

**Perspectives on the Iranian Nuclear Programme:  
Analysing Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Foreign Policies**

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*In Loving Memory of Clemens Pieper*

**Abstract.** The Iranian nuclear crisis is a proxy arena for competing visions about the functioning of international relations. Yet, no comprehensive analyses have been conducted so far that use the Iranian nuclear case as an illustration to conceptualise the interaction between ‘hegemonic structures’ and those actors resisting them. This doctoral dissertation is a first step to fill this gap in the literature. It analyses the foreign policies of China, Russia and Turkey towards the Iranian nuclear programme and thereby answers the research question to what extent their policies are indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony. Based on 55 semi-structured elite interviews with experts and decision-makers closely involved with the Iranian nuclear file, this research draws on neo-Gramscian scholarship to analyse resistance to hegemony across its ideational, material and institutional framework conditions.

The case studies examined show how ‘compliance’ on the part of China, Russia and Turkey with approaches to the Iranian nuclear conflict has been selective, and how US policy preferences in the Iran dossier have been resisted on other occasions. To understand such variation in ‘norm compliance’, this dissertation introduces a two-level model to understand foreign policy discrepancies between a discursive and a behavioural level. Chinese, Russian, and Turkish reluctance to use sanctions as tools in international diplomacy on a discursive level did not prevent the eventual adoption of international sanctions against Iran and Chinese, Russian, and Turkish compliance therewith on a behavioural level. While multilateral Iran sanctions are seen as complying with the *rules* of the UN system, additional unilateral sanctions are contested on *normative* grounds and perceived as illegitimate and as an extraterritorialisation of domestic legislation.

Besides an ideational resistance to unilateral sanctions, the economic impact of these ‘secondary sanctions’ on third country entities constitutes an additional material reason for Chinese, Russian, and Turkish criticism. Their eventual compliance with sanctions lists, however, indicates a level of receptiveness to the economic leverage of US-dominated international financial mechanisms. In this context, the Iran nuclear case serves as an illustration to shed light on the contemporaneous interaction of the forces of consent and coercion in international politics. This research thus makes a critical contribution to key questions of International Relations at the interstice of security governance, proliferation policies, and debates surrounding the co-existence between hegemonic structures and ‘norm-shapers in the making’.

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## Note on Transliteration and Translation

For all transliterations from the Chinese to the Latin alphabet, the standard *Pinyin* system (without diacritic markers) has been used for all proper names and translations (e.g. Xi Jinping, Zhuhai Zhenrong, taoguang yanghui).

Special characters of the modern Turkish alphabet have been used for all Turkish proper names, authors, and terms (e.g. Orta doğu, Erdoğan, Altunışık).

For transliteration from Russian, the British standard version has been used, thus ю becomes 'yu', я becomes 'ya', ъ is apostrophised etc. Proper names have been anglicised (Sergei, Andrei, and Alexander instead of Aleksander) – except when in another author's citation. Translations from Russian are the author's, except where indicated otherwise.

While there is no unified system for the transliteration of Farsi, the romanisation of Farsi names and titles has largely followed the Library of Congress system (e.g. Ahmadinejad, Rouhani, Diplomasi-ye Hastehi).

## List of Acronyms

- ABC – Atomic, Biological, Chemical (weapons)
- AEOI - Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran
- AKP - *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party)
- BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation
- BRICS – acronym referring to Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
- CCP – Chinese Communist Party
- CENESS - Center for Energy and Security Studies
- CFAU - China Foreign Affairs University
- CFSP – Common Foreign and Security Policy (of the European Union)
- CICIR - China Institute of Contemporary International Relations
- CIIS - China Institute of International Studies
- CIISS - China Institute for International Strategic Studies
- CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States
- CISADA - Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act
- CITIC - China International Trust and Investment Corporation
- CNOOC - China National Offshore Oil Corporation
- CNPC - China National Petroleum Corporation
- CTBT – Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
- CRS – Congressional Research Service
- GCC - Gulf Cooperation Council
- JCPOA – Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
- E3 – the ‘European Three’ (Germany, France, United Kingdom)
- E3+3 – the ‘E3’ plus China, Russia, United States
- ECFR – European Council on Foreign Relations
- EEAS – European External Action Service
- EU – European Union
- HEU - Highly Enriched Uranium
- IAEA – International Atomic Energy Agency
- ILSA - Iran-Libya Sanctions Act
- IMEMO – *institut mirovoj ekonomiki i meshdunarodnikh otnoshenii rossijskoi akademii nauk*  
(institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences)
- IR – International Relations

IRISL - Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines  
ISA - Iran Sanctions Act  
IRGC - Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps  
JPOA – Joint Plan of Action (of 23 November 2013)  
LEU – Low Enriched Uranium  
LNG – Liquefied Natural Gas  
MD – Missile Defense  
MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding  
Minatom – Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy (until 2004)  
MİT - Milli İstihbarat Teskilati (Turkish intelligence Agency)  
MTCR – Missile Technology Control Regime  
NAM - Non-Aligned Movement  
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation  
NDAA - National Defense Authorization Act  
NNW – Non-nuclear Weapon State  
NPT – Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty  
NSG - Nuclear Suppliers Group  
NWFZ – Nuclear weapons-free zone  
NWS – Nuclear Weapon State  
OFAC - Office of Foreign Asset Control  
OPEC – Organisation of Petroleum-Exporting Countries  
OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe  
P5+1 – the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany  
PJAK – *Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê* (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan)  
PKK - *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Worker’s Party)  
PLA - People’s Liberation Army  
PMD – Possible Military Dimension  
Rosatom – Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy (since 2004)  
SIIS - Shanghai Institute for International Studies  
SIPRI – Stockholm Peace Research Institute  
START – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty  
SWIFT - Society for Worldwide International Financial Telecommunication  
TANAP – Trans-Anatolian Pipeline

TAP – Trans-Adriatic Pipeline  
TRR - Tehran Research Reactor  
UK – United Kingdom  
UN – United Nations  
UNSC – United Nations Security Council  
UNSCR – United Nations Security Council Resolution  
US – United States  
USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics  
WTO – World Trade Organisation  
WWII – World War Two

## Introduction

*“The Iran question is the question of our age.”*

- Turkish diplomat in conversation with the author, Washington, 14 February 2014.

In 2002, an Iranian exile opposition group revealed the existence of nuclear facilities in Iran that were undeclared to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and therefore in breach of Iran’s obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) to which Iran had acceded in 1968. European states started to negotiate in the format of the ‘E3’ (Germany, France, the United Kingdom) with Iran to de-escalate what was soon turning into a delicate political conflict – to no avail. The file was taken to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2006, where the negotiation format was enlarged to the E3+3, or P5+1 (the five permanent UNSC member states plus Germany). When Iran was found in non-compliance of first UN resolutions and exhibiting insufficient transparency with the IAEA, international sanctions were imposed soon after, paralleled by unilateral sanctions imposed by the US and the EU. Years of missed opportunities, misunderstandings, stonewalling, and tactical deceptions on all sides followed.

At the time of writing, the six world powers are negotiating with Iran over a comprehensive ‘Joint Plan of Action’ to replace the first JPoA that was sealed in November 2013 in Geneva. After a political framework agreement has been reached on 2 April 2015 after marathon negotiations in Lausanne, Switzerland, delegations are gathering to hammer out the technical details of what will be Iran’s final nuclear status. In exchange for guarantees for the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme, monitored by the IAEA, sanctions imposed on Iran over the nuclear conflict will be gradually lifted. This prospect is dependent on a number of open question marks. Differences in opinions persist as to the time frame for the lifting of sanctions, the sequencing of their lifting, the concrete nature of the inspection regime, and a ‘possible military dimension’ (PMD) of past Iranian nuclear activities. The joint statement of Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Zarif and EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, issued after 2 April 2015, remained vague in all central points on durations and concrete procedures (EEAS 2015). In addition, different ‘factsheets’ on the framework agreement circulate that all differ in significant aspects. Domestic pressure forces constraints onto the negotiation teams because especially the US and Iranian administrations will have to ‘sell’ the outcome of the nuclear talks at home.

The stakes could not be higher. Iran’s international standing could be affected in a process where international trade, political and security relations with Iran will no longer have

to take place under the dangling Damocles sword of the nuclear conflict. While US President Obama's administration holds that a resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis could have 'transformational' power, US domestic and international critics find a shrill rhetoric to castigate what they regard as treason, deception or naivety.

The final contours of a nuclear agreement with Iran will have far-reaching implications for the future of the NPT, global security governance and the regional security architecture. The solution of the Iran nuclear crisis will co-determine the future working relationship between 'the West' and Iran. But on an equally fundamental and understudied dimension, the more than decade-old Iranian nuclear conflict served as a battle ground between 'the modernised' and the 'modernising' world, and between hegemonic powers and norm-shapers in the making.

It is that crucial nexus to which this dissertation will direct its attention. This research project analyses Chinese, Russian, and Turkish foreign policies towards the Iranian nuclear programme. While Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Iran policies, respectively, as well as their foreign policies towards the controversial nuclear programme of Iran have been analysed before, no comparative analysis thereof at book length has been produced yet. All three states have been involved substantially at different phases during the Iranian nuclear conflict. Their involvement and 'stakes' in this conflict will be elaborated upon in the following chapters. What is driving this research project is the underlying question how and where their foreign policies interact with another actor whose involvement, for a number of reasons, is critical for any resolution of the nuclear stand-off with Iran – namely the United States. Not least because of traumatised US-Iranian relations and the centrality of the US in Iranian foreign policy discourse, Washington holds considerable sway over Iran's nuclear future, and the strong US-Iranian bilateral negotiation track under their respective foreign ministers John Kerry and Javad Zarif testifies to this. But also on a structural level, the omnipresence of US financial power in international governance and the extent to which this particular leverage shapes policy formulation of other actors creates what in this dissertation will be called 'hegemonic structures'. These structures have met criticism and outright rejection by a range of actors, including Iran. An agreement with Iran thus also entails the potential for transatlantic disagreements over sanctions enforcement and the lifting of sanctions. Frictions between US and European administrations over the applicability of unilateral sanctions are already starting to emerge on the political horizon. And between Iran and its negotiating counterparts, but also within the P5+1, the different views over the implementation of a comprehensive agreement will ensure that the Iranian nuclear case will continue to be high on the world political agenda

long beyond 2015. While Iran has demanded the lifting of all sanctions upfront, others advocate a gradual lifting of nuclear-related economic sanctions in exchange for Iranian compliance with the terms of the agreement. And Russia and China have voiced concerns over the prospect that sanctions could automatically be reimposed if Iran was found in non-compliance, as such provisions in an international agreement would circumvent their veto power in the UN Security Council. Russia especially has indicated a strong desire to deepen trade relations with Iran in aspects that are currently still under international sanctions (like weapons trade) and is unlikely to easily agree to the re-imposition of sanctions. The momentum of P5+1 consensus might gradually be eroded after a nuclear agreement will have been reached. The US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, has therefore publicly pledged for a ‘snap back’ automatism for sanctions in case of Iranian violation of its terms of agreement, regardless of Russian and Chinese objections (Reuters 2015b). These dividing lines indicate that the implementation of a nuclear agreement will be fraught with intricate legal, institutional, and profoundly normative disagreements.

Technical questions about nuclear physics have been held hostage to political narratives on different sides. China’s and Russia’s involvement in the P5+1 format was crucial in dispelling the impression that the Iranian nuclear conflict in essence was a stand-off between Iran and ‘the West’. Yet, within the P5+1 and between the P5+1 and external mediators (such as Turkey), diverging views emerged as to the best approach and policies to resolve the nuclear crisis. Especially the debate over the imposition of sanctions became a thorny issue that stood emblematic for larger questions of legitimacy in international governance, hegemonic politics and conceptions of World Order. Against this background, the dissertation will be guided by the main research question to what extent Chinese, Russian, and Turkish foreign policies towards the Iranian nuclear programme were indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony. The Iranian nuclear case, in a sense, serves as a laboratory to examine fundamental questions about international relations that will continue to reverberate long after the Iranian nuclear file will be closed.

The structure of this dissertation is as follows. A first chapter will outline and justify the conceptual and theoretical framework adopted in this dissertation. It will be shown how neo-Gramscian scholarship in conjunction with a constructivist theoretical framework embedded in the scholarly literature on ‘norm dynamics’ will be a fruitful angle to the research project. The theoretical foundation for this study will lead to the conceptualisation of the guiding research question and break it down into analysable components. It will make sense of and elucidate terms such as ‘security culture’, ‘resistance’ and ‘hegemony’, and

situate the theoretical approach taken in the scholarly literature. A second chapter presents the methodology used to carry out the research and therefore directly follows from the discussion of the conceptual framework identified in the preceding chapter. It will outline which research techniques have been used for the case study analysis that follows. Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Iran policies will be presented as three in-depth case studies to illustrate the degree of resistance to hegemony. Qualitative interviewing with experts and decision-makers closely involved in nuclear diplomacy with Iran has been complemented with process-tracing and qualitative data analysis of a range of primary and secondary material. In addition to justifying why and how these research methods have been used the way they were, this chapter also articulates positionality of the researcher and reflects on epistemological constraints in social science research as they apply to the research subject at hand here. A third chapter gives a literature review of the state of the art in the empirical research on foreign policy towards Iran and shows the main dividing lines in the literature. It thereby aims to give a comprehensive account of not only the state of research on Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Iran policies, but of the wider scholarly literature that informs this dissertation, ranging from interdisciplinary studies in Inter-regionalism, Conflict and Security Studies, to Area Studies and research on ‘emerging powers’. This dissertation has used a wide range of literature, bridging disciplinary divides and drawing on international and Chinese, Russian, Turkish, as well as Iranian experts in the issue areas analysed in the chapters that follow.

Chapters Four, Five and Six then present the empirical case studies of this dissertation. Chapter Four analyses Turkish foreign policy towards Iran’s nuclear programme, and shows how Turkish Iran policies are torn between resistance to US approaches because of ideational and material disagreements and accommodation with US positions because of institutional framework conditions. Turkey’s NATO membership and a shared neighbourhood with Iran in particular will be portrayed as influential factors that have led many analysts to situate Turkey between different geostrategic and political ‘camps’. It will be shown how this affects Turkish foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme both on a discursive and a behavioural level. Chapter Five analyses Russian Iran policies and thereby introduces the second in-depth case study of this dissertation. Following a similar structure to the previous chapter, it will process-trace Russia’s positioning in the Iranian nuclear negotiations, especially when the case was referred to the UN Security Council in 2006, and outline the different ideational, material, and institutional factors impacting Russia’s foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme on a discursive and a behavioural level. It will be shown how each of these factors contributes to Russian overall Iran policies as an expression of a balancing act



between resistance to hegemony and hegemonic accommodation. Likewise, Chapter Six applies the conceptual framework worked out in the preceding chapters to an analysis of Chinese foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme. It will be shown how ideational, material and institutional framework conditions let China walk a tightrope between the imagery of a 'peaceful development' and Chinese interests that partially conflict with 'hegemonic structures' over the appropriate approach to solving the Iranian nuclear crisis. Chapter Seven comparatively analyses the research findings of these three in-depth case studies and answers the research question to what extent Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies are indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony. A final chapter concludes the dissertation by summarising the main research findings and outlining possible further areas of research.

# Chapter 1

## Theoretical Framework

### 1. Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of this study for a comparative investigation into Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies. An analysis of different conceptions of approaching the Iranian nuclear crisis not only reveals different understandings of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, it also unravels diverging views on how international politics function at large. It is in this sense that the present dissertation will answer the research question how Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme are indicative of a security culture resisting hegemony. Disentangling the nexus between foreign policies, the discursive projections thereof and security cultures that represent normative disagreements about international security governance, this research draws on a range of theoretical contributions that will be addressed in this chapter.

### 2. Security Discourse on Iran: The Power to Construct International Relations

This study analyses the rationale of China, Russia and Turkey in following policies that do not converge with norm- and security perceptions of Western administrations in their negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme. If we are to understand how actors use and refer to norms and how security perspectives differ, we need to account for a range of factors in foreign policy interest formation. The fault line between ‘material’ and ‘ideational’ factors in foreign policy is a long-standing one, and much older than the discipline of International Relations (IR) itself.<sup>1</sup> Without revisiting the underlying millennia-old philosophical debates surrounding ‘ideas’ and ‘interests’, the following paragraphs aim to condense and present the scholarship onto which this dissertation builds.

In Peter J. Katzenstein’s (ed.) seminal book *‘The Culture of National Security. Norms and Identity in World Politics’*, Katzenstein, Wendt and Jepperson (1996) aim to develop a framework for analyzing national security alternative to the “mainstream security studies”<sup>2</sup> by focusing “on the ways in which norms, institutions, and other cultural features of domestic

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hall (1993) on ‘Ideas and the Social Sciences’.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. different attempts to conceptualise ‘security’ and the scope of security studies: Walt (1991); Kolodziej (1992); Buzan (1983); Buzan, Waever, Ole & Wilde (1998); Buzan & Waever (2003); Dalby (1992); Shaw (1993); Waever et al. (1993); Klare & Thomas (1994); Sperling & Kirchner (1995); Williams (ed., 2008)

and international environments affect state security interests and policies” (37) and thereby propagate an essentially social constructivist argument: namely that ideas and identities of actors are being socially constructed by their social environment.<sup>3</sup> Different from rationalist accounts which emphasise material security environments and state-inherent actor properties and treat ideational factors as epiphenomenal to material capabilities and predispositions,<sup>4</sup> social constructivists depart from a relative (social) ontology and view an actor’s properties as “socially contingent” (ibid.: 34), i.e. as being constructed and reconfirmed through social interaction. International politics becomes a relational process. This is a first theoretical premise that will carry throughout this dissertation. Katzenstein, Wendt and Jepperson outline three possible effects of the environment on actors: First, it can affect the behavior of actors; second, it can affect the ‘contingent properties’ of actors; and third, it can affect the existence of actors all together (41). This fits in with their overall “theoretical perspective of sociological institutionalism with its focus on the character of the state’s environment and on the contested nature of political identities”, as Katzenstein formulates (4). What their formulation of relational politics fails to take into account, however, is the ‘feedback’ effect that these very actors have on the environment, i.e. how actors and their environment are locked in a mutually impacting way. Their approach, in other words, focuses on identity construction with a heavy emphasis on actor-centricity. Other authors have subsequently expanded the spectrum by shedding light on *structures* and their impact on the power of norms. Alexander Wendt made an important contribution in filling this gap with his seminal ‘*Social theory of international politics*’ (1999). In it, he examined agency and structure as being “mutually constitutive and *co-determined*” (184). He then brings this observation to its logical conclusion: “*structure exists, has effects, and evolves only because of agents and their practices*. All structure, micro and macro, is instantiated only in process” (185, emphasis in the original). The analysis of the foreign policies of the three case countries presented in this research project will draw on these tenets of co-determination between agent and structure that have defined and shaped much of social constructivist scholarship. As will be shown, such an angle helps shed light on security perceptions, role expectations, and public relations and identity politics – issues which are crucial in foreign policy analysis of a controversial topic such as the Iranian nuclear programme. Yet, it is only a first step towards accounting for

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. further influential constructivist works: Onuf (1989, 1998); Kowert (1998); Kubáľková, Onuf & Kowert (1998); Wendt (1987, 1999); cf. also Adib-Moghaddam’s work (2006) for an excellent analysis of the interplay of norms, identities and ideologies in the construction of international politics of the Persian Gulf and West Asia, revealing the “impact of exclusionary identity politics on foreign policies” (8). Cf. also Adler (1997); Lapid (1989); Lapid & Kratochwil (1996); Kratochwil (2001); Ruggie (1998).

<sup>4</sup> cf. also immutability thesis: Linklater (2008: 282).

structural forces that introduce *systemic asymmetries* between actors. Seeking to answer the research question whether Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies are indicative of a security culture resisting hegemonic structures furthermore requires the theoretical input of schools of thought addressing hierarchical orders, and the construction of hegemony. The sections that follow will discuss how structures of hegemony are essentially socially (co)constructed, and which conceptual frameworks help us to understand them.

If structure can affect agency, they also must have the power to condition differentiations among actors. Structures of power condition hierarchies of agents. It is this premise that captures the logic of the concept of ‘securitisation’ as developed by the ‘Copenhagen School’ (Buzan, Waever & Wilde 1998; Buzan & Waever 2003). Borrowing from constructivist theorising on the social construction of identities, this concept helps to analyse what issues or actors are being framed as a security threat (‘securitised’). “[...] the exact *definition* and *criteria* of securitisation is constituted by the inter-subjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects”, Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998: 25, emphasis in the original) formulate, and refer to the process of securitisation as a ‘speech act’, therewith explicitly borrowing from sociolinguistics (*ibid.*: 26).<sup>5</sup> In this reasoning, being in a position to ‘securitise’ an issue or an actor means having the authority to define what counts as ‘exceptional’ measures to deal with the perceived threat. The securitisation of Iran’s nuclear dossier, as will be seen, offers illuminating examples. Here, the rendition of enmity is order-constituting. ‘Order-constituting’ refers to the effect of reconfirmation of the securitising agent’s position of authority through the act of securitising. The power to label other actors ‘rogues’ reconfirms prevalent power structures (cf. also Homolar 2011; Hoyt 2000; Senn 2009). If such a discursive practice of enemy/threat construction is to have an effect, an “authoritative declaration of an ‘existential threat’ to the object concerned” needs to be made, as Williams (2003) puts it. Such a declaration, however, presupposes an “acceptance as ‘security issues’ in these terms by a relevant audience” (514), and this point importantly links to the idea of structural hierarchies: It necessitates a power standing of the securitising agent and the acceptance thereof by a ‘relevant audience’. At this point, we have arrived at the logic of power structures. Discourses securitising Iran’s nuclear programme as a threat to international peace and security, as well as Iranian rhetoric about ‘prestige’, perceived leadership of the Islamic and non-aligned world, Third Worldism and ‘unfairness’ in international politics (Barzegar 2012: 233) all rely on assumptions about perceptions and interaction effects. Power

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. on speech act theory also Müller (2001: 162); Risse (2000: 5).

relations and implicit value systems are audience-specific (cf. also Campbell 1993; Klein 1994; Balzacq 2010), and each audience will re-define the meaning of *justice* (cf. Welch 1993; Müller 2013; Gehring 1994: 366). This last inference ties in nicely with theoretical aspirations to identify ‘hegemonic discourses’ and prevalent power structures whose usefulness for the research underlying this dissertation will be addressed further below. An investigation into Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward Iran in this research reveals different security conceptions and thereby disentangles possible correlations between the power to securitise the Iranian nuclear programme and the extent to which such a power position stands indicative for a necessary receptiveness of other actors (relevant audience as a precondition for the process of securitisation). While this research does not adopt and apply the ‘securitisation’ framework as a direct theoretical tool, it is imperative to understand its underlying logic that both policy and academic discourse is influenced and shaped by dominant actors. The next section will link these arguments about security discourses to a broader theoretical understanding of norm dynamics in international relations and thereby embeds the research question about security cultures into its wider normative dimension.

### 3. Analysing international norm dynamics

In their oft-cited work on norm acceptance and norm dynamics, Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) argue that “norms evolve in a patterned ‘life cycle’ and that different behavioural logics dominate different segments of the life cycle” (888). After an initial promotion of norms by what they call ‘norm entrepreneurs’, a process of socialisation sets in which they label a ‘norm cascade’, in which a sufficiently critical mass of actors accepts and adopts that particular norm (whereby a ‘tipping point’ is reached). In a last stage, actors internalise norms, rendering compliance automatic and thus creating a new ‘logic of appropriateness’, in the words of March & Olsen (1998: 949; cf. also March & Olsen 1989). The ‘norm life cycle’ presents a framework for the emergence of norms in international politics, and sheds light on the mechanisms of change, albeit in a somewhat schematic fashion that fails to systematically account for contingent power relations. The ‘classical’ norm literature that draws on Finnemore’s and Sikkink’s work proceeds from a conception of relatively static stages (cf. also Florini 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Nadelmann 1990; Johnstone 2007). Alexander Wendt (1999) speaks of ‘Culture’ as a self-fulfilling prophecy (184ff.), and thereby makes the important observation that the expectation of ‘appropriate behavior’ (culture) structures how agents behave – itself a precondition for the preservation or alteration of culture, or, as Gramsci would have it, of a ‘historic bloc’. Norms become a ‘conventionally’ accepted

standard of appropriate behavior. “Consensus becomes common sense, and common sense structures our thoughts”, Ali Ansari (2006: 5) writes in *Confronting Iran* and cautions: “[...] conclusions are reached on what we choose to see. And often what we choose to see supports our preconceptions, even if they are misconceptions.” (82). Questioning such dominant normative structures is an exercise in implicitly advocating alternative norms, or at least a modified norm understanding. It is the latter prospect, however, that has been largely neglected in the ‘classic’ scholarly norm literature. As Wunderlich (2014; cf. also Wunderlich et al. 2013) convincingly demonstrates, this has been due to a research bias towards a unidirectional understanding of norm diffusion. Agency-based analyses of norm dynamics have tended to conflate norm diffusion with the promotion of ‘positive’, i.e. Western, liberal norms (‘altruistic norm advocacy’, Wunderlich 2014: 85). In reaction to this strand of literature, new studies have been written on changes in international norms as being essentially dispute-driven (Stiles & Sandholtz 2009: 323f.), on the contestation of norms (Bob 2012; Sandholtz 2007; Wiener 2008; Krook & True 2012; van Kersbergen & Verbeek 2007), and on the link between norms and power structures (Adler-Nissen 2014; Epstein 2012a, b; Towns 2012). Their works thus have contributed to the advancement of a ‘new’ generation or a ‘second wave’ of norm literature (cf. Cortell & Davis 2000; Wunderlich 2013) that conceives norms as essentially contested narratives. Wunderlich (2014) reverses the directionality of Finnemore’s and Sikkink’s original ‘norm entrepreneurship’ model and asks to what extent ‘norm violators’ (such as Iran) can be conceived of as ‘roguish’ norm entrepreneurs and contribute to a norm ‘renovation’ (88-89). Such scholarship weaves together norm dynamics, contingent power structures and fundamental issues of international legitimacy.

On the latter aspect, Reus-Smit (2014) writes: “Interpretative ambiguity and normative dissonance are reasons why social processes of legitimation and delegitimation are often marked by intense political contestation” (346). The social construction of identities and ‘order’ is intimately linked with hegemonic legitimacy, the latter of which will be expanded upon in the next section. The link between ‘hegemonic discourse’ and the structures of power has also been emphasised in the works of Laclau (1988) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985).<sup>6</sup>

Recurring but essentially contested concepts such as ‘the international community’ to which the nuclear programme of the ‘rogue regime’ of Iran allegedly presents a threat call for a critical re-evaluation of taken-for-granted assumptions about the conditions of legitimacy in

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<sup>6</sup> Albeit in an explicit poststructuralist reading, where discourse and practice are constitutive of each other. This dissertation, however, makes a distinction between discourse and foreign policy behavior, as will be outlined in section 5 below.

international politics, as has been emphasised in the previous section on order-constituting effects of securitising discourses. Different narratives of a foreign policy issue under consideration (the Iranian nuclear programme as perceived differently by different actors) are reflective of underlying value and belief systems that inform and drive foreign policy. Here, challenging questions arise about the conditions for acceptance of and admission to an ‘international community’<sup>7</sup> that may give rise to critiques of the functioning of the international system as a reflection of selective norms of certain dominant states (cf. also Epstein 2012a; Widmaier & Park 2012). Jeppersen, Wendt and Katzenstein (1996) interestingly remark that “World society carries standardised oppositional ideologies that are usually selective reifications of elements of dominant world ideology” (48); of “restricted subsets of global society”, in the words of Nincic (2005: 11).

The NPT regime as a normative framework underlying much discussions surrounding Iran’s nuclear crisis is a case in point for such latent power structures and conceptions of world order. Dividing its signatories into those in possession of nuclear weapons before 1 January 1967 and non-nuclear weapon (NNW) states that are not allowed to acquire nuclear weapons according to Art. II, the treaty effectively imposed an arbitrary freezing of the political status quo. This has created a political fault line between the developed and the developing, the modernised and the modernising world (Patrikarakos 2012: 30). Hurrell (2006) makes out double standards in the way that during the Cold War, “possession of nuclear weapons was widely seen as a necessary qualification for a seat at the top table”, while their acquisition today has become “a sign of unacceptable behavior and potential status as a rogue state” (4). Tellingly, former IAEA Secretary General Mohamed ElBaradei writes of an “asymmetry of the global security system” (172) that he detects in the perpetuation of the existing global nuclear framework conditions, as emphasised by the “linkage between nuclear proliferation and the sluggish pace of disarmament” (254). This “discrimination between the haves and have-nots” (Hurrell 2006: 11) and the non-recognition of Iran’s “inalienable right” to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes by key actors in the Iranian nuclear dossier<sup>8</sup> is a recurrent theme underlying all negotiation efforts with Iran (Wunderlich et al. 2013: 263-272). This nuclear discrimination purposely built into the NPT became the bone of contention

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<sup>7</sup> Hedley Bull’s work (1977, 1995) focusses on bridging the assumed dichotomy between ‘power’ and ‘norms’ and has theorised on a “third conception of an international society” (Bull 1966: 79). While this is a valuable starting point, it departs from a conception of norm promotion that itself favours those states in the most powerful position to convey narratives of ‘appropriate behaviour’.

<sup>8</sup> The initial US insistence on a complete cessation of Iranian nuclear activities violated spirit and letter of Iran’s rights as a member to the NPT according to Art. IV thereof and “led to more distrust toward the West in Iran and disillusionment with disarmament treaties” from an Iranian perspective (Mousavian 2012: 451).

for much wider ‘fairness’ issues between the ‘developing world’ and ‘Western domination’, as framed by Iranian argumentation. And it was the main reason for the dramatic failure of the 2005 NPT review conference. The nexus between nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation was also high on the agenda of the 2015 NPT Review conference in New York, which ended without a final communiqué on 22 May 2015. The Iranian delegate also criticised the imbalance between security concerns in the Middle East and the absence of Israel from the NPT. For the first time, Israel was an observer state to the NPT review conference in 2015. Inherent asymmetries in the NPT regime again let the conference end fruitlessly.

The Iranian nuclear crisis needs to be understood not only as a political challenge for the NPT regime, but as a proxy issue for a wider re-thinking about world order and “nuclear hypocrisy” (Osborne & Morrison 2013: 32f.). This dissertation sheds light on how China, Turkey and Russia positioned and position themselves toward these essentially *normative* questions and what they tell us about underlying conceptions of security governance, the non-proliferation regime and world order at large. China and Russia are both nuclear weapon-states themselves and permanent members of the UNSC. A binary distinction between nuclear ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ thus fails to account for differences in foreign policy approaches to Iran between these two states and the West. While China, Turkey and Russia are driven by myriad factors and motivations in pursuing their respective Iran policies, the case studies in this dissertation will carve out the existence of common themes of diplomacy and foreign policy principles on which their positions converge and on which they potentially differ from ‘Western’ approaches.<sup>9</sup> The next section turns towards a conceptualisation of such norm dynamics for the analytical purpose of addressing the research question whether Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward Iran’s nuclear programme are indicative of a security culture that resists normative conceptions sustaining hegemonic structures.

### **3.1 Conceptualising security cultures and resistance to hegemony**

Drawing on Katzenstein’s (1996) definition of ‘culture’ as “a set of evaluative standards (such as norms and values) and a set of cognitive standards (such as rules and models) that define what social actors exist in a system, how they operate, and how they relate to one another” (21), a security culture is understood as a set of evaluative and cognitive standards in the security governance realm, i.e., the yardstick with which states assess legitimate means and

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Section 2.1. of Chapter 1 on the methodological approach adopted for a more detailed discussion of the case study selection.



ends in security policies. While ‘evaluative standards’ in the form of norms and values will be further elaborated upon in the following section, the use of ‘cognitive standards’ understood as ‘rules and models’ as taken from Katzenstein’s definition may require further clarification at this point. If ‘norms and values’, as will be shown, are concrete convictions and conceptions, ‘rules and models’ relate to the broader macro-structure that regulates the way these norms and values are communicated, applied, or changed. An example is the UN system setting rules and models by way of its institutional make-up and treaty stipulations (decision-making procedures, legal proceedings, constitution of UN bodies) that serves as a broader frame for the channelling of concrete norms and values that account for the former’s political content and are often at the heart of debate among its member states (such as sovereignty, non-interference). Rules and models are structures underlying norms and values. If China, Russia and Turkey regard US unilateral Iran sanctions as illegitimate, but accept international (i.e. UN-backed) Iran sanctions, they reveal their own understanding of certain *norms* in international politics, while demonstrating an adherence to the *rules* of the UN family. Likewise, acceptance of unilateral sanctions would imply adherence to the rules of hegemonic structures, despite a preference for alternative norms.

Such a definition of security cultures assumes that the recognition, shaping and evaluation of security cultures is necessarily relational: The assessment of legitimacy here inherently presupposes interaction effects, as alternative discourses aiming at the modification of prevalent norms make no sense in an isolated system. This links up with the understanding set forth above in section 2 that ideas and identities are always socially (co)constructed. Alexander Wendt (1999) writes in this context: “even if states act on the basis of the meanings they attach to material forces, if those meanings are not shared then the structure of the international system will not have a *cultural* dimension” (158). To take an illustrative example, a different understanding of energy security reveals underlying conceptions of legitimacy in politics that are at the roots of diverging energy security *cultures*: While for most Western countries, energy security essentially implies security of stable supplies, energy security for an energy exporting country like Russia may imply the security of continued dependence on Russian energy companies on the part of European markets. Another example is that of contract security. This concept implies the general principle in public international law of the reliability of contract partners and an understanding that contract stipulations ought to be adhered to (*pacta sunt servanda*). Both the West and countries under investigation in this research project (China, Russia, Turkey) reproach each other at times of interpreting and consequently circumventing or even blatantly ignoring contract stipulations according to their

political convenience. Examples here include the reproach brought forward against Western countries that the insistence on a complete shutdown of Iran's nuclear programme is a violation of the spirit and the letter of Art. IV NPT. Another example of a Western reproach against unwanted trade with Iran is the position that the export of certain products and technologies to Iran violate the spirit and the letter of pertinent UNSC sanctions resolutions on Iran – whose legality may in turn be questioned by other actors, and so forth.

These examples forcefully make the point that what is deemed 'appropriate behaviour' in international politics is always the outcome of an intersubjective evaluation and presupposes what Wendt (1999) calls *Culture* as 'socially shared knowledge' (141). The acceptance or rejection of a foreign policy behaviour as appropriate is the expression of *security cultures*. 'Security' becomes situational and is intimately and inextricably linked with images of 'Self' and 'Other'.

A further conceptual element of a security culture between hegemony and resistance to be clarified here is that of 'hegemony', 'counter-hegemony' and 'resistance'. Aware of scholarly contributions skeptical of the possibility of an application of Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' to international relations as the expansion of a concept originally conceived to apply to the nation-state (Femia 2005; Germain and Kenny 1998; Burnham 1991; Bellamy 1990; Worth 2008), this dissertation moves away from Gramsci's focus on a dominant social class, but contends that the idea of hegemony can nevertheless be usefully applied to the international arena (cf. also Rupert 1995).<sup>10</sup> Drawing on Gramsci's components of hegemony as developed in, i.a., his *Prison Notebooks*, hegemony essentially implies a dominant position in social, economic, and political structures (Gramsci 1971: 171-72). In Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, a dominant class forms a relationship with subaltern classes that is characterised both by consent and coercion (Gramsci 1971: 55-60; 415-25).<sup>11</sup>

Gramsci's reflections as developed in prison mark a transition from his earlier journalistic, and politically instrumental, work, to an all-encompassing socio-political account

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Keohane (1984), Gilpin (1987), Josphe (2002) for realist analyses and usages of the concept; Ikenberry (2004), Ferguson (2003) for liberalist analyses (the 'benign hegemon' theory); Clark (2009a, 2009b) for an English school approach to hegemony; Cox (1981), Arrighi (1993), Rupert (1995), Worth (2009) for neo-Gramscian analyses of 'hegemony'.

<sup>11</sup> This concept of hegemony needs to be understood in the context of their time. Written for revolutionary Marxist politics, especially Lenin's understanding of hegemony was interchangeable with 'political leadership' (Service 2000: 170-71; Cox 1993: 50), and Gramsci acknowledged having drawn on Lenin in theorising on 'hegemony' (1971: 381). In a sense, a widespread acceptance of a Gramscian application of 'hegemony' in IR (and thus outside of Marxist circles) is somewhat surprising and has, over time, acquired an academically instrumental meaning of its own and thus moved away intellectually from its progenitor under the wider umbrella of Critical Theories. Jones (2006) writes of a 'Gramsci industry' that has become tailored to different disciplines.

of historical changes in state and society (Fiori 2013: 287-88). He understands the importance of the *Making of Culture* as key to the crafting of Order (ibid.: 130). To the extent that these cultural codes formulated by dominant actors get accepted throughout society and become *common sense*, hegemonic order is always based on the dual foundation of consent and coercion – just like a centaur is always half man, half beast, in the analogy Gramsci borrowed from Machiavelli (Cox 1993: 52; Gramsci 1971: 169-70). In the same logic, ideas alone never create lasting order. Instead, theory (ideas) and practice are inextricably interrelated and interpenetrate each other (ibid.: 142). Gramsci's therefore necessarily is a circular understanding of how hegemony comes into being, and how it changes gradually. Such an ensemble of and arrangement between hegemonic structures and the wider society represents a 'historic bloc'. In a neo-Gramscian understanding of hegemony in International Relations as developed, e.g., in Cox's seminal works on *World Order* (Cox 1996: 131), the prevalence of dominant structures that are accepted and sustained by a sufficiently large number of other actors (states) can also constitute such an 'historic bloc'. To the extent that other states act upon, sustain and reinforce US dominant structures in the social, economic and political sphere, US hegemony post-1945 has brought about a historic bloc in a Gramscian understanding that is being upheld by the vast majority of states in the Western hemisphere. A security culture is understood as hegemonic if shaped by a dominant actor that holds sufficient power so as to induce adaption and acceptance thereof by other actors. Such an understanding draws on Gramsci's conception of *cultural* hegemony (Service 2007: 139-40), but adds an understudied dimension of the security and foreign policy realm and thus moves away from the strong association of neo-Gramscianism with the discipline of International Political Economy (cf. also Worth 2011: 386-390). Rather than focusing on narrowly materialist conceptions of hegemony, this dissertation holds that the *perception of hegemonic legitimacy* is crucial for the preservation or alteration of hegemonic structures.<sup>12</sup>

By implication, a security culture is counter-hegemonic if it confronts or challenges a prevailing hegemonic framework and the normative pull toward socialisation with it. The latter, drawing on a definition by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), is "the dominant mechanism of a norm cascade- the mechanism through which norm leaders persuade others to adhere" (902). "Gramsci's concern", Schwarzmantel (2009) writes, "lay in challenging the dominant ideas or hegemonic concepts, and forming a new historic bloc or constellation of social forces to create an alternative set of ideas [...]" (8). Resistance of normative structures underlying

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<sup>12</sup> This is an argument also made by Ian Clark, discussing the concept of 'hegemonic succession' with a view to China-U.S. relations (2011). Cf. also Rapkin & Braaten's (2009) conceptualisation of hegemonic legitimacy and Reus-Smit (2014) on 'Power, Legitimacy, and Order'.

hegemony lies at the root of every attempt to challenge consensual relationships, to resist a dominant 'historic bloc'. If hegemony is based on consent and coercion, questioning prevalent practice and contesting norms touches the foundational pillars of hegemonic consensus. The "emphasis on the continual construction, maintenance and defence of hegemony in the face of constant resistance and pressures is reflected in Gramsci's strategic theory and the potential for 'counter'hegemony", Morton (2007: 97) notes in *Unraveling Gramsci*.

It is at this point that an important conceptual differentiation between 'resistance' and 'counter-hegemony' needs to be made. "A counter-hegemony would consist of a coherent view of an alternative world order, backed by a concentration of power sufficient to maintain a challenge to core countries", Robert Cox writes (1981: 150). The notion of 'counter-hegemony' thus implies a drive towards power transitions. While it may be possible conceptually to think of 'counter-hegemony', the latter is unlikely to exist in practice. Even examples coming to mind such as North Korea, which has disregarded US pressure and hegemonic structures, left the NPT and eventually tested atomic bombs, cannot serve as an empirical example of a phenomenon we could term 'counter-hegemony'. In a more complex world, the setting up of such essentially reductionist dichotomies could not capture a more fine-grained picture of how states position themselves towards hegemony, and would be immediately vulnerable to criticism as to how one could judge whether China, Russia, or Turkey are moving more or less towards the extreme end of such a spectrum. It is also worth noting that Gramsci himself never used the term 'counter-hegemony'.

The ideas of consent and coercion developed in Gramscian thought transcend a dichotomous juxtaposition of 'domination' and 'resistance'. "It is very difficult to conceptualize," Steve Jones (2006) formulates, "some pure moment of 'resistance' within a Gramscian framework, since the identities and representational forms of the dominated are formed through an engagement with the hegemonic projects of the power bloc" (76). Resistance is therefore never a "totalizing act" (ibid), but always a qualified form of disagreement with a part of, or even a number of, hegemonic policies. The "values of the power bloc, subalterns and counter-hegemonic forces are in a constant state of negotiation, compromise and change" (ibid.: 79). Resistance and hegemonic power are engaged in a constant process of engagement with each other. Contrary to the idea of 'counter-hegemony', resistance is therefore conceptualised here as a qualified form of disagreement with hegemony, with established power constellations. It thus borrows more from Gramsci's concept of a longer-term 'war of position' in which meanings and values gradually become

contested, rather than from his idea of a ‘war of manoeuvre’, which Steve Jones (2006) likens to an ‘all-out frontal attack’ (31).

It is therefore suggested here that ‘resistance’ to hegemony captures more accurately the conceptual continuum that eschews distortionary simplifications and allows for empirically more qualified analysis of nuanced foreign policies.<sup>13</sup> Conceptually and empirically, ‘counter-hegemony’ entertains the idea that one hegemony will eventually be replaced by another (dichotomous understanding). Yet, instead of an *anti*-American world, we should arguably think of *post*-American variants (Zakaria 2011). Contestation need not mean endeavors to topple the hegemonic system, but can be a first step towards reforming it. Another helpful distinction here may be that of radicalism (negation of the prevalent order) versus resistance (qualified disagreement with parts of that order).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the unlikelihood of ‘counter-hegemony’ on a state level may be explained by the threefold distinction of hegemony made by Gramsci: Since a hegemonic world order implies predominance in the social, economic and political sphere (cf. above), the attempt to resist hegemony in the security and political sphere may be cushioned by a state’s dependence on and integration in the international economic order that is predicated upon the US-inspired neoliberal world order (i.e., the economic sphere). It is precisely in this context that an analysis of Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies becomes an examination of the friction between consent and coercion, between resistance and hegemony.

Lastly, both in a realist as well as in a critical understanding, ‘hegemony’ has been treated largely as a state-centric concept. This dissertation, however, is more sympathetic to a Coxian understanding of hegemony in that it focusses on the material, ideational as well as institutional conditions that are underpinning hegemonic structures (Cox 1996: 97f.; 135f.; Gill, S. 1993, 2003; Rupert 1995, 2000; Pijl 1984). The interplay between these will help understand the positioning of China, Turkey and Russia towards hegemonic structures and shed light on what might at first sight seem to be ambiguous policies towards a monolithic hegemonic pole. While a security culture in a hegemonic understanding implies an expected adherence to the norms of this hegemonic power structure (as the set of standards by which behavior is considered ‘appropriate’), the understanding of a security culture in a Chinese, Russian and Turkish reading experiences a significant shift of emphasis in that security is understood to be security *from* such a normative hegemony. As will be shown, this explains the discursive re-iteration of the foreign policy norms of sovereignty and non-interference.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. also section 2.1. of the following chapter on ‘measure in degree’, rather than ‘measurement in kind’.

<sup>14</sup> Also cf. Adib-Moghaddam (2014: 116-118) on this differentiation.

This is not to imply that China, Russia and Turkey act in a concerted manner to craft a security culture of their own understanding in an attempt to openly challenge ‘the system’.<sup>15</sup> Instead of assuming strategic convergence in their foreign policy behavior, the case studies in this research project will analyse adherence to a common security culture discursively, while their respective material interests may be different or may even be in conflict with each other.

### 3.2 Conceptualising norms and norm adherence

“How do we know a norm when we see one?”, Finnemore & Sikkink (1998: 888) ask a notoriously intricate question in foreign policy analysis. The extent to which administrations or decision-makers adhere to ‘norms’ out of conviction or as a discursive label, e.g. out of strategic convenience, is ultimately impossible to tell. In the scholarly norm literature, ‘norms’ are generally defined as a standard of appropriate behaviour (cf. DiMaggio 1997; March & Olsen 1984, 1989, 1995, 1998: 948; Katzenstein 1996: 5f.; Sandholtz 2009). Katzenstein (1996) formulates:

“norm(s) [...] describe collective expectations for proper behavior of actors with a given identity. In some situations norms operate like rules that define the identity of an actor, thus having ‘constitutive effects’ that specify what actions will cause relevant others to recognize a particular identity. In other situations norms operate as standards that specify the proper enactment of an already defined identity. In such instances norms have ‘regulative’ effects that specify standards of proper behavior. Norms thus either define (or constitute) identities or prescribe (or regulate) behavior, or they do both” (5).

Detecting and assessing ‘appropriate behavior’, as was shown in the preceding sections, is always a matter of interpretation. Analyzing reference and adherence to norms in foreign policy therefore becomes an inherently intricate and interpretative endeavor. To the extent that the discursive reference to norms can be assumed to reveal a level of conviction, the interplay between foreign policy identity, perceptions of legitimacy and the accompanying rhetoric about it tell us what kind of security culture is underlying a state’s foreign policy machinery – in other words, how a state’s discursive reference to norms both regulates and constitutes its behavior.

The discursive usage of foreign policy ‘norms’ such as sovereignty, legitimacy and non-interference, in other words, serve as indicators of a security culture resisting hegemony or the eventual emergence thereof. This is to be explained by the political controversy and historical legacy surrounding these particular norms. International relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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<sup>15</sup> As would be an underlying assumption of a ‘power transition’ theory.

have seen the relativisation and gradual erosion of the main tenets of Westphalia; sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other sovereign states. These are understood as principles of ‘Sovereign Equality’ in public international law.<sup>16</sup> Sovereignty, authority and territoriality have been at the heart of definitions of modern statehood and the way international politics works (Zaum 2007: 28f.). The gradual erosion and relativisation thereof is not only attributed, as it often is in the literature, to the end of the Cold War, the higher risk of intra-state conflicts and ensuing controversial debates about rights of states to interfere in other states in order to prevent atrocities. Arguably, the principles of Westphalia had always been ignored or re-interpreted according to political convenience. This has been the case with the period of colonisation, political patronage systems or authoritarian federations, to name but a few examples. Arrighi (1993) has therefore theorised on the emergence of world hegemony from a Westphalian system based on state sovereignty, over an Imperialist system under the British empire to a US-crafted system of hegemonic world governance. Historical empires, by definition, did not face the resistance of national borders. Imperial rulers from Marc Aurel, Alexander the Great to Charles V. attempted to export their ideas of universality with the instruments of territorial domination. Formally since 1648, geopolitics and territorial differentiation imposes dividing lines that impede imperial or hegemonic politics. The latter, then, is a deliberate act of governance to override territorial and, by consequence, cultural borders and therewith breach the principles of non-interference and sovereignty. This act of often very skillful political interpretation to justify the breach of the afore-mentioned norms has, historically, been ascribed to those states that were in a powerful position to do so. Hegemony presumes system-inherent power asymmetries. The United States today, as will be specified in the following section, has followed policies that blatantly contravened the norms of sovereignty and non-interference, relying on hegemonic structures it had created and sustained. If we are to analyse resistance to such hegemony, it is illustrative to reflect on the context and way in which those norms are uttered and reiterated that are the utmost indications of security cultures deemed non-hegemonic. Norm contestation, as the previous section has shown, can shake a foundational pillar of consensual hegemony.

Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) formulate: “[...] norm language can help [...] considering the components of social institutions as well as the way these elements are renegotiated into new arrangements over time to create new patterns of politics” (891). The

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<sup>16</sup> State sovereignty and territorial integrity are generally accepted as ‘norms’ under customary international law and emanate from the notion of ‘Sovereign Equality’ as the bedrock principle of the Westphalian international order.

challenge of recognising a foreign policy norm as the expression of a security culture alternative to a hegemonic one in practice amounts to a theoretical interpretation of recurrent themes found in discourse – how and in what context they are used, and what they tell us about a state’s own foreign policy identity and its conception of ‘appropriate behaviour’ in an international system of states. For example, to the extent that states like China, Russia and Turkey renounce and oppose notions of a potential infringement of the norm of ‘sovereignty’ as epitomised by the intrusive effect of sanctions regimes, we may conclude that these states advocate for such a norm (‘sovereignty’) to be accepted as regulating international politics. Norms become shapers of security policies. Analyzing in what context China, Russia and Turkey advocate different behavioral logics as the expression of normative understandings that diverge from dominant security cultures toward Iran is illustrative of their perception of legitimacy in international relations. Qualitative data analysis and interviewing will detect recurring concepts and ideas that are expressions of larger perceptions of identity and legitimacy.<sup>17</sup> Interviewees (most notably official decision-makers), in this sense, serve as norm-carriers whose reference to the issues discussed here (pertaining to perception of other actors’ foreign policies, legitimacy in international politics etc.) tells us to what extent ‘norms’ in foreign policy decision-making do play a role and are ‘internalised’.

#### 4. Whose hegemony?

It has been argued so far that a security culture here is understood as hegemonic if shaped by a single dominant actor that holds sufficient power so as to induce adaption and acceptance thereof by other actors. “Hegemonic strategies [...],” Leverett & Leverett (2013) write, “are inherently expansionist: a state uses military, political, and economic power not just to defend its interests but to bend others into accommodating them” (332). Informed by the revisionist historiography and literature on US hegemony,<sup>18</sup> the US is deemed such a single most dominant actor that, as of yet, remains unmatched in its potential to influence other actors (cf. also Wilkinson 1999: 142; Krahnemann 2005: 533; Wicht 2002: 77). Suffice to recall that Gramsci’s conception of hegemony entails dominance in the political, economic and cultural sphere. However difficult a comprehensive assessment is, it is fair to suggest that historical empires have achieved near-dominance in one or two of these spheres at best. Charles V.’s imperial vision of ‘Universitas Christiana’ in the 16<sup>th</sup> century essentially was a Christian

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<sup>17</sup> On the methodology adopted here in document analysis and qualitative interviewing, cf. the next chapter.

<sup>18</sup> For ‘revisionist’ accounts of the history of the Cold War and US foreign policy, cf. Chomsky (1992; 2003); Bacevich (2002); Bromley (2004); Layne (2006); Stokes (2005); Gaddis (1997); Ikenberry (2004); Afrasiabi & Kibaroglu (2005: 3); Lee (2010).



empire,<sup>19</sup> while the British empire can be said to have achieved imperial status in the economic and maybe cultural sphere at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the Second World War, however, the US arguably was the first to establish a form of hegemony that comes closest to an all-encompassing (neo-) Gramscian understanding of the term. Hence, the “first major successful resistance to U.S. hegemony [...]”, Noam Chomsky (2013) holds, was “the loss of China” in 1949 (57), and goes on to show how the terminology of ‘loss’ to capture political changes towards US-unfriendly governments neatly conveys the connotation of worldwide control. ‘Losing’ China, Southeast Asia, Iran, the Middle East is in itself a hegemonic discourse, a ‘paranoia’ of the ‘superpowerful’ in the words of Chomsky, because you cannot lose what you do not own (ibid.: 60). Discussing reports of the telecommunications company Apple entering the Iranian market, a State Department official remarked in an interview that the “motivation is to provide Iranians with technology that is in line with broader US foreign policy goals, (with) the post-WWII idea to maintain [sic] global capitalism.”<sup>20</sup> As telling as such a statement is for the US importance attached to the maintenance of a global neo-liberal ideology, it also stands in striking contrast to US efforts to regulate third countries’ trade relations with Iran for the sake of upholding a narrative of enmity carefully constructed for over three decades since Iran’s Islamic Revolution in 1979.

This dissertation will analyse the effects of such hegemonic structures on the Iran policies of the states investigated. The US unilateral sanctions regime in place is arguably the ultimate expression of hegemonic power structures: the US imposed punitive measures onto other states that do business with Iran (Lohmann 2013) – an “imperial extension of American power and [...] (a) sheer effrontery by which America sought to impose its political position”, as Ali Ansari (2006: 144) puts it. The first effort to sanction third country entities was enacted with the 1992 Iran-Iraq Nonproliferation Act that prohibited the transfer of goods or technologies that could facilitate the development of ABC weapons (Takeyh & Maloney 2011: 1301). This sector-specific sanctions regime was significantly expanded with the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996, which was modified in 2001 and renamed the Iran Sanctions Act in 2006 (Leverett & Leverett 2013: 310).

Beyond the initial proliferation dimension, the ILSA imposed sanctions on third country entities investing more than 40 million US dollars in the development of petroleum resources in Iran. This extension of the scope and applicability of Iran sanctions signified a sea change in US Iran policies in the way these gradually served to create a comprehensive

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<sup>19</sup> Until Luther’s reformation movement and the split within the Christian church reduced this ambition to that of a Catholic empire.

<sup>20</sup> Author’s interview, Washington, 30 October 2014.

regime that was to be adhered to on a global basis. The extraterritorial application of these US unilateral sanctions was introduced with the justification of ‘Iranian sponsoring of international terrorism’, and thus acquired an explicit non-nuclear dimension (Lohmann 2015). US administrations under Clinton, Bush jr. and Obama gradually expanded the scope of the existing Iran sanctions regime by targeting ever more commercial activities of third countries in Iran.

Hegemonic structures are also self-preserving. Even with a change in administration, domestic structures so far have prevented a noticeable shift in US Iran policies. President Clinton grudgingly had to sign the ILSA into law - against his own policy preferences - after a defeating legislative approval in Congress.<sup>21</sup> The same dividing lines resurface at the time of writing where the US administration is negotiating a Comprehensive Joint Plan of Action (CJPOA) to solve the nuclear crisis and to decide over the sequencing of the lifting of sanctions. Knowing that Congressional legislation to remove sanctions will require a lot of political capital, State Secretary Kerry stated that the administration has the authority to suspend sanctions and that “‘in the end’ Congress would weigh in” (Sullivan 2014). Institutional structures can carry further hegemonic policies even if administrations seek to shift frameworks.<sup>22</sup>

Latest examples of unilateral US ‘secondary’ sanctions (called ‘secondary’ because they do not stop at sanctioning the target state directly, but also aim to punish third country entities’ dealings with the target state) were the 2010 Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA) sanctioning purchases of Iranian oil as well as business transactions with the Iranian Central Bank<sup>23</sup> and the 2012 Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act. Such a process of ‘extraterritorialising’ US legislation and enforcing political conceptions onto other states through compliance under the threat of economic costs is the epitome of hegemonic coercion on the basis of the US predominance in the global trade, financial and economic system. Andrew Wilson (2014) writes: “America’s hard power may be waning and its soft power easy to criticise, but it still has a massive comparative advantage

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<sup>21</sup> The US president can veto Congressional legislation. Such a presidential veto can be overruled by a 2/3 majority in Congress. In the case of the ILSA, Clinton knew that his veto would not stand a chance of preventing the enactment of ILSA, given that the House of Representatives had unanimously passed the bill with a 415:0 vote in favour (Parsi 2007: 188).

<sup>22</sup> The unprecedented extent to which the US administration’s Iran policy has become the object of partisan turf wars between the White House and the (Republican-controlled) Congress in 2015 forcefully underscores this observation. The extension of a Congressional invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu – in breach of all diplomatic protocols – and an unauthorised open letter to the Iranian government, signed by 47 Senators, were the two starkest examples of Congress undermining the president’s Iran policy.

<sup>23</sup> CISADA also included sanctions against the sale of Iranian caviar, carpets and pistachios, which had previously been exempted under the Clinton administration.

in financial power and in intelligence. [...] The US may no longer want always to be the world's policeman, but it does want to be the world's private investigator" (202).<sup>24</sup> The former high-level US officials Leverett & Leverett (2013) even hold that US secondary sanctions are "almost certainly" illegal under WTO regulations, but that no one has litigated the question so far (280).<sup>25</sup>

"The fear of reputational costs", Giumelli & Ivan (2013) write, "has led banks to adopt cautious behavior in order to avoid paying the costs of defying UN, EU and especially US financial bans" (15). The observation that 'psychology' and 'reputation' have led companies to 'over-comply' with sanctions lists for fear of possible (unintended) violations was confirmed by several officials interviewed for this study.<sup>26</sup> 'Reputational costs' here underlines the perceived need to adhere to such a sanctions regime (out of fear of future consequences) and forcefully ties in with points made above on the relational aspect of politics and the normative pull towards dominant discourses. Tellingly, the EU has imposed harsh unilateral sanctions that went beyond the sanctions regime imposed by the UNSC, such as the EU's Iran oil embargo in July 2012 – "under pressure from the United States", as former Iranian official Mousavian writes in his 2014 book (37), and continues: "One of the harshest blows to the Iranian financial system came with the US Congress threatening to place sanctions on the Belgian-based Society for Worldwide International Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) unless they cut ties with all Iranian banks. [...] Unsurprisingly,

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Gill (2008) makes the same argument when he formulates: "[...] American power in an increasingly network-based world order is linked to its leading edge in panoptic technologies" (213). He defines 'panopticism' as 'surveillance processes' (232). Drawing on Bentham's Panopticon, Foucault writes in *Discipline and Punish* to that effect: "Panopticism is the general principle of a new 'political anatomy' whose object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline" (208). Such an observation can fruitfully be transposed to the international plane. To these factors for US hegemony, Caverley (2007) adds the 'globalisation' of defense contractors.

<sup>25</sup> In order to pre-empt formal counter action by EU member states in the WTO, the US government seemed to have found a *modus operandi* over the application of the ILSA. To this effect, it is worth quoting at length from Kenneth Katzman's (2006) CRS Report for Congress: "Traditionally skeptical of economic sanctions as a policy tool, the European Union states opposed ILSA as an extraterritorial application of U.S. law. The EU countries threatened formal counter-action in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and in April 1997, the United States and the EU formally agreed to try to avoid a trade confrontation over ILSA (and a separate "Helms-Burton" Cuba sanctions law, P.L. 104-114). The agreement contributed to a decision by the Clinton Administration to waive ILSA sanctions on the first project determined to be in violation: a \$2 billion<sup>2</sup> contract, signed in September 1997, for Total SA of France and its minority partners, Gazprom of Russia and Petronas of Malaysia to develop phases 2 and 3 of the 25-phase South Pars gas field. The Administration announced the "national interest" waiver (Section 9(c) of ILSA) on May 18, 1998, after the EU pledged to increase cooperation with the United States on non-proliferation and counter-terrorism. The announcement indicated that EU firms would likely receive waivers for future projects that were similar." Since 2010, however, US president Obama enforced US unilateral sanctions also against European companies by way of executive orders (Lohmann 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Author's interview with European Iran desk officer, Berlin, 14 November 2014; Author's interview with State Department official, Washington, 30 October 2014; Author's interview with Turkish diplomat, Washington, 30 October 2014.

the EU yielded to US threats and consequently cut off the Iranian Central Bank from the international financial system” (38).

While section 2.2 of chapter 3 will add an important caveat on the importance not to conflate the EU and the US in a general ‘Western bloc’ approach,<sup>27</sup> suffice to mention at this point that the present analysis will shed light on Chinese, Russian and Turkish efforts to position themselves in opposition to a security culture involving a US-inspired system of pressure on Iran whose legitimacy is being called into question by a security culture advocated by China, Russia and Turkey. In doing so, however, this research rejects a simplistic and easily-adoptable anti-Americanism implicitly underlying some of the literature on US dominance that sometimes is at the boundary of analysis and advocacy.<sup>28</sup> Against the backdrop of the centrality of the US for the Iranian nuclear dossier,<sup>29</sup> it will be shown to what extent China, Russia and Turkey, in pursuing their Iran policies, are resisting the US as the single most dominant actor in the Iranian nuclear crisis and its underlying hegemonic security culture. The unprecedented US-Iranian rapprochement following the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran’s new president in June 2013 accounts for a remarkable thawing of bilateral relations as a precondition for first signs of diplomatic efforts to bear fruit and led to the conclusion of a first agreement between the P5+1 and Iran in November 2013. A ‘political framework agreement’ as a basis for Iran’s final nuclear status was reached on 2 April 2015. In addition, political dynamics in the Middle East, above all the conflict in Syria and the ensuing fanning of confessional radicalisation<sup>30</sup> implicitly foster a positive momentum for diplomatic progress in the Iran nuclear talks. The historical Syrian-Iranian alliance<sup>31</sup> and Tehran’s steadfast backing of Syria’s Assad makes Iran an inevitable ‘center of gravity’<sup>32</sup> in any talks on the future of Syria, Iraq and on strategies to contain transnational violence. But talks with Iran on these issues, in turn, is conditioned on progress in the nuclear dossier that allows an at least partial rapprochement between the US and Iran (Pieper 2014: 11-12).

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<sup>27</sup> In a neo-Gramscian analysis, the adherence to and upholding of such a power system would even be labeled a ‘historic bloc’ in which a hegemonic structure is upheld by the consent of states accepting its underlying value system.

<sup>28</sup> This is true if we think of the underlying emancipatory appeal of, e.g., neo-Marxist theorising. Scharzmantel (2009) cautions against a “straightforward and relatively banal idea of US hegemony in the post-Cold War world” (6) and calls for a differentiated application of neo-Gramscian thoughts in International Relations.

<sup>29</sup> On this point, cf. also section 2.1 in chapter 3.

<sup>30</sup> Syria’s ungoverned spaces and the infiltration of parts of the Syrian ‘opposition’ by religious extremists have allowed the creation of a fertile breeding ground for sectarian and transnational radicalisation. The rapid advance of the so-called ‘Islamic State’ in the summer of 2014 has to be seen in this context.

<sup>31</sup> For an insightful analysis thereof, cf. Milani 2013.

<sup>32</sup> So formulated by Mark Perry. Intervention at the conference ‘The Syrian Crisis: Can Diplomacy Succeed?’, organised by the SETA Foundation, Washington D.C., 14 February 2014 (cf. Annex II).

An investigation into security cultures crafted, as will be shown, as a reaction to dominant US-inspired paradigms on Iran as from 2002 thus also becomes an investigation into power shifts at historic turning points for world politics. Non-Western resistance to compliance with dominant power structures can eventually usher in a shift in these structures themselves. Asking to what extent the US security culture towards Iran itself has changed to allow for a US-Iranian reconciliation as from 2013, due to the above-mentioned foreign policy motivations, is the subject of another research project.

## **5. Discourse and Behaviour: Understanding Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies**

As laid out in the preceding sections, any emerging new norm or discourse has to have a sufficient power so as to frame illegitimate established norms and discourses which it is going to replace or alter. The attempt to alter normative frameworks because established norms become perceived as inappropriate or illegitimate presupposes a level of discontent or disconnect of certain actors with the status quo as represented by other actors. Attention needs to be paid to discursive framings of who is considered to ‘revolt’ against an existing order and on the basis of what legitimacy status quo powers (‘hegemonic powers’ in a critical perspective) in turn deny emerging and possibly conflicting power centers legitimacy and recognition, acting as the “custodians of the seals of international approval and disapproval” (Claude 1966: 371-2). An analysis of changing and conflicting conceptions of security cultures as an expression of diverging interests and identities of different actors effectively becomes an investigation into alternative normative narratives of international relations at large.

Resistance to hegemony, so the power transition paradigm, can lead to counter-hegemonic struggles by which new ‘power centers’ ultimately create a system of international relations crafted according to their own political conceptions of legitimacy.<sup>33</sup> Hegemonic transition theories and power transition theories have focused on the extent to which emerging new power poles replace existing dominant power structures to create new models of governance.<sup>34</sup> This literature has regained much attention in the context of “emerging powers” and in the debate about who the architects of the future global order are. Here, one needs to be

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. on this also section 4 in chapter 3 on a discussion of the ‘power transition’ literature.

<sup>34</sup> On this, cf. also section 4 of chapter 3. Seminal examples discussing global power shifts and prospects for international cooperation are Gilpin (1981); Organski (1968); Organski & Kugler (1980); Kugler & Lemke (1996); DiCicco & Levy (2003); Jones, B. (2011); Keohane (1984); Kagan (2002, 2012); Kupchan (2012). Cf. also Chan (2004b); Lebow & Valentino (2009); Lemke (1997); Vezirgiannidou (2013); Clark (2014).

careful not to read the existence or emergence of a non-Western bloc alternative, acting as a monolith of resistance to the Westernisation of discourses, into any alternative voices calling for a more differentiated understanding of politics. While Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme arguably breathe the ambition to partially ‘de-Westernise’ security cultures and discourses toward Iran,<sup>35</sup> as will be shown in the chapters that follow, one must be careful not to over-theorise on indications of counter-hegemonic forces struggling to topple the prevailing power system. As mentioned above, adherence to an alternative security culture is not assumed to imply a concerted action of states to challenge ‘core countries’ representing a hegemonic security culture. This dissertation aims to differentiate such a too categorical depiction of systemic power transitions by investigating the extent to which Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme stand indicative of alternative security cultures toward Iran in a “process of power de-concentration” (Tessman & Wolfe 2011: 218) in which dominant power structures have not been replaced by alternative governance structures (yet). This accounts for more continuous and nuanced power shifts in world politics and holds that “resistance is immanent to power” (Adib-Moghaddam 2014: 91). Elsewhere, Adib-Moghaddam writes: “Such resistance is as productive and promiscuous as power, which is why both are coterminous – resistance is where power is” (ibid.: 23).

At this juncture, this dissertation makes a distinction between a discursive and a behavioral level in foreign policy behavior to introduce a two-level model to better capture such qualified resistance to hegemony: An advocacy for a non-hegemonic security culture on a discursive level can be paralleled by compliance with a hegemonic security culture on a behavioral level. A seeming discrepancy between both levels can thus be observed.

The possible variation in norm compliance described here is visualised by a two-level model to capture “resistance to hegemony,” as shown in Table 1.

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<sup>35</sup> Understood here in a similar logic as Scott’s (1990) ‘counter-discourse’. Suffice to note, however, that Scott rather focusses on an individual and a class level.

**Table 1. Two-level Model to Capture “Resistance to Hegemony”**

	Discursive level	Behavioral level
Adherence to security culture	Advocacy for non-hegemonic security culture	Compliance with a U.S.-inspired hegemonic security culture
Degree of resistance to hegemony	<i>Normative</i> divergence with hegemony	<i>Rules</i> convergence with hegemony

Normative divergence in conjunction with rules divergence would be ‘counter-hegemony’, because it rejects hegemony on both a discursive and a behavioral level. This scenario is not represented in the table because the case studies that follow aim to make sense of a perceived discrepancy between both levels. In the same logic, it excludes the occurrence of normative convergence with rules convergence, because this scenario represents perfect adherence to hegemonic policies. Neither of these two scenarios applies to the Iran policies of China, Russia and Turkey, so this dissertation is interested in shedding light on ‘ambivalent’ cases, where the discursive level need not be a function of the behavioral level, where a state’s foreign policy displays incoherence, in other words. A state can advocate for a non-hegemonic security culture discursively, but still comply with a hegemonic security on a behavioral level. What an actor does may not correspond with how he acts. ‘Norms’ relate to the discursive level as this research proceeds from the assumption that actors convey, talk about, and refer to norms as ‘evaluative standards’, to take up Katzenstein’s terminology (1996: 21). Discourse differs where evaluations presuppose diverging norms. ‘Rules’, then, relate to the behavioral level in the way they condition and structure actors’ ‘cognitive standards’ (ibid.). Partial acceptance of hegemonic structures on a behavioral level even when conveying normative divergence on a discursive level may be predicated upon a level of perceived political and material dependence on the US. The latter observation and the extent to which it can be discerned in the case studies under investigation here will be qualified in the empirical chapters for Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies, respectively.

On a theoretical note, however, it is felt that an important parenthesis on the compatibility of materialist motivations with the overall theoretical framework as laid out

above should be inserted at this point. Rather than subscribing to either a purely neorealist analysis where social mediation and ideational factors in foreign policy are treated as epiphenomenal or to an exclusively ('thick') social constructivist angle where the assumption of 'ideas all the way down' does not allow for material forces to play a prominent role, this dissertation is sympathetic to the theoretical position of moderate constructivism where material predispositions as well as the aspect of social mediation are recognised as playing a role in a state's foreign policy decision-making. The idea of social mediation cannot exist in "a material vacuum" either, in the words of Kowert & Legro (1996: 490-1). Sørensen (2008) contends that Robert Cox's Neo-Gramscianism is an example of a theoretical framework acknowledging both material and ideational forces (13) and formulates: "International norms affect and shape the exercise of political and economic power and are themselves affected by economic and political power" (15). As worked out in section 3.1 above, Gramsci's theory of hegemony presupposes the contemporaneous forces of theory (ideas) and practice (institutions) – which Gramsci's biographer Giuseppe Fiori calls a 'Socratic Method' (2013: 142; cf. also 334-35). Ideas turn into practical forces, shape and change consensual orders, and vice versa. Adopting a purely materialist or purely idealist framework to analyse politics and policies, in other words, would make no sense if social and material factors co-determine each other (cf. Reus-Smit 2012: 532; cf. also Sørensen 2008; Nau 2002; Katzenstein & Okawara 2001/02; Katzenstein & Sil 2004).

It is this conception of correlational complementarity that allows for an analysis of divergences between a discursive and a behavioral level. In line with a 'thick' social constructivist thinking, the critique may be brought forward that 'everything is social', and that discourse in itself already constitutes behavior. This reading has been emphasised by Habermas' (1981) writings on speech acts as communicative action. But if we are to accept that interests can be material as well as social, it would be an ontological fallacy to hold that discourse always is an empirical act. Beyond semantic hairsplitting, it is perhaps instructive to think of the concept of 'doublespeak'.<sup>36</sup> According to this concept, what an actor says does not always correspond with how he acts. An actor, in other words, can fall short of acting upon the discourse he conveys. It is in this understanding that the present dissertation makes a distinction between a discursive and a behavioral level of foreign policy to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of an actor's security culture.

The understanding and perception of a state's standing in 'the international system'

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<sup>36</sup> The term is often traced back to George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, published in 1949. While it does not appear in the book as such, the term is conceptually close to that of 'doublethink', which is used in the book.



may lead states to adopt foreign policies that they would not otherwise adopt if the system were such that interaction effects did not matter; if states were to regard themselves as isolated actors, in other words. Based on an understanding of the US' power position and its ability to enforce unilateral sanctions on third countries' companies, for example, China, Russia and Turkey may adopt policies that are not beneficial economically (e.g. reduction of Iranian oil imports). The pursuance of materialist foreign policy objectives thus takes place *at least next to* ideational motivations; or, more often than not, as *the outcome of* implicit foreign policy identity perceptions and conceptions about legitimacy. As social context always (co)determines a state's foreign policy behavior, 'interests' are ideational as well as material. As Thomas Diez (2005) formulates: "The point is not that normative power is not strategic, but that strategic interests and norms cannot be easily distinguished and that the assumption of a normative sphere without interests is in itself nonsensical" (625). The advocacy for resistance to hegemony in Chinese, Russian and Turkish security cultures can therefore be accompanied by an awareness of material dependence that makes these states (temporarily) accept foreign policy decisions as the expression of norms of hegemonic structures (such as intrusive sanctions regimes). In the long-term, however, their resistance to hegemonic security cultures may reflect on their aspiration to bring about a non-hegemonic understanding of *norms* regulating international politics and a more equitable adherence to the *rules* of the UN system.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the theoretical framework adopted for the analysis in this dissertation. It has been argued that any analysis of security discourses and perceptions toward Iran needs to problematise underlying power structures not only in security governance but in international relations at large. This study proceeds from the assumption that both policy and academic discourse is influenced, shaped and reconfirmed by powerful actors. Especially with a view to the politically loaded discourse on the Iranian nuclear programme, it appears paramount to understand politics surrounding Iran as a clash of narratives that needs to be deconstructed with the aim to disentangle deep-seated contentions about legitimacy in international relations. This chapter has thus situated the research project's theoretical contributions within the 'second wave' of international norms literature that understands norms as essentially contested narratives.

It is the contestedness of norms in analyses of international politics that provides the first key to an understanding of Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies. While China,

Turkey and Russia are driven by myriad factors and motivations in pursuing their respective multifaceted Iran policies, the case studies in this dissertation will carve out the existence of common themes of diplomacy and foreign policy principles on which their positions converge and on which they potentially differ from a dominant security culture on Iran, shaped and reconfirmed by hegemonic power structures. Hegemony is shaped and sustained by the correlating forces of consent and coercion, and this chapter has worked out how norm contestation is an act of resistance to a consensual hegemonic order. It will be shown how Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies are partially crafted and perceived as countering the Iran policies of other powers, most prominently the US as the single most dominant actor in the Iranian nuclear dossier. Drawing on a neo-Gramscian understanding of hegemony (Cox 1996: 97f.; 135f.; Gill, S. 1993, 2003; Rupert 1995, 2000; Pijl 1984), it will be analysed how China, Russia and Turkey interact with the material, ideational and institutional dimension of US-inspired hegemonic power structures. Here, a major caveat should sound a note of caution that is being reflected in the theoretical framework adopted: Being aware of the danger of the ‘hype trap’ (Calabrese 2006) that an analysis of alternative power centers as the harbinger of global power transitions might fall into, this study aims to challenge the assumption that ‘rising powers’ are by definition always revisionist, as assumed by, e.g., the power transition and hegemonic transition theory. It will be shown how ‘rising powers’<sup>37</sup>, in a process of “power de-concentration” (Tessman & Wolfe 2011: 218) where no alternative world order has replaced the US-dominated governance architecture yet, resist hegemony and advocate for alternative security cultures, but still remain bound to the US in many ways. Just as ‘resistance’ is never absolute, power changes take place gradually, and it has been shown how ‘resistance’ as a qualified form of disagreement provides a more suitable conceptual instrument to capture such power diffusion than ‘counter-hegemony’. Drawing on neo-Gramscian scholarship and situated in the literature on international norm dynamics, it will be analysed how Chinese, Turkish and Russian Iran policies are indicative of resistance to hegemonic structures. To that end, a two-level model to analyse foreign policy has been introduced. A discursive foreign policy level can be paralleled by a behavioural level that falls short of acting upon discursively propagated norms. Analysing which factors account for China’s, Russia’s and Turkey’s partially diverging positioning on a discursive and a behavioral level, this dissertation will answer the research question how Chinese, Russian and

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<sup>37</sup> the classification of which is in itself debatable, as shown in chapter 3. Cf. section 4 on ‘emerging powers’ therein.

Turkish foreign policies toward Iran's nuclear programme are indicative of a security culture resisting hegemony.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methodological Framework**

#### **1. Introduction**

After the theoretical framework adopted in this research design has been outlined in the previous chapter, the purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the methodology used in the investigation into Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme. In analyzing different approaches to the Iranian nuclear programme and with the aim to disentangle underlying conceptions of security cultures, analyses of Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies serve as investigations into Iran policies that are different from ‘the West’. Departing from the guiding research puzzle underlying this study, analyses of the foreign policies of China, Russia and Turkey serve as case studies to illustrate different approaches to the Iranian nuclear programme and the existence or possible emergence of security cultures resisting hegemony. The research design adopts an integrative comparative case study design that combines analyses of Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme on a within-case level, respectively, with an eventual cross-case comparison. Research methods on the within-case level are process-tracing, qualitative data analysis as well as qualitative expert interviewing and participant observation. The analyses of the respective case studies then allows for the drawing of inferences about security cultures on the cross-case (macro) level.

Before each of these methods will be elaborated in detail, a preliminary remark on the nexus between theory and methodological designs precedes at this point. A relational theory of reference underlying much of critical theorising and as also adopted in this research has important methodological implications. While the interpretative camp of qualitative researchers occasionally prefers to speak of constitution rather than causation in making inferences about the empirical world (Wendt 1999: 85), this dissertation proceeds from the assumption that analytical eclecticism need not stand in contradiction with methodological rigour. While method follows from pre-existing theoretical understandings of the world, a mutually informing process between method and theory accounts for a constant dialogue between evidence and argument on the basis of a convincingly crafted research design. The reproach of marrying a post-positivist epistemology with a social ontology is old and dates back at least to the second ‘great debate’ in IR (Kurki & Smith 2010). Beyond die-hard camp thinking, this study acknowledges that norms and perceptions play a role in states’ behavior as

much as material capabilities do.<sup>38</sup> While theoretical sophistication and a certain ‘playful approach to creative theorising’<sup>39</sup> are sometimes traded for an exclusive tilt toward methodological craftiness, this dissertation aims to combine theoretical interpretations as outlined in the previous chapter with a robust methodology, the latter of which will be the subject of the following pages.

## **2. Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme: Case studies of security cultures toward Iran**

### **2.1 Case selection strategy and scope conditions**

In this dissertation, the case study selection derives from an empirical dimension that is to be explained by the scope conditions of the case study research design detailed in the following paragraphs.<sup>40</sup> These derive from pre-existing theoretical conceptions as laid out in the previous chapter that inform and narrow down the possible range of scope conditions.<sup>41</sup> Scope conditions delineate the population and specify the universe of cases to be analysed (Walker & Cohen 1985). If the scope conditions adopted apply to all cases analysed, a degree of homogeneity can be assumed that is the basis for inferences about correlation in comparative case studies. Suffice to recall that the orientation of epistemological pluralism as advocated for by scientific realism allows for a more reflectivist interpretation of the evidence found through process-tracing on a within-case level in line with the theoretical framework as outlined in the previous chapter with the more general case study methodology detailed below. The following paragraphs will outline the scope conditions for the choice of case studies in this research project as derived from the theoretical framework that was presented in the previous chapter.

*The ‘non-Western emerging power’ status.* Derived from a theoretical framework examining power shifts in a process of ‘power de-concentration’,<sup>42</sup> this study analyses Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies as three case studies of ‘non-Western’ foreign policies towards a contested issue area. A focus often placed in the scholarly literature on foreign policies of states like China, Turkey and Russia is their perceived inherent ‘non-Western-ness’. Chapter

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<sup>38</sup> This is also consistent with moderate constructivism, as explained in the previous chapter. Cf. also Neal’s chapter on ‘empiricism without positivism’ (2013).

<sup>39</sup> Advocated by Knud Erik Jorgensen at the Gent-Kent doctoral workshop, 25 February 2013, Brussels.

<sup>40</sup> On the use of case studies cf. i.a. Rohlfing (2012: chap. 1); Eckstein (1975); Seawright & Gerring (2008); George & Bennett (2005).

<sup>41</sup> This also corresponds to an understanding that theory should come before method.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. section 4 of chapter 3.

3 gives an indication of some of the dividing lines in the literature on foreign policy analysis of China, Russia and Turkey.<sup>43</sup> Underlying many analyses of their foreign policies is a bifurcation into two thinkable scenarios: Either these states socialise into a Western-dominated world, including its governance structures, or they will herald a power transition and ‘emerge’ as challengers to this Western-dominated world.<sup>44</sup> Acknowledging that the ‘emerging power’ label has been criticised on substantial and conceptual grounds, this dissertation aims to shed light on the working relationship between powers that have created, crafted and sustained the prevailing international governance architecture (and a ‘historic bloc’ in Gramscian terminology), and those powers that will, one way or the other, play an important role in the gradual modification thereof. While this is not to argue that China, Russia and Turkey act in a concerted manner to accelerate the demise of prevalent (security) governance structures, it will be shown in this research how their respective foreign policies share commonalities in terms of normative conceptions of how international relations should be governed. With structural imbalances built into a system that was defined by the powerful position of certain Western states, ‘rising powers’ will have an interest in advocating security cultures that challenge such power asymmetries. Aware of the empirical criticism brought forward against the ‘emerging power’ status, this study argues for a re-conceptualisation of the future working relationship between (former) hegemonic powers and ‘emerging powers’. However misplaced the semantics of the label ‘rising’ or ‘emerging’, this scope condition is crucial for selecting cases that have a stake in formulating and discursively shaping power shifts, for ‘norms-shapers in the making’.

As much as ‘hegemony’ and ‘resistance’, as the previous chapter has carved out, are never absolute and in a continuous process of interaction, an analysis of Chinese, Russian and Turkish respective foreign policies towards Iran’s nuclear programme becomes an examination of *non-Western* foreign policies in processes of interaction and inter-penetration between allegedly exclusive camps. However, the theoretical interest in analysing resistance to hegemony presupposes a case selection of states that contest a US-inspired ‘hegemonic bloc’ that is largely *Western-dominated*. While the foreign policy of a European state may

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<sup>43</sup> Pertinent to much theorising on Turkish foreign policy, for example, is the reading that Turkey represents a ‘bridge’ between the Western world and a region and culture that is not Western. In this context, Barry Buzan et al. have coined the label ‘Westernistic’ to characterise states like Turkey or Japan that breathe the ambition to be perceived as a, if not Western country, then at least as being close to its political cultures (Buzan & Segal 1998; Buzan & Diez 1999: 49).

<sup>44</sup> Analyses of power transitions due to the emergence of new ‘power poles’ include Schiffer & Shorr (2009); Sakwa (2012); Hurrell (2006); MacFarlane (2006); Armijo (2007); Brawley (2007); Hancock (2007); Sotero & Armijo (2007); Morris (2011); Patrick (2010); Phillips (2008); Serfaty (2011); Subacchi (2008); Rynning & Ringsmore (2008); Vezirgiannidou (2013); Lieber (2014); Laidi (2012, 2014); Nel (2010). Cf. also section 4 of chapter 3.

theoretically equally be an example of a counter-hegemonic security culture, the empirical track record of European negotiations with Iran and especially the EU's 'over-compliance' in Iran sanctions rules out such an analysis for the purpose of this study already on factual grounds,<sup>45</sup> and it will be shown at a later point if and how 'resistance' can take place within 'historic blocs'. Most importantly, however, the scope condition 'non-Western' is dictated already by the theoretical interest of an examination of cases that are non-Western foreign policies as an investigation into security cultures crafted in opposition to 'Western' normative frameworks.

*Political dependence on the US.* This is a condition that differs across actors and policy domains. Political dependence relates to the power position of the US in the international (economic and political) system and is closely intertwined with an understanding of dominance that renders the US unavoidable to deal with. As laid out in the previous chapter, the US is acknowledged as the prevalent hegemonic point of reference whose preservation depends on the acceptance thereof by other states. This is the consent that actors give – tacitly or explicitly – to established power structures without which the latter could well come into being, but could not be sustained for long. Such an acceptance, as elaborated upon in the theoretical chapter, presupposes a level of dependence that lets states subscribe to dominant normative frameworks. Turkey's political dependence on the US already is a more formalised relation due to (NATO) alliance structures and Cold War historical legacies. But also Russia's and China's foreign policies have widely been analysed as balancing acts between policies that were not appreciated by the US and foreign policy stances that were more accommodating to the US and arguably crafted in reaction to or anticipation of US perception of Chinese and Russian policies. Russia's quest for (a new) international identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union underwent distinct phases of re-orientation that always involved a re-balancing of relations with the US (cf. Belopolsky 2009: 14-28; Casier 2006; Katz 2002; MacFarlane 2006: 44f.; Sakwa 2002; Trenin 2006; Tsygankov 2007; Mendras 2012; Nizameddin 2013: 52f.; Shakleina 2013: 166-174).

And also China's economic rise essentially was an opening-up to and adherence to an international economic system that was created and dominated by the US after 1945. This opening-up of China to a 'system' determined to a large extent by the United States was ushered in under Deng Xiaoping's leadership as from 1978, but preconditioned on the re-opening of US-Chinese relations under Nixon and Mao in 1972 (Kissinger 2011). Pertinent to

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<sup>45</sup> On this, cf. section 2.2. of chapter 3.

an analysis of foreign policies toward Iran's nuclear programme for this research, the sanctions regime in place against Iran, as laid out before, is the epitome of a hegemonic power constellation: While UN-backed international sanctions require the consent of the UNSC permanent members China and Russia, the US unilateral sanctions regime imposes penalties on third country companies entertaining business relations with Iran – so decided and adopted by a single state outside of UN structures (Lohmann 2013). The fact that China, Russia and Turkey, albeit grudgingly, accept and comply with parts of such an elaborate system of 'extraterritorialised' US legislation suggests a substantial level of political dependence on the US on the part of these countries, and therefore becomes an important further scope condition for case studies examining the friction between the advocacy for security cultures that resist this hegemony and the factual adherence to prevailing hegemonic structures. The case studies that follow will analyse how and why this is the case, and how 'political dependence' on the US need not exclude resistance to US policies on other occasions.

*Interest in relations with Iran.* Analyses of foreign policies that find themselves in an area of friction with the US over the Iranian nuclear programme condition a level of interest in bilateral relations with Iran. This is another scope condition that stems from the theoretical understanding of security cultures as expressions of sometimes conflicting normative frameworks in international relations: If a case study aims to examine the existence of security cultures resisting hegemony, there needs to be an issue at stake that can serve as an exemplary 'empirical entrance point' to make sense of wider conceptions of how international relations should be governed. This would be precluded, however, if China, Russia and Turkey did not have a stake for entertaining a disagreement about Iran policies; if they simply did not care about Iran and its nuclear programme, in other words. China, Russia and Turkey have economic, geopolitical, and broader ideational interests in relations with Iran, as will be carved out in the analysis that follows. 'An interest in relations with Iran' in the widest sense is therefore a complimentary scope condition to the previous one: For an analysis of foreign policies toward Iran's nuclear programme to produce theoretically and empirically meaningful inferences about the existence of security cultures resisting hegemony, it must be given that the cases analysed have both a level of dependence on 'hegemonic structures' and stakes in the upholding of relations with Iran. It will be shown how these partially centrifugal forces oftentimes present a policy dilemma for China, Russia and Turkey.

*Leverage in the nuclear dossier.* This final scope condition directly derives from the importance assigned to the case countries' weight in the Iranian nuclear dossier and can be



formulated as ‘having the ability to influence the nuclear negotiations’. China and Russia are permanent UNSC members and part of the P5+1 format. The importance of these two states for the Iranian nuclear negotiations has become obvious with the referral of the Iran file from the IAEA to the UNSC in 2006 at the latest, where sanctions resolutions require the consent of Moscow and Beijing. The resulting balancing position between the ‘Western camp’ and Iran theoretically gives them what Bercovitch & Schneider (2000) in their review of the mediation literature call “leverage, power potential, and influence” (149).<sup>46</sup>

Turkey, the third case study, is often portrayed as having the potential to act as a ‘facilitator’ of talks, being embedded in Western strategic security cultures, and, at the same time, a geographic neighbour of Iran that, throughout history, has learnt the necessity to maintain good-neighbourly relation with Iran. “Cultural and geographical proximity to at least one of the conflict parties” (151) is acknowledged by Bercovitch & Schneider (2000) as a possible factor that can increase a mediator’s acceptance. It is this position that led some analysts to see Turkey in a bridge-building function conducive to diplomatic de-escalation. ‘Mediation’ in diplomacy has been defined in different ways, and its preconditions and required components have been discussed controversially (Bercovitch 1992: 8; Moore 2003: 8; Blake & Mouton 1985: 15; Kleiboer 1998; Herrberg 2008). Underlying many analyses of the effectiveness of mediation in different conflict situations is the view that mediators should be impartial, be in a position to influence the conflicting parties’ perceptions or behavior and (as a precondition for the latter) have credibility as a mediating party. The fact that Turkey is a NATO member and a regional neighbor of Iran inspired and informed theorisations of Turkey as a potential facilitator of talks and conduit of messages between Iran and the West, rather than as a fully-fledged mediator.<sup>47</sup> The idea of facilitation is distinct from mediation in that a facilitating third party should not interfere in the process (Fisher 1972; Burton 1969). The perception of Turkish facilitation was given life with, e.g., the choice of Turkey as a venue for negotiations between the EU3 and their Iranian counterparts, and between the extended format of P5+1 and Iran. And with the phase of remarkable shuttle diplomacy in 2009 and 2010 that led to the signing of the Tehran declaration in May 2010, Turkey had

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. also on the importance of ‘leverage’ in international mediation: Cot (1972); Brookmore & Sistrink (1980); Kleiboer (1996: 371f.).

<sup>47</sup> Section 3.2 of the following chapter will expand on this point. cf. also Gürzel (2012); Gürzel & Ersoy (2012); Fuller (2008); Giragosian (2008); Kibaroglu & Caglar (2008); Kibaroglu (2009); Lesser (1992); Önis (2009); Üstün (2010); Ülgen (2012). In this context, see especially former Turkish foreign minister Davutoğlu’s article ‘*Turkey’s Mediation: Critical Reflections from the field*’ (2013).

clearly engaged in mediatory diplomatic efforts.<sup>48</sup> The chapter on Turkish Iran policy will expand on these points. It follows from the theoretical interest in security cultures that resist hegemony that an investigation into foreign policies towards Iran's nuclear programme becomes more meaningful if the foreign policies examined do have a certain level of 'leverage' over the direction of nuclear talks with Iran that may or may not be used to give expression to a security conception alternative of one advocated for by hegemonic structures.

The case study selection thus derives from an empirical, yet theory-informed dimension. Given the above scope conditions, intentional case selection is a viable strategy. The cases are in and of themselves 'substantially interesting' cases. The extent to which the foreign policies analysed represent security cultures resisting hegemony is necessarily expressed as 'differences in degree' and cannot be categorised as positive (counter-hegemonic security cultures present) or negative (counter-hegemonic security culture absent) with regard to the outcome.<sup>49</sup> This is also consistent with and dictated by the theoretical understanding outlined in Chapter 1 that power shifts in international relations take place gradually.

## 2.2 Integrating the within-case with the cross-case level

The cross-case analysis eventually will allow me to contribute to theoretical insights pertinent to an understanding of Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies as the expression of security cultures resisting hegemony. A mutually informing process between theory and the phenomena found in empirical research accounts for an appropriate blending of evidence with argument.<sup>50</sup> The indeterminacy problem, according to which several causes can explain the same outcome (Collier et al. 2004: 47), can arguably be diminished by good theoretical explanations that make sense of the collected evidence and strengthens the cross-case comparison.

The small-N problem, which in essence states that due to the small number of cases studied, the generation of valid causal inferences is precluded or at least constrained, can arguably be circumvented in such a research design by a two-step approach of within-case process-tracing, followed by a cross-case comparison of the findings generated in the respective within-case studies. Such an integrative case study design allows one to generate causal inferences on two levels of analysis and to make comparisons on the basis of the cross-

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<sup>48</sup> On this, cf. i.a. Ozkan (2010); Leverett & Leverett (2013: 361f.); Parsi (2012: 172f.); Pieper (2013a: 85-86; 2015); Fitzpatrick (2010); Kibaroglu (2010).

<sup>49</sup> On continuous measurement as a yardstick for differences in degree, cf. Goertz (2006: 30f.); Rohling (2012: 63).

<sup>50</sup> Sometimes called the 'abductive approach' (cf. Wodak 2004: 188).

case scores.<sup>51</sup> The advantage of a small-N case study selection lies in the possibility to take contextual power structures into account (Gerring 2007b: 172; Lieberson 1991; Mahoney 2000; King et al. 1994: 208f.), an approach which is appropriate to the research question of a particular geopolitical constellation underlying this dissertation.

The aim in this study is thus essentially twofold. In a first step, Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme are analysed respectively, standing as three in-depth analyses (within-case level) of foreign policies of three different states (China, Russia, Turkey) toward a particular geopolitical issue (the Iranian nuclear programme). In a second step, which will be the comparative aspect of this study, Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies will ultimately be analysed with a view to overlapping interests that will have been carved out in the foregoing analyses (cross-case level). This second step fits well with the comparative methodology adopted in this research and therewith blends in-depth analyses of the three case countries' respective Iran policies with a broader analysis of several cases in the search for general trends on a cross-case level. The comparative case study method has a long-standing history and is widely used as a viable strategy to generate causal inferences from small-N analyses (Lijphart 1971; Hall 2003; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer 2003; Savolainen 1994; Lieberson 1991, 1994; Collier 1993; Ragin 1987).

Here, the question of representativeness cannot be ignored when inferring from the case countries' stance towards Iran to broader generalisations about security governance and the non-proliferation regime at large (Fleetwood 2010: 132; Ekström 2010: 80f.). Therefore, the main focus lies on a critical analysis of China's, Russia's and Turkey's foreign policies in a particular situation of turbulent geopolitics. I am aware of the question of representativeness in inferring to this being a typical case study for the state of non-Western security conceptions and non-proliferation policies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Seawright & Gerring 2008). Much of the qualitative scholarly work analysing 'particular cases' adheres to a certain "causes-of-effects" approach to explanation as compared to the "effects-of-causes" approach underlying much quantitative work (Mahoney & Goertz 2006: 230f.).<sup>52</sup> This dissertation analyses the foreign policies of the three case countries toward a particular issue area and is thus interested in understanding outcomes in particular cases. It is hoped that the cross-case comparison triggers a fruitful dialogue between the empirical data and the theoretical interpretation that enriches our understanding of non-Western voices in the substance studied here. Blending evidence

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<sup>51</sup> More on comparability and generalizability, cf. below.

<sup>52</sup> The 'effects-of-causes' approach does not imply that randomisation is used, but is merely a perspective on causality and an acknowledgment of 'marginal effects'. I thank Dr. Ingo Rohlfing for clarifying this point.

with argument, this dissertation explains Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies but equally aims to make a contribution to our broader understanding of non-Western foreign policies in the non-proliferation and the security governance realm that resist dominant power structures. As the three cases analysed here are ‘substantially interesting’ in themselves in view of the scope conditions laid out above, the question whether generalisation of the findings to similar cases is possible is an empirical one. On the basis of the case selection strategy adopted here, the interest lies more in a discipline-configurative (cross-) case study and less in generalisations to similar cases. While there is often a trade-off involved between the comparability of cases and the generalizability of the inferences made from a cross-case comparison (Rohlfing 2012: 126), the focus of the case study research design in this dissertation lies on a longitudinal within-unit comparison (policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme in a given timeframe), so the main interest lies in increasing the comparability of cases.<sup>53</sup>

### **3. Identification of research methods**

Now that the case study research design, including the motivation for the combination of the within-case with the cross-case level has been laid out, the following sections will serve to identify the appropriate research methods for the practical carrying out of the case studies. The primary research methods will comprise process-tracing as well as qualitative data analysis of policy documents (primary sources, e.g. declassified government documents, international organisations documents, press releases, transcripts of speeches), memoirs of decision-makers, policy briefs and the scholarly literature, supplemented by semi-structured elite interviews with experts and decision-makers. Process-tracing is used as a research method on the within-case level. The identification of themes by way of constant comparison allows for the scoring of causes on the cross-case level.

#### **3.1 Process-tracing and qualitative data analysis**

Process-tracing is a method that enables the researcher to disarm many of the small-N problems associated with case studies. Process-tracing is an appropriate method to study how and why something has evolved over time (Van Evera 1997: 64). Process-tracing enables the researcher to look for causal mechanisms in single case studies, allowing us to make reasoned inferences on the basis of their observable implications (cf. Gerring 2007a; George & Bennett

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<sup>53</sup> On the nexus between external validity and comparability, cf. also Ruzzene (2012).

2005: chap 10; Hall 2006; Mahoney 2000: 412; Brady 2004; Beach & Pedersen 2012; Collier (2011). In other words, this method allows for the reconstruction of a historical process via the collection of process observations. These are defined as an “insight or piece of data that provides information about context, process or mechanism, and that contributes distinctive leverage in causal inference“ (Collier et al. 2004). In the present research, process-tracing as a method looks at the way that China, Russia and Turkey have positioned themselves toward the Iranian nuclear programme through an analysis of concrete foreign policy decisions by way of constant comparison of the data used (cf. Savin-Baden & Major 2013: 436-37). A reconstruction of the way that Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme have been crafted relies on the collection of observations that will be found in policy documents, briefs, legislative documents and through the analyses of process observations in qualitative interviews. Informed by the underlying theoretical framework and determined by the empirical substance matter, such process observations can be voting behaviours in relevant international organisations such as the IAEA or the UN Security Council, revealing trade flows, negotiation positions, remarks delivered in Security Council meetings, and press releases, among others. As these need to be constantly interpreted in light of the theory and in the framework of broader explanatory mechanisms, such an endeavor is inherently complex and constitutes more than a form of ‘pretentious journalism’.<sup>54</sup>

Employing constant comparison as a qualitative form of data analysis, the interpretation of the evidence found through process-tracing will be identified as themes around which factors in foreign policy revolve.<sup>55</sup> These themes will be found in interview transcripts, official documents and the scholarly literature, and will be continually compared against each other. The comparison will be necessarily theory-informed and dictated by the identification of themes as laid out in my theoretical framework (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006: 4; Crabtree & Miller 1999). Themes thus identified by theory (sovereignty, non-interference, legitimacy, (il)legality, hegemony) are instrumental in drawing broader conclusions about normative understandings of the actors examined and their conceptions of security cultures. Sources, in other words, are translated into themes. These themes are the unit of analysis in qualitative data analysis (Hermann 2008: 157f.), the “micro-level for the empirical investigation” (Wiener 2009: 188). Guided by the underlying research question and

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<sup>54</sup> So formulated ironically by Carsten Schneider, lecture, ECPR Summer School on Methods and Techniques, Ljubljana, 6 August 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Savin-Baden & Major (2013: 436-37) on constant comparison as an analytical method in qualitative data analysis.

its theoretical underpinnings, such an approach does not preclude the additional identification of themes as the data collection proceeds and is in line with this dissertation's aim to achieve a fruitful cross-fertilisation between evidence and theory.<sup>56</sup> However, conceptual templates for the analysis of documents and interview transcripts are largely given *a priori* by theory. By way of constant comparison, the research question underlying this dissertation helps to extract meaning from communication (such as interviews and policy documents). Key questions in interviews, for example, were structured around the key terms and themes identified earlier by the theoretical framework, pertaining to Chinese, Russian and Turkish conceptions of legitimacy in international relations, foreign policy approaches to addressing Iran's nuclear file, and understandings of sovereignty, non-interference, power politics and perceptions of other actors' foreign policies.<sup>57</sup> The processing of information (transcription and thematic analysis of interviews, summary and analysis of documents) in light of these concepts then allows me to contextualise information and conclude on the accuracy of the theory to interpret the empirical evidence and, if needed, suggest modifications to the theoretical model. Such an interpretative endeavor (rather than proceeding from an inductive content analysis) is justified by the research question at hand and the qualitative nature of this research. The validity of such qualitative data analysis is also ascertained by triangulation as another implicit methodological approach adopted in this dissertation where all research methods used are combined and 'triangulated' against each other (Campbell & Fiske 1959; Denzin 2009: 297; Neuman 2006: 149f.; Flick 2004: 181f.).<sup>58</sup> In any empirical research, not all causal process observations might be collected due to the non-availability of certain interviewees, publications, or the classification of policy documents, making the collected sample possibly biased. The selection of sources, Thies (2002) cautions, "*always* incurs the potential for claims of unwarranted selectivity and investigator bias" (555). With the aim to bridge such possible deficiencies, triangulation intertwines the research methods and increases the reliability of the methodological footing. Triangulation of sources in this context also means consulting a variety of sources in order to "maximize [...] archival coverage" and avoid tautological interpretations of evidence that may arise from the use of only one type of sources (Thies 2002: 557; 565). This method thus results in a cross-validation of the findings from qualitative data analysis of primary sources (official documents, declassified government documents, press releases, legislation, international organisations documents,

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. also Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006) on "research analysis as an iterative and reflexive process" (4).

<sup>57</sup> The following section will expand on this in more detail.

<sup>58</sup> Atkinson & Coffey discuss triangulation as a method for combining participant observation and interviewing (2002: 806).

memoirs, transcripts of speeches), press reports and policy briefs, the scholarly literature, and insights gathered from interviews with experts and decision-makers, as well as post-interview debriefing notes, field notes and participant observation.

The use of interviews and interview transcripts will be further detailed in section 3.2 below. Policy documents and declassified government documents, like Foreign Policy Concepts, Military Doctrines or declassified embassy cables, essentially serve a similar purpose in document analysis as interviews: They textually embed governmental policy and make it possible for the researcher to read, analyse, and compare not only *how* policy is discursively conveyed, but in some instances (especially with declassified material) also *why* this is the case. Press releases and statements, in government parlance, belong to the category of public relations and therefore have always to be read as socially mediated language with a purpose. Yet, for an investigation into possible discrepancies between discourse and behaviour in foreign policy, the official governmental positioning is crucial to include in the picture. Documents of international organisations, like minutes of Security Council meetings or of IAEA Board of Governors meetings, will be used to document when and how Chinese, Russian and Turkish officials have voiced objections, concerns or approval. And memoirs of former officials intimately involved in the Iranian nuclear file will be drawn upon throughout the chapters that follow, as these are highly informative accounts of decision-makers that often write from the convenient position of elder statesmen who do not have to mince their words because of the secretive nature of both the dossier and their official position with all caveats on open information that ensue.

As important documents (especially preparatory documents for the case countries' negotiation positions toward the Iranian nuclear programme) are not always available as open sources, interviews become a necessary supplement to base the research findings on a reliable footing- the methodology of which will be the subject of the next section.

### **3.2 Interviewing methods**

For the purpose of this study, qualitative semi-structured elite interviews were conducted as a method of empirical data generation. With the ability to “both make use of and shape the resources of the public sphere” (Wiener 2009: 191), elites comprise decision-makers, policy consultants as well as senior scholars. The interviews involved a set of open-ended questions that give the interviewee the chance to talk from their perspective with as little intervention on the part of the interviewer as possible (Weiss 1994; Warren 2002). This is designed so as to ensure that the interviewee is not steered into a particular direction in answering the questions,

thus avoiding research bias. Introductory questions would usually refer to the interviewee's professional engagement with and experience of the issue area, setting the ground for more detailed or probing questions as the interview proceeds, establishing trust with the interviewer and easing the interviewee into the conversation, a factor that is intimately linked to the issue of rapport and neutrality between interviewee and respondent (Platt 2002: 46-47; Rapley 2004: 19). Questions were formulated in a way that would avoid the implication of pre-conceived assumptions, insinuating or steering questions and biased wording. As the conversation proceeded, questions would investigate the rationale for particular decisions or policies (explanatory probes), the interviewee's practical understanding of particular concepts, policies or contexts (clarification probes), or a specific and in-depth decision-making process (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 135). Questions on current positions in and foreign policies towards Iran's nuclear dossier against the background of the most recent P5+1 talks would often provide a timely introduction to the conversation. The timely dimension derived from the high frequency of negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran at different levels (expert, political directors, foreign minister) throughout the timeframe in which this research project was carried out (2012-2015). This initial discussion of current negotiations and the prospects thereof was followed by more specific questions on conceptions of the sanctions regime or specific policy decisions that have been controversially debated in the country's respective Iran policies (such as the Russian non-delivery of the S-300 system to Iran or Turkey's decision to participate in US missile defense plans). Especially questions on the sanctions regime in place were revealing of the interviewee's understanding of legitimate means and ends in international politics. This information was most relevant for this dissertation's analysis of security cultures with their underlying normative disputes in international relations. To allow for a comparative analysis of the research findings on a cross-case level, a common set of questions was formulated for all interviews, and adapted slightly to the specificities of each and every interviewee. During some interviews, attention needed to be paid to the risk of feeding insights from other interviews back to the interviewee. Curious about the replies other (especially official) interviewees might have given me in previous interviews, some interviewees asked as much. With a view to the protection of this research project interviewees, the challenge here lay in not succumbing to the temptation to become too 'chatty' and reveal information that might, in turn, also impact on the interviewee's response.

But how do we recognise adherence to certain norms in interviews? Asking a Russian foreign ministry official about US unilateral Iran sanctions, for example, is an indirect inquiry



about Russian perceptions of US security cultures and legitimacy in international relations. Interviewing arguably requires the capacity to detect codes behind words, which are nothing other than ‘ciphered inventions’.<sup>59</sup> The interviewer, then, needs to de-cipher the semantic schemes used to convey how an interviewee talks about, assesses, and implicitly evaluates things. Interviewees (especially officials) function as norm-carriers in this regard (cf. also Young & Schafer 1998; Foyle 1997). State agents “tend to anthropomorphize the state” (Li 2010: 356). “[...] individual elites”, Antje Wiener (2009) formulates, “carry normative baggage which informs their respective expectations towards the meaning of norms” (191). In this understanding, elite interviews are norm contestation in practice: Interviewees’ semantic references to normative frameworks and ‘associative connotations’ (ibid.: 188) at the micro level reveal broader conceptions of legitimacy at the macro level (international politics).

Keywords and phrases relating to the conceptual framework identified earlier may not appear verbatim in the interview, but will have to be identified by the researcher. “The cross-linkage between keywords and norms allow for a comparative distinction of individually held associative connotations” (ibid.). The intrusive effect of the Iran sanctions regime, for example, is related to an understanding of sovereignty in that the effect of sanctions arguably curtails the sovereignty of the sanctioned nation (by cutting it off from international financial and trade flows, thus restricting its autonomy of policy decisions). Critically questioning the legitimacy of such a regime is revelatory of an interviewee’s normative understanding of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘non-interference’. How do we, then, recognise resistance to hegemony in interviews? Resistance, as has been worked out in chapter 1, is never a “totalizing act” (Jones 2006: 76), but always a qualified form of disagreement with parts of hegemonic policies. The three dimensions of hegemonic structures as borrowed from a Coxian framework (material, ideational, institutional) have been identified in the theoretical framework. If an interviewee talks about trade statistics or the economic effect of sanctions regimes, examples are given that relate to the material dimension of this triangle. Language on ‘legitimacy’, normative language on sanctions and on the foreign policies of other states presupposes intersubjective evaluations and relate rather to the ideational dimension of hegemonic structures. And emphases of the institutional nature of sanctions (unilateral or multilateral), the UN system, or UN-created international bodies disclose an interviewee’s perception of the institutional aspects of international politics and how hegemonic structures relate to them. ‘Resistance’ to a particular policy like the imposition of an embargo that becomes apparent in an interview, in

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<sup>59</sup> Words as ‘ciphered inventions’ is a formulation by Dr. Michael Dillon. PhD workshop at the University of Kent at Brussels, 3 December 2014.

other words, does not in itself reveal resistance to hegemony on a state level. It is only through the careful collection of such indicators (or the lack thereof) for resistance, both in every respective interview transcript internally and throughout the range of conducted interviews, that a more comprehensive picture of Chinese, Russian, or Turkish ‘resistance’ emerges. The danger of reading such conceptions into the interview transcript (selectivity and researcher bias) is circumvented by a thorough triangulation of the data with a variety of other sources to cross-validate the interpretation.<sup>60</sup>

Depending on the flow of the conversation, the order of questions was reverted or changed spontaneously, selectively reacting to the answers given with thematic follow-up questions (cf. Johnson 2002: 111; Rapley 2004: 22). This allowed for an appropriate combination of structure and flexibility. Even though questions were structured around similar sets of topics (proliferation-related issues of the Iranian nuclear programme, recent developments in the nuclear negotiations, motivations for and effects of certain policies), interviews were always also tailored to the individual interviewee depending on his/her professional involvement. Interviews were conducted in English and, in cases where the interviewee’s and the author’s nationality was the same, in their mother tongue.<sup>61</sup> No interpreters were used. During interviews with officials and policy-makers, a form of informed consent to be signed was also handed over that would ensure the confidentiality of the research findings as well as the non-attribution of the answers given to the interviewee in compliance with ethical guidelines and the UK Data Protection Act 1998 designed to safeguard personal data.<sup>62</sup> This form of consent sometimes was signed only by the end of the conversation. The form was always signed, even when a prior consent was already given by the interviewee’s superiors, as was the case with some interviews with officials. Expert interviewees were asked whether they consent to being cited by name. The data was recorded in writing. No tape recorders were used so as to allow for a maximum of openness on the part of the interviewee.<sup>63</sup> The interviews were transcribed shortly after the interview had taken place, so as to avoid lapses of memory of what has been said that may arise if tape recorders are not used. The transcription of interviews also included the processing of non-verbal data pertaining to the interview setting, such as field notes and reflections on atmosphere, non-

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. above.

<sup>61</sup> This was the case with interviews in the European External Action Service, diplomats at the IAEA and with some experts.

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.kent.ac.uk/infocompliance/dp/about.html>. Cf ethical guidelines for qualitative interviewing. Cf. also Kvale & Brinkmann (2009: 68f.). The form of consent was handed over together with contact details about myself as representative of the research project, and an information sheet about my research.

<sup>63</sup> On advantages and disadvantages of using tape recorders for qualitative interviewing, cf. Warren (2002: 91).

verbal communication and other external factors.<sup>64</sup> In some cases, interviews were conducted over the telephone or via Skype where an in-person interviewing session was not possible due to (travel related) financial or time constraints.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.2.1 Identification of interviewees

Foreign policy in all three case countries is primarily shaped and decided upon in the respective foreign ministries. Besides this traditional understanding of foreign policy as the *domain reservée* of the foreign ministry, foreign policy in general and Iran policies in particular are shaped and informed by a number of other ministries and influential actors in all case countries to varying degrees, respectively. The following paragraphs give an overview of how this played out in the identification of interviewees.

Interviewees have been identified through strategic sampling due to the nature of the present research topic. Organisational charts of the foreign ministries in the respective case countries' capitals give a first orientation of the relevant departments and units involved in the Iran policy decision-making process and are thus a first step in core group targeting. In the Russian foreign ministry, relevant departments are the second Asia department (*vtoroy department asii*),<sup>66</sup> covering Iran; and the department for security policy and non-proliferation (*department po voprossom besopasnosti i razoruzheniya*) as the main department in charge of the nuclear dossier.<sup>67</sup> Departments involved in the foreign policy-making on Iran in the Turkish foreign ministry are the department for the OSCE, arms control and disarmament (in charge of the nuclear dossier); the political department; and the economic department (dealing with Iranian-Turkish trade and business relations). Chinese foreign policy toward Iran is shaped by the foreign ministry, where the Arms Control and Disarmament department, the West Asian and North African Affairs department and the International Organisations and Conferences department are involved. Besides key persons in the respective foreign ministries

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<sup>64</sup> A (mutually) candid exchange of information in interviews is facilitated by an atmosphere of conviviality where the hospitality of the hosting interviewee plays a crucial role, especially when the meeting takes place in a more formal setting such as a ministerial office. The proverbial Turkish hospitality allowed interviews to take place over Turkish tea, a factor conducive to the effect of 'rapport' between interviewer and interviewee described above. Likewise, discussions were facilitated by tea in the Russian and the Chinese foreign ministries, respectively. A talk in the US State Department was facilitated by Starbucks coffee, the officially franchised coffee supplier in the State Department canteen.

<sup>65</sup> Roger W. Shuy discusses advantages and disadvantages of telephone interviews versus in-person interviews (2002: 538f.). He contends that telephone interviews largely reduce 'interviewer effects' associated with the interviewing process as a social interaction as described above (540).

<sup>66</sup> Второй департамент Азии

<sup>67</sup> Департамент по вопросам безопасности и разоружения. While the foreign ministry had largely been sidelined under President Yeltsin, it increasingly gained a coordinating function for Russia's overall Iran policy since the late 1990s (Belopolsky 2009: 46-49).

in Ankara, Beijing and Moscow, interviewees have also been identified at the permanent representations of the three case countries to the IAEA in Vienna. Given their posting to key organisations for the topic of this research, their insights added an important dimension of expertise at the official policy level.

While names of desk officers are usually not publicly available, first contact details were provided by the German federal foreign office and the German embassy in Moscow.<sup>68</sup> This first step helped me get hold of names of diplomats working closely on the Iran nuclear file, including at the European External Action Service, but also in Moscow, where I had worked in the political department of the German embassy. Further identification of interviewees has then often followed the principle of ‘snowball sampling’: First interviewees referred me to further potential interviewees, either in their own institution/ministry, in their national representations elsewhere, e.g. at their respective permanent representation at the IAEA in Vienna, or in other countries’ institutions. Interviews at the Turkish foreign ministry in Ankara have led to interviews at the Turkish mission to the IAEA in Vienna; interviews at the foreign ministry in Moscow have led to interviews and hour-long discussions at the Russian embassy in Washington, D.C. Interviews with the Iran desk in Berlin have led to interviews with the nuclear negotiation team of the EEAS, which in turn have led to an interview in the US State Department in Washington.

In a similar vein, first exploratory interviews with experts on the issue area (in Western capitals, but also in Ankara, Beijing and Moscow) and with senior diplomats from the European External Action Service as well as conversations with EU member states’ diplomats have often been useful in providing further names and contact details of target interviewees. Given the inherent reluctance in granting access in some administrative cultures as an additional barrier when requesting interviews (Adler & Adler 2002: 515), such referral via colleagues also had an important ‘legitimising’ effect and helped facilitate setting up meetings (cf. also Odendahl & Shaw 2002: 307). In contacting the Chinese foreign ministry in Beijing, I was thus able to refer to European (member state or EEAS) counterparts of my target interviewee. Name-dropping served crucially as a door-opener. Through extensive travelling and target interviewing, this research project benefits from face-to-face interviews that have been conducted with actual delegates from the respective nuclear negotiation teams, and/or the respective Iran desks of China, Russia, Turkey, Germany, the UK, the US, and the EU.

Additionally, after first sets of interviews and an interpretation thereof in light of the

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<sup>68</sup> I have worked at both places as an intern- an opportunity that gave me first valuable contact details.

research question and theory had taken place, further sets of interviews then also followed the principle of ‘theoretical sampling’, in which the data analysis prompted me to further research particular concepts or processes which could not yet be sufficiently clarified with the given data generated so far. This is a necessary reflexive approach to detecting patterns in interview responses that allows for adapted, or even new, paths of inquiry.

Besides these statist foreign policy actors mentioned above, research institutes and think tanks in the three case countries inform foreign policy, ‘float’ policy ideas and thereby partially also shape the decision-making process. In China especially, influential think tanks are known to be consulted by the State Council and are providing policy analyses and recommendations for the Chinese foreign policy decision-making process. Since the 1980s, Chinese foreign policy has seen the emergence of a network of formal and informal relations and exchanges between decision-makers and research institutes. The latter thereby filter and interpret relevant information and play a certain system-legitimising role- otherwise they would not be invited to State Council hearings in a closed political system in which the Communist party decides on all major policy directions of strategic importance. This latter observation naturally bears out on the extent to which these think tanks can be regarded as independent or entirely objective. This means at the same time, however, that interviews with experts and policy analysts from these think tanks often generate quasi-official policy position responses.

The most influential Chinese think tanks in the realm of international relations are think tanks that are officially affiliated with the State Council and the foreign ministry such as the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS)<sup>69</sup> and the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR). The latter enjoys close ties with the ministry for state security, “is the primary civilian intelligence organ and has direct access to the Politburo Standing Committee” (Downs 2004: 28). The military think tank China Institute for International Strategic Studies (CISS) belongs to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) also regularly briefs different ministries of the central government as well as the Foreign Affairs Office of the Party Central Committee (SIIS 2013). These institutes act as foreign policy consultants and craft conceptual policy recommendations for the Chinese government and thus have a considerable impact on the Chinese foreign policy decision-making process (cf. also Lanteigne 2009: 29). Next to these think tanks, departments of international politics in renowned universities such as

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<sup>69</sup> CIIS is one of the most influential civilian foreign policy research institutes and counts as “the research arm of the MFA” (Downs 2004: 28). Cf. also Shambaugh (2002: 583-585); Glaser & Saunders (2002: 597-616).

Peking University, Qinghua University (which cooperates with the Beijing office of the Carnegie endowment for international peace), Renmin University, and the China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU), the latter of which is deemed a preparatory stage for the Chinese foreign service and has close links with the foreign ministry, regularly act as foreign policy consultants. I have stayed at CFAU as a visiting doctoral student for two months, which has helped me set up interviews and get a good grasp of the Chinese policy community.

Exchanges about the direction of Chinese foreign policy between Chinese ministries and these influential actors work in a two-way process, which makes interviews with Iran experts and foreign policy analysts at CIISS, CIIS, CICIR and the universities a fruitful empirical contribution to this research. Chinese interviewees at these think tanks also include former officials. Chinese think tanks thereby gradually adopt the US-inspired ‘revolving door’ principle between official positions and research fellowships.

To a lesser extent, the same holds true for Russian think tanks. While Russian Iran policy is shaped by the foreign ministry, with important strategic decisions made by the president who, according to the Russian constitution, holds ultimate authority in foreign policy matters, a number of Russian think tanks provide a considerable amount of expertise and consultancy related to nuclear non-proliferation and energy policy. These include primarily the CENESS (Center for Energy and Security Studies) and the PIR Center (the Russian Center for Policy Studies), the latter of which has close ties to the Russian government and is regularly briefing the foreign ministry and the defense ministry on foreign policy, nuclear proliferation and arms control. The Turkish think tank scene is somewhat less pronounced in terms of foreign policy consultancy. Instead, renowned experts at Turkish universities brief and consult their government, and it is with a number of these that interviews were conducted on Turkish Iran policies (i.a. at Middle East Technical University, Hacettepe University, Kadir Has University, IPEK University). Other experts included a range of policy analysts, consultants and senior academics in Brussels, Moscow, Ankara, Berlin, Vienna, London, Istanbul, Washington, Beijing and Shanghai.<sup>70</sup> In total, 55 elite interviews (i.e., experts and decision-makers) were conducted for this research project in 9 countries.

### ***3.2.2 Qualitative sampling in interviews***

As almost always with qualitative sampling, selection bias can hardly be avoided since the selection of interviewees and publications is oriented already beforehand towards the usefulness for this particular field of research (Collier & Mahoney 1996). Moreover, the “non

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Annex I for a list of all interviewees and their respective affiliations.

availability of interviewees as well as non-publication of certain government documents introduces ‘systemic error into the sample’” (Burnham et al. 2008: 160). Burnham et al. further acknowledge that due to the nature of qualitative politics research, random sampling often turns out to be inappropriate. “[T]he researcher [...] selects the cases (e.g. interviewees, official documents, newspapers, pictures etc.) that it makes sense to select” (*ibid.*: 157). (Non-probability) purposive modes of sampling are often used when the number of cases studied is small and process-tracing as a within-case method is used (Tansey 2007: 789). The foreign policy decision-making process toward Iran in the respective case countries involves a small number of people at different departmental levels in a few ministries, in embassies, and in permanent representations worldwide (to international organisations). Interviewing sampling methods are thus necessarily purposive for the research question underlying this dissertation because enlarging the group of respondents to interviewees that are not involved in or have no expertise in the issues at hand would be irrelevant. Moreover, much qualitative research using interviews follows the ‘saturation principle’ according to which increasing the data set if all the relevant information has already been generated (when the data set is ‘saturated’) becomes obsolete (Johnson 2002: 113).

#### **4. Participant observation and cultural immersion as political stance**

Besides qualitative interviewing, Participant observation has also been used as a more indirect method of research (cf. Guest et al. 2012; Kawulich 2005). Participation in numerous policy conferences, speeches, and roundtable discussions did not only help deepen my expertise on the issue areas being studied here, but also sensitised me for particular foreign policy styles, appearance, behaviour and rhetoric of officials relevant to my research topic. Conferences attended did not necessarily always directly relate to the research question underlying this project.<sup>71</sup> However, the observation of the behavior and rhetoric of Chinese, Turkish and Russian decision-makers is instructive for a much broader understanding of their respective public administration and diplomatic cultures and ultimately an element conducive to a deeper understanding of foreign policy cultures. Such an approach helps comprehend “habits, attitudes, and professional discourse” (Jorgensen 2001: 11), which sensitises us for (political) bias in primary sources and discourse. Participation in such events also facilitated approaching and talking to officials as well as experts (informal unstructured interviews;

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<sup>71</sup> Examples include the Kurdish question in Turkey; Turkey’s EU accession talks; China-EU economic relations; or economic security in Southwest Asia. See Annex II for a complete overview of conferences attended.

Guest et al. 2012: 77).<sup>72</sup>

In the same vein, sojourns in the countries of research were deemed an important element to immerse not only in the political, but administrative, linguistic and historic respective culture. Without an awareness of country-specific cultural codes, policy analysis that overlaps with the discipline of Area Studies can only be shallow. I had lived, studied and worked in Russia for a year before embarking on this doctoral research – time spent that my research on Russia benefitted from in myriad ways. My sojourn and travels to Russia also not only improved my Russian language skills which helped during the research, but gave me a useful feel for approaches to interviewing in Russia. In the absence of publicly available contact details of Russian officials, addressing their departments over the phone requires the Russian conversation skills necessary to prevent their secretaries from hanging up. The same holds true for contacts with Chinese interview partners. Even though I did not systematically study Chinese, I learned a number of phrases that allowed me to drop keywords when the occasion arose. This often contributed to the necessary rapport in interviewing. I also started learning Turkish with the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in Brussels. This turned out to be most useful in preparation for fieldwork, interviews and other arrangements on the spot in Turkey. Longer stays in target countries also helped me develop a grasp of culturally determined time and space conceptions, conversation styles, and helped me ‘move around’ more easily – insights and skills essential to fruitful research that goes below the surface of readings in the office. While working on this research project, I travelled back to Russia three times, to Turkey four times, and stayed in China for field research for two months. I also travelled widely within each of these countries. The necessity to understand cultural codes holds true also, and perhaps even more so, for Iran. Even though not a case study in this research design but rather the object of study towards which the three case countries’ foreign policies are being analysed, any research involving foreign policy *towards* Iran benefits from an understanding of a country that all too often is rendered an abstract variable in policy research. Without anticipating the research findings in the following case study chapters, suffice to retain that the political language on Iran as an ‘issue’ or a ‘cause’ (rather than a state and a nation on equal terms) is quite instructive in this regard.<sup>73</sup> For a necessary cultural understanding of Iran, I have travelled to Iran in March 2013, visiting Shiraz, Isfahan, Yazd, Persepolis and Tehran. ‘Fieldwork’ in political science research eschews easy definitions.

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<sup>72</sup> In conversation analysis, the validity of such an approach stems from an understanding of talk as structurally organised action (cf. Peräkylä 2004: 155).

<sup>73</sup> Henry Kissinger once famously stated that Iran has to decide whether it wants to be a ‘nation’ or a ‘cause’ (Ignatius 2006).



While I did not engage in qualitative interviewing in Iran as I did in China, Russia, Turkey and elsewhere (see section 3.2 above), I absorbed political and cultural sentiments, had casual conversations with ordinary Iranians, and travelled through the country as a tourist. On a bus driving from Isfahan to Tehran, I passed by and saw the controversial nuclear facilities at Natanz, whose existence was uncovered in 2002 by an Iranian exile group, sparking the international conflict about the country's nuclear programme. I talked to Iranian clerics in a mosque in Isfahan, interacted with Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) patrols, and saw the supersized pictures of 'martyrs' from the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) that still flank the highways in Tehran. What may seem a historical caesura in text books to the outside observer is filled with vivid substance once the traveler reaches Iran. President Rouhani's comparison between Iranian soldiers in the Iran-Iraq war and Iranian diplomats in the current nuclear negotiations on the occasion of the anniversary of the 1979 revolution in February 2015 becomes more comprehensible from a politico-cultural perspective. The nexus between political culture, culture at large, and foreign policy is a crucial one to understand international relations in all its *structural* dimensions. This is especially true when analyzing an international conflict whose difficulty to be resolved lay in no small part in the clash of political cultures and negotiation mentalities. Tim Guldemann, former Swiss ambassador to Tehran, writes to that effect on the Iranian culture: "Suffering, being a victim of illegitimate power and imposed injustice, is a fundamental motif in Iranian culture. The injustice is lamented, not fought against. [...] The Iranians are convinced of the legitimacy of their own position and the illegitimacy of foreign actions against them." (2007: 172). Absorbing as much of that culture through direct encounters, conversations, and exposure leads to a better *political* understanding where culture is political and the political becomes culture.

Sparked by the same desire to discover the cultural edifice of the countries in the research focus here, I travelled from Beijing to Moscow through Mongolia via the land route on trains, buses, horses, jeeps and ferries. Covering 7900 kilometers on Transsiberian railways, I had numerous conversations with Russian travelers over teas in rattling carriages, experienced cities and sights along the route, and stared at seemingly endless birch woods, getting a feel for the vastness of Siberia and the Russian hinterland that figures so prominently in attempts to explain 'the Russian psyche' ever since Dostoyevskiy. Travelling through the vast territory of the Russian state helps understanding the spatial determinants of a national identity that inevitably impact foreign policy. The relation between space and authority was a recurring fault line in the history of Russian state- and nation formation, from the first accidental nature of settlements and fiefdoms, the 'Mongol yoke' between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the

16<sup>th</sup> century, eastward territorial expansion under Katherine the Great, to Soviet forced mobilisation of resources in spite of the country's spatial givens. 'Space' becomes a cultural 'site', and the Russian 'big state' has grown historically as a response to a large space. The imperatives of space are essential in understanding Putin's consolidation of the 'resource state' and contemporary perceptions of encirclement in the post-Soviet space. Experiencing state and space in Russia on the spot was an invaluable contribution to my understanding of Russian foreign policy.

These are but a few examples of impressions that are not attached the official 'fieldwork' label, but are ultimately conducive to a comprehensive grasp of the research subject beyond the written word in sometimes intangible ways. The latter effort, it is held here, enriches one's 'episteme'. Culture and national self-perceptions invariably play into the making of foreign policy. And if our filters of perceptions implicitly guide our research, – an epistemological concession every researcher has to make – broadening our horizon in multiple directions becomes a foundation for better-informed, and arguably more inspiring, research.

The engagement with one's research subject has an inherent political dimension by design, and it is at this juncture that I consciously articulate positionality. The role of a researcher can never be a neutral one, and the portrayal of politics and policies always is one of many possible ways. Especially in light of the theoretical assumptions and underlying conceptual frameworks developed here, the discussion that follows in the remainder of this dissertation will highlight how the Iranian nuclear conflict is essentially one of contested narratives. If a researcher can himself never be objective in the art of analyzing, the angle chosen is one that represents a conscious research choice. The theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter justified and defended that choice. The 'political' ambition of this dissertation, then, short of providing policy recommendations or engaging in political advocacy, is to contribute to a critical engagement with the contested issue areas at hand, and to reveal their inherent political nature. In other words, it is hoped that the reader is presented with arguments that can have the potential to trigger a change in perceptions of the Iranian nuclear conflict.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the methodological framework for the analysis that follows in the next chapters. It has been shown that its purpose is essentially twofold. Analyses of Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme stand as three

respective within-case studies that are substantially interesting in themselves. Derived from the scope conditions specified, China, Russia and Turkey are states that are non-Western, politically dependent on the US, have stakes in bilateral relations with Iran, and are said to have leverage power in the Iran nuclear file. Even though these conditions apply in qualitatively different degrees to the three case studies, these scope conditions form the basis for a comparative analysis methodologically and are, in turn, derived from the theoretical framework as laid out in chapter 1. The primary research methods on the within-case level comprises process-tracing as well as qualitative data analysis of policy documents (primary sources, e.g. declassified government documents, international organisations documents, press releases, memoirs, transcripts of speeches), policy briefs and the scholarly literature, supplemented by semi-structured elite interviews with experts and decision-makers. Especially process-tracing as a search for causal mechanisms through the analysis of policy documents and process observations from qualitative interviewing are commonly used methods in small-N research and arguably can disarm many of the problems concerning causal inferences associated with comparative case study research designs.

Interviewees have been identified with a view to their ability to inform this research due to their professional engagement with and expertise of this dissertation's topic. The way the interviewees have been identified, addressed and used was laid out in this chapter. Drawing on exploratory and first interviews, 'snowball' sampling has led to further contact details of highly relevant interviewees, including in all foreign ministries of the three case countries, European nuclear negotiation teams, and the US State Department, next to a range of other officials and experts. It has been shown how this research project draws on a range of primary sources, from elite interviews to official documents to memoirs of former decision-makers involved with Iran diplomacy. Notoriously intricate questions in qualitative (small-N) research such as purposive sampling and selection bias have also been addressed. While a range of data has been consulted for this research, the qualitative empirical work underlying this project requires intentional selection of documents and sources. The number of informed experts and officials working on and with Iran is limited by nature, as is the range of documents available as declassified information. The qualitative data analysis thus made use of the information that is both relevant and available. By triangulating the empirical data, tautological and reductionist interpretations will be avoided to the extent possible in social science research. This latter point raises an inherent methodological dilemma in social science research. Michael Dillon captures it as follows: "In every methodology and philosophy, there

is politics. We are all truth-tellers.”<sup>74</sup> As every social scientist is bound to accept this essentially instrumental nature of research, the following chapters will necessarily present one way of telling the truth. While the next chapter will elaborate on the political nature of much Iran research, it is hoped that the conceptual framework as presented in chapter 1 provides for a novel triangulation of the material presented that is both empirically and theoretically enriching.

Detecting and analysing similarities in the crafting and rhetoric of foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme on the part of China, Russia and Turkey in the respective within-case studies allows me to reflect on the extent to which they adhere to common understandings of legitimacy and normative conceptions in international relations in a second step of this dissertation. The research findings of the respective within-case studies (the next three chapters) will eventually be comparatively analysed in light of the conceptual framework identified in chapter 1. This macro-level comparison of process observations from the in-depth case studies is an approach that is deemed appropriate for the qualitative research angle guiding this project. The cases presented here are ‘substantially interesting’ and justify the eventual cross-case comparison in chapter 7 for which the ‘small-N problem’ in social science research arguably holds little relevance.

This comparative approach will eventually answer the research question to what extent Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme are indicative of security cultures resisting hegemony. As the cross-case analysis is a longitudinal within-unit comparison (policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme in a given timeframe), greater comparability of cases is favoured over generalizability. However, it is hoped, ultimately, that the scoring of correlations on a macro-level adds to our understanding of broader non-Western security conceptions in a process of ‘power deconcentration’ (Tessman & Wolfe 2011: 218) in international politics - bearing in mind the conceptual constraints identified, ensuing implications for external validity and the empirical specificities of each and every actor as research objects. The contribution to such an understanding stems from the recognition of the theoretical framework identified earlier as potentially applying to a range of cases other than those analysed within the scope of this dissertation. While the numbers of cases relevant for the nuclear-related Iran diplomacy is limited by design, as the above scope conditions make clear, the theoretical assumptions laid out in the preceding chapter may shed light on international relations between Western and (other) non-Western

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<sup>74</sup> PhD workshop at the University of Kent at Brussels, 3 December 2014.

actors in other policy domains, and thus provide usefulness for further research. The main interest of this dissertation, however, lies with an analysis of Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme and thus with an in-depth understanding of particular power constellations.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature review: State of the art in the empirical research**

#### **1. Introduction**

This study focuses on the foreign policies of China, Russia and Turkey toward the Iranian nuclear programme and thereby draws on a vast array of disciplines, ranging from International Relations, Area Studies, studies of inter-regionalism to political Geography and Geopolitics as well as mediation, conflict resolution and security and strategic studies. This chapter will thus give an exploratory literature review of the state of empirical research that the present study builds upon. The dissertation's explicit aim is to bridge disciplinary confines: While the three in-depth case studies draw in large parts on the respective Area Studies literature (both from international and Chinese, Russian, Turkish, and Iranian scholars), the analysis is complemented by insights from inter-regional studies, conflict studies and the non-proliferation literature.

#### **2. The Iranian Nuclear Programme as a regional and international security challenge**

The Iranian nuclear programme has been widely acknowledged as a regional and international diplomacy challenge, as testified not only by extensive media coverage, but also the proliferating scholarly and think tank literature on the subject.<sup>75</sup> The following paragraphs will give an exploratory review thereof, outlining the most relevant dividing lines in the debates involved.

While the present research, due to its focus on the respective Iran policies of China, Russia and Turkey, is to be situated within a particular sub-field of that literature that will be discussed further below, it cannot but be informed by the growing body of literature that has been produced on other approaches to the Iran dossier for the sake of a more solid basis for comparison and point of reference, among which the US and the EU approaches are the most

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<sup>75</sup> For a non-exhaustive overview, cf. i.a. Zak (2002); Brzezinski (2004); Howard (2004); Pollack (2004); Venter (2005); Ansari (2006); Delpech (2006); Kibaroglu (2006); Lowe & Spencer (2006); Parasiliti (2009, 2012); Peimani (2006); Timmermann (2006); Biscop (2007); Jafarzadeh (2007); Melman & Jafandar (2007); Fayazmanesh (2008); Nasr & Takeyh (2008); Bertram (2009); Toukan & Cordesman (2010); Maloney (2010); Mousavian (2012); Patrikarakos (2012); Thérme & Khazaneh (2012); Parsi (2012); Joshi (2012); Kang (2013).

determining ones, both for Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies, as will be shown, but also for the direction and prospects of the nuclear talks as such.

## 2.1 U.S. foreign policy toward Iran's nuclear programme

Analyses of US Iran policy commonly emphasise the diametrically opposed positions of Iran and the US ever since the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the subsequent hostage crisis in the US embassy in Tehran that led to the break-up of diplomatic relations.<sup>76</sup> Rather than seeing this as the beginning of misunderstandings, US policies in the Middle East in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been analysed as playing a crucial role for the Iranian perception of the US as an 'arrogant superpower'. Especially the coup against Iranian prime minister Mohamed Mosaddeq in 1953 continues to reverberate in the Iranian national memory and in the Iranian government's references to historical misdeeds by the US government.<sup>77</sup> Haunted by a track record of misperceptions, slipped opportunities and relentless insistence on each respective exclusionary position, US-Iran relations with a view to the nuclear crisis<sup>78</sup> have been widely analysed as finding expression in frustrated diplomacy, renewed US advocacy for international sanctions and the imposition of US unilateral sanctions on Iran.<sup>79</sup> US attempts to isolate Iran increasingly violated the letter and the spirit of the 1981 Algiers Accords between Iran and the United States.<sup>80</sup> For years of negotiations in the Iranian nuclear conflict, the US had upheld the suspicion of Iran's nuclear programme potentially having a military dimension, whereas Teheran adamantly upholds its legitimate right to nuclear enrichment for civilian purposes in accordance with Art. IV of the NPT.<sup>81</sup> In her political memoirs, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's account of the Iranian nuclear talks implicitly insinuates

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<sup>76</sup> There is an abundance of literature on US-Iranian relations. For effective accounts thereof, cf. i.a.: Ansari (2006); Beeman (2008); Bill (1988); Cook & Roshandel (2009); Cottam (1988); Ehrlich (2007); Emery (2013); Fayazmanesh (2008); Ganji (2012); Leverett & Leverett (2013); Litwack (2014); Mearsheimer & Walt (2007: 280-305); Mousavian (2014); Murray (2010); Parsi (2012); Pollack (2004); Sick (1985); Takeyh & Maloney (2011: 1299f.); Tarock (2006). For insightful analyses of US positions in the Iranian nuclear conflict, cf. Fitzpatrick (2006a: 70-73); Maloney (2010); Parsi (2012).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Kinzer's (2008) book on the 1953 coup for an insightful account.

