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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the media is part of a "soft power" approach in Iran's foreign relations with the aim to shape audience perceptions in order to influence political decisions regarding the Islamic Republic. Main rationale for this is the relative lack of "hard power" assets that Iran could bring to bear. It further will show that Iran developed a modern media diplomacy apparatus, and that Iran is using deliberately message construction techniques to shape audience perceptions.

SHAPING PERCEPTIONS - THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

INTRODUCTION

> *The establishment of radio station in Iran has been associated with that of Telegraph or wireless equipment. The First wireless equipment began to work in 1926[1].*
>
> *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting*

While this equipment was a single transmitter for broadcasting radio to Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) today has a World Service Radio network in over 30 languages and entertains several satellite TV stations addressing foreign audiences worldwide. Most of those stations have webpages, some with links to Facebook, and some are available on YouTube and Google+ and have a Twitter feed. These facts help to illustrate the reach of the revolution in communication technology over the past two decades and to demonstrate the globalisation of information and mass media. In addition, they raise interesting questions: Why does the authoritarian regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran dedicate resources to programmes like this, when Iran is better known in the West for its controversial nuclear programme, its military sabre-rattling that threatens the international oil shipping route through the Strait of Hormuz, and its suppression of domestic dissent? Are economic interests of Iranian companies behind those efforts, or do those programmes serve foreign policy objectives? If so, what is the role of the media in Iran's foreign policy? This paper will try to answer this last

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[1] Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Website "About Us"; http://www.irib.ir/English/AboutUs/index.php; Internet; accessed 24 May 2012.

question by examining an aspect of Iranian foreign policy that has been overshadowed by its "hard power" aspects in the recent debate on Iran: Iran's use of "soft power" to reach its strategic goals.

This paper argues that the media is part of a "soft power" approach in Iran's foreign relations with the aim to shape audience perceptions in order to influence political decisions regarding the Islamic Republic. Main rationale for this is the relative lack of "hard power" assets that Iran could bring to bear. It further will show that Iran developed a modern media diplomacy apparatus, and that Iran is using deliberately message construction techniques to shape audience perceptions.

For that the paper is divided in three parts. The aim of the first part of is to demonstrate that Iran's regime has an objective rationale for a soft power approach and is cognisant of the concepts of "soft power" and media diplomacy, which would be the first of three criteria that would speak for such a role of the media in Iran's foreign policy. From an international relations perspective, the concept of "soft power" based on Joseph Nye's definition will be introduced. This forms the starting point for explaining the rational for using the media in such an approach to diplomacy. Against this theoretical backdrop, Iran's relatively weak "hard power" posture in economic and military terms forms the rationale for why Iran might pursue a media diplomacy approach. In a second step, evidence is presented that key policy makers in Iran's government are familiar with the concepts of "soft power" and public diplomacy and that the knowledge of the power of the media in shaping public opinion is even quasi ingrained in the regimes DNA.

The international media and information environment necessitates flexible and adaptive organizational structures of a media influence programme. The second part will therefore demonstrate that Iran has the means to meet the second criterion: a modern,

flexible and adaptive foreign audience media structure. Theoretical bases for a evaluation of Iran's foreign audience media structure is Pierre Phalavi's bureaucratic-entrepreneurial model that has been adopted by major public diplomacy actors such as the BBC or the Deutsche Welle. Iran's foreign audience media structure is described. It will be shown that Iran has dedicated media channels for dedicated target audiences and that Iran at least tries to emulate successful media diplomacy programmes. Furthermore, Iran tries to suppress information coming out of Iran that would contradict the regime's message to outside audiences.

The third part shows that the third criterion for a dedicated media influence strategy is equally fulfilled: evidence for deliberate message construction in Iran's foreign media outlets in line with its foreign policy objectives. Techniques of agenda setting and news framing can constitute solutions to the dilemma of mass diplomacy of remaining true and credible while transmitting one's message to target audiences. In order to identify frames in Iran's message, strategic themes in Iran's foreign policy are identified. Those are nationalism based on the Persian heritage, revolution and anti-imperialism, and the theme of the "Islamic awakening" based on the Shia interpretation of Islam. Iran's foreign policy is ultimately aiming at regime survival, international recognition, and the maximization of Iran's regional influence. Iran's approach to foreign policy is quite pragmatic once those aims are endangered. It is demonstrated that Iran is quite pragmatic in the construction of its messages to different target audiences. Finally, there is ample evidence that Iran is indeed using message construction techniques to shape audience perceptions in line with its foreign policy objectives, which is the last criterion that speaks for a dedicated media influence strategy.

IRAN's APPROACH TO SOFT POWER: RATIONALE AND UNDERSTANDING

The concept of soft power in international relations

Does Iran really pursue a media-influence strategy? Or is Iran simply following the example of other countries in informing global audiences about Iran's policies? Or are the foreign audience media outlets just based on the economic interests of companies residing in Iran? To answer these questions, it is necessary to derive criteria for the analysis of Iran's foreign media programme to find an overlap between Iran's foreign policy and Iran's foreign media programmes.

A starting point for the definition of criteria that would speak to a dedicated media-influence strategy pursued by the Islamic Republic of Iran is the concept of soft power in international relations. The term soft power was originally coined by the political scientist Joseph Nye. His argument is based on the difficulty of defining power in international relations solely by physical sources of power such as militaries or economic potential. Countries that have such traditional "hard power" resources often do not achieve the desired outcomes of their foreign policy despite their potential. Those resources of national power are in fact the basis for a more important aspect of power: the relational aspect of power between countries. Therefore, Nye places emphasis on a definition of power based on behavioural outcomes: power is wielded in such a way as to achieve the desired outcomes, and strategies are used to achieve ends by relating means, or power resources, to ways in which to achieve those outcomes. Nye attributes three

aspects to relational power: "commanding change, controlling agendas, and establishing preferences."[2] The first aspect of commanding change relates to a nation behaving in a manner that goes against its initial preference. This aspect of power is linked to coercion and the use of hard power resources. Economic sanctions or military threats against a country are classic instruments in international relations to alter the behaviour of a non-compliant country. These measures of coercion are even codified in Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, and resolutions of the United Nation Security Council in regard to Iran's nuclear programme might serve as examples (e.g., UNSCR1929). Economic incentives or payments are the other side of this power aspect. In short, the first aspect of power resembles the "carrot-and-stick" approach.

The second aspect of power relates to "framing and agenda setting."[3] Power is used to frame certain problems and issues in international relations in such a way that only certain solutions to those problems seem legitimate and feasible, regardless of the initial preferences of the targeted actors. At the same time, other issues are not placed on the agenda for action. This exercise of power is less obvious than the first aspect, and a targeted actor might not even be aware that it is taking place. The intended target might even perceive the agenda or the framing of issues to be legitimate, and therefore not realize the influence of an outside actor.[4]

The third aspect of power relates to shaping the target's initial preferences, basic beliefs, and perceptions themselves. By shaping these features, one can influence the

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[2] Josef Nye, Jr. 2011. *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 11.

[3] *Ibid.,* 13.

[4] *Ibid.,*13.

strategies that an actor might pursue and hence alter the behavioural outcome. This is the subtlest use of power, because the target is most likely unaware that such influence is being wielded.

Aspects two and three constitute what Nye defines as soft power: "the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes."[5] In other words, hard power is used to push a target towards a desired behaviour or to or constrain the target in a coercive manner, while soft power is used to achieve an effect by pulling or attracting a target towards the desired outcome.[6] Soft power is the ability to shape or reshape preferences without resorting to force or payment. Nye identifies three sources of soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policy.

But how does soft power change the foreign policies of a targeted state? Nye suggests a direct and an indirect approach. To achieve a direct effect, the sources of soft power are used to influence government elites and to create attraction towards a certain foreign policy goal, which leads to elite decisions and to desired outcomes. In the indirect approach, the sources of soft power are aimed at a nation's population to attract or repel certain foreign policies in order to create an enabling or disabling environment for an elite decision.[7]

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[5] *Ibid.*,16.

[6] *Ibid.*,20.

[7] *Ibid.*, 22.

The concept of soft power often carries in discussions an element of being the "better" use of power, as it is "less aggressive" and is based on a positive notion of attraction. In fact, some authors have broadened the concept and sources of soft power to elements that were not originally described by Nye. One example of this broadening is the development of a framework to actually quantify the soft power potential of certain countries by including education, brand names, cuisine, "soft power icons", and other subjective soft power qualities in the development of a "soft power index."[8] On the other hand, critics of the concept of soft power often claim that the concept is ill-defined and "too soft" to be relevant, especially from a realist point of view on international relations. It is argued here that both notions are based on a misunderstanding of the concept. Soft power in itself is actually not "soft." It is used to achieve desired outcomes, which can be quite "hard." The application of soft power is only a means to an end, a fact that can be exemplified by developments in Afghanistan. The international community represented by NATO, the European Union, and the United States, as the only remaining superpower, have had to adjust their desired end state for Afghanistan since the successful ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001. What was once envisioned as a Western-style democracy in Afghanistan is now the handover of security responsibilities to the government of Afghanistan as soon as possible and a redeployment of major combat troop formations in 2014, both with an unknown mid- and long-term perspective. The opposing forces in Afghanistan certainly did not achieve this result by the use of hard power. By framing the presence of international forces as an occupation, exploiting incidents such as the accidental burning of copies of the Koran and the killing of civilians, and persuading

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[8] Jonathan McClory, *The New Persuaders II - A 2011 global ranking of soft power* (London: Institute for Government, 2011), 12.

Western audiences that their militaries are fighting a lost cause, the Taliban successfully used soft power to alter the international agenda for Afghanistan.

From soft power to soft power diplomacy

Both the direct and the indirect approaches have short-and long-term effects, and the methods of gaining or wielding soft power are abundant, whether soft power is exercised by words or deeds. However, the definition of soft power, with its references to persuasion, agenda-setting, and framing, puts central importance on communication, especially in the indirect approach. This interaction between a government and the population of a target state to influence the policies of that state is the basis for the concept of public diplomacy. While classic diplomacy is exercised by government officials communicating and interacting with government officials, often in secrecy, public diplomacy addresses the population of a state directly. Nye describes public diplomacy in three concentric rings. The center ring relates to the day-to-day communication of policy. The aim of this practice is the explanation of policy and the provision of a means of crisis communication. Day-to-day communication looks at a time horizon of days and weeks, and this short-term public diplomacy relies mainly on the dissemination of information. The second circle relates to strategic communication, wherein strategic themes or narratives are perpetrated. The aim of strategic communication is a long-term solidification of those themes and narratives. The last circle relates to relationship-building with key individuals in target audiences. Those long-term initiatives could encompass cultural, educational, and scientific exchange

programmes.[9] Therefore, this long-term public diplomacy relies mainly on the communication of cultural values.

