
Critical Discourse Analysis of Iran's Foreign Policy Behaviour after US-Withdrawal from the JCPOA



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Abstract

This study responds to one central question, i.e., whether Iran's moderate foreign policy approach remained intact in the aftermath of the collapse of the nuclear deal or not? For this purpose, the study conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis of Rouhani's and Raisi's speeches at the United Nations. The study applies Teun A. van Dijk's framework of analysis to find underlying ideologies of positive self-presentation and negative other representation in the selected corpus. Findings reveal that there was no significant increase in negative other representation except for the United States and Israel. The study also finds that there was less use of hyperbolism and rhetoric lexicalisation. The study concludes that Iran's foreign policy behaviour in the post-JCPOA collapse era was neither conservative nor moderate. It can rather be attributed as 'rational'. The stress on effective and result-oriented engagements with the US and the European Union and the opening up to anti-ideological blocs appear to be a result of realistic calculations of strategic and economic challenges and opportunities. The study uses van Dijk's selected discursive strategies that sync with positive self and negative other representation. These findings have larger implications for future nuclear negotiations, the fight against terrorism, Middle Eastern security, and Iran's relations with Afghanistan, the West, and Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, Iran foreign policy, nuclear sanctions, Iran nuclear deal, joint comprehensive plan of action

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Introduction

Ideologies are hidden in the discourse and discourse serves as a powerful instrument to influence and gain political advantage. President Ahmadinejad's conservative ideology failed to resolve Iran's economic woes and issues around its nuclear programme. He could not muster the international community's support against unfair treatment towards his country. Excessive criticism of international organisations and the world powers even further isolated Iran. Additionally, it also undermined Iran's image as a responsible and trustworthy state in the international community. These factors, along with domestic opposition, led to the fall of Ahmadinejad. In the 2013 presidential elections, the majority voted in favour of President Hassan Rouhani who was known as a 'moderate cleric' and an 'experienced negotiator'. Rouhani's rise to power can be contended as the beginning of an end to confrontational politics with the outside world.

President Rouhani previously served as Secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security Relations from 1988 to 2015. During his tenure at the Supreme Council, he extensively dealt with European countries. Based on his past experiences, the international community anticipated a major shift in Iran's foreign policy. It was also hoped that Rouhani's policies would help the country in ending its regional and international isolation. Rouhani on his part tried to improve Iran's image in the international community as a responsible state open to negotiations.¹ Although his *modus vivendi* towards the West was viewed with some scepticism, it greatly helped in reaching the landmark nuclear deal with the United States and the European Union which came to be known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The JCPOA collapsed, however, when the US unilaterally walked out of it shortly after Donald Trump came into power. President Trump claimed that the deal failed to curtail Iran's nuclear ambitions and its regional influence. He re-imposed the international

sanctions that were lifted as part of the deal. Trump also persuaded other signatories to back out of the nuclear deal to isolate Iran. These developments cast a negative shadow on Iran's moderate foreign policy pursuits. The way in which Iran responded had far-reaching consequences for future nuclear talks and regional security. Given the aforementioned, the questions arise: What was Iran's response in the face of Trump's 'maximum pressure' strategy? Was there any change in Iran's behaviour towards other signatories? How is the new Iranian president Ibrahim Raisi taking the nuclear issue with the European Union? Did Iran's moderate ideology remain intact following the collapse of the nuclear deal?

This study attempts to answer these questions through critical discourse analysis of President Rouhani's and Raisi's speeches at the United Nations. The selection of UN speeches as a corpus for discourse analysis was primarily for two reasons: the corpus was a primary document that was easily accessible and it was presented at the highest international forum which not just has a wider audience but a wider impact too. This study is timely as Iran and the European Union are seeking revival of the deal and looking for means to somehow re-engage the US. Also, Iran-Saudi back-channel dialogues are underway and Tehran is actively engaged in Afghanistan's affairs. In the given situation, it is important to understand the Iranian foreign policy behaviour to better understand Tehran's future course of relations.

The study begins with insights highlighting the importance of studying foreign policy behaviours and sheds light on critical discourse analysis as a tool to interpret underlying ideologies in foreign policy speeches. In the following sections, the study discusses the major foreign policy patterns deduced from Rouhani's and Raisi's UN speeches to uncover ideological metaphors.

Why and how do we study state behaviours?

Relationships are primarily built upon state behaviours and such behaviours determine the future course of directions. Knowing

foreign policy behaviour, attitude, and approaches of a particular country is an important aspect in the field of international relations (IR). Like humans, every state seems to behave differently in different situations and IR scholars have been developing different modules and methods to infer foreign policy responses of particular states. This is not an exclusive feature of the IR discipline. Political scientists throughout history have been studying monarchs, empires, and kingdoms. Why a particular state adopts a certain behaviour is another mode of inquiry that fits in the reasoning and explanatory research. Central to this study are the questions of what has changed? And how much has changed? This mode of inquiry is essentially required to unravel the complexities associated with a particular phenomenon that in turn opens avenues for further reasoning. For instance, descriptive analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis, a notable incident in international history, intrigued many scholars to contemplate the underlying reasoning to better predict state behaviours in a crisis.

