

Russia and the Security Council in the Case of Iran's Nuclear Project

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Abstract

Iran's nuclear program has been an important issue for all great powers throughout the past decade; compared to other countries, however, Russia's attitude in addressing this issue in the Security Council is particularly important due to a history of technical cooperation with Iran on nuclear projects. The approach and objectives Russia has been pursuing in the process of handling Iran's nuclear file in the Security Council, particularly regarding ratification of resolutions against Iran, have had a significant impact on the fate of this program. Assuming that national interests guide Russia's attitude toward Iran's nuclear project, this paper seeks to answer this question: "What are the factors that shaped Russia's positions in the Security Council in the process of ratification of resolutions against Iran?" The hypothesis of this research is that, "Relying on its perceptions of Iran's nuclear program and its engagement and competition with the United States and Iran, Russia has taken a dual control and moderation approach, and seeks to impose pressure on Iran to control its nuclear progress, while also moderating the Western pressure in order to prevent US military action." The research methods include data collection, interviews, and examination of documents and Security Council resolutions.

Keywords: Foreign Policy Roles; Nuclear Program; Iran; Russia; Security Council.

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Introduction

Russia's approach towards issues related to Iran is not only significant for Iran, but has an important effect on the fate of these issues considering the country's position as a major global power, as well as its special bilateral ties with Iran. Unlike its clear strategy on certain regions and countries, Russia's foreign policy towards Iran has different and at times contradictory aspects and is influenced by numerous factors. Theoretically, according to articles 80, 84, and 86 of the Russian Constitution, Russia's President defines the main foreign policy guidelines of the country, and other agencies are responsible for its implementation. However, in practice, institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Economy and Energy, and companies such as ROSATOM, Gazprom, and Arm Industries have been influential in policy-making regarding Iran.

In addition to these complications, no documents or statements specifically on Kremlin's approach towards Iran have been published by the Russian presidential office. Although, some documents in recent years have mentioned the status of Iran. Documents like "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" in July 2013 and 2016, the first appendix of the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia entitled: "The Main Direction of Russian Federation Policy in Field of International Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation" in December 2010, "The Energy Strategy of Russia until 2030" in November 2009, and "The Russian Federation Concept of International Scientific and Technologic Cooperation" in January 2000 have referred to Iran where relevant to their subjects, but they still lacked a comprehensive and clear picture of Iran's position. Compared to Moscow's attitude towards its neighbor countries, Europe, and the United States as priorities of foreign policy, this ambiguity is more understandable (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, 2016)

Such ambiguities have caused different views on Russia's foreign policy towards Iran. These ambiguities and complications are even more significant when it comes to Russia's foreign policy approach to Iran's nuclear program since at the same time as technical nuclear cooperation between two countries, layered and ambiguous behaviors and positions are committed and taken in Moscow regarding Iran's nuclear case. For example, Russia's attitude in dealing with Iran's

nuclear program in the Security Council has led to different interpretations of Russia's approach to this issue. Why Russia has not, despite its technical cooperation with Iran in the nuclear field, prevented the ratification of numerous resolutions against Iran in the Security Council and even fully agreed with their implementation and enforcement, has always been worthy of attention in analyzing and explaining Russia's foreign policy towards Iran in general and Iran's nuclear program in particular; it has also had a significant effect on breeding distrust in Iran-Russia relations.

In examining and evaluating the reasons for such approaches by Russia in the Security Council, different perspectives generally emphasize the influence of the Western element on Russia's foreign policy and Russia's use of Iran as a playing card in its interactions with the West. The analysis of this subject based on a single factor does not seem comprehensive. Therefore, considering the reductionist analyses of offered on this issue, and assuming that Russia, like other actors, shapes its policies based on national interest, this paper is concerned with Russia's perception of Iran's nuclear program and its impact on Russia's national interest and foreign policy roles in the framework of its foreign policy strategy. The 'foreign policy role' is the position each country defines for itself in the international system in relation to other actors; the foreign policy role of each country comes from different aspects of its identity. This article seeks to answer the question, "What are the factors that shaped Russia's positions in the Security Council in the process of ratification of resolutions against Iran?" Our hypothesis is that, "Relying on its perceptions of Iran's nuclear program and its engagement and competition with the United States and Iran, Russia has taken a dual control and moderation approach, and seeks to impose pressure on Iran to control its nuclear progress, while also moderating the Western pressure in order to prevent US military action." In order to study and evaluate the various dimensions of this hypothesis, this paper uses methods of data collection, interview, and examination of documents and Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, a constructivist theoretical approach will be used in order to better understand the context of the formation of Russia's attitude in the Security Council given the simultaneous effect of material and non-material factors.

Constructivism; The Evolutionary Cycle of Identity and the Role of Foreign Policy in Defining National Interests

Constructivism is a major theory in international relations that has offered new aspects in analysis of countries' foreign policies. The three main characteristics of constructivism that have led to the creation of a middle approach between explanatory and reflective theoretical approaches in the analysis of international policy and foreign policy issues are: emphasizing the importance of normative and semantic structures along with material structures, noting the role of identity in shaping political action, and finally, noting the mutual relationship between structure and agent (Berchil et al., 2013: 273). Constructivists emphasize on these characteristics in order to avoid reductionism in analyzing and understanding issues, and they have been able to, particularly by using the identity element, well analyze and explain issues like reasons for countries' changing foreign policy over time. In addition to considering material factors in analyzing foreign policy, constructivism puts greater emphasis on the effect of identity on shaping foreign policy and its decisive role in depicting national interests. Keeping this relationship in mind, one can easily understand the formation or change of a state's foreign policy towards others over time.

