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How the New York Times Portrayed the 2010 Brazil-Turkey-Iran Nuclear Deal: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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This paper examines the New York Times' reaction to the 2010 Brazil-Turkey-Iran (BTI) nuclear deal – the very last diplomatic effort before the imposition of international sanctions track over the following years. The New York Times' (NYT) coverage of the deal is examined using the Critical Discourse Analytic (CDA) approach formulated by Teun van Dijk. The results show a strong bias against the BTI deal throughout the NYT's news coverage. The overarching theme in coverage of the deal is the imputation of malignant intentions on the part of both Iran ("to kill time to further its nuclear weapons program") and Brazil and Turkey ("to advance their own business dealings with Iran and gaining international recognition"). Also, non-relevant information is used to imply a threat of Iranian development of nuclear weapons. Moreover, the NYT leaves almost totally "unsaid" that president Obama had asked Brazilian and Turkish leaders to go to Tehran and get this deal. Therefore, the NYT basically echoed, and legitimized, discursive practices of the U.S. government on the deal.

Keywords: Iranian Nuclear Program, Critical Discourse Analysis, the New York Times, Iran-U.S. relations

Introduction

Iran's nuclear program has been an issue in international politics for more than a decade. The fact that nuclear technology by nature is dual-use – it could be used for peaceful, civilian purposes while also developed more for weaponization purposes – along with the political reality that Iran does not belong to the club of allied Western states, has made this issue a serious headache for Western powers. With the election of Barack Obama as U.S. president in November 2008, however, hopes for a peaceful resolution to this issue rose.

From the very beginning, Barack Obama used a metaphor to show his administration's willingness to work with Iran: the possibility of America's "extended hand" if there were to be an "unclenched fist" on the other side. For example, in his inaugural address, President Obama told Iranian leaders that, "we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist" (Obama 2009: para. 24). One of the very first diplomatic efforts to act on this promise was the proposal offered by the so-called P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany).

Under the terms of this offer, Iran would send the bulk of its radioactive material abroad for further enrichment and then, after a year, would receive fuel rods for its aging Tehran Research Reactor – which was used for medical purposes such as the treatment of cancer patients (Crail 2009). In fact, this deal provided the grounds for a face-saving first step for both sides: while the threat of further Iranian enrichment (and possible weaponization) would be deferred, Iran could meet some of its nuclear research and development needs with Western help.

But that deal faced serious obstacles when it came to an examination of its details: how long should Iran wait to get the fuel rods? Where should those materials be kept and what would be the terms of Iran's access to them in case of, say, a breach by the West? In how many batches should the materials be delivered? These issues produced disagreements that prevented the signing of a final deal. While President Obama had threatened harsher sanctions if a deal was not reached, Western powers gave the deal another chance through mediation by Turkey and Brazil. Thus, Western powers ended up commissioning the two emerging powers – Turkey and Brazil – who had friendly relations with Iran, with the task of forging an agreement under clear conditions and deadlines. In fact, it was later revealed by the Brazilian government that President Obama had sent President Lula da Silva of Brazil an official letter explaining the terms under which the U.S. would support a deal if Brazil and Turkey facilitated one (Today's Zaman 2010; Leverett and Mann Leverett 2010). Apparently, a similar letter was also sent to the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. From what was leaked to the media later, however, it appears that the U.S. did not expect such a deal would be reached since they had included provisions that Iran had opposed in earlier negotiations.

For example, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (perceived to be closer to Iran than any other UN Security Council member state) predicted a 30 per cent chance for the success of a Turkey-Brazil mediated deal while U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had reportedly discouraged the Brazilians from pursuing the mediation (Parsi 2010a). In sum, World powers were not expecting that deal to go through and had already initiated moves toward imposing sanctions: the U.S. had started a campaign to create international consensus for new Iran sanctions by trying to convince Russia and China about a need for new limits against Iranian banks abroad. And this is exactly what makes the case of the Brazil-Turkish brokered deal of 2010 important: it was the very last international effort to remain on the diplomatic track before imposing new and harshest-ever sanctions on Iran. This effort failed due to Western rejection of the deal, and there followed a three-year campaign of imposing crippling sanctions on the Iranian economy.

