

# **Iran's Nuclear Program Discourse as Deterrence Effort against The United States of America**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research "Iran's Nuclear Program Discourse As Deterrence Efforts Against The United States" is to explain the controversial discourse of Iran's nuclear program which is still being a discourse in international security politics. U.S perception to Iran is always negative, this is because the relations built by these countries always experiencing obstacles. This articles use of qualitative methods with descriptive as a technic of the research. As for the concept that the writer uses in the slice of this problem is deterrence concept with Realist approach. For Realists view, convincing the safety of a state in an anarchic international system is the most important factor above all else. Economic sector and others can be protected if the country's security is guaranteed. Therefore, as the rational actor, Iran see its nuclear program more important as an effort to ensure the safety from all potential external threats. As a rational actor, Iran considers its nuclear program more important as an effort to ensure its security. This paper elaborates how Iran makes choices in determining its policy between retaining its nuclear program or even halts its nuclear program. This paper will present a graph of "Iran chooses strategy", it will be understood why Iran would prefer the policy to maintain its nuclear program.

***Keywords: Nuclear, Iran, Deterrence, United States of America.***

## A. Introduction

One of the Middle East conflicts which is until now has not been resolved yet is the controversy of Iran's nuclear development program. The difficulty of the problem has led to the completion of a complex situation in the Middle East region, especially in the Persian Gulf region. The efforts of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in facilitating the settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue has always failed since Iran get the council's decision such lame and likely to harm the Iranian side. Then, Iran also feel its nuclear program does not violate the ethics code and rules of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which entitles every nations member to use nuclear facilities for peaceful purposes.

For the United States and its allies, Iran is believed try to develop nuclear weapons. This is evidenced from the report of IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) that Iran is now enriching uranium at rate of 20 percent. Based on theory, uranium enrichment at this level will be able to produce nuclear weapons in a short time. This problem demand the U.S. to impose sanctions on Iran in an effort to stop its nuclear program. For example, in 2012 ago, the U.S. and Europe imposed sanctions on Iran's oil export ban. This is an effort to pressure Iran, because oil is one of the major commodities in Iranian economy. U.S. also banned all U.S. financial institutions to do business with the Iranian central bank (Barzashka & Oelrich, 2012). The U.S. threatened to impose sanctions for companies in the U.S. which are still doing business with Iran.

In fact, even if the U.S. continues to tighten sanctions against Iran, it does not bring a change in attitude of Iran to continue to develop its nuclear program. Actually, the U.S. attitude towards Iran is not a new issue. During the previous

governancy, the U.S. had also been several times to impose sanctions on Iran with the same issue. Until at that time, Iran's nuclear program had been halted because of the current Iranian leaders did not want to take the risk of the U.S. sanctions. However, at Mahmud Ahmadinejad governmency, nuclear program owned by Iran need to be operated again considering the nuclear program become the vital interests for Iran's today and future.

This kind of phenomenon certainly raises a big question for most people, especially for those concerned about international security issues, in which the question arises about the question of why Iran would prefer an option to retain its nuclear policy, whereas this option will bring disruption consequences to their domestic economy This question become the key issue in this paper. This paper will try to elaborate and analyze the problem by using the theory of deterrence. In addition, this paper will also try to elaborate Iranian option with the graph of "preferred strategy" which used to determine policy choices by Iran.

## B. Theoretical Framework

At the beginning, the deterrence concept was originally used to describe the behavior of the super powers countries between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the cold war. Both countries use military superiority as the "*psy war*". However, the use of this concept goes widespread and not just related to the two major powers in the cold war. Classically, *deterrence* can be defined as a prevention efforts where the country A threatens the country B to convince the country B not to do unwanted actions by the country A. The definition of deterrence evolved into two types,

namely *Retaliation* (penalty) and *Denial* (defense) (Barry Buzan, 1987).

In simple, deterrence as *Retaliation* intended to give the penalty of retaliation in order to prevent the enemy state aggression. Then, deterrence as *denial* as the form of ability to capture direct attack from the enemy. Afterward, there is one critical question related to what if a country wants to make deterrence efforts while its military capability is not able to outperform the opponent. The answer is by the nuclear weapons capability. In the history of the weapons development technology, there has never been a single case in this planet, a country who have nuclear weapons attacked by the most powerful country though. This shows that nuclear is the only means of deterrence of the most advanced in this century to prevent aggression from enemies.

