

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE MODERATE GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY IN IRAN

Abstract. *Hassan Rouhani, sponsoring a discourse of moderation to help win the presidential election of Iran in 2013, may represent the signification system governing such a hegemonic discourse. This study attempts to evaluate the moderate government's foreign policy by making use of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis method to gain a deeper insight into the way the signifiers are articulated alongside each other, the way the signifiers are defined and redefined by a nodal point, the way they are made coherent around a superior signifier, and the way antagonistic delimitations are created for the purpose of the hegemonic overcoming over other discourses existing within this area and, finally, the availability and credibility evaluation methods are applied. An analysis of the foreign policy of the country's eleventh government indicates that such a discourse constructively interacts with the nodal point and has succeeded in preserving its hegemonic position by enjoying a more coherent political subjectivity and its application of exclusion and marginalisation processes as well as via its foregrounding competencies and even stronger availability and acquiring greater credibility with respect to other competitive discourses.*

Keywords: *government of moderation, foreign policy, constructive interaction, discourse analysis*

Introduction

Undoubtedly, language and the thoughts proposed using it express a speaker's social background and the values, motivations, objectives and interests they are seeking to attain. Evidently, the election of a president is a key political event in any country that has a decisive impact on people's

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lives and the country's political and security future. Accordingly, a survey of the rival discourses in this area can help us convey the utopia sketched by each and every one of them. In this study, we seek to investigate the foreign policy talks of the eleventh government, otherwise known as the government of moderation, and arrive at an understanding of its intended concepts and the world it depicts. Hence, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is applied while a general theoretical framework is offered to elucidate the foreign policy discourse of the eleventh government and its struggle to become hegemonic.

By applying Laclau and Mouffe's theory, we try to identify the nodal point, the elements and punctilios of discourses of moderation on foreign policy within the context of the talks and speeches by Rouhani. We then deal with the mythological perspectives and generalisations of such discourse as well as the application of tools of exclusion, marginalisation and foregrounding used to stretch the boundaries of hostility. In addition, the methods of availability and credibility along with the role of political subjectivity in the discourse's transformation into something with a more hegemonic nature are addressed.

Study Method

The present study builds on the foundations of the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe.

Relying on the ideas of thinkers such as Saussure, Derrida, Barrett, Lacan, Gramsci and Althusser, they developed a very effective theory. These theorists fall into two groups: structuralists and post-structuralists.

Structuralism theory assumes there is a clear similarity between language and social relationships. In this sense, languages and societies are considered to be the same due to their logical structures and common characteristics. This means various phenomena such as social formulas, political ideologies, myths, family relationships, texts and even wrestling matches can all be understood as systems of related elements (Barthes, 1973). In summary, this method involves defining social phenomena as relations between components, forming a complementary set of displacements between these components and analysing their real relations (Levi-Strauss, 1969: 84).

According to Derrida, structuralism is a fundamental moment in entering post-structuralism. The concerns of these two intellectual movements are usually somewhat similar. They both focus on structures, albeit structuralism only describes them and post-structuralism emphasises critical and sometimes intolerable structures. The four main post-structuralism criticisms of the intellectual arrangement of structuralism are:

1. Structuralism precedes the stability and freezing over the change, but in post-structuralism's view constant changing is authenticity.
2. Structuralists prefer structures to social agents and limit their work to the discovery of structures. Poststructuralists confirm this, but they place somewhere to resist.
3. Structuralists generalise everything and search for general rules, but poststructuralists are fascinated by discontinuities and discontinuities.
4. Structuralists were highly science-oriented and believed to have found a total methodology, but poststructuralists entered the field of thought from an anti-Semitic standpoint (Whinsant, 2012).

Poststructuralism emerged from the structuralism stream of thought and contends that our understanding of reality depends more on linguistic relations than anything else. This means our understanding of ourselves and the phenomena around us can only be achieved through the structure of language. The basic problem here is that these language relationships are neither intrinsic nor necessary, but instead arbitrary.

According to the poststructuralist approach to different foreign policy approaches (including the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran), any objectivism and determinism due to positivist, rationalist and transcendental views are opposed and any action is identified regarding the particular discourse in which it operates.