So, to understand state behaviours and approaches, it is pertinent to focus on determinants such as history, geography, culture, and religion. However, examining behaviours in a crisis is something different that can be better analysed through discursive analysis of statements and speeches of the heads of the states. Discourse analysis is all about studying the language. The language can be written, spoken, and in the form of images or expressions. There is a strong connection between language and politics. States can use language to their advantage through its effective utilisation at both national and international levels.

According to Fairclough, "Discourse can misrepresent as well as represent realities, it can weave visions and imaginaries which can be implemented to change realities and, in some cases, improve human well-being, but it can also rhetorically obfuscate realities, and construe them ideologically to serve unjust power relations." Fairclough argues that ideologies are hidden in the discourse that can

be uncovered and interpreted through the effective use of discursive tools. According to Rahman, "Ideology represents politico-religious dogmas and beliefs, and they are embodied by the term 'worldview' as a whole." According to van Dijk, ideologies are the 'basis of discourse' and "this is through discourse the political ideologies are acquired, and expressed," and the legitimacy of actions is often gotten through political discourses.² How exactly one is moderate or conservative can be examined through unravelling the threads of cognition. Thus, investigation to reproduce underlying behaviour (ideology) has been central to the critical discourse analysis.

To extract behaviour or ideology from the text, van Dijk identified 27 categories of discursive analysis in which 'positive self-presentation and negative other representation' are macro-level and the rest are micro-level discursive strategies. Micro-level strategies include "Actor description, Authority, Burdon, Categorisation, Comparison, Consensus, Counterfactuals, Disclaimers, Euphuism, Evidentiality, Examples, Generalisation, Hyperbole, Implications, Irony, Lexicalisation, Metaphor, National self-glorification, Negative-others Representation, Norms, Number Games, Polarisation, Populism, Positive self-presentation, Presupposition, Vagueness, and Victimisation."³ These categories altogether fall in Dijk's ideological square, premised around the following;

"Emphasise **our** good things

Emphasise **their** bad things

De-emphasise **our** bad things

De-emphasise **their** good things."⁴

These can be applied to all kinds of texts, talks, speeches, and actions to determine the underlying behaviour and the ideology.

What has already been done in the Iranian context?

In a discourse analysis framework, it has already been established that President Rouhani was following a moderate political ideology as compared to his predecessor Ahmadinejad. While using

the discourse-historical approach, a study by Alemi analysed President Rouhani's and his predecessor Ahmadinejad's UN speeches by incorporating discourse features such as the representation of 'self and identity'. The study found a fundamental difference in language and the tone of both the presidents, wherein Ahmadinejad largely portrayed himself as the saviour of mankind and remained critical of the world powers, while President Rouhani followed a moderate approach and remained focused on specific foreign policy issues.

Another study by Kayvan Shakoury and Veronika Makarova used van Dijk's model of critical discourse analysis and investigated the differences between President Rouhani and President Ahmadinejad's UN speeches, both in view of micro- and macro-level discursive devices. Findings revealed that at the macro level, Ahmadinejad used more negative other discursive strategies in comparison to Rouhani. Ahmadinejad's focus remained on highlighting wrongdoings of the world powers that jeopardised global peace. The present study is distinct from the abovementioned studies as it seeks to interpret the change in the moderate foreign policy approach in the aftermath of the collapse of the nuclear deal.

Methodology

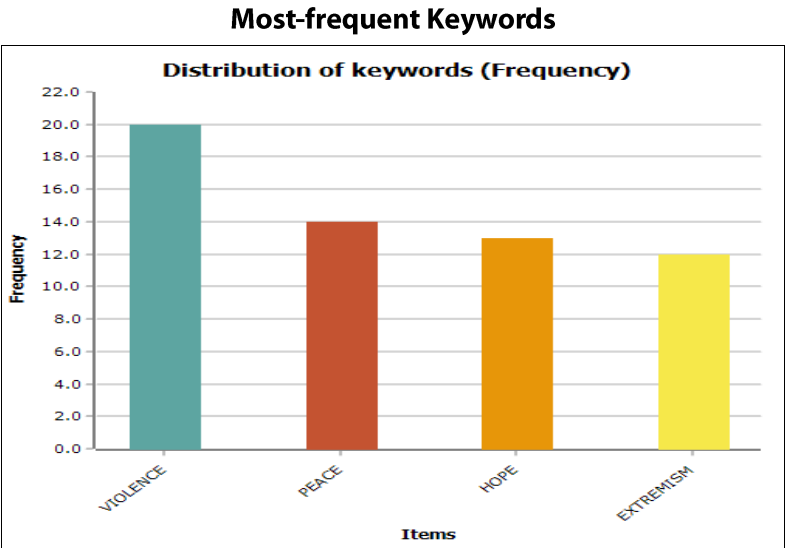
The UN speeches are written in a global context, and that context needs to be understood. For that purpose, this study employs van Dijk's approach to decipher underlying themes in President Rouhani's first speech at the United Nations in 2013, his last speech in 2020, and President Raisi's first speech at the 76th General Assembly Session of the United Nations. All three speeches were retrieved from the Iranian President's official website.⁵ The study applies van Dijk's macro level of analysis of polarisation. This macro-level analysis attempts to discover underlying ideologies of positive self-presentation and negative other representation in the text. The macro-level represents the gist of a text, the themes, the contexts, and the concepts at a broader scale and thus provides the global meaning of a

