

# The Influence of National Identity on Israel's Refusal Policy on Iran Nuclear Deal

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**Abstract:** On 2015, Iran has reached an agreement with the European Union and the P5+1 (permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) on Iran's nuclear program. In this deal, Iran is required to reduce its nuclear program capability instead of sanctions imposed against Iran will be gradually lifted. But the deal was rejected by one of Iran's arch-enemies in the region, Israel. Israel suspects that the deal could be exploited by Iran to enlarge its nuclear weapons capabilities. The author uses the National Identity LoA to examine why Israel rejected the agreement, and also through the perspective of structural constructivism to find out more in the identity relation between Israel and Iran, as well as how that identity influenced Israel's refusal of the Iran nuclear deal.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

After a deadlock for 13 years, finally in 2015 emerging a new history of Iran's nuclear program that has been much in the spotlight of the world. On April 2, 2015, an agreement was reached with the European Union and the P5+1 group, the UN Security Council member states (United States, Britain, France, China and Russia) plus Germany with Iran taking place at the Beau-Rivage Hotel Palace in the city of Lausanne, Switzerland (BBC News 2015; Borger and Lewis 2015). This diplomatic agreement was reached after 18 months of intensive talks, and then peaked in a period of eight days of talks held almost continuously through the night, and finally reached an agreement on April 2 night that continued into the early hours (Borger and Lewis 2015). Under the deal, Iran pledged to drastically reduce its nuclear capacity as a form of retaliation for the gradual sanctions imposed on Iran.

In a joint statement after the talks, top European Union diplomat Federica Mogherini and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (in Borger and Lewis 2015) praised the agreement, which they called a 'decisive step' after a long negotiation. Zarif later added that the agreement indicates that Iran's nuclear program is particularly peaceful, and has and will always remain particularly peaceful, while on the other hand it does not impede Iran's interest in meeting the needs of nuclear energy aimed at the

needs of its citizens. Based on the factsheet issued by the United States after the negotiations which were later launched by BBC News (2015), the outlines of the agreement's outcome include: 1. Iran will reduce its uranium enrichment capability by two-thirds of its current capability and inventory low uranium levels. 2.) The uranium add-on machine that is no longer in use will be stored and monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). 3.) All Iranian nuclear facilities will be regularly inspected by the IAEA. 4.) Iran will redesign the heavy water reactor in Arak so that the reactor is unable to produce plutonium bombs. 5.) Sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe on Iran will be gradually lifted but may be re-imposed if Iran does not comply with existing agreements.

Nevertheless, it turns out that a deal that many received this positive response is also inseparable from the various rejections. One of the refusals came from Israel as a close ally of the United States as well as Iran's enemies. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even called the deal a "historic mistake" (Kershner 2015). Furthermore, Netanyahu mentioned that Israel would not be bound by the resulting agreement. Netanyahu sees that the Iran Nuclear Deal's deal will sharpen regional tensions and also give Iran plenty of time to produce bombs in large quantities. Netanyahu told Obama that the treaty would increase the danger because Iran would produce a nuclear weapon whether it waits for 10 to 15 years according to the limitations set forth in the

agreement or by violating the agreement itself (Kershner 2015). Even quoted by The Times of Israel (2015), Netanyahu referred to Iran as a 'terrorist regime' and the existing accord provides incentives for Iran to increase its nuclear weapons power, rather than changing Iran's policy so far. The agreement also further strengthens Iran's power to destroy Israel.

## 2 NATIONAL IDENTITY LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

In explaining the issue of Israel's rejection of the Iran Nuclear Deal agreement, the authors chose to use the National Identity Level of Analysis (LoA). The author set out from the argument of Dharmaputra (2017) that state, culture plays an important role in any case because all human activities will be the products and components of the culture. While the national identity itself is one of the basic concepts contained in the culture. National identity can play an important role in the foreign policy of a country because it can differentiate one country from another. The national identity can determine the answers to emerging questions such as "who are 'we'?", "What do 'we' do" and "who are 'they'?" (Hudson 2007 in Dharmaputra 2017). Simply understood that the national identity can then determine the direction of a country's foreign policy.

