

Iran Nuclear Deal: The Role of Iranian Media and Public Opinion

R. Dicky Johar Pribadi and Annisa Pratamasari

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga

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Abstract: Level of analysis is one of the strategies that offered in the research methodologies to analyze the phenomenons in International Relations, including the study of foreign policy analysis. Then, one of some level of analysis is the role of media and public opinion. In this article, the author tries to apply the level of analysis with the role of media and public opinion to analyze Iran's foreign policy under Hassan Rouhani's regime regarding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or Nuclear Deal. Nuclear installation in Iran itself has been accused by international, especially Western countries, as unsafe and non-transparent development. Iran then disclaimed and revealed that the development of nuclear in Iran is for peaceful purpose or not for nuclear weapons. As the result, there is so many international economic sanctions against Iran which then causing the domestic economic to be weak. Public opinion is then shaped by the mass media to encourage Rouhani's regime to struggle for nuclear agreement internationally. Thus, the sanctions would be lifted soon. Rouhani itself succeed to take a decision on Nuclear Iran Deal in order to keep the constituents and his team supporters.

1 INTRODUCTION

In essence, foreign policy analysis is one of the major studies in International Relations. To understand foreign policy, the author borrowed Deborah Gerner's understanding in his article entitled *The Evolution of Foreign Policy Analysis*. According to Gerner (1995: 18), foreign policy is "the intentions, statements, and actions of actor-often, but not always, a state-directed toward the external world and the response of these actors to these intentions, statements, and actions". Thus, it can be seen that the intentions, statements, and actions that policymakers have made in response to the external world are the characteristics of foreign policy. In the study of foreign policy analysis itself, the process of foreign policy making and the factors that influence it become a central focus of discussion. So that the coverage of foreign policy discussion is easy to be analysed and not overlapping, one of the methodology strategy is through Level of Analysis or level of analysis (Sulistyo, 2016). In this article, the author describes about the level of mass media analysis and public opinion to clarify its use in foreign policy analysis. In addition, the authors will also analyse a case study of Iran's foreign policy related to Iran's Nuclear Framework Agreement or better known as

Iran's Nuclear Deal policy under the Hassan Rouhani regime using the level of analysis of the role of media and public opinion.

2 THE DYNAMICS OF IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEAL

The draft of nuclear development in Iran was originally formed in the 1950s. Precisely in November 1967, Iran built its first nuclear reactor under the US Atoms for Peace program (Arms Control, 2016). United States support is also increasingly visible when the superpower also supplies a reactor with a power of five megawatts and uranium supply is high enough to 93 percent for its operation. Iran's nuclear installation is then considered for the development of energy-based advanced technological advances. Iran's own president, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlevi, said that the target of nuclear capacity reaching up to 23,000 MWe is aimed at liberating oil and natural gas in the framework of export demand (World Nuclear, 2016). The nuclear installation in Iran then attracts attention from multinational companies, such as Siemens KWU and Framatome, to support the construction of nuclear power plants in the Persian Gulf region. Next, the Iranian parliament ratified the

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in February 1970 (Arms Control, 2016). Through this nuclear non-proliferation treaty itself, Iran is committed to using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes or not to use it to develop nuclear weapons possession. But in early 1978, nuclear development in Iran had slowed down as the Shah Pahlavi regime began to lose its power in the Iranian government. In 1979, there was an Iranian Revolution which caused Iran and US relations to stretch. Even during the Iranian Revolution, there were 52 US diplomats held hostage and only released after 444 days (Kerr, 2016: 152). As a result, the United States sanctioned and severed its diplomatic ties with Iran. This ultimately led to the development of nuclear in Iran had slowed down.