Nevertheless, to the surprise of many observers, Iran agreed to the Turkey-Brazil mediated deal in the last hour: Turkey and Brazil got a deal from Iran that met all the terms and conditions set by Washington (Parsi 2010b). At that point, with international consensus on ratifying a new round of Iran sanctions already built, there were serious questions in Washington whether a return to the deal track was possible. And this is exactly what makes this a very interesting case: the U.S. president himself had asked his Turkish and Brazilian counterparts to go to Tehran and get this deal on his behalf; but was he ready at that point to come forward, change course and take it? The answer was no.

Not only did President Obama reject the deal he himself had asked for, but the U.S. also attacked the Turks and Brazilians for seeking the deal. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "accused Brazil and Turkey of being international ingénues, suckered into a spoiling operation by Iran" (Financial Times 2010: para. 1). Moreover, within hours of the deal being reached, the U.S. announced that the five permanent members of UN Security Council had agreed on a new

sanctions resolution against Iran. The U.S. reaction confused and upset Turkish and Brazilian leaders.

Then President Lula da Silva of Brazil later disclosed President Obama's letter – which clearly explained the terms of an acceptable deal from Washington's perspective. President Lula also said that all U.S. dates and deadlines were actually met (Dreyfuss 2010). Likewise, Turkish officials were puzzled and disappointed. Their disappointment led to their unprecedented 'no' vote against the new Iran sanctions resolution in the UN Security Council while all major powers voted for it. It is important to ask why the U.S. rejected a deal it had clearly asked for?

As noted above, the problem was that the U.S. had already moved to the sanctions track against Iran – holding talks with Russia and China to persuade them to agree to specific actions against Iran – anticipating that the deal would not go through. In fact, the BTI deal was not a real proposal in the first place – only another proof showing Iran's defiance. Thus, although the White House itself had sent an official letter to the Turkish and Brazilian governments asking for specific terms and conditions, it did not accept the deal when it was ultimately signed by Iran at the last minute:

Even with this fact in mind, many analysts and observers were puzzled about why the U.S. did not end the pursuit of sanctions at that point and return to a diplomatic track which the U.S. government had originally preferred (Parsi 2010b; Leverett and Mann Leverett 2010). Analysts speculated that because Iran was slow to accept the deal, the U.S. wanted to teach Iran a punitive lesson through sanctions. After the U.S. rejection of the BTI deal, Iran went on the offensive and began to expand its nuclear infrastructure in response – which led to more crippling sanctions from the U.S. and escalated the crisis to unprecedented levels. This could have easily been prevented at that very early point by U.S. acceptance of the BTI deal (Parsi 2010b).

Given the high stakes involved in the confrontation track, and given clear contradictions in U.S. position toward BTI, one wondered how America's leading liberal newspaper – The New York Times – would report it. Would a liberal newspaper just repeat government line on the issue or, instead, would it take a more independent position supporting diplomacy over sanctions and confrontation? The New York Times was chosen for this study because, in contrast to such other newspapers as the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post, it is known as a more liberal paper regularly critical of government narratives on domestic and foreign issues. Therefore, its reportage on such an important international issue could be taken as a case to study the degree of its independence from unjustifiable foreign policy.

I will discuss the literature on media representations of Arabs and Muslims in the next section, then explain the critical discourse analysis approach and present an analysis of NYT coverage of the BTI negotiations and their aftermath. Results show that The New York Times does not critique U.S. government's position at all. Rather, it legitimizes this position by impugning Iranian and Turkish-Brazilian intentions as insincere and by ignoring President Obama's letter to President Lula da Silva of Brazil.

