ISRAELI-IRANIAN RELATIONS: CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE AND THE REFLECTION OF RELATIONS IN RHETORIC

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Israeli-Iranian relationship since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 by first identifying whether specific conditions were present when changes in this relationship occurred. Secondly, I examine the degree to which the rhetoric espoused in each nation’s written press reflected these changes. To test my hypotheses, I analyzed four case studies: The Iran-Contra affair, the election of Iranian President Khatami in 1997, the 2000 al-Aqsa Intifada and the Lebanon War in 2006. My research largely supports the presence of five specific conditions for change in the Israeli-Iranian relationship and partially supports the reflection of this relationship via rhetoric in the press. This research highlights conditions that could promote cooperation between Israel and Iran and offers rationale for employing successful policy to this end. Additionally, my analysis ultimately reveals that the level of antagonism in rhetoric may not be the best factor to determine the extent of antagonism present in a country’s official policy.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to Cory R. Johnson. Without your help and patience this would not be possible.

Many thanks and much love,

JORDANA C. GIRTEN
# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1: Introduction, background and methodology** ............... 1  
Focus .................................................................................................................. 1  
Main question ...................................................................................................... 2  
Hypothesis .......................................................................................................... 2  
Importance .......................................................................................................... 2  
Contribution ....................................................................................................... 5  
Methodology ......................................................................................................... 7  
  Case study selection ............................................................................................. 7  
  Rationale for choice of newspapers ..................................................................... 10  
  Acknowledgement of research limitations .......................................................... 13  
  Explanation of rating scale ................................................................................. 13  
Roadmap .............................................................................................................. 14  

**Chapter 2: First hypothesis supported- five conditions identified** 15  
Condition 1: Alternative to the political status quo ........................................... 16  
Condition 2: Enemy of my enemy is my friend .................................................... 19  
Condition 3: Benefits for both parties ................................................................. 21  
Condition 4: Reputation positively affected abroad .......................................... 23  
Condition 5: Domestic pressure for change ....................................................... 26  
External pressure- does not always precipitate change .................................... 26  

**Chapter 3: Hypothesis two partially supported** ................................. 29  
During the 2006 Lebanon War rhetoric changed from somewhat antagonistic  
to highly antagonistic ....................................................................................... 29  
During the election of President Khatami rhetoric changed from somewhat  
antagonistic to somewhat cooperative ............................................................ 31  
No change in rhetoric during the Iran-Contra affair or 2000 al-Aqsa intifada .... 33  
Summary of rhetoric .......................................................................................... 35  

**Chapter 4: Alternative explanations and policy implications** ........... 37  
Alternative explanations ...................................................................................... 37  
  Cooperation may not be the best option ............................................................. 37  
Implications for current policy ........................................................................... 39  
  Missed opportunities ........................................................................................... 40  
  Possible consequences of non-cooperative policies .......................................... 41  

**Chapter 5: Policy recommendations** ...................................................... 43  
Recommendation 1: Create an environment for the conditions of change .... 43  
Recommendation 2: Ignore inflammatory rhetoric ........................................... 45  
Recommendation 3: Build trust and negotiate directly .................................... 46
Bibliography ...................................................................................................................... 48
Primary Sources .............................................................................................................. 48
Secondary Sources ......................................................................................................... 50
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Focus

This research paper focuses on the dynamic relationship between Israel and Iran after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. Israel and Iran share a unique historical relationship in which the degree of cooperation often varies depending on regional political dynamics.¹ This unique relationship is grounded, in part, in the ethnic and religious “outsider” status ascribed to both nations by their Arab neighbors.² Other dynamic factors—including societal perceptions, political decisions and military operations—within Israel and Iran also are important. Although they were strategic allies prior to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, these two nations arguably have become mortal adversaries.³ As two of the strongest military powers in the region, Israel and Iran may have to reopen their dormant dialogue to foster a sustainable peace in the Middle East.

Have Israel and Iran spouted too much antagonistic rhetoric to establish a long-lasting cooperative dialogue and working relationship? Since 1979, the rhetoric exchanged between these countries has ranged from completely aggressive during times of beleaguered relations to more agreeable when mutually beneficial opportunities for cooperation arose. This analysis assumes that the relationship between Israel and

Iran can change. History demonstrates that this cycle repeats itself.\(^4\) In this context, the role of print media in exposing rhetoric is a significant aspect of this paper. Does an association truly exist between the state of Israeli-Iranian relations and the tone of rhetoric in media outlets?

**Main question**

By analyzing the Israeli-Iranian relationship and associated rhetoric, this project seeks to answer the following question: What conditions were present when the level of tension between Israel and Iran changed and did each nation’s rhetoric reflect these changes?

**Hypothesis**

To answer this question, I test the following hypotheses:

1. Specific conditions were present when the relationship between Israel and Iran changed from more to less antagonistic.
2. Changes in the Israeli and Iranian relationship precipitated a change in the intensity of antagonism reflected through rhetoric.

**Importance**

Ideally, readers will come away with fresh insights into the relationship between Israel and Iran. Despite antagonistic rhetoric, a positive transformation in this relationship may be possible. I chose four case studies illustrating historical events in which a degree of positive or negative change occurred, ultimately with a goal of

equipping policy makers with informed recommendations for handling future US policy regarding Israel and Iran. Policy makers should look for, or try to create, certain conditions to foster a positive change because of the critical impact Israeli and Iranian actions could have on the future security of the Middle East.

International attention regarding the Israeli-Iranian relationship continues to increase as Iran pursues an indigenous nuclear capability and as Israel grows more wary of its own security. Moreover, Iran’s support for anti-Israeli terrorist groups continues to increase tensions with Israel and could lead to violent conflict. Preventing such a military conflict between Israel and Iran could potentially dominate future US efforts to achieve a sustainable peace in the Middle East. An established working relationship and open dialogue between these two adversaries could prevent a war. But how can we reach this goal of cooperation, especially in the face of deep-seeded animosity and mutual distrust? Ultimately, a more thorough historical understanding of Israeli and Iranian interaction could assist policy makers in both nations, and in the United States, to identify conditions that led to effective communication in the past. This understanding will be beneficial as the international community presses forward in hopes of diplomatically reconciling Israeli and Iranian interests before security conditions deteriorate such that either nation resorts to escalated military or

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unconventional strike options. Using historical lessons, can the international community employ conflict resolution strategies specifically tailored to assist Israel and Iran in establishing a cooperative dialogue?

Israel and Iran are in the midst of an extremely polarized relationship in which antagonistic rhetoric is commonplace. My analysis reveals how Iran's nuclear ambitions and alleged support for anti-Israeli terrorist activities, for example, invoke an increasingly intense level of rhetoric from Israel. During a speech given in March 2010, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clearly illustrated the current animosity between Israel and Iran: “A radical Iranian regime armed with nuclear weapons could bring an end to the era of nuclear peace the world has enjoyed for the last 65 years. Iran's brazen bid to develop nuclear weapons is first and foremost a threat to Israel, but it is also a grave threat to the region and to the world.” After the United Nations passed its fourth round of sanctions against Iran and Iran's nuclear ambitions in July 2010, the United States subsequently imposed harsher unilateral sanctions against Iran. Iran responded to this threat by reiterating that it continues to develop nuclear technology and will not be bullied into sacrificing its national sovereignty. In September 2010,

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad retorted to the possibility of attacks on Iran’s nuclear facilities by stating that “such a war would know no boundaries. War is not just bombs.” Efforts to coerce Iran do not seem to have changed Iranian behavior. Moreover, all sides continue to espouse antagonistic rhetoric that is not conducive to cooperation. Analyzing trends in rhetoric provides an understanding of the political climate in which decisions are made and, ultimately, of whether and how policy makers use media establishments to convey these political viewpoints to other nations.

Contribution

My research expands upon current literature regarding Israeli-Iranian interaction. Analysis of the Iranian-Israeli relationship since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 has been limited. Since the revolution, scholars have published only a few studies analyzing the relationship between Israel and Iran. In the preface to his book Treacherous Alliance, Trita Parsi, founder and president of the National Iranian American Council, noted that a book has not been written on Israeli-Iranian relations in over twenty years. The book Parsi refered to is Sohrab Sobhani’s The Pragmatic Entente: Israeli-Iranian Relations, 1948-1988. My research reveals that the aforementioned writers, along with John

12 Mearshimer and Walt, The Israel Lobby 302.
13 Parsi, Treacherous Alliance, xii.
Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, may have ideological agendas other than scholarly knowledge. I took these potential biases into account throughout my research.\(^{14}\)

While many of the current scholarly works address questions relating to the history of Iran and Israel, the authors did not adequately address several other questions. Parsi, for example, explained that toning down Iran’s rhetoric became the first goal of Khatami’s desire to rebuild Iran’s image.\(^{15}\) However, Parsi did not address whether the rhetoric in Iran’s press reflected this political shift. Other questions that remain unanswered in the current literature include:

1. What role does rhetoric play within Israeli-Iranian relations?
2. Did a change in this relationship over time create a change in rhetoric or did rhetoric influence the changes in the political climate?
3. What types of political events served as catalysts for such a change?
4. What conditions were present during these political events?

Although these questions may be currently unanswered, Iranian studies expert Suzanne Maloney of the Brookings Institution explained in her book *Iran’s Long Reach*, that “Iran’s deployment of anti-Israeli rhetoric deserves special attention.”\(^{16}\) The current literature provides the foundational research to find and understand the answers to the aforementioned questions and presents credible insights into historical events and the


\(^{15}\) Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 211.

subsequent political ramifications. The authors did not, however, answer all the questions or explain all the variables involved in this dynamic relationship. The texts also failed to provide policy recommendations for the United States in dealing with future relations and antagonistic rhetoric between Israel and Iran.

**Methodology**

To test my hypotheses I use two methodologies—within-case process tracing and across-case controlled comparison.\(^{17}\) I examined four case studies based on pivotal moments in history in which a change in relations occurred between Israel and Iran. I used process tracing within each case study to analyze the context, factors and conditions that led to a shift in policy. Two case studies illustrate an improvement in relations. Conversely, two additional studies represent deterioration. Comparing the conditions surrounding these events (across-case controlled comparison) allowed me to determine the extent of association between these conditions and the improvement in Israeli and Iranian relations.

**Case study selection**

The first case study examines the dialogue and relationship between Israel and Iran leading up to and during the Iran-Contra Affair. The Iran-Contra Affair was a critical moment in which the Israeli government willingly cooperated with Iran despite the revolutionary rhetoric calling for Israel’s destruction. Official Israeli government sources indicated that the Israeli government believed the Islamic Revolution to be an isolated

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\(^{17}\) For information on process tracing and controlled comparison, see Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (*Belfer Center Studies in International Security*), (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005).
event and that further cooperation could facilitate a return to the earlier strategic partnership between Israel and Iran. The Iran-Contra Affair typically evokes words like scandal and corruption; more importantly, however, the event created an environment in which unlikely collaboration existed between Israel and Iran.

The second case study examines the relationship after the election of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in 1997. Khatami's election, his reforms of the Islamic republic and subsequent call for a “dialogue between civilizations” provided an opportunity for increased dialogue and cooperation with the West. While Israel remained skeptical of Iranian government intentions, it recognized that the election of Khatami indicated the Iranian population's desire for improved relations with the outside world. Khatami envisioned Iran as a strong international player and wanted to erase Iran’s image as a pariah state. To accomplish this goal, Khatami suggested engagement with the West and a softening of tensions.

The third case study analyzes conditions surrounding the Israeli-Iranian relationship during the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000. Tensions between Israel and Iran dramatically increased because the Israeli government believed Iran had provided

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18 Trita Parsi, Treacherous Alliance, 121.
21 Trita Parsi, Treacherous Alliance, 202.
23 The al-Aqsa intifada is also referred to as the Second Intifada.
weapons and training for the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{24} When Israel captured the \textit{Karine-A} transport ship, evidence of these arms shipments was revealed.\textsuperscript{25} The Israelis found more than 50 tons of Iranian-made rockets, anti-tank grenades and explosives carried by Hezbollah members headed for the Palestinian Authority.\textsuperscript{26} The capture of the \textit{Karine-A} provided the Israeli government enough evidence to establish a link between Iran, Hezbollah and the Palestinian Authority.\textsuperscript{27} Threats increased between Israel and Iran as Israel tried to eliminate Iran’s support for anti-Israeli actions. Meanwhile, Iran publicly denied any relation to the \textit{Karine-A} and denounced the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{28}

The fourth case study examines Israeli and Iranian interaction during the Lebanon War of 2006. Tensions again escalated and the Israeli-Iranian relationship drastically deteriorated. The Israeli government believed Iran continued to provide weapons and support to Hezbollah and thus directly was responsible for the deaths of many Israelis.\textsuperscript{29} According to Anthony Cordesman, Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Hezbollah would never have emerged as a major force in Lebanon without the arms transfers, training and advice, and financial support

\textsuperscript{25} Cordesman, \textit{The Israeli-Palestinian War}, 235, 278-279.
\textsuperscript{26} Cordesman, \textit{The Israeli-Palestinian War}, 235.
\textsuperscript{27} Cordesman, \textit{The Israeli-Palestinian War}, 235.
of Iran.” Moreover, Iranian and Middle East experts assert that Iranian government support for Hezbollah as well as the Iranian indifference to ending the conflict enraged the Israeli government.  

Rationale for choice of newspapers  

After analyzing the conditions surrounding these historical events, I compare each nation’s rhetoric immediately before, during and after each critical moment, primarily by using Israeli and Iranian newspapers and open-source government documents. Given the lack of real political debate on Iranian state-controlled radio and television, the print media provides the main forum for debate and expression of differing opinions in Iran. All publications are subject to the Press Law of Iran, which bans the publication of articles that “violate Islamic principles” or “might damage the foundation of the Islamic Republic.” All Iranian print media is owned by the government and, accordingly, consists of similar rhetoric regarding foreign relations. I examine the Iranian newspaper Tehran Times for this research project. Created in 1979 as the “voice of the Islamic revolution” and published by the government-run Islamic Propagation Organization, this was the first English international newspaper intended to spread the Islamic Revolution around the world. 

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To analyze Israel's rhetoric, I examine The Jerusalem Post and Haaretz daily newspapers. The Jerusalem Post takes a center-to-conservative outlook on news and events and primarily competes with Haaretz. Haaretz serves as Israel's oldest daily newspaper and tends to lean towards a more liberal or left-wing audience. Unlike Iran, all of Israel's newspapers are privately owned. Because Israeli papers possess strong political affiliations with domestic political parties, I chose to analyze the paper that most closely corresponded to the political party in power during each case study. For example, Haaretz aligns more closely with the Labor Party, while the Jerusalem Post aligns itself with the Likud Party.