**Kenneth Waltz** said *"If a country has nuclear weapons, it will not be attacked militarily in ways that threaten its manifestly vital interests. That is 100 percent true, without exception, over a period of more than fifty years. Pretty impressive"* (Amitai Etzioni, 2010). He also said *"Nuclear weapons are the only peacekeeping weapons that the world has ever known"*.

### **C. Result and Discussion**

The difficulty of separating and identifying specifically between nuclear for energy needs and weapons make the spread of ownership of nuclear weapons difficult to stem. For example, since the introduction of NPT treaty in 1970, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea have acquired nuclear weapons, and it all stems from nuclear facilities for civilian purposes. According to nuclear experts, the country's motivation to acquire nuclear weapons can at least be identified from its uranium enrichment activities. Since, the rate of uranium

enrichment done to the level of 90 percent (enriched uranium) will be able to produce nuclear weapons.

Nuclear technology is like "double edged sword". When a country is able to use nuclear technology for civilian purposes, the actual country was also able to acquire nuclear weapons. The complexity of the security issues triggered the emergence of a country's desire to transform the nuclear technology into a weapons. For example, Israel, a country which is believed to have around 200 nuclear warheads without confirmation to the IAEA. This Israel's nuclear technology originated from French pre assistance for civilian purposes. However, Israel unilaterally use nuclear for military purposes. This dualism function of nuclear technology is a big problem for international security. In an anarchic international system, countries will be racing to acquire nuclear weapons as an effort to maintain the security of their country from enemy attack.

### **Iran's Perceptions against the Threat of U.S.**

The attitude of anti-US has emerged since the overthrow of Shah Reza Pahlavi in the Iranian revolution of 1979. This revolution becomes a great moment for Iran since its able to restore the constitution of Islamic system in the country. However, these events being early deteriorating relations between Iran and the U.S. Because, Ayatollah Khomeini, the revolutionary leader and President of Iran, who was actively campaigning anti-US stance. At the same time, Iranian students also attacked the U.S. embassy and held 52 U.S. diplomats in Teheran. This event angered President Jimmy Carter. Through this incident, it is until now the relationship between both countries never harmonious, despite the efforts of some moderate Iranian leader such as Khatami and Rafsanjani to improve

relations between the two countries, but this effort still failed.

In general, there are some things which become as important issues why Iran and the U.S. are very difficult to harmonize relations between them. *Firstly*, since Shah Reza Pahlavi being coup d'etat-ed as well as the transformation of Iran governancy from Monarchy system to Islamist system, anti-Israel stance remains the attitude which can not be eliminated at each leader of Iran. *Secondly*, related to Iran's nuclear program, which since the Iranian revolution, the ambitions to develop nuclear weapons to be one of priorities. Nuclear development in addition to the use as a renewable energy source, it is also used as a military instrument as a deterrent outside attack.

When Iran expressed anti-Israel stance, then it implies to against the U.S. indirectly. Of many U.S. allies, Israel is the most protected ally and guaranteed by the U.S. security. Evident from 1972 to 2006, the U.S. has used its veto on 42 resolutions of the UN Security Council Resolution which are critical to Israel. This amount is greater than the combined number of veto been given by the other council members during the same period. This attitude prove that the U.S. will always ensure Israel's security. Briefly, a threat to Israel is also a threat to the U.S. These attitudes also forced the U.S. to always keep an eye on Iran's strength. For the U.S., Iran became a threat to the security of Israel.

This attitude of the U.S. certainly drives Iran to always be vigilant. Especially since the U.S. military issued a policy on a large scale in the Middle East. The U.S. military bases scattered around Iran become a threat that will someday "ripped" Iranian security. The moment of the U.S. invasion to Iraq become a bad experience and an important lessons for

Iran to continue to strengthen themselves. This speculation threat, indeed, is not without reason, according to Mehran Kamrava, *Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar*, that there are three reasons why the U.S. put most military bases in the Middle East, namely to secure oil resources, to ensure the security of Israel and to combat threats to the U.S. interests.

The U.S. President, George W. Bush, has also clearly said Iran as one of the "Axis of Evil". Iran is considered as country which actively support terrorism as Hamas in Palestine and Hizbullah in Lebanon. For Israel and the U.S., weapons support, funding, and military training by Iran to Hamas and Hizbullah are Iranian efforts against Israel indirectly. This hostility intensity imply the Iran's behavior who feels its security is always in danger. Thus, in purpose of this security maintainance it is needed the alternative power in ensuring the country's security is maintained from enemy aggression. Therefore, Iran's nuclear become an important instrument as deterrence effort against the enemy.

