



## Nuclear Deal and Iran Unfreezing; the Case of the International Crisis Group

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(Received: Jan. 01, 2019 Revised: Mar. 13, 2019 Accepted: May 24, 2019)

### Abstract

Negative socio-psychological repertoire about adversary exists in many societies plunged in conflicts. The challenge is how to make the structure of the society more flexible for a conflict resolution with enemies. This article examines the attempts of a pro-Iran-deal civil society, the - International Crisis Group, to change the negative societal beliefs regarding Iran, which exist in the American society. By using the unfreezing theory of Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011 b) as well as the NVIVO 12, which is qualitative content analysis methodology, this paper attempts to analyze this procedure from 2011 to 2016. The International Crisis Group made an effort to break the rigidity of barriers and remove their content in the American society. This trend of Iran unfreezing started in 2011 and increased in 2013, during the presidency of Hassan Rohani in Iran. Results indicate that the International Crisis Group fought against the rigid discourse that exists in the US about Iran through four main principles: removing the perception of Iran as a threat, legitimizing and humanizing Iran's image, emphasizing the importance of the course of time, and expanding new information and alternative data about the US-Iran conflict. This new information aimed at justifying Iran's actions and giving roadmaps for the future policies of the US toward Iran.

**Keywords:** Ali Vaez, International Crisis Group, Intractable Conflict, Iran-US Negotiations, Psychological barriers, Unfreezing

## 1. Introduction

The rigidity of beliefs constitutes a determinative psychological barrier to conflict resolution (Gayer, Landman, Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2009). According to Ross and Ward (1996), socio-psychological barriers are “cognitive and motivational processes that impede mutually beneficial exchanges of concessions and render seemingly tractable conflicts refractory to negotiated resolution” (Ross & Ward, 1996, p. 254). These barriers govern “the way that human beings interpret information, evaluate risks, set priorities, and experience feelings of gain and loss” (Ross & Ward, 1996, p. 263). Anwar Sadat was the first Egyptian president who claimed that a socio-psychological barrier exists in his country’s relations with Israel; he also admitted the actual cognitive mechanism through which they operate: “distorted and eroded interpretation of every event and statement” (Sadat, 1977). As Sadat mentioned, and other scholars further approved, these barriers are obstacles for the transformation of data and the resolution of conflicts.

During the Iran Deal, non-state actors adopted a “pro” or “against” attitude toward the deal through different spectrums. In Iran, the country’s hard-liners asserted that the United States will not uphold its part of the bargain; the deal should therefore not be trusted. On the American side, attempts were made to downgrade the deal by different means. The opponents of the deal portrayed Iran as an evil regime, envisioning nuclear weapons. They mentioned Iran as a supporter of terrorism, and an abuser of human rights, which should not be trusted. On the other side, many in the US advocated the promotion of tolerance, the understanding of the Persian culture, and the acceptance and understanding of Iran in order to prevent a new war. This article attempts to examine the way in which the Intentional Crisis Group tried to change the

image of Iran in the American society, as well as the way in which it attempted to confront the rigid structure of societal beliefs about Iran in US media. The question to ask is, how did the International Crisis Group try to sell the deal in the US? It is worth noting that the researcher is aware of the fact that President Trump withdrew from the deal; however, this article does not propose a study of the Iran nuclear deal; it attempts to understand the trend of Iran's unfreezing in the US society by a non-state actor during the period from 2011 to 2016. It focuses on the International Crisis Group's mass media presentation to elaborate on the unfreezing process.

The methodology adopted in this study consists of a qualitative content analysis. The data is composed of the media products recruited from the International Crisis Group experts. The number of published media products produced by this institution during these mentioned years—is 95 products, which were analyzed and categorized by the researcher. These products consist of video, audio or published material. The researcher used NVIVO 12 for processing the data and at the end, a query has been extracted. NVIVO 12 is a software used for qualitative content analysis, which relates data to a code. The number and percentage of codes are proposed in a diagram by NVIVO. Every report, news, etc., which was published in the mass media under one title is assumed to be one unit of analysis (UOA). The UOA's paragraphs were paraphrased in one or more codes. A codebook was finally extracted based on the study's research questions and themes were extracted from the existing relevant theories as well as previous pilot studies.

### **1. 1. Theoretical Framework**

Conflicts are accompanied by a socio-psychological repertoire (Bar-Tal, 2007). Their cause varies from political issues to

economic and cultural ones, but their severity and longevity have a direct relation with the socio-psychological repertoire that accompanies them (Bar-Tal, 2007). During a conflict, when the issue of the conflict is frozen, members of the society have a tendency to approve their beliefs by their experiences, rigidly denying substitute information (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011b). Therefore, one of the important roles of conflict resolution is removing this rigidity and changing/replacing the existing beliefs with alternative ones to promote the resolution of the existing conflicts.

Scholars recognize different barriers in the process of conflict resolution, which may be of political, cultural, economic, physiological or socio-psychological nature (Arrow, Mnookin, Ross & Tversky, 1995; Ross & Ward 1996; Zartman, 2007). Socio-psychological barriers have been studied for twenty-four years. The first scholar who considered the issue was social psychologist Lee Ross and his colleagues (Ross & Ward 1996; Mnookin & Ross, 1995; Maoz, Ward, Katz & Ross, 2002), who focused on cognitive and motivational processes. Many scholars worked on socio-psychological barriers of conflict in different spectrums (Kelman, 1987; Ross & Stillinger, 1991; Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011b). These spectra may be divided into four major groups; looking into the cognitive and motivational factors of barriers, the nature of these barriers, which we define as societal beliefs<sup>1</sup>, and the emotional attitudes regarding these barriers. Different scholars have investigated the cognitive and motivational factors that keep the

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1. Societal beliefs: when the society's members shared cognitions on issues that are of special concern to society. They are organized around themes and consist of such contents as collective memories, ideologies, goals, myths, and so on (Bar-Tal, 2000). They may be shared by the great majority of society members (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011b).

conflicting mindset (Mnookin & Ross, 1995; Ross & Ward, 1996), as well as the emotional attitudes that empower the conflicting situation (Bar-Tal 2001; Halperin 2008; Halperin, Sharvit & Gross, 2011). The nature of the societal beliefs has been categorized and studied by different scholars (Bar-Tal, 1998, 2007; Coleman, 2003; Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003, Kelman, 1965; White, 1970). The outcome of the above-mentioned research indicates that rigid “socio-psychological repertoires” are barriers to free transformation of information, and have negative consequences on conflict resolutions. They reduce the reality to black and white, with biased information about the conflict (Lodge & Taber, 2000); in such a way, that they play a prominent role in the continuation and the maintenance of conflicts (Fisher, Kelman & Nan, 2013).

Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011a; 2011b) conducted a comprehensive examination of different socio-psychological barrier theories regarding an intractable conflict, and presented a comprehensive model. According to Bar-Tal, there are supporting beliefs behind any intractable conflict, which construct the barriers for a resolution. These repertoires or conflict supporting beliefs can be divided into two major groups; ideological beliefs and circumstantial societal beliefs. Ideological conflict supporting beliefs “provide a stable conceptual framework that allows society members involved in intractable conflict to organize and comprehend the world in which they live, and to act toward its preservation or alteration in accordance with its standpoint” (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011b, p. 34). They do not mention a specific conflict, but are general ideological systems of societal beliefs that help the society see the conflict from its own angle/point of view.

Conflicting societal beliefs firstly draw on conflict as a “zero sum game,” and justify the conflict, its development and insistence

and continuation (i.e., the nature of the conflict), Secondly, the other side of the conflict is delegitimized and the blame is put on its shoulders. Thirdly, a positive image of the inner group is demonstrated and a sense of victimization of the self-group is elaborated (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011b). Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011b) indicate that these beliefs reflect a combination of societal beliefs of collective memories –which consist of the history of the conflict- and the ethos of the conflict. The ethos of the conflict are divided into eight major groups<sup>1</sup>. The other group of societal beliefs are circumstantial conflict supporting beliefs, as they appear in a specific context (e.g., the president of the adversary is uneducated). Another barrier, called General World Views, is “systems of beliefs not related to the particular conflict but provide orientations which contribute to the continuation of the conflicts because of the perspectives, norms, and values that they propagate” (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011b, p. 21). The number of them is extensive, but among them, one can mention the prominent ones

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1. The ethos of conflict are divided into eight categories:
    - a. Societal beliefs about security, safety, and national survival importance and the ways to fulfill them.
    - b. Societal beliefs about the justness of one’s own goals, elaboration on the goal and a trial to show the importance of them by making rationale and explanation of them.
    - c. Societal beliefs of victimization that shapes the inner group as victims of the conflict
    - d. Societal beliefs of delegitimizing, dehumanization or demonization of the opponent
    - e. Societal beliefs of unity which means ignoring the inner group conflict to concentrate on the opponent threat.
    - f. Societal beliefs of positive collective self-image concern that believes on positive traits, values, and behavior to one’s own society and the bad ones to the other.
    - g. Societal beliefs of peace refer to peace as the ultimate desire of the society<sup>5</sup>.
    - h. Societal beliefs of patriotism, loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice.

such as political ideologies (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

The two above-mentioned types of conflict supporting beliefs, alongside general world-views make the cluster of societal beliefs, through which individuals perceive the reality of the conflict. The problem is not the content of these beliefs, since they can be modified by the reality, but one of their central characteristics, their freezing essence, which makes them barriers to conflict resolution (Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). The complexity of these barriers does not belong to the beliefs or the accompanied feelings, but to their rigidity, which makes them challenging and inescapable. This freezing process is fed by structural, motivational, emotional, institutional and contextual factors, which turn the conflict supporting beliefs into a rigid element. Rokeach (1960) indicates that this freezing corresponds to the beliefs' resistance to change.

From a cognitive and motivational angle, Kruglanski (2004) indicates that the rigidity of beliefs can be explained by considering the need of the mankind for conflicts; as a result, people resist to accept alternative information that would promote a change. Human beings have this tendency to assume their own beliefs, as the only existing truth, or their need to project their inner inferiorities to the adversary as the result of a projection need. The other theoretical approach is from a cognitive viewpoint, which focuses on the structure of the human mindset. According to this viewpoint, people tend to accept less complex beliefs because of their presumed simplicity (Rokeach 1960; Tetlock 1999). The last perspective is institutional control of the beliefs by different means such as educational, governmental or cultural elements (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2014). Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011b) elaborate on

the reverse process of rigidity, which they refer to as unfreezing. A theoretical framework has been elaborated by them with the help of Lewin's (1976) conception that every cognitive change begins with unfreezing (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2013). They elaborate that unfreezing consists of three levels:

1. The first step is the reevaluation of societal beliefs that were acquired during a lasting conflict;
2. The second step consists of the openness of the mind for new alternative information;
3. The third step is the acceptance of the new ideas received in the previous step.

Gayer et al. (2009, p. 954) indicate that "the first two phases are necessary for unfreezing, while the third phase, called *seizing*, is needed for endorsing new beliefs and attitudes to facilitate a peace process that replaces the conflictive repertoire". The primary steps for unfreezing require that a society have access to the alternative information that is contrary to its repertoire beliefs gain during intractable conflicts. The access to the information is needed to create an internal conflict in the minds of the members of the society to push them out of their rigid beliefs about the conflict (e.g., Abelson et al., 1968; Festinger 1957). These steps address the concepts that feed the conflict; they may consist of the profitability of continuing the conflict or the beliefs about the adversary. By using principles of prospect theory, Gayer et al. (2009) address one of the most important obstacles of the psychological barriers for conflict resolution. It means that talking about losses can help the unfreezing process.

*Framing* is considered a central element in the unfreezing theory, which refers to the process of selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating



text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entmann 1993, p 52). Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011a) mention three important guiding principles that lead to the unfreezing of a socio-psychological repertoire.

1. Firstly, the framing should convince people that the course of time may worsen the situation.
2. Secondly, the framing should concentrate on other threats rather than the targeted conflict, which may consist of internal, regional or global ones.
3. Thirdly, the framing has to show the costs of conflict for the inner group during the course of time as well as in the future.

