Public Diplomacy in the Middle East: A Comparative Analysis of the U.S. and Iran

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Abstract

In today's world, a country's portrayal and prestige in public opinion is more important than before, essentially contributing to the failure or success of its policies. From this perspective, many states have considered efforts at influencing and shaping public opinion in recent years. The United States is among those which pay utmost attention to this issue, pursuing its activities within the framework of public diplomacy. In recent years, a change in mindsets in the Middle East is viewed as one of Washington's public diplomacy goals. Iran also has a few plans for introducing the Islamic Revolution's model to the world and influencing global public opinion. Given religious, cultural and geographical commonalties, Iran pays special attention to the peoples of the Middle East. This paper seeks to compare public diplomacy employed by Iran and the United States in the region, raising the question of which has been more successful. This comparison particularly refers to certain key aspects of the public diplomacy of the two nations, including their goals, audience, sources of soft power, instruments and degree of success.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Middle East, Iran, United States

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Introduction

Iran and the United States seek to expand their soft power in the Middle East in a variety of ways. By airing TV programs via satellites, attracting students from regional countries, using the influence of Iranian and Shi'i culture as well as the political Islam based on criticism of the Western and American hegemony, Iran seeks to increase its popularity in the Middle East. Assisted by media and its economic potential, the U.S. also tries to influence the Middle East through a variety of strategies. An overall glance at the political structures in Iran and the U.S. reveals that their structures differ a lot, leading to the adoption of different policies. This paper seeks to compare the two countries' performance concerning public diplomacy in the Middle East during the Arab uprisings. First of all, we have to point to the characteristics and concerns of the two nations in their public diplomacy in the Middle East. If we want to compare their performance based on their objectives in adopting different policies within the framework of public diplomacy, we have to consider the degree of their favorability and influence among the peoples of the Middle East as displayed by opinion polls. Even though the U.S. has tried to change the opinions of publics in the Middle East, and particularly after September 11th, 2001, using a variety of means, it has not achieved its major public diplomacy goal; i.e. reverse negative attitudes towards the United States. In contrast, Iran has sought to engage in the regional political and diplomatic trends not only within its public diplomacy framework but also through its foreign policy. In Iraq, Afghanistan and even in Syria and

Bahrain, Iran has pursued a better policy than the U.S., though it needs to rectify some of its policies in order to achieve full success.

This paper seeks to answer the question of how successful U.S. and Iranian public diplomacy activities have been. It can be argued that even though U.S. public diplomacy is very organized and well-funded, it has failed to attain acceptable achievements, whereas Iranian public diplomacy, which lacks organization and coherence, is of a more favorable situation because of its Islamic-cultural grounds and links in the Middle East. On this basis, this paper first offers a conceptual framework on public diplomacy and then compares American and Iranian public diplomacy in the Middle East.

I- Conceptual Framework

There is no agreement on a widely acceptable definition of public diplomacy, but this paper relies on a definition which indicates that public diplomacy involves strategic planning and execution of educational, cultural and communicative programs by a sponsoring state for the public opinion in a target country so that the pressure of public opinion would lead political leaders in the target country to make decisions in favor of the foreign policy goals of the sponsoring state. On the other hand, public diplomacy includes actions for interaction and communication with nations and thoughts which aim to establish and preserve long-term relations according to the culture, values and policies of the system in question and other nations (Hadian and Ahadi, 2009: 88). Currently, some nations are faced with difficulties in executing public diplomacy due to structural problems, the most important of which is the absence of a clear definition of public diplomacy in the countries in question or the adoption of policies inconsistent with this type of diplomacy.

One of the basic principles of a successful public diplomacy involves the selection of specific audience and the implementation of policies suitable for the audience. The selection of a specific audience and implementation of policies appropriate for this audience

