

Culture and National Identity Analysis: The Background of Great Britain Involvement in Iran's Nuclear Deal

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Keywords: Iran's Nuclear Deal, culture, national identity, level of analysis

Abstract: The involvement of United Kingdom in Iran nuclear deal closely linked to its national culture and identity. Such foreign policy making can be understood by identifying the national identity of the United Kingdom. United Kingdom emphasizes the values of Western liberalism in its foreign policy-making process. However, liberalism adopted by the United Kingdom is not passive tolerance, but rather muscular liberalism which refers to anti-terrorism. United Kingdom interpreted the Iran's identity as a threat. The reason behind this interpretation is the potential of emerging Islamic radical movements in the country. Therefore, nuclear possession by Iran became a main concern by the United Kingdom due to the Islam identity of the country. This phenomenon can be analyzed using an aspirational constructivism that emphasizes the past experience and the rationality of the political elite in the process of foreign policy making. The terrorist attacks that took place in London on 7 November became the base of the rationality of the political elite of United Kingdom to establish the differentiation between British and Islamic identities. The main purpose of the foreign policy of the United Kingdom through its involvement in Iran's nuclear deal is to avoid the misuse of nuclear weapons by radical Islamic movements.

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Iran and the P5+1 country consisting Great Britain, Russia, France, China, and Germany, signed an Iranian nuclear deal in Vienna. The agreement discusses the limits and inspections required in order to lift economic sanctions provided by the P5+1 countries against Iran. Prior to the negotiation process, the P5+1 countries decided to impose economic sanctions against Iran to stop the Iranian government's nuclear development actions that are perceived to threaten international stability. The overall agreement known as the joint comprehensive plan of action became the momentum of a rare process of diplomacy and negotiation in the Middle East (The Guardian, 2015). In this paper, the author will explain the background of British involvement in the agreement through the level of analysis of culture and political identity.

The involvement of the Great Britain in Iran's nuclear deal of 2015 represents its importance to realize international security. The main focus of the United Kingdom after reaching an agreement is to ensure that the agreement is well implemented and nuclear weapons are no longer within the reach of Iran. David Cameron as prime minister of Britain issued a statement related to Iran's nuclear deal in a press conference "After persistent diplomacy and tough sanctions, the international community has delivered a historic deal with Iran. A deal which secures our fundamental aim- to keep Iran from developing a nuclear weapon- Through this assertion,

it is understood that the fundamental target of Britain is to keep away Iran from nuclear to create world security. There is an attempt to distinguish between Britain (self) and Iran (others) based on culture and national identity between the two. In this context, it is understood that the possession of nuclear weapons by Iran with different identities is viewed by the Britain as a threat to international stability. Therefore, the Britain must then participate in the implementation of sanctions given against Iran which was re-appointed by agreement with the joint comprehensive plan of action.

The response provided by Britain represents the definition of foreign policy (Wilkenfeld et. al., 1980). According to Wilkenfeld et. al. (1980), foreign policy is an official action initiated by sovereign states in order to change or create conditions beyond the territorial boundaries of the country. In connection with Iran's nuclear deal, it is understandable that the involvement of Great Britain in the agreement is an attempt to make changes to the development and enrichment of nuclear facilities in Iran that could threaten international stability. David Cameron (The Guardian, 2015) argues that Iran's nuclear deal is a first step between the two countries to combat extremist Islamic movements and the reopening of the British embassy in Tehran. In an interview with Al-Arabiya, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Telegraph, 2015) argued "We know about the causes they support, the terrorist groups they have funded, the problems they've contributed in the region, and we say: 'Step one: we've got them away from a nuclear

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DOI: 10.5220/0010279100002309

In *Proceedings of Airlangga Conference on International Relations (ACIR 2018) - Politics, Economy, and Security in Changing Indo-Pacific Region*, pages 484-488

ISBN: 978-989-758-493-0

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weapon; step two is to now engage with them directly about these issues and seek changes in their behaviour on these issues too". Through these statements, it is clear that differences in identity are the cornerstone of British involvement in Iran's nuclear deal.

In addition, it is understandable that Great Britain defines Iran as a country with a strong Muslim culture and identity so that Great Britain assumes that there is funding from the terrorism's government by the Iranian government. Iran also suspects that such weapons could be abused by extremist movements. This so striking identity difference makes the writer analyze the involvement of Great Britain with the national identity level of analysis.