Constructivist theorists' first principle in analyzing foreign policy is to emphasize state's lack of integration as an actor. In analyzing foreign policy, his theoretical approach holds that governments do not always have a coherent and constant identity, and their identity changes under the influence of numerous internal and external factors, including the domestic social construction, the nature of domestic groups, relations of society, state, and external actors, and the nature of the international system (Borozna, 2008: 7). Given this emphasis on the fluidity of identities of government actors, we can say that changes in states' identity elements can lead to changes in their foreign policy, because states' national interests and, ultimately, foreign policy behaviors are inspired by their identities.

Accordingly, the constructivist argument is that since the identity of governments inspires interests and, consequently, their behavior, understanding the process of identity formation for these actors and different aspects of the dominant identity of a country's political

system is necessary. In this respect, while factors like history, geography, ethnicity, religion, and the type of political system are the mainly responsible for shaping the government's identity, other factors such as rulers' individual variables and dominant political discourses in society and among political groups also influence the formation of identity. As Alexander Wendt believes, "Identities are the foundation of the interests"; therefore, to analyze the interests of a country and provide a general understanding of its foreign policy, noting the type of dominant identity discourse shaped as a result of the above-mentioned processes and factors is vital because by considering the factors affecting the formation of a dominant identity, and by being aware of its different dimensions, one can understand the interests of a state and its foreign policy priorities. In addition, possible changes to foreign policy or contradictory behaviors can also be understood since they will be explainable through identity changes or different and new perceptions of the intentions and behavior of the other side (Moshirzadeh, 2007: 352-353).

Considering constructivists' identification of various types of identities such as typical, collective, and role-specific, this article focuses on the role-specific identity of actors and the impact of an actor's perceptions of the goals and behaviors of the other side regarding role priorities. Every government has an identity role that is not intrinsic and comes to be in interaction with other actors at domestic and international levels. In this process, every country depicts certain roles for its foreign policy under the influence of its identity type or discourse of dominant identity. These roles are inspired by countries' conceptions and identity components and describe where a state is or the role and status it is seeking to achieve. In this respect, Wendt believes each state has a role or identity in the social structure and in interaction with other actors. Relying on this identity, it is possible to analyze the relationship between national identity and national interests (and, consequently, foreign policy behavior). So, the type of dominant identity discourse defines one's roles of foreign policy, and these roles define the interests, priorities, and, ultimately, behaviors of these actors towards others (Shoja et al., 2013: 19-27).

Russia's Foreign Policy towards Iran and Its Priorities

Russia's Foreign Policy towards Iran, just like the framework and general axes of their foreign policy, has been influenced by changes in the dominant identity discourses of Russia and its elites' views on Iran. In fact, although for reasons like geographical proximity or political issues the geopolitical element has always been an important factor in shaping Iran-Russia relations, given the developments in interactions of the two countries over the past few decades, we see that dominance of every identity approach in Russia has had consequences for its relations with Iran. While in the era of the Atlanticist discourse, Iran did not play an important role in Russian foreign policy, their perspective changed in the Eurasianist era, and with growing importance of Iran in their foreign policy, we have witnessed the expansion of Russian-Iranian relations (Koolae, 2006: 73-75).

The main components of Russia's foreign policy towards Iran, in addition to the impact of identity components, are about geography, the superiority of political and security issues to economic issues (with the exception of the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when economic issues were more important for Russia under the influence of the westernization discourse) and, ultimately, the involvement and influence of third-party actors (Jafari and Mirjalali, 2010: 13-17). The geographic proximity of Russia and Iran has linked the security concerns of the two countries in issues like developments of Central Asia and the Caucasus or the danger of extremism penetrating Middle East, and has been an important factor in determining the quality of relations between the two sides, especially the shift in Russia's view of Iran. Iran's importance for Russia from political and security points of view in matters like confronting western influence in the region is visible in the words of Russian leaders despite limited bilateral trade relations. Another aspect that influences Russia's policies towards Iran is the intervention and influence of a third-party or other great powers. This has been evident both directly and indirectly and via changes in Russian identity perceptions through interaction with the West; for example, when Russia has good relations with the West, the importance of Iran's position in its foreign policy diminishes. In some circumstances,

however, Russia has been forced to reduce its ties with Iran under western pressure (Белоглазов, 2016).

Despite Russia's limited ties to Iran in the 1990s, influenced by the domination of Westerners, with Primakov and Putin coming to power and strengthening the Eurasian positions, relations between Iran and Russia increased. During this period, while cooperating on issues like countering Western influence in the region, Russia has been pushing for increased cooperation in the nuclear field with Iran, and in response to US allegations, stated that Iran's activities and Russian cooperation on them are within the framework of the NPT. The September 11, 2001 incident and the growing concern about extremism among Russians had consequences like Russia's cooperation with the United States on the fight against terrorism and, eventually, brought the relative closeness of these two powers. This relationship with the west had negative impacts on relations between Russia and Iran and the process of cooperation between the two (Katz, 2002: 71-76).

In the last decade, Russia's foreign policy towards Iran can be described as an attempt to strike a balance between cooperation with Iran and providing its military and strategic needs, and cooperation with the West in order to control and exert pressure on Iran. In fact, by adopting a dual controlling and moderating approach, while controlling any increase in Iran's power, Russia has tried to balance the Western pressure on Tehran in its own interest. In fact, in the context of Russia's foreign policy towards Iran being influenced by Russian elites' perception of Iran and the West, but under the influence of other factors like Putin's understanding of Russia's international position and the impact a relationship with Iran could have on preservation or acquisition of desired foreign policy roles (like great global power, regional superpower, and nuclear superpower), the Russians seek to strike a balance between the two sides. Therefore, on the one hand, while cooperating with Iran, Russia has opposed Iran's demands for advanced weapons and military technology, and, like the case of the S-300, even if it had an obligation in this regard, it did not fulfill it as best as it could, and on the other hand, they demanded maintaining interactions with Iran in various areas, including the nuclear cooperation despite Western pressures. At

the same time that Russia is worried about Iran becoming a regional or nuclear rival and increasing its power, especially in the nuclear field, a Western military strike against Iran is also viewed as opposing its own interests, therefore it has sought to moderate the Western pressure. It is also worth noting, however, that during international crises, Russia has always enjoyed and benefited from cooperation and consultation with Iran (Trenin and Malashenko, 2010: 21-22).