Radityo Dharmaputra (2017) then also adds that the main values of the national identity LoA are related to the relationship between "self" and "other". Therefore, Campbell (1990) adds that meaning and identity are always the result of "self" and "other" arising from interpretation, and not as a product that reveals the exclusive sides of an existing identity. When valuable forms and content of domains depend on specific historical contexts, it can then be understood that identity in the world of global politics is the result of the exclusive practice of various resistant elements that seek to secure the identity contained in a country connected with the dangerous discourse identified and coming from outside the country (Campbell 1990). Then there are two views related to identity relation with foreign policy. First is the opinion of Neack (2008) that the cultural factors in a country's domestic can establish a national identity, and which then direct the foreign policy of a country. Second is the opinion of Clunan (2009) that the national identity and culture of a country is formed based on the interpretation of other countries.

According to Hudson (1990), there are several assumptions underlying the national identity LoA. The first is that a country's decision-making is influenced by the country's culture and historical experience. Second, the cultural influence on the foreign policy of a country is not directly, but through the intermediaries of the actors who play a role in the foreign policy making of the country. Third, the analysis of culture is also useful in predicting responses most likely to be taken by a country in the face of certain situations. Because the identity and culture of a country tend to be permanent, the predictive accuracy produced tends to be high if the prediction uses cultural analysis and identity.

National identity LoA is closely related to the perspective of constructivism. This perspective has basic principles, among others: (1) the structure of the human set is determined chiefly by shared ideas, not the material forces (2) the identity and interests of the actors of international relations are constructed by shared ideas rather than by circumstances (Wendt 1999). Then Katzenstein (1996) also adds that ideational factors in constructivism such as cultural roles as a means of social mobilization or generating threat perceptions are the best forms of explaining patterns of friendship or hostility among nations.

In the the national identity LoA perspective that the author will use to analyze this case is the structural constructivism initiated by Alexander Wendt. Wendt (1999) then proposed several premises supporting the perspectives which he initiated, which was then summarized by Dharmaputra (2017). First, because the state dominates subjectivity in the politics of the world, the state becomes the main unit of analysis. Both international structures are formed based on interaction between subjects, not material aspects. Third, that the identity of the state is constructed by the social structure, not something given.

Furthermore, Wendt (1999) believes that there exists an anarchic world structure, marked by the absence of centralist authority. The structure of anarchy will dominate the system, and then there are three examples of the dominant role of anarchic systems: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian structures (Wight 1991 in Wendt 1999). Then Wendt (1999) adds that self-help in Hobbesian structures is the best way for a country to get out of the threat it faces. In this paper the author will attempt to explain whether it is true then that Israel's national identity has a significant effect on Israel's refusal of an Iran deal seen from the perspective of structural

constructivism, or indeed it does not play an important role in Israel's rejection.

### **3 THE INFLUENCES OF IDENTITY ON ISRAEL'S REFUSAL ON IRAN DEAL**

When Israel was founded nearly seven decades ago, the Declaration of Independence clearly states the new state as a Jewish state. But the document also perpetuates democracy as a core principle, ensuring "the full equality of social and political rights for all its inhabitants" (Rudoren 2014). Submission of a draft law stating that Israel is a Jewish state has actually been going on for a long time. The same bill was first proposed in 2011 and then submitted again in 2015 (Harkov 2017). However, it was only in May 2017 that the bill was finally accepted by the Knesset board.

The bill, which will also be ratified as the basic constitution of the state of Israel, also states that Israel is a nation state of all Jews. If the draft law is to be passed, then all laws applicable in Israel must be interpreted in accordance with the basic values of Jewish belief (Harkov 2017). Not only that, the bill that will validate Israel as a Jewish state also includes several important issues, such as national anthem and symbols as well as national flags. This includes the controversial issue of Hebrew as the official language, while Arabic has a special status and it is still required that all government services be available in Arabic. The bill also calls for the government to work to strengthen relations between the state of Israel and the Jewish diaspora. So the bill is a form of self-determination aspiration based on Jewish cultural and historical traditions (Harkov 2017).

