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UNDERSTANDING AS THE ULTIMATE MEDIUM TO RESOLVE MISTRUST:
RE-IMAGINING A NEW NARRATIVE BETWEEN THE
UNITED STATES AND IRAN

A Dissertation

Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
University of San Francisco

In Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Presented by
Ali Goldoust

San Francisco, California
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This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's "dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to-and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Ali Goldoust   04/21/2009
Candidate   Date

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Ellen Herda   04/21/2009
Chairperson

Dr. Dan McPherson   04/21/2009

Dr. Shabnam Koirala-Azad   04/21/2009

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Mohtaram, who is the love of my life

- and to my sister, Shahla, who always encouraged me to further my education

- and to the memory of my uncle, Hassan Talebe, who taught me to enlarge my vision.

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

Introduction

Of one essence is the human race,
Thusly has creation put the base;
One limb impacted is sufficient,
For all others to feel the mace*

* Iranian poet, Saadi (1184-1283), in Golestan,
Inscribed on the entrance of United Nations Hall of Nations

The United States and Iran have fostered an increasingly antagonistic relationship over the past three decades. For Iranians, the U.S. foreign policy of interference in Iran, such as the CIA coup in 1953, represents foreign arrogance. For American leadership, the Iranian revolution and hostage crisis in 1979 are considered the turning point in the two nations' relationship. The American interference in Iranian politics and the Iranian harsh rhetoric and actions created a sense of resistance to U.S. policy on the Iranian side and a fear and antagonism on the American side, resulting in an antagonistic narrative between the two. In recent time, escalation of anger has reached the point of serious consideration of even military intervention and regime change by the U.S. and the reaction to this threat is increased rhetoric and non-compliance on the Iranian side. This practice of rhetoric and not talking to each other has increased misunderstanding between the two countries over the last half of a century. True conversation calls for equality for each side, but with the hostility between the US-Iran, if we wait for both sides to go forward together, we may never have a dialogue at all. In this critical time, it is my assumption that the United States, as a world leader, may have a higher responsibility to go first and break down the wall of mistrust. Through engagement, more opportunity may come by moving outside the arena of demonization and into dialogue. The purpose

of this study is to engage experts in a dialogue, listen to them, and seek possibilities to transform the crisis from an antagonistic to a discursive level, using critical hermeneutic theory as the basis for my data analysis. Since my audiences are the American policy makers and leaders, the hope is that the outcome may provide a more appropriate and comprehensive way to engage and perhaps, build a relationship with Iran.

Research Topic

At his address to the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations on September 6th, 2000, former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami expressed his view that it is the ethical duty of all world citizens to make the 21st century a century of peace and peaceful coexistence. The United Nations accepted this responsibility by naming 2001 as the year of 'Dialogue among Civilizations.' Khatami's call to investigate alternative policy designs that might prevent similar clashes to those quarrels which made the 20th century a century of international wars and national conflicts inspired me to think of the practice of non-dialogue and policy of rhetoric between the United States and Iran. In the past three decades, the absence of a meaningful dialogue between the U.S. and Iran has resulted in growing tension and diametrically opposed reactions to past and current events which continue to deepen the crisis between the two nations. Instead of dialogue, the two countries issue blanket reaction statements and sling respective accusations toward each other, on every subject from support for terrorism on one hand to attempts of regime change on the other, creating an environment of mutual mistrust. This history of mistrust has created a short-sighted paradigm which lays the foundation for the current dangerous situation between the two nations.

To change this paradigm, as a leading force in today's world, there may be a need for a stronger diplomatic effort by the American policy makers and leaders in the 21st century to consider a new approach toward international crisis, including the issue of Iran. Such a new approach would change from the "clash of civilization" mentality advocated by Huntington (1993) toward reconfiguring new policies advocating engagement and discourse to resolve differences. After all, to solve a conflict, it is necessary that one side gives up a little in order to break the chain of antagonism. This study explores the historical roots of the conflict to set the stage for a new understanding. More specifically, based on the application of critical hermeneutic theory and using a participatory research process; I focus on creating a text which may uncover a new understanding for leaders and policy makers, allow them to see previously unknown aspects of this relationship, and move from the stage of mistrust to one of constructive engagement and dialogue. As Habermas (1984) notes this stance calls for an orientation toward reaching an understanding.

Background of Research

After decades of hostility toward each other, experts such as Haass and O'Sullivan (2000), Takeyh (2002), McFaul, Milani, and Diamond (2006), Wilson (2007), and Zarif (2007) urge a paradigm shift in the US-Iran relationship. These experts, in one way or another, suggest that the two countries need to begin a dialogue and engage in negotiation to resolve their problems peacefully. In this research, my assumption, as indicated above, is that the United States may carry the major responsibility from the perspective of power. In a hierarchal sense, this position of power delegates more responsibility to the holder to be more patient, forgiving, moderate and concerned with

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the bigger picture.   This is not an easy process as the responsibility is given mostly to the

Americans, but it is a necessary step to change the current adversarial paradigm.   In the

past, the U.S. demonstrated its willingness to change the paradigm, as former Secretary

of State Madeleine Albright (2000: 356), stated:

> Neither Iran, nor we, can forget the past; it has scared us both. But the question
> both countries now face is whether to allow the past to freeze the future; or to find
> a way to plant the seeds of a new relationship that will enable us to harvest shared
> advantages in years to come, not more tragedies. Certainly, in our view, there are
> no obstacles that wise and confident leadership cannot remove. … We want to
> work together with Iran to bring down what President Khatami refers to as the
> 'wall of mistrust.'

Despite the understanding expressed by this statement, the official attitude toward Iran

worsened when the Democrats left office. To change the narrative of mistrust, a renewed

new effort is needed to mitigate the damage sustained during the last eight years, when

the two countries engaged in a very hostile relationship.

This wall of mistrust began in 1953 when, fueled by the assumption of a

communist threat and a fear of a new nationalism that might threaten U.S. and British oil

interests, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) joined with the British in a coup that

replaced the elected government of Prime Minister Mossadegh with Zahede under the

dynasty of Mohammed Reza Shah. Under the Shah, the U.S. enjoyed good relations with

Iran for many years, however the seeds of mistrust had been planted as the populace who

suffered under the Shah looked at the U.S. as the cause. This mistrust quickly germinated

as the people objected to the Shah's mistreatment and took to the streets in protest.

During the 1978-9 revolution, in the eyes of Iranians, the United States, as the supporter

of the monarch, was as guilty as the Shah for their suffering. After the revolution, when

the United States gave shelter to Shah for health-related issues, the Iranians saw this

action as representative of U.S. desire for a figure head for future invasion plans. The suspicion of all things American grew and fueled the storming of the U.S. Embassy, as many held the opinion that it was a CIA stronghold and they feared a return of monarchy and despotism.

When the revolution was usurped by the Islamic movement led by Ayatollah Khomeini, an Islamic government was established, the demonization of the U.S. was used as a unifying device, which is employed even to the present day. This in turn has thickened the wall of mistrust among U.S. policy makers as their understanding of Iran is clouded by rhetoric of the new Iranian government and the opinion grows that Iran is filled with fanatics. The fear of all things Islamic grew and culminated in President George W. Bush's proclamation of Iran as an 'Axis of Evil' followed by the much touted atomic crisis.

Under this adversarial narrative, accusations between Iran and the United States became the norm in their relationship. This accusatory environment, created by a shared mistrust between the two governments, has become the source of their demonizing the other. In recent years, the old accusatory narrative, accelerated to a new level of dangerous rhetoric that can easily and quickly turn into a confrontation. The dangerous adversarial rhetoric in Washington towards Iran and the controversial behaviors of Iran in the Middle East, including the harsh rhetoric towards the U.S. and Israel, makes the danger of a military confrontation an imminent possibility.

To begin to dismantle the mistrust which is the basis for the current paradigm, a change in understanding between the two is required. The last 30 years with the U.S. policy of regime change, accusations, sanctions, and demonizing has proved

unproductive. It is time for American leaders to look at past history with Iran, try to comprehend that country, and develop a new approach to transform this adversarial attitude to one of constructive engagement. Doing so provides an opportunity to further U.S. security and diplomatic interests, reversing a trend described by Brzezinski (2005: 20) who argued an "anxious America, obsessed with its own security, could find itself isolated in the world, the focus of global hatred. In the end, which scenario prevails hinges on a simple choice: Will America seek to dominate the world, or lead it?"

I believe there is much potential and opportunity for the United States to engage with Iran and improve their relationship. A poll by Abbas Abdi (in Fathi 2005) illustrates that 74% of Iranians favor a dialogue with the United States. The irony of this result is that the poll indicates that majority of Iranians are sympathetic toward the U.S. culture and support a relationship, even while the Iranian government adamantly opposes American influence. A growing majority of U.S. citizens abhor the Gulf conflict and desire a less aggressive approach from their leaders. But the grass roots base of both countries is threatened by the other country's antagonistic rhetoric and their own biased media, which create feelings of isolation and nationalism in each country.

Even though there is a need for both countries to reduce hostility, as a world leader, the United States' lead could make possible the exploration for new paths to peaceful coexistence. Since Iran is a key country in the Middle East and viewed by many emerging countries as a champion opposed to American interference in the region, then a change of policy in US-Iran relations might create a new model for peace building based on dialogue. This response to Khatami's call to ethic responsibility is strengthened by the urgency of not wasting the precarious but existing, pro-peace citizen base in both

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countries which teeter on the blade of nationality and growing negative rhetoric, as the danger of military intervention increases and the stakes rise larger in a world grown too small for conflicts to be contained. If we don't generate proper policy to address this new world order soon, it may become too late in the near future.

The current U.S. policy of military intervention in Iraq illustrates the unending disaster inherent in using force to resolve a dispute. After almost six years of occupation, the Iraqis' future is dark and American's future in the region is unknown. The tragedy of this military intervention is a testament to the importance of solving disputes through engagement and dialogue. The six years of military conflict in Iraq incurred, and continues to reap, catastrophic costs in human life and national debt on both sides. Iraq's infrastructure is destroyed, millions are homeless or refugees and the U.S. invasion instigated a call to arms of anti-American forces with the result that Iraq has become a war zone based on factions and issues that no longer are internal or inherently Iraq's. A conflict with Iran would be even larger and more costly on all fronts than the one in Iraq has been. Geographically, Iran is an important and influential country throughout the Middle East and is seen as a prototype by many emerging countries in regards to U.S. relations. Military intervention might create negative reactions in the region and around the world and the world can not afford another conflict. All of this has resulted in increased instability in an already unstable region.

The disastrous consequences of the Iraq war should be a lesson to avoid a new conflict between the U.S. and Iran. As Sacks (2005: 113) notes, in "the short term, conflicts are won by weapons. In the long run, they are won by ideas …. We must turn the clash of civilizations into a conversation between civilizations." Khatami reflected

similar advocacy in his speech in 2000, observing that the art of capable leaders should focus on reducing the level of tension through dialogue rather than involving in disastrous conflicts.

<div align="center">**<u>Significance</u>**</div>

It is anticipated that this research may be significant because it addresses the critical issue of how to configure U.S. foreign policies in regard to Iran in the 21st century. Throughout this text, I place more responsibility on the United States' side in order to deal with the current crisis. I do this because I feel that the American position of leadership in the world, combined with its proclaimed value system, lays a larger degree of responsibility at their door. My belief is that America has been and needs to be a role model for the rest of the world. Therefore, it is important for American policy makers to walk as they talk, if they want American values to continue to be recognized, perhaps even appreciated around the world. As former President Carter (in Gaddis 1986: 29-30) emphasized, our "belief in freedom of religion – our belief in freedom of expression – our belief in human dignity …. These principles have made us great, and unless our foreign policy reflects them, we make a mockery of all those values." My goal is to see if there is a more appropriate way for the United States to take initiative to lead, based on its own principles. As Nye (2005: 167) argues, if "a country represents values that others want to follow, it will cost less to lead." The U.S. may need to return to its inspiring tradition to lead the world economically, politically, and culturally based on its tradition of core values. However, following these principles is one part of the foreign policy conduct and understanding the other side of the issue, Iran, forms the second part of it.

In my conversation with Dr. Provence, the director of Middle Eastern Studies in the History Department at UC San Diego, he mentioned the lack of an appropriate and effective theoretical framework for dealing with today's international crisis in U.S. foreign policy. According to him, the United States' foreign policy is still based on the Cold War mentality where one side raises the cost of competition so high that the other is unable to continue. In this mentality, victory is accomplished through the defeat of the other side. In the 21st century, it may be wiser to turn from an emphasis on strategic might to one grounded in understanding the concerns of others. This lack of a foreign policy based on understanding of others, indicated by Provence, is mentioned also by Gary Sick (1986) who believes the lack of understanding among the U.S. foreign policy makers may be the result of ignorance about Iran. This ignorance, comes from a basic U.S. minunderstanding of Iran's motivations, their unique world view, the conflicting political pressure within the nation itself and the integral application of *zahr* and *baten* in personal, business and diplomatic relations. *Zahr*, in Iranian culture, refers to a protective face one presents to those they mistrust and *baten* is the inner truth shared only when there is trust. This ignorance may be resolved through what Dr. Provence called a need for new theory in the international arena and through what Khatami advocated as "dialogue among civilization" in his UN speech in order to engage, have dialogue, and reach a better understanding. In this text, through my research and analysis, I also try to bring about a better understanding of Iran. This may help the expansion of horizons and shift of paradigm in the U.S. foreign policy.

Should U.S. leaders and policy makers decide to engage with Iran based on principles and understanding, a new model for peace building may be developed.

Perhaps a constructive look at the US-Iran relationship may promote an alternative that sustains working relationships and creates a new horizon for international conflict resolution. By engaging with Iran, a new understanding may be reached through a process of interaction rather than accusation and harsh rhetoric which strengthens the ideology of extremism in Iran and in the region. Moreover, the conversations of this study may bring out alternative stories which may hold new ideas and explain histories and wisdom that therefore may not have been open to Americans, more particularly to American policy leaders, prior to this. Significance may reside also in the potential dialogue at the international level at which the study's conversations were held over the past few months. For this purpose, this document might be a medium for the leaders in both governments, but especially in the United States, to better communicate with their counterparts, understand their concerns, and meaningfully moderate their policies.

<u>Summary</u>

The US-Iran conflict is an example of a complicated post-modern crisis. Despite the United States' consistent use of sanctions and harsh rhetoric to intimidate the Islamic Republic, Iran has grown to be an influential state in the Middle East and become a leader of anti-American influence. Both countries engage in the demonization of the other, resulting in escalating tension. Since the U.S. policy of intimidation has not resulted in any desirable outcome, this study tends to explore through conversations with experts the need for an alternative approach or a possible shift in paradigm. A deeper understanding of Iran and Iranian actions and reactions may serve American policy makers and leaders to more effectively approach Iran and to ease the tension through

engagement and dialogue. To begin this understanding, I will explore the background of

Iran and the U.S. involvement into their story in the upcoming chapter.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH SITE

Introduction

This Chapter offers background information on Iran, including geography and natural resources, demographics, culture, history and politics, political power structures, and sanctions. It provides information to help the reader better understand Iran as a nation, both as a people and a political system, to present a clearer picture of Iran's historical background in the last 200 years and to shed light on Iran's involvement with the U.S. in the last six decades.

Geography and Natural Resources

According to Sullivan (2002: 11) "Iran is a crossroads connected politically, economically, diplomatically, culturally, militarily, and socially to many different regions. It is the most important state, in many ways, in the [Persian] Gulf and in Central Asia." It is located in Southwest Asia and the eastern part of the Middle East. The size of Iran is 1,648,195 squares kilometers which makes it the 18th largest country in the world. The Caspian Sea is to the north, Afghanistan and Pakistan are to the east, Turkey and Iraq are to the west, and the Persian Gulf is in the south. Perhaps the most historically influential of its borders is the shared northern border with the former Soviet Union (now states such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan) and the past influence of communism.

The country is located in a rich oil and natural gas resource area in the Middle East, which made it attractive to western powers since the early 1900s. According to Bellaigue (2005: 19), "Iran is the second-largest oil producer in the Organization of

Petroleum Exporting Countries and has the world's second-largest natural gas reserve."

In the early twentieth century, British oil exploration made the British a strong eco-political force in the southern part of the country and an influential power on the Iranian government. In the Northern provinces, the former Soviet Union was a primary player for oil and political influence to balance British power. As a result, the two major powers battled for Iranian oil during much of the first half of the century. After World War II, the United States stepped into the void created by Britain's loss of power within the Iranian political spectrum as Iran began to nationalize their oil fields. However the Western need for oil and fear of communism became the controlling foreign policy factors and led to the C.I.A. led 1953 coup, which replaced Mossadegh with the Shah. After the revolution and rise of Islamic rule, combined with fear of terrorism and nuclear development by Iran, the U.S. has had a policy of embargos and sanctions. These restrictions have not changed the behavior of the Iranian government, however, the sanctions make obtaining the needed contractors and technology to develop new oil and gas fields very difficult.

Demographics

Iran is a diverse country consisting of people of many religions and ethnic backgrounds united by the Persian culture. Limbert (1987: 19-20), U.S. embassy attaché and hostage during the embassy takeover in Iran, explains that "Iranian society resembles a mosaic or a Persian carpet in which varied languages, religions, and tribes, like distinct colors and textures, form an intricate yet coherent design." Persians, the founders of Ancient Persia, constitute the majority of the population, with ethnic groups including Azeris, Gilaki and Mazandarani, who reside in the north and northwest of the country and

scattered throughout Iran are a small percentage of Kurds, Arabs, Turks, Jews, and Armenians along with representations of other small ethnic groups.

Religiously, Iran is not a very diverse society. Limbert (1987: 29) illustrates that between "85 and 90 percent of the Iranian population adheres to a minority branch of Islam called *Shi'a*, or, more precisely, he *Shi'at Ali* ("party of Ali"). About 10-15 percent of the world's Muslims belong to this branch of Islam; the rest, called *Sunnis*, are followers of the *Sunna*, or 'tradition.'" Shi'a Islam is the official state religion. The Sunni Muslims are mainly Kurds and Balochis. There is also a remaining two percent of non-Muslim religious minorities who are Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and Bahais. The first three religions are officially recognized and protected, and have reserved seats in the Parliament. However, there are restrictions upon the Bahais religious minority. Despite the fact that they are Iran's largest religious minority, they are not officially recognized and are denied civil rights and liberties, access to higher education and employment.

According to Bellaigue (2005), Iran's population has reached almost 70 million; more than two-thirds are under the age of 30. On this issue, Amuzegar (2003: 4) notes that the "government-encouraged baby boom of the early 1980s has now spawned a new generation, the Third Force, which sees neither the fundamentalists' concept of velayat-e-faquih (the supremacy of Shi'a jurists) nor Khatami's "Islamic democracy" as the answer to Iran's current predicament." This younger generation is vocal about reform and won the 1997 election for President Khatami, who ran on a youth favored reformist platform, and again in 2000 voted in a large majority of reformists' representatives to parliament in hopes of social, political, and economical reform. Another factor in the younger population are the university women who compose more than half of incoming classes

and spearhead the move for women's rights. Beeman (2005: 6) notes that women "are there and in every way, in every area of public life, and they're not going to go away. They are actually one of the strongest forces for reform in the country." The majority of second generation revolutionary Iranian youth want socio-political change and economical prosperity and, although their voices are subdued, they represent strong potential for dialogue within Iranian society.

Another group to consider is the expatriates, now living around the world, but with enduring identity and political ties. In the U.S. alone, there are several claims of a first and second generation Iranian population of somewhere near two million, although the Census Bureau records a much lower number, probably because many Iranians living in the U.S. quit claiming Iranian ties after the hostage crisis. Bozorgmehr (2000: 167) notes that the "combined presence of former college students and elite exiles accounts for the highly-educated, entrepreneurial and professional character of the Iranian community in the U.S." Iranians in the United States "have one of the highest levels of educational attainment among all immigrant groups in the US, ranking third in 1990, after Asian Indians and Taiwanese." The majority of this group desires a better relationship between U.S. and Iran and many still have strong connections with their home land. The potential of this minority group in the United States may facilitate educational, cultural, entrepreneurial, and business involvement before any governmental involvement.

The final observation I draw from this discussion on demographics is that despite the animosity between the U.S. and Iran on the official level, on public level there exists a potential to develop dialogues and explore understanding. Amuzegar (1999: 93) explains that the civil unrest in Iran in late 1990s "revealed that hostility towards America

… had not overriding priority for Iran's increasingly educated younger generation. They seek a distinct identity, meaningful employment … more contacts with the outside world … and a clear hope for the future." This demographic is a growing political force with a desire for more open relations with the rest of the world.

Culture

The Islamic regime actually made the de-Islamization of Iranian society happen in a faster pace. As Mohit (2001: 25) explains, "Iran is far less religious than twenty years ago. It is an irony of history that one of the most fanatical religious movements should be the cause of such a great enlightened transformation." After three decades of living with the propaganda of the Islamic regimes and experiencing social and political restrictions and not having prosperity and freedom for a better future, majority of Iranians, specifically 70% youth, "find neither ideological, economic, or political reasons to support the ruling clergy" (2001: 23). However, this new generation in Iran is extremely cautious about its approach to change the political system. Instead of an extreme measure such a revolt or bloody clashes with the government's tough forces, they choose a peaceful, more effective, slower, but more fundamental process of change.

The rise of the reform movement in Iran in the late 1990s is a reflection of this generation's desire for a fair engagement with the rest of the world. As Sullivan (2002: 6) notes, "the great majority of the people … would like to see some improvement in Iran's relations with the U.S., and to see Iran leave its partial isolation imposed on them by the U.S." Beyond the ideological years of the 1980s, the top down approach of their government in the 1990s, this generation expressed its ideals in the late 1990s through the reform movement expressed and led by former President Khatami. The youths believe in

merits of individuals, as in the United States, rather than any other form of advancement and "want to free the enormous material and human resources of the country from the grips of a pre-capitalist, reactionary regime supported by parasitic merchant-capitalist class" (Mohit 2001: 26). The policy makers and government analysts need to be aware of the potentials that this generation represents in Iran.

History and Politics

Introduction

Iran was once the great Persian Empire which stretched across Asia and Europe. Limbert (1987: 46) notes that more "than twenty-five centuries of continuous existence as a nation have given Iran a rich and complex historical inheritance." The rule of Cyrus, around 650 B.C., was known for enlightenment, scholarship and the freedom of religion. Persian history is steeped with early poets and thinkers who were forerunners of modernity. This leads us to wonder how such a country, steeped in the wisdom of the very ideas shared by modern Americans, could become one of the U.S.'s major enemies. This section covers the decline of Iranian dynasties, the issue of Imperialism, Iran's Constitutional Revolution, the entrance of the United States in the Iranian political scene, and the subsequent CIA Coup, followed by the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis.

Dynasties, Constitutional Revolution, and Imperialism

Iran dealt with the concept of modernity in a direct sense during Qajar dynasty at the beginning of 19th century, with the establishment of Iran's first modern college system and other modern reforms. However, the Qajar dynasty coincided with the rise of imperial Russian and British power which led to repeated intervention, war and loss of Persian territories throughout the 19th century. Keddie (1981: 39) notes that "Russian and

British protection of the Qajars against revolts made Iran a country with very limited independence. Iranian internal politics in the Qajar period are frequently shadow politics, with real politics often occurring not only … behind the scenes, but even beyond the seas." The corrupt and weak stance of the Qajar dynasty led to popular protests and eventually Persia's constitutional revolution in 1905 derived from the influence of European modernity on Iranian intellectuals and clerics who, according to Milani (2004: 17), "forced the king to sign into law a new constitution that limited the power of the monarch and moved Iran in the direction of creating a modern democratic system."

Iran's first attempt toward democracy by establishing a parliament failed to put an end to Iran's feudal system as the country still lacked the infrastructure that could support a democratic process, such as political parties and institutions. Milani (2004: 17) notes:

> democracy is more than just ideas; it requires and intricate network of institutions; it needs a civil society to act as a buffer between the power and the people. [It is] in need of constant monitoring and mentoring; it requires a citizenry conscious of the perils that threaten democracies and willing to show the patience and tolerance necessary to sustain a democratic polity.

The country was ripe for a military coup and was soon under the control of the head of the military, Colonel Reza, who later became Prime Minister and ultimately the King, Reza Shah Pahlavi. Zirinsky (1992: 650-5) notes that Reza established an authoritarian government that valued nationalism, militarism, secularism and anti-communism combined with strict censorship and state propaganda. As king, he ruled the country from 1925 to 1941, and was forced to leave by the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran.

U.S. Entrance

In the late 1800 and first part of the 1900, the United States and Iran enjoyed a relationship based on a mutual interests. Ansari (2006: 15-6) explains:

> The United States and Iran had enjoyed a formal commercial presence in Iran since 1856 with the signing of a treaty … the United States had no desire to become embroiled in the imperial politics of the Old World. The treaty was straightforward, reciprocal, and remarkable balanced, establishing diplomatic missions …. The Iranian parliament, impressed by American achievements and convinced of her 'anti-imperial posture (the American after all had thrown out the British), decided that the United States offered the least politically sensitive and most competent option for the procurement of administrative and financial expertise.

To help a very traditional/rural society, American missionaries such as Shuster were sent to Iran to create a treasury civil service, organize gendarmerie, and establish a taxation system. At the same time, the United States tried to open up new territory in Iran which had traditionally belonged to Russian and Britain. Nevertheless, because of the American aids and assistance, Iranians welcomed the newcomer, the United States, to enter their social and economical life. However, the historical circumstances put the U.S. in a rivalry context with Russian and Britain, which led the U.S. to be more aggressive in order to win its hegemony game.

U.S. Political Involvement in Iran

Edward Said (1979: 4) writes that from "the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II France and Britain dominated the Orient and Orientalism; since World War II America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did." This approach includes continuing the Western mindset of superiority toward the Oriental and following the dictates of national interests; such as opposing the spread of communism by the Soviet Union, expanding its sphere of influence and obtaining new economical incentives such as oil contracts in the region.

As the new dominant western power, the United States supported regimes that could maintain stability in their countries and sustain security for the U.S. interests in the

region. In Iran, the U.S. chose to support the regime of Mohammed Reza Shah, the son of the old deposed Colonel Reza. As it is indicated in the Teaching Resource Center's (1997: 4-5) document, Iran, with its 1,250- mile shared border with the Soviet Union, was an important geopolitical point of resistance against the expansion of communism under Truman's policy of containment. As a result of this policy, Iran played the role of gendarme for the U.S. in the Persian Gulf and in the broader spectrum in the Middle East.

After the Second World War, interest within the United States about the Middle East escalated. Said (1979: 295) notes that "with the exploitation of its oil, strategic, and human resources pioneered by Britain and France, the United States prepared for its new postwar imperial role." Through partnerships and trade in oil, arm sales, trade, and assistance programs the United States became dominant in the Iranian political scene. This facilitated both countries leadership policies. In Iran, Mohammed Reza Shah could begin his modernization program and received aid from U.S. and for the U.S., Iran supplied oil for growing U.S. needs and Mohammed Reza Shah became a stabilizing factor in the region and a close informant on Soviet movement in the region.

Iranian people, however, did not feel easy with the cultural dominance of the United States over their life. Limbert (1987: 51) notes that perhaps "one explanation for the Iranians' unease in their recent contact with the West was the perception that Westerners … were impervious to Iranian cultural influence and that cultural exchange would proceed in only one direction." A nation with a majority of people who believed in simple values and traditions, the fast modernization exposed them to immoral materialistic world. The pious Iranians citizens, which formed the majority of the country prior to the revolution, were overwhelmed by the speed of the development and

the dominance of the U.S. culture in Iran. As Beeman (2005: 25) describes, this social

class seemed to "had lost its spiritual core. It had become poisoned–obsessed with

materialism and the acquisition of money and consumer goods." As a result of these fast

development policies conducted by the U.S. in Iran, the Iranian religious leaders were

able to make "connection between the colonial policies of Great Britain and the

subsequent economic and political activities of the United States" (Beeman 2005: 57).

CIA Coup

In 1952-3, as the tension between Britain and Iran over Iranian oil share reached

its peak, so did the pressure of British government on the United States government to

join British to overthrow the democratically elected government of Prime Minister

Mossadegh. Dr. Mossadegh's government challenged the British Oil Company by

nationalizing the Iranian oil industry and limiting the power of Mohammed Reza Shah on

a national level. As Kinzer (2003: 150-1) explains, the U.S. finally authorized a C.I.A.

sponsored coup after Eisenhower became President and the suspicion of communism was

added to the incentive of guaranteeing the flow of oil to its growing industries.

According to Abrahamian (2001: 187), the U.S. overthrow of Prime Minister

Mossadegh, the man who "captured the imagination of the people" destroyed the U.S.

image for many Iranians. Iranian people, as Kinzer (2003: 2) notes, "thought of

Americans as friends, supporters of the fragile democracy they had spent half a century

trying to build. It was Britain, not the United States that they demonized as the

colonialist oppressor that exploited them." After August 1953, there was no longer a

difference between Britain and the United States, in fact many Iranians saw the U.S. as

the government which prevented them from having a better future and embracing a

democratic society by "putting an end to democratic rule in 1953 and installing what became the long dictatorship of Mohammad Reza Shah" (Kinzer 2003: x).

After the CIA coup, the Iranians' sense of unease was replaced by a sense of mistrust toward the United States. Beeman (2005: 67) explains that the "United States became the Great Satan … the great external corrupter of culture and morality, supporter of illegitimate power, and destroyer of the natural bonds that bind men to each other in relationship of mutual benefit …." The CIA coup and unlimited support for monarchy between 1953 and 79 provided enough evidence to Iranians to see the United States as an imperialistic power that intends to satisfy only its own interests rather than being fair.

As a result of this image of the United States, a sense of resistance to the U.S. policies was developed among Iranians. Beeman (2005: 66) explains that in Iranians' mind, the "United States is the ultimate supporter of illegitimate authority in this case the Shah. … In the Iranian symbolic universe, this is the ultimate external corrupting force, and it must be resisted at all cost." In this context, the American support for the Shah damaged him, because the U.S. influence was viewed as illegitimate by most Iranians. Still, it is in this context that when Mohammed Reza Shah fled Iran in early 1979 and was permitted into the United States, supposedly for medical treatment, the event, in the minds of Iranians, was interpreted through the memory of 1953 coup. In this context, the U.S. embassy in Iran was seen as a so called "spy house" and had to be neutralized to prevent any possible repeat of a coup.

Based on the review of the past, this sense of resistance still exists among Iranians who do not see the United States' government as a legitimate force to dictate policies to Iran. Beeman (2007: 4) argues that frankly, "from Iran's perspective, the United States

has no standing to make such accusations. It is neither respected as a social or cultural superior, nor has it acted as an acknowledged patron of Iran or its people." In the past 29 years, the U.S. has acted as a superior party and treated Iran as the inferior party by accusations, sanctions, and even military action such as supporting Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war. The notion of what Said (1979) calls an imperialistic superior-inferior approach in international relations has not resulted in any positive regard for the United States.

Revolution

After the coup in 1953, the Shah arrested most of Mossadegh's cabinet ministers, supporters, and his military officers. Kinzer (2003) explains that Mohammed Reza Shah banned Mossadegh's political parties and imprisoned or killed most of his prominent supporters. The Shah's regime became despotic, oppressing opposition groups, attempting to fast-forward the modernization of the country without heed to the populace, and creating a feeling of resentment as Iranians saw the gap between the rich and the poor as the result of the regime's "preference for its wealthier citizens and for large economic enterprises. They also resented the corruption and waste that was pervasive in the government and especially in the royal family. All this dissatisfaction … was a predisposition for the revolution" (The Teaching Resource Center 1997: 4).

According to the Teaching Resource Center document (1997: 5), when "Jimmy Carter proclaimed human rights as a major tenet of his foreign policy," the Iranian opposition groups criticized the Mohammed Reza Shah's regime openly throughout 1977. The continuation of the Shah's policies and his disregard for Iranians turned the unhappy population into the mass protests on the streets during 1978, eventually forcing the Shah's departure from Iran and the victory of revolution in February 1979.

The Iranian revolution was a break with the past. After almost 150 years of foreign influence in Iran, Iranians now desired to re-establish a new relationship with the rest of the world. The Iranian revolution, as Ansari (2006: 71) addresses, like "the French revolution … sought to reorganize the international order in its own image, liberating the oppressed through an export of its revolutionary ideals." This sense of liberation from superpowers after years of humiliation by Russians, British, and ultimately by the United States, led the Islamic Republic to show a "definitive break with the past, defined by the termination of relations with the United States. This termination is defined by the seizure of the U.S. embassy in November 1979."

Hostage Crisis

Although at the beginning the revolutionary government was a nationalistic secular government, their power collapsed when religious leaders, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, the charismatic Islamic cleric exiled by the Shah because of his political opposition, perhaps orchestrated, but definitely took advantage of the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Iran. As is indicated in the Teaching Resource Center's document (1997: 7), the "takeover was seen as a move by the religious leadership to embarrass their [secular] government and prevent normalization with the United States, and it caused the collapse of the Bazargan government." Prime Minister Bazargan and other democrat liberals in his cabinet resigned in disgrace and Iran lost what little influence a secular government might have made possible. The religious forces used the charismatic Ayatollah Khomeini to silence other secular voices within the country and to gain control from the government. Khomeini "Like most revolutionaries, Khomeini perceived that the best way to consolidate his regime at home was to pursue a confrontational policy abroad"

(Takeyh 2006: 19). After the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, the Teaching Resource Center document emphasizes that "Khomeini had consolidated his power in Iran and the United States had severed diplomatic relations." Relations between the two countries were now either openly antagonist or chillingly silent. Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic began to change the old structure of power in Iran and reshape it into a new desired form.