To analyze the rhetoric in each paper, I chose a date range representing sufficient time before and after the critical moment in each case study to determine the change, if any, in the level of antagonism. The timeframes chosen for this analysis vary depending on the duration of the different events. I analyze press reports for the first case study between February 1986 and July 1987. The Iran-Contra affair became public in November 1986; however, as early as August 1985 secret plans were in development for Israel to ship weapons to Iran in exchange for the release of the American hostages. The timeframe chosen allows for analysis of rhetoric before the story was revealed to the public, during the height of the scandal and after the media focus on the story subsided. For this case study, I identified 99 articles from The Jerusalem Post, Tehran Times and Haaretz as relevant to my analysis.

35 Segev, The Iranian Triangle, 43.
Iran elected Mohammad Khatami as president on 23 May 1997. Accordingly, for the second case study, I analyze articles written between January and December 1997 to characterize the rhetoric before, during and immediately following Khatami’s oath of office.\textsuperscript{36} I chose a few months before and after the election to establish a baseline for the amount and intensity of the rhetoric, which is critical to identify any subsequent changes. In total, I selected and analyzed 119 articles from The Jerusalem Post and Tehran Times for this time period.

To analyze rhetoric exposed during the al-Aqsa Intifada, I examine press from July 2000 to December 2002. Although the al-Aqsa Intifada lasted approximately five years,\textsuperscript{37} I chose a date range that provides rhetoric prior to the start of the tensions, during the height (highest casualties on both sides) of the intifada and when the tensions lessened (lowest average casualties for both sides). During this timeframe, I determined that 134 articles from Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, and Tehran Times were relevant.

The Lebanon War in 2006 lasted just over a month—from 12 July to 14 August. Therefore, I used a shorter timeframe to analyze the rhetoric during this event. An examination of press issued from April 2006 to November 2006 provided sufficient data during the lead up to the war, during the fighting and after the war concluded to

\textsuperscript{36} Khatami was elected on 23 May 1997 and formally took office on 4 August 1997.

\textsuperscript{37} The exact starting and ending dates of the al-Aqsa intifada are disputed. Most literature cites Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount on September 28, 2000 and the subsequent violence that arose as the start of the intifada. For some, Yasser Arafat’s death in November 2004 marked the end of the intifada, while others cite the Sharm El-Sheikh Summit in February 2005. See Cordesman, The Israeli-Palestinian War, David W. Lesch, “Israel and the Arab World,” in Contemporary Israel, Robert O. Freedman, ed, 212-214.
determine any change in rhetoric. For this case study, I analyzed 126 relevant articles from Tehran Times and the Jerusalem Post.

Acknowledgement of research limitations

External factors limited, to some extent, the ability to capture the entire catalog of rhetorical statements exposed by Israel and Iran during the aforementioned case studies. For example, limited archival newspaper holdings were an obstacle. Inevitably, I assume I missed some news sources either due to key word searches or erroneous titles that did not meet my criteria. Despite these limitations, my search still revealed a wide breadth of diverse sources.

Explanation of rating scale

In each country’s newspaper articles, I compare the intensity of the rhetoric towards the other state and, accordingly, codify the level of antagonism in the rhetoric with the following range scale: highly antagonistic, somewhat antagonistic, neutral, somewhat cooperative, and highly cooperative. To rank the level of antagonism, I examine the exact words used in the texts.

- Highly antagonistic - direct threats by one country against the other or calling for military or terrorist action against the adversary
- Somewhat antagonistic- expressing one’s own military capabilities or name-calling
- Neutral- articles simply relaying factual information about the other country
• Somewhat cooperative- articles downplaying the threat posed by the adversary or cautioning the government against military operations
• Highly cooperative- articles expressing a desire for engagement or dialogue

From the data collected, I determined the extent to which changes in dialogue were subsequently reflected in each nation's rhetoric.

Roadmap

To test this paper's hypotheses, I begin in Chapter 2 by examining specific conditions present during periods of change in the Israeli-Iranian relationship. Chapter 3 assesses the extent to which the rhetoric from each country changed as reflected in each nation’s print media. In Chapter 4, I present competing explanations for changes in the Israeli-Iranian relationship and address the political implications of my analysis. Chapter 5 provides policy recommendations, which are drawn from the policy implications identified in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 2: FIRST HYPOTHESIS SUPPORTED- FIVE CONDITIONS IDENTIFIED

The analytic findings of this paper support my first hypothesis because five specific conditions were present when the Israeli-Iranian relationship changed from more to less antagonistic. The conditions, identified in Table 1, affected this relationship in different ways and to different extents across the two case studies in which positive change occurred. For example, the Iran-Contra affair satisfied Conditions 1, 2, and 3 but did not have long-term impacts for cooperation, possibly because Conditions 4 and 5 were not present. The election of President Khatami satisfied all five conditions and offered Israel and Iran a chance at achieving Condition 3. However, the election did not yield a long-term cooperative relationship probably, in part, because the West did not ultimately provide Iran with equal benefits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition 1: Alternative to the political status quo</th>
<th>Iran-Contra Affair</th>
<th>Election of President Khatami</th>
<th>2000 al-Aqsa Intifada</th>
<th>2006 Lebanon War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Somewhat Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 2: Enemy of my enemy is my friend</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 3: Benefits for both parties</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 4: Domestic Pressure for change</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 5: Reputation positively affected abroad</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The conditions identified in Table 1 were not as prevalent when the relationship deteriorated between Israel and Iran. My research reveals that Condition 1 was not apparent during the 2000 Intifada; the status quo did not change significantly, instead behaviors remained consistent. The 2006 Lebanon War partially satisfied Condition 1 for Israel. Israel’s invasion of Lebanon created a significant shift in Israel’s policy but the change did not alter the state of affairs for Iran. Like the 2000 Intifada, the conflict only increased Iran’s support for anti-Israeli groups. My research did not reveal obvious aspects of Conditions 2 through 5 in either of these case studies.

**Condition 1: Alternative to the political status quo**

The greatest catalyst for a change in the Israeli-Iranian relationship seems to be a variation in the status quo. According to Avi Shlaim, a well-known historian of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel and Iran had excellent relations from 1953 until 1979, when the American-backed shah was overthrown and Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic theocracy came to power.38 My research begins here. I use the revolution as a starting point and assume that the post-revolutionary status quo consisted of highly Islamic revolutionary ideology in Iran that fostered anti-Israeli sentiment and extreme ideological opposition to Israel, thus resulting in a negative relationship between Israel and Iran.

