

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY GANGNAM STYLE

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# **PUBLIC DIPLOMACY GANGNAM STYLE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The diplomatic impasse between the United States and Iran is officially broken after thirty-four years of mutual recriminations and mistrust. The need for a reinvigorated U.S. public diplomacy is essential to forge a new relationship based on respect, understanding, and shared political, social, and economic interests. “Gangnam Style” public diplomacy is a simultaneous multiplatform approach to information sharing and engagement that utilizes various programs to stimulate people-to-people connections based on culture, education, and business. By applying this strategy, the current rapprochement between the United States and Iran can be expanded to the benefit of both countries.

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This thesis is dedicated to a new future for U.S. and Iranian relations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Public diplomacy was a term first coined in the mid-1960s by the U.S. career diplomat and scholar Edmund Gullion at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He was describing a new kind of diplomacy – one that went beyond closed-door negotiations and extended to communicating with, and influencing, foreign publics. This diplomacy, today a State Department responsibility, has become an essential element in American foreign relations. Given that the United States and Iran -- bitter antagonists for over thirty years -- have achieved a diplomatic breakthrough by agreeing to negotiations regarding the Islamic Republic's nuclear program, it is time for American public diplomacy toward Iran to be expanded and reinvigorated so that the two countries can better understand and cooperate with each other... Such is the main argument of this thesis.

The thesis has seven chapters. Chapter one examines the recent events that led to a U.S. –Iranian rapprochement. Chapter two investigates the nature and interrelationships of soft power, propaganda, and public diplomacy. Chapter three provides an overview of Iranian history since its very beginnings – an important factor to take into consideration when designing a U.S. public diplomacy strategy toward Iran. Chapter four evaluates U.S. government-funded radio and television programs currently beamed at the Islamic Republic. It also focuses on how Hollywood has shaped American perceptions toward Iran and how Iranian government propaganda, media, and censorship affect its population. Chapter five speculates on the complex issue of how Iran has reacted to Western notions of modernization. Chapter six outlines concrete measures to be taken to enhance American public diplomacy toward Iran. Chapter seven, the conclusion, ends with a the hope that a Gangnam Style public diplomacy – a term inspired by the song of a

U.S.- educated South Korean performer that recently went viral – will achieve wide popularity in Iran. In a nutshell, this style of public diplomacy is a simultaneous multiplatform approach to engagement that utilizes various programs to stimulate people-to-people connections based on information sharing, culture, education and business. The appendix contains a timeline of events mentioned in this thesis.

## CHAPTER 1

### GENEVA ICEBREAKER – REOPENING OF U.S. - IRANIAN RELATIONS

Just when many thought the day would never come for the “Great Satan” and the “Mad Mullahs” to begin reconciling, the time to begin a new relationship with the United States and Iran has officially arrived. The French philosopher, Alain Badiou, defines an event as a transformative and unpredictable situation that breaks with the status quo, evoking thought and action. By Badiou’s account, it irreversibly alters our sense of what is possible; ultimately, something occurring that changes what we know and promotes thought and action.<sup>1</sup> Marking a new beginning and a game-changing rapprochement can be considered that “event.” Accordingly, an event may be an exceptional breakthrough in international relations and communication creating a new reality whereby key players can break an impasse and invigorate a new relationship. That is precisely where we stand today with Iran and the United States.

The golden key to effective global diplomacy and negotiations is to know whom you are speaking, how you are engaging your audience, and ultimately, why it matters for those involved. Understanding a nation and its citizens’ history, culture, language, and behavior is absolutely essential for any form of effective political and public diplomacy. Today, as in the past, the United States and Iran hold an outdated form of diplomacy and engagement. This is a result of a convoluted joint experience of mistrust paired with an obtuse and ineffective U.S. public diplomacy strategy. It has failed to garner the greater support of the Iranian people and achieve the United States’ geopolitical aims.

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005).

America's relationship with Iran is fraught with suspicions stemming particularly from the 1950s when nationalistic Iranians blamed the ouster of former Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh on the U.S. and Great Britain. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the hostage crisis at the American Embassy in Tehran completely destroyed any trust between the two nations. As a result of this mutual suspicion, the United States' public diplomacy campaign in the past three decades has not succeeded in influencing and winning over the Iranian people. The warring rhetoric of the "Mad Mullahs" and the "Great Satan" only perpetuated this situation.

"Gangnam Style" diplomacy conveys the attributes of its namesake -- highly popular and virally effervescent beyond borders. The famous video of a popular South Korean musician, PSY, garnered over 1 billion views around the world despite linguistic and cultural barriers.<sup>2</sup> With that concept, the new U.S. public diplomacy strategy would help foster a better relationship and diplomatic engagement between the United States and Iran and would serve as a blueprint for diplomatic strategy in other countries.

This new approach would attract the vibrant, inquisitive Iranian youth by incorporating a multilateral platform of social and political engagement, to induce an effervescent, catchy, and positive sentiment toward the United States. It would take into consideration the Iranian cultural framework to dispel negative views Iranians hold towards the United States and, ultimately, strengthen a foundation for a renewed relationship. This method would entail a combined approach of cultural reconciliation that would aim to disseminate a popular message and/or policy. "Gangnam Style"

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<sup>2</sup> William Gruger, "PSY's 'Gangnam Style' Hits 1 Billion Views, Unprecedented Milestone" *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/1483733/psys-gangnam-style-video-hits-1-billion-views-unprecedented-milestone> (accessed February 26, 2014).

diplomacy would incorporate popular engagement with Iranian citizens via digital diplomacy; media; people-to people interactions; music; arts; and educational, scientific, economic, and business exchanges.

### **Breaking News**

Thirty-four years of diplomatic silence have ended between the United States and Iran. In Geneva on November 24, 2013, the world's most influential powers, the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, China, France and Germany witnessed the two countries break the ice by reaching a controversial six-month interim nuclear deal. The agreement halts any advancement of Iran's controversial nuclear program but stops short of insuring that the country would never develop a nuclear weapon. On January 20, 2014, Iran agreed to start eradicating a portion of its highly enriched uranium stockpile and freeze production of any additional centrifuges. As Secretary of State John Kerry said, "As of that day, for the first time in almost a decade, Iran's nuclear program will not be able to advance, and parts of it will be rolled back, while we start negotiating a comprehensive agreement to address the international community's concerns about Iran's program."<sup>3</sup>

After over a decade of missed chances for rapprochement between previous U.S. and Iranian administrations, several political factors finally aligned to create a new opportunity. President Obama was reelected with foreign policy an important part of his agenda, and President Hassan Rouhani was elected was elected with a high turnout of voters. Both leaders showed a preference for a constructive approach. For months leading

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Update on P5+1 Negotiations With Iran" under Remarks by Secretary Kerry: January 2014, Press Statement, John Kerry, January 12, 2014 <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/01/219566.htm> (accessed January 12, 2014).

to the interim deal, both presidents were setting the stage. Around the world, incessant media blitzes were forecasting the prospects for war and intensifying Western sanctions. In September 2013, President Rouhani set the tone for reconciliation before heading to New York for the 68th UN General Assembly. In his first op-ed in an American newspaper, he stated, “A constructive approach to diplomacy doesn’t mean relinquishing one’s rights. It means engaging with one’s counterparts, on the basis of equal footing and mutual respect, to address shared concerns and achieve shared objectives. In other words, win-win outcomes are not just favorable but also achievable. A zero-sum, Cold War mentality leads to everyone’s loss.”<sup>4</sup> This declaration set the international stage for beginnings of a new era.

In President Obama’s address to the General Assembly, he acknowledged the deep-rooted mistrust between the two nations and reiterated the United States’ readiness to test diplomacy before any other options. He said, “I don’t believe this difficult history can be overcome overnight -- the suspicions run too deep. But I do believe that if we can resolve the issue of Iran’s nuclear program, that can serve as a major step down a long road towards a different relationship, one based on mutual interests and mutual respect.”<sup>5</sup>

In his response before the UN, President Rouhani expressed his nation’s willingness to seek constructive engagement with the world and ease the historic tensions

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<sup>4</sup> Hassan Rouhani, “Why Iran Seeks Constructive Engagement.” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2013 under “Opinions” [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe_story.html) (accessed January 5, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> UN General Assembly, Sixty-Eight Session, *Barack Obama*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly> (accessed January 5, 2014).

with the United States. He said, “Iran seeks to resolve problems, not to create them. There is no issue or dossier that cannot be resolved through reliance on hope and prudent moderation, mutual respect, and rejection of violence and extremism.”<sup>6</sup>

While Obama and Rouhani did not shake hands at the UN just before the Iranian President departed New York, the first telephone conversation since 1979 between the two countries’ top leaders took place. During the phone call -- Rouhani was on his way to the airport -- Obama stressed his intention to reach a comprehensive solution to the nuclear issue. He later told reporters at the White House, “Resolving this issue, obviously, could also serve as a major step forward in a new relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, one based on mutual interests and mutual respect.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Why It Matters**

As journalist and Iran expert Robin Wright aptly said in 2013, “The new diplomacy also produced real human contact. U.S. and Iranian diplomats have spent more time together over the past three months than in the entire three decades since the American Embassy takeover. They are learning how to talk to each other all over again -- often in the same language.”<sup>8</sup> The pro-sanctions and pro-war advocates argued that

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<sup>6</sup> UN General Assembly, Sixty-Eight Session, *Statement by H.E. Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York, September 24, 2013) 5.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Baker, “U.S. and Iran Agree to Speed Talks to Defuse Nuclear Issue,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2013 under “World-Middle East,” [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/28/world/obama-says-he-spoke-to-irans-president-by-phone.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/28/world/obama-says-he-spoke-to-irans-president-by-phone.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0) (accessed December 20, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Robin Wright, “The Iran Deal: A Humanizing Breakthrough,” *Time*, November 25, 2013 under “Foreign Affairs,” <http://ideas.time.com/2013/11/25/robin-wrights-piece-on-geneva/#ixzz2pT1bQwFB> (accessed December 17, 2013).

tightening Iran's isolation brought the country to the negotiating table. While that played an important factor, it was not the key element that allowed the impasse to be broken. A number of Iranian experts, politicians and reformists such as Kamal Kharrazi, Dariush Shayegan, and Javad Zarif had been vocal about expressing the need for Iran to engage in dialogue and reconciliation for over a decade but never found the right timing and opportunity.

The election on June 14, 2013 of President Rouhani who selected a highly educated cabinet, began a new era in Iranian politics. It employed a pragmatic political approach rather than a reformist style such as during President Mohammad Khatami's tenure (1997-2005) or the hard-line conservatism reflective of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2012). The Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei still remains wary of this new diplomatic campaign but welcomes the easing of U.S.-led sanctions. Although Rouhani was not his first choice for president, Khamenei is highly conscious that in dealing with global political realities Iran needs to negotiate in order to ensure the longevity of the regime's existence. President Rouhani and his cabinet, part of the same clerical class that preceded them in power, acknowledge the need to demonstrate reconciliation and collaboration. They are attempting to realign Iran into the international arena.

In 1997, the Islamic Republic of Iran began to adjust its posture in the world with the election of reformist President Khatami. He was the first among the clerical leadership who started to deal with the United States in a conciliatory manner. However, due to other complicating factors, which will be discussed in later chapters, he was only able to plant the seeds of reform and reintegration. The election of President Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad took the country back to rigid conservative principles that thwarted the reformist movement that started in 1997.

At the Saban Forum in Washington D.C. on December 7, 2013, President Obama acknowledged the political shift in Iran and, more importantly, the complexity of dealing with that country. “He [Rouhani] represents the desire on the part of the Iranian people for a change of direction,” Obama said. “And we should not underestimate or entirely dismiss a shift in how the Iranian people want to interact with the world.”<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that, in addition to the historical difficulties of communicating with Iran due to its mistrust toward the United States, the domestic political wrangling among Democrats, Republicans, and other factions in Washington made it even harder to handle relations between the two countries. In fact, President Obama pressed this point by saying, “The idea that Iran, given everything that we know about its history, would just continue to get more and more nervous about more sanctions and military threats and ultimately just say, ‘We give in,’ I think does not reflect an honest understanding of the Iranian people and the Iranian regime.”<sup>10</sup>

At this juncture both the United States and Iran have an opportunity to finally bridge their differences and realign themselves for their joint strategic interests. The propaganda of the “Mad Mullahs” and “Great Satan” needs to come to an end for the sake of world peace and geopolitical stability.

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<sup>9</sup> Time of Israel Staff, “Full Text of President Obama’s Remarks to the Saban Forum” *Times Of Israel*, December 8, 2013 under “Israel and the Region,” <http://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-president-obamas-remarks-to-the-saban-forum/#ixzz2psakbS3z> (accessed January 7, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## A New Chance

Sixty percent of Iran's 79.9 million people<sup>11</sup> are under the age of 30<sup>12</sup>, a huge factor to be reckoned with. Historically, its youth has been open to change and is the most politically active among the fifty-seven nations in the Islamic world.<sup>13</sup> The United States must therefore seize this opportunity to apply a more evolved public diplomacy in order to win and sustain the hearts and minds of this highly educated, and politically astute demographic. The peaceful use of nuclear energy must especially be promoted among Iranian youth in order for them to reject the development of nuclear weapons. An enhanced public diplomacy should engage the Iranian public with a new and improved campaign that includes digital diplomacy, media, and people-to-people contacts.

As President Rouhani said, "I urge them [United States] to make the most of the mandate for prudent engagement that my people have given me and to respond genuinely to my government's efforts to engage in constructive dialogue. Most of all, I urge them to look beyond the pines and be brave enough to tell me what they see -- if not for their national interests, then for the sake of their legacies, and our children and future generations."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook, 2013" under "Country Comparison to the World" <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2119.html> (accessed January 7, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Omid Memarian and Tara Nesvaderani, "The Youth," The Iran Primer, United States Institute of Peace. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/youth> (accessed September 15, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hassan Rouhani, "Why Iran Seeks Constructive Engagement." *Washington Post*, September 19, 2013 under "Opinions," <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to->

President Obama and his administration are poised to take advantage of this new diplomatic situation. He reaffirmed that “There’s a lot of change that’s going to be taking place in the Middle East over the next decade. And wherever we see the impulses of a people to move away from conflict, violence, and towards diplomatic resolution of conflicts, we should be ready and prepared to engage them — understanding, though, that, ultimately it’s not what you say, it’s what you do.”<sup>15</sup>

Even though obstructionists of both parties on Capitol Hill and regional power politics may continue to impede the path to diplomacy, 2014 will prove to be a defining year for both countries. A new chapter of diplomacy, dialogue, and collaboration begins. As Alain Badiou explains in *L’Etre et l’événement*, “truths are militant processes which, beginning from a specific time and place within a situation fall in line with new forms of broadly egalitarian principles.”<sup>16</sup> Badiou’s event theory refers not to change as such, but to “occurrences” that provide a “new opening” for thought and action. He seeks to expose and make sense of the potential for radical innovation (revolution, invention, transfiguration) in every situation. Badiou’s ultimate objective can be described, then, as the effort to expose and make sense of the potential for profoundly new realities. Every

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[engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe\\_story.html](http://www.engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe_story.html) (accessed January 5, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Time of Israel Staff, “Full Text of President Obama’s Remarks to the Saban Forum” *Times of Israel*, December 8, 2013 under “Israel and the Region,” <http://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-president-obamas-remarks-to-the-saban-forum/#ixzz2psakbS3z> (accessed January 7, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> European Graduate School, “Alain Badiou Biography,” *The European Graduate School*, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/biography/> (accessed February 9, 2014).

such development can only begin with an exceptional break with the status quo, an “event.”<sup>17</sup>

Aiming for an ease in a long standing tensions between the United States and Iran and borrowing from Badiou’s concepts on event and the irreducible multiplicity of truth, the goal of the State Department’s mission for public diplomacy needs to be highlighted. It aims “to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.”<sup>18</sup>

“Gangnam Style” diplomacy strives to be the roadmap for the future of American public diplomacy towards Iran by incorporating the lessons learned from previous campaigns. The lack of expertise, knowledge, and grasp of Iranian history, cultural identity, and temperament of the Iranian people may have led to past failures. Yet a fresh strategy can rectify and nurture new relationships. In the following chapter, the concepts of soft power, propaganda, and diplomacy will be analyzed; as well as their importance,

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<sup>17</sup> Alain Badiou, *Is the Word ‘Communism’ Forever Doomed?* in *Miguel Abreu Gallery*. 2009 <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/articles/is-the-word-communism-forever-doomed/> (accessed February 9, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> United States Department of State, “Under Secretary for Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs,” *United States Department of State* <http://www.state.gov/r/index.htm> (accessed February 26, 2014).

in shaping public diplomacy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> According to Joseph Nye Jr., soft power is the power of attraction to shape the preferences of others to be drawn towards the outcomes you favor rather than forcing them into submission. Simply put, propaganda is biased, misleading, and/or persuasive information, both written and visual, used to publicize a particular idea, cause, or point of view. Diplomacy here is defined as engagement between two international actors in a global environment.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOFT POWER, PROPAGANDA & PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

#### Soft Power

Harvard University's Joseph Nye, Jr. coined the term soft power just after the Cold War to describe the power of attraction by drawing others towards favored outcomes rather than forcing them into submission.<sup>1</sup> Simply put, soft power is appealing to the emotions and persuasion by means of seduction – cultural, political, social, and economic. By effective agenda setting, attraction can be aroused, and the object of attraction will likely co-opt for the favored result if the correct formula of influence is applied.

