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The Representation of the Iranian Nuclear Program in the American Media

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to unfold what sort of ideological representation the Iranian nuclear program has had in two of America's predominant newspapers, the New York Times and the Washington Post (through their headlines). The study, which sets out for this objective, concentrates on Edward Said's work titled "Orientalism", an exclusive theorist of post-colonial theory. In other words, this article will examine the "Islamic Threat" generally described in the West in conjunction with the theoretical framework of Orientalism and the reflection of the Iranian nuclear program in these two newspapers in terms of controlling it. Consequently, in this media news, the Iranian nuclear program is described as an object that might cause harm at any moment through the discourse of the Islamic enemy. Therefore, it is represented that the subject must control this dangerous object.

Introduction

Edward Said made an essential contribution to Postcolonialism, which questioned the legacy of Western colonialism, with his Orientalism. On the one hand, Said took the frame of Orientalism from the scope of its singular meaning through his work. On the other hand, Orientalism made Orientalism the most used concept in academic usage. Said presented a new perspective on East-West relations with this prominent work. According to him, the West produced an imaginary East so as to define itself, justify its colonial objectives, and accomplish this goal, based on the knowledge-power relationship.

The West, which puts itself at the core of the world based on the separation between "I and others", has drawn its own East with oriental studies. It started with Eastern cultures, civilizations and beliefs for an extended period of time. The image of the East is being put, which emerged as a result of these studies and on which all the negativities that come to mind were filled into use in almost every field of life, from a range of daily life to politics, social sciences to fine arts and the media, and still continues to do so. With this separation, the West has also created its identity, which it describes as "superior," and has tried to consolidate it constantly.

In Orientalism, the West represents the most advanced stage of humanity, while the East reflects laziness, lethargy, sinfulness, and tyranny. Furthermore, the East has been diminished to the position of an object that lags behind Western civilization and must reach the highest level that the West has. The East, which is desperate against the West, is in need of the West. For this cause, the West has continuously legitimized its right to tutelage and disposition over the backward, uncivilized

East (Said, 2013). Briefly, the representation of the East within this perspective gives the West the right to colonize the East and intervene. The West has constructed its intervention, sometimes for democratic purposes, sometimes through human rights or for familiar reasons, based on the values that it had previously tried to persuade the East, whatever the name might be.

As a result of the power it holds, the West has constantly reproduced the East-West differentiation according to the conditions. Therefore, it has served as information to keep the above-mentioned superior-subordinate relationship continuous (Young, 2016). By doing so, it has flourished itself economically, culturally and politically in particular. For this purpose, the relationship has been covered in many Western academic works. In addition, by employing rapid and effective communication brought by globalization, the West has initiated the media to be used as the most crucial source in this direction since the information which the West produces expands very quickly to almost everyone. For the West, the media has become the instrument that will best represent the definition of the most critical outsider or enemy.

To sum up, the West satisfied its necessities for the shape and continuation of its own identity by establishing an imaginary picture of the East. In conclusion, the West utilized this situation by constantly creating and spreading information with the purpose of preserving the superior-subordinate connection in the bilateral relationship (Hall, 2013). Undoubtedly, in this process, it should be underlined; The other was not left alone. On the contrary, it was intervened when necessary to be taken under control to prevent their 'barbaric' outcomes.

Orientalism, Islam and Iran

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the image of the East, which was adopted as the opposition of the West, specifically America, mentioned above in the introduction, has gradually left its position to an Islam-centred discourse. According to Said, the 1973 oil crisis was the breaking point in this situation. As a conclusion of this event, oil prices raised, and the West started to see this situation sort; the Muslims were on the corner of repeating the old conquests (Said, 2013). The oil embargo, which brought a tough economic shock to the West, reaped the seeds of the fear of Islam in the West, which was incompatible with its interests. Said pointed out that before this event, it was challenging to face Islam in American culture or the media, but rather Arabs, Turks, Iranians, or Pakistanis were seen and heard. In other words, the word Muslim was rarer than not seen or heard in the US media before the 1970s (Said, 2013).