R.S. Zaharna proposes another method of describing public diplomacy initiatives. She differentiates between an informational framework and a relational communications framework. This distinction is based on the observations of cultural anthropologists and intercultural communication scholars. Studies in these fields differentiate between cultural dimensions in social behaviour. One of these dimensions is the individualism-versus-collectivism dimension. In societies that rank high on the individualism scale, the interests of the individual are more important than the interests of group harmony, cohesion, and stability. Societies that rank high on the collectivism scale place a higher importance on the aforementioned values than on individual rights and interests. Communication in societies of the first category can be described as low-context communication. That is, the code or the message is more important than the context in which the message was communicated. Societies that rank high in the collectivism scale exercise high-context communication, in which the true meaning of the message is found implicitly in the context of how the message was communicated. Most European and North American countries belong to the low-context category, while most non-Western societies belong to the high-context category. Analogous to this categorization, public diplomacy initiatives can be attributed to either a relational or an informational framework. Efforts in the relational framework are geared to the long-term development of relations or of an environment in which messages are perceived in a certain way. Cultural, scientific, and educational exchange programmes and international visits fall

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[9] Josef Nye Jr *The Future….,* 125.

into this category. The informational framework relates more to the transmission of information and to the message itself.[10] We see in both approaches that the transmission of information as well as culture is a central element in public diplomacy and that there are short- and long-term effects.

The role of the media in public diplomacy

Public diplomacy encompasses a wide spectrum of activities aimed at wielding soft power. To understand the role of the media in Iran's foreign policy, it is now imperative to locate the role of mass media in the general concept of public diplomacy. The importance of the media in public diplomacy, especially audiovisual media and the Internet, stems from the following observation from German sociologist and system theorist Nicklas Luhmann in his seminal work *The Reality of the Mass Media*: "Everything we know about society and the world we know almost exclusively from mass media."[11] Luhmann bases this argument on the observation that an individual has to rely on mediated information to construct his or her own reality and knowledge about the world, because it is not possible to create that knowledge from one's own observations and experience.[12] Scientific, educational, cultural, and religious exchange programmes reach relatively few individuals and have the additional difficulty of identifying and attracting key individuals. The same is true for public diplomacy–inspired tourism

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[10] R.S. Zaharna *Information and Relational Communication Frameworks of Strategic Public Diplomacy* in N. Snow and P. M. Taylor (Eds.) *The Public Diplomacy Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2008), 86-100

[11] Niklas Luhmann, Die Realität der Massenmedien 2., erweiterete Auflage (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag: 1996), 9 .

[12] *Ibid.,* 9.

initiatives. Therefore, the media is the means of choice for public diplomacy in the attempt to alter the perceptions and beliefs of target populations, and hence the foreign policy of the targeted country.

Against this backdrop, the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy by the use of mass media are therefore the basis for the first criterion that would speak to the existence of a media-influence strategy in Iran's foreign policy: evidence that Iran's foreign policy makers are familiar with the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy and that they recognize that those approaches would be useful in the achievement of Iran's foreign policy goals. If this criterion were fulfilled, it would be evident that Iran's foreign media activities really are based on a political calculation versus economic interests.

Iran and the usefulness of soft power diplomacy

There are two major reasons that Iran is pursuing a soft power approach to international relations: lack of economic power and weak military capabilities. While Iran is rich in energy resources, especially oil, the economy in Iran suffers from inefficiencies due to government overregulation and a large state sector. Food and energy prices are still controlled and subsidized, despite recent reforms. Corruption is widespread, and the gray and black markets are flourishing. Iran's economy also suffers from an estimated inflation rate of consumer prices of 22.5%. For 2011, the Iranian government reported an unemployment rate of 15.3%. Overall, 80% of Iran's economy is dependent on revenues from oil exports. Other export commodities include chemical and petrochemical products,

fruits and nuts, and carpets. Iran's main export partners are China, India, Japan, and Turkey.[13]

We can see from these indicators that the Iranian economy is lagging behind the economic development of other nations in the region, partially due to the regime of sanctions against Iran. The weak economy and the high unemployment rate coupled with a very young population (the average age is only 26.8 years and roughly 70% of the population was born after the 1979 revolution) bear the potential for domestic dissatisfaction and unrest. Therefore, the economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran hardly represents a hard power asset. Even the threat of restricting oil exports and thereby raising the world market prices for oil does not carry much weight, as such actions would mostly affect China, Iran's most important export partner and political supporter. The international community has actually used Iran's dependence on oil revenues to its advantage by imposing sanctions against Iran's oil trade in an attempt to coerce Iran into compliance with the provisions of the Nonproliferation Treaty.[14]

Despite the desire of the Iranian regime to become a regional powerhouse, one strategic goal in Iran's foreign policy that will be discussed later, Iran's military capabilities are overall weak, especially compared to other actors in the region. Iran's only military power projection capabilities consist of support from partners and proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and of irregular military and paramilitary units such as the

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[13] Central Intelligence Agency "The World Factbook – Iran," www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir html; accessed 02 April 2012.

[14] Nathan Hodge and Tennille Tracy, "Obama Clears sanctions Against Iran"*, The Wall Street Journal* (30 March 2012), (online edition); available from http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303404704577313794019149280.html; Internet; accessed 30 March 2012

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qods Force, predominantly in the Levant. While these groups exert some influence abroad, Iran's conventional military capabilities are not capable of large conventional operations against Iran's neighbors or other countries in the region or further abroad.[15] This became especially evident in 1998, when the Iranian regime cancelled a military invasion of Afghanistan at the last moment.[16] Iran's defence expenditures are also relatively low compared with those of other countries in the region. Iran's military equipment is mostly obsolete, with a few exceptions in air defence capabilities. The only region in which Iran can exert direct influence with conventional military forces is in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran could threaten the flow of merchandise and oil going through this maritime chokepoint with anti-ship weaponry and tactics, and in fact did so in the Iran–Iraq war, leading to negative consequences for Iran's war effort.[17]

Iran's military posture is based mainly on deterrence and defence by asymmetric warfare. The deterrence element is established by a strong ballistic missile force. In recent years Iran has continued to develop ballistic missile systems with higher ranges and is potentially working on intercontinental ballistic missile capability. While these capabilities could threaten targets in the region and abroad, especially when Iran's

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[15] United States Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Iran's Military Power,* Statement by Lieutenant General Ronald L. Burgess, Jr., Director, Defense Intelligence Agency,14 April 2010; available from http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/100414_FINAL%20DIA_SFR_to_SASC_Iran_Hearing_20100413.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 March 2012

[16] Walter Posch, "Zwischen Ideologie und Pragmatismus: Grundlinien der Iranischen Außenpolitik". *ÖMZ* 6/2010 . 754

[17] The U.S. and other Western nations began to mark their oil tankers with their own national flags to protect them and escort them through the Strait of Hormuz. Furthermore, attacks on oil shipments did not entice support for the Iranian cause but eventually led to increased support for Iraq.

controversial nuclear programme is taken into consideration, the main focus of the regime seems to be internal security and the defence against outside threats.[18]

Overall, we see that Iran's hard power potential in international relations is rather limited. The rationale for a soft power approach therefore comes in part from this lack of hard power potential. On the other hand, Iran certainly noticed that the United States did not achieve its foreign policy goals in the region by the use of hard power. It must be obvious for Iran that influencing public opinion in the U.S. is a practical way to influence the United States' foreign policy. The above-mentioned changes in policy towards Iraq and Afghanistan make this clear. Furthermore, it is important for Iran to gain and maintain the support of key allies, namely, China and Russia. China and Russia are at least skeptical and suspicious of U.S. foreign policy towards Iran. While China is a major trade partner for Iran, and Russia is a major supplier of modern military equipment and nuclear technology, both countries also have veto powers in the United Nations Security Council. Harsh sanctions or even military action by the international community against Iran could be averted by their veto in the U.N. Security Council. In other words, Iran must maintain its capability to wield soft power with those countries. This also speaks against any overly aggressive moves by Iran in international relations, as an interruption of trade through the Strait of Hormuz would seriously damage Iran's relationship with China, for example. Overall, investing resources in the fulfillment of a soft power strategy aimed at increasing its influence in the region and in the defence of its interests seems to be an affordable alternative for Iran to fill its hard power deficit. But is there an explicit

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[18] United States Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Iran's Military Power,...*

understanding and recognition by Iran's government of the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy?

Governmental consensus

The concept of soft power is well understood in academic and foreign policy circles in Iran. For example, in 2008 Manouchehr Mohammadi attributed the survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979 to its soft power potential. He argues that soft power actually was the predominant form of power in international relations before "the domination of capitalist and materialist philosophies since the 15th century especially in Europe caused the gradual circumvention of soft power by hard power."[19] In this article he also quotes Joseph Nye in the description of soft power concepts, and he acknowledges the importance of the media: "While being exerted through the Media, soft power could bring about long term or even constant effects. This way, soft power can do the same functions more profoundly than once was done by hard power, absent from its negative effects."[20] Further in the article, he derives Iran's sources of soft power from religion and from the positive characteristics of the Iranian people and their leadership. At the time his article was published, Manouchehr Mohammadi was Professor of International Relations in the Faculty of Law and Political Science at Tehran University. At the same time, he was the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Education and Research. In 2011 Dr. Ebrahim Anousheh, from the Department of Law and Political

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[19] Mohammadi Manouchehr, "The Sources of Power in Islamic Republic of Iran." *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* Vol. XX, (No.2: 1-21, Spring 2008). (online edition); available from http://dermfa.ir/pdf/spring2008/The-Sources-of-Power-final.pdf; Internet; accessed 14 March 2012

[20] *Ibid.*

Science of the Islamic Azad University Teheran, made the case for Islamic ideology as the main source of soft power in an article published in the *Journal of American Science*. He concludes that Islamic ideology is "[a] soft power which has managed to increase the influence of Iran in many countries [and] highlights the role of Iran in geopolitical dynamic [*sic*]."[21] We see here that a strong link exists between academia, which is familiar with recent research in the field of public diplomacy, and the executive, which is responsible for research into and formulation of Iran's foreign policy.

The concepts of soft power and public diplomacy not only are known by academics and bureaucrats in Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs but also are practiced by the head of government, President Ahmadinejad. In May 2006, the Iranian president sent an 18-page letter in Farsi to U.S. President George W. Bush. While the letter was addressed to President Bush, it was also distributed to the international media and received worldwide news coverage and commentaries. One can therefore argue that the American government was only a small part of the intended audience. In fact, in a blog entry on the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy webpage, Mohammad Ganjidoost called the letter "[a] soft power, noopolitik approach."[22] At the time Ganjidoost was a former career diplomat and ambassador and a researcher on political issues at the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) at the Iranian

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[21] Dr. Ebrahim Anousheh, "The role of soft power in foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran." *Journal of American Science* 7 ((7)) 2011: 266-70; Available from http://www.jofamericanscience.org/journals/am-sci/am0707/042_5871am0707_266_270.pdf; Internet; accessed 20 March 2012
Journal of American science, 2011; 7 (7)

[22] Mohammad Ganjidoost, *A Soft Power, Noopolitik Approach: President Ahmadinejad's letter to President Bush;* blog entry, 24 Jul 2006*;* The CPD blog. University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy; available from http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/060724_soft_power_noopolitik_approach_president_ahmadinejads_letter_bu/; Internet; accessed 20 March 2012.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this blog entry he focuses on the public discussion that the letter received. He emphasizes "that this letter will remain as a document of civil correspondence addressed to the appropriate world through President Bush; and this is certainly a public diplomacy which may not have necessarily immediate result, especially when power politics is making its last noisy move out."[23] President Bush did not reply to this letter. In November 2006 President Ahmadinejad sent a six-page letter to the American people. In this letter, which was published in English online, he strongly criticized the U.S. government and expressed his conviction that the American people must "deplore" the Bush administration's behaviour. The letter also makes strong references to the "ever worsening pain and misery of the Palestinian people… [due to] the Zionist regime."[24] Again, it therefore can be argued that the American public was not the only audience targeted by this letter. Another Iranian academic and professor of international relations at Tehran University, Dr. Davoud Hermidas-Bavand, commented in an interview with the *New York Times* that the intent of the letter was "to get the sympathy of Arabs," and that "[t]he letter makes Ahmadinejad a subject of international talks, particularly in the Middle East."[25] Both letters created worldwide media attention and led to discussions about their target audiences. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that both letters were certainly not written without the help of foreign policy advisors familiar with the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy. It seems that the role and

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, *Open Letter to the American People*. 29 November 2006; available from http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/11/29/ahmadinejad.letter/; Internet; accessed 20 March 2012.