Furthermore, Iran's nuclear development continued in the 1990s precisely in the era of the Rafsanjani regime that had worked with China and Russia (World Nuclear, 2016). However, the cooperation did not last long. In fact, China's nuclear development cooperation was canceled before construction began. Some sentiments from the West then emerged when Iran was considered to be developing its nuclear technology in secret and unsafe environment. Moreover, United States also added Iran to the list of state sponsors of terrorism (Arms Control, 2016). In later years, some Western countries were reluctant to work with Iran on unsafe nuclear development charges and the United States' assumption that the country is one of the axes of the world's crime (White House, 2016). The United States alone had issued the Iran Sanctions Act to cut US investment exceeding 20 million dollars in the Iranian energy sector. Ultimately, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is encouraged to step in for inspection and further research on how Iran's nuclear technology is developed. The IAEA forced Iran to stop any enrichment and nuclear development process as long as Iran has not provided any transparency regarding the material it uses (Arms Control, 2015). In 2006, Iran announced the development of nuclear enrichment with uranium. Western countries, including permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UN), are increasingly concerned about Iran's nuclear development. The United States in particular, considers that Iran is developing nuclear weapons because Iran has used material of uranium element is high enough and pure plutonium (White House, 2016). As a result, countries in the UN Security Council and Germany and the EU propose establishing a framework agreement for Iran in order

to stop the enrichment program for a given period of time.

The agreement between the five major countries with Germany and the European Union (P5 + 1) and Iran was reached in the Iran Nuclear Framework Agreement under the era of the Hassan Rouhani regime which is considered a bit more cooperative with the West, precisely in July 2015. The agreement framework, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is expected to ensure Iran's nuclear program fundamental shift toward the development of peaceful nuclear technology (Medium, 2015). The countries involved in JCPOA are also optimistic that the implementation of this agreement can positively contribute to regional and international peace and security. In the JCPOA itself, it is mentioned that Iran's uranium reserves will be trimmed 98 percent in the next 15 years and will not produce plutonium (Antara news, 2015). Thus, it should hinder Iran pursue for the latest technology for nuclear weapons. The sanctions given by the United Nations, the United States and the European Union will eventually lifted. The BBC (2016) itself reported that some of the sanctions imposed on Iran have paralyze Iran's economy of more than 160 million poundsterling only in oil revenues since 2012. Through this Iranian Nuclear Treaty Framework, Iran also able to re-sell its oil into the international market.

3 MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

Level of analysis often cited in a social scientific research as a multilayered structure in a system. One of the academics of International Relations, Barry Buzan, defines the level of analysis as a set of interacting units within a structure (Buzan, 1995: 202). The level of analysis in a social scientific study or International Relations Science is actually not an obligation. However, the level of analysis is believed to facilitate the choice of theory in analysing the case studies that will be examined. In addition, the level of analysis is also considered to be able to make research more focused on the scope of the discussion or its explanandum and make a more comprehensive analysis (Sulistyo, 2016). Many academics of International Relations are classifying different levels of analysis. Just like David Singer (1961: 80-82), which divides the level of analysis into two, namely the international system and the

national state. Unlike Singer, Neack (2008 in Dharmaputra, 2016) classifies the broader level of analysis, ie individual, system, and state.

In Neack argument of analysis, state level of analysis includes domestic institutions, culture, as well as public opinion and the media. Public opinion and media are considered to be one of the most important levels of analysis and are not spared in analyzing foreign policy. Public opinion itself is an external attitude of the community that is conveyed and then formed due to an issue that is chained by the media (Ida, 2016). In relation to foreign policy making, there is a debate between whether public opinion can be influential in the process of foreign policy-making or just being limited to "consumers" who enjoy the outcome of decisions by political elites. Gabriel Almond (1950 in Holsti, 1992: 442) himself mentions that the public actually tends to be indifferent to foreign policy and is considered "volatile" in response to international phenomena. This is due to the lack of structure and content that the public understands. As a result, Almond (1950, in Holsti, 1992: 442) believes that public opinion has little influence in directing foreign policy. This Almond statement later also relates to David Brul  s top-down approach and Alex Mintz (in Dharmaputra, 2016). According to them, there are three classes of public interest and interest in public opinion and policy. First, public who do not understand the issues and social phenomena widely. Second, attentive public interested but not too much influence in the policy making process. Finally, the public elite is interested and has enough information to influence public opinion making and government policy. In this case, the government can follow the willingness of public opinion to form foreign policy or even vice versa.