On this basis, Laclau and Mouffe divided society into antagonistic areas in each of which a certain type of signification is stabilised, and consider everything of being to have the nature of a discourse. In notifying their identity, these discourses begin alienation in the communities and carry out a certain signification deconstruction from their signified and gather them in an equivalent cycle to penetrate the minds of the subjects, and always seek to become hegemonic to dominate affairs and apply all sorts of tools to appear positive to make them seem grandiose. The stabilisation of a meaning of a sign within a discourse is carried out via exclusion of other likely meanings. Laclau and Mouffe place in the discursivity field signifiers that are left outside the discourse environment and may be used as raw materials for new articulations (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 105).

The "hegemony" concept is very significant for elucidating Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse. The concept clarifies who is superior in the realms of politics and the community. In other words, it defines which political force should make decisions regarding the domineering forms of behaviour in society (Marsh and Stoker, 1999: 209). If public thinking accepts the signification of a signifier, even temporarily, the signifier becomes hegemonic. The becoming hegemonic of other signifiers means that the entire signification system and, finally, its discourse and identity will become hegemonic. The temporary stabilisation of the identities is the most

important specialty of the hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 44; Litowitz, 2004; Mumby, 1997).

The eventual contingent, temporary and haphazard nature of the phenomena and discourses are associated with the concept of antagonism in Laclau and Mouffe's theory. If antagonism is constantly threatening a discourse and exposes it to collapse, the entire discourses share a probable and passing feature and can never be stabilised (Laclau, 1990: 28). The main condition for the premise of the hegemony formation or configuration is the presence of antagonisms. In the political arena, antagonisms cause "others" or animosities to form. These others relatively delimit the boundaries between "us" and "them". They thus pave the way for differentiations between discourses and discourse territories. Antagonisms will never diminish but settle temporarily at certain moments and remain concealed from eyes in power relations.

In discourse disputes try to draw a halo of ungetatable power around them by accentuating their strong points and the weak points of their rival and also by marginalising their weak points and the strong points of their rival. Foregrounding and marginalisation serve to preserve and continue the power and persistence of the hegemony. To eliminate the hegemony and domination of a discourse, the signification stability should be destroyed so as to provide the grounding for a momentary change in the floating signifier. In this way, competitive discourses can append their referents of interest to the nodal point in such an unrest and agitated space and stabilise their own signification systems, as a result of which deconstruction occurs (Laclau, 1990: 41-43).

It should be kept in mind that a discourse can achieve its appearance and emergence conditions so that is capable of approaching a myth; that is because discourses are always accompanied by social crises and problems, and the governing discourse tries to take advantage of such a space and condition to hegemonise itself by showing the competency to escape from this mess. For the same reason, the other discourses offer a clear-cut image of the future of their presence to the subjects and underline there would be no news of problems under those promised conditions. Laclau calls this idealistic image a myth. Discourses, indeed, look for ways to do away with unrest and create objectivity. The myth involves the formation of "a new objectivity by means of the rearticulation of the dislocated elements" (Laclau, 1990: 61).

These two theoreticians employ the "availability" and "credibility" concepts to explain how myths can be turned into discourse. The former means the extent to which a discourse is made available on the condition that no other discourses have emerged as a substitute for the hegemonic discourse and the latter is conceptualised as indicating that the discourse's proposed

principles should not be inconsistent with the underlying principles of society (Laclau 1990: 66).

It is worth mentioning that subjects enjoy relative freedom in Laclau and Mouffe's theory. Laclau and Mouffe make use of the two concepts of "subject situation" and "political subjectivity" to elucidate the subjects' position. Subjects' position refers to the hegemonic discourse's inclusiveness and the dissolution of their freedom of action inside the discourse's signification system. Thus, since the governing discourse determines the social identities and social relations and everything, the subject's identity is resultantly specified within the discourse. A subject can feature diverse, occasionally paradoxical identities inside various discourses. The concept "political subjectivity" is the other side of the coin on which an increase in social unrest exposes a discourse to destabilisation and decline. The subjects take political measures as political agents or factors and challenge the governing discourse's hegemony and try to make their own order of interest dominate the society and discourse. In this situation, the subjects can enjoy freedom of will and independence. Under such anomic circumstances, the subjects make decisions for the discourse and their creativity, innovation and mythification show up from beyond their discourse hegemony, with this representing the moment that another history can be made for the society. With the domination of the myth and objectivisation of the discourse, the evanescence and eclipse of the subject starts in a situation of subjectivity (Yorgensen and Phillips, 2000: 60). Hence, Laclau and Mouffe consider the human factor as playing a determining role in the change and creation of revolutions outside the framework of the discourses and are thus not regarded as being captives of the social structures.