[25] Michael Slackman, "Iran's President criticizes Bush in letter to American People" *New York Times*, 29 November 2006, online edition; available from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/30/world/middleeast/30iran.html; Internet; accessed 03 April 2012.

importance of the media in the creation of public opinion are well understood in today's Iran. But the notion that media can have an impact on political and social developments is also demonstrated in Iran's recent history. The media had an influential effect in the revolutionary stage and in the post-revolutionary period. Ayatollah Khomeini, a member of the clergy from Qom and a critic of the Shah's regime and the United States, reached audiences in Iran through smuggled audiotapes of his sermons recorded during his exile in Turkey, Iraq, and France. In France he received considerable media attention as a new revolutionary leader and gave more than 100 interviews. "Small media" products such as those audiotapes and leaflets mobilized supporters of the revolution.[26] Ayatollah Khomeini's quote that "[p]ropaganda can bring down a mountain" is therefore not surprising. After the revolution, one of the first steps in the "Islamization" of the society was the takeover of Iran's only national broadcasting body, National Iranian Radio Television. During the Iran–Iraq war, the media were used extensively for mass mobilization and propaganda.[27]

The state and especially the religious leadership maintained strict control of Iran's media, and the regime constantly tried to isolate the Iranian population from the influence of outside media, or at least diminish the impact. As a result, we see not only that the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy are well understood and, in fact, practiced by Iran's government apparatus but also that the use of the media for influencing target audiences is quasi-ingrained in the regime's DNA.

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[26] Mehdi Semati, *Media, Culture and Society in Iran: Living with globalization and the Islamic state* (London: Routledge, 2008.), 5.

[27] *Ibid.,* 5.

At this point we have established that Iran attaches great attention to the media, suggesting that the regime wants to pursue a strategy of media influence. However, it remains to be demonstrated that Iran has developed a distinctive media diplomacy apparatus to conduct a systematic and organized media-based strategy of influence.

IRAN'S MEDIA DIPLOMACY SYSTEM

Modern Media Diplomacy Structures

The second criterion that demonstrates Iran's purposeful use of the media towards its foreign policy goals is the existence of a foreign media structure that is flexible and adaptive enough to compete with domestic and other foreign media outlets in target countries for the attention of the target audience. This criterion is based on one reason that public diplomacy via mass media is of central importance: the easy access to target audiences. The 1990s underwent what some authors termed an information revolution. The development, distribution, and market success of new information and communication technologies, such as the personal computer, satellite television, mobile communication, and the Internet, made international borders very porous to the flow of information. Satellite television in particular provides a means to easily reach target audiences, even in authoritarian countries.[28] The Islamic Republic of Iran itself can serve as an example here. While the reception of satellite TV is prohibited by law, many Iranians have access to 38 Persian-language TV channels, because the authorities are not

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[28] Pierre C.Pahlavi, "Mass Diplomacy: Foreign Policy in the Global Information Age". (PhD dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, 2004), 46.

prosecuting violators of the legislation as diligently as they pursue regime-critical Internet bloggers.[29]

But the spread of information channels brings new challenges to the practitioners of public diplomacy. The abundance of channels creates a fierce competition between the providers of information for the attention of their audience. Scarcity of information has been replaced by scarcity of attention.[30] Media outlets have to attract their audience. This is one of the reasons that classic propaganda, i.e., propagating false and manipulated information, no longer works. Credibility becomes a market asset, especially for news networks. Once information channels have lost their credibility, they are not attractive anymore: audiences that have the feeling that the information they receive is false or manipulated can shift their attention to different channels. In this context, the very notion that a government is sponsoring the media outlet might undermine its credibility with the intended target audience. But credibility is not the only factor that makes a particular media outlet attractive to the audience. The information presented must also meet the information and entertainment needs of the audience. Research on the reporting of news has identified a range of factors that make information "newsworthy," i.e., commercially relevant in the competition for audience attention.[31] While it is not important to expand on the theory of newsworthiness, it is important to point out that these factors are specific

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[29] Mojtaba Saminejad, "Media and Internet under Control and Censorship" in *Iran Human Rights Revue: Access to Information* edited by Danesh, Tahirih, and Ansari, Nazenin (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2011), 41 – 47; Available from http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1369.pdf; Internet; accessed 20 June 2012.

[30] Joseph Nye, Jr. *The Future of Power…,*103.

[31] Leif Kramp, "Was Journalisten aus Informationen machen: Nachrichten und News" in *Informationen Zur Politischen Bildung* Nr. 309/2010 (Massenmedien), 52-54.

to individual cultures.[32] Consequentially, any media influence programme needs to be both flexible and adaptive to markets in the different target audiences. One programme translated into the languages of the different target audiences is simply not enough. Each audience requires an outlet tailored to its cultural needs and background, meaning that Iran should have specific programmes for specific target audiences that try to be competitive in the target markets. This is a challenge for any government-sponsored foreign media programme. By and large, a bureaucratically controlled government broadcast system cannot meet both the flexibility and credibility requirements at the same time.

Therefore, the political scientist Pierre Pahlavi developed a model that shows a way out of this dilemma. He argues that modern mass diplomacy has adopted a "bureaucratic–entrepreneurial" model. This model consists of a minimum of "governmental leadership and governmental mechanisms with as much decentralization as possible."[33] The core tenet of the bureaucratic–entrepreneurial model is the notion that public diplomacy "relies upon a discreet and flexible audiovisual broadcasting operating system, able to work effectively in a controlled partnership with the non-governmental sphere."[34] In this system, a central agency affiliated with the government devises the overall communication strategy and supervises its implementation. This agency coordinates and de-conflicts the different mass diplomacy efforts and channels. This lead agency is also responsible for the creation and maintenance of relationships with

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[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Pierre C. Pahlavi " Mass Diplomacy….", 192.

[34] Pierre C. Pahlavi, *Collective Diplomacy: A New Public Diplomacy Paradigm for the 21st Century, unpublished, 2012*, 171.

"external media partners," which provide in part the dissemination of the programmes.[35] The advantage of this approach is the wider distribution of one's message by addressing the audiences of established media outlets. At the same time, the influence of a government in the programming is less visible for the intended audience; hence the credibility of the message is not compromised by the recognition of the government as the originator of the message. Furthermore, entrepreneurial outlets are generally faster and more adaptive to changing audience demands.

A prime example of this bureaucratic–entrepreneurial partnership is the British BBC World Service. The BBC enjoys immense credibility among its audiences thanks to its editorial independence and reaches huge worldwide audiences by providing attractive content to private media outlets. Despite its editorial freedom, the BBC is "constrained by the need to respect the strategic lines drawn by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office,"[36] which finances a large portion of the BBC world service. Another good example of the bureaucratic–entrepreneurial model is the German Deutsche Welle (DW). Publicly financed, DW produces media content and uses media content produced by the public broadcast authorities of the German Länder. To reach target audiences in foreign countries, DW has partnerships with "over 5000 partner broadcast stations and more than 400 broadcast institutions around the world."[37] In the following sections, we will explore how Iran's foreign broadcast system compares with the aforementioned examples.

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[35] *Ibid.*, 171.

[36] *Ibid.*, 173.

[37] *Ibid.*, 174.

Iran's Media Structures

The Central Agency – The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Supreme Leader oversees all media activities. The main body of Iran's audiovisual and electronic media outlets is the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). The Iranian constitution describes the limit of freedom in broadcasting by stating that "freedom of expression and publication of ideas by the IRIB must be in line with Islamic laws and national interest."[38] The IRIB is supervised by a governing board composed of two representatives each from the presidency, the legislature, and the judiciary.[39] This supervising board does not have direct executive powers. According to Iran's constitution, the Supreme Leader appoints a director for five years. The current director, Ezzatollah Zarghami, served in the Revolutionary Guards and was one of the students occupying the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979.[40] He and his predecessor, Ali Larijani, are members of the conservative faction and are close to the Guardians.

The notion that the IRIB has a political mandate is also made clear on the IRIB webpage. Article 3 of its policies and principles emphasizes that "[t]he fulfillment of the

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[38] Pierre C. Pahlavi, "Understanding Iran's Media Diplomacy", Israel Council on Foreign Relations, http://israelcfr.com/documents/6-2/6-2-3-PierrePahlavi.pdf; Internet; accessed 07 July 2012, 22.

[39] BBC monitoring, " Guide to Iranian Media and Broadcast to Iran" (London, BBC monitoring, 2007); Available from http://www.arabmediasociety.com/UserFiles/DOCUMENTS%20Iran%20Media%20Guide.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 March 2012, 2.

[40] *Ibid.*, 2.

Supreme Leader's point of view as the Islamic Jurisprudent"[41] is an important part of its

mission. Further tasks according to the mission statement include "[s]etting the situation

for acceleration and enforcement of the national bodies (which are Executive, Judiciary,

legislative) programs [*sic*]" and "[s]etting the situation toward the self-sufficiency and

embodiment of the policy of 'Neither East, Nor West' in all of the fields of politics, social

affairs, culture, economics and military within the framework of the Islamic Republic's

Laws [*sic*]."[42] The webpage also makes reference to an "intensifying media war, focusing

on winning the public opinion."[43]

The Supporting Agencies

The IRIB is supported by several differently affiliated agencies and organizations.

The **Center for Music and Songs** in Teheran and its affiliated regional centers were

established to ensure "that music production in the genres like classic, folk music modal

and symphonic music are in conformity with the country's national culture and

religion."[44] According to the IRIB webpage, the center is also responsible for the

formulation of policy for the IRIB.[45]While there is little information about this subject

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[41] Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Website "About Us";
http://www.irib.ir/English/AboutUs/index.php; Internet; accessed 24 May 2012.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] *Ibid.*

available on the webpage itself, this may involve the formulation, coordination, and supervision of the implementation of media initiatives for a range of target audiences.

The **SABA Cultural and Artistic Center** was founded in 1968 and produces animated content for the IRIB, mainly for children programming[46]. **Sima Film** is an IRIB-affiliated production company responsible for the production of "movies, motion films, documentaries, theater and the other visual programs, emphasizing on Iranian values, Iranian culture, art and civilization."[47] **Takta Company**, **Sima Chub**, and **Saratel** are companies that produce communication technology, office furniture and products, and movie theater equipment and furniture and oversee the construction of buildings, respectively.

Soroush is the publishing house of IRIB and produces magazines and "deals with compiling, translating, printing and publishing books of scientific, educational and cultural nature in the fields of literature, Iranian and Islamic genuine culture and art, the pure and applied sciences, the social sciences, communication and other branches of science."[48]

Soroush Resaneh and **Soroush Audio and Visual Company** are companies in the fields of Internet, network, and communication technology and advertising and audiovisual support services, respectively. The IRIB also has a youth organization, the Young Journalists Club.