According to Nye, advocates of military power, such as former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld -- who claimed in 2003 he did not even understand those words -- believe that "The world's only superpower does not need permanent allies; the issues should determine the coalitions, not vice versa."<sup>2</sup> In 2004, Nye wrote that "Skeptics of soft power claim that popularity is ephemeral and should not guide foreign policy. The United States, they assert, is strong enough to do as it wishes with or without the world's approval and should simply accept that others will envy and resent it."<sup>3</sup> Today, years after Rumsfeld's critical comment, one can see how the inability to understand the importance of soft power is precisely why critical regions such as Iraq and

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power – The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "The Decline of America's Soft Power," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004 under "Features" <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59888/joseph-s-nye-jr/the-decline-of-americas-soft-power> (accessed March 1, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Afghanistan are in disarray and the image of the United States is held in low regard. According to a 2004 Gallup International poll, “pluralities in 29 countries say that Washington’s policies have had a negative effect on their view of the United States.”<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Iran has been able to influence and promote its soft power in Iraq including by reputation and image management; export of revolutionary Islam; and propaganda and spin.<sup>5</sup>

The central foundation of soft power is attraction which if embraced can fuse into part of cultural fabric. Without it, there is no chance of it influencing people. Nye notes that the top three resources a country’s soft power are based on: culture and its attractiveness to others; its political values and whether it upholds them both domestically and internationally; and, finally, its foreign policy’s legitimacy and moral authority.<sup>6</sup> Given that the United States prides itself on being an inclusive culture, encompassing all nationalities, it is in a prime position to utilize its assets to promote universal values and interests around the world. Furthermore, the United States’ collective culture as expressed in film, music, education, science, and business, gives it the winning advantage of incorporating effective soft power to targeted countries. However, the key to its effectiveness lies in nuances to promote certain ideas without being directly overt.

Arguably, since the end of the First World War, the United States has been at the helm of technological advancement and modernity. While the United States exports all

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Eisenstadt, “The Limits of Iran’s Soft Power,” The Iran Primer, United States Institute of Peace. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/mar/22/limits-iran's-soft-power> (March 4, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power - The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 11.

things American around the world, some countries only choose elements from them, and others outwardly reject them. As Nye writes, “It is much too simple to equate globalization and Americanization. Other cultures contribute mightily to global connection.”<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, “American culture is deconstructed and re-constructed into the everyday experience of the people. American popular culture is not the monopoly of Americans; it is a medium through which people around the world constantly reorganize their individual and collective identities.”<sup>8</sup>

Nicholas J. Cull of the University of Southern California contends that countries should embrace soft power cautiously or risk their audience becoming wary of their true intentions. Overemphasizing positive national traits may backfire into ridicule. Cull states that “In the context of soft power, this mockery is leveled against countries whose public diplomacy degenerates into propaganda.”<sup>9</sup> Cull’s significant point is that soft power is not interpreted uniformly across all cultures. Every nation has its own set of tastes and cultural preferences. For example, American movies may be welcomed by the Iranian public while American fashion may not. Cull concludes that a country must take into account that “when attempting to deploy soft power, your opinion isn’t important; your audience’s is. Therefore, those working on soft power campaigns must be able to step

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>8</sup> Masako Notoji, “Cultural Transformation of John Philip Sousa and Disneyland in Japan,” in Wagnleitner and May, *Here, There, and Everywhere*, (Salzburg, 2000), 225.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas J. Cull, “Why Protecting Soft Power is So Hard to Do,” *Russia Direct* under “Opinions,” June 14, 2013. <http://www.russia-direct.org/content/why-projecting-soft-power-so-hard-do> (accessed March 4, 2014).

outside their own cultural context and look at their country from a foreigner's perspective."<sup>10</sup>

A number of politicians and scholars have the misperception that soft power is the only tool for foreign policy initiatives. In 2003, Nye developed the term "smart power" as the combination of "hard"<sup>11</sup> and soft power resources into effective strategies."<sup>12</sup> In 2009, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "America cannot solve the most pressing problems on its own, and the world cannot solve them without America... We must use what has been called 'smart power,' the full range of tools at our disposal."<sup>13</sup>

However, while smart power can be a useful foreign policy instrument, in the case of Iran, an emphasis on effective soft power at this time is needed. Considering that "People abroad saw the U.S. as a 'been there done that' country"<sup>14</sup> -- Iran provides ripe territory where the opposite can be true due to the readiness of youth to engage the outside world. Country-branding expert Tom Buncle says, "Especially in places like the Middle East, where there's this deep psychological conflict between the delights of an American lifestyle and the politics of the U.S., you can't change all the negative

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Nye defines hard power as using tactics such as war, coercion, sanctions, force, and threats to achieve a foreign policy objective.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph S. Nye., Jr. *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 22-23.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph S. Nye., Jr. "Get Smart-Combining Hard and Soft Power," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2009 under "Features," <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/node/65163> (accessed March 1, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Michael Scaturro, "Rebranding America: Can the U.S. Sell Itself to International Tourists?" *The Atlantic*, January 14, 2014, under "Global," <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/01/rebranding-america-can-the-us-sell-itself-to-international-tourists/283061/> (accessed on January 14, 2014).

perceptions with a marketing campaign. But you can speak to those who are well-disposed to the U.S.”<sup>15</sup> John Kester, representing the United Nations’ tourism division, says that despite the former animosities between the U.S. and Middle Eastern countries, there is “a love-hate relationship, and yet many people would want to travel to the U.S., despite the hassles.” He notes, “The Middle East isn’t a large market right now, but that could certainly change in the future.”<sup>16</sup> As *New York Times* journalist Carol Giacomo recently wrote from Iran in December 2013, “There is no doubt that many Iranians, especially young Iranians, want to engage with America and are listening to what the country and its leaders have to say. It is an opportunity Washington should not squander.”<sup>17</sup> The United States must seize this opportunity to use the tools of soft power through its public diplomacy to achieve greater aims.

### **America & Propaganda**

In recent history, one of the best definitions of propaganda is given by Walter Isaacson, whose vast media experience includes being the President of CNN, Managing Editor of *Time Magazine*, and more notably, the head of the Broadcasting Board of Governors that leads U.S. international broadcasting to 43 languages to over 100 million viewers around the world. Isaacson describes the Declaration of Independence, the founding document of the United States, as a work of propaganda. He notes that it is “an exercise in public diplomacy intended to enlist other countries to the cause. If you are

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Carol Giacomo, “How Young Iranians View America,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2014 under “The Opinion Pages-Taking Note,” [http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/13/how-young-iranians-view-america/?\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&ref=opinion&\\_r=2](http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/13/how-young-iranians-view-america/?_php=true&_type=blogs&ref=opinion&_r=2) (accessed March 1, 2014).

trying to persuade people to join with you, there are three general methods. You can coerce them with threats, convince them by pointing out their own interests or entice them by appealing to their ideals.”<sup>18</sup>

Propaganda as an activity has been in existence since humankind. The etymology of the word propaganda stems from the efforts of missionaries and other religious figures to convert people to their faith. According to the 1937 *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, propaganda is “in the broadest sense ... the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations. These representations may take spoken, written, pictorial, or musical form.”<sup>19</sup> It further notes, “the term propaganda is reserved for the spreading of subversive, debatable, or merely novel attitudes. If deliberation implies the consideration of a problem without predisposition to promote any particular solution, propaganda is concerned with eliciting such predispositions.”<sup>20</sup> The task of a propagandist is to “intensify attitudes favorable to his purposes, to reverse obstructive attitudes, to win the indifferent or at least to prevent them from being antagonistic.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it aims to alter behavior and thinking; maintain a status quo; justify sacrifices allegedly taken on behalf of the people; as well as pass on social inheritance -- which means generations within a same social stratum with shared experiences will take the same positions as their predecessors.

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<sup>18</sup> Walter Isaacson, “A Declaration of Mutual Dependence,” *New York Times*, July 4, 2004 under “Archives,” <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/04/opinion/a-declaration-of-mutual-dependence.html> (accessed March 1, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Harold Lasswell, “Propaganda,” *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1937, vol 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 524.

Propaganda has been a key strategic tool throughout the ages. The United States has used propaganda since the American Revolution when it sought overseas support for its war of independence from Great Britain. During the First World War, England via its War Propaganda Bureau launched an effective propaganda campaign in the United States against Germany. This bureau was responsible for spreading literature, radio broadcasts, and other highly manipulative information across the Allied forces and neutral countries to gain more support for British cause. It successfully managed to sway the United States to break diplomatic ties with Germany.<sup>22</sup> As Philip M. Taylor states, the First World War was “the first ‘total war,’” encompassing all facets of contemporary warfare. According to Taylor, “It was between 1914 and 1918 that the wholesale employment of propaganda as an organized weapon of modern warfare served to transform its meaning into something more sinister.”<sup>23</sup>

When Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany in 1917, he established the Committee on Public Information (CPI), the first U.S. government propaganda agency that was served at its peak by 150,000 employees.<sup>24</sup> As the historian David F. Krugler notes, “In order to make the world safe for democracy, Wilson recognized that the United States needed to explain its aim to the peoples of the world, not just to their leaders and diplomats, and had to unify the ethnically diverse American people in order to support an

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<sup>22</sup> George G. Bruntz, *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918* (New York: Arno Press), 20-30.

<sup>23</sup> Philip M. Taylor, “Propaganda in International Politics, 1919-1939,” *The Origins of the Second World War*, ed. Patrick Finney.

<sup>24</sup> John Brown, “The Anti-Propaganda Tradition in the United States,” Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/19.htm> (accessed February 28, 2014).

abrupt end to nearly three years of eroding but still popular neutrality.”<sup>25</sup> This agency, whose work ended in 1919, was responsible for communications coming to and fro the United States in an effort to monitor all that was being circulated about the war. CPI used a variety of media tools, including pamphlets, public speaking engagements, as well as films and arts to propagate the designed messages for war support, democracy, influencing international media, and counter enemy propaganda.<sup>26</sup> However, by the end of the First World War, public sentiment in the United States grew critical of the CPI. According to former diplomat John Brown, “Propaganda experts in the post-war period saw Wilson as a master of the trade. Harold Lasswell, author of the classic *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, wrote that Wilson was ‘the great generalissimo of the propaganda front.’”<sup>27</sup> Brown notes that anti-propagandists, many of them intellectuals, criticized propaganda, accusing it of dishonesty, violence to language, spreading of hatred, distortion of history, and incompatibility with democracy.<sup>28</sup>

During the Second World War, President Franklin D. Roosevelt by Executive Order in 1942 established the Office of War Information (OWI).<sup>29</sup> Roosevelt felt it was

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<sup>25</sup> David F. Krugler, *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Stewart Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918*, (San Diego: Progressive Press, 2009), 214-226.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/19.htm> (accessed February 28, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Executive Order 9182 Establishing the Office of War Information," June 13, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16273> (accessed February 28, 2014).

imperative to have “an active part in winning the war and in laying the foundations for a better postwar world.”<sup>30</sup> He appointed a former CBS journalist, Elmer Davis, as the OWI’s director in order to use a journalistic model for disseminating wartime propaganda messages through news bulletins and movies.<sup>31</sup> In 1942, just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, OWI established Voice of America (VOA) as the official international broadcasting division in the United States government. In an effort to convey real and truthful news, VOA went on a hiring campaign that sought journalists to build its organization. To this day, it is in operation, broadcasting to a global audience of more than 134 million people in over 40 languages.<sup>32</sup> Currently, Voice of America is transmitting to Iran via Persian News Network (PNN) formerly known as the Persian Service, since the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

Ultimately, due to Congressional pressure, the main OWI was defunded and shut down by Executive Order, with all its assets turned over to the Department of State. However, Voice of America continued to thrive. Brown notes that, “In 1948, concerned that the American public could be the victim of propaganda produced by its own government, the Congress passed the Smith-Mundt Act, which forbade the domestic

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<sup>30</sup> Allan Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

<sup>31</sup> Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Voice of America, “Inside VOA,” *VOA History*. [http://www.insidevoa.com/section/voa\\_history/2330.html](http://www.insidevoa.com/section/voa_history/2330.html) (accessed on February 28, 2014).

dissemination of U.S. government materials intended for foreign audiences.”<sup>33</sup> In 2013, the National Defense Authorization Act overturned this sixty-four year prohibition.

The word propaganda both as a word and as an activity continues to be controversial. As the late U.S. State Department official, Richard Holbrooke, stated in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, “Call it public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or -- if you really want to be blunt -- propaganda. But whatever it is called, defining what this war is really about...will be of decisive and historic importance.”<sup>34</sup> Despite Holbrooke’s statement, equating propaganda and public diplomacy, and despite an overlapping interconnection between these two activities, it is vitally important to recognize they are not one in the same, as we shall see in the rest of this chapter.

### **Public Diplomacy**

As Ambassador Laurence Pope succinctly stated in March 2014, “Public diplomacy is an ancient art.”<sup>35</sup> Coined in 1965 by Dean Edmund A. Gullion of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, “Public diplomacy ... deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign

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<sup>33</sup> Brown, <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/19.htm> (accessed February 28, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Richard Holbrooke, “Get the Message Out,” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2001 under “Opinions” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/13/AR2010121305410.html> (accessed February 16, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Donald M. Bishop, “Interview: Ambassador Laurence Pope on the State Department, the Foreign Service, and Public Diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Public Diplomacy Council*, March 5, 2014 <http://www.publicdiplomacycouncil.org/commentaries/03-05-14/interview-ambassador-laurence-pope-state-department-foreign-service-and-public> (accessed March 11, 2014).

policies.”<sup>36</sup> Gullion, who was also an accomplished career ambassador, suggests that public diplomacy is overarching and it does not follow a linear trajectory. The Fletcher School’s Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy expands this idea further: “It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications.”<sup>37</sup> About the time public diplomacy was coined diplomat John Lackey Brown offered this characterization of the activity: “The Cultural Affairs Officer soon comes to realize that his job is really a form of love-making and that making love is never really successful unless both partners are participating.”<sup>38</sup>

Public diplomacy does not directly or overtly target its audience. It is and it should be more strategically designed in order to reach its desired political result. The key attribute of public diplomacy is to be able to understand a foreign public’s psyche and to be able to apply and to be able to apply foreign policy objectives with greater consideration of a foreign public’s mindset, history, culture, and behavior. Nicholas J. Cull identifies key characteristics of public diplomacy as the following: effective

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<sup>36</sup> The Edward R. Murrow Center Of Public Diplomacy, *What is Public Diplomacy?*, The Fletcher School- Tufts University, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy> (accessed March 5, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> John Lackey Brown, “But What Do You Do?” *American Diplomacy*, September 2002 under “Archives,” [http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives\\_roll/2002\\_07-09/brown\\_cao/brown\\_cao.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives_roll/2002_07-09/brown_cao/brown_cao.html) (accessed on March 14, 2013).

listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange, international broadcasting, including psychological warfare which Cull describes as “a parallel activity that shares some key features of public diplomacy, but which has to be administered beyond a rigidly maintained firewall.”<sup>39</sup>

Judith McHale, the former Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs under the Obama administration, stressed the need to revamp how the United States interacts with a young global demographic that is digitally growing, obtaining nonstop information and news at its fingertips. She said, “The communications revolution that has rocketed around the world has had an impact on the attitudes, behaviors, and aspirations of people everywhere. Public opinion is influencing foreign governments and shaping world affairs to an unprecedented degree.”<sup>40</sup> The fact that all forms of communication and connectivity have exploded globally in the recent years not only enables but also necessitates a more advanced level of worldwide interactions.

In March 2010, McHale went before Congress with a new twenty-first-century public diplomacy strategy that would “support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and government of the United States and citizens of the

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<sup>39</sup> Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*. *USC Center of Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School*, 2009. <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/publications/perspectives/CPDPerspectivesLessons.pdf> (accessed March 8, 2014) 10.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Future of U.S. Public Diplomacy, Testimony Judith McHale”, March 10, 2010 under “Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs,” <http://www.state.gov/r/remarks/2010/138283.htm> (accessed March 8, 2014).

rest of the world.”<sup>41</sup> The objectives McHale presented to Congress were the following: form the narrative; expand people-to-people relationships; resist violent extremism; make better-informed policy-making and resources deployed for top policy priorities.<sup>42</sup> The U.S. State Department’s newest recruit as Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, former media executive Richard Stengel, enters the government with a special exemption that “lets him communicate directly with journalists he’d otherwise be barred from contacting.”<sup>43</sup> This privilege would enable the United States’ top public diplomacy official to engage the media in a more open and targeted fashion to inform/influence key publics both domestically and internationally. The waiver indicates “Mr. Stengel may be asked to weigh in on high-level strategic decisions about which media outlets are best suited for certain access or interviews with Department officials, and on how best to frame news coverage of Department policies, operations, and activities.”<sup>44</sup>

In recent years, there are indications that the U.S. government is slowly adopting the new media forms of engagement. The crucial job Stengel holds will be to enhance such role but more importantly, to repair the U.S. image and its support for controversial foreign policy objectives. As journalist Jonathan Kaplan writes, “The White House will expect him to implement some policies, and foreign policy crises will force some

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Jim McElhatton, “Ex-Time Executive Gets Waiver to Communicate with the Press,” *The Washington Times* under “Politics”, March 4, 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/mar/4/ex-time-executive-gets-ethics-waiver-to-communicat/> (accessed March 5, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

development, but Stengel will have to hold his own bold prescriptions, too. That's a difficult balancing act," especially since he is working with the "largest bureaucracies on the planet"<sup>45</sup> and must gain the attention and support of the Secretary of State and the White House, including on key public diplomacy issues pertaining to Iran. He must initiate a well-calibrated and multi-platform campaign to assuage the Iranians that the intentions of the United States are benign and can serve the interests of the Iranian people despite doubts about the true motivation of the United States.