A political subject is an individual or social actor that makes use of a dislocation situation and takes certain acts and steps and these actions and performances are effective for the discourse variations. In Laclau and Mouffe's minds, the emergence and prevalence of the discourses are subjected to the roles played by the political actors who are responsible for leading political debates. Therefore, under dislocation and crisis conditions, the role of leaders and politicians becomes prominent because it is the political leaders and subjects who endeavour as the carriers of the discourses to give the myths offered through the discourses a metaphorical and general aspect by simplifying and generalising them (Dehghani Firouzabadi and Ata'ee, 2014: 97).

The investigation of any discourse should be based on textual data and an appropriate and precise scrutiny thereof to bring about the weaknesses and pitfalls it contains. This is normally done by referring to writings, the press, newspapers and journals etc.

Laclau and Mouffe's Analysis Model

Clearly, the antagonism that provides for articulation is evaluated in this model. To do so, the following analytical pattern is applied as a guideline for assessing the texts based on the study's theoretical framework.

Study Questions

Through mapping articulation of the moderation discourse's foreign policy, the present article seeks to extract the nodal point of the discourse's foreign policy and answer the following questions:

- Around which nodal point has the moderation discourse's foreign policy been made coherent and how are the other signifiers articulated around this nodal point?
- How has the moderation discourse's foreign policy made itself hegemonic in its creation of antagonistic boundaries and generation of alienation?
- Which mechanisms are used by this discourse in line with its creation of alienations and hegemonic renderings?

Identifying the Space of Hostility

The first step in political analysis within the frame of discourse theory is to identify the space where at least two discourses are found that have antagonistic relationships and intend to eradicate each other. Since the discourses enjoy a relational identity and every discourse verifies its identity in association with the other discourses, the signification systems are also arranged and offered in contrast to the competitor's signification system. The signification system of every discourse comprises collections of the signifiers that are ignored and left unattended by the other discourses and the newcomer discourse tries to propose and foster them so as to discover and disclose the shortcomings of the governing discourse and its own strong points.

To comprehend the reason the moderation discourse has become hegemonic, we first need to consider the decline in the previous hegemonic discourse. The social base of the prior discourse, namely the government of Ahmadinejad, was predominantly the social classes who were left outside the traditional conservative groups, i.e. tradesmen and clergymen who held a substantial share of power during the two courses of post-Islamic Revolution stabilisation. Elections held in 2006 made traditional conservatives accept the new among the 'fundamentalist' clique. But it was not long before many of the old conservatives became fed up with the newcomers'

actions. The political and economic crises became so intense that political forces, on both the left and right, lamented the lost days and anticipated a vague and blurred future if the current status were to continue.

Ahmadinejad's discourse was a reflexive reaction to the entire specialties and experiences of the developmentalist right-wing forces and agents who were then followed by the reformists. Radicalism in this era not only ended in the previous managers' refinement but it also destroyed the theoretical and empirical accomplishments and the knowledge accumulated in the preceding three decades (Fazel and Attarzadeh, 2014: 402).

In this government and in the international arena, positions have always been taken against the trust-building policies and the previous governments' suppression of tension; moreover, increased public threats against Iran in regional and international areas were seen. In practice, such invasive behaviours of the government ended up to the West's benefit because with institutionalisation of the claim of Iranophobia on one hand, and the nuclear threat of Iran on the other, the American iron value system was established in the occupied regime's territory while sales of arms and military equipment by the USA and the west to the neighbouring countries increased. In line with this, the military presence of the USA and its allies in the Persian Gulf was strengthened and NATO's missile defence radar system and patriot missiles were established in Turkey. Even Iran, subject to embargoes and reduced oil incomes, was forced to spend a considerable share of its oil dollars on military purposes.

But these conditions could not persist because populist policymaking cannot live long due to its inefficient disposition and the unstable tendencies of the mass of society. Ineffective domestic management had tangible outcomes like in the area of sustenance and high level of political disputes within political society and the lack of a political consensus among actors when confronted with the upcoming crises and political phenomena challenged both the society and policy with fundamental problems.