Literature on Media Representations

American media's representation of Arabs and Muslims has received a fair amount of attention from communication and media scholars. From Edward Said's influential works Orientalism (1978) and, more directly-related, Covering Islam (1997) to other works analyzing misrepresentations of Arabs through Hollywood movies, news outlets and other media forms, the issue of media representation of Arabs and Muslims has received a lot of attention mainly in illustrating

simplistic and stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims in American media. As a major Muslim country in the Middle East, Iran has been no exception in this regard. Being in an apparently perpetual state of conflict with the United States, media representation of Iran might be considered worrisome: apart from age-old stereotypes with regard to religion and ethnicity, Iran is now commonly represented as a major political "trouble" in the region. Hollywood movies 300 (2007) and Argo (2012) are some more recent examples of such misrepresentations.

In U.S. media and the Middle East: Image and perception (Kamalipour 1995), multiple authors examine various aspects of Western media representations of Arabs and Muslims. From the photographic coverage of Middle Eastern women and coverage of "the Arab" in Western political cartoons to the portrayals of Iranians in American movies and major magazines such as Time and Newsweek, multiple aspects of misrepresentations are presented. According to Kamalipour, "constant barrage of disasters, coups, uprisings, conflicts, and terrorist activities, reported routinely by the U.S. media, fosters a gross misimpression of Middle Eastern peoples and cultures" (p. xx).

Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) conducted a critical discourse analysis of major American newspapers' editorials regarding the Iranian nuclear program. Their study includes all editorials of the New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal in the 20-year period between 1984 and 2004 that deal with Iran's nuclear program. Through analysis of naming choices and lexicon used in these editorials, they sought to determine if certain Orientalist themes were used in discussing the Iranian nuclear program. They concluded that two Orientalist discursive themes (unreliable Orientals and the threat of Islam) dominated editorial positions with regard to Iran's nuclear program.

Similarly, Jason Jones (2010) conducted a discourse analysis of the language of nine media interviews of former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to study her discourses regarding Iran. More specifically, he examined topic shifts, relations of scope and topic, and portrayals of Iran and the U.S. in her interviews. His findings show that Secretary Rice used her interviews to portray Iran's nuclear program as a weapons program while not providing any evidence for that (the interviewer is often complicit in this process). Also, she depicts the White House as a proponent of multilateral diplomacy while Iran is defined as a rogue state.

The present study seeks to build on this literature by addressing the specific question of how the New York Times reacted to the 2010 Brazil-Turkey-Iran deal. Since the NYT is known as a leading liberal newspaper in comparison to other major U.S. newspapers, the response to this question would show the extent to which a liberal newspaper is critical of U.S. government discourse on such an important international issue crucial for Middle East peace and stability. This is especially worth examining because of clear contradictions in the U.S. government's words and actions with regard to the BTI deal.

Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

In this section, I will address critical discourse analysis and explain its appropriateness for the present study. I will first define discourse and discourse analysis according to Norman Fairclough (1993) and especially Teun van Dijk (1991, 2001). Then I will discuss van Dijk's methodological insights regarding global coherence, the importance of irrelevant information and implication, and the role of "unsaid." I will also explain how discourse analysis can illustrate whether different discursive practices can contribute to the maintenance of the status quo or, in-

stead, seek change through challenging mainstream discourses. Finally, I will address the rationale and the time frame for the analysis of NYT coverage.

Discourse analysis is a method for examining the use of language and how it affects the way "reality" is understood. As Phillips and Jorgensen state in their introduction to Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method (2002: 1), "Our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them." In other words, language is not just a reflection of the world – it plays an indispensable role in how the world is conceived, represented, and perceived. Discourse analysis analyzes language use in order to show how different uses of language, or discourses, contribute to a reproduction of broader unequal social relations on the one hand and change those relations and practices on the other.

One classic example of how some discourses have tried to present a certain picture of the outside world to their audience is "ethnocentric and racist representations in the mass media, literature, and film [by Westerners describing their encounters with the non-Western world.] Such representations continue centuries-old dominant images of the Other in the discourses of European travelers, explorers, merchants, soldiers, philosophers, and historians" (van Dijk 2001: 361). According to van Dijk, these discourses fluctuate "between the emphasis on exotic difference, on the one hand, and supremacist derogation stressing the Other's intellectual, moral, and biological inferiority, on the other hand." Edward Said's (1979) landmark volume on the study of Orientalism as the ideology permeating Western representations of non-Western world is a prominent example of work on such discourses across a range of texts.