### **Are Propaganda & Public Diplomacy Different?**

While holding common attributes, propaganda and public diplomacy are still different. In an interview with forty-year veteran of the Voice of America, Alex Belida, he acknowledged the blurred lines and nuances they convey and lack of understanding between the two concepts. He said that "Propaganda has such a negative connotation. But I suspect for many people, the term 'public diplomacy' is merely a replacement for propaganda." Belida added that "Good journalism brings audiences; propaganda loses them. The example is Radio Moscow during the Soviet era -- officials spent massive amounts of money to make it a global super-station. Yet no one (or very few) listened because the broadcasts were so clearly slanted to reflect a pro-Moscow, anti-U.S. line."<sup>46</sup> According to Brown, neither public diplomacy nor propaganda is altruistic. Both essentially serve a country's interests. However, he differentiates the methods used by

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<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Kaplan, "Big Adjustment - Five Things Richard Stengel Should Know About His New Job," *Foreign Policy*, February 23, 2014 under "Argument," [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/02/23/five\\_things\\_richard\\_stengel\\_should\\_know\\_about\\_his\\_new\\_job](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/02/23/five_things_richard_stengel_should_know_about_his_new_job) (accessed March 5, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Alex Belida, Interview by author, Washington D.C., March 3, 2014.

these activities. He writes that public diplomacy at its best: “provides a truthful, factual exposition and explication of nation’s foreign policy and way of life; encourages international understanding; listens and engages in dialogue; objectively displays national achievements overseas, including the arts.” In contrast, he argues that propaganda at its worst “forces its messages on an audience; demonizes elements of the outside world and claims the nation it glorifies can do no wrong; simplifies complex issues, including history; and misrepresents the truth and deliberately lies.”<sup>47</sup> To put it in psychological perspective, in public diplomacy, if the targeted group feels that the message and its intentions mesh, it is considered honest. On the other hand, “the worst propaganda leads audiences to believe that its content does not reveal its true purpose, and therefore it is dishonest.”<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, a professional propagandist is aware that “when a single lie is exposed, the entire campaign is jeopardized. Dishonesty is discouraged, but on strategic, not moral, grounds.”<sup>49</sup> As propaganda expert Lasswell stressed, “Propaganda as a mere tool is no more moral or immoral than a pump handle.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> John Brown, “Public Diplomacy and Propaganda: Their Differences,” *American Diplomacy*, June 22, 2008 [www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2008./0709/comm/brown\\_pudiplprop.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2008./0709/comm/brown_pudiplprop.html) (accessed March 5, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Aaron Delwiche, “Propaganda,” *Propaganda Critic* under “War Propaganda,” [http://www.propagandacritic.com/articles/ww1\\_demons.html](http://www.propagandacritic.com/articles/ww1_demons.html) (accessed March 5, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> Harold Lasswell, “Propaganda,” *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1937, vol 11.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCISE HISTORY OF U.S. – IRANIAN RELATIONS

Iranians are members of an ancient civilization as opposed to simply the citizens of a nation. It is fundamental to recognize that fact. The character of the Iranian people comes from centuries of history. As Michael Axworthy, Director of the Centre for Persian and Iranian Studies at the University of Exeter, notes: “Iranian history can be seen as a microcosm of human history as a whole: empires, revolutions, invasions, art, architecture, warriors, charismatic leaders, and the blackest villains.”<sup>1</sup> A grasp of Iranian history is vital in comprehending the role Iran plays in current international politics and its historically complicated relationship with the United States. To be effective, U.S. public diplomacy must consider the historical experience of other countries. This chapter will provide an overview of Iranian history and put into perspective how Iranians developed their identity by focusing on culture, religion, politics, and their struggles with modernity.

#### **The Empire and its Groove**

The Persian Empire spans over thousands of years and established itself as a major power. It stretched from Egypt to Central Asia and its rich and multi-ethnic civilization had a vast and strong army, a monotheistic religion known as Zoroastrianism, and well-organized governance.<sup>2</sup> It has survived and often prospered throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran – A History of the Islamic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), xix.

<sup>2</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 3.

centuries despite foreign invasions by Greeks, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, Romans -- Iran, as it is called today, is a major regional power.

The Persian Empire was not one to cower in the face of conflict. When the Arabs invaded in their attempt to spread Islam, it took several centuries before the Persian Empire fully embraced the new religion. Moreover, the Persians still maintained their heritage and language, despite adopting Islam and some Arab influences into their culture.<sup>3</sup> Iranians were mostly Sunnis until the arrival of the Safavid dynasty (1501 to 1722), which unified the empire by establishing the Shi'ism doctrine of Islam as the official religion. Today, Shi'ism is often associated with Iran given that it is the largest Shi'ite country. Iranian religious centers are located in the holy cities of Qom and Mashhad both significant in the birth and evolution of Shi'ism. In addition, Shi'a influences of Sufism in eastern Iran played a key role in preparing the people for the advent of the formal Shi'ism introduced during the Safavid dynasty, which lasted through the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Today, as in the past, Shi'a Islam is part of the Usuli School of Ithna-Ashari (Twelver) Shi'a Islam, which is the mainstream of Twelvers to which the majority of Iranian Shi'as belong. This leads non-Shi'ite states in the region to make propaganda claims that Iran is a pariah country that instigates sectarian tensions in the Middle East.

During the Qajar dynasty (1796-1925), Iran lost a great deal of its sovereignty due to the Treaty of Turkmenchai, which confirmed Persia's loss of all its Caucasus territory

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,10.

<sup>4</sup> Said A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam - Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in The Shi'ite Iran From Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

and granted economic and extraterritorial rights to Russian citizens.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Treaty of Golestan resulted in the inclusion of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Daghestan into the Russian Empire. The Persians considered these losses as a huge national misfortune.

Pressured by nationalistic revolutionaries, the Qajar dynasty was transformed into a constitutional monarchy, with its first *Majles* (Parliament) convening in October 1906. It adopted a progressive constitution modeled after Belgium's. As Pollack notes, "this was a searing experience for Iranians. In the minds of many people, it had been mounted to seek redress for and bring an end to depredations of a corrupt monarchy and rapacious foreign interests. Democracy was not the aim of the revolutionaries but their method. Democracy was simply a tool in the arsenal of nationalism."<sup>6</sup>

In 1908, a British explorer, William D'Arcy, discovered oil in southern Iran. Due to the concessions made in territorial controls between the British and Russians. Thus, the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 divided the country into two spheres of influence, although Iran remained a sovereign state.<sup>7</sup> By the time of the First World War, Iran was in the front lines of a so-called conflict of influence wars with Turkish Ottomans, British, and Russian military forces crossing through the Iranian territories competing for control. By the end of the war, the British achieved largest grasp over the region.<sup>8</sup> With the central power vacuum caused by the instability of the Qajar government, Reza Khan, a powerful commander of the Cossack Brigade, the elite military force, became a major

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<sup>5</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ervand Abarhamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 25.

player in the political scene. He instigated a military coup in 1921, deposing the last Qajar Shah, Ahmad Shah Qajar, and establishing the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925.<sup>9</sup>

The Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) came in a period of modernization and industrialization throughout the region, particularly in Turkey. The fervently nationalistic Reza Shah favored a secular, unified state, free from internal divisions and foreign meddling, that did not include a political role for the religious elites, whom he viewed as “retrogressive and the *ulama* as backward-looking obstacles to progress.”<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979) espoused a secularist project that attempted to send religion back into the enclave of the private sphere. For him, Islam embodied an impediment to Iran’s pursuit of national identity.<sup>11</sup> To this day, in Iran, the dichotomy between religion and nationalism is in a continual flux, defining an empire concerned with secular power but not always religious.

### **Roots of Mistrust**

In order to counterbalance British and Soviet influences, Reza Shah, a proponent of increased German commercial enterprise in his country, made Germany Iran’s largest trading partner. Reza Shah abdicated and was sent into exile by the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in August 1941. If only symbolically at the time, his young twenty-one-year-old son, Muhammad Reza Shah, ascended to the throne. The Second World War

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>10</sup> Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of New Iran* (University of Michigan: I.B. Tauris, 2003) 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13.

marked the beginning of significant contact between Iranians and Americans, who shared military resources and aligned themselves in the Allied fight against the Germans.<sup>12</sup>

The evolving Iranian-American relations proved to be culturally complex. In cables between the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the lack of manners and the cultural insensitivity of Americans towards Iranian citizens were underscored because of fears that it would backfire against Americans.<sup>13</sup> After the war, Iran was one of the poorest countries in the world<sup>14</sup> with the economic situation worsening due to a bad harvest, which triggered a massive depression and caused civil unrest.<sup>15</sup> As the economy plummeted, many of the Shah's earlier oil concessions to the British were criticized and led to public demonstrations.

In 1951, the administration of the charismatic Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh nationalized the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. His empathy for nationalistic fervor helped him gain popular support. As the British diplomat Sir Sam Falle noted, "He was sincere, honest, patriotic, nonviolent, brilliant, and the people loved him, wanted him and saw him as a sort of Iranian Mahatma Gandhi."<sup>16</sup> As enthusiasm for Mossadegh swept throughout the country, the Shah fled to Europe. Angered by Mossadegh's nationalization of oil resources and fearing that support for him could lead

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<sup>12</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 40.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Yonah and Allan Nanes, ed., *The United States and Iran* (University Publications of America, 1980), 62-69.

<sup>14</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 56.

<sup>16</sup> Sam Falle, *My Lucky Life* (London: The Book Guild, 1986), 75.

to communism, the United States and Great Britain allegedly orchestrated driving him out of office and reinstated the Shah. The 1953 event was a momentous one, as the Iranian scholar, Ervand Abrahamian, stated, “These twenty-eight months form a defining fault line not only for Iranian history but also in the country’s relations with both Britain and the United States. It is often said that major wars and revolutions carve in public memory clear defining moments separating ‘before’ from ‘after.’ The same can also be said of 1953 with regard to the public memory and political culture of Iran.”<sup>17</sup>

The roots of anti-Americanism in Iran were planted during the tenure of Mossadegh. In the words of historian James A. Bill, “Fiercely nationalistic, the movement of the 1950s was anti-Western in tone with special antipathy reserved for the British. But even in 1953 signs of strident anti-Americanism were visible. Slogans such as the one labeling the U.S. embassy a ‘nest of spies’ were already shouted in the streets of Tehran in 1953.”<sup>18</sup> The heavy-handed involvement of the United States and its collusion with the British made it lose respect and sympathy in Iran. As Bill points out the United States missed the chance, in the following two decades, to win over the Iranian people. “In the streets of Tehran in 1978 a constantly repeated slogan was ‘Death to the American Shah!’ In short, American policy between 1953 and 1978 emphasized a special relationship with the shah and his political elite.”<sup>19</sup> This created animosity and

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<sup>17</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup 1953, The CIA, And the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>18</sup> James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 96.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

mistrust toward the United States and its true intentions in Iran and in the greater Middle East.

Immediately prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution several major groups could be identified as anti-Pahlavi, including the activist *ulama* that pushed for more secular authority and was unwilling to collaborate with the government. This religious group, many of whose members had previously refrained from politics, now attacked the Shah's government on the grounds of injustice and dictatorship. The other two were major factions were urban militia, which had existed since the 1960s were the Marxist *Fadaiyan-e Khalq* and the Islamic leftist *Mujahedin-e Khalq*. The *Bazaaris* (merchants) and other opposition groups -- both religious and secular leftist -- covertly distributed anti-American and anti-regime materials. They were declared illegal and were forced to go underground. Once the first-democratically elected President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr was deposed in June 1981. The *Mujahedin-e Khalq* leader Massoud Rajavi and Bani-Sadr fled to Paris. It is doubtful that these critics of the regime would have been successful in achieving their goals if their activities had only remained within the religious classes and or the so-called "intellectual left" populations. It was only when the protests picked up momentum in the middle classes that the revolution truly materialized.<sup>20</sup>

### **Islamic Revolution: 1979**

Popular discontent intensified throughout the 1970s. By 1977 every faction of Iranian society felt alienated, giving rise to Ayatollah Khomeini (then in exile in Paris) and Islamic activists. In that year, the Shah and the Empress met with President Carter in

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<sup>20</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 88-126.

Washington leading to anti-Shah demonstrations in Tehran and by Iranian-Americans in front of the White House. Khomeini claimed there were secret dealings between the U.S. and the Shah to build American colonies outside of major Iranian cities, which the Iranian public began to believe.<sup>21</sup> Khomeini emphatically argued that the Pahlavi dynasty had “sold Iran’s soul to the West while promoting corruption, immorality, and oppression in Iran.”<sup>22</sup>

With Iranians divided and factionalized, civil unrest increasingly grew. As the leader of a brewing revolution, Khomeini was positioned at the right time and the right place. Immediately, all the opposition groups converged. Khomeini had become the unifying symbol, with the only common message that political change was essential and the Shah must leave. While protests raged, the Shah finally left Iran mid-February of 1979, paving the way for Khomeini to return from exile. The 1979 revolution ended 2,500 years of monarchy as the people of Iran demanded a democratically elected government. As the scholar Kenneth Pollack notes, “the United States’ greatest mistake was not failing to prevent his [Shah] fall but in following policies that made his fall so injurious to our interests.”<sup>23</sup>

The final debacle in U.S.-Iran relations, particularly from the American perspective, was the takeover of the American Embassy in Tehran. On November 4, 1979, a group nearly five hundred extremist students charged through the embassy gates

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<sup>21</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 233-239.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>23</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 137.

and held sixty-six American diplomats and Marines hostage.<sup>24</sup> By many accounts, the takeover was meant to be a short maneuvering tactic, but turned out to be a defining pivot in U.S.-Iranian relations for decades to come. For 444 days, American citizens watched the incessant media blitz surrounding the hostage crisis, awaiting the release of the fifty-two Americans remaining in captivity in Tehran. In the words of James Bill, the hostage crisis was a “central part of the post-revolutionary power struggle, and Washington’s actions became a daily factor in the complex domestic Iranian political equation.”<sup>25</sup> In 1981, with the Algiers Accord, the hostages were finally released and the United States declared a policy of nonintervention in Iran. By then, however, the U.S. had suspended oil imports from Iran and had frozen billions of Iranian assets.

The prominent French philosopher Michel Foucault praised the Iranian Revolution of 1979. A social theorist of power, knowledge and inequality, Foucault became the Western voice of what was occurring in Iran leading up to the revolution. He traveled there twice and met with Khomeini, marveling at his writings and concept of the Islamic movement. He hoped that the Iranian Revolution would express “a radical form of political spirituality for Iran and the broader Muslim world.”<sup>26</sup> As Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson note Foucault foresaw “the enormous power of the new discourse of militant Islam, not just for Iran, but globally. He showed that the new Islamist movement

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>25</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 295.

<sup>26</sup> Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 267.

aimed at a fundamental cultural, social, as well as political break with the modern Western world.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Iran-Iraq War: 1980-1988**

With Khomeini in power by 1979, Sunni-leader Saddam Hussein keenly watched the events unfold in neighboring Iraq. Saddam believed the southern province of Iran, Khuzestan, which contained vast oil fields and a sizable Arab population, should be incorporated into greater Iraq. Considering Iran weak and destabilized, Saddam attacked it on September 22, 1980.<sup>28</sup> The invasion proved to be “one of the most incompetent military operations of the twentieth century.”<sup>29</sup> Despite having been taken by surprise by this invasion, Khomeini remobilized the ailing Iranian military and called for the “army of twenty million.”<sup>30</sup>

One of the darkest episodes between the U.S.-Iran relations was the missile firing upon an Iranian commercial airliner from the USS Vincennes in the Persian Gulf on July 3, 1988.<sup>31</sup> The captain on the U.S. warship maintained the airplane was an F-14. However, the United States military killed 290 passengers and crew onboard the scheduled Iran Air flight from Bandar Abbas to Dubai. To this day, the Iranian regime

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<sup>27</sup> Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault, Gender, and the Iranian Revolution: The Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>28</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 184-186.

<sup>29</sup> Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs, Iran the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 113.

<sup>30</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 186.

<sup>31</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 276.

refuses to believe that the incident was an accident.<sup>32</sup> As Michael Axworthy notes, “the conviction that the destruction of the airliner was deliberate helped to persuade the Iranian leadership that the U.S. would go to any lengths to prevent Iran winning the war.”<sup>33</sup> This war having begun at the heels of a revolution, continued for eight years with a million dead. A ceasefire was finally declared in August 1988; on June 5, 1989 Khomeini died from a massive heart attack.<sup>34</sup>

### **Khatami Era: 1997-2005 – The Seeds of Reform**

After years of political wrangling between conservatives and reformists, the election of reformist Mohammad Khatami with high voter turnout, radically changed the political mood in 1997. Disenchantment with the government had grown because many promises of the 1979 revolution never fulfilled. Inflation caused record prices. Unemployment was at 30 percent<sup>35</sup> and crime, drugs, and corruption were rampant. Despite not being the religious establishment’s favored candidate, Khatami won the presidency with 70 percent of the 80 percent voter turnout.<sup>36</sup> His campaign message of “change” galvanized the country. As Kenneth Pollack writes, “The unexpected victory

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 261.

<sup>35</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook 1997* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 328.

immediately touched off a debate in Washington over what Khatami wanted to do and would be able to do, and how the United States should react.”<sup>37</sup>

Khatami’s election catapulted the country into experiencing freedoms not enjoyed prior to 1979, including in media, culture, and the arts. Within the first year of his presidency, 740 newspapers and journals were being published in Iran.<sup>38</sup> The highly regarded Iranian cinema was reinvigorated. More importantly in terms of diplomacy, his cabinet was comprised of many liberals favoring a rapprochement with the West. Extending an olive branch to the world and particularly to the United States, Khatami called for the Dialogue of Civilizations, a refutation of Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*.<sup>39</sup> In a string of interviews with news organizations, Khatami underscored that a confident Iran was looking forward to mutual respect and understanding with the United States. While many in the American political and intelligence circles expressed skepticism about these comments, they were also challenged on how to handle this new diplomatic opening.

In the late the 1990s, the second Clinton administration slowly began to engage Iran through official channels via Swiss diplomats, the easing of visa restrictions, and economic incentives. With social unrest including among the young bubbling in Tehran, Clinton wanted “to ratchet up the level of U.S. support for Khatami in hope that this would allow him to make a breakthrough in relations with America.”<sup>40</sup> He wanted to

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<sup>37</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 313.