Power Structure in Iran

In the early 1900s, the Iranian constitution was created and modeled after European democracies. Amuzegar (2003a: 139) indicates that as "in most democracies, there are three independent branches – Majlis, the judiciary and the executive – in charge of enacting, supervising and implementing law and order." However, as Amuzegar further explains, that there are also three extra-democratic bodies that undermine Iranian power structure as democratic. These bodies were added to the constitution after the 1979 revolution in order to create buffers against any change proposal coming from any other body within the Iranian political system. This section provides an overview of the power structure in Iran in order to better comprehend the complexity of the decision making process, and the real power holder, in the Islamic Republic. It includes the all-encompassing powers of the Supreme Leader and his councils, the restricted functions of the executive and legislative branches, and the potential of change as represented by the reformist and other socio-political forces.

The Constitution and the Supreme Leader

The political system of the Islamic Republic is based on the 1979 Constitution called the 'Fundamental Law' and its revision in 1989, which sets up a power pyramid as

follows: Supreme Leader as head, followed by the Council of Guardians, the Expediency Council, and the Assembly of Experts, which overlook the performance of legislative, executive, and judiciary branches of the government. To understand the system's top-down decision-making process, it is necessary to understand the powers of the Supreme Leader, seen as the Islamic representative of God, who, as Mohit (2001: 20-1) notes, has "the last word and the veto power on any important national or international decisions made by the government. He is not just the spiritual leader of the nation but also the ultimate political decision maker of the country." Virtually all power is under the control of the Supreme Leader, from declaring war, controlling the foreign policy, the judiciary, the media and the approval of some cabinet members.

The Supreme Leader is accountable only to the Assembly of Experts, elected by the people by vote for eight-year terms. The Assembly of Experts, as Amuzegar (2003a: 139) notes, is "composed of 86 clergymen … in charge of appointing, supervising and, if need be, replacing the rahbar [Supreme Leader]." As all of their meetings and notes are strictly confidential, the Assembly has never been publicly known to challenge any of the Supreme Leader's decisions. They are two components of a system that are tied to each other and, as a result, do not challenge each other.

Council of Guardians

The most powerful body after the Supreme Leader is the Council of Guardians. The council is made up of twelve jurists, including six appointed by the Supreme Leader and six elected by the Parliament from jurists nominated by the Head of the Judiciary. Amuzegar (2003a: 139-40) explains that the irony of this undemocratic council is that "the judiciary chief himself is appointed by the rahbar, and is responsible only to him."

He further explains that the Council of Guardians must "approve all bills passed by the Majlis [parliament] for conformity with the Constitution and the Islamic *Sharia* [law] before they become law ... [and] vet every candidate's qualifications for national elective office." The powerful Council interprets the constitution and may veto Parliament if a law is deemed incompatible with the constitution. As Kamrava (2007) explains, should disputes arise between Parliament and the Council of Guardians, a special group, called the Expediency Council, is in charge to resolve the dispute.

As Amuzegar (2003a: 139) explains, the "council on expediency, composed of some three dozen or so ex-officio members and other officials appointed by the Supreme Leader. This council is constitutionally in charge of resolving legal disputes between the Majlis and the Council of Guardians ...," and consulting with the Supreme Leader on important national interests. The leader of the council is appointed by the Supreme Leader, which brings the power back once more to the Supreme Leader. As it is shown, there is a circle in the Iranian political system that observes and controls the decision making process in the upper echelons, mainly by the Supreme Leader or his office. In this complicated system, the power of executive branch is minimized to the management of the internal affairs of the country.

President

The Constitution defines the President of Iran as the highest state authority. Elected by public vote for a term of four years, the President can be re-elected for a second term. Mohit (2001: 21) notes that the "candidates for the presidency, however, go through the filter of the Council of Guardians" who verify the candidate's allegiance to

the ideals of the Islamic revolution. Through the means of the Council of Guardians, the Islamic Republic confirms the compatibility of the presidential candidate with the system.

The President is responsible for the implementation of the Constitution and for the exercise of executive powers under the supervision of the Supreme Leader. As Amuzegar (2006: 72) notes, although the President is elected by the direct popular vote, he has to take "all his critical cues from the Supreme Leader. He [has] neither the authority nor the independence to deliver on his promises without the *Rahbar's* [Supreme Leader] consent and approval." In this regard, Iran is different from many other states, where the executive branch has control of the armed forces. In Iran, this is under the control of the Supreme Leader. The President appoints and supervises the Council of Ministers and eight Vice-Presidents, who must be approved by the legislature. Even though the President appoints the ministers of important ministries such as Intelligence and Defense, it is customary for the President to obtain explicit approval from the Supreme Leader before presenting them to the legislature for a vote of confidence. In this context, as Amuzegar observes, even former Iranian President Khatami called "Iran's president a *tadorak-chi* (logistics manager) of the regime" shortly before leaving office.

Parliament

The Islamic Consultative Assembly has 290 members, who must be approved by the Council of Guardians before running for election. The assembly of *Majlis* draft legislation, approve the national budget and ratify international treaties, but as Mohit (2001: 21) notes "since most of the decisions of the *Majlis* are subject to the Council of Guardians' veto, this body is mainly reduced to a mere consultative assembly." For example, when the reformist parliament was to investigate the operation of many

conservative agencies, as Gasiorowski (2000: 34) reminds, the Expediency Council announced that "parliament had no authority to investigate state agencies controlled by the leader, putting the security forces, the judicial system, the state-controlled media, the parastatal business foundations and other powerful bodies beyond public scrutiny." Therefore, since the Republic desired to reduce the chances of challenges by a critical parliament, as Mohit (2001: 21) explains, it was "extremely important for the ruling clerics to fill the *Majlis* with friendly representatives."

The practice of the elimination of candidates in combination with holding seemingly free elections gives the appearance of a democratic political system in Iran, however only candidates with the Council's stamp of approval may run. As Mohit (2001: 23) argues, the political elite by "giving the elections a veneer of democracy they sought to gain legitimacy for the regime." The people's vote, then, has only limited leverage in popular elections, such as the Presidential and parliamentary elections where the people's vote plays a key role, but only to the extent of choosing between pre-approved candidates. Even with these limited political options, it was this popular leverage that helped both the former reformist President Khatami to win in the 1997 presidential election over his conservatives' rivals and the moderate representatives to win the parliamentary election in 2000. This created a window of opportunity for Iranian progressive forces to enter the scene in hopes of reforming the system and the foreign observer of today would do well to pay attention to these elections.

Conservative and Reformist in Iran

The philosophy of religious conservatives in Iran derives from Plato and Socrates' idea of the philosopher in ancient Greek, which was adapted by Ayatollah Khomeini in

the figure of *velayate faqih* (Supreme Islamic Jurisprudent) and implemented in Iran.

Milani (2005: 26-7) explains that for "both Plato's Socrates and for Khomeini, the ruler is

not a servant of the public but rather its shepherd or guardian, and his legitimacy flows

not from a social contract validated by the people through elections, but rather from a

suprasocial or metahistorical phenomenon." As a result, conservative parties that are

loyal to the Khomeini's legacy do not see the elections as a necessary means for leading

the people. "Islamic government, ordained by God and oblivious to public approval, is

the only form of legitimate power; all other forms of power – secular, democratic, or

despotic – are entirely illegitimate." In this context, for the conservatives, the Supreme

Leader is the representative of God on earth and must be followed by people. In their

view, the people's vote has only a consultative function.

On the other hand, there are Iranian moderates who follow the ideals of the

Constitutional Revolution in 1905 to 1907. The Iranian democrats have the experience of

100 years of challenge with their undemocratic rivals. There were many instances that

Iranian democrats were defeated by their conservative rivals; the rise of Reza Shah as an

authoritarian figure in post-Constitutional Revolution, the 1953 coup against

democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadegh, and the decline of the 1979 revolution

from a democratic revolution to a semi-totalitarian regime in post-revolution. Despite all

these defeats, the Iranian democratic movement is strong today. Milani (2005: 33)

expresses his optimism and notes that "the continued vibrancy of civil society, women's

unrelenting struggle for recognition of their rights, the increasing employment needs of

young people, Iranian society's urgent desire to join the modern world, and finally, the

open rift in the ranks of clerical power," are the positive elements for the Iranian

democratic movements. Failure by outsiders to recognize the power of these movements results in misunderstanding of Iranian society today.

Up until now, however, the Islamic Republic has not shown any flexibility to the will and desire of different ethnic, gender, and political groups in Iran and has continued to consolidate the power of Islamic elements within the country. For example, to tackle the Khatami's reform initiative, the conservatives used whatever means in their power to neutralize the reformist efforts for change. Nevertheless, the consolidation of Islamists within the country imposed further restrictions on the country from the outside world.

Sanctions

Over the last 30 years, the U.S. has imposed a variety of sanction to punish the Islamic Republic for what the U.S. considers bad behavior. As Amuzegar (1997: 31) notes, the "AMERICAN-DRIVEN sanctions against Iran were meant to transform the "backlash state" into a law-abiding, cooperative, and constructive member of the world community." The United States hoped that economic "hardship and fiscal austerity would demoralize the population and turn it against the regime." As Bill (2001: 89) argues, policy makers "from five administrations have sought to weaken Iran and diminish its credibility in the international arena." After the hostage crisis, the United States gradually imposed sanctions against the Islamic Republic to punish and prevent the revolution from its expansion in the region. Sullivan (2002: 4) argues that the purpose of the U.S. sanctions against Iran "was to help cut off outside financial and other help to Iran to redevelop its oil, gas, and other industries. The underlying purpose was also to cut off funding and economic development that Iran could use to export its revolution, and to engage in terrorist activities." The most prominent sanctions on Iran, as Askari et

al. (2002: 57) point out, are "the restrictions on US-Iranian trade … in 1995 the prohibition of investments in Iran and extended to third countries who violated these investment restrictions in 1995 and the Iran Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) in 1996." Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these sanctions is under question.

Despite all the restrictions that the U.S. posed against the Islamic Republic and the challenges created for the Islamic Republic to develop economically and renew its relatively old industries, the Republic survived the difficulties. Sullivan (2002: 4) explains that the "increasingly warm relations between the EU, Russia, China, and others with Iran seem to be helping Iran go around many of the extraterritorial sanctions and laws imposed by the U.S." The Islamic Republic survived American economic sanctions because the country was able to establish and reinforce its relationship with other states that had different views of the Islamic Republic. Sanctions did not limit Iran's economical development, nor did they stop the Republic's influence in the region. The influence of the Islamic movements from Egypt to Pakistan inspired by the 1979 revolution demonstrates how the Islamic Republic expanded its ideology in the region.

While the sanctions may be costly for Iran, American companies paid a high price for these sanctions as their ability to trade or develop oil exploration with Iran was cut. As Ansari (2006: 143) argues, "Clinton's executive order put an end to any such exploratory economic tries, much to the satisfaction of America's competitors, who relished the prospect of an Iranian market free from American competition." American industrial companies are well-known for their relative cheap services all around the world. The U.S. sanctions on Iran and the prohibition of the American companies from participating in the Iranian market created an environment where Japanese, Chinese,

Russian, and European companies could obtain lucrative contracts with no American competitors. Thus, the sanctions had several unintended effects: Iran pays a higher price for doing business and U.S. companies have been sidelined, observing rather than participating in the lucrative contracts that others have obtained.

In a high oil price era and with many clients to provide service to Iranian industrial needs, the Islamic Republic found itself without concern for the hostile countries. As Ansari (2006: 231) notes, the new ultra-conservative Iranian president, Mahmmud Ahmadinejad, and his advocates in Iran believe that with "oil prices so high, there is no need for foreign relations that ultimately could only pollute the purity of the revolution and the perfection of the nation." Many friendlier countries such as China and Russia, with more sympathetic attitudes, can provide assistance to Iran. The Iranian hard-liners in Iran who are considered the backbone of the Islamic Republic's political system do not see engagement with the U.S. as crucial for their survival.

The failure of the sanctions posed on Iran indicates the ineffectiveness of the forceful policies and illustrates the need for a different approach. Bill (2001: 89) refers to the Atlantic Council report and argues the "U.S. sanctions and embargoes have failed to alter Iranian political behavior." As a result of this failure, Bill continues, "important voices in the U.S. foreign-policy establishment have concluded that it is time to attempt a fundamentally new approach. In this plan, the emphasis is upon creative diplomacy, constructive engagement and calculated steps to rapprochement." Bill (2001: 98-9) emphasizes that the engagement with a powerful and influential country such as Iran is essential for the U.S. given "Iran's regional power position and its great hydrocarbon wealth and large population..." According to him (2001: 91), the United States needs to

engage with Iran "whether the leader of Iran wears a turban, a military helmet or a baseball cap…" A refusal to engage with Iran may cost the United State a high price as the United States finds itself "increasingly alone" as Iran establishes "alliances between countries like Iran and China or Iran and Russia ..." and "these alliances take on an anti-American flavor" (Bill 2001: 99). The alliance between Iran and U.S. competitors may become even more costly than the economical and strategic damages incurred up to now.

This potential danger may be avoided by redefining the US-Iran narrative. If the U.S. "were to lift the embargo, for example, Iran is likely to respond positively and constructively." With improved Iranian relationships, the United States may be able to stabilize the region through Iranian help, procure raw energy from Iran, and American companies can benefit from Iranian vast market in need for foreign assistance and products. Iran may also be able to ease the tension between the United States and the Muslim world in the region.

Summary

This preceding conceptual entrée of this text is designed to allow the reader to observe Iran's geographical and economical potentials, socio-cultural structure, and layers of historical and political development in Iran, including the complex power structure in the Islamic Republic, and the non-functionality of sanctions against the Islamic Republic. As Herda (1999: 127) notes, this Chapter was designed to configure a totality out of scattered events. It illustrates the convoluted characteristics of Iran and the complexity of the US-Iran relationship. This narrative description of the country's background is designed to help policy makers better understand Iran's standing and the motives behind Iranian actions. A more meaningful grasp of Iran may help policy

makers to distance themselves from misrepresentation and false assumption and also may

widen their comprehension about the tension between the two nations by providing a

deeper understanding of Iran.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

<u>Introduction</u>

This section reviews literature with varying emphasis which, when observed holistically, forms a new text to craft a fuller understanding of the narrative between the United States and Iran with the hope that an alternative course of action might arise between the two nations. This Chapter includes six thematic frames that may help the reader to observe different perspectives in this relationship. The review of literature attempts to recognize the layers of complexity involved and the issues of assumption and narrative that are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the conflict between the two states.

The foundation of this study is the research question itself, which lays out the thematic parameters for this inquiry. These cornerstones will house the topical framework that guide the construction of this project. The first cornerstone laid is the study of cultural and political historians like Said (1994), Keddie (1981), and MacFaul et al. (2006) along with Kinzer (2003), Abrahamian (2001) and Shalom (1993), covering question of identity, origins of cause, political narratives and historical foundations. This cultural and political research explores the constructs of the narrative between the U.S. and Iran and examines how misunderstanding formed a paradigm of mistrust.

The second cornerstone is carved from bedrock anthropologists such as Geertz (1988, 2005) and Beeman (2002), who deal with the complexity of post-modern cultural conflict based on ideals of identity, ideology and independence compounded by the symbolic constructs of the 'other.' As Beeman (2002: 2) argues, this anthropological

insight is needed to understand the dynamics of Iranians' culture and the "nature and persistence of the conflict."

The third cornerstone to frame this research is the study of the philosophic works of Ricouer (1983, 1992), Kearney (1998, 1999) and Gadamer (2004), involving interpretive research of the nature of *mimesis*, the power of imagination, and fusion of horizon by applying the understanding of founding events, forgiveness, and narrative identity. These philosophic theories frame a critical hermeneutic approach to analyze and interpret the cultural, historical and political narrative between the two countries in order to refigure an alternative course of action.

The fourth and final cornerstone to cement this structure in place is the social text of Iranian society, which is a complex hybrid of multiple narratives battling for supremacy which compose a national identity often at odds with itself and which presents a perplexing conundrum to Western understanding. These opposing elements within Iranian society, and indeed, within the average Iranian, play an important role in any exploration which seeks to promote dialogue between the two civilizations. This review of literature is motivated by a concern to deconstruct the existing antagonist narrative and configure a new foundation where the two nations can deal with their differences on a discursive level in order to alleviate the continuing paradigm of non-discourse and accusatory rhetoric.

This diverse foundational literature was gathered by the desire for a meaningful text from which to draw a blueprint for the formation of a new and comprehensive understanding. In this literature review, there will be six main thematic frameworks that

are necessary in understanding the sources of the current adversary paradigm between the

U.S. and Iran and the possibility for an alternative. These thematic frames are:

- Orientalism as a Cultural Background
- Founding Events that Formed National Memories
- Narrative Identity Caught in the Permanence of Conflict
- Understanding Post Modern Complexities
- The Need for Dialogue
- The Use of Fiction in Re-Figuration of Time

Review of these themes illustrate how each of them is an aspect of a

comprehensive sense and an adaptive course that help establish a new approach between

the U.S. and Iran based on the pre-figuration of their past through reinterpretation and

better understanding, and configuration of a new present based on an ideal future.

Orientalism as a Cultural Background

Edward Said (1994) introduces the notion of Orientalism as a rebuttal to the

writings about the Orient popular in the 1800's. Said maintains that the Western writers

portrayed an image of the Orient, which stretched from Palestine to India, skewed toward

the exotic, strange and inferior. This shaped Western thinking about the Middle East for

two centuries and maybe even today. In his opinion, Westerners perceive themselves as a

superior civilization and this has become a mark of their approach when dealing with the

countries in Orient, including Iran. While in the past the French and British conducted

their business with this mentality, in the middle of the 20 century, the U.S. replaced them.

Farber (2005: 48) emphasizes:

> England, after the war, was giving up on empire. It had lost the desire, the will,
> and the resources necessary for international primacy. Its imperial presence was
> fast fading from the Near and Middle East. The United States, haphazardly and
> with a different agenda, was just as quickly stepping into the breach. Iran, which
> had been for so long dominated by England, was one of the first nations in the
> region to receive critical American attention.

The United States approached the Middle East with the same mentality of superiority as French and British and, unfortunately, became the new foreign dominant imperialistic force in the region.

In this new territory of the Middle East, the United States looked at Iran as a battle ground to fight the Soviet Union and stop the spread of communism. To reach this objective, the United States ignored any concerns of the Iranian people. As Farber (2005: 71) notes, "the United States depended on their best friend in the Persian Gulf [the Shah] to spend billions of his new petro-dollars in the United States, combat Soviet communist influence in the region, and act as a force of stabilization, Westernization, and modernization in the Islamic World." Nevertheless, this approach was seen by Iranians as an unbalanced and unfair act towards Iran, for Iranians witnessed how the United States in return for this support, allowed the Shah unrestrained abuse of the Iranian people's basic freedom as he suppressed, imprisoned, exiled and executed those who opposed his policies.

As a result of this approach towards Iran, the Iranians opinion began to change towards the United States. As Said's (1994) discusses in his book, *Orientalism,* the U.S. was seen only as a force which cared about its own concerns at the expense of locals. Farber (2005: 37) mentions that in the "1970s, for Iranians across the political spectrum, the United States figured as a kind of dues ex machina in the drama of their national life; it was an outside force that intervened as it wished, often without regard for the desires or even well-being of the Iranian people." For example, by overthrowing the Iranian democratically elected Prime Minister in 1953 and supporting an illegitimate Shah to stay in power, people not only viewed the Shah as a puppet of the United States, but also

considered the U.S. as the cause of their domestic political misery. As Beeman (2002: 4) explains, now, the "United States was seen as inheritor of the mantle of colonialism carried out earlier in the 20th century by Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union," which was pointed out by Said (1994).

During this tense time, the Shah's agreement in autumn of 1964 to grant immunity for American military personnel in Iran worsened the situation. The religious conservatives led by Khomeini saw the opportunity to attack the Shah and portray the U.S. as an evil force in the region. Khomeini's (in Moin 1999: 121-2) speech was filled with harsh rhetoric against the U.S. government claiming the "point is that we are fighting against America. We must …attack the regime so that the whole nation will realize that this Shah is an American agent and this is an American plot." The U.S. conduct in Iran began to increase the hostility of the religious in Iran. By giving this inflammatory type of speech, Khomeini not only portrayed himself as the main opposition leader to oppose the Shah, but also pictured the United States as an imperialistic force in Iran. "America, Khomeini exhorted, propped up the Shah, demonstrating the cynical hypocrisy of a nation that claimed to champion freedom but supported only repression…The charge had just enough truth to weaken the Shah and to demonize the United States in Iran" (Farber 2005: 86). After the revolution, when the Shah was accepted into the U.S., Farber (2005: 188) notes, the "new regime anxiously awaited signs that the superpower would soon subvert their revolution." This was how asylum for the Shah was interpreted by Iranians and explains the climate of fear which created the hostage crisis and the beginning of a US-Islamic Republic cold war.

American conduct fueled Iranian retaliation in 1979 by the hostage crisis. This event, then, provided a context for the U.S. policy makers to behave aggressively against the Islamic Republic. As Ansari (2006: 27) notes, the "coup revealed America's influence and malevolent ambitions in Iran. The immense sense of betrayal that was felt – and cultivated for later generations – cannot be understood outside the context of a relationship that had been thought to be positive and benign." On the American side, the hostage crisis should be looked at in the same historical context. Americans were confused about the anti-Americanism coming from Iran in the post-revolution era. As Farber (2005: 189) explains, the Americans always believed that "their culture and their nation (as well as their military) represent the future of all of humanity." In Americans' view, the U.S. which helped Iran to develop and modernize did not deserve to be treated as the "Great Satan" in the post-revolutionary era. Farber (2005: 188) concludes that the "Iranian public's memories of American actions and the American public's general ignorance of U.S. policy in Iran were so asymmetrical as to preclude mutual understanding." The different cultural perspective towards each other was developed and the two countries entered an era of antagonism.

For this research, the concept of pre-figuration introduced by Ricoeur (1983) is vital to the understanding of the past in a new light and possibly to take a new course of action for the present. The root cause of the problem understood through Said's (1994) theory sheds light on the historical framework between the two countries from a different perspective. This first phase of mimesis, $mimesis_1$, understanding the past in a new way, includes recounting of the past to portray a different historical setting for the current environment. Under this Ricoeurian concept, there is a need to return back and interpret

differently the relationship between the United States and Iran; recognize the background which created a biased basis of interaction; and unfold a different understanding thus employing the first step of mimesis$_1$.

<div align="center">**Founding Events that Formed National Memory**</div>

Ricoeur (1996: 7) introduces the idea of "founding events" and refers to them as historical events that remain in the historical memory of the people. In his opinion, this historical memory then "prevents cultures from allowing themselves to be recounted differently…." Once this notion is formed in the historical memory of a people, those people tend to be blocked in their horizon of past memories. They tend to think only within the framework of their stagnated historical cycle. They become victims and prisoners of those memories as they can not move beyond that dogmatic way of thinking. The CIA coup of 1953 and the Hostage Crisis of 1979 are two such founding events in Iranian American history which as Ricoeur (1996: 7-8) mentions have frozen the identity of the other into repetitious celebrations of blame which are used deliberately and form barriers preventing the two nations from seeing beyond these negative historical events.

As Ricoeur (1988: 187) notes, these "events, which are said to be 'epoch-making,' draw their specific meaning from their capacity to found or reinforce the community's consciousness of its identity, its narrative identity, as well as the identity of its members." The 1953 CIA coup influenced dramatically the identity and consciousness of Iranians and provided a foundation for their hostile reactions towards the U.S. The subsequent events completed this cycle. As Ansari (2006: 70) notes:

> The events of 1953 were a foundational moment in the construction of US-Iranian relations and transferred Iranian suspicions from the historic Anglo-Russian axis towards the Americans. The events of 1979 crystallized this tradition. The

revolution of 1979 bound Iran and the United States in an intimate ideological relationship, defined by a collective and shared traumatic experience.

The political developments between former Presidents Clinton and Khatami's administrations indicate the depth of the problem caused by these founding events. Even though former Secretary of State Madeline Albright (2000: 356) apologized for the U.S. role in the coup, Khatami's political elites were not able to use the apology as an occasion to move beyond this stagnated memory. The incapability of the Iranian administration to forgive the U.S. government and use Albright's apologize indicates how profound the influence of 1953 coup was within Iranian political spectrum and how the pride of the Iranians is to create such an unwillingness to move beyond the past.

The seizure of the American embassy resulted in American politicians using Iran as a scapegoat for the past 30 years. In the United States, Iran became an easy mark for condemnation. Whenever an American foreign policy in the Middle East went wrong, Iran was to be blamed. As Ansari (2006: 112) notes, political "disagreements could be set aside because blaming Iran was now a bipartisan affair to which all Americans could subscribe, Republican or Democrat, politician or bystander. Iran had transcended regular politics and become a myth, part of political folklore." This is a direct result of the American embassy seizure in Tehran and the holding of American diplomats for 444 days, for this picture continues to play as part of American historical memory. However, the result of such a stagnated paradigm of viewing the other prevents what Ricoeur (1996: 7) describes as the engagement and normalization of a relationship and instead holds each side prisoners of their views. Rejecting a plea for forgiveness is a serious decision on the part of anyone or any nation. It goes both ways.

The import of these two events is understood through the research of political historians like Abrahamian (2001), Shalom (1993) and Kinzer (2003), who explore how the 1953 Coup created such outrage and sense of intrusion for Iranians as to grow resentment so large that it led to the birth of anti-Americanism in Iranian political narrative. Similarly, research by Conover, Mingst and Sigelman (1980) found the Hostage Crisis resulting from the Revolution negatively changed the American view about Iran and Iranians were subsequently seen as dangerous and ruthless. This vital memory still colors the American perspective. As Takeyh (2006: 116) argues, the "emotional legacy of the Mossadeq coup and the hostage crisis, and the bureaucratic paralysis in both countries, have led to a relationship that seems immured in its pattern of antagonism and suspicion." These two events established the beginning of an area of hostility for the two sides and the long-term hostile policies towards each other that were developed in the last 30 years. As a result of CIA 1953 coup, Americans became notorious for their foreign policy of interference in Iran. On the other hand, as a result of the Hostage crisis in 1979, Iranians were labeled by Americans as irrational and fanatic. These are labels that the two countries still use to describe and to demonize each other.

The current status between the United States and Iran illustrates how remaining stagnated within the national memory of hostility can be dangerous. Within this train of thought Sacks (2005: 113) notes that if "we can forgive others, and act so that others can forgive us, then we can live with the past without being held prisoner by the past." The United States and Iran represent a case where the two entities have not been able to forgive each other and remain in the arena of revenge rather than moving toward tolerance as a result of not overcoming the founding events in the past. The 1953 CIA

coup in Iran caused the hostile action of the hostage crisis in Tehran which helped create antagonism among American politicians. After 30 years in post-revolution Iran, the two countries remain explicitly hostile toward each other.

Narrative Identity Caught in Permanence of Conflict

In my research, I thought the challenge might be whether Ricoeur's (1992) theory of narrative identity, which is used on an individual level, can be applied to the narrative identity in an international relationship between two nations. Even though Ricoeur's narrative identity theory is designed for individual identity, as Kearney (1996: 182) observes, narrative "identity operates at the level of *both* individual and communal identity." The two nations can be identified as two individual entities that operate in relation to each other. My objective is to apply Ricoeur's narrative identity theory to an international problem: more specifically, to examine why Americans and Iranians have resisted each other for so long without any opening for possible engagement. This theory helps me to see the sources of resistance and the forces for change within the narrative identity of these two countries in relation to each other.

Understanding the notion of permanence in time, introduced by Ricoeur (1992: 116), allows an analysis of the permanence of conflict which exists between the U.S. and Iran for more than five decades. Each narrative identity, as Ricoeur (1992) explains, is constituted by two dimensions, the *idem* and the *ipse,* which are in constant dialectic with each other. Idem, or sameness, represents the sedimentation which remains frozen in time, the part of identity that remains permanent through time. Applied to the US-Iran relationship, this dimension has taken hold of their national identity and does not allow them to move beyond the existing paradigm. The second dimension, ipse, or selfhood,

represents innovative dimension of their identity, the dimension that is oriented towards change. In the last 30 years, neither seems willing to explore the ipse, or selfhood.

Especially important to this research is the understanding that the two sides are caught by their sameness, remaining in a state of mistrust, non-discourse and angry rhetoric as is evidenced by the media from both countries and the scholars who have followed the political history of the two states' relationship. As Ricoeur (1992: 115-25) argues, idem identity tends to sustain status quo and resists change. This dimension of narrative identity traps each of the two countries in permanent hostility and does not allow them to go beyond their current norm. By understanding the narrative identity of the two countries in terms of idem and ipse, I seek to see if there is any possibility to encourage change within the notion of narrative identity based on promoting and strengthening the ipse identity represented by innovative forces in the two countries.

Being caught in the idem dimension of their narrative identity may determine how they look at each other. Ansari (2006: 82) argues that often "what we choose to see supports our perceptions, even if they are misconceptions. Unwilling to reassess our mistakes or to assume responsibility, it is easy to ascribe blame to the 'other,' and the more incomprehensible the 'other,' the better." The demonization narrative has been the main story between the two governments in the last three decades. In both camps, this comes from a matter of convenience. In America, the politicians don't want to seem weak on the issue of Iran. Ansari (2006: 132) emphasizes that politicians in the U.S. are "unwilling to risk valuable political capital in an election year by appearing to be soft on Iran." In Iran, the politicians demonize the U.S. to increase their control and crash down the domestic opposition and democratic movements. For example, Khomeini used the

hostage crisis to crash down internal opposition groups and to create an international

crisis to be the main focus of the nation while consolidating his own power in Iran. This

mentality in two camps has worked as a barrier to open discussion of issues between the

U.S. and Iran and strengthened the current stagnated narrative.

External factors are other elements in this narrative of hostility. Whenever there

was a chance for engagement, other interested parties around this matter played a

destructive role. Ansari (2006: 166) argues that "many regional countries, having

benefited form the rupture in Iran-US relations, were deeply antithetical to the loss of

investment, prestige, and importance that would result from a rapprochement between the

United States and Iran …." As a result, as he continues, extensive "efforts were made to

remind Washington of Tehran's continued enmity towards the Israeli state and prevent

any reassessment of U.S. relations with Iran" (2006: 184). Countries such as Israel,

Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan justify their defense budget and their U.S. economical and

military assistance by exaggerating the threat of Iran to Washington. These countries

which benefit from the antagonism between the U.S. and Iran have not been very

sympathetic to the idea of engagement. This external aspect of the American-Iranian

relationship, which in many ways is out of their immediate control, makes engagement

more challenging.

The U.S. approach towards Iran reflects a negative American perspective in

regard to the Islamic Republic. Ansari (2006: 3) argues that for the U.S. administrations,

"Iran is not simply a problem, it's *the* problem. It's not just a member of the Axis of

Evil, but the founding member, the chief sponsor of state terrorism, or to use a more

recent characterization, the central banker for terrorism." Under this circumstance, Iran

became a taboo where no politicians dared to look at the issues constructively. Within this framework, the U.S. policy towards Iran followed a narrative of hostility, which was the norm. President Bush's speech in the State of Union in 2002 where he placed Iran among the Axis of Evil is interpreted within the same school of thought.

Nevertheless, the harsh approach by the U.S. not only did not help the U.S. court a friendlier relationship with Iran, but also destroyed moderate elements within the Iranian political system who could have been a more reliable ally with the U.S. in the long term. Ansari (2006: 189) explains that "Iranian policy makers were left bewildered by the axis of evil speech and proved far more critical of their own foreign policy establishment than that of America." After President Bush's speech, former Iranian reformist President Khatami, who had put all his effort to reconcile Iran with the western world, and had some relative success to convince European countries, became the target of the criticism of the hardliners who make the policy. This speech weakened the position of Khatami in Iranian domestic policy when he faced harsh criticism from conservatives about his soft approach towards the United States. Such destructive narrative in the U.S. has worsened the situation both in Iran and between the two countries. Further, such harsh rhetoric caused the rise of President Ahmadinejad in Iran who continues to oppress Iranian democratic movements inside the country and conduct a very aggressive foreign policy outside of it.

Understanding Post Modern Complexities

By considering Ricoeur's (1996: 7) proposal that the "identity of a group, culture, people, or nation, is not that of an immutable substance, nor that of a fixed structure, but that, rather, of a recounted story," the US-Iran complex narrative has the potential to be

changed in a more constructive way due to the possibility of a new interpretation. The narrative identity theory will form a basis of observation to analyze the dialectic between the two countries in the past and present time and will be considered as a potential dialectic that can generate possibilities.