represents one of the most important elements of a successful public diplomacy. In terms of media activities as part of public diplomacy, attention is usually paid to the general audience, since such messages for the general public are largely based upon feelings, emotions and partly on perception. Thus, in this case, there is no need for such messages to spend too much time and contemplation for formulation and convincing. Conversely, messages aimed at a sophisticated audience, experts and leaders have to be founded upon perception and cognition, organized in a more subtle way (Minavand, 2008). Making efforts at understanding the content and its closeness to the type of audience's outlook, identifying reference groups for further influence of the message as well as exploitation of suitable technologies for better access of the audience to the message are key points for the success of public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy also demands the usage of suitable instruments in order to be able to employ the sources of a country's soft power for influencing foreign audiences. According to Joseph Nye's definition, soft power in every country stems from three sources: culture (sectors which are attractive for others), political values (when they are consistent with their expectations at home and overseas), and foreign policy when seen as legitimate and moral (See Nye, 2004). Media and education are among the salient instruments employed by public diplomacy. Possessing extraordinary influence, media outlets are able to create a positive or negative portrayal of a country in various societies. In public diplomacy, the way the state apparatus interacts with media is one of the most important factors in the success of public diplomacy goals. States need to create a network of vast professional communication channels as the Internet provides the opportunity for new information to be rapidly shared with the target audience.

Education is one of the other instruments of public diplomacy which particularly affects the sophisticated and educated strata of a society. Providing attractive academic opportunities for citizens of

target countries can through the granting of scholarships among other things have long-term effects on these individuals upon their return home. All the instruments employed in public diplomacy can be effective if, and only if, they become able to gain the trust of public opinion (Melissen, 2005). Gaining public trust takes time and inappropriate action might squander the efforts made over years. Public diplomacy alone cannot gain public trust among a foreign audience, but there is a need for the existence of coordination between a state's overall policies and its public diplomacy.

II- U.S. Public Diplomacy

One of the main U.S. concerns in the Middle East has been the rise of negative attitudes towards America and its policies. Since September 11th, 2001, the United States has clearly understood the capabilities of extremist forces in the Middle East and the threat they pose to American interests throughout the world. The reactions in 20 Muslim countries to the movie insulting the prophet of Islam, accompanied with attacks on U.S. embassies, once again showed that anti-American attitudes among Muslims - and particularly in the Middle East - still persist, seriously affecting American interests. After George W Bush took office, a coherent strategy was formulated as the American public diplomacy goal in order to change public opinion in the Middle East. Nonetheless, negative outlooks in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, Libya and Pakistan have continued within the past years and U.S. actions have done little to change it. Although some believe that a reduction of negative attitudes toward the U.S. indicates a relative success of U.S. public diplomacy, the country has in practice failed to attain its main goal of considerably reducing negative outlooks. For instance, Pew public opinion polls carried out in the spring of 2012 showed that 15% of Turks viewed President Barack Obama's policies as favorable, whereas the corresponding figure was 12% in the last year of George W Bush's presidency. In countries which have experienced a

revolution, this figure has varied. In a Pew poll in Egypt, 19% of respondents found U.S. policies acceptable, whereas before the Arab uprisings, the figure was 22%. In Pakistan and Jordan, this figure has showed a stark reduction. In 2008, 19% of Jordanians and Pakistanis had a positive view of the U.S., while in 2012, only 12% endorsed American policies.

U.S. Favorability

	1999/ 2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Turkey	52	30	15	30	23	12	9	12	14	17	10	15
Egypt	-	-	-	-	-	30	21	22	27	17	20	19
Jordan	-	25	1	5	21	15	20	19	25	21	13	12
Lebanon	-	36	27	-	42	-	47	51	55	52	49	48
Tunisia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	45
Pakistan	23	10	13	21	23	27	15	19	16	17	12	12

Source: Obama's Challenge in the Muslim World: Arab Spring Fails to Improve U.S. Image, Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 13, 2012, http://pewglobal.org.

Sources of U.S. Soft Power: Nye identifies three sources of U.S. soft power as follows:

Culture: The cultural parameter of American soft power is widely believed to be found in the American lifestyle, music, movie, sports, scientific advances, academic superiority and other related elements. The attractiveness of American culture is evident in European and some Asian countries and it was even one of the reasons behind the U.S. victory over the Soviet Union during the Cold War. But do American culture and lifestyle interest Middle Eastern peoples? An opinion poll demonstrates that only 36% of people in Egypt, 39% in Jordan and 30% in Turkey like American popular culture (PEW, June 13, 2012: 28). As these figures show, elements of American culture contradict public culture in the Middle East and their lifestyles.

