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NUCLEAR SECURITY. CASE
STUDY: EUROPEAN UNION AND
IRAN

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KEY WORDS

European Union, Common Foreign and Security Policy, Iran, nuclear security, Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism.

SUMMARY

Introduction

How *common* is the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union? The majority of the researchers in the field would agree that this policy is not exactly a *common* one, as the foreign policy actions of the European Union have demonstrated in the past. Still, if we analyze the way in which the European Union understood to intervene in the Iranian nuclear crisis, the response does not seem to be that simple. For the first time, the member states of the European Union were capable of having a common position in what regards international crises and were capable of speaking with one voice. As surprising as this common European approach may seem, there is no real debate in the literature on the motives that determined the European Union to act united and no explanation on the means the Union decided to use.

As such, the doctoral thesis has as a main aim determining the motives that enabled the Union to have a common position and to become the main negotiator in the Iranian nuclear problem. The theoretical framework will comprise two of the types of new institutionalism developed in the European integration theory: rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. The hypothesis tested in this thesis is formulated as it follows: If there are interests of the European Union member states, then the European Union will intervene in international crises, but will use in its intervention only the means from a set of options defined by the security identity developed at the European level.

Structure of the thesis

The doctoral thesis is structured on four main chapters, which realize the passage from the general framework of security to nuclear security, while the final part is dedicated to analyzing the Iranian nuclear programme and to the case study, which presents the reaction of the European Union to the Iranian nuclear crisis.

The first chapter of the thesis concentrates on security, with a special emphasis on the concepts of security in the contemporary period. Security was and will be a central concept in security studies and in international relations, a concept that, instead of its extensive use, does not have a definition that is widely accepted both by practitioners and by theoreticians. The concept of security has become even more relevant starting with the 1990s when there can be noticed changes in the international relations and in the security environment, due to the dissolution of bipolarity at the international level but also because of the more and more felt phenomenon of globalization.

In what regards the structure of the chapter, the first part has the role of presenting the origins of this concept, of clarifying the debates surrounding the definition of security, as well as the sources of ambiguity related to a universal accepted definition. The second part of the chapter focuses on the classical vision of the concept of security, this vision overlapping with the realist vision of this central concept of international relations. The third subchapter presents the evolution of this concept in the new international environment that appeared after the end of the Cold War. As such, this part has the role of presenting the extension of the security concept in order to include other fields in the post-Cold War period apart from military security.

For this essay to be as comprehensive as possible, it was considered important to include a section that reveals the way in which the main theories of international relations have understood to define the concept of security. At the end of this chapter, the concepts of security used by the main international or regional organizations with relevant tasks in international peace and security are clarified.

Nuclear security is the main subject of the second chapter of the doctoral thesis. Starting from the idea that nuclear proliferation represents an essential preoccupation of humankind, as noticed also by the United Nations Organizations, that chapter has as a main aim the analysis of nuclear security from the point of view of contemporary challenges and of the responses that the international community decided to offer. The chapter is split in five parts. As such, the first part concentrates on aspects related to the development of nuclear technology; the second part pays attention to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, but also to

the challenges pose by them to international security, while the third part takes into consideration the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the last half a century.

The fourth part analyzes the nonproliferation international regime, which has in its centre the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, underlying the strengths as well as its weaknesses and the possible solutions for limiting the deficiencies that it currently suffers from. In addition, it was considered important to dedicate the last part of the chapter exclusively to presenting some recent cases of nuclear proliferation that represent challenges for the international contemporary regime of nuclear nonproliferation and from which the international community can learn some lessons in order to improve the regime in the future.

The third chapter of the thesis is dedicated to presenting the most important aspects of the Iranian nuclear programme. Iran has made the first steps for developing a nuclear programme during the Reza Pahlavi shah, and ironically, one of the first countries that supported Iran in order to attain this objective was the United States of America, the biggest contemporary threat to the Iranian national security. The attention of the international community was attracted definitely and irreversibly by the Iranian nuclear programme starting with the year 2002 when the first disclosures regarding its hidden evolutions were made public.

The chapter is structured in five main parts. The first part analyzes the motives behind the decision of the Iranian state to develop a nuclear programme, starting from the right to have a programme and the support it has among the Iranian population, continuing with the energy needs, national pride and prestige, regime survival and opportunity, and ending with the desire of Iran to ensure its hegemony in the region but also its security.