The Jewish identity that was attempted to affirm through the bill agrees with what Susan Wright (1998) has said that culture is a process of contestation to form meaning. In this case, the existence of a draft law is able to preserve Jewish cultural and historical traditions, thus later affirming that Israel is a Jewish state, and the identity possessed by the Israelis is a Jewish identity. Then, of course, will raise the question of whether this Jewish identity turned out to have negative sentiments that then impact on Benjamin Netanyahu's refusal of the Iran nuclear deal. So then in this section the author will explain whether Jewish identity influences Benjamin Netanyahu's refusal of the Iran nuclear deal.

As Hudson (1990) has pointed out in the previous section, there are some points that serve as the basic assumptions of the national identity level of analysis. The first is that a country's decision-making is influenced by the country's culture and historical experience. Second, the cultural influence on the foreign policy of a country is not directly, but through the intermediaries of the actors who play a role in the foreign policy making of the country. Third, the analysis of culture is also useful in predicting responses most likely to be taken by a country in the face of certain situations. Because the identity and culture of a country tend to be permanent, the predictive accuracy produced tends to be high if the prediction uses cultural analysis and identity. Then the author will verify whether these basic assumptions are true.

Regarding the first point, it must be assessed whether later rejection made by Benjamin Netanyahu is based on cultural influences and historical experiences of the past. If later the author interprets textually Benjamin Netanyahu's official statement issued after the achievement of the Iran nuclear deal agreement released by The Times of Israel (2015), in which there is not explicitly contained aspects of culture that then impact on Netanyahu's refusal. The complete statement issued by Netanyahu does not show at all that there are elements of Jewish culture which then encourage rejection. Although there were later denunciations of Netanyahu against the burning of American and Israeli flags followed by the Iranian President four days before Netanyahu issued a statement. However, it is hard to say that the Israeli flag incineration then provoked Israel's rejection of the agreement. Because just before the Iranian nuclear deal talks reached an agreement, a few months earlier Israel had criticized the talks because it seemed to be hidden from Israel (Pileggi 2015).

It goes on to the second point that states the cultural influence on a country's foreign policy is not directly, but through the intermediary of actors who play a role in the country's foreign policy making (Hudson 1990). It can then be understood that from that point, subjects who participate in foreign policy making are directly affected by culture in taking their country's foreign policy. So then in connection with the case of Israel's refusal of the Iran nuclear deal, it should be examined how the influence of Jewish culture influenced the statement issued by Netanyahu. In fact, it is difficult to find a direct and clear correlation that Jewish culture influenced Netanyahu in his rejection statement. Consequently if in the first and second points there

is no clear answer to how the Jewish identity of Netanyahu affects Israel's rejection, then the third assumption is not certain that then the predictions produced have high accuracy.

If then the basic assumptions of the national identity level of analysis are not able to be strongly proven, then the question arises whether this level of national identity analysis is relevant in analyzing Israel's rejection of the Iran nuclear deal. However, later the writer chose not to rush to argue that national identity has no influence on Israel's refusal. As mentioned earlier, the author will use the perspective of structural constructivism initiated by Wendt (1999) to examine more in this case, and the use of this perspective in analyzing this case will be the authors describe in the next section.

#### **4 STRUCTURAL CONSTRUCTIVISM ANALYSIS ON THE INFLUENCE OF ISRAEL'S IDENTITY IN REFUSING IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL**

In contrast to the materialist views that have been circulating in the thought of the study of International Relations, constructivism has the hypothesis that the structure of the human set is chiefly more due to cultural influences than the material phenomenon (Wendt 1999). Constructivism also fights the rationalist view that is also widely circulated in the study of International Relations, stating that the structure not only regulates behavior but also constructs identity and interests. But that does not mean then constructivism no longer regards the material strength and role of the person as an intentional actor, but in this case there is a shift that shared ideas embedded in material and culture such as identity and interests are the most likely conditions in explaining the power and interests.

Constructivists hold that the concept of identity plays an important role in interpersonal and international interaction. Wendt (1999) treats identity as the possession of every actor that generates motivational and behavioral character, and is rooted in the self-understanding of each actor. But identity is not as simple as subjective quality or unit level, simply by self-understanding depending on the other side and how the other side presents that understanding. However, the quality of identity is also seen from the interaction between the subjects

or systemic and identity construction is also determined by internal and external structures. Given that identity is not a single phenomenon that is easily affected by the general definition, then Wendt (1999) emphasizes that there are four types of identities that will further the authors discuss below.