Values: American values, including democracy, freedom, equality and human rights constitute another source of American soft power, which have attracted attention in the Middle East in recent years. Even U.S. officials have ascribed the start of liberation movements and support for democracy to the realization of American goals in the Middle East. In an opinion poll, 6 out of 10 Tunisians

and 4 out of 10 Egyptians accepted American ideas and patterns for democracy promotion (PEW, July 10, 2012). The largest number of people advocating democracy is found in Lebanon and the smallest number in Pakistan. As a matter of fact, regional peoples have preferred a political system arising from their own opinions and freedom rather an American pattern of government. American values such as support for democracy, equality and freedom have attracted attention in recent years as a result of developments in the Middle East, but some of these values including individualism and gender equality have not become popular among people yet. U.S. double standards in advocating democratic changes in one country and indifference to dictatorship and suppression in another in the Middle East may disrupt one of these sources of American power.

Policies and notably foreign policy constitute another source of soft power for every country. An inappropriate foreign policy can impair the sources of soft power, however attractive and strong they might be. For example, under George W Bush, American policies were centered on militarism and adventurism in the Middle East. This did not correspond with its actions in the area of public diplomacy. Thus, negative attitudes towards the U.S. increased in all countries of the world, and particularly in Muslim countries, to such a degree that it became one of the main concerns for American authorities. With the Obama Administration taking office, many hopes were revived for the enhancement of U.S. activities within the public diplomacy framework. Obama came to power with a slogan of change which led to an atmosphere of optimism in the U.S. and the world about the improvement of conditions. Opinion polls at the time showed that hope for change in U.S. policies altered Middle Eastern peoples' position towards the United States. The Obama Administration's perceived efforts to remove the harsh and insulting American tone regarding Islam and Muslims in parallel with friendly dialogue with Middle Eastern peoples was considered as a new form of American public diplomacy. After five years, nonetheless, opinion polls indicate

that in spite of Obama's actions, such as the withdrawal from Iraq and planned withdrawal from Afghanistan, the U.S. still lacks a favorable image in the Middle East. Most of the polls show that there is still huge pessimism among Middle Eastern peoples about U.S. actions. Indeed, a comparison of polls conducted in 2010 and 2011 highlights a reduction in Obama's popularity as a result of his promises not being met (PEW, May 17, 2011).

U.S. Favorability and Confidence in Obama

	2009	2010	2011	Change
	%	%	%	10-11
Jordan	25	21	13	-8
Turkey	14	17	10	-7
Pakistan	16	17	11	-6
Indonesia	63	59	54	-5
Lebanon	55	52	49	-3
Egypt	27	17	20	+3
Palest. ter.	15	-	18	+3

Source: Arab Spring Fails to Improve U.S. Image, Pew Global Attitudes Project, May 17, 2011, http://pewglobal.org/files/2011/05/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Arab-Spring-FINAL-May- 17-2011.pdf.

The reasons for the continued negative outlooks towards the U.S. in Muslim countries are multiple. In theory, grounds for socialist, anti-Imperialist and nationalist thinking are deep-rooted in Arab and Muslim countries. In this relation, Arab people and elites are affected by Arab nationalism, which experienced one of its golden ages under Egyptian leader Nasser. This ideational background, along with U.S. policies and actions after September 11th, has exacerbated antipathy towards the U.S. among the regional Muslim masses. America's invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, support for the region's autocratic regimes, humiliating treatment of Middle Eastern nations, propagation of a war on Islam in its political circles, blame for economic underdevelopment and unconditional support for Israel are among the reasons that have tainted perceptions of the U.S. in the regional peoples' mentality.

U.S. support for Israel creates negative feelings towards the U.S. more than any other factor. The special U.S.-Israel relationship is

notably visible in the Arab World. During the past years, the U.S. has been the major obstacle to the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions against Israel through the use of its veto power, forcing countries such as Egypt and Jordan to sign peace treaties with Israel. On the other hand, U.S. positions towards the hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians have contradicted the public opinions held in the Arab and Muslim worlds. The U.S. has never called Israeli conduct racist and brutal and with the exception of the 1956 war in the Sinai Peninsula, it has not exerted pressure on this regime to withdraw from Arab territories. Certainly, such actions have resulted in increased antipathy and terrorism against the U.S. in the world (Abdullah, April 9, 2010). Furthermore, economically, Israel is the largest recipient of American aid in the world and it receives one-fifth of total American foreign aid. Militarily, the U.S. equips Israel with advanced military hardware including assault helicopters and fighter jets, while most of these weapons are used to target Palestinians, killing innocent citizens. Regional peoples believe that the U.S. is committed to safeguarding Israel's security, leading to Israel's victory in any war against its Arab adversaries (See Faath, 2006). Without paying attention to regional circumstances and the roots of discontent, the U.S. is not expected to attain significant achievements by just relying upon its cultural and value sources.