It should be kept in mind that Russia's limiting of its cooperation with Iran has been influenced by its elites' perception of Iran as a rival to its roles. In fact, Russia's relations with Iran, contrary to the initial perception of closeness, are of complexity. The Russians, while cooperating with Iran, are worried about its emergence as arrival regional power. This is well illustrated in the view of Dimitri Trenin, the Russian scholar, who claims that Moscow believes that a powerful Iran can be threatening for Russia. Iran, as the second largest gas supplier after Russia, is a potential competitor with Russia in the energy market, and a nuclear Iran can also make it difficult for Russia to dominate over Central Asia and the Caucasus. Despite concerns among Russian political elites about Iran's rising power, Russia is also unlikely to weaken Iran since a weak Iran will have security implications for Russia, such as instability in the region. That's why Russia has always opposed any military attack on Iran (Trenin and Malashenko, 2010: 7-8).

Over the past two years, with the escalation of the crises in Ukraine, and, in particular, Syria, Moscow's approach to Tehran has become more complicated; while Russia faces an embargo from the West, the loss of its traditional sphere of influence in Syria is worrying, and sharing interests with Tehran has led to closer ties between the two. Moscow is trying to play the role of a global power in different crises, and in this respect, tries to work with actors like Iran to advance its interests. Therefore, given the current situation and taking into account Russia's economic situation with the ongoing sanctions, we have witnessed an increase in Russia's interactions with Iran in the economic, political, and regional spheres. These collaborations peaked in the use of Russian fighters at Shahid Nozheh Air Base in Hamedan for anti-terrorist operations in Syria, which was described by some as a strategic coalition. Given the temporary nature

of this cooperation, as well as the roles and principles of Russia's foreign policy, it would be unlikely to expect the level of "serious cooperation" to rise on the particular issue of Syria.

As the above elements show, analysis of Russia's attitudes towards Iran based on economic or geostrategic incentives is inadequate because it does not pay attention to the influence of non-material factors, especially Russian elites' views on Iran. Russia's foreign policy behaviors are influenced by the roles drawn for its foreign policy, including the role of a great world power, a regional superpower, and a nuclear superpower, which are based on its political and intellectual elites' perceptions about Russia's position in the world and the region. Russia strives to adopt a policy towards Iran and its issues in line with such roles. Indeed, Russian political elites' image of the country's roles and the impact of strengthening or weakening Iran's power on the quality of Russia's acting of roles have shaped their two-dimensional approach to Iran (Omelicheva, 2012: 341-342).

An interesting point about Russia's approach in international assemblies when dealing with Iran's nuclear case show Russia's interests are defined by its political elites regarding Iran's nuclear activities to be in the line with its roles, priorities, and concerns within the framework of the major roles of Russian foreign policy. In other words, taking into account the kind of perceptions that Russia's political elites have about Iran's nuclear program and Tehran's intentions to pursue the program, they have adopted behaviors and positions to secure their own interests in acting the desired roles for Russia. Therefore, given Russia's general foreign policy on Iran, the priorities and concerns of the ruling elites in Moscow will in Iran's nuclear case and its management will be addressed in a numbers of ways.

A) Russia's Nuclear Doctrine and Iran's Nuclear Program

As a nuclear superpower, Russia and other nuclear states oppose other actors' acquisition of this type of weapon. This has been more focused on in foreign policy by the Eurasianists, relying on Russia's nuclear superpower role (Russian New Military Doctrine, 2001). Meanwhile, and despite the fact that officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran have repeatedly stated that they are not seeking nuclear weapons, referring

both the supreme leader's fatwa and reports from the IAEA inspectors, one aspect of Russia's approach to Iran's nuclear program, in particular how they address the issue in the Security Council or during the process of reaching a final nuclear deal, is preventing the progress of Iran's nuclear program towards achievement of nuclear weapons. This is one of the reasons Russia has for supporting pressure on Iran, including the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1929 and emphasis on the continuation and increase of inspections of Iranian facilities. Various factors have contributed to the formation of such a view in Moscow, and they mainly relate to the perceptions of the political elite of Russia regarding future conditions and Iran's acting in relation to Russia's roles and positions. From Moscow's point of view, Iran's access to the nuclear weapons will change the regional balance of power, and this is not in the interest of Moscow. Russians believe a nuclear Iran will behave more aggressively and independently in Central Asia and the Caucasus (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2010).

Regardless of Russia's nuclear doctrine, its position on developments in Iran's nuclear program has shown that it is able to change its position on the issue to prevent Iran from becoming nuclear. Russia's expression of concern about Iran's nuclear program when activities of the Fordow facility were discovered by media suggests that Moscow's position can change. As stated on the official website of the Russian Foreign Ministry, "the media's discovery of activities in the Fordow facility has detracted Russian confidence in Iran". Some reactions to this issue in Moscow have been even harsher than Washington, because, as some realists believe, the United States might accept a nuclear Iran since they believe it may be more responsible, and as a result, the process of reconciliation between the United States and Iran could progress. Russia, on the other hand, will not accept a nuclear Iran because of its proximity to Iran and concerns about a nuclear arms race on its southern border; the Russian position so far has also been in this direction (Karami, 2010: 186-187).