<sup>38</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 335.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>40</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 322.

make sure that Khatami had the “ammunition he needed to convince Iran’s hard-liners to accept the start of a gradual rapprochement.”<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, due to tense Iranian domestic politics in July 1999, the incipient global dialogue stalled. Student demonstrations in response to the closure of a popular reformist newspaper incited revolutionary forces to savagely beat and kill many protestors. Demonstrations raged in the streets with calls for Khamenei to resign and for Khatami to stand up for the people who elected him. The protests spread throughout major cities, with Khatami condemning both the protests and the violence. This created great political discontent and the conservative hardliners blamed foreign intervention for the national unrest. As a result, Khatami was forced to take a more muted stance. Khatami, however, managed to secure reelection in June 2001. He won nearly 80 percent of the 68 percent voter turnout, which still produced a higher total number of votes supporting him than for his first term.<sup>42</sup> Pollack notes that many in Washington felt “Khatami’s election was the start of a counterrevolution in Iran, while others argued that he was nothing but ‘old wine in new bottles’ – just another revolutionary mullah, but one with a nicer smile.”<sup>43</sup>

A glimmer of U.S.-Iranian solidarity occurred after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. The terrorist group, Al-Qaeda, attacked the United States with hijacked U.S. airplanes crashing into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing almost 3000 people. Iranian leaders from the conservative and reformist parties, mainly Khamenei and Khatami, stood side-by-side with the Americans and condemning the horrific attack, in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>42</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 354.

<sup>43</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 312.

contrast to other parts of the Middle East that felt jubilation and believed justice was served.<sup>44</sup> Despite that moment of solidarity, in President George W. Bush's State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, "Khatami was rewarded by inclusion of Iran with Iraq and North Korea in what Bush called the Axis of Evil."<sup>45</sup> The foreign policy expert Barbara Slavin noted in 2007 that apparently the controversial phrase was added to the speech moments before it was delivered, without consideration of the effect it would have on the long-term U.S.-Iranian relationship.<sup>46</sup> Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice claimed in her memoir that the phrase was inserted by the speechwriter but no objections were raised by the State Department and the Pentagon. Rice writes, "So the next morning, when the media focused almost exclusively on the phrase, I was stunned and so was the President. We had for all intents and purposes, some believed, declared war on North Korea, Iran, and Iraq."<sup>47</sup> "Admittedly," she adds, "the harsh language suggested that negotiation was impossible. How could you negotiate with members of an 'Axis of Evil'?" The phrase helped brand the Bush administration as radical and bellicose, given to hot rhetoric and a preference for military force.<sup>48</sup>

During Khatami's presidential term, in 2003, another missed opportunity for the two countries occurred. The representative of U.S. interests in Iran, the Swiss

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<sup>44</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 355.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S. and the Twisted Path to Confrontation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007) 17.

<sup>47</sup> Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor* (New York: Random House, 2011) 150-151.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 151

ambassador, Tim Guldemann, helped in exchange of communication between the two governments. Trita Parsi, President of National Iranian Council, states that “At the strategic level, the Iranians wanted to reach a long-term understanding with the United States by putting a halt to hostile American behavior such as the ‘Axis of Evil’ rhetoric.”<sup>49</sup> Guldemann, the messenger, presented the proposal known as the “Grand Bargain” to Washington in which Iranians offered key concessions such as ending active opposition to Israel in return for the end of the isolation of Iran by the United States, as well as dropping sanctions and any measure taken for a regime change.<sup>50</sup> Some in Washington welcomed this gesture, but due to the Bush administration’s lack of interest, the “Grand Bargain” fell on silent ears. A reaction later considered a mistake by those eager to engage in diplomatic rapprochement with Iran. According to Pollack, the debate on how to deal with Iran “would rage in Washington until long after Khatami, he actually wanted to make fundamental change but had been unable to do so.”<sup>51</sup> In the end, Khatami became a popular and visionary clerical figure who despite domestic and international support, was viewed as a powerless president, able only to plant the seeds of reform after decades of conservative rule.

### **Ahmadinejad Era: 2005-2012 – Rigid Conservatism**

As the political effervescence of the Khatami era began to fade the conservative factions of Iran reasserted its power by bringing Iran back its Islamic roots. The election

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<sup>49</sup> Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the U.S.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 246.

<sup>50</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 360.

<sup>51</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 312.

of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former mayor of Tehran, to the presidency for two terms was as unexpected as was Khatami's presidential landslide victories. On June 17, 2005, 63 percent of Iran's 47 million eligible voters came to the polls.<sup>52</sup>

Ahmadinejad's platform of hard-line conservatism was rooted in his humble background. He truly believed that Western influences were not needed in Iran. He campaigned as a proud member of the Iranian working class and with promises of reinvigorating the economy. As Axworthy notes, when Ahmadinejad came to power, "it was clear that there would be a hardening of Iranian attitudes. Iran no longer felt as vulnerable as it had in 2003; the occupation of Iraq was not going well for the U.S., and Iran was already in an influential position there."<sup>53</sup>

From the onset, Ahmadinejad's provocative policy and rhetoric toward the United States was contrary to the conciliatory steps of Khatami. Ahmadinejad's controversial remark about wiping Israel off the map was viewed as a direct threat to regional peace.<sup>54</sup> With its president antagonizing leaders around the world as well as the Iranian people, Iran fell into a spiral of diplomatic isolation. Despite a worldwide uproar against the

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<sup>52</sup> Siamak Namazi, "The Iranian Presidential Elections: Who Voted, Why, How & Does it Matter?" *Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars- Middle East Program- Occasional Paper Series* (Summer 2005) <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/mepopsummer051.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 384.

<sup>54</sup> R.K. Ramazani, *Independence Without Freedom- Iran's Foreign Policy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2013), 200.

restart of uranium enrichment that was once suspended during Khatami's tenure, Ahmadinejad insisted that the nuclear program was solely meant for peaceful purposes.<sup>55</sup>

During Ahmadinejad's eight years in office, social reforms were neglected, and he began to implement laws that limited the rights of women in education, sports, and other fields. Despite the fact, that in Iran, unlike other parts of the Middle East, women are a major political force. Women make up one-third of practicing doctors, 60 percent of civil servants, and 80 percent of teachers.<sup>56</sup> Leading up to the June 2009 elections, women across the Islamic world, including from Iran, started the famous one million signatures campaign in demand for equal rights. Throughout Ahmadinejad's presidency, as Haleh Esfandiari<sup>57</sup>, Director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholar points out, "under hardliners, women generally fared poorly on several fronts. The momentum for change built up over the previous sixteen years virtually evaporated."<sup>58</sup> Esfandiari also notes that in the June 2009 presidential campaigns, thousands of women supported the two leading reformist candidates who were vocal backers of women's rights.<sup>59</sup> However, despite all the strong support from the women and men combined, a contentious issue of the disputed 2009 election was that the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>56</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 397.

<sup>57</sup> Haleh Esfandiari was detained in Iran and held in solitary confinement from May 8, 2007 until August 21, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Haleh Esfandiari, "The Women's Movement" The Iran Primer, United States Institute of Peace. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/womens-movement> (accessed February 28, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

votes were improperly counted and/or the electoral process was rigged and ultimately did not result into the presidential candidate they had hoped for.

The diplomatic tables of a renewed attempt at reconciliation finally turned, late in 2008, with the election of President Barack Obama. In March 21, 2009, Obama sent a *Norouz* (Persian New Year) televised message directly to the Iranian people, the first such communication from a U.S. president in thirty years. As Ruhi Ramazani, Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia, stated, “His remarks about the greatness of Iranian culture were music to the ears of the people of Iran. Khamenei, however, responded with a litany of Iranian grievances against the United States. More specifically, he said he did not wish to prejudge the intentions of the new president, whom, he said, he did not know; but he demanded action to match Obama’s ‘slogan of change’.”<sup>60</sup>

While the Iranian government was contemplating the best manner to engage, leading up to the June 12, 2009 election the political and social mood in Iran began to swiftly change. The two main candidates in the presidential election of that year were Ahmadinejad and the leading opposition candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi. The election became one of the most controversial in recent history. Despite the huge support for the opposition candidate throughout the country, the official results showed Ahmadinejad winning sixty-three percent of the vote.<sup>61</sup> Demonstrations gripped the country as protesters flocked the streets wearing Mousavi’s campaign color of green, condemning the evidently rigged election results. Within days, the Green Movement amassed over

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<sup>60</sup> Ramazani, *Independence Without Freedom*, 201.

<sup>61</sup> Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 402.

three million people in a peaceful manifestation.<sup>62</sup> Over the next few months, the Green Movement evolved from disgruntled and disillusioned voters to citizens trying to reclaim the original promises of 1979 revolution.<sup>63</sup> Four years later on June 14, 2013, many such voters selected Hassan Rouhani as president in an election in which over 50 percent of the approximately 72 percent of the 50 million eligible voters participated.<sup>64</sup>

Today the United States still has no official diplomatic relations with Iran. Arguably this chapter suggests, throughout the years, the Iran government needed an external enemy in order to have a pretext for the domestic repression of democratic groups, an enemy that needs to be perpetuated to permanently bind the regime to its revolutionary supporters.

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<sup>62</sup> Abbas Milani, "The Green Movement," The Iran Primer, United States Institute of Peace. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/green-movement> (accessed February 28, 2014).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "Hassan Rouhani Wins Iranian Presidential Election," *BBC*, June 15, 2013, under Mid-East, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22916174> (accessed March 8, 2014).

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCISE CURRENT STRATEGY – UNCLE SAM VERSUS THE AYATOLLAH

#### Uncle Sam Style

The propaganda warfare between the United States and Iran has existed for over three decades. Since 1979, U.S. officials have continually stressed that the Islamic Republic of Iran was a hostile regime at the brink of nuclear capability that will soon make an actual bomb. Officials declared that such a capacity is “unacceptable” and to prevent it, all options, including military intervention, were on the table. In the late seventies before he was deposed, the Shah was on a nuclear energy spending spree with the support of the United States, West Germany, and France. As the Middle East expert Kenneth Pollack writes, most of the Shah’s effort “was focused on nuclear energy to ensure that Iran’s hydrocarbon (crude oil) wealth was available for export and not needed for domestic consumption.”<sup>1</sup> The best evidence indicating that Iran wasn’t pursuing a nuclear bomb was that the Shah became a charter member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), even before China or France, in July 1968.<sup>2</sup>

In 1984, the military news magazine, *IHS Jane’s Defence Weekly*, published a fabricated report that Iran was just two years away from acquiring a nuclear weapon.<sup>3</sup> At

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *Unthinkable* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013) 34.

<sup>2</sup> David Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran: The Birth of an Atomic State* (London: Tauris, 2012), 14-82.

that time, according to the July 1984 *Department of State Bulletin*, cited in *CounterPunch*, Kenneth L. Adelman, a neoconservative and former Director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, gave an address in Chicago on May 2, 1984, during which he spoke of ‘frightening thoughts’ such as Iran, Libya, or the Palestinian Liberation Organization acquiring a nuclear bomb. Adelman then stated that “today, talks about the spread of nuclear weapons to Iran is in the news.”<sup>4</sup> This despite the fact when Khomeini came to power he condemned nuclear weapons and temporarily halted all projects.

In 1992, the United States’ prime ally, Benjamin Netanyahu, an Israeli parliamentarian at the time, said that “Iran is three to five years from being able to produce a nuclear weapon- and that threat had to be ‘uprooted by an international front headed by the U.S.’”<sup>5</sup> Congressional pressure started to bubble when “in early 1992, a task force of the House Republican Research Committee claimed that there was a ‘ninety-eight percent certainty that Iran already had all (or virtually all) of the

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Sahimi, “The Long History of Lies About Iran,” *Anti-War*, April 3, 2013, <http://original.antiwar.com/muhammad-sahimi/2013/04/02/the-long-history-of-lies-about-iran/> (accessed March 18, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Mehran Ghassemi, “An Interview with Sasan Fayazmanesh – The U.S., Israel, and Iran,” *CounterPunch*, Weekend Edition March 17-19, 2007 <http://www.counterpunch.org/2007/03/17/the-us-israel-and-iran/> (accessed March 8, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Scott Peterson, “Imminent Nuclear Threat? A Timeline of Warning Since 1979,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 8, 2011 under “World,” <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/1108/Imminent-Iran-nuclear-threat-A-timeline-of-warnings-since-1979/Israel-paints-Iran-as-Enemy-No.-1-1992> (accessed March 8, 2014).

components required for two or three operational nuclear weapons.”<sup>6</sup> In 1995, the *New York Times* correspondent Chris Hedges reported that “Iran is much closer to producing nuclear weapons than previously thought, and could be less than five years away from having an atomic bomb, several senior American and Israeli officials say.”<sup>7</sup> His lengthy article instilled fear, according to his sources, Iran was accelerating its nuclear campaign, not only in its capabilities but also by the recruitment of the scientists from the former Soviet Union and Pakistan. In 1998, former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld reported to Congress, “Iran could build an intercontinental ballistic missile -- one that could hit the U.S.-- within five years. The CIA gave a timeframe of twelve years.”<sup>8</sup>

The nuclear fear campaign intensified during the Bush administration (2001-2009), when soon after 9/11 the president declared Iran part of the “axis of evil.” The government funded Voice of America (VOA) – Persian service saw its budget nearly double, practically overnight, and began hiring talent from all over the world to enhance its programming and propagating the anti-Iran campaign.

In subsequent years, during the Obama administration, former VOA Persian News Network (VOA-PNN) director Alex Belida revamped its entire programming to bring

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Hedges, “Iran May Be Able to Build an Atomic Bomb in 5 Years, U.S. and Israel Officials Fear,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1995 under “Archives,” <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/05/world/iran-may-be-able-build-atomic-bomb-5-years-us-israeli-officials-fear.html> (accessed March 8, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Peterson, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/1108/Imminent-Iran-nuclear-threat-A-timeline-of-warnings-since-1979/Israel-paints-Iran-as-Enemy-No.-1-1992> (accessed March 8, 2014).

true journalism and higher-level production to the network. Belida said, “Propaganda has no place, in my opinion, in U.S. funded international broadcasting via VOA or Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty (RFE-RL).<sup>9</sup> Nor should VOA or RFE-RL be guided by U.S. government officials dictating programming.”<sup>10</sup> During Belida’s tenure at the network, critics claimed the Voice of America had become the “Voice of the Mullah,”<sup>11</sup> undermining U.S. foreign policy. Whereas in reality, VOA was upholding the 1976 VOA Charter that reads: “The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio... VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.”<sup>12</sup> Belida notes that “For any democratic form of government to function properly an educated and well-informed citizenry is essential. The ultimate goal of U.S. international broadcasting, to any country, should be to provide the audience of that country with news and information that will enable it to make educated decisions, including educated assessments of the actions of its own leaders as

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<sup>9</sup> Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty is a broadcaster funded by the U.S. government and supervised by the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the same entity overseeing VOA.

<sup>10</sup> Alex Belida, Interview by author. Washington D.C., March 3, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> “Editorial: Voice of the Mullahs,” *Washington Times*, April 14, 2010 under “Opinion,” <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/apr/14/voice-of-the-mullahs/> (accessed March 8, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> “VOA Charter,” *Inside VOA*, <http://www.insidevoa.com/info/voa-charter/2322.html> (accessed March 8, 2014).

well as those of the U.S. government.”<sup>13</sup> Belida’s statement reflects the words of the VOA charter: “VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies.”<sup>14</sup> It should be emphasized that as much as there is a clear moral argument made for American public diplomacy as The Hamid and Christina Moghadam Director of Iranian Studies at Stanford University, Dr. Abbas Milani said, “I don’t think public diplomacy and propaganda are the same but I also don’t think there is a complete line of demarcation, one person’s propaganda can be another person’s public diplomacy or vice versa. There are areas that if you engage in public diplomacy it will have the same effect or it might seem like it has the same intent of propaganda.”<sup>15</sup> The differentiating factors between the two concepts should always be considered when dealing with Iran.

Iran’s reaction to VOA programming has always been a mixed bag. In 2008, former leader of the revolution and Iranian Prime Minister Ebrahim Yazdi, speaking in Washington, said, “The age of the revolution is over...VOA Persian must act as non-partisan media...VOA is seen as attacking Islam.”<sup>16</sup> However, a huge success in VOA history during Belida’s tenure was the creation in 2009 of the satirical show “Parazit,”

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<sup>13</sup> Alex Belida, Interview by author, Washington D.C. March 3, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> VOA Charter, <http://www.insidevoa.com/info/voa-charter/2322.html> (accessed March 8, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Ali Scotten, “Former Leader of Revolution, Ebrahim Yazdi, calls for U.S.-Iran Talks, Rips into VOA Persian,” *NIAC Insight*, April 7, 2008 <http://www.niacinsight.com/2008/04/07/former-leader-of-revolution-ebrahim-yazdi-calls-for-us-iran-talks-rips-into-voa-persian/> (accessed March 8, 2014).

which in Persian means static, referring to the constant satellite jamming by the Iranian government. The show's co-creators Kambiz Hosseini and Saman Arbabi combined elements of comedy with hard political news and professional television production. Just before the disputed 2009 Iranian election, "Parazit" became a weekly thirty-minute program that at its peak had thirty million viewers in Iran and over a million fans on social networking sites. The popularity of the show was primarily due to its appeal to youth. Bootleg copies were rampant in large Iranian cities. The hit production "has been compared to 'The Daily Show,' but there's a lot of darkness to it. There's a lot of sad news," said Arbabi. "We have to walk a fine line. We come from that generation of kids who got up in Iran and protested the government. We share their politics, so we echo their voice."<sup>17</sup> This show would have enabled the U.S. government to create a platform to promote its policies; but lacking a clear direction Parazit was disbanded due to personnel conflicts. On the other hand, for a brief period the program put the United States in a favorable light -- in terms of information, entertainment, and discussions.

