit the acts of aggression. Iran's Nuclear Negotiator, Sirus Naseri, stated 'we meet when the world is remembering the atomic bombings of the civilians in Hiroshima (Aug 6) and Nagasaki (Aug 9) sixty years ago. The savagery of the attack, [And]… those who survived should never be removed from our memory' (Mehr News, 2005a). Naseri continued by grouping the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as the victimized and oppressed by the United States and its allies saying 'none of the NPT members of the NAM rely on nuclear weapons in any way for their security…but also many members of NAM are denied the peaceful uses of nuclear technology by some of the NPT nuclear-weapon states and their allies through the mechanisms of export controls and other denial arrangements' (Mehr News, 2005a). The premise of this speech is that Iran is trying to show credibility and legitimacy on its nuclear energy program. Iran, like other NAM states are forbidden to use or have access to such a civilian program but the irony of this message is that the United States demonstrated irresponsibility to the world and hypocrisy as America was never penalized for killing and injuring innocent civilians and should be punished.

Furthermore, the Islamic Republic criticizes the United States for not upholding its standards to other states. Ahmadinejad points out that 'certain countries in the region not only possess nuclear technology but also have the atomic bomb…however there is no mention of them and no one is bothering them' (Nasseri, 2012). This is in reference to India, Pakistan, and most notably, Israel as they are not a signatory member of the NPT. From the Iranian perspective, Khamenei argued 'there is no doubt that the decision makers in the countries opposing us know well that Iran is not after nuclear weapons because the Islamic Republic, logically, religiously and theoretically, considers the possession of nuclear weapons a grave sin and believes the proliferation of such weapons is senseless, destructive and dangerous' (Press TV, 2012b). To discredit the claims by the United States and to build confidence building measures to the global community, the Islamic Republic signed the Tehran Declaration, Paris Agreement, and the Additional Protocol (signed but never ratified) (Ritter, 2006; Zarif, 2007). During this period, Iran voluntarily suspended its nuclear program for two and a half years and opened its doors to the IAEA inspectors to conduct rigorous inspections on all of its nuclear and military sites (Ritter, 2006; Zarif, 2007). After inspecting Iran's facilities, the Director General of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei concluded they found no evidence that Iran diverted its program for military purposes and all of the nuclear material has been accounted for; yet, unable to exclusively confirm the authenticity of Iran's program (Ritter, 2006; Zarif, 2007). Years later, Director General Yukiya Amano wrote in his August 2012 assessment; as Iran has some outstanding issues, 'the agency is unable to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities' (Amano, 2012).

The Islamic Republic's decision to continue its program has led to a series of sanctions that continues today which are designed to cripple Iran's economy and force them into isolation. Nonetheless, the political consequences have not prevented the Islamic Republic to stop its uranium enrichment activities with the assassinations of five nuclear scientists and cyber warfare of the Stuxnet, Flame, and Duqu viruses that are designed to derail Iran's nuclear program (McElroy and Williams, 2012). The reality of this narrative is the United States has struggled to 'prove' Iran is building a nuclear weapon. As the United States has no conclusive evidence, White House spokesman Jay Carney said 'the lack of evidence of Iranian nuclear weapons has given the United States the time and latitude to continue the policy we have applied since the president took office' (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012). Language, as Onuf (1998:59) notes that 'talking is undoubtedly the most important way that we go about making the world the way it is.' Committed to American-Israeli security, Obama declared

> I will take no options off the table, and I mean what I say….I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And as I've made clear time and again during the course of my presidency, I will not hesitate to use force when it is necessary to defend the United States and its interests. And make no mistake: We [the United States] will do what it takes to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge, because 'Israel must always have the ability to defend itself, by itself, against any threat' (Parsons 2011).

Stressing the urgency to the United States and the world about the Islamic Republics nuclear program, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated 'you want these fanatics to have nuclear weapons' as he defined a 'red line' on when to militarily strike Iran (Benhorin, 2012). Apart from the fact that the United States will intervene if a war breaks out with Israel, the Islamic Republic has still uphold its identity narrative as Khamenei countered with these remarks in a fiery sermon, 'threatening Iran and attacking Iran will harm America' and that 'sanctions will not have any impact on our determination to continue our nuclear course' (Khan and Martinez, 2012). Iran's challenging narrative alarmed Israel and gave her an opportunity to respond with a similar narrative: a Jewish narrative.

6- Islamic identity narrative met by a Jewish identity narrative

The Israeli-Iranian story-telling is rooted on Iran's Islamic identity, the resistance bloc, and words and speech acts. The Self is constituted by language and presents its meaning through words and speech acts as an instrument to achieve their goals and beliefs (Onuf, 2001; Perinbanayagam, 2000; Sterling-Folker, 2006). Speech acts are salient as Onuf (1998:59) notes that 'talking is undoubtedly the most important way that we go about making the world the way it is.' When people respond to speech acts that are directed towards them, they decipher the language, construct interpretation and meaning to those words, and perception to make sense of the Other and the situation given (Jervis, 2002; Sterling-Folker, 2006). For Iran, the antagonism between Iran-Israel is mostly noted on Israel's existence and the oppression of the Palestinians for the past 60 years; hence, the creation of Quds Day. Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi stated, 'Iran will never recognize Israel as a state because it has violated the legitimate rights of Palestinians' (Moussalli, 2008: 148). When Israelis hear statements and phrases such as Israel is a 'cancerous tumor,' an 'insult to humanity,' and 'the occupying regime [Israel] must be wiped off the map' (Press TV, 2012c; Sanders, 2009: 82); have solidified Israeli fears and asserted that Iran is their most dangerous adversary in the region. Iranian speech acts has emboldened its image in the Middle East; yet, Iran's resistance and Islamic identity narrative was countered by an Israeli victimization and Jewish identity narrative thus drawing another line of contestation in the current regional politics.

Language and speech acts play an important role in society and affect our reality. President Shimon Peres defined their reality with Iran as 'an evil, cruel, morally corrupt regime. It is based on destruction and is an affront to human dignity' (Associated Press, 2012a). And according to former Israeli Intelligence Chief Shabtai Shavit, he argues 'since the intention of the enemy [Iran] in this case is to annihilate you, the right doctrine is one of preemption and not of retaliation' (Peterson, 2010). The Jewish identity narrative oscillates between Israel's defense against the rising Islamic demographic and political challenge seeing in 'Iran…the greatest danger of all could soon be upon us: a militant Islamic regime armed with nuclear weapons' stated by Netanyahu (Kahl, 2012). Certainly, Iran's nuclear program is the center stage of the political discourse narrative which the Israeli government has sparked its fears to the global community of an Iranian nuclear weapon since the early 1990's (Peterson, 2011). The intensity of Iranian identity politics has shifted the Israeli dialogue from national self-determination where Israel is seen as 'a homeland for the Jewish people;' to an Israeli tactic where the actual issues of borders, water, Jerusalem, and settlements were shelved and instead the debate turned into the necessity of a Jewish state facing Islamic terrorism (Ibish, 2011). The Iranian Islamic- Shiite identity narrative reverberated further in the region to create the Sunni-Shiite existential threat.

7- The cultural identity rivalry of Iran and Saudi Arabia

Not surprisingly, Iran's Shiite identity clashes with its Arab Sunni neighbors; particularly with Saudi Arabia. The Saudis identity narrative derives from the theology of Wahhabism; founded in the 18 Century by Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhabi (El Fadl, 2007). The institutional politicization of Wahhabism in Saudi culture and politics began under Abd al-Aziz bin Al Saud; founder of modern Saudi Arabia in 1932 (El Fadl, 2007; Yamani, 2008). The ultra conservative creed of Wahhabism serves as a distinctive religious identity for Saudi Arabia; categorizing itself as a pious nation which counters against Shia thought by regarding Shia Muslims as 'heretics' and 'apostates;' all based on the understanding of how they perceive reality (al-Rasheed, 2011; Yamani, 2008). The colliding Saudi-Iranian narrative has generated the Saudi government to use scholars, journalists, mosques, Wahhabi clerics and educational institutions to promote their Sunni

identity and inject sectarianism to counter the Iranian Shiite identity (Rahigh-Aghsan and Jakobsen, 2010). Such fears of Iran and the colliding narratives are being witnessed across the region today that reflects a clash of ideas, perceptions and identities that could ultimately evolve into a violent narrative, specifically as the Middle East are experiencing mass uprisings and revolutions. Based on this understanding of Saudi Arabia's identity, it has allowed them to be aggressive on its domestic and foreign policies to 'repel Iranian influence and silence dissidence at home' to maintain stability and leadership in the Middle East (al-Rasheed, 2011; Conge and Okruhlik, 2009). A clear indication of the Saudis leadership role in the region was in Bahrain, as they mobilized their security forces and GCC forces into Bahrain to quell the Shiite protesters and Iranian interference, and foiled a Shiite plot against the state (al-Rasheed, 2011; Teitelbaum, 2011). The fear of Iran and Shiites abroad has evolved into identity driven policies to promote a reward or punishment benefit based on religious affiliation.