B) Possible Increase of Iran's Capabilities and Russia's Superpower Position in the Region

The Russian leaders, who are influenced by factors like historical heritage, geographical situation, and the Eurasianist identity

subsequently portray foreign policy roles such as the dominant superpower in Eurasia for their country fear that if Iran's capabilities are enhanced due to massive advances in the nuclear program or possible access to nuclear weapons, Iran will have the potential to emerge as a rival for Russia at the regional level. Therefore, Russia's priorities in bilateral relations and multilateral negotiations are to prevent Iran from increasing its strength and preserving Russia's supremacy in the region as a nuclear and regional superpower. In this regard, Russia has emphasized the need for extensive inspections of Iranian facilities at various stages of the nuclear program. This approach is not limited to nuclear issues, and Moscow is concerned about any significant increase in Iran's power in areas of energy or influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Zargari, 2014).

On the nuclear subject, the continued progress of Tehran's nuclear program will have two negative consequences for Russia. If Iran gains access to nuclear weapons, it will become a rival for Russia in the region. If the West attempts to control Iran by military action, Moscow will face consequences like instability on the borders of its area of influence, American encroachment towards Russian borders, and escalation of the threat of terrorism. Therefore, over the past two decades, Russia has always tried to hold back a possible American military attack while preventing Iran's nuclearization and controlling any increase in its strength. The simultaneous adoption of controlling and balancing approaches has been the country's top priority in the nuclear case of Iran (Kozhanov, 2012: 9).

C) Balancing Military Threats against Iran

One of Russia's main goals in playing a proactive role in the Security Council is to prevent any possible US military strike against Iran and the fall of the current Iranian regime. That is why the Russians emphasized diplomatic solutions, sanctions, and political pressures at all stages of the nuclear talks while opposing military action. It can be said that any possible US strike against Iran would be a nightmare for Putin, because in addition to creating instability in the southern frontiers of Russia and disrupting its roles, it would bring the United States closer to Russian security frontiers and threaten Russia's domination in the region. In addition, such an approach would

strengthen United States' unilateralism and hegemony, and is contrary to the principles contained in Russia's foreign policy documents, such as multilateralism. This issue is one of the foundations of Moscow's approach to Iran's nuclear case and one of the reasons for its efforts to achieve a non-military solution to the Iranian nuclear issue (Schwartz, 2015: 1-2).

D) Concerns about Iran's Closeness with the West

Russia has taken advantage of cooperation with Iran on various topics such as confronting the deployment of the missile defense shield and, more generally, countering U.S. unilateralism. Although Russia and Iran are not strategic partners, Russia does not want Iran to approach the Western camp due to successful nuclear talks since in that case, the United States would have more opportunities to influence border regions of Russia, which will disrupt Russia's acting of roles desired by Moscow. Accordingly, Russia has always been trying to play a central and mediating role between Iran and the West, and, of course, maintain its foreign policy balance. This is a serious incentive for Moscow's cooperation with Iran in nuclear technology and provision of some of Iran's nuclear and military needs, as well as their entry into nuclear negotiations, where they have played a serious role in the past decade. In the same vein, by presenting plans like those of 2006 and 2011, Russia has sought to continue nuclear cooperation with Iran and also shown its endeavors to play a role in the implementation of the nuclear deal and the continuation of nuclear technical cooperation with Iran. Another demonstration of this policy is Moscow's measures to increase economic, technical, political, and security interactions with Iran, which, while bringing the country closer to Iran and supplying its needs, would address concerns about the improvement of Iran's relations with Russia's (Katz, 2015). Given this approach, Russia's positions in international organizations on Iran's nuclear case will be outlined and analyzed in the next section.

Internationalization of Iran's Nuclear Case and Russia's Positions and Votes in the Security Council

The economic situation and political conditions in Russia are such that the country has not been able to preserve its domains of traditional influence. In addition, over the past two decades, we have witnessed

the expansion of Russia's rivals into its traditional sphere of influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Therefore, given the importance of Russia's position and roles such as great global power and regional superpower, one of Kremlin's strategies for playing a global and regional role is attempting to have a word in matters or with actors on which the West has less influence. International crises provide Russia with an opportunity to put itself in an equal position with the United States and other global powers. In this regard, Iran and its nuclear issue as an international crisis provided an opportunity for Russia to play such a role in the Security Council and in interaction with other powers. Based on a history of technical cooperation with Iran, Russia has been working to be an active player and direct the process in the direction of its interests while also preventing American unilateralism by dealing with Iran's nuclear case in multilateral negotiations and international institutions (Kozhanov, 2012: 5).

When Iran's nuclear program first became known as an international dispute, Russia was not directly involved in negotiations. At this stage, negotiations were between Iran on the one hand and the three European countries of Germany, Britain and France on the other; the issue was not yet referred to the Security Council. At this time, Russia was trying to get more involved. In this regard, Russian authorities repeatedly commented on Iran's nuclear program and the resolutions to the dispute, and, while stressing Iran's right to enrich Uranium, adopted ambiguous and contradictory positions (Putin, 2003).

When Iran's nuclear case became internationalized for the first time, Russian authorities emphasized on international monitoring of Iran's nuclear activities, noted that Iran's nuclear activities and cooperations with Russia are peaceful in nature, and expressed interest in continued cooperation on the one hand, and on the other, while delaying the fulfillment of their obligations towards Iran, they claimed to share the Western concern for the prospect of nuclear weapons and confrontation with Iran (Mojtahed Zadeh and Rashidi Nezhad, 2011: 3).