That said, the creation of a new narrative faces Geertz's (2005) challenge of understanding the post-modern complexities presented to nations with multi-ethnic identities, various narrative concerns, and the often opposing priorities at the international level, which represent complex national and international post-modern issues. "The end of colonialism altered radically the nature of the social relationship …," therefore, to deal with these problems, we need to have a post-modern approach (Geertz 1988: 131). Simple positivistic and military calculations may not be fit to deal with the complexity of issues today. Understanding the concerns of others in the international arena is a vital element of diplomacy in foreign policy making. This aligns well with Gadamer's (2004: 306) concept of 'fusion of horizon" which argues that in "the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs …" where the two sides may expand their restricted perspectives of the other's views.

The meanings of the issues and events in the American-Iranian cultures may become clearer by observing how they read the hostage crisis in 1979. Since, as Nye (2005: 170) explains, the objective is to better understand the other side of any given issue, the "first step in making a better case is a greater understanding of how our policies appear to others …." The presence of the U.S. in Iran and the hostage crisis were seen and interpreted in two completely different ways in the two countries. Americans saw

the event as a clear hostility by irrational religious extremists towards the U.S. diplomats in Iran. Farber (2005: 154) notes:

> The American mass media portrayal of everyday Americans suffering at the hands of foreigners – Islamic foreigners, in particular – resulted in a widespread public misunderstanding of American foreign policy. Thus, the American mass media coverage of the Iran crisis helped persuade Americans to see themselves as victims of "terrorists" who irrationally hate "us," rather than to recognize that Iranians had attacked the U.S. embassy in response to American policy in Iran.

When the media and politicians simplify the event as an irrational act by foreigners and look at it through that glass, they act superfically. The complexity of the world today requires a much deeper analysis of events to understand them fully.

On the other hand, the hostage crisis had a totally different meaning for the Iranians. In his analysis, Farber (2005: 155) explains that Iranians

> saw the U.S. embassy officials they had captured as representatives of the American government, which had subverted their political system, supported a dictator who had tortured and killed dissidents, and sought to destroy their revolution. Where the American people saw individuals and their families, the Iranian revolutionaries saw a superpower that had always treated their nation, their culture, and their religion as expendable pawns in a bigger game.

In such a circumstance, the hostage crisis for Iranians was completely a legitimate action, because it was an act of protest against a superpower who sought to destroy the legacy of a nation. By the seizure of the embassy, Iranians wanted to signal their discontent with the American foreign policy of interference in Iran. By determining Iran as an evil and irrational country, the Americans' view remained on the surface rather than representing deep understanding of the issue. This pattern of simplistic view towards Iran, unfortunately, still is alive and common among American policy makers and leaders.

President Bush's State of the Union address in 2002 exemplifies this, because the speech simplified the issue to a minimum level of discussion. Brzezinski (2005: 16)

describes the U.S. foreign policy in recent years as "a notion that is always congenial to an aroused public mood, but whose black-and-white view of the world ignores the shades of gray that define most global dilemmas." From Milani's *Lost Wisdom* (2004), we find that there are many narratives in Iran that deal differently with the concept of modernity represented by the West. There is the narrative that describes conservatives in Iran as people who do not want to deal with modernity at all. There is the narrative of moderate religious that does want to provide a moderate image of Islam and is open to the concept of modernity based on a moderate interpretation of Islamic laws. There is also the narrative of Iranian secular democrats that wants to have a democratic political system and to have a fair relationship with the West. The awareness about these different existing movements in the Iranian society helps to better understand the complexity of Iran as far as it relates to the US-Iran adversarial narrative. The awareness of these layers in the Iranian society would help American policy makers to be more effective in dealing with the question of Iran.

If the United States desires to remain a leading country in the world, it may need to change its policies from leading by force to leading by example in order to win the hearts of others. As Nye (2005: 167) notes, the "ability of a country to attract others arises from its culture, its values and domestic practices, and the perceived legitimacy of its foreign policies." For a long time, the United States had been a leading country in the world as an example and inspiration to others. In the past few years, U.S. foreign policy declined to lead through the force of its military strengths. Brzezinski (2005: 19) notes that power "and force alone are not sufficient to preserve American hegemony …. Coercion creates new antagonists but does little to prevent them from" growing and

causing further problems. In dealing with the question of Iran, the United States may better be off, if it starts to understand Iran, Iranians' needs, and their behavior rather than threatening them with the policy of regime change, sanctions, and military attack. Since Iranian people have sympathy for the American culture, a more diplomatic, culturally-aware, and comprehensive approach towards Iran may attract Iranians even more. As Ury (2005: 180) indicates, the "goal should not be to end conflict but to transform it, to change its form from violence and warfare to dialogue …."

Need for Dialogue

Former United Nations Secretary, Kofi Annan (2005: 95) claims that dialogue "provides a vehicle for advancing cooperation." In response to Samuel Huntington's (1993) call for a "clash of civilization," on the same line as Annan, former Iranian president, Khatami (2000), calls for a "dialogue among civilizations," and invites all nations, including Iran and the U.S., to discuss their differences in order to reach understanding. This was a completely different approach from that of Huntington, who suggests that nations would be ultimately forced to resolve their disputes through clashes. Intellectuals like Takeyh (2002) and Saunders (2001: 41-2) urge for a paradigm shift between the U.S. and Iran as they see the positivistic-military approach as a wrong and fruitless way to address and change deep seated "human conflict across ethnic, religious, cultural, or even civilizations' divides." The relevance of this scholarly call for systematic dialogue with parties involved in a confrontational mode in order to create a shift in paradigm aligns with Kearney's (1998: 208) *power of the common.'* Through imagination, language, dialogue, and discourse function as the medium to generate the dynamic of the discourse from confrontational to normal and transform relationships.

The perspectives of these scholars reinforce my view that dialogue between the two nations may create the understanding proposed by Ricoeur (1992) and unfold the possibility of change spoke of by Kearney (1998), then perhaps the two sides may leave their fixed and unmoving positions and possibly see the other perspective as suggested by Gadamer (2004) in his concept of "fusion of horizons."

Ricoeur (1992) talks about the relationship of self and other which constitute their narrative identity. According to his theory, a relationship between two separate entities is defined by how they interact with each other. The divisive language of hostility and antagonistic actions from one side may fuel further hostility and even violence in the other camp. As former Secretary of United Nations, Annan (2005: 96) notes, hostile "rhetoric is all too often the precursor to hostile acts, and hostile acts have a way of escalating into violence, conflict, and worse."

Khatami's initiative for dialogue with the other was valuable because it indicated the beginning of a constructive era in Iran's behavior. Ansari (2006: 154-5) argues that to "use the language of international relations, Khatami essentially discarded vulgar realism and introduced a measure of constructivism into Iran's foreign policy strategy. The culture of mistrust had to be deconstructed and replaced by a more suitable edifice." For almost 18 years after the Iranian revolution, Iran was portrayed as an irrational and aggressive country in the West. Khatami opened a new chapter for Iran and its relationship with the western world. To establish Iran within the international community, as Ansari (2006: 162-3) continues, "Khatami decided these issues could best be addressed by placing them in an overall framework of reconciliation. He labeled this the "Dialogue of Civilization," a direct response to the pervasive thesis of a "Clash of

Civilizations," emphasizing the importance of cultural, *meaningful* communication."
Unfortunately, the hardliners in the United States dismissed Khatami's proposal for
dialogue, not knowing that, as a result of their miscalculation, they would face an ultra-
conservative Iranian president who would take a very harsh position towards the U.S.

The United States may need to open up a line for dialogue since dialogue has
proven to be the most effective way to resolve critical issues in the international arena.
Recent change of the U.S. approach with countries such as Libya and North Korea in
regard to their nuclear programs is a clear proof about the power of dialogue and how it
can work toward changing the dynamics. If dialogue occurs, through a process of
interaction, the U.S. may be able to engage Iranians on a variety of critical topics. Up to
this point, as Ansari (2006: 213) explains, for both sides, "engagement was an act of
treason. It was a view that dove-tailed neatly with the perspective of American hawks,
who likewise considered any form of compromise with the Islamic Revolution
tantamount to treason. Engagement would, by necessity, affect the nature of the
Revolution …" because it opens up and connects Iran to the outside world. A normal
relationship with the rest of the world, which is the desire of moderates in Iran, can
empower them in Iranian domestic politics. As far as concerns the U.S., dialogue could
be an effective way to tackle hard-liners in Iran, help the moderate narratives to flourish,
and open up possibilities.

As for my research, the question is whether there is a possibility for change in this
hostile and restricted paradigm. What would be the function of my text in this quarrel in
the international arena? Ricoeur (1981) and his concept of re-figuration of time through
fiction may help me to encourage my reader to interpret the relationship between the U.S.

and Iran in a new light and consequently, to interpret the responsibilities of leaders in this same light.

The Use of Fiction in Re-Figuration of Time

Ricoeur's (1988: 185-95) notion of reconstruction of time in narrative through fiction highlights the potentials that exist in the history of the US-Iran relationship, which were ignored under the hostile status of the two countries in the past three decades. My text works as a fiction to realize such potentials, for as Ricoeur (1981: 296) argues, "the world of fiction leads us to the heart of the real world of action." Although the research in this text may seem idealistic, such idealism is a necessary antidote to the current paradigm. As Michael Province at the University of California in San Diego emphasizes, the United States lacks a comprehensive updated foreign policy for the 21st century which could be materialized through imagination in a fictional work to liberate itself from its current outdated paradigm and further, as Ricoeur (1988: 191) notes:

> one of the functions of fiction bound up with history is to free, retrospectively, certain possibilities that were not actualized in the historical past, it is owing to its quasi-historical character that fiction itself is able, after the fact, to perform its liberating function. The quasi-past of fiction in this way becomes the detector of possibilities buried in the actual past.

In this text, my aim is to offer a new approach, based on the understanding of the other players and their concerns rather than condemning them, in hope of reaching consensus and long lasting agreements. My fictional work invites leaders and policy makers to move beyond the restricted paradigm that was the dominant approach in the 20th century, where the approach was primarily one of looking at the relationship in terms of strategic planning, regional hegemony, and military intervention and instead proposing an approach that avoids the mentality that caused the opportunities of the past to be ignored.

Leaders from both countries have expressed understanding that the current

paradigm needs to change, yet these occasions were lost under the shadow of antagonism.

For example, one lost opportunity occurred when President Clinton made an overture

toward making amends (Farmanfarmaian and Zonis 1999: 33) when he said:

> I think it is important to recognize, however, that Iran, because of its enormous
> geopolitical importance over time, has been the subject of quite a lot of abuse
> from various Western nations. And I think sometimes it's quite important to tell
> people, look, you have a right to be angry at something my country or my culture
> or others that are generally allied with us today did to you 50 or 60 … years ago.

On the Iranian side, former President Khatami wasn't able to take former President

Clinton's message of sympathy for Iranians and use the occasion to break through the

past and create new ties because of the foul taste left by the coup and current political

mindset in his own country. These understandings never materialized as meaningful

dialogue because the two countries remained prisoners of their hostility towards each

other. The hope is that the reconstruction of their history through this fictional work may

provide a chance for policy makers to look at missed opportunities and learn from the

past, which may help them to realize a constructive narrative. Although my story cannot

change the past, the hope is that this fiction and its meaning may have the power to

refigure the past and shape a better future.

<u>Summary</u>

In the review of literature, the political, anthropological, hermeneutic, and socio-

cultural elements serve as a comprehensive framework to analyze the historical

background, national identity, complexity of Iranian society and the US-Iran relationship,

and the need for dialogue to deal with this post modern conflict. The complexity of the

issue requires a meaningful dialogue to understand the conflict and try to approach the

problems differently. In the review of literature, I wove these different aspects together in order to represent the multiplicity of aspects involved in this conflict. Without paying attention to these different layers, and by simplifying the problem as a 'good vs. evil' confrontation, it may not be possible to comprehend fully the issues. To create a meaningful narrative, I apply below Ricoeur's (1988) concept of emplotment in my re-figuration of time between the U.S. and Iran. With this concept, I illustrate how I reconstruct the US-Iran relationship in a new way in order to generate a new understanding. This approach may help to better understand Iran's history, national identity, and the complexity of Islamic Republic in relation to the United States.

I provide the background of the country and literature review to present a background for this research topic and different views in regard to this issue. Since the aim is to reveal a new way of thinking by the end of this research, it is helpful to examine the past history of these two nations. As Ricoeur (1988: 191) discusses, "in order for us to be disposed to believe [in the possible alternative], the probable must have a relation of verisimilitude to what has been." The review of the past enables me to find potentials that existed in the past, but were never actualized. Based on these potentials, my alternative proposal is the result of a more interpretive review of this past which forms the narrative identity of the two countries. Now, it is time to move to the next Chapter to illustrate the research process.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH PROCESS

<u>Introduction</u>

The process in this research weaves critical hermeneutic philosophy with my exploration of the US-Iranian hostile relationship. This section is based on the idea that interpretive theory is a relevant source to enlighten the data that are obtained through research conversations. This section presents the theoretical foundations for the research analysis, the conceptual framework for conducting the research, the research protocol for data collection, data analysis' process as it relates to this study, pilot study, and summary. The research process is a cornerstone of my entire research project, connecting themes of the country's background, literature review, and data with the critical hermeneutic theory represented by Ricoeur (1983, 1992), Kearney (1998), and Gadamer (2004).

<u>Theoretical Foundation</u>

Introduction

The theoretical foundation serves as a framework for interpretation and discussion of aspects of interpretive theory for the research analysis. This section is based on the belief that critical hermeneutic philosophy offers an appropriate theoretical basis to illuminate the data gathered from the research conversations.

In this section, elements of interpretive theory are used that appear most relevant as research categories for the analysis of the current tension between the United States and Iran. These theories also create a framework for new alternatives of change. Theorists such as Ricoeur (1983, 1992), Kearney (1998), and Gadamer (2004) are employed for the interpretation of the data. In the first section Ricoeur's concept of

mimesis$_1$ is applied to review and reinterpret the past; mimesis$_3$ is used to reach a better understanding for generating new possibilities; and I use mimesis$_2$ to imagine the ideal possibilities which may enable leaders to envision an alternative course of action for the present in this U.S.-Iran relationship. To understand and move beyond the past, however, it is necessary to apply Ricoeur's (1996, 2004) concepts of "founding events" and "forgiveness." Founding events help the reader to better comprehend the foundations of mistrust between the two states and forgiveness helps to break through the past barriers. The on-going back and forth within the three stages of mimesis forms the narrative identity of the US-Iran relationship. Kearney's "power of imagination" reinforces Ricoeur's mimesis$_3$ and shows how imagining an ideal future can be conceptualized to alter the current paradigm between the two nations. Finally, Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizon provides a forum to create a proper environment to enlarge views and expand understanding where new prospects can be reached for engagement; as a result of this maturity, change from an adversarial narrative toward one of understanding may occur.

Mimesis

Ricoeur (in Kearney 1998: 242) uses narration as a construction of meaning in time and defines "narrative as the synthesis of the heterogeneous, that is, the capacity to re-describe reality by combining elements dispersed in time and space into some kind of coherent pattern." To combine these dispersed elements in time and space into a comprehensive narrative, he uses the concept of mimesis, which is moving backward and forward in time in order to obtain a new meaning out of the events. Kearney (2004: 131) aligns with Ricoeur saying that narration preserves "the meaning that is behind us so that we can have meaning before us. There is always more order in what we narrate than in

what we have actually already lived; and this narrative excess … of order, coherence and unity, is a prime example of the creative power of narration." Furthermore, Ricoeur (1981: 180) defends his construction by explaining that "*mimesis* is not a copy: *mimesis* is *poiesis,* that is, construction, creation." As defined thus, mimesis is an innovative reconstruction of the time in narration. Ricoeur elaborates, using the definition to understand the development of events before the conclusion of them. Ricoeur (1983: 67) argues that to "understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion …." The concept of mimesis is useful for the analysis of the U.S. and Iran relationship because it helps to illustrate the present stalemate by better understanding the past episodes in order to refigure a new relationship.

In reconstructing time in narrative and obtaining a meaning out of it, Ricoeur (1983: 53) establishes three stages of mimesis to cover past, present, and future:

> In constructing the relationship between the three mimetic modes I constitute the mediation between time and narrative. Or to put it another way, to resolve the problem of the relation between time and narrative I must establish the mediating role of emplotment between a stage of practical experience that precedes it and a stage that succeeds it.

Ricoeur offers the concept of $mimesis_1$ as referred to the past, pre-figuration; $mimesis_2$ as referred to present, configuration; and $mimesis_3$ as referred to future, re-figuration. The purpose of mimesis can be summarized by saying that the potential for change lies in our ability to recognize, understand, and redress what has happened, and to create new structures and ways of thinking and interacting in the future.

Mimesis$_1$

$Mimesis_1$ aims at establishing a new relationship between self and the other through a new interpretation of the past. Ricoeur (1981: 152) notes that "it is a self and

another, posed in psychological terms, that interpretation pursues; interpretation always aims at a reproduction, a *Nachbildung,* of lived experiences." He counts on this possibility because he believes the identity is a dynamic entity that develops itself through retelling over time. Ricoeur (1996: 7) argues that the "identity of a group, culture, people, or nation, is not that of an immutable substance, nor that of a fixed structure, but that, rather, of a recounted story." By recounting a past history, a narrator may be able to portray the same past in a new light derived from a different perspective. This new perspective may generate new understanding and provide momentum for a new course of action in the relationship between the two selves. In the case of this text, through a re-construction, I aim to generate a new narrative for the U.S. and Iran based on a new look at their pasts. To reinterpret the past in a new way, however, a light needs to be shed on past events.

Founding Events

There are historical events that do not easily fade from a people's memory. These events become a source of stagnation for the people who experience them. Ricoeur (1996: 7) refers to these events as founding events which are:

> the influence exercised over the collective memory … the repeated commemoration and celebration of which tend to freeze the history of each cultural group into an identity which is not only immutable but also deliberately and systematically incommunicable.

The shock of the founding events is so intense, important and unsettling that the import remains in people's historical memory. As a result of the gravity of this memory, it becomes a part of their identity, in a way that the remembrance of these events prevents people from envisioning new possibilities. This rigid formation of cultural identity can stop a people from moving beyond their horizon and shifting their paradigm. If this

rigidity becomes a tradition, it can cause further restrictions for future generations to move beyond their respective norm. The concept of founding event is crucial for my research analysis since both the United States and Iran are caught up in such founding events: the CIA 1953 coup in Iran and the 1979 American hostage crisis in Tehran.

However, there are alternatives to break through such a limited horizon. Recounting the same event in a different way provides an avenue of release from the chains of the founding events. Ricoeur (1996: 8) suggests that these founding events can be recounted by the cultures involved and notes that in "this exchange of memories it is a matter not only of subjecting the founding events of both cultures to a crossed reading, but of helping one another to set free that part of life and of renewal which is found captive in rigid, embalmed and dead traditions." Through telling and exchanging of stories and interpreting differently, it may be possible to move beyond clichés and overcome the horror of founding events within a tradition. Participatory research conversations provided me this opportunity to discuss this with experts from both sides and reflect their views in this text. Both the U.S. and Iran desperately need to move beyond their rigid position based on their experienced founding events in order to open a new chapter in their relationship. To move beyond the established norm, however, forgiveness may be a necessary step.

Forgiveness

Ricoeur (1996) explains that forgiveness is a necessary element to diminish the effects of founding events from the historical memory of a group or a nation. Forgiveness comes through a process of retelling and exchanging stories of the past. Ricoeur (1996: 9) explains that forgiveness is "a specific form of the revision of the past

and, through it, of the specific narrative identities." By recounting and retelling the past events, the groups involved in the events may see the events in a different manner, which may provide them a new way of thinking, acting, and a reduction of the events' gravity. By exchanging their perspective of those events, the groups involved in this process may see and comprehend the other's position and in doing so, begin to understand the suffering of the other.

Ricoeur (1996: 9) adds that "the exchange of memories must no longer be investigated through the perspective of glorious deeds but rather through this new perspective of suffering." For the groups involved in the events it "is necessary this time to proceed from the suffering of others; imagining the suffering of others *before* re-examining one's own." Before taking positions and justifying actions, one needs to imagine how other people suffer from one's actions. This observation may move parties from their rigid position to develop empathy for the other. In the case of US-Iran, instead of accusation, it may be more constructive if the United States as a world leader, recognizes the suffering of Iranian people in the post 1953 CIA coup, which prevented Iran from developing into a real democracy. In addition, forgiving Iran because of its wrong doing in hostage crisis, not only illustrates a world leader's generosity, but also may lead Iran to see the suffering of the Americans during American diplomats' captivity and admit their wrong doing in the embassy assault. These interwoven interactions may open possibilities for a more empathetic and meaningful engagement.

Mimesis$_2$

Ricoeur's concept of mimesis$_2$ refers to the act of emplotment of the unrealized potentials of the past in order to configure a new narrative based on those missed

potentials. Ricoeur (1983: 53) explains that mimesis$_2$ functions as mediation between the past and the future in configuring a present by act of emplotment. Mimesis$_2$ intervenes between a past that we already lived and a future that we desire to live in:

> the very meaning of the configurating operation constitutive of emplotment is a result of its intermediary position between the two operations I am calling mimesis$_1$ and mimesis$_3$, which constitute the two sides [*l'amont et l'aval*] of mimesis$_2$. By saying this I propose to show that mimesis$_2$ draws its intelligibility from its faculty of mediation, which is to conduct us from the one side of the text to the other, transfiguring the one side into the other through its power of configuration.

In a literary sense, mimesis$_2$ is conducted by the author who, by emplotment of lived past events, seeks to configure a story that never had a chance to be actualized. The stage between prefiguring a past and refiguring a future composes the configuration of the present; the action that is taken in present time based on the past experiences with a look to the future ideals. It is my intention to shed light on the past history of the U.S. and Iran by finding potentials for configuration of a new narrative that best serves the two nations and satisfies my responsibility as the author.

Mimesis$_3$

Mimesis$_3$ refers to the text and reader's imagination and the ideal world they want to live in. Ricoeur (1983: 71) argues "I shall say that mimesis$_3$ marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality." Herda (1999: 77) comments that in mimesis$_3$ the "researcher and participant here are interested not in what is behind the text, but what the text opens for future possibilities." Mimesis$_3$ is therefore the stage where the reader in front of the text may reach new horizons that were not options before. It is the readers in front of the text

and their imagination that may lead them to refigure these existing ideal choices. Herda continues that it "is an intersection of the text and the reader and creates an imaginary world we might inhabit. If we cannot imagine … we can never live in a world different from the current conditions." As the researcher, I carry the responsibility of creating a text by a new emplotment for my reader who by "the act of reading is thus the operator that joins mimesis$_3$ to mimesis$_2$. It is the final indicator of the refiguring of the world of action under the sign of the plot" (Ricoeur 1983: 77). There is satisfaction for the author if his imagination, represented in his text, can generate his reader in front of the text to imagine new possibilities. Should this text help the readers figure out new possibilities, it can be claimed that the stage of mimesis$_3$ worked.

Narrative Identity

The idea of forgiveness involves a re-seeing of the self in the other, of picturing one self as the other. As Ricoeur (1992: 3) notes, as "long as one remains within the circle of sameness-identity, the otherness of the other than self offers nothing original." As long as the United States and Iran remain captured by biases of their founding events, the narrative identity of the two nations remains constant, and forgiveness will not occur. Within the notion of identity, Ricoeur (1992) recognizes two poles that play important roles in his concept of narrative identity. He distinguishes "sedimentation" and "innovation" as two dimensions of narrative identity and names them respectively *idem*, sameness, which is permanent in time, and *ipse*, selfhood, which appropriates itself to the changes over time. Ricoeur (in Kearney and Dooley 1999: 8) stresses that the "difficulty of being able to deal with changes through time is one reason why identity is so fragile." The identities of the U.S. and Iran rest in the tradition of mistrust. However Ricoeur

(1991a: 429) emphasizes that the "shaping of a tradition in effect rests on the interaction between the two factors of innovation and sedimentation." Today the sedimentation dimension of the two countries' identity is dominant within the notion of their narrative identity, the process of innovation is discontinued, and the renewal of the identity is paralyzed. To change the stagnation, their narratives need to be recounted and the events must be refigured.

The Power of Imagination

The idea of the power of imagination derives from Kearney's (1988: 370-1) notion that the "poetic imagination would nourish the conviction that things *can be changed.* The first and most effective step in this direction is to begin to *imagine* that the world as it is could be *otherwise.*" Looking at the stagnated relationship between the United States and Iran, Kearney's concept of the power of imagination inspired me to use this concept for my research, imagining that things can be otherwise than they have been in the past three decades between the U.S. and Iran.

As Kearney (1996: 185) notes, "narrative imagination opens us to the foreign world of others by enabling us to tell or hear other stories." Imagination is a necessary element to conceptualize an ideal alternative for the future. It can help us to expand our horizons and circumnavigate impasses that block us. Kearney (1998: 226) notes that it "is the schematizing power of imagination which opens the possibility of some kind of unified horizon for our diverse action." If we think and act different than the established paradigm, our new thoughts and actions might generate different possibilities, or as Kearney (1998: 228) explains, "to unrealize repressive realities in favor of emancipator

possibilities." In the past 30 years, inaction has only resulted in a stagnated relationship. If the aim is to alter this sedimentation, then imagination may have an important role.

Imagination can be as simple as little stories that people share with each other, which can generate larger scale movement in our interconnected world. Kearney (1998: 228) describes imagination as little stories that we tell, that

> are recounted, invented, heard, played out. It is a culture where the people does not exist as a Subject, but rather as an accumulation of thousands of little histories, futile and serious, and which permit themselves to be drawn together to constitute larger stories ... to form what one calls the culture of a civil society.

Narrating alternative stories of the U.S. and Iran relationship may provide enlightenment for the reader as a new way of thinking about the issue at hand. In my conversations, each one of the discussions with my participants is a little story that is to be shared, that can shed light on one aspect of the U.S. and Iran relationship, that may open up a new possibility, and which may help my reader configure a new course of action. The hope is that the summation of these stories, at the end, may provide an alternative that is strong enough to challenge the current status quo.

To change our horizons, we need to attend to these counter narratives which Kearney (1998: 251) thinks "serve an ethical-critical purpose as alternative stories to the official stories, as truncated or subversive narratives that brush history against the grain and put the dominant power in question." Our stories can challenge the official story of the two states which are stagnated with the policy of status quo. If we don't take initiatives, as Kearney (1998: 228) warns, the "status quo reigns supreme for as long as we refuse our utopian capacity to imagine things being other than they are." Since the official story of the US-Iran relationship has been a stagnated narrative of blame and hostility toward each other in the last three decades, there is a pressing need to imagine a

new narrative that might help to challenge the existing norm and change the current course of action.

The Fusion of Horizon

Gadamer (2004) introduces the notion of "fusion of horizon" as an expansion of a person's perspective towards the others expressed either by an individual or in a text in order to enlarge a person's view. He (2004: 301) first defines the horizon as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth." Within a horizon, there are individuals whose vision is limited and those who can see into the remote possibilities. Gadamer continues:

> A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand, "to have a horizon" means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within his horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small.

A fusion of horizon, therefore, can be the orientation of individuals, or groups, to move towards the other's perspective which may enable the individual to develop new insights, new understandings, and a more expanded perspective. Gadamer (2004: 302) adds that the fusion of horizon is a "means to get to know the horizon of the other person" or group. It is expanding one's field of vision, and way of thinking. He (2004: 304) continues that to "acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion." The inclusion of another horizon makes one's own horizon larger

rather than causing its loss. As a result, through the fusion of horizon people enrich their perspective by orienting themselves with the other's standpoint.

In the last three decades, the United States and Iran demonstrated their incapability to move beyond their antagonistic paradigm. The two countries are restricted by their dogmatic views toward each other and remain prisoners of their short sighted views. Their political biases do not allow them to see the other's perspective. Gadamer (2004: 304) notes that if "we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, for example, then we will understand him – i.e., become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person – by putting *ourselves* in his position." With a constructive look into their past history, the U.S. and Iran need to comprehend the legitimate concerns of each other. As a country with leadership standing in the world, a possible U.S. initiative not only will show the U.S. capability to extend its hand and enlarge its horizon to include the Iranian's, but also may encourage Iranians to do the same and abandon their harsh rhetoric. As Sacks (2005: 112) notes, by doing so, the U.S. shows that its "world has become bigger because it now includes you." The minimum success is to neutralize the Iranian conservatives who always chose a hostile course of action against the U.S. and never played a constructive role in decreasing tensions.

The concept of fusion of horizon serves as a theoretical cornerstone to encourage the U.S. and Iran to leave their dogmatic views towards each other and enlarge their current restricted horizons. The idea of a fusion of horizon, Ricoeur (1981: 62) explains, "implies a tension between what is one's own and what is alien, between the near and the far." The US-Iran tension may be the result of historical misunderstanding, driven from

their otherness with each other, which may be resolved if the two sides expand their perspectives to embrace the other's.

Summary

To engage the two nations together in order to expand their insight, dialogue is the first crucial step to reach minimum degree of understanding. In response to Kearney's question, Ricoeur (in Kearney 2004: 120) answers, the "challenge is to bring conflicts to the level of discourse and not let them degenerate into violence; to accept that they tell history in their own words as we tell our history in our own words, and that these histories compete against each other in a kind of competition of discourse." I used the concepts of mimesis, founding events, forgiveness, imagination, and fusion of horizon as my theoretical foundations because these concepts can provide a context to assist a transition from a confrontational to a discursive level between the United States and Iran in this critical time.

__The Conceptual Framework for the Research Process__

Introduction

This section introduces the conceptual foundation of the protocol for data collection and analysis. The proposed theoretical framework for this research is interpretive formed by a critical hermeneutic orientation to participatory inquiry drawn from Herda. As Herda (1999: 9) explains, critical hermeneutic participatory research:

> is a position to which one is summoned …. To recognize the summons is to recognize the nature of critical hermeneutic participatory research. This recognition transforms the manner of approaching the issues we investigate and the position of the researcher. The researcher moves from a position of neutral observer or social advocate to a position of being within a transformative act with others.

In this tradition, Herda (1999: 2) claims, the "work of participatory research is a text created by the researcher and the research participants that opens the possibility of movement from text to action." The focus of this partnership of researcher and research participants, creation of text, and movement towards action distinguishes the critical hermeneutic research from more traditional research modalities in American academia.

Research in Critical Hermeneutic Tradition

The nature of critical hermeneutic participatory research is grounded in the relationship with the other throughout the research process and the new way of thinking and understanding that may occur from the relationship. Herda (1999: 4-5) notes:

> Participatory research can chronicle the events, goals, means, people, and consequences of our lives. It can also develop a story as a whole that opens up new ways of thinking and acting …. Research is a shared process of understanding and possible action with those in the research population as well as a vehicle by which we can recognize our potential and our mistakes.

By conducting a research conversation where both researcher and research participant are led by the topic at hand, through partnership, imagination, and act of emplotment, a new understanding may arise. However, the critical hermeneutic tradition involves a change in assumptions, which requires a reinterpretation of self, the other, and the surrounding narratives. Herda (1999: 90) explains in "critical hermeneutic research, our attempt is to bring biases out into the open, not to technically reduce or control them." The understanding that may rise from this new orientation is what Gadamer (2004) calls fusion of horizon as documented above.

In the critical hermeneutic tradition, the role of researcher is always evolving as compared to the static quality of more traditional research modalities in American academia. Herda (1999: 87) clarifies:

> The role of the researcher is far different from than a collector of data, an expert, and neutral player, or a partner in a dialogue. The researcher's orientation toward the research event as a whole gives opportunity for one to become a different person than before the research took place. It sets the researcher in a reflective and imaginary mode, thus opening new ways to think about the … problems that drew one to research in the first place.

In interpretive participatory research conversations, the researcher encourages participants to be fully involved in the research. As they are engaged with the research topic and their conversation progresses, they may both gain insights and develop new understandings that may expand their horizons.

Summary

As Herda (1999) explains, the aim in the participatory research conversation in a critical hermeneutic tradition is to change the positivistic paradigm that has influenced research in the applied fields and social sciences for many decades. In interpretive participatory research, the researcher does not consider the participant as an object that is supposed to be examined. Instead, both researcher and participants try to reach new understandings of the research topic through a process of interaction and conversation.

Research Protocol for Data Collection

Introduction

At the core of any research process, there is the collection, presentation, and analysis of data. The integrity and systematic thoroughness of the data collection process follows a procedure that is authentic to the tradition within which the research took place. Therefore, there can be a line of continuity between the research topic, categories and questions, the collection and presentation of data, and analysis. This section includes the data collection guidelines, research categories and guiding questions, research timeline, entrée to Iran, research participants, research journal, language, and summary.

Data Collection Guidelines

Data were collected through research conversations with participants from scholarly institutions or government sectors who are active on some level with American-Iranian affairs, be it research or leadership. Since the intent of this research is an inquiry to understand better the US-Iranian relationship and to pursue a dialogue that may promote a more beneficial working relationship, conversation partners were selected to represent the varying perspectives involved in exploring the issue.

Informal and formal conversations, which lasted between 45-60 minutes, were conducted in English, and in some cases in Farsi, recorded, and transcribed into a written text for analysis. General topics of the conversations were provided to participants in advance for their reflection. However, the specific questions were not communicated to them in order to leave space for the participants' originality of thoughts. Herda (1999: 98) notes that often "the second or even third conversation is carried out in a more creative mode whereby the conversant can think about ways to address the problem." In some cases, further conversations did take place to address the uncovered area of the research. Additional conversations addressed critically the issues missed during the first conversation.