<sup>78</sup> i.e. in the framework of the official 'P5+1' format for negotiations as from 2006. Direct bilateral relations have been absent since the storming of the US-American embassy in Tehran in 1979.

<sup>79</sup> For an insightful analysis of the frictions between White House, State Department and Congress on these issues, cf. Parsi (2012).

<sup>80</sup> These Accords formally settled the hostage crisis and state that "it is and from now on will be the policy of the United States not to intervene, directly or indirectly, politically or militarily, in Iran's internal affairs". Algiers Accords available at [last accessed 8 November 2014]: [http://www.parstimes.com/history/algiers\\_accords.pdf](http://www.parstimes.com/history/algiers_accords.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> Hassan Rouhani (2011) describes in his memoirs of his time as chief nuclear negotiator that Iran's right to enrich was an objective he sought to achieve during negotiations with the EU-3 (61; 666). The US, and other Western governments and experts, hold that a 'right to enrich' is not given by the NPT. Since 'enrichment' is not explicitly mentioned in the treaty provisions, another position taken by some states is that 'enrichment' is an implicit right. On this, cf. also footnote 320 in chapter 7.

Iranian military intentions, justifies a ‘carrots and sticks’ approach and conveys barely concealed pride in imposing hard-hitting sanctions on Iran (Clinton 2014: 416-446). When the US insisted on a ‘complete cessation’ of an Iranian nuclear fuel cycle, as was the US’ initial position in 2003-4, it is not only violating the spirit and letter of the NPT,<sup>82</sup> it also forcefully demonstrates how international law can be held victim to political narratives: The first steps toward an Iranian nuclear programme were made with an agreement reached in 1957 between the US and Iran ruled by Shah Reza Pahlevi. Under the auspices of the US ‘Atoms for Peace’ programme, the US provided Iran with a nuclear reactor and Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU), followed by US support for Iran to acquire a reprocessing facility for plutonium extraction (Oborne & Morrison 2013: 38f.). After the Iranian revolution in 1979 swept away a state that was hitherto a regional ally of the US, Washington cancelled its contracts and nuclear agreements with Iran. In the 2000s, an Iranian nuclear programme was being securitised<sup>83</sup> whose initial stepping stones were laid with the help of the US.<sup>84</sup> In an Iranian reading, the US’ approach to the Iranian nuclear programme is the expression of Western arrogance, imperialist attitudes and nuclear double standards (Attar 2011; Soltanieh 2011; Moshirzadeh 2007: 524; Oborne & Morrison 2013; Mousavian 2012: 468). The Iranian establishment’s mistrust of the ‘Big Satan’ USA leads it to suspect US policies toward Iran as a cover-up for regime change policies. Going beyond initial ‘targeted’ sanctions against entities and individuals associated with Iran’s nuclear programme, the US propagated a *comprehensive* sanctions regime<sup>85</sup> that nurtured the Iranian suspicion that not its behaviour, but its very regime was the problem.

On the American side, governmental doubts continuously persisted as to the Iranians’ sobriety and peaceful intentions. Analysts therefore agree that these ‘perceptual impediments’ (Miller 2011) need to be dismantled if one is to reach a long-term solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis that would be acceptable to both parties. An important first step in this direction was done with the conclusion of a political framework agreement on Iran’s nuclear status on 2 April 2015. This agreement contains basic parameters for the negotiation of a comprehensive nuclear agreement. These negotiations have not least been made possible due to changes in both US and Iranian administrations. In *Iran’s Nuclear Chess*, Robert Litwak

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<sup>82</sup> Iran was one of the first states to sign the NPT in 1968 and ratify it in 1970.

<sup>83</sup> Jason Jones (2011) has analyzed how the Iranian nuclear issue has become securitised in US media and policy discourse and how this discourse impacted favorably on the Bush administration’s policy strategising on Iran.

<sup>84</sup> For a more detailed and concise discussion of US-Iran nuclear cooperation in the 1960s and 1970s, cf. Kibaroglu (2007) and Patrikarakos (2012); Ansari (2006).

<sup>85</sup> While ‘targeted’ sanctions can discriminate, comprehensive sanctions aim at the complete interruption of trade and finance between sender and target.



(2014) analyses how the Obama administration has brought about a discursive shift from the earlier Bush administration's labelling of Iran as a 'rogue state' to an 'outlier' state (17-33; cf. also Litwak 2008: 92). He contends that this signalled a policy shift from a unilateral categorisation of other actors (rogue) to a focus on Iranian non-compliance with *international* norms (outlier). It remains to be seen how actual policies will match this rhetoric.

Despite repeated explorations of possible direct bilateral talks even before the election of Rouhani<sup>86</sup> and at times strikingly progressive US-Iranian encounters in the context of the nuclear talks<sup>87</sup>, it is not clear how a 'grand bargain' of US-Iranian normalisation of relations will look like. While the Obama administration believes in the 'transformational' effects that a nuclear agreement with Iran could have on the regional security structure and, implicitly, on US-Iranian relations, the political 'fall-out' effects in both Tehran and Washington will entail intense infighting between the administrations and domestic hardliners that are opposing any partial rapprochement. It should be beyond doubt, however, that a long-term solution to the nuclear crisis is not conceivable without it. The implementation of a nuclear deal will have to be closely monitored by the IAEA and be embedded in a multilateral context that will require the consent of those states negotiating it (the '5+1' format). As the implementation of such a deal, however, will entail the lifting of UN and unilateral sanctions, Iran could undergo a transition towards a 'normal' country. This process will inevitably have repercussions on the US-Iranian relations. Mousavian (2014) asserts the centrality of the US in ending Iran's isolation, and recalls that all Iranian attempts to negotiate with the Europeans in a "West Minus US" approach have failed (138; cf. also Milani 2009; Perthes 2010: 95-96). David Patrikarakos (2012) formulates: "[...] throughout the meandering 60-year history of the nuclear programme from 'Atoms for Peace' to Obama's White House today, the USA has remained the single most important factor in deciding whether Iran goes nuclear or not" (66). Given Iranian fixations on the US, American foreign policy is thus not only crucial to

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<sup>86</sup> In a remarkable move in 2009, Ahmadinejad had written a letter to president Obama stating the Iranian readiness "to engage in bilateral negotiations, without conditions and on the basis of mutual respect" (Charbonneau 2011). Cf. also Dareini (2012). Iranian Foreign Minister Salehi confirmed again in the run-up to the 2013 Almaty talks Iran's readiness to engage in direct talks and emphasised the 'honest intentions' of the Obama administration. However, he stated, the last word regarding such a decision lies with the Supreme Leader (speech in Berlin, 4 February 2013, cf. Annex II).

<sup>87</sup> The direct encounter between US undersecretary of state William J. Burns and Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili in Geneva in 2009 was one such example of bilateral meetings (Mousavian 2012: 454) prior to Hassan Rouhani's term. The unprecedented direct talks between US State Secretary Kerry and Iranian foreign minister Zarif following Rouhani's inauguration have introduced a qualitatively new momentum to such bilateral encounters which culminated in the negotiation of a first interim agreement (the 'Joint Plan of Action') on 23 November 2013. The strong bilateral US-Iran track in negotiations on a political framework agreement in March and April 2015 has also arguably been a crucial precondition for the P5+1 format to reach an agreement on 2 April 2015.

understand for a comprehensive solution of the Iranian nuclear crisis, but also if we are to understand Iranian motivations and positions. For better or for worse, the US has been Iran's 'Significant Other'. This relationship is critical to any understanding of the Iranian nuclear conflict, and to how China, Russia, and Turkey relate to it.

## 2.2 EU foreign policy toward Iran's nuclear programme

The foreign policy of the EU toward the Iranian nuclear programme has also been covered elsewhere by a range of authors. In the absence of US-Iranian bilateral relations, it fell to the 'EU3' (i.e. France, Great Britain and Germany) to lead negotiations with Iran when the latter's nuclear programme was uncovered in 2002, with the format being joined by the EU High Representative for the Union's Common and Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana at the time, in late 2003.<sup>88</sup> The diplomatic track record thereof has been widely analysed in the scholarly literature as well as in memoirs and biographies of decision-makers.<sup>89</sup> Under the EU's negotiation efforts, nuclear talks seemed to have been making progress since the stalled 2003 Sa'dabad negotiations all the way to the initially applauded 2004 Paris agreement, which outlined broad-based European-Iranian cooperation in a number of issue areas, including comprehensive cooperation in the nuclear, technological and economic field in return for 'objective guarantees' in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. Developments as from 2005, however, accounted for a failure of the early EU-led proposals and the eventual referral of the Iranian nuclear dossier from the IAEA Board of Governors to the UNSC according to Art. XII.C of the IAEA Statute. Two main impediments to progress in nuclear negotiations were US resistance to European and Iranian proposals<sup>90</sup> and the Iranian presidential elections that saw the coming into office of president Ahmadinejad with an ensuing turn for the worse concerning cooperation with the West. It is at this juncture that hopes for easily negotiable solutions were dashed at the latest.

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<sup>88</sup> Mark Fitzpatrick (2006a) writes that even before the birth of the P5+1 format in 2005/2006, US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns had "consulted closely with his EU-3 counterparts and joined strategy session" (73). From the beginning, thus, the US was involved in the process, but not yet at the forefront of diplomatic activity. Fitzpatrick also confirms that Russia and China were sometimes included in these sessions before the P5+1 format existed (*ibid.*).

<sup>89</sup> Examples include Baalbood & Edwards (2007); Biscop (2007); Dryburgh (2008); Fischer (2011: 250f.); Sauer (2007, 2015); Straw (2012: 433f.); Tertrais (2006); Giumelli & Ivan (2013); Kuzmicheva (2009); Peimani (2006); Keukeleire & MacNaughtan (2008: 113); Bretherton & Vogler (2006: 183); Kile (2005); Ansari (2006: 202f.); Barzegar (2012: 255f.); Patrikarakos (2012: 195-225); Mousavian (2012); Chirac (2011: 300).

<sup>90</sup> Former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw (2012) recounts in his memoirs how in this early phase of negotiations over nuclear Iran, the US was highly suspicious of not only the Iranians, but also of the Europeans' approach (405; 448; 453). Tellingly, former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (2011) calls E3 diplomacy with Iran a 'disaster' in his memoirs (639). And former Iranian nuclear spokesperson Mousavian (2014) suspected US behind-the-scene activities in the EU3' lack of flexibility in 2003-2005 (202-206).

The referral to the Security Council in February 2006 by an IAEA board vote of 27-3 paved the way for the eventual imposition of Chapter VII sanctions on Iran and, interestingly, a gradual shift of positions within the ‘Western’ camp, with France and Great Britain becoming increasingly more assertive and formulating confrontational foreign policy stances on Iran, to an extent even that leads Osborne and Morrison (2013) to describe them as ‘client states’ of the US in the Iran dossier (6). Kayhan Barzegar (2012) attests a loss of the EU’s ‘independent and mediatory role in the Iranian nuclear dossier’ after the failed 2004 Paris agreement, and observes a closer alignment with US positions thereafter, ‘adopting principles of deterrence and anti-weaponization’ (256). In the second half of the 2000s, this even went as far as the imposition of EU unilateral sanctions that go well beyond the UNSC-backed international sanctions on Iran, and arguably, affected Iranian entities and Iran’s economy much more than US unilateral sanctions (such as the 2012 EU oil embargo or financial sanctions such as the cut-off from the Belgian-based SWIFT system). EU unilateral Iran sanctions have seen a qualitative change from 2010 onwards, as opposed to the human rights-related sanctions adopted in the 1990s.<sup>91</sup>

Two caveats should be inserted at this point. References to the ‘Western’ camp by no means imply an analytical grouping or equation of EU and US positions in the Iranian nuclear dossier. These have been substantially different at times, which gave Iran ample opportunities to “exploit the gap between Europe and the United States to achieve Iranian objectives”, as Mousavian (2012: 180) confirms. Especially since 2006 and the formation of the P5+1, the term ‘Western camp’ is referred to in order to differentiate between the Western (Germany, France, Great Britain, USA) and non-Western (China, Russia) states in this negotiation format. A subsumption of at times different US/EU positions into a ‘Western camp’, however, does not contradict the conceptual reference point of a Gramscian ‘historic bloc’ worked out in the theoretical chapter. Such a historic bloc breaks down the above mentioned ‘Western camp’ into hegemonic (US-inspired) structures, subalterns (European and other allies), and other (and perhaps even overlapping) actor constellations.

A second caveat concerns the EU’s Iran policies: It is not assumed here that the EU represents a homogenous bloc pursuing coherent policies toward Iran. It should not come as a surprise that different countries have different approaches. The ‘EU-3’ format is acknowledged as leading negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme, together with the

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<sup>91</sup> EU unilateral sanctions have been applied to more sectors, including non-proliferation, and moved from ‘targeted’ to comprehensive sanctions approaches. Yet, the intended effects and likely impact of EU sanctions lacks both public and governmental scrutiny (as admitted by government officials. EU sanctions workshop, 14 May 2015, London. Cf Annex II). Cf. also Portela (2010).

Union's High Representative<sup>92</sup> who acts both as a political representative of all 28 member states and a vice president of the European Commission at the same time.<sup>93</sup> The foreign policies of Germany, France, and the UK in the Iran dossier, moreover, have partially been very different.<sup>94</sup> The 'EU's policy' toward Iran has to be seen as the outcome of policy consultation and coordination among those three and the nuclear negotiation team of the European External Action Service. Even though the EU's Iran policy is not the research focus of the present analysis, cross-references will be made when analysing China's and Russia's diplomacy within the P5+1 framework, and Turkey's outside it.

### **2.3 Other Perspectives on Iran's nuclear programme: The Non-Aligned Movement and Arab States**

Next to these two key players in the nuclear talks (US and EU), there is a handful of different perspectives on the Iranian nuclear programme that are not as determining as the US and the EU over the future direction of negotiations, but which are crucial to bear in mind if one is to contextualise Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies against the backdrop of a plethora of positions in the Iranian nuclear dossier.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is such an example of a positioning in the Iran dossier that is often in opposition to Western positions, and to which not least the Iranian leadership, especially in the Ahmadinejad period, has referred to in their quest for international coalitions that would form a counter-balance to 'the Western bloc'. This group of 120 states breathes the ambition not to be formally aligned with or against any power bloc in the international arena. The NAM was founded in September 1961 in a Cold War context between the two ideologically opposed blocs with the aim to offer an alternative middle course of non-alignment and a platform "opposing imperialism and great power hegemony" mainly for developing countries (Jackson 1983; Jaipal 1987). The position of the NAM in the Iranian nuclear dossier today is based on an "emphasis on the multiculturalism and challenge against the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, on the one hand, and non-compromising position on inalienable and non-discriminatory right for peaceful uses of nuclear energy" (Soltanieh, in Mousavian 2012: 471; cf. also Kibaroglu 2006: 222; Meier 2014: 7; Potter & Mukhatzhanova 2012; Yew 2011; Litwak 2014: 58-59; Braveboy-Wagner

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<sup>92</sup> And, since the coming into force of the Lisbon treaty, the nuclear negotiation team of the European External Action Service (EEAS).

<sup>93</sup> Interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 4 June 2013.

<sup>94</sup> David O'Sullivan, EEAS Chief Operating Officer, therefore remarked with regard to the difficult approximations of different national positions that an EU3 line usually provides a good indicator for an EU-wide compromise. Keynote speech at the EXACT conference, Brussels, 11 July 2013 (cf. Annex II).

2009: 24). Especially in the context of the ‘Looking to the East’ diplomacy of the Ahmadinejad administration, Iran relied on the support of the NAM for its perceived struggle for ‘inalienable’ nuclear rights and against Western hegemony and suppression, believing in its role as the leader of a “Third World bloc” as the harbinger and representative of the real ‘international community’ (Mousavian 2012: 128; 190f.; Posch 2013: 15; Wunderlich et al. 2013: 266). The lack of cooperation and support for the Iranian position, evidenced by the lacking support for Iran’s candidacy as a non-permanent member of the UNSC in 2008 or the NAM’s support for UNSCR 1803 in March 2008, however, cast a damp on the perception of unquestionable strategic bonds between the NAM and Iran. Mousavian formulates: “Adoption of Resolution 1803 both rebutted the ‘looking to the East’ policy and proved that Iran’s strategic friends such as China, Russia, and the Non-Aligned Movement were not willing to pay a high price for supporting Tehran” (2012: 300). Against this background, Yew (2011) analyses the partially instrumental nature of the NAM, and distinguishes between “NAM as a normative concept”, “NAM as an Association”, and “NAM as a Foreign Policy Tool” (7-9). While she finds little principled convergence between national positions on non-proliferation issues and NAM positions, she carves out an associational value of Third World solidarity in the face of perceived unfairness and disproportionality in global proliferation dynamics. By implication, NAM has come to be seen as a platform for states like Iran to cultivate an anti-Americanism in a multilateral setting and to act as the “Avenger of the Dispossessed” (Wunderlich et al. 2013: 266; Wunderlich 2014: 94; Yew 2011: 9-10). An insightful read in this context is also Potter’s & Mukhatzhanova’s (2012) study on *Nuclear Politics and the Non-Aligned Movement*, which fleshes out the internal division within NAM, including diverging positions on Iran’s nuclear programme (95-109), and also discusses implications of a NAM chairmanship by Iran (143-154).

Another subject of scholarly and policy discussion has been the position of Arab States in the Middle East and, in particular, of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC, founded as a reaction to and to counter-balance revolutionary Iran in 1981, did not hide the fact that the Iranian nuclear programme and the continuing Iranian lack of transparency was seen as a matter of concern.<sup>95</sup> Arab leaders severely mistrust the Iranian leadership, and as revealed in the diplomatic cables disclosed by Wikileaks, Saudi King Abdullah had urged the US to attack Iran in order to “cut off the head of the snake” (Sanger, Glanz & Becker 2010). From an Arab perspective, the Iranian nuclear programme is often associated with

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<sup>95</sup> On Iran-Gulf relations, cf. Bill (1996); Fürter (2002); Gargash (1996); Milani (1996); Fürtig (2002).

regional hegemonic ambitions of the Iranian regime (Joshi 2012: 116).<sup>96</sup> In this context, it has been theorised that a nuclearised Iran would disturb regional power balances and possibly trigger a regional arms race.<sup>97</sup> With a view to such a scenario, Arab states in the region have been adamant in stressing the need for Iranian cooperation with the IAEA and UNSC resolutions and have been advocating (not always publicly) for Western decisive stances on Iran's lack of compliance (Parsi 2012: 14f.; Guzansky & Yadlin 2013: 111-113).

#### 2.4 Iran as an object of study: Eschewing sensationalism and alarmism

The image of Iran often encountered in Western media and press reports but also in influential think tank analyses and academic journals is one of a 'rogue' or 'pariah' regime, at least of an internationally isolated theocracy whose intransigence, veiled intentions and lack of transparency with regard to its nuclear programme needs to be countered with a tough diplomatic stance as well as coercion. Under international law, coercing Iran includes the imposition of sanctions under article 42 of chapter 7 of the UN Charter as well as, if Iran is deemed a 'Threat to international peace and security', the use of force if backed by a UNSC mandate under article 43 of the same chapter (enforcement action). Besides such legal considerations, much literature has been produced on the Israeli-Iranian official enmity, Israel's staunch opposition to any Iranian nuclear programme and the likeliness as well as feasibility of Israeli pre-emptive strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities even outside of international law stipulations.<sup>98</sup>

Much of the discourse on Iran and the Iranian nuclear programme is politically loaded, emotionally charged and ideologically gridlocked. Sometimes based on unsubstantiated

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<sup>96</sup> Borghard & Rapp-Hooper's (2013) study analyses an oft-mentioned side-argument of Iranian regional ambitions in this context, namely that of Iran's support for Hizbollah. In it, they debunk the argument often found in policy analyses as well as scholarly articles that an Iranian nuclear bomb would automatically embolden proxy groups such as Hizbollah. Such an 'extended deterrence' scenario, Borghard & Rapp-Hooper find, is unlikely given both intrinsic state sponsor-proxy particularities that cannot be translated into state-level deterrence strategies; and the nature of the Iran-Hizbollah relationship according to which a nuclear Iran will entail Iranian interests that may even be at odds with Hizbollah's. Cf. also Guzansky & Yadlin (2013: 114).

<sup>97</sup> Patrikarakos (2012: 244; 277); Kibaroglu (2006: 224); Kaye & Wehrey (2007); Edelman et al. (2011: 67); Fitzpatrick (2006b: 21); Guldemann (2007: 174); Clawson & Eisenstadt (2008: 18); Lippman (2012: 117); Tertrais (2010-11: 49-50). Cf. also 'Second-Order Nuclear Proliferation' Joshi (2012: 104f.), 'reactive proliferation' (Solingen 2012a: 38), and Khan (2002: 219-266) on 'Proliferation propensities in the Arab States'. Hunter, R. (2010), however, holds that speculations about a regional arms race should not be overstated: "[...] if Iran were to 'go nuclear' in the next few years, it is already too late for Saudi Arabia, Egypt or any other regional country to start a nuclear programme that could be ready within a decade or more" (145). These countries, he contends, would rather look to the US as a security provider in a regional alliance structure.

<sup>98</sup> Pedatzur (2007); Raas & Long (2007); Ram (2009); Talmadge (2008); Therme (2012a); Clawson & Eisenstadt (2008); Parasiliti (2009: 9-10); Gergorin (2009: 21); Fitzpatrick (2010: 88). Tertrais (2010-11) makes the interesting point that an Israeli NATO membership could be a way to embed Israeli security concerns in a multilateral framework and dissuade Israel from unilateral military actions.

assumptions and pre-conceived categorisations, a number of accounts typically depict Iran as an anarchic and obscure place and its government as irrational and illegitimate, ranging from politicised and polemic commentaries by agenda-driven foreign policy practitioners and analysts,<sup>99</sup> all the way to judgemental analyses by different parts of the media establishment and academics alike that unquestioningly reproduce a particular narrative of the Iranian nuclear crisis. In *Confronting Iran* (2006), Ali Ansari recounts how the Iranian ‘enemy’ construction on the part of US administrations took place in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution and the ensuing hostage crisis largely in the absence of regular ‘reality checks’ (93f.). In their book *Going to Tehran* (2013), the former US government officials Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett analyse a powerful Iran mythology to be at work that defies logic and prevents objective policy recommendations.

Yet, not only policy circles, but also the academy is guilty of essentialising a country that most readers only know for the appearance of its nuclear programme in news headlines. “It is this market for ‘Iranian pop studies’ that allows some to become ‘experts’ on the country by writing a travelogue, without footnotes or quoting a few newspaper sources at best”, Adib-Moghaddam (2010: 16) aptly complains in *Iran in World Politics*. This calls for the need for a critical reading of foreign policy discourses on Iran, precisely because “discourse on Iran is saturated with policy-relevant, think-tank-type analyses, which are too often designed to reify the caricature of Iran as a monolithic, unchangeable, eternally anarchic place” (2010: 15). This discourse is nurtured by “one-dimensional empirical material, aestheticized narration or anecdotal journalistic description” (*ibid*: 16), he states. This sorry state, then, demands the “[...]’de-reification’ of existent cultural systems, both as an intellectual effort and political praxis” (*ibid.*, 133), rather than “the reification of apparently authoritative truisms” (2006: 2), he writes in *International Politics of the Persian Gulf*. Loyal to this spirit, the present study draws upon the international body of literature on the subject area that is distinguished by well-substantiated and convincingly argued analyses that reveal both analytical thoroughness and empirical rigour,<sup>100</sup> and triangulates its own research observations with primary policy documents and semi-structured elite interviews.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> i.a. influential US neoconservative authors such as Krauthammer (2012a, 2012b); Ledeen (2007); Muravchik (2006); neoconservative politicians such as Dick Cheney (2011); John McCain (2012); or former Israeli ambassador and foreign policy advisor Dore Gold (2009). Khalaji (2008) is an example of how think tank analysis nurtures and propagates a distorted narrative about such essentially ideological classifications of ‘rationality’ and ‘irrationality’.

<sup>100</sup> i.a. Adib-Moghaddam (2006, 2010, 2011); Ansari (2006); Bertram (2009); ElBaradei (2012); Jafari (2009); Katouzian (2009); Khlopkov (2007); Perthes (2008, 2009, 2010); Parsi (2012); Patrikarakos (2012); Posch (2013). The Iran reports by the International Crisis Group also serve as well-researched and substantiated accounts of

Likewise, the literature on legal aspects of the nuclear non-proliferation regime (cf. Arbatov 2007; Kirichenko 2007; Pilat 2007; Mousavian 2012; Patrikarakos 2012: 51f.), as well as technical aspects related to the nuclear fuel cycle (cf. Diakov 2007, 2009; cf. also ElBaradei 2012: 12f.; Therme & Khazaneh 2012: 104f.; Patrikarakos 2012: 42f.) will be referred to where necessary, feeding into the discussion about the political controversies surrounding the technicalities of the Iranian nuclear programme.

Ultimately, while Iranian foreign policy is not the main focus of this research (but rather China's, Russia's, and Turkey's), the analysis that follows is equally informed by the literature on the Iranian perspective on the nuclear crisis as well as policy accounts and behind-the-scene analyses, the latter of which are particularly relevant for a broader understanding of the evolution of the nuclear stalemate as perceived by relevant actors involved. To name but a few, Alireza Jafarzadeh's (2007) book *'The Iran Threat'* serves as an analysis of the Iranian nuclear programme from the Iranian exile oppositionist who uncovered its existence in 2002.<sup>102</sup> Seyed Houssein Moussavian's (2012) *'The Iranian Nuclear Crisis. A Memoir'* is a detailed high-level Iranian insider account of the nuclear crisis from 2002 until 2012 from the man who served as spokesperson for Iran's nuclear negotiation team from 2003-2005. Similarly, former chief nuclear negotiator and today's Iranian president Hassan Rouhani (2011) wrote a book on diplomacy surrounding the Iranian nuclear case covering the time span he was in charge of Iran's negotiation team (2003-2005).<sup>103</sup> And Mohamed ElBaradei's (2012) elegantly and captivatingly written *'The Age of Deception. Nuclear Diplomacy in Treacherous Times'* offers an illuminating behind-the-scenes coverage of nuclear diplomacy with Iran from the former Director General of the IAEA.

### **3. Russian, Turkish and Chinese Iran policies: State of the art in the literature**

Scarce attention has been paid so far to comparative analyses of the positions and rationale of the three case countries China, Russia and Turkey under consideration in the present research that can and do influence the process of negotiations and set the tone for the further course of

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nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2003, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

<sup>101</sup> Cf. the previous chapter for a detailed discussion of the data collection methods used.

<sup>102</sup> Admittedly, authors with political agendas can and should be read with an awareness of their intentions.

The alarmist language of Jafarzadeh's book is a case in point.

<sup>103</sup> *Amniyat Melli va Diplomasi-ye Hastehi Iran (National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy)* was published in 2011 and a shortened version entitled *Ruayt Tadabir va Omir (Narration of Foresight and Hope)* in 2013.



events in the Iran dossier beyond a negotiated resolution of the Iran nuclear talks. Not enough attention has been paid to ‘non-Western’ foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear crisis.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.1 Russian foreign policy toward Iran

Russian-Iranian bilateral relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 2000s and in particular as from the 1990s have been widely analysed by a range of scholars, cutting across the disciplines of Area Studies, International Relations and studies in inter-regionalism.<sup>105</sup> The Iranian revolution in 1979 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 have been carved out as landmark events in bilateral relations in various ways, whose repercussions and implications for current foreign policies will be referred to throughout the analysis that follows. While the Iranian Revolution may have nurtured hopes in Soviet Russia of a looming Soviet-Iranian axis to confront American predominance in the Middle East after the fall of the Shah, Khomeini’s ideological orientation of situating Iran “neither East nor West”, the designation of the USSR as the “little Satan”, and Iran’s suppression of its Communist Tudeh party put an end to such deliberations.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, Soviet-Iranian relations quickly reached a pragmatic level of cooperation. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the demise of the Soviet Union then fuelled intense trade relations that also included the transfer of weapons and nuclear technology (Parker 2009: 103-128; Therme 2013; Sarukhanyan 2006; Golan 1998: 30-41). Iran’s only nuclear power plant in Bushehr was built and operated by the Russian atomic industry. The importance of Russia for Iran’s nuclear infrastructure has been widely analysed (cf. Khlopkov & Lutkova 2010; Parker 2009: 103-128; Therme 2013; Sarukhanyan 2006; Golan 1998: 30-38; Mizin 2004; Orlov & Vinnikov 2005; Yurtaev 2005). Chapter 5 will dwell on the significance of these ties for Russia’s foreign policy towards Iran’s nuclear programme after 2002.

A number of analyses of Russian foreign policy following the break-up of the Soviet Union make out distinct phases of foreign policy re-orientation toward the West, ranging from assimilationist to more assertive and independent foreign policies that bespeak Russia’s quest for a post-imperial foreign policy identity (Belopolsky 2009: 14-28; Casier 2006; Katz 2002;

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. the previous chapter for a detailed discussion of the case selection strategy.

<sup>105</sup> i.a., Adomeit (2007, 2009); Golan (1998); Gusher (1997); Freedman (2000); Jalali (2001); Katz (2002; 2008); Orlov (2010); Primakov (2009: 310; 341f.); Sakwa (2002); Naumkin (1998); Therme (2012b, 2013); Trenin & Malashenko (2010); Yurtaev (2005). Cf. most notably John Parker’s *Persian Dreams. Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*’ (2009) as a concise book-length analysis of Russian-Iranian relations as from the 1990s.

<sup>106</sup> For analyses of Soviet-Persian and Soviet-Iranian relations, cf. i.a. Parker (2009: 1-56); Sicker (1988); Yodfat (1984); McCain (1987: 39-53); Chubin (1993); Yapp (1982, 1983); Vassiliev (1993); Varasteh (1991); Freedman (1991); Ramazani (1990); Golan (1990: 176-196); Rubinstein (1982: 57-132); Atkin (2011); Heller (1992: 38-40).

MacFarlane 2006: 44f.; Sakwa 2002; Trenin 2006; Tsygankov 2007; Mendras 2012; Nizameddin 2013: 52f.; Shakleina 2013: 166-174). Russia's policy toward the CIS and other Central Asian countries, including Iran, has inspired numerous case studies investigating Russian foreign policy shifts (or lack thereof) in the 1990s toward its 'Near Abroad', Central Asia and the Middle East (cf. i.a. Belopolsky 2009; Freedman 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Lepingwell 1994; Kerr 1995; Sakwa 2002: 375f.; Trenin 2006; Dannreuther 2004, 2012).<sup>107</sup> Belopolsky (2009), in *Russia and the Challengers*, asks the question why Russia chose to align itself with the 'challenger' states China, Iran, and Iraq, and analyses how US foreign policy has factored into Russian foreign policy decision-making. While her analysis of the institutional complexities involved in the formulation of Russia's Iran policy is insightful, the reading of Russian closer 'alignment' with China and Iran as a consequence of Russia's quest for a new post-Soviet identity obfuscates rather diverse foreign policy motivations with the drive to underline "Russia's Eurasian character" (28). A similar conclusion is drawn in Nizameddin's (2013) *Putin's New Order in the Middle East*. Russia's policies towards different actors in the Middle East, including Iran, are seen both in the context of respective bilateral relations and through the prism of US-Russian relations in their effect on the region. With a stronger focus on the latter, the reading that Moscow's prime motivation for its Middle Eastern policies is to undermine the US presence in the Middle East is a running theme of the book. Notwithstanding the simplified portrayal of statist identities, I consider the underlying assumption of exclusive alignment patterns (either pro-US or pro-Iran) problematic for a number of reasons that Chapter 5 on Russia's Iran policies will elaborate on. Crucially from a conceptual point of view, such depictions borrow too heavily from an IR neo-realist understanding of 'balancing' and proceed from a too unidirectional understanding of foreign policy complexes and how 'resistance' takes place in international relations. Chapter 1 has outlined a more nuanced approach whose validity will be assessed after the empirical case study discussions in the chapters that follow.

Staying within the conceptual frame outlined before, Chapter 5 will thus draw on and benefit from Russian Area Studies, and inter-regional studies at the interstice of Middle Eastern studies and post-Soviet studies. In particular, Parker's (2009) *Persian Dreams* provides an insightful analysis of Russian-Iranian relations in their wider regional and historical context. The implications of the Iranian nuclear crisis for the nuclear non-proliferation regime and, by implication, for Russia's political agenda, as well as Russia's motivations for its Iran policy, have been succinctly analysed by a number of authors (i.a.,

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<sup>107</sup> cf. also the writings by the influential former Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov (2009: 340f.).

Adomeit 2009; Aras & Ozbay 2006; Arbatov 2007; Lata & Khlopkov 2003; Lucas 2008: 248f.; Orlov & Vinnikov 2005; Stürmer 2008: 55; 113f.; 211f.; Trenin & Malashenko 2010; Yurtaev 2005; Mizin 2004; Katz 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012; Sarukhanyan 2006; Meier & Pieper 2015; Pieper 2015b). It is within this burgeoning body of literature that the chapter on Russia's position toward the Iranian nuclear programme is situated, making a timely empirical contribution not only to the discussion of a highly topical geopolitical challenge, but arguably to our wider understanding of Russian foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>108</sup> Especially the Ukraine crisis and the ensuing deterioration in relations between Russia and the West as from late 2013 calls for analyses that make sense of Russia's place on the world stage – the latter of which is critical for any resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis. As a state member to the P5+1 negotiation format with Iran, its nuclear expertise and nuclear commercial activities in Iran, Russia is critical for the successful conclusion of the Iran nuclear talks as well as for the implementation of an eventual nuclear agreement. This leverage gave rise to speculations that cooperation with Russia over the Iranian nuclear file could be endangered in the wake of the crisis in overall Russian-Western relations from 2013 onwards. Yet, despite allusions and threats to the contrary, Russia has not altered its positions in the Iran nuclear talks and has maintained a constructive level of cooperation with 'the West' on resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis. Meier & Pieper (2015) have analysed a number of factors why that is so, and Chapter 5 includes a section on the impact of the Ukraine crisis on Russia's stance in the Iran nuclear talks.

### 3.2 Turkish foreign policy toward Iran

Similarly, Turkish-Iranian bilateral relations, including Turkey's perspective on Iran's nuclear programme, have been widely analysed.<sup>109</sup> The formulation of the foreign policy doctrines of 'zero problems with neighbors' and 'Strategic Depth' under foreign minister Davutoğlu has inspired such analyses of a country that is situated at the crossroads geographically between Europe and the Middle East, is institutionally embedded in a Western (NATO) strategic

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<sup>108</sup> In the same vein, *International Politics* has published a special issue on '*Russia in the New International Order*' (2012, vol. 49, no. 4). Arguably, the outbreak of what came to be termed the 'Ukraine crisis' in late 2013 brings renewed scholarly attention to Russia's role in international relations and Russia's alleged 'revisionist' foreign policy agenda (cf. Wilson 2014; Sakwa 2015 for the first two book-length analyses thereof).

<sup>109</sup> For an overview, cf. Pieper (2013a, 2015); Hale (2013: 170-72, 238-242); Jenkins (2012); Larrabee & Lesser (2003: 147-149); Larrabee & Nader (2013); Lesser (2005); Altunışık (2008); Aras (2001); Cetinsaya (1999; 2003); Oktav (2007); Olson (2001: 11-104, 2004); Cornell (2001); Fuller (2008); Fuller et al. (1993); Giragosian (2008); Hakan (2009); Kibaroglu & Caglar (2008); Kibaroglu (2009, 2010); Kinzer (2010); Mango (1994); Önis (2009); Özcan & Özdamar (2010); Gürzel (2012); Bleek & Stein (2012); Udum (2012); Larrabee & Nader (2013); Ülgen (2011, 2012); Barkey (2013); Gürzel & Ersoy (2012); Kardas (2010).

culture, and has had a rich and varied history of bilateral relations with its neighbour Iran. Amongst occasional references to and conceptualisations of Turkey being a ‘pivotal state’ in the region (cf. Winrow 2003; Lewis 2006; Kazan 2005; Larrabee & Lesser 2003: 2-3),<sup>110</sup> Turkey has come to be analysed as a state pursuing a differentiated foreign policy outlook that did not necessarily converge with US and EU policies – either regionally or globally. Mastney’s and Nation’s (1996) edited volume *Turkey between East and West*, and William Hale’s (2013) seminal *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774* offer politico-historical reasons for this observation. In practice, this made Turkey an interesting potential bridge-builder between the Islamic Republic Iran and the ‘Western camp’. Turkey’s role as a ‘bridge’ or ‘facilitator’ has therefore been emphasised in analyses of Turkey’s Middle Eastern policies more broadly, and in Turkey’s Iran policies in particular (cf. Gürzel 2012; Gürzel & Ersoy 2012; Fuller 2008; Giragosian 2008; Kibaroglu & Caglar 2008; Kibaroglu 2009; Lesser 1992; Önis 2009; Üstün 2010; Ülgen 2012).<sup>111</sup> In this context, studies have investigated Turkey’s role in defusing the Iranian nuclear crisis against the background of the Brazil-Turkey-Iran nuclear fuel swap deal agreed in 2010 (Ozkan 2010; Leverett & Leverett 2013: 361f.; Parsi 2012: 172f.; Pieper 2013a: 85-86; 2015a; Fitzpatrick 2010; Kibaroglu 2010). Insightful reads are especially the accounts of former US State Department official Mark Fitzpatrick (2010), of Turkish proliferation expert Mustafa Kibaroglu (2010), and Trita Parsi’s (2012) analysis of Turkey’s Iran diplomacy entering into friction with US policies in *A Single Roll of the Dice*. These studies have brought Turkish mediation in the Iran nuclear dossier to the forefront of attention. ‘Mediation’ in diplomacy has been defined in different ways, and its preconditions and required components have been discussed controversially (Bercovitch 1992: 8; Moore 2003: 8; Blake & Mouton 1985: 15; Kleiboer 1998; Herrberg 2008). However, this has been done from a particular perspective indebted to conflict studies. Here, mediation becomes necessary once a conflict has occurred. Chapter 4 will contextualise differing assessments of Turkey’s mediatory potential against the background of this literature, and analyses implications of mediation for the way we conceptualise resistance, norm contestation, and international legitimacy. As such, the aim is to allow for a cross-disciplinary analysis of Turkish Iran policies, drawing on conflict and mediation literature, Turkish Area Studies, Middle Eastern studies, and International Relations.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. also Davutoğlu’s monograph *Stratejik derinlik* (2001).

<sup>111</sup> Cf. also former Turkish foreign minister Davutoğlu’s article ‘*Turkey’s Mediation: Critical Reflections from the field*’ (2013).

<sup>112</sup> The theoretical and conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 1 will guide this endeavor. Studies in ‘International Relations of the Middle East’ often proceed from an almost automatic (neo-) realist theoretical

The analysis thereby also is to be positioned within the scholarly debate about Turkey's statist identity at the interstice of regional imperatives, global security alliances and bilateral partnerships. By nature of this dissertation's research focus, a special emphasis is placed on the implications for Turkish-Iranian relations on the one hand, and Turkish-American on the other. While Turkish-Iranian relations have deteriorated in the Erdogan-Ahmadinejad era, the Turkish-Brazil initiative has triggered speculations that have, to varying degrees, brought the 'axis-shift' discussion about a Turkish (security) political re-orientation away from the West and more towards regional engagement back to the fore. As with exclusionary readings of Russian foreign policies as reviewed in the previous section, such analyses of mutually exclusive positions risk becoming reductionist and too often caricature foreign policy that is driven by factors of security, economics, international and institutional framework conditions, and domestic politics. Underlying many studies of Turkish Iran policies is an understanding of a distinctive Turkish regional diplomacy that does not necessarily converge with 'Western' diplomatic preferences despite Turkish NATO membership.<sup>113</sup> In some analyses of Turkish foreign policy, an allegedly implicit 'Islamist' foreign policy agenda of the AKP government is overstated.<sup>114</sup> This scholarly discussion has partly been transposed to the political arena in the wake of the failure of the May 2010 Tehran declaration that chapter 4 will expand upon. Turkish foreign policy shifts arguably date back to at least the end of the Cold War and cannot be pinned down to 2002.<sup>115</sup> Pieper (2015) therefore has analysed Turkey's Iran policy as a balancing act between 'geostrategic pragmatism' and 'alliance management'.

After 2011, the deterioration in Turkish-Iranian relations in the wake of the Syrian civil war has inspired a number of analyses (Pieper 2013a, 2014: 3-4; Taşpınar 2012; Kibaroglu 2012; Larrabee & Nader 2013: 8f.; Barkey 2013). Naturally, Turkish-Iranian geopolitical disagreements and fundamentally differing conceptions of regional order impact upon Turkey's leverage power to defuse the Iranian nuclear crisis. In addition, the unprecedented developments in US-Iranian diplomatic communications since the summer of 2013 bring along structural limits to the usefulness of actors that previously had shown

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lense (cf. Hinnebusch & Ehteshami 2002; Hinnebusch 2003). A notable exception of scholarly work that accepts theoretical diversity as strength is Fred Halliday's (2005) *The Middle East in International Relations*.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Oğuzlu's (2008) analysis of a '*Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy*'. Cf. also Aykan (1996, 2007); Cagaptay (2004); Gunter (2005); Gürzel (2012); Hale (2013: 158-173); Kibaroglu (2010); Larrabee & Lesser (2003: 159-185); Lesser (1992); Mowle (2007); Ozkan (2010); Önis (2011); Ülgen (2012); Savyon (2010); Shenna (2010); Stein (2012); Serfaty (2011: 13); Robins (1991, 2013).

<sup>114</sup> Cf., e.g., Önis & Yilmaz (2009); Cagaptay (2009); Bilgin (2008). Most notably, Huntington's (1996: 144-9) depiction of Turkey as a state 'torn' between Islam and 'the West' is simplistic.

<sup>115</sup> The AKP first came to power in 2002.

mediatory capacity. Against this background, the chapter on Turkey's stance toward the Iranian nuclear programme will add a timely contribution to our understanding of a multifaceted and nuanced Turkish foreign policy as an influential non-Western voice even beyond the phase of direct mediation in 2009-2010.

### 3.3 Chinese foreign policy toward Iran

The literature on China's position with regard to the Iranian nuclear crisis has become prolific, aiming to keep pace with the dense Sino-Iranian relations that have been intensifying especially since the 1990s.<sup>116</sup> Investigations into China's contemporary Middle Eastern, and particularly Iran policies, have largely – and one might add, monothematically - analyzed China's Iran policy as an expression of commercial and geostrategic interests that are complicated by partially clashing with US policies in the region.<sup>117</sup> Most accounts commonly analyse Beijing's approach toward Iran's nuclear programme as a translation of a geostrategic and commercial foreign policy necessity: Iran supplies the crude oil that China inevitably needs for its growing economy, so the conclusion conventionally found in many analyses (Bo 2011; Burman 2009; Chen 2010; Dorraj & Currier 2008; Djallil 2011; Garver 2011; International Crisis Group 2008; 2010: 5f.). A second branch of literature on China's broader foreign policy toward Iran emphasises Chinese arms supplies to Iran (i.a. Blumenthal 2005; Dorraj & Currier 2010; Gill, B. 1998, 1999; Hickey 1990). Surprisingly, relatively few comprehensive studies on Chinese-Iranian relations at book length have been undertaken so far, Abidi's (1982) and, more recently, Burman's (2009) and Garver's (2006a) accounts being notable exceptions. Abidi's *China, Iran, and the Persian Gulf* (1982) serves as a historical reference work for an analysis of Sino-Iranian relations during the Shah's reign and, given the date of publication, is a dated reference to understand current bilateral relations. He traces back Sino-Iranian historical interactions, cultural exchanges and political developments in bilateral relations between post-revolutionary China and pre-revolutionary Iran. Garver's (2006a) study, in turn, provides a most comprehensive and oft-cited overview of

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<sup>116</sup> For an overview, cf. Calabrese (2006); Chubin (2010); Dorraj & Currier (2008, 2010); Djallil (2011); Fan (2011); Garver (2006a, 2011); Gentry (2005); Kemenade (2009; 2010); Lin (2009); Mazza (2011); Nourafchan (2010); Pieper (2013b); Razani (2012); Shen (2006); Slavin (2011); Swaine (2010); Yuan (2006).

<sup>117</sup> Bo (2011); Burman (2009); Chen (2010); Djallil (2011); Garver (2011); Jin (2005); Kemenade (2010); Nourafchan (2010); Shen (2006); Yuan (2006). Alterman & Garver's (2008) *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East* analyzes China's Middle East policies' on Sino-US relations and vice versa. For more historical accounts of China's foreign policy towards the Middle East, including Iran, cf. Calabrese (1991); Emadi (1997); Kumaraswamy (1999, ed.); Dillon (2004). For an account of Chinese-Middle Eastern relations 'from the Silk Road to the Arab Spring', yet with rather flimsy coverage of China's policy on Iran's nuclear programme, cf. Olimat (2013).

contemporary Sino-Iranian relations. Having an implicit focus on policy implications for the US at times, his is a fair and balanced account that embeds China's Iran policies into the wider political context of China's security, ethnic, and global power considerations from Deng Xiaoping's until Hu Jintao's leadership. Burman's (2009) work on Sino-Iranian relations also offers a critical analysis of historical, economic and political ties between China and Iran. Yet, part of his conclusions and scenarios appear reductionist and border the realm of essentialising conspiracy theories, when he writes – paraphrasing Huntington's clash regime (1993, 1996) - of a strategic Sino-Iranian partnership as part of a civilisational bloc challenging the West (cf. p. 26-27; 159f.).<sup>118</sup>

A vast body of literature has been produced on China's regional policies and the perception thereof by neighboring states,<sup>119</sup> China's 'rise' since the launch of Deng Xiaoping's reform period,<sup>120</sup> on future scenarios of Sino-US relations<sup>121</sup> and China's potential to fundamentally change the world order with its economic weight translated into commensurate political power (revisionist vs. status quo power debate).<sup>122</sup> This burgeoning body of literature debating the future direction that Chinese foreign policy might take indicates that there is considerable uncertainty in Western policy circles about the future role and behavior of a 'rising China': Either, so the assertion, China continues the path of socialisation with other global players, works with existing rules of the game and arranges itself with the global political, economic and monetary system that essentially is based on the post-1945 US-dominated liberal order; or it will seek to use its growing political weight to

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<sup>118</sup> Calabrese (2006: 13) also warns in this context of the 'hype trap' that analyses of the Sino-Iranian cooperation are inclined to succumb to. Yet, the idea of 'civilisational solidarity' is one undercurrent in some analyses of Sino-Iranian relations and will re-appear in chapter 6.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Breslin (2009); Chan (2010); Denny (1994); Dillon (2007); Goh (2007/8); Hughes (2005); Kang (2003, 2007); Khoo & Smith (2005); Ross (2006); Roy (1994); Shambaugh (2004) for an overview of such debates.

<sup>120</sup> Seminal examples include Brown et al. (2000); Cohen (2010); Goldstein (2008); Johnston & Ross (1999); Kent (2007); Kissinger (2011: 321f.); Ross & Zhu (2008); Shambaugh (2005); Yan (2006); Zhang (2014).

<sup>121</sup> This is a subject discussed especially in the US academia. Bernstein & Munro (1997); Ross (1997); Art (2008); Beeson (2009); Christensen (2001); Dobbins (2012); Foot (2006, 2009/10); Foot & Walter (2011); Friedberg (2005); Goldstein, A. (1997/98), Goldstein, L. (2011); Ikenberry (2008); Kagan (2009); Kissinger (2011, 2012); Levy (2008); Mahbubani (2013: 123-126); Ross (2006); Schweller (1999); Shambaugh (2000, 2004/05); Sinha (2003); Wang (2005); Zhao (2008, ed.); Zoellick (2005).

<sup>122</sup> For readings of a Chinese 'revisionist' foreign policy, cf. Chin & Thakur (2010); Christensen (2011); Deng (2006); Economy (2010); Feng (2009); Friedberg (2005, 2011); Halper (2010); He & Feng (2012); Holslag (2011); Kissinger (2011: 487f.); S. Chan (2004a); Shirk (2007); Swaine (2011). For analyses of a more cooperative Chinese foreign policy, cf. G. Chan (2006); Gill, B. (2007); Ikenberry (2008); Johnston (2003, 2004, 2013); Kang (2003, 2007); Liang (2007); Medeiros & Fravel (2003). For 'pragmatic' approaches, cf. Breslin (2013); Da (2010); Geeraerts & Holslag (2007); Kastner & Saunders (2012); Wang (2011); Zhao (2006); Yan (2006). In this context, cf. also the 'power transition theory': Levy (2008). Zhu Liqun's study *'China's Foreign Policy Debates'* (2010) offers an effective overview of these and other major debates on China's foreign policy from a Chinese perspective. For an insightful overview of Chinese domestic foreign policy debates, cf. Shambaugh & Xiao (2012: 36-72).

influence the global order by gradually enforcing its own ideas of managing not only the international economy but global governance at large. It is in this context of power transition that the debate about a shift from the ‘Washington consensus’ to a ‘Beijing consensus’ is to be situated (Breslin 2009: 827).<sup>123</sup> Martin Jacques’ (2012) book ‘*When China Rules the World*’ offers thought-provoking ideas about a future world order marked by the decline of Western dominance and an increasingly assertive China, covering a range of thematic (economic, political, societal) as well as geographical (Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Middle East, the Americas) dimensions of what he makes out as a “foreign policy [that] becomes less adaptive and increasingly informed by Chinese interests and distinctive values” (Jacques 2012: 593).

Speculations and projections about the future trajectory of China’s foreign policy have proliferated in the context of an expanding scholarly ‘China industry’ theorising on ‘China’s rise’. In many such analyses, there is a noticeable tendency to treat ‘power’ and ‘interests’ in a neo-realist reading, and to embed analyses of Chinese foreign policy in the terminology of balancing, alliance structures, and deterrence. This bespeaks a general trend of such works to be written from an IR theory perspective, quite often unveiling a lack of cross-disciplinary debate between the IR theorist and the Area Studies specialist. It is at this juncture and against the background of the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter that the chapter on China’s foreign policy toward the Iranian nuclear programme ties in, adding to our understanding of China’s current Iran policies and the extent to which these resist hegemony from an as yet understudied conceptual angle.

#### 4. The ‘emerging powers’ literature

Analyses of the foreign policy positions of these selected states towards Iran equally benefit from and expand the existing literature on BRICS countries<sup>124</sup> and emerging new power centres in the international system.<sup>125</sup> These studies typically analyse the changing

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<sup>123</sup> There is a tendency in the US literature on the subject to shroud Chinese intentions in a cloud of suspicion, and to implicitly assume a ‘rising’ China to constitute a threat to the US. As Lynch (2009) interestingly observes, the dividing line in the scholarly literature between those finding China to be a ‘revisionist’ actor and those seeing more indications for a cooperative, ‘status quo’ behavior in international relations largely reflects the IR theoretical divide between Realism and Neoliberalism.

<sup>124</sup> Acronym referring to Brazil, Russia, India China, South Africa. Originally coined by the investment firm Goldman Sachs in 2001 in a report formulating predictions about the growth potential of Brazil, Russia, India, and China; South Africa was added in 2011. Cf. Goldman Sachs (2001); Wilson & Purushothaman (2003).

<sup>125</sup> cf. i.a. Hurrell (2006); MacFarlane (2006); Armijo (2007); Brawley (2007); Hancock (2007); Sotero & Armijo (2007); Morris (2011); Patrick (2010); Phillips (2008); Serfaty (2011); Subacchi (2008); Rynning & Ringsmose (2008); Vezirgiannidou (2013); Lieber (2014); Laidi (2012, 2014); Nel (2010); Khanna (2008); Nadkarni & Noonan (eds., 2013). In 2006, *International Affairs* devoted a special issue to ‘*Perspectives on Emerging Would-Be Great*



international economic system in a multipolar world and the shift of power equations that growing economies of ‘emerging powers’ bring along. This stream of literature has brought the hegemonic transition theory and power transition theory in the context of systemic leadership contestation by newly emerging powerful states to renewed scholarly attention.<sup>126</sup> Drawing on this literature, the present research project aims to look into the extent to which Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward Iran stand indicative of resistance to hegemony that might herald a power transition in international security cultures. While this study thus also analyses power transitions between dominant actors and others that might co-define the terms of international relations to a greater extent in the future, it does so from two different starting points.

First, it analyses ‘power transitions’ not in the realist-rationalist framework that is predominant in this scholarship. The theoretical angle adopted in this dissertation has been justified at length in the first chapter. Taking away the focus from the realist fixation on the occurrence of wars between nation-states that herald power transitions because of ill-defined ‘national interests’,<sup>127</sup> it will be argued that policies of dominant actors aimed at preventing potential challengers from arising can also be crafted around sanctions, information warfare and norm contestation. The latter two aspects relate to the power to convey narratives. These can all be *instruments of hegemonic structures* short of an all-out military confrontation, and it will be shown in the following chapters how these relate to norm contestation and rules compliance against the background of the theoretical framework adopted here.

Second, this study does not proceed from the analytical category of ‘BRICS’ states in order to expand its conceptual scope or fields of applicability. The suitability of ‘BRICS’ as an analytical category has already been questioned elsewhere, both out of the analytical simplification of subsuming rather diverse countries into one variable,<sup>128</sup> and out of a possible

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*Powers*’ (2006, vol. 82, no. 1). *Review of International Studies* did the same in October 2010 (vol. 36, no. 4, ‘Regional Powers and Their Strategies: Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership’).

<sup>126</sup> The conceptual link between counter-hegemonies and power transitions adopted in this dissertation has been addressed in section 3.1 of chapter 1. Seminal examples discussing global power shifts and prospects for international cooperation are Gilpin (1981); Organski (1968); Organski & Kugler (1980); Kugler & Lemke (1996); DiCicco & Levy (2003); Jones, B. (2011); Keohane (1984); Kagan (2002, 2012); Kupchan (2012). Cf. also Chan (2004b); Lebow & Valentino (2009); Lemke (1997); Vezirgiannidou (2013); Clark (2014).

<sup>127</sup> Such analyses typically look at material preconditions for the ‘rise’ of countries and their resulting potential to challenge order. Kupchan (2014) has recently attempted an important step towards taking the focus away from this fixation in presenting “a synthesis of constructivist and rationalist approaches by demonstrating how ideational, cultural, and material interests combine to shape the social purpose of hegemonic powers” (222). Three out of the four ‘logics of hegemony’ that he juxtaposes, however, are themselves material (‘geopolitical, socioeconomic, commercial’).

<sup>128</sup> Cf. MacFarlane (2006); cf. also Armijo (2007); Hancock (2007); Laidi (2012, 2014); Sotero & Armijo (2007) as investigations into the appropriateness of including particular states (most notably Russia) in that category. Cf. also Sakwa (2012). MacFarlane (2006) likewise denies Russia’s status as ‘emerging power’, and depicts its

conceptual fuzziness of the ‘emerging power’ status. Other denominations with different state constellations could be used, ranging from IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) (Nel 2010: 953) to BICS (Brazil, India, China, South Africa), MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey) to GIBSA (Germany, India, Brazil, South Africa). Even if one does not want to attach labels like BRICS, there emerges a group of ‘challengers’ that has the potential to be the “‘brics’ of a new era”, as Simon Serfaty (2012/13) puts it (30). In most accounts, an ‘emerging power’ status entails the connotation of a general level of unhappiness with the current global power configuration (cf. i.a. MacFarlane 2006), which might translate into a desire to contest and alter the US-dominated framework for international politics. Nadkarni (2013) writes of a “coming power-shift between established (the USA, Europe, and Japan) and rising (China, India, Russia, and Brazil) powers [...]” (1). Breslin (2013) therefore writes of a “‘alliances of the dissatisfied’ with other distributive-minded states” (617). Here, Andrew Hurrell (2006) warns of the danger of reading observations of allegedly coordinated policies into “developments [which] are picked up with alacrity by those looking for signs of a coordinated willingness to challenge Washington, or for evidence of emerging multipolarity and a renewed potential for systemic revisionism” (3). And Paola Subacchi (2008) acknowledges: “It is important to stress that in this debate potential plays a much bigger role than reality” (491). It is precisely in this context that the theoretical framework adopted in this dissertation aims to provide a more nuanced interpretation of diplomatic friction between different actors in a “process of power deconcentration” (Tessman & Wolfe 2011: 218). As elaborated more extensively in section 3.1 of the theoretical chapter, analyses of power blocs allegedly clashing and vying for the crafting of exclusionary world orders miss the point of the dynamic relationship between hegemonic structures, ‘subalterns’ and counter-hegemonic forces that transcend the idea of monolithic bloc clashes implied in studies of ‘the West and the Rest’.<sup>129</sup> As Serfaty (2012/13) wisely observes: “Russia, China and India have more interest in the United States and the EU than in each other, though each for different reasons” (33). The ‘power transition’ projection is complicated by domestic foreign policy debates, and hence differing ideas on scope, goals and means of what it means to be ‘rising’ or ‘global’ power. China, Russia, and other countries necessarily have “competing international identities that try to satisfy a variety of international (and domestic) constituencies,” (36-37) Shambaugh &

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foreign policy as a “holding game” rather oriented towards “revers[ing] the substantial decline of the 1980s and 1990s” (56-57) which will “permit Russia to *re-emerge* as a great power in a pluralist international system” (emphasis added). Brüttsch & Papa (2013) show how the ‘BRICS’ states share only a fragile level of coalitional cohesion.

<sup>129</sup> Niall Ferguson (2012) writes of the West and the ‘Resterners’ (323).

Xiao write in their chapter in Nau's and Ollapally's edited volume on *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers* (2012). The case studies that follow show how that applies to China, Russia, and Turkey, and the penultimate chapter sheds light on the implications thereof for the level of their 'resistance to hegemony' in a comparative fashion.

Two fundamental flaws bedevil predictions of coming power transitions between a group of like-minded states and established powers: First, they proceed from a teleological reading of political developments. The history of power transition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be written in hindsight yet. And it certainly is no linear development. And second, the analogy drawn that a growing economic weight will necessarily entail a greater role "in addressing the transnational challenges of globalisation, climate change and terrorism" (Nadkarni 2013: 2) fails to account for the fact that there are no single definitions of these 'challenges'. What came to be termed globalisation may be perceived as American hegemony elsewhere. And 'terrorism' is a relational term by default. These are labels that *produce* reality, and it is argued here that norm contestation over these, and other, terms lies at the basis of 'power shifts'. What is being advocated in the present research is a certain sensibility for emerging power centers whose partially different conceptions of world order raise questions about the endurance of the Western-dominated international system of governance in many issue areas, including security cultures. In this vein, Michael Schiffer and David Schorr (2009) have edited an insightful volume on 'International Leadership in a shrinking world', with chapters examining the future role of states that "will all likely be critical for the emerging world order" (3), including China, Turkey and Russia, and without the obfuscating focus on rationalist terminology that the scholarly literature on 'power transitions' is pregnant with.

Writing on Russia, Richard Sakwa (2012) speaks of a "structural revisionism inherent in the new pattern of international politics" (449) that comes about through the co-existence of status quo powers and those states unhappy not necessarily with the prevalent structure, but with its selective application in issue areas such as security governance (453f.).<sup>130</sup> Much in the same logic, the following analysis is equally informed by and draws upon the concept of 'neo-revisionism' (Sakwa 2011) to make sense of foreign policies that do not directly question or challenge the essence of the international system (as revisionist states would do), but indirectly aim to revise its functioning. In a similar vein, Serfaty (2011) describes China and Russia as "prudent revisionist powers" (18), and Barry Buzan (2010) writes of a "reformist revisionist" power (18). Such concepts aim to avoid over-theorising about foreign

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<sup>130</sup> For the same argument on China, cf. Breslin (2009, 2013), and Clark (2011: 25-26). Cf. also Ferdinand's (2007) observation that neither China nor Russia "is trying to overthrow [...] globalization", but "may be able to bend international trends in directions that are more advantageous to them" (680).

policies that do not coincide with that of the ‘system leader’ as expressions of the advancement of alternative norms in international security governance and bridge the conceptual gap between ‘norm-setter’ and ‘norm-taker’.<sup>131</sup> The coexistence of established and ‘emerging’ powers will inevitably determine the design of the future world order. We are at a historic juncture where the working relationship between former hegemon and ‘rising powers’ as potential challengers is already being re-balanced. Research is needed to examine this relationship beyond the accommodation-confrontation spectrum.

In this regard, with different prioritisations and conceptions of legitimacy between different actors involved becoming manifest, the Iranian nuclear crisis arguably is not only a battle field for the survival of the NPT regime, but is a debate about differing conceptions of world order and security governance. A comparative analysis of the foreign policies of China, Turkey and Russia toward Iran fits in with debates about policy responses to the Iran puzzle and examines the security cultures of influential non-Western actors (China, Russia, Turkey) toward Iran which are informed by foreign policies that are born out of both domestic, inter-regional and international considerations. Rather than misconstruing these as illustrations of a binary fragmentation of security policies into ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ templates and depart from pre-conceived assumptions about statist identities and foreign policy intentions, the present analysis rejects simplistic dichotomies and will critically process-trace the Iran policies of China, Turkey and Russia with a view to their degree of resistance to hegemony.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter explored the state of the art in the literature that the analysis in this dissertation draws upon. It thereby elaborated on the state of the art in empirical studies analysing politics surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme in general and of the three case studies chosen for this dissertation in particular. An interdisciplinary angle to the literature is deliberately chosen to allow for a fruitful cross-fertilisation. While the three in-depth case studies will draw to a large extent on the respective Area Studies literature from both the international and respective national scholarly community, the analysis is enriched by inter-regional studies (Middle Eastern studies, post-Soviet studies, and the interstice between these and single country studies), and the IR, norms, and non-proliferation literature at large.

While Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward Iran, respectively, have been analyzed by a range of scholars, no comparative analysis thereof has been produced so

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<sup>131</sup> On the latter two concepts, cf. Finnemore & Sikkink (1998); March & Olsen (1989); March & Olsen (1998).

far. It is thus hoped that the empirical research carried out for this study will make a timely contribution to our understanding of multifaceted foreign policies that remain understudied in analyses of the Iranian nuclear crisis. Much literature has been produced on the attempts of ‘the Western world’, led by the US, to engage with Iran over its controversial nuclear programme. This dissertation aims to fill the gap in comparative analyses of non-Western voices in the Iranian nuclear dossier. Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies are critical for an understanding of the diplomatic complexities involved in the Iranian nuclear talks. In addition, their leverage in the Iran talks will translate into their weight as actors in the implementation of any nuclear agreement with Iran.

An analysis of these important foreign policies therefore also adds to our understanding of non-Western foreign policies in the non-proliferation and security governance regime and situates itself in and makes sense of the debates involving US hegemony, multipolarity and emerging powers. Turkish-Iranian, Russian-Iranian and Chinese-Iranian relations have always to be seen in the context of their engagement with and contestation of ‘the West’. Importantly, the final section of this chapter has emphasised how the caveat is attached that no linear power transition is assumed in analyses of ‘resistance to hegemony’. This dissertation rejects the idea of exclusive foreign policy alignment often found in rationalist accounts of international relations, ‘emerging powers’ and possible future power clashes. It has been shown how this dissertation is to be situated within the literature that aims to nuance such dichotomies, and in so doing seeks to make a contribution to the growing body of literature on the co-existence between hegemonic structures and actors that will likely be ‘brics’ in any future edifice resembling what elsewhere has been called ‘global governance’.

The US in particular is an actor that enters strategic policy calculations of China, Russia and Turkey with regard to approaches to Iran- against the backdrop of US-Iranian official enmity since 1979, the centrality of the US as a dominant actor in international politics, respective bilateral relations, and US prominence in international financial structures. Arguably, the US unilateral sanctions regime in place and the subsequent ‘extraterritorialisation’ of US legislation is an ultimate expression of hegemonic power structures as has been elaborated upon in the first chapter. Embedding the research question in the scholarly debates about the future of the international system post-Pax Americana, it has been shown how this dissertation aims to offer a refined picture of the foreign policy behavior of states that contest these hegemonic structures on the example of

Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the contentious issue of the Iranian nuclear programme.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Iranian Nuclear Programme**

#### **1. Introduction**

As the first in-depth empirical case study of this dissertation, this chapter analyzes how Turkish foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme is indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony. Wanting to answer this question requires following a conceptual structure that was outlined in chapter 1. A first section therefore looks at the disagreements between Turkey and its Western counterparts over diplomatic approaches to Iran's nuclear programme following the latter's disclosure in 2002 as an illustration of normative disagreements between Turkey and Western governments involved in the diplomacy surrounding Iran's nuclear file. The portrayal of an emerging security challenge in different ways is revealing for the extent to which normative convictions determine discursive practice. It underlines how security has to be understood as a relational concept. A second section analyzes Turkey's stance on sanctions that were imposed on Iran as from 2006 as an expression of the failure of diplomacy to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis. A distinction will thereby be made between Turkey's stance on international and on unilateral sanctions. This distinction will reveal Turkey's understanding of the legitimacy of the nature of sanctions and therewith already give an answer to the question how Turkish foreign policy conveys a normative divergence with Iran policies pursued by Western governments. 'Norms and values' are concrete convictions and conceptions (such as 'sovereignty', 'non-interference'), while 'rules and models' relate to the broader macro-structure that regulates the way these norms and values are communicated, applied, or changed. Especially the sanctions issue serves as an illustrative application of these concepts and Turkey's interaction with the institutional framework conditions for hegemony. In the absence of a permanent UNSC membership, Turkey does not hold the same leverage as Russia and China over the adoption of international sanctions. Turkey's active role in mediation between the P5+1 and Iran, however, sparked a number of scholarly analyses of Turkey's Iran policies, and justifies a focus on Turkey's foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme as a case study in this dissertation. Turkey is, as will be shown, on the fringes of different security cultures, and an analysis of its Iran diplomacy is most instructive for investigations into security cultures that resist hegemonic structures.

Turkey's foreign policy discourse regarding international sanctions and ensuing rights

and obligations of Iran are indicative of Turkey's perception of such sanctions as political tools in international relations. Acceptance of UNSC-mandated sanctions reveal a basic acceptance of the *rules* of the UN system, while an analysis of Turkey's understanding of unilateral sanctions that are adopted and implemented outside of UN procedures will convey an insight into Turkey's *normative* conceptions that may or may not be different from those powers adopting such sanctions. As laid out in the methodological chapter, this will be analysed by way of qualitative data analysis and interviews with experts and decision-makers. The latter act as norm-carriers whose replies to my questions about Iran diplomacy, particular policy decisions and the sanctions regime allow me to substantiate the analysis of a potential normative divergence between Western and Turkish approaches to the Iranian nuclear file. Recognising the concepts identified earlier in the discourse found is an interpretative endeavour, and follows from the approach to qualitative data analysis as laid out in chapter 2.