8- The regional Shii-Sunni colliding narrative

Many Shia's across the region are depicted by Sunni governments as agents of Iran (Nasr, 2007). In this event, the perceptual view of the Other is important as the Self can produce desired images of the Other (Jervis, 2002) to achieve their goals. And when there is a perceived existential threat to one's identity, this identity takes a priority in defense strategy (Kreidie and Monroe, 2002). The colliding Shii-Sunni narrative between the rising identity of Iran and the existing Sunni identity deeply impacts state-society relations, noticeably in the UAE and Bahrain. The colliding narratives have shaped regional politics in UAE as regional tensions in the Iranian-Sunni identity divide prompted UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan, to order the expulsion of more than a thousand Lebanese Shiite expatriates over their presumed affiliation with Hezbollah as the June 7 general election in Lebanon saw the defeat of the Hezbollah led alliance by the Saudi and western backed coalition (Daou, 2009). The Arab street support on resistance bloc members has prompted Sunni leaders such as the Bahraini al-Khalifa family to promote a five year policy offering poor Shiites a stipend if they convert to be a Sunni Muslim—to reduce Iran's sphere of influence (Pelham, 2008), which stipulates the fear of a rising Iran. The challenge the GCC face is they 'recognize that the emerging Shia powers hold a fascination for young Arabs, who are attracted to the rising generation of outspoken leaders such as Ahmadinejad and Hassan Nasrallah' (Yamani, 2008: 151). These leaders speak the words of what many young Arab and Muslims feel on critical political issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian dilemma. Post 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War, Nadia al-Khatib, a 16 year old Palestinian proudly stated, 'he [Nasrallah] is different to other heroes because he stands up to Israel, he isn't scared and he doesn't stay quiet—he takes action' (Shabi, 2008). However, Iran's anti-Western Islamic regional narrative is challenged today specifically by the uprising in Syria. The link of Hezbollah to Iran through Shiites of Iraq and the political convenience of Al-Assad regime are faced by the Arab awakening inevitable change the Iranian leaders espoused as the spread of the Islamic revolutions against the pro-western Arab leader (Iskandar, 2011)

9- The Syrian crisis
The Arab-Islamic uprisings and revolutions have changed the geopolitics of the Middle East. Today, Iran's rise is heavily being contested inside Syria as Khamenei states 'the truth about the Syrian (issue) is that a proxy war (has been waged) by certain governments, led by the United States and some other powers, against the Syrian government with the aim of serving the interests of the Zionist regime and dealing a blow to the resistance in the region' (Tehran Times, 2012b). Evidence of this accusation is Saudi Arabia and

Qatar exhibiting its support to the world by paying the salaries and arming the Syrian opposition groups and Jihadists while the United States is providing intelligence (BBC News, 2012a; Sanger, 2012). The Iranian government has reacted to the events and Ahmadinejad announced the Islamic Republic will do 'all in its power to support this country' to prevent the demise of Bashar al-Assad (Reuters, 2012). The repercussions of the Syrian crisis have furthered the Sunni-Shii identity into further polarization and this dilemma unraveled the dilemma Hamas has on Iran, while denouncing the Syrian regime response to the uprisings. Hamas tried to reinvent itself, looked with hope at the big success of the Egyptian Ikhwan and President Mohamed Morsi, while at the same time worrying about getting the necessary financial support either from the resistance bloc represented by Iran, or from the so called moderate bloc led by the GCC states financed by Qatar. Along and with the Russian intervention to deter US military intervention against Syria, the Iranian government led by the moderate leader Rohani devised a sophisticated strategy exploiting Washington's opposition of the rampant spread and possible gain of the Sunni Jihadist in case of a military action against Syria (Stratfor, September 2013). Iran's dominant Sectarian narrative coupled with the resistance proxy narrative –actually- played a role in reversing U.S. president from bombing Syria to resorting to diplomacy hand in hand with Iran to solve the Syrian crisis.

Definitely, the uprisings are a manifestation of colliding Sunni-Shii narratives of the oppressed against the oppressor, and identities with new dominant narratives are evolving with states and non-state actors reshuffling ideas and creating new alliances. Turkey has involved itself in this affair by breaking off relations with Syria and supporting the opposition groups—a move that swiftly lead to the erosion of relations with Iran. Turkey's surprising appearance on the Middle Eastern stage ameliorates the Iranian effect—all to weaken Iran as it believes the Assad regime will be overthrown. Similar to the Iranian stance, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced Turkey "will stand by the Palestinians until the end' and called Hamas 'resistance fighters who are struggling to defend their land' (Al-Akhbar, 2012; Hürriyet Daily News, 2011). The Turkish shift from a strictly secular country with normal relations with Israel, into a country allowing intertwining of religion and politics along with its tumultuous relationship with Israel gives the Sunni Arab Street a choice away from Iran. Clearly, the Palestinian issue has helped Iran rise in power, giving them an advantage over any other Arab state and the West over the notion of Palestinian statehood and resistance against Israel. The United States' inability to materialize the promises of Palestinian statehood or at least contain Israeli settlements as a ground for fair peace negotiations have weakened the American power in the region and equally strengthen the Iranian-Turkish regional struggle over power in the region.