Therefore, this article is aimed at looking at the first two steps of unfreezing, which consist of the reevaluation of societal beliefs acquired during a lasting conflict, and the openness for new alternative information. These changes for the reevaluation of societal beliefs consist of the mentioned eight societal beliefs mentioned above, alongside other beliefs based on the conflict resolution framing mentioned above. The analysis will consist of the Crisis Group Reports published from 2011 to 2016 to illustrate whether these reports attempted to set the grounds for the removal of the rigidity of Iran-US relations through one of these mentioned principles.

## **2. Results**

The International Crisis Group is known as an independent group that tries to prevent war. This group was rather active during the Iran Nuclear Negotiations in producing contents for media and its experts were present in the real negotiation. Most of their products

containing reports, op-ed, videos, and interviews are published in mass media such as Reuters, The Atlantic, BBC, NPR, the *New York Times*, and Aljazeera America. The experts of the International Crisis Group on Iran consist of Gareth Evans as the team supervisor, its then- president and a leading non-proliferation statesman; Ali Vaez, as the senior analyst and core writer on the Iran issue, Robert Malley, as analyst, and Joost Hilberman as MENA Program Director of the International Crisis Group. Vaez participated in the negotiations about Iran from 2013 to 2016. He participated in 22 rounds of talks with Iran in all levels and exchanged viewpoints with different parties. Vaez had a prominent role in elaborating both sides' viewpoints to the media or as they say to sell the deal to the people of the United States through the help of mass media such as The Atlantic, the *New York Times*, NPR, Reuters, or social media such as Twitter (@AliVaez and @CrisisGroup). The International Crisis Group's Twitter account has 147000 followers and Ali Vaez separately has 29000 followers, which are both a significant number of followers. Crisis indicates that "media commentaries by Vaez were circulated among negotiators as he sought to build support for the deal in public opinion, especially in the U.S." (International Crisis Group, 2015a). Different news agencies quoted the assertions made by the Crisis Group or arranged interviews with the its analysts.

Among the board of trustees of the Crisis Group, George Soros and his son Alexander Soros were present (Jett, 2017). Soros is infamous among the Iranians because of his controversial support of the 2009 movements in Iran. But he was one of the most important supporters of the Iran deal through his institution, Open Society (Jett, 2017). The Ploughshares Fund 2015 annual report indicates that this institution funded the International Crisis Group "to support research and advocacy efforts to inform the debate

about the P5+1 and Iran framework agreement and potential final deal to resolve concerns over Iran's nuclear program" by \$150,000 (Ploughshares Annual Report, 2015, p 28). Based on the Rhodes' interview - who was the Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Communications of the White House during Obama's presidency, with the *New York Times*, Obama's team used groups like Ploughshares to effectively carry the message of the White House regarding the nuclear deal. He was quoted that "We created an echo chamber, [...] They [the independent experts and journalists] were saying things that validated what we had given them to say" (Samuels, 2016). He directly referred to the relations between the White House and Ploughshares and assured that the White House made the opponents of the deal crazy by its echo chamber.

*Expansion of negative societal beliefs about Iran:* The International Crisis Group started its analysis on Iran from 2011 through a small number of articles, which have increased in the recent years. The Group talked about Iran as a hostile regime that is willing to/is likely to develop nuclear weapons. Some of the freezing beliefs about Iran never left the Crisis Group, but the number of them decreased. Hilterman, an expert from the Crisis Group explained in 2015 in Reuters that Iran is a regional destabilizer; yet, because of rivalry with the Saudis, he assures that the deal is contained and useless (International Crisis Group, 2015b). The capability and hostile intentions make the threatening image of an adversary (Sides & Gross, 2013). Iran in 2011 was categorized as a capable country with hostile intentions.

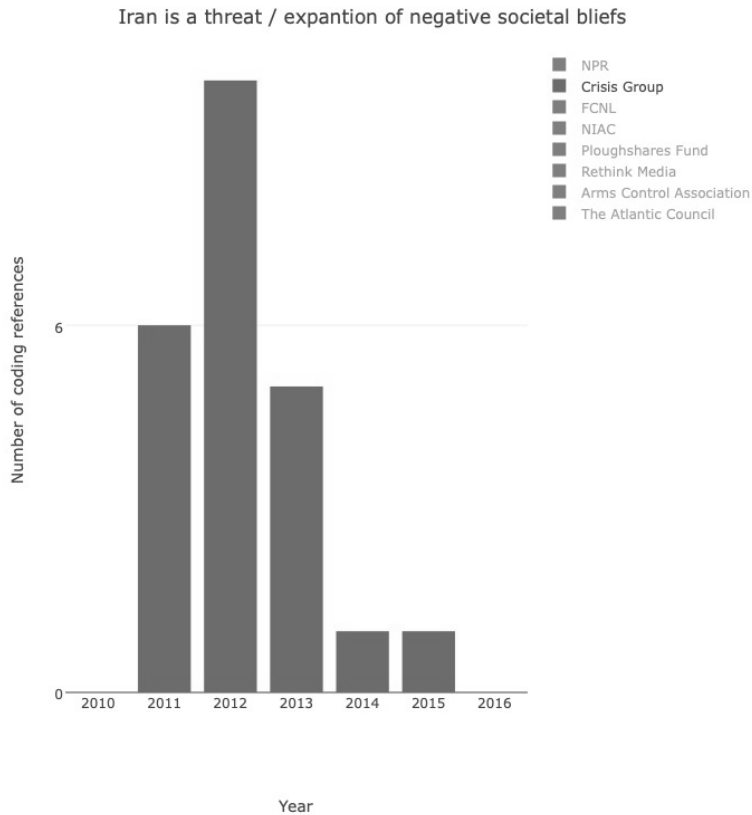
"Iran is now using more advanced uranium enrichment capabilities. UN inspectors say that Iran has deployed 136 of its new IR-2m centrifuges (which might have up to triple the enrichment capacity than the antiquated IR-1 centrifuges) in

Natanz [...] Iran has also installed 27 even more sophisticated IR-4 centrifuges [...] The Fordow facility, hardened against air attack, is also being equipped with IR-1 cascades to produce 20 percent enriched uranium, which is more highly enriched uranium that could be used for weapons” (Vaez & Ferguson, 2011).