1.1 National Identity Level of Analysis in Foreign Policy Analysis

Before a further analyzing, first the author will explain the level of national identity analysis. Ken Booth (1990) argues that reality is part of cultural construction. The national identity formed within a country is the result of the construction of the existing culture in the country. Identity itself is a consequence of the interpretation that arises between self and other with the cultural basis. A country's view of other countries has implications for interaction patterns with diverse consequences and depends on the interpretation that arises. David Campbell (1999) argues that the interpretation of a country against the potential danger of other actors has an impact on a country's policy making. Culture is one of the factors of a country in the process of making foreign policy of a country so it is important to understand the culture in order to find patterns of foreign policy making of a country. In light of this cultural understanding, Campbell (1999) then defines foreign policy to be a process referring to a country's relations with other countries, differentiation practices, and a worldview in assessing the object of foreign policy-making as foreign. In this context, the foreign policy-making process is separate from the country's constitutional mechanisms since the policy-making resolutions are based on self-identity and the differences that usually lie with ethnic, racial, gender, and local values. Through the process of foreign policy making, a country seeks to construct, produce and maintain its political identity. Foreign policy making can also be understood as a defensive mechanism against outsiders that threatening the identity of a particular country.

Anne L. Clunan (2009) explains, when viewed from the perspective of constructivism, the national interest is not formed from the material factors, but the identity, norms, and other social cultural factors. Identity forms a social structure which then becomes the foundation of foreign policy making. Social norms constitute possible action by considers the consequences of social structures in the international system. A state acts on the distribution of identities,

norms, and practices that differ from one another. One constructivist approach is the aspirational constructivism that assumes that national identity is not only the result of the historical experience and habits of the predecessors of a society, but also the reason of the political elite to determine the national interest of a country (Clunan, 2009). Aspirational constructivism examines the current situation and history to explain the formation of foreign policy by the political elite. In this context, human beings are represented as agents in combining past and present perceptions that shape the national identity and national interests of a country.

Aspirational constructivism emphasizes the central role of aspirational logic in the making of national identity and national interests. The base of this perspective is the theory of social identity that explains that a country needs the motivation of positive distinctiveness of self-esteem from other countries so as to form a "us" group identity. In order to discover the distinctiveness, a state will make its history and experience a reference in its foreign policy determination. This is then known as aspirations related to national identity and national interest (Clunan, 2009). Assuming that humans need self-esteem, so does a country that wants to obtain self-esteem collectively from its external environment. In order to safeguard the self-esteem, a state may transform itself or another party. Aspiration is derived from the need to maintain a positive self-esteem or develop a negative self-esteem, depending on the country's interests. When associated with national identity, political elites try to improve or maintain collective self-esteem in the international system. A country's history of its purpose and status affects collective self-esteem and becomes the basis of aspiration in the present and the future.

1.2 Great Britain's Self Image

In order to understand the identity of Great Britain, it is important to understand how the country defines itself in the international system. Great Britain is often conspired to apply Western culture with a view of liberalism that highly regarded by itself. Nonetheless, the liberalism in question is not passive, but liberalism opposed to the emergence of Islamic extremism. British Prime Minister David Cameron believes that in order to safeguard Western ideology and values, Great Britain should implement muscular liberalism rather than passive tolerance of liberalism. Muscular liberalism itself refers to the notion of liberalism that focuses on the attitude of anti-terrorism (BBC, 2011). At a security conference in Munich, David Cameron argued that there would be a separate oversight of the Muslim group getting funding from the public in order to counter extremist movements. This attitude can not only be observed as a national self-image of Great Britain in promoting muscular liberalism, but also as an effort to eliminate radical movements of Islam that

they identified as threats. Through the policy of monitoring it is clear that there is a suspicion from Britain against the Islamic groups. In this context, the British interprets Islam as the others and considers it a source of threat.

As liberal country, the Great Britain so upholds freedom of expression, religious freedom, democracy, rule of law, racial equality and gender. The adoption of these norms became the basis of British society. Apart from that, there is also a practical aspect that the British political elite applied in establishing national identity in the Great Britain. Immigrants in Great Britain are educated to speak English and follow the history curriculum of the Great Britain even though they are not from there (The Guardian, 2011). It is aimed at forming cultural commonalities in society and to unify identity as a citizen of Great Britain. The main purpose of the education system in such a way is to build pride in local identity. Through community education it can also integrate commonalities such as Islam, Hinduism and Christianity as part of British society. Based on that view, the assumptions that arise in the British political elite over Iran's nuclear possession are countries with potential Islamic radical movements should not have access to nuclear weapons. There is a potential misuse of such weapons by radical Islamic movements that are interpreted as a threat to world peace.