Research Categories and Guiding Questions

The preliminary research categories and leading questions were designed according to the theoretical framework, background of country, and review of literature. These categories and questions served to collect data from participants during the research conversations. Herda (1999: 103) explains that

> As one goes through a review of literature, one needs to think about developing certain categories that will help serve as parameters for the research project ….

The researcher has the responsibility to make a decision about which categories will shape a research project. This is an important decision because categories play a dynamic role in the research. They carry the project forward, serve as markers for inquiry, provide the circumference of conversations, and serve as points or themes for discussion in analysis.

Philosophers such as Ricoeur (1983, 2002), Kearny (1998), and Gadamer (2004) attracted my attention because I discovered that their theoretical circle provided an efficient theoretical support to deal with the crisis that exists between the United States and Iran.

The research categories were designed to retain the same tone throughout various research conversations to maintain consistency in the research, while the research questions were modeled for generating conversations rather than for the purpose of soliciting answers. The questions were changed as new understanding rose throughout the research process in order to further and to deepen the critical value of the research as shown in Table One, see page 75. For my questions, I followed Gadamer's (2004: 368) premise where questioning "opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject." For this research, the conversations were a part of total data set including documents, observations, my own experiences, and journal entries.

RESEARCH CATEGORY	*RESEARCH GUIDING QUESTIONS*
Mimesis	- Why have the U.S. and Iran not been able to engage in a way that moves the relationship in a positive direction? - If the two countries once had peaceful tradition, why have they abandoned this tradition? How did they reach this point? - Historically, what are different social and political movements in Iran? Can you describe these pro and anti-American movements in the past and present?
Founding Events	What is the history of the two countries in the past? What are the important events? What was the influence of these events on the relationship of the two countries?

Narrative Identity	• In the narrative identity theory, there is a constant relationship between the "self" and the "other." How can this interconnectedness be applied to the U.S. and Iran relationship? Could you describe how the potential within the social movements in Iran?
Forgiveness	• In this hostile relationship in international arena, is there any space for the concept of "forgiveness?" Is there a possibility that they can move beyond this antagonistic narrative? How?
The power of imagination	• How can we generate new options to exit the current impasse in the US-Iran relationship? • What options to this crisis do you see? • What alternative ways of thinking can be implemented? • What role can academia play to generate alternatives way of thinking and acting? How? • What are the challenges for the implementation of these ideas? • Is there a way that we can influence and convince policy makers to implement these ideas?
Fusion of horizons	• Is an engagement possible between the U.S. and Iran? • How is it possible to change this stagnated paradigm and break from its confines? • What are the challenges to a meaningful dialogue and engagement? • Why should they engage, if accusing is easier and beneficial? • How is it possible to create new orientation towards engagement?

Table One. Research categories and guiding questions

Timeline for the Research

The primary research time was between the months of May and November 2008. I conducted six conversations with the experts in the field in the United States and two conversations in Iran. My conversation partners are introduced in Table Two, see page 77. My trip to Iran was during summer 2008 where I conducted two formal conversations with a researcher and freelance journalist and a graduate student in political science who have focused extensively on matters related to foreign policy and specifically on the US-Iran relationship and are knowledgeable about my research topic.

Prior to my trip to Iran, I made arrangements with four potential candidates in Iran, but was only able to have conversations with two of them in the summer of 2008. Two government officials did not participate as they initially indicated.

Research Participants

The main data for this research were gathered in a total of eight formal research conversations with professionals engaged in academia, government agencies, and NGO's who are involved with the US-Iran conflict. Since the intent of this research is to provide compelling data for policy makers to think about shifting the current antagonistic paradigm between the U.S. and Iran, conversations partners were selected based on their knowledge and awareness of the US-Iran relationship in the last half of a century in order to provide a deeper insight to this research. I originally proposed certain conversational partners, but some changed due to their availability. Six of my research participants live in the U.S. and two live in Iran. In one way or another, they have been involved with the political aspects of the two countries during the last 50 years.

Name	Title	Organization	Language
Dr. Abbas Milani	Prof. of Iranian Studies	Stanford University CA	English
Dr. William Beeman	Prof. of Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies	University of Minnesota	English
Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi	Prof. of Planning and International Development & Director of Center for Middle Eastern Studies	State University of New Jersey	English
Thomas Pickering	Ambassador	Retired	English
Dr. Hamid Dabashi	Prof. of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature	Columbia University	Farsi

Dr. Gary Sick	Professor of Political Science and Iran Expert	Columbia University	English
Mr. Abbas Abdi	Researcher	Freelance Journalist (Iran)	Farsi
Mr. Babak M.	Graduate Student in Political Science	University of Tehran (Iran)	Farsi
Dr. Michael Provence	Prof. of History	University of California at San Diego	English (informal)

Table Two. Chart of official conversation partners.

My pilot study conversation partner, Dr. Milani at Stanford University, (figure 1) has written extensively on the US-Iran relationship. Abbas Milani is a research fellow and co-director of the Iran Democracy Project at the Hoover Institution. In addition, Dr. Milani is the Director of Iranian Studies at Stanford University and a visiting professor in the department of political science where I met him for our conversation. His expertise is US-Iran relations and Iranian cultural, political, and security issues.

Dr. Abbas Milani
Figure 1
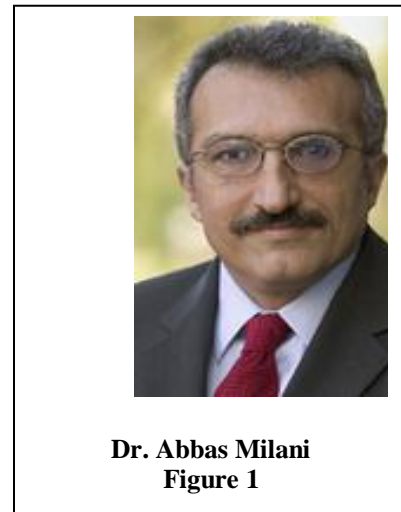
Dr. Milani is a former Professor of History and Political Science and Chair of the Department at Notre Dame de Namur University and a Research Fellow at the Institute of International Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. Milani also served as an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Law and Political Science at Tehran University and was a Member of the Board of Directors of Tehran University's Center for International Studies from 1979 to 1987. He was a Research Fellow at the Iranian Center for Social Research from 1977 to 1978 and an Assistant Professor at the National University of Iran

from 1975 to 1977. He is a member of the American Association of Political Science, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and the Association of Iranian Studies.

Dr. William O. Beeman (figure 2) was my second conversation partner. I talked with Beeman during his trip to California in December 2007. Beeman is Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota. Beeman's research includes the language styles and socio-cultural patterns in Iran and traditional theatre in the Middle East. He spent time in Iran in order to conduct research for his book, *Language, Status, and Power in Iran.* He also has a very insightful second book on Iran, *The "Great Satan" vs. the "Mad Mullahs."* This second book not only

Dr. William O. Beeman
Figure 2

showed his depth of knowledge about Iran, but also was eye opening for me to better understand the cultural differences between the United States and Iran. Currently, his research topics are philosophic anthropology and peasant and nomadic societies in the Middle East, particularly Iran and the Persian Gulf region.
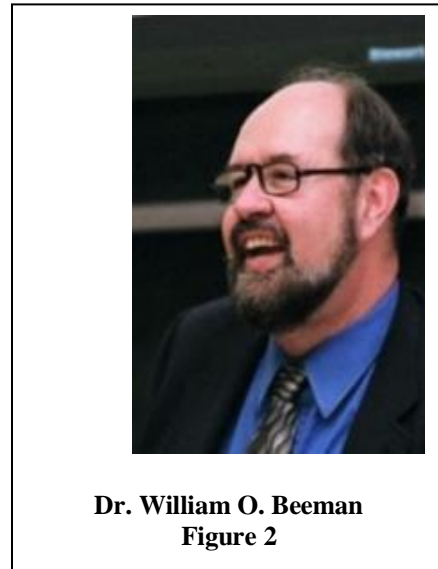
Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi (figure 3) was my third conversation partner. Amirahmadi holds a Ph.D. in planning and international development from Cornell University and is a professor of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, where we held our conversation. Amirahmadi has served as director of the University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies,

as chair and graduate director of his department at the Bloustein School, and as the

University Coordinator of the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship Program.

Amirahmadi is the founder and president of the American Iranian Council (AIC),

a research and policy think-tank devoted to improving

dialogue and understanding between the peoples of Iran

and the United States. Amirahmadi is also a founder of

the Center for Iranian Research and Analysis and served

as director for many years. He was a candidate for

President in the Nine Presidential Elections in Iran in

June 2005, but the conservative and religious Guardian

Council disqualified him for his dual Iranian-American

citizenship. He is also the president of Caspian

Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi
Figure 3

Associates, Inc., an international strategic consulting firm headquartered in Princeton.
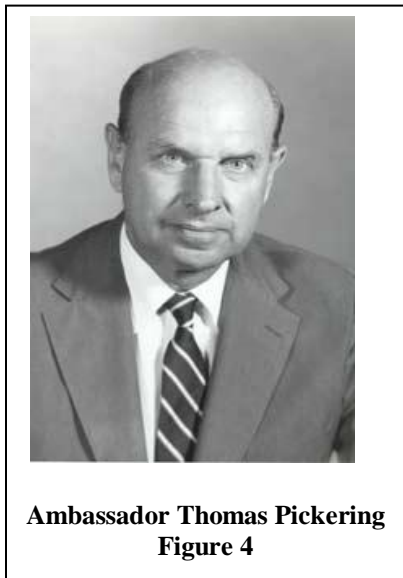
Ambassador Thomas Pickering
Figure 4

Ambassador Pickering (figure 4) served as U.S.

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and as the

President of the Eurasia Foundation, a Washington,

D.C. based organization that makes small grants and

loans in the new states of the former Soviet Union.

Ambassador Pickering held the personal rank of Career

Ambassador, Permanent U.S. Representative to the

United Nations, the highest in the U.S. Foreign Service

from March 3, 1989 to May 1992. I conducted my

conversation with Pickering over the phone due to his busy travel schedule.

Pickering also served as Executive Secretary of the Department of State and Special Assistant to Secretaries William P. Rogers and Henry A. Kissinger from 1973 to 1974. He is a member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies and the Council on Foreign Relations. In a diplomatic career spanning five decades, he has served as U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation, India, Israel, El Salvador, Nigeria, and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Ambassador Pickering also served in Zanzibar and Dar el Salam, Tanzania. Pickering visited Iran in the past and currently collaborates with American Iranian Council to promote peace and engagement between the U.S. and Iran.

Dr. Hamid Dabashi
Figure 5

My next research participant was Dr. Hamid Dabashi (figure 5). Dabashi is the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York, the oldest and most prestigious chair in Iranian Studies. I met Dabashi in the University of Columbia. He also taught and delivered lectures in many North American, European, Arab and Iranian universities. A committed teacher for nearly three decades, Professor Dabashi is a public speaker around the globe, a current affair essayist, and a staunch anti-war activist.

Dr. Gary Sick
Figure 6

Another research participant was Dr. Gary Sick (figure 6) who was a member of the National Security Council during the former President Carter's administration during the hostage crisis in 1979-80. Sick and I spoke together over the phone very early one morning. Sick is an American academic and analyst of Middle East affairs, with special expertise on Iran, who served on the U.S. National Security Council under three presidents.

He has authored three books and is perhaps best known to the wider public for voicing support for elements of the October Surprise Conspiracy theory regarding the Iran Hostage Crisis and the 1980 Presidential Election.

Sick served on the staff of the National Security Council under presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan, and was the principal White House aide for Persian Gulf affairs from 1976 to 1981, a period which included the Iranian revolution and the Hostage Crisis. He is currently an adjunct professor of International Affairs at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs, and a senior research scholar at SIPA's Middle East Institute. In addition to his professional duties, he sits on the board of directors of Human Rights Watch, and serves as founding chair of the Advisory Committee of Human Rights Watch-Middle East.

Abbas Abdi (figure 7) is one of Iran's most influential reformists. I met with Abdi in the privacy of his home in Tehran. He was the first person to storm the United States embassy in Tehran, along with other students, during the early years of the Iranian

Revolution in 1979. In the following years, he became a critic of the political establishment of Iran. He was a supporter of President Mohammad Khatami's reform plans, and one of the most influential figures in the reformist camp after 1997. He ran into legal trouble after the Invasion of Tehran University Dormitories in which the police attacked the dormitory of the university because of student protests following Abdi's article in Salam newspaper. Later he conducted a poll asking Iranians if they

Journalist Abbas Abdi
Figure 7

supported resuming government dialogue with the United States. When Abdi and the other pollsters pushed results reporting 75% in favor, they were jailed. Abdi spent several years in prison as a result.
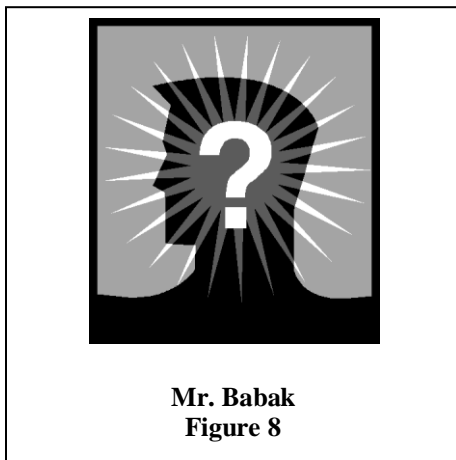
Mr. Babak
Figure 8

Mr. Babak (figure 8) was my last conversation partner and we met at his house in Rasht. Babak is a graduate student in political science at the University of Tehran, with a focus on Middle Eastern studies. He desired to remain anonymous throughout this research. Babak is in his last year of his MS program.

More information on each participant is provided within the presentation of data in Chapter 5. Sample invitation and thank you letters for the participants are included as Appendices B and C. Consistent with ethnographic research protocols, I anticipated that

participants might refer me to additional conversation partners. As these additional conversations helped to deepen insight on the research topic at hand, I integrated this data into my research.

Entrée to Iran

I traveled to Iran in July and met with my conversation partners in August 2008. Because I lived in Iran until 2001, I had the chance to reach my conversation partners through former college classmates who live in Iran and helped me to contact these experts. I resided in Tehran for one week in order to conduct and complete my conversations. In addition, I sat in a seminar which was offered during my stay which was focused on the US-Iran relationship in the last 50 years. By attending, I learned more about Iranian perspective on the relationship of the two nations. I also visited the former American embassy in Tehran, which became a museum to exhibit the foreign interference and is open to the public.

Language

Conversations with Dr. Milani, Dr. Beeman, Dr. Amirahmadi, Ambassador Pickering, and Dr. Sick were conducted in English. These conversations were done in the U.S. Conversations with Dr. Dabashi, Mr. Abdi, and Mr. Babak were conducted in Farsi, and then translated into English. For the purpose of accuracy, and the opportunity for different ideals, all transcripts were sent to the participants for their review.

Observations

A research journal was kept throughout the research process as a means of recording observations, insights, reflections, challenges, and thought developments. Herda (1999: 102) notes that any "changes and new understanding recorded by the

researcher enrich the text as a whole and give depth to the research project. The researcher's log or journal is integrated into the text that gives birth to the matter of the text, which in turn unfolds new worlds" or insights that help both researcher and reader to develop new understanding. The journal helped me step back and distance myself from the text and appropriate myself to new perspectives developed in the unofficial setting of my personal reflection time. Please refer to Appendix E for my journal of personal reflections.

Summary

This summary illustrates the process through which the data were gathered through conversations for the research analysis. Prior to the conversations and upon the study of the background of research site and literature review, I developed a set of questions related to the hermeneutic theory that could address the less known aspect of the US-Iran relationship. The timeline for research, including entry into Iran and interaction with participants, are reflected in the observations section, along with the language used to communicate with participants, and the cultural influences of those participants. In the observations section I also reflect on many of the meaningful aspects of this interpretive participatory research approach that I might not have experienced in more traditional research modalities in American academia. This section also clarifies the experience and the procedure that researchers undergo in an interpretive participatory tradition. The next section introduces step by step the data analysis process in an interpretive participatory research process.

Data Analysis' Process

Introduction

Herda (1999: 98-9) notes that analysis "is a creative and imaginative act. In data analysis the researcher appropriates a proposed world from the text." She describes an overall plan for data presentation and analysis which results in the creation of three overlapping texts. The first text is formed by the research itself, conversation transcripts, the country background and literature review. Presentation and analysis of data create the second and third round of texts that are generated by the researcher. Ultimately, the analysis of my research conversations creates a two stage process of understanding the problem differently and appropriating a new vantage point. In this section I set the stage for data presentation and analysis, the pilot study, and the researchers' background.

Setting the Stage for Data Analysis

<u>Fix the discourse by transcribing recorded conversation</u>

Recorded conversations were transcribed as soon as possible after each conversation to create a text. This text distanced the researcher and his reflections were recorded in the research journal. Review of the text and my research journal allowed me to appropriate myself to the text and many times I reached a new understanding.

<u>Pull out significant statement, develop themes and place them within categories</u>

The text created from the conversations was reviewed, noting significant issues and categorized according to the research categories initially proposed. Revisions indicated by the analysis were made.

<u>Substantiate the themes</u>

In order to create a faithful reflection, the research conversations were recorded and were transcribed. These quotes were cross referenced with the data from the country background, literature review, and political narratives and analyzed under the research categories to provide insights.

<u>Examine the themes from a theoretical perspective</u>

The convergence of theoretical themes and research categories are noted in order to analyze the patterns and perspectives between the data observations, outside documentation, and personal log regarding the issue of mistrust between the United States and Iran.

<u>Provide opportunity for continued conversation with participants</u>

Each participant was provided with a copy of the text created by the conversation along with a brief analysis to allow the participants to understand how the text was understood by the researcher and allowing them the opportunity to comment. This created an occasion to have second or third conversation with some of participants.

<u>Set a context for the written discussion</u>

The context of the discussion included political, cultural, historical aspects of Iranian society and the United States' and Iran's relationship. Sometimes, the personal background stories of participants shed light on the research topic.

<u>Discuss the grouping of themes</u>

Since all research categories were related to overlapping aspects of the research topic, themes that surface from the data fitted within more than one research category. Research categories that best fit the research topic were chosen first. Then, appropriate

questions were designed within each category that helped the progress and development of conversation and creation of text. The goal was to create themes and sub-themes that shed light on the research topic on a theoretical level which could best help understanding of the research problem.

<u>Discuss the research problem at a theoretical level</u>

To prepare for a secondary analysis, relevant theoretical concepts from critical hermeneutic theory that applied to my research were chosen and developed. The theoretical foundations, data, and studies related to research topic were interwoven together and discussed at theoretical level to create a narrative.

<u>Find the implications for new insights and direction</u>

Implications relating to the understanding of the US-Iran past history, their current status, alternative thinking, the possibility of finding common ground, paradigm shift, and taking new course of action were raised as appropriate to the participants throughout the course of this research study. As the reflective process brought new insights, implications emerged.

<u>Bring out those aspects of the study that merit further study</u>

Since the research on the subject of post-modern US-Iran conflict was exploratory and hermeneutic in nature, it was expected that additional issues would come to the surface which merited further study and discovery. These new findings could open new directions for further research.

<u>Give example of learning experiences and fusion of horizon</u>

Participatory research in a critical hermeneutic tradition can be described as a learning experience for both researcher and participants. They interact and discuss the

research topic in a context which may provide them new insights. Throughout this process, the horizon of both researcher and participants are expanded. As new understandings emerge, these new lessons will be highlighted to stimulate imaginative implications and illustrate reconfiguration of new course of action. These new understandings are noted in the data analysis section below in Chapter Six.

Pilot Study

No matter what field of study I start in higher education, my research always returns to the enduring question of non-discourse, or worse outright enmity, between my homeland of Iran and my adopted home of the United States. It is rational that my study and initial pilot of my research topic are aimed less toward the preemptive containment policy of 'power politics' espoused by Huntington (1993) and more toward the refiguring narrative of 'a dialogue among civilizations' of Khatami (2000).

Propelled as I am by my background of growing up during the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent years of internal upheaval and external hot and cold relations with the United States, it was no surprise to find myself on the manicured grounds of Stanford University one sunny October day in 2007 to meet with Dr. Abbas Milani, the resident Iranian specialist and my first conversation partner. Milani first came to my attention as I researched the need for a paradigm shift between the U.S. and Iran. His article, *Win-Win U.S. Strategy for Dealing with Iran*, caught my attention and I soon discovered he taught at nearby Stanford. I spent the week before our meeting devouring and then dissecting his book, *Lost Wisdom*, where Milani credits the Persian legacy of poets and intellectuals as having created an early national background of openness to 'others' and the adoption of the ideals of freedom and democracy, the same basic principals on which the United

States was later formed. In his book, Milani claimed the two countries share a wisdom that has been lost.

As Herda (1999: 127) notes "in telling a story about the transcriptions and the experiences of data collection, the point is to discover a plot." The plot of the master narrative between Milani and myself involved the questions his book provoked in me, questions based on the thought that lost wisdom might be found. Imbedded in the idea of *wisdom* is the idea of something old, something founding, a tradition that can be handed down, and a language to live by. However, without a retelling, traditions can be lost. Milani stressed that there are two narratives; the leadership of each state and the narrative of the people.

Milani's comments reinforced Ricoeur's (1992) description of the relationship between self and other where the actions of 'self' influences the 'other's' reaction and creates a dialectic between the two. I considered Banisadr, the first president of the Islamic Republic (1981), and his claim that the extreme right wings of both countries help each other by the antagonistic positions that they took to demonize the other. For example, when President Bush places Iran in the 'axis of evil,' President Ahmadinejad calls the U.S. the 'Great Satan,' thus perpetuating antagonistic dialectic. Milani thought Ricouer was absolutely right and mentioned that our "behavior toward whoever the interlocutor is helps create the reality …. I think it is absolutely correct that the radicals, the dedicated radicals here in this country and in Iran, want the war" and create an antagonistic reality.

With Milani describing the official sides of the two countries, I wondered if there was hope for moderation in their ideologies. Milani said we can't change the minds of

radicals who are absolutely certain about their own beliefs, but we can lessen the damage "and the way you can do this is to minimize the chance that the radicals would have their day, where the voice of reason and moderation will win out, … It is hard, but it can be done. If it can be done in anywhere, it can be done in a democracy."

The transcription of my conversation about wisdom, people and leaders' narratives, and the bi-polar demonizing myth of 'self and other' with Milani unfolded a new perspective on the power of action. I saw how Milani was very passionate about the idea that every one of our actions counts to either agitate or calm reactions from our 'other' because of our interconnectedness with one another. This reminds me of how much potential every single narrative, including mine, has in offering alternatives to the master narratives of the leaders in the two nations. This learning experience encouraged me to continue my research in hope for fulfilling my personal responsibility as a citizen.

During the pilot study, I faced the reality of having a professional conversation with an expert in the field and found myself uneasy at the beginning. Before going to meet with Milani, I read two of his books and several articles to prepare appropriate questions. However, I though I spent too much time introducing each question because I was fearful in facing this expert. After this conversation, what I realized was that a conversation could be conducted with questions without large introductions. If I gave up control over the way the conversation went, then there would be room for a truer fusion of horizon.

For the Institutional Review Board of Protection of Human Subjects' permission, and the complete transcriptions of all research conversations please refer respectively to

Appendices A and D. For the research conversation's questions, refer to Table one in the section labeled Research Protocol for Data Collection.

Researcher Background

Some background information may help my reader may better understand why I came to pursue this research topic. I believe the socio-political changes in Iran in the late 1970s and early 1980s shaped my identity. I was born and raised in Iran. As a child, I witnessed the Iranian revolution in 1979. The revolution brought a new reality into Iranian lives. The dramatic change of power in the government, the conflict between different factions within the revolutionary government, the execution of the opposing groups by the new Islamic government, the Iran-Iraq war, and the socio-political and cultural changes shaped my personality. They created significant experiences for me as an adolescent. There was turmoil in the society and everybody's life was affected by the events. Those who opposed or disagreed with changes became the victims of the ideological government. People experienced pain by the new reality. Reflecting on others' pain became the substance of my life. I am more sensitive to my surroundings.

After high school and during the Iran-Iraq war, I fulfilled my military service for two years. In the last month of my service, I was injured by a landmine and hospitalized for three months. For a period of six months, I used a wheelchair to move. Then, I was on crutches for almost two years. My healing process lasted almost three years. I directly, and my family indirectly, suffered from this unjust war. I can imagine the suffering of all humans who experience directly or indirectly from military conflicts. My healing process was a long period of reflection upon the inhuman aspects of politics where the suffering of people is not considered. I realized the uselessness of that conflict

for Iranians and Iraqis. People on both sides were affected from those eight long years of conflict. The healing process helped me to realize that conflicts bring more suffering than they heal. Perhaps, this was the main reason I became interested in this research topic. I realized awareness is the best way to oppose unwanted conflicts.

 In 1992, I won a scholarship from the Italian embassy in Iran and went to Italy to study language and culture. Upon my return to Iran in 1994, I entered the University of Tehran and started a bachelor program in Italian Studies. In 2000, I won a scholarship from the Italian embassy in Iran and attended the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Siena, Italy, for four months. In 2001, I moved to the U.S. Upon my arrival in San Diego, I taught Italian language at University of California at San Diego for a year. In 2002, I was admitted to the Italian Graduate Program at University of California at Los Angeles and finished my Masters in 2004. I began my doctoral program at University of San Francisco in 2006, where I finally returned to my original passion, focusing on the topic of my interest, and fulfilling my ethical responsibility to be an advocate of peace and non-violence as opposed to the policy of military intervention to resolve a dispute.

<u>Summary</u>

Since the antagonistic narratives worsened the situation between the United States and Iran in the last three decades, this research is an attempt to provide an alternative approach to deal with the crisis between the two nations. Geertz (2005) notes that people need to change their way of thinking in dealing with international crisis in a post modern world. The orientation of finding quick solutions will not solve complex problems. Both the military intervention mentality and the "either with us or without us" orientation used

by President George Bush in his State of Union address in 2002 proved to be ineffective in the last 30 years of dealing with a complex case such as the relationship between the U.S. and Iran. A critical hermeneutical approach, which is grounded on the understanding of the other, may result in a better alternative. This new approach, however, requires willingness to engage with the other, respect, patience, consistency, and most importantly forgiveness. As Milani indicated in his conversation with me, both countries have these values in their traditions; therefore, they have the potential to recall them in this difficult time. As Milani shared his story with me, I thought about Kearney and his concept of "life as narrative." Kearney (2002: 133) notes, "life is always on the way to narrative, but it does not arrive there until someone hears and tells this life as a story." In my next Chapter, I introduce the stories of my other seven research participants who shed light on different aspects of the US-Iran relationship and raise possibilities for alternative stories to tell.

CHAPTER V

DATA PRESENTATION AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

<u>**Introduction**</u>

In addition to the pilot study conversation introduced earlier, in this Chapter I present seven other formal conversation partners who contributed to this research. Located in two different parts of the world, the United States and Iran, these experts provide a unique perspective on my research topic, new insights regarding the unknown aspects of this quarrel, and participation in the process of text creation. The purpose of these conversations with experts was to create a forum where different issues between the U.S. and Iran could be discussed. As Herda (1999: 129) notes "solving problems requires discussion and conversation with others to reach a conclusion grounded in action about what things mean and the way things are done." Throughout these conversations, there were themes that were developed which are presented here in the form of vignettes using the themes of post-modern complexity and lack of understanding, Iranian narrative identity, political culture as the structural problem to prevent relationship development, the necessity of dialogue, the dilemma of the Islamic Republic, and the need for leadership. These themes relate to my research categories, which are mimesis, founding events, forgiveness, narrative identity, the power of imagination, and the fusion of horizon, and guide this chapter as presented under each title.

Post-Modern Conflict and the Lack of Understanding

My conversation with Dr. William O. Beeman focused on the post-modern characteristic of the US-Iran conflict. I came to learn about Beeman (2002, 2005, 2006) by reading his articles *Iran And The United States-A Case Study In Postmodern Culture*

Conflict, Rafsanjani Victory Probable, But Not Certain, In Iran's Real Election, How To Talk The Talk With Iran, and his book (2005) *The "Great Satan" Vs. the "Mad Mullahs."* I soon learned that Beeman spent time in Iran to conduct his research, the result of which became his earlier book (1986) *Language, Status, and Power in Iran.* I believed his familiarity with Iranian culture, his cultural awareness, and his continuous research on Iran made him a prime conversation partner. Therefore, I contacted him through his personal blog and he promptly answered and agreed to have a conversation with me about my research topic. Our conversation covered a range of themes from the post-modern characteristics of this conflict and founding events as the basis for the wall of mistrust between the two countries which caused the rise of hard-liners and their discourse as the dominant course of action in the narrative identity of the two countries. Other themes included the lack of respect in dealing with each other, misunderstanding of the other which created a restricted paradigm, and the rise of Iranian youth as potential in Iran who, with their sympathy for the western world including the U.S., may be able to bridge the differences between the two countries and ease a possible engagement.

In our conversation, Beeman called the US-Iran tension a post modern crisis of complex non dialogue and indirect relationships damaging both nations. He stated:

> The reason I called this a post-modern conflict, is that because of the nature of the communication between the United States and Iran, we actually don't talk to each other. Everything is done through the media, through public discourse, rather than any kind of direct talk, or direct negotiation.

The lack of dialogue in the US-Iran relationship has caused the two sides to communicate from a stance of nationalism and mainly through the public arena of media. When I further asked Beeman how he sees the daily harsh rhetoric between the two nations, he explained that a sense of national pride did not allow either side to have flexibility

towards the other which is needed in negotiating sessions. As a result, the fear of looking soft pushed the officials of the two nations to use harsh language in order to look tough to their constituencies on their respective national stages. The result has been the rise of a negative mode of communication and ultra-complexity of the cultures which caused the loss of opportunities in the past three decades. From a geopolitical view, after the fall of the Shah, the United States lost a very strategic and important ally in the Persian Gulf. From an economical perspective, American companies are banned from participating in vast Iranian projects. On the Iranian side, Iran became almost an isolated country in the international scene and underwent many sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the UN Security Council, which caused Iran's economy to deteriorate in the past three decades.

During my conversation with Beeman, we discussed the ineffectiveness of the policy of containment and non-dialogue with Iran. He emphasized that "you absolutely can not do anything with anybody in Iran until you have a relationship with them. … And if you are *ghahr* with somebody, you don't talk to them directly, but you do all this sort of accusations, you know, and you never get together." To emphasize the ineffectiveness of the policy of containment and non-dialogue as a punishment for the Islamic Republic, Beeman concluded that "I would think that nothing is going to happen until we are in a situation that we establish some kind of relationship with each other." To explain his rationale, Beeman referred to how the lack of direct dialogue hindered the comprehension of the real issues between the two states and the officials of the two countries only ended up condemning and demonizing each other through the media.

One cause for the policy of non-dialogue comes from the negative image derived from the historical events in the relationship of the two countries. When we talked about

the 1953 CIA coup and the 1979 hostage crisis, Beeman pointed out that these "two events are very interesting, because if you play them side by side, you see that each of these two events actually embodies the same crime and that is the violation of national sovereignty." Both Iranians and Americans feel their national sovereignty was abused by the other. Iranians felt that their democracy was stolen with the help of the U.S. coup as the Shah eliminated opposition groups and Americans felt diplomatic relations were disdained and abused by the hostage crisis. These events had negative influences in the historical memory of Iranians and Americans and became "founding events" in accordance with Ricoeur's (1996) definition.

These founding events, then, became the foundation for antagonistic discourse between the two countries. Hardliners in each county began to condemn and demonize the other which escalated the problem to a much larger scale dispute. In this text, since the focus is more on the U.S., I asked Beeman if he had any insight on the American discourse towards Iran. As Beeman explained, in the United States, hardliners "are trying to say that anybody who wants to treat Iran as an equal partner in a dialogue is somehow to be attacked. This is precisely the government line for the neo-conservatives." Through their influence in the media and based on the negative image making, hardliners encourage American policy makers and institutions to continue a hostile discourse in dealing with Iran. Organizations such as "American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee or AIPAC… [is] certainly one of the major founding sources for these individuals who are trying very hard to convince the U.S. government to take a hostile posture with regard to Iran." This kind of approach creates a short sighted paradigm where the wall of mistrust grows taller between the two countries.

The firmness and inflexibility of groups such as AIPAC represents the notion of firmness in national identity or what Ricoeur (1992: 124) calls the notion of idem identity in the concept of narrative identity, where the "permanence in time" element of identity prevails over the more flexible and change-oriented element of national identity. In the last three decades, this groups' firmness of position blocked any attempt for the resolution of the issue between the two states. Under this circumstance, Ricoeur (1992: 3) continues, as "long as one remains within the circle of sameness-identity [idem], the otherness of the other than self offers nothing original." As long as the United States demonizes the Islamic Republic, the Iranians will not be ready to embrace even positive moves by the United States. As a result of this approach, the two countries remained in the phase of hostility for almost 30 years and, as Beeman emphasized, "I would think that nothing is going to happen until we are in a situation that we establish some kind of relationship with each other," to promote change and open a line for a dialogue.