Vaez and Ferguson (2011) also indicate that Iran is one step near to the development of nuclear weapons: “Stockpiling 20 percent enriched uranium could significantly shorten the time it would take Iran to breakout to weapons-grade uranium, which is much more highly enriched”. In its 2011 reports, Crisis admitted that there is still time to push Iran back from making nuclear weapons and suggested to make a contract to limit the country’s nuclear procedures. However, as the years continue, the number of these threatening issues weakens. Iran is portrayed as incapable of making weapons or hurting others. Crisis, in 2015, argues that the nuclear deal has removed the question of the Iranian threat (Vaez, 2015c).

*Iran is not a threat:* If the issue of the conflict is linked to national security or other major foreign policy goals, the higher the level of attention it receives, the more the weight of the public opinion. Iran was regarded as a threat to the Middle East, but Crisis assumed this agreement “as the first critical hurdle overcome” which was a start for breaking the existing taboos for further agreement (Hiltermann, 2015). The National Public Radio (NPR) also interviewed Ali Vaez in 2015. He admitted that Iran’s nuclear program is no more a threat and it could therefore be removed from the security list (Vaez, 2015a). Crisis tried to illustrate that the threat of Iran is exaggerated by Israel. “Israelis, not for the first time, could be exaggerating the threat and its imminence, a reflection of their intense fear of Iran (International Crisis Group, 2012). As indicated in the diagram below, the negative societal

beliefs and Iran’s threat were rather significant and frequent in 2011 and 2012, but were lessened in the course of time, even though they were never omitted:



*The course of time make conflict worsen (framing):* In the reports published during the period from 2011 to 2013, two issues have been significantly elaborated: one is the threat of a nuclear weaponized Iran and the other is the fear of war between the US and Iran, or Israel and Iran. As an example, on November 10, 2011 a report was published in *The Atlantic* by Vaez, which elaborated that the threat of a nuclear weaponized Iran has to take into consideration diplomatic ways for their resolution. It argued that

sanctions make the situation more threatening while Iran is making more centrifuges than it made in 2003 despite the most serious sanctions imposed on the country in the world history. Crisis questioned the productiveness of sanctions (Vaez, 2013b). In a report published in Aljazeera in 2013, Ali Vaez also mentioned that Iran has not yet decided on making a nuclear weapon, which is seen as a violation of Islam (Vaez, 2013d). He based his claims on a quotation from James Clapper, the United States' director of national intelligence who argued "Iran's leaders have not yet decided to build nuclear weapons, The U.S. and Israeli intelligence communities are reasonably confident of their ability to detect such a decision" (Vaez, 2013c).

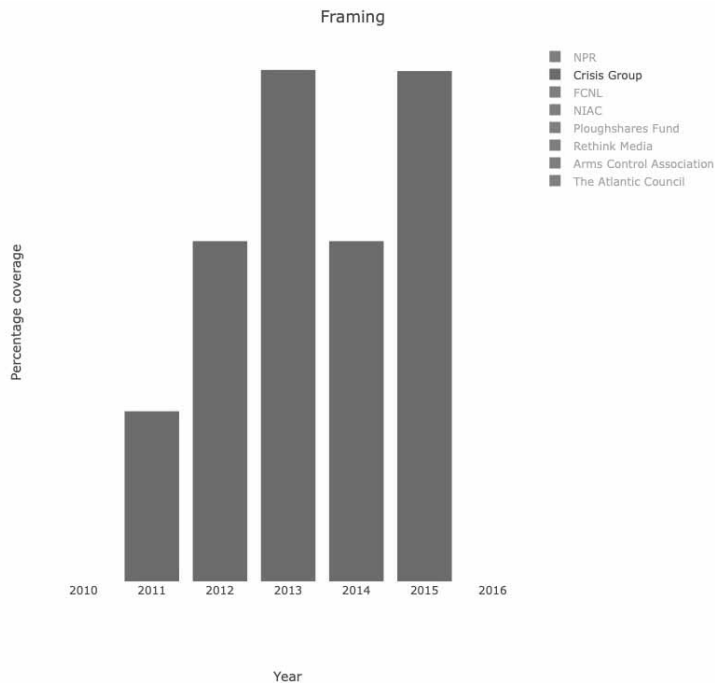
Crisis indicated that this delay in diplomacy may push the undecided Iran to make a nuclear weapon. When Iran analyzes that "Saddam Hussein's in Iraq, which had no nuclear weapon but the U.S. overthrew it; Muammar Qadhafi's in Libya, which relinquished its weapons of mass destruction but NATO attacked it; and North Korea, which possesses nuclear weapons and is still stands" Iran becomes more willing to make nuclear weapons (Malley, 2012b). Malley (2012b) explained on June 15, 2012 that if the talks fail, a military strike may happen by America, Israel or both against Iran; it will escalate the tensions and Iran will withdraw from the nonproliferation treaty. He assured that after the strike, Iran "will expel UN nuclear inspectors, and it will use its indigenous knowledge". This time Iran will probably produce nuclear weapons. Evans, another expert from the Crisis Group discussed the importance of the time that the US has lost as Iran became more powerful in its nuclear facilities every day. She elaborated that the number of centrifuges increased from 164 uranium-enrichment centrifuges in 2003 to 18,000 centrifuges in 2015; as a result, if the US delayed the talks, Iran would become even more powerful (Evans, 2015). The fear of war and the fact

that US is more secure with this deal was mentioned in a significant number of articles and reports by the Crisis Group. The Group illustrated that the consequences of extending the conflict are rather high.

*Costs of conflict is elaborated in Crisis (framing):* In *The Atlantic*, Vaez, Sadjadpour & Ghadar (2011) express the concern of the old facilities of Iran and the risk of a nuclear meltdown to the release of radioactive material to Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia's soil since the facilities is located in the proximity of the Persian Gulf. Crisis indicates that the course of time would make the conflict more threatening and the consequences of not reaching a peace agreement may be as devastating as a nuclear weaponized Iran or a war in Middle East by Israel. The threat of a military strike is rather present in the International Crisis Group discussions. Malley (2012a) elaborates that “the West seems intent on trying its new, harsher-than-ever sanctions regime. Israel is growing impatient. Tit for tat acts of violence appear to be escalating. And Iran might well be on an unyielding path to militarization”.