On the basis of this analysis, the final two sections will show how a two-level distinction between a discursive and a behavioral dimension of foreign policy applies to Turkey's Iran policy. These sections will build on the preceding analysis of Turkey's sanctions policy and Iran diplomacy and identify material as well as ideational factors in Turkey's Iran policy that make up a complex web of foreign policy motivations which in this research is captured by a two-level model to understand the nexus between security culture and the degree of resistance to hegemony, as elaborated upon in chapter 1. Turkish foreign policy discourse on Iran's nuclear programme and on Western and especially US approaches to Iran's nuclear programme will be contrasted with Turkey's foreign policy behavior that may be in contradiction with a security culture Turkey itself advocates for. Especially an analysis of the period of Turkey's remarkable foreign policy activism in the Iranian nuclear file that culminated in the Tehran declaration of May 2010 will examine the role of Turkey as a mediator between the P5+1 and Iran and what it reveals about Turkish security culture on Iran.

As explained in chapter 1, resistance to hegemony is understood as disagreements with hegemonic structures. This disagreement necessarily is captured in degree and is composed of diverse discursive as well as behavioral elements: A public advocacy for norms alternative to those sustained by hegemonic forces can be paralleled by a foreign policy behavior that falls short of acting upon this discourse. Deviation from hegemonic norms, in other words, will be captured by a two-level model of a discursive and a behavioral dimension. Making sense of such a variation in compliance weaves together the concepts of norm divergence and rule



convergence and will allow me to answer the question how Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme is illustrative of a security culture that resists hegemony.

## **2. Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran following the revelation of the latter's nuclear programme in 2002: Discursive divergence from US policies**

This section will examine Turkey's foreign policy discourse towards the Iranian nuclear programme. This is a first analytical step in line with the introduced two-level model to analyze resistance to hegemony on a discursive and a behavioral level.

Turkey signed the NPT in 1969 and ratified it in 1980. Turkey also ratified the NPT's Additional Protocol in 2000, is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG),<sup>132</sup> and has been supportive of the Middle East nuclear weapons-free zone initiative. Ankara was thus always a steadfast supporter of international nuclear non-proliferation efforts and endorses the IAEA's safeguards regime and verification mechanisms to ensure non-diversion of nuclear material to military purposes.<sup>133</sup> Yet, with the revelation of the Iranian nuclear programme in 2002, Turkey has been very cautious not to join the Western pressure on Iran (Udum 2012: 103f.). The insistence on the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its neighbours, together with the affirmation of Iran's right to nuclear power for peaceful purposes was one of the main foreign policy lines implicit in Turkey's position on the Iranian nuclear programme. Turkey refrained from assuming Iranian military intentions. As a foreign ministry official formulates in an interview: "We shouldn't judge on the basis of assumptions".<sup>134</sup> Murat Mercan, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, summarises Turkey's Iran policy as follows:

"We advocate diplomatic and economic engagement of Iran rather than isolationist policies as a more effective way to address the challenges that we are facing in the region. We will continue to encourage all our counterparts to take a conciliatory approach in order to better tackle the problems in the Middle East. [...] Any interference from the outside world will have a boomerang effect and will be counter-productive. Therefore, the international community should refrain from any attempt to interfere in Iran to the detriment of the social and political fiber of Iran" (Mercan 2009: 18; 19).

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<sup>132</sup> The NSG, created in 1974, is a group of nuclear supplier countries that sets guidelines for nuclear and nuclear-related exports, aiming to strengthen the global non-proliferation regime.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat to the IAEA, over phone, 23 August 2013.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

Statements coming from the Turkish foreign ministry and then-prime minister Erdoğan underscored the Turkish insistence on the upholding of Iranian sovereignty and the principle of non-interference, which Ankara saw at threat when an emerging US securitisation of the Iranian nuclear programme started to impact on Western governments' positions in the Iranian nuclear dossier. Erdoğan criticised what he saw as an "unfair" and one-sided focus of the West on a possible military dimension of the Iranian programme, while Israel's de facto nuclear weapons were turned a blind eye to (Hunter, R. 2010: 166). Iran, so the message, should not be the sole focus of nuclear security considerations. In a 2007 interview, when asked whether he shared Western fears about an Iranian nuclear bomb, Erdoğan replied with a swipe remark: "We are against nuclear weapons, regardless of whether they are in the hands of Iran or Israel or any Western country. But obviously some states are allowed to have weapons of mass destruction while others are not."<sup>135</sup> Besides this emphasis on an equitable application of nuclear security efforts, Turkish statements also made reference to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that should guide diplomatic approaches to the Iranian nuclear crisis.<sup>136</sup> Turkey was also well aware of the regionally destabilising effect that a war with Iran would entail. Notwithstanding the collapsing bilateral trade, Turkey would most likely receive an influx of Iranian refugees crossing the Turkish-Iranian border, be drawn into a regional proxy war or even become the target of Iranian counterstrikes (Larrabee & Nader 2013: 26; Ülgen 2011: 159). Given the stakes, Erdoğan did not mince his words, calling the prospect of a war with Iran 'crazy' (in Parsi 2012: 180).

With this foreign policy discourse, Erdoğan's government was in line with its regional foreign policy formula of 'zero problems with neighbors' that had been formulated by foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. This concept was aimed to convey Turkey's striving for good relations with its neighbours, including Syria, Iraq and Iran in the course of a general foreign policy shift toward a stronger regional commitment.<sup>137</sup> Öviz & Yılmaz (2009) have therefore written of a policy of 'soft-Euro-Asianism' that characterised AKP foreign policy in the first

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<sup>135</sup> SPIEGEL Interview with Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Available at [last accessed 24 March 2015]: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/spiegel-interview-with-turkish-prime-minister-recep-tayyip-erdogan-if-the-eu-doesn-t-want-us-they-should-say-it-now-a-477448.html>.

<sup>136</sup> The importance of these principles has been emphasised again by Turkish prime minister Davutoğlu at a keynote speech in Brussels, organised by Friends of Europe, 15 January 2015 (cf. Annex 2).

<sup>137</sup> Another implicit motivation in Turkish-Iranian relations likely was the fathoming of a Turkish-Iranian approximation of their policies towards 'the Kurdish question' (Scholl-Latour 2001: 177). Especially after PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan's expulsion from Syria and ensuing arrest by Turkish authorities, Turkey started suspecting Iran more than Syria of providing sanctuary for PKK fighters (Olson 2004: 48). At the same time, Iran feared that Turkey could play the 'Azeri card' and stir up separatist sentiments in the Iranian Northern provinces with a strong Azeri population (ibid., 11). And with PJAK, an offshoot of the PKK, waging an armed struggle against Iranian authorities since 2004, Iran may have had a stronger incentive to coordinate 'Kurdish' policies with Turkey.

half of the 2000s and that was meant to imply a policy of stabilising relations with all neighbouring regions (13). Condemning Iran over its Iranian nuclear programme and exerting pressure on its neighbor, in this reading, would have run counter to the idea of ‘Zero problems with neighbors’ and ‘Strategic Depth’ in the region. Such a policy also entailed a more critical stance towards Western policies in the region, as illustrated by geopolitical overlaps of interests between Iran and Turkey in the run-up to the looming US-led Iraq war in 2003. The US administration was struck by the refusal of the Turkish Grand Assembly on 1 March 2003 to approve of US troop deployments on Turkish soil for combat operations in neighbouring Iraq (Kibaroglu & Caglar 2008: 62; Robins 2013: 384).<sup>138</sup>

As Turkey adopted a more US-critical foreign policy discourse publicly, it also became more critical of Israeli foreign policy and the Israeli settlement policy. Turkish officials and especially prime minister Erdoğan started to publicly criticise Israel on harsh terms (Kibaroglu & Caglar 2008: 63; Gul 2011; Kibaroglu 2012: 87; Barkey 2013: 146; Oktav 2007: 89). Turkish criticism of and alienation from the US and Israel went hand in hand with a warming of relations with US-defiant countries like Iran. The furtherance of good-neighborly relations led to the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the transport of Iranian gas to Europe via Turkey between Iran’s petroleum minister Kazem Vaziri-Hamaneh and Turkish energy minister Hilmi Guler. At their meeting, they also addressed the Turkish development of Iran’s South Pars gas field (Hiro 2009: 389). In this context, a harsh foreign policy rhetoric over Iran’s lack of transparency with the IAEA would have sent mixed signals in a phase of Turkish-Iranian rapprochement in line with Davutoğlu’s new regional policy.

When the Iranian nuclear file was referred from the IAEA to the UNSC in 2006 and the imposition of chapter VII sanctions followed, Turkey was critical of the use of sanctions as a political instrument and emphasised that sanctions can complement diplomacy, but should never be an end in themselves. Such an understanding recurred in responses from officials interviewed for this research project.<sup>139</sup> This position is to be explained by an upholding of the principle of ‘non-interference’ and the Turkish understanding and conviction of sovereignty that lies at the basis of its skepticism of Western pressure against a country with legitimate nuclear rights as an NPT member, as explained by a high-ranking Turkish diplomat in an interview.<sup>140</sup> In addition, it has been pointed out that the experience of

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<sup>138</sup> Cf. Cagatay (2004), Gunter (2005) for implications of this decision on Turkish-US relations.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat, Ankara, 17 June 2013; Interview with Turkish diplomat, Turkish embassy Beirut, 14 August 2014.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat to the IAEA, by phone, 23 August 2013.

destabilising sanctions in neighboring Iraq is another factor in Turkey's perception of sanctions as a counterproductive instrument and another driving force for Ankara's insistence on the need to find political solutions (Üstün 2010: 20; Larrabee & Nader 2013: 27). A briefing on 'Iran's Nuclear Program – The Turkish Perspectives', issued by the Turkish foreign ministry in June 2010, formulates: "For decades, Turkey has borne the burden of tragic events unfolding in its vicinity. Adverse economic and political implications of the sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s bear testament to this fact" (Turkish foreign ministry 2010). At the same time, the skepticism toward sanctions carries the Turkish awareness that the weakening of its neighbor Iran will impact on the Turkish economy due to close trade links. "We explain to our US partners: If you want to hurt Iran, don't hurt us at the same time", a Turkish diplomat explained in an interview.<sup>141</sup> Foreign minister Davutoğlu publicly stated that Turkey was against sanctions with a view to concerns over possible constraints on regional trade such a new sanctions regime might entail (Raphaeli 2010). It will be the subject of a later section to analyze the effect of such material factors on Turkey's Iran policy and its stance on sanctions. Turkey's NATO membership is another factor to mention in this section if one is to understand Turkey's discursive positioning on the Iranian nuclear crisis. Turkey's public discourse on Iran oftentimes displayed a level of friction between evolving national security perceptions and NATO commitments and, closely related to the latter, solidarity with its US ally. In 2010, the Turkish Security Council approved of the removal of Iran and Syria from the list of countries posing a security threat to Turkey and instead explicitly named Israel as a destabilising force that could potentially trigger a regional arms race (Lutz 2010; Vahedi 2010). Military officials and politicians, such as retired General and former secretary-general of the National Security Council Tuncay Kilinc, openly started raising the question whether Turkey should withdraw from NATO and rather engage in other regional organisations (Kibaroglu & Caglar 2008: 68; Baran & Lesser 2009: 210). The 'Missile Defense' episode of 2011 therefore introduced a major irritant into Turkish-Iranian relations. Presented as a missile defense shield with a missile-defense radar to be stationed in Kurecik, Turkey, the US introduced its new strategic missile defense plans as being directed against potential missile attacks coming from Iran (Barkey 2013: 154). These plans triggered a phase of irritation between Turkey and Iran, as the Iranian government was concerned that its neighbour Turkey agreed to the deployment of the radar on its soil (Gürzel 2012: 148; Kibaroglu 2013: 228).<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Interview, Ankara, 17 June 2013. Also formulated almost identically by another Turkish foreign ministry official at the Turkish embassy in Washington, author's interview, Washington, 14 February 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Even though the Iran nuclear issue is not on the official policy planning agenda of NATO, it is always a topical issue, as a NATO official explained in an interview. Author's interview, Brussels, 29 January 2015. Tertrais

This move was preceded by the Turkish reluctance to specifically name Iran as a threat to the Alliance- because of the sensitivity of this issue in bilateral relations and out of an understanding that such a listing would give reason to Tehran to advance its missile capabilities as counter-balancing measures (Ülgen 2012: 10; Kibaroglu 2013: 232).<sup>143</sup> In Ömer Taşpınar's assessment, the Turkish decision to host the radar system was evidence of Turkey having become a proponent of the containment of Iran- something that boosted Turkey's image in American eyes (Taşpınar et al. 2012: 10).<sup>144</sup> Under the pressure of what he calls a 'double gravity predicament', Philip Robins (2013) writes that Ankara chose "its global strategic relationship with the United States ahead of any region-based considerations", (394). Turkish divergence from US foreign policy on a discursive level with regards to the Iranian nuclear programme, especially in the latter half of the 2000s, was thus oftentimes paralleled by more mixed signals on a behavioral level, as the Missile Defense episode demonstrated. A later section will return to this question of behavioral convergence. Suffice to note at this point that the 'MD' episode described above occurred after Turkey's failed mediatory efforts in the Iranian nuclear crisis, and thus during a period of tacit re-alignment with American positions. This will be the subject of the next section.

In its foreign policy discourse on the emerging Iranian nuclear crisis, however, Turkey conveyed a normative divergence from Western governments advocating for sanctions and from an approach employing pressure on Iran over the latter's lack of transparency. "The Turkish policy regarding sanctions is a microcosm for Turkish nuclear diplomacy in general", Sinan Ülgen (2012: 7) therefore writes. The same rhetoric was evident in Turkey's reaction to sanctions imposed on Iran: While international sanctions, backed by UNSC resolutions, are

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(2010/11) writes that a nuclear Iran would "undoubtedly have an impact on NATO's internal nuclear debate. A possible outcome of these deliberations would be for NATO nuclear weapons to 'move South'; the weapons would be maintained in Italy and Turkey [...]" (47). In the remainder of his article, he develops scenarios for Turkey's possible reaction to a nuclear Iran. With Turkey being a NATO member, Turkey's policy planning in this regard has far-reaching implications for the alliance (55-56).

<sup>143</sup> According to a Turkish high-ranking diplomat, the Turkish agreement to the radar system was also tied to the insistence that it should not be specified against which potential threats the defense shield was targeted. Author's interview, Brussels, 29 May 2013. Acknowledging Iranian concerns, another Turkish foreign ministry official conceded: "Of course, they don't like rockets on their borders". Interview in Ankara, 17 June 2013.

<sup>144</sup> It has also been argued elsewhere that Turkey's 'nuclearization', when faced with a possible Iranian nuclear bomb, would only be prevented by the credibility of NATO and US security guarantees (Udum 2007; Ülgen 2012: 23; Baran & Lesser 2009: 213; Perkovich & Ülgen 2015b). In the context of debates about the likeliness of a regional arms race with a nuclear armed Iran, Turkey would abstain from striving to counterbalance as long as it can effectively rely on NATO's 'extended deterrence' clause and Article V of the NATO Charter (Interview with Sinan Ülgen, visiting scholar Carnegie Europe, Brussels, 6 May 2013; Interview with Dr. Şebnem Udum, Ankara, 18 June 2013). Others argue that even NATO's 'nuclear umbrella' would not prevent Turkey from nuclearising when faced with a nuclear Iran, as this would severely unsettle the regional balance to Turkey's disadvantage (Interview with Dr. Meliha Altunışık, Ankara, 14 June 2013; Interview with Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı, Ankara, 18 June 2013). Cf. also Perkovich's & Ülgen's edited book (2015a) on Turkey's Nuclear Future.

accepted by Turkey, Ankara views EU and US unilateral sanctions as unhelpful measures that have an adverse effect on the Turkish economy. They are also seen as undermining dialogue efforts with Iran and strengthening Iranian hardliner positions (ibid.).<sup>145</sup> Tellingly, a Turkish foreign ministry official remarked in an interview that “we use the same talking points on both international and unilateral sanctions”.<sup>146</sup> If the same diplomatic language applies to all sanctions, regardless of the institutional basis for their adoption, so the message, the use of sanctions as a political instrument is viewed with *categorical* skepticism by the Turkish government.

Institutional constraints in global governance structure, however, explain why Turkey naturally is a more passive actor concerning international sanctions: While Russia and China are both permanent Security Council members holding veto power and have a more authoritative say over the adoption of such sanctions, Turkey does not need to formally adopt them, absent a permanent UNSC seat. But as their effect also impacts Turkey’s external trade relations, Turkey’s public support and discursive acceptance thereof is an important indicator for a level of solidarity with international pressure on Iran that a later section will return to and analyze in light of the question how Turkey’s Iran policy resists hegemony. Before doing so, however, Turkey’s involvement in international efforts to negotiate with Iran will be analyzed against the background of its foreign policy rhetoric as examined in this section.

### **3. Turkish mediation in the Iranian nuclear dossier?**

This section will shed light on the period of Turkey’s pro-active shuttle diplomacy in the Iranian nuclear dossier in 2009 and 2010. For the purpose of this chapter, this is an illuminating period to analyze for two main reasons. First, and as pointed out above, Turkey lacks a permanent UNSC seat. Analyses of China’s and Russia’s Iran policies thus proceed from a somewhat different starting point structurally and institutionally. This is an important point to retain for an application of a Coxian understanding of hegemony, including its underlying material, ideational and institutional structures. Turkey’s active diplomatic involvement in the Iranian nuclear dossier in 2009-2010, however, allows us to analyze its Iran policies from a position of altered institutional stakes that approximated Turkey’s role to the P5+1. This approximation (by way of mediation) will be further detailed in this section. Second, analyzing Turkey’s foreign policy in and the rationale for this active shuttle

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<sup>145</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat, Ankara, 17 June 2013; interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

diplomacy allows for a concrete analysis of the behavioral dimension of Turkish Iran policy in line with the two-level model introduced in chapter 1 and at the outset of this chapter. It allows us, in other words, to pin-point Turkey's *deeds* in diplomacy, next to the discursive edifice as worked out in the preceding section. This behavioral level also plays out in the way sanctions regimes are implemented, as such implementation directly and concretely translates security cultures into trade restrictions to be communicated to companies. While the latter aspect will be the subject of section 4, Turkey's active shuttle diplomacy in 2009-2010 and its implications for Turkey's security culture will be dealt with in the following paragraphs.

'Mediation' in diplomacy has been defined in different ways, and its preconditions and required components have been discussed controversially (Bercovitch 1992: 8; Moore 2003: 8; Blake & Mouton 1985: 15; Kleiboer 1998; Herrberg 2008). Underlying many analyses of the effectiveness of mediation in different conflict situations is the view that mediators should be impartial, be in a position to influence the conflicting parties' perceptions or behavior and (as a precondition for the latter) have credibility as a mediating party. The fact that Turkey is a NATO member and a regional neighbor of Iran inspired and informed theorisations of Turkey as a potential facilitator of talks and conduit of messages between Iran and the West, rather than as a fully-fledged mediator (cf. Gürzel 2012; Gürzel & Ersoy 2012; Fuller 2008; Giragosian 2008; Kibaroglu & Caglar 2008; Kibaroglu 2009; Önis 2009; Ülgen 2012).<sup>147</sup> The idea of facilitation is distinct from mediation in that a facilitating third party should not interfere in the process (Fisher 1972; Burton 1969). The perception of Turkish facilitation was given life with, e.g., the choice of Turkey as a venue for negotiations between the EU3 and their Iranian counterparts, and between the extended format of P5+1 and Iran. On Turkey's mediatory potential, a Turkish foreign ministry official remarked: "We are ready to host, but we never invited. We only provided logistical support when we were approached. We never imposed ourselves as mediators."<sup>148</sup> Talks between the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani and EU High Representative Javier Solana in April 2007 in Ankara and P5+1 negotiations at the political directors-level in Istanbul on several occasions, the latest having taken place in April 2012, were the reason for the perception of Turkey as an impartial host and venue for negotiations (Önis & Yilmaz 2009: 19).

Yet, Erdoğan's government did not leave it to the role of facilitator and started pronouncing an interest in a more proactive diplomatic involvement in the Iranian nuclear dossier. "We are ready to be the mediator", Erdoğan stated the Turkish interest in getting

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<sup>147</sup> In this context, see also former Turkish foreign minister Davutoğlu's article '*Turkey's Mediation: Critical Reflections from the field*' (2013).

<sup>148</sup> Author's interview, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

involved in the nuclear file in November 2008, and continued: “I do believe we could be very useful” (in Parsi 2012: 145). In fact, observers of the nuclear talks have pointed out that on the sidelines of the negotiations in Istanbul, Turkish diplomats have not merely confined themselves to acting as a host, but have actively mediated between the parties in an attempt to broker approximations of policy positions.<sup>149</sup> While Turkish interlocutors tend to emphasise Turkey’s natural role as a facilitator and a more candid dialogue atmosphere than the P5+1 have with Iran,<sup>150</sup> other (mainly Western) insiders and experts are more critical. Critiques of the perception of Turkey acting as a conflict mediator range from rectifying that Turkey’s role may rather be comparable to that of Switzerland providing ‘good services’ (i.e. more as a conduit of messages)<sup>151</sup> all the way to the assertion that Turkey does not play any role whatsoever and that Turkey is the most overrated country in the nuclear dossier.<sup>152</sup> As asserted by a high-ranking Swiss diplomat who had been directly involved in mediatory diplomacy between the US and Iran in the absence of US-Iranian direct diplomatic relations, the idea of mediation does not meet with much enthusiasm in Western capitals.<sup>153</sup> Switzerland, so a common comparison, possesses credible channels that Turkey does not have because of Turkey’s questionable neutrality and power political interests in the region.<sup>154</sup> The idea of Turkish mediation has also been questioned out of a practical understanding that enlarging the format makes coordination more difficult. “When you multilateralise”, Dr. Ali Vaez from the International Crisis Group puts it, “you make it [the format] a dysfunctional mechanism for diplomacy. It takes away capital for innovation because you are more likely to be on lowest common ground.”<sup>155</sup>

### 3.1 Brazilian-Turkish mediation and the 2010 Tehran declaration

Notwithstanding these different perspectives on the idea of Turkish mediation, Turkey, together with Brazil, started negotiating as a mediator between Iran and the P5+1 as from

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<sup>149</sup> Author’s conversation with German foreign ministry official, Berlin, 4 February 2013.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat, Ankara, 17 June 2013; Interview with Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı, expert on Turkish foreign policy, head of department for International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 18 June 2013; Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 4 June 2013.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Dr. Walter Posch, senior Iran analyst, SWP, Berlin, 25 June 2013; Interview with high-ranking European diplomat to the IAEA, Vienna, 13 August 2013.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with high-ranking Swiss diplomat, Berlin, 26 August 2013.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*; Interview with former German ambassador to Tehran, Berlin, 26 August 2013; Interview with Gökhan Bacık, Ankara, 9 September 2013. “Even as a facilitator, the other side needs to accept you as an honest broker”, Dr. Şebnem Udum puts her skepticism of the Turkish ability to approximate positions. Interview, Ankara, 9 September 2013.

<sup>155</sup> Interview via Skype, 25 July 2013. Similar points were made by Soli Özel, foreign affairs editor at Habertürk and lecturer at Kadir Has University, interview, Istanbul, 7 September 2013.



early 2010. Turkey's entry into the Iranian nuclear negotiations as a mediator is to be contextualised against the background of the unsuccessful attempts in 2009 to negotiate a nuclear fuel swap deal, a proposal by the Vienna group in which Iran would have agreed to send three-quarters of its Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) out of the country to be refined in Russia, and would have in turn received the nuclear fuel needed for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) in the form of nuclear fuel rods from France. Even though the U.S. administration was hesitant to accept Turkey as a mediator at first, largely due to Turkey's new regional assertiveness and Erdoğan's occasional anti-Israel rhetoric (Parsi 2012: 181f.), the US State Department conveyed already in early 2009 the US appreciation of any Turkish efforts to help alleviate tensions over the Iranian nuclear case (ibid.). As the nuclear fuel swap proposal of the Vienna group lost momentum in late 2009, Brazil and Turkey seized their chance of diplomatic initiative- separate, at first, then by way of a coordinated shuttle diplomacy from January 2010 on (ibid.). Both, in addition, had become nonpermanent members of the UN Security Council in 2010- a fact that conveniently bolstered their political weight as mediators.

Turkish officials had repeatedly stressed their discontent with unhelpful pressure on Iran in the form of sanctions for the latter's noncompliance with the IAEA and UNSC stipulations. In October 2009, Erdoğan underlined Iran's right to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and criticised Western one-sided pressure on Teheran for suspected illicit nuclear activities and the fact that Israel's possession of nuclear weapons was dealt with as a political taboo at the same time (Seufert 2012: 26).<sup>156</sup> One month later, Turkey abstained from condemning Iran in the IAEA Board of Governors (ibid.).

With the aim to propose a diplomatic initiative to ease tensions, Turkish foreign minister Davutoğlu, together with his Brazilian and Iranian counterparts, negotiated the Tehran declaration in May 2010, a declaration that guaranteed Iran the right to use nuclear energy for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) and specified the transport of 1200 kg of LEU from Iran to Turkish soil, an idea that, in its details, was similar to the earlier proposal of a nuclear swap deal by the Vienna group in late 2009, but conveyed a conception of non-Western power constellations in the search for a solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis. Iran hailed the establishment of a new world order, aligning itself with the South American regional leader Brazil and Turkey, an influential regional actor in the Near East (cf. Savyon 2010). Turkey, however, understood this declaration as an attempt to engage Iran and let

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<sup>156</sup> As also reiterated by a Turkish foreign ministry official in an interview, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

diplomacy work (Kibaroglu 2010: 4f.; cf. also Santos 2011).<sup>157</sup> The reading that Turkey had seized its chance to play on the stage of international diplomacy usually reserved for ‘Great Powers’ and was thus boxing above its weight is a political one that has much to do with the presentation of certain narratives *after the fact*, as will be shown below.

As confirmed by a Turkish diplomat who was directly involved in the negotiations, the US was briefed on the plans for the TRR deal, but did not think that Turkey would “deliver on this”, so they had already “gotten China and Russia on board for UNSC sanctions”.<sup>158</sup> Then-Secretary of State Clinton complacently remarked in a testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 18 May 2010, referring to the impending sanctions momentum: “I guess that tells us all we need to know about the deal Brazil and Turkey tried to work out with Iran” (Hunter, R. 2010: 154). While the deal actually did meet a lot of US points content-wise,<sup>159</sup> the “timing was bad”, the Turkish diplomat intimately involved in the negotiations explained in an interview.<sup>160</sup> And on a global power political level, there was a certain astonishment on the US side as to “who these upstarts [i.e. Brazil and Turkey] are”.<sup>161</sup>

A former E3 delegation member put it in an interview: “Turkey is not a mediator, but part of the problem. The Tehran declaration was an unfortunate story. It was a good attempt, but it came too late. This often happens in international politics. Remember the 2003 Swiss initiative. It simply was not wanted politically by the Bush administration at the time. It was bad timing.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> As also stated by a Turkish foreign ministry official in an interview, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Turkish high-ranking diplomat, Brussels, 29 May 2013. In her memoir, Hillary Clinton (2014) admits that “throughout the spring of 2010 we worked *aggressively* to round up the votes” (427) [for UNSC sanctions, emphasis added].

<sup>159</sup> The U.S. State Department and other critics of the 2010 proposed swap deal argued that the Iranian decision for a 20 percent uranium enrichment was left unaddressed, that Iran’s uranium stockpile had increased since the latest Vienna group proposal of October 2009 (‘time has overtaken the original proposal’), and that the Tehran declaration did not address Iranian past defiance of UNSC resolutions (cf. U.S. Department of State 2010). Mark Fitzpatrick (2010) writes: “France, Russia and the United States [the key actors of the earlier 2009 fuel-swap initiative] [...] could hardly agree to legitimise enrichment in Iran without a limit on the level” (79).

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Turkish high-ranking diplomat, Brussels, 29 May 2013.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*; point also made by Soli Özel, Foreign affairs editor at Habertürk and lecturer at Kadir Has University, interview, Istanbul, 7 September 2013. The US take on the proposed swap deal at the time was that “this is not Turkey’s league to play in”, he put it. In a similar vein, Hillary Clinton (2014) describes Turkey and Brazil as “prime examples of the ‘emerging powers’ whose rapid economic growth was fueling big ambitions for regional and global clout” (430). The implicitly dismissive tone becomes even more discernible as she goes on to say that “They also happened to have two confident leaders in Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, both of whom considered themselves to be men of action able to bend history to their will” (*ibid.*).

<sup>162</sup> Author’s interview with former E3 delegation member, Brussels, 29 January 2015. His reference to the ‘Swiss initiative’ refers to the ‘Guldemann memorandum’ of 2003. In it, Iran offered the US government an unprecedented level of cooperation on all issues of concern, full transparency with the IAEA and guarantees for the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme, and a ‘roadmap’ detailing proposals for negotiations to break the ‘wall of silence’ between Iran and the US. The Swiss ambassador to Tehran, Tim Guldemann, transmitted

Ironically, the Tehran declaration had gotten the US backing through a letter that president Obama had sent in April 2010 to Brazilian president Lula in which he welcomed a Brazilian-Turkish diplomatic initiative (Mousavian 2012: 383; Parsi 2012: 187). The fact that Iran reacted positively to the proposed fuel swap deal confronted the US with a dilemma: Either to allow a diplomatic break-through in the nuclear dossier, or to go ahead with a new round of international sanctions. They opted for the latter. “Between instituting sanctions and getting one bomb’s worth of LEU out of Iran, Washington had chosen the former”, Trita Parsi (2012: 194) formulates in his detailed account of the diplomatic complexities surrounding the 2010 Tehran declaration. Justifying her government’s decision, then- US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laconically writes in her memoir that Turkey’s “‘Zero Problems with Neighbors’ foreign policy [...] made Turkey overeager to accept an inadequate diplomatic agreement with its neighbor, Iran, that would have done little to address the international community’s concerns about Tehran’s nuclear program” (Clinton 2014: 217). If anything, this passage is a prime example of a selective reading of events for political reasons that lacks empirical substantiation.

Against the background of the Tehran declaration, its commitment to diplomatic efforts and the conviction that this agreement was the first to have secured the approval of Iran and could have served as an important trust-building measure, Turkey voted against UN Security Council Resolution 1929 on 9 June 2010, along with Brazil. Lebanon abstained. The Turkish vote against this latest round of international sanctions was to be read as a frustrated reaction to the impatience of Western powers only one month after the Turkish-Brazilian diplomatic initiative, as was also formulated explicitly in Erdoğan’s letter to the leaders of 26 countries before the adoption of the resolution in the Security Council (Mousavian 2012: 382). Before voting against this resolution in the Security Council, Turkey’s UN representative Apakan expressed his government’s frustration with the negative reception of the Tehran declaration: “Sufficient time and space should be allowed for its implementation. We are deeply concerned that the adoption of sanctions would negatively affect the momentum created by the declaration and the overall diplomatic process” (UN 2010b: 3-4).

As NATO-member Turkey had never voted against the American position since 1952, this constituted a watershed in American-Turkish relations and resulted in a public diplomatic fall-out between the Turkish and the American side (Hiro 2009: 426; Parsi 2012: 193f.; Leverett & Leverett 2013: 363). The sentiment of irritation and frustration was also publicly

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the memorandum to the US State department. In the White House, however, it fell on deaf ears. The official reason for its rejection was the unclear nature of the document’s provenance.

demonstrated by an op-ed that Brazilian foreign minister Amorim and his Turkish counterpart Davutoğlu had published in the *International Herald Tribune* in late May 2010. After this experience of a failed diplomatic initiative, Turkey started coordinating closer with the Americans in the Iranian nuclear dossier<sup>163</sup> - out of a desire to avoid such miscommunication in the future, but arguably also out of a frustrated understanding that its pro-active role in 2010 did not meet much enthusiasm.<sup>164</sup> “Turkey’s mediator role ended with the ‘No’-vote against resolution 1929 in 2010”, Soli Özel puts it.<sup>165</sup> From the role of mediator, Turkey retreated to the role of ‘facilitator’ again, with Istanbul hosting the January 2011 P5+1 talks with Iran. Other back channels were used thereafter, and the strong bilateral US-Iran negotiation track after the election of Rouhani in 2013 had brought a new momentum for diplomacy to the nuclear talks effectively that rendered Turkish mediation obsolete. The political framework agreement reached on 2 April 2015 was applauded by Turkey. Telling for the Turkish emphasis of missed opportunities in 2010 was the reference to the Tehran declaration in Turkey’s press release one day after the successful conclusion of the talks in Lausanne: “Turkey has actively supported the processes for a peaceful solution through dialogue and has contributed to them including through finalising [sic] of the Tehran Joint Declaration in 2010” (Turkish foreign ministry 2015). As Mustafa Akyol (2015) holds, the Turkish government’s memory of seeing its own deal fall apart five years ago partially explained the relative public silence in Turkey on the talks between Iran and the P5+1 in early 2015.

Turkey’s motivation for the 2010 Tehran declaration, as analyzed in this section, was a mixture of the Turkish insistence on a resolution of the nuclear conflict through dialogue and engagement and a pragmatic attempt to engage Iran in order to reduce tensions. In line with a discursive divergence from hegemonic approaches advocating pressure and sanctions on the Iranian government as analyzed in the first section, Turkey thereby displayed a security culture that resisted hegemony in its underlying ideational structure. The adherence to a non-hegemonic security culture on a discursive level meant normative divergence from hegemony. Pursuing a pro-active diplomatic role in an attempt to reduce those tensions that, as Ankara felt, were only sustained and increased by international sanctions, Turkey’s foreign policy resisted hegemonic structures. While the Turkish government believed to enjoy the backing of

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with Turkish high-ranking diplomat, Brussels, 29 May 2013; “the US has learnt to understand Turkey better since 2010”, as one Turkish foreign ministry official put it, Interview, Ankara, 17 June 2013.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Dr. Meliha Altunışık, Ankara, 14 June 2013.

<sup>165</sup> Foreign affairs editor at Habertürk and lecturer at Kadir Has University, interview, Istanbul, 7 September 2013.

the US administration, however, it was left in the belief that it did not intentionally resist a US foreign policy line, i.e. the backing for Turkey's diplomatic initiative made its negotiators believe they were adhering to an approach approved by the US government. In the sequence of events, it was the failure of the West to honor and act upon the Tehran declaration and the subsequent adoption of sanctions that led to Turkey's public positioning against the US official position. The US reaction to the Tehran declaration, in other words, was the expression of suppression of diplomatic engagement because of hegemonic structures: To be faced with the dilemma of choosing between sanctions and acting upon a diplomatic breakthrough negotiated outside of the P5+1 framework only becomes a dilemma when one understands the institutionalised nature of the sanctions movement. Its adoption seized a 'momentum' (because it was perceived on the US side that Russia and China would not veto the upcoming sanctions resolution), and it kept US domestic critics of Iran diplomacy in Congress happy. Choosing sanctions over diplomacy was thus the expression of hegemonic structural path dependency. The fact that Turkey retreated from its mediatory role thereafter and, as confirmed by Turkish officials, even communicated and coordinated its policies more closely with the American administration in the aftermath of this short episode of behavioral divergence, evidences Turkey's desire to convey 'solidarity with the US' and 'comply' with US positions. Despite a discursively underscored normative divergence, behavioral convergence eventually (and noticeably quickly) took place after the short-lived episode of a public alienation.

The next section will examine this nexus between the discursive and the behavioral level of foreign policy with a view to Turkey's compliance with the Iran sanctions regime. Against the background of a normative divergence from ideational underpinnings of hegemony as analyzed in the first section and Turkey's short phase of balancing between behavioral divergence and convergence as the expression of Turkey's interaction with hegemonic structures, such an examination with a view to the sanctions regime is an important analytical step pertaining to Turkey's reaction to the material and institutional dimension of hegemonic structures in a Coxian framework.

#### **4. Between 'Gold-for-Gas' and sanctions waivers: Turkey's balancing act regarding unilateral Iran sanctions**

The fact that the Turkish Iran diplomacy in 2010 ended up being portrayed as a dilemma between diplomacy and sanctions and that diplomacy came too late in a Western reading drove a wedge between the US and Turkey and severely angered the Turkish side- not least

because Turkey was sure to enjoy the backing of the Obama administration and because of prime minister Erdoğan's personally invested capital in this episode of Iran diplomacy. It also underlined once more very clearly the Turkish position that international sanctions can complement diplomacy, but always complicate political negotiations and should never be an end in itself, as analyzed in the first section.<sup>166</sup> The institutional nature of sanctions is thus relevant here: UN-mandated international sanctions are seen with skepticism, but are not rejected categorically by Turkey. Unilateral sanctions, however, that are adopted by actors outside of UN structures, pertain to a security culture that Turkey was not supportive of, as this section will show. It is primarily the predicament of being dependent on Iranian energy economically that explains Turkey's sometimes ambivalent stance on US unilateral sanctions.

Especially given Ankara's frustration with the lack of credit for its active Iran diplomacy and the adoption of sanctions resolution 1929, it has therefore been speculated by US officials that Turkey might offset the effect of sanctions on Iran by promoting trade relations with Iran and thereby undermine Western sanctioning efforts. Besides the energy dimension which will be elucidated in the following paragraphs, Iran is economically relevant for Turkey as a transit for Turkish trucks heading to Central Asia, for the Turkish tourism industry, and for Turkish companies' plans to invest in Iranian construction and service sectors (Ülgen 2011: 158; Larrabee & Nader 2013: 32).

What was more central to US allegations of 'sanctions-busting', however, was the perception of Turkey becoming a financial lifeline at a time when US authorities were stepping up their efforts to isolate Iran from international payment transfers. When Dubai started imposing restrictions on transit goods destined for Iran, the Turkish foreign economic relations board announced its willingness to step in and provide Turkish ports for those shipments (Raphaeli 2010), which led to US concerns about Turkish sanctions-busting and subterfuges to continue with trade relations that would undermine US efforts to dry up financial lifelines to Iran. The most publicly discussed annoyance to the US in this regard has been Turkey's 'gold-for-gas' trade with Iran, in which Turkey had been exporting gold to Iran via Dubai as an indirect payment for Iranian natural gas deliveries and as a perceived means to circumvent the sanctions regime that is aimed to cut off Iran from the international banking system (Kandemir 2013). Relevant US sanctions legislation in this regard especially was the 2012 'Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act' that essentially was meant to cut off Iran from international payment in US dollars for its oil sales. Turkey had therefore paid Iran in Turkish Lira, held in Halkbank accounts, with which Iran in turn had been buying gold

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat, Ankara, 17 June 2013.

from Turkey. When the US tightened its control on the sales of precious metals in the beginning of 2013, a motivation explicitly was to stop the alleged Turkish attempt to find loopholes in the US sanctions regime (ibid.; Daly 2013). As US Treasury Department undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence David Cohen told the House of Representative's Foreign Relations Committee in May 2013: "I can assure you we are looking very carefully at evidence that anyone outside of Iran is selling gold to the government of Iran." (ibid.). Raphaeli (2010) even writes in this regard: „Turkey will watch Russia and China to determine how far it can go in ignoring U.S. unilateral sanctions“ (7). And in spite of international optimism regarding the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action as part of the interim nuclear agreement struck between Iran and the P5+1 in November 2013 in Geneva, the US Treasury Department added Turkish businesses and individuals to a list of violators of US Iran sanctions in early February 2014 (Gladstone 2014).

In frank words that are quite indicative of the Turkish government's perception of the legitimacy of unilateral sanctions, a foreign ministry official comments on the 'gold-for-gas' controversy in an interview as follows: "if the criticism is that we undermine unilateral sanctions, then I'm sorry [sic], nobody is at the centerpiece of the world. The US is not making laws for the world community."<sup>167</sup> The same official sums up Turkey's stance on the sanctions question as follows: "Concerning companies' exports [of potentially sanctioned goods], they always ask for approval by the foreign ministry. If sanctions are mandated by the UN Security Council, we say no. If companies, however, are affected by unilateral sanctions, it is their decision. In the resolution text, a 'restrictive/limited approach' is mentioned. We don't intervene in companies' dealings."

The distinction here is that of unilaterally adopted sanctions that run counter to *norms* Turkey subscribed to as governing international relations (sovereignty, non-interference), versus UN-adopted international sanctions that adhere to a *rules*-based international order. Legitimate 'institutions' in a Turkish understanding are those of the UN system that legitimise the penetration of sovereign rights, if deemed necessary and if so decided by the Security Council. But Turkey resisted the *institutional* structure of hegemony, i.e. the institutionalised nature of US sanctions enforcement for essentially national security interests ("The US is not making laws for the world community").

However, Turkish officials explain that Turkey has to strike a balance between showing solidarity with the US, disagreeing with the latter's sanctions policies, and the

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

imperatives of geography.<sup>168</sup> Official interviewees confirm that US officials regularly ask Turkey to reduce their oil imports from Iran.<sup>169</sup> While Turkey shows receptiveness to the idea by discussing import reductions and diversification plans,<sup>170</sup> Turkey is regarding neighboring Iran as an inevitable trading partner. “[...] Iran simply has the best oil”, as formulated by the same ministerial source.<sup>171</sup> Iran is Turkey’s second largest oil and gas supplier after Russia. Turkey is importing around 20 percent of its gas and around 40 percent of its oil from Iran (US Energy Information Administration 2012: 6; 2013: 2), which remains an issue of permanent contention in Turkish-American relations with a view to unilateral US Iran sanctions.<sup>172</sup> In March 2012, Turkey announced for the first time a planned reduction of oil imports from Iran by 20 percent and engaged in talks with Libya and Saudi-Arabia to make up for the resulting shortage.<sup>173</sup> A 20 percent Iranian oil import reduction is the amount required to qualify for US ‘sanctions waivers’ – which Turkey subsequently was granted on 11 June 2012 and renewed for another 180 days on 7 December 2012 (Daly 2013).

This was perceived as a remarkable development in Turkey’s approach to unilateral US sanctions- Ankara had previously always stated that it saw itself bound by UN sanctions only (cf. Habertürk 2012). Enforcement of unilateral US and EU sanctions had always been left up to the Turkish private sector (Ülgen 2012: 9). The Turkish foreign ministry “informs private companies of the impact of new sanctions”, as formulated repeatedly by foreign ministry officials interviewed in this project.<sup>174</sup> While leaving sanctions enforcement up to the private sector can be read as a convenient way to guard a political level of passivity on the part of the Turkish government as concerns pressure on Iran, it is worth pointing out that the oil and gas company BOTAŞ Petroleum Pipeline Corporation is wholly state-owned since 1995. Turkey’s oil refiner Tüpraş is also government-owned, and a Turkish diplomat confirms in an interview that “upon request by the US, Tüpraş has decreased its oil imports from Iran”.<sup>175</sup> Compliance with unilateral US energy sanctions in order to qualify for ‘sanctions

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<sup>168</sup> Interview with Turkish high-ranking Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 17 June 2013; Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Turkish embassy, Washington, 14 February 2014.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Turkish high-ranking Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 17 June 2013.

<sup>170</sup> Supply diversification plans included ideas to increase oil imports from Northern Iraq. Leaving aside political and logistical problems, the interest was reciprocated from the Iraqi side. Interview with Dr. Meliha Altunışık, Ankara, 14 June 2013. Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Washington, 14 February 2014; Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 17 June 2013.

<sup>173</sup> These talks with Libya and Saudi-Arabia, however, ‘came to nothing’, as confirmed by a Turkish foreign ministry official. Author’s interview, Washington, 14 February 2014.

<sup>174</sup> Author’s Interviews with Turkish diplomats, Ankara, 17 June 2013; Washington, 14 February 2014; Beirut, 14 August 2014, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>175</sup> Author’s interview with Turkish diplomat to the US, Washington, 30 October 2014.



waivers' therefore is a deliberate act of demonstrating solidarity with the US on a governmental level. As confirmed by a Turkish foreign ministry official working on Turkish-Iranian bilateral issues, cutting down on oil trade with Iran, like in 2012, is "a ministerial decision".<sup>176</sup> US concerns, the same official went on to state, "are taken into account in some sectors" (ibid.). In a similar vein, a Turkish diplomat to the US points out that the Turkish-Iranian trade volume fell from 22 billion \$ in 2012 to 18 billion \$ in 2013 because of US unilateral sanctions. Scaling back trade with Iran was, the same diplomat asserts, a "governmental decision", and adds: "You have to do that. The United States has such a power in the world economy that your companies suffer otherwise".<sup>177</sup> Despite occasional acts of resistance against the institutional structures of hegemony, as shown above, it is the material dimension of hegemony that constrains Turkey's political leeway.

Another instance of reacting to US pressure was Ankara's decision in 2008 to cancel the agreement with Iran to invest 5.5 billion US dollars and operate in the South Pars oil fields (Kardas 2010; Larrabee & Nader 2013: 31). Such an investment would have 'violated' the US Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) that foresees sanctions against foreign companies investing more than 20 million US dollars in the Iranian energy sector. The Turkish renouncement of the investment signaled that Turkish investment in the Iranian oil infrastructure was sacrificed for a politically higher-valued alignment with US interests concerning Iran.

A publicly demonstrated normative divergence from hegemonic structures, as examined in the first section of this chapter, and ambivalent cases such as the 'gold-for-gas' deal covered above, did not prevent Turkey from demonstrating a behavioral convergence with the very same power structures. While emphasising Turkey's conviction that 'non-interference' in Iran's domestic affairs should guide the search for political solutions to the Iranian nuclear crisis, Ankara underscores the importance of solidarity with its US ally and even shows compliance with US unilateral sanctions. In the terminology worked out in section 5 of chapter 1, a relatively strong normative divergence on the discursive level was paralleled by rules convergence with hegemony on a behavioral level – with occasional resistance on the latter level (e.g. 'gold-for-gas'). The next section will contextualise this finding in Turkey's broader strategic policy environment and discuss how Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme is indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony.

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<sup>176</sup> Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 20 August 2014. Another foreign ministry official describes the government's role in Tüpraş' trade with Iran as "advisory". Author's interview, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>177</sup> Author's interview with Turkish diplomat to the US, Washington, 30 October 2014.

## 5. Turkey's Iran policy between ideology, geostrategy and alliance management: Resistance to Hegemony?

Turkey's Iran policy was always a balancing act between geostrategic pragmatism, ideational foreign policy projections and Western alliance management, as this section will show. This balancing act helps explain the research finding of a mixed rules convergence with hegemonic structures which concluded the previous section. The Turkish shuttle diplomacy with Tehran in 2009-2010 in an effort to secure a deal as a confidence-building measure and build-up for further substantive talks was an illustration of a remarkable foreign policy activism. "Turkey has reoriented its foreign policy by means of an active, multidimensional and visionary framework. Mediation is an integral part of this policy," former foreign minister Davutoğlu writes in praiseful words (2013: 90). Turkey's mediation in the Iran file served at least two purposes strategically. It assured the US of Turkey's commitment to international diplomacy that were in line with Western security and non-proliferation priorities. This understanding stemmed from the communication between the US and Turkish diplomatic teams. Secondly, Turkey's mediation conveyed a prioritisation of political dialogue and a rejection of sanctions as a counterproductive means of pressuring the Iranians at the same time. Seizing a moment where other diplomatic initiatives on Iran were scarce, the Turkish-Brazilian diplomacy was conceived to at least allow for more 'breathing space' before sanctions would become an option again.

This episode was preceded by a phase of relative alienation from unilateral US positions. With a foreign policy discourse that had become increasingly more critical of the US and of Israel under the AKP government, Turkey had started to convey a political regionalism that tied it closer to the Islamic republic of Iran both out of geographic proximity and culturalist interpretations of non-Western conceptions of international relations. It is this conception that brings the Turkish position occasionally closer to China's and Russia's with regard to a joint hesitant approach to the use of sanctions on Iran and with regard to a shared conviction of the foreign policy principle of 'non-interference'. Turkey is committed to the nuclear non-proliferation regime and would not want to see a nuclear Iran emerge in the region that would also challenge Turkey from a regional power perspective. Turkey is "hedging against the risks of a nuclear Iran", as Dr. Ian Lesser formulates.<sup>178</sup> Yet, Turkey makes a clear differentiation between legitimate non-proliferation concerns and what it perceives as unhelpful pressure on a country that has legitimate rights to nuclear energy. This

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<sup>178</sup> Executive Director of the German Marshall Fund in Brussels, interview, Brussels, 23 July 2013.

distinction in Turkey's foreign policy discourse was carved out above in the first section.

Without a permanent UNSC membership, Turkey's insistence on the IAEA as the main body to legitimately watch over the non-proliferation regime and hence also the Iranian nuclear file,<sup>179</sup> Turkish suspicion against UN-backed pressure on Iran arguably also carries an element of awareness that the transfer from Vienna to New York deprives Turkey of an instrument to make its voice heard and takes the issue to the international arena of Great Power politics. "The world is bigger than five," president Erdoğan revealingly formulated his general discontent of the structure of the Security Council at the 69<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly in 2014.<sup>180</sup> Prime minister Davutoğlu strikes a similar cord when he publicly complains that the P5 are deciding on other countries' behalf.<sup>181</sup> Especially when the nuclear file was eventually transferred to the UNSC in 2006 and calls for the imposition of sanctions grew louder, Turkey publicly displayed a normative divergence with a powerful hegemonic position on Iran at the time. While adhering to the 'rules and models' of the UN system at large, Turkey's position on the Iranian nuclear crisis revealed different 'norms and values' that the Turkish government deemed better suited to govern international relations.

Coupled with the Turkish awareness that Turkey's geographic location and cultural proximity makes Ankara a more natural interlocutor with Tehran than any Western negotiator,<sup>182</sup> Turkish foreign policy activism in the Iran nuclear file in 2010 served to demonstrate to the Iranians that Turkey will not abuse their trust in simply advocating a Western agenda (Parsi 2012: 189f.). At the same time, it demonstrated to the West that Turkey can be a useful bridge-builder and manage to negotiate a deal over Iran's nuclear programme that could have been a meaningful interim stepping stone to re-establish trust and engage in further negotiations.<sup>183</sup> In this sense, Turkey's mediation managed to walk the line between alliance management and commitment to Western non-proliferation concerns. At the same time, it also was an exercise of Great Power diplomacy and demonstration of Turkey's foreign policy self-perception and portrayal, and was an attempt to avert the imposition of sanctions. Turkey's criticism of Western impatience and the Turkish vote against UNSCR

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<sup>179</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat to the IAEA, by phone, 23 August 2013.

<sup>180</sup> President Erdoğan Addresses the UN General Assembly. Available at [last accessed 8 January 2015]: <http://www.tccb.gov.tr/news/397/91138/president-erdogan-addrebes-the-un-general-abembly.html>.

Elaborating on this statement in responses to his address at the World Economic Forum in 2014, he said: "(The Security Council) should not be a platform where only five countries have a say. Such a system is not fair at all. This world is not a slave of these five permanent countries." Summary of the transcript available at [last accessed 24 March 2015]: <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/news/397/91194/president-erdogan-reiterates-turkeys-stance-in-regional-ibues.html>.

<sup>181</sup> As he did at a 'Policy Spotlight' keynote speech in Brussels, organised by Friends of Europe, 15 January 2015.

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Turkish high-ranking Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 17 June 2013.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat to the IAEA, by phone, 23 August 2013.

1929 in June 2010 forcefully made this point also on a behavioral level. Voting against this sanctions resolution as a non-permanent Security Council member at the time, Turkey displayed both a normative and a rules divergence from hegemonic structures and drove home a strong message of resistance. Turkey has consistently been criticising the imposition of sanctions before and after the 2010 Tehran declaration also because of economic interdependence with Iran and the implications for regional trade ties that an economically weakened Iran would bring about. Turkey's Iran policy has therefore always been a tightrope walk between alliance management (commitment to Western security cultures through its NATO membership), geostrategic pragmatism and economic necessity (dependence on trade with Iran), together with ideational foreign policy projections (Davutoğlu's 'Zero problems with neighbors' and 'Strategic Depth' concept).

As administrations in Western capitals following the 2010 Tehran declaration publicly started questioning Turkey's objective stance in the Iranian nuclear file and reproaching Ankara with having been outsmarted by Iranian deception (Parsi 2012: 195f.),<sup>184</sup> Turkey's abandonment of a mediator role thereafter and 'closer communication with the Americans'<sup>185</sup> as a result can be read as a desire to avoid getting their hands burnt by playing a pro-active role that is not wanted politically by the P5+1 format – an eventual rules convergence, in other words, with those policies that Ankara had tried to overcome with its mediation in the first place.

In addition, Turkey's power to defuse the Iranian nuclear crisis and its ability to mediate between the P5+1 parties and Iran was further eroded in the wake of power shifts in the region starting with the outbreak of what has come to be coined the 'Arab Spring' that saw Iran and Turkey oppose each other with fundamentally differing perceptions of regional order - as epitomised by their diametrically opposed interests especially in the Syrian civil war (Pieper 2013a, 2014: 3-4; Taşpınar 2012; Kibaroglu 2012; Larrabee & Nader 2013: 8f.; Barkey 2013). While Iran remains one of Assad's latest steadfast allies in the region,<sup>186</sup> Turkey has positioned itself increasingly more outspoken against any future prospects of Assad holding power in Syria. After an initial Turkish support for Assad, Ankara has officially called the Assad regime an illegitimate one, with Erdoğan even calling on Assad to step down (Taşpınar 2012: 137). In harsh terms, prime minister Davutoğlu criticised the Western failure to find common ground in opposing Assad. With the so-called 'Islamic State'

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<sup>184</sup> Turkey has been branded 'Iran's lawyer', as Stein & Bleek (2012: 137) put it.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Turkish high-ranking diplomat, Brussels, 29 May 2013.

<sup>186</sup> President Rouhani let it be known that Iran will support the Syrian government "until the end of the road" (Reuters 2015c).

becoming a much bigger security challenge on the agenda of Western policy circles, Davutoğlu lamented calculations in Western capitals that Assad could eventually be considered a lesser evil and, in the face of the terrorist challenge posed by ‘the IS’, “be seen as the good guy and stay in Damascus”.<sup>187</sup>

Such resentment over wider regional policies spilled over into Iran’s perception of Turkey’s role in the nuclear crisis. The reason Istanbul was no longer wanted as a venue by Iran for the February and April 2013 nuclear negotiations lay in differences of the two countries’ positions toward Syria.<sup>188</sup> Only a few years after Iranian receptiveness to Turkish diplomatic activism, Turkey was sidelined as a credible broker in the Iran file by the course of events. On the one hand, Turkey started siding more pro-actively with political actors in the wake of societal upheavals throughout the Arab world that destroyed what was left of Turkey’s perception as a neutral broker (Seufert 2014).<sup>189</sup> On the other, Turkey and Iran face each other in grim opposition concerning geostrategic conceptions in the Middle East. It is quite telling that in 2013 and 2014, Oman acted as a conduit of messages between the US and Iran<sup>190</sup> – a role that, ten years ago, was Turkey’s. Instead of ‘zero problems with neighbors’, Turkey now faced zero neighbors without problems.

It was in this context of Turkish-Iranian diverging agendas for regional policies that president Erdoğan’s outburst against Iran following the conclusion of the political framework agreement on Iran’s nuclear programme on 2 April 2015 had to be understood: While foreign minister Çavuşoğlu was one of the first to applaud the outcome of the nuclear talks, Erdoğan warned of a boost to Iran’s role in the region and criticised Iran’s policies in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. As Sinan Ülgen contends, such statements were not linked to the negotiated outcome on the nuclear file per se, but were aimed at mending fences with Saudi-Arabia and a wider ‘Sunni bloc’ of Arab states in the region (Arslan 2015). Saudi-Turkish relations had suffered after Turkey had taken sides for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which the Kingdom in Riyadh considers as a terrorist organisation. Iran-critical statements coming from Turkey are music in the ears of the Saudi kingdom, which is a regional rival of Iran and likes to see Iran’s role in the region diminished. As Ülgen holds, closer Saudi-Turkish relations are

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<sup>187</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, keynote speech in Brussels, organised by Friends of Europe, 15 January 2015.

<sup>188</sup> As confirmed by a Turkish high-ranking diplomat; Author’s interview, Brussels, 29 March 2013.

<sup>189</sup> The taking of sides for Sunni Muslim forces in the region was perceived as biased, and culminated in Turkey’s pro-Muslim Brotherhood position on Egypt, the uncompromising public support for Sunni anti-Assad actors in Syria (even if radical) and markedly sharper tones in rhetoric against Israel. “Erdoğan’s government departed too quickly from its own version of a foreign policy oriented at win-win results and over-hastily plunged into a foreign policy determined by confessional identities and interests,” Günther Seufert (2014: 34) attests.

<sup>190</sup> Author’s interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 20 March 2014.

beneficial for Turkey's regional agenda, as they help confront common challenges, including 'the Islamic State', and the pro-Iranian Houthi militia in Yemen.<sup>191</sup> In reaction to Turkey's public support for Saudi policies in Yemen, 65 Iranian parliamentarians had demanded a cancellation of Erdoğan's planned visit to Iran in early April 2015 (Bar'el 2015). The visit eventually did take place despite the preceding war of words. Turkey's Iran policies, as such considerations demonstrate, are often the outcome of partially conflicting policy priorities on a number of often diverse issues and on different levels (security, economic, global regional).

Fences in sour Turkish-Iranian relations had been mended a bit, at least on the surface, after Hassan Rouhani was elected president in Iran in June 2013. Rouhani's pledges to follow policies of 'prudence and moderation' enabled a tentative Turkish-Iranian rapprochement. In an interview with Al-Jazeera on 12 February 2014, Erdoğan called Iran and Turkey 'strategic partners', and explicitly underlined that purchasing oil and natural gas is part and parcel of such a partnership.<sup>192</sup> This was followed by a visit Erdoğan paid to Iran on 28-29 January 2014, where he signed trade deals in the hope of increasing energy ties – much to the dislike of the US administration, which again must have seen the potential of its sanctions regime being undermined (Hafezi 2014). The visit was reciprocated in June 2014 by a visit of Rouhani to Turkey – the first visit of an Iranian president to Turkey since 1996.

The controversial 'gold for gas' deal between Iran and Turkey was another case in point of a delicate balancing act between demonstrating to the US that Turkey is ready to go along with their Iran policy to an extent that it will not significantly impact on the Turkish economy. Resistance to hegemony on a behavioral level was therefore sometimes ambivalent in Turkey's case. A readiness to reduce Iranian oil imports, like Ankara announced in 2012, can be read as a rules convergence with hegemonic structures as pertaining especially to existing Iran sanctions regimes. But public announcements to increase oil and gas imports from Iran on other occasions, like Erdoğan has done during his high-level visit to Tehran, again run counter to that perception – as do occasional allegations of sanctions-busting like indirect payment methods to circumvent financial sanctions as analysed above.

Ultimately, it might also be worth pointing out that a tendency for public defiance of US policies was stronger in the prime minister's office under Erdoğan's leadership than in the

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid. On other issues, Turkish-Saudi convergence of interests is not always given. On the Syrian conflicts, both Turkey and Saudi-Arabia share their enmity with Bashar al-Assad. However, Turkey and Qatar support opposition groups that are clashing with those backed by Saudi-Arabia.

<sup>192</sup> "Erdoğan: Turkey's role in the Middle East," Talk to Al Jazeera, 12 February 2014. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2014/02/erdogan-turkey-role-middle-east-201421282950445312.html>.

foreign ministry.<sup>193</sup> Not known for mincing his words, Erdoğan was a prime minister who displays more consistency between a discursive and a behavioral level of resistance to hegemony. Barkey (2013) even states that Erdoğan “has [at times] articulated positions that mirror Tehran’s” (149). And among experts and Turkey watchers, it has been an open secret that within the Turkish cabinet, influential actors take a more pro-Iran stance than others. The former head of the Turkish intelligence agency (Milli İstihbarat Teskilati, MİT), Hakan Fidan, was renowned as one of the most influential pro-Iran actors and a close confidant of then-prime minister Erdoğan. Experts had long speculated that Turkey’s Iran policy constituted a certain *domaine réservé* for the former MİT-head, where he had enjoyed a disproportionately big leeway,<sup>194</sup> even to the point where he had been alleged to pass on intelligence information to the Iranian government (Entous & Parkinson (2013). The impression that otherwise objectionable interactions with Iran might have enjoyed the backing from high government officials was nurtured further when the state prosecutor’s investigations had “exposed serious connections between Iranian agents and senior government officials,” Turkish media wrote in February 2015 (Today’s Zaman 2015).

The article continues: “The investigation unearthed pro-Iranian figures believed to have been working for Iran from within the Turkish government. The case file implicated names such as former National Intelligence Organization (MİT) head Hakan Fidan, Interior Minister Efkan Ala and ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) spokesperson Beşir Atalay.”

Tellingly, the investigations were brought to a halt by the Turkish government.<sup>195</sup> While difficult to verify, it thus cannot be excluded that personal politics and even ‘networks’ with vested interests have factored in as a variable to influence Turkey’s overall foreign policy towards Iran. Turkish diplomats in turn, in interviews for this research project and elsewhere, tend to emphasise the importance of solidarity with the US as an important regional and global ally – even when Turkish compliance with certain US-inspired policies, as the sanctions question has shown, proves to be ‘costly’.<sup>196</sup> At times the object of tense discussions

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<sup>193</sup> Erdoğan’s term as prime minister ended in 2014. On 12 August 2014, he was elected as the 12<sup>th</sup> Turkish president, and as the first president to be elected by popular vote.

<sup>194</sup> Author’s interview with Dr. Mark Hibbs, Berlin, 16 March 2015; Interview with Gökhan Bacık, Ankara, 9 September 2013. Cf. also Hibbs (2015).

<sup>195</sup> This had been made possible due to new legislation enabling a stronger political interference in the judiciary that was introduced in 2014, and had resulted in international concern over the politicisation of the Turkish judiciary. Amongst other things, the new law gives the government great clout in the nomination of judges and prosecutors. Cf. Pamuk (2014).

<sup>196</sup> Turkish foreign ministry official. Author’s interview, Washington, 14 February 2014.

between US and Turkish officials, Turkey's regional policies are bound to partially conflict with the US and other NATO partners.

## 6. Conclusion

Following a two-level model between a discursive and a behavioral level to analyse resistance to hegemony as outlined in chapter 1, this chapter has analysed the extent to which Turkey's foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme is indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony. Normative divergence from hegemony, as the first section has shown, can be discerned most clearly on a discursive level. From the outset of the Iranian nuclear crisis in 2002, Turkey was cautious with criticism of the Iranian government and did not follow public positions at the time that emphasised Iran's violations of its IAEA Safeguards Agreement. Reiterating instead the Iranian right for peaceful nuclear energy, Turkey warned its Western counterparts at the same time not to interfere with Iranian domestic politics and to respect Iranian sovereignty. It was shown how Turkey's public positioning on the emerging nuclear crisis coincided with a regional foreign policy re-orientation that sought a deepening of relations with Turkey's immediate neighborhood. This new foreign policy outlook was epitomised by the two concepts of 'Strategic Depth' and 'zero problems with neighbors', albeit more so for public relations purposes than for operational policy implementation.

At the same time, it was shown how Turkish diplomats – in interviews for this dissertation as well as in public statements – hurry to emphasise their basic solidarity with the US government. Turkey's NATO membership already gives it an inroad into Western security perspectives. Turkey has underlined the importance of Iranian collaboration with the IAEA and the necessity of Iran complying with its obligations under the NPT and work toward a political solution of the Iranian nuclear conflict. This divergence between a level of appreciation for Iranian arguments about sovereign rights as an NPT member and a public endorsement of Western security concerns carried along chance and burden for Turkey's foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme. A burden was the diplomatic challenge to reconcile these partially conflicting standpoints. A chance, however, was given to Ankara in the form of its mediatory potential precisely because Turkey was seen as being situated between two camps. This enabled Turkey to facilitate talks between the P5+1 and Iran (Istanbul as a neutral venue for negotiations), and to mediate in a period of shuttle diplomacy in 2009-2010. It has been argued in this chapter how this period of mediation lets us discern Turkish foreign policy behavior from up-close for the purpose of this case study research design. Absent a permanent UN Security Council seat and outside of the P5+1 format for



nuclear negotiations with Iran, Turkey's activism in the Iran nuclear file gave it 'leverage' and thus approximated its role to that of other, institutionally more established, actors, in Iran diplomacy. Section 2.1 of chapter 2 has worked out how 'leverage' is a scope condition for the case selection of this dissertation, and it has been an underlying theme of this chapter to show how not only Turkey's active mediation, but also its friction between different security cultures, gave it 'leverage' and credibility in nuclear diplomacy with Iran.

The May 2010 Tehran declaration to defuse the Iranian nuclear crisis was an intriguing precedent of a non-Western attempt to ease tensions and make use of Turkey's political capital in Tehran- a mediatory effort by Brazil and Turkey that did not encounter much appreciation in Western capitals. This episode stood indicative of Turkey's insistence on the need to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis through political dialogue and diplomacy on a discursive level and resist self-perpetuating hegemonic power structures on a behavioral level that had hitherto obstructed meaningful attempts at crisis diplomacy. Turkey's short mediatory role ended with UNSCR 1929 in June 2010, an outcome that infuriated Ankara because it illustrated the Western insincerity in finding a genuine solution to the Iran crisis, in a Turkish reading. Turkey's retreat to the role of facilitator and closer alignment with US positions thereafter, however, underlined again Ankara's official re-iteration of the importance of solidarity with its US ally. Resistance to hegemony on a behavioral level, in other words, never was a consistent policy imperative for Turkey. 'Compliance' with a US-inspired security culture took precedence on a behavioral level. Rules convergence with hegemonic structures took place more often and more consistently so than occasional experiments with rules divergence as acts of resistance to a hegemonic security culture.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the examination of Turkey's position on international and unilateral Iran sanctions presented in this chapter. Turkey's diplomacy on the sanctions issue was a balancing line between disagreeing with a Western securitisation of the Iranian nuclear file and resulting sanctions regimes on the one hand and still complying with Western sanctions efforts after 2006, on the other. Here, a distinction between the institutional nature of sanctions has been made: While criticising the use of sanctions as political instruments in international relations on a normative basis, UN-mandated sanctions were eventually accepted as the outcome of international negotiations and the adoption through UN institutions. The Turkish government, however, reiterates not to be bound by unilateral sanctions. Imposed outside of UN structures, these are seen as circumventing the *rules* of the UN system. The government 'informs' the Turkish private sector of the impact and consequences of UN unilateral sanctions, so the official stance. Next to a normative

divergence from hegemony, resistance to hegemonic practices such as the extraterritorialisation of US legislation was carried out on a behavioral level by Turkish circumventions of unilateral sanctions regimes affecting Turkish-Iranian trade, as discussed in section 4. Such circumventions, like the controversial ‘gold-for-gas’ deal, never were consistently outright counter-hegemonic policies by design. As has been shown, Turkey showed responsiveness to US allegations of ‘sanctions-busting’, and eventually complied with US unilateral sanctions regimes affecting both Iranian and Turkish companies. As a consequence, Turkey qualified for US ‘sanctions waivers’ because of a reduced level of Iranian oil imports, despite Turkey’s high dependence on Iranian oil and gas supplies. The fact that Turkish entities were sanctioned again by the US Treasury Department thereafter, and that US suspicions about Turkey undermining Iran sanctions regimes persist, demonstrates that Turkey is walking a tightrope walk in sanctions compliance, and that its record of behavioral resistance to hegemony is ambivalent.