text. The ideological pattern under the polarisation framework is viewed through some of van Dijk's micro-level discursive strategies such as "Actor description, Authority, Burden, Categorisation, Comparison, Consensus, Disclaimers, Evidentiality, Generalisation, Hyperbole, Lexicalisation, Metaphor, National self-glorification, Populism, Victimisation." The selection of the first and the last speech of Rouhani has been made purposely for examining the change before and after the collapse of the nuclear deal. Additionally, the selection of Raisi's first speech (latest available) is based on examining the (dis)continuity of his predecessor's approach. The study argues that an increase or decrease in the employment of discursive strategies under the framework of polarisation will help understand Iran's foreign policy approach in the post-nuclear deal collapse era (i.e., to establish it as either hardliner, moderate, or rational).

Findings and Discussion

In the first corpus of around 2,654 words, the most frequently quoted word was 'violence'. Rouhani mentioned the word 'violence' in more than 15 places in different contexts such as strategic violence, structural violence, and violence and extremism. In all instances, violence, however, was categorised as 'fear'. In contrast, the words like human wisdom, tolerance, justice, collectivism, moderation, and peaceful means have been categorised as 'hope'. The whole corpus in a nutshell revolved around two broader themes, i.e., fear and hope.

Figure.1



Throughout the speech, violence and extremism in all its manifestations have been discouraged and presented as the leading cause of spreading fear and pessimism across the globe. The aforesaid in view, Rouhani tried to convince the audience about the importance of peaceful solution for not only global problems but also for the security issues in the Middle East and its nuclear programme. His request to the world community to work together for justice and peace and presenting his country as a responsible and forthcoming state in all collective efforts demonstrates Iran’s urge for greater integration. In other words, Rouhani pleaded Iran’s case on ‘moderate’ ideological footings before the international community. The following sections shall highlight and discuss important *topoi* that Rouhani used in his first speech to understand Iran’s departure from a conservative foreign policy approach.

World in Transition: Dangers of Violence

Rouhani regretted in his speech that the international discourse was heavily polarised between the centre and periphery and also between the civilised north and uncivilised south. And that was

the sole reason for the violent form of xenophobia such as faith-phobia, Islamophobia, Shia-phobia and Iran-phobia. Together, these, in his view, posed 'serious threats to the world peace and human security.'

The prevalent international political discourse depicts a civilised centre surrounded by un-civilised peripheries [...]. The creation of illusory identity distinctions and the current prevalent violent forms of xenophobia are the inevitable outcome of such a discourse.

Rouhani in a passive manner blamed some actors on the world stage who still advocate military solutions and coercive measures to maintain the old mentality of the cold war, i.e., 'superior us' and 'inferior others'. For Rouhani, the deadly violence in the region including the "assassination of common people and political figures in Iran" was the outcome of this polarisation. But today in a transitional period, when vulnerability has become a global concern, a limited chance of a mistake can be accorded to the situation.

[...] I should underline that illegitimate and ineffective threat to use or the actual use of force will only lead to further exacerbation of violence and crisis in the region [...] there is no guarantee that the era of quiet among big powers will remain immune from such violent discourses, practices and actions.⁶

The above statements emphasised that unfair treatment and discriminating behaviour with some states (including Iran) is counterproductive and needed to be stopped urgently. The tone cannot be read as 'threatening' but 'precautionary'. Rouhani used a 'consensus' discursive strategy to get universal support and endorsement on his violence narrative. The words 'illegitimate' and 'ineffective' with the threat used in a specific lexical style to embolden that illegitimate and ineffective threat or the actual use of force, is the

very cause of furtherance of violence. The outcome, i.e., the furtherance of violence is presented in a 'counterfactual' framework. The use of the personal pronoun 'I' refers to Rouhani's personal submission to the fact of increasing violence in case of continued illegitimate means. The above paragraph (i.e., para 13 of the speech) ends at a generalisation (for wider attention). However, paragraphs 11, 12, and 13 of the speech were replete with the 'examples' (a discursive strategy) in support of Rouhani's argument on violence. Para 14 employed a more 'populist' strategy by highlighting the killings of innocent people in the name of combating terrorism.