The result of a hostile discourse and non-dialogue with Iran was an approach based on a misunderstanding of Iran among American leaders and policy makers. The lack of dialogue prevented a meaningful understanding of Iran's motivations behind its actions. This misunderstanding caused the U.S. to approach Iran with a Cold War mentality and to seek regime change in Iran. The American leaders concluded that by imposing difficult condition on Iranians, they might break down the country and cause a pro-American uprising. Beeman explained:

> I think the problem is that the United States government has a very simplistic view …. They know that the young people in Iran and Iranian population have generally a positive view of American culture. But, they assume, because the Iranian population is favorable towards the United States therefore, they are going to be susceptible to calls on the part of the United States to overthrow their own government. This is one of the very simplistic things that the American officials

have been trying to promulgate. For instance, they think if Iran can be shocked by- for example dropping bombs- this is one of the things that they thought about it, or if Iranian people can be made uncomfortable enough through economic sanctions, they will rise up and overthrow the clerical establishment. Now, I heard this from many, many American officials, and every time I hear this I am amazed frankly by the stupidity of this scenario. These are people, who don't know anything about how the Iranian government is constructed, or how the Iranian constitution works, and the idea that somehow you make people miserable and then they rise up and overthrow their leaders as a result, is an extremely foolish notion. The Iranian people may not always like their leaders, but they love their country. When you love your country, even if you don't like your leaders, you try to improve things; you don't try to destroy things.

This, Beeman suggested, is why the United States implementation of regime change policy and sanctions against the Islamic Republic did not result in an uprising of Iranians against their government. The misunderstanding of how the Islamic Republic works and the ineffectiveness of U.S. policies became clear as the Islamic Republic survived the chaotic post-revolutionary era, came out of an eight year bloody war with Iraq, survived the American sanctions and regime change policy, gained experience in the regional and international arena in how to deal with challenges, and became a more influential country in the region.

To change this negative dynamic, Beeman expressed that a respectful approach and appropriate language for the other must be restored between the two states. In his belief, "whereas the United States and Iran both agree on the need for respect, they don't agree on each party deserving respect from the other." This mentality creates a common hostile rhetoric where, as Beeman (2005) notes, the Iranian side frequently called the U.S. the "Great Satan" and where the Americans treated Iranians as "Mad Mullahs." To prevent further damage and reduce the current tensions between the two states, Beeman emphasized, "one important point in trying to improve the relationship between the United States and Iran is to establish an ethic of mutual respect between the two

countries." Here, he continued, the effort should be to use a respectful language in order to establish a collaborative communication channel:

> If you read my earlier book, L*anguage, Status, and Power in Iran,* you see that my point about how language is used in Iran and in Iranian discourse is that one of the things that is the hallmark of discourse in Iran is the ability to reframe an argument. Specially the ability to reframe a social situation, so it becomes more formal or less formal, more *'baten'* and less *'zaher,'* this is a very great ability on the part of Persian speakers.

The complexity of the Iranian way of communication requires a deep understanding of how they convey their message and how they receive messages from others. Intimidating rhetoric used by Americans proved to be ineffective in scaring their Iranian counterpart, and only proved to be damaging. For example, the pre-conditions that the U.S. imposes before the beginning of any talks with Iran is only one ineffective way of communication which hurts the Iranians sense of pride and makes them more resistant in their standings with the U.S. Ahmad and Forst (2005: 9) argue that "progress is impossible without respectful dialogue," and respect is shown by the way the parties interact with each other. In the US-Iran relationship, as Beeman advocated, the only legitimate way to deal with Iran is to use an ethic of respect towards the other without imposing any pre-conditions.

I finished my conversation with Beeman with a sense of the immediate need to develop a better understanding of Iran and to approach it differently. As he noted, the lack of direct communication and interaction in the last 30 years created an environment where Iran has not been understood correctly. To break down this non-dialogue and misunderstanding, immediate talks should occur between the two states.

To begin talks, however, there is a need to review the past relationship and understand it thoroughly in order to find out the areas of misunderstandings and the areas of potentials that may help the realization of a new course of action. To review the past, I

reframed my questions for my next conversation partner in a way to gain more historical insight about the US-Iran relationship.

Iranian narrative identity

My next conversation partner was Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi. I learned about Amirahmadi (2007) when I read his report on the US-Iran relationship called *In Search Of Understanding and Dialogue*. Later, I discovered that Amirahmadi is a prominent academic who seeks engagement through dialogue between the United States and Iran. Most importantly, I found out that Amirahmadi did not settle for discussing this dispute on a theoretical level in academic setting, but has taken action by establishing an organization, the American Iranian Counsel, to lobby leaders and policy makers in both the U.S. and Iran for a possible engagement. Learning more about him on the American Iranian Counsel and his personal website and by reading his articles led me to contact Amirahmadi because I believed he would be a meaningful conversation partner due to his theoretical and practical activity. He promptly answered and agreed to participate in a conversation with me, which illustrated his readiness for taking action in any process which may lead to a possible step towards engagement.

My conversation with Amirahmadi provided a historical perspective on why Iranians behave a certain way in dealing with the United States. It is his belief that even though the American and Iranian governments had a fair relationship prior to the 1953, when Americans provided aid and assistance to the Iranian government, the dynamics of the relationship in the Iranian view changed dramatically after the CIA coup. Amirahmadi mentioned that the "coup certainly marked a new era in US-Iran and American-Iranian relations." This change was due to the unconditional U.S. post-coup

support for the monarchy in Iran, even though the king abused his power and oppressed

and executed the opposition groups. Amirahmadi explained that during:

> the era of the Shah, Iranians were not very much interested in US-Iran relations because they felt that the relations were not equitable or fair, that is relations were not seen as based on a solid, mutual-benefit ground. People were concerned that the Shah's government was not a legitimate government being that the U.S. had imposed that government on the Iranian people and the country through the 1953 coup against the democratically-elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossaddeq.

This unconditional support for the Shah from 1953 to 1979 changed the

perspectives of Iranians about the U.S. In this period, the United States was seen as a

country with its own agenda such as fighting communism and stopping its influence in

the region by supporting Shah against it. To do so, however, the U.S. ignored any wrong

doing of the monarch such as the oppression of opposition groups in his domestic policy,

which fueled an anti-American narrative in Iran. Amirahmadi noted:

> With the coup, the U.S. and Iran entered into the second period in US-Iran relations. During this period, while the governments came increasingly closer to each other as allies, the Iranian people became much more anti-American. During the Cold War years, the younger Iranians, the more radical Iranians, and the more nationalistic Iranians, religious and secular, became increasingly anti-American. … America for the first time entered the Iranian political culture as an imperialist power bent on exploiting and dominating the country. After the coup, it was not just the Communists who were anti-American, but also an absolute majority in the nation. That was a major change in the US-Iran relationship.

The United States, which had been seen as a progressive country that helped Iran in the

first half of the 20th century, now became the figure of an arrogant foreign force in Iran.

This conceptual development in the Iranian mind aligns with what Edward Said (1994)

called the notion of the United States as an imperialistic country in the Middle East.

Previously, Britain and Russia, with their political games in Iran, were considered as

imperialistic figures. Now, it was the United States who replaced these previous super

powers. As a result, an Iran that potentially could have remained a friendly country

instead became distinctly anti-American. These developments led the opposition groups to sharpen their criticism of the Shah and the U.S., and to come into the streets of Iran to protest against these two figures during 1978.

Once Iranians realized the assistance and unconditional support of the United States for the Iranian monarch, anti-Americanism became a part of their protest. Amirahmadi pointed out that

> The revolution in 1979 had basically two goals. One was to fight the dictatorship of the Shah and to establish democracy, and the other one was to fight the domination of America and create an independent Iran. Freedom and independence were the two slogans of the revolution. Independence was directed toward the U.S. domination and freedom was directed toward the dictatorship of the Shah. That is how the Iranian revolution became very much integrated into this idea of anti-Americanism that preceded it.

The political oppression imposed by Shah and ignored by the U.S., the memory of the 1953 coup, the 1964 immunity act for the U.S. military personnel in Iran approved by Shah, and the Shah's exploitation of the Iranian traditional culture created a strong anti-Shah wave with a taste of anti-Americanism among Iranians. The revolution and the defeat of the Shah and his main supporter, then, gave Iranians a sense of pride in their new found independence. As Amirahmadi explained, from an impartial perspective, the Iranian revolution and its anti-U.S. rhetoric may be interpreted as a move by a nation in search of its freedom from a dictator and independence from a dominant foreign force.

Amirhmadi stressed the anti-American narrative reached its peak when Iranian revolutionaries took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran, which was the beginning of open hostility between the two states. Iranians saw the 1979 admittance of the Shah into the United States for medical treatment as another attempt by the U.S. and Shah to re-establish the dictatorship and they feared another occurrence similar to the 1953 coup

plot. This interpretation motivated the extreme elements of the revolutionaries to move

from anti-American rhetoric into anti-American action. Amirahmadi pointed out:

> A turning point in the post-revolution came when the young Islamic radicals took American diplomats and embassy employees in Tehran hostage for 444 days. Subsequent developments simply reinforced the hostility and created a situation between the U.S. and Iran that I have in a few places called "a spiral conflict;" a conflict that regenerates itself, a conflict that grows even when the two sides try to be nice to each other.

Americans looked at the hostage crisis as the violation of international law against their

sovereignty by Iranians and this is the source of their hostility towards the Islamic

Republic. The subsequent events only increased the tension between the two countries.

On one hand, Iran's holding of the hostages for 444 days, the increase in the Anti-

American rhetoric, the use of anti-Israeli rhetoric as a close ally of the U.S., and the

Iranian support for Islamic groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas in the region increased

the Americans doubt about the nature of the regime in Iran. On the other hand, events

such as the failed hostage rescue mission conducted by the Carter administration, support

for Saddam Hussein during Iran-Iraq war, policy of regime change towards Iran, and the

U.S. led multi-level sanctions against Iran have increased the level of antagonism against

the U.S. among Iranians, resulting in what Amirahmadi calls a spiral conflict.

However in late 1990s, after years of antagonism, there was a change in discourse

within the Islamic Republic in how to deal with the rest of the world. Iranians illustrated

their willingness for a change by choosing the former reformist President Mohammad

Khatami into office in 1997. Amirahmadi looked at this moderation as a potential that

still exists in Iran. He noted:

> Today, the pro- and anti-Americans are in the minority while a large majority has developed a more nuanced position about the U.S. They are neither for nor against the U.S. They want to have good relations with the U.S., a relationship

that benefits both nations. I must also add that the Iranian people have, as a whole, become more positive about the West. They do not think of the West or the U.S. in terms of imperialism and the like categories as in the past, and have, generally, a positive view of the global community. They like Europeans, Canadians, Americans, Latin Americans, and everybody else.

As the Iranian population is still young and in search for a better democracy and a better relationship with the rest of the world, including the United States, they represent a vast potential that exists in Iran. The positive tendency of Iranian youth towards the West should be looked at as an asset that needs careful attention among the policy makers and leaders in the U.S. As Beeman (2005) notes, this generation will enter in the Iranian socio-political scene in the next five to ten years. By taking an inclusive approach, this young generation could be developed as an asset for collaboration in the future.

Based on the potentials in the Iranians' society, Amirahmadi suggests that the way to deal with Iran is to work on mutual interest and expand understanding instead of focusing on the differences. The current hostility is the result of the last three decades of antagonism and harsh rhetoric between the two governments. Amirahmadi emphasized the importance of working on mutual interests:

> They should stay more with the issues that bond them rather than the issues that divide them. If they begin to do these things, I think the relationship can quickly improve. I said it quickly improves because the infrastructure for improvement is there; the people are not hostile to each other in the two countries, the governments are. So, the infrastructure of the people is healthy. The market is there, the investment opportunity is there, the economical opportunities are there. All kinds of opportunities for cooperation and coordination … are there.

Even common sense tells us that a policy of rapprochement, instead of 30 years of containment, may be more effective in dealing with Iran. The question remains as to whether the United States is willing to use common sense in dealing with Iran. In one of his presidential rallies in Pennsylvania on October 29, 2008, now President Obama

expressed his commitment to implement reason in the U.S. foreign policy arena in dealing with other countries. He said he would change the dominant ideological basis of the current U.S. foreign policy into a common sense policy. If he implements his campaign promises and if his understanding of "common sense" translates to the same approach advocated by the experts in this study: to soften the language, use respect, engage rather than antagonize; then the potential for a positive response exists in Iran. The missing part is to implement the common sense to have a dialogue, bridge the differences, and engage in order to benefit from a mutual relationship.

Amirahmadi's brief review of the past history of the two countries' relationship hopefully helps us better understand the development of hostility between the two states in the past 55 years. This review of the past for a new understanding aligns with Ricoeur's (1984: 54) notion of mimesis where he says "[w]e are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time." By reading Amirahmadi's story, there may be a new understanding of the past with a look at the possibilities for the future which may lead us to end up in a better course of action in the present.

At this point, however, the question remains as to why the two countries cannot change the current hostile narrative as Amirahmadi proposed. The story of my next conversation partner, Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, addresses the cause of this hostility. Pickering pointed out the necessary action to go beyond this current hostile narrative to reach a common ground.

Domestic politics, forgiveness, and courageous leaders

I learned about Pickering through my third conversation partner Amirahmadi. After my conversation with Amirahmadi, I translated two of his articles from Farsi into English and developed a working relationship with him. During that period, I asked him if he knew anybody who could share their insights on the US-Iran relationship with me. Amirahmadi introduced me to the former Ambassador Pickering and arranged my contact with him, which I followed up by sending an email and requesting a conversation about my research topic. Pickering kindly accepted my request and I sent him a set of guiding questions for his review prior to our conversation. During our conversation, there were themes that emerged as I tried to deepen my understanding of this crisis between the two countries. The themes included domestic politics as a barrier for engagement, forgiveness and trust building as necessary components to move beyond the current hostility, and courageous leaders as necessary for shifting the paradigm.

One of the reasons why the two countries have remained in this antagonistic paradigm may derive from the restricted parameters within which the leaders of the two countries perform. Pickering pointed out that the leaders of the two countries have been prisoners of their own domestic political framework. He said:

> I think a lot of it had to do with the political environment inside each country. To some extent, the reluctance of the leadership in each country to take a chance within the context of that political environment of making a forward move that would be seen perhaps as being weakness in the face of the confrontation with the other. [These leaders worried] whether in fact the other country was truly ready to take some forward steps or was only seeking to use engagement as a way of perhaps levering from the other side more concessions rather than being genuinely interested to find a win-win agreement. In these kinds of cases the fact that is certain is that to make progress both sides have to find the way to make concessions. … leaders don't like to take the risk that they would get involved in a situation making concessions, the end result to which would be all the benefits for the other side and no benefit for them.

Under this circumstance, leaders chose not to risk exposure, but rather to demonize the other and gain political popularity within their constituencies rather than recognizing the legitimacy of the other and go against the political norm in their respective countries. Pickering continued, saying this dilemma "is in fact something that becomes an emotional issue which tends to stand in the way of reality and maybe an ability to use diplomacy to achieve national interests as opposed to merely being a kind of resistant party in a set of difficulties." In the US-Iran case, Pickering's point is clear.

For instance, during his presidential campaign, when President Obama announced he would sit down with Iranian leaders to negotiate and advocated that leaders should talk even to their enemies, he was criticized sharply by both parties in Washington as being naïve in his approach towards Iran. As a result, in his first press conference as the president elect in November 7, 2008, when he was asked to respond to the congratulatory letter for his election from the Iranian president, he followed the established norm of creating pre-conditions to discourse, quoting the need for Iran to agree to "no nuclear weapon development [for Iran and] a cessation of aiding terrorist groups" (Cillizza, 2008: 1). Although there is no solid proof about Iran's development of nuclear weapons or their support for terrorist groups, this language struck me as accusatory and reminded me of the antagonistic rhetoric we have heard from leaders over the past 30 years. If this is Obama's pattern, then the opportunities may be ignored again. The power of the political establishment caught in the prevailing paradigm seems to restrict even Obama, who presents himself as a messenger of change, if his first press conference as president elect was any indication of his approach. The question is if there is a real possibility for changing this hostile paradigm.

A level of forgiveness may be necessary before this paradigm could be shifted. Pickering described the role of forgiveness as an important and positive move forward from antagonism to engagement:

> I think an ability to accept apology and an ability to accept the sense that the other side recognizes that it might have made a mistake is the beginning of forgiveness. … It is also true that at least, in some societies, being able to put historical barriers behind one by in fact having a conversation about regret, apology, and change are all part of the process.

After the passage of time and as the wounds of hostile actions lose their strength within the historical memory of nations, opportunity grows for the parties involved in a conflict to forgive the other. Obama's advocacy for change creates an encouraging atmosphere for forgiveness. Enough time may have passed to allow both Iran and the U.S. to forgive what happened. This hopeful atmosphere, however, has not always existed.

In Pickering's opinion, forgiveness is one of the more difficult responsibilities that leaders shoulder, for, as Ricoeur (1996: 11) describes: "forgiving is not the exercise of an easily granted forgiveness – that which once again is reduced to forgetfulness – but the difficult practice of responding to a request for forgiveness." Obama will need to be ready to recognize every opportunity, direct or indirect, which may come his way. For example, the Iranian president's congratulatory letter to president elect Obama could be interpreted as a way for putting the past behind and opening up new possibilities. If Obama does not acknowledge this letter and refuses to capitalize on this opportunity by opening even a small line of communication, another opportunity will be lost, repeating the paradigm of the past three decades. The change of perspective needed here is for leaders on both sides to not look at forgiveness as a sign of losing pride or showing

weakness; on the contrary, forgiveness shows their capacity as leaders to forgive the other side for a bigger purpose.

This perspective of forgiveness requires courageous leaders able to act. The process will not be unchallenged. As Pickering emphasized, disagreements "exist often in diplomacy and it takes serious leadership to be able to overcome them." However, before the leaders can make any effort in moving forward, Pickering emphasized, dialogue and talks are a crucial medium to expand area of interests. "Obviously, the ideal set of circumstances is win-win. And how you can portray that to the other side as an opportunity is a serious challenge. And to some extent you have to have discussion in order to be able to do that." In his opinion, leaders need to take initiative to discuss their differences and create opportunities for further engagement. Pickering provided an example of leadership for dissolving tension between the U.S. and China in the past:

> One of the things, that I think, was most useful when we first started to speak to the Chinese was that both the U.S. side and the Chinese side, Dr. Kissinger and Zhou Enlai, wanted to speak about each other's views of the international scene, the world at large, the aspiration and the role and place of their country and how that related to the other side. To me, that kind of dialogue is enormously important and could very constructively set the stage for then talking about critical issues.

Once the U.S. and Iran can trust each other on less threatening issues and create a positive atmosphere by focusing on shared values and mutual interests, it may be possible to further the talks and include critical issues between the two countries. Under such a positive circumstance, the other party is encouraged to become involved in the process and be more constructive and take their own positive steps. Obama once expressed his willingness to engage in talks with non-friendly countries, including Iran. He is the President of the United States now and the question remains whether he, as the leader of

the most influential country in the world, is willing to initiate talks as he advocated during his presidential campaigns. His initiation of talks with Iran could disarm the Islamic Republic when they justify their hostility by recalling the U.S. intention over many years to change the regime in Iran.

Although Pickering mentioned the political system as the challenge for a possible engagement, by referring to some historical experiences, he was optimistic about the possibility for engagement. In his opinion, there is a need at this stage for courageous leaders who can forgive, build trust, and take initiatives to move beyond the hostile discourse that became the norm in the last 30 years. Pickering's idea coincides with Ansari's (2006: 241) advocacy for courageous leaders and how to move beyond the restricting paradigm:

> To surmount this culture and to overcome the consensual momentum will require leadership of extraordinary imagination, vision, and courage. America in particular must think in terms of not only winning the war but winning the peace, by recognizing that Iran-US relations in the twentieth century have been defined as much by collaboration as confrontation, even after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and that compromise has and continues to be possible. A preoccupation with conflict is blinding us to the opportunities for the future.

For my next conversation partner, however, the challenge of bypassing the difficulties in this relationship is enormous. Dr. Hamid Dabashi at Columbia University focused on the structural problems in the American and Iranian political systems as a barrier to progress.

Political Cultures as the Structural Problem

I learned about Dr. Dabashi when I listened to his discussion with another academic on an Iranian radio station broadcasted in the U.S. Dabashi attracted my attention due to his vast western philosophical knowledge, awareness about Iranian culture, his accomplishments as a professor and his publications on Iran. I thought

Dabashi would bring value to my research because he could discuss the US-Iran conflict on a philosophical level. I emailed Dabashi and asked for a conversation with him and he kindly agreed to do so. The concepts such as political culture as barriers in the two countries, constitution of enemy, and post-modern complexity of this relationship with its different players were among the dominant themes throughout our conversation.

In Dabashi's belief, the political structures in the two countries were the main barriers to the normalization of relationship between the two nations. In his view, the two governments are restricted by the political systems within which each performs. On the political cultures in the two countries Dabashi pointed out that

> countries from a strategic and positional perspective are defined in a specific political culture. For example, in the American political culture Israel is defined as a friendly country, an ally, and a country that protects the U.S. interest. Now, you can discover as many Israeli spies as you want who spy on the U.S., …, steal American top secret documents, yet, despite when these facts are discovered, which contradicts the nature of a friendly country, nevertheless, there is no change in the assumption about Israel in the U.S. On the other hand, Iran is defined as an enemy in this culture. Now, it does not matter that Iran helped the U.S. in its military attack against Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, it does not matter how Iran let the U.S. air force to use its national air space, or it does not matter how much shared interests from an strategic perspective they have in the Persian Gulf; these realities, do not change the negative picture that is given to Iran.

Dabashi believed this political culture in the U.S. has created an illusion for the American government which has prevented it from dealing with Iran on the basis of realities on the ground. He also acknowledged that the same political culture exists in Iran which does not allow Iranian politicians to release themselves from this restricted paradigm:

> In Iran, they made Israel as an enemy meaning that they pictured Israel as the enemy of Iran. But, the reality is that during Iran-Iraq war, the Islamic Republic imported weapons through Israel which is a friendly act from the Israeli side. Nevertheless, despite Israel helping Iran, still, the negative picture of Israel in the Iranian political culture does not change.

To explain what it means to be involved in this type of relationship, Dabashi emphasized: "What I want to say is that, here, we are not performing within a real framework. The whole thing is based on a false premise. And these false premises are major parts in these political cultures." In regard to my research topic and how the two states antagonize each other, Dabashi explained that "the American political culture is all based on the concept of enemy. One time, this enemy was Taliban, then Iraq, and now is becoming Iran. In Iran, there is the same story. Now, the constitution of enemy is clearly dominant in the Iranian political culture." Dabashi's points about the structure of political culture in the two countries illustrated the challenges that exist in bridging the two sides of this conflict. To understand better the root cause of this structural problem, I asked Dabashi how and why political cultures are involved in the acts of antagonizing and demonizing.

Dabashi noted that these types of political cultures need what he called "the constitution of enemy." He clarified that he borrowed the term from German political philosopher Carl Schmitt (2007) who believed the concept of the constitution of enemy has a philosophical root in the survival of each political culture. Dabashi noted:

> the democratic institutions that exist in the United States look at the constitution of the enemy as a theoretical concept. This is a philosophical concept when you constitute an enemy. Carl Schmitt believes that until you create an enemy, wisdom can not be created in a political culture. Advancing wisdom in a political culture, as Schmitt states, depends on the constitution of enemy.

As Dabashi explained, through the constitution of enemy, the hardliners in the U.S. and Iran were able to antagonize each other and further their own policies on their national stage. The United States presents Iran as an enemy and justifies its various expensive military programs in relation to the Iranian threat. The establishment of a missile defense system in Hungary proposed by President George W. Bush to defend NATO allies from a

possible missile attack by Iran, which was argued in late 2007 and early 2008, is the latest case. On the other hand, Iran makes the same argument against the United States by saying that the U.S. intends to overthrow the Islamic Republic. This U.S. policy allows the Islamic Republic to militarize the internal situation in the country, increase its own defense budget to counter the Americans antagonism, and oppress any democratic movement within the country which resists for a more democratic society, all of which undermine a belief that the U.S. intends to overthrow the government. Still, the contrary beliefs remain. The two countries entered and remain in the paradigm of the constitution of enemy because it not only allows them to justify their restrictive policies and self-serving agendas, but also to create a philosophical argument to counter the other side's arguments and actions.

The failure of the two countries to establish a relationship in the past three decades illustrates Dabashi's point. Despite the notion of constitution of enemy, the U.S. and Iran had talks on several occasions in the last decade alone, but were not able to develop those talks into engagement. Talks about how to deal with Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan prior to the U.S. attack on Afghanistan or occasional talks in Iraq over the security of that country represent these opportunities. When I asked Dabashi about why the U.S. and Iran were not able to advance these random talks into deeper engagement, he pointed out that this is "because they are involved continuously in the constitution of enemy." He added that, "we see this method in both countries that are facing each other. So, there is this stubbornness in both countries and its direct damage is the global comprehensiveness of both cultures." This structural problem of creating enemies to further their own policies, which creates a paradigm of fear and the ability to fund that

fear, has already damaged the reputations of the two countries for they no longer base their actions on the mutual respect and understanding of each other, the values and ethics that form the foundations of both countries and on which they were both founded. For the last 30 years, Iran has been called a sponsor of terrorism and the U.S. became the symbol of a unilateralism in dealing with international crisis, especially in the last eight years.

In addition to the existence of a political culture which leads to the constitution of enemy, Dabashi also emphasized that the post-modern complexity is another element that negatively influences the US-Iran relationship. In Dabashi's opinion, the conflict between the United States and Iran is not independent from other players in the regional and international scene. There are many regional and international players who have interests in the US-Iran relationship and influence this relationship in the direction that promotes their own interests. He noted:

> In the international relationships, it is not possible to limit the US-Iran relationships only to the relationship between these two countries. The relationships are like a chess game now. Moving pieces in this game changes the relationship among many other pieces. … the reality of the current international relations is that we can not think about the international issues from a national perspective anymore. … we need to think regionally, then, ultra regional. For example, think about the relationship between the U.S. and Venezuela, which is located in the American continent. The US-Venezuela relationship is influenced by the Iran-Venezuela relationship. … We need to stop seeing this problem from a dual relationship between the two countries and two cultures. Instead, we need to see the international political scene as a chess board.

What Dabashi mentioned in our conversation aligns with what Geertz (1988) called the impossibility of looking at the world in the terms of black and white. There are many players in this interrelated world and their interests and influence must be considered for better understanding of the US-Iran conflict. Dabashi emphasized that it would be a

mistake to look at the US-Iran relationship only in terms of these two countries and noted that "we should not ignore the role of countries such as Israel and Pakistan. Countries like Israel, as Pakistan, their interests and their existence depends on the hostility between the U.S. and the countries in the region." Dabashi continued by providing an example about the American Israeli Public Affair Committee, where "there are 70,000 members that are constantly working to inflame the fire between the two countries." The survival of these organizations and their respective countries depend upon the hostility between the U.S. and a country like Iran. By exaggerating the threat of Iran, for example, an organization such as AIPAC aims to justify further monetary and military assistance from the U.S. to Israel. While Dabashi is pessimistic about the political cultures in the two countries and the game played by the players in the international arena, he sees existing potentials between the two nations.

At the end, Dabashi provided a message of hope in our conversation towards these existing potentials in the civil societies of the two countries; from people in academia to people on the street. He pointed out:

> The relationship that normal people, experts, and people like professor Beeman and others see in regard to the US-Iran relationship is a cultural perspective that are observed by the people, like us, who are interested in cultural matters. We are from that culture and are living here. In case of Mr. Beeman, he belongs to this culture but he conducts research about that culture. We hope for a friendly relationship between the two countries and the two cultures. … Right now there is an antagonism in the official relationship between the two countries, still, the Iranian youth, but not just the youth, are interested in America, American culture, American literature, American music, and American pop culture. … [For example] even after the September 11, 2001, as you know, the young people [of Iran] gathered in *Mohseni* square to show their solidarity with the Americans.

These potential groups from both countries, who want to interact and strengthen their ties with each other, are the opposite of the hostility that exists in the nature of the political

cultures with the two countries. While Dabashi acknowledges the existence of the opposing groups in the two nations, those who benefit from the status quo and those who desire a better relationship, there is hope that although the strength of the people in the face of the political structure is limited, nevertheless, the people can depict a better future with their own messages. Kearney (1998: 227-9), ultimately, confirms that it is the power of narrating different stories by others that can challenge and re-realize the official story of the state and perhaps provide alternatives.

My conversation with Dabashi worked as an eye opener for me. I was amazed by the depth of his insights on the structural problem in front of a possible engagement between the two nations. His description of the problem not only illustrated the impasse of the two states, but it also imposed a dilemma in front of me as a researcher who tries to realize a better course of action as an alternative to the current hostility. As I faced this dilemma and thought about how to seek a resolution for this impasse, I also worked on designing a different set of questions, to engage my next conversation partner, so that together we could tackle the structural challenges and hopefully move beyond the dilemma. When reflecting on my questions, I thought I needed to reframe them in a way that encourages my partner to discuss the necessary measures that need to occur to encourage the emergence of alternative stories to challenge the official narrative. With this in mind and despite being a little nervous about my conversation with Dr. Gary Sick due to his rank in the Carter administration, I prepared to talk and seek his insights on the issues between the U.S. and Iran.

The Necessity of Dialogue and Hopeful Signs

I was introduced to Dr. Gary Sick by one of my earlier conversation partners, Dr. Amirahmadi. He asked me if I was interested in having a discussion with Sick about my research topic. I knew of Sick, due to his very crucial position in the former President's Carter administration as a member of his National Security Council during the hostage crisis in 1979-80 and his extensive publishing on Iran. I was very grateful and contacted Sick by email and he agreed to have a conversation with me about the topic of my research. The main themes we discussed included the necessity of dialogue, current status between the US-Iran, how to create an understanding between the two, and the possibility for a different course of action.

The establishment of communication and beginning of dialogue are crucial steps to break down the stagnated paradigm of non-dialogue in this relationship. Sick emphasized that it "is, however, the political side that has prevented the two sides from coming to really communicate with each other." To be released from this phase, the medium of dialogue is needed to change the dynamics. Sick argued:

> I think both sides have legitimate concerns about the other. That would be, in fact, a basis for any kind of negotiation. Those concerns would have to be dealt with directly and that is why I personally think that direct negotiations between the United States and Iran are very good idea.

For Sick, the result of 30 years of policy of non-dialogue resulted in missed opportunities and further misunderstanding of each other for the two nations. He believes that at the current time, "the possibility is there, it just has not been developed thus far." At this point, as many other of my research partners emphasized the importance of dialogue, I realized the significance of Khatami's call for "dialogue among civilization" as the medium to reduce further conflicts and tensions, which may otherwise bring catastrophic

consequences. Sick was another research partner who saw the need for dialogue and emphasized the importance of this specific time for the beginning of talks to stop the crisis from escalation.

Sick believed that there has been a change in the discourse between the two countries in the recent time. He described the conferences in Iraq over the security of the country during 2007-08 and in Europe over the status of the US-Iran relationship in 2008 as positive signs that might change the dynamics of the hostile relationship between the two countries. He noted:

> So, things are not necessarily staying the same and I think there is real sign. Plus, do you know, Senator Obama has talked about having direct negotiation with Iran, which is something that no presidential candidate had ever said before. So, I think there is some change happening and I see also in Iran a greater willingness to even talk openly about having a diplomatic relation for instance with the United States. So, I think things are moving maybe not very fast and it may not be permanent, but there are some hopeful signs as well as non-hopeful signs.

While the two countries never had an official or public discussion in the last 30 years, recent developments indicated that there may be a change in their approaches towards each other. On one hand, as Sick emphasized, "what we are seeing right now is the U.S. becoming a more and more active participant in the discussions that have been going on for some time between Iran and Europe. …, the United States has been taking more and more of active view toward negotiation and diplomacy over [the last] two years." On the other side, the Iranian government has showed interest in talking with the U.S. In fact, the current Iranian president, Ahmadinejad, expressed his willingness to talk directly to the U.S. president on several occasions. So with the U.S. via Obama indicating a willingness for dialogue and with Iran making overtures to initiate talks, this seems to be a breakthrough in the tradition of non-discourse, what Sick calls 'hopeful signs.'

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The question is how to develop what Sick called positive signs into meaningful talks and actual engagement. This may be a daunting task, considering that in President Obama's first press conference after being elected, he met President Ahmadinejad's proposal to talk with the same preconditions as the previous administrations and, as of yet, no formal response has been made. Considering how previous talks disintegrated into occasions to accuse and demonize each other continually, there is the realist fear that the two nations will never be able to rise above the demonizing discourse. Sick believed, along with Amirahmadi and Pickering, that courageous leaders are needed to transform the hostility and hesitation into dialogue and engagement, creating incentive to move past the complex incentives that exist to do nothing.

> I would argue that the hard facts include the dangers of continuing hostility. That is a hard fact and it is one that many of the senior policy makers actually are concerned about. So, I don't think that it is a matter of finding a secret way to influence policy makers. I think being out in front and making the arguments that what the benefits might be are arguments in themselves ….