An important part of Russian approach to and policy on Iran's nuclear issue is the attempt to enter negotiations directly. After several rounds of talks between Iran and the three European countries, and despite some agreements, these negotiations failed for various reasons, and disputes over Iran's nuclear program entered a different stage. At

this time, with the change of government in Iran and the resumption of nuclear activities, the United States led by George Bush attempted to introduce Iran as a global threat, and in pursuit of this hostile policy, it sought to securitize Iran's nuclear program. The issue was referred from the IAEA Board of Governors to the Security Council in 2006. However, it should be noted that the United States could not refer the case alone, and the referral was accompanied by silence of Russia and other countries. In fact, Russia's position in the IAEA was in accord with the securitization of the Iranian nuclear program and its referral to the Security Council. The reason for Russia's cooperation with the United States in referring the case to the Security Council was also clear: not only their concerns about militarization of Iranian activities would be eliminated, but their first priority which was to increase their involvement in the negotiations related to Iran's nuclear case would be realized. Up to this point, Russia had no direct negotiating position, and its role was limited to statements and resolutions issued by the IAEA or the Board of Governors. Russia was only a member of the Board of Governors and had little influence on the fate of Iran's nuclear program. The referral of the case to the Security Council, given Russia's permanent membership in the council, provided the opportunity for Russians to use the nuclear talks as a tool in their foreign policy while being directly involved in the negotiations, and along with it, act along the line of its roles in the global and regional arena (i.e. a global, regional, and nuclear power) and prevent potential threats against itself through effective incorporation of these roles. When the Iranian case was being reviewed at the IAEA and the meetings of the Board of Governors, Russia always emphasized on the need for Tehran's full cooperation with the Agency and IAEA's monitoring of Iran's activities to make sure its own red line, which is a necessarily peaceful nuclear program for Iran, is respected (Pieper, 2014: 18).

After referring Iran's nuclear case to the Security Council, it was expected that Russia and China would resist against the US and prevent the passing of resolutions against Iran. However, this was not the case for reasons that will be mentioned. Ever since referring Iran's case to the Security Council in 2006, Russia has made a distinction between its technical cooperation with Iran and other aspects of Iran's

nuclear program that are allegedly problematic (Pieper, 2014: 31). Russia's approach to the Iranian nuclear case in the Security Council is very significant because it represents Moscow's general approach to Iran and their view on any increase or extensive decrease of Iran's power. Russia has, in its own interests, played a more active role in this area. Since 2006, when Russia directly entered the Iranian nuclear case, the country has not always had a clear and lasting approach towards Iran, and has acted differently according to international atmosphere and its interests, or responded differently to the continuation and progress of Iran's nuclear program considering its interests. In this process, Russia has simultaneously sought to maintain its ties with Iran as a major actor in Middle East, protect its red lines in the nuclear field, and adopt positions in line with the Westin pressuring Iran.

During the review of Iran's case in the Security Council, one of the Russian strategies to play an active role was to present proposals aimed at resolving the issue for its own benefit. Given the importance of the level and method of uranium enrichment in the dispute between Iran and the P5+1, Russia presented a plan focused on continued enrichment for Iran on Russian territories. In the early days of the adoption of the Security Council sanctions against Iran to end the crisis, Russia announced the proposal to "Enrich uranium on Russian territories" via an "Iran-Russia Joint Stock Company". In the eyes of the Russians, this plan could pave the way for escalation of disagreements to stop. However, Iran did not accept Putin's proposal, which led to Russian dissatisfaction. Russia did not think Iran would reject the plan for enriching its fuel on Russia's territory in the context of tightening sanctions that aimed to suspend the enrichment altogether, but since the plan did not provide the interests of Iranian leaders, it was not accepted by Tehran, and this influenced Russia's future positions in the Security Council against Iran as well (Kiani, 2008: 357).

Given the significance of the Security Council's actions in determining the fate of Iran's nuclear program and the Russian position in this council, the main steps of this council in response to Iran's nuclear program will be addressed here, and Russia's positions as a permanent member of the Security Council will be discussed.

Although the Security Council has adopted resolutions, statements, and positions on Iran's nuclear program from 2006 to 2015, the issuance of the six resolutions from 2006 to 2010 is being reviewed in this article as their most important decision to address Iran's nuclear case. Since 2010, the council has taken other measures in relation to Iran's nuclear program, but its positions have largely confirmed the previous resolutions and emphasized the need for them to be implemented. Another major Security Council action on this issue was the issuance of Resolution 2231 in 2015 after the JCPOA was reached, which will be examined in the final section.

Following Iran's negative and broad response to the proposed package by the other side in negotiations (July 31, 2006), and the opening of the heavy water complex in Arak, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1696 on August 9, 2006, with the aim of expressing concern over re-starting enrichment activities and suspending them. This resolution calls on Iran to suspend all activities related to enrichment and reprocessing, including research and development, until approved by the IAEA. The resolution was adopted under Article 40 of Chapter Seven of the UN Charter, which does not contain punitive measures or sanctions, but threatens further action under Article 41 of Chapter Seven of the UN charter. Russia supported the adoption of this resolution against Iran because the main points the resolution, which were a request for suspension of activities, cooperation with the international community, and oversight of the IAEA, were in line with Moscow's priorities (UN Security Council Resolution 1696, July 31, 2006).

Security Council Resolution 1737 was approved on December 23, 2006, with positive votes of all 15 members of the Security Council including Russia; it had a harsher tone and included new sanctions since Iran had not complied with the provisions of the previous resolution and the new resolution wanted to force Iran to end its uranium enrichment. The resolution called for Iran to immediately do what was requested by the IAEA, including the suspension of all enrichment. In this context, the Security Council insisted that Iran should suspend all reprocessing and enrichment activities, even research and development, plus the construction of a heavy water research reactor. There were also restrictions placed on the

transportation of dual-use goods and services and travel or training of people involved with Iran's nuclear program. In the end, the resolution once again threatens more vigorous action by the Council if Iran does not abide. The resolution was approved by the Russian representative and co-sponsored by the Western side (UN Security Council Resolution 1696, December 23, 2006).

Security Council Resolution 1747, suggested by the P5 + 1 as a result of rising tensions between Iran and the Security Council, was approved on April 24, 2007 with consensus of all fifteen members of the Security Council. By adopting this resolution, the council broadened the scope of sanctions against Iran. Several Iranian officials and companies were sanctioned under this resolution, and an embargo was issued on providing supplies or sale and transfer of arms and related materials to Iran. Although this resolution imposed arms restrictions on Iran and Moscow has military cooperation with Tehran, it continued to cooperate with the West and, in line with its concerns about non-proliferation, voted in favor of this resolution (UN Security Council Resolution 1747, March 24, 2007).