The Crisis indicates in 2012 that the failure of negotiations leads to “Israeli pressure for a military option may intensify” (Malley, 2012b). Crisis maneuvers intensively on war threat to convince that negotiation is the best way. The Group believes that “as 2012 begins, prospects of a military confrontation, although still unlikely, appear higher than ever”, and nuclear talks can “avoid that fate” (International Crisis Group, 2012, Malley, 2012b). The premier threat in the Middle East, which acts as a lever to push sides for negotiation, in Crisis’s viewpoint, is the fear of war in the Middle East, which may be initiated by Israel. By reminding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Crisis tries to illustrate the devastating costs of war for the United States and the region as well as the likelihood of the same burden if diplomacy fails.

*Fear of War (framing)*: Crisis attempts to illustrate that if Iran has not developed nuclear weapons by this time, it will endeavor to develop them when negotiations fail. It therefore attempts to convince others to support the deal and seems to make the threat much more severe than it really may be. Vaez elaborates that if the negotiations fail and US or Israel carry out a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, then no doubt "Iran will withdraw from the nonproliferation treaty, will expel UN nuclear inspectors, and it will use its indigenous knowledge to reconstitute its nuclear program" and nothing can anymore prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapon (Malley, 2012b). The mentioned concepts in this argument – the course of time and the cost of conflict - are based on the framing category, which were mentioned in the theoretical framework of the study. The number of these codes increased from 2011 to 2016. The diagram below illustrates the number of references made to these concepts in different years.





*Trust, empathy and engagement with Iran is suggested:* The Crisis endorsed Iran's engagement in the Middle East affairs to make empathy. The Group argued that direct, energetic diplomatic engagement with Iranian officials can make the situation simpler and give them dignity (Vaez, 2015b). The Crisis used the experience of Ankara, which engaged with Iranians and received significant results from this involvement for expanding its relations with Iran; he suggests that we have to engage with Iran in the Middle East case like Syria (Vaez, 2015b). The Crisis indicates that knowing Iran's right to enrich on its soil has to be acknowledged outright a nod to its sense of dignity, which will expand the trust between the Iran and United States (Vaez, 2015b). Vaez indicates that looking into the need of Iran and finding ways to satisfy their needs is a way to break the freeze relation. Crisis also emphasizes the false deeds of both sides, which have feuded the mistrust. It elaborates on the prevalent threat of US and Israel on Iran, which confused the Iranian side (Vaez, 2015b). He recommends policy makers to engage Iran in the Middle East affairs for giving the country a feeling of legitimacy, similar to the issue of Syria (Vaez, 2013c).

*Future actions:* The Crisis recommended a comprehensive deal with Iran to limit the country's enrichment in the context of a transparent program under tight control. In response, the US gives Iran the leverage of reliving sanctions. In his report in *The Atlantic* on November 10, 2011 Ali Vaez suggests that diplomacy with Iran is the best option available. He indicates that "diplomacy remains the most viable means in resolving the Iranian nuclear impasse" (Vaez, 2011). Crisis referred to engagement with Iran, and suggestions for diplomacy or trust with Iran forty-six times from 2011 to 2016. Vaez was quoted in Ploughshares:

Why not try to reproduce such diplomacy-driven successes? If Iran is provided with guarantees that it will not be penalized for admitting to its past transgressions, it might be more willing to open up to greater IAEA scrutiny, which could help the world understand what threats it is and is not facing from Iran. A similar approach worked well in Libya and could work in Iran as well (Ploughshares, 2011).

*Iran's perspective is elaborated:* Crisis frequently sits in the position of Iran and tries to see the conflict in that perspective, which leads to more new information or the correction of the existing misinformation. Ali Vaez indicates in Reuters that looking through the eyes of Iran can make the problem more understandable (Vaez, 2015b). He indicates that the hostile neighbors of Iran are a threat to the country and make the situation harder for Iran to put aside its superiority in arsenal or nuclear program. It mentions the measures taken by its enemies “including attacks on its territory, physical and cyber sabotage, U.S. bolstering of the military arsenals of its Gulf enemies and, perhaps most damaging, economic warfare” Crisis asks that in such hostile conditions, why would Iran “volunteer a concession that arguably would leave it weaker in a hostile neighborhood?” (Vaez, 2015b). Malley (2014) indicates that the Iranians feel that they have been asked to put all of their cards on the table at the beginning, “convert facilities, roll back the nuclear program, and send their stockpile of enriched material abroad”. In return they’re only being offered “suspension of sanctions, which could be reversed at the stroke of a pen”.

*Voice of Iranians is echoed:* Unlike many other American specialists on Iran, the Crisis Group tried to echo the voice of the Iranian government directly and show the mistrust that was rooted out in Iranian minds about the United States. It elaborated on the

speeches delivered by Iran's Supreme Leader, who is the most controversial figure in America. The Crisis Group quoted the Supreme Leader about the inauguration of President Obama: "We have no experience of this new president and administration, we will wait and see. If you [the United States] change your attitude, we will change, too. If you do not change, then our nation will build on its experience of the past 30 years" (Vaez, 2013c). Mentioning the history is a reflection that Iranians also feel a loss in relations with America, which has resulted in the emergence of a negative attitude toward positive relations. Gayer et al. (2009) explain that talking about "loss" is an important point in the unfreezing process. Malley (2012a) discusses the right of Iran for having nuclear program and the belief that Western powers should not dictate the nuclear programs of other countries:

It is far more sympathetic to the view that the West cannot dictate who can have a nuclear capacity and who cannot; is less alarmist when it comes to the status of Iran's program; and believes that the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran is both distant and unsure.

Crisis tries to behave in between the US wills and intentions and Iran's wills and intentions: in reality, the voice or the will of Iran is rather rarely reflected in the US context. Crisis talks about the importance of time for Iran, the obstacles of negotiation for Iran, and raises various issues that are important for Iran.