#### **Iran Uranium Enrichment Level**

Simply, the uranium of nature is just 0.7 percent of uranium 235 (pure uranium), the rest is uranium 238 (Emerson, 1998). These proportion are too aqueous to support the chain reaction, so that the nuclear reactors require proportion of uranium 235 in fuel to be increased by about 2 or 3 percent which known as enrichment. However, if the proportion of uranium 235 increased to the level of 90 percent, it will be able to make a nuclear weapon.

In the making process of nuclear weapons, generally, there are 3 stages of uranium enrichment activities, namely: *first stage* is called *Low Enriched Uranium (LEU)* stage, which is a low-

level enriched uranium, that uranium contain uranium 235 (U-235) in the concentration less than 20 percent and more than 0.7 percent, and if commercialized as reactor fuel it will produce U-235 enriched at or less than 5 percent. **Second stage** is called *Medium Enriched Uranium (MEU)*, which are uranium enriched in levels medium, that U-235 enriched by 20 percent. In this intermediate level nuclear development is not only capable of being used as an energy source, but its function has been extended to research and medical needs. **Third stage** is called the *High Enriched Uranium (HEU)*, which is uranium enrichment that capable to produce uranium U-235 enriched to the level of 90 percent. This enrichment level is the highest level of uranium enrichment, which is taken as an effort to the creation of nuclear weapons.

Based on the description of the uranium enrichment level Iran from several sources, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the first stage (5 percent) is, Iran has been enriching uranium at this stage. That is, Iran is currently enriching uranium at the second stage, that is at the level of 20 percent. With the ability to enrich uranium at 20 percent, Iran will quickly be able to enrich uranium at the level of nuclear weapons creation, that is the level of 90 percent. The image below is a simple explanation of the stages of low-enriched uranium to the level of high-level enrichment.

According to ISIS, the rising uranium enriched to low levels (*Low Enriched Uranium / LEU*) from 5 percent to 20 percent is an enrichment activity that is so very fast. So that the calculation of the enrichment rate, it just take a few months for Iran to will be capable to produce nuclear weapons, which is more than 90 percent. Scientifically, enriched uranium around 4-5 percent is sufficient for the

nuclear reactors operation for energy needs, 20 percent for medical needs, and above 90 percent for nuclear weapons.

Uranium enrichment level at this rate of 20 percent of HEU can be obtained in three ways: *first*, the increasing uranium enrichment can be obtained by enriching the LEU itself which is located in Natanz. *Second*, HEU is obtained with a secret nuclear facility, and *third*, can be obtained from other countries assistance, such as North Korea, Pakistan, or even elements in Russia.

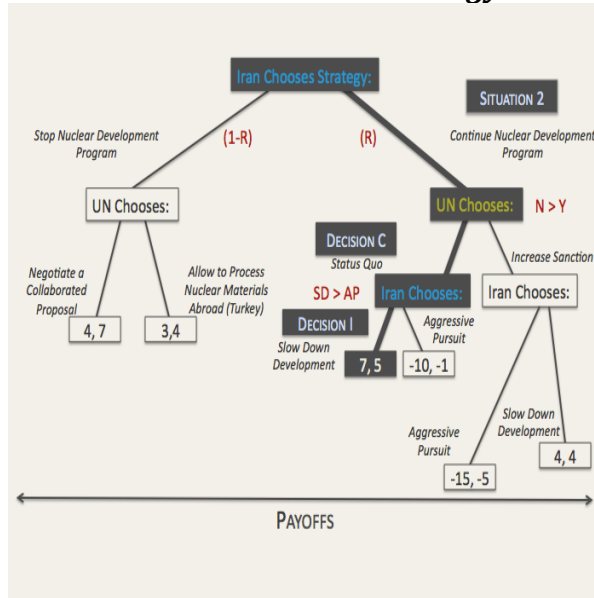
### **Iran's Nuclear Capability as Deterrence Efforts**

The Iranian government has learned a lot from the invasion of the U.S. to Iraq, where the chemical weapons that allegedly possessed by Iraq was not enough to deter the U.S.. So, for Iran, the U.S. will be more careful about issuing an aggressive policy against Iran if the country has a potential nuclear threat. For example, the fear of the U.S. to the program's heavy water reactor owned by North Korea demanded Clinton governancy to make a peace agreement (negotiations) with North Korea in order to stop the nuclear program there (Hanna, 2001). This is what prompted the Iranian government to believe that it is only through nuclear ability, Iran will be able to prevent the aggressive U.S. policy. Instead of dealing with the U.S. military, Iran prefers to use the discourse of nuclear potency as a tool to prevent the U.S. in interfering the security interest in the Persian Gulf region.