The history of Turkish-Iranian relations is a history of a balancing dynamic between competition and cooperation. Likewise, Turkish foreign policy is a multidirectional one that has to reconcile regional policies of hegemonic resistance with an embeddedness in international alliance structures that still let Turkey comply with hegemonic policies on a behavioral level. In practice, such structural constraints find expression in, i.a., compliance with but criticism of Iran sanctions, energy trade with Iran with the simultaneous planning of import reductions and supply side diversifications, and US-critical discourses with a concurrent commitment to NATO alliance structures and security identities. Turkish Iran policies are the outcome of a complex calculation of economic pragmatism, regional foreign policy imperatives, international alliance structures and a politico-cultural sensibility for Iranian resentment to Western pressure as analyzed above. A public advocacy for a non-hegemonic security culture and norms alternative to those sustained by hegemonic forces can be paralleled by a foreign policy behavior that falls short of acting upon this discourse. While Turkey on occasions resisted hegemony on a behavioral level, as ‘sanctions-busting’ trade circumventions like the gold-for-gas deal demonstrated, a basic adherence to US power structures eventually prevailed over the possibility of an outright resistance to hegemony. In practice, Turkey’s normative divergence from hegemony on a discursive level did not translate into a consistently implemented policy objective because it was outbalanced by rules convergence with hegemony on a behavioral level.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Russian foreign policy toward the Iranian nuclear programme**

#### **1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces the second empirical in-depth case study and analyzes to what extent Russian foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme is illustrative of a security culture that resists hegemony. Russia's contemporary Iran policy in general and its position toward the Iranian nuclear programme in particular has to be understood in the context of geopolitical shifts brought about by the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and their implications for Russia's statist identity, foreign policy orientations and Russia's self-understanding of its position in the international system of states. The most determining historical dividing lines for an understanding of Russian-Iranian relations have already been outlined in chapter 3. With a view to this dissertation's underlying research question about the nexus between security cultures and foreign policy behavior toward hegemonic power constellations, the following pages will thus analyse Russian foreign policy toward the Iranian nuclear programme as the outcome of a delicate balancing act between strategic engagement with 'the West' and adherence to foreign policy norms that partially clash with Western interests. Nothing has underlined the finding that the terms of agreement between Russia and the West over 'norms' in international politics require a constant re-negotiation more than the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2013-4 that has evolved into the most fundamental crisis in relations between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. This chapter will thus also situate policy coordination in the Iranian nuclear file as an illustration of norm contestation in international relations in a broader context of what will be shown to be a compartmentalisation of foreign policy.

A first section therefore looks at the disagreements between Russia and its Western counterparts over diplomatic approaches to Iran's nuclear programme following the latter's disclosure in 2002 as an illustration of Western-Russian normative disagreements. It will shed light on Russia's reaction to an emerging US securitisation of the Iranian nuclear issue. A second section will analyze Russia's stance on international and unilateral sanctions on Iran against the background of Russo-Iranian bilateral relations, Russo-American relations and Moscow's understanding of the functioning of international security governance. This is an important analytical step for an examination of Russia's understanding of legitimacy in international politics. Suffice to recall that 'norms and values' are concrete convictions and

conceptions (such as ‘sovereignty’, ‘non-interference’), while ‘rules and models’ relate to the broader macro-structure that regulates the way these norms and values are communicated, applied, or changed. As has been shown in the previous chapter, especially the sanctions question serves as an illustrative application of these concepts: If states accept and approve international sanctions as mandated by the United Nations Security Council, they convey a basic acceptance of the *rules* of the UN system. An analysis of Russia’s understanding of unilateral sanctions that are adopted and implemented outside of UN procedures, then, conveys an insight into Russia’s *normative* conceptions that may or may not be different from those powers adopting such sanctions.

On the basis of this analysis, a fourth section sheds light on the perception of Russia as a constructive mediator in the Iranian nuclear talks and therefore adds to the discussion of the behavioral dimension of Russian Iran policy. A fifth section will discuss whether the latter level has, and if so how, been affected by the overall deterioration in relations between Russia and the West in the wake of the ‘Ukraine crisis’ as from 2013. The findings of these sections will bring us to a final section that shows how a two-level distinction between a discursive and a behavioral dimension of foreign policy applies to Russia’s Iran policy. This section will build on the preceding analysis of Russia’s sanctions policy and Iran diplomacy and identify material as well as ideational factors in Russia’s Iran policy that make up a complex web of foreign policy motivations which in this research is captured by a two-level model to understand the nexus between security culture and the degree of resistance to hegemony, as elaborated upon in chapter 1. Russian foreign policy discourse on Iran’s nuclear programme and on Western and especially US-American approaches to Iran’s nuclear programme will be contrasted with Russia’s foreign policy behavior that may be in contradiction with a security culture Russia itself advocates for. Making sense of such a variation in compliance weaves together the concepts of norm divergence and rule convergence and will allow me to answer the question how Russia’s foreign policy towards Iran’s nuclear programme is illustrative of a security culture that resists hegemony.

## 2. Russia's foreign policy towards Iran following the revelation of the Iranian nuclear programme in 2002: Reacting to U.S. securitisations

This section sheds light on disagreements between Russia and its Western counterparts over Iran's nuclear programme following the latter's disclosure in 2002. Doing so, it presents the Russian foreign policy discourse in this question, which is a precondition for a first analytical step in presenting the two-level model of a discursive and a behavioral dimension to understand the nexus between security culture and the degree of resistance to hegemony.

With the revelation of an Iranian enrichment facility in Natanz and a heavy-water plant under construction at Arak, hitherto undeclared to the IAEA and thus in breach of Iran's Safeguards Agreements, Russian nuclear cooperation with Iran suddenly appeared in a disconcerting light (Lata & Khlopkov 2003).<sup>197</sup> Russo-Iranian nuclear cooperation had started in September 1994 when a protocol was signed between the Russian Atomic Energy Minister, Viktor Mikhailov, and the president of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI), Reza Amrollahi, in which the Russians expressed their willingness to complete the 1000-MW power reactor at Bushehr worth 800 million US dollars. Bushehr was Iran's only nuclear power plant project that had been started by German Kraftwerk Union AG in 1970 (Yurtaev 2005: 107), but was abandoned in the wake of the Islamic Revolution (Orlov & Vinnikov 2005: 50). Unable to get nuclear technology from its former European partners that had cooperated with Iran in the starting phases of the Iranian nuclear programme under the Shah in the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>198</sup> Iran had turned to China and the USSR (with Russia succeeding the latter). As from the mid-1990s and despite US pressure, Russia had become Iran's nuclear partner (cf. also Sarukhanyan 2006: 88-108).

Against the backdrop of the uranium fuel sales for the construction of Bushehr, Putin appeared pugnacious and downplayed the revelations of a covert Iranian nuclear programme, calling nonproliferation concerns a 'means of squeezing Russian companies out of the Iranian market' in 2003 (Parker 2009: 221).<sup>199</sup> Such a statement neatly captures the Russian *zeitgeist* at the time on the nexus between non-proliferation and legitimate nuclear cooperation that continued to underwrite Russian foreign policy in the Iranian nuclear dossier for the years to come: Russian economic benefits had to be weighed against political and security concerns of

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<sup>197</sup> Seyed Hossein Mousavian (2012) even asserts that Russia and Iran had been negotiating 'secretly for cooperation on an enrichment facility in Natanz and heavy-water reactors in Arak, but Russia halted this cooperation under pressure from the United States in the late 1990s' (55).

<sup>198</sup> most notably Germany and France

<sup>199</sup> Russia is contracted to deliver fuel for the Bushehr plant until at least 2021 (Meier 2014: 19), but has agreed to provide fuel for the plant's lifetime in an additional protocol.

technology sales to Iran that might be of a dual-use nature. Russia's official position thus indicated non-compliance with the US state of alert and apprehension regarding early signs of an emerging securitisation of the Iranian nuclear issue.<sup>200</sup> A Russian diplomat told me in an interview, smirking: "Concerning Iranian nuclear intentions, we are not so hysterical as the Americans".<sup>201</sup> It was already at this early juncture in the Iranian nuclear crisis that different security conceptions towards Iran's nuclear programme between the US and Russia became apparent. If the rendition of enmity is an order-constituting and arguably hegemony-sustaining exercise, as has been argued in chapter 1, publicly challenging such a process of securitisation is resistance to hegemony on a discursive level. A harsh anti-American rhetoric on the part of the Putin administration that is bordering on the verge of outright discursive counter-hegemony became noticeably strong again in 2013-14 in the wake of the 'Ukraine crisis' and the ensuing rapid deterioration in relations between Russia and the West, which will be discussed in section 5 below. President Putin's speech at the Valdai Discussion Club on 24 October 2014 powerfully juxtaposed the conception of American 'unilateral diktat(s)' and domination by a 'self-proclaimed leader' against the 'principle of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of any state' and the mutual respect for other state's (however defined) national interests (Putin 2014).

Terms such as the 'pursuance of national interests' therefore have to be understood as relational concepts: What reads as an act of defiance of hegemonic powers can be an act of necessary resistance against instrumental politicisations in a non-hegemonic reading. In the context of Russia's interests increasingly clashing with those of the U.S. over the looming war in Iraq in 2003, Moscow saw no reason to comply with U.S. pressure and renounce its commercial ties with Tehran. Tellingly, the abrogation of the 1995 Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission under president Putin in 1999 (Antonenko 2001) had effectively put an end to US-Russian consultations concerning arms and technology transfers to Iran. Russian foreign policy was what Richard Sakwa calls 'essentially ambiguous' (Sakwa 2002: 366): Having officially announced a 'strategic partnership' with the U.S. and endorsed the NATO-Russia Council in 2002 (Conrad 2011: 45), Putin continued defending the Bushehr project and thereby indirectly sat on the fence when it came to judging the security implications of an

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<sup>200</sup> Carnegie nuclear proliferation expert Dr. Mark Hibbs comments on the US' reversion of its stance on this issue in an interview. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the US portrayed the Bushehr power plant as a problem, while not recognising the real proliferation risk that lay in non-declared nuclear facilities. "These were dilettantes in the White House that did not understand the nuclear fuel cycle", Dr. Hibbs remarked. The US skepticism of Russian nuclear activities in Iran was reversed a decade later: In nuclear talks with Iran in early 2015, the US delegation was supportive of the idea to include the Russian atomic industry as a technical component for a final nuclear settlement of the Iranian nuclear programme.

<sup>201</sup> Author's interview with Russian diplomat at the embassy to the US, Washington, 31 October 2014.

Iranian nuclear programme in a Western reading. The United States was trying hard to end Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran (Belopolsky 2009: 101-107). In a Russian reading, Bushehr was a legitimate civilian nuclear power plant, unconnected to any hitherto covert uranium enrichment facilities (Aras & Ozbay 2006: 134).<sup>202</sup> Recurrence to 'legitimate' projects conveys a sense of self-determination and independence from other actors' alarmist rhetoric about nuclear Iran and calls to mind the relational dimension of security cultures: In the context of a looming securitisation of Iran's nuclear dossier in the first half of the 2000s, Russian recurrence to 'legitimacy' in international politics and external economic policies aimed to position Moscow against the outlining US approach to Iran's nuclear programme. Russian official statements after the conclusion of the political framework agreement on 2 April 2015, negotiated in Lausanne between the P5+1 and Iran, served as a reminder that Russia had supported Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy all along (Russian foreign ministry 2015).

From the beginning of the nuclear stand-off in 2002, Putin had repeatedly emphasised the Iranian right to nuclear power (Putin 2003; Mousavian 2012: 163f.). This, as well as the track record of nuclear cooperation between Russia and Iran made Russia the logical candidate in Iran's search for allies as international public opinion turned against Iran and as Western governments grew more impatient with the Iranian lack of cooperation and transparency while talks over the nuclear programme proceeded. In a broader 'Eastern bloc approach' embraced especially with the coming into office of president Ahmadinejad in 2005, Iran reached out to Russia, China and the Non-Aligned Movement, hoping to find an international coalition supportive of Iran. Especially the support of China and Russia, two permanent UNSC members, was deemed crucial in resisting US pressure (Mousavian 2012: 84; 141). Suffice to recall that in a Gramscian understanding of hegemonic structures, a 'historic bloc' works to enforce and sustain the dominant power structures in place (Cox 1996: 131). Especially in the years of the Ahmadinejad administration, it reportedly was the Iranian ambition to forge a counter-bloc that would include Russia and China as important anti-hegemonic Great Powers and thus, in a neo-Gramscian understanding, work against such a prevalent 'historic bloc'.

This was the case in the run-up to the first IAEA Board of Governors meetings in 2003 dealing with Iran, and in the course of the following years when referral of the Iranian nuclear file from the IAEA to the UNSC still might have been prevented. Ideologically inflated as a 'looking to the East' policy with the advent of Ahmadinejad as president and Ali Larijani as

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<sup>202</sup> Also re-iterated by a Russian foreign ministry official. Author's interview, Moscow, 18 April 2013.

chief nuclear negotiator, Iran was trying to garner support of these states in order to build a broad anti-US coalition to break the format of Iran facing Western negotiation partners over its nuclear programme that met increasingly fierce opposition (Mousavian 2012: 190f.).

Therewith, however, Iran was misinterpreting Russian intentions: Following Iran's resumption of nuclear enrichment activities in August 2005 after a period of temporary suspension (Jafarzadeh 2007: 159), testimony to the failure of nuclear negotiations between Iran and the EU3, the file was referred to the UNSC in March 2006. Of the 35 members of the IAEA Board of Governors, 27 endorsed the board resolution, of which Russia was one. The Russian endorsement became possible after a reference to 'international peace and security' has been omitted. An earlier resolution had still contained the reference and was therefore vetoed by Russia (Fitzpatrick 2006a: 21). The Iran nuclear case now had been transferred from Vienna to New York. Russia, hesitant to join the negotiations at first (International Crisis Group 2006: 14), was forced to take a stance by now at the latest by nature of its permanent Security Council membership.

In UN Security Council negotiations, Russia found itself in a camp with China arguing for a less pressuring approach to Iran than the US and European countries were pushing for and argued against the adoption of a UNSC resolution (Patrikarakos 2012: 224; Mousavian 2012: 235f.). In an attempt to broker a political solution to the crisis, Russia proposed a plan in 2006 by which Iran would have to transfer its enrichment programme onto Russian soil while still benefitting from its output.<sup>203</sup> The idea of such a transfer was quickly rejected by the Iranians. This decision signaled to Moscow that Iran would not accept indefinite reliance on Russia in the field of nuclear technology and constituted a watershed both for Russia's perception of the Iranian goals and for US-Russian cooperation over the Iranian nuclear file: Not only did this episode prove the "total failure of the 'looking to the East' policy", it "opened a new chapter in the nuclear standoff in which Russia began to move closer to the West," as Houssein Mousavian (2012) writes in his memoirs (256-7). And after the failure of renewed EU and P5+1 initiatives to reach a politically acceptable compromise in the following months, Russia did not make use of its veto right and approved of UNSC resolution 1696 in July 2006, which for the first time used the operative wording of a 'threat to international peace and security' that Iran constituted.

Pursuing a more US-independent foreign policy line while at the same time increasingly aware of the Iranian delaying techniques and against the background of the rejection of 'the Russian plan', Russia voted for UNSC Resolution 1737 in December 2006,

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<sup>203</sup> referred to as 'the Russian plan'.



approving for the first time the imposition of chapter VII sanctions on Iran. The sanctions regime was intensified and reaffirmed by UNSC Resolution 1747 in March 2007, followed by Resolution 1803 in March 2008 and Resolution 1835 in September the same year.

While Russia aimed at averting or at least slowing down international pressure on Iran, it aimed at slowing down Iran's advances in its nuclear programme at the same time. This was evidenced by the constant pushing back of the date of completion of the Bushehr power plant, which, on the surface of it, was attributed to 'technical' issues (Katz 2010: 64; 2012: 58), but was also read as a Russian sensitivity to US concerns (cf. also Nizameddin 2013: 266). It equally prolonged the Iranian dependence on Russian technology.<sup>204</sup> Therme (2012b) therefore writes that Russia was 'instrumentalising' nuclear cooperation with Iran in order to both keep Iran dependent on Russian know-how and to hinder an Iranian 'nuclear success' (190).<sup>205</sup> While this strategy can be read as a rational commercial calculation, it also served to show responsiveness to US security perceptions at the same time and fulfilled a double purpose for Russia in this sense. Russia's public statements against unhelpful pressure on Iran entailed advocacy for a security culture that resisted US hegemony, while Moscow still managed to steer a course that was avoiding outright rejection of US policies. In analyzing Russian Iran policy, it thus seems useful to make out a distinction between a discursive level (public advocacy for a security culture that is resisting hegemony), and a behavioral level (eventual approval for UNSC sanctions resolutions and a renouncement of unwavering support for the Iranian position), which will be elaborated upon more extensively in the following sections.

The next section will shed light on Russia's understanding of sanctions as a political instrument in dealing with Iran, and what this reveals about Russia's understanding of legitimacy and norms in international relations. This will be an important intermediate analytical focus on Russia's foreign policy discourse pertaining to the sanctions regime before the section that follow can complement the analysis with an examination of the behavioral dimension of Russia's foreign policy towards Iran. The synthesis of this discursive and

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<sup>204</sup> With Bushehr, Moscow held leverage over Iran as far as fuel and the technical operation of the plant was concerned. Fuel fabrication and insertion is a technically difficult process and is best carried out by the actual producer of the plant. In addition, Iran needed the Russian technicians to operate the plant, as was also evidenced by the informal prolongation of the initially contracted two-year period during which Russian technicians were supposed to work in Bushehr. In this sense, through its nuclear technology cooperation, Moscow had channels through which it was able to make its voice heard in Tehran (Author's interview with Dr. Anton Khlopkov, Director of CENESS, Moscow, 17 April 2013).

<sup>205</sup> While Russian officials cited Iranian payment delays as reasons for the delay in Bushehr going 'online', Iran was referring to technical deficiencies on Russia's end (ibid.).

behavioral level then allows me to draw a comprehensive picture about Russia's security culture on Iran and the extent to which it is indicative of resistance to hegemony.

### 3. Russia's position on Iran sanctions

#### 3.1 Russia's approach to UNSC sanctions on Iran: Normative divergence

In accordance with the Russian hesitance when it comes to international sanctions against Iran, Moscow has always reiterated the importance of dialogue and diplomacy, rejecting a military solution to the crisis and calling on Iran to comply with the IAEA. In addition to braking the sanctions track, Moscow has thus (in tandem with China) worked toward weakening their impact by watering down provisions contained in the UNSC resolution drafts (Kuchins & Weitz 2009: 176).<sup>206</sup> "Sanctions", President Putin reminded his audience at the Valdai Club in October 2014, "are already undermining the foundations of world trade, the WTO rules, and the principle of inviolability of private property" (Putin 2014).

Moscow's eventual support for pressure and sanctions on Iran was a double-edged sword: Russia appeared to heed to US concerns about the Iranian nuclear activities and, unofficially, made sure that it would remain the exclusive provider of nuclear fuel for Iran by slowing down Iran's nuclear advances. At the same time, it angered the Iranians and shattered any illusion that Russia was a reliable ally and would always protect Tehran from Western pressure. In Tehran, the impression was fuelled that the Iranian nuclear programme constituted a 'bargaining chip' for Moscow and that "Russia is intentionally stalling in dealing with Iran to wring concessions from the United States" (Mousavian 2012: 93). In his Third-Worldist romantic, Ahmadinejad's 'overreliance on Russia' even became a cause for domestic criticism within Iranian policy circles (ibid.: 320). With Russia approving of successive rounds of UNSC-backed international sanctions, Iran had learnt the hard way that it could not rely on Russia as a diplomatic shield. But the disillusionment was mutual: Also in Russia, official voices began to worry that "Tehran had [...] outsmarted Moscow by using Russia's diplomatic screen to advance Iranian goals that were inimical to Russia's own security interests" (in Parker 2009: 249). Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation thus by no means implied an automatic lenience with Iran in the nuclear talks. Russia's history of nuclear partnership with Iran was fraught with mutual frustration and occasional public accusations.

Russia's support for UN sanctions under chapter VII thus has to be seen in this context of Russian skepticism regarding Iranian intentions and of wanting to be seen as a constructive

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<sup>206</sup> As also confirmed by a German foreign ministry official, conversation with author, Berlin, 4 February 2013.

partner for the Western interlocutors. The calculation was a mixture of geostrategic as well as global power political considerations, as will also be seen further below in sections 4 and 6. Remarks delivered by Russia's UN representative, Vladimir Churkin, in Security Council sessions that passed the sanctions resolutions, conveyed a balance between the cautious admonition of Iran's failures to address international concerns about its nuclear file and a principled reservation regarding the use of restrictive sanctions (UN 2006b: 2-3; UN 2007: 10-11; UN 2010b: 8-9).

Russian approval for sanctions also was a reaction to political circumstances at the time that would have made resistance to sanctions difficult to sell politically. This was the case with the revelation of the existence of Iran's second uranium enrichment facility in Fordow near Qom in September 2009, hitherto unknown to the IAEA,<sup>207</sup> and also to Russian intelligence services (Parsi 2012: 126; Mousavian 2012: 397). Russia was taken by surprise and therefore angered by the Iranian lack of transparency, but was also not pleased by the fact that Western intelligence sources had not been shared with Moscow (ibid.).<sup>208</sup> Another undercurrent was the fact that Iran had rejected the Vienna group's proposal in 2009 that had centered around Russia as a key actor in the fuel swap deal.<sup>209</sup> The latest sanctions regime against Iran was approved by the UN Security Council in June 2010 with Resolution 1929. Russia's vote for sanctions therefore also has to be seen in the context of this political momentum, where Russia's frustration with the Iranian lack of cooperation was one factor in the calculation and where a veto in the UNSC would have constituted an outright rejection of (not only Western) security political concerns regarding Iranian non-compliance with previous resolutions and IAEA safeguards agreements, as demonstrated blatantly again with the revelation of the Fordow facility.

In addition, Russia's approval of international sanctions often was linked to concessions offered by the US administration in exchange for Moscow's consent in the sanctions question. In what has been described as 'horse-trading' taking place between the US and Russia,<sup>210</sup> the controversial Missile Defense (MD) episode in US-Russian relations may have become interlinked with Iran sanctions in the UN Security Council whereby the Obama

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<sup>207</sup> therewith also supposedly breaching IAEA modified code 3.1, which stipulates the acknowledgment of new facilities already as from their planning phase (IAEA 2011).

<sup>208</sup> In her memoir, Hillary Clinton (2014) recalls how the "steely Lavrov" appeared "flustered and at a loss of words" when the US informed Russia on the Qom facility. She attributes Russia's noticeable change in rhetoric to this revelation (425). Fitzpatrick (2010) writes that "the Russians were not amused that they had to hear about the Fordow plant from the Americans" (71).

<sup>209</sup> As confirmed by a former Russian diplomat to the embassy in Tehran. Conversation with author, Washington, 1 November 2014.

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Dr. Ali Vaez, chief Iran analyst, International Crisis Group, via Skype, 25 July 2013.

administration offered concessions in the MD plans (renouncement of the missile defence shield deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic) and would be guaranteed Russia's cooperation in the Iran nuclear file in return, e.g. Russian green light for a new round of international sanctions on Iran, as some experts hold (Mousavian 2012: 335; Kuchins & Weitz 2009: 168; Patrikarakos 2012: 256). President Medvedev's public reaction to a secret letter by Obama about such an Iran-missile shield bargain indicated that Moscow was not happy to publicly discuss the matter (France24 2009). The fact that Moscow did not reconsider its support for sanctions in June 2010 after the surprising Brazilian-Turkish diplomatic break-through in May 2010 and Tehran's unexpected approval of the Tehran declaration, however, goes to show that Russia had been promised too many important concessions by the US, as Trita Parsi contends (2012: 196). And under US pressure, Russia even suspended the planned sale of its S-300 long-range air-defence system to Iran (Parsi 2012: 47). Medvedev issued presidential decree 1154 in October 2010 to that effect. The cancellation of the S-300 contract was a major annoyance for Iran with which Russia squandered a good deal of its 'leverage power' over Tehran.<sup>211</sup> With the latter decision, the Medvedev administration sent a strong political signal: A positive one in a Western reading, a negative one in an Iranian reading. And when in May 2010, Russia approved of sanctions resolution 1929 in the UN Security Council, it had agreed to the toughest round of sanctions ever imposed on Iran over its controversial nuclear programme so far – a seeming reversal of Moscow's position from only five years before. Esfandiary and Fitzpatrick (2011) even contend that Russia "went beyond the strict reading of the UN sanctions by cancelling (the S-300 contract) [...]. This was a decision that may have had the most significant impact on Iran of any national measure" (145) – a decision that has even been likened to Russia's own unilateral sanctions on Iran (cf. Kozhanov 2015b).<sup>212</sup> The importance of the Iran issue and the acknowledged necessity to work with the Russians on Iran has been an important (if not the most important) motivation behind the US-Russian 'reset' policy in 2009, as confirmed by

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<sup>211</sup> A politically more tactical alternative might have been the temporary (unlimited) freezing of the contract, instead of having it completely cancelled altogether. Author's interview with Dr. Anton Khlopkov, Moscow, 17 April 2013.

<sup>212</sup> While imposing a weapons embargo, paragraph 7 of UNSCR 1929 makes no mention of surface-to-air systems. The S-300 is such a system, so on technical grounds, Russia could have delivered the system to Iran. Iran has thus filed a law suit before the International Arbitration Court in Geneva against Russia for cancelling the S-300 contract. Reportedly, the S-300 deal was subject of discussion during Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu's meeting with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Dehqan in Tehran in January 2015 (Fars News Agency 2015; Vedomosti 2015). And on 13 April 2015, two weeks after the conclusion of the political framework agreement with Iran in Lausanne, President Putin officially cancelled the suspension and paved the way for an eventual delivery (BBC 2015. On this, cf. also Kozhanov 2015a).

former State Secretary Clinton in her memoir (Clinton 2014: 235; cf. also Parsi 2012: 94; Fitzpatrick 2010: 71; Kozhanov 2015b).<sup>213</sup>

### 3.2 Russia's position on unilateral Iran sanctions: Normative divergence and discursive anti-hegemony

Russia was and is skeptical of the use of sanctions as a means of pressuring Iran into compliance. Russia's permanent representative to the IAEA Vladimir Voronkov therefore reiterates that the removal of all sanctions should be the result of the IAEA's clarification of all remaining questions on Iran's nuclear programme (Fars News Agency 2014). In contrast to Russia's grudging acceptance of international sanctions, however, unilateral sanctions as imposed by the US and the EU, it is being reiterated from the Russian foreign ministry, are not seen as legitimate instruments of international politics (Russian foreign ministry 2012b; Medvedev 2010; Reuters 2010; Sheridan 2009).<sup>214</sup> "We view unilateral sanctions as illegal", a Russian foreign ministry official working on the Iranian nuclear dossier puts it in an interview.<sup>215</sup> Next to the finding that unilateral sanctions have "only brought a disrapture of the E3+3 dynamics" (ibid.), such a frank statement conveys Russian conceptions of legitimacy in international politics. Sanctions, imposed unilaterally by the US and the EU, are viewed as breaching a normative framework that should govern international relations. "Another risk to world peace and stability is presented by attempts to manage crises through unilateral sanctions and other coercive measures, including armed aggression, outside the framework of the UN Security Council," the official Russian Foreign Policy Concept formulates (Russian foreign ministry 2013a). 'Rules and models' of the UN system, in Katzenstein's terminology (1996: 21) to understand 'culture', are not adhered to if sanctions are adopted outside of the UN Security Council, in a Russian understanding.

Reacting to the EU decision to impose an oil embargo on Iran, effective from 1 July 2012, Foreign Minister Lavrov publicly deplored what he described as unilateral steps designed to "punish Iranian stubbornness" (Russian foreign ministry 2012a). He emphasised that Russia regarded such steps as a 'deeply faulty line' and reiterated the importance of political dialogue instead of punitive measures. The EU was criticised for the fruitlessness of an excessive tilt toward a unilateral sanctions track which is regarded as 'unhelpful' by the

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<sup>213</sup> Dr. Alexei Arbatov, head of the Center for International Security at IMEMO, asserts that the S-300 decision was the 'peak' of the US-Russian reset policy. Author's interview, Moscow, 13 November 2013.

<sup>214</sup> This point was also persistently made in all interviews with Russian officials carried out for this research. Russian ambassador to the EU Vladimir Chizhov also reiterated this position at a keynote speech on 2 February 2015; University of Kent's EU-Russia conference, Brussels.

<sup>215</sup> Interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 18 April 2013.

Russian dialogue partners and is said to complicate the search for common policy positions within the P5+1, as emphasised by a Russian diplomat in an interview.<sup>216</sup>

While presented in Russian public diplomacy as motivated by the adverse effect sanctions have on diplomacy, Russia's rejection of unilateral sanctions and hesitancy to use international sanctions is also to be explained by the adverse material effect these have on Russian companies: In the context of a growing anti-Iran climate in Western policy circles as the nuclear dossier was dragging, the U.S. criticised Russian exports of weapons and defensive systems and explicitly started sanctioning Russian firms for conducting such business with Iran. The aircraft manufacturer Sukhoi and arms exporter Rosoboronexport were sanctioned in 2006, 2007 and 2008 (Defense Industry Daily 2006).<sup>217</sup> The US thereby was aiming at hampering what was perceived as a 'cynical' Russian two-track policy in which Moscow was officially committed to the international sanctions regime but not supporting the spirit of it (Patrikarakos 2012: 228). Russian weapons deliveries, however, were outlawed on a multilateral basis in 2010 by the weapons embargo adopted through UNSCR 1929. But unilateral sanctions also hampered Russian trade with Iran in other areas. As a Russian diplomat remarks in an interview: "Our trade volume (with Iran) is not as high as it used to be because of unilateral sanctions. This is because of globalised trade: The EU SWIFT sanctions made bank communication with Iran more difficult".<sup>218</sup>

Russia, as demonstrated by its language on sanctions, is motivated by a normative understanding of their (il)legitimacy, but is equally motivated by the material dimension of the effect of sanctions. This finding differentiates Russia's stance on the sanctions regime: While Moscow criticises the political effects of sanctions, its compliance with the latter appears to be selective and dependent on the US position, the impact of sanctions on Russia, and the nature of the sanctions adopted (unilateral or international). This is an important point to retain for an examination of a Russian security culture as resisting hegemony and its constituent material, ideational and institutional underpinnings (Cox 1996: 97f.; 135f.). A later section will come back to this point.

The remainder of this chapter will put such an interplay between material and normative considerations for Russia's sanctions policy into the wider perspective of Russia's public diplomacy surrounding the Iran case. This will answer the question how Russia's

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 18 April 2013.

<sup>217</sup> Along with Rosoboronexport, the Bush administration also sanctioned the Tula Instrument-Making Design Bureau and the Kolomna Machine-Building Design Bureau in 2007 (Belopolsky 2009: 127). The sanctions against Sukhoi, imposed because of alleged violations of the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000 were lifted again in November 2006 (Ria Novosti 2007).

<sup>218</sup> Author's interview with Russian diplomat, Brussels, 19 March 2015.

foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme is illustrative of a security culture that resists hegemony. An intermediate conclusion suggests that Russia's foreign policy discourse bears indications of a security culture that resists hegemony: Russia emphasises legitimate rights of Iran, legitimate Russian commercial ties with Iran, counterproductive sanctions pressure and illegal Western unilateral sanctions and therewith emphasises the sovereignty of Iran to be upheld. The impression on a behavioral level is more mixed: Russia was slowing down the sanctions track, but eventually adopted and complied with international sanctions, yet was blacklisted for trade with Iran that ostensibly contravened sanctions regimes. The next section introduces a Russian discourse of constructive mediation as a final element that adds to Russia's security culture on Iran before two final sections will synthesise the research findings and conclude this case study.

#### **4. Russia's role in the Iranian nuclear dossier: Constructive mediation and behavioral convergence**

As has been analysed in the previous sections, Russia always had to reconcile security perceptions with legitimate commercial aspects of Russo-Iranian relations. As much as this had been a source for disagreement between Russia and its Western counterparts, it had demonstrated Russia's defense of a security culture that would resist securitising discourses, which were presenting Iran's nuclear programme as an inherent threat and basing policies on allegations. In the second half of the 2000s, however, decisions by the Iranian leadership had alienated Moscow and contributed their part in bringing Moscow to agree to the imposition of sanctions. President Medvedev's decision not to deliver the S-300 defense system to Iran, that would have allowed the interception of long-range missiles, could be seen as a tilt toward a course more accommodating to Western security concerns.

The depiction of Russia's role in the Iran dossier as being that of a veto-player indulgent with the Iranians would therefore be a fallacy. In its official diplomacy, Russia was always emphasising the need to find a political solution to the nuclear crisis through dialogue. Proposals such as the creation of an international fuel center on Russian soil by president Putin are a case in point (Diakov 2007: 135f.). Former IAEA Secretary-General Mohamed ElBaradei notes in his memoirs in this context:

“Contrary to allegations made at times by the West, Putin strongly opposed Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons and questioned its need for nuclear enrichment capability; but he concurred that Iran should be offered attractive assistance, including nuclear technology, and he supported an international guarantee of reactor fuel supply.

Putin also put forward an idea for an international repository for spent fuel, which I applauded” (ElBaradei 2012: 137).

As nuclear proliferation expert Mark Hibbs holds, a Russo-Iranian nuclear cooperation agreement<sup>219</sup> would achieve to embed Iran’s nuclear activities within a transnationally controllable and verifiably peaceful framework and would inevitably align Russia closer with Western powers in emphasising the need for full Iranian cooperation with the IAEA (Hibbs 2013). Given the failed attempts in 2009 and 2010 to negotiate fuel swap deals, however, it remains doubtful whether the scenario of a multilateralisation of the fuel cycle<sup>220</sup> to prevent or contain Iranian domestic enrichment is still a feasible one. As reported by the New York Times on 3 November 2014, the shipment of parts of Iran’s nuclear stockpile to Russia to be turned into fuel for Iranian nuclear power plants was apparently discussed by the delegations in November 2014 as part of a final nuclear settlement (Sanger 2014), and is reminiscent of the idea of a fuel swap deal already discussed in late 2009. While this option seemed to have been on the negotiation table initially in P5+1 talks with Iran in Lausanne in March 2015, the Iranian rejection of any shipments of its stockpile to Russia put an end to this debate (Richter & Mostaghim 2015). Considerations about technicalities about negotiated solutions for a final Iranian nuclear status aside, Russian officials stress that Moscow has introduced several constructive proposals throughout the process, some of which are known (like Lavrov’s ‘step-by-step’ plan in 2011 or the proposal for an international fuel consortium in 2006), while others are unknown to the public and were circulated within the P5+1 format.<sup>221</sup>

Next to such concrete technical proposals, Russia’s public stance oftentimes gave Moscow the role of an admonisher against a lack of cooperation on both the Western and the Iranian side. “We encourage both Iran to fully comply with the IAEA, and are pushing both sides (the US and Iran) to meet and talk”, said a Russian diplomat to the US in an interview.<sup>222</sup> Admonishing the Iranian leadership to show more transparency, Russia is adamant in its criticism of what is being perceived in Moscow as politicised and unhelpful pressure from the West. Reacting to the 2011 IAEA report that was read as an unusually outspoken expression of frustration with the Iranian lack of transparency (IAEA 2011), Moscow lamented its ‘destructive logic’ (Russian foreign ministry 2011) and deplored that

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<sup>219</sup> International fuel bank or Russia as destination for the return of Iranian spent fuel rods.

<sup>220</sup> The first international nuclear fuel reserve bank in Angarsk, Russia, is an example of an attempt of such a multilateralisation of the nuclear fuel cycle that Russia had built together with the IAEA (Meier 2014: 22).

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 18 April 2013. Some European observers are more skeptical of the rationale behind these Russian technical proposals. A European diplomat describes them in an interview as ‘economically questionable’ and ‘based on Russian commercial interests in Iran’. Author’s interview, Brussels, 6 February 2015.

<sup>222</sup> Author’s interview, Washington, 31 October 2014.



the report did not contain any new evidence. And reacting to the shadow boxing exercises of the dialogue partners in the search for a venue for negotiations in 2012 that would be acceptable to all parties, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov urged all parties to stop behaving “like little kids” and pragmatically agree on a venue, emphasising that the Russian side believed in the importance of the “essence of the talks” (Lavrov 2013). The unprecedented progress in nuclear talks following the Iranian presidential elections in June 2013 that led to a historic first interim deal between Iran and the P5+1 were therefore publicly welcomed and appreciated by the Russian foreign ministry.<sup>223</sup> Lavrov expressly applauded the constructive role of the US delegation under the leadership of State Secretary John Kerry after the P5+1 negotiations in early November 2013 (Russia foreign ministry 2013b).

Reiterating the importance of constructive dialogue and Moscow’s contribution to that end, Russian foreign ministry officials noted the similarity between the ‘reciprocal approach’ underlying the proposal discussed in Geneva in November 2013 and Lavrov’s earlier step-by-step proposal.<sup>224</sup> Russia is thus even being ascribed the role of an intermediary and facilitator of talks between Iran and the West by some observers (Aras & Ozbay 2006: 139).<sup>225</sup> In line with Russia’s desire to be perceived as a responsible global power, such interpretations reflect on Moscow’s willingness to be seen as a cooperative and pragmatic dialogue partner in the Iranian nuclear file. Seyed Hossein Mousavian (2012) even writes that it was a strategic mistake of the West not to have given the Russian ‘step-by-step’ plan more consideration (457).

Especially during the Medvedev administration, Russia managed to highlight issue areas for closer cooperation with the West and nurtured the impression of Moscow as a constructive dialogue partner in the Iran dossier, but also in the US-Russian dialogue in general. Following Putin’s presidency that had initiated an assertive foreign policy line that did not shy away from being increasingly more outspoken about its disagreements with Western strategic political interests, Medvedev’s presidency was characterised by an understanding of foreign policy as a ‘modernisation resource’, meaning the need for closer political consultation with the US and Europe with the intent to steer Russia toward a broader politico-economic modernisation course.

This arguably impacted on the negotiations on the New-START treaty about the

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<sup>223</sup> Author’s interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 12 November 2013.

<sup>224</sup> Author’s interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 12 November 2013; Author’s interview with Russian diplomat at the Russian embassy to the US, Washington, 31 October 2014.

<sup>225</sup> Interview with Dr. Anton Khlopkov, Moscow, 17 April 2013; conversation with German diplomat, Moscow, 18 April 2013.

reduction of strategic nuclear weapons between the US and Russia or the granting of transit routes for US- and NATO troop supplies to Afghanistan. In the case of the controversy over the Iranian nuclear programme, as already discussed above, the non-delivery of the S-300 defense system to Iran was such an example of a slightly more accommodating foreign policy toward Western security political concerns. But as was also shown above, this should not necessarily be attributed to an ideational convergence of security cultures, but arguably was the concrete outcome of a tangible ‘quid pro quo’ policy between the US and Russia. “Rather than ‘norms’ and ‘public goods’,” Kuchins & Weitz (2009) remark in this context, “Russian leaders and political analysts frame Russia’s terms of international cooperation as *realpolitik* bargains and ‘trade-offs’ of interests” (168). If ‘multilateralism’ in international relations is understood as legitimacy by way of international socialisation, then the Russian reference to multilateralism is at least surprising in the face of Russia’s debating culture on contested international issues that is marked much more by geopolitical conceptions and ‘spheres of interest’.<sup>226</sup> Despite policy-specific Russian proposals like those discussed above, Russia does not capitalise on such instances of Russian-led multilateral approaches. Russia’s approach to multilateral cooperation, in other words, remains ad-hoc and compartmentalised. The understanding of ‘trade-offs’, in a positive reading, also allows selective cooperation on some issues areas, even when conflicting interests prevail in others, as the following section will demonstrate.

In spite of Moscow’s foreign policy discourse suggesting otherwise, the result of this, as with Russia’s eventual adoption of UNSC sanctions, oftentimes was convergence on a behavioral level. It is this aspect of convergence of security cultures that was cast in doubt by the outbreak of the ‘Ukraine crisis’ and the deterioration in relations between Russia and the West. The following section will shed light on the possible impact of this crisis on Russia’s Iran policies, before a final section will weave together the discursive and behavioral dimension of Russia’s foreign policy on Iran and reflect on the extent to which Russia’s foreign policy toward the Iranian nuclear programme is the expression of a balancing act between the desire to be perceived as a constructive intermediary between Iran and the West, as analysed in this section, and the advocacy for a security culture that resists hegemony.

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<sup>226</sup> This point was made by Prof. Andrei Makarychev. Panel discussion, University of Kent’s EU-Russia conference, Brussels, 3 February 2015.

## 5. The impact of the Ukraine crisis on Russian Iran policies

Reports in the summer of 2014 about a Russian-Iranian oil-for-goods barter agreement worth 1.5 billion \$ raised eyebrows in Western capitals. According to the terms of the agreement, Russia would be importing 500.000 barrels of Iranian oil per day in exchange for Russian equipment and goods exported to Iran (Saul and Hafezi 2014; Arbatov 2014).<sup>227</sup> Given that Russia is an oil exporting country itself, the import of additional Iranian oil would not make sense in pure energy political thinking, but was read as a favorable macroeconomic aid for the Iranians suffering from the financial effects of existing sanctions regimes.<sup>228</sup> Just why this would be in Russia's interest lacks intuitive obviousness, and therefore led to speculations about Russia's positioning in relations with Iran beyond the Iranian nuclear conflict.<sup>229</sup> The irritation about such a posturing helps explain Russian official attempts to dispel the reading that Russia undermines existing sanctions regimes already before a comprehensive nuclear agreement with Iran would have them lifted. "We have our own oil, we don't need additional Iranian oil," a Russian diplomat dispersed such speculations in an interview.<sup>230</sup> Shortly after the political framework agreement of 2 April 2015 was reached, however, deputy foreign minister Ryabkov stated that such an agreement was being implemented, at a time when President Putin ended the suspension over the delivery of the above-discussed S-300 system (Baczynska 2015). The resuscitation of the S-300 was an important indication that P5+1 unity is likely to erode, should a final nuclear agreement be reached. "Russia has broken ranks with the U.S. and EU", Sasnal & Secrieru (2015: 3) write. Speculations about Russian future Iran policies in 2015, however, have to be seen in the context of what has been termed 'the Ukraine crisis' in 2014, but has evolved into the most severe post-Cold War crisis in relations between Russia and the West.

The Ukraine crisis has arguably influenced Russian strategising about external trade projects such as the oil-for-goods agreement with Iran. This crisis has resulted in high (EU and US) pressure on Russia, with ensuing implications for Russia's network of international

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<sup>227</sup> Russian exports to Iran are mainly metals, food, and machinery.

<sup>228</sup> A European diplomat also questioned the desirability of the agreement on the Iranian side as follows: "What does Russia have that Iran really wants?". Author's interview, Brussels, 6 February 2015.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Kozhanov (2015b) on the 'revitalization of Russian-Iranian relations' and the impact of tensions with the West thereon. Due to a clause in the Joint Plan of Action of November 2013 negotiated between Iran and the P5+1, the implementation of such an oil-for-goods deal would also be in contravention of the JPOA. The latter "allows Iran to continue exporting a total of 1 million barrels a day of oil to six countries: China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Turkey." Since Russia was not an oil customer of Iran at the time the JPOA was negotiated, it was not included in this provision.

<sup>230</sup> Author's interview, Russian mission to the EU, 7 October 2014.

trade partners. Against the backdrop of the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia and the downgrading of Russian creditworthiness by rating agencies such as Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's, the attractiveness of Russia as an investment target has decreased.<sup>231</sup> While Russia dismisses such downgrading as a 'political decision', the Russian economy has experienced an intensified capital flight.

In this context, Russia's search for new alliances, including the discussed barter agreement with Iran, serve to convey the signal that Russia "does not bother about Western sanctions, and shows that it has other trade partners," as an Iran desk officer holds in an interview.<sup>232</sup> Short of actual economic diversification options, such negotiations can thus put up a smokescreen as a reaction to Western economic isolation attempts. But the economic alienation is mutual: The Russian government has shown a tendency of economic alienation from US-inspired financial and economic instruments – in addition to the level of political resentment, and in addition and reaction to Western attempts to isolate Russia economically. Examples are the Putin administration's announcement to substitute embargoed manufactured goods from the West by domestic produces; indirect taxes and direct product bans; and relevant changes in the customs legislation (Libman 2014).

As a catalyst for an unprecedented deterioration in relations between Russia and the West, the Ukraine crisis has affected policy coordination in almost all areas - with the notable exception of the Iran nuclear talks, where a constructive level of collaboration between Russia and the West has remained intact. Here, a partial discrepancy between a discursive and a behavioral level quickly became apparent. At a time where policy coordination with Russia was suspended in most other formats (like the G-8 group or the NATO-Russia Council), Russian official rhetoric alluded to the possibility that the Russian government could recalibrate its position in the Iran nuclear talks as a reaction to Western pressure on Moscow over its policies towards the Ukraine conflict. The impression that Moscow was flirting with the idea of using the Iran nuclear talks as a vehicle for obstructionism was nurtured when on 19 March 2014, Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov stated that Russia could reconsider its position on the Iranian nuclear dossier in the context of Western sanctions discussions directed against Russia. This was an indication for the impression that Russia occasionally has used the Iran nuclear talks as a 'bargaining chip' to get concessions in other

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<sup>231</sup> In the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russia has been downgraded to one notch above 'junk' status first. In January 2015, Standard & Poor's downgraded Russia's foreign currency credit rating to junk status, thereby placing it below investment grade (BBC 2014; Andrianovna & Galouchko 2015).

<sup>232</sup> Author's interview with European diplomat, Iran desk, Berlin, 14 November 2014. Cf. also Kozhanov (2015b).

issue areas (Fitzpatrick 2014).<sup>233</sup> Importantly, as a member of the European negotiation team pointed out in an interview, Ryabkov didn't hint at a Crimea-Iran connection until after the talks in Vienna had ended, indicating that his statement was intended in an audience-specific (and not substantive) context.<sup>234</sup> And again on 30 December 2014, Russia publicly warned the US that sanctions against Russia could harm cooperation on the Iranian nuclear dossier. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Alexander Lukashevich commented as follows: “The actions of the US call into question the prospects of bilateral cooperation in resolving the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme, the Syrian crisis and other urgent international problems. As Washington has been able to see, we never fail to respond to such unfriendly actions” (Russian foreign ministry 2014). President Putin’s Valdai speech in October 2014 was pregnant with such discursive warnings and was the strongest high-level outburst of what can be read as an outright counter-hegemonic positioning in the wake of the Russian-Western resentment in 2013-14 that takes the listener back to past times of Cold War rhetoric. The speech has been dubbed ‘Munich II’, but arguably takes the Russian resistance-rhetoric to new levels.<sup>235</sup> Speaking of the ‘unilateral diktat’ and ‘dictatorship over people and countries’ of a ‘self-proclaimed leader’, he stated: “It does not matter who takes the place of the center of evil in American propaganda, the USSR’s old place as the main adversary. It could be Iran, as a country seeking to acquire nuclear technology, China, as the world’s biggest economy, or Russia, as a nuclear superpower” (Putin 2014). Asked about Russia’s cooperation on the Iranian nuclear file, Putin vaguely stated that “external conditions might force us to re-consider some of our positions” And in an interview in March 2015, deputy foreign minister Ryabkov (2015) was playing on a similar rhetoric, stating that Russia reserves itself a ‘maximum of maneuverability’.

Despite these public warnings and gloomy rhetoric on a discursive level, however, retaliatory moves affecting the Iranian nuclear talks did not materialise on a behavioral level yet. Officials and experts thus far share the assessment that Russian hints at a change of position in the Iranian nuclear talks remains symbolic politics, but are not followed by substantive policies.<sup>236</sup> In the maelstrom of a deteriorating political climate between Russia on

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<sup>233</sup> Asked about Ryabkov’s statement about a possible Ukraine-Iran issue linkage, a Russian diplomat remarked in an interview: “Yes, but that was in March [of 2014]. These were emotional times”. Author’s interview, Washington, 31 October 2014.

<sup>234</sup> Author’s interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 20 March 2014.

<sup>235</sup> ‘Munich II’ here refers to Putin’s (in) famous speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, in which he accused the US of undermining global stability, provoking a new arms race, and toppling foreign governments and warned of NATO eastward expansion and unilateralism.

<sup>236</sup> It should not come as a surprise that Russia diplomats emphasise this point. But also non-Russian officials and experts have confirmed this assessment: Author’s interview with Dr. Mark Fitzpatrick, London, 11 July

the one hand and the EU and the US on the other in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear file have remained as a rare policy domain where constructive cooperation on a working level continues. The frosty relations at the time of writing have not ‘spilled over’ into the Iran dossier. Quite to the contrary, Russia is not only supportive of the diplomatic track on a behavioral level, but is even pro-actively working on a politically mediated solution. This finding is indicative of the high importance that Moscow has attached to a political solution of the simmering Iranian nuclear conflict (cf. also Meier & Pieper 2015). The following section will suggest a number of reasons why that is so, and thereby weaves together the research findings of the previous sections with the two-level distinction between a discursive and a behavioral dimension of foreign policy that was worked out before.

## **6. Russia between constructive mediation and status quo politics: Resistance to hegemony?**

A peculiar combination of factors lets Russia resist US policies, while on other occasions, US pressure on Iran and the upholding of tensions surrounding Iran’s nuclear programme is supported by Russia. This section disentangles this seeming variation in Russia’s foreign policy line by following the two-level model of a discursive and a behavioral dimension of Russia’s Iran policy as introduced earlier. A number of material factors will therefore be analysed to complement the preceding analysis of Russia’s discourse and role perception. Linking these two levels to the concepts of normative divergence and rules convergence as carved out before allows me to conclude on the nexus between Russia’s security culture on Iran and resistance to hegemony.

A first factor in Russia’s support for pressure on Iran on a behavioral level is Russia’s comparative advantage on the European gas and oil market. Skeptics have pointed out that this is the strongest counterargument for Moscow to be genuinely interested in a long-term solution to Iran’s nuclear crisis. Should Iran’s final nuclear status be settled, a partial normalisation of relations between Iran and the West would ensue. As a result, Russia could, in the mid- to long term, be faced with the emergence of a competitor on the European energy

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2014; with Dina Esfandiary, London, 11 July 2014; with European diplomat, Berlin, 14 November 2014; with former E3 delegation member, Brussels, 29 January 2015; with European diplomat, Brussels, 6 February 2015; EEAS official, Brussels, 24 February 2015; with E3 official, London, 10 March 2015; with Dr. Mark Hibbs, Berlin, 18 March 2015.

market.<sup>237</sup> Russia's current near-monopoly position on the European gas and oil market, so the reading, would be endangered. The scenario of a sudden Iranian oil and gas competitor, however, falls short of accounting for more nuanced market structures: Even before the imposition of the EU's oil embargo against Iran in 2012, Iran provided a stable 6 % of the EU's oil imports (Eurostat 2012). Russia's share is around 30 %. Russian officials are thus relaxed about the prospect of Iran becoming a rival on the European oil market any time soon – even after the lifting of Iran sanctions.<sup>238</sup> A similar expectation prevails for the gas export market: Russia's share on the European gas market lies at 30 %. Even though Iran holds the world's second largest gas reserves, it lacks the production and transportation structures. Russia also knows that the existing pipeline structure benefits Russian gas interests, while pipelines from Iran to Europe do not exist and would have to be built.<sup>239</sup> Even alternative projects like the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) would transport natural gas from Azerbaijan and thus circumvent Iran. Yet, the rapid deterioration in relations between Russia and the EU in the course of the Ukraine crisis has sped up Europe's efforts to diversify its energy sources away from Russia (European Commission 2015; ECFR 2015). But also Russia is seeking to diversify its oil and gas customers and increasingly seeks to export LNG to the Asian market (Westphal 2014). While the prospect of Iran becoming an important energy supplier for Europe is still unclear, it cannot be excluded that political dynamics have the potential to shake Russia's position on the European energy market (cf. also Sasnal & Secrieru 2015).

A second factor explains why pressure on Iran is advantageous for Russia as long as this pressure upholds tensions *without* leading to escalation: Russia has commercial interests in Iran that could see tougher competition once tensions with Iran are eased in the wake of a comprehensive nuclear agreement. Russian economic activities in Iran are low, as are energy cooperations.<sup>240</sup> The historically more significant weapons trade has shrunk as a consequence

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<sup>237</sup> Author's interview with European diplomat, Iran desk, Berlin, 14 November 2014; Author's interview with Swiss high-ranking diplomat, Berlin, 26 August 2013; author's interview with Dr. Walter Posch, Berlin, 25 June 2013; Author's interview with former German ambassador to Iran, Berlin, 26 August 2013; Author's interview with European diplomat, Brussels, 6 February 2015. Cf. also Mironova (2015).

<sup>238</sup> Author's interview with Russian diplomat, Brussels, 19 March 2015. Email correspondence with Russia diplomat, 12 March 2015; Author's interview with Russian diplomat, Brussels, 7 October 2014.

<sup>239</sup> A Russian diplomat put it in an interview as follows: "(The) EU has a strong dependence on Russian gas. Iran would not have such a strong input once sanctions were lifted. Maybe energy-starved Southeast-Asian countries would jump on that opportunity, but (the) Russian energy export is also fixed because of pipelines going to Europe. Nabucco is not moving forward, pipelines need time to be built, it takes a while." Author's interview, Brussels, 19 March 2015.

<sup>240</sup> The idea of a gas-OPEC that would include both Russia and Iran and constitute an area of economic cooperation has been analysed as being rather illusionary (Adomeit 2007: 15f.). Despite its gas wealth, Iran is a gas consumer and lacks the production and transport structures to become a meaningful gas exporter.

of UN weapons embargoes. Yet, cooperation in the nuclear technology area (Bushehr) has been the flagship of Russian-Iranian economic cooperation, despite mutual accusations and frustrations as described in section 2 above. On 11 November 2014, Rosatom announced its intention to construct eight additional nuclear reactors in Iran. The Russian government knows that a military escalation of the Iran conflict would have destructive consequences on a Russian built-up of stronger economic relations including the deepening of nuclear technology cooperation, whereas the upholding of certain tensions could be rather beneficial in this regard. Western tensions with Iran guarantee Russia a certain market position that results from the absence of Western competition. A normalisation of Iran's relations with the West could change this equation. This is especially true if a nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 were to pave the way for the lifting of sanctions that could bolster a renewed international investment in and trade with Iran. Russia, in this scenario, could stand to lose from a nuclear agreement from a purely commercial point of view. It is not always clear, however, whether the furtherance of nuclear technology cooperation is a purely commercially-driven project (by Rosatom), or whether Rosatom's Iran projects are not at least partially co-decided by Russia's political leadership.<sup>241</sup>

Another scenario is that of a resolution of the nuclear issue *without* a broader political normalisation of Iran's relations with the West, which could create an 'empty space' in Iran, possibly to be filled by Russian investments.<sup>242</sup> However, it has been pointed out that the Russian-Iranian trade volume does not account for a big share on either side's external trade balance: Russia's trade with Israel almost reaches numbers comparable with Russian-Iranian trade, despite the fact that Israel's population is ten times smaller than Iran's (Sazhin 2010). The Iranian-Turkish trade volume is seven times higher than the Russian-Iranian; Iran's trade volume with China is even 13 times higher than the one with Russia, as stated by Tehran's ambassador to Moscow (Sanaei 2013). In the context of a possible rapprochement between Iran and the West as made possible by a first interim nuclear agreement of 24 November 2013 and the political framework agreement of 2 April 2015, experts even speculate that Russia is placing its bets and starting to enter into trade talks with Iran that would position Moscow into

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<sup>241</sup> Proliferation expert Dr. Mark Hibbs held the latter view. Rosatom's economic incentive to invest in Iran, which is chronically short of money, can be questioned. If it was not for a political signal of commercial autonomy (that the Kremlin is determined to send), Rosatom's board might be better advised to invest in more financially stable markets abroad, Dr. Hibbs held. Author's interview, Berlin, 18 March 2015. Traditionally, Minatom, and since 2004 Rosatom, have had an important role in driving Russian Iran policy, as Belopolsky (2009) holds: "Given the economic rewards to be reaped in these markets, Minatom Ministers freelanced, developing policy towards these states [China, Iran, Iraq] which was not coordinated or necessarily in line with state policy" (58).

<sup>242</sup> This point was made by Dr. Vladimir Sazhin, interview, Moscow, 17 April 2013.



a better position in the future event of an altered standing of Iran (Lukyanov 2014). Reports in 2014 about a Russian-Iranian oil-for-goods barter agreement additionally fuelled the impression that Russia is not only thinking ahead for an after-sanctions scenario, but is working to undermine Western sanctions regimes on Iran, as discussed in the previous section.<sup>243</sup> Asked about this Russian-Iranian barter deal, a US State Department official mentions in an interview: “If the barter deal goes through, the US would sanction Russian companies”, and continues: “In such cases, we make a demarche first. We give them a chance or two to comply”.<sup>244</sup>

A third and related reason for Russia’s reluctance to side with too much pressure on Iran is one of geopolitical influence and that of China’s growing weight in Central Asia and the Middle East. Iran’s economy is heavily dependent on oil exports to China, while the latter has an interest in expanding its cooperation with Iran concerning the development of its oil infrastructure and providing products to Iran that fill the void left behind by the absence of Western companies.<sup>245</sup> Following an outright anti-Iran policy would let Russia ‘lose Iran to China’ economically. Yet, as Kozhanov (2015b) points out, what ails the prospect of Russia’s stronger economic activity in Iran is not the competition with China, but Russia’s structural economic and technological problems. The equipment and technology that Iran is in need of, in other words, Russia lacks itself. At the same time, the question whether China would exploit such a scenario and single-handedly do business with Iran, disregarding US and European positions on Iran is a hypothetical one. As will be shown in the next chapter on China’s position in the Iran nuclear file, this is questionable given China’s policy of balancing its commercial interests in Iran with a level of receptiveness to US positions. Such a policy also is in line with the impression of China ‘hiding’ behind Russia in the UN Security Council (Parsi 2012: 48; International Crisis Group 2006: 13f.).<sup>246</sup> The dynamic between Russia and China in the Security Council in this regard is an intriguing one, not least because of a joint adherence to a security culture that shows resistance to US pressure. A later comparative chapter will address this issue in more detail.

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<sup>243</sup> The facts surrounding this Iranian-Russian barter agreement were rather nebulous. The discussion about such a proposed oil-for-goods deal was therefore mostly understood as symbolic politics in a phase of strong pressure on the Russian government in the context of the Ukraine crisis – also because of contradicting Iranian and Russian press statements.

<sup>244</sup> Author’s interview, Washington, 30 October 2014.

<sup>245</sup> On this, see the following chapter on China’s foreign policy toward Iran.

<sup>246</sup> Author’s interviews with Dr. Mark Fitzpatrick, International Institute for Strategic Studies London, 11 July 2014; with Dr. Dina Esfandiary, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 11 July 2014; with EEAS official, Brussels, 13 March 2013; with EEAS official, Brussels, 4 June 2013; with former German ambassador to Iran, Berlin, 26 August 2013; with EEAS official, Brussels, 20 March 2014; with European diplomat, Brussels, 18 March 2014; with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014.

Fourth, Russia's foreign policy in the Caucasus and its 'near abroad' could have met resistance or a policy of Islamic solidarity and mobilisation (at least a public outcry) from Iran (Berman 2006). That Iran stayed quiet on Russia's Chechnya policy<sup>247</sup> can be seen as a certain 'quid pro quo' on the side of the Iranians for Russian economic and technological assistance and for Russian 'protection' of Iran from international pressure at least in the first few years of the Iran dossier following 2002 as outlined above. If Russia had pressured Iran too much, it could have run the risk of Iran playing 'the Islamic card' in the Caucasus that would certainly not be in Russia's interest of regional stability (cf. also Akhieva 2012). A major caveat on sectarianism in political Islam should sound a note of caution on Iran's ability to stir up tensions in this region, however: While Iran is a Shia theocracy, Muslims in the Caucasus are predominantly Sunni. Like in Afghanistan, both Iran and Russia have an interest in staunching Sunni extremism in the region.<sup>248</sup> The rise of fundamentalist Sunni groups like the so-called 'Islamic State' has underscored this convergence even more.

Fifth, and arguably the most important reason from a global power and prestige perspective, Russia's self-understanding of being an unavoidable global power player enters into the calculation about the direction Russia's Iran policy ought to take. In the context of the scholarly debates about Russia's decline following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (cf. i.a., MacFarlane 2006; Hancock 2007; Trenin 2001; 2006; Tsygankov 2007), Russia, as a permanent UNSC member, wants to be understood as a state among equals. Russian skepticism voiced during the nuclear talks in Lausanne in March and April 2015 over a 'snap back' provision that would automatically re-impose sanctions on Iran if the latter was found in non-compliance with its agreements was indicative in this regard (Gordon & Sanger 2015): Moscow's concerns hinted at the dilution of its veto power that a Security Council authority over sanctions matters entails. Drawing on Sakwa's concept of 'neo-revisionism', it is understood here that Russia's working with international organisations of the UN system does not constitute an appeal by Moscow to fundamentally challenge the system of international governance, but to partially revise its functioning (Sakwa 2011). "Russia considers itself a 'great power' and an alternative, although not necessarily adversarial, civilizational and geopolitical pole in world politics," Sakwa (2015: 28) writes, and elaborates: "The essence of neo-revisionism is not the attempt to create new rules or dangle a vision of an alternative international order, but the attempt to ensure the universal application of existing norms" (ibid.: 31). This observation ties in with the distinction made in chapter 1 between 'rules and

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<sup>247</sup> "Iran's quietist narrative towards Russia's hegemonic posture [...] in Chechnya and the north Caucasus", as Dorraj & Entessar (2013: 8) put it.

<sup>248</sup> This point was also made by Dr. Vladimir Sazhin, interview, Moscow, 17 April 2013.

models' as cognitive standards versus 'norms and values' as evaluative standards (Katzenstein 1996: 21) and gives a preliminary answer to the question whether Russian foreign policy on Iran indicates a security culture that resists hegemony. While Russia supports and adheres to the 'rules' and basic functioning of the UN system, its disagreement with other UN members and US power structures reveals a different *normative* understanding of what is deemed legitimate in international relations. Putin's 2014 Valdai speech underlined this distinction as follows: "We must clearly identify where unilateral actions end and we need to apply multilateral mechanisms [...]" (Putin 2014). The concept of 'neo-revisionism' thus captures the strife towards more equitable and thus non-hegemonic international relations, while falling short of outright opposition to hegemony. "As the existing order is visibly crumbling", Dmitri Trenin (2009) writes in a commentary to Kuchins' & Weitz' chapter in *Powers and Principles* (2009), "Moscow wants to be present at the creation of its replacement" (189), and therewith echoes their analysis of 'Russia's Place in an Unsettled Order', in which "an international system of global American hegemony [is] evaporating and being replaced by genuine multipolarity" (166). Elsewhere in Putin's 2014 Valdai speech, the root cause of the new ice age between Russia and the West was therefore formulated as follows: "The Cold War ended, but it did not end with the signing of a peace treaty with clear and transparent agreements on respecting existing rules or creating new *rules and standards*" (emphasis added). While 'norms' can differ, so the message, a rules-based arrangements between Russia and the West should have ensured an equitable co-existence.<sup>249</sup> In practice, this implicitly should entail a Western recognition and acknowledgment of Russia's status as a Great Power, in a Russian understanding. Russia is thus very aware of its power to veto new sanctions in the UNSC. Combined with deliberations about the state of US-Russian relations, Russia's Iran and Middle East policy can tip the scales in a process either towards greater consultation with the Russians or towards international isolation of Russia (Katz 2008). Russia's foreign policy towards the Syrian civil war is a case in point for the implications of Russian resistance to US-inspired power structures: While Western governments have increasingly started to articulate a strong opposition to the idea of Assad staying in power, Moscow has been adamant in its support for the Assad regime. This was illustrated not only by Russian repeated veto's in the UNSC (together with China) against resolutions that could have legitimated a foreign military intervention in Syria, but also by Russian deliveries of arms and military equipment. In its support for Assad, Russian and Iranian regional interests are converging,

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<sup>249</sup> Western responses to this reading usually hold that the Russian reference to mutual respect and equality in diplomacy often is upheld as a disguise to breach international obligations.

while the West and Russia had been further drifting apart (Trenin 2012). “For Iran, it is an issue of regional balance of power and its own security, and for Russia it is an issue of upholding certain principles of international order and rejection of US pressure”, Lukyanov (2014) reflects on this geopolitical convergence of interests between Russia and Iran over Syria.

Similar to the impact of the Ukraine crisis discussed in the previous section, experts as well as Russian officials assert that disagreements over the future of Syria and the Iranian nuclear dossier are two separate issues.<sup>250</sup> “We are professional enough to keep them apart”, as formulated by a Russian foreign ministry official in an interview.<sup>251</sup> Yet, even if one considers an ‘issue linkage’ of the Iranian nuclear stand-off with disagreements about Syria and about Ukraine as unhelpful, Russia’s Syria and Ukraine policies are indicative of a Russian security culture that advocates resistance to power structures that have not only defined and shaped the geopolitical mapping of the Middle East, but international relations at large. In a Western reading, Russia’s foreign policy is thus perceived at times as rebellious, obstinate, and disruptive at worst.

“There is an abyssal mistrust in the West toward Russia”, a high-ranking Swiss diplomat puts it in an interview, and continues to argue that Russia’s policies toward Syria only add up to the impression of Russia’s poker games surrounding the question of delimitation of the Caspian Sea, its monopolistic energy politics and the overall impression that Russia is playing games in the Iran dossier, but is not genuinely interested in a long-term solution to the crisis, as a status quo situation is far more beneficial for Russia.<sup>252</sup> Understood against the backdrop of Russia’s Great Power status understanding, however, such a political holding game should not be misconstrued as a deliberate Cold War-type strategy to humiliate the West, or as a revisionist agenda by a renegade Russia. As Trenin (2013) argues, Putin’s attempt to disperse war speculations over Syria by introducing the idea of a destruction of Assad’s chemical weapons arsenal in August 2013 was meant to restore equality in US-Russian relations and reassert the understanding that Russia’s voice cannot be overlooked in world politics. Moscow, so the Russian rationale, made international relations more ‘democratic’ again (cf. also Allison 2013; Adomeit 2013). The understanding that the foreign policy principles of ‘territorial integrity’ and ‘sovereignty’ should govern international

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<sup>250</sup> Interview with Dr. Anton Khlopkov, Moscow, 17 April 2013; Interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 18 April 2013.

<sup>251</sup> Interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 18 April 2013.

