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Muslim Stereotypes and Nuclear Iran

David S. Norick
Chapman University, noric100@mail.chapman.edu

American Views of Muslims and a Nuclear Iran

David Norick
Department of Political Science, Chapman University; Orange, California

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Introduction to Research
- This study examines how stereotypes affect foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear program.
- American beliefs about Muslims have changed (negatively) over the past 15 years due to American wars in the Middle East and terrorist attacks perpetrated by Islamic groups.
- The United States has enacted serious economic sanctions on Iran over allegations that they were attempting to develop nuclear weapons.
  - At the same time, the United States has not done the same with India and Israel, both of which have admitted to having nuclear weapons (India) or are suspected of possessing them (Israel) without having signed the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty.
- Regional Security Complex Theory
  - Theorizes how nations act in geographical regions where threats are most likely to come from inside the region.
  - United States' desire to maintain influence over the Middle East (exerted through Israel) would be under threat if Iran could flex its own muscles in the region.

Fear Towards Nuclear Iran
- United States, and world as a whole, has become more proactive in limiting the spread of nuclear weapons.
  - Similar sanctions and reactions currently seen In the situation with North Korea and its own missile program.
- Worried towards comments of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the Iranian people themselves.
  - "Death to America" chants.
  - Ahmadinejad saying USA was behind 9/11 at a UN Conference.
  - Both Khomeini and Ahmadinejad with comments referring to eradication of Israel.
- Iranian connections with terrorist groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Al Qaeda.
  - Analysts worry that nuclear weapons would fall into the wrong hands.
- Responses in past have varied.
  - Israel has reportedly assassinated Iranian nuclear scientists and planned to bomb nuclear sites.
  - America initially resorted to crippling sanctions on Iran in conjunction with others.
  - Recently (with EU and UN) made a deal to reduce or eliminate sanctions in diplomatic treaty where Iran would curb its nuclear program advancement.
  - Republican Party has sought to increase sanctions and use of force over diplomacy.

Hypotheses:

H1: The greater the belief in the stereotype that Muslims are violent, the more likely the respondent is to believe that Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

H2: Stereotypical beliefs about Muslims, a respondent's ideology, and the belief that Iran is developing nuclear weapons are together significant indicators of the favoring of the idea that the United States should bomb Iranian nuclear development sites.

H3: Respondents who do not believe the stereotype that Muslims are violent are more likely to favor non-military approaches such as economic sanctions or direct diplomatic talks than those who believe that stereotype is at least slightly accurate.

Data

H1: Nuclear Weapon Development
Cross Tabulation Results:
- Percent of people that agree that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, grouped by level of agreement with stereotype that Muslims are violent.

  - Stereotype is extremely accurate: **93.3% believe Iran is developing nuclear weapons**
  - Stereotype is highly accurate: **93.2% believe Iran is developing nuclear weapons**
  - Stereotype is moderately accurate: **90.4% believe Iran is developing nuclear weapons**
  - Stereotype is slightly accurate: **92.2% believe Iran is developing nuclear weapons**
  - Stereotype is not at all accurate: **89.7% believe Iran is developing nuclear weapons**

H3: "Nonviolent Versus Violent Responses"
Cross Tabulation Results:
- The USA should pursue direct diplomatic talks
  - Some level of agreement: **87.3%**
  - No agreement: **93.6%**
  - Most likely to agree with USA's plan: *No Agreement*
- The USA should increase sanctions on Iran
  - Some level of agreement: **91.4%**
  - No agreement: **89.9%**
  - Most likely to agree with USA's plan: *Moderately Agree*
- The USA should bomb nuclear development sites
  - Some level of agreement: **52.1%**
  - No agreement: **32.0%%**
  - Most likely to agree with USA's plan: Strongly *Agree*
- The USA should invade Iran with troops
  - Some level of agreement: **31.2%**
  - No agreement: **15.8%**
  - Most likely to agree with USA's plan: *Strongly Agree*

H2: Bombing Nuclear Sites
Linear Regression Model
- Measures how significant a set of potential factors are on a given dependant variable.
- Independent Variables: Level of agreement with violence stereotype, belief that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, and self-placement on the liberal/conservative scale.
- Dependant Variable: Agreement with idea that US should bomb nuclear development sites.

Model Summary			
R	R-square	Std. Error	Significance
.726	.527	1.797	.000
Ind. Variable	B	Beta	Significance (P)
Iran developing nuclear weapons	.276	.297	.000
Agreement with stereotype of Muslims as violent	.201	.251	.000
Self-placement on liberal conservative scale	.234	.312	.000

Interpretation of Data
- Significance values of .000 mean any result from the regression will be very significant, as any value under .05 can be called significant.
- R-square value stands for goodness of fit (how variations are accounted for) and .527 means that the variation is accounted for well enough to make the data valid.
- B-values of all three independent variables represent a positive correlation (slope) with the dependent variable of public opinion towards bombing nuclear sites.
- Liberal-conservative self-placement had the most relevance to the respondent's answer regarding the dependant variable (based on the Beta value).
- However, both of the other independent variables had Beta scores high enough to assume that they were also relevant to the dependant variable.

Findings

H1: Nuclear Weapon Development
Those who responded that the stereotype was at least slightly accurate were more likely to believe Iran was developing nuclear weapons, and respondents with the highest agreement were over 3.5% more likely to believe so than those who did not believe it was accurate. One interesting note is that those who believed the stereotype was moderately accurate were not much more likely to believe Iran was developing nuclear weapons than those who did not agree with the stereotype.

H2: Bombing Nuclear Sites
Using a linear regression analysis, there is seen to be a positive correlation between the noted independent variables and the belief that Iranian nuclear sites should be bombed, With a R-squared value of .527 there is an extremely good fit between the variables, and the data is statistically significant. Overall, the self placement on the liberal/conservative scale was seen to be the most important indicator of their belief in bombing said sites.

H3: Non-Military Responses
While responses to the sanctions question were nearly equal no matter the level of stereotype agreement, those who disagreed with the stereotype were about 7% less likely to advocate for bombing sites or direct invasion as compared to those who had any agreement, and were one-third to one-half as likely to have the same response as those with strong agreement. At the same time, people who disagreed with the stereotype were the most likely by several percent to want diplomacy, the only response that did not entail any damage to Iran.

Conclusions
- Most people in the United States believe that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, but level of belief in Muslim stereotypes does have an affect.
- People who have a higher level of agreement with the violence stereotype are more likely to support the government using punitive measures against Iran.
- Political views and prior belief of Iran nuclear development also contribute to opinions on punitive measures, which then can be seen in American foreign policy at times in the past.
- People with a higher opinion of Muslims (don't agree with the violence stereotype) will be more likely to advocate for peaceful means of nuclear negotiations with iran

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