Instruments: The U.S. takes advantage of a variety of instruments in order to strengthen its public diplomacy in the region including vast media facilities, use of satellite networks, the Internet (including social media networks), making regional populations familiar with the benefits of political and economic liberalism, academic programs and international conferences. Media and education are the two most important means used by American public diplomacy for materializing its objectives in the region:

Media: The U.S. possesses various radio and TV networks broadcasting programs in different languages including Alhurra, Seva and Voice of America. Alhurra is an Arabic satellite TV news network

based in the U.S.; Seva is an Arabic radio network; and the Voice of America broadcasts programs in several languages for Muslim countries. American experts believe that Alhurra and Seva have failed. The Voice of America is efficient, but it does not broadcast programs in major languages including Arabic and Punjabi.

Education: Educating various social strata in the Middle Eastern countries is another influential instrument used by American public diplomacy. Educating future elites and leaders of the regional countries can enhance the long-term impact of U.S. public diplomacy. The United States pursues numerous educational programs, the most important of which is the Fulbright program. The U.S., moreover, implements extensive programs for language education. On the one hand, it pursues programs for teaching English to other nations and on the other, pursues teaching of Arabic and other languages used in the Muslim World to Americans. The American language education program is viewed as successful but very limited (Johnson, February 10, 2004).

U.S. Response to the Uprisings: Negative sentiment towards the U.S. is continuous in the Arab countries, even though some American experts were hopeful that the U.S. would utilize the opportunity of the start of the popular uprisings to direct revolutionary currents. However, American authorities failed, particularly in the first months after the popular uprisings broke out, to take necessary actions and positions. With the start of protests in Tunisia, American authorities proclaimed that they would advocate neither of the two sides (people or the government). In Egypt, positions within the public diplomacy framework were less suitable; a number of American politicians clearly backed Mubarak since the first days of the revolutionary movement. With respect to Libya, the U.S. declared that it would support a UN Security Council resolution leading to NATO intervention. After a few months, U.S. positions became more consistent as President Obama indicated that the U.S. would support demands by the Middle Eastern peoples, opposing the

use of violence and suppression of people. These remarks, nevertheless, failed to impact the Arabic-speaking audience and the results of a Zogby opinion poll conducted in July 2011 showed that Obama's popularity in the Arab nations fell to less than 10% (Zogby, July 15, 2011).

As developments in the region continued to unfold, then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paid several visits to the region, meeting the youth and civil society groups. On the other side, the U.S. propaganda line shifted and the American authorities began supporting democracy and free elections; even in countries with close ties to the U.S. such as Egypt. Has the U.S. then been overall successful in attracting public trust in the Middle East? Obstacles to the promotion of U.S. public diplomacy in the region and the degree of attractiveness of America's sources of soft power should be considered. In this regard, U.S. support for Israel constitutes the main obstacle. On the other hand, only some of the sources of U.S. soft power attract people, including democracy and economic prosperity, whereas in certain cases, U.S. policies impair such attraction.

III- Iran's Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy in the Iranian political structure differs greatly from that of the U.S. Indeed, in the early years after the advent of the Islamic Revolution, Iran managed to use its soft power in the region and the world adequately, particularly because the mission of the Islamic Revolution was a cultural one. Indeed, the major goal of Iran's public diplomacy is to present a successful Islamic-Iranian model to the region and the world. The Iranian Revolution has been characterized by its search for independence as Iran lacked true independence before the revolution and particularly relied upon Western countries. After the Revolution, Iran proclaimed certain principles and interests for itself which were not necessarily consistent with the demands of other states. However, Iran made utmost efforts at preserving its independence. Such a characteristic has been attractive to the Arab nations whose regimes

have relied tremendously on extra-regional states (Ahadi and Dadandish, 2011: 153).

Iran, nevertheless, failed to take utmost advantage of such soft power, most significantly because of the problems arising from the Iran-Iraq war, making self-defense atop of Iran's agenda. In the post-war years, security policies, enhancement of military capacity and hard power have been given priority in Iran due to regional conditions. Currently taking advantage of soft power parameters within Iran's public diplomacy framework in the region and the world can help reduce the impact of adverse propaganda conducted by some states and media against Iran. In recent years, Iran has reduced its reliance on ideological mechanisms in order to expand its regional influence and credibility. Instead, Iran has endeavored to build a successful model of resistance and independence; thus reinforcing independence-seeking potentials in the region, consolidating the foundations of Iran's soft power (Ghanbarlou, 2011: 22).