Following the oil crisis, the outbreak of bombing occasions in the 1980s and 1990s, considering Islam with terrorism, concluded in a way that the depth and intensity of this shock increased. At the beginning of 1979, the revolution that took place in Iran caused the West's, particularly America's, concerns to amass. These and similar situations in Islamic countries have taken the perception of the outsider and the enemy, Islam, one step higher in the West over time. But its peak, that is, the replacement of communism, was unquestionable with the end of the cold war.

With the end of the cold war, communism, the ultimate enemy of America in particular and the West in general, was defeated, and this situation led the West to seek another to feed itself. Considering the need for the other to define or make sense of identities in post-colonial theory, the need for another to replace communism for the continuation of the West's supra-identity emerged after the Cold War period (Foucault, 2021). At a point when this expectation was at its peak, Samuel Huntington, in his famous article published in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, signalled that Islam would be the one to fill the vacuum left by the defeat of the West's arch-enemy of the Cold War era which was communism. Judith Miller for this thesis of Huntington; He supported the idea that Islam, whose unique mission is militant, is very dangerous for the West, stating that it is the thesis of the millennium. As mentioned in previous segments, the enemy Islam, whose infrastructure had

been shaped and formed before, started to take its place in the gap in need of the other that the West needed with such resounding academic works. The West has now assessed Islam to a particular and dominant position to give the continuation of its upper identity (Huntington, 1993). In other words, Islam has now become a cultural and ideological other sub-identity of Western civilization. As Said also pointed out, an emphasis on the US and the outsider started to become the core of the writings and works about Islam written in the West.

The West, which found its need for the "outsider" with Islam following the Cold War, did not put off supporting it in the media. For instance, in the January 21, 1996, issue of *The New York Times*, the "View of the Week" section was titled: "The Red Trouble Is Gone, but Islam Has Come". Another instance unfolds the point that Islam has reached in a short period of time in terms of hostility. Robin Wright, the leading Islamic scholar for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote in his January 26, 1991, article that US and Western officials are still looking for strategies to deal with "Islamic forces" and that dealing with Islam from the Bush administration, 30-40 years ago, it was way better to fight communism. To sum up, as Said emphasized, "Islam" in Western writings has now started to be reflected as an object that includes everything that is most disapproved from the point of view of civilized and Western rationality.

After introducing Islam as the primary enemy of the West through academic works and media representations, another vital point to be mentioned here is: The representation of Islam in the West is coherent and generally aimed at spreading fear. Said; Islam gathers the entire Muslim world, with all its diversity, representing an extraordinary evil and thoughtless essence. From the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to oil and Afghanistan to Iran, most of the most striking and often bad news, wherever there is a Muslim population, is about Islam. Every occasion that occurs in Islamic countries or is asserted to be done by Muslims abroad and is not supported by the vast majority of Muslims is reduced to Islamic fundamentalism (Hentch, 2012). Taking sides against this situation, Said points out that no one equates the Jonestown massacre, the devastation of the bombing in Oklahoma, the destruction of Indochina with the West or Christianity, and states that such events are only equated with "Islam" (Said, 2013).

The title of Daniel Pipes' article in *The National Interest*, published through the end of 1995, most clearly exemplifies what is meant above: "There is no moderation: Fighting Fundamentalist Islam" (Pipes, 1995). Every single one of the Muslim populations of more than a billion has furious emotions towards the West. The reason for that is they are always ready to shed blood, and even their religion has made them enthusiastic about it. In addition, the logic of autocracy and medievalism, which many Muslims reject, has also been consistently associated with Islam. According to Karim, in the news on Islam in the Western media after the cold war, Islam is shown as a reason for the turmoil in the "Third World countries" and has a representation that threatens a peaceful world order of the West.

In conclusion, the enmity of Islam as another in line with the interests of the West has found its counterpart in Western society. For instance, students at any American university, including the most elite, are asked what they think of when the word 'Muslim' is mentioned, and they almost entirely get the same answer: the armed bearded and fanatical terrorist, bent on destroying his enormous enemy, the United States (Ashcroft, 1995). Furthermore, Said expresses the success of the enemy representation of Islam as follows: "Most Americans now shudder as the slightest news about Muslims or Islam comes unfolds, or a scourge begins to be expected" (Said, 2013).