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[46] *Ibid.*

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] *Ibid.*

Most notably, the IRIB as a central agency is supported by a research agency, the

Research Center of IRIB (RCIRIB). The main mission of the RCIRIB is the "study,

research and measurement on the fields related to IRIB needs using scientific methods in

order to use in policy-making, planning, supervision and quality upgrade of radio and

television programs within the frameworks of IRIB organizational principles."[49] The

Research Center has three departments: the Department of Media Studies, responsible for

research on "culture and media, art and media, law and media, language and media,

economy and media, media management and message engineering and supervision and

coordinating management;" the Department of Social Research and Program

Measurement, responsible for public opinion, political, cultural–religious, and

psychological research and opinion polls; and the Department of "Provinces and Abroad

Researches [*sic*],"[50] whose main responsibility is the planning of international research

and opinion polls regarding IRIB's foreign audience media outlets.[51] Among the working

groups employed by the research center is one dedicated to "media management and

message engineering."[52]

Overall, the IRIB directly controls a broad portfolio for the production and, as we

will see, the dissemination of media content. With the Research Center the IRIB has

furthermore the instruments to observe the effectiveness of its messaging in reaching its

target audiences. The message construction and engineering can be centrally directed.

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[49] Research Center of IRIB, "About Us." http://www.rcirib.ir/enrcirib/aboutus.aspx; Internet; accessed 24 May 2012.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] Research Center of IRIB "Working Groups." http://www.rcirib.ir/enrcirib/WorkingGroups.aspx; Internet; accessed 24 May 2012.

This centralized structure therefore forms the bureaucratic core of Iran's media diplomacy programme. As we have seen, the notion that the media is understood to be an instrument for influencing public opinion is well supported by the mission of the IRIB as the central agency. It is important to emphasize here that the IRIB oversees both domestic broadcasting and activities aimed at foreign audiences, a fact that especially distinguishes the IRIB from Western media diplomacy programmes, which clearly differentiate between domestic and foreign audiences. The means of reaching the foreign audiences is the topic of the next sub-chapter.

Iran's foreign audience media outlets: adapted to different target audiences

In addition to various national and regional radio channels, the IRIB manages World Service radio stations. The **IRIB World Service** dates back to 1946. These stations transmit "exclusive and various programs and news in more than 30 languages and dialects."[53.] Among those are programmes in English, German, French, Russian, Spanish, Albanian, Bosnian, Italian, Turkish, Armenian, Indian, Japanese, Urdu, and Chinese. Overall, the IRIB has branches in 45 countries.[54] These channels broadcast on terrestrial shortwave, AM, and FM radio transmitters and via satellite. Additionally, the various IRIB World Service radio stations maintain an Internet presence. These webpages offer links to live broadcasts, recorded content, and written analyses and comments. The IRIB World Service radio stations are certainly closely controlled by the central agency since those represent the official, government-controlled foreign media outlets of the

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[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Pierre Pahlavi "Understanding Iran's…", 23.

Islamic Republic. The webpages of the different World Service stations do not try to disguise their affiliation with the Iranian government.

In addition to several major national TV stations and 30 provincial TV stations, 17 of which are broadcast via satellite and are therefore also available to outside audiences, Iran maintains several TV stations dedicated to foreign audiences. These TV stations include Jamejam, Al Alam, Sahar, Al Kawthar, Press TV, and the newest addition, HISPANTV, all of which will be examined in more detail later. Iran's media outlets are available to a worldwide audience on 15 satellites with different channels for different regions.

The content of the channels varies for different audiences, a feature that will be analyzed in a later part of this paper. All of the TV stations offer webpages as well. Similar to the content of the different IRIB World Service webpages, audiovisual files, written commentaries, analysis and information, and links to live broadcasts of these channels can be found on the TV channels' webpages.[55] We will see in the following section that all of these TV outlets are designed to address different target audiences with their cultural backgrounds in mind, which addresses the requirement of having specifically tailored outlets in order for media diplomacy to be effective.

The different TV stations and the local offices of the IRIB run as separate affiliate stations of the central IRIB in Tehran. The rationale for and the overall structure of the foreign audience satellite television channels can be found on the English webpage of the **Sahar Universal Network**, which explains their mission as follows: "[t]o introduce the

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[55] Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Website "About Us....

Islamic Revolution of Iran to foreign viewers as the most significant, influential uprising of the past century by explaining Islam's views on politics and independence as well as its rejection of oppression as opposed to the nations' acceptance of oppression." The webpage also provides the background and the reason for the establishment of this TV channel. Stating that the Western mass media evolved from propaganda and "psychological warfare" to a "subtle program of subliminal, psychological persuasion" that uses "clever media manipulation," the network was created as an "independent organization" in reaction to the Western use of mass media, as "[t]here was only one way to effectively combat such an onslaught and that was also by the media."[56] The Sahar Universal Network was established in 1996 from several foreign-audience satellite TV stations targeting Arab-speaking audiences. Judging from the information available on its English-language webpage, this network's main aim is to propagate the Islamic revolution and Iranian Islamic values while countering the "misleading news dominated by the West and the [*sic*] Zionism."[57] Today, the Sahar Universal Network is comprised of six programming groups, which produce and broadcast programmes in Azeri, English, French, Kurdish, Bosnian, and Urdu.[58]

Such as "counter-propaganda" mission is far less pronounced on the webpage of IRIB's **Jaam-e Jam network**. This network, with three channels for Europe, Asia, and North America, addresses "Iranian expatriates as well as millions of Persian speakers and

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[56] Sahar TV Universal Network "About Us."
http://setv.irib.ir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=72&Itemid=201; Internet; accessed 24 March 2012.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Ibid.*

Moslems who appreciate Iranian-Islamic culture and civilization."[59] It aims "at developing solidarity among the Iranian expatriates and consolidating their ties with Iran as well as advancing a better understanding of modern Iran, promoting the Persian language and national interests."[60] It broadcasts a mixed programme consisting of documentaries, discussions, talk shows, entertainment formats such as movies and series, and news.[61] The main focus of this network seems to be the promotion of Iranian culture, language, and society, and it has dedicated programmes such as *Marze Por Gohar* (Precious Land), which "depicts various aspects of Iranian history, geography and culture and reports on the customs, cultural heritage and tourist attractions from all over Iran."[62] This network was established in 1997, and, according to the 2007 BBC media-monitoring report on Iran, the network seems to target a domestic audience in competition with expatriate satellite TV stations that can be received in Iran as well. According to the BBC report, the channel "takes a more relaxed attitude on social issues such as showing musical instruments being played, which would not be allowed on the domestic channels."[63] This detail indicates that the regime is very aware of the competition posed by foreign satellite stations. The creation of a TV channel that has a more liberal appearance, while still communicating the regime's message, and that can be received quasi-coincidentally in Iran might have been a response to counteract the appeal of expatriate stations, which are run mostly by political dissidents. The fact that the strict

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[59] Jame Jam TV "About Us." http://www.jjtvn.ir/english-about-us.asp; Internet; accessed 24 March 2012.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] BBC monitoring, " Guide to Iranian Media and Broadcast to Iran" …,8.

regulations for domestic programming are not applied to such channels is reflective of a very pragmatic approach in Iran's media influence programme, an aspect that will be examined in more detail later.

Al-Kawthar does not have an English-language webpage. This network, which was originally named Sahar 1 and changed its name in 2006, has an 18-hour daily broadcast programme in Arabic. The programming is mostly religious and cultural, with the aim to promote Shia Islam to audiences in the Middle East and Africa. Part of its content is produced in Beirut, and the programming also includes news and political discussions.[64]

Al-Alam was established as a news network in February 2003. The network's head offices are located in Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, and Teheran. It also has more than 50 correspondents in 40 countries.[65] It was created to compete with other major pan-Arab satellite news channels such as Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. According to its webpage, the aim of Al-Alam is to provide "transparent media coverage of political events and developments," to "[p]ut forward solutions to the problems facing the Islamic and Arab world," and to "develop a spirit of unity and highlight the common interests of the peoples of the region."[66] The network can also be received in Iraq without a satellite receiver because it is broadcast there via a terrestrial TV transmitter.[67] With Al-Alam and Al-Kwahtar , Iran has two channels for Arabic-speaking audiences that encompass both

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[64] *Ibid.*

[65] Al-Alam.ir "About Us." http://www.alalam.ir/aboutus; Internet; accessed 24 March 2012. Translation by translate.google.com

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] BBC monitoring, " Guide to Iranian Media and Broadcast to Iran" …,7.

long-term cultural–religious public diplomacy themes, which predominantly targets the Shia population among Arab nations, and short-term day-to-day public diplomacy programmes, which are oriented towards more secular and predominantly Sunni audiences. Both channels are specific and complementary, since each channel targets a dedicated Arab speaking community with different cultural or religious background. While the 2007 BBC media-monitoring report states that extensive information in English is available on Al Alam's webpage, English-language information can no longer be found on that site. It seems that Press TV has become the dedicated media outlet for English-speaking audiences.

PressTV was established in 2007 and is based on a model similar to that of the Al Jazeera English news network. While the IRIB webpage lists Press TV as one of the "universal channels" that "provide news coverage for IRIB's listeners and viewers and Moslems all around the world,"[68] no information about this affiliation with IRIB is found on Press TV's webpage. Press TV's headquarters are based in Teheran, and, according to its webpage, Press TV has offices located throughout the world. While the other foreign-audience TV networks more or less explicitly state that they are advocating the worldview of the Islamic Republic of Iran and are promoting the Iranian culture, no such sentiments are found in Press TV's the vision statement. The vision of Press TV according to its webpage is:

> Heeding the often neglected voices and perspectives of a great portion of the world;
> Embracing and building bridges of cultural understanding;

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[68] Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Website "About Us.... : The IRIB webpage lists Press TV as one of the "universal channels", which " provide news coverage for IRIB's listeners and viewers and Moslems all around the world."

Encouraging human beings of different nationalities, races and creeds to identify with one another;
Bringing to light untold and overlooked stories of individuals who have experienced the vitality and versatility of political and cultural divides firsthand.[69]

The case that Press TV's purpose is not as innocent as it is presented in its mission statement becomes clear in the criticism expressed in an article on a news website that reflects the views of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. In an article with the headline "$25 Million News Network with No News," the author expressed his disappointment with Press TV's coverage of the U.K. riots in 2011. He claimed that Press TV's coverage of the U.K. riots did not match the BBC's coverage of the riots in Iran after that country's 2009 presidential elections. Referring to "Iran's extensive interests in Britain," the author stated that

[c]urrently much of Iran's assets have been frozen in UK banks and the British government has carried out many sanctions against Iran, hence Press TV as the overseas arm of the Iranian government in its Soft War with the enemy had the means to take over the leadership of the protesters in UK to create a background for the Iranian regime to resurrect its interests in UK and be able to barter with the British government.[70]

This criticism also indicates that the executives of Press TV have relative freedom in the production of their programmes, which is clearly an indication of a managerial approach in Iran's media influence programme. Press TV also employs prominent presenters such as George Galloway, a former MP from the Labour Party. Galloway is a strong opponent of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and he was expelled from the Labour Party in 2003

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[69] Press TV "About Us." http://www.presstv.ir/about html; Internet; accessed 24 March 2012.

[70] Scott Lucas "Iran snapshot: Revolutionary guards v. Press TV (Azarmehr)." in EAWorld View [online]. Available from http://www.enduringamerica.com/home/2011/9/12/iran-snapshot-revolutionary-guards-v-press-tv-azarmehr html; Internet; accessed 24 February 2012.