Despite possessing strong bases with respect to soft power, unlike other countries, in Iran there is no specific institution with a formulated strategy for effective application of public diplomacy, though some actions taken by certain state institutions can be defined as falling within the framework of public diplomacy. Known better as cultural diplomacy in Iran, Iranian thinkers believe that accompanying usual diplomacy with vast cultural relations will contribute to the enhancement of soft power as it faces less resistance in the societies of the world. Generally speaking, the bulk of Iran's activities in the sphere of public diplomacy is undertaken by the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, while the Foreign Ministry plays a complementary role. The audience of Ian's public diplomacy largely consists of people in the Muslim world. The audience, considering the sources of Iranian soft power, is mostly located in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus; thus the other geographical areas cannot be regarded as the audience of Iranian public diplomacy in the long-term.

Sources of Iran's Soft Power: Sources of Iran's soft power can

be addressed in three categories:

Culture: Iran's civilizational parameter is one of the cultural sources of Iranian soft power, as Iran has a millennia-old civilization and suitable identity background. On a domestic level, even though Iran has different ethnicities and communities, shared cultural, lingual and civilizational identity has resulted in unity in the country. On an international level, the enhancement of Iranian civilizational elements such as mythologies, ancient rituals, language and culture can further consolidate solidarity among the peoples in those regions, and particularly in regions located within Iran's once-civilizational area. Among the most salient Iranian rituals which are susceptible to the promotion of Iranian prestige and soft power in the world is Nowruz. Nowruz is the most important national festivity celebrated by Iranians and other nations with shared cultural roots with Iran. The first and foremost achievement in this regard was the registration of Nowruz as a world heritage in UNESCO.(1) Nowruz festivities are held in places such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Iraq, Turkey, and the Caucasus republics. I.e. the holiday is celebrated in almost 20 countries by 300 million people. This event has been emphasized within the cultural and public diplomacy framework particularly with respect to regional public opinion and enhancement of Iran's soft power. Apart from Nowruz, Iran possesses other customs, traditions, arts and national characteristics with which Iran's national and cultural prestige can be reinforced. Iranian cultural traits possess much attraction among the Middle Eastern nations, and can be viewed as constant sources of Iran's soft power.

Values: Islamic and Shi'i values constitute another parameter that can potentially serve as a factor in increasing Iran's soft power. After Islam entered Iran and was accepted by the Iranians, a new culture and identity called Iranian-Islamic culture evolved. This dynamic and strong culture gave rise to domestic unity and granted identity to Iranian territory vis-à-vis other nations. This parameter was also vividly seen in the advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The

impact of Iran on other Muslim nations is so large that it serves as a major factor in Iran's heightening influence on foreign public opinion in such a way that some of the regional peoples consider Iran as an acceptable model in the promotion of Islamic ideals. Obviously, the parameter of Shi'ism and Iran's connections with Shi'a Muslims around the world is another element of Iranian capabilities in the sphere of soft power as evidenced by Iran's utilization of this parameter in post-Saddam Iraq. Although at the beginning, the U.S. did not imagine that Iran's influence in Iraq would be so large that it could affect Iraqi policies, Iran's role and influence became known to American authorities as social and political institutions were shaped by the groups exiled under Saddam.

Policies: The third source of Iranian soft power, like other countries, is policies and particularly foreign policy which on occasion has led to the enhancement or weakening of the two other sources. Adoption of consistent, appropriate policies such as détente has served to improve Iran's image.