Propaganda, bias, and a misdirected editorial policy are not just seen in government-funded broadcasting. It can also occur in mainstream, independent news organizations, reflecting what can arguably be called complicity between private and United States government funded media. These days, consumers of news can choose the

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<sup>17</sup> Tara Bahrapour, "Expats 'Daily Show'-style VOA Program Enthralls Iranians, Irks their Government," *Washington Post*, December 31, 2010 under "World," <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/31/AR2010123101327.html?sid=ST2011012103765> (accessed March 8, 2014).

political platform they agree with along with what medium (digital, television, radio) to use.

In late 2013, the twenty-four hour cable news service CNN was criticized by conservative pundits for giving what they considered glorified news coverage to Iran and its leaders. As mentioned earlier about how the *New York Times* and *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly* reported false findings about the Iranian nuclear program, sources – both in government and outside- manipulate (sometimes unknowingly) journalists to create the news agenda or spin of the day. As the possibility of rapprochement became a reality for the U.S. and Iran in November 2013, many news organizations designed coverage focusing on Iran and U.S.-Iranian relations, creating an atmosphere to generate favorable public opinion for the prospects of diplomatic engagement. News organizations often seek experts to discuss the top news of the day. However, inadvertently the choices of specialists can imply bias if the producers and editors do not conduct proper vetting resulting in partiality of the on the part of the news network.

A prime Washington propaganda effort occurred in 2011 when the United States government tried “to manufacture an Iranian threat with the revealing of the purported Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States. Washington’s great intelligence coup, however, fell well short of passing the rudimentary laugh test.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite the absurdity and unlikelihood of this plot, media outlets were in a spinning frenzy over it. The *Wall Street Journal* wrote that “an assassination on U.S. soil is a

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<sup>18</sup> Ben Schreiner, “Washington’s Propaganda Against Iran: Why the U.S. Readies for War,” *Al-Akhbar*, December 2, 2011 <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/2177> (accessed March 2, 2014).

sobering wake-up call” and “had it succeeded, this would have constituted an act of terror by the Islamic Republic of Iran on U.S. soil, arguably an act of war.”<sup>19</sup>

Hollywood plays a big factor in spreading entertainment that is biased against Iran. Numerous stereotypes are suggested in implicit and explicit ways by movies, documentaries, news programs, and advertisements in order to create a prejudicial reaction in readers and viewers. The motion picture industry has been used for propaganda since the beginning of the twentieth century in collaboration with the U.S. government, including the CIA and the Department of the Defense. Hollywood often focuses on visuals of mosques, and women covered in long, black Islamic *chadors*,<sup>20</sup> emphasizing the religious segment of the Iranian population and failing to provide a more realistic picture of the society. Iranians are portrayed in leading terrorist roles, among other stereotypes.

In the early nineties, the movie *Not Without My Daughter* created a huge controversy by its portrayal of Iran and how it treated estranged foreign wives and their children. This film was released just when the U.S. was beginning to condemn Iran’s nuclear dossier. Academy Award winning films such as *Argo*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Zero Dark Thirty* are just a sliver of the major Hollywood productions blatantly

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<sup>19</sup> “Iran’s Terror Plot,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 13, 2011 under “Review & Outlook,” <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970203633104576625260808261024?mg=reno64-wsj> (accessed on March 2, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> *Chador* is one of the garments worn by Iranian women to observe the Islamic dress code known as *hijab*. It is highly associated with a religious upbringing and/or way of life.

promoting U.S. foreign policy with tilted propaganda towards Iran, Somalia, and Afghanistan respectively.<sup>21</sup> Each of these movies has been promoted as “based on a true story,” leaving many viewers to think that the events actually happened, although a great deal of artistic license was used to meet macro (foreign policy) and micro (business) objectives.

“According to Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich, *Argo* is a propaganda film concealing the ugly truth [accuracy of the real events] about the Iranian hostage crisis and designed to prepare the American public for an upcoming confrontation with Iran.”<sup>22</sup> Film critic Andrew O’Hehir writes that the Academy Award Association was making a huge mistake giving the most coveted award in the film industry to this movie. He argued that, besides not being of high artistic quality, “it is also a propaganda movie in the truest sense, one that claims to be innocent of all ideology. Affleck [the star] and Terrio [director] are spinning a fanciful tale designed to make us feel better about the decrepit, xenophobic, and belligerent Cold War America of 1980 as it toppled toward the abyss of Reaganism, and that’s a more outrageous lie...”<sup>23</sup> Barbara Honegger, a former political analyst for President Reagan, said in a talk radio program, “The whole purpose of *Argo* is

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<sup>21</sup> Julie Lévesque, “Screen Propaganda, Hollywood and the CIA,” *Global Research*, March 1, 2013 <http://www.globalresearch.ca/screen-propaganda-hollywood-and-the-cia/5324589> (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew O’Hehir, “Argo Doesn’t Deserve the Oscar,” *Salon*, February 18, 2013 under “Entertainment,” [http://www.salon.com/2013/02/18/why\\_argo\\_doesnt\\_deserve\\_the\\_oscar/](http://www.salon.com/2013/02/18/why_argo_doesnt_deserve_the_oscar/) (accessed on March 2, 2013).

to prepare the war against Iran, which is absolutely being planned for this summer.”<sup>24</sup>

When First Lady Michelle Obama announced its Academy Award live from the White House in front of millions of viewers around the world, the film became one of the most politically charged productions and Oscar winner in modern Hollywood history.

### **Ayatollah Style**

In Iran information is a means of controlling minds through different methods and media including television, film, newspapers, posters, murals, billboards, demonstrations, and websites. Journalists are jailed, satellites are removed from rooftops, and programs are specifically produced to indoctrinate the masses in favor of the regime. Although unethical and banned by the United Nations Charter, freedom of speech is perpetually disregarded in Iran, mostly through various means of censorship. Due to extreme censorship in Iran, the U.S. should be cautious in regards to a most essential differentiating factor that has continually created problematic misinterpretations - the difference between Iranian regime and the Iranians when addressing Iranian people. This lack of realization in communication with people has been an alienating factor and a source of complaint among the Iranian middle class and the youth.

Ironically, the technologies of Nokia and Siemens have come to be instrumental to advance propaganda platforms. In addition to the official broadcasting system, two major organizations are responsible for propaganda in the Islamic regime: the *Basij*

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<sup>24</sup> Cavan Sieczkowski, “Ben Affleck & Argo Covert Operation? Film is War Propaganda, Says Conspiracist,” *Huffington Post*, March 14, 2013 under “Entertainment,” [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/14/ben-affleck-argo-covert-operation-iran\\_n\\_2875070.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/14/ben-affleck-argo-covert-operation-iran_n_2875070.html) (accessed on March 2, 2014).

(revolutionary militia) and the Revolutionary Guards. According to *Farsnews* and *PBS Frontline* in 2010 there were 21,000 volunteer reporters trained by the Revolutionary Guard in communication and media.<sup>25</sup> According to *New York Times*, using a *Reporters Without Borders* report, "In Iran, the Revolutionary Guards recently announced their ambition to build their own spinternet by launching 10,000 blogs for the *Basij*... This comes at a time when the Internet has become a major force in exposing corruption in the highest ranks of the Iranian leadership."<sup>26</sup> The Iranian government also created a cyber-police that monitors Internet pages considered a threat to national security that could lead to social upheaval. *The Washington Post* writer Thomas Erdbrink reports that "The United States, they [Iranian officials] charge, is waging a 'soft war' against Iran by reaching out to Iranians online and inciting them to overthrow their leaders."<sup>27</sup> Erdbrink further reports from a Digital Media Fair in Tehran, where a cyber police exhibition spokesperson said, "we are here to create a cyber police force inside the people's

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<sup>25</sup> Muhammad Sahimi, "Intel Chief: No Link Between \$3Bil and Mashaei; IRGC 'Reporter' Training," *PBS Frontline*, October 8, 2011 under "Press Roundup," [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/10/irgc-propaganda-arm-includes-15000-reporters.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+Tehranbureau+%28tehran+bureau%29](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/10/irgc-propaganda-arm-includes-15000-reporters.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Tehranbureau+%28tehran+bureau%29) (accessed March 2, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Evgeny Morozov, "Propaganda.com," *New York Times*, March 29, 2009 under "Opinions," [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/30/opinion/30iht-edmorozov.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/30/opinion/30iht-edmorozov.html?_r=0) (accessed on March 2, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran Cyber Police U.S. Threat," *Washington Post*, October 29, 2011 under "Middle East," [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/iran-cyber-police-cite-us-threat/2011/10/27/gIQA1yruSM\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iran-cyber-police-cite-us-threat/2011/10/27/gIQA1yruSM_story.html) (accessed March 2, 2014).

mind.”<sup>28</sup> Another twenty-two-year-old young woman at the fair told Erdbrink, “We always thought that the government is blocking all those web sites to make our lives boring. But today we were told that it is the United States that is purposely blocking some information for Iranian users. Clearly, they are our real enemies.” She added, “We need to be protected. There are many dangers out there.”<sup>29</sup>

There is no constitutionally mandated freedom of the press in Iran. Therefore, the media has understandingly become the propaganda arm of the state. According to Freedom House, a leading voice on human rights in Iran “The government directly controls all television and radio broadcasting...the authorities frequently issue ad hoc orders banning media coverage of specific topics and events, including the economic impact of international sanctions, the fate of opposition leaders, and criticism of the country’s nuclear policy.”<sup>30</sup>

In 2007, Iran launched Press TV, an internationally recognized media outlet with twenty-four-hour English-language programming. Disguised in a veneer of legitimacy and the supposed precision of a news network, Press TV is created to influence its audience against the West. In regards to the November P5+1 negotiations, Press TV claims that the United States’ framework for negotiations does not respect international law: “This is why the talks will fail. International law is simply irrelevant. Rights are

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> “Iran,” *Freedom House*, 2013 under “Freedom in the World 2013,” <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/iran#.UyO2Z9w5PLR> (accessed March 2, 2014).

irrelevant. The law comes from the United States government, and the rest of the world may only exercise privileges bestowed upon them by the Masters of the Universe in Washington, D.C.”<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, Press TV publicizes that even the Obama’s administration does not really wish to exercise diplomacy: “how meaninglessly the word ‘diplomacy’ is being used. The full spectrum of opinion on the subject ranges from support for the Obama administration’s efforts to bully Iran into surrendering its rights to criticisms of Obama for not doing even more to punish the Iranians into submission. That’s it.”<sup>32</sup>

The following words and phrases are among those used to blacken the reputation of the United States: crimes against humanity, disinformation, double standards, economy, human rights, imperialism, intelligence, Islamophobia, media, military, war, politics, racism, terrorism, war crimes, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and Zionism.

For decades, billboards and murals have been a prominent tool for spreading propaganda across the country, especially in Tehran. Visual representation of symbolic messages can have a lingering effect on people and their memory. Since the recent diplomatic breakthrough between the United States and Iran, controversial anti-U.S. billboards displayed by radical Iranian fundamentalists have sprouted throughout Tehran. According to one commentator, “The new wave is not limited to specific political figures

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<sup>31</sup> “Understanding Media Propaganda About Recent Talks Over Iran’s Nuclear Program,” *Press TV*, November 19, 2013 under “United States,” <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/11/19/335439/us-media-propaganda-about-iran/> (accessed March 2, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

or an organized demonstration following the public Friday prayers.”<sup>33</sup> The key words of these new billboards is the phrase: “American Honesty” which is blatant propaganda aimed at spurring thoughts and debate of whether or not the United States should truly be trusted. In these illustrations, “The designer presents the American side dressed in a combination of business attire and military fatigues and boots, accompanied by a dog, trying to show that Americans lack of honesty and don’t observe diplomatic protocol even when they come to the negotiation table. In another image, the claws of a bird of prey (U.S.), is extended for a handshake with a human hand (Iran).”<sup>34</sup> Another shocking billboard in Tehran that popped up in January 2013 depicted Obama alongside *Shemr*, a villain in Shi’a Islam with a caption that read: “Be with us. Be safe.” As *The Guardian* writes, “This is an example of what one might call ‘high-context’ propaganda. Whereas in America unfounded insinuations that Obama is a Muslim come from his enemies, in Iran they come from admirers.”<sup>35</sup> The article further notes that, “The Tehran mural aims to invert this occult symbolism by recourse to Shi’a tradition. The villain *Shemr* belongs to the narrative of Hussein's martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala in 680, the trauma that split Muslims into Sunni and Shi’a denominations.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Reza HaghghatNejad, “New Wave of Anti-U.S. Sentiment in Iran,” *Iran Wire*, October 29, 2013 <http://iranwire.com/en/projects/3271> (accessed March 2, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> “Iran’s Obama Billboard: What it Really Means,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2013 under “Shortcuts Blog,” <http://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2013/jan/20/iran-obama-billboard-tehran-propaganda> (accessed March 2, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Iranian cultural-media organizations run by the Revolutionary Guard recently carried out a multi-media competition called “The Great Down With USA Award,” asking participants to use key words such as “Why do we say down with America?,” “Why is the U.S. not trustworthy?,” “U.S. and Breaking Promises,” “U.S. and Self-Conceit,” and “U.S. and Human Rights.” Iran incorporates propaganda to expand on problems in the West by focusing on riots, killings, suicides, divorce rates, and any kind of disobedience. During the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations, as evidenced on social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, many Iranian youth believed that American cities were being taken over and that soon a revolution similar to the 1979 one in Iran would happen in the United States. Yet the death of Neda Agha Soltan, the young woman who was killed by sniper fire in the protests, which was broadcast around the world along with information of countless others who died in the demonstrations, was denied any news coverage in the country. Along with its intense propaganda, Iran has instilled great fear in the Iranian psyche by arresting, kidnapping, and killing Iranian artists, journalists, protesters, political activists, religious minorities, and homosexuals.

Historically, from the beginning of the 1979 revolution, the most common charge made against the U.S., the Western world, and those Iranians executed or arrested by the Islamic courts and committees was that of being a *mufsid-e fi'l arz* (corruptor of earth), an indefinable term which has Qur’anic roots assigned to people who create havoc upon earth. From early on, the revolution had become an endorsement of Shi’a Islamic themes, with government ministries and ordinary participants being carried along by the momentum. Many revolutionaries assumed the self-assigned roles of public morality

enforcers, not daring to disclose their private opinions. The identity of this revolutionary body and details about its activities were mostly undisclosed but it was generally believed to have had a coordination role, supervising the functions of the government and key policy decisions. This apparatus was later expanded and today *Shora y-e Negahban* (The Guardian Council) is in charge of all crucial policies of the country. Whereas originally the guiding principle-making council (The Guardian Council) included radicals such as Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, Chief Justice Mohammad Beheshti, Chief Justice Abdul Karim Mousavi Ardabili, as well as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, today, however, it consists of reformists and fundamentalists.

Throughout the years, the nature of the policy-making bodies have changed, but most major strategies in terms of transfer of power, assignment of presidential candidates, and foreign policy objectives still originate from them. All major decisions, however, ultimately need the seal of approval from the grand spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. Still from the early days of arguing over the wording of the revolutionary referendum to today's rapprochement with the United States, there has been a serious tension between the radical hardliners and the liberal democratic elements.

Freedom of speech and political activity, rallying points during the 1979 revolution, became restricted and not before long, the liberty to criticize the new government and particularly the leader was taken away. Hence, it was crucial for this Shi'a Islamic state to be practicing religious law but also forming a socially responsible revolutionary ideology. Any deviation from the official line through television, radio, and print media was said to originate from U.S. imperialism, Zionism, and therefore came

from outside the Shi'a doctrine. To prevent this trend, in the very early 1980s, Islamic societies took over universities and government offices and transformed them into Islamic institutions. If a person were judged to have an unacceptable past, such as belonging to certain minority, leftist groups, elite monarchist circle, and/or came from noble families all meant that they were deemed a "corruptor on earth." Soon women without veils and Islamic *hijab* came under attack by Islamic revolutionaries known as *Hezbu'llahis*.

The more organized and radical groups such as leftist *Fadaiyan-e Khalq* and *Mujahedin-e Khalq* were declared illegal and were forced to go underground. When the first democratically elected President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr was deposed in 1981 it was clear that hardliners had triumphed. The *Mujahedin-e Khalq* leader Massoud Rajavi and Bani-Sadr fled to Paris, where a new phase in Iranian domestic public propaganda was launched. Several major bombings killing government leaders and the eight-year long Iran-Iraq War became major reasons to promote further anti-American propaganda.

The power and the influence of *ulama* and their religious authorities have steadily increased and yet the growth of the middle class population has kept the tension between the secular and religious groups ongoing. The twenty-four-hour religious propaganda and anti-Western rhetoric have drastically changed the relationship of individuals towards religion, as well as influenced public opinion towards the West. Instead of conveying itself as a spiritual function, the *ulama* has managed to assert a very visible controlling presence in Iran. Complete conformity is constantly and increasingly insisted upon

through propaganda and censorship, in action and in ideology. In order to prove religiosity an anti-Western attitude has constantly been demanded.

Conclusively, throughout the past three decades as the Iranians and Americans have been diplomatically silent, it could be argued that Iran's propaganda practices are much more overt, polarizing, and predictable. In years past, the Iranian government did not engage in a considerable amount of public diplomacy as it feared that external cultures could influence the Iranian public. On the other hand, the U.S. practiced more public diplomacy tactics often with traces of underlying propaganda. The U.S. method has been more subtle and nuanced. Arguably, both the U.S. method of public diplomacy and the Iranian method of propaganda are currently equally dangerous for the following reasons: prevents effective engagement, it does not address the fundamental issues at hand, both parties are equally misunderstood, great deal of intended and unintended misinformation is spread, leading to further ignorance and egoism on the part of each party. This type of conveyance, influencing, and engagement has obviously not garnered the results one might hope for. To paint each country as the enemy will only go so far for so long before the credibility of messenger is questioned.