"after urging British soldiers not to fight in Iraq."[71] Galloway also gained prominence by appearing on the TV show "Big Brother." He also is a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, has links to Hamas, and was presented with an honorary Palestinian passport. Previously, Galloway had contacts with Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq, and a charity Galloway set up was partly funded by the Iraqi dictator.[72] Galloway recently won a seat in Parliament as a candidate for the Respect Party.

Another member of the Respect Party, "veteran journalist Yvonne Ridley,"[73] has her own weekly show on Press TV. Ridley gained fame after being captured by the Taliban in 2001, when she entered Afghanistan without protection or proper documents. After her 11-day captivity, she converted to Islam and became a strong opponent of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Before her employment with Press TV, she was chief reporter at the Sunday Express and worked for Al Jazeera and the British-based Islam Channel. She is also an activist who supports the Palestinian cause and seems to defend Jihadist ideologies.[74] Another prominent presenter on Press TV, Ken Livingstone, is a former mayor of London[75].

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[71] The Associated Press " George Galloway re-elected to U.K. parliament." CBC News webpage; http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2012/03/30/uk-george-galloway-byelection html; Internet; accessed 12 April 2012.

[72] *Ibid.*

[73]Press TV "The Agenda." http://www.PressTV.ir/section/3510509 html; Internet; accessed 24 March 2012.
[74] Rachel Cooke "Free radical." *The Observer*, 6 July 2008, online edition, Available from http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/jul/06/women.features4; Internet; accessed 12 April 2012.

[75] Peter Dominiczak "Ken Livingstone under fire for earning thousands from Iranian TV role" *The London Evening Standard*, 19 January 2011, online edition, Available from www.standard.co.uk/news/ken-livingstone-under-fire-for-earning-thousands-from-iranian-tv-role-6557372.html; Internet; accessed 24 April 2012.

An interesting feature of Press TV that indicates that the foreign media activities of Iran are in fact following the bureaucratic–entrepreneurial model is that Press TV also runs a company called Press TV Ltd., which is based and registered in London, England. This company has its own webpage and declares itself as "a television production company producing a wide range of material for news and documentaries for both broadcast and non-broadcast outlets."[76] Press TV Ltd. offers products and services to "independent and international television networks"[77] and to individuals who want "to learn how to cover current affairs and produce news reports and packages."[78] Among those services and products are documentaries, archive footage, training, studio rentals, and vehicle rentals for satellite news-gathering. The documentaries span topics such as "how Zionists planned the colonization of Palestine," "the attacks on Palestinian people in Gaza by Israeli forces using US-made white phosphorous shells," and a six-part series called "Media Morphs – Propaganda" showing "the art of cinema throughout history explaining how media projects itself to viewers by promoting certain ideas with entertainment."[79] There is no explicit information about this company's affiliation with the IRIB or with the Islamic Republic of Iran on its webpage. On Press TV's webpage one can find an extensive catalogue of documentaries produced for or by Press TV. The webpage states that the "Documentary Department of PRESS TV is interested in selling

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[76] PressTV Ltd. "About Us." http://PressTV.co.uk/about.php; Internet; accessed 23 June 2012.

[77] PressTV Ltd. "Services overview." http://PressTV.co.uk/services.php; Internet; accessed 23 June 2012.

[78] *Ibid.*

[79] PressTV Ltd. "Documentaries." http://PressTV.co.uk/documentaries.php?page=2; Internet; accessed 23 June 2012.

the broadcasting rights of its documentaries to other television networks, websites, companies, distributors, independent buyers etc."[80]

However, the independence of Press TV and Press TV Ltd. is certainly limited. This became obvious in the events that led to the cancellation of Press TV Ltd.'s broadcast licence in the U.K. for the Sky network. Press TV was available in Great Britain on Sky until the broadcast regulator Ofcom revoked its licence under Condition 29(2)(a) of the Licence and section 238(4) of the Communications Act 2003, as license holder Press TV Ltd. did not exercise "effective control over the selection of programmes that comprise the service and their organisation into a programme schedule."[81] Press TV was charged with a violation against the broadcast rules on fairness and privacy by airing an interview with the Iranian-born journalist and filmmaker Mazair Bahrani while he was imprisoned in Iran accused of being a spy. The interview was scripted by his interrogators, and Press TV used a clip from that interview to prove that the Western media coverage of the demonstrations after the Iranian presidential elections 2009 was biased. Press TV was fined £100,000[82], and during the proceedings representatives of Press TV Ltd. suggested that editorial control of the channel was exercised by the Teheran headquarters of Press TV international.[83] Based on the Ofcom decision, the Bavarian Office for the New Media

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[80] PressTV "Distribution." http://www.PressTV.ir/doc/Distribution.html; Internet; accessed 06 June 2012.

[81] Ofcom "Revocation Provider of the Service Press TV Limited." Available from http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/broadcast-licence-conditions/press-tv-revocation.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 March 2012.

[82] Linda Pressly "Iran's Battle for TV Influence takes shape on Press TV." *BBC Radio 4, The Report*, 29 December 2011; Available from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16317282; Internet; accessed 23 March 2012.

[83] Julian Clover "Press TV loses Ofcom licence." *Broadband TV News,* 20 January 2012; Webpage; http://www.broadbandtvnews.com/2012/01/20/press-tv-loses-ofcom-licence/; Internet; accessed 25 March 2012.

ordered a satellite broadcast provider based in Munich to stop broadcasting Press TV via ASTRA satellites, although the programme is still available in Germany via cable television.[84]

The newest network in IRIB's portfolio is the Spanish-language network **HispanTV**, which started broadcasting in 2011. It offers 24-hour programming aimed at Spanish-speaking countries, predominantly in Latin America. The network broadcasts with the intent of promoting "a bridge of friendship and understanding between the peoples of Iran, Middle East and Latin America" and seeks to "[p]roduce films and audiovisual material to bring the cultural reality of Iran, Middle East and Latin America to own homes [*sic*] and environments of our users."[85]

All foreign-audience media outlets of the IRIB have dedicated webpages that feature a professional web design and provide audience-feedback mechanisms such as comment fields and links to social networks and Twitter.

The efforts of the IRIB are complemented by several **news agencies** that are either official or affiliated with institutions and persons close to the Iranian regime. These news agencies fulfill their mission by providing the international media with news reports and footage. That this information is not independent and unfiltered becomes clear when one looks at their guiding principles. For example, the 2007 BBC media-monitoring report notes that one of IRNA's principal objectives is "countering the cultural onslaught of

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[84] Tobias Lill "Irans Nachrichtensender Press TV- Dieses Programm ist in Ihrem Land leider verfügbar." *Spiegel Online,* 23 June 2012; http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/tv/iranischer-sender-press-tv-koennte-lizenz-in-deutschland-verlieren-a-839550 html; Internet; accessed 23 June 2012.

[85] Hispan TV "QUÉ ES HISPANTV." http://www.hispantv.com/About.aspx; Internet; accessed 21 April 2012.

enemies of the Islamic revolution,"[86] and the managing director of the privately owned

Fars news agency described the main objective of the agency as "promoting the principles

of the Islamic revolution and safeguarding national interests."[87]

Overall, we see that the Islamic Republic of Iran has established a sophisticated

apparatus for the influence of foreign audiences. The IRIB constitutes the central agency

in this apparatus. It oversees and orchestrates the different foreign-audience networks.

The involvement of this central agency in the dedicated network is more or less disguised

depending on the target audience. Especially in those outlets aiming at Western

audiences, references to the IRIB are hard to find. It seems that especially Press TV wants

to portray itself as an independent and reliable TV network. The modus operandi of Press

TV with its London-based production company Press TV Ltd. can be seen as an attempt

to emulate the bureaucratic–entrepreneurial model exercised by other public diplomacy

networks such as the BBC or the Deutsche Welle. In fact, the model of the Deutsche

Welle, with its central bureaucratic government structure, localized offices and outlets,

content produced by state-owned public television and radio networks, and distribution of

products by over 4000 public and private partners, might be the model that Iran most

seeks to imitate[88]. Especially the marketing of footage and documentaries by Press TV

and Press TV Ltd. and offering of training services to interested partners might serve as

evidence. The goal of these activities could be quite similar to that of the Deutsche Welle

with its partners, which "integrate programming in their lineups and websites, send guest

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[86] BBC monitoring, " Guide to Iranian Media and Broadcast to Iran" …, 24-26

[87] *Ibid.*, 24-26

[88] Deutsche Welle "Services - Multimedia content in 30 languages."
http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15703976,00 html; Internet; accessed 12 June 2012.

editors and utilize the training programs that DW Akademie has to offer."[89] The

employment of local celebrities as commentators or presenters of the media content is

also indicative that an entrepreneurial approach endeavored. The message origin is further

disguised and the celebrity status is used to attract more audiences. Overall, it seems that

the different TV outlets that at least try to disguise their relationship to the central IRIB

also have more latitude in their programming. They can be therefore located more on the

entrepreneurial side of the bureaucratic–entrepreneurial model, while the official IRIB

channels are closer to the bureaucratic side.

 It is clear that the evolution of the audiovisual and electronic public diplomacy apparatus

of the Islamic Republic of Iran is still in its beginning stages. However, the different

outlets seem to have the potential and expertise to quickly adapt to the information and

entertainment needs of their target audiences.

However, a discussion of Iran's foreign media apparatus would not be complete

without touching upon a particularity that further distinguishes Iran's media influence

efforts from those of other countries: the efforts of the regime to control the activities of

its citizens in the Internet. Recently, for example, the Revolutionary Guards acquired a

controlling majority over the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI), which in turn

controls all fixed line telecommunication infrastructure, the largest mobile telephone

company, and the largest Internet provider in Iran.[90] The regime pursues a strategy of "1)

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[89] Deutsche Welle "Profile – Facts and figures." http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15703990,00.html; Internet; accessed 12 June 2012.

[90] Gholam Khiabany "Media in Iran: state, social, other" in *Iran und die Neuen Medien – Herausforderungen fu☐r den Auslandsrundfunk*, Institut fu☐r Auslandsbeziehungen e. V. (ifa), Stuttgart, 2011; Available from http://www.ifa.de/pdf/edition/iran.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 July 2012, 48.

colonisation of cyber-space with official sites and blogs; 2) filtering and censoring and arresting bloggers and online journalists; 3) limiting the speed of the internet"[91], and the Iranian parliament passed extensive legislation curtailing the use of the Internet.[92] In April 2012, there were even reports that Iran was seeking to create a national "clean" Intranet cut off the Internet[93]. While those measures are clearly aimed at suppressing organized dissent against the regime, there is also a public diplomacy rationale for restricting the flow of information out of the country. This becomes clear when one looks at the events that happened during the protests after the 2009 presidential elections in Iran. During those protests, a young woman named Neda Agha Soltan was killed, presumably be security forces. A bystander recorded the incident, and only hours after the event the video footage was broadcast to worldwide audiences via major satellite TV stations that picked up the material from YouTube where the video was posted. The Iranian government afterwards changed the story about the incident four times.[94] The regime was forced to quickly react to a crisis that evolved from a news source inside Iran that reached international and domestic audiences. The message of a democratic election process that the government tried to convey to inside and outside audiences was compromised by the footage taken by protestors that reached international news outlets via the Internet. The desire of the Iranian government to control the flow information out

[91]*Ibid., 48.*

[92] Mojtaba Saminejad "Media and Internet under Control and Censorship." in *Iran Human Rights Revue: Access to Information* edited by Danesh, Tahirih, and Ansari, Nazenin (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2011), 41 – 48; Available from http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1369.pdf; Internet; accessed 20 June 2012.