Instruments: Media: In Iran, media activities are centered on the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. This organization carries out a huge volume of tasks, which apart from communicating with the domestic audience, includes operation of satellite networks in foreign languages such as Al-Alam and Press TV in order to communicate with world public opinion. In this regard, the Arabic-language Al-Alam network has gained attention in the Arab Middle East. Established in 2003, it sees BBC Arabic, al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya as its rivals. At the first place, it tries to neutralize Iranophobia promoted by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In recent years, it has focused on Islamic Awakening to argue that what Arabs were doing was exactly what Iranians did in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution.[2]

Education: Admission and education of foreign students is another policy that is taken into consideration for promoting public diplomacy. Foreign students from Afghanistan, Iraq, Central Asian nations, Arab countries, African nations and some other countries

have been admitted to Iranian universities. Imam Khomeini International University is one of the largest academic institutions, which possesses a huge capacity for admitting foreign students, though currently there are 100 foreign students for every 8000 Iranian students. Another large Iranian institution that admits foreign students is Al-Mustafa International University in Qom. This is a scientific-seminary institution with branches all around the world including the London Islamic College, Indonesia Islamic College and Ghana Islamic University. Al-Mustafa International University with 2500 faculty members has more than 20 thousand students from 100 countries (Mehr News Agency, July 5, 2010).

Iran's Response to the Uprisings: With the beginning of popular uprisings in the Middle East, Iran also tried to enhance its role and influence among the peoples of Arab countries. Iranian authorities viewed these uprisings as arising from people's Islamic awakening and their search for returning to Islamic values with the Islamic Revolution in Iran as their role model. Some analysts in Iran argued that returning to Islamic values was only one of the reasons for the uprisings and there existed other reasons as well. Even though high-ranking Iranian officials welcomed the popular uprisings in the Arab countries, the performance of official and unofficial Iranian institutions in influencing these uprisings was not effective. Iran's official institutions including the Foreign Ministry sought to enhance the Iranian people's role by sending messages to the Arab nations and by adopting wise stances. Iran's foreign policy orientation, accordingly, shifted in many Arab countries including Tunisia and Libya where popular uprisings led Iran to adopt positions in supporting the people even though there were good relations between those governments and the Iranian government. With respect to Egypt with which Iran had cut off diplomatic relations after the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian authorities sought to establish connections with revolutionary groups, relying upon diplomatic relations after the Muslim Brotherhood came to power. Nonetheless, Salafist and secular groups did not agree with Iranian positions and just some branches from among the moderates, youth and

the Muslim Brotherhood expected instrumental Iranian help. Moreover, when the Egyptian military council set out to lead the developments, it relied more upon the Turkish model than the Iranian one, trying not to compromise their economic interests with the West and the U.S. for rapprochement with Iran.

Tunisian authorities have also established good relations with the U.S., Europe and particularly with Turkey. The Iranian Foreign Ministry acted belatedly concerning Libya. Due to NATO's intervention during the popular uprising, Iran recognized the revolutionary council belatedly, failing to help Libyan citizens. But instead, it tried to highly publicize the uprisings in Yemen and Bahrain. The Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, as one of the institutions active in the sphere of public diplomacy, also implemented programs for the establishment of relations with the peoples of those countries including inviting several Egyptian Muslim women to take part in a poem congress on the Islamic Awakening.

Within the nongovernmental sphere in Iran, reactions to the popular uprisings have seemed insufficient due to inadequate exploitation of social network and cyber instruments, leading to scant sympathy shown by Iranians to the protesting citizens in the Arab World. Iranians have collectively showed their support for the Arab revolutions through the demonstrations held after the Friday prayers, Eid al-Fitr, the International Quds Day and the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. Such support is mainly aimed at criticizing the Al Khalifah and House of Saud policies in suppressing the Bahraini and Yemeni peoples. In the meantime, the outbreak of the unrest in Syria made Iran face a difficult situation, leading to the loss of the impact of its support for popular uprisings. Anti-Iranian propaganda has been on the rise along with the complex situation in Syria in such a way that Iran is also blamed for the conditions in that country. Dealing with such a situation is very difficult for Iran, requiring special diplomatic skills on both formal and informal levels, all the while a prolongation of the Syrian situation will bring about many disadvantages for Iran.

In spite of all problems and shortcomings faced by Iran for promoting its public diplomacy in the Middle East, there are opportunities ahead for Iranian public diplomacy in the Arab World, the most important of which is the ideational proximity of the Arab intellectual circles with the Islamic Revolutionary discourse; most notably with respect to its intransigence to Israel and countering certain U.S. policies. The peoples of Arab countries respect Iran as a Muslim nation that stands against U.S. and Israeli policies in the Middle East. At the same time, there are other questions which pose obstacles to Iranian public diplomacy including pre-Islamic differences between Iranians and Arabs. On the other hand, Iran is faced with widespread negative propaganda which has affected the Arab public opinion; propaganda which seeks to give rise to old Iran-Arab differences and to portray Iran as a serious threat to the existence of Arab nations. The Arab governments have also tried during recent years to counter Iran, using educational programs and media. Yet, there are constant Islamic values and norms that have linked Iran to the peoples of Arab countries in spite of all differences. Iran enjoys a high capacity for influencing the Arab developments, though unlike the U.S., Iranian activities are not consistent within a public diplomacy framework. Attention to issues of human rights, democracy and social rights and liberties also matters a lot. On the other hand, preservation of Iran's regional role and place within the regional power equations gains the attention of Iranian officials as efforts are made in order for the Iranian role and influence not to be undermined easily by the other actors.