The first is a corporate or personal identity formed through self-organizing and a homeostatic structure that distinguishes "self" with "other" (Wendt 1999). The construction of this personal identity involves a sense of 'I' or when it is associated with the state then a sense of 'We' arises, and through the work of consciousness and memory which then form a common narrative of "ourselves". However, this type of first identity is inseparable from outside influences in constructing personal identity. The second is the type identity that lies in the personal identity and refers to the social category or labels that the person owns based on some of the characteristics of that person. Fearon (1997 in Wendt 1999) mentions that these characteristics include appearance, behavior, values, knowledge, experience, historical similarities, and others. The third is the identity role that asserts that personal identity can not be viewed only from "self", but also the role identity can only be achieved by taking a "self" position in the social structure and observing the behavioral norms of "self" against the "other" identity contrary to "self". The fourth is the identity of the collective which has a confusion in distinguishing "self" with the "other", because "self" can be categorized as "other" and even the two can join to create a single entity (Wendt 1999).

To find out how then the level of identity analysis plays an important role in Israel's rejection of the Iran nuclear deal, it must first be understood also the history of relations between Israel and Iran. At the beginning of the emergence of the state of Israel, the country has a good relationship with Iran. This is because at the very beginning of Israel's emergence it has come under siege and pressure from Arab countries in the surrounding environment which makes it necessary to forge alliances with non-Arab forces in the Middle East, such as Turkey, Christian Lebanon and Iran (Latschan 2014). On the other hand in the 1950s, Iran also suspected the rise of Arab nationalism. The suspicion grew when the Shah's regime, which was heavily influenced by the United States, came to power. Iran also considers Israel which is also supported by the United States as a good geopolitical counterweight in the face of Arab countries. Israel and Iran then have a good relationship. Israel sends agricultural experts,



transfers technical knowledge, and also trains Iranian armed forces. In return, Israel, which is in desperate need of oil, is getting crude supplies from Iran. Even Henner Fürtig (in Latschan 2014) mentions that in the late 1970s an 80 percent Israeli oil inventory was supplied by Iran.

However, the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran ended the good relationship between the two countries (Latschan 2014). The spiritual leader of the new regime, Ayatollah Khomeini, strongly criticized Israel for occupying the Palestinian territories. Once he took power, he canceled all agreements with Israel. When Israel intervened in the Lebanese civil war and moved to southern Lebanon in 1982, Khomeini sent Iranian Revolutionary Guard troops to Beirut to support local Shiite militias. To this day, the emerging Hizbullah militant group was then regarded as an arm of Iran in Lebanon (Latschan 2014).

Although the Israeli-Iranian relationship is fractured, at the same time the two countries are still engaged in secret cooperation, triggered by the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980 (Latschan 2014). Israel, felt threatened by Saddam Hussein's regime, then sided with Iran. According to a study conducted by Tel Aviv's National Security Investigation Institute (INSS) (in Latschan 2014), Israel supplied \$ 500 million worth of weapons to Iran during the three-year Iran-Iraq war. Instead, Iranian intelligence agencies then provided valuable information to the Israeli air force that bombed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981. When in 1986 the Iran-Contra scandal broke out in the United States when senior US officials ordered the sale of thousands of anti-tank missiles and anti-aircraft to Tehran and used the proceeds from the sale of the weapons to fund the Contra rebels in Nicaragua, Israel is believed to also be significantly involved in the deal (Latschan 2014).

After the scandal and the Iran-Iraq war completely ended in 1988, relations between Israel and Iran were finally cut off. Iraq was weakened, and eventually further weakened by the US-led Desert Storm Operation three years later (Latschan 2014). Iran no longer has any reason to maintain cooperation with Israel. In addition, Iran began to focus on the issue of Palestine. Iran used to bring the issue of Palestine out of the Arab context and move it into the Islamic context. Fürtig (in Latschan 2014) argues that Iran's move by drawing the Palestinian issue out of the Arab context will certainly be the focus of all Muslims, not just Arabs. So then Iran hopes to be recognized leadership competence in the Islamic world. Israel-Iran relations are also often

heated up because of statements often issued by the presidents of Iran, especially during the leadership of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad has often criticized Israel, especially regarding Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. He even issued a statement during a speech to the UN General Assembly that he did not believe in the Holocaust and also said that Israel would disappear (Charbonneau 2012). Similarly, Israel's attitude denounced Iran's nuclear and actively participated in efforts to change the regime in Iran (Latschan 2014).