<sup>252</sup> Interview in Berlin, 26 August 2013. Similar points were also made by Dr. Walter Posch, interview, Berlin, 25 June 2013.

politics also has to be understood in this context of the idea that states should treat each other on equal terms. The official Russian Foreign Policy Concept breathes this ambition to ‘democratise’ international relations (Russian foreign ministry 2013a). ‘Democratisation’ of international relations would thus accurately characterise Russia’s understanding of a desirable security culture to govern international politics. In the reading that ‘democratisation’ entails the deconstruction of power hierarchies, this is an endeavor explicitly questioning hegemony. If international relations are ‘democratic’, existing power asymmetries are smoothed out, eliminating hegemonic structures by definition. Such rhetoric underscores an advocacy for a non-hegemonic security culture.

From the reasons outlined above, Russia’s foreign policy discourse is upholding the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, cautious not to join the chorus of voices advocating a punitive stance on Iran over its controversial nuclear programme. The Russian Foreign Policy Concept reads: “Russia will be making a meaningful contribution to the stabilization of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa and will consistently promote peace and concord among the peoples of all the Middle East and North Africa countries on the basis of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of states and non-interference in their internal affairs” (ibid.). Moscow’s foreign policy discourse, as sections 2 and 3 of this chapter have shown, displays a normative divergence with hegemonic policies and advocates for a non-hegemonic security culture on Iran.

Throughout the decade-old complexities of international politics surrounding the Iranian nuclear case, Russia has alternated in alienating both ‘the West’ and Iran: Russia is not shying away from resuscitating potentially controversial deals at a later moment in time that had been temporarily halted due to US pressure and (unfavorable) international attention. The much-discussed S-300 deal is a case in point: Frozen under US pressure in 2009 by the Medvedev administration and suspended after the adoption of UNSCR 1929 in 2010, the Putin administration considered resuscitating the sale in September 2013 at a moment when the coming into office of Iranian president Rouhani and positive political signals for an easing of tensions constituted a convenient window of opportunity to do so (Kommersant 2013). The Missile Defense (MD) episode and Russian support for UNSCR 1929 in 2010 in exchange for US concessions was another example of a pragmatic behavior that analysts have described as ‘horse-trading’<sup>253</sup> – which was sure to have angered the Iranians. The impression thus occasionally prevailed that while Russia is purporting to propose plans in the P5+1/E3+3 format (the Russian plan, the Lavrov plan), a plethora of Russian commercial interests,

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<sup>253</sup> Interview with Dr. Ali Vaez, chief Iran analyst, International Crisis Group, via Skype, 25 July 2013.

Russian energy politics and its global role understanding obstruct a long-term solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis, as formulated, i.a., by former high-ranking European diplomats involved with the Iran file.<sup>254</sup>

A high-ranking Swiss diplomat succinctly formulates: “Nobody trusts the Russians”.<sup>255</sup> Russia’s foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear dossier is torn between the public advocacy for more ‘democratic’ international relations and a security culture that understands security as security *from* hegemonic frameworks. On a behavioral level, the political dependence on the US makes Russia follow a partially accommodating course on other occasions. Dmitri Trenin (2014) speaks of a ‘compartmentalised environment’ defining US-Russian relations and a pragmatic approach to specific issue areas in which both cooperation and disagreement is possible at the same time.<sup>256</sup>

Conveying a normative divergence with the ideational framework of hegemony on a discursive level, Russia’s balance on a behavioral level is more mixed, displaying compliance with international sanctions, while various material factors let Russia work towards a solution to Iran’s nuclear crisis with its Western counterparts. The behavioral level, in other words, does not coincide with the discursive level on which Russia advocates for a security culture resisting hegemony. Its foreign policy on Iran therefore is the outcome of a balancing act between hegemonic accommodation and resistance.<sup>257</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

Following the two-level distinction between a discursive and a behavioral dimension of foreign policy to examine the degree of resistance to hegemony as introduced in this dissertation, this chapter has analysed Russia’s foreign policy towards Iran’s nuclear programme. In line with the theoretical framework of this dissertation as outlined in chapter 1, it thereby answered the question how Russian foreign policy towards Iran’s nuclear

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.; Interview with Dr. Walter Posch, Berlin, 25 June 2013; Interview with former German ambassador to Iran, Berlin, 26 August 2013; Interview with high-ranking Swiss diplomat, Berlin, 26 August 2013. Cf. also Mousavian (2012: 397f.).

<sup>255</sup> Interview with high-ranking Swiss diplomat, Berlin, 26 August 2013.

<sup>256</sup> An E3 official speaks of ‘pockets of cooperation’ between Russia and the West. Author’s interview, London, 10 March 2015.

<sup>257</sup> Following Hassan Rouhani’s election in June 2013, it can be argued that the US position on a long-term solution to Iran’s nuclear status is starting to shift. Russian opposition to such a final nuclear status, therefore, may be deviating from US foreign policy. For analytical purposes, however, the reference point here is Russia’s compliance with its own discourse (behavioral inconsistency with a discursive level), instead of US positions seemingly undergoing changes. Concerning the latter, it is argued that hegemonic structures still remain in place insofar as changing negotiation positions do not yet account for an overhaul of hegemonic structures. The sanctions regime is a forceful case in point.

programme is indicative of a security culture resisting hegemony.

It has been shown how Russia conveys resistance to hegemony on a discursive level by emphasising the legitimate nuclear rights of Iran, the legitimacy of Russian commercial ties with Iran, the counterproductive effect of sanctions and the illegality of Western unilateral sanctions. On a behavioral level, Russia was slowing down the sanctions track when the Iranian nuclear file was referred to the UNSC in 2006, but eventually adopted and complied with international sanctions, yet was blacklisted for trade with Iran that ostensibly contravened sanctions regimes. At the same time, an occasional remarkable degree of pragmatic cooperation with the US on the Iran file has been observed – not only at the peak of the Obama-Medvedev ‘reset’ policy, but also in diplomatic negotiations in the P5+1 format.

As carved out above in the analysis of Russian-Iranian relations, Russian foreign policy toward Iran and its nuclear programme thus has always to be seen in the context of Russia’s political relations with ‘the West’ in general, and with the US in particular. Russian foreign policy makes a distinction between purely commercial and legitimate nuclear technology usage (e.g. Bushehr), and a security political dimension of the Iranian nuclear programme (‘Western allegations of military intentions remain unproven’). This was especially true since the revelation in 2002 of the hitherto covert nuclear programme of Iran. Moscow’s strife to preserve Great Power status and to be seen as a responsible permanent UN Security Council member explains its voting for sanctions resolutions against Iran – even though it publicly advocates a security culture that breathes the ambition to ‘democratise’ international relations and resist US pressure.

Russia shows a reluctance to agree to international sanctions on Iran, yet conveys a desire to be perceived as a constructive player in the Iranian nuclear dossier. A number of Russian initiatives (Putin’s 2006 proposal for the multilateralisation of the nuclear fuel cycle, the 2011 ‘step-by-step’ plan, the creation of a fuel consortium on Russian soil etc.) are indicative of this Russian willingness to make a constructive contribution. A new war in the Middle East, so the Russian rationale, is a bigger evil than Iran potentially acquiring nuclear weapons. Yet, it is also true that it cannot be in Russia’s interest to see a nuclear Iran emerge on its Southern flank that would have obvious implications for the regional power balance and challenge Russia’s nuclear monopoly in the region. But while a nuclear Iran cannot be in Russia’s interest, Moscow does not support any regime change plans. While Russia emphasises the need to find a diplomatic solution to Iran’s nuclear crisis, the upholding of tensions (and temporary non-resolution of the crisis) may even be beneficial for Russia for the reasons outlined in the last section of this chapter. Russian foreign policy here essentially

amounts to a hedging strategy that avoids alienating one side or the other too much by upholding the rhetoric propagating diplomatic engagement and political solutions, while implicitly contributing to the upholding of a certain political status quo situation.

Russia and its Western counterparts in the P5+1 framework occasionally appear to be standing on two opposite ends of the spectrum of political instruments when it comes to approaching Iran. As this chapter has shown, however, taking such disagreements as signs of an unalterable freezing into mutually opposed camps and portraying Russia as a cumbersome veto player in the UNSC, blocking and derailing Western negotiation efforts, does not do justice to much more complex foreign policy positions that have to bridge official discourse(s) with largely material, global power political and security motivations. This two-level foreign policy between a discursive level advocating non-hegemonic governance models, and a behavioral level on which Russia takes policy decisions that run counter to that ideal underlines the complexities of Russia's Iran policy that cannot solely be captured by a policy of 'resistance to hegemony'.

Russia's Iran policy is an illustration of a state's foreign policy that challenges hegemonic structures, but works within the system of governance inspired by the US. It is an example of a friction between contestation and accommodation, between resistance and consent. "In spite of the difficulties in relations between Russia and the United States during Putin's second term in office, Russia never sought to follow the Eurasianists' prescription for constructing a counterhegemonic bloc", Mankoff concludes (2009: 82). Russia's search for a foreign policy identity, like that of any other state, is an iterative process as the outcome of the state's international context, its self-understanding, and the perception thereof by other actors (cf. also Ziegler 2012). 'Security' is always contextual, ideas and identities always co-constructed by the social environment. This finding explains the seeming variation in Russia's Iran policy, where the advocacy for a security culture that resists hegemony does not always coincide with divergence from hegemonic structures on a behavioral level.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Chinese Foreign Policy towards Iran's nuclear programme**

#### **1. Introduction**

This chapter analyses China's foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme and introduces the third empirical case study in this research project. In line with the theoretical and conceptual framework outlined in chapter 1, it answers the research question to what extent China's foreign policy in the Iranian nuclear case is indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony. This chapter follows a similar structure to the previous one.

A first section outlines China's foreign policy discourse and how it conflicts with Western discourses on the Iranian nuclear programme following the discovery of hitherto unknown Iranian nuclear facilities in 2002. It will be analysed to what extent normative divergence can be discerned. The second section analyzes Chinese conceptions of the use of international sanctions on Iran and analyzes to what extent Chinese foreign policy in the sanctions issue is torn between normative divergence and rule compliance, followed by a third section turning towards China's position on unilateral sanctions. These two sections carve out the important distinction between 'norms and values' and 'rules and models' in understanding an apparent ambivalence between China's foreign policy on sanctions because of clashing ideational and institutional framework conditions. Following the two-level model between a discursive and a behavioral dimension of foreign policy introduced earlier, a fourth section identifies conditions that explain Chinese positions on the Iranian nuclear file that differ from 'the West' because of underlying material motivations. A final section weaves together these different elements of ideational, institutional and material constraints in explaining Chinese Iran policy. Making sense of an observed variation in norm compliance brings together the concepts of norm divergence and rule convergence and allows me to answer the question how China's foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme is illustrative of a security culture that resists hegemony.

#### **2. Chinese foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme: Discursive resistance to US securitisations**

At a time when all eyes of the international and certainly Chinese security and non-proliferation community were on the North Korean nuclear case in 2002, the revelation by an Iranian exile opposition group of the existence of a clandestine Iranian nuclear programme hit

the news (IAEA 2003). While the EU and US reaction was a harsh condemnation, China's reaction was more reserved: China underlined the Iranian obligation to prove the exclusively peaceful character of its nuclear programme, but refrained from departing from assumptions over Iranian intentions that could not be proven. In its official diplomacy, China was thus repeatedly emphasising Iran's legitimate right to peaceful nuclear energy under Article IV of the NPT and was critical of Western rhetoric and pressure on Tehran because of non-proven proliferation concerns (Dorraj & Currier 2008; Garver 2011: 81f.; International Crisis Group 2010; Mazza 2011; Nourafchan 2010: 39; Swaine 2010: 6f.; Yuan 2006; Pieper 2013b).<sup>258</sup>

The upholding of the principle of non-intervention and sovereignty is a recurring key Chinese foreign policy conception that influences the formulation of Chinese foreign policy and diplomacy since the 1950s. Much of China's foreign policy conceptualisation dates back to the Maoist doctrine of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence articulated at the 1955 Bandung conference.<sup>259</sup> These principles are: Mutual respect for 'territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in domestic affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence' (Lanteigne 2009: 11, 46). While it is not difficult to recognise the Westphalian perception of the centrality of state sovereignty in international relations in these principles, Chinese foreign policy thinking is complemented by the more anti-hegemonic tone of the 'four no's', namely "no hegemony, no power politics, no military alliances, and no arms racing" (ibid.). John Garver (2006a) therefore calls China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence an "implicitly antihegemonist code of behavior" (47). Tellingly, then-president Hu Jintao called for a "common endeavor to promote democracy in international relations" at the CCP's 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 2007 (Hu 2007: 59). Reminiscent of the Russian plea for more democratic international relations formulated in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept (see previous chapter), China's understanding of democracy *between states* can therefore be translated as a refusal of hegemonic politics.<sup>260</sup> This understanding aims at the leveling of power asymmetries in international relations. If international relations are "democratised", states become equals, just like voters nominally are in democratic political systems on the domestic level. The advocacy for "democratic"

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<sup>258</sup> These talking points were also given in an interview with a former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014.

<sup>259</sup> This conference, held in Indonesia, saw the gathering of many heads of states of 'developing countries' and was perceived by the Chinese leadership under chairman Mao Zedong as the expression of an anti-imperialist momentum. Public references to the 'Bandung Spirit' throughout the 1960s underlined the importance China attached to ties with the developing world, especially at a time when Chinese-Soviet relations increasingly faltered in the wake of the Mao-Krushchev rift (Lanteigne 2009: 133).

<sup>260</sup> On a strategic level, the fear that interventionist policies can lead to precedents affecting China's delicate relations with Taiwan and Tibet has been analysed as another underlying factor for China's steadfast stance for 'non-interference' (Wu 2010: 295).

international relations, in other words, checks hegemonic ambitions because it contests power hierarchies.

Ultimately, an additional discursive undercurrent in Chinese-Iranian relations in the 1980s and 1990s was that of a ‘civilisational’ level of Third World solidarity and opposition to US hegemony (Garver 2006a: 3-28; Burman 2009: 26-27, 159f.).<sup>261</sup> Statements would commonly refer to the fact that both countries had to cede territory and partially lost sovereignty and suffered national humiliations at the hands of Western imperialism. As will be seen further below, China’s flirtation with such an overtly anti-hegemonic rhetoric was toned down in the later part of the 1990s. The reasons were many. But as a consequence, China’s biting swipes at US ‘arrogance’ and ‘imperialism’ became fewer, its foreign policy discourse more cautious.<sup>262</sup>

The guiding principles of ‘territorial integrity’ and the mutual respect for sovereignty, however, continued to serve as a discursive framework for Chinese foreign policy, recur as official talking points and therefore also repeatedly resonated in China’s approach to the Iranian nuclear crisis. In its positioning on the Iranian nuclear issue, China thus has always insisted on a political dialogue (as opposed to sanctions) as the only way forward to solve the nuclear crisis (Calabrese 2006: 10; Garver 2011: 81f.; Mazza 2011; Nourafchan 2010: 39; Swaine 2010: 6f.; Yuan 2006). In a rare statement conveying the urgency of the subject matter and the importance of political negotiations, the Chinese delegation to the P5+1 warned of “wasted time”, should the talks on a political framework agreement in April 2015 fail. “If the negotiations are stuck, all previous efforts will be wasted”, the statement went (Reuters 2015a).

China was also critical of what was perceived in Beijing as double standards in nuclear diplomacy, with Iran being harshly criticised for its lack of transparency, while the West remained silent on nuclear activities of non-NPT members such as Israel, Pakistan and India.<sup>263</sup> This testified to what China criticised as ‘nuclear favouritism’ (International Crisis Group 2010: 4). On passing UNSCR 1887 in 2009 on nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, Chinese president Hu Jintao’s remarks in the Security Council did not once make reference to Iran, but instead warned against ‘double standards’ and spoke of the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime at large (UN 2009: 11-12). Tong Zhao (2015)

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<sup>261</sup> The aspect of ‘civilisational familiarity’ in Chinese-Iranian relations was also mentioned by Dr. Su Hao, interview at China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, 6 May 2014.

<sup>262</sup> Yet, Shambaugh & Xiao (2012) assert: “[...] anti-hegemony (*fan ba*) remains the *sine qua non* of the Chinese worldview and foreign policy” (47).

<sup>263</sup> Interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014.

makes the argument in this context that the Chinese interest in strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime is also conditioned by its security interests in Southeast Asia: Any final agreement with Iran could serve as a model to be applied to other non-nuclear weapon states under the NPT. The virtual nuclear capability of Japan, Zhao thus holds, is a concern that factors into China's overall interest in seeing the Iranian nuclear conflict resolved with a robust IAEA verification regime. The nuclear programme of Vietnam and the possibility of a Philippine one were also cited in this line of argumentation.

It is also worth pointing out that Chinese interviewees in this research project mentioned the idea of a nuclear weapons-free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East when discussing the Iranian nuclear issue.<sup>264</sup> Such a zone, however, would be meaningless without the inclusion of Israel. Reference to the NWFZ project can therefore be read as an expression of dissatisfaction with selective nuclear non-proliferation policies in the Middle East. China's argumentation here echoes that of Iran (Wunderlich et al. 2013: 270). A further Chinese criticism was targeted at the heavy bias towards non-proliferation efforts on the part of the Western nuclear powers, while the unwillingness to effectively engage in nuclear disarmament was uncovered as hypocrisy and a lack of credibility (International Crisis Group 2010: 4).<sup>265</sup> With this discourse, China's position resembles those of the NAM more than any other nuclear-weapon state (NWS).<sup>266</sup> Fey et al. (2013) call this a position of "solidarity *with*, and a distanced and privileged position *toward*, the NAM [...]" (187).

This foreign policy discourse had to be understood not only against the background of China's publicly formulated norms and values, but also against the background of China's 'complicity' in the set-up of controversial Iranian nuclear facilities. China passed on sensitive nuclear technology supplies to Pakistan and Iran in the 1980s and 1990s that were at odds with the efforts of the West at the time to consolidate the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Beijing provided a nuclear reactor for the Isfahan Nuclear Technology Centre; signed a memorandum whereby China committed itself to train Iranian scientists and engineers; shared knowledge for the design of nuclear facilities needed for uranium conversion and directly contributed to the building of a uranium conversion facility in Isfahan and in heavy water

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.; Interview with Li Xin, China Institute of contemporary international relations, Beijing, 24 April 2014. Cf. also foreign minister Wang Yi's link between the implementation of the agreement between Iran and the P5+1 and the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East (Wang 2014). The NWFZ in the Middle East is called for in the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, and was linked to the indefinite extension of the NPT the same year at the NPT Review Conference (Potter & Mukhatzhanova 2012: 38-39).

<sup>265</sup> Justified as this reproach might be, it is somewhat misplaced as coming from nuclear-armed China. With this position, however, China is targeting the US and Russia as possessors of the world's largest nuclear arsenals (cf. also Fey et al. 2013: 182-83).

<sup>266</sup> On NAM positions on non-proliferation and disarmament, cf. section 2.3 of Chapter 3.

production plants (Djallil 2011: 236; Garver 2006a: 139-165; Patrikarakos 2012: 122, 135-37). The main controversy concerning Chinese contributions related to Iranian nuclear technology was the sale of natural uranium in 1991 - a sale that the IAEA did not know of and that was uncovered only in 2003 at the Jabr Ibn Hayan Multipurpose Laboratories at the Tehran Nuclear Research Center and that would later resurface in the charges against Iranian violations of its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (ElBaradei 2012: 117; Patrikarakos 2012: 157; Mousavian 2012: 54).<sup>267</sup>

In the latter half of the 1990s, China abandoned its close cooperation with Iran in the nuclear realm and complied more strictly with international non-proliferation regimes. The outside perception of Chinese assistance to an Iranian nuclear programme might spoil China's intention to be seen as a 'responsible Global Power', American interlocutors explained their Chinese counterparts (Garver 2006a: 201-236). During the 1990s, China therefore signed up to the relevant treaties and agreements concerning nuclear non-proliferation. Beijing signed the NPT in 1993 and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996. China also joined the Zangger Committee and the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 1992 and was supportive of the fissile material reduction treaty (Nourafchan 2011: 42; CTBT 2013).<sup>268</sup> With these framework policy shifts, discourse and behavior followed suit. "[...] when China joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 1992", former Iranian nuclear spokesperson Hossein Mousavian (2012) recalls, "it ceased nuclear cooperation with Iran under American pressure" (54). And in 2003, China published a remarkable White Paper on Non-Proliferation Policy in which China committed itself to "continue to take an active part in international non-proliferation endeavours, and exert great efforts to maintain and strengthen the existing non-proliferation international law system within the UN framework".<sup>269</sup> Working through the international non-proliferation regimes in place strengthens China's standing in international negotiations on Iran as well. Rather than simply resisting US Iran policies, it provides Beijing with a legal footing in its positioning on the Iran file. This helps both keep extralegal policy options of other actors in check and strengthens multilateral non-proliferation efforts. "[...] material considerations alone do not justify the decision to join these regimes," Li Xiaojun (2010) underlines, and suggests that socialising effects had replaced "instrumental calculations" (349). By choosing to sign on to these treaties and agreements, China was thus formally set on

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<sup>267</sup> The failure to report the sale was mentioned in the IAEA's June 2003 report on the implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in Iran (IAEA 2003: 2).

<sup>268</sup> China, however, has not yet ratified the CTBT.

<sup>269</sup> White Paper on China's Non-Proliferation Policy Published. Available at [last accessed 2 October 2014]: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2003/Dec/81312.htm>.

a path that allowed a compatibility of interests with the West regarding Iran – regional stability, non-proliferation, and compliance with global institutions like the IAEA.

Yet, in all its dealings with Iran in the nuclear infrastructure domain, China had never attached the same sense of urgency and concern to Iranian nuclear ambitions as Western governments had. Beijing's reserved reaction to the discovery of hitherto undeclared Iranian nuclear facilities in 2002 mirrored this divergence between China and the West. China resisted the emerging securitisation of the Iranian nuclear case and warned against the danger of the political nature of certain allegations.

China's official 'Five Principles for a Comprehensive Solution of the Iranian Nuclear Issue', outlining China's understanding of the necessary approach to a successful closure of the Iranian nuclear file and set forth by Deputy foreign minister Li Baodong in 2013, arguably hark back to the tone and spirit of the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence' referred to above: Reiterating the importance of dialogue, respect for Iranian legitimate rights, reciprocity, good will, and a holistic approach to security, China's government implicitly rejects punitive and intrusive policies and explicitly calls for a gradual lifting of all unilateral and multilateral sanctions imposed on Iran (Chinese foreign ministry 2014; Hua 2014a). This is a diplomatic language that takes up the 'Five Principles' and applies them to the Iranian nuclear talks. In calling on other players with stakes in the Iranian nuclear file to act with restraint and on the basis of mutual respect, China resisted voices calling for a punitive approach to address the Iranian nuclear challenge. China discursively advocated for a security culture that resists hegemonic politics. Like Russia, as analyzed in the previous chapter, China displayed resistance to hegemony on a discursive level by publicly challenging an emerging process of securitisation after 2002.

On the basis of this observation, the next section sheds light on China's understanding of sanctions as a political instrument in dealing with Iran, and what this reveals about China's understanding of both 'rules and models' and 'norms and values' in international relations. The imposition of sanctions on Iran clearly contravenes a security culture that China discursively favored, as analysed in this section. Analysing China's positioning in the sanctions debate is therefore a revealing step in approaching a comprehensive picture of China's Iran policies on a discursive and a behavioral level.

A fourth and fifth section complement the analysis with an examination of a seeming discrepancy between the behavioral and the discursive dimension of China's foreign policy towards Iran and the reasons therefor. Showing how these relate to the ideational, institutional

and material framework conditions of hegemony, the chapter then concludes how China's foreign policy in the Iranian nuclear dossier resists hegemony.

### **3. China's position on Iran sanctions**

#### **3.1 China's position on international Iran sanctions: Between normative divergence and behavioral convergence**

The intrusive effect of sanctions fundamentally goes against the spirit of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence as outlined above. Based on an understanding as outlined in the previous section that hegemonic power politics are seen as interfering in the internal affairs of other sovereign countries, China regards sanctions as a concrete expression of such an intrusive approach breaching the principle of non-interference.

US and E3 sanctions resolution initiatives on Iran therefore were continually delayed by China and the content of the resolutions significantly 'diluted' by Chinese amendments in what has been described as a 'delay-and-weaken strategy' (International Crisis Group 2010: 12; cf. also Mousavian 2012: 236). In braking the imposition of sanctions and watering down their content, the Chinese government was thus not only resisting US policies, but actively working against them. Instead of assuming straightforward resistance to US hegemony as the prime foreign policy motivation, however, the eventual adoption of sanctions in the UN Security Council bespeaks a Chinese desire to maintain the 'peaceful rise' and 'responsible stakeholder' imagery, whereby the Chinese government essentially succumbed to pressure from the US rather than resisting it. In addition, the security policy argument that nuclear powers are reluctant to see new nuclear powers enter their exclusive club helps understand why international sanctions were, at a minimum, slowing down Iranian progress on its nuclear fuel-cycle activities. The aggressive Iranian rhetoric of the Ahmadinejad administration certainly was not conducive to furthering Iranian interests in seeing weaker, rather than stronger, international sanctions adopted. It is thus instructive to see Chinese dilution attempts of sanctions resolutions as an effort to water them down without emptying them.

In pursuing this strategy in sanctions negotiations, however, cooperation with Russia was crucial, as China sees 'isolation in the Security Council as something to be strictly avoided' (International Crisis Group 2010: 15; cf. also Wuthnow 2010: 66).<sup>270</sup> Before P5+1 meetings, the Russian and Chinese negotiation teams convened to agree on joint approaches concerning the proposal of amendments of sanctions resolution texts (as did the E3+1, i.e. the

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<sup>270</sup> This wording was almost used verbatim by a European diplomat in conversation with the author, Moscow, 18 April 2014.

EU3+the US, dialogue partners).<sup>271</sup> In practice, Chinese-Russian joint efforts consistently managed to water down the initial resolution's provisions, with China proposing what was called 'amendments' (which in practice were deletions of complete passages) to certain paragraphs, while Russia was proposing 'amendments' (read: deletions) to the other remaining paragraphs.<sup>272</sup> In a context where the momentum for sanctions increasingly gained traction in 2006 after the referral of Iran's nuclear case to the UNSC, China also supported the Russian plan in 2006 to transfer uranium enrichment to Russian soil (Mousavian 2012: 235). The realisation of this plan would have defused tensions and disrupted the momentum for sanctions in the Security Council. The lack of Chinese high-level participation in P5+1 meetings in New York at the time was another clear political signal conveying China's unhappiness with sanctions (Mousavian 2012: 365). Iran, for its part, knew how to play on differences in policy priorities within the P5+1 format. In late 2009, for example, when the idea of a fuel-swap plan was declared dead politically by other influential actors, China kept arguing its case. Fitzpatrick (2010) writes: "Iran fed China's position by engaging various interlocutors as potential intermediaries. Needing Beijing's support, or at least acquiescence, for a new UN sanctions resolution, Washington kept the door officially open for as long as it could" (77).

Yet, having worked against their imposition in the UNSC, China eventually approved of sanctions on Iran. Interviewees, both from government-consulting institutes as well as former officials, confirm that this was due to a realisation that Iran did not cooperate transparently enough with the IAEA, as well as a willingness to demonstrate a cooperative spirit to the Americans.<sup>273</sup> It is the effect of Sino-American relations on China's Iran policy that largely explains China's voting for UN sanctions resolutions. Even though Iran sanctions entail negative effects on Sino-Iranian commercial relations (a subject of section 5) and run counter to China's principled opposition to the intrusive effect of sanctions, China eventually supported them. In this context, John Garver (2011) writes of a 'Dual Game' that China is

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<sup>271</sup> German foreign ministry official, conversation with author, 4 February 2013.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.* A comprehensive analysis of a joint Chinese-Russian negotiation behavior is beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice to recall at this point that inferring from such pre-negotiations the existence of a united Chinese-Russian 'bloc' confronting the West would be an analytical fallacy. The previous chapter has analysed Russia's positions on Iran in the Security Council as well as Russia's respective foreign policies that are distinct from China's. The next chapter will draw on the conclusions reached in the two chapters on Russian and Chinese Iran policies in synthesising the research findings from a comparative perspective. The following chapter will therefore also elaborate on the positional dynamics between China and Russia in the UN Security Council. Section 5 of this chapter will already introduce this aspect.

<sup>273</sup> Author's interview with Dr. Jin Lianxiang, senior research fellow at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, Shanghai, 16 April 2014; Author's interview with Dr. Su Hao, China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, 6 May 2014; Interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014.



playing in Iran. In other words, China displayed a behavioral convergence with policies Beijing was criticising from a normative point of view. There is a clear distinction between the ‘international system’ (which does not always serve US interests) and US dominance in it. This is important to underline as it nuances a relatively straightforward attempt to check US hegemony. A number of arguments, as highlighted above, add up to China’s foreign policy motivations to cooperate with the US once sanctions efforts were picking up momentum. And while the imposition of international sanctions on Iran was pushed and lobbied for by the US government, China could have stopped such efforts with its veto right. Knowing that the actual use of this veto right would have reputational political consequences, however, China has thus traditionally favored “the practice of abstention and acquiescence” (Wuthnow 2010: 63). Eventual support for UNSC sanctions on Iran therefore is, in Katzenstein’s terminology, compliance with ‘rules and models’ (of the UN system), while China’s public statements indicate disagreement with the ‘norms and values’ underlying these sanctions policies.

But was China complying with the Iran sanctions regimes that the Chinese government itself had voted for? Resolution 1929 (2010) “calls upon states to *take appropriate measures*” [UN 2010, emphasis added] to restrict Iranian financial capacities and “decides that all States shall [...] *exercise vigilance* when doing business with entities incorporated in Iran or subject to Iran’s jurisdiction, including those of the IRGC and IRISL.”<sup>274</sup> (ibid., emphasis added). Such a vague wording, coupled with the absence of UN enforcement mechanisms, would still allow China to continue commercial interactions that are seen as violating sanctions provisions by other parties. Charges by the US Treasury Department pertaining to China’s compliance with UNSCR 1929, for example, were that IRISL used front companies and transferred ownership to companies in Hong Kong in order to conceal its identity (US Treasury Department 2011). The US administration also hinted at China’s continued business with Iranian financial institutions and warned China’s biggest banks not to accept transfers from IRISL’s insurer Moallem (Rubinfeld 2011). Replies by Chinese authorities made reference to insufficient intelligence capabilities and the difficulty in identifying front companies and deceptive practices from legitimate operators (Broadhead 2011).<sup>275</sup> Asked about the charges that IRISL still lay anchor in Hong Kong, a Chinese

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<sup>274</sup> UNSCR 1929 significantly expanded sanctions on the Iranian financial sector, prohibiting the establishment of Iranian banks abroad and froze foreign account assets of Iranian entities. It also for the first time directly identified the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as a target of sanctions and imposed sanctions on the Iranian transport sector (Iran Air Cargo and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines – IRISL).

<sup>275</sup> Under international law, in addition, it is hardly possible to prevent ‘flag hopping’ because legal requirements of ownership and manning of ships remain vague. The applicable 1986 Registration Convention has never entered into force (Sohn et al. 2010: 52). If Iranian cargo vessels thus change flags, third parties

diplomat replied that “Chinese customs officials pay close attention to the implementation of relevant UN Security Council resolutions. We also have our internal laws. But sometimes some parties want more than what is stated in the resolution provisions. We obey the Security Council resolutions, but we don’t want to go much beyond that.”<sup>276</sup> Etel Solingen (2012b) therefore summarises China’s stance on UNSC sanctions as follows: “China’s compliance with multilateral sanctions has been selective, reluctant, and intermittent, often relying on linguistic and behavioral contortions to justify inconsistencies” (333).

Arguably, an important factor always was the political momentum at the time of adoption of sanctions resolutions. Even though China has been calling for patience with Iran, political framework conditions made Beijing approve of sanctions when diplomatic soothing strategies would not work anymore against the background of a major public discontent with Iran. When the international tension and public attention surrounding the Iranian nuclear file was highest, a Chinese veto would have constituted an outright rejection of Western security political concerns- and international isolation was something Beijing was keen to avoid. This was the case with resolution 1737 in 2006, when Iran had removed IAEA seals from its enrichment facilities in order to re-start uranium enrichment instead of suspending it as stipulated in the preceding resolution 1696 (IAEA 2006; UN 2006a); with resolution 1803 in 2008 when Iran further refused to suspend heavy-water related activities (UN 2008a); and with resolution 1929 in 2010, which was adopted after the revelation of yet another (hitherto unknown) nuclear facility near Qom in autumn 2009 (UN 2010a).

In all these cases, moreover, China gave what Wuthnow (2010) calls a ‘qualified acceptance’ (74): China’s consent to the imposition of sanctions was accompanied by remarks conveying equivocation, as becomes clear from the minutes of relevant Security Council meetings (statements before or following the vote). On passing UNSCR 1737, China’s UN representative Wang Guangya stated that the sanctions were considered ‘limited and reversible’, and called on ‘all parties concerned’ to ‘practice restraint’ (UN 2006b: 7-8). These talking points reappeared in China’s remark on passing UNSCR 1747, in which Wang also urged all parties (in a somewhat awkward phraseology) to ‘creatively seek to resume negotiations’ (UN 2007: 12) and also deemed it important to point out that UNSCR 1747 did not alter the exemption provisions of UNSCR 1737 (ibid.: 11). Reiterating the reversibility of sanctions, Wang’s statement after voting for UNSCR 1803 also called upon all parties to ‘give full play to initiative and creativity and demonstrate determination and sincerity in resuming

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cannot contest. Sanctioning Iranian cargo traffic therefore involves an active enforcement on the part of port states.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with Chinese diplomat to the US, Washington, 31 October 2014.

negotiations' (UN 2008b: 17). President Hu Jintao's remarks following China's vote for UNSCR 1887 in 2009, as noted in the previous section, did not refer to Iran once, and instead expanded on the need for a strong global non-proliferation regime in general (UN 2009: 11-12). And in justifying its vote for the much-discussed UNSCR 1929 in 2010, China's representative Li Baodong again reverted to earlier talking points about reversible sanctions, the 'incremental' and 'clearly targeted' nature of sanctions adopted, and nebulously stated that 'Security Council unity is essential to resolving the Iranian nuclear issue' (UN 2010b: 10-11). The latter statement reads especially contradictory in view of China's strong discourse against sanctions on Iran on other occasions as analysed in the previous section. In view of China's vote for this toughest sanctions resolution on Iran ever imposed, the argument of 'Security Council unity' stood out as a particularly weak pretext.

In its Iran policies, however, China naturally has an interest in a stable Middle East. Diluting sanctions and eventually adopting them may not be such a contradictory policy as it seems on the face of it: China's 'delay-and-weaken' policy takes out the most restrictive elements of sanctions provisions, while the adoption of sanctions is a political signal that takes the wind out of the sails of those actors that advocated military strikes on Iran. In this understanding, China's work through the UN (including the adoption of sanctions, if necessary) is a way to influence the US. The adoption of sanctions can thus also be seen as the lesser evil that, at a minimum, gives breathing space to counteract 'hawkish' actors. A regional destabilisation through the outbreak of an open military conflict would severely endanger and disrupt Chinese oil supplies and commercial interests in the Iranian market. And in addition, not being pro-active itself, but waiting for Western initiatives to de-escalate the nuclear crisis, China can conveniently follow a strategy of maintaining its market position in Iran while benefitting politically from ('free riding' on) Western diplomatic efforts, as European officials and Iran experts explained in interviews.<sup>277</sup>

The following section will add to the analysis on China's policy on Iran sanctions by examining China's position on and reaction to unilateral sanctions before an intermediate conclusion can be reached on how China's Iran policy relates to the ideational and institutional dimension of hegemony.

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<sup>277</sup> EEAS official, author's interview, Brussels, 13 March 2013; Ali Vaez, Author's interview via Skype, 25 July 2013; Author's interview with Dr. Dina Esfandiary, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Author's interview, London, 11 July 2014; Author's interview with high-ranking Swiss diplomat, Berlin, 26 August 2013; Author's interview with former E3 delegation member, Brussels, 29 January 2015. However, Carnegie scholar Tong Zhao (2015) writes that "For its part, Beijing is interested in shedding the label of free rider and more actively contributing to peace and stability in the region. But China won't be able to complete the process overnight. Beijing has generally preferred to take an indirect and gradualist approach [...]."

### 3.2 China's position on unilateral Iran sanctions: Normative divergence

Irrespective of oft-repeated suspicions about Chinese irregular compliance with international sanctions, the Chinese government publicly pledges its commitment to the institutional structure of the UN. China has worked through the mechanisms of the UN family and displayed an acceptance of its legitimacy to govern international relations since Beijing took the permanent membership in the Security Council from Taipei in 1971 (Zhang 1998: 73-91). While international sanctions adopted by the United Nations are thus adopted with the support of China as a permanent UNSC member, the Chinese government opposes any unilateral sanctions. This formulation is repeated nearly verbatim across the range of interviewees – be they government consultants, academics, or Chinese officials.<sup>278</sup> Unilateral sanctions are seen as the extension of domestic law onto other sovereign states and thus as breaching international law.

“We oppose the imposition of unilateral sanctions on Iran and believe that using sanctions to exert pressure cannot fundamentally resolve the Iran nuclear issue”, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei underlined (Reuters 2013). China was calling on all parties to show “flexibility, increase communication and push for a new round of talks as soon as possible” (ibid.). China’s rhetoric against unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran has consistently conveyed China’s “principled opposition” (Garver 2006a: 66) against what is seen as the expression of “arrogant hegemonism” (ibid.: 84).

But China’s normative divergence from hegemonic approaches over the institutional nature of unilateral sanctions was never merely an ideological conviction. China’s dislike for an extraterritorialised US legislation also had to be understood in the context of Chinese companies having been sanctioned unilaterally by the US for interaction with Iran that were seen as undermining US efforts at changing Iranian behavior. Chinese companies have been sanctioned by the US because of Chinese missile and technology supplies that assisted Iran’s ballistic missile programme,<sup>279</sup> and because of Chinese nuclear technology transfers to Iran

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<sup>278</sup> Interview with Chinese foreign ministry official, Beijing, 18 April 2014; Interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014; Interview with Chinese diplomat to the US, Washington, 31 October 2014; Interview with Dr. Li Xin, China Institutes of contemporary international relations, Beijing, 24 April 2014; Interview with Dr. Su Hao, China Foreign Affairs University, Author’s interview, Beijing, 6 May 2014.

<sup>279</sup> Between China and the US, China’s compliance with the MTCR became a constant issue of contention. China recognised Annex I that lists which missiles and related equipment are banned (Category 1 missiles), but not Annex II, which lists dual-use ‘missile-related technology and items’ whose export is to be controlled by an export licensing system on a case-by-case basis (Garver 2006a: 212-13). The US decision in 2003 to ban Norinco from the US market for several years was likely the most outspoken and decisively public sanctions effort in this regard. Norinco, formally China North Industries Corporation, is a Chinese manufacturing company that is known, i.a., for its defense products.

that potentially assisted the setting-up of Iranian *unsafeguarded* facilities, as specified in the first section of this chapter (thus in breach of IAEA stipulations). The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996 furthermore stipulated that investments made in the Iranian energy sector exceeding 20 million US dollar in one year are sanctionable activities (Katzman 2006). The ‘Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act’ (CISADA) of 2010 also includes the provision of refined petroleum products to Iran as breaches of that act. The Chinese company Zhuhai Zhenrong was sanctioned under CISADA in 2012 (US Department of State 2012). The Chinese Kunlun bank, together with the Iraqi Elaf Islamic Bank, was the first foreign bank to be sanctioned under CISADA in July 2012 for having financed oil-related businesses with Iranian banks that had been blacklisted before (Lohmann 2015: 5).

Even though the Chinese government officially states that it does not accept the legitimacy of these unilateral sanctions, the effect of Chinese entities being listed carries a significant labeling effect that China cannot ignore. Insisting on the illegality of American pressure and the freedom of Chinese trade relations lies on one side of the spectrum, showing a cooperative spirit and ‘investigating’ issues of concern to the US on the other. This holds for ‘controversial’ investment projects as well as for oil trade, which had become an area the US had identified as a leverage with which to dry up financial lifelines to Iran. Acknowledging precisely this conundrum, the US has been encouraging Arab oil exporters (like Saudi Arabia) “to boost oil exports to China in an attempt to decrease reliance on Iranian oil and secure agreement to sanctions” (International Crisis Group 2010: 14).<sup>280</sup> Another idea on the part of the State Department was to ask Saudi Arabia to sell its oil to China at a lower price (Kemenade 2010: 109). And in her efforts to round up support for UNSCR 1929 in 2010, State Secretary Clinton told Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo that if China supports the resolution and “reduces its commercial ties to Iran, we could help it find other sources of energy”, she writes in her memoir (Clinton 2014: 432).<sup>281</sup> It is important to emphasise at this point, however, that Chinese reductions of oil imports from Iran were not the sole result of US pressure. Chinese energy security concerns, it can safely be assumed, are driven by diversification plans in the face of supply insecurities and domestic economic pressures, just like that of any other country.<sup>282</sup> Reductions of oil purchases are also driven by desires not to

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<sup>280</sup> The American attempts to persuade Saudi Arabia to increase its oil deliveries to China in order to decrease Chinese oil dependence on Iran was also mentioned by Dr. Su Hao, China Foreign Affairs University, Author’s interview, Beijing, 6 May 2014.

<sup>281</sup> President Obama also reportedly had a phone conversation with then-president Hu Jintao precisely on China’s position on Iran sanctions in the run-up to UNSCR 1929 (Zhao 2013: 117).

<sup>282</sup> This has also been confirmed by a former Chinese diplomat to Iran, author’s interview, Beijing, 22 April 2014. Cf. also Downs (2004: 34).

become overly dependent on one type of energy (oil, gas, wind, solar, hydroelectric, nuclear).

The extent to which the Chinese government was happy to accept such US-brokered supply alternatives is not publicly documented. At a minimum, however, Beijing showed receptiveness to US demands to decrease its purchases of Iranian oil (Tsukimori & Goswami 2013). Such a policy both serves to respond to US perceptions of China's Iran policies and to qualify for the US sanctions 'waivers' granted to those countries that 'significantly reduce' their import of Iranian oil as outlined in section 1245 of the US National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (Lohmann 2013: 4; US Department of State 2013). A 20 % reduction of Iranian oil imports is considered a 'significant reduction' according to this US sanctions legislation. Such a reduction qualifies for a waiver granted to states that would otherwise be sanctioned by US authorities (Lohmann 2013: 4), even though the formulation suggests that the granting of such waivers comes with a considerable political leeway. Supply diversification talks, in this sense, may also serve as 'proof' that a decrease of dependence on Iranian oil is envisaged. China's reduction of Iranian oil imports and plans to diversify its oil suppliers can, against the background of the US sanctions legislation, be read as a direct response to American policy concerns and serves to show Chinese cooperation to their American counterparts. This is reconfirmed by former Chinese officials as well as influential analysts.<sup>283</sup> China repeatedly qualified for these periodic waivers since 2012.<sup>284</sup>

Yet, a caveat on the interaction between the Chinese government and state-owned oil companies should be inserted here: While one may read a reduction of Iranian oil imports as a governmental decision to comply with US pressure, some experts hold that Chinese companies cannot but comply with international market conditions. Even if the government wanted to actively disregard US unilateral sanctions, Chinese companies would still suffer from the secondary effects of sanctions or temporarily renounce on Iranian payments due to financial sanctions.<sup>285</sup> Chinese companies therefore have a market-induced incentive to comply with sanctions regimes, which should not be misconstrued as a governmental concession to the US.<sup>286</sup> A former Chinese diplomat to Iran explained in an interview that Chinese companies have an interest in enlarging their market access and profits abroad, while the Chinese government has an interest in enlarging its 'soft power' abroad.<sup>287</sup> Yet, this can also serve as a convenient argument for China's government to 'save face' both vis-à-vis its

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<sup>283</sup> Interview with Dr. Jin Lianxiang, senior research fellow at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, Shanghai, 16 April 2014; Interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with Dr. Jin Lianxiang, Shanghai, 16 April 2014.

<sup>285</sup> Interview with Chinese foreign ministry official, Beijing, 18 April 2014.

<sup>286</sup> Dr. Liao Baizhi, Interview, Beijing, 24 April 2014.

<sup>287</sup> Author's interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014. On this, cf. also Zhao (2015).

domestic business lobbies as well as vis-à-vis its American counterparts. To the latter, a reduction in Chinese-Iranian oil trade appears as a sign of governmental cooperation in pressuring Iran, while the government can fall back on the ‘effects of markets’ argument for the former. Tellingly, a Chinese diplomat to the US offered a glimpse of political frankness when asked about the effect of unilateral EU and US sanctions by saying: “Even if we don’t admit it, EU and US sanctions do work. Chinese companies should take care. Both the government and companies have to comply.”<sup>288</sup>

A final element to keep in mind when analyzing China’s position on sanctions is their effect on Chinese investments in Iran. Western sanctions on Iran have allowed for the opening-up of the Iranian market for Chinese companies: China makes use of the economic vacuum created by the Western self-imposed embargo situation and sells its products that are unavailable to Iran otherwise. Patrikarakos (2012) writes that “Tehran was (and has been) able to anticipate and counter any loss in EU trade by shifting the balance of its economic relations eastwards” (236). In a sense, China therefore benefits from the embargo situation created by Western Iran sanctions, as it enlarges the Chinese share in the Iranian market, despite persistent Iranian complaints about the quality of Chinese goods.<sup>289</sup> A protracted stalemate in the Iranian nuclear crisis even “provides an opportunity for China,” argues Dr. Liao Baizhi of the China Institute for contemporary international relations, which is affiliated with the Chinese ministry for public security.<sup>290</sup> Chinese government officials, however, are quick to deny such claims, arguing that market competition is ‘just normal’ and that China would not be worse off with the prospect of increased Western investments in Iran, should the Iranian nuclear conflict be resolved.<sup>291</sup> This is perhaps not surprising, given that China has an interest in publicly dispersing speculations about China’s interest in a status quo situation concerning Iran’s isolation from other major international trading partners. But since China’s ‘energy hunger’ determines its Middle Eastern policies more than anything else, as a European Iran desk officer remarks, China would benefit from the eventual lifting of

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<sup>288</sup> Author’s interview, Washington, 31 October 2014.

<sup>289</sup> Ali Vaez, chief Iran analyst with the International Crisis Group, therefore succinctly characterised the Sino-Iranian economic relationship as an ‘oil for junk’ exchange. Author’s interview via Skype, 25 July 2013. In a similar fashion, a US State Department official stated in an interview that China and India “have been taking advantage of (Western) sanctions. But the quality is crap.” Author’s interview, Washington, 30 October 2014. See also Garver (2006a: 239). The idea of China taking advantage of Western embargoes against Iran has been expressed by a number of interviewees (author’s interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 24 February 2015; author’s interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014; author’s interview with European diplomat, Brussels, 6 February 2015;

<sup>290</sup> Deputy director Institute of Middle East Studies, Author’s interview, Beijing, 24 April 2014.

<sup>291</sup> Interview with Chinese foreign ministry official, Beijing, 18 April 2014; Interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014; Interview with Chinese diplomat to the US, Washington, 31 October 2014.

sanctions because it would allow China to import a higher amount of Iranian oil (which is otherwise complicated due to existing embargoes).<sup>292</sup> A former E3 delegation member argues in a similar fashion, stating that China's interest in the Iranian market, and China's interest in upholding a dominant position on the latter, is relative. "China has commercial markets elsewhere. A political solution would be the lesser evil for China, compared to the status quo and a military escalation of the conflict".<sup>293</sup> The interest China might have in upholding a level of tensions to benefit from a strong position on the Iranian market, in this line of argumentation, is outweighed by the argument of regional stabilisation that a comprehensive nuclear agreement with Iran can bring about.

China's position on Iran sanctions regimes, as this and the previous section have shown, is dependent on the institutional nature of the sanctions adopted. Even though China is critical of the use of sanctions as a political instrument and advocated for diplomacy and political dialogue as the primary means of addressing the Iranian nuclear issue, as shown in the first section of this chapter, international sanctions as adopted through the UN structures were eventually accepted. Importantly, this was done only after China had actively worked against them through the UN structures and had worked on watering down the content of the sanctions provisions.

Besides such international sanctions, China displays an ideational disagreement with sanctions that deviate from the structures of the UN. In its rejection of the legitimacy of unilateral sanctions, China conveys a normative divergence from hegemony that is also partly explained by US sanctions against Chinese entities directly. A partial compliance with US unilateral sanctions, at the same time, can be seen as behavioral convergence with hegemonic structures. In addition, this section has outlined a number of other factors that have an influence on China's decision to support sanctions. It has been shown how the diverse character of aspects factoring into China's foreign policy decision-making cannot be conceived as a relatively straightforward 'resistance' to US policies. Factors influencing China's Iran policy and its ultimate approval of international sanctions include US flexibility towards China (exempting China from unilateral sanctions, introducing China to alternative oil suppliers), the character of Iranian noncompliance with the IAEA, and international market (dis)incentives. The first is a political aspect and is subject to behind-the-doors bargaining between Chinese and American counterparts in the administration. The second is a security argument: China is a nuclear-weapon state and has an in-built desire not to see the

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<sup>292</sup> Author's interview, Berlin, 14 November 2014.

<sup>293</sup> Author's interview with former E3 delegation member, Brussels, 29 January 2015.



number of nuclear-weapon states grow. Such a development could potentially entice other states to follow suit and unleash a dangerous proliferation dynamic. It also endangers stability conditions in the Middle East and beyond. The aspect of market disincentives relates to the argument put forward by Chinese officials that market dynamics are out of the hands of the central government. Companies decide to stay in or out of Iran business faced with sanctions, so the argument. This serves to dispel the point often made by non-Chinese experts and officials that China stands to benefit from Western embargoes against Iran. The fact that Chinese companies operating in Iran are big state-owned ones, however, casts a certain damp on this line of reasoning.

It will be the subject of the next section to take the latter thought further and elaborate on the effects of Chinese-Iranian economic relations on China's position on Iran sanctions. Such an analysis presents the third side of the Coxian triangle of hegemonic structures, the material dimension, and will allow me to conclude in a later section on the extent to which the combined effect of institutional, ideational, and material dimensions of hegemony makes Chinese foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme indicative of a security culture resisting hegemony.

#### **4. The material dimension of hegemony and Chinese-Iranian economic relations**

The economic partnership between China and Iran is a dimension that has substantially shaped Chinese-Iranian overall bilateral relations. While China is exporting capital goods, engineering services and arms to Iran, the latter is primarily exporting oil to China. At the same time, China is shipping some of its own refined oil into northern Iran, as Iran – despite its oil wealth – does not have sufficient refining capacities.<sup>294</sup> As from 2009, China has become Iran's most significant foreign trade partner. The Chinese-Iranian trade volume is extensive. It reached a record high of 45 billion US\$ in 2011 and stood at 39.4 billion US\$ in 2013.

The importance of oil shipments in Chinese-Iranian economic relations was underlined by a number of major oil deals that have tied the two countries' economies together even more closely, cementing not only Iran's position as one of China's biggest oil supplier, but also making China a key stakeholder and one of the largest investors in the Iranian oil industry. In March 2004, Chinese state oil trader Zhuhai Zhenrong signed a 25-year contract

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<sup>294</sup> e.g. oil from the China Petroleum National Corporation-led consortium in Kazakhstan. This ties China, Iran and Kazakhstan together in an economic triangle (Hiro 2009: 387).

to import 110 million tons of LNG from Iran worth 20 billion US\$ (Shen 2006: 61). Likewise, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between China and Iran was signed on 28 October 2004 following which Sinopec (China's second-largest oil company) was allowed to start developing the Yadavaran fields in Southern Iran and the ensuing exploration of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was contracted to explore the MIS oilfields and won the tender for a LNG project in the South Pars field in 2006 and the construction of an extracting pipeline in 2009, and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) participates in upstream development of the North Pars gas field (International Crisis Group 2010: Annex B).<sup>295</sup> China now also is active developing the Azadegan field in Iran (Jacques 2012: 435),<sup>296</sup> and it was reported that China was willing to finance the construction of Iranian refineries (Derakhshi 2009). Besides these activities in the energy field, Chinese corporations have invested in non-hydrocarbon sectors: joint ventures have been created;<sup>297</sup> Chinese companies have been investing in Iranian infrastructure projects (Calabrese 2006: 9); China's largest steel factory developer is building plants in the Yazd province (ibid.), and the China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC), together with Chinese Norinco, was contracted for the completion of the Tehran metro system (ibid. 6, 9).<sup>298</sup> This web of economic activities is crucial to bear in mind when wanting to understand China's stakes in Iran and, consequently, in the Iranian nuclear talks. Across the range of interviewees for this research, the extent of economic relations always resurfaced in explanations of Chinese Iran policies.

Beijing's involvement in the Iranian economy and especially in the oil sector is to be explained by China's interest in the stability of oil supplies for the Chinese economy ever since China became a net oil importer in 1993. Seen in the context of China's rise as an emerging global power, this need for stable oil supplies becomes a crucial determinant in China's Iran policy ('resource diplomacy', cf. Lanteigne 2009: 51f.). As China's 'rise' since Deng Xiaoping's reforms primarily meant a 'rise' in the economic sphere, the Chinese government sees the necessity for political stability in the Middle East through the lens of

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<sup>295</sup> It needs to be stressed that MoUs are normal procedures in the oil industries. Their significance needs not to be overstated.

<sup>296</sup> After the Japanese government pulled out of a preferential bidding offer by the Iranian government.

<sup>297</sup> In 2007 and 2008 respectively, a Sino-Iranian joint venture of automobile companies was created (between the Chinese company Chery and the Iranian company Majmoeh Mazi Toos and between Chinese LiFan and the Iranian KMC Company). Cf. International Crisis Group (2010: 7).

<sup>298</sup> cf. also Tehran Metro website (2013), <http://tehran-metro.com/featured/iran-seeks-2bn-from-china-to-complete-tehran-metro>; Interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014.

economic supply stability.<sup>299</sup> While China's main oil supplier is Saudi Arabia,<sup>300</sup> Iran usually ranges second. Viewed through the prism of Sino-US relations, Saudi Arabia remains a less controversial oil supplier because of the special alliance relationship between Washington and Riyadh. US security guarantees to Saudi Arabia thus also translate into energy security guarantees for China.

The history of Chinese public diplomacy suggests that Beijing kept a watchful eye on the US perception of China's external economic policies. The importance attached to the US' perception of China's foreign policy remained crucial in Chinese foreign policy since the re-establishing of relations with the US under Nixon and Mao in 1972 and, at the latest, since Deng Xiaoping's reform period as from 1978: The US perception of China was crucial for the latter's acceptance to a US-dominated capitalist system. A short period of strategic convergence between China and the US over Iran under the Shah ended with the ouster of a pro-American Iranian regime in 1979. China was cautious not to let its principled normative divergence from US hegemony (and ensuing sympathy with Iranian anti-hegemonism) go out of hand and endanger Chinese relations with the US. The latter's benevolence was crucial for China's path of economic modernisation ushered in under Deng Xiaoping.

Beijing's desire to portray itself as a 'responsible Great Power' (*fuzeren de daguo*; Chan 1999: 146) and to convey the image of China's 'peaceful rise' indicated a discursive willingness not to endanger the US' acceptance of China as an equal power on the world scene. The concept of 'peaceful rise' as introduced in a 2003 White Paper was even replaced by the more harmonious-sounding concept of 'peaceful development' (Glaser & Medeiros 2007). China's economic development was conditioned on accommodation with global power structures. If China 'develops peacefully', so the narrative, it does not challenge a prevailing status quo.

An illustrative material factor explaining Chinese sensitivity to the US in its conduct of external economic relations is the US military presence in the Malacca Strait, through which most of Chinese oil supplies from Iran are shipped.<sup>301</sup> The Chinese dependence on this maritime bottleneck explains why a Sino-US political detune is not desirable for China

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<sup>299</sup> Interview with Dr. Jin Lianxiang, senior research fellow at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, Shanghai, 16 April 2014.

<sup>300</sup> In 2011, around 20 % of Chinese crude oil imports came from Saudi Arabia, while imports from Iran accounted for 11 % of Chinese overall crude oil imports. Angola also ranks as one of China's biggest oil suppliers. cf. International Energy Agency (2012a: 6).

<sup>301</sup> The Malacca Strait is a maritime strait between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, linking the Indian to the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea. Cf. International Energy Agency (2012b). Burman (2009) further names the Lombok Strait and the Strait of Macassar, "each of which could 'fairly' easily be blockaded by the US Navy" (117).

already out of important logistical reasons (Goldstein 2011: 96). While it can also be argued that China conveniently ‘free rides’ on US protection of sea lanes (Downs 2004: 32), it has to be acknowledged at a minimum that China is logistically dependent on American benevolence. In 2003, former president Hu Jintao therefore even spoke of a ‘Malacca dilemma’ that China faces in case of a potential blockage (from either terrorists or other states) of such an essential lifeline for the Chinese economy that connects East Asia with the Middle East. Hinting at the presence of the US in that waterway, Hu noted that “certain powers have all along encroached on and tried to control navigation through the strait” (in: Lanteigne 2009: 86). In an acknowledgment of such a logistical vulnerability, China has invested in the construction and development of the port of Gwadar in Southwest Pakistan as well as in the planning of overland transportation lines like the Karakoum Highway between Pakistan and Western China that would allow the supply of Iranian oil from Pakistan to mainland China through Gwadar (Markey 2014: 10).<sup>302</sup> Such a diversification of supply lines aims to secure the stability of oil supplies from the Middle East via overland routes and testifies a Chinese awareness of its current dependence on American benevolence (cf. also Garver 2006a: 289-90).

Other economic projects that aim to link inter-regional trade relations are affected by the future prospect of an altered international standing of Iran in the wake of a nuclear agreement: Chinese projects like the so-called ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative comprising the Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt are conceptualised as economic corridors through the Eurasian continent (Godehardt 2014). With this project, Chinese external trade and foreign policy planning has envisioned a joint policy towards central Asia, the Middle East, the Black Sea region and the Caucasus. A stable Middle East becomes a precondition for the implementation of such a project. Given the central geographical location of Iran, trade complications because of existing sanctions regimes and the prospect of military escalation of the conflict are an obstacle to any such project planning. Here, China has a long-term economic interest in supporting the negotiations toward a nuclear agreement that could facilitate Chinese trade with and transit of goods through Iran.

The lifting of sanctions, including of existing weapons embargoes such as that imposed with UNSCR 1929, may also see Chinese material interests in Iran clash with Russian ones. In the past, both China and Russia invested in the Iranian nuclear infrastructure and were main arms suppliers to Iran. Since the late 1990s, however, Russia had surpassed

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<sup>302</sup> Cf. also Garver (2006b) on China’s development of overland transportation links with Central Asia. This infrastructure expansion, he contends, is a projection of Chinese economic interests in need of logistical protection.

China as the most important nuclear sponsor of Iran, as evidenced not least by Rosatom's construction of Iran's only nuclear power plant at Bushehr (see previous chapter). China is therefore unlikely to pronounce a heightened interest in re-entering the Iranian nuclear market. But also Chinese attempts to restart arms deals with Iran will likely face Russian competition. Immediately after the conclusion of the nuclear talks in Lausanne, Russian foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov nurtured these speculations when he demanded that a final agreement must include the lifting of arms embargoes (Saunders 2015).

Another material factor in Sino-Iranian relations and diplomatic link-up between Sino-US relations and material assistance to Iran is the Taiwan issue. Bearing in mind China's 'lost territory' and 'One China' rhetoric and the politico-historical importance attached to the 'Taiwan question' (Hughes 2005), one comprehends the sensitivity and state of alert with which Chinese governments react to US support to Taiwan. This, in turn, has been linked up with Chinese support for Iran. In September 1992, China for the first time linked its foreign policy toward Iran to the Taiwan question after the US had announced the sale of 150 F-16 fighter aircraft to Taiwan (Djallil 2011: 241). And again in 1997, Chinese arms sales to Pakistan and Iran have been read as a policy of 'retaliation' for the US sale of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Taiwan (ibid.). On the other end of this competition-cooperation spectrum lies a policy of mutual consent in case both parties agree to neither supply Iran nor Taiwan with sensitive technology, respectively. In such a case, "China would agree to sacrifice Iran in return for Taiwan, its greater foreign policy priority. Such a deal would represent a tacit recognition that East Asia was China's sphere of influence and the Middle East, America's", Martin Jacques (2012) sums up such a tit-for-tat strategy and thereby makes an interesting geopolitical link to consents over regional spheres of influence (436). This can be read as a dynamic of 'retaliation' in the form of weapons sales to countries of high security political concern for the respective other and of 'rewarding' cooperation on either side in the form of refraining from such sales if suspension of weapons sales on the respective other side is guaranteed.<sup>303</sup> In a more anti-hegemonic reasoning, missile sales to developing countries serve to 'equalise' a global imbalance brought about by US hegemony, as Garver writes (2006a: 180). A caveat should be attached to the Iran-Taiwan nexus in Beijing's and Washington's respective foreign policy calculations, however. An understanding of an automatic policy of retaliation in arming one side or the other fails to account for more subtle policies that feed into the 'competition-cooperation spectrum' as described above: After the

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<sup>303</sup> Suffice to recall that UNSCR 1929 has introduced a multilateral weapons embargo on Iran. The deliberations described here were pre-2010, but may resurface with the lifting of sanctions as a CJPoA is implemented.

1996 tensions in the Taiwan strait and US support for Taiwan, Beijing agreed to suspend its nuclear cooperation with Iran- in spite of continuing arms sales. Support in terms of military hardware is thus not to be equated with unequivocal support for Iran in the diplomacy surrounding the nuclear dossier. Importantly, Garver (2006a) analyzes China's suspension of nuclear cooperation with Iran in 1997 as part of a larger strategic period of disengagement from Iran due to US pressure (115-117; 151; cf. also Burman 2009: 110-11). And Goldstein (2011) cautions against a too stark causal link in the US-Taiwan arms sales relationship. This issue, he contends, should not be overstated in its significance, and is "largely symbolic in nature", and [...] in an actual conflict with China, these aircraft would almost surely never leave the ground, as their bases would likely be quickly obliterated by Chinese missile strikes" (108).

Moreover, China's foreign policy is partially motivated and informed by economic interest groups.<sup>304</sup> Decision-makers in Beijing have to carefully weigh the pursuance of commercial interests with the perception of China's foreign policy on the part of other major stakeholders. While major investment projects as mentioned above at the outset of this section may nurture the impression of extensive Chinese-Iranian technology transfers, part of these did not materialise yet or remain in the planning phase. This sometimes is the outcome of a Chinese behavior not to endanger the 'responsible Great Power' image that a pursuance of commercial contracts in outright disagreement with US security political pressure would entail. The 'extraterritorialisation' of US legislation by way of unilateral sanctions affecting third country companies serves as another, more material deterrent. It is also a political deterrent because the listing of Chinese entities is a publicly visible and therefore undesirable labeling. Chinese receptiveness to US legislation, in this context, is an example of an adherence to hegemonic structures, while its official foreign policy discourse pledges resistance to hegemony. However, it should also not be forgotten that the non-materialisation of Chinese investment projects in Iran may be the result of political decisions in Tehran. And in view of a politicised environment when doing business in Iran, the Chinese government may decide to sign legally non-binding MoU that allow for political maneuverability (read: commitments are easier to revoke in case of unfavorable political framework conditions).

However, there is a level of disagreement among experts as to the relation between

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<sup>304</sup> China's state-owned business corporations and oil traders enjoy a powerful position in lobbying the Chinese government. This latter observation carries with it a sound of caution from an analytical point of view not to equate the interests of Chinese companies with those of Chinese governments. (Interview with Dr. Jin Lianxiang, Shanghai, 16 April 2014.)

state-owned companies and the policy planning of the central government.<sup>305</sup> While the latter can easily refer to the market effect of unilateral sanctions and the constraints with which internationally operating companies are confronted in explaining a decrease in Iranian oil imports, the effect can also conveniently be used to demonstrate a level of cooperation with the US – depending on the audience to which such statements are uttered. Corporate interests need not be Chinese ‘national interests’, but the tightly interwoven dependencies between these two makes it difficult to assess from the outside who in China decides on sanctions ‘compliance’.

Much in the same logic of referring to the complications of international markets, this reading would also explain why the Chinese government had conducted most of its material assistance to Iran, both in the military domain and in the provision of “dual-use technology”, e.g. nuclear infrastructure, covertly or semi-covertly (Garver 2006a: 125). When China began to supply arms to Iran (and Iraq) during the Iran-Iraq war, the government relied on third country intermediaries, “thus allowing Beijing to claim with narrow accuracy that *China* had not sold weapons to Iran” (ibid.: 81). This ‘cover’ effect that Garver calls a “policy of plausible denial” (ibid.: 194) would allow China to present its dealings with Iran in one light or the other, depending on the intended audience.<sup>306</sup>

Such a finding underlines the importance that the Chinese government has attached to the perception of China-Iran relations on the part of other actors and is an important one for an investigation into China’s degree of ‘resistance to hegemony’: While material factors can partially explain a deepening of relations between Iran and China, the importance Beijing attached to possible perceptions thereof by other actors (mainly the US) suggests that China was not going to allow this to evolve into an overt anti-hegemonic partnership. Official as well as expert interviewees emphasise that China “values” its relationship with the US and wants to be a cooperative partner.<sup>307</sup> As this section has analyzed, commercial interests in Sino-Iran relations partially clashed with the desire to uphold and further develop China’s relations with the US. Relations to the US, in a Chinese reading, should not be allowed to wither because China had to accommodate itself with the predominant global superpower. It

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<sup>305</sup> In an insightful article, Downs (2004) writes that the top leadership positions in the major Chinese (state-owned) oil companies like CNPC, Sinopec and CNOOC are appointed by the Central Committee of the CCP. This gives company heads direct access to and political clout over the Chinese leadership, in addition to the state’s “fiscal dependence” on these companies (25).

<sup>306</sup> Dr. Wu Riqiang from Renmin University asserts that a central governmental decision to stop certain arms deals will be followed by Chinese arms companies. Author’s interview, Beijing, 22 April 2014. Reference to ‘complications of the international market’, in this reading, is a loophole argument to continue with policies that the government does not officially want to be associated with.

<sup>307</sup> Interview with Dr. Jin Lianxiang, Shanghai, 16 April 2014; Interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014.

was the US on whose consent China's acceptance to the 'international community' was dependent following China's economic 'opening up' to the world in the wake of Deng's reforms. Sino-Iran relations were subordinated to the higher-valued Sino-US relations in cases where a political prioritisation was necessary. It is in this context that Garver (2006a) calls the Sino-Iran relation a "second-order relationship" (293). The US administration is aware of this Chinese prioritisation, as a State Department official confirmed in an interview: "China really values its relationship with the US. It values it above that with Iran."<sup>308</sup> This finding suggests a complex balance between material and ideational factors in China's foreign policy decision-making towards Iran and already anticipates an answer to the question whether Chinese Iran policy 'resists hegemony'. The following section thus answers the research question to what extent Chinese foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme is indicative of a security culture resisting hegemony, bringing together the previous analyses of China's foreign policy discourse, its position on sanctions policies, and of the material dimension of China-Iran relations.