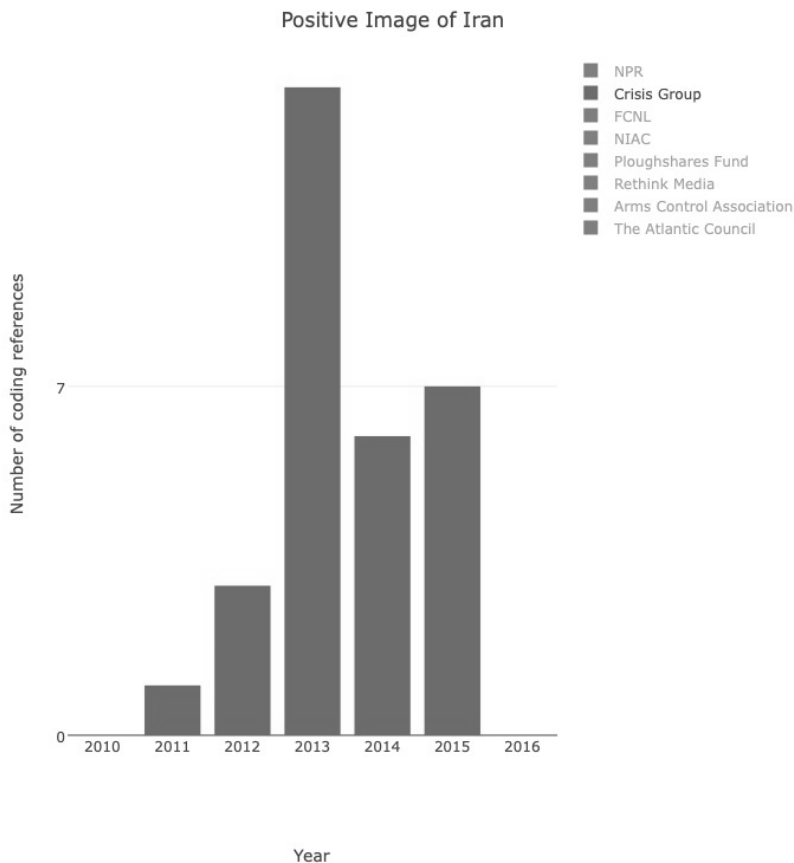
*A good character description of Iran and Rohani is presented:* The election of President Rohani is perceived as a hope for change in the attitudes of Iran toward the US. Rohani is reflected in the Crisis Group as "the architect of the only nuclear agreement between Iran and the West during the past 11 years". He is named as the "most moderate and pragmatic candidate in Iran's six-way

race” (Vaez, 2013c). The Crisis mentions the mistrust that Americans have about President Rohani: they accuse him of having been involved in terrorist activities; he is viewed as an ineffective president in the issue of foreign policy, as in Iran, the Supreme Leader has the power in this issue. The Group attempts to justify the mistrust and the animosity as the result of the prolonged existence of the conflict between two, which needs through investigation. Crisis tries to recommend American administrators to recognize the situation worthy and engage with Iran in the nuclear issue during Rohani’s presidency. Crisis justifies that the comparison of the foreign policy of Ahmadinejad and Rohani indicates that presidents also have a word in the foreign policy of Iran and therefore it is wise to take this election worthy for a deal:

A moderate voice on the nuclear issue that still holds some sway within the regime is more likely to deliver on a nuclear compromise than a regime critic who would be stymied at every turn, destined to wage a losing fight (International Crisis Group, 2013)

The humanization process of Iran is speeded from 2013, due to the presidency of Rohani. He is pictured as a wise man educated in west. In 2014, Malley tries to show the re-humanization process in the stream between the two groups. He says “Journalists who used to demonize each other a year and a half ago have now spent so much time with each other that they understand that the other side is also human, has questions, fears, and hopes” (Malley, 2014). In another part of his speech, he indicates that Iranians are normal people, very similar to us, “Iranian are like us and they are a proud people — as deeply attached to sovereignty and scientific progress as Americans are”. In another part, Iran’s image is again illustrated as normal human beings similar to Americans, they eat in the same table “except they don’t eat alcohol or pork” (Malley, 2014).

Malley also mentions the close relations between the Iranian and American sides to the extent that they call each other by names (Malley, 2014). Ali Vaez (2015c) in Reuters also admitted that the foreign minister of Iran is educated in United States and is rather familiar with the laws of the American society.



*Foster Trust:* Crisis accentuate Rohani’s presidency and tries to convince others that the best time for diplomacy is his presidency; postponing the negotiation may therefore lead to another president like Ahmadinejad. Vaez (2013c) goes further and elaborates the

roadmap for the US president to foster trust between the two countries by sending a message first to the Iranian people during the inauguration of president Rohani and telling them that: "We are ready to work with Mr. Rohani's government to resolve these issues".

Crisis further recommends that in the next step, the White house should send a private letter to Iran's Supreme Leader and ensure him that "Washington does not aim at bypassing him and is ready for talks based on a comprehensive agenda" (International Crisis Group, 2013). Moreover, Malley (2014) mentions the close relations and the trust between the Iranian and American sides, to the extent that they call each other by names: Hey Bob, Hey Abbas. It elaborates that at the personal level, both sides have mutual trust.

*Iran's good deeds to foster trust:* Crisis mentions the willingness of the Iranian side for negotiation and talks about the good deeds of Iranians to show their sincerity in this regard and foster trust in the American side (Casey-Baker & Kutsch, 2012). It acclaims that Tehran could suspend its enrichment in Frodo "by turning on nearly 2,000 centrifuges that it has installed at the facility, but are not yet operating". Iran could use its applied IR-2m machines, but has delayed the procedure. Tehran has "converted 60 percent of its 20 percent enriched uranium stockpile to uranium oxide, which is less prone to proliferation, as its further enrichment requires weeks of chemical processing detectable by the IAEA" (Evans, 2015). Malley (2012b) argues that Iran took positive steps in negotiations and for this, he mentions Iran's previous nuclear agreements, which may be regarded as the country's attempts for making trust, which are followed by the disturbing acts of sanction:

Turkey also has useful experience. In 2010, together with Brazil [...] in intensive talks with Iranian officials and, much to the West's surprise, reached a deal on the Tehran Research Reactor.