Moderation, shifting away from extremism and cruelty, the removal of the embargoes, a balance between the right and the task, the observation of mutual respect, win-win diplomacy and idealism were concepts that could be found among the signifiers and the main concepts of Rouhani's foreign policy discourse, which was reconstructed around the nodal point of constructive interaction with the world. The moderates dominated their discourse hegemony over the community by communicating the inauspiciousness of the status quo of the society and by accentuating the role of rationalism and constructive interaction.

Rouhani's Foreign Policy Discourse

By introducing a discourse of moderation, Rouhani sought to engage in configuring his foreign policy discourse around a nodal point, namely balance and equilibrium. He also made efforts to establish a balance and equilibrium between the “prohibitive confrontation” as the nodal point of the justice-oriented fundamentalist discourse, and the “prohibitive submission” as the nodal point of the reformation signifier by way of which to determine and articulate constructive interaction as the nodal point of the moderation discourse. Rouhani's government entered the election battle by promising the simultaneous steering of the centrifuges' spinning and people's sustenance and, proportionately, introduced as his foreign policy a modification of the foreign policy and lower related costs. Rouhani sought a solution to the country's progress and acquisition of a higher position and rank for Iran in international equations not in a contrast but in a constructive interaction with the world. Unlike the fundamentalists who had changed the nuclear issue to a pivotal and identity-related topic, he looked to marginalise it and hoped for a fair and peaceful dissolution of the dispute with the west. Rouhani, based on his slogan of moderation, introduced idealism accompanied by realism as his foreign policy discourse which was considered half way to a compromise and half way to a conflict with the US-led West over topics like the nuclear one (Dehghani Firouzabadi and Ata'ee, 2014: 116).

The “constructive interaction” concept was a key term in the signification system governing the president's discourse in the moderate foreign policy. Regarding the elaboration of his moderate perspective, Rouhani says “I think it is necessary for the Iranian nation to be informed of some points concerning the foreign policy and nuclear issue. The government's policy regarding the foreign affairs is the policy of moderation; neither submission nor compromise, neither passiveness nor confrontation” (speech, 11/02/2014).

He announced that easing tensions, creating mutual trust and interacting constructively are the path the moderation discourse would take and explicitly asserted Iran never wanted war with the world and his government would do its best to put reins on the war-seekers and war-instigators. On the other hand, he added that Iran could never be forced to submit through embargoes or never be threatened into war; rather, the only way to interact with Iran is by way of conversation from an equal stance, mutual trust-building and bilateral respect and reducing hostile speech (04/08/2013).

Therefore, his government was ready for better and constructive relationships with countries around the globe, with particular conditions being considered for the regional countries, Islamic countries and the non-aligned movement member states and is prepared to develop mutual interactions

within the framework of better and more sincere relationships with these countries. "Victory can never be achieved under the shadow of seclusion, it can be achieved under the umbrella of interaction; of course, interaction should be constructive, effective, accompanied by diplomacy and heroic flexibilities. It has to be alongside with the national sovereignty, with independence and with the enforcement of what the people want", he stated (Speech, 3/11/2013).

Rouhani's underlying foreign policy can be inferred from the speech he made at his inauguration ceremony at the Islamic consultative assembly on 13 August 2013. He stated:

in the area of foreign policy, with full decisiveness and as the one appointed by the honorable people of Iran, I announce that the Islamic Republic of Iran is seeking for peace and stability in the region. Iran is the harbor of stability in this turbulent region. We are not looking for changing the borders and overthrowing of the governments. The political system of every country depends on the general public's wants and volitions. We oppose any sort of change in the political systems through foreign interventions and know the use of coercion as an opposite point to the democracy and the nations' rights to determine their own destinies. Opposition and fighting with any sort of tyranny, domination and abuse, especially the military invasions, is an integral part of our Islamic, revolutionary and Iranian culture. Peace and stability in the entire regions around us are not only a wish and want rather they are full-spectrum needs and necessities for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Transparency is the key for opening the door of trust. The type of transparency we talk about cannot be unilateral and without executive and practical mechanisms in the bilateral and multilateral relations. (speech, 07/12/2013)

It is clear that constructive interaction is seen as the nodal point of the moderation discourse about which the other signifiers and signification signs are formed and articulated. Based on this nodal point, the most important approach adopted by president Hassan Rouhani regarding foreign policy is the synergetic dissolution of problems via interaction and collaboration with the world. In fact, constructive interaction may be defined with concepts like peaceful symbiosis, easing of tensions, trust-building, mutual respect, mutual interests and understanding (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2013: 17).