[93] Steven Musil "Iran expected to permanently cut off Internet by August" CNET News, 9 April 2012; http://news.cnet.com/8301-1023_3-57411577-93/iran-expected-to-permanently-cut-off-internet-by-august/; Internet; accessed 14 July 2012.

[94] Mehdi Yahyanejad "The internet and protest in Iran."in *Iran und die Neuen Medien – Herausforderungen für den Auslandsrundfunk*, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e. V. (ifa), Stuttgart, 2011; Available from http://www.ifa.de/pdf/edition/iran.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 July 2012, 53.

of Iran is therefore understandable and explains the restrictive control over the Internet usage versus the tolerance of satellite TV reception. The censorship on the Internet is therefore seen as being complementary to Iran's media influence strategy. The Neda incident makes it also clear that the integrity and trustworthiness of news reporting is essential for the effectiveness of any media influence strategy. How Iran copes with this dilemma of trying to influence target audiences in line with its foreign policy objectives while remaining credible is the topic of the next chapter.

FOREIGN MEDIA MESSAGE CONSTRUCTION: OVERLAPPING WITH IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY GOALS

Establishing that Iran possesses the necessary technical and organizational means to convey its message while trying to suppress dissenting information plus recognizing that Iran understands the media as an instrument for its foreign policy is a necessary starting point for the assertion that Iran is pursuing a media-influence strategy, but the argument is not yet complete. The final criterion that would speak to a dedicated role of the media in Iran's foreign policy is the deliberate construction of their message for different audiences in line with Iran's foreign policy goals. A three-step approach will be undertaken to show that there is indeed an overlap between the messaging and Iran's foreign policy. The first step will introduce the techniques of agenda-setting and framing, which allow the transmission of political messages in today's hyper-media environment where audiences have little patience with unreliable information and unattractive media content.. Iran's long-term foreign policy themes will be identified in a second step. The

final step will demonstrate that Iran is indeed using message construction techniques to influence selected target audiences in line with Iran's foreign policy themes.

Message construction techniques

Nicklas Luhmann asserts that even if suspect that the information received by the media is manipulated, we have no choice but to rely on it because of a lack of alternatives.[95] This is not entirely true anymore. Thanks to advances in modern communication technologies, such as satellite television and the Internet, we can choose among several different information channels in our use of mass media. For this reason, classic propaganda as we know it is obsolete. Even the governments in authoritarian states no longer have a monopoly over the information flowing into their countries and therefore cannot falsify or overly distort information. The credibility of the sender therefore becomes its main asset: persuasion is based on credibility, and once credibility is lost, the sender will face great difficulty even reaching the intended audience. The message content must be true, as it can easily be checked against other sources. This presents a challenge for any practitioner of mass diplomacy. How can a regime convey one's message and policy while remaining credible and true? The answer to this question lies in the careful construction of the message content. Studies on media influence in the formulation of politics and public perception of political issues undertaken in the past 70 years point to the mechanisms of agenda-setting and framing, terms that Nye probably used on purpose in his definition of soft power.

Agenda-setting in media science terminology describes the effect of the media consciously or unconsciously determining what the audience regards as an important or

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[95] *Ibid.*

unimportant political issue. In media and communication science, the underlying idea of agenda-setting is traceable to the 1920s. Walter Lippmann argues in his 1922 book *Public Opinion* that public opinion is formed by the media.[96] The term agenda-setting itself was first used by McCombs and Shaw in their examination of the 1968 presidential election in the United States. Their central argument was that the media determined by their reporting which issues of the election campaign became important to the voters. They called this influence "agenda-setting," since those issues were put on the political agenda of the campaign. Since then, more than 425 empirical studies worldwide on different aspects of agenda-setting have confirmed the initial hypothesis that the news media has a significant influence on what audiences regard as important and which issues are therefore set on the political agenda of the day.[97] Recent studies attribute similar effects to the entertainment media as well, and there are indications that reporting on the economy may have grave and real consequences on "both economic performance and expectations," especially if the reporting is negative.[98] In short, what the media reports focuses the attention of the audience on certain issues and therefore influences the perceived importance of those issues, with secondary effects in the political discussion.

But this is not the only media effect. The media also exerts a direct influence on how audiences think about an issue. This effect is the subject of **news-framing** theory and research. News-framing theory has its roots in both social science and psychology.

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[96] Maxwell McCombs and Amy Reynolds, "How the News Shapes Our Civic Agenda" in *Media effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, 3rd edition, ed. Jennings Bryant and Mary B. Oliver, 1-16. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 2.

[97] *Ibid.*,2.

[98] *Ibid.*,3.

The underlying hypothesis is that the sense-making, perception, and judgment of a given piece of information rely on and occur within a certain frame of reference. The sender of a message can invoke those frames in the recipient by the way he presents the message. The interpretation of the same message can be completely different, depending on the way the information is framed.[99] Those frames can be created more easily if the issue is new. In this case information is presented in a package that contains an argument and "symbols, metaphors, and images."[100] In addition, a "storyline" is provided explaining how this new issue is to be understood. But framing is also effective when references to existing frames are made. In this case, "[f]rame effects can rely upon culture-based meanings, norms, and values."[101] Understanding the cultural context of and the current debate in the intended target audience therefore becomes crucial, especially in high-context cultures, explaining the need for dedicated and separated media outlets for different target audiences. Referring to existing frames is in fact the more prevalent case in news reporting, and this makes the exact wording of a message important, as even slight differences in formulation can affect how the information is perceived. While approaches to framing in sociology refer to macro-level observations and in psychology to individual-level observations, both approaches argue that "news frames exert a

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[99] David Tewksbury and Dietram A. Scheufele "News Framing Theory and Research" in *Media effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, 3rd edition, ed. Jennings Bryant and Mary B. Oliver, 17-34. (New York: Routledge, 2009),18.

[100] *Ibid.*, 19.

[101] *Ibid.*, 19.

relatively substantial influence on citizens' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours."[102] More importantly, the audience is generally unaware of such influence.

Usually, media sciences attribute the effects of agenda-setting and news-framing mostly to economic and cultural factors in the examined societies.[103] Furthermore, journalists in most countries have to follow a professional code of conduct that prohibits manipulation. In political communication, public relations, and advertising on the other hand, agenda-setting and news-framing effects are used purposely to achieve political or economic effects. It is therefore only reasonable to assume that practitioners of public diplomacy via mass media would use the same techniques to purposefully influence target audiences. Prerequisite to the effectiveness of any such conduct is an intimate familiarity with the culture and the political environment and agenda of the day and a respect for market mechanisms and demands for media products from the target audiences.

In the previous chapter we saw that Iran has the necessary organizational and technical infrastructure to pursue such an endeavor. The fact that the IRIB maintains its own research center — with departments devoted to cultural research, opinion polls, and research on message construction — and dedicates different networks with local expertise to different target audiences especially highlights this ability. However, it is now necessary to identify an overlap between Iran's foreign policy goals and themes with the messages Iran tries to convey to certain target audiences in order to make a convincing argument for the existence of a media-influence strategy.

Iran's strategic foreign policy themes

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[102] *Ibid.*, 19.

[103] Leif Kramp "Was Journalisten aus Informationen machen: Nachrichten und News" …,52.

The starting point for this examination is the deduction of Iran's main foreign policy themes based on its history and strategic situation. We will see that one can identify three predominant themes in Iran's foreign policy that seem contradictory at first: nationalism based on the Persian heritage, revolution and anti-imperialism, and the theme of the "Islamic awakening" based on the Shia interpretation of Islam.

Iranians still look proudly back at over 2500 years of Persian heritage. The Persian Empire was the predominant power in the region before the Hellenistic era, and the Persian history is rich in distinct cultural and societal accomplishments. Over the centuries, the Persian Empire declined, eventually fell, and was occupied and dominated by various powers such as the Seljuk-Turk, Arab, Mongol, Afghan, Ottoman, and European states. In the beginning of the last century, Iran was "a pawn in the 'Great Game' between Russia and Britain."[104] Subsequently, Iran was occupied during the First World War by Russia and Great Britain and was a de facto British protectorate from 1919 to 1921.[105] While Reza Pahlavi ruled as Shah, Britain maintained a strong influence. After Pahlavi showed support to Germany, he was forced to resign and hand over his powers to his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in 1941. Subsequently, Iran was invaded by Great Britain and the Soviet Union and was occupied within a month. How little Iranian sovereignty was respected during this time is evident from the fact that during the famous Teheran conference in 1943, in which Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt agreed on war and post-war strategies, the Iranian authorities were not notified that the conference would

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[104] Chris Forster and James Owen "Understanding Iran: a solution to the nuclear crisis?" London: The Foreign Policy Centre, *Policy Brief,* February 2006; Available from http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/710.pdf; Internet; accessed 20 June 2012, 2.

[105] Ben M. Cahoon " Iran." http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Iran.htm; Internet; accessed 08 June 2012.

take place in the capital, and the Shah was "not even invited as an observer to any of the Allied leaders discussions."[106] After the war the Soviet Union did not retreat from Iranian Azerbaijan, and the province became a Soviet republic in the USSR. In 1953 the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was overthrown in a coup supported by the British MI6 and the American CIA, once the government announced plans to nationalize British-owned oil companies. While his father had tried to balance British and Russian influence by extending ties to Germany, the United States, and France, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi strongly aligned Iran with the United States to rebuild its strength and regional influence by the creation of a modern state with strong military forces. At the same time, he maintained good relations with European powers, with regional actors such as Egypt, Jordan, and Israel, and, during the 1970s, with the Soviet Union, India, and China.[107] Iran was strongly supported by the U.S. in its acquisition of modern arms and even nuclear technology. The rationale for this support from the U.S. can be found in the "Two Pillar" strategy of diminishing Soviet influence in the resource-rich Middle East by supporting friendly Arab nations and Iran. In their attempt to resurrect Iran to the status of former times, both Shahs also invoked sentiments of a distinct Iranian ethnical background: Iranians belong to the Aryan ethnicity versus the Semitic ethnicities of the Arab people in the region. The notion that ethnicity plays a role in the national identity is reflected in the fact that "Iran," the official name of the country since 1935, means "home of the Aryans." While the name change was certainly informed by fascist ideologies in Europe, the name was never changed back. In 1971, the Shah adopted the title *Aryamehr*

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[106] Alidad Mafinezam and Aria Mehrabi, *Iran and Its Place among Nations* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2008), 48.

[107] *Ibid.*, 48.