Even though the United States promotes fairness, freedom of speech, democratic rule, as well as a secular system that can better serve all its citizens with the highly preferred separation of church and state doctrine -- the United States still needs to deal with the theological Iran in a non-judgmental manner in order to be able to continue negotiations. The old U.S. strategy of public diplomacy or lack thereof needs to change in

order to modify the rhetoric and the reactions of the Islamic Republic of Iran once and for all.

## CHAPTER 5

### CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS – IDENTITY & CONFLICT

#### American Exceptionalism

The concept of American exceptionalism emerged from the beginning of the New World when the English Puritans settled in America. As sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset explained, “The nation's ideology can be described in five words: liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire. Being an American is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those who reject American values are un-American.”<sup>1</sup> President Ronald Reagan’s description of the U.S. as “shining city upon a hill” or President George W. Bush’s claim that Americans are “chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world”<sup>2</sup> are allusions to the uniqueness and perceived invincibility of the United States.

Despite Americans’ belief in their exceptionalism, a December 2013 Pew survey titled “America's Place in the World” shows that 52 percent of those polled believe the

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<sup>1</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, “American Exceptionalism: A Double Edged Sword,” *Washington Post*, 1996 under “Books,” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/americanexceptionalism.htm> (accessed February 5, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Charles M. Blow, “Decline of American Exceptionalism,” *New York Times*, November 11, 2011 under “Opinions,” [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/19/opinion/blow-decline-of-american-exceptionalism.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/19/opinion/blow-decline-of-american-exceptionalism.html?_r=0) (accessed February 5, 2014).

United States should not meddle internationally. Only 38 percent disagreed.<sup>3</sup> According to the Pew Research Center, “The public thinks that the nation does too much to solve world problems, with increasing percentages want the U.S. to ‘mind its own business internationally’ and pay more attention to problems here at home.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Persian Empire Mentality**

Iranians have their own sense of exceptionalism stemming from their knowledge (and myths) about their ancient and powerful Persian Empire. At its peak, the empire encompassed more than seventy ethnicities. Today, it is made up of Persians (61 percent), Azeris (16 percent), Kurds (10 percent), Arabs (2 percent), Lurs (2 percent), Balouchies (2 percent), Turkmen (2 percent), and an additional one percent of other ethnicities.<sup>5</sup> The concept of identity is of utmost importance to Iranians. As Milani noted, “Iranians have a sense of themselves as historic.”<sup>6</sup> Throughout their history of over thousands of years, one attribute most Persians<sup>7</sup> hold dear is who they are and where they came from. It is a pillar of their existence by giving it meaning. The University of Minnesota’s Middle East

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<sup>3</sup> “America’s Place in the World 2013,” *Pew Research Center*, December 2013 <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/12-3-2013%20APW%20VI.pdf> (accessed February 5, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> “Iran Primer- Iran Factbox,” *United States Institute of Peace* <http://iranprimer.usip.org> (January 3, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> The term Iranian and Persian are used synonymously. Iran was formally known as Persia until 1935 when Reza Shah requested from the international community to call the country Iran. The term Iran comes from the Persian word *Aryana*, which means land of the Aryans.

expert, Professor William O. Beeman, notes that, “For ordinary Iranians, the waves of external conquest which have buried their land over the centuries: Alexander and the Greeks, the Arabs, Ghengis Khan and the Mongols are as alive as if they happened yesterday.”<sup>8</sup> Beeman adds that “every time Iran was conquered by one of these great external powers, the nation subsequently rose like a phoenix from the ashes and reestablished itself.”<sup>9</sup> With each conquest by foreigners, Iran’s culture was diversified in the arts, sciences, architecture, philosophy, and literature. “The struggle between inside and outside, when painted on the canvas of Iranian history, is seen as a struggle between the destructive forces of external invading conquerors and reproductive growing forces of the internal core of Iranian civilization. The internal core has thus far been the victor.”<sup>10</sup> As Jin Liangxiang, research fellow with Shanghai Institute of International Studies observed, “The psychological outcomes of these traumatic experiences are the cognitive model for overestimating external threats or, to put it another way, causes for extreme suspicion as well as sensitivity about the intentions of the external world.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William O. Beeman, *The Great Satan vs. The Mad Mullahs - How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 2008) 27.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>11</sup> Jin Liangziang, “The Historic Logic of Iran’s Foreign Policy and the Need to Build Mental Respect,” *China-US Focus*, June 28, 2012 under “Slider,” <http://www.chinausfocus.com/slider/the-historic-logic-of-irans-foreign-policy-and-the-need-to-build-mutual-respect/> (accessed February 4, 2014).

Historically, Iran has an “ambition to be a major global or at least regional power as well.”<sup>12</sup> As the Middle East and Migration expert Behzad Yaghmaian states, “The ‘great power’ syndrome was a guiding rod for the Iranian state during the late Shah’s regime, and perhaps his father. All we need to do is to listen to the last Shah’s speech at Cyrus the Great’s [considered the Great King of Persia and founder of the Achaemenid Empire approximately 600 – 530 BC] mausoleum in 1971. ‘Cyrus rest in peace because we are awake,’ the Shah<sup>13</sup> said after calling himself the King of the Kings (Shah-e Shahan).”<sup>14</sup> In reference to the current period, Yaghmaian notes that “Ayatollah Khomeini changed this great power syndrome to an ‘Islamic-power’ syndrome. This orientation perhaps guided Iran’s foreign policy till Khomeini’s death in 1989. After this year, Iran pursued a conflicting foreign policy, none guided by any grand ‘global power deficit syndrome.’ Iran responded to international threats and tried to fortify its position through varying and conflicting measures.”<sup>15</sup>

In order to have an effective engagement with Iran and/or with the Iranian people, one must be fully conscious to their history and heritage. Without that knowledge, dealing with Iran can pose many difficulties. In his first *Washington Post* op-ed to the Americans and international world, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said, “The

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> The reference is to the last Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi who went to exile in 1979.

<sup>14</sup> Behzad Yaghmaian, Interview by author. Manhattan, NY. March 17, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

centrality of identity extends to the case of our peaceful nuclear energy program. To us, mastering the atomic fuel cycle and generating nuclear power is as much about diversifying our energy resources as it is about who Iranians are as a nation, our demand for dignity and respect and our consequent place in the world. Without comprehending the role of identity, many issues we all face will remain unresolved.”<sup>16</sup> He added that “We must work together to end the unhealthy rivalries and interferences that fuel violence and drive us apart. We must also pay attention to the issue of identity as a key driver of tension in, and beyond, the Middle East.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Cultural Conflict**

To understand a nation fully a person and/or an international entity needs to comprehend the country’s culture. The law professor and conflict resolution expert, Michelle LeBaron, describes different cultures as "underground rivers that run through our lives and relationships, giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of self and other.” LeBaron portrays the influence of culture as being powerful and unconscious, “influencing and attempting to resolve conflict in

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<sup>16</sup> Hassan Rouhani, “Why Iran Seeks Constructive Engagement,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2013 under “Opinions” [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe_story.html) (accessed January 5, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

imperceptible ways." She states that the impact of culture is huge, affecting "name, frame, blame, and attempt to tame conflicts."<sup>18</sup>

Due to the enormous influence of culture, LeBaron finds it important to explain its nuances. First, "culture is multi-layered," meaning that "what you see on the surface may mask differences below the surface." Second, "culture is constantly in flux," meaning that "cultural groups cope with different dynamics and sometimes unpredictable ways." Third, "culture is elastic," all members of a cultural group may not participate in the norms of the culture. Lastly, "culture is largely below the surface," it isn't easy to reach the deeper levels of culture and its meanings.<sup>19</sup>

Cultural conflicts usually occur when values and beliefs clash. In 2001, the General Conference of UNESCO asserted that "...cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature."<sup>20</sup> As UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura stated, "The Universal Declaration makes it clear [Article 1 of UNESCO Universal Declaration] that each individual must acknowledge not only the otherness in all its forms but also the plurality of his or her own identity, within societies that are

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<sup>18</sup> Michelle LeBaron, "Culture Conflict," *Beyond Intractability*, eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, July 2003 <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/culture-conflict> (accessed January 5, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Koïchiro Matsuura, "UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity," *General Conference of UNESCO – Paris*, November 2, 2001 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf> (accessed January 5, 2014).

themselves plural. Only in this way can cultural diversity be preserved as an adaptive process and as a capacity for expression, creation, and innovation.”<sup>21</sup>

Cultural diversity and plurality characterize Iran. As Milani noted, “The thing that defines Iran is what Hafez [Persian poet] calls *rend* (wisdom), wise, slippery, ambiguous, half-Zoroastrian, half-Muslim – this notion that Iran is defined by its Islamic heritage is one of the biggest misconception. They have a bifurcated identity. Iran is a hybrid. Iran is a hybrid of Islam, Zoroastrianism, monotheism, things that they have taken from everyone else.”<sup>22</sup> In the words of Yaghmaian, “There is a collective Persian identity among the people of Iran, if not the state. Iran is a multi-national state. The Azari people see themselves first as Iranians and then as Turks (Azari). They are a part of the national power structure and do not feel politically or economically marginalized. This is not however the case with other nationalities in Iran. Many feel and are marginalized and repressed.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Yaghmaian notes, “The U.S. has been using this national divide as a tool for organizing various minorities in Iran, and arming some of them against the central government. The U.S. has funded and helped Sunni armed forces in Baluchestan, and even Arabs in Khouzestan.”<sup>24</sup> It should be emphasized that this tactic has further deepened the roots of Iranian mistrust for the United States. Any effective and reasonable U.S. policy should consider the multi-faceted nature of the country and not

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Behzad Yaghmaian, Interview by author. Manhattan, NY. March 17, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

risk polarizing the various ethnic minorities in Iran. This will prove to be in the U.S. long-term interest in the region.

American sociologist C. Wright Mills, who formulated Power Elite Conflict theory, believes social structures are created by the unequal distribution of wealth and resources, causing a rift between social classes. Mills argues that the interests of the elite are opposed to those of the rest of the population.<sup>25</sup> Mills' theory suggests that the ruling clerical regime in Iran will continue formulating policies to stay in power and that, in order to maintain this power at home and abroad, would have no incentive to give up its nuclear military arsenal. According to Yaghmaian, "Iran's nuclear ambitions have been defensive. I believe Iran used the nuclear buildup in order to be taken seriously by its adversaries. The state wished to negotiate as an equal partner with other influential forces in the region."<sup>26</sup> Since the election of President Rouhani, Yaghmaian suggests, "I think Iran has reached this objective now. It is being taken seriously. It is being respected as a power."<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Gene Sharp, Professor Emeritus of political science at Dartmouth College and widely read author of *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, argues that power is not monolithic. It does not derive from the political elite. For Sharp, whose books have been smuggled in many Middle Eastern countries, the foundation of a state derives from the

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<sup>25</sup> P. Knapp, *One World – Many Worlds: Contemporary Sociological Theory* (New York: Harper Collins) 228-246.

<sup>26</sup> Behzad Yaghmaian, Interview by author. Manhattan, NY. March 17, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

support of its subjects. If citizens do not respect authorities, the leaders have no power. Sharp has been called the "Machiavelli of nonviolence."<sup>28</sup> The recent protest movements in Egypt and Tunisia were inspired in part by his thinking.<sup>29</sup> As regards Iran, its citizens do not automatically follow their leaders, but have their own interests – and power – that can lead to social change. They are political actors in their own right who do not seek out the sympathy or help of outsiders to carry out their goals.

### **The Quest for Modernity**

There is little consent among academics concerning basic questions of modernity in Iran. Does a society have to be modern and secular in order to be democratic? What kinds of transformations in Iranians' psyche are required for their society to be deemed "modern?" Iran is in transition from a traditional to its particular version of modern society. For an effective U.S public diplomacy effort to influence Iranian audiences while encouraging dialogue, it should consider Iran's historical quest for its own particular modernity.

As Dr. Ebrahim Yazdi said in a speech at the Middle East Institute on April 8, 2008, "This process towards modernization of politics and economy, which started

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<sup>28</sup> Ruairidh Arrow, "Gene Sharp: Author of the Nonviolent Revolution," *BBC*, February 21, 2011 under "World," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12522848> (accessed on February 6, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Gene Sharp is the founder of the Albert Einstein Institution, a non-profit organization advancing the use of non-violence action in conflicts around the world.

almost 150 years ago, has been expedited by the 1979 Revolution.”<sup>30</sup> There is general agreement in the scholarly literature that modernity occurs when a critical mass of society discards a life of passivity and attains a sense of choice and need for achievement. Islamists, however, insist that modernity was a pretext for domination by colonial powers. Ali Banuazizi, a professor of social psychology at Boston University, reflecting on this Islamic perspective, argues that religion and tradition are not signs of backwardness. Banuazizi disagrees with classical Western-centric modernization theorists, who view tradition in negative terms. He criticizes Western media’s one-sided interpretations and portrayal of the Iranian Islamic Revolution as retrogressive and extremist. He emphasizes that during the 1979 revolution cultural divisions and class differences were as influential as the revival of religious authority. To Banuazizi the revolution was a mass social uprising involving political as well as social forces. He points out that modernization does not necessary bring secularization.<sup>31</sup>

Contributing to discussion of Iranian modernity, Yazdi notes that “Iranian culture could be described as having two dimensions, nationality and religiosity, or Iranian as well as Islamic. These two are so tightly woven together so that their separation is almost

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<sup>30</sup> Ebrahim Yazdi, “The Situation in Iran,” *Payvand Iran News*, April 21, 2008 <http://payvand.com/news/08/apr/1204.html> (accessed March 2, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi, “Iran’s Tortuous Path Toward ‘Islamic Liberalism’,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 2001 [http://www.dr.soroush.com/PDF/E-CMO-20010000-Irans\\_Tortuous\\_Path\\_Toward\\_Islamic\\_Liberalism.pdf](http://www.dr.soroush.com/PDF/E-CMO-20010000-Irans_Tortuous_Path_Toward_Islamic_Liberalism.pdf) (accessed March 2, 2014). Ahmad Ashraf, “Bazaar-Mosque Alliance: The Social Basis of Revolts and Revolutions,” *Politics, Culture, and Society*, 1 (1988): 538-567.

impossible.”<sup>32</sup> One of Iran’s prominent philosophers and cultural theorists, Dariush Shayegan, reflects this approach when he states that “Modernity is a cultural earthquake often unconsciously embraced by its most strict and inflexible opponents in the form of ‘revolutionary ideology.’” He further maintains that “Traditional society is facing an external reality that originates from the West. The meeting of these two incompatible worlds leads to a profound distortion, not only in how the Muslim world sees the West, but more importantly, in how it sees itself.”<sup>33</sup>

In his book, *Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran*, Milani delves into the Iranian roots of modernity. Referring to the classical poets Sa’di and contemporary writers of the Pahlavi era, notes that rationality, knowledge, and pursuit of worldly pleasures were characteristics in contrast with the mentality of the Sufis and the *ulama*. Milani emphasizes that “The fundamental argument that modernity is a Western phenomenon is an argument made by two groups: the pro-Foucault groups, who didn’t know anything about Iranian tradition or the West. They understood neither culture. The second group making this argument is the clergy that is anti-modern.”<sup>34</sup> In Milani’s words, “Modernity is not from the West; it reached its maturity in the West. The idea that this is exclusively Western is problematic.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Yazdi, <http://payvand.com/news/08/apr/1204.html> (accessed March 2, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Darius Shayegan and John Howe, trans., *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

According to Seyed Asadollah Athary-Maryan, a Senior Research Fellow at Iran's Middle East Strategic Studies, "With the emergence of nation-state phenomenon and establishment of an absolute modern government during the first Pahlavi era, a quasi-contemporary situation was instituted from the higher echelons in the country." He elaborates on the historical context of how modernity is infused into the Persian culture, and noting that "The Qajar period (1794-1925) witnessed an escalation of Western influence. Iranian rulers and the elite started a top-down reform process in the army and administration. After the victory of the Constitutional Revolution (1907-1909), which was a type of modern revolution, the challenge between tradition and modernity emerged as the central topic of Iranian political literature."<sup>36</sup>

In addition, experts such as the University of California at Berkeley's Professor of Persian and Religious Studies, Hamid Algar; Stony Brook University's Director of Institute for Global Studies, Said Amir Arjomand; and Harvard University's Gurney Professor of History, Roy Mottahedeh, all maintain that the failure of the Pahlavi era's culture and mindset prevented the nation from embracing the rapid economic developments resulting in the 1979 Islamic revolution. Yazdi, who was a key actor in the revolution, has a different perspective on the issue, arguing that "Ignoring the lessons of history, the clerics made a historical mistake by assuming direct rule. They were not qualified for such a rule. Despite their traditional grip on the masses, clerics lacked the

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<sup>36</sup> Seyed Asadollah Athary-Maryan, "Challenges Between Tradition and Modernity in Iran," *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, 2 no. 2 (Fall 2000) <http://en.merc.ir/default.aspx?tabid=98&ArticleId=52> (accessed March 2, 2014).

knowledge and comprehension of the complexity of contemporary human society and institutions that govern its social norms, and economy.”<sup>37</sup>

In treating the causes of the 1979 revolution, as well as the concept of modernity versus religion and tradition, the conventional approach of “cause and effect” should be refined by embracing the rhizomatic approach of Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>38</sup> The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari use the term “rhizome”<sup>39</sup> and “rhizomatic” to describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical causes pointing to multiple data representation and interpretation. In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, they oppose dualist categories and binary choices. They argue that one must shy away from deducing that all actions have a linear and binary relationship. A multitude of connections and channels, and not cause-and-effect relationships is what bond societies. This approach allows for deeper comprehension about how a society changes and leads to more enlightened policy-making. Indeed, inconsistencies are where the answers may be found.