Different scholars have defined discourse and discourse analysis in different ways. For the purpose of this study, I use Norman Fairclough's and Teun van Dijk's definitions of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to demonstrate how this approach could be applied to the discourse of The New York Times. Van Dijk's approach is especially relevant here given his focus on racism and ethnocentrism. Here, discourse is used as a count noun indicating "a way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective" (Fairclough 1993: 138).

Summarizing a range of techniques for conducting discourse analysis, Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) acknowledge that there is no single standard way to conduct discourse analysis; that different researchers, depending on the nature of the topic and the texts under study, have employed different analytical instruments to facilitate their studies. "As with other qualitative methods of analysis, there is no clear-cut procedure or recipe as in the natural sciences" (124). However, Phillips and Jorgensen offer general guidelines on where to begin and how to proceed with the analysis in a way that directs the progression of the study: "The way to start is to read and reread the transcriptions in order to identify themes" (124). Thus, the very first step of work on the texts is to read them very closely – looking for topics, themes and patterns of language. In this way, the similarities, differences and more generally structures of language toward the specific subject (here the BTI deal) would start to emerge, enabling the analyst to classify different discourses. Phillips and Jorgensen also point out that the researcher should be open toward whatever new themes/topics they encounter and not limit themselves to a pre-determined set of themes or discourses.

Van Dijk (1991) offers some helpful insights for the conduct of CDA. He introduces the concept of global coherence, which refers to the text's overarching topic/theme. In fact, van Dijk's method focuses on the search for those general themes/topics that structure the discourse/message behind the text: "global coherence is described by what we all intuitively know as themes or topics. Topics conceptually summarize the text, and specify its most important in-

formation." This, according to van Dijk, "forms the thematic or topical structure of the text" (113). An analytic examination of the construction of discourses would illuminate the ways views/positions could be established, resisted, or changed through discursive practices.

Another methodological point van Dijk makes is the importance of non-relevant information that accompanies many discursive constructions. According to van Dijk, "Many ideological implications follow not only because too little is being said, but also because too many, irrelevant things are being said" (1991: 114). In fact, irrelevant information could be used to (implicitly) establish false causal relationships or interpretations through the text. For example, van Dijk talks about how racial or ethnic themes are brought to the forefront of many crime stories in order to offer a racial explanation for whole events. Thus, by examining irrelevant information within the text, implicit discursive constructions of many meanings/interpretations might be explained.

This is what van Dijk calls implication: "one of the most powerful semantic notions in a critical news analysis is that of implication… much of the information of a text is not explicitly expressed, but left implicit." In other words, "textual expressions may imply concepts or propositions which may be inferred on the basis of background knowledge" (1991: 113-114). This shows that no bit of information within the text should be overlooked. The analyst should look for implied discursive messages or interpretations through the study of all the information, part of which might be irrelevant data used to imply a certain understanding.

Van Dijk also addresses the importance of the "unsaid." This means that sometimes, by not saying something, crucial parts of a picture are left unattended – leading to a flawed understanding of a whole issue. According to van Dijk, "The analysis of the 'unsaid' is sometimes more revealing than the study of what is actually expressed in the text" (114). There are clearly methodological issues regarding how to determine what constitutes the "unsaid" as there are unlimited possibilities for inclusion of other information within a text. In other words, because something is "unsaid," it is hard to analyze. One possible way, however, is to see if highly relevant information – significant elements or aspects of an issue – are excluded from text. This could also be seen through an examination of alternative discourses: how one discourse leaves parts of the issue "unsaid" for the purpose of constructing its own specific account (with its implications), while other discourses emphasize such "unsaid" parts.

Finally, discourse analysis can illustrate whether, and how, different discursive practices can contribute to the reproduction and maintenance of status quo or, instead, seek change through challenging mainstream discourses. In other words, each discourse has its own implications with regard to a current state of affairs: does it construct an alternative, critical account of the issue at hand, or does it just confirm a dominant understanding? Or, in the words of Phillips & Jorgensen, "Does the discursive practice reproduce the order of discourse and thus contribute to the maintenance of the status quo in the social practice? Or has the order of discourse been transformed, thereby contributing to social change?" (2002: 86-87). Thus, one might ask, what combinations and recombinations of discourses are used to resist and challenge the status quo? All these features make CDA a good fit for the study of the NYT coverage of the BTI deal.