Parallel to this, he continued "it is evident from the internal viewpoint that the moderation discourse as a means for fighting back the hostility discourse has always underlined the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution's

support of the government's approach. The government's diplomacy relies on the people's wants and counts on the supreme leader's guidances" (Speech, 3/12/2013). Rouhani asserted that some individuals should know that foreign policy does not belong to certain wings and parties and foreign policy is formed within the framework of national interests and, if they stay hand in hand and unified behind a single standard-bearer, namely the supreme leader, they can be triumphant (speech, 11/02/2014). He added that the Iranian people have made up their minds to bring an end to the unfair embargoes and limits imposed on the country through constructive policies and negotiations, and that this would be pursued better and in bigger leaps with the support of the people and the supreme leader (speech, 27/02/2014).

In such a discourse, the alienation in the foreign policy discourse the president adopts is formed around those dissatisfied with the peaceful dissolution of the nuclear issue and the removal of the embargos. These are the ones who have replaced logic and precise and scientific calculations with poetry and mottos and sacrificed an accurate understanding of global issues and events with their own slogans and mismanagement. He expressed that if the nation perceives we are working according to policies, it will support us even if the entire world threatens to treat us coercively, and if we only stick to catchwords and move irrationally and our way of conduct so that the people sense we have not acted consistently, no national consensus would be created (speech, 2014/06/13). Therefore, avoiding sole adherence to slogans is another pivotal signification in the president's foreign policy talks.

As expressed, foreign policy is not an arena for slogans. But if we like to be admired by the people very much, there is another way. If we like to make others clap for us, there is another way. We do not have the right to use foreign policy to seek admiration and applause (speech, 17/08/2013). In his speech commemorating the 36th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution's victory in 1978, he particularly blamed the Zionist regime that is against any sort of agreement with Tehran. To better emphasise the strategic and religious significance of the nuclear talks, he even stepped far beyond and equated these talks with Iraq's invasion of Iran (1988-1990). He stated with regret: "on those days that the soldiers were fighting in the frontlines the people were supporting them behind the lines (...), no treason is worse than the treason behind the frontline" (Keyhani, 2015).

Through alienation, the discourse of moderation tries to drive discourses against his own away and stabilise his own discourse hegemony. Such alienation is formed around the ones who are seeking to defeat the nuclear talks by creating barriers. Moreover, in such a discourse mechanism the opponents of the discourse of moderation are introduced as those looking to

increase the costs and pressures, combat the world while benefiting from the embargoes and all those who do not behave according to logic and scientific calculations and threaten the country's national interests with their mottos and harsh ways of speaking are considered as the alienated others in such a discourse.

Generally speaking, when elaborating the signification system governing Rouhani's foreign policy, it has to be said that such a discourse has been formulated around constructive interaction as its nodal point, but there are also other clues and elements articulated in this discourse. Some of them are listed below.

Realist Idealism

Rouhani emphasises that there is a base of contending tyranny, combating invasion, persistence, resistance and independence in foreign policy while the other base thereof is effective and constructive interaction with the world. In his ideas, both bases are the two indicators of a single policy (speech, 03/11/2013). Thus, putting realism and idealism on each side, he deploys them in his foreign policy discourse as a counteractor of compromise and contention. In his speeches, he states that "the government ties ideals and realities at side of one another and brings them to balance" (speech, 11/02/2014).

The most important reason behind strengthening realism in the eleventh government's foreign policy points to the nature of the government's discourse. If moderation is defined as the median of the two extremes of superfluousness and meagerness, it implies and entails realism. Extremism and emotional radicalism result from having no recognition or ignorance of the realities or having an inaccurate understanding of them. On the other hand, meagerness is also an effect of the misunderstanding and misconception of the realities (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2013: 17).

Further, the internal and external realities require the corroboration of the realism and realistic views contained in the foreign policy of the eleventh government. It can be stated that at least half of the problems facing society stem from the special international conditions imposed on the Islamic Republic and the Iranian nation. Hence, at least half the solutions were latent in their quality of guiding and managing a strategic and powerful foreign policy and surely the management and navigation of the optimal and successful foreign policy entails the wise removal of problems and bottlenecks. Rectifying the problems per se necessitates the recognition of the realities and the taking of measures based on realism (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2013: 17). Radicalism and idealism therefore had to be adjusted.