On the other hand, the poor Israeli-Iran relations are also supported by Iran's support of several military groups who become enemies of Israel, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. Rabinovich (2015) mentions that the military capabilities of Hizbullah and Hamas while fighting with Israel are a product of Iran's regional ambitions and policies. Support for Hezbollah in Lebanese politics as well as of course Hamas in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict clearly demonstrates Iran's interests. The effect is surely to present Iran geographically located on the outskirts of the Middle East region to the core areas of the Mediterranean as well as the northern and southern sides of Israel (Rabinovich 2015).

One of the important elements that the author of this analysis is Netanyahu statement in the official statement of his rejection of Iran nuclear deal. In the statement, Netanyahu referred to Iran as a 'terrorist regime' (The Times of Israel 2015). Netanyahu did not once just label Iran as a terrorist regime. As he appreciated Trump's plan to pull the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal, he also called Iran the "world's foremost terrorist regime" (Netanyahu 2017). But there is no clear explanation as to why Netanyahu has repeatedly referred to Iran as a 'terrorist regime'.

In relation to the type of identity categorized by Wendt (1999) and described earlier, the labeling of Iran as a terrorist regime by Netanyahu relates to the classification of type identities. Wendt (1999) calls the identity of type lies in the personal identity (which in this case the state is equated with the person), and it is intrinsic to the actor. This intrinsic property refers to the social categories or labels that the individual possesses based on some of the characteristics of the person, one of which is behavior (Fearon 1997 in Wendt 1999). The author argue that this is inseparable from Iran's foreign policy behavior which is hostile to Israel and supports Hezbollah and Hamas that Israel considers to be terrorist and threaten Israel. Such Iranian behavior then prompted Israel to label Iran as a

'terrorist regime' and to construct Iran as a threat to Israel.

In connection with Israel's refusal of the Iran nuclear deal, the author will start from Wendt's (1999) analysis of three basic values in Hobbesian anarchy culture that can help actors in shaping their interests. The first is to construct enmity with each other. The second is the term construction. The third is within the conceptual framework of the symbiosis of hostility. At this time, the author will analyze how Israel's refusal is based on a symbiosis of hostility between Iran and Israel. In the Hobbesian international system, hostility is something constructed. The entity of a state depends on the existence of the other party. In this case, the self pushes the other to take the enemy's identity so that then "self" can maintain its identity to be hostile to the "other". This is what happened when after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran ran a foreign policy hostile to Israel (although there was some secret cooperation between the two, especially during the Iran-Iraq War as described above). Therefore, Iran which in this case positions as self directly makes Israel a position as the other as its enemy, and this is similar to Soviet-Soviet hostilities in the Cold War (Wendt 1999). Israel's rejection of the agreement is reasonable as Wendt (1999) says that as an enemy, "other" is an actor who does not recognize the right of self as an autonomous actor and will not reduce the level of violence against "self". In this case Israel as the "other" did not diminish his suspicion of Iran as a form of self-help, so Israel later refused the deal.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The Iran nuclear deal that gets a positive response from various parties, in fact still get rejection from Israel as the arch enemy of Iran so far. In an attempt to analyze how Jewish identity that has been closely associated with Israel affects the rejection, the author do not get a single explanation that can answer why there is rejection. Therefore, the author uses the perspective of structural constructivism in answering this problem. The author searches the dynamics of Israeli-Iran relations before determining the identity of Israel and also Iran, so it is found that Israeli identity labeled Iran as a 'terrorist regime' due to Iran's hostile behavior towards Israel and sponsoring groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Through an analysis of Hobbesian culture, it is found that Israel refused the agreement also encouraged the attitude of Israel that did not reduce

its suspicion of Iran as a self-help form from Israel itself.

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