In short, Islam is represented to be ideologically hostile to the values of the West; in the meantime, it is described as a threat to the West at any time. Of course, Islam, which has been made hostile in this way, should not be left alone. Otherwise, he may become a monster that will destroy the superior values of the West at the slightest opportunity (Ghazvinian, 2021). Consequently, the West not only

negates its war with Islam but also works in its representations that it should not be left unattended and should be taken care of by intervening.

It has been tried to exemplify the struggle, as mentioned above, of Islam's othering through the West, predominantly Iran. In his other fiction, there is no question that an anti-Western and Islamic-oriented administration came to power with the 1979 revolution in Iran, which elevated Iran to a unique position for the West (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria, 2007). With this transmission, Iran has become a window opportunity to satisfy the West (Islam) about the other. While the news about Iran, which took little place in the American media until the 1979 Iranian Revolution, had an affirmative representation, it was perceived as a modern state. Nonetheless, after the revolution, particularly the hostage crisis that came with the revolution, Iran's affirmative representation has altered the direction. Said states the panic in the West after the seizure of the American embassies in the language of the West: "They had us cornered; along with us the normal, democratic, rational order". In short, as Said pointed out again, with the Islamic revolution, Islam came to the point of insanity by provoking itself in Iran. With the revolution, Iran became an irritating manifestation of this Islam image (Said, 2013).

Following, Iran got out of the control of the West under the name of an Islamic administration, and as a consequence, the West suffered from oil-oriented economic damage; the West did not represent Iran as an enemy in the media. For example, the Sunday supplement of the New York Times on January 6, 1980, had an outstanding headline: "Militant Islam: The Historic Whirlwind." On December 8 of the same year, New Republic made a news report such as "Islamic explosion". Unquestionably, the most surprising of these were the statements in the editorial of the Wall Street Journal on November 20. The article stated that "the reason for the decline of civilization is, above all else, the weakening of the Western power, which has these ideas and expands these ideas". In addition, the following cover of Time magazine on April 16, 1979, shortly after the Iranian revolution, summarizes the above-mentioned issue clearly: "Militant Awakening".



A bearded muezzin calmly reads the call to prayer in the painting he placed on the cover of Time magazine. The 19th-century image, which is one of the examples of Orientalism, does not correspond to the time of the news. In other words, the re-emergence of this picture after a long time, right following the Iranian revolution, symbolizes the West's representation of Islam in the best way. And its publication after the revolution signals that Iran will be a major target of its representation.

In brief, after the Iranian revolution, the Iranian representation in America was shown with an emphasis on "Islam" in the context of "Threats and terrorism". Besides, America's relations with Iran are also reflected in this procedure. The fact that Americans learn about ninety per cent of the information about Iran after the revolution from radio, television and newspapers makes the perception of Iran in society dramatically valuable. As a result, the Iranian nuclear program, mentioned below, will

be shown as proof that it is trying to be represented as an "Islam"-oriented other in the Western media, particularly the American media.

Representation of Iran's Nuclear Program in the American Media

Islamic Iran versus the West

By assumption, we look at the news of the two leading American newspapers (New York Times and Washington Post) regarding the Iranian nuclear program; the two put the pressure on the forefront as representation in the context of me and the outsider: Islamic Iran against the West. In other words, while Iran's nuclear program is being covered in these two newspapers, it is perceived that Iran's Islamic identity is tried to be brought to the core. For example, the headline of the New York Times dated April 9, 2013, "If the talks turn out to be negative, Iran has said it will increase its nuclear fuel production." As can be seen, there is no abnormality in the literary content of the news. But what is interesting in the delivery of the news is the photo used for the news. Although it has nothing to do with the news, the photo in question includes Iranian women wearing chadors. The presence of four women wearing chadors next to the two men clearly shows that the emphasis on Islam is aimed to be brought to the fore in the news. In short, with the photo used for this news, Iran's Islamic identity was tried to be emphasized while reporting Iran's nuclear event.