10- Conclusion

In all cases, Iran's identity narratives have put her on the map as a major player in the Middle East and in global politics leading to new alliances, tipping off United States policies in the region, and indirectly inspiring rebellions in the region. Although the political narratives have become more threatening, the two camps are still engaged in an identity fight that has resulted in an impasse that is still being challenged to weaken the Other. The perception and misperception of the Other can lead to dire consequences that can provoke or initiate a conflict. Evidence of this is Iran's aspirations that have forced the United States and its allies to increase its covert operations, security, and sanctions against Iran which forces a reciprocal response from Iran.

In terms of understanding the Islamic Republic, Iran's global resistance, as well as its regional Islamic and local Shiite narratives has positioned it among the main actors in the region best able to take

advantage of opportunities, and react to challenges. The Iranian Islamic resistance narrative reshaped the Israeli Palestinian conflict diluting the impact of conciliatory Arab politics, while presenting a more determined hard line position. Hezbollah and Hamas with Iran's full support were able to accomplish better power status not only for Iran, but also for Lebanon and the Palestinians. Since 1996, three major successful prisoners' exchanges took place, Israel withdrew from most of the Lebanese territories; Hamas withstood massive Israeli assaults on Gaza and was able to reach an accord with the Palestinian Authority— its Palestinian competitor; and lately UNESCO recognized a full Palestinian state. Of course, the conflictive ethos and norms shaping the Israeli Palestinian relations keep the conflict intractable; however, the cost of managing and maintaining the status quo of no peace is much higher, something both Israel and the United States consider seriously today.

Iran remains to be the single greatest perceived threat to the United States and its allies in the Middle East. The Islamic Republic's strategy of asserting its influence in the region has shown the world its determination to become a major regional power player. Iran has successfully maneuvered its politics against America by its allies—state and non-state actors. Resistance, Islam, and Shiism has shaped Iran's dominant identity narrative. To meet Iran's challenges, Israel, the United States and its Arab and Sunni allies reshuffled their alliances, imposed harsh sanctions, used all tools of coercive diplomacy from threats to attack Iran, to plans betting on regime change, and cutting off Iran from its state and non state actors. Unquestionably, Iran's opponents used the narrative of terrorism to tarnish the resistance divine character, paralleled Iran's Islamic rhetoric with extremism to dilute Iran's pragmatic politics, and successfully raised the level of fear of the Sunni-Shia divide.

Today, the overall clashing narrative is coupled with regional and global power restructuring. On the regional level, the Arab world is witnessing major upheavals rather than uprisings in the Arab world; potential sectarian and tribal conflicts; fear of the rise of new marginalized groups as a result of economic crisis; and power vacuums in the recently liberated states of the old elite establishments. On the global level, Russia's reemergence along with China and the rest of the BRICS on the world stage is limiting US and Western attempts in containing the role of Iran in the region. This emerging global narrative poses a challenge to the existing world order of secular nationalism with a rising narrative ranging from the religious to cyber world. The prospects of the latter regional and global colliding narratives are to be further analyzed in a following study.

Iran's narrative is no secret to policy makers; however, the understanding of how narratives are communicated and how identities are constructed, help in explaining the Iranian regime tactics in garnering local and regional support, building strategic alliances, and positioning itself as a major player in today's global politics. Simultaneously, Iran's tactics are being challenged with the wake of the Syrian uprisings. The understanding of the Iranian identity narrative is not to suggest that the foundation of clashes and antagonism is civilizational; but rather to emphasize the lack of understanding of the other, coupled with demonization of other nations, can deepen the divide, radicalize more groups, increase the security dilemma, and speed the arms race making solutions more costly and difficult. As a final note, this study is a prelude to further analysis on the intertwining of the Islamic Republic of Iran domestic factional political narratives and its regional and global political narrative before and after September 11th and the 'war on terror' narrative.

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[1] A Usooliyoon literally translated as fundamentalist. However, Muslim Jurists do not agree with the labeling of fundamentalist as it has evolved from a protestant tradition to a politically loaded term associated with extremism and violence. For the purpose of better explaining the impact of this trait on Shiite political institution we use the exact term of Usooliyoon.

[2] Read more on Shia political thought and Vilayet El Faqih, In Veize, Ahmed (2004) Shia political Thought. Islamic Center of England 2004.