Following the above protocols for critical discourse analysis, the present study begins with a careful reading of entire news stories. These texts are closely examined in order to elicit patterns of language and determine the overarching themes/topics of The New York Times coverage of the BTI deal. The study seeks to address the following: what is the news article all about? More specifically, how the whole BTI deal is characterized (topics and themes used to describe it), how the goals and functions of the negotiators (Iran and Brazil-Turkey) are por-

trayed, the implications/results for the West and the world in general, and finally, how the world should react to it. Also, discursive implications of non-relevant information (e.g. background information) and the "unsaid" are analyzed. Implications of the "unsaid" could be analyzed by examining if highly relevant information are excluded from the text and whether (and how) such exclusions would affect understanding of the issue.

Given all power dynamics involved, a critical discourse analysis of the NYT coverage of the deal would be especially illuminating: unlike Wall Street Journal and Washington Post, the New York Times has a reputation for being more independent and liberal when it comes to its coverage vis-à-vis the government. In fact, not only is the NYT regarded as one of the most credible American newspapers with a renowned history and a vast readership, but it also is known as a liberal paper that is not a mouthpiece of U.S. administrations on domestic and foreign issues (Blake 2014). For this reason, that would be interesting to see how such a supposedly liberal newspaper would react to this deal and whether or not it reproduces government discourses hence contributing to the maintenance of status quo.

To answer these questions, all the New York Times news stories that directly address the BTI deal over a 45-day period – from five days before the signing, up to forty days after its signing (May 15th 2010-June 17th 2010) – were retrieved through a LexisNexis search of the NYT archives. This time period includes the majority of NYT coverage of the BTI deal and its aftermath.

Analysis

There were roughly eight news stories in the NYT that directly addressed the BTI deal. These stories began to appear a couple of days before the deal was reached. A careful analysis of these texts found the repetition of certain themes. The themes include Iran's malignant intentions, Brazil's and Turkey's malicious intentions, and the NYT's implicit position regarding the deal – its negative standpoint and prescriptions on how to react to it. Background information about the potentially military nature of Iran's nuclear program was another overarching theme A final theme is an example of van Dijk's idea of the importance of the "unsaid": President Obama's official letters to Brazilian and Turkish leaders (asking them to negotiate a deal on terms set by the U.S. government) are largely unmentioned. Each of these themes will be discussed in turn.

The most prominent theme in the NYT coverage of the BTI deal is that Brazil, Turkey, and Iran were not sincere in their efforts. The language used in describing the intentions of these countries is uniformly negative, and the certainty and frequency with which the NYT imputes nefarious motives to the negotiations is especially noteworthy. The NYT reportage and these imputations lose all credibility in light of the later revelations that Brazil and Turkey were negotiating according to the terms that President Obama had laid out for them in his letters.

According to the NYT, Iran's primary motive was to "block – or at least delay" the West from imposing new sanctions on Iran (NYT 15 May). In other words, this was just a "delaying tactic" to "undermine efforts" on sanctions in the UN (NYT 17 May). This most prominent theme is repeated emphatically in almost every single story on the issue. The BTI negotiations and the deal are described as an Iranian "pretext" to avoid UN interference in its nuclear program. The paper also portrays Iran negatively by asserting that Iran only tries to appear cooperative when international pressure mounts (NYT 18 May). Elsewhere, the paper calls the deal "a frantic effort" on the part of Iran to "blunt the American-led campaign for harsher sanctions"

(NYT 19a May). It also portrays it as a way for Iran to "stall for more time to develop nuclear arms" (NYT 25 May).

Without any explanation of the core issues or the larger international context for the BTI deal, the NYT reports that the issue is Iran's "real" intentions. The reportage repeats that the BTI negotiations represent a malignant effort by Iran; that they have no intention other than delaying new sanctions to gain time for developing a nuclear arms program. The application of CDA can easily lead one to conclude that the NYT news coverage has a strong bias against the deal even before it is reached.