The chapter continues with a detailed chronology of the Iranian nuclear programme on different periods, starting with the 1950s until today, with the aim of underlying the role that various international actors had in developing this nuclear programme. The end of this part presents different possible scenarios regarding the evolution of the nuclear programme in the future. Quo vadis Iran? Is the Iranian state heading towards a civilian or a military nuclear programme? There are arguments that make us believe that Iran wishes to develop a military programme but also arguments that sustain the contrary.

The next part of the chapter presents the consequences that the development of a military nuclear programme by Iran will have upon the nuclear nonproliferation regime, already affected by the recent cases of proliferation, but also upon international security. The last part of the chapter presents the responses of the main international organizations and of the big powers in front of the Iranian case of nuclear proliferation. In this sense, there are

presented the reactions of the United Nations, of the International Atomic Energy Agency, but also of the United States of America, Russia, China and Israel, states with the biggest potential of influencing the evolution of the Iranian nuclear programme in the future.

The thesis's last chapter represents a passage from the general to the specific, a case study that aims to analyze the reaction of the European Union to the Iranian nuclear case. The united intervention of the European Union in this case of proliferation represents a novelty for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which although it has appeared more than one decade ago has known mostly cases of scission among the EU member states than cases of unity. The first part of the chapter presents the relations between the European Union (European Communities at that time) and Iran starting with the 1950s, while the next pages present the main phases of the EU intervention in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis.

The theoretical framework employed by the thesis, meaning the new institutionalism, with its main two branches - rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, are introduced in the third part of the chapter. The end of the chapter is dedicated exclusively to the analysis of the European Union's intervention in solving the nuclear crisis in Iran with the support of the two types of institutionalism.

Conclusions and recommendations

Security still has a strong resonance in contemporary security studies, and will continue to have, as long as there are divisions at the international level in the form of nation states. The end of the Cold War and globalization led to a modification of the concept of security, a concept that today signifies not only a single dimension, the military one, but six dimensions, all equally important and interrelated: military security, political security, social security, cultural security, environment security and economic security.

In what regards the theory of international relations, we emphasize the emergence of more approaches that do not have as aim solving the problems but understanding them, the analysis of the way in which they appeared and which put the accent on the role of knowledge and common understanding of security. Trying to keep up the speed with the evolutions from the international level, the main organizations responsible with maintaining the international peace and security at the global or at the regional level have tried to adapt the concept of security they use and to diversify the range of activities undertaken in order to successfully combat the new challenges. It is remarkable that these organizations prefer to avoid clear definitions of security, due to the diversity of the member states, and in exchange

prefer to speak about the security risks they are taking into account.

It can be said that security became a more complex concept in modernity, but surely its evolution will not stop at this point, depending not only on the technological evolutions and from the military field but also on the evolutions from the cultural, social, environment and political fields of the states.

At the same time, nuclear security was and will be an essential preoccupation of the international community, especially if we have in mind the emergence at the end of the Cold War of the second nuclear era, which involved the spread of nuclear weapons at a faster speed than in the past among the developing states. In what regards the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, the main identified challenges for international security are the costs associated and the risk of depletion of uranium resources, safety and security, nuclear waste, and the risk of proliferation having as a possible consequence nuclear terrorism.

The use of nuclear technology for military purposes by developing nuclear weapons has known a significant rise mostly after the end of the Cold War. If in 1968, the moment in which the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty was signed, there were five nuclear states, nowadays their number rose to nine, with the possibility for Iran to become the tenth nuclear state. The nuclear nonproliferation regime includes multilateral treaties and conventions adopted in general under the auspices of the UN and of the IAEA, as well as bilateral treaties concluded between the United States of America and Russia, and the new efforts for the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The survival of the international nuclear nonproliferation regime depends on the way the international community decides to respond in front of the new cases of nuclear proliferation, meaning India, Pakistan, North Korea, or on the contrary to ignore them. While India and Pakistan, not being parts to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, cannot even be verified or sanctioned through this regime, the UN Security Council sanctioned North Korea, part to the NPT until 2003, for proliferation, but so far, the sanctions did not have the expected results. The biggest worry is the way in which states that wish to proliferate will understand the lessons from these cases: is it preferable to remain parts to the NPT and be unable to develop military nuclear programme, or to develop them and bear with the consequences, or it is better to renounce to the NPT, and liberate themselves of all constraints that it imposes?