The Iran-Contra “hostages for arms” affair provided Iran and Israel, with the help of the United States, the opportunity to deviate from the preexisting non-cooperative relationship that was established after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The “hostages for

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arms” deal presented a unique divergence from anti-Iran sentiment in the West.\textsuperscript{39} Furthermore, both nations proceeded to cooperate with Iran, the regime credited for highly anti-western policies and ideologies.\textsuperscript{40} The Iran-Contra affair opened dialogue and provided enough of a digression from the existing political status quo that Israel and Iran could work together, albeit in secrecy.\textsuperscript{41} According to Parsi, despite all the anti-Israeli rhetoric, Israel believed Iran’s Islamic radicalization would be short-lived and the two countries could once again form an alliance.\textsuperscript{42}

Likewise, the election of reformist President Khatami demonstrated a shift in the status quo from the Islamic fundamentalist President Rafsanjani. Khatami’s reformist policies provided new possibilities for the Iranian population’s disappointment with Rafsanjani’s policy, which precipitated isolation from the West.\textsuperscript{43} Khatami’s challenger in the election, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, Speaker of the Majlis (Iran’s legislative body), held the favor of much of the religious establishment, including Ayatollah Khamenei.\textsuperscript{44} However, Khatami won the election with seventy percent of the popular vote, signaling to Israel and the West that the Iranian population’s desire for change and its displeasure with the current isolationist direction of the Islamic Republic.\textsuperscript{45}

“The reformist movement,” argued Suzanne Maloney from the Brookings Institution, “contributed to a

\textsuperscript{39} Iran needed the arms to continue fighting Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War.
\textsuperscript{40} Shlaim, \textit{The Iron Wall}, 440-441.
\textsuperscript{41} Segev, \textit{The Iranian Triangle}, X.
\textsuperscript{42} Parsi, \textit{Treacherous Alliance}, 106.
\textsuperscript{43} Shahriar Sabet-Saeidi, “Iranian-European Relations: A Strategic Partnership?” in \textit{Iran’s Foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad}, Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, eds. 61.
\textsuperscript{44} Ayatollah Khamenei remained officially neutral, but according to Congressional Quarterly, “his statements left little doubt that he favored Nateq-Nouri.” Congressional Quarterly, ed., \textit{The Middle East}, 10 ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2005) 253-254.
\textsuperscript{45} Congressional Quarterly, \textit{The Middle East}, 253-254.
meaningful shift in Iran’s debate on its approach to Israel through public questioning of the revolution’s ideological verities [or truths] by key officials and influential newspapers."\textsuperscript{46} This change in Iran’s political line facilitated a more open atmosphere in which improved relations could be possible.

The dynamic changes to the status quo illustrated during the Iran-Contra affair and election of President Khatami facilitated a positive change in the Israeli-Iranian relationship. However, when Israeli-Iranian relations worsened during the 2000 al-Aqsa Intifada and 2006 Lebanon War, my analysis suggests that changes in the status quo were insignificant. Both Israel and Iran continued their respective non-cooperative foreign policies toward one another. After 1979, Iran supported the Palestinians in their fight against Israel. Israel, in turn, continued to struggle with the Palestinian population after the first Intifada in 1987.\textsuperscript{47} According to Anthony Cordesman, the al-Aqsa Intifada started (in part) as a Palestinian response to Israel’s unwillingness to agree to make concessions to Palestinian demands.\textsuperscript{48} The al-Aqsa Intifada seemed to harden established Israeli and Iranian conceptions of the other instead of facilitating cooperation; Israel increased construction of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza as Iran increased its support for the Palestinians and associated terrorist organizations.\textsuperscript{49} Likewise, Iranian President Ahmadinejad capitalized on the already tense political atmosphere during the Lebanon War in 2006 by increasing his support for and

\textsuperscript{46} Maloney, \textit{Iran’s Long Reach}, 69.
\textsuperscript{48} Cordesman, \textit{The Israeli Palestinian War}, 74-75.
\textsuperscript{49} David W. Lesch, “Israel and the Arab World,” in \textit{Contemporary Israel}, 212-213.
“trumpeting” the progress of Lebanese Hezbollah. In these examples, events threatened perceptions of national security and exacerbated an already tense relationship between Israel and Iran by compelling each nation to take defensive measures that only antagonized the other nation.

**Condition 2: Enemy of my enemy is my friend**

Cooperation can be facilitated if two or more nations ally against a common adversary or rival. These nations do not have to be allies in every sense, but a common enemy can facilitate an opening for cooperation. As Sohrab Sobhani remarked, Israel and Iran can see one another as potential partners in “counterbalancing” more “immediate adversaries.” Iran and Israel often viewed Iraq as a common, primary adversary after 1979; both countries perceived that Iraq’s military capabilities were the greatest threat to regional security.

My research suggests that Israel used the “enemy of my enemy is my friend” approach as part of a rationale for cooperating with Iran during the Iran-Contra affair. Prior to the American hostage situation in Lebanon and any weapon shipments from Israel, Iran was deeply entrenched in war with Iraq. “What is good for Israel,” explained Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, “is a no win situation in the Iran-Iraq war.”

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51 Lesch, "Israel and the Arab World," 220-221.
54 Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente*, 149. Round table discussion with Yitzhak Rabin at Tel Aviv University,
Iran-Contra affair provided Israel the opportunity to fuel the Iran-Iraq War in which each side destroyed one another in a long drawn out battle.\footnote{Shlaim, \textit{The Iron Wall}, 440-441.} According to Sobhani, Iran also viewed Israel in a similar manner.\footnote{Sobhani, \textit{The Pragmatic Entente}, 156.} Ayatollah Khomeini realized, although he never said so publicly, that a “Tehran-Tel Aviv axis” would help both Iran and Israel protect their “security imperatives (e.g., enmity toward Iraq).”\footnote{Sobhani, \textit{The Pragmatic Entente} 157.}

Likewise, Iraq remained the primary enemy of Israel and Iran at the time of President Khatami’s election. As tensions between Iraq and its neighbors intensified, the opportunity for cooperation between Iraq’s enemies also grew. The Iran-Iraq war did not remove Iraq as a security threat; instead, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein ultimately grew more aggressive towards his neighbors throughout the 1990s.\footnote{Saddam Hussien further showed his aggression by invading Kuwait in 1990. Parsi, \textit{Treacherous Alliance}, 140-141.} Khatami viewed Iraq’s aggression as an opportunity for better cooperation with Israel.\footnote{Mearsheimer and Walt, \textit{The Israel Lobby}, 288-289.} “I follow every single statement that an Iraqi leader makes,” explained Iran’s Ambassador to the UN, Javad Zarif, in a 2004 interview with Parsi, and “rather than a military threat, Israel was a political threat to Iran’s interest and influence in the region. Iraq [was] the real threat [to our national security].”\footnote{Parsi, \textit{Treacherous Alliance}, 145.} Israel also viewed Iraq as a much greater danger to its security than Iran. As Israeli diplomats declared to \textit{Haaretz}, “The current Israeli position
holds that Israel does not have conflict with the Iranian people, the state of Iran or with Islam."\(^{61}\)

Unlike during the Iran-Contra affair and President Khatami’s election, Iran and Israel did not concentrate on a common enemy during the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000 and the 2006 Lebanon War. Instead, Iran strengthened its support for Israel’s enemies and the Israeli government responded by focusing its enmity towards Iran. My analysis suggests that because the Israeli government believed that Iran supported the Palestinians throughout the al-Aqsa Intifada and Hezbollah throughout the 2006 Lebanon War, the possibility for cooperation between Israel and Iran did not exist. Furthermore, the Israeli Prime Minister accused Iran of trying to derail peace negotiations to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.\(^{62}\) To no avail, Israel tried to coerce Iran to stop supplying arms and cease its political and financial support to both the Palestinians and Hezbollah.\(^{63}\) With no common enemy to unite them, Israel and Iran did not cooperate.

**Condition 3: Benefits for both parties**

For opposing sides to collaborate effectively towards a goal, each side must perceive that cooperation will yield beneficial outcomes. If one party believes the other side will gain more from an improved diplomatic relationship, or seeks some other self-interest, cooperative agreement may become less likely.\(^{64}\)

\(^{61}\) “Softer Israeli Policy Sees Iran as ‘Threat, Not Enemy’," *Haaretz*, July 8, 1999. OSC.