Furthermore, public opinion channelled through the media is also considered capable of becoming one of the influence of foreign policy making. However, there is also debate that the media is only able to continue the policy of the government through its publicity. This itself can be because the media is not 100 percent independent or is actually controlled by a certain political elite. Robinson (2002: 26) in his book *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy, and Intervention* later believes that media only influences when government policy is unclear. As a result, the media can framing certain issues to shape public opinion which then generates a sphere of concession in assisting the formation of foreign policy. Thus, the mass media can be viewed as a guide or interpreter

of various uncertainties or alternatives (McQuail, 2000 in Subiakto & Ida, 2015: 131).

4 MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION AND THE IRAN DEAL

Iran is an Islamic republic located in the Persian Gulf. Before becoming a republic itself, Iran was a monarchy held by an authoritarian monarch and had a track record as a country with limited freedom of expression (Kerr 2016: 152). But after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran gave an opportunity for its people to be more flexible in their opinion and politics in the government even closer with the West. Now, Iran ruled by a President named Hassan Rouhani who is rumored to be more open to the West. With regard to Iran's own Nuclear Treaty Framework, the Iranian people had previously hoped that the president elected since 2013 would be able to change his country's conditions for the better, especially in the economic field. When Rouhani elected as Iran's presidential candidate in 2013, he gave a pledge to the wider chance for Iranians to be elected to the seat of government power. Rouhani (Middleeasteye, 2015) then came to power and began to show his steps to the Iranian society in order to solve Iran's economic problems and provide its supporters (grassroots) with social freedom. On the issue of Iran's own domestic economy, such as high unemployment issues is widely perceived to have become public opinion capable of influencing policy-making in the era of the Rouhani regime. To achieve these objectives, Rouhani further seeks to end the sanctions imposed by the United Nations, the European Union and other Western countries on Iran's nuclear development that is run to date (Middleeasteye, 2015). The public also considers that the sanctions imposed on Iran have been detrimental to the domestic, given that it is capable of influencing international cooperation especially with the major powers such as China, the United States, France, Germany and other EU countries. In the end, the international world, especially the Western countries, chose to terminate its aid, trade, and foreign investment to Iran because of its response or concern over Iran's unsafe nuclear development allegations. Yet when looking at the abundant wealth of petroleum resources, Iran has a great opportunity to conduct trade cooperation with the wider international world. Thus, the public believes that Iran's economic movements are consequently slower and governments abandoned

with the big powers can not meet the needs of their people, including in terms of job provision.

Looking at the above phenomenon, the author believes that the public has been able to convey their opinions through the media, so it can be an issue or an important problem at the domestic level. The issue of weakening the economy has prompted the Hassan Rouhani regime to negotiate further with the major powers in the UN Security Council, the P5 + 1 with Germany and the European Union, over nuclear development in the country that is accused of being one of the nuclear weapons plans. Looking back at the two approaches of David Brulé and Alex Mintz (in Dharmaputra, 2016), the authors see that the public opinion formed is categorized as a case study of a bottom-up approach. This is because Hassan Rouhani, who is basically the president or leader of Iran, follows the will of the masses. In contrast to the bottom-up approach, the top-down approach itself is seen in terms of the popular consensus made by the elite function by reviewing national interests and without regard to public opinion. The second approach is certainly not suitable for analyzing case studies that occurred in Iran.

The public opinion response related to Iran's own nuclear development has been studied by the University of Tehran Center for Public Opinion Research (UTCPOR) in 2014 and previously by research organizations related to public opinion, such as Iran Poll.com, The Program for Public Consultation (PPC), and The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM). In 2014 alone, UTCPOR conducts surveys to Iranians both living in Iran and outside Iran with the question "How important is your opinion on Iran's nuclear development program?" (Gallagher, et al., 2015: 8). As a result, four out of five, or rather 83%, Iranian society responded that the nuclear development program is so important to the country. While 11% more, stated that Iran's nuclear development is not so important. Research related to public response to Iran's nuclear development is actually also done by organizations and the results were obtained an average of 80% of Iranians consider it important. Furthermore, UTCPOR is also informed that the majority of Iranians, ie 73%, believe that the development of nuclear technology in the country is aimed purely for peace (Gallagher, et al., 2015: 8). They believe that nuclear developed in Iran alone can help Iran's energy and medical needs. In addition, public opinion formed in Iran also shows that Iranians are optimistic that nuclear development could improve Iran's economic, cultural, social, and military or security progress.