Such kind of atmosphere turn the exact reason for Iran to retain its nuclear program. To more understand about why Iran choose to keep its nuclear program with the consequences to receive sanctions from the UN Security Council which it can

incriminate Iran, especially from the economic aspect, it is displayed below a graphic of "strategy choice" which display Iranian strategy in selecting the option to continue the nuclear program or to stop the nuclear program.

**Frame 1. Iran Chooses Strategy**



Picture above shows the calculation of the decision to be taken by Iran and its implications covered when choosing to keep nuclear development activities or to stop the nuclear program. When Iran prefer the decision to halt it's nuclear program (A: *Negotiate A Collaborated Proposal*), then there are some other consequences that will be accepted by Iran. *Firstly*, deterrence efforts will be reduced. *Secondly*, Iran's desire to dominate the Middle East again will fail. *Thirdly*, the IAEA (depending on the deal), but most likely will have a wide access to conduct inspections of Iran's nuclear program. The IAEA inspections, indeed, would be a direct UN intervention in controlling the Iranian facility uranium enrichment on safe standards. While positive aspects that can be felt by Iran through the choice is, *firstly*, the tensions between Iran and international society will be reduced. *Secondly*, the reduction of

economic sanctions from the U.S. and UN. *Thirdly*, allowances for uranium enrichment for civilian purposes. In this decision, the most rational acceptable thing for Iran is the reduction of economic sanctions by the U.S. and the UN. However, these decisions have an impact on reducing the deterrence power of Iran, because all of Iran's nuclear activities will be fully monitored by the IAEA.

If Iran chooses to terminate its nuclear program by selecting the decision (B: *Allow to Process Nuclear Materials Abroad*), same to the A decision, *First*, Iran's efforts to make deterrence will also be lost. *Second*, besides Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Israel will remain a dominant force in the region. *Third*, process to obtain nuclear material from abroad will be difficult because there are rules of the IAEA.

Conversely, if Iran would prefer the decision to develop the nuclear program (*status quo/slow down development*), it shall mean that this decision also has implications for Iran. Slow down the development of a nuclear program after the UN chose *the status quo* means that Iran has utilized several opportunities to develop nuclear partners. Slowing developing nuclear does not rule out the efforts to obtain nuclear weapons at all, it is merely an effort to reduce tension. Therefore, Iran can enrich the uranium enrichment at a high enough level with nuclear reasons by peaceful program, but with such a level, Iran is also capable of producing nuclear weapons. Thus, this option would better provide the gap for Iran to keep enriching uranium.

If Iran prefer the decision by developing a nuclear program aggressively (*status quo / aggressive pursuit*), then Israel will be ready to engage in a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities to prevent nuclear

threat from Iran. Israel will use the attacking reasons by saying Iran had violated international law and in order to maintain orderlines and peace of the world. Such steps have been carried out by Israel against Iraq in 1981 and against Syria in 2007. For Iran, this decision will certainly destroy which implications are very great. Casualties and the destruction of nuclear facilities will make the Iranian nation down. Later, this decision will also trigger a nuclear arms race and to countries in the region aggressively.

Options of category policy (*increase of sanctions/ aggressive pursuit*) carries dangerous implications for Iran in which this decision will lead Israel to attack Iran, while strict UN sanctions remain in force for Iran. Lastly, if Iran choose decision (*increase of sanction / slow development*), the United Nations sanctions will be tightened and there is a possibility to add oil embargo against Iran. This will off course affect Iran's economic sector in which the oil becomes an important sector in its contribution to the state economy. It will lead fluctuation, indeed, to traders with the other classes in society. From the decision choice above, the more rational policy option category as well as being the current Iranian policy is the category of *the status quo / slow down development*. It is evidenced that Iran currently undertaking the development of its nuclear facilities by increasing uranium enrichment. In the process of uranium enrichment, Iran at a time may be able to acquire nuclear weapons. Then, this situation is also able to provide deterrence effort against Iranian security. Thus, Iran would prefer to continue to develop its nuclear facilities, but not aggressively.