After Talks End, Iran Announces an Expansion of Nuclear Fuel Production:

Family members of slain nuclear scientists stood with Fereydoun Abbasi-Davani, far right, a nuclear official, on Tuesday. By DAVID M. HERSZENHORN and RICK GLADSTONE Published: April 9, 2013

Iran's president announced an expansion of the country's uranium production and claimed other atomic energy advances on Tuesday, striking a pugnacious tone in the aftermath of diplomatic talks that ended in an impasse with the big powers last weekend in Kazakhstan.



Another example presents an image as interesting as the photo above. The headline of the article written by Victor Morton in the Washington Post in November 2014: "Obama will bypass Congress on the embargo on Iran if the Nuclear deal is successful." As it is understood from the title of the report, the event is a nuclear issue. However, as in the present news above, the photograph used in this news also reveals that Iran's Islamic identity is being tried to be brought to the core. As seen in the photo below of the news: There is a flag as a symbolic representative of Islam, and the *Kelime-i shahada*, which is the pre-requisite of Islam, is written in Arabic on the flag. The Iranian flag is on the right side of the lower part of the flag. The fact that the flag is given in the background shows that Iran is not trying to be represented in private, but rather the Islamic identity is trying to be brought to the core.

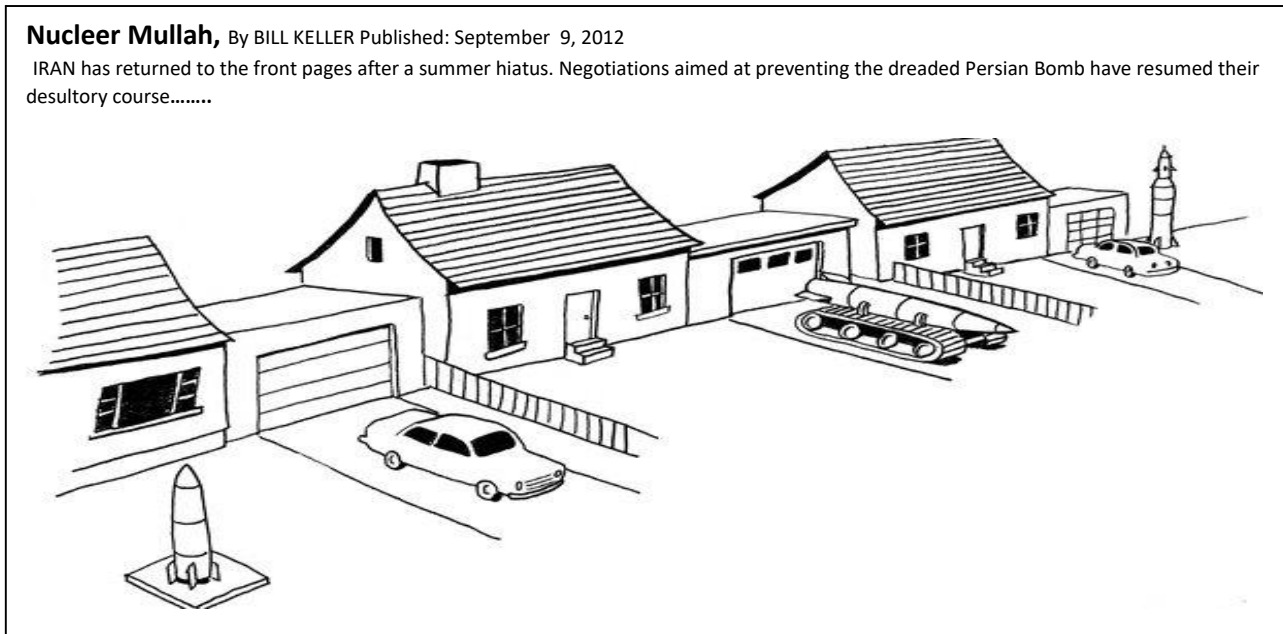
Obama will bypass Congress on Iran sanctions if nuclear deal is reached:

In another example of the White House bypassing Congress to avoid a vote it would lose, the Obama administration will not to seek congressional approval to suspend sanctions against Iran if a deal on the Islamic republic's nuclear program can be reached, The New York Times reported Sunday nit.....