In a nutshell, has Iran succeeded in attracting the public trust in the Middle East? In response, it can be claimed that before the start of the Syrian crisis and mounting of tensions over Iran's nuclear program, the Iranian performance in the Middle East and the degree of people's tendency to favor Iranian outlooks were acceptable. But now, Iran is going through a difficult time, on the one hand because of its nuclear program leading to unprecedented international pressures. On the other, international propaganda against Iran is

mounting, portraying Iran as a threat to international peace and security. Iran's actions and policies to neutralize such a psychological atmosphere have been insufficient and ineffective and Iran's voice is not seriously heard in the world. Iran needs to adopt policies that would reduce the existing negative space against Iran, while advancing its own goals. The election of a new president in Iran in 2013 can open a window of opportunity for Iran to reduce the negative space found against Iran as the 2008 U.S. presidential elections created hopes that the negative atmosphere against the U.S. would decrease.

IV- Comparison

At the regional level, the Iranian soft power strategy towards the neighboring countries so far has been emphasis upon religious, historical and cultural commonalties. For this reason, Islamic and Shi'i integration of regional nations with the Islamic Republic of Iran as plays a crucial role. The United States has long devised long-term programs for changing ideational and cultural policies in the Middle East. The September 11th events have been a turning point in the country's regional policy in terms of reliance on soft power according to which structural engineering of Middle Eastern societies in cultural, social, political and economic dimensions topped American authorities' agenda. Of course, considering the country's past practice and the region's characteristics which indicate a shift in the trend of pro-Western policies of the regional leaders, hard power dimensions of U.S. Middle East policy are expected to remain salient in spite of the new slogans used by the U.S. establishment and President Obama.

The U.S. performance in some countries has brought about huge political costs including the costs of the invasion of Iraq which led to the loss of American prestige on the world stage and particularly in the Middle East, because the White House relied largely on unilateralism rather multilateralism and on coercion rather persuasion. The image which was created of the U.S. as a domineering and even rogue state among world public opinion as a

result of policies pursued by George W Bush was not the image sought by the Neo-Conservatives (Ataie, 2011: 201). The inhumane treatment of Abu Ghraib prisoners by the American military impaired American soft power vigorously.

While Iran has stressed on religious, historical and cultural commonalties with Iraq, experiences demonstrate that use of such parameters along with a country's attractive policies in promoting development, prosperity, peace, stability and security can diminish or remove past conflicts. When America's second face, i.e. its soft power, withered away as a result of overuse of hard power in the region, and particularly in Iraq, Iran became able to advance its policies in Iraq, though it could create better conditions for itself with a better performance.

Another point is people's propensity to democracy and freedom which by some in the U.S. are viewed as American achievements in the region. Undoubtedly, democratic values can attract the nations, contributing to the production of soft power, but it is not the case when these are imposed at gun point. At the same time, one may not regard democracy as unique, perceiving any propensity to democracy as necessarily consistent with Western countries and the U.S. The U.S. has tried this unsuccessfully in Iraq where it set out to shape the Iraqi political system with unilateralism based on hard power. But in practice, the Iraqi political system took another shape, different from what the American policymakers had envisaged. Those engaged in American public diplomacy have also largely ignored lingual and cultural differences, religious difference, and geographical distance, and have sufficed to spending on propagation and regular programs. This practice was successful in Western countries or Japan, leading to a significant rise in American favorability among the people in those countries, but these very actions have failed in the Middle East.