As the authors wrote earlier, the majority of Iranians themselves are encouraging the Hassan Rouhani regime to hold meetings with the major powers, including P5 + 1, to discuss Iran's related nuclear development and negotiate the lifting of sanctions. In the end, Iran agreed on the outcome of its negotiations with the countries in an Iranian Nuclear Framework Agreement which is also supported by Iranian society. The proof, as many as 57% of Iranians support their foreign policy to pursue a Swiss based agreement (Lausanne) Understanding which became the forerunner of the Iran Nuclear Framework Agreement with the P5 + 1 countries (Gallagher, et al., 2015: 12-13.) Only 15% of Iranians oppose and 28% others choose to follow government policy or do not know the framework of the agreement. For Iranians who support their own accord, they believe that Iran can increase its cooperation with the P5 + 1 countries in building the latest nuclear reactor and benefiting its domestic economy. In addition, most importantly the Iranian community believes that the Iranian Nuclear Agreement Framework made with P5 + 1 will also reduce the tendency of domestic economic mismanagement and corruption by governments (Gallagher, et al., 2015: 13). Looking at this case study, the authors then classify that the public in Iran has a high level of knowledge and interest in its foreign policy in pursuit of Iran's Nuclear Framework Agreement. In this case, most Iranians can be classified as political elites who are able to encourage the creation of public opinion. In fact, public opinion is able to push the Iranian parliament and leaders to agree on the Iran Nuclear Framework Agreement as Rouhani wants to defend his constituency to keep supporting his regime until the next general election.

The formation of public opinion cannot be separated from the role of media. As Robinson (2002: 28-29) says, the media has been framing issues that focus on individual suffering and identifying them as victims who need help from the "outside". Subianto and Ida (2015: 14) in his book *Communications, Politics, Media, and Democracy* say that framing is done by the media to build and influence the interpretation of the reader or viewer about an issue. In this case, the media influence how the public sees and evaluates the politics of its government. The author then analyzes how the development of the media in Iran is related to its nuclear development, especially under the Rouhani regime. According to the BBC (2016) in its story entitled *Iran profile - the media*, all broadcasts in Iran have been controlled by the state and must

reflect on its official ideology. Radio channels in Iran are interconnected as the majority are operated by the state-owned Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). US-based Freedom House ranked Iran on the third level after China and Syria as the worst country for internet freedom. Although there are some private media, but the media is mostly held by the minions of the Iranian government itself. In the era of Khamenei's own regime, some Iranian media such as Kayhan, became the mouthpiece of government policy. The news is mostly related to Iran's nuclear issue, even if it does not comply with Khamenei's official stance (Freedom House, 2015).

In Rouhani era, Rouhani promised to further reduce media and information restrictions (Freedom House, 2015). This can be seen from one of the mass media owned by the Iranian government in English, called Tehran Times. In an online portal located at www.tehrantimes.com (2016), there are almost 4000 articles and news with the keyword "nuclear deal". The authors analyzed that the news regarding public opinion criticizing government policies increase in the Rouhani era. Such as news on September 20, 2015 in Tehrantimes (2015) under the title Vice President of Hopeful of New Beginning for Iran. In the news, the country hopes to abolish sanctions due to Iran's nuclear development that could have a major impact on oil and gas revenues. Furthermore, Tehrantimes news (2015) on August 22, 2015 under the title British-Iran ties After Sanctions stating that the effect of physical sanctions from the United Kingdom is actually not very meaningful for the development of Iran's capacity and capabilities. But for financial sanctions alone, Iran's domestic economic condition is quite disturbed as other countries tend to prevent capital inflows from entering Iran. Even in fairly recent news, December 21, 2016, Tehrantimes (2016) dare to make the news of Rouhani's Losing Support, Still Likely to Win Re-election: Analysts say that poor economic performance makes the Rouhani government one of the reasons for its declining popularity, though after the abolition of some international sanctions due to Iran's Nuclear Treaty Framework. The Iranian community itself is still so familiar and waits with previous promises that focus the cabinet's performance in its regime to fight for an international nuclear deal and domestic economic improvement over the past three years.