## 5. From Triangulation to Proactivism – Resistance to Hegemony?

Deng Xiaoping had outlined a pragmatic doctrine that should accompany China's modernisation process as from 1978 ("hide our capabilities and bide our time (*taoguang yanghui*); be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership"; in: Jacques 2012: 590).<sup>309</sup> During Hu Jintao's presidency, Marc Lanteigne (2009) holds, China's doctrine of 'biding its time' was being replaced by exercises of great power diplomacy (*daguo zhanlue*, 21). In characteristically vague wording, President Hu had announced in 2009 that China should "continuously keep a low profile *and proactively get some things done*" (Chen & Pu 2014: 178, emphasis added). The foreign policy mantra under president Xi Jinping shifted from *taoguang yanghui* to *fenfa youwei* (striving for achievement), Tong Zhao (2015) writes.<sup>310</sup> The new Chinese leadership seems to be less willing publicly to join or support

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<sup>308</sup> Author's interview, Washington, 30 October 2014.

<sup>309</sup> Shambaugh & Xiao (2012) attribute the scholarly obsession with 'concealing leadership' to a translation error and contrast several possible translations of Deng's dictum *taoguang yanghui, bu dang tou, zousuo zuowei* (40-41).

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Lampton's (2014) study for insights into questions of strategic leadership from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping. Zhao (2013: 114-120) contrasts Chinese 'Core Interests' with 'Global Power Responsibility' and shows how Chinese decision-makers were traditionally torn between bilateralism and multilateralism to address major foreign policy issues. A comprehensive and insightful overview over Chinese domestic foreign policy debates has been written by Shambaugh & Xiao (2012). While domestic debates about China's foreign policy role abound, "government officials in the Foreign Ministry and Central Committee Foreign Affairs Office are



Western policies that are seen as ‘neo-interventionism’ (Chatham House 2013: 5). The 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report (of November 2012) stressed the concept of China’s ‘peaceful development’, but equally warned, in a quite explicit language reminiscent of the ‘four no’s’ in Chinese foreign policy thinking, of the danger of ‘hegemonism’, ‘power politics’, and ‘neo-interventionism’ (ibid.). This rhetoric was echoed by then-party general secretary Xi Jinping in January 2013 and was a timely positioning against the backdrop of the NATO intervention in Libya, attempted UNSC resolutions on Syria and sabre-rattling over Iran.<sup>311</sup>

While Chinese foreign policy is being interpreted as becoming more outspoken about its disagreements with other governments, other observers buy in to the argument of ‘peaceful development’, according to which China is an inherently inward-looking country whose Confucian behavior prevents it from seeking hegemony or expansion. “Things in the extreme do not last long, just as dragons suffocate, freeze, and fall when they fly too high”, a dictum by Lao Tse was given in an interview with a Chinese scholar as an analogy for the dangers of too assertive foreign policies.<sup>312</sup> Analyses of Chinese foreign policy tend to be couched in terms of status quo versus revisionist policies.<sup>313</sup> Against this background, the analysis of China’s Iran policies presented in this chapter has shown how China’s foreign policy can display elements of resistance to hegemony as well as hegemonic accommodation.

China’s position on the Iranian nuclear programme, as has been shown above, bespeaks a diplomatic tightrope walk in which Chinese governments had to “triangulate their various interests with Washington and Tehran” without wanting to choose between the two (Shen 2006: 63). China’s act of triangulating the effects of Sino-US relations on Sino-Iran relations and vice versa emerged as a continuing pattern in China’s relations between these two countries after the Islamic revolution in 1979 and during the Iran-Iraq war. “It is our principle that we hope not to see any normal commercial cooperation being politicized”, foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying (2014b) formulates. But in practice, commercial interests in Iran were weighed against US pressure and the perception of Chinese foreign policy in Washington. As was confirmed in interviews for this research project, it always was the anticipation of possible effects on relations to the US that determined how far China was willing to go in courting Iran by publicly lending support. Anti-hegemonic sympathies with

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pragmatically centered between these two schools (Major Powers and Global South), but they must respond to Nativist and Realist voices in society, the military, and the Communist Party”, they write (67).

<sup>311</sup> Xi Jinping’s taking over of the office of president in March 2013 marked the official transfer of power to a new Chinese leadership.

<sup>312</sup> Interview with Dr. Zhang Lihua, resident scholar at Carnegie Beijing, Tsinghua University, Beijing, 25 April 2014.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. section 3.3. of Chapter 3 for an overview of the scholarly discussion.

Iran always were balanced against the importance China attached to the Sino-US relationship and the possible detrimental effect on China's economic modernisation path that an alienation from Washington could have entailed. On the material side of the Coxian triangle of hegemonic structures, China showed accommodation with hegemonic conditions even when in ideational disagreement – and even though other material interests could have otherwise led China to deepen its relations with Iran.

With regard to the sanctions question, Beijing therefore knows that its voting pattern in the UNSC is a positioning with far-reaching political implications in one way or the other. Voting for UNSC resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran lets Beijing lose political capital in Iran, while voting against them would have alienated those powers pushing for a tougher stance toward Iran and the 'sanctions sponsors', most notably the US. Abstaining from a vote might be a way for China to circumnavigate this dilemma, but does not do justice to Chinese claims to being seen as an influential power taking responsibility on issues of global security.<sup>314</sup> A Chinese foreign ministry official explained in an interview that the Chinese delegation is engaging in mediation between the US and the Iranian position in P5+1 nuclear negotiations with Iran.<sup>315</sup> And a former Chinese diplomat to Iran even remarked in an interview that China was pressing Iran to compromise on the question of the uranium enrichment level – a crucial point of contention in P5+1 talks with Iran.<sup>316</sup> It is important to note, however, that this is Chinese official rhetoric. As former Iranian officials recall, China was even more at the periphery of the negotiations than Russia (Mousavian 2012: 182, 264). Asked about the dynamic and relationship between Russia and China in the Iran diplomacy, serving as well as former officials working on Iran confirmed in interviews that the impression prevails that China is "following Russia's lead" in the Security Council.<sup>317</sup> A former E3 delegation member formulates:

“At times, China was hiding behind Russia, and on other occasions, it was the other way around. China had Russia built up a counter-position to the West. China

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<sup>314</sup> Zhao (2013) fittingly writes of a “balance between taking a broad great power responsibility and focusing on its narrowly defined core interests to play down its pretense of being a global power” (121).

<sup>315</sup> Interview with Chinese foreign ministry official, Beijing, 18 April 2014.

<sup>316</sup> Interview with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014.

<sup>317</sup> Author's interviews with Dr. Mark Fitzpatrick, International Institute for Strategic Studies London, 11 July 2014; with Dr. Dina Esfandiary, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 11 July 2014; with EEAS official, Brussels, 13 March 2013; with EEAS official, Brussels, 4 June 2013; with former German ambassador to Iran, Berlin, 26 August 2013; with EEAS official, Brussels, 20 March 2014; with European diplomat, Brussels, 18 March 2014; with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014; author's interview with E3 official, London, 10 March 2015. A European diplomat described the Chinese negotiation technique as 'not completely passive, but rather low-level', and continued: "China is not so creative. They [sic] help where they can, but display a 'strategic patience'". Author's interview, Brussels, 6 February 2015.

generally has an observing and restrained role. China is tackling problems with a long-term view. They don't want to fall out with the Americans.”<sup>318</sup>

This is an observation that emphasises the perception that China did not want to be seen at the forefront of diplomatic activity. This puts China into an intricate position. Its institutional weight as a permanent Security Council member makes it too ‘big’ a state to hide behind rhetorical contortions and act in the shadow of a publicly more assertive Russia. Yet, at a time where relations between Russia and its Western interlocutors are undergoing their most fundamental post-Cold War crisis in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, China will likely have to walk a tightrope walk between publicly siding with Russia on Iran, and distinguishing itself from Russian positions in other issues areas. As a consequence, Chinese foreign policy may enter a new ‘maturing’ phase that can contribute to dispel the fallacy often made in Western capitals of assuming a Chinese-Russian ‘bloc position’. Naturally, a stronger Chinese dissociation from Russian positions in public posturing comes at the expense of convenient ‘covers’. Whether this means that Chinese positions will clash more openly with American ones is doubtful: The analysis presented in this chapter has carved out cautious characteristics of the Chinese foreign policy machinery. At a minimum, however, it can be assumed that the evolving nature of Chinese-Russian dynamics will have an impact on Sino-US relations as well.

In addition, China's growing economic weight, both in the Middle East and globally, forces China to make choices and adopt public positions in line with its geopolitical influence. Close economic ties with Iran and a perception of sanctions as an interference into the domestic politics of sovereign states on the one hand needed to be reconciled with the desire to be perceived as a ‘responsible Great Power’ that is actively supporting and endorsing nuclear non-proliferation efforts on the other hand. The latter meant an eventual Chinese endorsement of sanctions resolutions against Iran, even though such a policy went against the Chinese public discourse on how to approach the Iranian nuclear issue. Displaying a norm divergence, China showed a rule convergence with hegemonic approaches. While this is not to argue that China shared an American approach on an ideational basis, this factual observation has been qualified throughout this chapter: A number of economic, security, and political reasons explain why China's interests are best served by working through the P5+1 format. The latter has meant working with and responding to influential American policy preferences, but entailed a means for China to exercise institutional control over them. China's ‘rise’ will continue to spur debates and attempts at predicting the future direction of

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<sup>318</sup> Author's interview with former E3 delegation member, Brussels, 29 January 2015.

its foreign policy. As this chapter has shown, however, the complex picture of Chinese foreign policy in the Iranian nuclear file eschews an easy categorisation of either status quo or revisionist policies.

## 6. Conclusion

Following the same two-level distinction between a discursive and a behavioral dimension of foreign policy as introduced in chapter 1 and as applied in the previous two, this chapter has analyzed to what extent China's foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme is indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony. It has been analysed how China's foreign policy towards the emerging nuclear crisis after 2002 resisted hegemony on a discursive level by emphasising the importance to respect the principles of non-interference and sovereignty, Iranian legitimate nuclear rights and political negotiations on equal terms.

This discursive resistance directly countered US attempts to push the Iranian nuclear file to the UN Security Council. China conveyed a normative divergence from what was perceived as 'hegemonism' in American foreign policy. Cox' analytical framework to understand hegemony rests on the 'triangle' of its underlying ideational, institutional and material dimensions, and it has been analysed to what extent China's security culture resists hegemony along those dimensions. Re-iterating that China regards sanctions as a violation of the principle of non-interference and an infringement of Iran's sovereignty, Chinese decision-makers made it clear that US attempts to punish Iran for its lack of cooperation and transparency over its nuclear programme ran against China's understanding of an ideational framework that should govern international politics. Nothing captures this normative divergence more clearly than China's recurrence to its 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' as guiding principles of foreign policy, which represent an explicitly anti-hegemonic posture. And ultimately, an additional discursive undercurrent in Chinese-Iran relations is the aspect of 'civilisational' solidarity that captures the joint historical experience of humiliation at the hands of Western imperialism (Garver 2006a: 3-28; Burman 2009: 26-27; 159f.). Besides its obvious public diplomacy utility for Iran of 'keeping China as a friendly voice in the negotiations', as one E3 official put it,<sup>319</sup> however, this must not be confused with an ideological stylisation of an 'Eastern bloc' policy as pursued by the Ahmadinejad administration and that did not meet much enthusiasm on the Chinese side (Mousavian 2012: 84; 141). Mousavian formulates: "China's foreign policy is based on

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<sup>319</sup> Author's interview with E3 official, London, 10 March 2015.

development advancement, while Ahmadinejad's foreign policy is based on ideological advancement" (401). And in a frank judgment about his country's foreign policy, former Iranian ambassador to China, Javad Mansouri, described the 'looking to the East' policy a mistake (in: Mousavian 2012: 443). The recurring Chinese rhetoric about 'civilisational solidarity', it thus appears, does not correspond with Iranian preferences. Despite such rhetoric, cooperation in bilateral relations is mostly limited to economic (energy) cooperation.

The Iran sanctions issue, as has been analyzed in the second and third section of this chapter, illustrates China's degree of resistance to the institutional nature of hegemonic politics. Conveying a serious discontent with international sanctions as legitimate instruments to pressure Iran, China has engaged in a 'delay and weaken' strategy with regards to sanctions resolutions in the UNSC. As has been shown, it was largely the effect of Sino-American relations on China's Iran policy that explained China's eventual adoption of UN resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran, even though these entail negative effects on Sino-Iranian commercial relations and run counter to China's principled opposition to the intrusive effect of sanctions. Despite its normative divergence from hegemony, China showed an eventual rule compliance with hegemonic positions. The institutional nature of sanctions (multilateral versus unilateral), however, is decisive for Chinese official compliance: While acceptance of UN-sponsored sanctions was the outcome of a 'triangulation' of the importance of Sino-US and Sino-Iranian relations, unilateral sanctions are rejected outright by China. Unilateral sanctions, as has been analysed, are seen as an illegitimate extension of domestic law onto other sovereign states. China's partial compliance with these latter sanctions (like the reduction of Iranian oil imports as stipulated by US sanctions regimes) is a matter of controversy and acknowledged tacitly at best, as interviews confirm. China's qualification for US sanctions 'waivers' is as much a signal of cooperation with America as it is a matter of identity politics: Wanting to avoid the label of a 'spoiler' and in line with a 'responsible stakeholder' rhetoric, China's Iran policy here walks a fine line between pursuing significant commercial relations with Iran and tacitly conceding to US positions. Resistance to hegemony, in other words, was strong on the discursive dimension, but more mixed on the behavioural dimension.

Lastly, this chapter has analyzed material factors that influence China's Iran policy. These are particularly relevant in the context of China's economic modernisation. The Chinese government has an interest in good economic relations and in securing its energy supplies from Iran's huge oil and gas fields. Iran, in turn, imports part of its refined petrol from China due to its own limited refining capacities. Iranian-Chinese bilateral trade is

intensive. Iran used to be an important buyer of Chinese military exports before the imposition of UN embargoes. Iran also received capital goods that it cannot receive from the West because of imposed unilateral embargoes (Blumenthal 2005; Dorraj & Currier 2010; Gill, B. 1998; Hickey 1990). China's trade relations with Iran explain why mounting tensions surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme are not in China's interest in a stable Middle East. Some interviewees, however, also held that China stands to benefit economically from a protracted stalemate surrounding the Iranian nuclear file. Against this background, the material dimension of hegemony towards Iran (keeping Western embargoes in place in order to increase pressure on the Iranian government) may be supported by China, rather than resisted. Irrespective of which side of this argument one is on, it seems fair to suggest that China resists the material dimension of hegemony to the extent that resistance is conducive to the furtherance of China's own commercial interests in Iran.

Chinese-Iranian relations, both in the economic and in the political sphere, were periodically subordinated to the higher-valued importance attached to Sino-US relations. Chinese foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear programme thus exhibits elements of both norm divergence from hegemony and partial rule compliance with its underlying institutional and material dimensions. China's foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme is the outcome of a balancing act between resistance to hegemony and hegemonic accommodation.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Comparing the Cases: Chinese, Russian and Turkish Policies in the Iranian Nuclear Dossier**

#### **1. Introduction**

On the basis of the previous three chapters that have provided three in-depth case studies, this chapter compares the foreign policies of China, Russia and Turkey towards the controversial Iranian nuclear programme. This cross-case comparison carves out the similarities and differences in the three case countries' Iran policies and will allow me to answer the research question how these are indicative of a security culture resisting hegemony.

The first section briefly outlines similarities in the foreign policies of China, Russia and Turkey towards the Iranian nuclear programme that was uncovered in 2002. Taking up the Coxian concept of hegemony as introduced in the theoretical chapter and as discussed in the respective case studies, this section analyzes how China, Russia and Turkey engage in normative disagreement with Iran sanctions regimes over their institutional nature as well as material impact. The second section shows how the 'de-Westernisation' of Iran discourses is related to divergence from hegemony in its ideational dimension. A third section makes sense of Chinese, Russian and Turkish partial convergence with hegemony in its material dimension, while their discourse suggests a normative divergence. It will be shown here how 'compliance' is inherently situational, and how perceptions of legitimacy and dependency create permissive margins for hegemonic policies. On the basis of this analysis, the final section analyzes the seeming ambiguity between the advocacy for counter-hegemonic security cultures on a discursive level and the partial adherence to U.S.-dominated governance structures on a behavioral level, and draws conclusions on the extent to which the Iran policies of China, Russia and Turkey resist hegemony.

#### **2. Contesting Hegemony: Normative and Material Disagreements with Iran Sanctions Regimes**

Russian, Chinese, and Turkish foreign policies towards the controversial nuclear programme of Iran display a security culture that is different from what has been carved out as a U.S.-inspired hegemonic security culture. When Iranian nuclear facilities were uncovered in 2002, hitherto undeclared to the IAEA and therefore in breach of Iran's Safeguards Agreement, it did not take long for discursive dividing lines to emerge. While the Bush administration was

pursuing an assertive foreign policy line on Iran, going so far as to threaten Iran with an attack and regime change (the incorporation of Iran into the infamous “Axis of Evil” being arguably the most dramatic and tangible discursive step in this process of securitisation, cf. Bush 2002), China, Russia and Turkey reacted with caution and were more hesitant to assume Iranian intentions on the basis of contested proliferation concerns. Yet, Russia, China and Turkey held that pressure was not conducive to achieving greater cooperation by the Iranians concerning their nuclear file with the IAEA, and publicly reiterated that diplomacy was of the utmost importance for working towards a political solution of the emerging nuclear crisis. In their foreign policy discourse, they counteracted a reading of the NPT and of Iranian rights as an NPT member that was perceived as a politicised one. In Articles II and III of the NPT, non-nuclear weapons states commit themselves not to acquire nuclear weapons, while Articles IV and V make mention of an “inalienable right” (a formula that Iran continuously referred to) of all parties to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.<sup>320</sup> The crux of the Iranian nuclear crisis for many years lay in whether non-nuclear weapon states (like Iran) have a “right to enrich”. China, Russia, Turkey, and other non-Western actors regarded the US’ and other Western states’ insistence on the denial of that right as a hegemonic exercise, as “an effort to rewrite the NPT unilaterally”, as former senior director for Middle East affairs on the US National Security Council Flynt Leverett (2013) formulates (260).<sup>321</sup> This stand-off lay at the basis of years of semantic hairsplitting as to how to interpret the relevant treaty provisions. International treaty law was instrumentalised by diametrically opposed factions. ‘Compliance’ with international law is selective and situational (on this, cf. also Litwak 2012: 34-39), a point to which section 5 below will return.

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<sup>320</sup> Now-president Hassan Rouhani (2011) writes in his memoirs on his time as chief nuclear negotiator that “any government that accepts long-term suspension or stopping enrichment is doomed to collapse” (61; 666). In a similar fashion, Hossein Mousavian (2014) writes that Iran would never accept denial of access to enrichment under the NPT (138). This ‘right’ has been likened in importance to the nationalisation of the Iranian oil industry in 1951 under prime minister Mossadegh (cf. Parasiliti 2012: 35). Possibly aware of the fruitlessness of maximalist positions, governments may change the language used in negotiations (without affecting the substance). For instance, a European Iran desk officer calls the ‘right to enrich’ question a pseudo debate, and instead states that what is relevant is ‘factual on-the-ground’ enrichment. Author’s interview, Berlin, 14 November 2014.

<sup>321</sup> The Obama administration’s tacit recognition of Iranian uranium enrichment has to be read as a realisation of the political untenability of the Bush administration’s insistence on ‘zero enrichment’. “We lost that battle”, former US National Security Council official Dr. Robert Litwak acknowledged in an interview. Author’s interview, Washington, 31 October 2014. And former high-level US diplomat William Burns formulates: “[...] The reality is that the Iranians have developed over the course of the last decade or more the know-how to enrich, they know their way around basic enrichment technology, and you can’t wish that away, you can’t dismantle it away, you can’t bomb it away. [...] I understand the argument for no enrichment, but I just think that train left the station” (Burns, Glasser 2015).



Contrary to North Korea's walk away from the NPT in 2003, the Iran case is different in nature.<sup>322</sup> Rather than weakening the treaty regime through another withdrawal from the treaty, the Iranian case is challenging the regime *from within*. The impasse in diplomatic progress towards a settlement of Iran's nuclear status soon made it clear that the legal contestation on the surface gave way to a much deeper-seated malaise in international power constellations. In their positions towards the Iranian nuclear programme, China, Russia and Turkey implicitly started to question the legitimacy of US-dominated power structures to decide over legality and illegality in international relations. They began to resist hegemony.

A Coxian understanding of hegemony proceeds from an analysis of its underlying material, ideational, and institutional structures. According to Cox, hegemony is "based on a coherent conjunction or fit between a configuration of material power, the prevalent collective image of world order (including certain norms) and a set of institutions which administer the order with a certain semblance of universality" (1981: 139). The cases presented in this research project show all three dimensions of a U.S. hegemonic security culture towards Iran that is being contested by China, Russia and Turkey in different adaptations. Drawing on Gramsci's components of hegemony as developed in, i.a., his *Prison Notebooks*, hegemony implies a dominant position in social, economic, and political structures (Gramsci 1971: 171-72). And in addition to the use of coercion to maintain such a dominant position, hegemonic structures can only be sustained when coupled with the tacit consent of a critical mass of the hegemon's subalterns. As argued in section 4 of chapter 1, the United States were the first to establish a form of hegemony that corresponds closest with a Gramscian understanding of the term. To the extent that other states act upon, sustain and reinforce US-American dominant structures in the social, economic and political sphere, US hegemony post-1945 has brought about a 'historic bloc' in a Gramscian understanding that is being upheld by the vast majority of states in the Western hemisphere.

Suffice further to recall that a distinction between norms and rules was made in the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Drawing on Katzenstein's (1996) definition of culture as "a set of evaluative standards (such as norms and values) and a set of cognitive

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<sup>322</sup> Attempts at political negotiations to end the first North Korean nuclear crisis that culminated in the 1994 Agreed Framework did not produce reliable guarantees to ensure that North Korea was not using nuclear material to manufacture a nuclear weapon. A second crisis in 2002 led to the expulsion of IAEA inspectors from the country, and the eventual withdrawal of North Korea as a state party to the NPT in January 2003. Ensuing UN sanctions and several rounds of six-party talks (between the US, Russia, China, Japan, North Korea and South Korea) could not prevent North Korea's march to a nuclear weapon. The testing of missiles and underground nuclear tests in 2006 drove the final nail in that coffin (cf. Bulychev & Vorontsov 2007: 13-29). Contrary to North Korea, Iran does not claim to have nuclear weapons ambitions and wants its nuclear programme to be accepted as legal and legitimate. Effective comparisons between the North Korean and the Iranian nuclear case are Fitzpatrick (2006) and Litwak (2008).

standards (such as rules and models) that define what social actors exist in a system, how they operate, and how they relate to one another” (ibid.: 21), “norms and values” are here understood as concrete convictions and conceptions, while “rules and models” relate to the broader macro-structure that regulates the way these norms and values are communicated, applied, or changed. All three states investigated here advocate an adherence to the institutional framework of the UN system as embodying the underlying rules and models of international politics. Unilateral sanctions regimes, however, circumvent these rules and models. In what became contested as an essential exercise of hegemonic power, the US started imposing intrusive sanctions not only on a target country (Iran), but also onto third countries that are engaged in business with Iran (cf. Lohmann 2013) - an “imperial extension of American power and [...] (a) sheer effrontery by which America sought to impose its political position”, as Ali Ansari (2006: 144) puts it. Unilateral sanctions thus propose ‘rules and models’ that run counter to those of the United Nations because they relinquish UN mandates for their adoption – a fact which implicitly undermines ‘rules and models’ of multilateral decision-making. Contesting the legitimacy of extraterritorialised U.S. legislative action, therefore, becomes a normative divergence from hegemony. The cases under investigation here have resisted hegemony on a discursive dimension – on the basis of the institutional nature of sanctions.

With regard to unilateral sanctions, a European External Action Service (EEAS) official remarked in an interview: “China and Russia explicitly *do not* share this sanctions policy.”<sup>323</sup> Chinese, Russian and Turkish conceptions of legitimacy in this regard pertain to a desirable security culture that resists hegemonic politics, that resists established power constellations reserving the right to “make [...] laws for the world community”<sup>324</sup> outside of UN structures. The respective language (diplomatic talking points) used on unilateral Iran sanctions by Chinese, Russian, and Turkish officials, respectively, is quite revealing in this regard. In interviews conducted for this dissertation, Turkish diplomats described these sanctions as “unhelpful” or “counterproductive”, while the discursive divergence from such policies went noticeably further in statements by Chinese and Russian officials. The former “oppose” such measures, while Russian officials even described them as “illegal”.<sup>325</sup> Thus, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘non-interference’ are norms that should govern international relations; they

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<sup>323</sup> EEAS official, author’s interview, Brussels, 4 June 2013.

<sup>324</sup> So formulated by a Turkish foreign ministry official, Author’s interview, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>325</sup> Interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 18 April 2013; Interview with Russian diplomat, Russian mission to the EU, Brussels, 7 October 2014; Interview with Chinese foreign ministry official, Beijing, 18 April 2014.

are the ideational underpinning of what would be a counter-hegemonic movement. In this context, interference is not only understood as the physical intrusion into the territory of another state, as in the case of a military invasion, but equally captures the intrusive effect that a comprehensive sanctions regime can have on a country. In the case of Iran, the US has woven a web of a truly intrusive sanctions regime composed of different sub-regimes of sanctions for different charges (human rights abuses, terrorism charges, nuclear-related) that seeks the country's complete international isolation. The use of political discourse to capture this degree of 'intrusion' is most revealing and needs no further explanatory commentary when the US Secretary of State calls for 'crippling' sanctions.<sup>326</sup> In addition, 'secondary sanctions' even have an intrusive effect on third countries because of undesired interactions with the sanctioned entities. These secondary sanctions affect China, Russia and Turkey in different sectors of the economy, respectively. As the previous three chapters have shown, their stakes in Iran sanctions are different, and so are their stakes in resisting not only the ideational, but also the material dimension of these sanctions. Arms trade constituted a bigger part of the Russian-Iranian trade volume than it did in the Chinese-Iranian trade volume.<sup>327</sup> Both Russian and Chinese weapons deliveries, however, were to be suspended by a gradually expanded UN arms embargo. Determined to restrict Russian arms exports to Iran already before the imposition of UN embargoes, the US sanctioned the Russian aircraft manufacturer Sukhoi and arms exporter Rosoboronexport in 2006 and 2008. On balance, though, Russian 'compliance' with different Iran sanctions was 'easier' economically because of the relatively negligible Russian-Iranian trade volume than it was for China.<sup>328</sup> China has bigger stakes in trade with Iran and in energy relations in particular that make it hard to renounce on Iranian oil imports. The attempt to dry up financial lifelines to Iran by gradually hampering its access to the financial markets as well as the US prohibitions to invest significantly in the Iranian economy thus proved to be more of a challenge to China than to Russia. As was discussed in chapter 6, The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996 stipulated that investments made in the Iranian energy sector exceeding 20 million US dollars in one year are deemed sanctionable activities (Katzman 2006). The 'Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability,

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<sup>326</sup> As former US State Secretary Hillary Clinton has done "for years", as she writes in her memoirs. She adds with barely concealed pride how the US assembled a 'coalition' to adopt them, and that "Bibi Netanyahu told me he liked the phrase so much that he had adopted it as his own" (Clinton 2014: 441).

<sup>327</sup> Cf. the arms trade databases at SIPRI ([http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade\\_register.php](http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php)). Subsequent UNSC resolutions, especially UNSCR 1929, have imposed arms embargoes that impede Russian arms sales to Iran. Asked about Russia's compliance with Iran arms embargoes, a Russian official states in an interview that Russia's arms export control regimes are now even stricter than the US and UN ones. Author's interview, Washington, 31 October 2014.

<sup>328</sup> cf. Section 5 below on a comparison of the Chinese-Iranian with the Russian-Iranian trade volume.

and Divestment Act' (CISADA) of 2010 then also included the provision of refined petroleum products to Iran as breaches of that act, and the Chinese company Zhuhai Zhenrong was sanctioned under the CISADA in 2012 (US Department of State 2012). China's increased sensitivity to US sanctions in the energy field is to be explained by the need for oil imports, while Russia is endowed with its own natural resources. Their vulnerability to US unilateral sanctions and, consequently, their material resistance to them, therefore differs because of different economic framework conditions.

And Turkey's economic dependence on Iran also primarily lies in the energy sector. With roughly 20 percent of gas imports and 40 percent of oil imports coming from Iran, Turkey's government had to find a balance in continuing trade relations with Iran, and wanting to show receptiveness to US concerns. Turkey's 'gold-for-gas' trade with Iran in which Turkey had been exporting gold to Iran via Dubai as an indirect payment for Iranian natural gas deliveries was perceived in Washington as an attempt to circumnavigate US financial sanctions on Iran, and Turkish businesses continue to be on the watch list of US legislators and sanctions-enforcement agencies (Daly 2013).<sup>329</sup>

The interstice of and interaction between different economic and political policy prioritisations can thus lead to frictions between various domestic actors in the formulation of foreign policy – a fact so complacently dismissed by IR 'realist' schools of thought. It should not come as a surprise to Foreign Policy analysts that a state's 'Iran policy' is the aggregate outcome of a debate between various domestic actors, often with partially clashing agendas. Governmental politics is often path-dependent in respective institutional contexts (Welch 1992: 116) and enriched by varied domestic foreign policy debates (Nau 2012). Perhaps nowhere was this more noticeable than in Russia during Yeltsin's administration (1991-1999). In a climate of administrative chaos and economic decline during the early Yeltsin years, foreign policy with regard to nuclear export control regimes oscillated as competing voices within Russia rendered Moscow's Iran policy ambiguous at best.<sup>330</sup> While the Ministry of Atomic Energy (MinAtom), headed by Viktor Mikhaylov, approved of nuclear technology

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<sup>329</sup> "US sanctions enforcement agencies are primarily those authorities that monitor the implementation of US financial sanctions. The Bureau of Industry and Security in the US Department of Commerce monitors the export of dual-use goods, the Directorate of Defense Trade Controls in the State Department monitors the sale of military hardware, and the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (and here especially the Office of Foreign Asset Control, OFAC) in the US Finance Department monitors compliance with US financial sanctions [...]. In close consultation with the US State Department, OFAC controls (compliance with) US financial sanctions and enforces them in collaboration with federal authorities" (Lohmann 2014: 4, author's translation).

<sup>330</sup> This was the case despite Yeltsin's official centralisation of foreign policy under the auspice of the President's office. This attempted centralisation in effect sidelined the foreign ministry, thus encouraging Minatom and the defence ministry to engage in their own diplomacy (Belopolsky 2009: 32-33, 35-38).

sales to Iran<sup>331</sup> without consulting President Yeltsin, Moscow officially committed itself through the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission to consult the Americans about arms and technology transfers to Iran of a dual-use nature (Antonenko 2001). And analyses of Russia's contemporary Iran diplomacy, as chapter 5 has shown, have to take into account inter-ministerial (and within ministries, inter-departmental) differences in approaches and shifting priorities between the Kremlin, the foreign ministry, and the Ministry of Atomic Energy (known as RosAtom since 2004). Turkey's Iran policy is torn between conflicting priorities of the prime minister's and president's office, the foreign ministry, the ministry of economics, and commercial (albeit state-owned) actors such as the oil and gas company BOTAŞ Petroleum Pipeline Corporation, and the oil refiner Tüpraş. In addition, the Turkish governmental position is complicated by the presence of cabinet members with more 'pro-Iran' sympathies than some of their colleagues.

As for the Chinese case, chapter 6 has demonstrated that there is a considerable degree of confusion over the relation between the Chinese government and companies such as Norinco, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) or the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC). Tellingly, companies were sanctioned unilaterally by the US administration, as mentioned above (e.g. the Chinese company Zhuhai Zhenrong or Russia's aircraft manufacturer Sukhoi and arms exporter Rosoboronexport), while the respective diplomatic machinery (primarily, but not exclusively, the foreign ministry) pledged cooperation with their US counterparts. If material resistance to hegemony depends on economic framework conditions, as worked out above, such framework conditions as well as institutional (read: bureaucratic and ministerial) structures also always provide a level playing field for domestic actors to act out disagreements over approaches to Iran and US hegemony.

The states under investigation here (China, Russia, Turkey) are thus by no means to be understood as respective monolithic blocs, and the preceding case studies have process-traced the outcomes of domestic decision-making processes and the occasional plethora of voices on the formulation of an overall governmental 'Iran policy'. In the remainder of the chapter, the commonalities and differences of Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies will therefore be compared on a cross-case level with a view to the aggregate outcome, i.e. to the degree of resistance to hegemony that the totality of their respective foreign policies in the Iranian nuclear crisis generates.

China's, Russia's and Turkey's economic interests in Iran, as analysed in this section, help explain a material resistance to hegemony and an insistence on the principle of 'non-

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<sup>331</sup> such as the delivery of a gas centrifuge needed to enrich weapons-grade uranium (cf. Parker 2009: 116).

interference'. Likewise, sovereignty is a concept whose link to hegemony is crucial: The rendition of enmity is an order-constituting exercise because it presupposes an acceptance thereof by a relevant audience (Williams 2003: 514; Campbell 1993; Klein 1994; Balzacq 2010). Being able to exert control over transgressions thus means being truly sovereign (cf. Agamben 2002: 25; Schmitt 1993: 19). If China, Russia and Turkey, therefore, reiterate legitimate Iranian rights to develop nuclear energy, they implicitly raise questions of sovereignty in that they question the non-granting of such rights on the part of hegemonic powers. Placing restrictions on nuclear fuel cycle development is perceived as encroachments on sovereignty, and it is here that their rhetoric becomes congruent with Iranian argumentation. The challenge in the stand-off over Iran's nuclear programme, a Turkish foreign ministry official reflects in an interview, is to "strengthen the NPT regime without infringing sovereign rights".<sup>332</sup> The contested nature of the legal dispute over Iranian nuclear rights, in this context, also casts doubts on the 'legality' of UN Security Council resolutions calling on Iran to suspend enrichment (UN 2006a, 2008a, 2010a). Because it is here that the crux of the international stand-off over Iran's nuclear programme lies, such provisions can, and have been, read as an act of hegemonic instrumentalisation of the UN system.<sup>333</sup>

Russia's and China's advocacy for more "democratic" international relations, in this context, is indicative of an effort to advance the ideational dimension of a security culture that resists hegemony, eliminates power asymmetries in international relations, and hence "democratises" them. Speeches by Chinese high-ranking officials on endeavors to "promote democracy in international relations" (Hu 2007: 59) and the idea of democratic international relations as put forward in the official Russian Foreign Policy Concept (2013) are seminal cases in point. And when Turkish president Erdogan reminds the assembled delegates at the UN General Assembly that "the world is bigger than five", he is breathing the same spirit and invokes the ambition to decentralise hierarchical relations. Turkey's non-inclusion in the UN Security Council, however, gives such statements coming from the Turkish head of state another dimension absent in the Chinese and Russian rhetoric because these directly challenge institutionalised power such as that of the permanent UNSC members. China's and Russia's

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<sup>332</sup> Author's interview, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>333</sup> 'Legality and 'illegality' of UNSC resolutions is highly contentious in the legal literature. The Security Council is empowered under the constituent treaty (i.e. the UN Charter) to pass resolutions binding on all members of the organisation (cf. Art. 24(1); Art. 25). With these institutional provisions, SC resolutions are binding even when in conflict with another treaty – such as the NPT – *provided that* resolutions are passed as decisions pursuant to Chapter VII (cf. the supremacy clause of Art. 103). Iran has rejected the legality of Security Council Resolutions demanding that it halts uranium enrichment. Then-permanent representative of Iran to the UN Javad Zarif (now foreign minister) called these demands in UNSCR 1696 'illegal' and 'unwarranted', and depicts the Security Council as an 'instrument of pressure' and as the wrong venue for discussing the issue which should be dealt with by the IAEA (cf. Zarif 2006; cf. also Pirseyedi 2013: 158).

reference to ‘democratic’ international relations thus have to be understood as a critique of the asymmetrical power disposal in international relations *beyond* such concrete institutionalised forms of power. This mirrors the distinction made between the ‘international system’ (which does not always serve US interests) and US dominance in it. The call for ‘democratic’ international relations reflects George Orwell’s famous dictum from *Animal Farm* that “All animals are equal. But some are more equal than others”. Despite formal equity, contingent power relations between states create asymmetrical hierarchies. Depending on political stances and orientations, these more powerful states can be labeled ‘primes inter pares’, superpowers, or hegemons. The ‘democratisation’ of international relations, in this reasoning, would bring about the leveling of such power relations.<sup>334</sup> This is thus not to be confused with the translation of democracy as a societal model for international emulation.<sup>335</sup> Quite on the contrary, Chinese and Russian calls for ‘democratic’ international politics presuppose the adherence to rules on an equitable basis internationally, while domestic rules can and should stay distinct, and while norm conceptions can differ.

Chinese, Russian and Turkish warnings of the counterproductive effect of punitive and pressuring policies that undermine diplomacy are indicative of the same intent. China, Russia and Turkey have publicly advocated for a security culture that rejects politics of aggression vis-à-vis Iran and therewith have sought to ‘de-Westernise’ discourse on Iran. This will be the subject of the next section, which links such a Chinese, Russian and Turkish discursive divergence to the extent of their resistance to hegemony. This intermediate step will be an important analytical one to conceptually synthesise their degree of resistance along the discursive and behavioral level according to the two-level model introduced in this dissertation.

### 3. The De-Westernisation of Iran Discourses

“Rationality” and “responsibility” in the international system are inherently subjective notions. The discursive usage of these terms, therefore, presupposes intersubjectively shared meanings. The narrative of an irrational, irresponsible Iranian leadership is a powerful example for the instrumentalisation of a discourse on logic. States that do not share

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<sup>334</sup> Mahbubani (2013: 227) writes of ‘democratic global governance’, and shows why Western governments oppose such concepts for demographic reasons: Should a representational formula for international organisations based on population be applied, the Western predominance therein would substantially shift in favor of non-Western states.

<sup>335</sup> Given Chinese and Russian domestic politics, the choice for such semantics on the part of China and Russia thus does not come without irony.

hegemonic values or political structures are labeled irresponsible, unreasonable, renegade counter-poles. As was carved out in chapter 1, a critical reading of international politics needs to ask who is ‘revolting’ against an existing order and who gets to act as “custodians of the seals of international approval and disapproval” (Claude 1966: 371-2). Since the Islamic Revolution propelled an anti-American regime to power in 1979, Iran has been positioning itself in opposition to policies crafted by the West, and the United States in particular. Both sides (Iran and the United States) have used this official rhetoric of mutual stigmatisation for political reasons for the last three decades. The “axis of resistance” rhetoric, used to denote resistance to Israel and American presence in the Middle East, is illustrative of such a discursive construction of competing worldviews (Posch 2013: 27). The social construction of statist identities for public relations purposes is often simplistic and even dualistic when combined with the means for foreign policy portrayal of an “enemy.” What can be a self-proclaimed axis of resistance may be an Axis of Evil in an antagonistic discourse. The language on ‘rogue states’ flouting international norms not because of their behavior but because of the *nature of their regime* (Litwak 2008: 92; 2012: 9-19; 2014: 17-33) is juxtaposed on the other side by the language on ‘global arrogance’, denoting an all-encompassing, almost Orwellian, reach of a roughshod superpower. Regimes of exception and truth are produced and reproduced through powerful narratives. The ‘state sponsor of terrorism’ label used by US administrations to discard the ‘rationality’ of Iran’s government is another indicator for the political nature of a mutual demonisation, of labels that *produce* reality: Successive US governments have deliberately supported regimes and governments that, by any account, have to be considered ‘terrorist’. Historical examples abound. “‘terrorism’ as a noun and ‘terroristic’ as an adjective,” as Adib-Moghaddam (2014) therefore concisely puts it, “are the terminological surface effect of discursive representations [...]” (167). Foreign policy discourse and state identities thus always have to be understood in a relational context. Asked about the sequencing of the eventual lifting of sanctions as an integral part of a CJPOA<sup>336</sup> against the background of the tightly interwoven and overlapping network of sanctions regimes for different charges (nuclear-related, Human Rights abuses, ‘terrorism’), a State Department official tellingly remarked in an interview: “Even if the nuclear sanctions were lifted, there would still be the state sponsor of terrorism label [...]. Companies are afraid of getting involved with Iran [...], (because of) reputational

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<sup>336</sup> Comprehensive Joint Plan of Action. This would be a more comprehensive follow-up agreement to the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) negotiated between the P5+1 and Iran on 24 November 2013 in Geneva. After two extensions of earlier deadlines (on 21 July 2014 and on 24 November 2014), the seven negotiation teams are reconvening at the time of writing to negotiate a CJPOA.



consequences.”<sup>337</sup> The hegemonic narrative of Iran has woven a dense tapestry of enemy projection that is very difficult to unravel – even if an agreement over Iran’s nuclear status will eventually be achieved. In addition, once adopted and implemented, sanctions often tend to take a life of their own that is difficult to unravel bureaucratically.<sup>338</sup>

In their advocacy for the non-interference of external actors in the fabric of a third country, states like China and Russia thus advance an essentially *relational* understanding of security. Publicly rejecting the idea of interventionism, they mould security cultures that counteract the attempt to ‘internationalise’ norms. China’s “four no’s”, discussed in chapter 6, are an attempt to provide a negative interpretation for what was crafted as ‘universal values’ by Western states, and to portray them as destabilising to China’s ‘national’ culture. The nationalist underbelly (more or less pronounced at different times in the last two decades) of Russia’s official discourse in the search for a post-Soviet identity is another such example where ‘counter-cultures’ take state identities and societal orders to a level that, by design, shuts out ‘the international’ (Sakwa 2012). The observed discrepancy between official rhetoric and the undermining of the principle of ‘non-interference’ on other occasions is an intriguing one. Publicly pledging for equitable international relations and the non-interference in other country’s domestic affairs, Russia and China make self-defined exceptions. Russia’s terminology of a ‘near abroad’ is most indicative in this regard, and Russian semi-covert interference in politics in neighboring Ukraine has only been the most emblematic of examples. And contested territorial disputes in Southeast Asia testify to China’s partially particularistic definitions of sovereignty. While a thorough examination of such cases is beyond the scope of this dissertation, suffice to retain here that ‘non-interference’ and an understanding of ‘national interests’ are highly contested and relational terms. While the preceding chapters have cast light on varying domestic motivations in Russian, Chinese, and Turkish foreign policies, further research is needed to illuminate the nexus between foreign policies and the internal determinants of ‘international norms’ discourses. In their aggregate effect on the international level however, as the preceding case studies have shown, norm contestation becomes an act of resistance to hegemony. In this context, the academic debate about ‘declining’ powers should not be misconstrued as exclusively encompassing ‘systemic’ power transitions (mostly framed in rationalist terminology), but should be inclusive of the fragmentation of *interpretative frameworks* to World Order.

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<sup>337</sup> Author’s interview, Washington, 30 October 2014.

<sup>338</sup> SWP nuclear proliferation expert Dr. Oliver Meier observes a tendency of bureaucracies to focus on the strengthening of sanctions without necessarily formulating mechanisms for the eventual lifting of sanctions. Author’s interview, Berlin, 14 November 2014.

China, Russia and Turkey advocate for security cultures that do not necessarily coincide with hegemonic conceptions of the need to counter an irrational Iranian leadership said to pose a threat to peace and international security. Doing so, they have positioned themselves between an actor that explicitly resists hegemony (Iran) and the hegemon itself (United States). In this, their foreign policy discourse has occasionally shown more appreciation for the Iranian perspective according to which the West aims to deprive Iran of technology that it has a legal right to use. Chinese, Russian and Turkish public diplomacy can be read as a discursive attempt at desecuritisation of the Iranian nuclear file. This diplomacy was also meant as an act of de-escalation of what was felt to be an emotionally charged, politicised discourse emanating especially from Washington. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as Patrikarakos (2012: 30) aptly writes, created a political faultline between the developed and the developing, the modernised and the modernising world (cf. also Guldemann 2007: 171). Beyond technical and legal disputes about Iran's nuclear programme and its rights and obligations as an NPT member, it is thus of paramount importance to understand the *political and ideological* dimensions of Iran's nuclear crisis. This is also key in understanding security cultures that resist political hierarchies created and sustained by a hegemonic "historic bloc" in the 20th century and of which the NPT as a freezing regime of the nuclear status quo is a prime example. The "values of the power bloc, subalterns and counter-hegemonic forces are in a constant state of negotiation, compromise and change", Jones (2006: 79) reminds us. US 'allies', in this understanding, are 'subalterns' that subscribe to the hegemonic projects of such a power bloc (ibid.: 42). Europe has lent its consent to US hegemonic project, as the evolving Iran diplomacies in the Western hemisphere has shown. Critical of US unilateral attempts to sanction Iran that increasingly also affected Iranian-European trade relations ('secondary sanctions') in the 1990s, the EU's stance on unilateral sanctions has been such that an initial criticism has led to an 'overcompliance' in 2011-12. Fear of 'reputational costs' (Giumelli & Ivan 2013: 15) has let the EU to adopt unilateral Iran sanctions that went beyond UN-mandated ones and affected the Iranian economy much stronger than US unilateral ones did (the 2012 EU oil embargo and cut-off of the Iranian Central Bank from SWIFT). So while 'resistance' can and does take place *within* a historic bloc, and even *between* hegemonic forces and 'subalterns', the empirical track record of European Iran diplomacies suggests the conclusion that despite differences in policy preferences, the EU has fully subscribed to hegemonic structures.<sup>339</sup> This has created the

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<sup>339</sup> Suffice to recall the important caveat in section 2.2 of chapter 4 that 'the EU's Iran policy' is the outcome of consultation and coordination among the 'E3' with their partially conflicting respective preferences, together

necessary *consent* of ‘subalterns’ to sustain and reinforce hegemonic constellations. The referral to the Security Council in February 2006 by an IAEA board vote of 27-3 paved the way for the eventual imposition of Chapter VII sanctions on Iran and, interestingly, a gradual shift of positions within the ‘European’ camp, with France and Great Britain becoming increasingly more assertive and formulating confrontational foreign policy stances on Iran, to an extent even that leads Osborne and Morrison to describe them as ‘client states’ of the US in the Iran dossier (2013: 6). EU sanctions were a manifestation of the *consent* of the subaltern to US hegemony. Between the US and the EU, there is a close collaboration on the areas targeted by their respective unilateral sanctions so as to maximise their effect. “This makes it not the UN, but as multilateral as possible,” an E3 delegation member remarked.<sup>340</sup> Another E3 official put this as follows:

We coordinated with the US before every round of sanctions. This has a political effect: You want to maximise the shock effect. If you want to shock the market, if you want to bankrupt a country, (and) if you do it yourself, it takes a hell of a lot of time.<sup>341</sup>

The intended outcome of sanctions, thus, is not to induce a change in behavior anymore, but to ‘bankrupt a country’. The means becomes self-satisfactory without much instrumental scrutiny. Another E3 government official formulated that EU Iran sanctions served to “constrain Iranian nuclear capacities, coerce Iran to the negotiating table, and to *signal disapproval of Iran’s nuclear programme*” (emphasis added).<sup>342</sup> Disapproval is not expressed of a possible military dimension (PMD), but of Iran’s nuclear programme per se. Yet another E3 government official noted that “given that [...] the EU is a key ally for the US, they’re expecting us to coordinate the scope and goals of sanctions with them.”<sup>343</sup> Another actor’s (US) expectancy is thus being internalised and structures European decision-making. Beyond legitimate proliferation concerns, a powerful narrative of regime disapproval has become a transatlantic consensus.<sup>344</sup>

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with the nuclear negotiation team of the EEAS under the lead chairmanship of the Union’s High Representative for Foreign and Security Policies.

<sup>340</sup> Author’s interview, Brussels, 24 February 2015.

<sup>341</sup> Author’s interview with E3 official, London, 10 March 2015.

<sup>342</sup> EU Sanctions workshop under Chatham House rules, 14 May 2015, London. Cf. Annex II.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Note that this consensus relates to the governmental level. A private sector representative remarked that the US State Department had been anxious of the European Court of Justice being too interventionist with regard to unilateral sanctions legislation, as a number of case challenging the legality of targeted sanctions against entities or individuals have been successful before the ECJ. While there is often a lack of evidentiary standards and due process, the US government’s position has been that “they like the legal uncertainty because it often leads to over-compliance.” EU Sanctions workshop under Chatham House rules, 14 May 2015, London. Cf. Annex II.

At the same time, US financial threats (secondary sanctions, threats to exclude trading partners from US financial institutions) served to *coerce* other actors into acceptance of hegemonic policies. While the US had agreed to exclude European companies from US unilateral secondary sanctions at first, presidential executive orders under Obama as from 2010 affected European entities with full force again (Lohmann 2015). “We present our partners with a choice: You either trade with the Bank of Iran or you trade with the Bank of America,” former US National Security Council official and Woodrow Wilson scholar Robert Litwak bluntly stated in an interview.<sup>345</sup> On the basis of the US dominance in the global financial system, and of that of the US dollar as the international reserve currency, US legislation is being extraterritorialised. Violations of US unilateral financial sanctions carry high penalties, and the fines levied against the French bank BNP Paribas in 2014 for having executed money transfers of companies, including Iranian ones, that are *on US sanctions lists*, was but the most recent and publicised example among a plethora of others (Lohmann 2014: 6). Asked about the imposition of EU unilateral sanctions in addition to UN and US sanctions, a European diplomat thus explains the rationale in an interview as follows:

“Europe was also under serious pressure. But we are part of the 3+3 format. The Americans like to impose sanctions, but have little trade with Iran. So they are looking at their partners to put pressure on Iran. It was only logical that we followed suit.”<sup>346</sup>

The power of exclusionary logic has a strong normative pull, a ‘historic bloc’ is moulded and sustained through the complimentary forces of *consent* and *coercion*. Against this background, the preceding chapters have shown how China, Russia and Turkey have resisted the hegemonic policies of this power bloc. In their foreign policies towards Iran’s nuclear programme, China, Russia and Turkey are resisting the ideational dimension of hegemonic structures. The hegemonic project to impose the acceptance of policies under coercion as described above, coupled with Western alarmism concerning Iran’s nuclear file, was decisively rejected and resisted by China, Russia and Turkey on normative grounds. Their acceptance of the rules of the UN system, however, demonstrates their adherence to the institutional dimension of the broader macro-structure through which international politics are channeled, conveyed and communicated, as shown in the previous section. “[...] Institutions ‘mediate’ between the ruling group and its intended audience”, Jones (2006: 76-77) writes in this regard. The Chinese and Russian approval of international sanctions in the UNSC is a case in point. While UNSC-backed international sanctions were approved with their consent,

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<sup>345</sup> Author’s interview, Washington, 31 October 2014.

<sup>346</sup> Author’s interview with European diplomat, Brussels, 6 February 2015.

additional unilateral sanctions efforts are seen as illegitimate, as essentially hegemonic policies. On the basis of these ideational and institutional dynamics analyzed in this, and the material dimension of Coxian hegemonic structures as analyzed in the previous section, the next section seeks to make sense of a seeming contradiction in the advancement of such a resistance to hegemony and China's, Russia's and Turkey's interaction with 'the hegemon'.

#### 4. Non-Western Iran Policies in Interaction with Hegemonic Structures

The previous sections have examined the extent of Chinese, Russian and Turkish adherence to the ideational, material, and institutional aspects of the Coxian triangle of hegemonic structures. The following paragraphs will analyse how these factors relate to the investigated states' 'compliance' with hegemonic policies. It will be shown how especially the question of 'sanctions compliance' is most indicative of their degree of 'resistance to hegemony'. A perceived dependence on the U.S.-dominated world economy explains behavioral deviation from foreign policies that resist hegemony. Disentangling the discursive from the behavioral level of foreign policy, this section demonstrates how a non-hegemonic discourse can be paralleled by partial compliance with hegemonic policies.<sup>347</sup> The official Russian Foreign Policy Concept, for example, bears a strong counter-hegemonic mark, as do repeated public statements indicating Russia's aversion to unilateral sanctions policies. "Another risk to world peace and stability is presented by attempts to manage crises through unilateral sanctions and other coercive measures, including armed aggression, outside the framework of the UN Security Council," the official Russian Foreign Policy concept formulates (Russian Foreign Ministry 2013a). Unilateral sanctions are regarded as "illegitimate," as confirmed by Russian foreign ministry officials.<sup>348</sup> The latter not only complicate diplomacy, in Moscow's thinking, but also have a negative effect on Russian companies' business dealings with Iran. Russian companies have been sanctioned for being seen as undertaking unwanted trade relations with Iran (*Defense Industry Daily* 2006).<sup>349</sup> Yet, Russia showed flexibility and (temporary) compliance with U.S. approaches towards Iran, when it suspended the delivery of the S-300 defense system as a result of the U.S.-Russian 'reset policy' that allowed closer cooperation on the Iranian nuclear file, as chapter 5 has outlined.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Such variation in norm compliance as described here was visualised by a two-level model to capture 'resistance to hegemony' in table 1 in chapter 1.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. section 3 of chapter 5.

<sup>349</sup> The sanctions against Sukhoi, imposed because of alleged violations of the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000, were lifted again in November 2006 (*Ria Novosti* 2007).

<sup>350</sup> Cf. section 3.2. of chapter 5.

China is dependent on Iranian oil imports, and its trade with Iran in the weapons and nuclear technology fields has long been regarded with suspicion in the West. However, Beijing shows a receptiveness to direct and indirect pressure coming from Washington: As much as China is dependent on Iranian crude oil supplies, policy-makers in Beijing are cautious not to overstep the mark set out by U.S. Iran sanctions (Pieper 2013b: 315). The Chinese reduction of Iranian oil imports in order to qualify for U.S. sanctions waivers against Chinese companies (Lohmann 2013: 4) is a forceful case in point for an adherence to a U.S. normative framework. Besides the material motivation, such compliance arguably has to do with the perception of China's foreign policy and with the impression that China is striving to behave like a "responsible stakeholder" in a hegemonic reading.<sup>351</sup> Having become *de facto* nuclear partners of Iran in the 1990s, both China and Russia also had halted cooperation under pressure from the United States, as the previous chapters have shown.<sup>352</sup> This Chinese and Russian receptiveness to American pressure has also been noticed with disgruntlement in Iran and is being recalled by Iranian officials (cf. Mousavian 2012: 54-55). "After all," Hossein Mousavian (2012) writes, "although Russia, China, and the Non-Aligned Movement exercised considerable clout in international diplomacy, they could not be relied on as a dynamic coalition leading the way toward a resolution of Iran's nuclear issue" (86). The depiction that China and Russia have effectively functioned as Iran's diplomatic covers and spoiled efforts to exert pressure on Iran is thus too short-sighted and is disproved by their track record of cooperation with the US. From a hegemonic perspective, responsibility is attributed to actors that subscribe to the norms of the hegemon, irresponsibility to those that disregard them.

Turkey shares with China and Russia an aversion for Western pressure on Iran. Thus, the government in Ankara has always found itself at a strategic crossroads dictated by its geographic location on the one hand, and its integration into NATO alliance structures and a commitment to Western security policies on the other. Emphasising that sanctions are counterproductive political tools to force Tehran to the negotiating table, Turkey engaged in a phase of proactive mediation in 2009 and 2010. This was intended to reduce tensions and

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<sup>351</sup> In 2005, then US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick has called on China to behave like a 'responsible stakeholder' (Zoellick 2005). Cf. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm>. "A critic may argue that basically he asked China to become like the United States", Amitai Etzioni (2011: 540) remarks, and analyses the 'aspirational standards' that such a normative and essentially simplistic term reveal (542-553). Taking note of what she perceived as a more assertive Chinese foreign policy, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2014) described China as a 'selective stakeholder' (75).

<sup>352</sup> Former US National Security Council official Dr. Robert Litwak confirms this in his 2012 book *Outlier States*: "[...] the Clinton administration diplomatically pressed both countries [China and Russia] to forgo nuclear commerce with Iran, making the cessation a condition for U.S. civil nuclear exports to China and threatening the cutoff of U.S. aid to Russia to get the Kremlin to forgo the sale of fuel-cycle technology (163-64).

propose diplomatic initiatives to the Iranian nuclear stand-off. Even though securing the historic first Iranian agreement to a proposed deal in May 2010, this episode of Turkish mediation ended as a policy failure when UNSCR 1929 was adopted only a month later. The subsequent retreat from an active role as mediator—while not shying away from venting its disappointment with Western impatience—was proof of Turkey’s alignment with U.S. positions. Given this stance, Turkey constantly finds itself in need of justification for its imports of Iranian oil—contrary to U.S. efforts to convince its allies of its economic isolation policies vis-à-vis Iran. While showing receptiveness to U.S. intentions, Turkey does not cut off the most cost-effective oil imports from neighboring Iran. Geography and economic considerations partially trump perceptions of solidarity with U.S. policies.

This is an important observation that explains perceived inconsistencies in the Iran policies of states like China, Russia and Turkey when filtered through a Western lens. While these states have advocated for foreign policy approaches to address Iran’s nuclear programme differently from those of the United States, they have still faced the imperatives of certain material constraints: Turkey cannot ignore the geographic imperatives that come from its location as Iran’s neighbor and its ensuing dependence on Iranian oil imports. The integration into the international financial system as part of the U.S.-dominated international economic governance structures is another such material constraint. This is illustrated by the effect of unilateral sanctions on Chinese, Turkish and Russian companies trading with Iran. “Washington’s expanding reliance on secondary sanctions [...]”, Leverett & Leverett (2013) write, “rests on an assumption that even countries resistant to American hegemony will go along, in the belief that participation in the global economy requires access to the U.S. financial system” (282). Were China, Turkey and Russia cut off from the international trade and financial system, the sanctions regime would not affect them to the extent that it intends. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to assume that their reaction to, and public diplomacy regarding, such intrusive measures would be different.

Finally, however, it is important to stress that differences in political prioritisations between the states investigated here persist and account for varying degrees of ‘resistance to hegemony’ beyond observed patterns of similarity in discourse and behavior, as carved out above. The three previous chapters have given ample empirical evidence of the multilayered nature of Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies towards Iran. China and Russia, for example, have different interests in a ‘status quo’ situation on the Iranian nuclear crisis that is to be explained by their material motivations for trade ties with Iran. While there have repeatedly been arguments for Chinese and Russian interests in a protracted stalemate of an

internationally isolated and sanctioned Iran because of economic advantages, Russia has much more an interest in such a protracted status quo situation than China has. Chinese-Iranian trade ties are substantial (aggregate bilateral trade flows ranging between a record high of 45 billion US dollars in 2011 and around 39.4 billion US dollars in 2013), whereas Russian-Iranian trade ties are comparatively negligible (with bilateral trade worth 3.6 billion US dollars constituting a high in 2010, which fell to a trade flow of 1.6 billion US dollars in 2013).<sup>353</sup> Chinese-Iranian trade ties might even be made easier with the eventual lifting of Western Iran sanctions (it would ease Chinese payments for Iranian oil deliveries if Iran was allowed into the SWIFT banking system again). This need not be the case for Russian-Iranian trade relations, as Western firms could constitute economic competitors for Russian ones. Russia's interest in 'spoiling' the negotiation track of the P5+1, as alluded to by Russian deputy foreign minister Ryabkov in March 2014, are thus greater from a purely material point of view than would be the case for China.<sup>354</sup> Aware of such arguments and their political significance, Russian officials emphasise that a transition to fully-normalised trade relations between Iranian and Western companies in the event of a negotiated nuclear solution "won't happen in a day", and that these are merely normal market dynamics that Russia does not have to fear.<sup>355</sup> Instead, so the official assertion, Russia would stand to gain from developing cooperation with Iran in other spheres, including investments in the Iranian oil and gas production (ibid.).

Turkey repeatedly called for a political solution to the Iran nuclear crisis, emphasised the importance of diplomacy, and warned of the counterproductive effect of sanctions, but nevertheless showed solidarity with the United States, as Turkish announcements about the reduction of Iranian oil imports demonstrated (Habertürk 2012). Turkey complied with Iran sanctions, even though this compliance was "costly," as formulated by a Turkish foreign ministry official.<sup>356</sup> China and Russia put the brakes on sanctions efforts in the UNSC, watered down resolutions and condemned pressure on Iran, and showed a stronger public anti-U.S. posturing and anti-sanctions stance than Turkey did.<sup>357</sup> On a behavioral level, however, China and Russia also demonstrated partial compliance with U.S. policies, as the

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<sup>353</sup> These are official UN trade numbers retrieved from the Statistics Division of the Department of Economics and Social Affairs. Available at: <http://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

<sup>354</sup> Author's interview with Dr. Dina Esfandiary, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 11 July 2014.

<sup>355</sup> Russian official at the permanent mission of the Russian federation to the EU, email correspondence with author, 13 March 2014.

<sup>356</sup> Author's interview, Washington, 14 February 2014.

<sup>357</sup> As also confirmed by Dr. Dina Esfandiary, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Author's interview, London, 11 July 2014.



examples cited above have demonstrated.

It is the construction of norms that influences material imperatives pertaining to adherence or rejection of hegemonic structures, and vice versa. This observation harks back to the reciprocal effects between ideational, material and institutional underpinnings of power structures in a Coxian understanding of hegemony.<sup>358</sup> Rather than singling out one dominant side of the equation, it is the joint effect of these factors that needs to be taken into account for an understanding of Chinese, Russian and Turkish policies in relation to Iran.

## **5. 'Compliance' with 'international norms' or with hegemonic structures?**

A discrepancy between discursive and behavioral levels in Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies can be observed, as the previous section has concluded. A public advocacy for resistance to hegemonic policies is paralleled by partial compliance on a behavioral level. Advocacy for an explicitly *non*-hegemonic security culture discursively here can be paralleled by compliance with parts of a US-inspired hegemonic security culture on a behavioral level. Grudging acceptance of a U.S.-inspired sanctions regime on Iran allows China, Russia and Turkey collectively to join the camp of “responsible” states because they adhere to material structures put in place for politico-ideological reasons. A normative disagreement with U.S. hegemonic structures, therefore, did not entail an all-out rejection of U.S. policies towards Iran. It was, instead, the relative dependence on the United States that led China, Russia and Turkey to tacitly accept parts of a hegemonic security culture despite this being against their normative conceptions. Normative divergence and rules convergence take place concurrently. Variation in norm compliance on the part of the case study states has to be seen in the context of their respective bilateral ties with the United States, the perception of their foreign policies toward Tehran and elsewhere, and their stakes in avoiding a confrontation with Iran. These stakes are, as has been shown, both material and ideational. As different material and ideational factors weigh differently for China, Russia, and Turkey, respectively, their degree of ‘compliance’ with US power structures inevitably differs, as also shown in section 2 above. As analysed in the previous chapter, China heavily depends on Iranian crude oil imports, which explains its indirect disregard for certain (unilateral) Iran sanctions regimes. The Chinese eventual approval of multilateral sanctions (and therewith compliance with US demands) was attributed to the higher value Beijing attaches to the US

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<sup>358</sup> And is also in line with a theoretical framework sympathetic to moderate constructivism.

than to Iran.<sup>359</sup> Turkey, as analysed in chapter 4, did not face the dilemma of formally having to approve of UN sanctions on Iran, yet still emphasises its alliance solidarity with the US. By way of institutional imperatives (NATO), Turkey already has a stronger ‘built-in compliance’ with the US government, even though this is subject to Turkey’s sometimes markedly different ‘national interests’, as not only the case study presented in chapter 4, but also the sectarian violence in neighboring Iraq, diverging approaches to transnational Islamism and other regional political and security issues have demonstrated. And of the three cases presented in this dissertation, Russia is the one where publicly articulated ‘norms and values’ are in starkest contrast to US preferences. ‘Compliance’ with US power structures at the time of writing is low as never seen since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Tensions over the future of Ukraine loom large in any recent attempts to explain the deterioration in relations between the US and Russia, and between the West and Russia in general (but should not be seen as sole explanatory factors). Despite allusions to the contrary,<sup>360</sup> Russia has not allowed this general state of frosty relations to affect the Iran nuclear talks (cf. Meier & Pieper 2015). Clearly, however, differently layered ideational and material conditions give Russia the least incentive to ‘comply’ with US policy. The fact that the Russian government has not ‘spoiled’ the Iran nuclear talks is indicative of its understanding carved out in chapter 5 that the closure of Iran’s nuclear file is in Russia’s own security interest, and that working through the P5+1 format is legitimised by UNSC resolutions. Constructive collaboration in this format is thus not to be misconstrued as ‘compliance’ with US interests, but underscores the Russian (and Chinese) approval of multilateral institutional structures to approach Iran’s nuclear programme. In Katzenstein’s distinction, ‘rules and models’ that have the power to *constrain* hegemonic projects institutionally are adhered to, while ‘norms and values’ can differ. Both China and Russia have eventually approved of UN-mandated Iran sanctions because they were negotiated through UN structures. They did not ‘comply’ with them for ideational reasons, but for the institutional reason that their governments co-decided on them. ‘Compliance’ with policies is therefore not to be misconstrued as ‘compliance’ with ‘norms’ of an ill-defined ‘international community’. Norm conceptions differ within the international system. Asking who is ‘complying’ with what norms and for what purpose necessarily brings

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<sup>359</sup> As was also the assessment of a US State Department official. Author’s interview, Washington, 30 December 2014.

<sup>360</sup> Such as Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov’s public statement on 20 March 2014 that Russia could reconsider its stance on the Iranian nuclear issue in the face of increasing Western pressure over Moscow’s Ukraine policies or occasional statements coming from the foreign ministry (Russian foreign ministry 2014).

up the question of contingent power constellations. Russian president Putin underlined this point in his 2014 Valdai speech in stark anti-hegemonic terms:

“In a situation where you had domination by one country and its allies, or its satellites rather, the search for global solutions often turned into an attempt to impose their own universal recipes. This group’s ambitions grew so big that they started presenting their policies they put together in their corridors of power as the view of the entire international community. But this is not the case.”

‘Compliance’ is thus a terminology that suggests hierarchical relationships. Putin’s snide remark about ‘satellites’ of one dominant country bears a striking resemblance to the conception of hegemonic ‘subalterns’ whose consent helps sustain a prevalent historic bloc. The case studies examined in this dissertation have shown how ‘compliance’ on the part of China, Russia and Turkey with approaches to the Iranian nuclear conflict that they object from an ideational standpoint has been selective, and how US policy preferences in the Iran dossier have been resisted on other occasions. The aggregate result from an analytical point of view, then, is the erosion of the concept of ‘compliance’, and a relational take on the legitimacy of policies with a global impact.