Security Council Resolution 1803 was approved on March 3, 2008, with 14 positive votes and Indonesia's abstinence despite P5+1's welcoming of removal of the recent ambiguity in the report of the Director General of the Agency on Iran's cooperation. In addition to emphasizing the previous sanctions, this resolution called on all governments to prevent connections between financial institutions and Iranian banks, especially Saderat and Melli, and encouraged government inspections of air and ship cargos to prevent the entry and exit of items prohibited in this or previous Resolutions. In the end, the P5+1 endorsed the diplomatic solution to the problem. Russia was in full agreement with the West in adopting this resolution (UN Security Council Resolution 1803, March 3, 2008).

Security Council Resolution 1835 while adopted with consensus on September 27, 2008 while the Council pointed out the need for commitment to the NPT once again, and emphasized the rightful implementation of previous resolutions and appeals by the Board of Governors. The resolution, although not including a new sanction, had Russia's positive vote (UN Security Council Resolution 1835, September 27, 2008).

UN Security Council Resolution 1929 was approved on June 9, 2010, with 12 votes in favor (including Russia), Turkey and Brazil against, and Lebanon's absence; as the most significant and harshest resolution against Iran, this resolution expressed dissatisfaction with Tehran's failure to comply with the provisions of previous resolutions on its nuclear and military program. The first request of the Council in this resolution is that Iran should sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and by implementing the Additional Protocol, suspend all nuclear activities. This resolution prohibits Iran's investment in commercial activities related to nuclear programs in other countries. The council also calls on governments to prohibit the opening of branches of Iranian banks and prevent shared investments or creation of shared relationships with them. In addition, companies involved in nuclear technologies and ballistic missiles, elements related to the Revolutionary Guards Corps, and shipping companies were added to the sanctions list. Another part of the resolution emphasizes dissatisfaction with Iran's activities in Qom since sufficient information has not been provided to the IAEA. The resolution imposed severe nuclear, arms, financial and banking sanctions on Iran. Unexpectedly, despite its severity, the resolution attracted Russia's support (UN Security Council Resolution 1929, June 9, 2010).

It is worth noting that the United Nations Security Council has approved other resolutions both since 2010 before the nuclear deal and resolution 2231 were approved in 2015; however, these were mainly regarding the implementation of the six resolutions and supervision of Iran's activities. A striking issue is Russia's position on these resolutions, which were contrary to expectations and in favor of resolutions. The reason for adoption of such positions by Russia in the Security Council will be discussed in the next section, but it is important to note that a group of factors led Russia's foreign policy interests towards the adoption of these sanctions despite the relative continuation (although with a significant change in level and speed) of nuclear cooperation with Iran. Therefore, it can be argued that since national interests have been Russia's foreign policy guide in the case of Iran's nuclear program, it is necessary to assess Russia's position on this issue or related negotiations in the general context of its foreign

policy and the roles desired by its leaders. Only when Russia's foreign policy interests and priorities are clarified in relation to Iran's nuclear issue can we understand and predict its attitudes towards and positions on other issues related to Iran in future (Molaei, 2014).

Assessing Russia's Positions on and Approach to Sanctions

The elites of the Russian foreign policy regime have tried to get the most out of Iran's nuclear negotiations, seeing them as a foreign policy issue connected to others, and to better fulfill their desired roles. In this regard, in recent years, they have used these negotiations as a means of engagement, confrontation, and bargaining with the West, even in relation to other issues, and while continuing their nuclear cooperation with Iran, have had relative cooperation with the West in approving sanctions. That is why some analysts have analyzed Moscow's approach to the Iranian nuclear case with an emphasis on the role of the international element and characterized the negotiations as a "playing card" for Russia in interactions with the West. This analysis only clears some of the reasons that influenced Moscow's approach, and other reasons have also been responsible for this behavioral pattern and affected the nuclear case. In spite of Iran's clear position on the peaceful nature of its nuclear program, some of the Russians' motives to favor the sanctions in the Security Council are rooted in its concerns about military uses of Iran's nuclear program. Russia's attitude towards sanctions against Iran in the Security Council, in particular regarding the nuclear program, has been contrary and obscure. On the one hand, Moscow has declared that it opposes the unilateral sanction of Iran and has claimed Iran's nuclear program to be peaceful in the framework of the NPT, on the other hand, their full compliance with the Security Council's six resolutions on Iran (resolutions No. 1696, 1737, 1747, 1803, 1835, and 1929) has created grounds for imposing unilateral and multilateral sanctions against Tehran. Also, Russia and its various institutions, like banks and financial institutions, have implemented sanctions against Iran in September 2010 (Kozhanov, 2012: 2). Since 2006, Moscow has supported the United Nations Security Council resolutions to pressure Iran and emphasize the need to implement UN and IAEA mandates. These documents cover a wide range of sanctions against the Islamic

Republic of Iran. In addition, the Russian President Medvedev issued an order prohibiting the sale of S-300 missile systems to Tehran on the basis of UN Security Council resolution 1929 of 9 June 2010, indicating complete compliance of Moscow with the sanctions of the Security Council against Tehran (Ivanov, 2014: 11-13).

In assessing the reasons for Russia's positions and behaviors in the Security Council in response to the continuation of Tehran's nuclear program, various factors and causes have been presented. First, we must refer to the conditions governing the international arena since Russia's behaviors as an agent, as well as the other actors' behaviors, are influenced by the international environment and its structure. Moscow's participation in the sanctioning process is about Russia's willingness to showcase its own image in the international community as an actor in line with the international community. At this time, the United States had been able to present Iran as a global threat by presenting a securitized image of Iran, and created a consensus among members of the Security Council. Therefore, Russian leaders, given their other motives, have taken the opportunity and tried to create a better picture of themselves and introduce Russia as a country concurrent with the international community by not resisting the process and cooperating with other members of the Security Council. At the same time, if Russia had vetoed the resolutions against Iran, the West would have accused them of ignoring the NPT and Russia would come under massive political pressure from the West (Mousavian, 2012: 162-165).