\(^{63}\) Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 283.

During the Iran-Contra affair, Israel and Iran could each receive somewhat equivalent gains from negotiating. Iran needed arms to fight Iraq. Israel, on the other hand, sought a method to communicate with “moderate Iranians” to strengthen its relationship with Tehran.\textsuperscript{65} Parsi claimed that “contacts between Iran and Israel were [driven] by… Iran’s need for arms and Israel’s hope of re-creating the Israeli-Iranian axis.”\textsuperscript{66} These mutual benefits made cooperation a smart strategic choice for both Israel and Iran. According to Segev, Iran wanted to make use of secret channels to communicate with Israel even after 1979, seeking primarily to gain access to American arms.\textsuperscript{67}

The election of President Khatami in 1997 also provided the opportunity for Israel and Iran to benefit equally from cooperation. By electing Khatami, the Iranian population indicated it wanted political reforms.\textsuperscript{68} Khatami also voiced his desire for a more open dialogue with the West, including Israel.\textsuperscript{69} Overall, Khatami’s goals consisted of removing Iran from isolation, reinvigorating the Iranian economy (i.e. ending sanctions imposed by the West) and moving Iran closer to being a great international player.\textsuperscript{70} Israel, on the other hand, viewed national security as its primary goal for cooperation.\textsuperscript{71} If Iran ceased support for groups fighting the Israelis, Israel believed it could move closer to securing its borders. After Khatami’s inauguration as President, he made overtures to Israel indicating Iran’s intent to draw back its support for anti-Israeli

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} Segev, \textit{The Iranian Triangle}, 130.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Parsi, \textit{Treacherous Alliance}, 127.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Segev, \textit{The Iranian Triangle}, X.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Mearsheimer and Walt, \textit{The Israel Lobby}, 289.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Mearsheimer and Walt, \textit{The Israel Lobby}, 289.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Mearsheimer and Walt, \textit{The Israel Lobby}, 289-290.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Robert O. Freedman, “Israel and the United States,” in \textit{Contemporary Israel}, 253-254.
\end{itemize}
groups. So, why, only two years later, did Iran continue to support the Palestinians during the 2000 al-Aqsa Intifada and Hezbollah during the 2006 Lebanon War? Khatami’s initial overtures did not bring the desired results from the West. In fact, the US instituted more sanctions against Iran. Therefore, the Iranian government probably viewed the prestige and loyalty it gained from supporting the Palestinians and anti-Israeli groups, such as Hezbollah, as a greater benefit than in cooperating with Israel; in other words, these armed conflicts did not present common policy objectives that could yield mutual benefits for Iran and Israel.

**Condition 4: Reputation positively affected abroad**

According to an element of the constructivism theory of international relations, an inherent link exists between a state’s actions and its identity. A national government, wishing to legitimize itself and foster diplomatic relationships with the international community, may therefore take specific actions to develop a positive international reputation. In the decades after Israel declared its independence in 1948 and Iran overthrew the Shah in 1979, each nation struggled to legitimize its existence to the world. “Beyond its rhetorical posturing toward Israel,” explained Maloney, “the Iranian government has always placed a premium on what has come to be known as ‘public diplomacy’ for enhancing its legitimacy at home as well as promoting its vision of the Islamic regime. Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 283, 355.

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75 Israel struggled to legitimize its actual existence, whereas Iran’s struggled to legitimize the Islamic regime. Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 283, 355.
Two core Israeli foreign policy goals have been universal recognition and acceptance; these goals, Israeli political expert Bernard Reich explained, provide Israel security through international legitimacy.

Following the Islamic Revolution, cooperation between Israel and Iran could have hurt the legitimacy of both nations because each government publicly called for the other’s destruction. However, the initial secrecy under which diplomatic talks between Israel and Iran were held during the Iran-Contra affair allowed both parties to officially refuse to negotiate in public. After media establishments leaked details of the scandal, the reputations of all involved were damaged and the possibility of cooperation dwindled. Both Israel and Iran vehemently denied playing any role in the scandal. Consequently, these trends toward cooperation resulted in international humiliation and only a short-lived improvement in relations.

On the other hand, Khatami’s election positively affected Iran’s reputation abroad. Iran’s population chose a reformist president who wanted Iran to reverse its isolationist policy and play a significant role in the international community. Khatami’s reforms and hopes for a better relationship with the West provided a means to achieve

76 Maloney, Iran’s Long Reach, 71.
77 Bernard Reich, “Israeli Foreign Policy,” in Diplomacy in the Middle East, ed. L. Carl Brown, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 121-122. Bernard Reich is currently a professor at the George Washington University-The Elliott School of International Affairs.
79 Parsi, Treacherous Alliance, 119.
this goal. Moreover, Khatami sought to end Western sanctions against Iran and eliminate Iran’s image as a pariah state.\textsuperscript{83} These factors combined to help legitimize Khatami’s presidency in the international community. Furthermore, in late 1998 and early 1999, European Union (EU) member states—including the United Kingdom, Italy and France—opened bilateral relations with Iran.\textsuperscript{84} This legitimacy enabled the Israeli government to consider cooperating with Iran. With the EU taking the first step, the Israeli government did not have to consider a tarnished international reputation as a result of cooperation with Iran.\textsuperscript{85}

Throughout the 2000 al-Aqsa Intifada and July 2006 Lebanon War, the Iranian government sought to improve its reputation with its Arab neighbors and not the international community. During these events, Iran could receive greater benefits by supporting Israel’s Arab enemies than it could by supporting Israel.\textsuperscript{86} These Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, as they continue to do today, drew great attention across much of the Middle East. Iran effectively capitalized on this attention by providing financial and logistical support to anti-Israeli forces and by urging Palestinian groups “to step up their fight against Israel.”\textsuperscript{87} President Ahmadinejad, along with Hezbollah leader Sayyid Hassan, “attained cult hero status” from much of the Muslim population for successfully defying Israel’s aggression into Lebanon and confronting a regional superpower.\textsuperscript{88}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{83} Sabet-Saeidi, “Iranian-European Relations,” 63.
\textsuperscript{84} Sabet-Saeidi, “Iranian-European Relations,” 63.
\textsuperscript{85} Sabet-Saeidi, “Iranian-European Relations,” 63.
\textsuperscript{86} Maloney, \textit{Iran’s Long Reach}, 32-33.
\textsuperscript{87} Cordesman, \textit{The Israeli-Palestinian War}, 234.
\textsuperscript{88} Maloney, \textit{Iran’s Long Reach}, 32-33.
\end{flushleft}
Condition 5: Domestic pressure for change

As the international community views Israel and Iran with increased scrutiny and applies political pressure—in the form of positive or negative incentives—in hopes of altering the current condition, to what degree should Israel and Iran consider these external factors when pursuing policies of their own? Maloney asserted that “meaningful political change” requires “some pressure on Iran’s existing political system from its own population” rather than international influences. The Israeli population must likewise desire a change in relations with Iran; otherwise, the democratically-elected government of Israel might have less impetus for action. Accordingly, domestic pressure for change may represent a critical foundation upon which to build a more cooperative relationship.