When associated with national identity level of analysis, it can be observed that there is a differentiation practice undertaken by the Great Britain. This phenomenon can be explained through the perspective of aspirational constructivism which emphasizes the historical experience as well as the logic in the formation of identity in a country (Clunan, 2009). Through Cameron's statement regarding muscular liberalism, it is understandable that potential threats can arise from minorities so that community integration from the grass root level is essential. One of the efforts of immigrant integration to Western society can be observed through the British education system that has been designed in such way in order to establish a common understanding among the community. Surely there is a reason behind David Cameron's negative view of Islam. When examined from the historical aspect, radical movements in the name of Islam is the main actor behind the terrorism event in London that occurred on July 7, 2005. Through this historical experience, the British political elite view Islam as a potential threat to the state. Therefore, they then formulate policies aimed at integrating immigrant communities and counteracting terrorist movements. Referring to the aspirational constructivism approach, it is understandable that the history of terrorist attacks in London has become a separate foundation for Britain to apply policies that can be understood as a response to an identity perceived as a threat to the state. The formulation of national interests in this context emphasizes the

integration of society and the efforts to eliminate radical movements within the international system.

1.3 The Influence of National Identity on Great Britain Involvement in Iran's Nuclear Deal

The Great Britain's concern about nuclear possession by Iran is inseparable from its historical experience and different identity differences between the two sides. Iran's nuclear ownership is considered dangerous given the regime in Tehran has the potential to issue an aggressive foreign policy. The assumption that Iran is the world's major terrorist supporter country makes the Western countries' interpretation of the countries with the Islamic identity worsening. Terrorism itself often considerate as an Iranian instrument in achieving foreign policy interests (Levitt, 2012). In response to this, the Great Britain which also has a bad interpretation of Islam then imposed economic sanctions to suppress the movement of radical movements in Iran. The background of Iranian identity that does not apply the values of liberalism within its country also serves as a basis for poor perception of the Great Britain against Iran. Therefore, the Great Britain and other P5+1 countries strongly doubt nuclear possession and development in Iran. The proximity of the Iranian government to terrorism is considered to be linked to attacks in the United States, Germany, Great Britain, and France. When analyzed using an aspirational constructivism approach, the attacks that occurred in London on November 7 became the foundation of British rationality to establish the differentiation between British and Islamic identities. The Great Britain's intention in Iran's nuclear deal is to avoid the misuse of nuclear weapons by terrorists.

Following the conclusion of Iran's nuclear deal, the main focus of the Great Britain is to ensure the outcome of the deal is well implemented and nuclear weapons are not within Iran's reach. Through the official press website, the foreign secretary of the Great Britain believes that the Great Britain will continue to work with its international counterparts to encourage Iran to play a transparent and constructive role in regional affairs, especially in the struggle against Islamic extremism (gov.uk., 2015). Through that opinion, the Great Britain identified that radicalism movements in Iran were a threat. Access to these movements against nuclear certainly can threaten international stability. Therefore, the British government then intends to direct the Iran government in a transparent and constructive direction so that movements of Islamic radical groups can be prevented. The assistance provided by Britain to Iran was given as an attempt to change the external situation beyond the territorial boundaries of Great Britain. Such an effort can be assumed to be a form of representation of Wilkenfeld et. al's foreign policy definition which defines it as an official action

initiated by a sovereign state in order to alter or create conditions beyond the territorial boundaries of that country. In this context, it is understood that the object of foreign policy of the Great Britain is to alter the domestic situation of Iran which is interpreted as having a close connection with terrorism. The signing of the joint comprehensive plan of action is the first step for the Great Britain to construct, produce and preserve its political identity from the threat of terrorism. Such efforts can be achieved by the granting of limitation to the nuclear enrichment control program against civilian nuclear program.

Not only that, Cameron's mistrust of Iran was also conveyed through an interview. He argues that Great Britain should not be naive in view of the Iranian regime. Cameron also stressed that Iran is a country with poor infrastructure, enforcement of justice, and human rights. Therefore, Iran's nuclear deal is a good start to make the world safer (NBC, 2015). Through these interviews, it is clear that the differentiation practices underlying the Great Britain to participate in Iran's nuclear deal. The entire agreement is established on the basis of verification, accountability, and steps that can be taken in response to violations committed by Iran. A set of mechanisms are intended to construct external situations caused by threats of identity interpretation. The rationality of Great Britain to participate in Iran's nuclear deal was formed due to a threat consideration which was further justified by past experience when Great Britain was attacked by radical Islamic movements. These variables then turned into the aspirations of the British political elite to create an international system free from radical Islamic movements. Through, Iran's nuclear deal, the Great Britain has the opportunity to construct an interpreted situation that can pose a threat. The external situations' construction efforts are reflected in the pressure placed by the Great Britain on Iran in order to change its behavior. The pressure was aimed at forcing Iran to agree on a joint comprehensive plan of action agreement.