There are several implications that will be borne by Israel if Iran able to have a nuclear weapon, *first*, Israel's

ability to deter Palestinian militant organizations and Lebanese is likely to fail, because Iran is an active country to provide military assistance to the organization. Then, Israel is no longer the only country with nuclear weapons in the Middle East. *Secondly*, the possession of nuclear weapons, Iran would be recognized as a regional power than Israel. Of course the implications are very broad, in which Israel will not be able to deal with a nuclear rivalry with Iran and continued territorial disputes with the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians.

*The New York Times* has described how Israel today are very concerned about Iran, because it does not find a way how to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities. Seen from the three major questions that remains a dilemma for Israel in facing the increasing Iran's nuclear program. Israel's dilemma raised directly by Ehud Barak, Israel's defense minister, *first*, has Israel the ability to attack Iranian nuclear sites total on and is Israeli military able to withstand the counter-attack from Iran which is not inevitable, *second*, has Israel the support of the United States, either openly or secretly, to attack, *third*, does the major possibility to hold Iran's nuclear threats when the power has been exhausted, will bring Israel in military aid from other forces. These three questions dilemma faced by Israel. This shows that Iran is not easy to beat, as the Iranian military forces backed by allied forces in the region to make a separate calculation for Israel.

The next dilemma experienced by Israel is a great risk of attack from Iran to make Israel must refrain from attacking, then is Iran's nuclear program going to be left away until Iran actually managed to have a nuclear weapon, This question also makes a great dilemma for Israel. If Iran has nuclear weapons, it's just allowing Iran to further expand its

military power in the sector. That is, the greater the threat of Iran and it's hard to resist its power. Thus, while the efforts that can be done by Israel to hit Iran is through the "vote" in the United Nations, supported by the United States as one of the UN veto.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The fact proves that Iran has not been shown to possess nuclear weapons until now. However, nuclear technology character that has duality of use (*the nuclear dual-use problem*) that nuclear technology on one hand can be used as civilian purposes (energy source) and on the other hand can be used for military purposes. It is not wrong if many countries including the U.S. and Israel view Iran's potential to acquire nuclear weapons. This is because Iran's ability to enrich uranium to the 20 percent level. However, the problem does not stop here, because if the argument as it means that all the countries that have nuclear technology should also have the potential to develop nuclear weapons. The core problem of Iranian nuclear controversy is not really lied at its nuclear technology, but rather the attitude of hostility between Iran and the U.S.. which mean, the issue of Iranian nuclear is only as "default" as an effort to pressure Iran.

In the Iranian perspective, this development is a source of pride for Iran as efforts to increase the power of the military and as a means of deterrence of potential threats from the U.S. and the real threat of Israel that in fact the enemy for a long time. This is illustrated by Iran's hostility towards Israel since the Islamic Revolution until now. Not to mention the presence of U.S. military bases around Iran as Israel's closest ally which also has a bad relationship for a long time. Attitude to constantly improve safety not without

reason, Iran learned a lot from the U.S. brutal attitude towards other nations and Iran's history of conflict with the Iraqi become a specific dilemma. On the other hand, the motivation to keep on floating nuclear, Iran got a strong reaction, especially from the U.S. and Israel. Therefore, before Iran is able to produce a nuclear weapon, the U.S. put pressure on Iran, particularly economic sanctions against Iran in an effort to stop Iran's nuclear program.

Being a big question why should a nuclear. Simply, nuclear is the least expensive way for Iran to counter U.S. military capabilities and Israel which takes time and costs are very expensive. The imbalance of military capabilities is meaningless when people are talking about nuclear. This is because due to the damage inflicted by the nuclear. Little or big amount of nuclear weapons is not important, because although it has a nuclear, means there is an imbalance in the amount of nuclear capacity between two or more states, the same result will be generated, which are equally devastated. Hence, throughout history, no country would dare and want to do a nuclear war, even though the U.S. the one who has the largest nuclear arsenal. Unlike the military capabilities which the state who has a greater military capability would be able to destroy the country with a small military capabilities. This proves that nuclear becomes deterrence to be the most effective tool to make the opponent or enemy thinks repeatedly to use military force against them.

This is the reason why many countries, especially the countries that already have nuclear technology sometimes transform its technology to be nuclear weapons. Therefore, one goal of the emergence of the NPT and the IAEA regime is how to manage and control the state that already has the ability of nuclear technology to not



transform nuclear technology into a deadly nuclear weapons. One form of the rules used is to give procedures and requirements in uranium enrichment level as a key ingredient in the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

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