External pressure does not always precipitate change

Historically, the United States and United Nations have tried to coerce Iran to change through international sanctions. These tactics seem not to have worked. Moreover, both the Iranian government and population consider many of these actions as intrusive meddling in internal affairs and hypocritical. Throughout my analysis, I did not find evidence to support change in Iran from external pressure. On the other hand,

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89 Maloney, Iran’s Long Reach, 116.
Israel seemed to be more influenced by requests from the United States and United Nations. Israel's motivation to appease its allies may stem from fear of losing its international support and subsequently endangering its security.\(^{93}\)

During the Iran-Contra affair, the secrecy under which negotiations occurred between Israel and Iran suggests that neither nation had domestic support or pressure at the time for reformation of relations. In fact, according to Samuel Segev, talks were held with “liberal” sidelined officials in Iran, thus official Iranian policy may not have been represented in the affair.\(^{94}\) The United States, using all available resources to free the American hostages, may have had more influence over Israel's desire to cooperate than domestic pressure. Regardless, neither the Israeli or Iranian government desired to cooperate after media outlets revealed the scandal.

Conversely, the Iranian population pressed for significant change when it elected President Khatami (see also Condition 1). Khatami galvanized the Iranian population; the election brought 91 percent of eligible voters to the polls and as previously noted Khatami won the election with a landslide.\(^{95}\) Without this domestic support for change, the reformist attitudes of the late 1990s likely would not have occurred.\(^{96}\) The energized population that elected Khatami by a significant margin revealed the possibility for a reform of Iranian policy and the opportunity for cooperation.

Neither the population of Israel or Iran seemed to want a significant shift in foreign relations with one another during the 2000 al-Aqsa Intifada or 2006 Lebanon

\(^{93}\) Reich, “Israeli Foreign Policy,” 122-123.
\(^{95}\) Congressional Quarterly, The Middle East, 253-254.
\(^{96}\) Khatami’s opponent was a hard-liner conservative who was the clear choice of the clerics.
War. Similar to the international Arab response, the Iranian population proudly backed the government’s support for the Palestinians and Hezbollah.\textsuperscript{97} Meanwhile, the Israeli population focused primarily on the failing peace negotiations between their government and the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{98} During the Lebanon War, the Israeli population was far more concerned about defending against Hezbollah and Iran’s support for the group than in building new ties with Iran.\textsuperscript{99} In both instances, domestic support favored continued hostilities.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{97} Maloney, \textit{Iran’s Long Reach}, 32-33.
\textsuperscript{98} Cordesman, \textit{The Israeli-Palestinian War}, 96.
\end{flushright}
CHAPTER 3: HYPOTHESIS TWO PARTIALLY SUPPORTED

My analysis partially supports this paper’s second hypothesis; therefore, examining rhetoric may not be the best method in determining the extent of antagonism present in a country’s official policy. Rhetoric exposed during the 1997 election of Khatami and the 2006 Lebanon War accurately reflected the political dynamics between Israeli and Iran. However, a substantial change in rhetoric did not occur during the Iran-Contra affair or the 2000 al-Aqsa Intifada. Rhetoric in the press probably did not reflect this positive change because Israel and Iran cooperated in secrecy during the Iran-Contra affair. Nevertheless, my research indicates that there is precedent for improved cooperation between Israel and Iran, regardless of rhetoric. As illustrated, Israeli and Iranian press statements often consist of some level of antagonistic rhetoric despite improvements in the overall relationship.

During the 2006 Lebanon War rhetoric changed from somewhat antagonistic to highly antagonistic.

From the beginning of April through the end of November 2006, Israeli rhetoric against Iran in the Jerusalem Post changed from somewhat antagonistic before the war began in July to highly antagonistic after the conflict ceased in August as illustrated in Chart 1. This change accurately depicts the political relations between Israel and Iran during this timeframe. Prior to the war, Israeli press generally revealed caution and concern over Iran’s nuclear ambitions. However, after the Lebanon War began,

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100 Note: in the chart “n” refers to the total number of articles from the particular country for the particular time period.
101 Sharon Wrobel “Nuclear Energy is Like Pandora’s Box,” The Jerusalem Post, 11 Jun 2006,
Israeli press shifted its focus to Iranian support for Hezbollah, often directly proclaiming that “Hizbullah [sic] is Iran’s international terrorist arm.” Moreover, Israeli press increased its warnings, in both intensity and amount, regarding threats posed by Iran. As Israel withdrew from Lebanon and the conflict came to an “official” close, the Israeli press began to discuss Israel’s weapons capabilities and procurements. By November, the Israeli press published discussions on military options for striking Iran’s nuclear facilities.

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**Chart 1: Change from somewhat antagonistic to highly antagonistic rhetoric during 2006 Lebanon War**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apr-Jun (Before)</th>
<th>Jul-Aug (During)</th>
<th>Sep-Nov (After)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Discussions of Israel, as portrayed by Iranian rhetoric in the Tehran Times between April and November 2006 also followed a similar pattern (see Chart 1).


During the election of President Khatami rhetoric changed from somewhat antagonistic to somewhat cooperative.

Iran’s rhetoric altered from somewhat antagonistic before to somewhat cooperative immediately after President Khatami’s election, mirroring the regime’s calls for reform as seen in Chart 2. Prior to Khatami’s election, Iran’s press seemed as hostile
to the United States as it was to Israel. During and immediately following the election, however, the degree of inflammatory rhetoric towards the US and the West lessened as Khatami worked to improve Iran’s image in the international community. Iranian commentary in the press focused heavily on improved relations with the West in general terms, including the United States. Interesting, these articles did not mention Israel by name. Accordingly, the Iranian press conveyed Khatami’s diplomatic agenda simply by including Israel in the generic term “the West”. They ceased blunt threats to the “illegitimate, Zionist regime,” as previously published.

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109 “Clinton Sworn in as President of ‘the United States of Israel’,” Tehran Times, 21 Jan 1997, FTS19970121001641, OSC.
112 Ibid.
Likewise, Israeli press reflected a similar transformation from somewhat antagonistic to somewhat cooperative rhetoric, respectively, before and after the election. The timing of Israel’s optimism corresponded with many of Khatami’s calls for reforms in Iran and more open dialogues with the West. The election of Iranian President Khatami did not seem to substantially increase the overall amount of Israeli press on Iran. However, more “cautiously optimistic” rhetoric regarding Iran emerged shortly after Khatami’s election in May 1997. At the same time, the Israeli press urged the Israeli government to reexamine Israel’s foreign policy with Iran but cautiously reminded readers of the security threats posed by Iran. This element of caution is critical. Despite suggesting the possibility of improved relations, the Israeli press stopped short of accepting and conveying the Israeli Government’s efforts of détente.