(light of the Aryans) during the celebration of 2500 years of Persian Empire in

Persepolis.[108] The official discourse of the time also portrayed the Arab invasion and rule

in the seventh century with its introduction of Islam as "the ultimate cause of the downfall

of the splendid and magnificent ancient Empire of Persia"[109]. The strong alliance with the

West and the implicit criticism of Islam was strongly condemned by Islamic clerics, and

the narrative of "Westtoxification" was developed, arguing that Iran's Islamic identity

and the country's independence was endangered by "Western penetration."[110] The

regime used increasingly oppressive methods to counter domestic opposition, which was

also informed by socialist and Marxist revolutionary ideologies. During the 1970s, the

Iranian civil society was dominated by a "socialist, 'third-worldist' and revolutionary–

Islamic zeitgeist."[111] The opposition slowly grew stronger, and the Shah was forced to

leave the country after the revolution of 1979. While the revolution was carried out by

intellectuals of various ideologies, including Marxist, communist, and Maoist, Islamists

eventually became the dominant power after the revolution. With this, the revolutionary

and anti-imperialistic theme acquired an additional characteristic, namely, that of a

distinct Islamic revolution based on the Shia interpretation of Islam. This sentiment is

best summarized by the slogan "Neither East nor West, but the Islamic Republic", which

was coined by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini during the Revolution but still endures in

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[108] *Ibid.,* 47.

[109] Mahmood T. Davari, *The Political Thought of Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahari: An Iranian Theoretician of the Islamic State* (London: Routledge, 2005), 56 quoted in: Arshin Adib-Moghaddam *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic* (London: Hurst, 2007), 48.

[110] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic* (London: Hurst, 2007), 49.

[111] *Ibid.,* 52.

today's political discourse in Iran. With the understanding that the revolution was following a higher cause, Ayatollah Khomeini stated that the Islamic revolution should not be confined to Iran. He declared that "Islam [was] revealed for mankind and the Muslims…. An Islamic movement, therefore, cannot limit itself to any particular country, not even to the Islamic countries; it is the continuation of the revolution by the prophets."[112] The political scientist Arshin Adib-Moghaddam therefore argues that "'Khomeinism' elevated the Iranian nation state to the status of a vehicle of divine substance. Inevitably, the Islamic Republic felt destined to change what was perceived to be an overbearingly hierarchical world order."[113] In a way, one can argue that this continuing self-perception is similar to the United States' self-perception of being an "Indispensable Nation" with a "Manifest Destiny." From that perspective, pride and nationalism are not contradictory to the ideals of a new Islamic world order.

All these events form the backdrop for the continuing themes in Iran's foreign policy: nationalism and pride based on the Persian/Iranian and Islamic heritage, a strong revolutionary and anti-imperialistic theme, based on a history of outside interference and the desire for independence, and a strong message of "Islamic awakening," based on the Shia interpretation of Islam and the desire to spread the Islamic revolution.

Based on this information, one could assume that Iran's foreign policy is ideological and principle based, and in fact, in the early phases of the Islamic Republic there was evidence for such tendencies. Examples include the cancellation of an $11-

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[112] Sermon delivered on 2 November 1979, quoted in Arshin Adib-Moghaddam *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic* (London: Hurst, 2007), 32.

[113] *Ibid.*, 57.

billion arms deal with the United States immediately after the revolution and attempts to destabilize neighboring Arab countries by spreading the Islamic revolution.[114] However, there is also ample evidence that Iran's overriding foreign policy objective is the survival of the state and of the regime and that the Islamic Republic of Iran follows a long tradition of pragmatism when national interests are endangered.[115] To name only two examples, Iran did accept an arms deal with the "Big Satan" United States and the "Little Satan" Israel during the Iran–Iraq war, in what became known as the Iran-Contra affair, and, more recently, there is evidence that members of the Iranian Republican Guard Corps cooperated with the CIA and U.S. Special Forces in the ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.[116]

The desire to exert regional influence and the desire for international recognition are derived from the overarching goal of survival and independence, and one could argue that the dual strategy of survival and power maximization has been practiced by all regimes irrespective of their ideological leanings: by the Safavids, competing with the Ottoman Empire for domination of the Muslim world; by the Pahlavis, seeking alliance with the United States to become the policeman of the Middle East; and by the Ayatollahs, exporting the Islamic revolution to secure its survival and its influence.

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[114] Shahram Chubin "Iran's Strategic Predicament" Middle East Journal, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Winter, 2000), pp. 10-24. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4329429; Internet; accessed 11 October 2011.

[115] R.K. Ramazani "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy" Middle East Journal, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Autumn, 2004.), pp. 549 – 559, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4330062; Internet; accessed 11 October 2011.

[116] Barnett R. Rubin "The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: Policy Gone Awry." MIT Center for International Studies, October 2008, Available from http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=93911; Internet; accessed 09 June 2012, 3.

It will be now demonstrated that Iran is equally pragmatic in the formulation of public diplomacy messages and places different emphasis on the three strategic message themes depending on the target audience.

Message construction in action

There are strong indications that the postulated influence strategies and messaging techniques are actually used. To limit the scope of this paper, the following examination is limited to the German, English, Russian, and Turkish webpages of the IRIB World Service and its respective target audiences. Because the IRIB is the central agency and the IRIB World Service is its oldest foreign-audience entity, its links to Iran's government and foreign policy are the closest. By looking at the webpages of the various World Service radio stations, one can easily identify the different rationales for agenda-setting and framing techniques, as the IRIB directly oversees these stations. It would be more difficult to compare the webpages of the different TV stations because those seem to adhere closer to the entrepreneurial side of the bureaucratic–entrepreneurial model and therefore seem to have more autonomy in their programming. Furthermore, the design of the various IRIB World Service webpages is very similar, and the placing and display of information therefore allow further insight into the applied framing and agenda-setting techniques. In order to analyze the content of the German and English IRIB World Service webpages in more depth and compare them with the other webpages of the IRIB World Service, one news story in particular will serve as an example of its framing information in different ways for different audiences: the downing of a Turkish reconnaissance jet by Syrian air defence on 22 June 2012. The basis for the analysis and comparison of the reports dealing with the incident is the web content of 25 June 2012. At

that time, Turkey claimed that the Phantom jet was on a flight over international waters testing Turkish radar sites. Syria claimed that the jet violated Syrian airspace and was shot down in the defence of Syrian sovereignty. Turkey protested, condemned the incident, and requested a special meeting of NATO based on Article 4 of the NATO charter initiating consultations over the incident.[117]

The German radio IRIB World Service webpage[118] features sections containing news, analysis, photo galleries, and information about programmes. The news sections cover the topics of politics, economy, science, and sports. The webpage features links to multimedia content and sections dedicated to comments, contributions, viewpoints, and analysis. There is also a section dedicated to Radio Islam, with information, news, and interviews about Islam. Another section is dedicated to Radio Kultur, the cultural programme with information about Islamic culture and reports on the cultural sites of Iran. Among the various topics of the reports, there are multipart features on "The Danger of Nuclear Weapons" and on "The Human Rights in the USA." Both features provide factual information but also point out the United States' alleged hypocrisy and double standards with regard to nuclear weapons and human rights violations.

Another indication of the deliberate use of framing techniques is the selection and presentation of interview partners. One frequent interviewee of the German IRIB World Service programme is Willy Wimmer. He is always introduced as a politician of the CDU, the conservative party in government, and as a long-time Member of Parliament.

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[117] The Associated Press "NATO to meet over Syria's downing of Turkish jet." CBC News webpage, 24 June 2012; http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2012/06/24/turkey-syria-plane-shot-down.html; accessed 24 June 2012.

[118] IRIB – German Radio "Das Deutsche Programm." http://german.irib.ir/; Internet; accessed 25 June 2012.

This introduction implies that Wimmer can speak with authority on certain issues and represents the beliefs of at least parts of his party, and hence the government. Wimmer is also known as a former state secretary for defence for the German Bundeswehr and still enjoys some public recognition. What is not mentioned is that Willy Wimmer is no longer an active Member of Parliament and that he has retired from politics. In fact, during his tenure in Parliament, Wimmer held political views far outside of the mainstream of his party. For example, Wimmer filed a complaint with the German constitutional court protesting the decision of the German Bundestag to mandate a deployment of reconnaissance aircraft to Afghanistan, a mandate that was strongly supported by his party.[119] In his interviews Wimmer is very critical of the United States' position in its conflict with Iran over Iran's nuclear programme.[120] These frequent interviews with Wimmer and other known critics of America and Israel follow the same rationale Press TV has for employing known public figures such as George Galloway. Their recognition and reputation serve to enhance the credibility of the message.

Further indications of framing and agenda-setting are found in the examination of the Turkish aircraft incident. While the incident and Turkey's reactions were widely reported by other news channels, the German IRIB World Service homepage of 25 June does not mention this incident at all[121]. Headline topics on this day included: the killing of 16 Syrian soldiers by "armed rebels," headlines claiming that the U.K. Army is exposing

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[119] Spiegel Online "Unions-Politiker Wimmer: ‚Ein Spiel mit gezinkten Karten'" *Interview mit Spiegel Online,* 07 .2.February 2007; http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/unions-politiker-wimmer-ein-spiel-mit-gezinkten-karten-a-464817 html; Internet; accessed 23 June 2012.

[120] IRIB - German Radio "Interview mit Willy Wimmer", IRIB – German Radio webpage, 22 Feb 2012; http://german.irib.ir/analysen/interviews/item/203023-interview-mit-willy-wimmer; Internet; accessed 23 June 2012.

[121] See Appendix A

Iraqi civilians to torture, that a Russian ship is leaving port to Syria, (after being stopped by the Royal Navy), that Mohammad Mursi is President of Egypt, and that Iran is "ridiculing" the U.S. sanctions. It is not clear why the shoot-down incident was not reported prominently on the German IRIB homepage. One explanation could be that no decision on the "spin" was made by the central agency. Germany is both a close ally to its NATO partner Turkey and home to a large Turkish minority. Because Germany is arguably taking the middle ground in the 5+1 negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme while strongly supporting Israel, it would be in Iran's interest not to upset public opinion with an ill-designed message before evaluating the general media response. The conflict in Syria is generally portrayed as an uprising of illegitimate rebel groups and terrorists supported by foreign groups against the legitimate Syrian regime, with several references to this perspective on the homepage. No reference is made to German involvement in the conflict.

The English IRIB World Service homepage[122], on the other hand, published a news story claiming that "Syria has arrested more than 40 German nationals for attempting to smuggle arms into the country."[123] This news story would certainly be of interest to a German audience and should have been reported by the German IRIB World Service, if news-worthiness criteria were actually being followed. The fact that it was not reported supports the idea that the IRIB is at least cautious in its approach to the German audience. Press TV, "an alternative news weblog," is named as the source for this information in the article. Portraying Press TV as a news source independent of the IRIB

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[122] IRIB – English Radio "IRIB – English Radio." http://english.irib.ir/; Internet; accessed 25 June 2012.

[123] English IRIB – English Radio "Syria arrests over 40 Germans" http://english.irib.ir/news/iran-a-iaea/item/94284-syria-arrests-over-40-germans; 24 June 2012; Internet; accessed 254 June 2012.

serves two purposes. On one hand, it enhances the notion that Press TV is really independent. On the other hand, it implies that the information did not come from an official news source. Should this information be wrong, the blame for the mistake would not fall on the "official" media. The English IRIB World Service homepage features almost the same sub categories, but also has a section called Radio Subcontinent addressing issues on the Indian subcontinent and in Pakistan. Furthermore, the webpage has a dedicated sub-category called Voice of Justice with reports and opinion articles concentrating on revealing U.S. hypocrisy. On 25 June 2012 this section[124] featured, among others, an article on the high jobless and suicide rates of veterans, an article about U.S. drone attacks, and an article entitled "U.S. Hypocrisy on Parade: Washington Arms Bahrain, Denounces Russia for Arming Syria." The radio Islam section featured the headline "Leader: Iran Unfurls Flag of Islamic Rule in Materialistic World." Again, no reference to this event was made on the German webpage. It is also interesting to note that Ayatollah Khamenei is titled "Leader" or, on occasion, "Supreme Leader" on the English website, while the German website uses the title "Revolutionsoberhaupt," which would be translated as "head of the revolution," as the German terms "Führer" and "Oberster Führer" have negative connotations.