Half of Rouhani's speech stressed the collective efforts (depicting consensus) to deal with violence, extremism, xenophobia, and global security problems. In that sense, the coverage of polarisation in theory and practice was merely to bring the attention of the audience to the fact that Iran was mindful of targeted violence, discrimination, and exaggerated security threats (like Iranian threat which Rouhani claimed was nothing but illusionary and imaginary) that are often used as an excuse by the big powers for coercive measures, but Tehran desired to move forward.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a regional power, will act responsibly with regard to regional and international security, and is willing and prepared to cooperate in these fields.

In the way forward, however, Rouhani employed a 'presupposition' strategy about his country as a 'regional power' to put it out for the world that Iran is a regional power and aspires to engage with the world and the regional neighbours from a position of strength. This reflects that the idea of an 'influential' Iran is deeply ingrained in Iran's ideology.

No Military Solution to World Problems

To resolve global security issues (manifest in his debate on violence), Rouhani discouraged military options as they only

exacerbate violence and crises. Quoting from the past military interventions in the Middle East and West Asia, Rouhani argued that the use of force only resulted in the killing of innocent people. Rouhani hailed Syria's signing of the Chemical Weapons Convention. While doing so, he emphasised that his country believed in the peaceful resolution of all disputes including its own nuclear issue. On nine occasions, he used the word militarism, militarise, military intervention, policies, solution, which stand quite significant in a corpus of 2,654 words.

Militarism and the recourse to violent and military means to subjugate others are failed examples [...]. Securing peace and democracy and ensuring the legitimate rights of all countries in the world, including in the Middle East, cannot – and will not – be realised through militarism.

Relating military actions with 'subjugation' reveals that the 'populist' discursive strategy was employed to earn the sympathy of sufferers. However, this was portrayed in a general context, not explicitly targeted against any specific country (i.e., the US). While discouraging the use of force, Rouhani's statement regarding Syria can be attributed as a positive self-presentation.

[...] when some regional and international actors helped to militarise the situation through infusion of arms and intelligence into the country and active support of extremist groups, we emphasised that there was no military solution to the Syrian crisis.

The use of the pronoun 'we' stresses Iran's positive self-presentation in promoting a peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis. It also reflects the underlying ideological connotation for Iran referring to it as 'a major player in the region'.

Iran: The Harbinger of Peace; Making the case for the Nuclear Deal

Rouhani outrightly rejected 'Iranian threat' as baseless and clarified boldly that Iran by no means, was a threat to regional or international peace and security.

[...] Iran poses absolutely no threat to the world or the region. In Fact, in ideals as well as in actual practice, my country has been a harbinger of just peace and comprehensive security.

The use of the phrase 'my country' by Rouhani emphasised that he is a representative of the majority. It also reveals the ownership and indigenous support for Rouhani's message of 'hope' to the world. Otherwise, the word 'Iran' in contrast to 'my country' appeared quite natural and little appealing.

Regarding Iran's nuclear programme, Rouhani made it clear that it was for peaceful purposes. He declared before the international community that nuclear weapons (also other weapons of mass destruction) had no place in Iran's security doctrine. And, thus, Iran as a responsible state was ready to address reasonable concerns that the international community had. In turn, Iran was given a right to enrichment and other nuclear rights.

[...] notwithstanding the positions of others, this has been, and will always be, the objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nuclear weapon and other weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran's security and defense doctrine, and contradict our fundamental religious and ethical convictions. Our national interests make it imperative that we remove any and all reasonable concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear program.

For removing uncertainties attached to Iran's nuclear programme, Rouhani offered to work with other countries transparently. In doing so, Rouhani again employed the phrase 'our national interests' instead of Iran's or 'my country's national interests' to embolden Iran's position in the regional context.

... the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a regional power, is prepared to engage immediately in time-bound and result-oriented talks to build mutual confidence and removal of mutual uncertainties with full transparency [...] seeks constructive engagement with other countries based on mutual respect and common interest, and within the same framework does not seek to increase tensions with the United States [...] we expect to hear a consistent voice from Washington.

Mentioning the 'United States' demonstrated that Iran was seeking positive engagement with the US. With this, Rouhani set the tone for future cooperation with the world and the US, particularly, to resolve the nuclear issue. However, Rouhani explicitly related 'regional power' with the Islamic Republic of Iran (not just Iran) to offer bilateral as well as multilateral cooperation from the position of elevation. This reflects that Rouhani employed a 'presupposition' discursive strategy to augment his country's position.

Coalition for Enduring Peace

Rouhani ended his speech with hope and optimism about the future. He urged the international community to stand up against violence and extremism.

...in the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran I propose, as a starting step, the consideration by the United Nations of the project: "the World against Violence and Extremism (WAVE). Let us all join this 'WAVE'.⁷

By using the prefix 'in the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran' before 'I', Rouhani tried to embolden the demand for working together to fight against violence and extremism as the voice of the people of Iran and his government.