The NYT uses a similar language when it comes to Brazil's and Turkey's intentions as well. The overarching theme in the coverage is that they, too, lack sincere motives. The NYT emphasizes that Brazil identifies with Iran in this case because it had similar problems with World powers over the expansion of its own nuclear program – which the NYT implies should be a cause of concern for the entire world: after all, all of them might have a malicious motivation in standing against us big powers. Thus, President Lula da Silva's efforts are not "selfless:" he wants to promote Brazil's emergence as a major world power, which partly lies in the "tremendous confidence that Lula has in himself" because of his popularity back home (NYT 15 May).

According to the NYT, Brazil and Turkey were pursuing their own – perhaps narrow – national interests when they pressed Iran to accept the BTI deal. For example, the paper emphasizes that Brazil and Turkey oppose Iran sanctions "for their own economic interests" (NYT 18 May). The NYT brings this to the forefront by ascribing salience to the idea that "Turkey and Brazil have considerable business dealings with Iran" (NYT 19a May). In other words, it is not necessarily in the interests of all nations to close a deal with Iran. Conversely, since these two nations only care about their own relations with Iran and their own economic interests, they should not be regarded as trusted, credible representatives of the world in dealing with Iran. This is the implicit message advanced through the NYT emphasis on their "true" intentions.

Another theme in NYT reporting on Turkey and Brazil was their lust for international standing and recognition: Turkey and Brazil wanted to show the world that they can, and should, have a place at the "big power table" (NYT 26 May). This is important because instead of focusing on what this deal would accomplish and the fact that the U.S. president had explicitly asked for it, NYT coverage only asserts yet another "intention" on the part of Brazil and Turkey – which, in its characterization, is by no means sincere. There is repeated emphasis on the idea that they wanted to "advance their emergence as a major power on the international stage" (NYT 15 May) or that they are "eager to flex their muscles on the international stage" (NYT 19a May) or that they are "eager to play larger international roles" (NYT 19b May). Such assertions advance the NYT storyline that they were actually pursuing their own self-interests. The paper is seemingly serving its own ends in focusing on irrelevant information and eliding the real issues of the content of the deal and its potential effect on Iran's nuclear program – issues which pass with very little attention.

Thus, the application of CDA may be said to show that the NYT exhibits a strong bias against the BTI deal in its news coverage. Textual analysis makes it clear that the NYT reported very little on the potential pluses and minuses of achieving a deal, instead repeatedly employing laguage emphasizing mostly irrelevant and unsupported assertions regarding the intentions and larger goals of Brazil, Turkey, and Iran.

Seeking to further undermine any validity of the BTI deal, the NYT in one article states that although the deal was quite similar to the one that U.S. and other Western powers had origi-

nally sought a couple of months before, this time it was less acceptable since Iran had accumulated more nuclear material over the intervening months (NYT 17 May). One day later, the paper printed two more reasons aimed at delegitimizing any agreement: that Iran had not stopped all its work with nuclear materials and had actually continued it on a more advanced level (NYT 18 May). Here, the NYT failed to mention that no requirements to stop such work existed in the original deal sought by the West – a key "unsaid." In a later report, the NYT added that the deal "lets Tehran take back the fuel stored in Turkey" and "makes no commitment to talks" (NYT 19b May). While the paper persisted in advancing all of these supposed justifications for the rejection of BTI deal, little mention was ever made that the deal itself was based on the official letters that President Obama sent to his Brazilian and Turkish counterparts clearly explaining the terms the U.S. wanted to see in the deal. In other words, it was what the U.S. had asked for (Today's Zaman 2010; Leverett and Mann Leverett 2010). This is the most important "unsaid" in the NYT coverage.