Rationalism and Intellectuality

An important topic in foreign policy discussions is the use of all means along with adoption of smart and logical methods while avoiding any radicalism in the foreign policy. In such a discourse, constructive interaction with the world requires rationalism as well as a cost-profit calculation. In fact, a moderation discourse pivoting around rationalism (in lieu of sole adherence to slogans and emotional arousals) seeks to maximise the advantages and minimise the disadvantages based on a win-win game and tries to find a principled and balanced solution to remove itself from the nuclear cul de sac it finds itself in with the west.

We enter the negotiations with logic and reasoning and we will elaborate and announce our logic in the public thoughts scene as well. The worst method is speaking aloud and harshly and act very slowly. If God wills it, we will take long steps in practice. But, taking a logical standpoint, we speak with the entire world very politely and wisely. (speech, 15/08/2013)

Observation of Mutual Respect

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Although global powers attempt to impose their desires in international relationships on weaker countries by dominating their international interactions, President Rouhani stressed the need to observe the Iranian people's rights and veneration for establishing peace and resolving the problems. Concerning foreign policy and diplomacy, he explicitly states he is looking to expand relationships and interaction with countries of the world based on mutual respect and that such a measure will not only benefit Iran but the entire world. The term "veneration", as used by Rouhani at his inauguration, regarding westerners' behaviours indicates the subjectivity significance in the foreign policy of the eleventh government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Jalili, 2016).

Win-Win Diplomacy

A diplomatic principle in international relations is that all parties resort to bargaining on giving and taking certain privileges in negotiations. Now the time has come for an end to zero-sum games in inter-country relations in which a party's gain implies the other has lost, with interactions currently following a positive-sum approach in which both parties happily and not reluctantly accept an agreement and while acquiring privileges they grant privileges as well (Jalili, 2016).

Denial of Cruelty and Extremism

One of the main and international axes in Rouhani's foreign policy is the rejection of any sort of violence in the world. With such a mentality, he was even able to greatly impress the UN General Assembly in his first appearance there in a way that he could draw attention to himself by calling for a world free of cruelty and extremism, and he succeeded in extensively impressing public thinking around the world. In the discourse of moderation, extremism and radicalism block the political way to constructive interaction. Therefore, the moderation discourse is now itself a rejecter of extremism and meagerness.

Rouhani declared: "Let us fight terrorism, internal war, violence and extremism in practice. Extremism and violence are not advantageous to any single nation and person" (Speech, 20/09/2013).

A Balance between Right and Duty

The eleventh government with its discourse of moderation in interaction with the world is seeking to balance Iran's rights and duties. In this discourse, while emphasising its nuclear rights Iran authenticates its duties and responsibilities before the international community. Based on this balanced approach of its own, Iran also expects the west to, while underlining Iran's responsibilities, support Iran's evident and legal rights concerning nuclear issues (Dehghani Firouzabadi and Ata'ee, 2014: 110). President Rouhani stated:

I explicitly tell the 1+5 countries that nuclear negotiations are a historical test for the Europe and the US. If, in atomic negotiations, they move within the format of law, Iranian nation's rights, common interests, mutual respect, interaction and collaboration they will hear positive responses from the great Iranian nation but if they want to repeat the past unpleasant and inappropriate methods, they should know that they have taken steps for the disbenefit of their nations, region and global welfare and stability and it will become clear that the entire accusations that they have so far proposed against the Iranian nation are baseless. Iran is eager to enter fair and constructive negotiations within the format of international regulations. (speech, 11/02/2014)

Lifting of the embargoes

Underlining the need to lift the embargoes is another focal point of the discourse of moderation. This moderate discourse, by highlighting the role

of embargoes in the economic problems and attributing them to the prior discourses' behaviours on one hand, and by making efforts to lift the bans and reduce the economic pressures on the people via constructive interaction on the other hand, has moved in line with increasing its legitimacy and social credibility. In March 2013, President Rouhani first described the "embargo" as reason behind the robberies of the Iranian nation's assets and said "a group got around the nation's interests and took the nation's money with the excuse of circumventing the bans".