In sum, Rouhani's first speech was more reflective of Iran's submission to a moderate foreign policy pursuit. The element of positive self was marginally low, however, negative other was there but portrayed in a subtle and 'vague' manner (discursive strategy)

since the focus was more on victims rather than on actors, the culprits. Notably, there was only one instance of negative other framing (explicit) in terms of criticising the UN Security Council for not condemning the perpetrators of Iranian nuclear scientist. This is in complete contrast to Ahmadinejad's framing of the UN and the Security Council where he vehemently criticised big powers' domination and the inefficiency of the world forum.

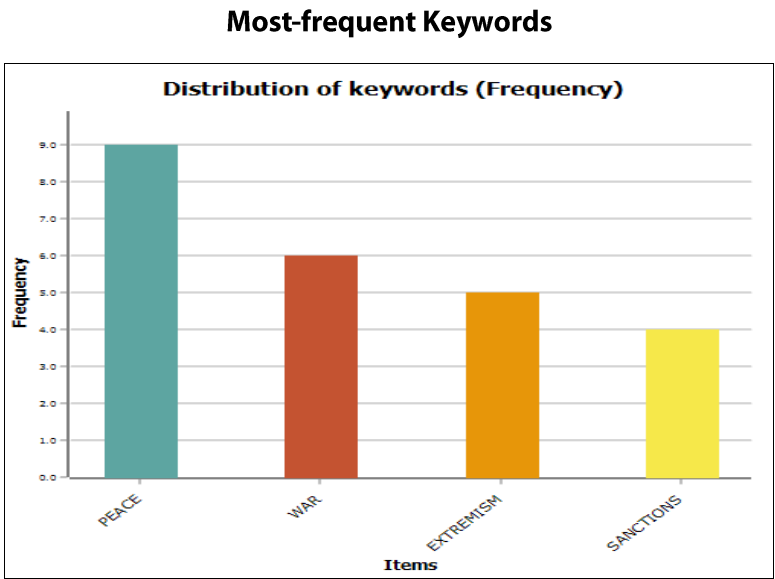
[...] had the Security Council not been under the domination of a limited number of governments? [...] UN's inefficiency has been on the rise [...] existence of the veto right and monopolisation of power in the Security Council have made it nearly impossible to defend the rights of the nations [...] the existence of discrimination and monopoly in the UN is in no way acceptable [...].⁸

There was a dedicated albeit small paragraph for Palestine under the context of structural violence and human rights. There was no direct mention of the words 'Israel' and 'Zionism/Zionist' which demonstrates that Iran was mindful that confrontational politics could undermine Iran's ambitious start. Instead of hyperbolism (that Ahmadinejad used to convince the audience), there was an element of populism (highlighting the sufferings of victims of violence, coercive military actions, and economic sanctions). There was no use of 'victimisation' in the discourse. The overall context of the speech seemed more academic and positive. Based on the findings of the first speech of Rouhani, the following lines look into the last speech of Rouhani.

In the second corpus of around 1,568 words (quite smaller than the first corpus), 'peace' replaced the word 'violence' as the highest quoted word by Rouhani. It was used in the context of positive self-presentation as Iran remained on the right side of history and always supported and promoted 'peace'. The opposite of peace, the word 'war' was particularly quoted in the context of the US. The word 'extremism' was the third-most frequently quoted word in the speech,

however, the context was different from the first corpus. Similar to peace and war, extremism was used for glorifying Iranian response to extremism. The word ‘sanctions’ was also used frequently in a more specific manner (Iranian context as compared to a more general one). The overall context revolved around a single theme: the realisation of injustice and unfair treatment with Iran.

Figure.2



Pandemic and Sanctions

Rouhani started by highlighting the challenge of Covid-19 that confronted the world. Turning to his country, Rouhani regretted that in the difficult time of the pandemic, Iran was facing severe economic sanctions.

All of us across the globe are experiencing difficult times during the pandemic. However, my nation, the resilient people of Iran, instead of enjoying global partnership and cooperation, is grappling with the harshest sanctions in history imposed in blatant and gross violation of the Charter

of the United Nations, international agreements and Security Council Resolution 2231.⁹

The mention of violations of the Security Council resolution reveals Rouhani's respect for the UN and its Security Council. From a discursive strategy point of view, Rouhani employed 'evidentiality' to support his claim about the violation of the Security Council resolution. The element of 'victimisation' can be observed as the people of Iran were suffering due to sanctions. On another occasion, Rouhani appreciated the presidents and the members of the Security Council (especially Russia and China) for stopping the US from exploiting the Security Council Resolution 2231. In other words, Rouhani hailed the sanctity of the UN and its Security Council. This reveals that Iran was mindful of not criticising the UN and the Security Council as it could jeopardise Iran's hard-earned image as a responsible state. He was also mindful that his predecessor failed to get relief for Iran with excessive use of negative other representation of world powers and inefficacy of the UN).

Negative Other Representation (the United States)

For greater attention and support for his argument against the US, Rouhani compared the widely circulated footage of US police kneeling on an African American's neck with the US treatment of independent nations (including Iran).