The story of President Obama's letter to Brazilian and Turkish leaders describing the terms of an acceptable deal – which was the basis for the deal signed in Tehran – remained unreported upon until one week after the deal was reached. Then, when it was mentioned for the first time, it was marginalized in the form of a short, isolated paragraph (with no reference in headline or lead) in the middle of a long story on how this deal would be a "spot on Brazilian leader's legacy" (NYT 25 May). The letters are mentioned only one other time (NYT 27 May), again without any reference in the headline or lead to the story. The important point here is that Obama's official letter was actually the reason why those two leaders took on the burden of attempting to strike a deal with Iran – and it turned out that, with regards to the content of the deal, they had done what President Obama had asked them to do (Today's Zaman May 2010). Thus, the existence and content of these letters, which would have discredited most of what the NYT and also the U.S. government had said in opposition to the deal, went largely unreported. And, in terms of CDA, "unsaid".

Finally, it is worth noting that while the nature of Iran's nuclear program is not known to be military (the International Atomic Energy Agency has never indicated that there is evidence showing the existence of a weapons program (Safdari 2014) – although it has asked for more cooperation on certain issues, site visits etc.), the NYT news coverage is usually accompanied by background information that ascribes a potential or actual weapons production aspect to the program. For example, the NYT talks about Western powers' suspicions (NYT 19a May) or uncertainty about it (NYT 17 May), perhaps intending to plant fear in readers minds about its potential military nature. This is a good example of how CDA can help one identify the use of background information to suggest or imply certain explanations – in this case implying without support that the real nature and goal of Iran's nuclear program is weapons-related.

Conclusion

The case of Brazil-Turkish brokered deal of 2010 is important because it was the very last international effort to return to the diplomatic track before imposing harshest-ever sanctions on Iran. After this effort failed because of Western rejection, there began a three-year campaign of inflicting crippling sanctions on the Iranian economy.

What was initially promising about the deal was the fact that Barack Obama had sent official letters to the Brazilian and Turkish leaders asking them to go to Tehran and negotiate a deal

on behalf of World powers (Today's Zaman May 2010). After the deal was reached, however, the U.S. rejected it, ostensibly because they had already moved to impose sanctions and convinced other major powers to vote for a new round of sanctions. Thus, it would be very telling to know how one of the most credible American newspapers, the New York Times, covered this issue vis-à-vis the rejection position taken by the U.S. government.

The results do not show any independent/critical position towards the U.S. government on the part of the New York Times though. In fact, the NYT betrayed a strong opposition to the deal in its news coverage even before the deal was reached. A critical discourse analysis of the NYT coverage shows that it largely emphasized the theme of insincere intentions on the part of both Iran and Brazilian-Turkish leaders as motivations behind striking the deal. In fact, the overarching theme is that Iranians wanted to buy time to further a purported (but undocumented) nuclear weapons program while Turks and Brazilians were after reviving their own business dealings with Iran and gaining international standing.

What does not get emphasized, however, is the fact that this deal was precisely designed based on what the U.S. President Barak Obama had asked for in a letter. This fact gets covered only in two news stories in an isolated, marginal way. Thus, coverage of the political context, and the actual text, of the deal was sacrificed for what the NYT projected as Iran, Turkey and Brazil's hidden agenda – that of pursuing their own self interests in the face of the "International Community's" concerns about Iran's nuclear activities. Here, as van Dijk puts it, the analysis of the "unsaid" is even more important than what is actually said in order to understand how the whole story is constructed.

Critical discourse analysis clearly shows how causal relationships are implicitly established by providing irrelevant pieces of information in news coverage – in this case the intentions of the sides. Also, it shows how leaving major elements of a story unsaid or marginalized – in this case President Obama's letters – can affect the way a whole story is presented. And finally, this research shows that not only did the NYT take the same position as that of the U.S. government against the deal, but it also actively portrayed the BTI deal in a negative light throughout its news coverage. Thus, the discursive practices of the NYT reproduced the dominant state discourse and, this way, contributed to the maintenance of status quo – in this case legitimizing the position of the U.S. government.

These findings confirm what we saw in the literature: that mainstream media tend to blame "them" (or "the others") as unreliable and evil while "us" are essentially innocent; even in the case of a liberal newspaper like the NYT, and even when the words and actions of U.S. government are self-contradictory.

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