According to Sick, the time is now for leaders to take action. He believed there are encouraging signs on both sides that show the willingness of both governments for talks. For him, the fact that the officials from the two countries met over the issue of Afghanistan, Iraq, and even in Europe over the Iranian nuclear issue to discuss their issues, could be interpreted as encouraging development between the two countries. These positive signs may be the beginning of a break down in the wall of mistrust between the U.S. and Iran and may guide the two sides into more meaningful dialogue. Then, there might be hope that these new developments may change the hostile dynamics that have existed between the two for a long time.

Based on the hostile history between the two countries and the many missed opportunities, at the end of our conversation the question for me was whether we were being too idealistic about the possibilities. I wondered if what Sick called positive signs and a hopeful spectrum were supported with facts. Sick noted that "I would argue that the hard facts include the dangers of continuing hostility. That is a hard fact and it is one that many of the senior policy makers actually are concerned about." Then, when I asked Sick how could we advocate the shift of paradigm and possibly influence the leaders and policy makers, he mentioned "I don't think that it is a matter of finding a secret way to influence policy makers. I think being out in front and making the arguments that what the benefits might be are arguments in themselves and they seem to be having some success." Even though the task of bridging and engagement seemed to be difficult, at the end, what Sick reminded me was what I had heard many times from my other research participants: the power of single stories that we can produce to minimally influence and change the dynamics of the official stories of the two states. On a personal level, I realized even my writing could generate a new narrative where common sense and shared stories could be a part of a larger scale campaign for advocating a peaceful resolution of this crisis.

After my conversation with Gary Sick, I made contact with my conversation partners in Iran to finalize our meetings. Out of five contacts, two of them responded to my emails and kindly agreed to share their perspectives and experiences with me. While on the plane to Iran, I thought I had to really appreciate the good will of my two participants to talk with me on a critical subject due to the risks they faced in Iran.

The Dilemma of the Islamic Republic

Upon my arrival to Iran, I called Mr. Abbas Abdi to set an appointment for our conversation. Now a researcher and freelance journalist in Tehran, Abdi began as a one of the original student idealists during the 1979 revolution and participated in the hostage taking of Americans. Years later, disillusioned with the dogmatism of the political system, Abdi became a strong supporter of the reform movement prior to and during Khatami's presidency. He was imprisoned, as indicated above, for his political activity in Iran, which included conducting a poll that showed around 80% of Iranians expressed their desire for a closer relationship with the United States. He warmly invited and received me at his house in Tehran, Iran, on August 18th, 2008, where we had a two-hour long conversation. In our meeting, themes that were developed included the structural problem in the US-Iran relationship as the main obstacle, the Islamic Republic's dilemma in dealing with the U.S., and the role of Iranian-Americans in the U.S.

In dealing with the United States, the Islamic Republic faces a dilemma which is not encouraging as far as it concerns the two nations' engagement. Similar to the strong concerns expressed by Dabashi, Abdi believed there is a structural problem in the US-Iran relationship that does not allow the two nations to normalize. However, Abdi looked at the problem from a different perspective than Dabashi:

> The main reason is because the two countries can not sum up their own requests and claims. Their game became a zero-sum game. In reality, Americans have a specific interpretation of the international order and want to impose this system on Iran. On the other hand, the Iranian government does not recognize this global order as defined by the United States. … their opposition to each other derives from the way they see the game. And their game has become a zero-sum game.

What Abdi calls the zero sum game resonates with what Dabashi calls the firm political structure in the two countries which constitute enemy. In this paradigm, no country

initiates engagement, instead they continue animosity by entrenching and finding

strength in their own claims. This is clear as we look at the tentative talks over

temporary issues between the two countries. These talks never moved beyond quick

resolutions spurred by a pressing need, i.e., the Taliban and Iraq. It is this characteristic

of a zero sum game that keeps temporary talks from developing into engagement. As

Abdi's emphasized:

> Their claims interfere with the other one's claims. Of course, there have been instances that their game was played differently and positively. Nevertheless, whenever there was a step forward, after that temporary positive step, they would return two steps backward. The reason why they can't establish a relationship returns to this structural problem.

This is why Abdi disagreed with Pickering and Sick when they saw signs of hope.

Abdi argued there are two dilemmas on two levels for the Islamic Republic. The

first one is that if the Republic engages with the U.S., it contradicts its own values:

> As you know and many other experts agree, the United States and Iran have many common interests in the region. Nevertheless, despite these common interests, and because of this characteristic of their belief system, they can not collaborate continuously with each other. … Now, why do they behave this way? It is clear that America defends this international system because their interests are in it. And, the Iranian side can not think of giving up its own position in regard to this international political order.

Abdi continued that this is a contradiction that the Islamic Republic faces and has not

been able to resolve:

> They can't even say that they don't accept this international order. They go around it and say it indirectly, but the root of the problem is this. Until they recognize such a system, they can not establish a relationship with others. When they accept it, the consequences are going to be much larger and will not be limited to the Iran-US relationship any more. … This is one important point that nobody pays attention to. For example, many people think that the Islamic Republic does not want to negotiate. I am not saying that they want to do so, but even if they desire to do so, they are not able to do so.

Abdi stated that "if Iran gives up, in the domestic policy, it will be a very costly option and move for Iran. Then, they will face consequences that may weaken the position of conservatives inside the country."

This brings the second level of concern for the Islamic Republic to the forefront. If the Islamic Republic engages with the United States, it may become the subject of further scrutiny by the international community. As Abdi emphasized:

> The Islamic Republic feels if it starts to engage and normalize, it needs to completely change its path. Improving the relationship with the U.S. means accepting the international order and, automatically, giving up from 30 years of their own position, the belief is that if this happens, the Islamic Republic may face difficult challenges in their domestic policy.

The internal dilemma and challenge for the Islamic Republic is that the opening of a relationship with the United States would subject the Republic's internal affairs, such as human rights, freedom of press, and other socio-political freedoms, to a deeper scrutiny by the United States and the rest of the western world. In other words, the Islamic Republic does not engage because it realizes that engagement has consequences that would put the Republic's control under threat, because foreign pressure for a more open society may create new possibilities for Iranians in their fight against the state ideology.

The delicacy of the circumstances in Iran, therefore, requires that the American leaders and policy makers be more careful in their approach to the Republic. Employing experts who are aware of the concerns of the Islamic Republic may make the engagement easier and reduce irritation to the Islamic Republic, that is, reducing the threat of internal political interference and regime change; abdicating the pursuit of the U.S. hegemony in the region, recognition for the Islamic Republic as a legitimate government and its acceptance into the global community.

Abdi's source of pessimism originates from his own disillusionment in the Islamic Republic. As a young man, Abdi believed in the ideals of the Revolution and participate fully in the process, even to the storming of the U.S. Embassy. However, as the Revolution was taken over by the more extreme elements within the formation of Islamic Republic, he became disillusioned when he saw the suppression of the Revolution's ideals of political and social freedom, including human rights and freedom of press. Exercising the freedom for which he fought, Abdi criticized and publicized his objections regarding the direction to which the country was headed. For this, he was arrested and, as we know, spent years in prison. Even though, disillusioned Abdi saw a small spot of potential that might help change the direction in the two countries' relationship. He cited the Iranian community in the U.S. as a possible catalyst for changing the dynamics of this relationship if they are able to provide a better understanding of Iran to Americans:

> Of course, this requires that these Iranians be familiar with the Iranian internal affairs and be allowed to take part in this matter. In this case, if they are allowed to actively engage with this issue, they can provide a proper image of Iran and form a lobby in the United States.

It may be that Iranians, like myself, will be able to help explain the motivations that isolate Iran and infuriate the western world, factors like the fear of power loss and the need for equality and respect as a nation.

After my conversations with Dabashi and Abdi, I realized the enormity of the challenges in front of the two nations and their people who work to positively influence the two states for a peaceful resolution of their disputes. Abdi's point also reminded me of my own challenges as a researcher who seeks to figure out an approach which may lead to a peaceful dialogue between the two.

Nevertheless, although Dabashi and Abdi stressed the challenges of influencing the discourse of the two states, however, each of them had a message of hope where I could find potentials for generating a new narrative for an alternative course of action. Abdi's final, hopeful message encouraged me even more because he referred to the significance of Iranians in the U.S., who desire to create an understanding between the two countries, positively influence this hostile relationship, and generate new ideas to bridge the two nations toward a possible engagement. In other words, people who hope to create what Gadamer (2004) calls "fusion of horizon," where the two sides learn about each other and enlarge their original perspectives and understanding about the other. By providing a truer understanding of Iran and Iranians and the motives behind their actions, Iranians living in the U.S. could influence an American dogmatic view towards Iran, which has depicted Iran as a country of fanatics and has been dominant in the U.S. government in the past 30 years. If academics and practitioners are able to provide a better understanding on Iran's motives, then, the American's perspective may expand, which ultimately could bring the two countries closer to finding common grounds.

When I was in Mr. Abdi's house, we broke into laughter several times because he suggested that I change the topic of my research from finding peace to finding war between the two countries; this joke emerged because he thought war would be easier to find and accomplish in today's world! Nonetheless, since he hopes for peace and peaceful coexistence with others in our world, at the end, he encouraged me to continue with my research. I gained the insights of an experienced man who was an early participator within the Islamic Republic, but who is now a main challenger.

I finished my talks with a representative of the revolution in Iran, I realized the time had come to meet with someone who belonged to the new generation of Iranians, those who the Revolution is more of a fairy tale, a generation who has grown up under the socio-political restrictions of the new regime and who are in search of equality and democracy at home and free interaction with the rest of the world. As I left Abdi's home, I was already thinking about my next conversation partner, a graduate student in political science, who represented the potential of youth within Iran.

Demonstrating Leadership

My last conversation partner was Mr. Babak, a graduate student in a political science in a college in Tehran, Iran. Babak did not want his identity to be revealed and this is why I only use his first name. A fresh minded college young man who represents a typical Iranian student, who sees how the many countries in the world are now improving their economic, political and social standing by being a more effective player in the global community and how Iran is isolated and restricted from participation by the ideology and stance of its leaders. He actively follows the political development in Iran and in the international arena. Throughout our conversation, Babak seemed to be hopeful for a better future. This attitude makes Iranians of his age and generation a major source of hope for a better future in Iranian society.

Having been introduced by a round about circuit of friends and relatives, Babak agreed to meet me in his house in Rasht to talk about the US-Iran relationship. Babak represents Beeman's idea that the youth are the great potential within Iranian society, a belief that in Abdi's opinion represents the predicament of the Islamic Republic should they engage with the United States and then are forced to face this generation's demands

for a more open society.   This presents a dilemma in that the potential for the U.S. is also

the problem for the Islamic Republic. So my questions to Babak were how the U.S. can

reduce the notion of threat.

Babak, like Amirahmadi and Pickering, emphasized that by taking a more

proactive and dialogue based role as a world leader, the U.S. may be able to disengage

Iran's defense mechanism, allowing a friendlier engagement of Iran with the western

world, including the U.S. Babak, like many young Iranians, see Obama as a consensus

builder, and there is now a higher hope for the return of the U.S. to the international scene

as a unifying world leader rather than as a unilateral power. Babak suggests that Obama

approach Iran with a humble attitude indicating a leadership quality that is able to

recognize and lay at rest the other's fear.

To implement these ideals into reality, concrete measures such as using a

respectful language is needed to build trust. Since the accusatory language and

demonization of each other has only increased the level of antagonism between the two

nations, a more respectful language is a viable option, and may influence this relationship

in a positive way. Babak agreed with this concept, advocated also by Beeman and

Milani, and said:

> Instead of accusing and threatening Iran, it may be better to soften its tone in
> order to soften Iran's tone. Many times, the language of diplomacy is much more
> effective than the language of force. By the U.S. taking such a step, I mean using
> a respectful and a more diplomatic language in dealing with Iran, this may
> encourage Iran to lessen its hard position. This may be much more effective to
> resolve this problem than using a harsh language and encouraging Iran to use the
> same harsh language.

Many experts believe that President Ahmadinejad won the presidential election in Iran

because the political system in Iran realized they needed a stringent president to counter

the neoconservatives and their harsh approach towards Iran. In a hostile environment, it is easier for the hardliners in Iran to justify their antagonistic policies against the U.S. and suppress Babak's generation claim for the need of a more open society. In a more peaceful environment, the rhetoric of "Great Satan" and "Axis of Evil" may vanish and a more constructive attitude may prevail.

If the U.S. desires a change in Iran, Babak saw the need to engage Iran in the international community. In doing so, Babak surmised, the U.S. may be able to influence the Islamic Republic in an indirect way. On one hand, the Iranian engagement with the international community could be considered an incentive by the U.S. for Iranian engagement. On the other hand, the U.S. may be able to request its demands from the Islamic Republic through the softer approach. Babak noted:

> Isolating Iran is not going to solve any problem, while engaging Iran with the international community results in a better relationship between the two countries and the expansion of democracy within Iran. For example, the United States can help Iran to enter the World Trade Organization, start to trade with Iran, and improve its relationship with Iran, while requiring Iran to stop its support for violent groups in the region, improve their human rights record, and open up the political situation in Iran. On one hand, Iran can see concrete incentives and on the other it sees what needs to be done to gain those incentives. In the diplomatic arena, these are steps that are doable and each of them can help the expansion of the engagement.

Babak's point represents at the very least an untried possibility that has not been attempted in the past. Since his proposal has never been implemented, it may be advantageous to attempt such a policy especially since President Obama has created a receptive atmosphere for dialogue and a possible shift in paradigm.

Babak was my last conversation partner. When I left him, I felt better about my research topic as his message was more hopeful. Nevertheless, his optimism didn't mislead me to distance myself from the reality described by Dabashi and Abdi.

Throughout my conversations with all my research partners, two messages were prevailed: first, almost all of them mentioned the existence of a structural problem in both countries imposed by their political systems; and second, they also conveyed a message of hope by focusing on the potentials that exist in both countries. This dilemma reflects also my challenge throughout my research in re-imagining what the possibilities might be in my text and overcoming the challenges to doing so.

Summary

The preceding data presentation and preliminary analysis provided an introduction to each of the formal research participants. Sometimes, the themes developed throughout the conversations were not specifically related to the research categories; however, due to their importance for providing a better understanding of Iran, they were presented in this Chapter. The data presentation also linked the data to related theoretical concepts from Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Kearney. The next part of this research interweaves these theoretical foundations with the data gathered from the research conversations in order to deepen the understanding of the crisis between the United States and Iran through the analysis of the data. The secondary analysis offers an expanded interpretation and understanding of my research experience with my participants and the insights that they shared with me.

CHAPTER VI

SECONDARY ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this Chapter, I present a secondary reading of the research conversation texts overlaid on the research categories introduced earlier in Chapter Four to generate meaning from their integration and present this meaning in the form of a narrative. Through a deeper analysis of my data, I attempt to obtain new meaning from the review of the past history of the two nations, the United States and Iran, the roots of the problem between the two, and search for ways to move beyond the current restrictions and discover possibilities, through imagination, that never were actualized. The hope is that by imagining differently, there may be a higher chance for each government to expand its horizon and enlarge its perspective, which may help them to understand the other in a truer way, to refigure a new course of action accordingly that could be peaceful and beneficial for both nations. In this Chapter, I use the theoretical concepts of Ricoeur, Kearney, and Gadamer including $mimesis_1$, $mimesis_2$, $mimesis_3$, founding events, narrative identity, forgiveness, power of imagination, and fusion of horizon to analyze the US-Iran issue at a theoretical level to possibly reach new meaning from the past and imagine a better future as a way to uncover a better course of action in the present.

$Mimesis_1$

To better analyze the US-Iran relationship and reach a better understanding, I thought it is necessary to review the past in a deeper sense. Gadamer (1976: xv) notes that "the past has a truly pervasive power in the phenomenon of understanding." The US-Iranian diplomatic relationship goes back almost 60 years. From 1953 to 1979, the

United States operated as a major player in Iranian domestic politics. However, this favored relationship soured and became hostile for the last three decades. Throughout my research conversations, several of my participants emphasized the significance of a new read of the past in order to reach a new understanding and possibly find potentials that were ignored in the fog of the current antagonism. The emphasis placed on the review of the past aligns with Ricoeur's (2005: 180) notion of mimesis in action: As he notes, "*mimesis* is *poiesis*, that is, construction, creation." To construct a new positive relationship, the first step is to genuinely understand the past which resonates with Ricoeur's concept of mimesis$_1$. Therefore, throughout my conversations, I focused on the review of the past to see if we could discover positive aspects that have been ignored or dismissed.

One such opportunity was overlooked, according to Amirahmadi, when the two sides did not try to approach the problem in order to find common grounds and their relationship has been based on retaliation.

> Complicating the situation is also a set of post-revolutionary developments that further increased their misunderstanding and mistrust. The practical responses on both sides have been fatal. Iranians took Americans hostage, and the Americans would support Saddam Hussein in the war against Iran and shoot down an Iranian civilian air plane; Americans would also impose sanctions on Iran and freeze Iranian assets in the U.S.; Iran would develop a clandestine civilian nuclear technology and support Hezbollah and Hamas against Israel. … The American claims against Iran about terrorism, nuclear proliferation, democracy deficit, and opposition to Middle East peace are products of this unfortunate history.

Ricoeur (1983: 67) notes that to comprehend a story or a series of events, it is important to find out "how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion …." In the US-Iran relationship, the hostile reactions toward the other were designed as strategic moves to satisfy the self interests of each state without trying to understand the motivations of

the other and without focusing on the communalities. As a result, demonizing became the norm in this relationship, resulting in a hostile narrative between the two.

Amirahmadi retelling of the history of mistrust and misconception between the two countries is our first stage of the pre-understanding recommended by Ricoeur (1984: 64) when he says we "can see the richness in the meaning of mimesis$_1$. To imitate or present action is first to preunderstand …. Upon this preunderstanding … emplotment is constructed and, with it, textual and literary mimetics." With this new understanding of how the two countries retaliated and reached this critical point in their relationship, with more awareness, we may be able to avoid what caused the problem to escalate to this critical point. Instead of strategic moves and retaliation against the other, with this new realization, we could emphasize our communalities to find common ground rather than emphasizing our differences. Looking for potentials in the past of the two countries may be a constructive way for finding common ground for a new reconstruction.

A genuine review of the past may highlight the latent historical-philosophical communalities that exist in the traditions of the two nations, especially their value systems. According to Milani, we should look for the shared *wisdom*, the idea of something old, foundational, a tradition that can be handed down, and as Riccoer (1983: 67) emphasizes without a retelling this wisdom can be lost; "it is in the act of retelling rather than in that of telling that this structural function of closure can be discerned." In the act of reframing the past history, we may be able to find potentials that can open up new possibilities. Milani reminded us of the similarities between the two countries:

> Iran has had a history of ideas that were democratic, ideas that were rational, ideas that tried to reconcile reason and revelation … that later became the element of modernity. In this country [U.S.] too, I think, what this country is found on is the search for modernity … which derived from democratic ideals.

These shared values in the traditions of the two nations present a sense of the past, a potential common ground for reconstruction. As Ricoeur (1992: 39) notes:

> We have to acquire simultaneously the idea of reflexivity and the idea of otherness, in order to pass from a weak correlation between someone and anyone else, which is too easily assumable, to a strong correlation between belonging to the self, in the sense of mine, and belonging to another, in the sense of yours.

Digging into the past and discovering the shared potentials may highlight the communalities between the two cultures.

Dabashi called this ability to retell the shared potentials between the two countries, "the comprehensiveness of both cultures." Dabashi provided an example of a shared history of where the U.S. and Iran worked together. In the late 1800s and early 1900s individual Americans worked with Iranians in different fields such as education, medicine, finance administration, and military to modernize their systems and win the heart and sympathy of Iranians. As a result of these interactions, the U.S. and Iran built a strong relationship in contrast to other forces such as Britain and Soviet Union which abused Iran for their own advantages. Tapping into the past model of individuals working together is a potential created by this review of the past using the concept of mimesis$_1$, which Ricoeur (1984: 54-7) describes as the need for preunderstanding of a narrative. These potentials, however, have been blocked by the policy of retaliation and repression that exists today. I will now analyze the sources of this antagonism uncovered in my conversations through Ricoeur's (1996) concept of "founding event."

Founding Events as Historical Barriers

In the past 60 years, there were several major historical events that worked as negative dynamics in the US-Iran relationship, including the 1953 CIA coup in Iran, 1979

American hostage crisis in Tehran, the 1988 American bombing of the Iranian passenger

flight 655, and the current nuclear crisis. These events shocked both nations to their very

core, making each country feel violated as Beeman noted:

> in the case of the coup against Mossadegh, the U.S. violated Iran's sovereignty by helping to overthrow a legitimate government and installing a government that would be favorable to the United States. So Iran uses that as a violation of their sovereignty. From the point of the United States the hostage crisis was a violation of American sovereignty, because diplomats are supposed to be protected by the county which they serve.

These events formed a memory in both nations' historical memory which has prevented

both the U.S. and Iran from developing a constructive relationship. Ricoeur (1996: 7)

comments that "what really prevents cultures from allowing themselves to be recounted

differently is the influence exercised over the collective memory by what we term the

'founding events' …." On one hand, the seizure of the U.S. embassy became a part of

the American negative memory about Iran and was the start of an anti-Iranian behavior in

Washington. Gary Sick described the negative image that the 1979 hostage crisis placed

in Americans' memory about Iran and Iranians, noting that "American politicians

remember the pictures of Iranian crowds shouting 'death to America' in front of the U.S.

embassy night after night in American television; I think that left an image that it is not

easy to change." What is ignored in this story is that the Iranian sense of antagonism

began with the violation of their sovereignty in 1953. This sense of violation generated a

counter reaction as Iranians justified the seizure of the U.S. embassy and arguing that

American conduct in Iran was an imperialistic one which had to be stopped by the seizure

of what they called the "spy house." Ricoeur (1992) reminds us that founding events can

create a perceived narrative that encourages stagnation as opposed to an orientation

toward change, where the idem overrides the ipse. The influence of those events on

Iranian and American historical memories was so great as to change policy in a negative way towards the other. Iran took to anti-American rhetoric and the U.S. adopted a hostile stance in return, which grew into a static narrative of antagonism.

The Two Nations Narrative Identity

As a result of the negative influence of the founding events on each other, the narrative identity of the two countries changed to a narrative of hostility. Ricoeur (1992) explains that narrative identity is formed by the relationship between one and another. It is a relationship of "concordance and discordance between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity; the dialectic of the self and the other than self" (Ricoeur 1992: 291). As Amirahmadi explained after "the coup, the U.S. and Iran entered into the second period in US-Iran relations. During this period, while the governments came increasingly closer to each other as allies, the Iranian people became as much more anti-American." This antagonism was fully revealed when Iranian students took over the American embassy in Tehran causing in Gary Sick's opinion, the forcing of the U.S. government into a hostile reaction. Amirahmadi confirmed Sick's point by saying that after the hostage crisis, "the more theoretical hostility became increasingly transformed into practical complaints and conflicts. Both sides have by now developed a laundry bag of grievances against each other that some are real and others are fictional."

This false premise encouraged the antagonism where each country demonizes the other, very similar to the Cold War policy of Carl Schmitt's (2007) "constitution of enemy," which Dabashi said might be one reason why the two countries "can't continue with these negotiations, talks, dialogue, and diplomacy within their political culture and

until these cultures allow them to do so." This rigidity of the two governments is a good example of Ricoeur's (1992) inflexible dimension of a narrative identity: Idem.

Ricoeur (1992: 115-25) further explains that the notion of narrative identity is formed by two dimensions; idem and ipse. Idem is that dimension of identity that remains constant over time, while the ipse is the pole of identity that is oriented towards change. The two dimensions of identity interact with each other, which forms the narrative identity of the two entities. In the US-Iran relationship in the last 30 years, the dominance of idem has over shadowed the ipse of their narrative identity, so their relationship was led by the forces of idem meaning a conservative hard headed approach toward the other. Until recently this antagonism was represented by the hostile rhetoric of President George W. Bush and President Ahmadinejad. We will have to wait to see if the constitution of enemy's narrative continues under President Obama.

If there is willingness, the US-Iran relationship might be influenced by constructive forces within the two political systems. According to Ricoeur (1996), the narrative identity is formed upon the interaction of ipse and idem identity and is influenced by the force of one upon the other. He (1996: 6) argues:

> narrative identity is not that of an immutable substance or of a fixed structure, but rather the mobile identity issuing from the combination of the concordance of the story, taken as a structured totality, and the discordance imposed by the encountered events. … narrative identity takes part in the mobility of the story, in its dialectic of order and disorder.

A positive and constructive approach by one side, even if with minimal impact, could influence positively this narrative of hostility. For example, former Iranian President Khatami's approach towards the rest of the world is a good example of how the forces of change, or ipse, are able to make a small break in the cycle of hostility, or idem.

Khatami's call for "dialogue among civilization" prompted the American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to take action and respond with an apology for the U.S. intervention in Iran in 1953. In fact, Khatami's call for dialogue changed the opinion of much of the world towards Iran as Babak noted:

> Khatami's idea of "dialogue among civilizations" created an opportunity where the relationship between Iran and the West was improved dramatically … Iran attracted more foreign capital than under any other Iranian president. Many foreign companies were in Iran to work and collaborate in Iranian vast projects. Iranians were able to travel easier abroad. Many students received scholarships from foreign embassies in Iran. All these were the result of agreement between Khatami's government and the rest of the world.

For a short while, the interaction between ipse and idem was dominated by the forces of change, which illustrates how a positive action can influence the dynamics in a stagnated relationship. However, ipse alone cannot change a paradigm. The combined diplomatic efforts of Khatami and Albright were not able to push beyond hostile narrative identity, founding events and the idem that ever seeks status quo.

The Importance of Forgiveness

My research partners including Amirahmadi and Pickering suggested that if a move beyond this stagnated process is to be made then one party may need to forgive the other with an ultimate aim of reaching a higher purpose in the relationship and moving past shared memory. Pickering explained how crucial it is:

> to overcome the historical barriers because there is no future if you can not find a way around historical barriers. It is also true that at least, in some societies, being able to put historical barriers behind one by in fact having a conversation about regret, apology, and change are all part of the process.

Change in the US-Iran narrative could not take place as the political cultures used the existing paradigm to block the two states from moving beyond their negative course. What was lacking was forgiveness which according to Ricoeur (2004: 468):

is directed to the unforgivable or it does not exist. It is unconditional, it is without exception and without restriction. It does not presuppose a request for forgiveness. One cannot or should not forgive, there is no forgiveness, if there is any, except where there is the unforgivable.

It appears that the two sides are more concerned with their strategic moves to gain political advantages rather than forgiving and moving beyond this stagnated paradigm. Forgiveness never took place as the two countries always placed preconditions before any talks. These preconditions, contrary to what Ricoeur advocates as the idea of forgiving, create a negative atmosphere where forgiveness becomes impossible because it becomes conditional.

This negative atmosphere might be dispersed by strong leadership who sees the advantage of moving beyond the restrictions of the past. As Ricoeur notes (2004: 285):

> Forgiveness offers itself as the eschatological horizon of the entire problematic of memory, history, and forgetting. This original heterogeneity does not exclude the possibility that forgiveness imprints the mark of its signs on all the instances of the past: it is in this sense that it offers itself as their common horizon of completion.

Amirahmadi emphasized there is a level of leadership involved in forgiving the other party: "At the end of the day, it does not matter who takes the first step or who is seen weak or strong. That becomes irrelevant after the relations starts. In fact, in the future, many may give credit to the guy who starts this process." By forgiving, such leaders may be able to convert the critical situation from obstinacy to forgiveness and its common horizon of absolution.

Building trust, as Pickering argued, does not come from a stick and carrot approach which has become the norm in the U.S. foreign policy towards Iran. True forgiveness in the foreign policy arena, which according to the political norm is unreal and an idealistic wish could be characterized as a transcendental act. As Obama

transcended domestic politics for many during his campaign, the hope is that he can also transcend "business-as-usual" foreign policy, including dealing with Iran. Such a change from stick and carrot to a trust building through dialogue in the U.S. foreign policy may change the dynamics of this hostile relationship resulting in a shift of paradigm.

The fear, of course, is that the Islamic Republic does not respond to a positive initiative by the U.S. and instead interprets it as a weakness. Pickering mentioned that "making a forward move that would be seen perhaps as being weakness in the face of the confrontation with the other" is the biggest fear. However, Ricoeur (2004: 459) emphasizes that the risk is worth the result, that "what is at issue here is nothing less than the power of the spirit of forgiveness to unbind the agent from his act." Even though the Islamic Republic may refuse to engage with the United States, by forgiving, the U.S. could show a new form of leadership and moral standing in the international arena. After all, President Obama claimed during his campaign, real leadership sits down with their enemies and enters into a dialogue, because sitting down with friends does not represent any challenge and does not require real leadership.

Imagining a Different Course of Action

In addition to forgiveness, imagining new alternatives may be required to change the dynamics of the discourse and to move beyond antagonism. In my conversations with my fellow research partners, they shared many stories with implied possibilities that could be implemented. As Kearney (in Ricoeur 1996: 185) explains, "imagination opens us to the foreign world of others by enabling us to tell or hear other stories …." As each participant shared their stories I thought how we could be, as Pickering said, "providing opportunities with [our] own private conversations between the two sides and by making

various suggestions of ways to proceed." The same effort by people on both sides could influence positively the official antagonistic narrative. Beeman commented that "the only thing that you can do is to try to influence public opinion and influence legislatures, write as much as you can" about what you think and how you want to challenge the official narrative. When I asked Milani about imagining alternatives, he said the "way you influence them is by writing op-ed pieces, by writing scholarly essays, by organizing meetings, by trying to have meeting with these people and by teaching students …." Each of my participants' stories became part of a larger story that challenges the current discourse between the two states, which together form an alternative. On the power of little stories, Amirahmadi reinforced the need for people "to become mobilized, engaged, proactive, demanding, and innovative in this relationship. They should form a strong constituency as the matter cannot be just left to their governments." During the Clinton-Khatami's presidencies, there was a rise in alternative stories, like that of Abdi and Rosen. The abductor and abducted generated a story that challenged the antagonistic line of the hardliners in the two countries and symbolizes the power of imagination.

My research participants advocate the power and influence of such stories in the public arena as a necessary practice, implementing Kearney's (2003: 102) power of imagination, which emphasizes that

> no experience is so utterly alien or alienating that it removes all possibility of human response. This response may be in terms of protest, praxis, imagination, judgment or even 'understanding' … but to rule out such possibilities, however tentative or partial, is, it seems to me, to condemn oneself to the paralysis of total incomprehension and, worse, inaction.

As Kearney advocates, imagining alternatives generates new possibilities and he (1998: 28) encourages us to broaden our imaginations because "the status quo reigns supreme

for as long as we refuse our utopian capacity to imagine things being other than they are." After 30 years of demonizing, it may be the time to assess new possibilities that might be realized in the relationship of the two countries. Although influencing the political establishments in the U.S. and Iran are very difficult, as Kearney (in Ricoeur 1996: 185) notes, the ideals provide new horizons with the power of "transcending the self towards possible or alien worlds." After all, the ultimate purpose of imagination is to raise the level of our political practice from one of the self strategic interests to a comprehensive approach that includes the interests of all.

Fusion of Horizons

If the habits of the two sides change and they acquire an orientation open to explore the unknown about the other, then, there may be an expansion of their perspectives or what Gadamer calls "fusion of horizons." In explaining the concept of horizon and its expansion, Gadamer (2004: 303) argues that "the horizon is … something into which we move and that moves with us. … the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon which is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction." Therefore, having an orientation to understand the other is an important element in the concept of fusion of horizon. Despite the complexity of the US-Iran relationship, nevertheless, the former Iranian President Khatami's orientation towards dialogue with others caused the rest of the world to expand its view towards Iran in a positive way. Iran became a much more active member in the international community than its current status.

To create fusion of horizon, however, each side needs to be willing to leave its stagnated position. Ricoeur (1992: 3) notes that as "long as one remains within the circle

of sameness-identity, the otherness of the other than self offers nothing original ….." The question is how to move outside of your own circle and encourage the other to do the same. Pickering suggested that Americans could initiate:

> programs which the U.S. at least has said it is willing to support and that is to bring Iranian youth to the United States to take part in our educational system … It is often true that when people have personal experience, particularly with the citizens of the other country, there is entirely a different concept about what could be done and how it could be done.

Such an exchange may remove people from their established norm and move them into the unknown area of other. The opportunity these programs might offer is through the exchange the two sides may become more receptive and open. Pickering continued:

> we need more opportunities to have dialogue among academics, former officials, among business people, and among others. If in fact, because of the U.S. sanctions most business with Iran is not possible in the current time, but those kinds of conversations and that sort of exchange can help to build trust back and re-establish confidence which could come with trust, which is badly lacking now.

These exchange programs in academia, athletics, and trade are useful mediums to learn more about each other and possibly break down the barriers in the relationship.

