

Joshua Baker

A Counterfactual Study of the US - Iran Nuclear Relationship

Supervisors: [Professor Nicholas Wheeler](/schools/government-society/departments/political-science-international-studies/staff/profiles/wheeler-nicholas.aspx) and [Professor Scott Lucas](/schools/government-society/departments/political-science-international-studies/staff/profiles/lucas-scott.aspx)

My PhD research uses counterfactual methods to investigate the narrative of missed opportunities that has surrounded the relationship between the United States and Iran. This narrative explicitly and implicitly states that the fundamental barrier that has prevented the United States and Iran from reaching cooperation over the issues that have long divided them is one of misperception and misunderstanding. Using two particular episodes in the US-Iran relationship since 2001 as case studies, the project aims to scrutinise the missed opportunities argument by counterfactually asking whether more accurate perceptions and understandings of the other would have made any difference to the recent history of US-Iran relations.

In investigating this case, the project also strives to contribute to understandings of the security dilemma in International Relations theory. This is because a specific parallel exists which links the 'missed opportunities' argument to a central contention found in much of the security dilemma literature. This contention states that if only actors could accurately gauge the perceptions of their adversaries, then security dilemma conflicts could be, to some extent at least, overcome. By using counterfactual methods, the aim of the project is to therefore speak to both this theoretical concern while also addressing the contentious issue of whether opportunities for cooperation have been missed by the US and Iran since 2001.

Profile

Before joining POLSIS and the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation, and Security (ICCS) in October 2012 I studied at the University of Exeter and the University of Plymouth. During the first year of the PhD I was the research assistant on the 'Challenges to Trust-Building in Nuclear Worlds' project within the ICCS. My doctoral research is funded by the ESRC.

Qualifications

- BSc (Hons) International Relations with Politics (First Class), University of Plymouth
- MA International Relations of the Middle East (Distinction), University of Exeter

Research interests

- Security studies
- International relations theory
- The security dilemma
- Empathy and emotions in international politics
- Nuclear weapons and non-proliferation

Teaching responsibilities

- 2013/14 - **International Security** (</undergraduate/courses/govsoc/modules/year-two/international-security.aspx>) (POLS 218)

Professional memberships

- BISA
- ISA

Conference papers

'Empathy and the Security Dilemma: Existing Perspectives and New Directions', European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, Glasgow, 3-5 September 2014

'Empathy, The Security Dilemma and the Problem of Other Minds', British International Studies Association Annual Conference, Dublin, 18-20 June 2014 (panel convenor)

'Imagining Empathy: A Counterfactual Methodology of Emotions', Counterfactual Histories and Possible Futures PhD Workshop, University of Helsinki, 13-14 February 2014.

'Making Empathy and Reciprocity Work: Lessons From the Iran Nuclear File', European University Institute, Florence, June 2013 (written with Nicholas J. Wheeler and Scott Lucas – presented by Wheeler)

Publications

'Deciphering Obama's Letter to the Supreme Leader', *Birmingham Brief*, 2014, available at www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/impact/thebirminghambrief/items/2014/11/obama-letter-13-11-14.aspx (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/impact/thebirminghambrief/items/2014/11/obama-letter-13-11-14.aspx>) (With Nicholas J. Wheeler)

'Breaking the Deadlock in the Iran Nuclear Negotiations', *ICCS Brief*, 1: 1, 2012, PP 12-14 (with Nicholas J. Wheeler and Scott Lucas).

Also published online as 'Iran Special Analysis: Breaking the Deadlock in the Nuclear Negotiations', EA WorldView, 2012, at www.enduringamerica.com/home/2012/12/17/iran-special-analysis-breaking-the-deadlock-in-the-nuclear-n (<http://www.enduringamerica.com/home/2012/12/17/iran-special-analysis-breaking-the-deadlock-in-the-nuclear-n>).

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