In fact, in a new discursive step, Rouhani initially promoted the predicate "bans are equal to plundering the nation's treasury" and through his creation of bipolarity in society based on delimiting a conflict line between the opponents of embargoes/proponents of corruption tried to demonstrate his government lay in between the groups opposing the bans and depicted his foreign policy critics as the proponents of corruption (Davari, 2014).

The discourse of moderation took advantage of its dislocation chance in the eleventh presidential election to move into a hegemonic position and succeeded in overriding its signification system at the societal level. Through mythification, this discourse made efforts aligned with criticising and denying the current status and depicting an ideal future in which all of current social problems and crises would be rectified. In line with this, in order to achieve a hegemonic position it was forced to generalise its intended myth and thus dealt with reshaping it as the resolver of all problems and satisfier of all needs. During the election competition and afterwards, the discourse of moderation granted its signifiers a metaphorical and general aspect and managed to gather the social forces around its discourse. Such an issue enabled the moderation discourse to dominate the social mentality and found a hegemonic position by being transformed into a social image.

Political Subjectivity

Political subjects clearly play important roles and are highly effective in the hegemonisation of the discourse of moderation. Their ways of perceiving the internal and external environments and their conceptions of the others as friends, foes and/or rivals, which is in line with the general thinking of society, could attract a great deal of attention and has been welcomed by many.

As the most prominent political subject of this discourse, Hassan Rouhani has played a significant role in the process of exclusion and foregrounding, making it available and acquiring credibility for it. In his election campaigns and particularly in the television debates, Hassan Rouhani engaged in a political discourse in which the moderation discourse's signifiers depicted a signification horizon bearing the promise of resolving the problems stemming

from the Iran-West conflict over nuclear issues. For example, he expressed it is impossible to bring an end to all sorts of relations with other countries, it is impossible to be separated from the world (Rouhani, 2013). Rouhani's famous phrase here was the "centrifuge must spin but the people's life must roll as well", which was greatly welcomed by society.

On the other hand, in the political background of both Rouhani and his government's victory, there were two figures, Hashemi and a lady heading the constructivist government and the reformation government, respectively, both of whom featured similar theoretical principles but with different priorities.

Rouhani's advertisements created an atmosphere during the election of pure admiration for the 16-year period prior to Ahmadinejad and a complete rejection of the 8-year period of Ahmadinejad's presidency. This clearly indicated the idea that Rouhani and his government were theoretically rooted in those two periods, namely involving constructivist and reformist governments. Rouhani's government cabinet composition also reflects the fact that his government is a combination of constructivists and reformists and this is another reason that Rouhani's government should be seen as a continuation and reiteration of that earlier 16-year period (Amini, 2013).

In Rouhani's ideas, creating a distance from moderation, the centrality of despotism, putting intellectuals and the fellows of contemplation away, destroying the outstanding revolutionary figures were all distinct traits of the past presidential period that led to spiritlessness and a lack of unity among society. Rouhani introduced himself a moderate who wanted to shun extremism in either left or right directions. He respected Khatami's constructive services and activities and announced he intended to continue the constructivist and reformist governments according to time exigencies, consulting with the people, elites and executing the leadership guidelines within the framework of a moderate government (Gomshad, 2015).

The discourse of moderation, with its use of the lingual instrument of exclusion and foregrounding such as in the related advertisements and media, intended to make itself prominent and exclude the other discourses, especially the ruling discourse. The government of moderation was fully attentive to the people's religious orientations with respect to the nuclear issue. The public insistence on the nation's complete rights concerning the nuclear issue on one hand and interest in compromise with the west and removal of the bans on the other and, in fact, simultaneous emphasis on the epistemological and identity safety as well as on physical and economic security are reflected in the signification system used by this discourse.

Emphasis on solving the nuclear issue via cooperation and negotiation with the west in lieu of pursuing costly and adventurous policies and creating a balance between the rights and duties on the nuclear issue and

preserving the nuclear accomplishments through constructive interaction with the world was especially exploited in the foregrounding strategy employed by the moderation discourse. Keeping to the discourse position of relieving the tensions with the superpowers, especially the USA on the nuclear issue, as the most rational ways to resolve the nuclear issue less expensively is another tool that served the foregrounding of this discourse. Rouhani announced the government is active in its foreign policy in the region and on the nuclear issue; however, it would not slow down at all in actualising the people's evident rights and would do its best to advance the issue through logic, reasoning and wisdom accompanied by esteem (speech, 20/09/2013).