No change in rhetoric during the Iran-Contra affair or 2000 al-Aqsa intifada

Unlike the previous case studies, during which press rhetoric reflected to a degree each nation’s policy, a significant change in rhetoric did not occur between February 1986 and July 1987 within either the Israeli or Iranian press reports. This fact possibly is due to the secrecy surrounding the Iran-Contra affair. As Chart 3 illustrates, the majority of articles from both countries throughout the affair remained “somewhat antagonistic.” However, after the cooperation was made public, both nations’ press

published reports denying any participation and blamed the United States for the entire incident.\textsuperscript{115}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart3.png}
\caption{Chart 3: No measurable change in antagonism during the Iran-Contra affair}
\end{figure}

Similar to the Iran-Contra affair, Chart 4 shows how noticeable changes in Israeli or Iranian rhetoric did not occur before, during or after the 2000 al-Aqsa Intifada. The overwhelming majority of relevant articles remained somewhat antagonistic throughout the case study. Iranian press concentrated primarily on its support for the Palestinians and denouncing “Zionist propaganda.”\textsuperscript{116} Israeli press focused on Iranian efforts to


\textsuperscript{116} “Zionist Predictions About Iran Senseless,” 30 Sep 2000, IAP2000093000000007, OSC; “Levy Attempts to Legitimize Israeli Regime by Spreading Rumours About Iran,” 27 Sep 2000, IAP20000927000062, OSC.
derail peace negotiations and provided cautious warnings on Iranian nuclear ambitions.  

\[\text{Summary of rhetoric}\]

Despite the articles published in the Israeli press regarding Iran during the case studies examined, the majority of print articles focused on other issues. These topics primarily included the settlement of the Palestinians, possibilities for peace treaties with Arab neighbors and factions within domestic political parties. Despite initial improvements in rhetoric, the Iranian press quickly blamed Israel or the United States and reverted to antagonistic rhetoric any time Iran’s government encountered setbacks.

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with negotiations. After anti-Israeli rhetoric reemerged, the Israeli press amplified its warnings of caution and increased reporting on Israel’s own military capabilities, emphasizing Israel’s ability to reach Iran.¹¹⁸

International events also played a significant role in the rhetoric chosen for press reporting. For example, before, during and after the Iran-Contra affair the Tehran Times published a far greater number of articles detailing the Iran-Iraq war than criticizing Israel. Before Khatami’s election, Israeli press concentrated more heavily on relations with the United States and Syria than it did on issues concerning Iran. This timeframe corresponded with Israeli and American efforts to negotiate a peace treaty with Syria.¹¹⁹

Between December 1997 and January 1998, the Israeli press focused more antagonistic rhetoric against Iraq than Iran as tensions between the US and Iraq rose, eventually resulting in the December 1998 US bombing of Baghdad. Immediately following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York, Israeli press primarily focused on uniting against global terrorism more so than espousing rhetoric towards Iran. Meanwhile, the overall number of Iranian press reports mentioning the United States or Israel seemed to decrease significantly during this timeframe. The initial shock of the September 11th terrorist attacks and subsequent uncertainty over how the United States would respond possibly explains this reduction.

¹¹⁹ Congressional Quarterly, The Middle East, 71.
CHAPTER 4: ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Alternative explanations

Cooperation may not be the best option

Although my research illustrates examples of cooperation between Israel and Iran, alternative analysis suggests that cooperation may not always be in the best interest of either state. David Pinto, from the University of Colorado, explained that if two states can successfully portray the other as an existential threat, each may gain more freedom and power over their own domestic constituencies.¹²⁰

Increased tensions with Iran may benefit Israeli regional superiority. Israel, for example, receives political support and military weapons from the United States to balance its capabilities against regional threats. If the threats are removed, as Mearsheimer and Walt argued, then the United States may be less inclined to sell weapons and support Israel diplomatically.¹²¹ As long as Iran remains a threat to the West, the United States and United Nations will most likely continue sanctions on Iran to debilitate its nuclear capability. If the international community removes sanctions, Iran may continue to increase its nuclear capability as well as its regional power. Accordingly, Iranian influence probably would expand to the detriment of Israel.¹²² As a

¹²¹ Mearsheimer and Walt, The Israel Lobby, 210-211.
nuclear power, Iran may also be able to diminish Israel’s deterrence power over the Palestinians as well as groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.\(^{123}\)

Moreover, Iran potentially could benefit from non-cooperation and increased antagonism with Israel. With Israel as its adversary, Iran can unite other Muslim nations against the “Zionist Power.” Cooperation with Israel potentially could hurt Iran’s legitimacy with anti-Israeli groups and other regional powers. The Iranian government might be perceived as hypocritical by calling for Israel’s destruction and then offering to cooperate. The United States may also benefit from increasing tensions between the two nations. The United States could use Israel’s fear of a nuclear-Iran and subsequent need for political and military support to extend US influence throughout the Middle East.\(^{124}\)

Despite these possible benefits, my research explains that a history of cooperation exists between Israel and Iran and both nations may receive greater benefits from cooperation than increased tension. Cooperation could lessen the external threats for both nations. If Israel did not perceive Iran as a security threat, then the Israeli government potentially could lessen expenditures on weapons and subsequently refocus attention and other resources to resolving conflict with the Palestinians.\(^{125}\)

Arguably, without Iranian support, Hezbollah would not pose as significant a threat to Israel.\(^{126}\) For Iran, cooperation with Israel could further legitimize the Iranian regime

\(^{123}\) Dershowitz, *The Case Against Israel’s Enemies*, 12-16.


\(^{125}\) Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 316-317.

throughout the international community. Without the threat of Israeli air strikes, Iran possibly would have greater flexibility to pursue a peaceful nuclear program. For the United States, cooperation between Israel and Iran could provide greater regional stability and decrease the amount of animosity towards the United States that currently pervades the Middle East.

**Implications for current policy**

The United States commonly works diplomatically with Israel and, in turn, polarizes itself against Iran. Using my analysis, the United States government should observe the current political environment and determine if conditions exist from which to create a new dialogue and, if not, identify what conditions need to exist for this change to be possible. Furthermore, the United States should examine the extent to which Iran’s highly antagonistic rhetoric prevents diplomatic relations. Both Israel and the United States seem to place too much emphasis on Iranian rhetoric and, as this paper illustrates, antagonistic rhetoric may not accurately reflect the intentions of the Iranian regime. The possibility for cooperation thus may exist despite rhetoric.

Policy makers do not seem to acknowledge the importance of the five conditions addressed in this paper. Current UN and US policy, comprised of negative incentives and sanctions against Iran, fail to satisfy the five conditions outlined in this paper. Iran views these negative incentives as an exertion of external pressure and “meddling”

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127 Cordesman and Hashim, *Iran*, 312-313.
129 Freedman, “Israel and the United States,” 269-270.
130 Thorough analysis of UN and US sanction orders did not reveal opportunities to promote Conditions 1 through 5.
in internal Iranian affairs, thereby resulting in a lack of trust. Negative incentives do not result in equal benefits for the party sanctioned. As this paper asserts, a primary condition for long-lasting positive reform lies within domestic support for change; arguably, negative incentives that hurt the Iranian population only yield distrust and animosity.

**Missed opportunities**

Because current policy may be on the wrong path, the United States may have missed opportunities for possible cooperation with Iran. According to Mearshiemer and Walt, “Iran signaled on two separate occasions since 9/11 that it was seriously interested in reaching a negotiated settlement with the United States.” The events of September 11, 2001 changed the status quo of relationships between the United States, Israel, and Iran, thus satisfying Condition 1. Additionally, the United States and Iran both perceived the Taliban as a common enemy; this fulfilled Condition 2. Later in 2003, Iran offered to help stabilize Iraq, negotiate on Iran's nuclear program and end support to organizations that committed violent acts on civilians. In return, Iran asked the United States to remove sanctions, remove Iran from the “axis of evil,” cease military threats, and provide access to peaceful nuclear technology. Although these

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132 According to Alikhani, sanctions have hurt Iran’s economy. Alikhani, *Sanctioning Iran*, 408.
benefits may seem balanced, the US Government did not perceive the same equality.\textsuperscript{137} Thus, cooperation did not progress and Condition 3 was not satisfied.