One of the systematic methods that newspapers use to demonstrate Iran's Islamic identity in Iran's nuclear news is using exclusive terms to present this identity. These words are generally; "Mullah regime" and "Fundamentalist". In conclusion, of the use of words such as "Mullah" and "Fundamentalist or Radical" in the news, the image that comes to mind in the reader's mind is Islam. Because the West generally tries to present these statements in the news, it tries to reflect Islam. For example, in an attack by non-Muslims or any event threatening the West, the word radical or fundamentalist is used alone concerning the perpetrators. In other words, in the event of an attack: "Radical Christians did it" is not reported in the Western media. To sum up, the perception that Islam equals fundamentalism or radicalism, which was previously placed in the subconscious of the readers in the Western media, as the Iranian nuclear program is the subject of this concept (fundamentalism), both Iran's Islamic identity is automatically emphasized, and this discourse is repeated. In addition, the adjective mullah, frequently used among Muslims and describes a person with a specific religious background, is one of the words used in case the Iranian nuclear issue is in the news.

The most striking example of this issue, which emphasizes Iran's Islamic identity with special terms, is the title of the comment written by Bill Keller in the New York Times on September 9, 2012, and the photo used. The photo used in the title "Nuclear Mullahs" (Nuclear Mullahs) is as follows:



While the news exaggerated the nuclear program, it also reflected Iran's Islamic identity using the Mullah concept.

The following sample news is the analysis written by Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar from the Washington Post newspaper. The news speaks of "anti-Americanism within Iran". Two interesting points are presented in this article. The first of these was the photograph used in conjunction with the event. In this news, which resembles another photo above, a woman in a chador is used. It is evident that the photo of the woman, which has little to do with the event described in the news, was used for a determined and deliberate purpose in the news. In addition, another interesting situation is the frequent use of the word "radical Islamists" in the nuclear news, which includes a photo of a woman in a chador. The words underlined in a few sample sentences from the news prove this.

Strategic anti-Americanism in Iran from the hostage crisis to nuclear talks

By Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar November,4

.....Those radical Islamists tapped into widespread anti-Americanism in Iran to consolidate the post-revolutionary regime.....
.....there were rumors that they were planning to attack the embassy again before their radical Islamist rivals outbid and preempted them.....



As seen in the sample news above, two newspapers (New York Times and Washington Post) tried to highlight Iran's Islamic identity while the Iran nuclear incident was reported. In summary, considering Islam is the outsider of the West, the Western media tried to identify the event with Islam while reporting on the Iranian nuclear program and thus tried to repeat the distinction between me and the outsider.

Oriental Distrust and the Islamic Threat

Another important point that should be emphasized while examining how the two newspapers in question represent the Iran nuclear event is that these two newspapers try to present the event within the framework of the cold war discourse. The news written in this direction is trying to show the Iranian nuclear program as an Islamic threat to the West. Given that if we look at the news, when it comes to the Iranian nuclear issue, the word threat or danger is used frequently in most of this news. Despite the lack of clarity in the West that Iran has nuclear weapons and that many other countries have multiple nuclear weapons, the word nuclear threat is generally associated with the Iranian nuclear program. This situation has been so internalized that the word threat or danger is compressed somewhere, even though negotiations are in question.

For example, the news of negotiation in the November 27, 2013 news of the New York Times was given under the title of "A Most Dangerous Deal". As it is easily understood from the news title, the negotiation event is portrayed as a great danger. In addition, the emphasis of the news title shown in the Washington Post below was also a threat. The analysis article titled "Iran's Growing Nuclear Program Threat" constantly repeated that the nuclear program is a threat to the West.