Alongside with its foregrounding strategy, the moderation discourse made considerable efforts to delegitimise and marginalise its biggest rival's discourse, i.e. contention discourse, to exclude and breakthrough the signifiers thereof so as to stabilise its own hegemonic position. In line with this, adventurousness and speaking harshly on nuclear issues that result in nothing but seeing the country incur greater costs are among the points underlined for excluding the competitor's discourse and it is by accentuating the rival discourse's imperfect perceptions of world realities and its lack of attention to the need for action in the international arena that efforts are made to display an inefficient image of this discourse in the public's eye. Emphasis on the country's isolation in the world through ignoring rationalism and intellectuality over such issues as the nuclear one is vividly seen in the speeches made by those sponsoring the moderation discourse for purposes like breaking down the foundations of the contention discourse's nodal point and, instead, it is made clear that the international pressures and full-scale embargoes and economic difficulties are all the result of the rival discourse's performance on the nuclear issue. Adherence to slogans and a delusive foreign policy instead of relying on the intellectualities and strategies in the rival discourse are examples of exclusionary strategies used in the moderation discourse. Finally, emphasis on the idea that some individuals benefit from the bans by speaking of persistence and resistance on the nuclear issue against the USA is a means applied to seclude the rival discourse on the social level.

By foregrounding its strong points and accentuating its rival discourse's weak points, this discourse has endeavoured to achieve and entrench its hegemonic position. The discourse of moderation has made itself available to society through speeches and Rouhani's election debates and by use of networks, facilities, instruments, equipment and various capabilities and the popular press and media, accompanied and supported by a great many artists for this discourse, an active presence in general university spaces and the widespread use of virtual networks and social networks. The majority

of the rival discourse, including the contention discourse, made use of common advertisement writing formats and methods, but on top of these formats the moderation discourse took advantage of more innovative and more diverse tools like symbolisation (key-making), selection of colour and the use of social networks to make itself readily available. Generally, the moderation discourse's availability was more intense than the other discourses in terms of its control over political factors, facilities and its formats (Dehghani Firouzabadi and Ata'ee, 2014: 116).

The discourse of moderation adapted itself to reflect the wants, wishes and mentalities of the people concerning resolving the country's problems, thereby achieving credibility. For the same reason, this discourse adjusted its signifiers based on the people's demands with respect to preservation of the nuclear accomplishments and reduction of the economic and international pressures and problems. Such adjustments can be observed in the speeches and positioning by Hassan Rouhani. Rouhani's emphasis on the simultaneous centrifuge spinning and people's life rolling on, interaction with the world, removal of the bans, observation of the red lines on the nuclear issue and heroic flexibilities reflects the greater coordination and correspondence with the majority of the people's wants and mentalities compared to the other discourses.

Therefore, besides being available, the moderation discourse was highly credited for having adjusted to the majority's demands and could complete its road to hegemonisation by taking advantage of a more active and more coherent political subjectivity as well as by applying exclusionary and foregrounding means as its discourse tools.

Conclusion

The present study has sought to elaborate the eleventh government's foreign policy discourse and the competition between this discourse and the rival discourses to establish a hegemonic position based on Laclau and Mouffe's theory. In line with this, while offering a theoretical framework based on the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe the eleventh government's foreign policy discourse and the signification system governing was investigated within the paradigm of moderation discourse. The nodal point and the other signifiers were identified and their hegemonisation style was evaluated within Iran's foreign policy space.

Iran's international conditions held an inappropriate status in 2013 due to the international isolation and embargoes. This issue demanded the advent of novel concepts in the area of Iran's foreign policy. By foregrounding the "constructive interaction with the world" concept, the discourse of moderation that did not deem it expedient to continue with the former

trend and the intensification of the embargoes could finally appropriately change the conditions and it was by displaying the unfortunate image of the current status that it succeeded to appear more capable than any other discourse of improving Iran's conditions in the international arena. This discourse managed to manifest itself as more optimum and more rightful by creating its own ideal space and making use of active political subjectivity and exclusion and marginalisation instruments as well as foregrounding means and its great ability to make itself readily available to acquire higher credibility so as to complete its hegemonisation.

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