Despite the fact that Iran has been suspected by the Western states for many years that it would like to develop nuclear weapons, the first rumors regarding the existence of a

complex Iranian nuclear programme came to surface in 2002, the information being revealed by an Iranian opposition movement in exile and later confirmed by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The investigations have shown that Iran developed the capacity to enrich uranium and tried to produce plutonium, both activities being indispensable for a nuclear programme. The motivations of states that have the intention to develop nuclear programmes are mostly common, and in the case of Iran they are related to: the right that it beneficiaries from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to develop a civilian nuclear programme accompanied by the large support for this programme among the population but also among the Iranian leaders; the rising energy needs of the Iranian state; national pride and prestige of a state with a long and rich history; ensuring the regime survival; the opportune moment for developing a programme having in mind the preoccupations of the international community; ensuring the regional hegemony and the security of the Iranian state.

The interest of Iran for nuclear technology dates back to the 1950s, when the shah Reza Pahlavi started to receive support from the United States of America through the Atoms for Peace programme. After a period of stagnation which followed the theocratic revolution, Iran became again interested in having a nuclear programme in the middle of the 1980s, and after some experiments conducted in 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium the Iranian nuclear programme started to attract the attention of the entire international community, being considered the most problematic case of nuclear proliferation together with the one of North Korea.

It is not surprising that international organizations as well as the big powers did not hesitate to react if we have in mind the consequences that the development of a military nuclear programme could have upon the international nuclear nonproliferation regime but also upon international security. Despite the constant attempts made by the International Atomic Energy Agency to clarify the programme evolution as well as its possible military dimensions, there are numerous items to be clarified. Neither the attempts of the European Union, not those of the big powers reunited under the P5+1 formula to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis through negotiations, incentives, but also multilateral sanctions completed by unilateral ones were sufficient for finding a solution accepted by all parties until today.

The possible solutions for solving the Iranian nuclear crisis include: continuation of negotiations, applying sanctions whether multilateral or unilateral, change of the Tehran regime through external interventions and actions, and the military attack, as a last resort solution. Each of these have their strengths and their weaknesses, each has supporters among the big powers as well as opponents. Most probably we will continue to witness a

combination between the first two solutions, that of negotiations and that of sanctions, while the military solution will be avoided due to the risks it presents, on one side, and due to the lack of consensus among the international community for using this final solution, on the other side.

Surely Iran will follow the path of North Korea, which means in practice the continuation of the nuclear programme, infrequent and limited cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, continuation of negotiations with the big powers only as much as it is necessary to ensure that the military solution will not be applied and that the multilateral sanctions adopted by the international organizations are kept at the lowest possible level. The international community as well as Iran is definitely aware that the lack of viable alternatives means that the only path to follow is that in which negotiations are combined with sanctions. In these circumstances, the international community has nothing else to do than to prepare for a nuclear Iran, a scenario considered as being more than probable in the near future and which can at best only be delayed, and to try to limit the potential effects of this state of facts.

The relations between the European Union (the European Communities at that time) and Iran were strongly affected until the end of the 1980s by the Cold War, the main aim of Western states being to avoid the expansion of the communist regime in Iran. The Union, as well as the United States of America, developed commercial relations with the Iranian state during the shah, the main European economic partners of Iran being Great Britain, Germany, France and Italy. The good relations were a consequence of the wish of the Iranians to reduce the dependence on the United States of America, on one side, the Union being viewed as a possible salvation in front of the American hostility, and a consequence of the importance attributed by the Europeans to Iran due to its rich energy resources, on the other side.

If in the first decade which followed the Iranian revolution from 1979 the relations between the two parts have deteriorated considerably, the European Union being sympathetic to the United States of America and its policy of isolating Iran on the international scene in spite the fact that the European states had strong economic interests in Iran, the situation improved starting with the 1990s. The European Union not only refused to apply the American treatment applied to Iran consisting in a policy of isolation, but succeeded in becoming the main commercial partner of Iran. The good relations between the two parts determined the EU member states to start in 2001 the negotiations for concluding a Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Iran.

The revelations in 2002 regarding the existence of a clandestine Iranian nuclear programme have strongly affected the cooperation between the two entities, the Union being more inclined to use conditionality in its relations with Iran: the signing of the agreements was conditioned by the evolutions in the nuclear nonproliferation field. The one decade experience of good relations with Tehran but also the interests of the big member states as well as the interests of the whole EU determined the Union to become the main negotiator in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis.

In what regards the theoretical framework used for explaining the UE's intervention in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis, rational choice institutionalism underlines the importance of member states' interests in the decision of creating institutions. From this point of view, the united action of the Union in international crises is a consequence of the convergence of member states' interests. Moreover, there needs to be taken into account another factor, namely the relative power of actors, since the big member states can alter the preference of the other members of the European Union.

The Iranian nuclear crisis is a case of foreign policy in which the interests of big member states had an importance in drawing a united EU intervention. The interests of the big three - Germany, France and Great Britain - to intervene in solving the Iranian nuclear file are extremely diverse: from good commercial relations to the wish of preserving the international nonproliferation regime, from the preoccupations regarding the credibility of the Union as important actor on the international scene to the wish of avoiding a new split among the member states.

Despite the power that the big member states have, the Union would not have been capable of speaking with a single voice if there have not been interests of the whole EU in solving the Iranian case. The economic, geostrategy and security interests mainly determined the united approach of the EU, but probably the most crucial aspect that needs to be taken into account is the opportunity that Iran represented for reviving the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Although rational choice institutionalism is the most suitable approach for explaining the European Union intervention in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis, it is not useful in explaining the European Union's means of intervention in this case of proliferation. As such, the question to be answered is: was the European Union's approach rational? The response is a negative one since there are numerous arguments that sustain the irrationality of the mean used by the European Union, whether we talk about the agreements signed with Iran in the period 2003-2004, or about the multilateral sanctions adopted under the auspices of the

United Nations and the unilateral sanctions adopted by the European Union to supplement the first ones. The arguments that support the irrationality of the UE intervention are related to the lack of incentives that it could offer to Iran, the lack of trust between the EU and Iran which led to an extremely slow rhythm of the negotiations, the drawbacks of the agreements signed in the period 2003-2004, the weakness of multilateral sanctions adopted under the UN auspices but also the extremely costly effects upon the member states of the unilateral sanctions adopted by the EU.

All this weaknesses of the European approach underline the lack of rationality in the Union's decision to use means such as negotiations, conditionality and multilateral and unilateral sanctions. Consequently, rational choice institutionalism cannot explain the European approach in the Iranian nuclear case regarding the means of this approach. If the EU member states would have acted according to the logic of consequentialism, they should have seen the drawbacks of their approach and tried to eliminate them.

Only if we use sociological institutionalism can we understand the means employed by the European Union in its approach towards Iran. In other words, the logic of consequentialism needs to be supplemented with the logic of appropriateness. The European Union member states chose conditionality, multilateral and unilateral sanctions, because membership in the European Union matters and influences the member states' opinion regarding the appropriate and expected behavior in a certain situation. As argued by sociological institutionalism, member states are in part products of the institutional environment in which they act, an environment in which they are strongly embedded and which they do not challenge anymore but accept it as it is.

The international identity of the European Union having at its basis values such as the preference for peaceful means in solving international problems, multilateralism, respect for international law and international organizations has influenced considerably the EU's approach in the Iranian nuclear case. Moreover, the European Union member states have passed through a process of socialization in what regards the foreign policy matters, and as a consequence the good past cooperation with the Iranian state and the years of experience in the nuclear nonproliferation field determined the member states to consider that the most suitable approach in solving the nuclear crisis is the appeal to diplomatic and political means. Only in case they would fail the EU was to employ multilateral and unilateral sanctions.

Moreover, member states have learned from cases like Iraq, North Korea and Libya that in cases of nuclear proliferation cautious intervention is needed, as too much criticisms

and isolation does not determine a change in the behavior of target states and that the sanctions need to be applied gradually. The mobilization of the European Commission, of the European Parliament, of the public opinion and of the international organizations seems to have influences to a great degree the EU member states' preferences regarding the means of intervention in the Iranian nuclear crisis.

The European Union intervention in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis has proved to be a good case for studying the way in which rational choice institutionalism can be combined with sociological institutionalism. We can conclude that in its attempt to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis the European Union member states did choose rationally but from a set of options already defined by institutions. The best way to characterize the European Union approach towards Iran is that of an interest-driven strategy combined with the "appropriate" means.

The implications for the future of the Common Foreign and Security Policy can be resumed as such: The EU member states are expected to act together in future international crises only when member states interests converge, and member states are likely to maintain their preference for non-military instruments and soft power due to their belief that political and diplomatic means can make miracles in solving the problems which the international community has to confront nowadays.