The second factor in assessing Russia's positions on sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program is the role of the international element in its foreign policy, along with a decline of the Eurasian identity discourse during the Medvedev era. Although Russia had started aligning with the West in 2006 and in Putin's era by adopting sanctions against Iran's nuclear program, the resolutions of the Putin period are more of a recommendation; serious sanctions and severe measures against Tehran's nuclear program were not taken. With the arrival of Medvedev, however, a series of trends emerged such as expansion of engagements with the United States, decline of Eurasianism, and US's commitment to Russia to not deploy a new missile defense system in Europe if Moscow complies with sanctions

against Tehran, which led to Moscow's full compliance with Washington in increasing pressure and adopting new sanctions against Iran. Although this factor is in line with the general principles of Russian foreign policy and its intended roles (i.e. maintaining superpower status in the Eurasian region), it also reflects the influence of the international element on shaping the positions and approaches of Russia (Белоглазов, 2016).

The third reason for Russia's position in favor of Security Council resolutions against Iran is based on Russian political elites' perceptions about the intentions of Tehran and their concerns about Iran's nuclear program. In this period and with the Iran's increasing level of uranium enrichment, Russia was worried about the progress of Iran's nuclear program despite Iranian top officials' claims regarding the peaceful nature of the country nuclear ambitions, and Russia's interests were defined in halting or mitigating the speed of these developments. Indeed, Russia's negative perception of Iran's intentions in extending the nuclear program has shaped its negative attitude toward Tehran and its cooperation with the west to put pressure on it. There was a consensus among the Russian political elites that if Iran's nuclear program deviates and shifts towards nuclear weapons, Russia's foreign policy interests and principles will be threatened because Iran's potential nuclear capacity threatens Russia's nuclear and regional interests and roles. Therefore, to address its concerns about the future of Tehran's nuclear program, Russia came to align itself with other actors in order to stop the progress of Iran's nuclear program (Гришин, 2016).

Other factors have been discussed in this regard, especially by the Russians. One of these factors is Moscow's response to the rejection of its proposal to transfer fuel and nuclear waste from Iran to Russia to resolve the nuclear disputes. Of course, this is related only to the latest and most important resolution regarding Iran's sanctions. At this time, the rejection of the Russian plan by Iran led to Russians' greater willingness to join the West in the Security Council against Iran and ratified a harsher resolution (Mousavian, 2012: 162-165).

According to the above, it can be said that various factors such as structure and environment of the international community (i.e. the tense atmosphere against Iran), the influence of the West, internal

changes in Russia, Iran's behavior, and Moscow's perceptions of Tehran's potential pursuit of a militarized nuclear program along with the idea that a nuclear Iran would be a serious threat to Russia have influenced Russia's approach and positions in the Security Council and in the process of ratifying resolutions against Iran. However, in order to avoid reductionism in analysis and explanation of Russia's positions in the Security Council and not consider only the one of the factors (like engagement with the United States, economic interests, security concerns, etc.), this issue should be evaluated and addressed within the framework of Russia's major foreign policy framework. Fearing Iran would become a nuclear power and increase its strength and capabilities as Russia's southern neighbor, Russia sought to halt the progress of Iran's nuclear program by ratifying sanctions against Iran. At the time, Moscow took pragmatic approach and, while exploiting a tense international atmosphere against Iran, endorsed the Western effort to put pressure on Iran to stop its nuclear program. Of course, it should be noted that Moscow did not pursue other Western objectives like undermining the political system of Iran or hoping for its collapse when approving sanctions because, though concerned about an increase of Iran's power, the Russians were well aware that any instability in Iran could have negative and important implications for them. Among these threats is the vacuum of power in Iran and the elimination of the barrier that stopped extremism and radical groups to enter Russia (Pieper, 2014: 21).

Taking into account the above point, Russia's different goals from the West in approving nuclear sanctions against Iran and their incentives to work with Iran, we can clarify and understand Russia's current policy regarding the necessity of lifting certain sanctions against Tehran and its approval of Resolution 2231. Nonetheless, two points about Russia's current view on sanctions against Tehran's nuclear program should be discussed. First, Russians believe that sanctions have been effective in preventing the progress of Iran's nuclear program, which, to some extent, provided the ground for moving towards a nuclear accord and addressing Russia's concerns about Iran's nuclear program. Second, although the sanctions prevented Iran from improving its relations with the West and this has been one of the main principles of Russian foreign policy towards

Iran, in the current era and with the decline of Russia's engagement with the West, Moscow needs Iran's vast market and economic cooperation with Tehran, and therefore, supports the lifting of sanctions (Zargari, 2016).

The Final Talks: The Nuclear Deal and Resolution 2231

After a series of developments, such as complete implementation of Security Council resolutions, the change of government in Iran and the start of a new round of talks increased hopes for resolving disputes over Iran's nuclear program. In this new period, while keeping Iran's nuclear case in the Security Council, the five permanent members of the council followed up with Germany for negotiations with Iran. In such circumstances, the situation for Russia was different and complex; on the one hand, it had achieved the objectives it pursued in supporting sanctions against Iran, including preventing a possible rise in Iran's power, encouraging Tehran to resume negotiations, and preventing unilateral Western action against Iran by exploiting the capacity to pursue the issue in the Security Council, and therefore, viewed a diplomatic final solution as the way to ensure protection of its interests. On the other hand, there was a concern that an agreement between Iran and the P5+1 would allow Iran to engage with the United States in other areas and set the grounds for Iran's Westernization. In such a situation, Russia was trying to play an active role in the negotiations and align the fate of the issue in line with its interests and roles. At all stages of the final two years of negotiations, Russia emphasized on issues like the need to resolve the dispute through diplomacy and multilateralism, the need for Iran's extensive cooperation with the IAEA and their supervision, the need to adhere to the NPT, and Iran's right to continue the peaceful nuclear program so that the cooperation between Tehran and Moscow could continue. Such positions were repeated throughout the negotiations and in Security Council meetings by the representatives of Russia (Trenin, 2015).