BBC World opinion polls conducted in 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2013 can help relatively compare the performance of Iranian and American public diplomacy in the Middle East. According to the polls, the U.S. has

failed to significantly ameliorate negative outlooks against it among Muslims, but its image has improved in the world. While average U.S. favorability in 2008 was 35%, it rose to 44% in 2013, whereas Iran's average favorability fell from 20% in 2008 to 15% in 2013. Although the poll has been conducted mostly in Western or Westernized countries and few Muslim countries were involved, its results should be considered. In the Middle East, in a BBC poll in 2008, U.S. favorability was 20% in Turkey, 16% in Egypt and 28% in Lebanon (BBC, April 2008). In the same year, Iran's favorability in Turkey was 17%, in Egypt 62% and in Lebanon 39%. In the 2011 poll, U.S. favorability in Turkey was 35%, in Egypt 26% and in Pakistan 16%, whereas Iran's favorability was 36% in Turkey, 25% in Egypt and 41% in Pakistan (BBC, March 7, 2011). U.S. and Iranian favorability have declined significantly in Egypt and Turkey in 2013.

Positive Views- The United States

	2008	2010	2011	2013
Turkey	20	13	35	27
Egypt	16	45	26	24
Lebanon*	28	-	-	-
Pakistan	-	9	16	14

Positive Views- Iran

	2008	2010	2011	2013
Turkey	17	13	36	17
Egypt	62	27	25	15
Lebanon	39	-	-	
Pakistan	-	33	41	52

Sources: Global Views of USA Improve, BBC World Service, Poll, April 2008: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr08/BBCEvals_Apr08_rpt.pdf; Global Views of United States Improve While Other Countries Decline, April 18, 2010: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pipa/pdf/apr10/BBCViews_Apr10_rpt.pdf ; Views of US Continue to Improve in 2011 BBC Country Rating Poll, BBC World Service, Poll, March 7, 2011: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar11/BBCEvalsUS_Mar11_rpt.pdf; Views of China and India Slide While UK's Ratings Climb: Global Poll, 22 May 2013, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/2013%20Country%20Rating%20Poll.pdf.

Regarding the United States, the 2011 poll results indicate that with Obama's election, there was this expectation that with a change in

tone and increased spending on the Middle Eastern countries and other actions in response to the Arab developments, the U.S. favorability would improve significantly. But actually such improvement was not seen in this poll and the other ones conducted by such institutions as Pew. Iran's case differs as Iranian public diplomacy efforts are very limited, unorganized and sparse. On the other hand, negative propaganda against Iran concerning its nuclear program and its support for the Syrian government act against Iran, but in response, Iranian actions taken in order to counter such propaganda are insufficient and ineffective. In a nutshell, it can be observed that constant factors of dissatisfaction of regional people with U.S. actions are more effective than the occasional events. (Lebanon was not considered for the BBC poll in later years, but in this article it is considered for comparison between Iran and the U.S. in 2008)

Conclusion

The structure of Iranian public diplomacy, unlike the American one, is unorganized and inconsistent, lacking a clear definition within a strategy for its performance. Iran, however, possesses huge potentials in the region, because it can influence the region as a result of its opposition to Israel and countering the U.S., which leads Arab public opinion to further embrace Iranian slogans and narratives rather than the American ones. The U.S. has pursued regular and organized efforts in the region in order to attain the most important goal of its public diplomacy; that is the reduction of negative outlooks of regional peoples towards the U.S. Some experts argue that such outlooks have been exploited by extremist groups to recruit forces and attack American interests in the Middle East and the world; thus, continuation of such negative outlooks will be counterproductive for the U.S. in the mid- and long-term. These efforts, nonetheless, have not yielded acceptable achievements which can be largely ascribed to continued U.S. pursuit of policies and actions in the region in spite of

its slogans and rhetoric, the most salient of which is the unconditional support for Israel. Such a reality cannot be removed from the mindsets of regional peoples, and particularly the Arabs, via media or academic activities. In fact, consecutive generations of Arab nations will not forget such a reality. New political-security developments have altered the power structure and politics in the Middle East to Iran's benefit, and are likely to adversely affect U.S. strategic interests in the region. Iran certainly occupies a lower rank in terms of hard power as compared to the U.S., but its spiritual and cultural status would grant Iran the capability to turn into an effective cultural hub in the region. Although Iran is currently faced with a multitude of problems, the constant factors of attraction of Iranian soft power in the Middle East would provide a fertile ground, which can resolve the problems, if wise actions are taken.

Notes

1. Novruz, Nowrouz, Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz, Nevruz: Inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?RL=00282.
2. http://www.alalam.ir/

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