\textit{Possible consequences of non-cooperative policies}

If US policy makers fail to explore possibilities for increased cooperation between Israel and Iran, then a significant deterioration of security in the Middle East may be the consequence. Increased tensions regarding Iran’s nuclear program could result in an Israeli military strike on Iran. Such military action would not be unprecedented; the Israeli military conducted preemptive air strikes on nuclear facilities in Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007.\textsuperscript{138} An attack on Iran, however, could increase anti-Western sentiment throughout the Middle East and result in greater risk to US forces abroad. The Iranian government would likely respond to an Israeli attack by launching a retaliatory strike against Israel as well as using proxy groups like Hezbollah and Hamas to escalate the conflict.\textsuperscript{139} Likely, Hezbollah and Hamas would react with increased suicide bombings and rocket attacks from Lebanon and Syria.\textsuperscript{140} Moreover, if Iran perceived that the United States initiated or was complacent with an Israeli attack, Iran could target US forces in Afghanistan or Iraq. American economic interests in the Middle East would also be at risk; oil prices could dramatically increase and Iran would likely close the

\textsuperscript{137} The United States had just “scored a stunning victory” in Iraq and America’s favorable position possibly led the American President away from negotiating. Mearsheimer and Walt, \textit{The Israel Lobby}, 302-303.


\textsuperscript{140} Cordesman, “Israeli and U.S. Strikes on Iran,” 10.
Strait of Hormuz causing significant problems for the Persian Gulf States.\textsuperscript{141} Therefore, policy makers should aim for establishing a more constructive approach that could foster a more cooperative environment.

CHAPTER 5: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To bring about these positive changes, what actions must be taken and what policy prescriptions should be pursued and by whom?

Recommendation 1: Create an environment for the conditions of change

To create a political climate with the best chance of fostering a long-lasting positive relationship between Israel and Iran, the international community should look to the five conditions for change formulated in this paper:

- Condition 1: Alternative to the political status quo
- Condition 2: Enemy of my enemy is my friend
- Condition 3: Benefits for both parties
- Condition 4: Domestic pressure for change
- Condition 5: Reputation positively affected abroad

The best chance for achieving success lies in applying as many of these factors to a specific policy goal as possible. However, the international community should be wary of applying Condition 2 because it creates cooperation by positioning both nations against a third party adversary; this condition only continues a volatile culture and could result in short-lived cooperation, as it would be based on the whims of dynamic international events. However, the realization of Condition 3 creates within Israel and Iran both a common desire to work together as well as a tangible result that will entice parties to maintain positive relations over time.

Herein, policy-makers must think creatively. To achieve Condition 3, policy makers could explore, for example, creating a joint nuclear energy project between Israel and Iran. Often, Iran asserts that it purely pursues nuclear power for peaceful
purposes.\textsuperscript{142} Israel could benefit from decreased reliance on fossil fuels, both in terms of energy scarcity and security. Israel probably would be less inclined to militarily strike a jointly-operated nuclear power plant. Although Israel criticized progress on Iran’s Bushehr nuclear power plant as “totally unacceptable” in August 2010,\textsuperscript{143} the regulated operation of a jointly operated and mutually beneficial power plant might be acceptable to Israelis; international and Israeli monitors could ensure that weapons-grade uranium enrichment was not occurring. Becoming a nuclear-capable state, peacefully, also would benefit Iran by satisfying Condition 5.

How could this policy goal be realized? Condition 1 must occur, meaning that both governments would have to work more closely together. This might require a substantial shift in how the populations perceive the other. One way of managing this perception requires a significant reduction in antagonistic rhetoric; although rhetoric does not always reflect a nation’s policies and intentions, rhetoric could have a strong impact on the hearts and minds of the population.

What role should the international community play in achieving Condition 1 in the context of a policy intended to create a jointly-operated power plant? Western nations should not seek to overly influence the internal processes in either government, especially in Iran, as historical analysis suggests this would be perceived as unjust

\textsuperscript{142} Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Interview with UN TV Network, 25 September 2010, \url{http://www.president.ir/en/?search=progressive&querystring=nuclear+and+peace&submit=+Search+&SearchType=1&MediaType=0&SearchInBody=1&ResultsPerPage=10&Catagory=0}.

Traditionally, the Iranian government reacts to perceived interference with antagonizing rhetoric, which has the potential to cause regression towards increased tensions. Allowing Condition 4 to be the primary force influencing improvement of Israeli-Iranian relations, then, is the best approach to developing legitimate results.

Critics may argue that this recommendation is unrealistic because neither Israel nor Iran would agree to work together towards a jointly-operated nuclear power plant. This argument assumes that precedent for cooperation does not exist between the two nations. However, policy makers must be proactive and creative in attempting to improve Israeli-Iranian relations. A jointly-operated nuclear power plant is only one example. The process through which this paper outlines the application of the five conditions to achieve it, however, may be similarly applied to other cooperative ventures.

**Recommendation 2: Ignore inflammatory rhetoric**

Having determined that only a small association exists between changes in the political relationship and rhetoric in press, governments—whether the United States, Iran, Israel, or other—should only pay a cursory attention to inflammatory rhetoric when formulating foreign policy. From my analysis, basing foreign policy on rhetoric in a nation’s press may prove dangerous. “Careless rhetoric,” Anthony Cordesman argued,
“both destroys credibility and the basis for negotiation and dialogue.”\(^{146}\) Rhetoric can easily be taken out of context, misunderstood or have its true meaning lost in cultural translation. As my research suggests, the temperament of rhetoric exposed in media outlets may not accurately portray a government’s true policy objectives, ideologies, convictions or long-term intents.

The United States and Israel should therefore not allow antagonistic rhetoric to interfere with diplomatic goals of political and economic engagement with Iran. Thus, the best option would be to ignore Iranian rhetoric and realize that antagonistic rhetoric in press, or even from the government itself, may not be reflective of the true intentions of the Iranian government.

**Recommendation 3: Build trust and negotiate directly**

By conducting direct and fair negotiations with Iran, the United States and Israel can create the mutual trust necessary for a long-lasting improvement in relations with Iran. The Iranian government views the United States as a security threat and subsequently believes that any overtures from the United States are insincere.\(^{147}\) Previous US Administrations considered actively engaging Iran; however, timing, deliverability and too much focus on major divisive issues derailed any significant progress.\(^{148}\) To build trust and pave the way for future negotiations, the Obama Administration should start with smaller grievances and deal with the Iranian nuclear

\(^{146}\) Cordesman and Hashim, *Iran*, 164.
\(^{148}\) Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, 154-155.
program separately and at a later time. Current policy makers could begin to build trust by ceasing threats against the Iranian regime. Verbal attacks by the United States legitimize reciprocal antagonism by the Iranian government. Policy makers should couple cooperative actions with more cooperative rhetoric. This policy would minimize meaningless “empty rhetoric” and illustrate to Iran and the international community that the United States seriously intends to cooperate.

The Obama Administration should also consider negotiating directly with Iran. “The previous Bush Administration’s refusal to negotiate directly with the Iranian government,” argued international relations professor, Alon Ben-Meir, “further deepens Iran’s distrust of the United States.” Negotiating directly with Iran could provide the Iranian government with more international legitimacy and an improved international reputation (satisfying Condition 5). Face-to-face negotiations could provide both Iran and the United States a better sense of one another’s ultimate intentions and highlight each side’s genuine concerns.150

150 Ben-Meir, “Nuclear Iran is Not an Option,” 80.
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