The growing threat of Iran's nuclear program

By Stephen Rademaker and Blaise Misztal November 7, 2011

When the computers that control Iran's centrifuges were attacked by the Stuxnet worm beginning in 2009, the assault was widely ascribed to intelligence services intent on setting back Iran's nuclear program. More significant than the damage to Iran, however, has been the damage to Western resolve, as the United States and other countries have become more complacent about the Iranian threat.

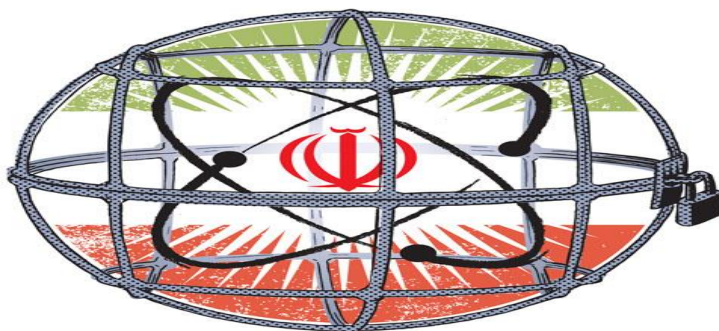
Combined with attacks targeting Iranian nuclear scientists and reports of shortages of key materials needed for centrifuges,

As can be seen in the examples above, in the majority of the Iranian nuclear news given in the mentioned newspapers, the news is either; ..." given under the title of Iran's nuclear threat (Iran's Nuclear Threat) or it is emphasized with titles such as "Iran's growing nuclear threat ..." (Growing Threat of Iran). For example, in the title of an article in the Washington Post on May 25, 2013 (Iran's nuclear designs are the greater Middle East threat), it was stated that the Iranian Nuclear Incident poses a threat to the Middle East. In summary, when it comes to the Iranian nuclear program, there is a threat, one way or another.

The frequent use of words that evoke threats in the news, the underlining of Iran's Islamic identity, and an attempt to give messages that pose distrust. An article in the Washington Post in 2003 was published with the title Iran's Bomb, and the article mentioned a fundamentalist regime in Iran several times. The news highlighted the threat by using the word bomb next to Iran's name. In addition, the term fundamentalist and the word Islam and reactionary were used together by blending them. As a result, the news tries to tell us the following; As an Islamic state, Iran is both a threat and a barbarian state. Furthermore, the possession of a nuclear bomb by an uncivilized Islamic state is also reflected as an unacceptable situation.

In some other news of these two newspapers, there are reports that the West has taken for granted both the extent of the threat in Iran's nuclear incident and its insecurity about Iran, as well as by other states in the Middle East. In this news, it is understood that some countries of the Middle East and especially the Gulf countries fear Iran's nuclear incident and do not trust Iran in a possible negotiation. For instance, the Washington Post's November 20, 2013, news report mentions the concerns of the Gulf countries against negotiations in the Iran nuclear incident. In the context of the news, it is reported that the Obama administration's negotiation with Iran will be a mistake and will actually carry the threat to the region to a greater extent. This situation shows that the danger and distrust of Iran, represented by the West, have been investigated in the Middle East or Islamic countries. This and similar news clearly reveal the conclusion of the oriental view of the West on Iran.

Oriental Control



The photo above is from the New York Times nuclear article on March 20, 2010. In the news, it is aimed to provide the message that the Monster Iran, which was created before, should be captured and put into its place; to do so, it should be taken under control. The round shape of the place is intended to imply that Iran is a bomb ready to explode for the entire world. Perhaps the finest detail among these

interpretations is unquestionably the foregrounding of the Arabic word Allah used on the Iranian flag. In a way, the message goes beyond Iran and emphasizes the threat of Islam. Giving the photo in this way is to confirm the West's right to intervene or control, which is one of the leading objectives of Orientalism mentioned above. Because according to Orientalism, the hostile other must be taken under control. Otherwise, the level of civilization that the West has brought to the world with the power and resolution will be threatened.