Suffice it to note that this is not meant to imply that the Iran policies of China, Russia and Turkey are crafted in a joint effort to challenge the U.S.-dominated system of governance. Interviewees confirm that consultations between their governments are made, but equally with all parties involved.<sup>361</sup> While a Turkish diplomat acknowledges that, for instance, “our [the Turkish] position is closer to the Russian discourse than to the Western one”,<sup>362</sup> a Russian diplomat states that “our [the Russian and the Chinese] positions are close (and) we coordinate positions and have similar goals”<sup>363</sup>, and a Chinese diplomat affirms that “we [the Chinese] are closer to the Russians than to the other four [P5+1 member states]”<sup>364</sup>, their foreign policies are seen as separate tracks. And also the extent of diplomatic engagement and contestation differs: Turkey is less involved institutionally than the UNSC permanent members Russia and China, and was engaged in diplomatic mediation between Iran and the established negotiating format of the P5+1. This position allows Turkey to be more critical of the imposition of multilateral sanctions, which it does not have to decide on itself (in the absence of a Security Council seat). But also between the two non-Western P5+1 states, China and Russia, there are nuances in official diplomatic contestation that distinguish their

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<sup>361</sup> Interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 18 April 2013; Interview with Russian diplomat, Russian mission to the EU, Brussels, 7 October 2014; Interview with Chinese foreign ministry official, Beijing, 18 April 2014; Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>362</sup> Interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>363</sup> Interview with Russian diplomat, Russian mission to the EU, Brussels, 7 October 2014.

<sup>364</sup> Interview with Chinese diplomat to the US, Washington, 31 October 2014.

positions from each other, as has become clear by the preceding two in-depth case studies. An impression prevails that China is ‘hiding behind’ a more assertive Russian diplomatic positioning.<sup>365</sup> Rather than theorising on counter-hegemonic bloc movements, it is therefore arguably a more insightful endeavor to analyze the respective interactions of foreign policies with hegemonic power structures and to examine their collective effect on the crafting of a security culture that resists those structures--even though these foreign policies have their different motivations, constraints and preconditions.

## 6. Contesting Hegemony and Moving into a Post-American World

Iran’s nuclear crisis was never only about nuclear physics. Its significance can also not be fully grasped by an exclusive public international law perspective, which is inevitably doomed to reproduce the circular semantic analyses that have bedeviled international negotiations since 2003. Iran’s nuclear crisis is about perceived hegemonic politics and about a conflict whose resolution will have far-reaching implications for the dialectic between the modernising and the modernised world. It will also affect perceptions of world order in a process where the U.S. role as a shaper of world hegemony is declining. Writing on the US practice of sanctioning third country entities for their interactions with Iran, Leverett & Leverett (2013) remark: “[...] American policy is now incentivising emerging powers to develop alternatives to established, U.S.-dominated mechanisms for conducting, financing, and settling international transactions. As Washington continues on this course, it will hasten the shift of economic power from West to East” (282). Such alternative mechanisms can be the Chinese and Turkish payments to Iran in currencies that circumvent the 2010 CISADA and the 2012 Iran Threat Reduction Act (like Turkish Lira or Chinese renminbi) or the use of front companies for “sanctions-busting” purposes. And faced with US and EU unilateral financial sanctions that complicate payment modalities for Iran, China and Iran had to revert to oil-for-goods barter agreements (much to the dislike of the Iranians).

It is no wonder, then, that Western observers of Russian, Chinese or Turkish foreign

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<sup>365</sup> Author’s interviews with Dr. Mark Fitzpatrick, International Institute for Strategic Studies London, 11 July 2014; with Dr. Dina Esfandiary, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 11 July 2014; with EEAS official, Brussels, 13 March 2013; with EEAS official, Brussels, 4 June 2013; with former German ambassador to Iran, Berlin, 26 August 2013; with EEAS official, Brussels, 20 March 2014; with European diplomat, Brussels, 18 March 2014; with former Chinese diplomat to Iran, Beijing, 22 April 2014; with European diplomat, Brussels, 6 February 2015; author’s conversation with former British Governor at the IAEA, Brussels, 23 June 2015. Deputy Director of the Institute of Middle East Studies of the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations formulates: “Russia has more leverage over the Iran dossier than China has. China just has economic relations with Iran, which doesn’t mean we have influence. We have to take a very pragmatic position. Russia has to stand in the first row.” Author’s interview, Beijing, 24 April 2014.

policies cannot but conclude that their policies appear ambiguous. States that sit on fences because they are torn between different security cultures, strategic circles, or geographic crossroads are bound to pursue multidirectional foreign policies. To the outside observer, these policies occasionally appear incoherent, or opportunistic at best and politically unfaithful at worst. Contesting norms that seem *common sense* because they represent a consensual relationship is an act of questioning a hegemonic order that is based on consent and coercion. Status quo actors, as dominant forces in this order, have an inherent interest in domesticating alternative initiatives. Exclusive and essentially simplistic categorisations are a recurring mantra of foreign policy projections and rhetoric. It has been shown in this research how an investigation into Chinese, Russian and Turkish policies toward Iran can offer more nuanced understandings of foreign policies between such exclusive camps.

At the heart of the Cold War over Iran's nuclear programme lie over three decades of traumatised U.S.-Iranian relations. Technical solutions to end this nuclear crisis have been proposed, discussed and rejected. It is the mistrust on both sides that prevent any politically easy solution to a crisis whose resolution will entail a new chapter in U.S.-Iranian relations. Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif once more reminded the assembled decision-makers at the 50th Munich security conference in January 2014 that the West does not have a 'monopoly on mistrust.' Only mutually acceptable proposals to craft a nuclear 'endgame scenario' for Iran will succeed in ending what Zarif called, in late 2013, an 'unnecessary crisis' (Warrick 2013). The replacement of the confrontational rhetoric of the Ahmadinjad administration by a more conciliatory tone under Rouhani's leadership has allowed a historically constructive dialogue with Iran that marks a new phase in the decade-old nuclear crisis, and that led to the first interim agreement on Iran's nuclear programme in November 2013. Against the backdrop of these dynamics, a Russian foreign ministry official remarked in an interview that the U.S. position had embraced an approach that Moscow had already been advocating for years.<sup>366</sup> Dmitri Trenin (2014) even writes that "the U.S. adoption of a gradualist approach toward Iran that Russia had long favored resulted in a breakthrough on the Iranian nuclear issue." Historic developments beginning in the late summer 2013 thus make it all the more relevant to reflect on foreign policies that resist hegemony. This is a most timely endeavor at a time when the world witnesses a shift in hegemonic structures as P5+1 talks with Iran aim to hammer out a comprehensive nuclear solution with Iran to succeed the Joint Plan of Action of November 2013 and the political framework agreement of 2 April 2015.

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<sup>366</sup> Author's interview with Russian foreign ministry official, Moscow, 12 November 2013.

Accommodation with hegemony, as the political disputes over the Iranian nuclear crisis have shown, is a temporal and temporary phenomenon and can take place at the same time as resistance to hegemony in other issue areas. The Russian ‘good for gas’ scheme that was reported on in the summer of 2014, Chinese ‘junk for oil’, and Turkish ‘gold far gas’ schemes all speak one language: The isolation of Iran over its controversial nuclear programme has been resisted commercially. With what Khanna (2014) calls a “break between commercial and nuclear diplomacy”, states like China, Russia and Turkey have crafted a security culture that resists hegemony. Resistance to hegemony here transcends a material dimension (commercialisation of relations) and can see the eventual emergence of a new security culture towards Iran.

The commercialisation of relations between Iran and other states that criticise the use of economic and financial power for political leverage has been a recurring discursive theme in the Ahmadinejad administration. The ‘looking to the East’ policy has been the explicit attempt to diversify Iranian trade relations in order to better resist US pressure (Mousavian 2012: 190f.). A subject of domestic criticism, and in the realisation of its relative fruitlessness, this policy objective has eventually been dropped. But the Iranian reference to vocabulary like that of a ‘resistance economy’ in 2014 (Khajepour 2014) bears a striking resemblance to earlier such attempts of commercial resistance (at least discursively) to denote not only a political disagreement with US-dominated world order that is part of the Islamic Republic’s foundational narrative, but also an economic model that ‘resists’ Western economic power. As such, it has been a strong illustration of ‘counter-hegemony’. While this is more propagandistic rhetoric than an actually preferable policy option on the Iranian side, China, Russia and Turkey cannot but arrange themselves with global financial and economic structures that they depend on – not only economically more so than Iran, but also politically, as the preceding chapters have shown.<sup>367</sup> “Contestation over primary institutions [...],” Barry Buzan (2010) formulates,<sup>368</sup> “is itself one of the driving forces behind the evolution of international security” (7). This dissertation has shown how resistance to power structures relates to the interaction effects between these power structures and perceptions of legitimacy

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<sup>367</sup> The fast-changing nature of international framework conditions and bilateral relations demands a caveat here. In the wake of the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West, the Russian government has shown a tendency of economic alienation from US-inspired financial and economic instruments – in addition to the level of political resentment, and in addition and reaction to Western attempts to isolate Russia economically. Examples are the Putin administration’s announcement to substitute embargoed manufactured goods from the West by domestic produces; indirect taxes and direct product bans; and relevant changes in the customs legislation (Libman 2014).

<sup>368</sup> by ‘institutions’, he refers to here as “organic institutions- such as sovereignty, non-intervention, territoriality, nationalism, international law, diplomacy, great power management [...]” (ibid.: 6).

in international relations at large (Clark 2011; Rapkin & Braaten's 2009; Reus-Smit 2014). Perceptions of the illegitimacy of UN-defying unilateral sanctions may resonate in China's, Russia's and Turkey's foreign policy discourse, but the perception of economic and political dependence on the very structures propagating a UN-rules contesting behavior prompts the same states to comply with its stipulations.

The Obama administration's subtle reframing of the challenge emanating from Iran (from 'rogue' to 'outlier': Litwak 2014: 17-33) signals a shift from purely unilateral approaches towards Iran to one that embeds US foreign policy in an international framework. China, Russia, Turkey and others have resisted a language that could be conceived as a pretext for military actions against Iran (Litwak 2014: 28). The US approach towards Iran, in turn, underwent a shift towards a more multilateral diplomacy and an *international* norm discourse. The inclusion of China and Russia in the P5+1 negotiation format was vital in preempting the impression of 'Western powers' attempting to negotiate away Iranian rights. Analysing how resistance of non-Western voices to US Iran policies may have created a new 'logic of appropriateness' (cf. March & Olsen 1998: 949) through the prism of US foreign policy therefore merits further research.<sup>369</sup> This ties in to the wider literature on power transition and power diffusion (Gilpin 1981; Organski 1968; Organski & Kugler 1980; DiCicco & Levy 2003; Jones, B. 2011; Keohane 1984; Kagan 2002, 2012; Kupchan 2012. cf. also Lebow & Valentino 2009; Lemke 1997; Vezirgiannidou 2013; Clark 2014). These are no linear processes. Conceptions of security cultures change gradually. And rather than assuming a coherent bloc challenge to US hegemony, the cases analysed here have disentangled qualified resistance along the material, ideational and institutional dimensions of hegemony, respectively. Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Iran policies have different rationales, respectively, and are often in conflict with each other. The scenario of the lifting of sanctions in the course of a comprehensive Joint Plan of Action over Iran's nuclear programme may entail economic competition between Chinese and Russian companies in some sectors on the Iranian market, as the previous chapter has argued. Chinese companies may enter the Iranian market in sectors where Russian ones were hitherto dominant. In addition, the lifting of economic sanctions can have implications for oil price dynamics that affect Russia and China reversely: Russia has an interest in high oil prices, while China benefits from low oil prices as a net oil importer. As for Turkey, Russian-Iranian trade volumes are surpassed by a significantly higher Russian-Turkish trade volume. Even with the lifting of Iran sanctions,

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<sup>369</sup> Inevitably, indeterminacy is an inherent challenge for such an endeavor. Additional factors impacting on US Iran policy can be Iranian policies, regional and international framework conditions and changes in foreign policy prioritisations due to changes in the administration.

Turkey might therefore constitute a competitor for Iran in expanding economic relations with Russia. China's, Russia's and Turkey's bilateral relations with each other thus complicate the idea of a unified bloc challenge to US policies.

As such, the contribution to the theoretical literature is one that aims to break down the schematic framework of 'systemic' analyses of power shifts in areas often misleadingly labelled 'global governance'. The decline of hegemony and "the rise of the rest" are too often portrayed in dichotomous terms. Studies of the BRICS and "emerging powers" typically analyze the changing international economic system in a multipolar world and the shift of power equations that growing economies of emerging powers bring along. This stream of literature has brought hegemonic transition theory and power transition theory--in the context of systemic leadership contestation by newly emerging powerful states--to renewed scholarly attention. Understanding foreign policies that are not 'Western' and do not necessarily share the same normative framework with a Gramscian historic bloc--but still work with the rules of the system instead of working to overthrow them—requires a more differentiated perspective on the dynamics of gradual power shifts. The scholarly debate about 'China's rise' is a seminal example here. Underlying analyses of a 'rising China' is an implicit assumption that a more pronounced Chinese foreign policy in international relations could come at the expense of US power. The 'international system' would experience a shift from the 'Washington consensus' to a 'Beijing consensus'. The 'China Threat' school formulates most emblematically that 'China's rise' is a negative development (Gertz 2000). Such scholarly interpretations are misconstrued. The coexistence of established and emerging powers will inevitably determine the design of the future world order. Research is needed to examine this relationship beyond the accommodation-confrontation spectrum.

It is in this context that Richard Sakwa (2011) has coined the concept of "neo-revisionism" to make sense of foreign policies that do not directly question or challenge the essence of the international system (as revisionist states would do), but indirectly aim to revise its functioning (cf. also Sakwa 2015: 30-35). In a similar vein, Serfaty (2011: 18) describes China and Russia as "prudent revisionist powers." Such concepts aim to avoid over-theorising about foreign policies that do not coincide with that of the "system leader" as expressions of the advancement of alternative norms in international security governance.<sup>370</sup>

Torn between resistance and accommodation, and under the constraints of the current political momentum, temporary as well as structural perceptions, and the imperatives of history, the foreign policies of China, Turkey and Russia in the Iranian nuclear dossier cannot

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<sup>370</sup> In a similar vein, cf. also Breslin (2009, 2013); Clark (2011: 25-26).



but appear as “essentially ambiguous” when filtered through a Western lens.<sup>371</sup> The U.S. leadership role is declining, but an entirely alternative international order is not yet in sight. As long as the U.S.-dominated historic bloc exists, China, Russia and Turkey will work with and through the international architecture in place. This does not mean that these states will accept the same norms. Despite disagreements with the United States at the macro level, China, Russia and Turkey do not appear as revisionist states constituting a bloc challenge to American dominance.<sup>372</sup> An acknowledgment thereof allows for the debunking of confrontational policy rhetoric and for more nuanced research on post-hegemonic power shifts. It also transcends the unhelpful divide between “norm-setter” and “norm-taker,” and helps us to reflect more accurately on the future coexistence between former hegemonic and emerging powers. The policy task is to accept diverging national cultures, but still craft rules and models that allow actors to coordinate policies that allow peaceful co-existence.<sup>373</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter has carved out the commonalities in Russian, Chinese and Turkish resistance to a consensual hegemonic order as demonstrated by a comparative analysis of their foreign policies towards the Iranian nuclear programme. For hegemonic power structures to become established and sustained over time, they presuppose an acceptance by a sufficiently large number of other actors. The acceptance of such structures constitutes what Cox calls a “historic bloc” (Cox 1996: 131). By implication, the rendition of enmity becomes order-constituting in hegemonic systems; i.e., it serves to sustain the structures in place and to reconfirm prevalent ideologies (Campbell 1993; Klein 1994; Balzacq 2010). Challenging such a rendition of enmity, therefore, is resistance to hegemony, as this chapter has shown. This is not to suggest that such resistance inevitably ushers in changes in the ‘historic bloc’, but rather demonstrates the continuous engagement and interaction between hegemony, its subalterns, and counter-hegemonic forces, caught in “a constant state of negotiation, compromise and change”, as Jones (2006) puts it (79).

This chapter has picked up the twofold distinction between a discursive and a behavioral level that has been worked out in the theoretical chapter and applied to the three empirical case studies throughout this dissertation: While Chinese, Russian and Turkish officials publicly advocate for an adherence to a security culture that emphasises compliance

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<sup>371</sup> Sakwa (2002: 366) has used this formulation to capture Russian foreign policy reorientations following the breakup of the Soviet Union.

<sup>372</sup> This was also the reflection offered by Dr. Robert Litwak. Author’s interview, Washington, 31 October 2014.

<sup>373</sup> Joshua Cooper Ramo (2010) has used the term ‘co-evolution’ in this context.

with the norms of “sovereignty” and “non-interference,” their level of perceived material and political dependence on the United States prompts them to follow foreign policies that still comply with parts of U.S. hegemonic structures. The U.S. unilateral sanctions regime and compliance with an extraterritorialised U.S. legislation is the most prominent case in point.

Russia, since the discovery of Iran’s hitherto covert nuclear programme in 2002, has emphasised the Iranian right to use peaceful nuclear energy and, until the referral of the Iranian nuclear file to the UNSC and the adoption of first Security Council resolutions, has largely shielded Tehran from international pressure--as has China. While Western governments observed Russian-Iranian nuclear technology cooperation with a watchful eye, Moscow continued making a distinction between legitimate commercial ties and an alleged military dimension of Iran’s nuclear programme. Likewise, the Chinese provision of sensitive nuclear technology to Iran, as well as its commercial exploitation of Western embargoes on Iran and its dense ties with the Iranian oil economy, have been seen as undermining Western attempts to increase international pressure on Iran. Turkey presents itself as a U.S. ally in the region and is committed to NATO alliance structures. Materially, its location as a geographic neighbor of Iran and the imperatives of economy, however, impose constraints on Turkey that allow Ankara to disagree with Western politics of securitisation of Iran’s nuclear programme. In political discourse, Turkey has emphasised the importance of political dialogue to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis and has been sceptical of the use of pressure and sanctions on Iran.

Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme arguably breathe the ambition to partially ‘de-Westernise’ security cultures and discourses toward Iran. On a discursive level, their foreign policies display a normative divergence with a U.S.-inspired security culture towards Iran. At the same time, one must be careful not to over-theorise on indications of counter-hegemonic forces struggling to topple the prevailing power system. Respective foreign policy motivations are diverse. The ‘de-Westernisation’ of Iran discourses is therefore not to be confused with a joint endeavor to create a counter-hegemonic bloc opposing U.S. leadership.

China, Russia and Turkey resist a hegemonic security culture on a discursive level. Advocating for a non-hegemonic security culture conveys a normative divergence, a deviation from hegemonic normative frameworks. Their relative dependence on the United States, however, leads China, Russia and Turkey to follow foreign policies that accept parts of this hegemonic security culture. The implementation of the international sanctions regime, even though potentially contrary to their economic interests, are cases in point. Even more tellingly, China and Turkey have reduced their oil imports from Iran in order to qualify for

U.S. sanctions exemptions. Partial acceptance of such hegemonic structures is predicated upon a level of perceived political and material dependence on the United States. And the acceptance of UN-backed international sanctions explains a convergence of rules that are still accepted as governing international relations at large. It explains an adherence to ‘rules and models’ that have the power to *constrain* hegemonic policies because they have to be channeled through *multilateral* institutions.

The coexistence of established and emerging powers will inevitably determine the design of the future world order. The working relationship between former hegemons and “rising powers” as potential challengers is constantly being re-balanced and re-negotiated. In this regard, with different prioritisations and conceptions of legitimacy by the different actors involved becoming manifest, the Iranian nuclear crisis arguably is not only a battlefield for the survival of the NPT regime, but is a debate about differing conceptions of world order and security governance. Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme, as analysed in this chapter, stand indicative of alternative security cultures toward Iran in a “process of power de-concentration” (Tessman and Wolfe 2011: 218) in which dominant power structures have not been replaced by alternative governance structures (yet).

The resulting seemingly ambiguous variation in compliance with the norms advocated by the case study states themselves is to be explained by the friction between resistance and accommodation with established power constellations where power is not exercised in a linear way. Precisely because the dialectic between hegemony, its subalterns and counter-hegemonic movements produces a constantly shifting and interacting pattern of re-negotiation over the terms of World Order, it proves impossible to pin-point resistance as a ‘totalizing act’ (Jones 2006: 76). As much as ‘historic blocs’ are sustained through the complimentary forces of consent and coercion, hegemony – conceptually and empirically – can never be absolute. By implication, it is impossible to conceive of its contrary extreme – counter-hegemony – in the absolute. “A counter-hegemony would consist of a coherent view of an alternative world order, backed by a concentration of power sufficient to maintain a challenge to core countries”, Robert Cox formulates (1981: 150), and thus importantly implies that ‘counter-hegemony’ denotes a drive towards power transitions. The conceptual distinction between an all-out confrontation (what in Gramscian terms resembles a ‘war of manoeuvre’ most closely) and a more gradual and nuanced contestation of hegemonic structures (a ‘war of position’ in Gramsci’s Thought) has been shown to apply to the Iran policies of China, Russia and Turkey. ‘Resistance’ has been conceptualised as a qualified disagreement with parts of the

hegemonic order, and it has been shown how such resistance takes place across ideational, material and institutional dimensions of such an order. At a time when U.S. foreign policy on Iran seems to be undergoing a paradigm shift, such a finding sheds light on the dynamics of international power shifts that will, one way or another, determine international politics and the co-existence between hegemonic powers and norm-shapers in the making.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

### 1. Synthesis

Much scholarly attention has been paid to foreign policy approaches to the Iranian nuclear crisis. Yet, no comprehensive analyses have been done so far that use the Iranian nuclear case as an illustration to conceptualise the interaction between what in this dissertation is called ‘hegemonic structures’ and those actors resisting them. This doctoral dissertation is a first step to fill this gap in the literature. It has analysed the foreign policies of China, Russia and Turkey towards the Iranian nuclear programme and thereby answered the research question to what extent these policies are indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony across its ideational, material and institutional framework conditions.

Doing so, this dissertation has drawn on neo-Gramscian scholarship in its conceptualisation of ‘hegemonic structures’. This approach has been complemented by a social constructivist theoretical framework that situates itself in the scholarly literature on international norm dynamics and change. Neither have neo-Gramscian approaches to international relations been consistently combined with the norm literature in such a way, nor has this fruitful cross-fertilisation been applied to interactions between the US and actors that display norm contestation with US paradigms. This novel theoretical angle has been applied to the contested politics of the Iranian nuclear crisis, which has been shown to be a battleground for much wider disagreements about the functioning of international relations at large. Such a theoretical angle has not previously been used in foreign policy analysis pertaining to the Iranian nuclear conflict.

The case studies examined show how ‘compliance’ on the part of China, Russia and Turkey with approaches to the Iranian nuclear conflict has been selective and situational, and how US policy preferences in the Iran dossier have been resisted on other occasions, depending on the ideational, material, and institutional framework conditions at hand. To understand such variation in ‘norm compliance’, this dissertation introduced a two-level model to understand foreign policy discrepancies between a discursive and a behavioural level. An advocacy for a non-hegemonic security culture on a discursive level can be paralleled by ‘compliance’ with hegemonic policies on a behavioural level. This dissertation has situated such variations between norm divergence and rules compliance in a conceptual framework that aims to understand the interactions between hegemonic structures and those actors engaging with their effects of coercion and consent in a neo-Gramscian understanding.

Based on 55 semi-structured elite interviews with experts and decision-makers closely involved with the Iranian nuclear file, analyses of Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies have served as three in-depth case studies, respectively, to illustrate resistance to hegemony. Through target interviewing, this project benefitted from face-to-face interviews that have been conducted with delegates from the respective nuclear negotiation teams in Ankara, Beijing and Moscow, and the respective Iran desks of China, Russia, Turkey, Germany, the US, and the EU. Additional experts interviewed included a range of policy analysts, consultants and senior academics in Brussels, Moscow, Ankara, Berlin, Vienna, London, Istanbul, Washington, Beijing and Shanghai. This research method has been complemented by qualitative data analysis of a range of primary sources (declassified government documents, international organisations documents, press releases, transcripts of speeches), memoirs of decision-makers, policy briefs and the scholarly literature. Research has already been produced on the Iran policies of China, Russia and Turkey, as well as on the Iran policies of the EU and the US. Scarce attention, however, has been paid so far to comparative analyses of the three actors presented here that have played important political roles at different stages in the Iranian nuclear crisis. The dissertation is an attempt to fill this gap in the literature.

Doing so, this research project has drawn on and triangulated a range of material in a way that generated empirically novel insights. It has been argued that the coexistence between dominant powers and powers that favour revisions to international security governance is characterised by contestation and accommodation at the same time. The Iran nuclear case has served as an illustration to show the contemporaneous interaction of the forces of consent and coercion that constitute hegemony in Gramsci's analysis, an observation that nuances the oftentimes too schematic scholarly terms of debate surrounding power transitions between the West and non-Western powers erroneously called 'emerging powers'.

Chinese, Russian, and Turkish foreign policies towards Iran's nuclear programme have been analysed as three in-depth case studies. The research findings of these within-case studies have then been compared on a cross-case level in the preceding chapter. The following paragraphs will summarise the research findings of the respective empirical case studies first. A second section will summarise the answer to the research question to what extent Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies are indicative of a security culture that resists hegemony, based on the theoretical and conceptual framework identified in chapter 1. A final section will conclude with areas for possible further research that the approach and findings of this dissertation can stimulate. It will be shown how the theoretical and conceptual framework of

this dissertation provides much potential for useful policy analyses beyond the focus on Iran diplomacy of this research project.

## 2. Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies towards the Iranian nuclear programme

Against the background of Russia's nuclear technology cooperation with Iran in the 1990s following the break-up of the Soviet Union, Moscow made a distinction between what it regarded as legitimate nuclear cooperation and an alarmist securitisation of Iran's nuclear programme. From the beginning of the nuclear stand-off in 2002, the Putin administration therefore emphasised the Iranian right to nuclear power, and the absence of conclusive evidence of a 'possible military dimension' of the Iranian nuclear programme (Putin 2003; Mousavian 2012: 163). When the nuclear file was then referred to the UNSC as a result of failed diplomatic attempts to solve the crisis, Russia worked, together with China, towards slowing down the pressure on Iran and watering down drafts of sanctions resolutions (Patrikarakos 2012: 224). This behavior, together with Russian public posturing, testified to the Russian principled skepticism regarding the use of sanctions as political instruments. The eventual adoption of sanctions resolutions bore witness to an increasing realisation in Moscow and Beijing of Iranian delaying techniques and also to a level of receptiveness to U.S. pressure. It also indicated that neither the Russian nor the Chinese government wanted to see the exclusive nuclear club to be enlarged by an additional nuclear Iran. In addition, Russian proposals to bring about political solutions (like the "Russian plan" of 2006, and Sergey Lavrov's step-by-step plan) are illustrative of Moscow's willingness to contribute to the diplomatic track and disperse tensions and war speculation (ElBaradei 2012: 137).<sup>374</sup> And arguably, Iran's decision to turn the Russian plan down was one of the factors contributing to Russia's growing impatience with Iranian tactics and to disperse the impression that Moscow served as a diplomatic shield for Tehran in the UNSC (Mousavian 2012: 256-257). Critics of Russia's "good faith" diplomacy in Iran's nuclear dossier, however, have pointed out that the importance of energy politics for Russia and its interests in Caspian Sea politics account for a lack of genuine Russian interest in a long-term normalisation of relations between Iran and the West.<sup>375</sup> This has occasionally nurtured the impression that Russia was flirting with the idea of using the Iran nuclear talks as a vehicle for obstructionism in order to get concessions

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<sup>374</sup> As also reiterated by a Russian foreign ministry official. Author's interview, Moscow, 18 April 2013.

<sup>375</sup> Author's interview with high-ranking Swiss diplomat, Berlin, 26 August 2013; Author's interview with Dr. Walter Posch, SWP, Berlin, 25 June 2013.

in other domains. Such an impression of the Iran nuclear talks as a bargaining chip was alluded to in Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov's remarks on 20 March 2014 on Russia's potential reconsideration of its position on the Iranian nuclear dossier in light of Western pressure over Moscow's Ukraine policies. As has been shown, however, a number of security, regional and economic reasons explain the Russian constructive cooperation on the Iranian nuclear file beyond public threat gestures.

As a comprehensive Joint Plan of Action will replace the interim Geneva agreement of November 2013 on the basis of the political framework agreement, Russia might have to adapt to a partial rapprochement between Iran and the West in general, and between Iran and the US in particular. Economic prospects that the lifting of sanctions can entail as well as the important role Russia will play in the implementation of any final agreement with Iran conveys the significance of Russia as an actor in the Iranian nuclear file, and helps explain its surprisingly constructive collaboration.

Similar to Russia, China was skeptical of U.S. rhetoric that began to securitise the Iranian nuclear file. China underlined the Iranian obligation to prove the exclusively peaceful character of its nuclear program, but refrained from departing from pre-conceived assumptions over Iranian intentions. In its official diplomacy, China repeatedly emphasised Iran's legitimate right to peaceful nuclear energy under Article IV of the NPT, criticised Western pressure on Tehran, and reiterated the importance of political dialogue (Dorraj and Currier 2008; Garver 2011: 81-84; Mazza 2011; Nourafchan 2010: 39; Swaine 2010: 6-8; Yuan 2006). China was also critical of what it perceived as double standards in nuclear diplomacy, with Iran being harshly criticised for its lack of transparency while the West remained silent on the nuclear activities of non-NPT members such as Israel, Pakistan and India, amounting to what China criticised as "nuclear favoritism" (International Crisis Group 2010: 4). Against the backdrop of the controversial Iranian nuclear file, it was especially the Chinese supply to Iran of sensitive nuclear technology in the 1980s and 1990s that was viewed with concern by Western governments (ElBaradei 2012: 117). When the Iranian nuclear file reached the UNSC in 2006, China prevented quick condemnation of Iran and braked efforts to impose sanctions in what has been characterised as a "delay-and-weaken" strategy (International Crisis Group 2010: 12). Like Russia, however, it eventually approved of resolutions that imposed a UN-backed sanctions regime on Tehran because of its continued lack of cooperation. And like Russia, the Chinese government does not accept additional unilateral sanctions imposed by the EU and the United States as legitimate measures to deal with the Iranian nuclear challenge. In analyses of China's Iran policies, the importance of



Chinese-Iranian oil trade, and commercial Chinese investments in Iran are often emphasised (Burnam 2009; Chen 2010; Dorraj and Currier 2008; Djallil 2011; Garver 2011; International Crisis Group 2008; 2010: 5-7; Zhiyue 2011). After Saudi Arabia, Iran is China's second largest oil supplier. China also benefits from Western sanctions imposed on Iran, since Chinese companies are happy to step in and fill the void in the Iranian market. Here, Beijing is seen as walking a tightrope between pursuing its commercial interests in Iran and showing receptiveness to international and Western security concerns. China is careful not to spoil its relations with the United States or to provoke perceptions that run counter to the official Chinese image of "peaceful development" by openly contravening existing sanctions lists. Also, like Russia, China did not hinder UNSC sanctions resolutions, trying to balance a pragmatic commercial approach to business in Iran with mollifying Western security concerns related to the Iranian nuclear programme. Ignoring the latter would convey a disregard for Western perceptions not only of Iranian intentions, but also of Chinese foreign policy towards Iran, and fly in the face of China's public diplomacy pursuing an increasingly international profile that reflects the country's growing importance on the world scene. This is also evidenced by China's reduction of Iranian oil imports in order to qualify for U.S. sanctions waivers (Lohmann 2013: 4). Experts and officials interviewed for this research project have shared the impression that Chinese foreign policy in the Iranian nuclear file is far less 'activist' than Russia's. Between the two 'non-Western' members of the P5+1 negotiation format, China is the one that exhibits the most 'strategic patience' and is seen as 'hiding' behind a more assertive Russia.

Unlike Russia and China, Turkey did not have the diplomatic leverage surrounding Iran's nuclear programme that a permanent seat in the UNSC attributes. Nevertheless, while the government in Ankara could not prevent or approve the imposition of international sanctions on Iran, its rhetoric resembled the cautious positions of China and Russia. "Our position is closer to the Russian discourse than to the Western one", a Turkish foreign ministry official tellingly remarked in an interview.<sup>376</sup> Turkey criticised the use of sanctions as political tools in international relations, warned of unhelpful pressure on Iran, and emphasised that only political dialogue would achieve a long-term solution to the diplomatic crisis emerging over the nuclear programme of neighboring Iran.<sup>377</sup> Turkey's Iran policy has often been a balancing act between the need to uphold good-neighborly relations in line with Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" and "Strategic Depth" doctrines, as formulated by

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<sup>376</sup> Author's interview, Ankara, 20 August 2014.

<sup>377</sup> Author's interview with high-ranking Turkish diplomat, Ankara, 17 June 2013. Cf. also Udum 2012: 103-106.; Mercan 2009: 18-19; Kibaroglu 2010: 4-6; Üstün 2010: 20; Larrabee and Nader 2013: 27.

former foreign minister (now prime minister) Ahmed Davutoğlu, and a certain sensibility for Western security political concepts that alliance structures like Turkey's NATO membership indirectly imply (Pieper 2013a). In an attempt to negotiate a political solution to Iran's nuclear crisis, Turkey engaged in a process of proactive diplomacy and managed to secure the first Iranian agreement to a proposed fuel-swap deal in May 2010 (Parsi 2012: 172-209; Kibaroglu 2010: 4-6). The Turkish shuttle diplomacy with Tehran in 2009-2010 was an illustration of a remarkable foreign policy activism that served at least two purposes strategically. While assuring the United States that Turkey's commitment to international diplomacy was in line with Western security and non-proliferation priorities,<sup>378</sup> Turkey's mediation also conveyed a prioritisation of political dialogue. At the same time, it underlined the rejection of sanctions as a counterproductive means of pressuring the Iranians. The unexpected rejection of the May 2010 deal by the United States, and the subsequent imposition of UNSC sanctions resolution 1929 just one month later, frustrated Ankara and abruptly ended the short-lived episode of Turkish mediation in the Iran dossier.<sup>379</sup>

Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran is followed with a watchful eye in Washington. The "gold-for-gas" deal between Iran and Turkey, for example, was seen as a Turkish attempt to circumvent the U.S. unilateral sanctions regime on Iran (Kandemir 2013). As much as Ankara shows receptiveness to Western security perspectives as a NATO member and to the importance of 'transatlantic solidarity', the imperatives of geography (Iran as a neighbor) and of economic pragmatism (the need for oil and gas deliveries) impose constraints on Turkey's regional and general foreign policy. These constraints occasionally create a level of friction between the United States and Turkey over their respective approaches to Iran, even though Turkey hurries to emphasise the importance of solidarity with its U.S. ally.<sup>380</sup>

### **3. Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies and Resistance to Hegemony**

It has been argued in this dissertation that the coexistence between dominant powers and powers that favour revisions to international security governance is characterised by the interacting forces of contestation and accommodation. Rather than constituting a bloc challenge to American dominance in 'the international system', it has been shown how China,

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<sup>378</sup> Turkey could base its diplomacy on the consent of the Obama administration, as evidenced by a letter written by U.S. President Obama to Brazilian President Lula in April 2010 in which he explicitly welcomed Turkish-Brazilian diplomatic initiatives (Mousavian 2012: 383; Parsi 2012: 187).

<sup>379</sup> Author's interview with Turkish high-ranking diplomat, Brussels, 29 May 2013.

<sup>380</sup> Author's interview with Turkish foreign ministry official, Washington, 14 February 2014.

Russia and Turkey display *norm* contestation and different conceptions of desirable security cultures, but propose an equitable adherence to common *rules* internationally. Here, a fruitful combination of neo-Gramscian with social constructivist scholarship has constituted an angle to illustrate resistance to hegemony in an understudied dimension. Situating this research finding in the wider literature on international norm dynamics, a distinction has been made between ‘norms’ and ‘rules’ and how this applies to ‘compliance’ with hegemonic policies. The case studies examined in this dissertation have shown how ‘compliance’ on the part of China, Russia and Turkey with approaches to the Iranian nuclear conflict has been selective, and how US policy preferences in the Iran dossier have been resisted on other occasions. Chinese, Russian, and Turkish reluctance to use sanctions as tools in international diplomacy did not prevent the eventual adoption of international sanctions against Iran. While multilateral Iran sanctions are seen as complying with the ‘rules’ of the UN system, additional unilateral sanctions are perceived as illegitimate and as an extraterritorialisation of domestic legislation. Besides an ideational resistance to unilateral sanctions, the economic impact of these ‘secondary sanctions’ on third country entities constitutes an additional material aspect of Chinese, Russian, and Turkish criticism. Unlike EU sanctions, US unilateral sanctions have ‘extraterritorial’ applicability. Chinese, Russian, and Turkish eventual compliance with such sanctions lists, then, indicates a level of receptiveness to the economic leverage of US-dominated international financial mechanisms in instances where the respective governments have leeway over commercial decisions. While the precise balance between public and private sector deliberations is not always transparent, interviewees confirmed that ‘compliance’ with sanctions that partially go beyond UN-mandated sanctions can be state-enforced and is often state-induced. Big energy companies in the countries examined here are state-owned, and decisions to reduce oil imports in response to energy sanctions are often political ones. But also private companies recoil from business in Iran with financial sanctions dangling over their heads like a Damocles sword. Compliance with Iran sanctions regimes on the part of private companies here forcefully underscores the *structural* dimension of hegemony whose reach extends beyond state control. The power of labels and of ‘reputational costs’ works in subtle ways, and often slips the control of central governments.

In this context, the Iran nuclear case serves as an illustration to show the contemporaneous interaction of the forces of consent and coercion in international politics. This is an observation that nuances the oftentimes too schematic scholarly terms of debate surrounding power transitions between the West and non-Western powers erroneously called ‘emerging powers’. For hegemonic power structures to become established and sustained over

time, they presuppose an acceptance by a sufficiently large number of other actors. To the extent that other states act upon, sustain and reinforce U.S. dominant structures in the social, economic and political sphere, U.S. hegemony post-1945 comes closest to a ‘historic bloc’ in a Gramscian understanding. This *consensual* order is complemented by US financial instruments (secondary sanctions, threats to exclude trading partners from US financial institutions) that serve to *coerce* other actors into acceptance of hegemonic policies.

At this point, this dissertation has offered a two-level model of foreign policy to understand Chinese, Russian and Turkish Iran policies: Norm advocacy on a discursive level need not be coherently translated into actual policies on a behavioural level. While Chinese, Russian and Turkish officials publicly advocate for an adherence to a security culture that emphasises compliance with the norms of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘non-interference’, and thus norm divergence from hegemony, their level of perceived material and political dependence on the United States prompts them to follow foreign policies that still comply with parts of U.S. hegemonic structures. Rule convergence was found on a behavioural level. The U.S. unilateral sanctions regime and compliance with an extraterritorialised U.S. legislation is the most prominent case in point.

On a discursive level, Chinese, Russian and Turkish foreign policies toward the Iranian nuclear programme arguably breathe the ambition to partially ‘de-Westernise’ security cultures and discourses toward Iran. Public advocacy for ‘democratic’ international relations was shown to follow the same logic of eroding the monopoly of hegemonic normative frameworks for the workings of international governance. Chinese, Russian, and Turkish foreign policies display a normative divergence with a U.S.-inspired security culture towards Iran, and their distinction between legitimate sanctions (those that follow UN rules) and illegitimate ones (those that are adopted unilaterally and thus violate the principle of Sovereign Equality) was a clear indication therefor. Eventual ‘compliance’ with US policy preferences on Iran on a behavioral level has been situational, selective, and motivated by differing ideational, institutional and material stakes at hand. Most notably, the predominance of the US in global trade and finance forces material constraints onto other actors that are not easy to discard. US financial sanctions exert a powerful hold over other governments’ decisions to curtail trade with Iran because their companies would otherwise risk losing access to US financial markets. This essentially amounts to material blackmail and exercises a structural power that oftentimes led to ‘compliance’ with policies on a behavioural level that were otherwise criticised on normative grounds on a discursive level.

The coexistence of established and emerging powers will inevitably determine the

design of the future world order. The working relationship between former hegemons and ‘rising powers’ as potential challengers is constantly being re-balanced and re-negotiated. In this regard, with different prioritisations and perceptions of legitimacy on the part of the different actors involved, the Iranian nuclear crisis arguably is not only a battlefield for the survival of the NPT regime, but is a debate about differing conceptions of world order and security governance for decades to come. This research thus provides a timely and critical contribution to key questions of international politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **4. Areas for further Research**

Observed discrepancies between a state’s official rhetoric and its foreign policy behavior are not limited to the Iranian nuclear case. The previous chapter has pointed to the ambivalence between Chinese and Russian public pledges to the principles of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘non-interference’, while their interference in other states may breach the very principles they hold dear in international politics. This ambivalence is neither limited to China, Russia or Turkey, nor to the principles presented in the preceding chapters. The distinction between discourse and behavior in a two-level model to analyse foreign policy merits further research and can serve as a model to be applied to other issue areas beyond the Iranian nuclear case. It allows the analytical synthesis between norm dynamics and rule applications in international relations and thus makes a conceptual contribution to the theoretical minefield of the international norm literature. The analytical as well as policy challenge is to craft models to acknowledge the inherently contested nature of norms while still allowing for a rules-based international order conducive to the furtherance of international peace and security. Research into policies and international politics is never neutral, as is no social science research. By necessity, the analysis in this dissertation has been one way of telling the story, and it is a conscious research decision to choose the conceptual, theoretical and methodological angle that has guided the investigation. However, it has been shown how the combination of constructivist scholarship with neo-Gramscian conceptual frameworks can offer theoretically novel interpretations of key questions about norm dynamics, World Order, security policies and the coexistence between ‘norm-shapers’ and ‘norm-takers’. It has been suggested how power shifts in international relations take place gradually. Further research is needed to examine these beyond a too static and schematic conception of power transitions that largely stem from rationalist theoretical straightjackets. The ‘power transition paradigm’ largely remains a neo-realist hobby horse. The contribution of other theoretical and conceptual angles, however, can add much-needed depth to the scholarship.

In a similar fashion, it has been shown that ‘legality’ and ‘illegality’ in international relations are relational notions by design. As the analysis of the Iranian nuclear case has demonstrated, the legal contestation over nuclear rights and obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty gave way to a much deeper-seated malaise in international power constellations. Working with these concepts as worked out in this dissertation will continue to enrich our understanding of fault lines between superpowers (US) and self-proclaimed revolutionary actors (Iran), between the modernising and the modernised world, and between those actors that substantially shaped world governance in the last century, and those that will likely be ‘brics’ of new or modified terms of the game.

Likewise, a better understanding of the conceptual implications thereof also directly translates into policy formulation: Government positions are informed by mutual perceptions, even if these do not correspond to reality. The assumption of Iranian victimisation as an inherent part of Shia political culture is an example of such preconceptions that have influenced how other delegations to the nuclear talks have formulated their bargaining positions in negotiations. This nexus between concepts and policies calls for continued accurate analyses that help realistically anticipate policy formulation on the part of other actors.

Against these areas for further conceptual research, this dissertation has equally touched upon a number of subjects and geographical areas that merit further empirical research. First, a political framework agreement has been reached between the P5+1 with Iran on 2 April 2015. Yet, even after the conclusion of a comprehensive nuclear agreement, the Iranian nuclear conflict is far from over. Dividing lines are starting to emerge at the time of writing as to the scope, duration, and procedures of such a final agreement. The implementation of this agreement will take years, and the political nature of the Iranian nuclear conflict will be sure to spark further research on policy coordination between those actors bearing responsibility for a successful closure thereof. The eventual closure of the Iran dossier in a UN Security Council resolution as well as the closure of the case by the IAEA pursuant to its documentation of the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme will need to be closely monitored by researchers and Iran watchers. The same holds true for the process of the lifting of both multilateral and unilateral Iran sanctions. The latter prospect has the potential to usher in a new phase of relations between Iran and the West that will undoubtedly inspire numerous research projects on the impact on global and regional politics.

Second, relations between Russia and the West at the time of writing continue to bedevil international politics, and continue to be a topical subject in need of critical and

timely research. As this dissertation has shown, there is no easy answer to the question about Russian ‘national interests’, and the case of the Iranian nuclear talks has illustrated a surprisingly ‘compartmentalised’ foreign policy, where frosty relations in most issues areas do not prevent constructive policy coordination on the Iranian nuclear file. The various foreign policy motivations presented in this dissertation can contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of Russian foreign policy, and the conceptual tools used in this endeavor can be applied to analyse relations between the West and Russia in other issue areas not studied in depth in this dissertation. The need for Area Studies expertise on Russia and the post-Soviet region more broadly could not be higher as relations between the West and Russia experience their most fundamental crisis since the end of the Cold War.

Third, the analysis of Turkish foreign policy has provided a substantive discussion of the foreign policy of a country that will most likely continue to spark scholarly debates and discussions. Turkey’s foreign policy has been shown to be at a crossroads between partially competing regional security conceptions. This is to no small degree attributed to strategic shifts of the Turkish government. Many different variables enter into Turkish foreign policy decision-making, and Turkey watchers will continue to make sense of Turkey’s seemingly derailed EU integration project, increasingly domestic authoritarian tendencies, Turkish-Kurdish relations, the uneasy Turkish-American relationship, and Turkey’s ambiguous stance on the advance of transnational Islamist fundamentalism. The empirical evidence presented in this dissertation can be a useful stepping stone for research delving into one or several of these aspects. The discussion of Turkish Iran policies has underlined how Turkey’s position towards Iran’s nuclear programme is inseparable from the wider context of Turkish regional policies and their implications for global security governance.

Fourth, the case study on Turkish Iran policies has shown how an actor that is not formally part of the UN-mandated negotiation format can have an impact on the direction of diplomacy. The Turkish mediation in the Iranian nuclear conflict in 2009-2010 was a remarkable period of activist foreign policy whose purpose, scope, and repercussions have been analysed in this project. Similar cases of diplomatic mediation as well as the potential for it, can be studied in a comparable framework. Such research projects could build on the analysis provided here on Turkish mediation and expand the existing scholarly literature on mediation and negotiation. Cases need not be limited to Iran diplomacy. Insights into the mechanisms, preconditions and perceptions of third country mediators can shed light onto the structural dimensions of international diplomacy.

Fifth, the analysis of Chinese foreign policy towards Iran has touched upon myriad foreign policy motivations of China in general and embedded the discussion of China's position towards the Iranian nuclear programme into the wider historical, regional, and global context of Chinese diplomacy. As China's political weight is growing commensurate with its economic influence in important world regions, China's leadership is gradually adopting its foreign policy planning. Scholarly research is needed to accompany and study this development. The evidence and conclusions presented here can contribute to the vast body of scholarly literature on Chinese foreign policy and provide nuance to the sometimes overheated discussion on 'China's rise'. As this dissertation has argued throughout, power shifts take place gradually, and the focus on structural forces of World Order can help zoom out from a too narrow actor-centric angle that characterises many studies of contemporary China.

Sixth, further areas of research relate to those foreign policies that have served as points of reference throughout this dissertation, namely European and American policies towards the Middle East in general and Iran in particular. At a time where negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear agreement between the P5+1 and Iran are under way, it becomes a timely endeavor to reflect on shifts in policies and positions both of the 'E3' and of the US. This is especially the case as any implementation of a nuclear agreement will involve new policy planning by design: The process of the lifting of not only multilateral (UN-adopted), but also Western unilateral sanctions will require the crafting of new Iran policies in Western capitals, and a partial re-thinking of relations between 'the West' and Iran on the one hand, and between European and US Iran policies after the dissolution of the P5+1 format on the other. With the prospect of Iran sanctions lifted, European and US administrations are indicating diverging views on relations with Iran after the nuclear conflict will be solved, particularly regarding future trade and security policy towards Iran. Against the background of its significance for the regional and inter-regional security architecture, trade relations, and political alliances, the 'Iran after sanctions' scenario will have repercussions on the future of the 'transatlantic dialogue' on the Middle East. Research in this context can make contributions to the debate on European Union Foreign Policy, the EU's Iran and Middle East policies, and to the burgeoning literature on 'the EU as an international actor'.

Seventh, the relationship between 'established powers' and 'emerging powers' will continue to both inspire research projects and obfuscate policy debates at the same time. Labels become 'sticky', develop a dynamic of their own that guide our assumptions about politics and policies, become 'path dependent'. The 'BRICS' label is a prime example of a



classification of a group of rather diverse countries into one conceptual unit that has become a political unit in its own right despite fuzziness over status, scope and policy implications. The inclusion especially of Russia into a group of economically ‘rising powers’ has been more than questionable. This research project has shown how ‘resistance’ to established power structures on the part of ‘emerging powers’ is multifaceted. Pronounced economic interests need not automatically lead to a stronger articulation of political divergences. Analytical projections impact on self-perceptions, and more scholarly research is needed to accurately reflect on the nexus between macroeconomics and political clout in international relations at the interstice of the disciplines of economics, IR, and Area Studies.

Finally, the previous chapter has referred to changes in US norm discourses that embedded US Iran policy in a more multilateral approach, and indicated how international norm dynamics have the potential to change policy preferences. More research is needed to investigate the effect that dissenting voices can have on US positions, and the extent to which ‘resistance to hegemony’ can generate ‘feedback effects’ on hegemonic structures. Rather than conceptualising a one-way ‘socialisation’ of ‘emerging powers’ into existing governance structures, the case of Iran’s nuclear file can serve as a basis for new research projects to investigate the effects of processes of ‘two-way socialisations’, whereby resistance to dominant power structures can eventually usher in a shift in these structures themselves. Such research would also have to shed light on the nexus between foreign policy learning, internal determinants of foreign policy, and domestic audience costs. The unprecedented partisan power struggle between (Republican-dominated) Congress and the US administration over US Iran policy at the time of writing is a forceful reminder for the validity and empirical necessity of such a research focus.

The Iranian nuclear crisis is a proxy for numerous fundamental debates about international relations. The list of possible further research areas presented here is therefore not exhaustive, and should be thought of rather as a sketch board from which to venture out. This study project has hopefully managed to demonstrate how the Iran question is indeed a burning question of our age.

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## Annex I – List of interviews Conducted

Interview #	Date & location	Description of the interviewee
1	Brussels, 13 March 2013	EEAS official, nuclear negotiation team
2	Moscow, 17 April 2013	Dr. Anton Khlopkov, Director, Center for Energy and Security Studies
3	Moscow, 17 April 2013	Dr. Vladimir Sazhin, Iran expert, Institute of Oriental Studies
4	Moscow, 18 April 2013	Russian foreign ministry official, department for security and non-proliferation, nuclear negotiation team
5	Brussels, 6 May 2013	Sinan Ülgen, visiting scholar Carnegie Europe
6	Brussels, 29 May 2013	high-ranking Turkish diplomat to the EU
7	Brussels, 4 June 2013	EEAS official, nuclear negotiation team
8	Ankara, 14 June 2013	Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık, Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University
9	Ankara, 17 June 2013	High-ranking Turkish diplomat, deputy directorate general for the OSCE, arms control and disarmament
10	Ankara, 18 June 2013	Dr. Şebnem Udum, expert in nonproliferation studies and Turkish foreign policy, department of International Relations, Hacettepe University
11	Ankara, 18 June 2013	Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı, expert on Turkish foreign policy, head of department for International Relations, Middle East Technical University
12	Berlin, 25 June 2013	Dr. Walter Posch, senior Iran analyst, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs)
13	Brussels, 23 July 2013	Dr. Ian Lesser, Executive Director of the German Marshall Fund Brussels

<b>14</b>	via Skype, 25 July 2013	Dr. Ali Vaez, senior Iran analyst, International Crisis Group
<b>15</b>	Vienna, 13 August 2013	high-ranking German diplomat to the IAEA
<b>16</b>	over phone, 23 August 2013	high-ranking Turkish diplomat to the IAEA
<b>17</b>	Istanbul, 7 September 2013	Soli Özel, foreign news editor at Habertürk and lecturer at Kadir Has University
<b>18</b>	Ankara, 9 September 2013	Dr. Şebnem Udum, expert in nonproliferation studies and Turkish foreign policy, department of International Relations, Hacettepe University
<b>19</b>	Ankara, 9 September 2013	Gökhan Bacik, Dean of the faculty of administration, IPEK University
<b>20</b>	Moscow, 12 November 2013	Russian foreign ministry official, department for security and non-proliferation, nuclear negotiation team
<b>21</b>	Moscow, 13 November 2013	Dr. Alexei Arbatov, head of the Center for International Security at IMEMO
<b>22</b>	Moscow, 15 November 2013	Dr. Andrey Baklitsky, PIR Center's "Russia and Nuclear Nonproliferation" Program Coordinator, PIR Center
<b>23</b>	Washington, 10 February 2014	Dr. Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council
<b>24</b>	Washington, 14 February 2014	Turkish diplomat to the US
<b>25</b>	email correspondence, 13 March 2014	Russian diplomat, permanent mission of the Russian federation to the EU
<b>26</b>	Brussels, 18 March 2014	Belgian foreign ministry official
<b>27</b>	Brussels, 20 March 2014	Russian diplomat, permanent mission of the Russian federation to the EU
<b>28</b>	Brussels, 20 March 2014	EEAS official, nuclear negotiation team
<b>29</b>	Shanghai, 16 April 2014	Dr. Jin Liangxian, senior research fellow, Shanghai

		Institute for International Studies (SIIS)
30	Beijing, 18 April 2014	Chinese foreign ministry official, nuclear negotiation team
31	Beijing, 22 April 2014	former Chinese diplomat at the embassy in Tehran, China Institute for International Studies (CIIS)
32	Beijing, 22 April 2014	Dr. Wu Riqiang, associate professor, Renmin University
33	Beijing, 24 April 2014	Dr. Li Xin, associate professor, China Institutes of contemporary international relations (CIIS)
34	Beijing, 24 April 2014	Dr. Liao Baizhi, Deputy director Institute of Middle East Studies, China Institutes of contemporary international relations (CICIR)
35	Beijing, 25 April 2014	Dr. Zhang Lihua, resident scholar at Carnegie Beijing and director of the China-EU relations research center, Tsinghua University
36	Beijing, 6 May 2014	Dr. Su Hao, China Foreign Affairs University
37	London, 11 July 2014	Dr. Mark Fitzpatrick, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)
38	London, 11 July 2014	Dr. Dina Esfandiary, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)
39	Beirut, 14 August 2014	Turkish diplomat to Lebanon
40	Ankara, 20 August 2014	Turkish foreign ministry official, political department
41	Ankara, 20 August 2014	Turkish foreign ministry official, department for disarmament and arms control
42	Brussels, 7 October 2014	Russian diplomat, permanent mission of the Russian federation to the EU
43	Washington, 30 October 2014	Turkish diplomat to the US
44	Washington, 30 October 2014	US State Department official
45	Washington, 31 October 2014	Chinese diplomat to the US
46	Washington, 31 October 2014	Dr. Robert Litwak, Vice President for Scholars and

		Academic Relations and Director, International Security Studies, Woodrow Wilson Center
<b>47</b>	Washington, 31 October 2014	Russian diplomat to the US
<b>48</b>	Berlin, 14 November 2014	Dr. Oliver Meier, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs),
<b>49</b>	Berlin, 14 November 2014	German foreign ministry official, Iran desk
<b>50</b>	Brussels, 29 January 2015	NATO official, WMD Non-Proliferation Centre, Emerging Security Challenges Division
<b>51</b>	Brussels, 6 February 2015	Belgian foreign ministry official, disarmament department
<b>52</b>	Brussels, 24 February 2015	EEAS official, Security Policy and Sanctions Division (EU nuclear negotiation team member at expert level)
<b>53</b>	email correspondence, 12 March 2015	Russian diplomat, permanent mission of the Russian federation to the EU
<b>54</b>	Berlin, 18 March 2015	Dr. Mark Hibbs, senior associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Nuclear Policy Program
<b>55</b>	Brussels, 19 March 2015	Russian diplomat, permanent mission of the Russian federation to the EU



## Annex II- List of attended conferences and events

#	Date	Event title and organisers
1	25 September 2012, Brussels	<p><b>After Osama: Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Future of Regional Stability</b></p> <p>Guest lecture by Imtiaz Gul, Executive Director, Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), Islamabad, organised by the European Peace and Security Studies Programme (EPSS)</p>
2	4 October 2012, Brussels	<p><b>China's lonely rise</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with Rosemary Foot, Oxford University, and Xie Tao, professor at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, organised by the Brussels Institute for Contemporary China Studies (BICCS) in cooperation with the Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce (FCCC) and the EU-Asia Centre</p>
3	5 October 2012, Brussels	<p><b>Taking stock of China's economic reforms</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with Prof. Dr. Michael Pettis, Tsinghua University, Steven Vanackere, Belgian Vice Premier and Minister of Finance, Marc van Sande, Vice President Umicore and Chinese Ambassador Liao Liqiang, organised by the Brussels Institute for Contemporary China Studies (BICCS) in cooperation with the Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce (FCCC) and the EU-Asia Centre</p>
4	16 October 2012, Brussels	<p><b>Syria: The price of the Russian-Chinese veto: Is the West hiding behind the red curtain?</b></p> <p>Discussion with Ekaterina Chirkova, Policy advisor at the South Asia Democratic Forum, organised by the EuroArab Forum</p>
5	12 November 2012, Brussels	<p><b>Reshaping Economic Security in Southwest Asia and the Middle East</b></p> <p>9<sup>th</sup> Annual Worldwide Security Conference organised by the EastWest Institute</p>
6	13 November 2012, Brussels	<p><b>Opportunities and Challenges in Africa's Transition</b></p> <p>Lecture by Ambassador Zhong Jianhua, Chinese Special Envoy to Africa, organised by the Brussels Institute for Contemporary China Studies (BICCS)</p>
7	15-16 November 2012, Bruges	<p><b>The Neighbours of the EU's Neighbours: Diplomatic and Geopolitical Dimensions beyond the ENP</b></p> <p>International Conference organised by the College of Europe</p>
8	27 November 2012, Brussels	<p><b>State-building, failing states, and the engines of change in the Middle East</b></p> <p>Guest lecture at BSIS by Dr. Rolf Schwarz, Political Officer in the Middle East and North Africa Section of the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division of NATO Headquarters</p>
9	28 November 2012, Brussels	<p><b>Tackling China's economic and social challenges: A Role for Europe?</b></p> <p>European Policy summit organised by the Friends of Europe, featuring, i.a. Zhang Lirong, Chargé d'Affaires at the Mission of the People's Republic of</p>

		China to the EU
10	10 December 2012, Brussels	<p><b>The World in 2020 – Can NATO Protect us? The Challenges to Critical Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Conference organised by NATO and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace</p>
11	12 December 2012, Brussels	<p><b>Breaking the Turkey-EU Stalemate</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with Marc Pierini, former EU ambassador to Turkey and visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe, Sinan Ülgen, Turkish foreign policy analyst and visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe and Selim Yenel, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Turkey to the EU, organised by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace</p>
12	17 December 2012, Ghent	<p><b>Major Developments in Turkey’s EU, Foreign and Domestic Policy</b></p> <p>Lecture by Selim Yenel, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Turkey to the European Union, organised by The Centre for EU Studies, the Ghent Institute for International Studies and the Centre for Turkish Studies at Ghent University</p>
13	23 January 2013, Brussels	<p><b>Poor Record, Positive Solutions: Advancing Press Freedom in Turkey</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with Ahmet Insel, managing editor and columnist; Marc Pierini, visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe; and Marietje Schaake, MEP, organised by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace</p>
14	24 January 2013, Washington, D.C. (webcast)	<p><b>A Proposal for the Resolution of the Iranian Nuclear Standoff</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, Seyed Aliakbar Mousavi, both former Iranian parliamentarians; George Perkovich, Vice President for Studies and Director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment; Jim Walsh, International Security expert and Research Associate at MIT; and Robert Litwak, Vice President for Scholars and Academic Relations and Director, International Security Studies, organised by the Woodrow Wilson Center</p>
15	31 January 2013, Brussels	<p><b>Asia’s Future – Challenges and Opportunities</b></p> <p>Keynote Speech by Rajat M. Nag, Managing Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), organised by the European Institute for Asian Studies</p>
16	4 February 2013, Berlin	<p><b>Iran’s Role in Regional Peace and Balance of Power</b></p> <p>Speech by and Discussion with Dr. Ali Akbar Salehi, Foreign Minister of Iran; organised by the German Council on Foreign Relations</p>
17	14 February 2013, Brussels	<p><b>China and Globalization</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with Wang Haifeng, expert at the Institute of Foreign Economics of the NDRC; and Gustaaf Geeraerts, director of BICCS, organised by the Brussels Institute for Contemporary China Studies (BICCS)</p>
18	21 February 2013, Brussels	<p><b>Emerging Global Security Threats &amp; Future Challenges – The NATO Perspective</b></p> <p>Talk by Dr. Jamie Shea, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, organised by Vesalius College in</p>

		association with the Institute for European Studies
19	26 February 2013, Brussels	<b>Russia and the European Union: Difficult Partners- Chances for a New Start</b>  International high-level Conference under Chatham House Rules organised by the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation
20	27 February 2013, Brussels	<b>A new era in Turkey's democracy- Settling the Kurdish issue?</b>  Panel discussion 'Turkish Insights Policy Dialogue' with Kemal Burkay, president of the Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK-PAR), Mehmet Özcan, president of the Ankara Strategy Institute and Taylan Cicek, vice president of Yüksekova Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (YÜSIAD), organised by the European Policy Centre
21	5 March 2013, Brussels	<b>Consolidating the Revolutions in North Africa – Rethinking Policies towards the Region</b>  Experts roundtable under Chatham House Rules with, i.a., Helga Schmid, EEAS Deputy Secretary General, organised by the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation
22	7 March 2013, Brussels	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> NATO-Asia Security Dialogue</b>  International conference under Chatham House Rules organised by the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation and NATO Public Diplomacy Division
23	8 April 2013, Brussels	<b>Turkey and the New Regional Balance in the Middle East</b>  Expert roundtable with Rouzbeh Parsi, research fellow at the EU Institute for Security Studies; Savaş Genç, professor at Fatih University Istanbul; Reza Marashi, research director at the National Iranian-American Council, and Marc Otte, Belgian foreign ministry official, organised by the European Policy Center
24	8 April 2013, Brussels	<b>Iran's nuclear stand-off and its regional role</b>  Panel discussion with Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council; Walter Posch, senior associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP); Thierry Coville, researcher at the Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques (IRIS); Savaş Genç, professor at Fatih University Istanbul; and Mohammad Ali Shabani, doctoral researcher at SOAS; organised by the European Policy Center.
25	15-16 April 2013, Moscow	<b>Russia and the EU: The Future of Europe and Eurasia</b>  International academic conference organised by the University of Birmingham and the Institute for Europe at the Russian Academy of Sciences
26	2 May 2013, Ghent	<b>Turkey's Foreign Security Policy in the Light of Recent Regional and Global Developments</b>  Lecture by Prof. Hüseyin Bağcı, Professor of International Relations at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara; organised by the Centre for Turkish Studies, Ghent University and the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre Brussels
27	7 May 2013, Brussels	<b>La Turquie, L'UE et l'OTAN : 50 ans après l'accord d'Ankara</b>  Speech by Selim Yenel, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Turkey to the European Union; organised by the Royal Higher Institute for Defence
28	28 May 2013,	<b>Influential partner in the region – Turkey's perception in the Middle</b>

	Brussels	<p><b>East</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with MEP Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, ALDE rapporteur for accession negotiations with Turkey; and Gökce Percinoglu, Project Coordinator Foreign Policy Programme TESEV; organised by the Friedrich-Nauman Foundation</p>
29	03 June 2013, Brussels	<p><b>The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism: The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy</b></p> <p>Expert Exchange with John O'Rourke, EEAS head of department for the Arabic peninsula, Iran and Iraq; Dr. Walter Posch, senior associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP); Daniel Keohane, FRIDE Director of strategic relations; organised by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs</p>
30	5-8 June 2013, Tartu	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> European Workshop in International Studies</b></p> <p>International academic conference organised by the University of Tartu and the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute</p>
31	12-14 June 2013, Ankara	<p><b>Turkey in the World</b></p> <p>12<sup>th</sup> International academic conference on International Relations organised by the Middle East Technical University (METU) Ankara</p>
32	9 July 2013, Brussels	<p><b>A U.S. Perspective on the Middle East</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with Ian Lesser, Executive Director of the Brussels office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and Robert Wexler, president of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace, organised by the German Marshall Fund of the United States</p>
33	11 July 2013, Brussels	<p><b>EXACT conference: Europe in the World</b></p> <p>Keynote speech by David O'Sullivan, EEAS Chief Operating Officer</p>
34	2-4 September 2013, Leeds	<p><b>Exchanging ideas on Europe</b></p> <p>43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference organised by the University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES)</p>
35	19 September 2013, Brussels	<p><b>The Future of NATO</b></p> <p>Keynote speech by Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary General</p>
36	9-12 October 2013, New Orleans	<p><b>2013 Annual Meeting</b></p> <p>47<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Middle East Studies Association</p>
37	26 November 2013, Brussels	<p><b>EU-China Relations: The Next Ten Years</b></p> <p>Europe-China Forum, organised by the Friends of Europe</p>
38	14 January 2014, Brussels	<p><b>Hégémonie et Leadership. Pourquoi l'Occident domine-t-il le monde ?</b></p> <p>Panel discussion with Nicolas Pascual de la Parte, Ambassador, Spanish permanent representation to the EU, Marquis Olivier de Trazegnies, historian, and José Ignacio Benavides, former Spanish ambassador, organised by the institute européen des relations internationales</p>
39	3 February 2014, Brussels	<p><b>Atoms for Peace in the 21st century</b></p> <p>Keynote speech by Yukiya Amano, Secretary General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), organised by the Egmont Institute</p>

40	12 February 2014, Washington, D.C.	<b>Young Scholars on Turkey</b> 4 <sup>th</sup> academic conference, organised by the SETA Foundation
41	10 March 2014, Brussels	<b>Tehran Calling: A New Direction for Iran?</b> Debate with Cornelius Adebahr and Dr. Rouzbeh Parsi, organised by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
42	26-29 March 2014, Toronto	<b>Spaces and Places. Geopolitics in an Era of Globalization</b> International Studies Association's (ISA) 55 <sup>th</sup> Annual Convention
43	18-22 August 2014, Ankara	<b>Fourth World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES)</b> International academic conference organised by the Middle East Technical University (METU)
44	30 October- 1 November 2014, Washington, D.C.	<b>Seventh Annual ASMEA Conference. Searching for Balance in the Middle East and Africa</b> International academic conference organised by the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa
45	15 January 2015, Brussels	<b>Policy Spotlight debate with Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu</b> Policy Spotlight on "Turkey, EU and a changing world: meeting challenges together", organised by Friends of Europe
46	2-3 February 2015, Brussels	<b>EU-Russia relations: Which way forward?</b> Jean Monnet conference organised by the University of Kent, in the framework of a Jean Monnet Multilateral Research Group between the University of Kent, Carleton University, Canada, St. Petersburg State University, and Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.
47	27 February 2015, Brussels	<b>After Minsk 2: What options for European policies towards Russia?</b> Expert roundtable with Prof. Markus Kaim, SWP, and Vincent Degert, EEAS, organised by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)
48	17 March 2015, Berlin	<b>The talks on Iran's nuclear programme: Implications for regional security and non-proliferation</b> Expert roundtable under Chatham House rules, organised by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) and the Heinrich-Böll Foundation
49	16-17 April 2015, Plsen	<b>Russia: Identities and Foreign Policies</b> International academic Conference at the University of West Bohemia, Plsen, Czech Republic
50	21 April 2015, Brussels	<b>NATO and Missile Defence: Where next?</b> Expert seminar under Chatham House rules, jointly organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), and the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland (CISSM)
51	14 May 2015, London	<b>Are European Union Sanctions Effective?</b> Workshop under Chatham House rules, organised by the Department of