Through these programs, instead of strategic military and political moves, higher purposes could be followed to bring constructive results. Gadamer (2004: 304) notes that "transposing ourselves … involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other." Until policy makers and leaders change their perspective about Iran and constructively approach that country, the result will be the same failed policies of the past 30 years. Putting more emphasis on cultural matters rather than strategic political and military moves may reduce the tension in this relationship. The act of transposing for Babak included:

> having interactions and establishing a stronger cultural relationship [that] could have positive influence on the diplomatic relationship between the two countries

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> .... If ... the cultural relationship expands, there is a higher chance that the expanded cultural relationship and interactions could positively influence the hostile diplomatic relationship.

Cultural interactions such as exchanging of stories in different forms including art exhibitions and film festivals would familiarize the two nations with each other on a deeper level. By exchanging stories in different forms, as Waldenfels (in Ricoeur 1996: 116-7) notes, the "foreign, thus understood and explained, would cease to exist. The sublimating forms of appropriation and surpassing of the foreign consist in reducing the foreign to ownness ...." If exchange of ideas and stories occur, as he continues, the distance "between the ownness and foreignness weakens and tends to abolish itself."

Abdi described these interactions and exchanges "from the cultural perspective and structural change in belief system [as] very powerful." Sick, Abdi, Pickering and Milani argued the effectiveness of being in the public arena and proposing programs that could increase the level of understanding of one side about the other. Their arguments resonate with Gadamer's (2004: 301) notion of fusion of horizon "to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy, and the way one's range of vision is gradually expanded." As he continues, "to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it." This awareness about unseen aspects consequently may result in being more aware of the others' perspectives and an enlargement of self view. The question is if politicians are willing to transcend the established norm and move beyond the established paradigm determined by the hardliner in the two countries.

Amirahmaid emphasized that this depends on the leadership of both countries changing their approach as "leaders in both sides at best have spoken their mind for the

interest of their own nation but hardly had they expressed willingness for common interests and mutual benefits of the two nations." As many of my participants described how exchange programs could enlarge the horizons of the two people towards the other, the question remains as to why this model cannot be implemented with the politicians on the two sides. If academia on both sides can interact and collaborate with the other, if normal citizens can do the same thing without bias; why do politicians not initiate such interactions? Are politicians prisoners of their title, forced to live with bias? Isn't it their ethical duty to act upon what is right? Reflections upon these questions may help to see the simplicity of taking action about enlarging one's view, to better see the other's perspective, and reach a better understanding about the other.

The Emplotment of the Author

In Chapter Two of this document, I tried to lay out the historical events over the last 200 years as Iranians experienced them. Throughout this Chapter, where I provided a historical background of Iran and the status of the relationship between the two countries in the last 60 years, my goal was to lay out a narrative where I could illustrate Iranian's perspective for my American readers who may not have been exposed to the Iranian viewpoint. In the preliminary and secondary analysis, I focused specifically on the relationship of the two countries with each other. In the preliminary and secondary analysis, my goal was to create a narrative to highlight the possibility that exists for another course of action to be actualized through imagining different alternatives. As Ricoeur (1984: 69) emphasizes, the "labor of imagination is not born from nothing. It is bound in one way or another to the tradition's paradigms." To refigure a new alternative, I felt it was necessary that my readers go back in the Iranian modern history and the

history of the two countries' relationship to understand better the roots of this conflict and to use their imagination to refigure a new narrative in their own mind that never had a chance to be realized, but might be implemented now. Ricoeur (1984) calls my action in this text as the notion of "emplotment" by the author.

As he describes, in this text I try to construct a present based on a better understanding of the past. As a result of such configuration of the past through a new emplotment, as Ricoeur (1984: 65-6) posits, I create a narrative that could generate new possibilities for a different course of action. In my conversation with Dabashi, he shared encouraging stories about the United States involvement in Iran, like Howard Baskerville, who was martyred during the Iranian constitutional revolution. Dabashi talked extensively on how to use past potentials in the US-Iran history:

> [researchers] can search for characters and individuals that have been critical of these two states and can provide a different narrative of the events. For example, in Iran, the state makes a negative image of the United States and intellectuals need to search and find out a character like Howard Conklin Baskerville. In the U.S. is the same; meaning characters, events and accidents that…. For example, they need to go and find out people like Morgan Shuster. He is a character that during the Constitutional Revolution in Iran helped the revolutionaries order their financial matters. So, by creating a contrast with what the states offer, they can provide a different narrative about the unique and independent characteristic of these two cultures and their relationship with each other.

By applying Ricoeur's (1984: 65-7) idea of emplotment, where events could be placed in a narration to obtain a new meaning, these past potentials could be developed in a new and positive narrative between the two states, while my emplotment of Dabashi and his proposal in this text may work as an encouragement to my readers for further reflections about the unknown possibilities. By providing a historical background about Iran and the status of relationship between the two countries and by emphasizing the possibilities that my research partners expressed in their conversation with me, my hope is that I was able

to emplot these events in form of a comprehensive narrative to highlight the potentials and possibilities that exist and could be developed for a different course of action between the two nations.

Dabashi's suggestion to search for characters who can symbolize a constructive and positive relationship resonates with Ricoeur (1984: 53) when he describes mimesis$_2$ as "the concrete process by which the textual configuration mediates between the prefiguration of the practical field [mimesis$_1$] and its refiguration [mimesis$_3$] through the reception of the work." The configuration or the act of emplotment of the past potentials that came to surface as a result of a better understanding in the stage of mimesis$_1$ is now being put in a new plot, to create a new narrative. To explain the plot, Ricoeur (1984: 56) notes that "understood broadly is the literary equivalent of the syntagmatic order that narrative introduces into the practical field. [It is] the sequential interconnections [that] the plot confers on the agents …" that can help realization of a new narrative. "In short, emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of simple succession" (Ricoeur 1984: 65). By digging into the past history of the two countries and discovering figures such as Baskerville and Shuster and retelling a new story, an unknown level of common value and significance may came to the surface that was unknown up to this point. The dedication of these American individuals to assist in the construction of a modern society in Iran might illustrate the moral standing that the U.S. had in the past with Iran. Throughout this new narrative, the emphasis could be put on the communalities and shared values rather than antagonism which became the norm.

My Text and My Readers

My hope is that my text could be an informative source for reflections. How has the encounter affected my readers? When I talked to my research partners, they all agreed that publishing and advocating a peaceful approach in the US-Iran conflict is all we can do. Babak mentioned that we need to "inform and increase the public's awareness. The public awareness comes from organizing conferences, giving speeches or publishing of articles or books." In regards to policy makers, Amirahmadi stressed:

> We have to try to convince them, we have to argue with them, we have to sit and talk with them to engage; that is what I do. I just stay the course and continuously talk to them. Tell them directly or indirectly through media, through interviews or sitting in a room privately. This is what I have been telling them and we will continue telling them as long as it takes.

The doubt of how my dissertation could influence the official narrative was with me throughout the process of writing during the past year. I was not sure if my proposal was effective in essence and in these circumstances. After my conversations with my research participants, I believe in the power of the text that an author can create as explained by Ricoeur (2005: 16) "human action, no less than literary texts, displays a sense as well as a reference; it possesses an internal structure as well projecting a possible world, a potential mode of human existence which can be unfolded through the process of interpretation." Sick also encouraged me about the power and the influence that a published text might have and mentioned that even President Obama "has been influenced by hard facts or the cultural background and communication [that surrounded him] … in some respect, I mean, people who are policy makers are not oblivious to the world." What is created by the author ultimately has the potential to influence others.

Finally, Amirahmadi warned that policy makers need to imagine new alternative and take action to change the current hostile narrative because:

> The cost of not taking the action, or the cost of inaction, is much higher than the cost of taking action towards peace. … any compromise for peace is less costly than the status quo or the alternative to peace, which is war. So, the leaders on both sides really have to compare the cost of compromise to the cost of inaction, which means maintaining the status quo or even worse than that is the cost of engaging into a military conflict, which would be devastating. So, if they are to consider logically these alternatives and if they are logical and reasonable people, then they will certainly decide in favor of peace and engagement.

With this dire prophecy ringing in my ears, I realize how this text reflects my personal effort and action to influence my audience for a better understanding of Iran.

Ricoeur (1984: 71) calls this stage mimesis$_3$ and emphasizes that it "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality." He continues that thus "the act of reading becomes the crucial moment of the entire analysis. On this act rests the ability of the story to transfigure the experience of the reader" to re-figure their own conclusion or course of action in this case (1991a: 430-1). My hope is that my text has the same effect as mentioned by Ricoeur in describing the significance of the relationship between the reader and the text:

> Appropriating a work through reading it is to unfold the implicit horizon of the world which embraces the action, the personages, the events of the story told. The result is that the reader belongs to both the experiential horizon of the work imaginatively, and the horizon of his action concretely. The awaited horizon and the horizon meet and fuse without ceasing.

As Ricoeur (1984: 53) notes, I chose critical hermeneutics "to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their

acting." The hope is that this text could enable readers to transcend the 30 years of harsh rhetoric and non-relationship to provide an opportunity for readers to reflect on the potential, which is a source for a new reconstruction of a positive course of action.

<u>Summary</u>

In this Chapter, I offer a more in-depth analysis of my research conversations through the interpretive lens of the theories of Ricoeur, Kearney, and Gadamer. My intent was to see if there could be alternatives that have been ignored by both states, for as Kearney (2002: 82) argues, "if warring nations were able to acknowledge their own and the other's narrative identities, they might then be able to reimagine themselves in new ways." Further, they might be able to refigure "blocked and fixated memories, trapped in compulsive repetition and resentment" which the U.S. and Iran have repeated over and over. I hope my narrative will encourage transcendence beyond the current relationship and my text may become a source of influence. Ricoeur (1984: 79) is very encouraging as he believes "reading poses anew the problem of the fusion of two horizons, that of the text and that of the reader, and hence the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader." My hope is that if policy makers or leaders read this text they may be alerted to the danger of the current course of action and may discover the potentials of dialogue, discourse, and reason as alternative to the hostility. This is my hope, and if I am to have any influence, I need to begin with myself as Herda (1999: 13) stresses "change does not begin by our changing the other, but by changing oneself." In the next Chapter, I offer a summary of this study, my findings, implications, reflections and concluding statement.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The US-Iran conflict represents a classic conflict with multi-layers of complexity. LeBaron and Pillay (2006: 19-23) illustrate three levels in a conflict: material, symbolic, and relational. The material represents the "what" of the conflict, the symbolic represents the meaning of the conflict, and the relational represents the necessity of building bridges between the parties in conflict in order to discuss the issues.

The United States and Iran developed a clear conflict in the last thirty years. This conflict gradually grew bigger, because the two countries accused and demonized each other over the material differences that they developed with each other over the years. If the two countries intend to resolve their conflicts, before looking at their differences on the material level, they need to understand their conflict in symbolic level (the meaning of why they oppose the other) and the medium through which they may be able to solve their issues (dialogue). Until the two countries are able to analyze the meaning and significance of their conflicts on the symbolic level, they may never understand the root cause of the problems. To resolve their issues requires discussion; in other words, dialogue and building relationships.

Only by having discussion and dialogue may they be able to understand why Iranians behave in one way and Americans behave the opposite. Through dialogue and having discussion then, they may be able to address the material matters such as the Iran nuclear issue and support for terrorism in American's mind and the U.S. policy of regime change in Iran for the Iranian side. In this text, the purpose has been to encourage leaders and policy makers in the U.S. to move towards engagement with Iran to learn in a more

significant way the motivations and purpose of Iranians in order to deal more effectively with the issues. As is advocated in this text, this could be possible if there is a dialogue and engagement.

As Michael Province, one of my informal conversation partners at UCSD, pointed out, the United States may need to adapt a new foreign policy based on dialogue and inclusion of others. As he emphasized, it is the lack of understanding about others in the foreign policy arena that leads to antagonist situations such as the US-Iran today. In this dissertation, my concern has been to mention that the 21st century requires an inclusive approach which could lead to understanding and collaborative problem solving. In the case of Iran, the paradigm of military hegemony, threat, the policy of regime change and harsh rhetoric has not changed and are not going to change Iranian behavior. As a result it may be time to take a new course of action based on dialogue and engagement.

This new course of action will be challenging. As Abdi and Dabashi emphasized, Iran may refuse to engage, but this does not mean that the U.S. should give up hope for a peaceful resolution and refer to military conflict as a solution. As I advocated in this text, the United States may have the ethical responsibility to step forward for dialogue and disarm Iran from their hostile conduct. After all, hostility from the U.S. is the ultimate response that Iranian conservatives desire in order to oppress the internal democratic movements, militarize the situation, and find a cause to rally against the constituted enemy. The challenge is how to transcend from this tradition of demonizing to a new paradigm of dialogue and constructive engagement.

To transcend beyond the current paradigm of antagonism, the leaders and policy makers may need to think in terms of a higher purpose in their foreign relations in the 21st

century. As I quoted Ansari earlier in my presentation of date it is time and our duty to move from blinding hostility to envisioning opportunities for the future. I hope my text encourages policy makers and leaders to see the possibilities that exist between the two nations, which could be used as a ground for a new relationship. Then, as Ricoeur (1984: 77) suggests, it is my "reader, almost abandoned by the work, who carries the burden of emplotment" to come up with a new course of action. I can only hope it is a fusion of narratives and the rise of a new more transcended action.

To take a more effective action, however, there should be an understanding of Iran. As Gadamer (1998: 4) argues, "the more we become acquainted with the past and present cultures and traditions of who stand outside our Christian tradition" the more we become more effective in how to interact with them. In the last 200 years, Iranians struggled to reach an independent and a more democratic society. The current antagonism with the western world, in specific with the U.S., could derive from their larger scale struggle for their independence and search for freedom, which they see as blocked by westerners. Presently, Iranian insistence on the nuclear issue may be a symbol of their resistance to what they call foreign interference. Their struggle is the search of a people trying to realize their ideals for a better society. Although the ordinary Iranian is prevented a realization of their ideals in this post-revolutionary era, this does not mean that they have forgotten those ideals. A deeper understanding of the Iranian struggle for a better society could help policy makers and leaders in the U.S. to see better the multiple layers behind Iranian action and to design their policies accordingly, such as encouraging and supporting domestic democratic movements in Iran rather that keeping

the mentality of regime change. The first step for U.S. policy change would benefit from an active approach toward engagement.

The Islamic Republic, however, may not engage even if the United States changes its approach. Opening up and engaging with the U.S. may increase the foreign scrutiny of Iranian internal affairs. This may create an opportunity for westerners to give even sharper criticism of Iranian leadership and politics. Under these circumstances, the Islamic Republic may see its existence in danger and conclude that the more closed the Iranian society is, the better the government can retain their power over Iranian society. However, if the U.S. desires a moderation of the position in the Islamic Republic, engagement may be the only way to influence the Republic's position in a positive way. This is what was advocated by President Obama during his campaign in the past two years in the foreign policy arena, where the art of diplomacy is expressed not only when we sit down with friends, but also when we sit down with enemies. Although negotiations may not lead to accommodation and desired results, they can yield more insights. Discourse with Iran may not necessarily lead to agreement between the two states, but it could lead to more understanding, which in turn may result in more possibilities, better options, and wiser policy. At this point, courageous leaders are needed to go against the grain and break down the cycle of antagonism. Now that President Obama advocates a newer style in the foreign policy arena, the hope is that he can take action to shift this hostile paradigm and engage with Iran.

In the last three decades, the United States has established two choices in how to deal with the Islamic Republic: Either recognize the regime and enter into dialogue on the terms of the Islamic Republic or antagonize the Republic by implementing a policy of

regime change and imposing sanctions. The U.S. chose the latter, which has not resulted in positive terms for the U.S. On the other hand, officially recognizing the Islamic Republic with its human rights violations, censorship of the press, and violations of the freedom of speech, may damage the campaign for these issues. The complexity of how to interact with Iran does not have a specific answer. The Islamic Republic can certainly live without a direct relationship with the U.S. as it demonstrated in the last 30 years as it showed in surviving a bloody war with Iraq for eight years which had the support of western world including the U.S. and surviving sanctions imposed by the U.S. in the last three decades and United Nations in the last few years. At this point, a more reliable choice would be to engage partially with Iran and assess its interactions and adjust and appropriate policies and terms of engagement as the relationship furthers.

From the beginning of this project, my concern was whether I could play a role in making a difference in the circumstances that surround the two countries. As I was born in Iran and lived in the United States for the past decade, and as a citizen of both nations, I feel I have the responsibility to do something about this problem. I am concerned about finding possibilities to change the current course of action and open up new possibilities. Throughout the literature review, conversations, and data analysis I foresaw possibilities for change in the current paradigm. I concluded that there could be a more peaceful course of action, if within the two nations there are leaders and policy makers who desire a peaceful relationship, who will take the initiative to transcend this relationship from a demonizing discourse to a more constructive dialogue with an emphasis on the commonalities. As Milani and Dabashi pointed out, the potentials exist in the two

countries' traditions and they need to be highlighted for the formation of a common ground.

As the final word in this summary, I must restate that my text is supposed to be only an occasion to open up a frank forum for discussion about the topic at hand. As Herda (1999: 90) notes, in "critical hermeneutic research, our attempt is to bring biases out into the open, not to technically reduce or control them." As a result, my intent was not to offer a definite conclusion, because I do not believe there is a clear-cut conclusion in social science research. As Gadamer (2004: 581) puts it, the "ongoing dialogue permits no final conclusion. It would be a poor hermeneuticist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word." This text intends to illustrate a new approach in international relationships, in this case with Iran, based on constant dialogue and understanding of the other, because as long as "we keep dialogue active, we continue to learn, understand, and create a relationship of sustainable security" (Lowry & Littlejohn 2006: 410). I advocate for this approach, because I believe it is my responsibility to act and hopefully stop the escalation of this crisis into a possible military confrontation. As Herda (1999: 131) notes, in "the end, it is our responsibility to think differently, to learn, and to act differently."

Findings

1- Antagonism engenders more hostility

Accusation and antagonism increase the level of hostility on the Iranian side and make it more difficult to reach a common ground. We witnessed how antagonist policies in the last three decades failed to bring about any positive change in Iranian behavior. The US-Iran relation from 1979 has reached a very critical and dangerous point in the

past few years, which was not seen before, when under former President George W. Bush, the U.S. government advocated military action against Iran. This is the highest escalation so far of antagonism resulting from the current policy of retaliation.

2- Lack of understanding

There is a need for understanding the motivations behind the actions of the Islamic Republic. What the U.S. has not realized is that Iran has been struggling to find its own identity as a country in 20th and 21st centuries. Iranian quest for democracy in the past 100 years has been opposed by the will of foreign powers. The CIA coup in 1953 was interpreted this way. In the nuclear issue today, for example, Iranians feel the U.S. is interfering and opposing their quest toward technological progress and independence. While the U.S. thinks that it symbolizes freedom, the view by Iranians is that it is a foreign force that opposes Iranian self determination.

There is not a strong understanding of Iran among the leaders and policy makers in the U.S. government. This is due to the fact that there are not enough people who are, politically, culturally, linguistically, and religiously aware of Iranians' actions. The American policy makers and leaders tend to simplify Iran and do not distinguish the variety of social movements going on beneath the surface. They usually tend to categorize the Islamic Republic as a crazy state which was evident also in the former President George W. Bush's axis of evil speech in his State of Union address in 2002. By using such an antagonist language against the Islamic Republic, the moderate government of Khatami faced domestic criticism by the hardliners in Iran who isolated Khatami as a soft President when dealing with Iran. As Khatami position weakened in Iran, Ahmadinejad as an ultra-conservative president reached power.

3- Potential in shared values of the two countries

There is vast untapped potential in the past history and in the traditions of the two countries. In a philosophical sense, Iranians have been searching for ideals similar to those upon which the American constitution is based. These ideals are independence, political and social freedom, and human rights.

In a more recent historical sense, there are positive historical events in the history of the two countries' relationship. There have been Americans who as missionaries have gone to serve and help Iran for many valuable purposes in the late 1800 and early 1900. These historical potentials have been ignored in the last 30 years of hostility and nobody had a chance to learn about them. They could be used as shared values in case there is a will for engagement.

4- Structural problem in politics – what if the Islamic Republic does not engage?

We shouldn't be simplistic about the difficulty of resolving the problem between the U.S. and Iran. International political affairs are a very complex and calculated arena. The two countries have two political cultures that demonize each other and benefit by this constitution of the enemy as a way to justify their domestic and foreign policies. The U.S. represents Iran as a danger and is able to sell arms to Iranian neighbors for self defense and look for its own hegemony in the region and justify its presence there. Iran demonizes the U.S. in order to justify suppressing opposition groups within the country by connecting them with the United States. So in this political culture change doesn't come easily and it takes a change of mentality over time.

We also don't know how the Islamic Republic will react to a new approach by the U.S. Even if the U.S. attempts to change policy and engage with Iran, what if the Islamic

Republic avoids engagement? The Islamic Republic does not want engagement because a true engagement with the U.S. may increase the international pressure on the Republic for fundamental changes.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

1- Need to change the old paradigm from Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* to Khatami's *Dialogue among Civilizations*

Since antagonism has only engendered more hostility, it may be time to change policies toward the Islamic Republic; where through engagement there may be a higher chance to influence the Republic dogmatism. The U.S. may need to adapt a more compatible foreign policy in the 21st century and leave the Cold War mentality of military threat and pressure that no longer works. The new approach should be based on dialogue, discourse and understanding the concerns of others by instituting programs of academic, cultural and trade exchanges which are currently under extreme restrictions and hindering any interaction or sharing of perspectives. Until the U.S. applies these principles to its dealings with the Islamic Republic and recognizes the Islamic Republic as a legitimate state, engages with it, and therefore expands its leverage of influence, they may not be able to influence Iranian behavior or moderate the Islamic Republic in its position.

2- Inclusive policies to engage Iran

In making their policies, American policy makers and leaders may need to recognize Iranians quest for progress and independence. In the 21st century, the world and regional players have changed and the new order needs to be considered. In the Middle East, Iran could become a positive player if it is engaged in regional decision

making. By engaging with Iran and creating policies that recognizes Iran as a regional

power and stabilizing force in the region, the U.S. may open up possibilities for

collaboration between the two countries. This not only satisfies the Iranian sense of

pride, but also may help the U.S. to maintain its regional influence through Iran. For

example, in this time of war against terrorism, it is crucial to have an important strategic

country such as Iran on the U.S. side.

Once the U.S. engages with Iran, it may be able to increase its influence in the

country. By designing policies that support the democratic social movements such as

increasing the cultural, literary, political, and academic, and other professional

interactions, the U.S. may be able to learn more about the complexities of the Iranian

society and connect in a stronger sense with those movements. Ultimately, this may

allow the U.S. to have a greater influence in the Islamic Republic. In a country where

there is already a sense of sympathy for the American culture these developments may

occur in a faster paste.

3- Expand on shared values through engagement

Since there are these philosophical and historical communalities, there is a higher

chance to influence Iranians through engaging policies rather than antagonizing and

isolating policies. These engaging policies include policies for more dialogue,

interactions, and engagement which could influence the more progressive and democratic

layers of Iranian society. There exists a broad basis of support for a relationship with the

United States. Creating programs where there is an emphasis on the history of

Americans who dedicated their professional lives to and in Iran will recall shared values

between the two nations in a time when they worked together. Designing these policies

may help the U.S. to win the heart and soul of Iranians instead of putting them in the defensive by hostility.

The U.S. should take advantage of the fact that for the past two centuries Iranians have a history of fighting for the values of democracy and most Iranians still want to see a democratic state of Iran. The values Iranians seek are the same basic values found within the American Constitution. By focusing on these shared values and assisting with the entry of Iranian academics and students into the U.S. and encouraging cultural pioneers to travel between the two countries, they may be able to highlight the communality that exists between them both and strengthen the foundation for a constructive relationship. The exchange would enable Americans to influence their Iranian counterparts and allow Iranians to learn more about American values.

4- Leadership is required to change the dynamics

Strong leadership could move beyond the political culture and make engagement possible and possibly hasten this process of change. Nixon with his global vision was able to break down the wall of mistrust between the U.S. and China. Even though it took 40 years, the U.S. and China currently enjoy a level of trade partnership. Such an action by a leader today could break down the wall between Iran and U.S. We'll have to see if President Obama as a leader of new policy will be able to start this process.

Even if the Islamic Republic is not willing to engage, the U.S. can take action by designing policies that encourages governmental engagement. It may be possible to initiate partial engagement by inviting Iranian representatives into the U.S., opening a line of relationship between American Congress and the Iranian parliament and advancing lower level government exchanges. This approach is different from the former

approach which tended to isolate the Islamic Republic, which is ideal for more extreme element within the Islamic Republic. Through a more robust diplomacy, as advocated by President Obama, influencing the Islamic Republic may be more realistic.

Recommendations for Further Research

Many of my conversations partners such as Milani, Amirahmadi, and Dabashi emphasized the existence of characters and events in the past that could be used as potentials for a new positive emplotment and narrative in the present time. Throughout this text, I mentioned them on several occasions. However, I did not mention specifically their names. Some of these characters are American missionaries who traveled to Iran and helped the formation of different ministries in Iran in 1800 and 1900. They include Howard Baskerville as Iran's first American martyr, Josef Cochran who founded Iran's first modern medical school, Elgin Groseclose as the Treasury General in Iran, Samuel Jordan who is famous as the father of modern education in Iran, John Limbert as an American professor in Iran and one of the hostages during 1979-80, William Miller who was a representative of Christian church in Iran, Arthur Millspaugh as the Treasury General, Richard Nelson Frye as an Iranian expert, Arthur Pope and Phyllis Ackerman as Iranian culture revivalists, Morgan Shuster as the Treasury General, and David Stronach as an archeologist of ancient Iran. Conducting future studies on these people and their contributions, and emploting their positive influence in Iran within a new narrative could be the source of a new story to generate a positive working ground.

The Iranian youth represents another area for future research. Today, as they form a large majority in Iranian society who are interested to engage with the rest of the world in pursue of a better life, different way of connecting with them including through

educational, cultural, artistic, social, political, and economical programs represent potentials for interaction and engagement. In this context, understanding their needs and finding ways to connect with them represent opportunity for further research.

Personal Insights

As for me, this research process became a learning experience. Throughout my research, conversations, and reflections I developed new insights that helped me see farther and become a more aware citizen. Herda (1999: 135) explains that we "do change, and consequently how we act can change. Risking our prejudgments is different than learning a new behavior. The act of learning does not happen in isolation; it only happens in a relationship with another, yet remains one's own responsibility." This research process, including the formal and informal conversations, enlarged my horizon to see the realities and restrictions before us. I learned how difficult it is to change the established paradigm in the political establishments in the two countries. I learned how the political pressures in Washington and Tehran became a restricted framework upon policy makers and leaders that does not allow them to move beyond and transcend this relationship to a higher level. Nevertheless, I also realized the existence of potentials in this relationship that could help the reduction of tensions between the two states. The Iranian democratic movement is another potential that the U.S. leaders and policy makers may need to have a closer look in order to better appropriate their policies towards Iran. I believe my research process became a meaningful learning experience as it pushed me further to engage in conversation with texts and participants, which ultimately enlarged my horizon and opened up new possibilities in my mind.

A Last Word

In this dissertation, my intention as a transnational researcher was to provide a better understanding of Iran and a new approach in how to deal with Iran in the 21st century. After 30 years of non-resolution and as Iran grows stronger in its national and geo-political influence, it is time for the U.S. to realize that the Islamic Republic is a reality and perhaps a harbinger of things to come in the new world. The U.S. may be able to satisfy it own national interest by satisfying the Iranian's desire for independence and equal recognition on the world scene. But the U.S. must realize the time is now to create a new approach in this new and ever changing world. Such understanding, in the context of the relationships between the U.S. and Iran, may have the encouraging power to begin a model for international crisis resolution.

I hope that by reading this text it may open a new horizon to my reader, as Ricoeur (2005: 143) notes that what the reader appropriates from the text:

> is not behind the text, as a hidden intention would be, but *in front of it*, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals. Henceforth, to understand is to *understand oneself in front of the text*. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed.

For myself as I studied the many texts during this research process, my own vision was expanded. I have shared what I appropriated which changed my perspectives. So I have commenced the journey which Herda (1999: 7) suggests begins with the idea that when "I change, the rest of the world changes." The rest belongs to the reader.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

University of San Francisco
Institutional Review Board of Protection of Human Subject

From: irbphs (irbphs@usfca.edu)
To: ali goldoust
Date: Tuesday, April 22, 2008 9:32:57 AM
Cc: Ellen Herda
Subject: IRB Application # 08-031 - Application Approved

April, 2008

Dear Ali Goldoust:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #08-031). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.
Sincerely,
Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

IRBPHS University of San Francisco
Counseling Psychology Department
Education Building - 017
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080
(415)422-6091 (Message)
(415) 422-5528 (Fax)
irbphs@usfca.edu

University of San Francisco
Letter of Invitation

Participant's Name and Title
Company or Organization
Address

Dear Mr. / Ms:

       Thank you for agreeing to participate in an exploration of my dissertation topic. As you know, I am a doctoral student in the department of Leadership Studies at University of San Francisco and my dissertation involves a hermeneutic approach to finding alternatives for the continued crisis between the United States and Iran and involves sustained conversations with a consortium of experts in the field in order to open up new avenues and approaches to the problem. The most challenging part of my dissertation is what to do about the antagonist stance of each nation to the other, in order to possibly change it and bring it from a confrontational level to a discursive level.

       I am inviting my conversation partners to explain how they approach my research topic in the practice of their work, including their motivations, observations, and stories of their personal journey.

       Our conversation will act as data for the analysis of the research topic described. Once transcribed, I will provide you a copy of our conversation so that you may look it over. You may add to or delete any section of the conversation during the research process. I will use our conversation to support my analysis. Data that you contribute, your name, and position will not be held confidential.

       My hope is that our conversation provides an opportunity for us to learn something together through the exploration of the topic I have described. Again, I thank you for your willingness to meet. I look forward to seeing you soon,

With regards,

Ali Goldoust

Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
doustcompany@yahoo.com

University of San Francisco
Thank You Letter

Participant's Name and Title
Company or Organization
Address

Dear Mr. / Ms:

Thank you for participating in an exploration of my dissertation topic. Our conversation was not only enjoyable, but extremely informative. Your ideas regarding narrative identity and shared values between Iran and the U.S. led me to a new understanding of the situation. I appreciate that you took time from your busy schedule to discuss new approaches to the problem with me.

As I mentioned earlier, I hope that my conversations with various experts will continue as we all join together and share our narratives. I'm enclosing the text of our conversation and the themes I identified and my understanding of those themes. Please feel free to correct or further the development of any ideas. This feedback will increase my understanding and I hope, continue our discussion.

I look forward to sharing the conversation discoveries from other participants with you as we all explore the possibilities of a changed narrative between the U.S. and Iran. Again, I thank you for your willingness to meet. I look forward to other conversations.

With regards,

Ali Goldoust

Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
doustcompany@yahoo.com

University of San Francisco
Transcription of Research Conversation

Ali Goldoust
Pilot Study
Dr. Abbas Milani
Department of Political Science, Middle Eastern Studies, Stanford University
11/05/2007 (12:30 pm)
Stanford University
38 minutes
Dr. Milani did not revise the original text.

<div align="center">

Pilot Study
Topic: US-Iran relationship
by
Ali Goldoust
Department of Leadership Studies
University of San Francisco
doustcompan@yahoo.com

</div>

Questions sent to Dr. Milani prior to the conversation

In your book, you mention that Iran has a background of openness to "others" with ideals like freedom and democracy. Since these are the same values and ideals in U.S. history, have both nations lost their past wisdom and view of the sense of other? How does this play into their history of mistrust, let's say in the last 60 years?

Ali Goldoust: Thank you very much for giving me your time Dr. Milani today. I really appreciate it.

Dr. Abbas Milani: You're welcome.

AG: **In your book, *Lost Wisdom,* it seems you suggest that both sides of this conflict that I am interested in, Iran on one side and the U.S. on the other, have both traditions that are similar to each other. The ideal of freedom and democracy throughout the history of the two countries are the same. So Iranians (and equally their Persian ancestors) like these ideas and concepts as much as Americans do. This basement exists in both sides. And then, it was also interesting that the title of**

your book is the *Lost Wisdom*. The first question that came to my mind that all these tension that exist between the two sides, Iran on one hand and U.S. on the other; so, did these two sides lost their wisdom that they can not go back to their tradition and come up with a new understanding and develop and relationship?

AM: No, I think what the two countries, first of all when we talk about the relation between the two countries, we have to make a distinction between what the leadership of these two countries think and what the people think. I think there is evidence that a majority of Iranian people still have a very positive view of U.S. and although the recent war rhetoric is changing American public opinion but I think still American public opinion does not see Iranian people as a threat, they see the government as the threat. So, when we talk about how these leaders and how the people of these two countries think of one another, we need to make a clear distinction. The current leadership in Iran and the current leadership in U.S., I think have lost their sense of purpose and their wisdom if you will, because I think, they both are taking these two countries in a collusion course which will be detrimental to all sides concern.

AG: Dr. Milani, how this concept of …, because when countries are dealing with each other, is obviously on their leadership level; at least on the official level. There might be some other type of exchanges that might or might not influence the official relationship. But, how does this concept of 'lost wisdom' plays in their 'mistrust' that they developed in the last 50 years, let's say.