Iran has been going through the phases of modernity but in its own Iranian ways. Although the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 laid the basis for a limited monarchy, a parliament, a free press, and free elections, for decades the required urgency for free and

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<sup>37</sup> Ebrahim Yazdi, “The Situation in Iran,” *Payvand Iran News*, April 21, 2008 <http://payvand.com/news/08/apr/1204.html> (accessed March 2, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Seán Hand, trans., *Gilles, Deleuze, Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>39</sup> According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, in botany, a rhizome is a thick plant stem that grows underground and has shoots and roots growing from it.

independent decision-making was not institutionalized. The Pahlavi dynasty introduced modern schooling, and the Literacy Corps of the 1960s helped increase the literacy rate to more than fifty percent by 1978. Today, more than eighty-five percent of Iranians are literate.<sup>40</sup> Iran under the Pahlavi dynasty became more secular and moved forward intellectually, scientifically and technologically. However, the 1979 revolution and the Islamic Republic denied many of the most important aspects of modernity -- violation of human rights, including freedom of speech and religion, as well as systematic discrimination against women and antagonism toward Western democracy. Iran also modernized without emphasizing an important feature of modernity -- respect for diversity and rights of the individual.

In the still theologically defined environment that can be found in Iran, the concept of “uncertainty” in the European model of rational thought, considered an essential element of modernity, is not easily embraced. The efforts to infuse a superficial type of modernity, with showcased technology, and spectacular infrastructure, did not change many traditional aspects of society especially in the religious sphere. However, in recent decades, a resilient Iranian middle class, connected to the modern world and globalized via digital media, aspires to a more democratic form of political life. This desire for a more Western-style modernity and institutions that reflect the needs and desires of citizens has steadily evolved in the last three decades. Khomeini’s reactions against this secular trend, while influential among the poorest segment of the population

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<sup>40</sup> United Nations Population Fund, “Iran,” under “Country Profile,” 2012. <http://iran.unfpa.org/Country%20Profile.asp> (accessed March 2, 2014).

did not stop the modernization process. A new educated middle class is now pushing for more civic progress, as expressed by the Green Movement in 2009.

Whether the modernization in Iran can be compatible with democracy remains problematical – and uniquely Iranian. Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897), considered a pioneer of Islamic modernism, underscored that science and reason were not an obstacle to religiosity arguing that in order to counter European influence the Muslim world has to embrace modern notions of progress.<sup>41</sup> Yazdi, criticizing conservatives who consider much of modernization a form of “blasphemy against Islam,” argues that intellectual Muslims strongly believe that the Islamic worldview that includes the perception of man in the context of his rights and liberties is “compatible with fundamental elements of democracy.”<sup>42</sup> He adds that the current Iranian situation has created a “sort of anti-religion feeling and/or non-religiosity among the new generation of our people,”<sup>43</sup> stressing that Iran’s path towards democracy and modernity can only be effective if it is aligned with the internal circumstances of the country. He concludes current “U.S. policy towards Iran is not helping the cause of democracy, but rather hurting it. It needs a drastic overhaul and rearrangement.”<sup>44</sup>

CNN International’s news correspondent, Reza Sayah, covered the Rouhani election and closely observed the Iranian people. He notes that “Iranians have a keen

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<sup>41</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 103-129.

<sup>42</sup> Yazdi.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

sense of culture and history. They deeply value dignity. Many often complain that when dealing with Tehran, Washington ignores these values and treats them as second-class citizens. Few things offend and perturb Iranians more than treating Iran as an inferior state.”<sup>45</sup> Speculating on the future of U.S.-Iranian relations, Sayah believes that “Tehran and Washington still have a long way to go before resolving their nuclear impasse – but many Iranians can taste the change and they want it to happen. An effective public diplomacy campaign can put additional pressure on the Iranian government to deliver the rapprochement most Iranians are calling for.”<sup>46</sup>

It is essential for an effective U.S. public diplomacy to differentiate between the Iranian government and the Iranian people. To equate the two has consistently alienated the middle class and the youth that are sympathetic modern principles of democracy. As Milani warns, “The most dangerous misperception about Iran is to think that the Iranian people are the same the Iranian regime.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Reza Sayah, Interview by author. Cairo, Egypt. March 17, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

## CHAPTER 6

### EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT –A NEW PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

With the recent improvement in U.S.-Iranian relations, the time has come to abandon inflammatory, anti-Iranian rhetoric that has been used by the U.S. government in the past. The United States must show a greater understanding and respect for Iranian culture, history, and people. The mistrust between the two nations needs a public diplomacy campaign which as the international journalist, Reza Sayah, points out, “effectively creates the perception that America’s actions matches its stated values and principles of human rights, peace and democracy.”<sup>1</sup> Washington must win the sympathy of Iranians not just by promoting and explaining its policies. It must also make it crystal clear that it is listening to Iranians and shares many of their values. A special focus should be placed on reaching out to the under thirty-year-old demographic that makes up over sixty percent of the eighty million population. Also needed is an overarching strategy that brings all of the elements of U.S. public diplomacy – including traditional and modern ones -- as an effective way to improve America’s standing and influence in the country. Such a coordinated approach will lead to an energized and well orchestrated American public diplomacy. I am calling this “Gangnam Style” Diplomacy – a diplomacy that creates the kind of enthusiasm and receptivity among audiences enjoyed by the South Korean performer, PSY, whose “Gangnam Style” music sensation went

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<sup>1</sup> Reza Sayah, Interview by author. Cairo, Egypt. March 17, 2014.

viral and crossed national and cultural boundaries. It also was appreciated for its humor and energy.

### **Media Wrap - To Beam or Not to Beam, That is the Question**

The role of U.S. government funded broadcasting has been continually debated. To beam or not to beam? That is the question. The answer is yes, but do it right. Effective USG broadcasting to Iran must provide its audience, particularly the young, content that is of interest to them. This requires being as thoroughly familiar with the audience as possible. As Sayah points out, “Iranians have a voracious appetite for news and are heavy consumers of Farsi language outlets like VOA, BBC Farsi, and newer outlets like the UK-based Mano-to [a highly popular satellite channel that broadcasts with news and entertainment].”<sup>2</sup> In the words of Milani, “I think U.S. government broadcasting should certainly exist. Why shouldn’t a major power have its views of the world broadcasted? The reason the Voice of America is not working and has lost its audience share is because they haven’t been able to put on good programming.”<sup>3</sup> Just days after the Iranian elections on June 18, 2013, the Senior Associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Karim Sadjadpour, informed Congress that “Both empirical studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that the vast majority of Iranians get their news from television more than any other source. Satellite TV is by far the most important tool for Iranians seeking to access independent news coverage or information beyond the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

government's censorship and control. Unfortunately, the Voice of America's Persian News Network (PNN) is woefully underperforming in this respect."<sup>4</sup>

The former Director of the Persian News Network (PNN), Alex Belida, agrees: "The evidence shows PNN has been a success in reaching a record number of Iranians but only when it does certain things: first, when it focuses on appealing to the under-thirty audience; second, when it avoids ideological programming that simplistically argues, 'the U.S. is good, Iran's Islamic leaders are bad' and third, when its on-air staff is not identifiable as being pro-Shah, pro this or that, and are simply straightforward broadcast journalists."<sup>5</sup> Belida stresses that "When PNN pursues a high-minded course of objective journalism, it attracts audiences because it has fundamental credibility. When it hasn't done this, audiences have declined."<sup>6</sup> To win attract viewers, Sadjadpour suggests that "It is critical for PNN to be taken outside the confines of Voice of America and render a public-private partnership, much like the BBC, which is supported by the U.S. government but managed by media professionals rather than government bureaucrats."<sup>7</sup> He also points out that no additional funding would be required beyond the network's

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<sup>4</sup> Karim Sadjadpour, "Realistic Expectations for Iran's New President," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 18, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/06/18/elections-in-iran-regime-cementing-its-control/gaw7#> (accessed March 14, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Alex Belida, Interview by author. Washington, D.C. March 3, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Karim Sadjadpour, "Realistic Expectations for Iran's New President," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 18, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/06/18/elections-in-iran-regime-cementing-its-control/gaw7#> (accessed March 14, 2014).

current budget. He argues that “For less than the cost of one F-15 fighter jet, we can play a significant role in helping to inform the thinking of tens of millions of people in Iran who are desperate for their country to emerge from international isolation,”<sup>8</sup> adding that “people want two things that Iranian state-media simply haven’t been able to deliver – accurate, impartial, and credible reports on what’s happening inside Iran and what’s happening in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

It is generally assumed that staff from the State Department and the White House is in continual contact with the Voice of America to provide it with guidance. However, that is not the reality. As Belida notes, “I was surprised at the total lack of input from any officials. To me, it actually raised the question of whether they were aware we existed -- a real pity, as one can arguably state that VOA PNN is and has been for more than three decades the sole means for U.S. officials to communicate broadly to the Iranian public.”<sup>10</sup>

Given its problems in both programming and organization, VOA’s Persian News Network needs to be overhauled. While its objectivity and professional journalism must be protected, it must be better informed of U.S. policy. Given the limited internal resources of the organization, experienced outside production companies should be contracted to provide innovative and compelling content. In the words of Belida, “There needs to be two-way programming, such as talk shows that enable Iranians to openly discuss or debate these views freely. I believe it is high time for VOA PNN to expand its

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Reza Sayah, Interview by author. Cairo, Egypt. March 17, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Alex Belida, Interview by author. Washington, D.C. March 3, 2014.

programming to include the production and purchase of what could be characterized as entertainment -- whether TV dramas or movies.”<sup>11</sup> From a long-term strategy perspective, VOA PNN should be restructured as a public-private entity and staffed by professional journalists. Milani suggests that “The thing that would be probably most effective is to help launch a media outlet that would be a surrogate for what an Iranian free television inside of Iran would have been like. If Iran was a democracy and had a possibility of having a television program -- what kind of programs would it put on? It wouldn’t be all news. It would be entertainment. It would be films. It would be criticism of the West, criticism of the government.”<sup>12</sup>

Most importantly, United States government international broadcasting should be inspired by the principles of public diplomacy at its best: providing accurate information and contributing to mutual understanding. In the words of Milani, “It becomes less propagandistic and more public diplomacy when they [United States government broadcasting] are truthful to facts. When they begin to also criticize the United States and not become all propaganda.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, according to Sayah, “Washington should also allow more Iranian journalists to visit the United States. This is another long-held grievance in Iran – that Iranian journalists are not granted access in the U.S, as international journalists are granted in Iran.”<sup>14</sup> Providing firsthand American media

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Reza Sayah, Interview by author. Cairo, Egypt. March 17, 2014.

experience to Iranian journalists would enable them not only to report what they see in the United States, but also feel included in the international media community. This relatively inexpensive form of engagement, and its long-term effects, while not quantifiable or immediately apparent is in the U.S. national interest.

### **Digital Diplomacy**

In 2006, according to the Iranian Ministry of Communication, eleven million people in the country had access to the internet, a fifty percent increase from the previous year. In 2009, that number rose to twenty-three million users.<sup>15</sup> There are over hundreds of thousands of exponentially growing Persian-language weblogs, which rank third among global weblogs in a given national language.<sup>16</sup> According to Sayah, “Iranians have a diverse taste in international news sources. Increasingly, the Internet has become a popular source of news among young Iranians.”<sup>17</sup> The urban sociologist, Masserat Amir-Ebrahimi, underscores that in Iran, where public spaces are controlled by restrictive cultural and state forces, the Internet takes on an important communications role. She notes that “For people living in these countries, especially marginalized groups such as youth and women, the internet can be a space more ‘real’ than everyday life.”<sup>18</sup> Although

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<sup>15</sup> Annabele Sreberny and Gholam Khiabany, *Blogistan – The Internet and Politics in Iran* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Mehdi Semati, “Living with Globalization and the Islamic State,” in *Media, Culture and Society in Iran*, ed. Mehdi Semati (New York: Routledge, 2008), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Reza Sayah, Interview by author. Cairo, Egypt. March 17, 2014.

the Islamic government puts restrictions on websites that are considered improper, Iranians are very savvy in overcoming these obstacles through proxy sites and filter breakers.

With the U.S. hosting eighty percent of all global websites,<sup>19</sup> cyberspace provides a modern and effective venue for American engagement with Iranians. As the University of California – San Diego professor, Babak Rahimi, notes: “Despite Iran’s expanding filtering regime, the internet continues to remain the most significant public forum of dissident expression where possibly an opposition movement from Iranian diaspora and native organizations could mobilized online.”<sup>20</sup> Given the absence or limited freedom of organized opposition groups in Iran, the “ever-changing Iranian public sphere, both in physical and virtual terrains, will shine the light of an open society on the Islamic Republic. In this struggle, the internet will serve as the virtual battleground against authoritarian rule and a march towards a democratic governance.”<sup>21</sup> Sayah noted that like Americans using social media, “Iranians often choose their source of news based on their own political views.”<sup>22</sup> Given the situation, the United States needs to tailor its message and reach out to the Iranian people via networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

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<sup>18</sup> Masserat Amir-Ebrahimi, “Performance in Everyday Life and Rediscovery of the ‘Self’ in Iranian Weblogs,” September, 2004, [www.badjens.com/rediscovery.html](http://www.badjens.com/rediscovery.html) (accessed on March 15, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Sreberny and Khiabany, *Blogistan*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Babak Rahimi, “The Politics of the Internet in Iran,” in *Media, Culture and Society in Iran*, ed. Mehdi Semati (New York: Routledge, 2008), 53.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

A significant digital public diplomacy breakthrough occurred in Iran when President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif communicated with world leaders and global audiences via Facebook and Twitter. As of March 2014, Rouhani had 185,000 followers and Zarif, who is the first Iranian official with a verified Twitter account, had 131,000. Zarif even tweeted the daughter of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on a variety of issues, including Iran's nuclear program and the government position on the Holocaust. Rouhani has promised to alleviate restrictions on internet access in Iran. However, as the Brookings Institution's Suzanne Maloney writes, "the executive branch's flirtation with social media flies in the face of the real restrictions that ordinary Iranians face in similar pursuits."<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, according to Maloney, "Rouhani deserves real credit to beginning to change the discourse of Iranian politics, and one can only hope that Iran's government and its policies will one day reflect the cosmopolitan and cultured perspectives of its citizenry."<sup>24</sup> The Iranian Minister of Culture Ali Jannati, admitting to a state news agency that steps have been taken to ban the satellite channels watched in Tehran by more than seventy percent of viewers, noted that "Maybe in five years we will laugh at today's actions."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Reza Sayah, Interview by author. Cairo, Egypt. March 17, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Suzanne Maloney, "The Frenzy Over Tehran's Tweets: Interpreting Iran's New Public Diplomacy," *Brookings Institution*, September 6, 2013, under "Blogs," <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/iran-at-saban/posts/2013/09/06-rouhani-zarif-twitter-facebook> (accessed on December 24, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Pizzi, "Iran Government Minister: Media Bans May Seem 'Laughable' in 5 Years," *Aljazeera America*, December 19, 2013, under "International,"

On December 6, 2011, the United States took the unprecedented initiative to open a virtual embassy for Iran. Currently, through the intermediary of the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, the diplomatic and administrative needs of U.S. citizens residing in Iran are handled there. In a welcoming statement on the virtual embassy's webpage, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Iranians that "Because the United States and Iran do not have diplomatic relations, we have missed some important opportunities for dialogue with you," adding that "we can use new technologies to bridge the gap and promote greater understanding between our two countries."<sup>26</sup> The Iranian government, still suspicious in this case of U.S. government intentions, blocked the website within twelve hours. Nevertheless, within days over 1300 messages were received inquiring about visas and opportunities to study in the United States.<sup>27</sup> Initial statistics from the virtual embassy indicate that there were half a million hits upon its launch<sup>28</sup> and almost two million page hits by its first year.<sup>29</sup> As much as these gestures are welcomed by

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<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/12/19/iranian-ministermediabansmayseemlaughablein5years.html> (accessed December 25, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Steve Jones, "U.S. Opens Virtual Iranian Embassy," *U.S. Foreign Policy*, <http://usforeignpolicy.about.com/od/middleeast/a/U-S-Opens-Virtual-Iranian-Embassy.htm> (accessed on March 14, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Kirit Radia, "U.S. says 'Virtual Embassy' Still Getting Through Despite Iran's Censors," *ABC News*, December 9, 2011, under "Politics," <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/12/u-s-says-virtual-embassy-still-getting-through-despite-irans-censors/> (accessed on March 14, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Kirit Radia, "Iran Blocks U.S. 'Virtual' Embassy Within 12 Hours of Launch," *ABC News*, December 7, 2011, under "Politics," <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/12/iran-blocks-us-virtual-embassy-within-12-hours-of-launch/> (accessed on March 14, 2014).

Iranian citizens, they need to be followed up with verifiable action. Otherwise, unfulfilled expectations can backfire and lead to complaints. Meanwhile, the virtual embassy's content and accessibility should be continually improved, thereby facilitating increased dialogue between Iranians and Americans. As noted by the founder of the widely read online magazine, *Iranian.com*, Jahanshah Javid, the articles of most interest to Iranians were about "politics and human rights. Love and sex were popular topics for universal reasons. But for Iranians there's a greater fascination because they are taboo subjects and the internet is the only outlet for information and discussion."<sup>30</sup> Based on his experience as chief editor, Javid recommends no limits or barriers to political discussion. Adding that "The most popular websites are those that allow users to post whatever they want. Censorship in any form is not only wrong but also useless in this day and age where people have so many choices to express themselves freely through social media or numerous self-publishing sites."<sup>31</sup> This is good advice for the U.S. government as it expands its digital diplomacy.