Despite speculation about the possibility of Russia playing an unconstructive role, the country had a positive impact on the nuclear deal by taking certain positions in the final months of negotiations and in the new round of talks before reaching a final nuclear deal in Vienna on July 14, 2015. In particular, by adopting certain measures

like reaching bilateral agreements with Tehran on nuclear and energy sectors (such as the initial agreement to build new power plants and an oil-exchange agreement between Moscow and Tehran), Russia reinforced Tehran's bargaining power in the final talks, and resolved some of Iran's concerns even though its ultimate goal was to pursue its own interests and highlight its role (Baev, 2015). In analyzing this Russian approach in the final stages of negotiations and their cooperation in reaching a final agreement, the leaders of Russia had several motives and goals in mind by intending to resolve the disagreements and reach a deal. First, the nuclear deal resolved Russia's priorities and strategic concerns about Iran's nuclear program because with the agency's supervision of Iran's activities, the level and extent of the progress of Tehran's nuclear program would be limited and controlled. Under these conditions, the potential nuclear threat of Iran would be resolved. Second, this agreement would eliminate the excuse for a one-way military action against Tehran by the United States on the southern borders of Russia. In addition to security and strategic issues, if sanctions were lifted, Russia could have benefited from the Iranian arms market given the Middle East security situation. Lifting sanctions would also increase the capacity of economic cooperation between Iran and Russia. The third motive for Russia to reach an agreement was to avoid political and economic isolation after the intensification of political tensions with the West since Russia wanted to work with Iran maintain close relations (Trenin, 2015).

In addition to Russia's adoption of an active and relatively cooperative approach in the final two years of negotiations with the P5+1 and in the meetings of the Security Council, cooperation with other members of the council to issue another important resolution on the following days of the agreement was another important Russian action regarding the Iranian nuclear case. On July 20, 2015, about a week after reaching the nuclear deal, Russia, along with other permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council, endorsed resolution 2231, which acted as an endorsement of the nuclear deal by the Council. The resolution, which was issued after 12 years of negotiation and ratification of numerous resolutions and finally a nuclear deal, undermined the Security Council's previous resolutions on Iran's nuclear program, and was implemented three

months after its adoption and Iran's compliance with its obligations. Like other resolutions, Resolution 2231 has initial and executive sections that oblige all member states of the UN to endorse the nuclear deal. It also included other issues, such as lifting of sanctions and restrictions included in previous resolutions against Tehran and the need for Iran to cooperate with the IAEA in verification areas (UN Security Council Resolution 2231, 2015). Just like in the case of the nuclear deal, emphasizing these factors in the latest Security Council resolution on Iran's nuclear case is in line with Moscow's priorities and principles because by resolving this dispute in the Council and Russia's active role, the main concerns of the country, such as misconceptions about the militarization of Iran's nuclear program or unilateral military action against it, were addressed.

Conclusion

In order to avoid reductionism and to understand and explain Russia's foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear program, and in particular to assess its positions at the UN Security Council in dealing with Iran's nuclear case, the issue should be analyzed and explained in the overall framework of Russian foreign policy. To assess Russia's moves in the Security Council, one should look at Iran's nuclear program in connection with other issues of Russian foreign policy. In order to understand the causes and factors shaping the Russian approach to cooperate in adoption of sanctions against Iran, it should be noted that the issue is related to other subjects, such as Russia's nuclear doctrine, its engagement and competition with the United States and other global powers, the regional foreign policy priorities of the country, and the position of Iran in its foreign policy and in relation to its foreign policy roles (like the position of a great world power, a nuclear superpower, and a regional superpower). The impact and consequences of the Iranian nuclear program on each of these issues should be considered in terms of the Russian elites' impressions and perceptions of Iran's intentions and behaviors in the nuclear field.

As mentioned when explaining Russia's positions in the Security Council and elaborating the reasons for its support for sanctions, based on Russian perceptions of the goals and implications of Iran's nuclear program, efforts to control the progress of Iran's nuclear

program and, in general, control the increase of Iran's power, and to mitigate the pressure of the West against Tehran have been the two main pillars of Russia's overall approach to Iran's nuclear case. In this regard, Russian foreign policy elites who, influenced by the Eurasian identity discourse and a pragmatic perspective, have taken on global and regional roles for the country's foreign policy by continuing nuclear technical cooperation with Iran with economic and political motives, emphasizing international monitoring of Iran's nuclear activities, presenting plans to control the progress and increase of Tehran's nuclear power, and imposing sanctions to persuade Tehran to accept nuclear restrictions, and at the same time opposing military action to destroy nuclear facilities. Accordingly, the Russian foreign policy elite initially sought to resolve Iran's nuclear issue in the Security Council through a political and multilateral approach; at a later stage, they tried to direct Iran's nuclear program in line with their own interests through preventing Iran's nuclear program, controlling the progress of Iran's nuclear program, preventing US unilateral action against Iran, and encouraging Tehran to cooperate with the IAEA. Russian positions such as adoption of sanctions and cooperation in their implementation are meant to pressure Tehran to stop its nuclear progress and persuade the United States to stop military action in the country's elites' perception. However, other factors, like using this issue as a means to manage relations with the United States, have also been influential in this process.

Authors' Statement: The author declares that she has fully observed all ethical issues including plagiarism, double publication and/or submission, redundancy, data fabrication and/or falsification, informed consent, misconduct, etc.

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