The footage broadcast to the world concerning the treatment of an African American by the US police is reminiscent of our own experience. We instantly recognise the feet kneeling on the neck as the feet of arrogance on the neck of independent nations.¹⁰

The use of metaphor appears out of context in comparison to historical facts that Rouhani quoted to highlight America's wrongdoings. Rouhani here employed a populist strategy to support his argument against US treatment with the independent nations.

Although Rouhani wanted to tell the audience about Iran's sufferings, it was framed in a general context to meet the populism criteria.

Positive self-presentation (boasting)

Right after the quotation, Rouhani boasted about Iran's efforts of peace and support to the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen. He boasted about Iran's efforts to fight extremism and to protect the people regardless of their religious affinities. He mentioned General Soleimani as a hero who fought against violent extremism. Furthermore, he hailed Iran's contribution towards the UN, raised its diplomatic efforts that helped achieved the multilateral nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

We stood with the people of Afghanistan against Soviet occupiers, domestic warlords, extremists, Al-Qaeda terrorists and American occupiers.

We played a pivotal role in all peace and reconciliation processes, be it the 2001 Bonn Conference or regional initiatives.

In the Mid 1980s, we called for collective security arrangements in the Persian Gulf.

We proposed World against Violence and Extremism (WAVE), which was unanimously adopted by this Assembly.

We offered a non-aggression pact to our neighbours and in 2019 we presented HOPE (Hormuz Peace Endeavour).

We were the first country in the region to stand with the people and government of Kuwait against occupation by Saddam.

We stood with the people of Iraq against Saddam tyranny, U.S. occupation and Daesh savagery [...] we supported all Iraqi—whether Kurd or Arab, Sunni or Shia, Yazidi or Christian.

We stood alongside the people of Syria against tens of terrorist Takfiri groups, separatists and foreign fighters.

We stood with the people and government of Lebanon against Zionist occupiers.

[...] in 2012, we presented a democratic solution through a referendum in Palestine.

We vociferously called for justice against aggression for the besieged people of Yemen and presented a four-point peace plan at the outset of hostilities in 2015.

[...] in 2015, we achieved the JCPOA as one of the biggest accomplishments of the history of diplomacy and remained faithful to it in spite of persistent violations by the United States.¹¹

Rouhani excessively used a positive-self discursive strategy in defence of his argument that Tehran did not deserve the kind of treatment meted out to it in the form of sanctions. Rouhani could also directly criticise the US and condemn sanctions, but the boasting was purposely adopted to justify the Iranian stance as a responsible state and to seek global appreciation. In other words, Rouhani tried to earn the international community's overwhelming support to pressurise the US. About JCPOA, he stressed that Iran was still adhering to the spirit of JCPOA despite the unilateral withdrawal of the US. This also indicates that Iran was open to negotiation with other signatories.

Moreover, Rouhani explicitly used the element of positive self-presentation (that was negligible in the first speech) to make everyone realise the unjust treatment his country was receiving at the hands of the US despite remaining faithful to the obligations of the nuclear deal. Although there was a significant shift from populism (highlighting the sufferings of victims) to more positive self-framing (stereotypical arguments), hyperbolism in the discourse remained relatively low (for instance: *The United States can impose neither negotiation nor war on us*).¹² The negative other-framing in Rouhani's last speech was glaringly reflective but only in the context of the US. By doing so, Rouhani urged the world community to stand by Iran as the country did not deserve the sanctions. There was not a single

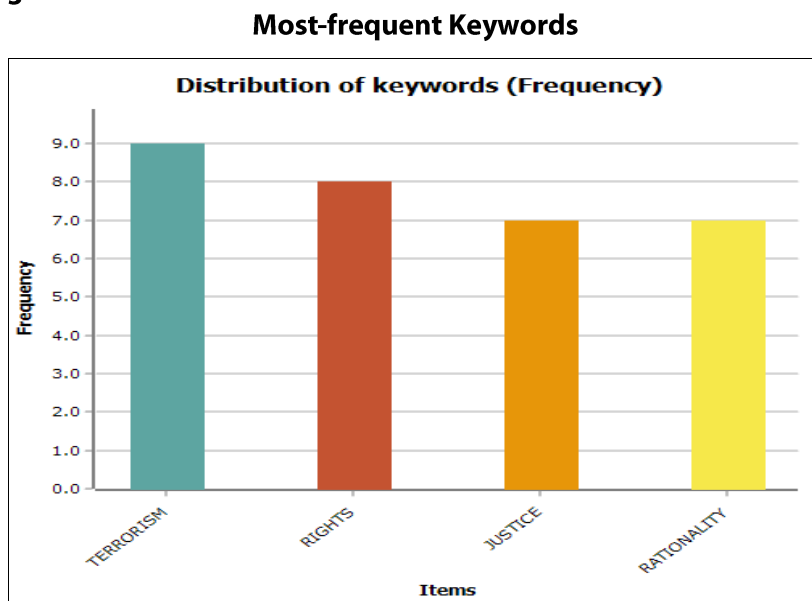
instance of criticising the UN and the Security Council that demonstrates Iran's expectations from the UN and its Security Council. This also indicated that Iran's approach towards the UN and the world community turned out to be more modest. So, in that sense, Rouhani's last speech was more practical and targeted than academic. What Rouhani wanted to achieve was 'endorsement' of his stance (using metaphor and an emphasis of good things) that could be exploited to pressurise the US. The following section will cover the first speech by Ibrahim Raisi to examine the frequency and the context of positive self-presentation and negative others.