### **People-to-People Diplomacy**

People-to-people contacts, for decades a key element in U.S. public diplomacy, is equally important today in increasing Americans' engagement with Iranians. As Milani

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<sup>29</sup> United States Institute of Peace, "U.S. Virtual Embassy Gets 2 Million Hits," *United States Institute of Peace*, December 7, 2012 <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2012/dec/07/us-“virtual-embassy”-gets-2-million-hits> (accessed on March 14, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Jahanshah Javid, Interview by author. Lima, Peru. March 15, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

notes, “There is room for citizen diplomacy. In a democratic society there is room for citizens to take the lead in initiating contact and breaking barriers, breaking stereotypes, trust building.”<sup>32</sup> There are three influential ways to achieve this. First, the U.S. government must quickly fix its visa problem. According to Milani, “The worst thing that happens to U.S. public diplomacy is this random system for visas. Some people wait months and months. The idea that Iranian students can’t get multiple entry visas is bad diplomacy.”<sup>33</sup> For American public diplomacy to be effective the U.S. government actions must match its words. Easing visa restrictions would be concrete evidence to Iranians that the America is serious in advocating people-to-people communication.

Secondly, the United States government should staff the U.S. interest section in Tehran with Americans. According to a former Foreign Service officer, Ramin Asgard, stationing diplomats in Tehran would enhance American security and increase U.S.-Iranian mutual understanding. Before the 1979 revolution, a major misstep by the U.S. government was to post American staff members at its Tehran embassy who did not speak Persian and had very little knowledge about the local situation. As Asgard notes, “The U.S. Department of State makes every effort to address the needs of U.S. citizens traveling to Iran, and to provide visa services to Iranians planning travel to the U.S. But there is only so much State can effectively do without U.S. personnel in Iran.”<sup>34</sup> A 2011

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<sup>32</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ramin Asgard, “Re-establishing a U.S. Diplomatic Presence in Iran: Advancing U.S. National Security and Serving American Citizens,” *PAALIA*, February 2014,

survey by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian-Americans found seventy-three percent of Iranian-Americans support a return of U.S. diplomats to Iran to staff the U.S. interests section.<sup>35</sup>

Lastly, when Iranians visit the United States either for tourism, education, and/or business, a concerted effort should be made to welcome them to the country and facilitate contact with its citizens. The State Department can show hospitality to tourists by voluntarily supplying free information and suggesting activities that of interests to them. Small gestures and human kindness go a long way in people-to-people diplomacy.

### **Education & Scientific Exchange**

In celebration for the Persian New Year, known as Nowruz, on March 20, 2014, Secretary Kerry via the Treasury Department, issued a “General License G” authorizing and enhancing education exchanges with Iran, including by online university courses. He said, “My own family is stronger today of the presence and love of Iranian-Americans, and I am proud of the family ties<sup>36</sup> that we Americans have to Iran its people.”<sup>37</sup> With an eighty-five percent literacy rate in Iran, its middle class highly values science and

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<http://www.paaia.org/CMS/data/sites/1/pdfs/Iran%20US%20Section%20Report%202013.pdf> (accessed on February 21, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Slavin, “Study Recommends U.S. Interests Section in Tehran,” *Al-Monitor*, February 2014 under “Pulse of Iran,” <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/02/iran-us-diplomats-return-nuclear-deal.html> (accessed on February 23, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> John Kerry’s daughter, Vanessa Kerry, is married to an Iranian doctor.

<sup>37</sup> John Kerry, “Message to the Iranian People on Nowruz,” *U.S. Department of State*, March 20, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/03/223732.htm> (accessed on March 20, 2014).

education. However, Iranians face many challenges going to university in their country given the large number of applicants, astronomical tuitions at private institutions of higher learning, and immense competition for admission. At the same time, Iran is suffering from its worst brain drain in decades. According to the Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, Reza Faraji-Dana, “Every year, about 150,000 highly talented people emigrate from Iran, equaling an annual loss of \$150 billion to the economy.”<sup>38</sup> The main reasons for this brain drain are massive inflation, lack of job opportunities, and a restrictive political situation. The U.S. could prove extremely instrumental in enabling students to pursue an advanced education especially for disadvantaged social and ethnic groups. Iranian students flocked to study in the United States before the 1979 revolution, but this opportunity waned with increased U.S.-Iranian diplomatic tensions. In 2012, however, Iranians studying in the United States increased by 24% from the previous year, with almost 7000 graduate students at U.S. universities.<sup>39</sup> According to Milani, “There should be more university exchanges, Iranian intellectuals should be able to travel here and vice versa.”<sup>40</sup> But if the United States does ease restrictions on education visas, it is also vitally important that the students are able to feel welcomed and live comfortably in the United States. As a result of sanctions, in recent years Iranians pursuing their studies

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<sup>38</sup> Bijan Khajepour, “Can Rouhani Reverse Iran’s Brain Drain?” *Al-Monitor*, January 12, 2014 under “Iran Pulse,” <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/iran-economy-diaspora-reconciliation-sustainable-progress.html> (accessed January 15, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Institute of International Education, “Open Doors Data – Fact Sheets by Country: 2012,” <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/Fact-Sheets-by-Country/2012> (accessed March 14, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

in the United States were unable to open bank accounts, make money transfers, and/or legally work to make ends meet. The United States government should also promote university-to-university exchanges. This is not unprecedented, as throughout the decades, well-known American campuses such as Georgetown, Harvard, and Yale hosted Iranian Iranians engaged in science and technology projects.<sup>41</sup> There is much room for more collaboration of this type, including by means of the State Department's Fulbright Program.<sup>42</sup>

The appreciation of another country's literature is a significant and beneficial part of educational exchanges. Historically, Milani notes, "One of the best things that the United States probably did in terms of its long-term effects was to help create the Franklin Institution in Iran in the 1960s. It became Iran's best publishing company. It set the modern standards of publications in Iran."<sup>43</sup> However, he also warns about the pitfalls of such cross-promotion by posing the question, "Are some people going to say if you translate de Tocqueville or translate American novelists you are engaging in propaganda? Of course, the Soviets said it. Everybody said it. But just because someone calls it propaganda doesn't mean they shouldn't do it, they should just do it better."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Bijan Khajepour, Reza Marashi, and Trita Parsi, "Extending Hands & Unclenching Fists," *NIAC*, December 2013, [http://www.niacouncil.org/site/DocServer/Extending\\_Hands\\_Unclenching\\_Fists.pdf](http://www.niacouncil.org/site/DocServer/Extending_Hands_Unclenching_Fists.pdf) (January 4, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Business Exchange**

In 1975, a five-year agreement was signed between the United States and Iran to provide the latter with \$15 billion worth of American goods and services. Expectations were that Iranian-American non-military and non-oil trade could even reach upwards of \$26 billion in the following years, as the U.S. and Iran at the time were close business partners.<sup>45</sup> Today, there are new prospects for business and investment possibilities in Iran given that the country is could become the next economic powerhouse in the region. U.S. allies in Europe and Asia are eager to seize that potentially lucrative opportunity. At present, however, Americans cannot participate in this economic bonanza if it were to occur. In the words of the David S. Cohen, Under Secretary of the Treasury who oversees American sanctions against Iran, in late January 2014, “Our message to all of these companies is the same: Iran is not open for business. There is a vast network of complicated sanctions that remain in place. Iran’s banking sector is still largely off limits, and now is not the time to re-engage with Iran. That day may come, but it’s not today.”<sup>46</sup> To be sure, under the Geneva agreement of November 2013, the United States released \$4.2 billion of Iran’s frozen assets in foreign banks to be paid in installments, and some trade restrictions have been eased. However, the sanctions still hold firmly on Iranian oil and exclude Iranian banks from the global finance network.

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<sup>45</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 204.

<sup>46</sup> Rick Gladstone, “U.S. Warns Against Business With Iran,” *New York Times*, January 23, 2014, under “Middle East,” <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/24/world/middleeast/us-warns-against-business-with-iran.html> (January 24, 2014).

## **Cultural Exchange**

In the past, officially sponsored cultural exchange between the United States and Iran has been limited due to the tense state of relations between their governments. However throughout the past decades, privately sponsored activities in the field of art, literature, music, and films have occurred. Among these people-to-people interactions, sports have played quite a significant and highly publicized role. The countries collaborated for example in friendly wrestling and basketball matches. This type of friendly competition engages Americans and Iranians at a different level of diplomacy marked by the spirit of fun and friendship. Another endeavor is the Pittsburgh Symphony that plans to return to Iran after fifty years this year – a form of musical diplomacy. In 1964, the State Department sponsored the three-month tour. Hollywood diplomacy is another means of engagement via the highly successful Iranian film industry that has received many accolades with the Academy Awards and numerous prestigious film festivals around the world. As Milani notes, “A major grievance among many Iranians is the perception that the U.S. doesn’t respect their place in history and the world. Imagine if Iranian athletes, musicians, artists, and academics were welcomed in the U.S. and those images were seen back in Iran? Imagine what that would do to regain trust among Iranians who hold their dignity and pride in extremely high regard.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Dr. Abbas Milani, Interview by author. Stanford, CA. March 18, 2014.

## CONCLUSION

### TURN THE DIPLOMATIC MUSIC ON

For over thirty-four years, the United States and Iran were engaged in a dialogue of the deaf. This impasse, however, appears to be over. The international negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, initiated last year, have put American and Iranian diplomats squarely in the same room. An increased interaction between their two countries, beneficial to both, has become a reality -- as the telephone conversation in September 2013 between President Obama and President Rouhani demonstrates. In order for these groundbreaking U.S.-Iranian contacts to expand and bring long-term results, however, a reinvigorated American public diplomacy toward Iran is an urgent necessity.

At its best, American public diplomacy – in essence, “informing and influencing foreign publics”<sup>1</sup> – provides a truthful, factual exposition and explication of U.S. policy and the American way of life; encourages mutual understanding; carefully analyzes and listens to overseas audiences; and objectively displays national achievements overseas, including in the arts.<sup>2</sup> It does not engage in crude propaganda, which “forces its messages on an audience, often by repetition and slogans; demonizes elements of the outside world

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of State, “Under Secretary for Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs,” *U.S. Department of State* <http://www.state.gov/r/> (accessed February 26, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> John Brown, “Public Diplomacy and Propaganda: Their Differences,” *American Diplomacy*, September 8 [http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2008/0709/comm/brown\\_pudiplprop.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2008/0709/comm/brown_pudiplprop.html) (accessed March 27, 2014).

and claims the nation it glorifies can do no wrong; simplifies complex issues, including history; and misrepresents the truth or deliberately lies.”<sup>3</sup>

Effective public diplomacy is not a one-size-fits-all program. It must be tailored to individual countries and their audiences. In the case of Iran, public diplomacy should be based on the following general considerations: First, the Iranian people, who value their past and culture, have a long and complex history. Second, Iran’s political, social, economic, and religious orientation is unique; it does not neatly fit into Western models of modernization. Third, a large segment of the population – over sixty percent -- is under the age of thirty, and Iranian women are among the most politically conscious in the Middle East. Fourth, in part due to Iranian governmental propaganda characterizing for decades America as “the Great Satan,” a considerable amount of anti-Americanism prevails among segments of the population -- despite the desire, shared by many in Iran, to enjoy American popular entertainment and to travel and study in the United States.

A reinvigorated American public diplomacy toward Iran, planned and implemented with its history and local conditions in mind, can make greater and better use of both traditional and newly-established programs. Among the traditional programs - - subject to improvement and updating as circumstances require -- are U.S. government-funded radio and television broadcasts in English and Persian. These broadcasts should not only inform audiences through accurate and objective news and commentary. They should also favorably influence them through cultural, musical, and entertainment programs. As for educational exchanges, the Fulbright program – long a pillar of U.S.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

public diplomacy – should be reestablished with Iran as a partner. Private university-to-university linkages should also be encouraged. Cultural programs – in music, the visual arts, film – should receive far greater funding and support. Finally, people-to-people contacts must be increased.

Among newly-established public diplomacy programs, the use of social media is the most important. Iranians (including some government officials) are devotees of cyberspace as a source of information, as their interest in the virtual U.S. Embassy established some years ago in Tehran demonstrated. Twitter and Facebook are means of communication that also make it possible for Iranians’ views to be heard beyond the boundaries of their country, where censorship and fear of speaking out are still a reality.

Public diplomacy does not function in a vacuum. Overseas, it is perceived by audiences through the prism of other activities undertaken by the U.S. government. This includes the issuance of visas. An easing of its visa regulations would do wonders for America’s image in Iran – which is one of the main concerns of U.S. public diplomacy. The opening of a non-virtual embassy with American staff in Tehran would also be a concrete step forward in creating stronger links between the two countries. Finally, in the private sector, increased U.S.-Iranian business projects would create the kind of cooperation that can lead to greater mutual understanding (if not, profits).

In summary, the public diplomacy I recommend is a simultaneous multiplatform approach to engagement that utilizes various programs to stimulate people-to-people connections based on information sharing, cultures, education, and business. I have chosen to coin such a reinvigorated U.S. public diplomacy “Gangnam Style,” referring to

a song by the American-educated South Korean performer PSY that went viral, appealing to audiences worldwide. Going viral – permanently – is my hope for U.S. public diplomacy in Iran, despite the obstacles it faces.<sup>4</sup> After decades of mutual accusations and recriminations, isn't it time to turn the diplomatic music on? Americans and Iranians, let's dance!

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<sup>4</sup> As Dr. Milani pointed out, “You should remember that when we are talking about public diplomacy, on the other side, you have a regime that is paranoid that thinks of cultural exchange as cultural hegemony. Khamenei only recently said, ‘the thing that keeps me up the most at night is this cultural attack.’ Cultural NATO he calls it—so where his cultural NATO begins and your public diplomacy begins, what he thinks is hegemonic cultural intrusion- and you and I probably think of scholarly exchange- that is what makes it difficult.”<sup>4</sup>

## APPENDIX

### Timeline: Events Mentioned in this Thesis

**1502 - 1736 Safavid Empire:** Shah Abbas founds the Persian nation-state. The Shi'ism doctrine of Islam is introduced but does not gain full momentum until the 19th century.

**1796 - 1925 Qajar Dynasty:** The new dynasty emerges led by Mohammad Khan Qajar.

**1856:** Mirza Abolhassan Khan Shirazi Ilchi Kabir is the first official Iranian diplomat posted in Washington D.C. The Treaty of Commerce and Navigations is signed, the first diplomatic agreement between the United States and Persia. Iran, suspicious of the Russians and the British, leans toward the United States.

**1906:** Iranian Constitutional Revolution. The first *Majlis* (parliament) is convened on October 7. Political leaders and the Shi'a *ulama* (clergy) support the Constitutional Revolution. There are major clashes between secular nationalists and the religious faction.

**1925 - 1979:** Pahlavi Dynasty founded by Reza Shah (1925-1941). The region undergoes modernization and industrialization – Iranian style.

**1932:** Reza Shah assumes the throne as the Shah.

**1941:** World War II - The United Kingdom and the Soviet Union invade Iran in August; Reza Shah is deposed.

**1941 – 1979:** Reza Shah's son Mohammad Reza Shah ascends to power. He espouses a secularist project that attempts to send religion back into the enclave of the private sphere.

**1951:** The administration of the charismatic Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh nationalizes the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

**1953:** Prime Minister Mossadegh overthrown by a plot organized by M16 and aided by the CIA. Suspicions of the United States and the United Kingdom arise in Iranian society.

**1953 - 1978:** American policy establishes a special relationship with the Shah and his political elite. In 1975, the United States and Iran sign a \$15 billion deal involving American goods and services. It is estimated that Iranian-American non-military and non-oil trade could reach upwards of \$26 billion in the future.

**1975 - 1979:** Civil unrest increases, leftist groups organize, religious activists and anti-Pahlavi groups are involved in underground activities.

**1979 Iranian Revolution:** Under immense pressure, the Shah leaves Iran mid-February. Ayatollah Khomeini in power heading a theological regime. Khomeini claims there were secret dealings between the U.S. and Iran to establish American colonies. Anti-American sentiments are at an all-time high.

**1979 Hostage Crisis:** Fifty-two Americans diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran are taken hostage for 444 days. Consequences: U.S. sanctions on Iran and severance of formal U.S.-Iranian diplomatic relations.

**1980 - 1988:** Eight-year-long Iran-Iraq war.

**1981:** First democratically elected President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr is ousted.

**1988 Iran Air Flight 655:** On July 3, the USS Vincennes in the Persian Gulf fires a missile at an Iranian commercial airliner killing 290 passengers.

**1989:** Khomeini dies from a massive heart attack. Soon after, Khamenei replaces him as the Supreme Leader.

**1995:** U.S. imposes trade embargo on Iran.

**1997 - 1998:** President Mohammad Khatami and reformers become politically active. Khatami calls for the “Dialogue of Civilizations” at the United Nations in New York.

**2001:** The Iranian government condemns the 9/11 terrorist attacks and expresses its condolences for their victims.

**2002:** President George W. Bush calls Iran part of the “Axis of Evil.”

**2003:** Iran proposes a "grand bargain" to resolve outstanding issues between the United States and Iran. No response from the U.S.

**2005:** Mahmoud Ahmadinejad elected Iranian president. He sends a letter to the White House that received no response. Ahmadinejad’s election returns the country to rigid conservative principles that thwarted the reformist movement begun in 1997. Iran nuclear plans are in full course.

**2006:** President Bush intensifies pressure and threatens retaliation for Iran's continued uranium enrichment. U.S. sanctions are imposed on Iran.

**2009:** Barack Obama is elected president. On March 21, he sends a Nowruz message. On June 12, Iranian elections are held. Ahmadinejad is reelected and the opposition Green Movement is crushed.

**2013:** Dr. Hassan Rouhani is elected president on June 14, giving hope for an improvement in U.S.-Iranian relations. In September, Rouhani addresses the UN and

Obama telephones Rouhani. On November 24, the United States and Iran reach a six-month interim nuclear deal in Geneva.

**2014:** On January 20, Iran agrees to eradicate a portion of its highly enriched uranium stockpile and freeze production of any additional centrifuges.

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