Through a prolonged process of diplomacy, the Great Britain succeeded in becoming a contributor in the process of adjusting Iranian identity to no longer be perceived as a threat. Michael Fallon, the Great Britain's Minister of Defense, believes the Iran's nuclear deal could help build mutual trust between the parties and prevent the nuclear race in the Middle East region (Dailymail, 2015). When analyzed using a constructivism approach, the agreement made by the Great Britain with Iran is a form of the Great Britain's efforts to maintain its self-esteem. There are two options for a country to maintain self esteem, i.e. changing its own identity or external environment. In this context, Great Britain already has a high self-esteem of its values in view of the P5 + 1 countries applying relatively similar values to the Great Britain. The similarity of view makes the P5+1 countries identify Iran as a threat. Therefore, the five countries have the intention to make joint comprehensive plan

of action in order to change the external party that is Iran. Through the agreement, these countries are working to change Iran's internal situation by granting the IAEA access to monitor Iran's nuclear development. The change must also have an impact on self-esteem. With external pressure, Iran was forced to approve the agreement and change its internal situation to fit the values adopted by the P5+1 countries. Adjustments made by Iran can have implications for the improved relations of Great Britain with Iran, as Iran is no longer identified as a source of threat. In addition, the appointment of economic and financial sanctions represents the great possibility given to Iran in determining a positive policy in the Middle East region. Full implementation and Iran's compliance with inspection and verification is the most effective way to stop Iran's military nuclear program in order to create regional security.

2 CONCLUSION

Based on the above explanations, the authors conclude that the national identity of Great Britain is closely related to Western culture and the view of liberalism becomes its own impetus in the process of foreign policy making to participate in Iran's nuclear deal. It should be emphasized that the values held by the Great Britain have their own distinction. Liberalism emphasized by the Great Britain is a muscular liberalism oriented to the values of anti-terrorism and not a passive tolerant. Through this understanding, the Great Britain established a policy to provide oversight of public funding inputs to Muslim groups in order to prevent the movement of extremist Islam. Through this policy, it is clear that the interpretation of the elite of the Great Britain against Islam in view of the potential threat of Islamic identity. Referring to the perspective of aspirational constructivism, a process of foreign policy-making is the result of rationalizing political elites based on history and current situation. When analyzed using this approach, the involvement of Great Britain in Iran's nuclear deal is the result of a consideration of the history of terrorism attacks in London on July 7, 2015 and the fact that Iran is the largest fund-raising country for the terrorist movement. Through such engagement, Great Britain can shape the domestic situation in Iran to no longer be a threat. In this context, it can be understood that the Great Britain interpreted the identity of Islam as the others and considered it a source of threat. The Great Britain's intention in Iran's nuclear deal is to avoid the misuse of nuclear weapons by terrorists given the potential for the emergence of radical movements with Islamic identity. Therefore, the Great Britain must respond to its nuclear ownership to prevent the worst-case scenario. This interpretation of identity to Iran

becomes the base of foreign policy making for the Great Britain to participate in Iran's nuclear deal.

The achievement of Iran's nuclear deal became an opportunity for Great Britain to construct, manufacture and preserve its political identity from the threat of terrorism. The main focus of the Great Britain after the signing of Iran's nuclear deal is to ensure that the agreement is well implemented and nuclear weapons are no longer within Iran's reach. The background of Iranian identity that doesn't apply the values of liberalism in its government is also a determinant factor of the involvement of the Great Britain. The Great Britain has a bad perception of Iran given the condition of the domestic regime in the country that not in line with Western values so the potential for nuclear weapons misuse is assumed higher. In addition, the concept of a country's self-esteem can also be used to explain the involvement of Great Britain in the agreement. The involvement of Great Britain in Iran's nuclear deal may be interpreted as an attempt to maintain its self-esteem. There are two options for a country to maintain self esteem, i.e. change its identity or change its external environment. In the context of Iran's nuclear deal, the Great Britain seeks to change Iran over the self-esteem referring that the understanding between Great Britain and the P5 + 1 countries are quite high. The author argues that Iran's nuclear deal could be the beginning of a good relationship between Britain and Iran. After being interrupted, the relationship between the two can be re-established with the identity construction efforts undertaken by the Great Britain and other P5 + 1 countries. Referring to the identity of Great Britain, the main purpose of foreign policy of the Great Britain by joining the Iran nuclear deal is because of the government of the Great Britain directed the Iranian government in a transparent and constructive direction so that movements of Islamic radical groups can be prevented.

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