AM: Well, do you know, in *Lost Wisdom* what I was trying to argue was that in spite of what the current regime says, Iran has had a history of ideas that were democratic, ideas that were rational, ideas that tried to reconcile reason and revelation. In *Lost Wisdom* I tried to show that for example as early as 10th to 12th century Iran had a series of thinkers, philosophers, writers who were very much at ease with the West, who understood Aristotle and Plato and who wanted pretty much the same things that later became the element of modernity. In this country too, I think, what this country is found on is the search for modernity. This country has been called by one historian the very first nation, the very truly modern society. It is the only society in the world that did not go through a traditional period. It began as a modern experiment. America is a quintessential modern country, Iran, in my view, has tried desperately, for almost 1000 years, to become modern. And, the domination of religion in Iranian politics and the attempt to make religion dominant in American politics today is part of what causes this loss of wisdom in both sides. Both sides are going in a way by their leadership, away from their tradition toward a new kind of theology.

AG: So, Dr. Milani some other scholar such as Beeman, I was reading an article by this gentlemen who was talking about …, let me go back for a second to your previous comment. Again, the ideal are there, the potentials are there, but in dealing with each other and resolving the problems I am assuming that the governments are the ones who need to take initiative. Beeman says that in the last half of the last century in the United States, the political system moved toward creating a bipolar myth in the political system. Maybe, we also see that in the

Iranian political system, because I lived up to six years ago in Iran, where they called U.S. as the big Satan. At the same time in the U.S. policy, it seems that the black and white thing, like the president Bush wanted to distinguish himself and his party from the other, when he said you are "… either with us or against us." So, basically, Beeman is saying that there is a 'self' that you create for yourself, and then the other that you portray as the enemy. So, by portraying the 'other' as your enemy, you can adjust and make your policy in the way that you want. As example, he talks about U.S versus the Middle East and also Iran. So, basically, U.S. portrays itself as the supporter of freedom, supporter of free market, and the progressive force for the world order etc. And portrays the other, Middle East, or in my case is going to be Iran, as the out law country, the crazy country, where there is no rational etc. So, if we look at each other in this way, which is existent in the two countries politics … on the other hand, scholars like you in articles such as "A win-win U.S. strategy for dealing with Iran," desire to shift the paradigm, to change the narrative in order to come up with something new. To be released from this type of paradigm. How do you deal with this powerful myth, which exists in the politics of the two countries, and shift paradigm?

AM: I think it is very difficult. Because in both countries, the myth has been nurtured by the state, which is a very powerful state. In both countries, the possibility for other voices to be heard is limited for different reasons. In Iran it is limited because Iran is a despotic society. Here it is limited because here public opinion is made by the media. The media seems to follow a kind of herd mentality for a while something becomes fashionable, and that becomes the hot topic of the day, and if you are going to go against the grain, it becomes very difficult to make an impact. The only thing that I can think of that one can do is in spite of odds against you, make an effort. It is much easier to go against the grain here, because at least they don't kill you if you go against the grain here. In Iran if you go against the grain or if you try to tell the Iranian people that the image that the leadership has up to world is a false manikin vision and the reality does not correspond to it, you end up in prison. Here, you are at best marginalized. You don't get a hearing. But, I see no other way than trying our hardest, relentlessly, to take the message that we need to look at this in a different way. We need to think about possibilities of paradigms as you called it, because the current paradigm, the paradigm of demonizing the other and the demonization that has gone on in Iran for 29 years, the great Satan, demonization, and the demonization that is now going on making Ahmadi Nejad, this crazy, dangerous, Hitler type. We need to show, at least for me, I think I need to show that although Ahmadi Nejad is a dangerous man, is in my mind a dangerous anti-Semitic person, but he does not have as much power of destruction as he is believed to have, and the way to defunct, to diminish his power, is in fact the opposite of going to war with Iran. Going to war with Iran, attacking Iran, in my view, would only strengthen those who are entrenched in the demonizing narrative.

AG: Dr. Milani, in the article "A win-win U.S. strategy for dealing with Iran" you obviously provide these great ideas of paradigm shift. However, on a practical level maybe sometimes people say, ok these ideas are great, but how are you going to

involve them. Let's say, if the power is not interested to do the way you are suggesting. How are you going to influence them, some example?

AM: The way you influence them is by writing op-ed pieces, by writing scholarly essays, by organizing meetings, by trying to have meeting with these people and by teaching students, do you know, when you teach in a place like Stanford, you are thinking about this as a strategic way, in a place like Stanford is a place where the elites of this country are trying to, and if you are teaching in these places, you know, and hopefully, in this long term train, the elite, but in the short term you try to make your case as forcefully as you can through the media through op-ed, through scholarly essays, through conferences, through lectures, and do you know, it is a hard sale, it is a very difficult thing to do, but it works, it is not like it is impossible to change and shape things, do you know.

AG: **Dr. Milani, Ricoeur is one of the philosophers of the critical hermeneutic theory; he talks a lot about the relationship between the 'self' and the 'other.' As a matter of fact, he has a book called *oneself as another*. He believes that the 'self' and 'other' are two entities that are connected to each other. So, whatever one does influences the other's reaction to the first action. So, this is dialectic between the two. At the same time, once in a while I follow our former Iranian president/the first president of the Islamic Republic, Banisadr, where he talks about this idea of systematic relationship between the extreme right wings, because he believes that these rights usually help each other, by the extreme positions that they take. For example, when Ahmadi Nejad talks about wiping out Israel from the map, Bush takes a hard position on him and uses a though language, and this becomes the narrative etc. What we have today basically. Any comment on this?**

AM: Yes, I think Ricoeur is absolutely right. Our behavior toward whoever the interlocutor is, helps create the reality, the image of that other person, so, there is a wonderful Indian expression that says, you become the name you respond to. If people keep calling you something, if people keep labeling you something, gradually you become that thing. You have the tendency to become that thing. If you keep telling your child that is dumb, from the moment of birth, now, more or less, that child would not behave in his/her full capacity. So, I think it is absolutely correct that the radicals, the dedicated radicals here in this country and in Iran, want the war. I think they beget one another, they help, they encourage one another, they feed one another's needs, sometimes of providing the kind of dangerous enemy you need to pursue this kind of reckless responses so I think of, I have, do you know, I completely agree that the extreme right in Iran and the extreme right in U.S. not only are similar in their beliefs, they both have a very simple minded view of the world, both have the manic view of the world, both have a demonizing view of the world, that one side is the good and the other side is the bad, and both sides are absolutely convince that they speak for God. They speak for right. And this is a very dangerous combination. And there is no doubt in my mind that these two poles strengthen and beget one another.

AG: You are describing the two official sides of the two countries; it appears that there is no hope for moderation or reform in their ideologies. And the only fight would be, as you mentioned previously, teaching people, providing knowledge to people.

AM: Yeah, I mean the radicals in the two countries are very much the last people you are going to change their minds. The kind of radical that Ahmadi Nejad is, comes with a false sense of certitude, comes with an absolute certainty about the veracity of their own claims. He would be the last person to be changed. One can hope to lessen the possibility that his view of politics would damage Iran, damage U.S., and damage Israel, and the way you can do this is to minimize the chance that the radicals would have their day, that the voice of reason and moderation will win out, I think it can be done. It is hard, but it can be done. If it can be done in anywhere, it can be done in a democracy. Where one is at least free to try to make one's opinion know and try to change others based on logical reasons.

AG: In *Lost Wisdom*, Dr. Milani, I think, you provide a narrative, how Iran and Iranians dealt with the concept of modernity. For example, one of the examples that I liked, is Nasr-al-din Shah, and his trips to European countries, and then you were also describing the reaction of religious figures such as Kafi, Majlesi, and Khomeini as the famous figures. You also mentioned the reactions of government officials who were disappointed by seeing that European countries progress and Iran's position compare to them. Finally, you described the though of secular intellectuals such as Shadman and Hedayat. So, I looked at your story as a story about a nation and its narrative with the concept of modernity. How Iran dealt with modernity. There were ups and downs. At this point in our history, how would you describe the narrative identity of Iranians and Iran? On one level, there is the conflict of Iranians with their government (internal conflict), and on the second level, there is the conflict between Iran, as a nation, with West, U.S. in specific. On the second level, for example, I think Ahmadi Nejad was able to make the nuclear case as a nationalistic issue.

AM: These are many different issues that you pointed out. I think we need to deal with them separately. I think the regime successfully and wrongly sold the people the idea that the nuclear technology is the cutting age of science of our time. If you don't have it, you are not modern, you are not scientific, which is very absurd. Nuclear technology enrichment is something that U.S. did 50-60 years ago. Today is cutting age of technology, is the information age, if Iran because of its desire to get nuclear enrichment technology, is then denied the access to computer technology, to information revolution, Iran will be the loser. That is a different question than what type of narrative the people in Iran are writing. What kind of identity are they defining for themselves. And I don't think there is one narrative. I think, since the Nasr-al-din Shah, several narratives that are competing for the domination. There is a narrative of people like Khomeini, who don't want to do any thing with modernity. They want to create their own theocracy, they want aspects of modernity, they want their penicillin, they want its guns, but they don't want its rationalism, they don't want its democracy, they don't want its secularism. There is a

narrative of people like the Shah, who said I will modernize you but you need to promise me to obey me. We can do everything else freely, don't question me politically. There is the narrative of modernity of Iranian democrats who say we want a free, independent, secular, republic. We don't want to emulate, we don't want to follow anybody but we are not afraid of following the West. There is a model that we want to create and that is an Iranian model of democracy. There is also a narrative of people like Sorush who tries to create a religiously modern narrative. So, I think the last 100 years Iran has been the scene of this upheaval, and that domestically, it is what is going on that is historically important. It is not whether Ahmadi Nejad will win or lose. Ahmadi Nejad is a minor footnote to history, I think. The big question for me is whether the modernist narrative or which of these modern narratives will win. Or whether de-modernizing narrative will win. Will Iran continue to try to be a part of modern world? Or will Iran try to say the modern world is not much to join, we don't want anything, we want to stop and get off the buss. My sense is that this battle is the battle of our time, and I don't think it has been decided yet. I don't think the religious de-modernized. People like Khomeini have not won. People like him politically won, but I think historically they have lost. I think if anything, the experience of the last 30 years, convinced people that this is not the narrative, which is not the identity that is amenable to them and to their interest.

AG: Dr. Milani, many people describe Ahmadi Nejad as somebody who does not have power. But there are many people who think that, anyhow, he represent a layer of power in Iran, which is very powerful. Believe or not, they could manipulate the election of 2005. Ahmadi Nejad was not a known figure, but the people who were behind him were so powerful that could generate people to vote for him. The irony of history is that Ahmadi Nejad compare to Khatami, former president, suggested 4-5 times direct talk to the U.S. government. So, what is your comment on this? What I am trying to say that there is a certain layer of power behind him.

AM: I think there is. I think there is a certain power, but I don't think that Ahmadi Nejad is still the determined power. I think the determined power is still Khamenei, the clergy, but I believe that Ahmadi Nejad represents a small but powerful minority of revolutionary guard, commanders, the Basijis, people who want a different Iran. They want a radical revolutionary Iran. And they don't have an upper hand yet, but I think if push comes to shove if there is a war with Iran, the people like Ahmadi Nejad will become more powerful. This is my fear. A war is most beneficial to him and his cohorts and constitutionally his power is very limited but in time of war, extra constitutional power becomes divided essentially on the street and whoever has the street gets more power. And Ahmadi Nejad has certain level of support among the revolutionary guard and the Bassijis [Islamic paramilitary force in Iran] and I think in the chaos of the war, nobody knows what will come out. To me, that is the problem. And part of the reason all these offers and counter offers have never materialized, is to go back to your first question, precisely because there is still the domination of that demonized 'other.' Both sides are afraid of the other, both sides are afraid of being the first one to break this taboo, both sides are afraid particularly, on the American side. President has been worry of becoming the first person that breaks the taboo of talking to Iran. Because Iran, after the

hostage crisis, became, maybe rightly, a 'pariah,' I mean, no country has done this before. To take diplomats of another country hostage for 440 days on the street. Any president that wants to break that, has to be a very historically conscious person, he has to take a giant leap, it requires something like Nixon decision to go to China. And I am not sure if Bush is that person.

AG: Do you see this character in any of the candidates for the next year presidential election?

AM: It looks like Obama is the only one who might do it. At least, he is the only one who talks about it. Whether, once he becomes the president, the constraints on him will prohibit him from doing it, I don't know. But, he is at least so far the only one who has said if I become the president I seat down and talk. No condition, nothing. I will talk about everything, which is what I have suggested they should do for five years now. I mean, this is almost everything that I have written.

AG: If he is not elected, and let's say Clinton is elected, and she said she would not go in direct talk with Iran because there are some disciplinary issues that she would consider them and prevent them to go in direct talk. If this is the situation, in addition to what you mentioned previously, what is that we as the responsible citizens can do?

AM: I think the only thing we can do is to create a political climate that supports those who want to talk, and weaken those who want to go to war. Everybody, I think, has to take the initiative. If we can convince one person, one neighbor, one lover, one student, this is how opinions are changed. You don't change, a society as complex as this, you don't change opinion or you don't make policy over night. You make it very gradually, you make it very quietly. You make it one person at a time. You need to have strategy. You need to have institutional support. You need to have think-thanks that support this, you need all of those things, but ultimately it is one step at a time. Each one of us doing what we need to do.

AG: Thank you so much Dr. Milani. I really appreciate it.

AM: My pleasure

University of San Francisco
Research Journal (Journal of My Conversations with Research Partners)

Journal of conversation with Dr. Milani (11/2007):

I contacted Dr. Milani directly through an email one month before my actual conversation day. He was very gentle to accept my request without any hesitation and referred me to his secretary. I exchanged a few emails with his secretary until we arranged an appointment for my conversation (Monday, November 5th, 2007). I did not experience any difficulty arranging this meeting.

I was very happy and excited about my meeting because Dr. Milani was a very well known scholar in Iranian studies. It was good to know I was starting with an excellent and valuable conversation partner who would enrich and deepen my research on the subject matter.

Since he is a very well known scholar in the field, I thought I needed to prepare myself very well for my meeting. First, I came to know Dr. Milani through one of his articles on the Iran-U.S. relationship subject. That article attracted me because it was on the same line of thought as my own. He and two other co-authors of that article suggested that since the United States will not lose anything if it goes to negotiation with Iran, it should contact Iran and start a negotiation process on all matters with Iran. After reading this article, I researched Dr. Milani and found out that he has a book, *Lost Wisdom,* which illustrates how the Iranian dealt with the concept of modernity since 10th century. After I made an appointment with him, I realized I had to read his book to be better prepared for my conversation.

Few days before my conversation, I felt nervous about my meeting. I felt Dr. Milani is a master of the subject matter and my questions might not attract him to get involved with me in a real conversation. The last few days before my conversation passed in this status of mind. However, I read his book, I designed my questions properly, and I felt that I was ready to conduct a meaningful conversation. After all, I had to go and did not have any other option.

When I went to his office, I realized he had offered his office hour for this meeting. As a result, he left the door open and there were some distractions. First, there was this phone call that he answered. Second, there was his secretary who brought some papers and lunch for him. Then, there were these students who wanted to meet with him. As a result, after 35 minutes, Dr. Milani asked me how longer our conversation would last! Toward the end, it appeared that there was a little of rushing. I just felt that I did not have a chance to have an informal conversation with him after our recorded conversation. I thought it was important to have a less formal conversation, specifically because our formal conversation was in English rather than Farsi, in order to have a good ending.

Nevertheless, I had given him all of my main questions. Before my meeting, I designed eight major questions for him which followed a narrative. As a result, I got a good narrative in response to my questions. After looking at my transcription, the text, I was happy with the narrative that I had in front of myself. However, I realized I could have asked at least two more questions to obtain an even better narrative. I designed those questions for the next conversation and will ask them in my next conversation. I know that this was my first experience in conducting a formal conversation about an extremely critical subject, so I did not expect from myself a professional job. The good part of it is that I gained very valuable experience for my next conversations.

There is another critical part to my conversation. I felt my questions became very long, almost a monologue, throughout my conversation. Since he was the expert of the subject, I could have been shorter in my preludes in order to have him explain about the subject.

I realized that Dr. Milani was not very relaxed during the conversation. I think this came from the fact that I started recording one minute after I arrived to his office. We did not have time to develop a relationship. Even though he was very open to accept my request for this meeting, I felt our conversation was tense. The other reason could have been my long preludes before asking my questions. Was this the reason Dr. Milani was tense or was it his character, or was there anything else? I don't know.

Despite the fact that I did not experience a warm environment in Dr. Milani's office, I really think I have a very meaningful text now. I transcribed the tape the same night that I returned home from Stanford University. I spent 5-6 hours transcribing it. While I listened to the sound file that night, I got frustrated because of my long preludes. As a result of that frustration, I did not return to the sound file and the text for a week. After a week, I read my transcription again. I realized it was a meaningful text. I loved the narrative that I had in the text. I forgot all about my frustration.

At the end, I patted myself on the back for a good job after all.

Journal of conversation with Dr. Beeman (Spring 2008):

After talking to Beeman, I was amazed about his emphasis on the existing ignorance among policy makers and leaders in Washington DC. Several times, Beeman mentioned that in the U.S. government and its related agencies, there is a lack of Iranian experts, who are really informed first hand about Iran. He believed that policy makers who don't have any idea about Iran, make important decisions about Iran in the U.S. government and related agencies. For Beeman, these policy makers do not have a good sense of what is going on in Iran.

Many times, they don't know how to read Iranian behaviors. They don't know how to use an appropriate language in dealing with Iran, or they don't know how important the concept of respect is among Iranians.

After he talked about the importance of a respectful language and a respectful approach towards Iran, I realized how the United States accused Iran in the last 30 years, which resulted in what we have today. Thinking about it, I see that the U.S. government never attempted to use a respectful approach or language towards Iran. Since the accusatory language has not resulted in any positive development, the question is, isn't it time to change the approach?

This makes me more excited about my research, because it shows me how a new and inclusive approach which is based on mutual respect, and which I am advocating in my dissertation, could change the antagonistic paradigm between the two countries. By what Beeman described as the ignorance of the leaders and policy makers, I became more proud of my work and more confident that I my work may play a significant role in coming up with a new approach in the future. I believe my research may contribute to a better understanding between the two countries.

Journal of conversation with Dr. Amirahmadi (May, 2008):

By re-reading Amirahmadi's conversation text, I realized he seemed too optimistic about the circumstances. In his statements, he simplified the challenges and, I guess, did not want to see how difficult they are to be resolved. As a result, his multiple attempts in the last few years to engage the two countries have not been successful. However, I admire his courage and consistency to stay on his course. This was the biggest lesson that I gained from my conversation with him; he exemplified somebody who takes action to change the paradigm instead of only talking on a theoretical level.

Journal of conversation with Ambassador Pickering(June 2008):

My conversation with Pickering was great. At the beginning, he was in control of the conversation. I was a little intimidated by his long term career in the past, so I did not develop a real discussion with him. At the beginning, I had a feeling that the sitting was more like an interview rather than a conversation. But, toward the middle of our conversation, I became more confident and was able to ask more open questions to open up discussion.

Pickering looked at the problem in a very comprehensive way, illustrating his diplomatic skills, and describing what needs to be done in order to have a chance to ease the current dispute. His insights were extremely helpful for moving towards a middle ground between the two countries' position. Unknowingly, he advocated Gadamer's (2004) fusion of horizon. He laid down the steps that could possibly help the two countries to close the gap between them and expand their horizons to embrace each other's perspective.

I thought he provided valuable insights throughout this conversation. I thought he provided very practical steps in how to more effectively engage with Iran, and how to

move beyond three decades of misunderstanding. This conversation was all about practical steps to how to recognize mutual interest and expand working ground. In addition, he seemed to be very insightful about the importance of respect and leadership's initiative to establish an effective line of communication between the two countries.

I feel very good after having this conversation with him because he showed how real steps could be taken for fusion of horizon and how real leaders could help these steps to be taken. Returning to Beeman's perspective, if there is a real understanding of Iran, then, these leaders who Pickering talked about may better be able to deal with the reality that is surrounding this conflict.

Overall, Pickering was very encouraging when he said there is lots of hope on my generation who has lived both in Iran and the U.S., know both countries, and who may bring a better understanding between the two sides.

Journal of my conversation with Dr. Dabashi (June 2008):

I had two conversation sessions with Dabashi. At the end of our first conversation, he told me we could have more conversation if I needed to further discuss the issue. I told him I would go through our conversation and prepare some more questions to ask him, in case I need more discussion. I did arrange a second conversation with Dabashi.

Our conversations turned to be great events. I gained so much of insights from our discussion. It was a very deep, meaningful, and philosophical discussion with Dabashi. It turned to be very meaningful, perhaps, because the conversation was in Farsi, so I was better able to communicate with my conversation partner, a barrier that I faced when I had my conversations in English with other research partners.

He was very eloquent and philosophical throughout our conversation. When I asked him different questions about the US-Iran conflict, he eloquently moved the discussion beyond the issue of US-Iran and put this conflict in a broader context. In his opinion, the US-Iran problem should be seen in this broader framework; in this way, we can better define this conflict. In his belief, there are 'stock holders' in this conflict that enjoy a level of benefit from this hostility between the two nations and, as a result, inflame this conflict.

Dabashi also emphasized the existence of political cultures in the two countries. Political cultures that carry on 30 years of antagonism and which benefit from this antagonism, political cultures that demonize each other and benefit from this demonization.

As a result, it may be very challenging to change these political cultures. When I thought about the political cultures, I realized how difficult it is to change the cultures in these two countries. I wondered if a theoretical framework such as hermeneutic would give me a means to deal with such a big challenge. I carried this doubt throughout my research process. Nevertheless, what I discovered was, as Dr. Herda (1999) notes in her book, I

am the one who is going to change and this change may result in a bigger change in my surrounding. With my research, if I am able to influence people in my community, people who may be policy makers or leaders, then, this is a change that may bring about bigger changes.

In our conversation, Dabashi draw a line between political and cultural activities; a line between politicians and intellectuals. In his view, intellectuals need to focus on their field of studies and do not interfere with the world of politics and leave the politics for the politicians (he sounded a little bit utopian and passive here; the idea of an intellectual who does not take action is a little passive for me). Nevertheless, he emphasized that intellectuals could have their influence on the politicians in a long run.

Journal of my conversation with Dr. Sick (July 2008):

The conversation with Dr. Sick did not go ahead as I wished for or as I planned for. Due to Dr. Sick's very busy schedule and because of the developments between the U.S. and Iran in July 2008, even before we started our conversation, he told me he was being contacted by news agencies in regard to the latest development between the two countries and that he could not spend much time with me.

When he said he did not have time and could spend only five to ten minutes with me, I realized that it was going to be a tense conversation. I knew I had the option to cancel the conversation right at that moment or ask for another time to do it. Nevertheless, I also knew he was a very valuable source and I did not want to lose this chance. Our conversation lasted almost 20 minutes.

Anyhow, this time table was the first block to our conversation. Despite having agreed to have a 45-60 minute conversation, now, he mentioned he would be brief and right to the point due to his busy schedule. I expected to gain a story out of him, with his history of being a high level official in three administrations in the United States in the past. Nevertheless, when he said he could not spend that much time, I realized this conversation was not going to be as I hoped for.

Indeed, this was not a conversation. After answering my first question, I realized Sick intended to provide short and direct answer to my questions. Even though I asked my first question in a way that I would receive a story from him about the US-Iran relationship, he answered very short. Nevertheless, because he was the highest official in my research partner's list, I thought his perspective would be very valuable for me.

This experience was another eye opening moment about the value of participatory hermeneutic research. Up to this point, July 16, 2008, I have had five conversations. Almost in all of them, I established very good relationships with my research participants. We were able to discuss the issues in a conversational setting; however, the experience with Sick was very different from two perspectives.

Throughout this conversation, I learned many new lessons that would not be possible, had I conducted a quantitative or qualitative research with some measurement tool. I better understood how the participatory research conversation allows the researcher to see angles that can not be discovered in a survey without any direct contact between the researcher and research participant. The more conversation I conducted, the more I realized the learning process involved in participatory research conversation. This conversation showed me how researchers could get better insights when they establish strong relationships with their conversation partners.

Throughout our conversation, or perhaps I should call it interview, I discovered another astonishing point. He did not seem to be as an impartial third party in regard to my research topic. My questions were usually answered with a sense of sympathy towards the U.S. He pictured the United States as the good party in this conflict and blamed Iran as the bad party and the cause of the problem. He sounded like a state man in the U.S. whose language is accusative! I did not have this impression in any of my previous conversations and this was an interesting experience for me to see an academic to be biased.

His partiality, reminded me of Dr. McPherson's comment about my bias throughout my proposal. McPherson is on my dissertation committee and gave me valuable comment on how my proposal was biased. While it was difficult for me to see myself as biased, now, by Sick's comments, I noticed how one can be biased and not realize it. Now, I could see McPherson point about my bias and how it could limit horizons. Sick provided a clear example of somebody who sees an issue with bias. This experience might help me to conduct my research in a more impartial way.

Finally, I considered this conversation as non satisfactory by hermeneutical standard, it was more of an interview than a conversation, however, the lessons from this conversation were very valuable for me and made me to see new aspects involved in the issue of the US-Iran. If American high ranking officials such as Sick only saw the Iranians' wrong doings, and if they do not mention the U.S. wrong doings at all, which Iranians interpret as dishonesty, how do they expect the Iranian leadership to be honest with them in dealing with different disputing issues that exist between the two? This was the great lesson of today's conversation.

Tonight is the 29th of July, 2008:

I have been reflecting on the concept of fusion of horizon and I realized that I need to make a change in my points about "fusion of horizon." The fusion of horizon, really, is not something that is going to happen between an American official and an Iranian official, because they are told to facilitate a relationship. The fusion of horizon, really, is what my text may bring to a reader. Though my text, I am inviting my reader to see a new perspective and hope to influence them by representing my argument, the perspectives that I bring to this relationship in hope of creating a new understanding about this relationship.

Journal of my conversation with Abdi (August 2008):

After I called Mr. Abdi in Tehran from my home town of Rasht, he recognized me and told me to call him when I came to Tehran. In Tehran, I called him in the morning and he asked me to call him later to fix an appointment with him. I thought he was trying to evaluate my trustworthiness due to the risky circumstances that surrounded intellectuals, including him, in Iran. Finally, I meet with him in his house in Tehran at 7:00 pm on August 18, 2008.

Another great coincident was the date of my conversation with Mr. Abdi. Fifty five years ego, exactly on this day, CIA conducted its coup to overthrow the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mossadegh. The date was August 18, 1953.

It was a very friendly meeting. He was extremely warm, humble, and a casual person. He was having a work related meeting with a friend in his house and their conversation was very casual. Apparently, they were investigating systematic crimes in big/industrial cities in Iran. They were also talking about what to do about the 30th anniversary of the revolution. After my arrival, their conversation went on without any interruption. He asked me to join them and have some tea while they were in discussion and this made me even more relaxed, because it showed me how friendly they are and gave me time to adapt myself to this new environment. Every thing went perfect so far.

I felt Mr. Abbas Abdi was extremely conservative in what he was saying. In some cases, he answered my questions very vague and, I guess, this was due to his caution about the possible consequences for him.

Abdi asked me some question about my background, the topic and purpose of my research, and the type of theory I was applying to my research topic. I explained where and what I was studying, and my research topic and my desire for offering an alternative course of action to the current course of action between the U.S. and Iran.

The conversation turned to be another great opportunity for me to think about the challenges that I face in my research. How is it possible to apply hermeneutics to a very calculated issue in the international arena?

He was not very optimistic about what I was doing. When I talked about my interest to build peace between the U.S. and Iran through my research, he did not seem to be very optimistic. He joked by saying it is easier if "you wanted to build war!" Later, I realized he was not joking! As somebody who spent several years in prison in the Islamic Republic, only because he conducted a survey in which he found out almost 86% of Iranians support talks and engagement with the United States, he had this sense of bitter humor. In his opinion, the two governments are on course toward confrontation. Iran does not recognize the new international system and the U.S. does not tolerate this. For him, confrontation is inevitable, even if it may be delayed. Nevertheless, he mentioned a dramatic change in Iranian government may change his prediction.

An important point of Abdi was that the Islamic Republic would like to engage with the United States, but is very careful to save its image in the Islamic World. In his opinion, this is a dilemma for the Islamic Republic. They want to engage and be legitimized by the U.S. but they do not want to appear as the weaker side of a possible engagement in the future (because their ideology of anti-Americanism in the region and in the world). This factor makes a possible negotiation and engagement even more difficult.

When transcribing my conversation with Abdi, I realized the pessimism in his views. He did not believe that there is a chance for the creation of a new narrative to challenge the official narrative of the two states. He believed the decisions on the state level are beyond wishful hoping! Nevertheless, what I think is that, it is this wishful hope that is the main factor for change in our world. Abdi, in my opinion, was isolated in a system that does not allow to imagine, but this could not stop me from imagining.

It was a great conversation because I discovered a new perspective in the US-Iran relationship. His point was close to Dabashi's point where he talked about the political cultures in the two countries and their power to restrict alternative narratives.

Tonight is October 14, 2008:

I am working on my dissertation writing. While I was trying to determine the significance of my introduction, precisely when I reached my conversation with Dr. Michael Provence, I finally realized what my research is all about. This was an amazing moment in my whole research. After reflecting days and weeks and months on the significance of my research and how I am going to apply hermeneutic to my research topic, I finally realized that my research is not about solving this problem between the two nations. My research is all about showing that a black and white mind set, where a forceful and military mentality prevails, is not going to work any more in the 21st century. The Islamic Republic is a good example where the U.S. is not able to accomplish any forward movement (because the U.S. does not have the leverage and resources for using force against the Republic). Simply said, the notion of understanding must be inserted in the American foreign diplomacy. Without this concept which requires a new approach, the others may not comply with what the U.S. desires the others to do. I think there was a fusion of horizon between me and hermeneutic thought tonight.

December 2008:

Here it is the point of this journal. Some of my research partners, including Abdi, were pessimistic about my research. Some of them mentioned the decision of power holders in the two countries as the most important element in this dispute between the two. They mentioned that the decisions of the statesmen are usually strategic and based on interest rather than a comprehensive approach to satisfy all parties involved. The points that concerned me were whether a hermeneutical theory can be applicable to this crisis.

Sometimes, this theory sound very idealistic to me. Sometimes, it makes me wonder if this theory is going to help me understand a political crisis in the international arena. Some of my research participants hesitated when I explained my approach. Their reaction was a little dubious about the applicability of this theory to this international crisis.

Even though their views make me have my own doubts about my approach, whether this theory is going to work as a framework for my research and whether it is going to be functional; nevertheless, I believe the 21st century is a century for paradigm shift as my informal research partner Dr. Provence at UCSD emphasized.

Up to this point, strategic maneuvers determined the resolution of political and international crisis. The result of strategic decision making has been disastrous in many cases, because of multiple conflicts in the international arena in the 20, and even at the beginning of the 21st century. This century should be is a century for more comprehensive and inclusive approach based on understanding the concerns of others. I believe a comprehensive theory, such as hermeneutics, might break down the walls of conventional thinking in international arena. It may bring a new perspective in how to see the problems, how to deal with them, and how to hope for their resolution.

This paradigm shift is very challenging, as many of my research participants emphasized; but they viewed the conflict by staying within the framework. What I am proposing in my text and inviting my readers to see is a move beyond the norm that has been dominant in the 20th century in general and in the US-Iran relationship in the past decades. Until we imagine inclusive approaches to deal with international crisis, until we respect others, until we understand the root cause of the problems and until we honest in dealing with them, we can not solve the problems. The US-Iran growing crisis is a good example that the mind set should be changed before we can change the narrative in this conflict.

The last point is about my communication line between me and my research participants. I realized that English language worked as a barrier in my English conversations sometimes. When I was conducting my conversations in English, sometimes, I was not able to further and expand the discussion as I desired. On the other hand, in my Farsi spoken conversations, I was able to go deeper in discussing the issue which gave me better insights about the problem.

Final Reflections (January 2009):

While I looked at my conversation partners as valuable experts with unique perspectives to my research, our conversations became opportunities for political discussions where a better understanding emerged at the end of the process. Throughout this research process, I realized I had emerged into this socio-political discussion and my level of understanding was transformed from a student to a participant in the forum. In my conversation with Pickering, he mentioned he hoped "we can count on you to have a more open mind about some of these particular issues and problems" as we discussed the

relationship. While I always considered myself inferior to my conversation partners who are experts in the field, Abdi included me among Iranians who live in the U.S. who might reduce the tension between the two countries.

This inclusion of myself in the engagement process reminded me of Gadamer points about the research conversation in hermeneutical tradition and the place of researcher and research participant where a fusion of horizons between the two reduces the superiority of any of them to the other:

As my research participants gave me weight during our conversations and raised my level from student to a partner, I felt a fusion of horizon emerge between us. As Gadamer (2004: 304) continues, the fusion of horizon "involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other." Although I had differences of opinion with my research participants in some instances, nevertheless, our conversations became occasions where different perspectives were discussed in hope of expanding each other's horizon. Gadamer (2004: 302) argues that in a true conversation, "we are not seeking agreement on some subject – because the specific contents of the conversation are only a means to get to know the horizon of the other person." While this text is a reflection of several experts' perspectives on the subject, it is also a testimony of the fusion of horizon between me and my participants.