Ebrahim Raisi's Speech at the United Nations General Assembly

In the third corpus of around 2,006 words, Ebrahim Raisi's focus remained on sanctions and condemnation of the US in particular and Zionism in general. Academically, Raisi's first speech resembles Rouhani's first speech. Rouhani began with violence and extremism as the challenge and ended his speech with hope. In similitude, Raisi began with terrorism as the challenge and ended up talking about dealing with those challenges rationally. Like Rouhani, who set the tone for multilateral cooperation on the nuclear issue, Raisi set the stage for the revival of the nuclear deal and greater integration with the world. The replacement of the word violence/extremism with terrorism by Raisi has its context. Furthermore, the looming fear of Daesh, Islamic State (IS) - Khorasan, and Al-Qaeda have heightened in their area of origin, Afghanistan. So, the reference to terrorism was timely and unique in the sense it has given a fresh dimension to Iran's foreign policy. Iran is actively involved in managing the situation in Afghanistan and Raisi's emphasis on the issue of terrorism points to the effort of highlighting Iran's rational and pragmatic approach towards global problems. It also indicates that Iran was ready to work with the international community against this menace. Hence, in line with this thinking, Raisi was not only setting the tone for the revival of

the nuclear deal but also seeking greater integration, cooperation, and partnership.

Figure. 3



Pandemic and Sanctions

Like Rouhani, Raisi also condemned the sanctions amidst the pandemic. He related the sanctions with the 'crime against humanity' and 'the new way of war' that the US was waging on nations.

Sanctions are the US's new way of war with the nations of the world [...] Sanctions, especially sanctions on medicine at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, are crimes against humanity[...].¹³

I, on behalf of the Iranian nation and millions of refugees hosted by my country, would like to condemn the continued illegal US sanctions especially in the area of humanitarian items, and demand that this organised crime against humanity be recorded as a symbol and reality of the so-called American human rights.¹⁴

Despite the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran was keen from the outset to purchase and import COVID-19 vaccines

from reliable international sources, it faced inhumane medical sanctions.¹⁵

Raisi equated the sanctions with an 'organised crime'. The same was the case with Rouhani, as he equated the sanctions with 'structural violence'. Replacement of the phrase 'structural violence' with an 'organised crime' was purposely done to emphasise American actions as 'illegitimate'. Overall, the context of discussing the sanctions is similar to Rouhani (populism and given the sufferings of common people).

Negative Other Representation (United States)

Like Rouhani, Raisi also employed a metaphor to undermine US credibility at home and abroad. While doing so, Raisi quoted the attack on US congress and incident of people dropped from the US plane in Kabul to stress that the US was not a credible state in the world.

This year, two scenes made history: one was on January the 6th when the US congress was attacked by the people and, two, when the people of Afghanistan were dropped down from the US planes in August. From the Capitol to Kabul, one clear message was sent to the world: the US' hegemonic system has no credibility, whether inside or outside the country.¹⁶

Instead of withdrawal, Raisi used the word 'expelled' for the US about Afghanistan and Iraq. Like Rouhani, Raisi used the word 'occupier' for the Zionist regime, however, relating it with the worst form of terrorism like slaughter (not killing) of women and children (the vulnerable class) indicating that Raisi employed 'populism' card to malign Israel.

Today, the US does not get to exit Iraq and Afghanistan but is expelled.

The occupier Zionist regime is the organiser of the biggest state terrorism whose agenda is to slaughter women and children in Gaza and the West Bank.

On another occasion, Raisi used populist card in an attempt to gather sympathy and the support of the US people by saying that:

"[...] the US taxpayers, who have to pay for this lack of rationality [...]."

Reaching out to the people of the US was the same card that the US has long been employing to exploit the protests and strikes in Iran to gather the sympathy of the Iranian people. This was unique in Raisi's approach toward the US as Rouhani did not exploit the 'people's perspective'.

Positive Self-Presentations

Like Rouhani, Raisi also hailed Iran's contribution to resolving the issue of Palestine.

"There is only one solution: holding a referendum with the participation of all Palestinians of all religions and ethnicities including Muslims, Christians and Jews. This solution was set forth by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran many years ago which is now registered as one of the official documents of the United Nations."

Raisi also underscored Iran's efforts to fight extremism while working with the government and the people of Syria and Iraq to mitigate the threat of ISIS. Raisi, however, related its fighting against the ISIS as Iran's policy to protect the territorial integrity of all countries in the region.