The threat and distrust of Iran reflected in Western society has also led the West to justify the embargo imposed on Iran. The sanctions imposed on Iran, which cause great fear for the West, are actually tools aimed at controlling the beast. When we look at the two newspapers about the incident, it is mentioned in the news that the US embargoes against Iran should be increased more and that European countries should act jointly with the US on this issue (Küpel, 2016). Otherwise, it is mentioned that great danger will come. For example, in an editorial in *The Washington Post*, he advises European countries to support the United States so that Iran does not have nuclear weapons and that the United States should also strengthen these embargoes.

In a commentary of the *New York Times*, the series of disasters expected with Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons is mentioned. The article predicts that if Iran has nuclear weapons, other Islamic states in the region will also have them, and therefore the presence of the United States in the region may come to an end. Furthermore, the article suggests that as a consequence of this, it will be more than the trouble experienced during the cold war period. Another news of the *New York Times* stated that if Iran had nuclear weapons, the gravity of the incident would be tremendous and harshly criticized that the steps to prevent this are still not taken.

In addition to the fact that the armed solution to Iran's nuclear incident is voiced realistically in both newspapers in general, they also present Israel's armed solution discourses on Iran as if it were ordinary news in their news. To sum up, two newspapers cover military threats from Israel against Iran as usual news. For example, the *Washington Post* the event; news that "Israel is considering pre-emptive war against Iran if nuclear talks fail" proves this. As the content of the news, it talks about Israel's concerns about Iran, and it is constantly mentioned that Israel is considering a military option as a solution.

In addition, although some news content is different, the images or photos used highlight the necessity of using the military option. For example, the photo used in the article "We Don't Have Nuclear Weapons" by Iranian Foreign Affairs President Javad Zarif in the *New York Times* in 2006 confirms this. The photo depicts the surrender of the bearded person representing Iran in the face of a gun.

We Do Not Have a Nuclear Weapons Program By JAVAD ZARIF Published: April 6, 2006

THE controversy over Iran's peaceful nuclear program has obscured one point in particular: There need not be a crisis. A solution to the situation is possible and eminently within reach.....



Conclusion

The representation of Islam, built by the West as the other, was covered in two of America's profound newspapers, the New York Times and the Washington Post, over the Iranian nuclear program and still continues. These two newspapers emphasized Iran's Islamic identity in the news concerning Iran's nuclear program, sometimes in the context of the article and sometimes in the photos used independently of the content of the article. The traces of the Islamic identity of Iran are reflected in most news related to the nuclear issue in the two newspapers. Nonetheless, in the news of North Korea's nuclear program, which is also perceived as a threat, the state has no religious identity. This situation proves that there is a different intention behind unfolding Iran's Islamic identity. In short, the West is trying to represent Islam through Iran's nuclear incident, which it has marginalized.

Furthermore, the Islamic identity is not only reflected in the news but also the other "Islamic" object, which the West laid the groundwork for after the cold war, is constantly tried to be dehumanized in the Iranian nuclear news. In other words, the need for repetition of the "outsider" after constructing the "outsider" is best met through Iran's nuclear program. The West, which set out for this goal, is repeatedly trying to satisfy itself within the face of Islam, the sub-identity it has constructed. As Said states, the West tries to identify every feature that would terrify humanity with Islam.

The West also represents the threat of Islam, which it constructs as the other, as an object that will harm its values. Therefore, it empowers itself to prevent this disaster. In this regard, the embargo or military intervention options that the West is trying to implement in the Iran nuclear incident exemplify this. The fact that the nuclear weapons incident, which the West owns in greater numbers, is never covered in the media confirms this.

The fact that Muslim countries or other countries are more interested in Iran's nuclear program regarding whether Israel has nuclear weapons or whether it poses a threat reveals the success of the representation that the West strives for. The victory of this effort has reached such dimensions that the intervention of Iran in the Muslim Gulf countries seems justified. Finally, the point that should be mentioned is that with this policy, the West also covers up the gain (exploitation) from Islamic countries. Again, due to the Iranian threat it poses in the Gulf countries, it condemns these countries to purchase weapons from him.

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