Iran would deposit 1,200kg of low enriched uranium (LEU) in Turkey and, in return, would receive 120kg of 20 per cent enriched fuel for its reactor.

Crisis indicates that the deal “mirrored almost exactly an earlier proposal from the P5+1”, but Us lost the time and “Iran’s LEU stockpile had grown, and it had begun to enrich at 20 per cent itself” which is qualified for making a weapon. But it is assumed as a good start that was accepted by Iran but responded by the tougher sanctions from the west (International Crisis Group, 2012)

*Sanctions are counterproductive:* Crisis sees the sanctions useless and counterproductive (Vaez, 2015b). Ali Vaez interprets the sanctions as a pain that is unable to produce a genuine policy change. He elaborates that no evidence exists that Iran faced an economic hardship: “the outlook of its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, rests on the core principle that yielding to pressure only invites more” (Vaez, 2015b). At another time, Vaez sides with Iran and indicates that sanctioning, in Iran’s view, is a way for overthrowing the state or replacing it with a new state that would peacefully coexist with the United States; such view boosts the mistrust on the Iranian side (Vaez, 2013c; International Crisis Group, 2013). Crisis never stops condemning sanctions and elaborates that sanctions are “harming ordinary citizens” (International Crisis Group, 2013). Vaez emphasizes more on the vanity of sanction by saying that sanctions are only as effective as the prospect of relieving them in exchange for policy shifts and nothing more. Evans, another specialist in the Crisis Group, elaborates that the West and Iran interpret sanctions differently. He indicates the viewpoints of Iran about sanctions and elaborates that they see sanctions as the West’s attempts to overthrow Iran’s government and destabilize the country, which means an eventual “regime change” for them (Evans, 2013). Therefore, Iran’s strategy

“in the experience of diplomatic isolation and the war with Iraq, can be summed up in two words: resist and survive, the former being the prerequisite to the latter”. This issue is extensively used by conservatives to downgrade the opening of Rohani:

The problem is that additional sanctions pressure will be interpreted by Iran as yet another effort to promote regime change, will be used by Tehran’s conservative elements to argue against any opening offered by Rohani, and thus obstruct the possibility of holding genuine talks (International Crisis Group, 2013).

The unproductivity of sanctions is also mentioned quite often in the Crisis discourse; if sanctions are imposed on Iran, they “will continue to adjust its economic policy in order to adapt to them” (International Crisis Group, 2013). In another part, Crisis argues that the economy is in the hands of the government or the Quasi-Governmental institutions, and sanctions barely change their interests; however, the storm of the sanctions targets ordinary peoples’ lives (International Crisis Group, 2013). Crisis indicates that sanctions did not affect the economy harshly since Iran coped with them (International Crisis Group, 2012). Vaez believes that sanctions make the Iranian people look at the outside world as uncaring (Vaez, 2013a). He indicates that sanctions are not useful and they make Iran’s government wealthy and while making the Iranian people pessimistic about the United States; “sanctions will harm ordinary people and push Iran’s leaders to escalate its own retaliatory steps” so they will construct “a web of punitive measures harder to unknot than to weave” (International Crisis Group, 2013).

*Finding justifications (we did wrong to them):* The Crisis Group links Iran’s desire in keeping its nuclear facility to the country’s national pride and its feeling of dignity. The Group argues that the



nuclear program is becoming a national pride issue in Iran. It assures that the Iranian people are like Americans in that are “deeply attached to sovereignty and scientific progress as Americans are” (Vaez, 2015c). Therefore, Evans asserts that given this “national pride”, it is impossible to take nuclear knowledge out of Iran and there is therefore no other way than negotiations (Evans, 2014). In another report, Vaez and Ferguson (2012) elaborate that Israel and the United States did false actions toward Iran, which have feuded the mistrust of Iranians involving “cyber-attacks, the killing of Iranian nuclear scientists and mysterious explosions”; again in another part Vaez (2011) claims “...and again it gave way to 15 months of bellicose rhetoric, saber-rattling, sanctions, assassinations and cyber-attacks”.

The Crisis group claims that it has played an important role in informing the world about Iran’s nuclear deal, as well as the final resolution between the two nations. Crisis indicates that it received a private message from Iran’s foreign minister, in which he acknowledged the Group’s significant contribution in the achievement of the nuclear deal. A senior U.S. official wrote: “I am sure you [Crisis Group] recognize your language in the final text” (International Crisis Group, 2015b). Major newspapers, from *the New York Times* to *Le Monde* had already quoted the Crisis Group more than 150 times in the first half of 2015. The Group also had thirteen full interviews with media in 2013, alongside its numerous quotations. Crisis was influential not only in the mass media, but also at the administrative level: there have been significant traces of the Group reports at the administrative level. In May, 2014 the Crisis Group published a report titled “Solving the Nuclear Rubik’s Cube”; the ideas expressed in this report were rapidly integrated into formal discussions at the negotiating table. The U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren said in a public hearing on the talks in June 2013:

I'm sure you've seen the report from International Crisis Group in which they evaluated those [tough U.S.] sanctions, in terms of how easy it would be to remove them. If the Iranians see the sanctions can't be lifted, then they will be all the more firmly entrenched in pursuing nuclear weapons. We have broad consensus in this country that we would prefer a negotiated solution in the Middle East. If [as Crisis Group argues] badly designed sanctions are going to increase the likelihood of Iran developing a nuclear weapon, then we need to focus now on how to fix that (International Crisis Group, 2018).

### 3. Conclusion

Fear of war with Iran is tremendously elaborated in the discourse of the International Crisis Group during the period from 2012 to 2013. the Group believes that war is an inevitable consequence of not achieving a productive deal with Iran. *The course of time* alongside the *costs of conflict* are often mentioned by the Crisis Group and indicate that as time elapses, this conflict will worsen, which may lead to a war. It elaborates that the consequence of such conflict for the US would therefore be a security decline. NVIVO indicates that the Crisis Group highlights the issue of course of time in its article 16 times. The cost of conflict is mentioned 71 times in Crisis' discourse from 2012 to 2014. The Group's discourse also refers to the good consequence of peace with Iran 8 times.