After reaching agreement in negotiations related to the nuclear deal with P5 + 1 countries, Iranian media then also intensively reported the news. As quoted by Foreignaffairs.com (2015), various

television channels and reformist newspapers, including Roozan, Hamkari Melli, and Hamshahri, announced that the beginning of the era of cooperation could improve Iran's ties with the West. Victory through diplomatic channels by the Iranian government is considered capable of bringing new hope to the public. In other Iranian conservative newspapers, such as Javan, Resalat, Jomhuri Islami, more emphasized that the Iranian resistance to Western sanctions is crucial because it is considered a victory for Iran without going through war (Foreignaffairs, 2015). The euphoria of Iranian society towards the achievement of Iran's Nuclear Framework Agreement is also not out of the media spotlight. One of them, the internet portal Middle East Eye (2015) mentions that many Iranians who then took to the streets after breaking the fast to celebrate the decision against nuclear deal.

The authors consider that Robinson's (2002: 25) explanation of the influence of mass media in foreign policy can be applicable in analyzing the role of the media against the policy making of the Iran Nuclear Framework Agreement under the Hassan Rouhani regime. Indeed in previous Iranian regimes, media and information were so controlled or restricted. The mass media has legitimate news because the data came directly from the state. This shows that the media in Iran previously only continued the policy of the government. In the era of Rouhani itself, government and private media and even foreign information are so intense about its policies, especially related to Iran's Nuclear Framework Agreement. Moreover, foreign policy uncertainty over the Iranian nuclear deal that did not meet the point of clarity with the Western countries in previous government regimes, made the public actively voiced their opinions and encouraged the media to raise the issue. Luckily, the Rouhani regime itself is broadening the spread of information and mass media. In addition, Rouhani also promised his policy regarding nuclear deal to the public in order for international economic sanctions to be lifted, in accordance with public opinion spread in the media and surveys made by domestic and foreign organizations.

5 CONCLUSION

Foreign Policy Analysis is one of the studies in International Relations which looks at how complex the policy-making process and the factors that affect why a country takes a particular policy. The author himself then concludes that the mass media in Iran is

enough to help the formation of public opinion from the Iranian society itself which is then able to encourage foreign policy making in the form of the achievement of Iran's Nuclear Framework Agreement by the Hassan Rouhani regime. Although in the era of regimes before Rouhani came to power, freedom of speech and information dissemination were so restricted and controlled. Moreover, policies related to nuclear development are only reported by taking direct data from the government and ignoring the voice of Iranian society. From the survey and the growing news, the public wants a change in the era of Rouhani, especially the improvement of the domestic economy more precisely the problem of employment or unemployment rate is high enough. The public believes that this economic problem is due to the lack of foreign interference, especially Western countries, to cooperate in economics such as investment and trade in Iran. Such minimal cooperation with foreigners is caused by international sanctions imposed on Iran due to Iran's nuclear development which is accused of being non-transparent and secure. Mass media also managed to frame the public voices, so that it formed public opinion which then became a national issue and heard by the government. Hassan Rouhani as the leader of Iran also promised to solve domestic economic problems and fight for the achievement of Iran's nuclear agreement with the P5 + 1 countries, so that international economic sanctions on Iran can be released. The strong will for the achievement of the Iran Nuclear Non-Proliferation Framework by the public is demonstrated by the celebration of the euphoria of Iranian society. The author himself ultimately believes that Iran's public opinion was heard because of the regime of Rouhani who wanted to defend his constituents or supporters, so his team could be elected again in the next election.

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