It has been our policy to strive for the preservation of stability and territorial integrity of all the countries of the region.

The use of the word 'our' reflects that Iran was mindful that its security is intractably linked with the security of all countries in the region and vice-versa. This also reveals Iran's strategic limitation and gives meaning to the Iranian nuclear programme which seems to be nothing more than rhetoric, and deterrence in security discourse.

Convergence with the Rest of World

Like Rouhani, Raisi ended his speech on a pleasant note. Nukes have no place in our defense doctrine and deterrence policy. The Islamic Republic considers the useful talks whose ultimate outcome is the lifting of all oppressive sanctions [...] while decisively defending all its rights and the interests of its people, Iran is keen to have large-scale political and economic cooperation and convergence with the rest of the world. I seek effective interaction with all the countries of the world, especially with our neighbours and shake their hands warmly.

In sum, there was less focus on positive self-presentation as compared to Rouhani's last speech. However, instances of negative others about the US were prominent. In both cases, an attempt was made to single out the US for sabotaging the nuclear deal. Rouhani and Raisi respectively presented Iran as a responsible state that believes in the sanctity of the UN and its Security Council, holds international norms, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations in high regard and as a country open to nuclear dialogues and future cooperation with the world. Both reiterated that nukes do not have any space in Iran's defence doctrine and deterrence policy. Both leaders showed seriousness towards nuclear negotiations by emphasising result-oriented talks. Considering the frequency of using personal pronouns by Rouhani and Raisi in the pre and the post-breakup of the nuclear deal era, there is a sharp increase in Rouhani's usage of the words 'we', 'our' and 'us' following the collapse of the nuclear deal. This indicates that Rouhani emphasised more on his country's 'good' things to make Iran's case strong against the US. Raisi, however, used personal pronouns less frequently in his first speech. This shows that Raisi set the tone for future cooperation like Rouhani. Moreover, in all three speeches, there was no notable increase in negative others representations (hardline).

Table 1**Frequency of personal pronouns**

<i>Pronounce</i>	<i>Rouhani (first) Pre-collapse N- Deal</i>	<i>Rouhani (last) Post-collapse N- Deal</i>	<i>Raisi (first)</i>
<i>We</i>	13	22	7
<i>I</i>	9	3	4
<i>Our</i>	9	14	8
<i>My</i>	4	1	4
<i>US</i>	4	7	13
<i>Total</i>	39	47	36

Conclusion

The critical discourse analysis reveals that Rouhani's first speech pursued engagement with the US in a precise and academic way, whereas his last speech was a kind of protest against the sanctions. Raisi's first speech was a replica of Rouhani's first speech as both ended their speeches on seeking effective engagement and result-oriented talks. Following the collapse of the nuclear deal, Rouhani employed more positive self-presentations whereas Raisi comparatively used more negative others representation against the US. However, in comparison to Ahmadinejad, Raisi's usage of negative others representation was very low. In both cases, the discursive strategies of positive self and negative other representations appear to be targeted at strengthening Iran's case as a rational and responsible state despite sanctions rather than provoking the US.

There was a consensus between Rouhani and Raisi on the foreign policy approach towards the European Union, Middles East, and the UN and its Security Council. Both sought greater participation and cooperation. Raisi's approach, however, was more practical as he clarified that Iran was ready if the US and the EU were ready to make some serious efforts. Defending the nuclear programme as peaceful

remained consistent before and after the collapse of the nuclear deal. However, in the post-JCPOA collapse period, there was a greater stress on defending the nuclear programme as peaceful by categorically stating that nuclear weapons had no place in Iran's security doctrine. Iran's quest for a greater role remained intact in the aftermath of the collapse of the nuclear deal. However, this quest appears to be based on strategic and economic limits. Therefore, there was a greater stress on cooperation both at regional and international levels.

The study argues that the collapse of the nuclear deal has brought significant changes in Iran's foreign policy. The collapse of the nuclear deal marks the transition of Iran's foreign policy from moderation to becoming more rational through balancing between available resources and strategic and economic constraints. Iran's cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency indeed reflects Tehran's rational approach. Moreover, cooperation with the European Union coupled with bringing more transparency in the nuclear programme can yield positive outcomes from the ongoing nuclear negotiations.

The study further argues that change in Iran's approach has greater implications for its future role in the region: for instance, Iran is dealing with the Taliban, who have been Tehran's arch-rivals in the past. Tehran is also vocal on the subject of terrorism and counterterrorism. Since India's approach is in sync with the West and the US, New Delhi can be Tehran's potential gateway. In line with this thinking, the relationship between Iran and India is likely to grow further in near future. Additionally, Iran, through its friendly approach towards Pakistan and the Central Asian states, is earning more credibility for its rational approach. It is argued that although Iran is aspiring for greater ties with regional as well as Western countries, chances of Tehran joining any kind of Western alliance to counter extremism and terrorism is less likely. Nevertheless, Iran's support to fight terrorism on multiple grounds will remain firm.

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