In 2013, Crisis gave a new image of Iran due to the election of the "most moderate president" Hassan Rohani, which casted an underlined opportunity for real progress to eliminate the threat of Iran. From 2013, the Crisis group attempted to show that Iran's interventionist actions in the region are justifiable because of its hostile neighbors. Crisis also justifies the need of the Iranian side for the nuclear program due to the need for electricity as well as the

Iranian people's need for dignity and progress. Crisis attempts to show that Iranians are like Americans with the same needs like national pride or dignity, and the country's nuclear program has become part of this dignity for them.

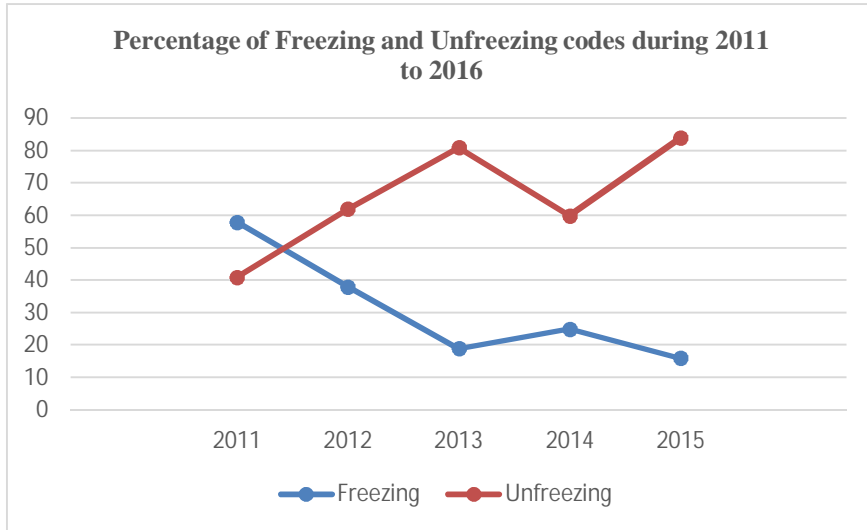
In the period from 2011 to 2013, Iran's nuclear issue is presented by the Crisis Group as a security subject related to the safety of the US and the Middle East, which explains the importance of the deal for the West. Using a similar tone as that of the US's dominating tone, the Crisis' discourse indicates that Iran is a threatening interventionist country in the Middle East. NVIVO shows that the Crisis related Iran to various security issues like nuclear weapons or war 59 times, 36 of which belonged to the period from 2011 and 2012. In 2011 and 2012, Crisis elaborated that if we lose time, Iran will achieve nuclear weapons and the security of the world would be jeopardized. From 2013, Crisis indicates that Iran has started to behave like a moderate actor by the election of its new pragmatic president and is therefore willing to make agreements with the US. In the period from 2014 to 2016, Crisis tried to assure that the threat of Iran is decreased. At the end of 2015, Iran's name seemed to have been removed from the list of securitized issues and was rather viewed as a contained power in the Middle East. As indicated in NVIVO, in the period from 2014 to 2016, the paragraphs on the unthreatening image of Iran are 45.

*Character descriptions* of Iran are mostly positive in the discourse of the Crisis Group, but the rationality of Iran is elaborated more in 2013. The Group tries to explain that Iranians are normal people like Americans, with the same feelings and needs. For elevating the legitimization of the Iranian government, Crisis indicates that Iran has a free election, and that a pragmatist can win the ballot, unlike its gulf neighbors who barely bend over a

free voice. From 2013, the government of Iran is characterized as wise and educated. NVIVO shows 17 codes that the Crisis Group had mentioned concerning the similarities between the Iranian people and the Americans, which mainly focus on the fact that Iranians are educated, moderate and trustable.

There are numerous misperceptions about the motivations and behaviors of parties in the relationship between Iran and the US, misperceptions that change the identity of the countries as well as the form and nature of the relations. Any new information that can lessen the rigidity of relations is worthy of acknowledgement; it consists of mentioning the good deeds of Iran in history, such as its positive participation in the elimination of the ISIS from the region. Crisis made an effort to look into the Iran-US conflict through the lens of Iran in 31 instances; it also gave nineteen roadmaps that contributed to the resolution of the conflict, as asserted by NVIVO. Crisis suggests administrators to take the necessary steps to resolve the conflict with Iran, end their enmity with Iran and try to understand this country instead of acting one sided. They suggest a more positive engagement with Iran and the removal of confusing sanctions, declaring that such actions would promote more trust between the two countries. From 2014, Crisis actively participated in the details of the negotiations and supported the resolution by suggesting different progressive proposals. From this point, Ali Vaez was actively present in the negotiations and acted as a mediator. As the last diagram illustrates, as time passed, the unfreezing issues about Iran, such as justifications of actions, positive societal beliefs (Iran's image), and framing about the conflict increased significantly. At the same time, the freezing issues, such as the threat of Iran and the negative image of Iran showed a considerable decrease. Although many freezing issues such the word "regime" were never omitted from this institution, a

certain number of positive steps were taken to break Iran's rigid image in the American society.



Although the JCPOA was disregarded during the presidency of Donald Trump and the attempts for its retrieval failed, one can witness a positive socio-psychological trend, which started in the United States during the period from 2011 to 2015. The Crisis group, as a minor institution with a great network, attempted to promote the a more favorable attitude toward Iran's nuclear deal in the American society. However, the harsh existing negative image of Iran in United States is an issue that cannot be ignored even by the compromise of Iran and the World. The blacken image of Iran is never eliminated in United States, but tracing any signs of change in this state of mind is important to investigate. It is true that Vaez is a controversial figure in Iran because of his collaboration with this institution, and that the Crisis Group and Ali Vaez's claims are somehow biased and sometimes far from Iran's real image, the Group's attempts to resolve the conflict between the

two countries is rather important in shaping a new image of Iran in United States, which is humane, wise, tolerant and reasonable. The elimination of Iran's blacken image in the American society is a primary step for a comprehensive conflict resolution with the world. Even after the withdraw of Trump from JCPOA, these institutions are still continuing their positive discourse on Iran, which needs another study to investigate on.

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