The English radio IRIB World Service webpage from this date did not mention the shooting down of the Turkish jet, either. The breaking news related mainly to events in or concerning Iran, for example, that "Iran, Bosnia stress growing bilateral cooperation," news of Morsi winning the Egyptian presidency, a Bahraini doctor being "in the 4th day of hunger," and that the "UK gov't authorized 'war crimes' in Iraq."

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[124] See Appendix B

From this comparison of the German and English webpages, one learns that all three themes are present, but with different emphasis. For example, the anti-imperialistic/anti-American theme is common to both webpages while on the German side there is less emphasis on the revolutionary Islamic theme. The rationale for this can be found in Iran's foreign policy objectives towards the West. Given the history of Western interference in Iran's affairs, it is not surprising that Iran perceives itself as being in a state of siege.[125] From a Western point of view, the Islamic Republic of Iran still displays a "deviant conduct" in international politics,[126] and while relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Western nations have somewhat stabilized, the climate is still dominated by mutual distrust and a strong U.S. military presence in the region. Therefore, Iran's prime foreign policy goal towards the United States and the West is the minimizing of the U.S. presence in the Middle East. From a media diplomacy perspective, the key theme in Iran's communication with Western audiences should be one of anti-imperialism supported by an emphasis on Persian culture and heritage. The desired effect would be that the public in targeted countries would begin to recognize the West's hypocrisy and double standards in dealing with Iran. Any media-influence strategy should try to exploit differences in the perception of foreign policy issues regarding Iran in different Western countries. Messages containing anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism should be found especially in non-English-language programmes and channels, in an attempt to reinforce latent anti-American and anti-Israel tendencies in the public discourse. We see in the above example that message construction along those lines can indeed be identified.

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[125] Chris Forster and James Owen "Understanding Iran: a solution to the nuclear crisis?" …, 2.

[126] Deon Geldenhuys *dDeviant Cconduct in Wworld Ppolitics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 121-141. ff

It is especially telling that the shoot-down incident played only a minor role in comparison to the reporting on the Russian IRIB World Service homepage. On the Russian homepage on 25 June 2012,[127] three articles dealt with NATO, two of which addressed the shoot-down incident. An article entitled "Washington's Failure to Transform NATO into a World Policeman," reported on the outcome of the NATO Chicago summit. A second article reported on Turkey's request for NATO consultations. The third article was placed between the previous article and an article in which Iran declares its own air defence system to be capable of shooting down ballistic missiles. The NATO-related article refers to a statement made by former General Leonid Ivashov claiming that the downing was provoked by Turkey in order to circumvent the U.N. Security Council and justify a war against Syria, following the approach undertaken by NATO against Yugoslavia and Libya.[128] It is also indicative of a framing approach that the IRIB webpage used a picture of Ivashov that is at least 15 years old and portrays him in full uniform[129]. An uninformed reader could get the impression by that picture that an active-duty, high-ranking military officer was giving the statement. The Russian IRIB World Service webpage has the same sub-categories as the German webpage. The reporting of the shoot-down incident, with its emphasis on a potential provocative action undertaken by Turkey, is certainly aimed to reinforce Russia's suspicions about NATO's and America's intent regarding Syria, which enjoys support from Russia. Good relations

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[127] See Appendix C, Translation by translate.google.com.

[128] IRIB – Russian Radio "Ивашов: Самолет, сбитый сирийскими ПВО, может стать поводом к войне." http://russian.irib.ir/news/blizhni-vastok/item/148484-ивашов-самолет,-сбитый-сирийскими-пво,-может-стать-поводом-к-войне; Internet; accessed 25 June 2012; translation by translate.google.com

[129] A search on the Internet provides more recent pictures of General Ivashov, displaying an elderly gentleman in civilian clothes.

with Russia are instrumental for Iran's security. Although Iran has had experience with Russian interference and lost the province of Azerbaijan to the Soviet Union, Iran is dependent on Russia's supply of military and nuclear technology and, more importantly, on Russia's political support and veto power in the United Nations Security Council. Therefore, the strongest theme in any message to the Russian public would be anti-imperialistic and anti-American, while avoiding topics such as the suppression of Islamic opposition groups in the former Soviet republics. There also should be only a little emphasis on the theme of the Islamic awakening. Russia is opposed to U.S. hegemony and interference in their internal affairs. Iran should seek to reinforce these sentiments, and in the above example it is clear that Iran is indeed pursuing such an approach.

The tone of the reporting on the incident is completely different on the Turkish IRIB World Service webpage[130]. On 25 June, three articles could be found on the Turkish homepage regarding the shoot-down incident. One article merely stated that Turkey sent a diplomatic note and that Turkey's Foreign Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Halit Cevik informed representatives of other countries about the incident[131]. The second article reported on talks among Turkish government officials and representatives of European and Arab countries and representatives of Iran. The article mentions the hope that the issue would be resolved in a calm manner. Turkey's request for NATO consultation is also mentioned[132]. The third article describes alleged Western concerns that Russian air

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[130] IRIB – Turkish Radio. http://turkish.irib.ir/; Internet; accessed 25 June 2012.

[131] IRIB – Turkish Radio "Türkiye'den Suriye'ye nota." http://turkish.irib.ir/haberler/turkiye/item/262361-türkiyeden-suriyeye-nota; Internet; accessed 25 June 2012; translation by translate.google.com

[132] IRIB – Turkish Radio "Düşürülen Türk savaş uçağının enkazına ulaşıldı." http://turkish.irib.ir/guncel-yazilar/haber-yorum/item/262368-düsürülen-türk-savas-ucağının-enkazına-ulasıldı;Internet; accessed 25 June 2012, Translation by translate.google.com.

defence systems being supplied to Syria are superior to Western aircraft[133]. The relatively balanced reporting regarding the incident can be seen as a reflection of Iran's desire to maintain relatively good relations with Turkey. Implying that Turkey provoked the incident as a pretext to NATO action against Syria would certainly not be welcomed by the Turkish public. At the same time, the references to the Syrian air defence system and its ability to shoot down NATO aircraft might serve the intent to portray any military action against Syria as a risky and costly endeavor. This messaging approach towards Turkey is not surprising. On the one hand, Turkey can be called a Western nation due to its secular constitution, its NATO membership, and its aspirations to become an E.U. member state. On the other hand, Turkey's population is predominantly Islamic, and Turkey is a major trade partner for Iran. Furthermore, the traditionally good relations between Turkey and Israel have suffered severe damage in recent years, with the Turkish government being one of the fiercest critics of the Israeli government. Turkey and Iran seem to be competitors for influence in the Middle East and on the "Arab Street," but the two nations enjoy relatively good relations with each other.[134]

While only select countries and regions were examined in this section, and with the understanding that content analysis over a longer period of time would increase the fidelity of the observations, one can see at least strong indications that Iran's foreign policy objectives overlap with the message construction in Iran's foreign-audience media.

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[133] IRIB – Turkish Radio "Türk savaş uçağının düşürülmesinin yankıları." http://turkish.irib.ir/guncel-yazilar/siyasi-yorumlar/item/262371-türk-savas-ucağının-düsürülmesinin-yankıları; Internet; accessed 25 June 2012, Translation by translate.google.com.

[134] Heinz Kramer „Zwischen Tradition und Neuorientierung: die Außenpolitik" in *Informationen Zur Politischen Bildung* Nr. 313/2011 (Bpb Türkei), p. 59.8 ff

This means that the third criterion for the existence of a dedicated media influence strategy is clearly fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

While it is recognized that the evidence presented for framing and agenda-setting techniques demands further examination, especially with regard to a long-term content analysis, one can nevertheless assert that there are strong indications of a dedicated media-influence strategy in an overarching foreign policy strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We have seen that Iran has a capable structure supporting those media-influence efforts. It is very likely that Iran is trying to emulate the bureaucratic–entrepreneurial business model of other major players in the public diplomacy field, such as the BBC or the Deutsche Welle. One can also assert that those media-influence efforts are coherent and designed to effectively communicate the regime's message to foreign audiences while trying to gain control over the information flow out of the Islamic Republic of Iran. What has not been examined in this paper is the level of effectiveness of those media-influence efforts in changing public perception in targeted nations. This is one area of potential further research. Given that the hypothesis of a dedicated media-influence strategy in a wider soft power foreign policy approach is proven, one can draw two major conclusions. The first is that one could identify trends in Iran's foreign policy and spending on certain issues by closely monitoring and analyzing Iran's foreign-media efforts. Changes in the framing of certain issues could be an indication of a change in the regime's standpoint towards an issue before official statements regarding the issue are

made. One example for this could be a potential change in the framing of the unrest in Syria as the actions of a few terrorists supported by Western powers and al Qaida against the legitimate Syrian regime to framing the unrest as a civil war.[135] This change could indicate waning support for the Syrian regime and could be understood by the Syrian regime as a direct warning from its closest ally. Furthermore, the creation of new foreign media outlets targeting new audiences could indicate Iran's increased interest in certain regions and might be indicative of new aspects in Iran's foreign policy.

On the other hand, the understanding that Iran is indeed pursuing a soft power approach in international relations provides a different lens through which Iran's actions could be examined. The example that comes to mind is Iran's controversial nuclear power programme. Mastering the nuclear fuel cycle and enrichment techniques of course has huge hard power implications. Having the capability to quickly assemble a nuclear weapon, maybe the ultimate hard power asset, thanks to the "hedging" of highly enriched uranium and having long-range delivery mechanisms on hand, a technology that is provided by Iran's space programme, make the Islamic Republic of Iran a virtual nuclear power. These capabilities coupled with aggressive rhetoric against "Zionism" make especially Israel rightfully concerned about Iran's progress in that field. Iran, in contrast, declares to both domestic and foreign audiences that its nuclear enrichment programme and its space programme are peaceful programmes aimed at the development and progress of the nation. In this context, both programmes enjoy massive domestic support, even among supporters of the opposition. By deliberately creating ambiguity in the programme, for example, by hardening and hiding the enrichment sites and producing

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[135] Press TV headline 19 June 2012: "Syrian army clears al-Sultanieh from armed gangs"

more highly enriched material than needed for scientific or medical purposes, Iran is provoking harsh reactions, especially from Western nations. Iran uses those reactions to increase its soft power potential among domestic and foreign audiences. We have seen that anti-imperialism is a major theme in Iran's strategic narratives. Harsh reactions by the West or Israel can easily be framed as imperialistic actions aimed against the progress of Iran. Reactions against Iran would therefore prove and support the regime's strategic narrative of being a victim of imperialistic action. Reinforcing these narratives to rally domestic political support might be the primary aim of a regime facing opposition from a population that demands political reforms and that has no memory of the Pahlavi era and the Islamic Revolution.

Realizing that Iran might be pursuing a "smart power" approach[136] by combining hard power aspects and soft power effects in its foreign policy could be the starting point for developing a comprehensive strategy for dealing with issues like Iran's nuclear programme. Exposing the constructed ambiguity in the nuclear programme would be just the beginning.

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[136] Joseph S. Nye Jr. "Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power" in *Foreign Affairs,* July/August 2009.

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