

Comparative Study of Iran and Turkey Media Diplomacy toward Central Asia and the Caucasus

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Abstract

Today public opinion of societies is considered as a very important and influential issue in government policy making. This has led each country to pursue its own policy in order to influence other countries in choosing policies consistent with it. In this context, public diplomacy seems to be the most practical approach. The process of transformation and diversity of diplomacy has grown considerably from the globalization process in terms of structure, agenda and practices over the last decade. Undoubtedly, one of the most important types of diplomacy in the world today is media diplomacy which means strategic planning of a government to influence public opinion of other countries and media diplomacy should be a consequence of the importance of public opinion in the field of international equations and the significant improvement in capacity of citizens to influence decisions. Governments know today the situation in the world is very different from the past and the citizens of countries are stakeholders who enjoy undeniable right to information and want to participate actively in political decision-making and community management.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and its division into several states, Central Asian region and the Caucasus became very important for various regional and trans-regional powers for variety of reasons, namely: communication, economy, energy and security. In terms of its cultural, civilization, identity and ethnic structure, the region is similar to the two neighboring countries: The Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey, which has found a very special place in foreign policy orientations of the two countries. Today the countries of the region have the right to influence beyond their borders and behave like independent players because of their past history, as

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well as the former Soviet communist politics, which had kept them as dependent and unstructured states. One of the most important demands of Iran and Turkey in foreign policy is to become regional power and extend their own ideologies (Iran is following the propagation of Islamic Revolution ideology and Turkey is following the ideology of pan-Turkism) which is the best place for above-mentioned countries policy propaganda. Accordingly, the present research is an attempt to study the comparative study of media diplomacy between Iran and Turkey in Central and East Central Asian region. The main question of the research is that what is the media diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey in Central Asia and the South Caucasus? In response to this question, using the conceptual framework of media diplomacy, the research hypothesis is that Iran's media diplomacy is based on audio-visual media and government organs and Turkey's diplomacy is based on private organizations and television programs.

Iranian media which focus on Central Asia are normally assisted and coordinated by the state. The main means in this area are all under the control of the Government of the Islamic Republic, which has enabled the regional states and foreign powers to look at the threats to Iranian propaganda and to prevent Iran's influence in the region. Iran's public diplomacy has been mainly based on Internet media.

Another important factor behind the failure of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Central Asia, is the great concentration of its foreign policy to the Middle East; in the same way Iran's overseas television networks have focused their attentions to Middle East and networks such as Al-Alam, Al-Kawthar, Sahar TV and Arabic films have entirely focused their attention on Arab populations and have been successful in recent years regarding Islamic awakening, the so-called Arab spring and Middle Eastern crises but we have not seen any particular performance in this area. In the radio section, Iran has several specialized networks on Central Asian region and the Caucasus, all of which broadcasting programs and news related to the language of the countries of the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran has not yet been able to launch a comprehensive real image of itself through its networks in the target region. In Iran, two Press TV and Hispanic TV networks have been launched for a specific audience at the international level.

The third factor behind Iran's failures in Central Asia and the Caucasus is the lack of attention to the existing capacities in Iran and the region as a whole, the most important of which are common language and common history, which in the media field are the two important elements that could influence in the region's policy making process. Turkey has been very active

in the field of media diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus and has launched several public, private and satellite TV channels in the region. Even the Turkish radio, broadcasts some programs in Armenian language (TAR-Radio has a part in Armenian). By making historic series such as Sri Lanka, Turkey has been looking for a new kind of Ottomanism which has attracted world political thinkers attention and highly elevated Turkey's stance in this regard. The country is also developing strands of culture and lifestyles that is eager to expand its living styles in the world, especially in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

By combining its governmental and non-governmental organizations and activities under the umbrella of Turkey, the country has been able to achieve its goals by adopting specific policies like Ottomanism and the use of propagation of Turkish values to achieve its cultural, economic and political goals in the region. It has introduced itself as one of the strategic allies of the region, attracting both the public and communities, as well as among the statesmen in Central Asian region.

Iran will receive cooperation with the countries of the region with open arms. Joint history, common elites, common language and shared values provide Iran with best opportunities to use its media and related industries to advance its media diplomacy in the region. But in practice, it has relied on the same number of government networks, sites and news agencies. On the other hand, Turkey, which has some commonalities with Iran, has been able to establish close ties with the countries of the region through a number of both private and public NGOs.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Identity, Media, Media Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy.