U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOWARDS IRAN DURING THE GEORGE W. BUSH ERA

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABF	Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation
BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CIPE	Center for International Private Enterprise
CPI	Committee on Public Information
FLTA	Foreign Language Teaching Assistantship
IBB	International Broadcasting Bureau
IEE	International Educational Exchange
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IIE	Institute of International Education
IRIB	Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Program
MKO/MEK	Mojahedin Khalq Organization
NAFSA	National Association of Foreign Student Advisers
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NIAC	National Iranian American Council
OWI	Office of War Information
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIA	United States Information Agency
USIS	United States Information Service
VOA	Voice of America
VOAPNN	Voice of America's Persian News Network

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I will argue that the administration of George W. Bush, during its 8 years in office, approached Iran with what it later called a "two-clock strategy". That is, the U.S. government directed its policies at fulfilling two objectives: changing both Iran's behavior and its government through instruments of hard and soft power.

The change in behavior dealt with curbing Iran's nuclear program. Worried about Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, U.S. government tried to slow down/reverse this clock (e.g., change the behavior) through economic and political pressure. On the other hand, it tried to speed the *clock* of regime change through instruments of soft power. The focus of the present work is on the soft power aspects of U.S. foreign policy.

I will mostly concentrate on the U.S. government's public diplomacy programs (from 2000 to 2008) targeting Iranians to create this change. I examine Congressional records, diplomatic presence communications, institutions' press releases, newspaper archives, personal accounts and interviews, and secondary resources (both in Farsi and English) in order to discuss the relevance, content, and achievements of such programs.

I will conclude that, in breach of the 1981 Algiers Accord between Iran and the U.S., based on which the United States pledged not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs, American government, particularly during the Bush administration, has concentrated heavily on changing Iran's political climate by following a cold war pattern in its public diplomacy programs. American soft power, however massive, has so far failed to bring immediate results. Nonetheless, like the Cold War rivalries, such policies will have long term implications for both Iran and the future relations between the two countries.

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century began with the shocking events of 9/11. It altered the paradigm of U.S. national security. After the bygone hotness of the Cold War, it was now more than ever, the Middle East that emerged on the spotlight of U.S. foreign policy. Attacks of 9/11, President Bush's policy of democratization and military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, and his administration's commitment to tackling the danger of Iran are all tangible proofs for this change of focus from the old Europe to the present Middle East. Because of the 9/11 attacks, there was a huge amount of sympathy for America at the beginning; but later on, after 8 years, the legacy of George W. Bush was little short of a downgraded approval rating for the U.S. government. It also resulted in wounded transatlantic relationships and raging anti-American sentiments generally throughout the world and particularly in the Middle East. In just one case, for example, the favorability rating of the United States in Germany fell from 60% in 2002 down to less than 30% in 2008. Such a downward spiral was even more prevalent in the Muslim countries of the Middle East.[1]

To fix America's image and save it from further attacks, the 9/11 Commission report, had emphasized (among many remedies) on enhancing public diplomacy and U.S. soft power to win Middle Eastern hearts and minds.[2] Another strategic document known as "Djerejian Report" produced by the *Advisory Group on Public diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World* reiterated the same obligations and recommended several public diplomacy solutions.[3] This claim also resonated in the language of Harvard's prominent professor Joseph Nye, when he called for more attention to wielding *soft* rather than *hard* power. He argued that to win the war on terror in the Middle East, U.S. government should resort to public diplomacy programs that attract, inform, persuade and influence.[4] The necessity of public diplomacy in the Middle East was almost impossible to ignore.

In this context, Iran, as a major power player and also of concern in the Middle East received reinvigorated attention in terms of public diplomacy. The Bush administration, with its reproaching phrase "Axis of Evil", indulged itself in a major ideological war against Iran.[5] Although American public diplomacy towards Iran had its roots in the Cold War period, the post 9/11 era was quite a refreshing time for U.S. public diplomacy programs' special form, velocity and impetus.[6] It was during this time that, for example, Condoleezza Rice, then U.S. Secretary of State, proposed a new "office of Iranian Affairs" to be formed within the state department and requested an unpremeditated budget of $75

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[1] Pew Research Center, "Opinion of the United States", *Pew Global Attitudes Project*, Key Indicators Database, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-08-02] from: <http://pewglobal.org>

[2] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 2004.

[3] Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, *Changing Minds,Winning Peace,* U.S. Dept. of State, Washington D.C., 2003.

[4] Nye, Joseph S., "The decline of America's soft power - Why Washington should worry", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 83, issue 3, 2004, p.16.

[5] Bush, George W. "The State of the Union Address", *White House.org*, online document, 2002, retrieved on [2011-03-30] From: <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov >

[6] The U.S. government launched a major propaganda campaign against Communism and USSR during the Cold War. The scope of the campaign was far greater than the USSR and would cover many countries including Iran, the southern neighbor of USSR and a strategic partner to the U.S. For further study see: Joyce Battle, Ed, US propaganda in the Middle East: the Early Cold War Version, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 78, 2002.

million dollars in 2006 to "promote democracy in Iran".[7] After more than a decade since 9/11, and despite the significance of U.S. war for Iranian hearts and minds, very few academic studies have been directed towards this subject matter. This dissertation will focus on the timeline of the George W. Bush presidency, its public diplomacy programs, and the context in which these programs were received by the Iranian public. It will also try to engage in an analytical study of how these programs manage to create the intended change.

Statement of the Topic

In response to criticisms about the lack of a soft power dimension in American foreign policy, Bush administration officials had always emphasized their commitment to public diplomacy towards the Middle East.[8] One, then, is left with the puzzle of why neo-conservative spending on public diplomacy programs has been unsatisfactorily incapable of turning the anti-American tide back, at least based on the present circumstances. There are, of course, some other preliminary questions to ask first: Was American public diplomacy really boosted up in terms of expenditure and programs when it came to the Bush administration's Middle East policy? If so, what form and strategies did it assume? How does the Middle East context, and its prevalent discourses about America, affect the outcome of American public diplomacy programs? These questions will constitute the macro-level part of the present study.

In order to answer the questions such as above, I have decided to focus the study on one particular Middle Eastern country, Iran. In this case, I will concentrate on the historical context of U.S-Iran relations, the contemporary programs of public diplomacy and their nature with regards to the ever-escalating conflict between the two countries. I will try to focus on the ever-growing rift between Iranians and Americans, especially after the 1979 revolution in Iran, and the prevalent discourse about the role of the United States in Iran's internal affairs. I will argue that the specific policies of the Bush administration, largely affected by 9/11 discourse, have had significant roles in shaping the patterns of American soft power towards Iran. I will finally draw the conclusion that the post-9/11 patterns imply that a new Cold War doctrine is emerging in American foreign policy, and specifically its soft power, towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. There will also be this intriguing question of why, despite the increase in U.S. government's Iran-related budgets, there is no substantial change in the Iranian regime or its behavior towards the United States (until present). It probably indicates that there are limits for the use of soft power approach for foreign policy gains and that other variables such as traditional diplomacy still hold grounds when it comes to Iran-U.S. relations.

Significance of the Study and Questions

As argued, public diplomacy, as an instrument of enhancing soft power, plays a prominent role in creating change in attitude and behavior among the targeted people of a foreign country. And since the relationship between Iran and the U.S. is among the most controversial issues of the contemporary world, this project will discuss the structure and components of U.S. public diplomacy towards Iran and the contextual reception of it in Iranian society. It focuses more specifically on the efforts of the Bush administration during his presidency. According to the my preliminary research, there are various programs such as exchanges, international broadcasts, sports diplomacy, NGO relationships, the game and entertainment industry, and social networking promotion, bearing greater attention, which will be cultivated, explained and evaluated.

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[7] Rice, Condoleezza, *2007 Budget Proposal for Foreign Affairs*, FDCH Political Transcript, Washington, D.C., 2007.

[8] See: Fitzpatrick, Kathy R., *The Collapse of American Public Diplomacy*, School of Communications, Quinnipiac University, Hamden, 2008, p. 20.

Studying the possible response/reaction of the targeted public will enrich the literature of conducting public diplomacy. This contribution will be more than just a case study, since variables such as the new information age and also the Middle Eastern environment have created a completely new ambience for U.S. soft power. There is also another variable which subtly affects U.S. engagement with a country like Iran; that is, the *lack of official relationships* between the two. I will assume that these factors are important in shaping the outcome of any country's public diplomacy. Thus, findings will not only historicize American engagement with a single country named Iran, but also broaden the scope of academia in the realm of public diplomacy with new elements such as the new information age, the Middle East environment, and no official relationship entering the field. In other words, the work will put light on issues such as conducting public diplomacy in a different time (information age), with a different country (i.e., Iran which is non western, Islamic, and Middle Eastern), and in the face of no official relationship.

The very major question that I ask is how U.S.-Iran public diplomacy programs can be interpreted within the overall framework of public diplomacy analysis, and how Iran's internally dominant discourses affect the outcome and reception of American public diplomacy programs.

A major problem here is the fact that, to this day, almost no significant academic work has managed to delve into the cultural aspect of U.S.- Iran relations after their estrangement in 1979.[9] To put it into a historiographer's words, the very primary task of this work is hence to answer the immediate question of *what really happened.* It would be quite imprudent to delve into analyzing and interpreting *phenomena* of the past without first being aware of the *existence of* those phenomena. Of course, as the researcher, I would also try to contextualize, explain and answers questions such as why particular phenomena occur after uncovering them.

Based on this approach then, I should first tackle other major questions such as:

1. What is the historical nature of Iranian-American relations and how does Iran position itself in such a discourse?
2. What is the historical role of public diplomacy in American foreign policy towards Iran?
3. How did the post-9/11 soft power approach of the United States reflect in specific goals and strategies of the Bush administration regarding Iran?
4. If typical constituents of American public diplomacy are international broadcasts, cultural exchanges, and democracy promotion, then, what particular set of public diplomacy instruments were implemented to address the White House's concerns regarding Iran?
5. How did the Iranian government, Iranian opposition, and the general public respond to American public diplomacy? What leverage do the official media in Iran have in shaping the discourse about such efforts?

It is only after finding convincing answers to the above questions that one can comprehend the complexities in the output of American public diplomacy programs and the historical patterns they are following.

[9] It should be noted that simultaneous to this research, some very few academic works (two PhD theses to be exact) were published which discussed a similar subject matter (see literature survey).

Literature Survey

There is an increasing trend to produce literature on the issue of U.S. public diplomacy. After the traumatic events of 9/11, recommendations came in the form of articles and books; one strategic roadmap, the already mentioned *Djerejian Report,* came as a report to congress and then was published in book format. In this work, the group- which consisted of some of the most experienced American public diplomats- argued that major contemporary challenges to U.S. leadership come from the Muslim world and that in order to deal with this phenomenon, not only traditional but also up-to-date instruments of public diplomacy should be utilized and strengthened. This report, as former Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes later stated, became a major guideline in molding post 9/11 U.S. public diplomacy.[10] Recommendations included having a real *strategic direction,* increasing the size of the budget of America's public diplomacy apparatus, enhancement of professional human resources regarding the Middle East, developing a new culture of measurement, tapping Internet and other new communication technologies, reviving the old network of *American Corners*, and finally, such measures as the establishment of libraries under such tentative names as *American Knowledge Library* in order to spread literature concerning the United States and its fundamental values such as human rights and the free market economy.[11]

This roadmap was later replaced by another important document, the first *U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*. This strategy, which was prepared by the State Department's Policy Coordinating Committee in 2006, became the essential guideline for the conduct of public diplomacy.[12] In a similar fashion to the *Djerejian Report*, it did emphasize on programs such as exchange, implementation of modernized technology, and promotion of diplomacy of deeds -meaning mostly providing aid to desperate nations. The national strategy had a major impact on the formation of new public diplomacy programs throughout the Bush administration period and I will hence refer to this document when discussing the Iran-specific programs generated under the Bush Administration.

As mentioned above, literature on U.S. public diplomacy is quite rich; but when it comes to U.S. public diplomacy on Iran, the literature could be divided into two parts: those that reflect upon the pre- 1979 revolution and those that cover American public diplomacy during the last 3 decades. While researchers and former diplomats such as Alen Heil, Richard T. Arndt, and James Bill, have been ardent in studying American public diplomacy in the pre-revolutionary Iran, there is clearly a lack of substantial academic data discussing the post-Islamic revolution era.[13] And that is not because there were no American public diplomacy programs, but mostly because of the break in official relations and consequently the lack of access to Iran by foreign researchers, particularly Americans.

Despite these challenges, some scholars have very recently begun to focus on the subject. A rather fresh study which happened to be published during the middle

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[10] Hughes, Karen, "A farewell Letter from the Undersecretary", *Public Diplomacy Update*, II, no. IV, 2007, p.2.

[11] American Corner is a semi-cultural center in libraries, universities or other places of one's host country that provides various types of information about the United States, politics, and society.

[12] U.S. Department of State, *U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*, U.S. Dep. of State, online document, June 2007, retrieved [on 2008-12-10] from: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/87427.pdf>

[13] On pre-revolution era's research see: Arndt, Richard T., *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Potomac Books, Dulles, Va. 2005; Bill, James A., "The Cultural Underpinnings of Politics: Iran and the United States", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 17.1, 2006, 23-33; Heil, Alan L., *Voice of America: A History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003.

phases of this research was the work of Foad Izadi, now a graduate of Louisiana State University and a professor at the University of Tehran.[14] Titled *U.S. Public Diplomacy towards Iran: Structures, Actors, and Policy Communities*, Izadi's investigation of the topic touches the prevalent discourse among American policy communities from which specific U.S. public diplomacy strategies arise. In other words, it is about the policy elites who encourage certain policies with regard to Iran and how such views are reflected in shaping U.S. public diplomacy towards Iran. Although rare in its kind and valuable for future studies, including the present dissertation, the work fails to investigate the possible reception and outcome of the programs in Iran and the discursive practice both among the public and the officials inside Iran which shapes such outcomes. Besides, while Izadi delves into an extensive and meticulous explanation of American democracy-promotion activities and international broadcasts, he forgets elaboration on other significant public diplomacy initiatives such as exchanges, sports diplomacy, and entertainment.

In addition to Izadi's work, there are some articles as well which, despite their lack of proper academic form, touch on the subject of American soft power in Iran directly. For example, Lionel Beehner of the Council of Foreign Relations, wrote a short article, "U.S. Soft Diplomacy in Iran", in which he discussed, very briefly, major pillars of American public diplomacy programs and painted a rather gloomy picture of possible success in U.S. public diplomacy; meanwhile, his piece does lack the discursive explanations for such a prospect.[15] Another think tank expert, Mehdi Khalaji of the Washington Institute for Near East Studies, wrote a longer than-5-page scholarly article which, although analytic in some respects, explored only the subject of U.S. *broadcasts* to Iran.[16] In *Through the Veil: The Role of Broadcasting in U.S. Public Diplomacy toward Iranian*, Khalaji focuses mainly on Radio Farda and Voice of America's Persian service. Besides alluding to their backgrounds, he points to some structural malfunctions of the networks as problematic challenges for international broadcasts towards Iran. Khalaji's work is a useful contribution but is short of providing a comprehensive picture of the American soft power presence in Iran. It also lacks an emphasis on the historical as well as the people's discourse in Iran about such broadcasts. Finally, there are also some articles written in the Farsi language. Except for very few of them, most of the articles only touch the surface and sometimes engage in the hypothetical rather than fact-based and comprehensive analysis.[17] An example for a very rare and valuable article is the work of Hessamodin Ashena, which deals with the history of American public diplomacy in Iran, particularly the Fulbright experience in Iran and how it factored into shaping the political circles during the Shah's rule.

In the following chapters, I will draw upon the findings of these works and try to present a comprehensive study in which the aforementioned gaps are intrinsically filled with proper scholarly investigation.

Understanding Public Diplomacy: Defining the Term

Any major research of this nature could hardly begin without addressing the question of what public diplomacy is. Here I will explain the general definition of the term, its historical background, and the instruments often associated with it. Since the topic is particularly about U.S. public diplomacy, I will focus on the United States' special approach to public diplomacy. Finally, I will articulate an

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[14] Izadi, *Foad, US Public Diplomacy towards Iran: Structures, Actors, and Policy Communities*, PhD Dissertation, Graduate Faculty, Louisiana State University, Houston, 2009.

[15] Beehner, Lionel, "U.S. Soft Diplomacy in Iran", *Council on Foreign Relations*, online document, 2006, retrieved [on 2011-08-12] from: <www.cfr.org/publication/9904/>

[16] Khalaji, Mehdi, *Through the Veil: The Role of Broadcasting in U.S public diplomacy*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington D.C., 2007.

[17] Naghizadeh, Roghayye, (ed.), *Diplomacye Omumi* (Public Diplomacy), Abrare Tehran, Tehran, 2005

eclectic definition of U.S. public diplomacy which has especially been devised to engage the Islamic Republic of Iran.

There is almost a consensus among scholars of the field that, although still in its evolutionary phase, public diplomacy is mostly about the "promotion of the national interest and the national security" of a country through "understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics" and broadening "dialogue between citizens and institutions of the involved nations".[18] In such a process, a government and its non-state actors are dealing with the public of the targeted nations. This is a broad definition and, although forms the basis of this dissertation in its treatment of the term public diplomacy, needs to be clarified. For example, some question such as the following need to be answered: What is the theoretical basis for engaging in acts of public diplomacy? How influencing public opinions in other countries affect national interests of another nation-state? What methods are used to create the influence? When was this concept introduced to international relations? And, finally, what does this seemingly general definition mean in detail?

The aforementioned broad definition of public diplomacy is the outcome of debates dating back almost 150 years. Although quite a young term inside the political lexicon, public diplomacy has provoked different understandings and conceptual implications during its evolution. Contrary to the notion that Americans were the originators of the term, public diplomacy had been first used by Europeans in the mid- nineteenth century, and only after that, during the mid-twentieth century, was the phrase taken up by American policy circles.

As Nicholas Cull, a distinguished scholar of public diplomacy at the University of Southern California, discovered in his study of *The Evolution of a Phrase*, the British were the ones who used the term in an 1856 article in London's *The Times*.[19] Public diplomacy at that time was used differently- to denote *civility* or *elegance of behavior*. Addressing the President of the United States at the time, the article had asked for an elegance of behavior among U.S. politicians so that a certain amount of impression on the public can be expected. *The Times* had opined:

> The statesmen of America must recollect that, if they have to make, as they conceive, a certain impression upon us, they have also to set an example for their own people, and there are few examples so catching as those of public diplomacy.[20]

The term was almost unheard among the politicians until the early 20th century when it mostly stood for the *open*, not behind-door, conduct of diplomacy. In other words, public diplomacy was almost synonymous with *open diplomacy*. President Wilson's use of the term in 1918 in the latter sense, gave such meaning further impetus. Wilson's *fourteen points* had emphasized on the "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at."[21] This would mean every political move and decision, especially in foreign relations, be made public and leaders speak more directly to the public rather than among themselves. The great wars and the use of propaganda on both sides swayed the term to convey its then standard meaning. However, it had to wait until the 1960s for Gullion to replace the pejorative terms *propaganda* and *information* with a more neutral one, *public diplomacy*. Public diplomacy then became about governments influencing foreign public's attitudes. This expression would soon encompass many of those activities of the United States, as well as many other western countries, which

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[18] United States Information Agency Alumni Association , *What is Public Diplomacy*, *USIA Website*, 2008, retrieved [on 2010-08-12] from: <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm>

[19] Cull, Nicholas, "Public Diplomacy before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase", in *Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, (ed.), Routledge, 2009, p.19.

[20] "The American president with a laudable desire", *Times*, 15 January, 1856, p. 6.

[21] Cull, *Public Diplomacy before Gullion*, p.20.

would range from information (sometimes even disinformation) and public affairs, to symmetrically intercultural exchanges. It was hoped that such a term would not carry a negative connotation like that of *propaganda*. Hence, based on Gullion's conception, public diplomacy received a brand new meaning which is still generally resonant among both academics and politicians:

> Public diplomacy… deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. 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 another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications.[22]

Although Gullion's designation of the meaning to public diplomacy has generally been accepted, when it comes to particularities, the phrase has been subject to various interpretations by different scholars of the field. It could easily be interchangeable with image making and branding, political advocacy, public relations, propaganda and disinformation, and also cultural relations/diplomacy. I would argue that, while not exactly the same as public diplomacy, each of the above concepts could be a subcategory to the phrase and have a major say in the general formation and conduct of public diplomacy. The evolution and practice of public diplomacy has greatly benefited from all of these fields and it is mostly the particular approach of a government or statesman which leads to attaching a particular meaning to public diplomacy. When in 2001, for example, the Bush administration appointed Charlotte Beers, a former advertising and public relations chairperson of a company, as its Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy to "brand U.S.A", the U.S. government had certainly more of a tendency to view public diplomacy from the lens of marketing and public relations than any other perspective.[23] In contrast, when Senator Fulbright pushed for educational and cultural exchanges and managed to initiate the *Fulbright Scholarship*, there were long-term and intercultural approaches contributing to U.S. public diplomacy. Or in the case of international broadcasts by the U.S. government, it is the controversial examples of political advocacy and information dissemination that come to play roles in influencing the foreign public.[24]

What makes all these concepts and tactics similar, and thus fit within the boundaries of public diplomacy is the purpose that they are used for: understanding, informing, and persuasion of foreign nations. If we define public diplomacy as the efforts of a government to engage the public opinion of another country for the sake of national interest, then each of these interpretations made by researchers and practitioners would be meaningful. To customize the definition of public diplomacy for this particular dissertation, one should try to comprehend the way it was implemented by the U.S. government. In order to achieve this purpose, I will first give an introductory and universal articulation of public diplomacy tools and how they are used. Then based on historical U.S. efforts made under the name of public diplomacy, I will articulate the American way of practicing public diplomacy.

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[22] Cull, *Public Diplomacy before Gullion*, p.20.

[23] Tiedeman, Anna, *Branding America: An Examination of U.S. Public Diplomacy Efforts after September 11, 2001*, M.A. Thesis, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. M.A: 81.

[24] On the controversy about U.S. propaganda activities directed at Americans see: Smith-Mundt Act, Public Law, 402, s80th Congress, 1948.

Public Diplomacy Instruments

Public diplomacy of every country consists of different programs that help foster a good understanding of its culture, society, and politics. To put it very briefly, popular and recurrent elements (or constituents) of a public diplomacy campaign are as follows: development of exchanges and alumni networks, traditional and digital international media, publications and documentaries, NGO partnership networks, libraries and multi-media centers, exhibitions, language trainings, computer-mediated games, and reconstruction, development, or aid projects. Each of these terms needs some further clarification.

Traditional and *digital international broadcasting* are more familiar concepts. They involve the old as well as new forms of international broadcasts such as radio, satellite television, and internet media outlets. Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Marti, Radio Farda, and recent Al-Hurra TV plus Radio Sawa are palpable examples of international broadcasts implemented by the U.S. government within the last 70 years.

Another element of U.S. public diplomacy is production and distribution of hard-copy print materials, motion picture films, CDs, and DVDs. *Publications* and *documentaries* either in hard or soft formats have thoroughly been used during the Cold War and have moderately made their way to the 21st century and the post-9/11 period.[25] This type of public diplomacy element was a recurrent element in American public diplomacy towards Iran during both the Cold War and the post 9/11 era and will later be analyzed in detail.

Libraries and *exhibitions* also have invaluable roles. At the early stages of U.S. public diplomacy efforts, libraries played a prominent role by having a major impact on the advancement of a more desirable society; at the same time, they could play their public diplomacy role through advertising American support for development of human knowledge. According to the former USIA officer Wilson Dizard, the United States' Information Agency had managed to operate lending libraries in more than 150 countries throughout the world throughout the 20th century.[26] There are still places in the world where unfettered access to books and periodicals can have a major impact on the development of a civil society while advancing the objectives of public diplomacy. Such libraries function as information brokers as well as distributors of a certain American lifestyle (that of happiness and prosperity) and thus fulfill the long-term duty of public diplomacy.

Alongside libraries, *Exhibits* too constitute one of the oldest forms of conducting public diplomacy. These exhibitions used to showcase scientific technology, arts, agricultural productivity and capability, and every subject or constituent that represented a country's technological advancement or socio-cultural values. In the case of the United States, these exhibitions in their own ways enhanced shared values and exposed aspects of American life to an audience who were unable to get familiar with America before. One particular form of a rather permanent exhibit for the United States was the *Amerika Hause* which was set up in major cities of Europe where cultural and scientific features were showcased to the foreign public.

Another tool for public diplomacy is *educational* and *cultural exchanges*. By exchanging people among nations, countries develop mutually long-term bonds between each other which often help increase the understanding of each other and defuse tension. Based on the degree to which these exchanges are mutual and symmetrical, target nations would view these exchanges in two ways: One way is seen as a benevolent and win-win act supported from both sides in order

[25] For some post 9/11 examples see: Graber, "Looking at the United States Through Distorted Lenses", *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 52, no. 5, January 2009, pp.735-754.

[26] Dizard, Wilson P., *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S Information Agency*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colo., 2004.

to teach as well as learn about each others' culture and society. This often involves the symmetrical two-way flow of individuals between the countries. Or sometimes, when exchanges are implemented in the case of adversarial nations, the target nation would view such acts as a win-lose equation with the hostile government trying to *brainwash* its citizens in order to crack and defeat its enemy. As I will argue and explain in detail later, the latter is applicable to the case of Iran-U.S. exchanges. Educational exchange programs have had a traditionally large stake in the U.S. budgetary procedure. There are numerous academic works praising such an approach to public diplomacy since, compared to other asymmetric on-way methods, exchanges often function as a long-term and symmetrical line of connection among nations.[27]

It should be mentioned that prominent scholars like Nye have gone so far to deem these cultural and educational exchanges as a "key element" of a successful public diplomacy strategy.[28] Another testimony to the significance of the exchange programs comes from the Association of International Educators (NAFSA):

> Welcoming foreign students enables us to replace walls of misunderstanding with reservoirs of goodwill. Now is the time for us to seize the opportunity to teach democracy, to teach human rights, to teach the rule of law, and the equality of each man and woman, to all of our children.[29]

Exchanges constituted a major element of American public diplomacy towards Iran as well. Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice referred to this strategy in a statement before Congress in 2006 when discussing her new initiative regarding democracy promotion in Iran.[30] Furthermore, the appointment of the Iranian-American Goli Ameri in 2008, as the assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, signaled the tendency of the Bush administration to engage Iranians not just in the realm of international broadcasting but cultural exchanges as well.[31]

Language training programs are often the most prevalent forms of exchange projects. They would satisfy both ends if a person who comes to a country learns the language of the host nation while teaching his or her own mother language to the citizens of the host nation. In the case of the United States, it is mostly the English language which has been advanced throughout major regions of the world.

Alumni networks refer to the groups and associations of very skilled and educated members of the world community which have their origins in the U.S. either during their occupations or studies as exchange students or visitors. A particular example for this is the *Fulbright Association* which was founded in 1977 as an institution to keep the participants of the *Fulbright Program* connected. Such alumni networks would keep their members committed and involved for their particular cause. The same is true for NGO relationships. Creating non-governmental organization partnership networks is also a duty of

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[27] Waldbaum, Robert Kaye, *A Case Study of Institutional and Student Outcomes an Educational Exchange Programs*, PhD dissertation, University of Denver and University of Bologna, 1996.

[28] Nye, Joseph S., *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004, p.18.

[29] National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, "Immigration, Foreign Policy Experts Discuss Role of Foreign Students in U.S. Security and Foreign Policy", *National Press Club Policy Forum*, Washington D.C., 2005.

[30] Rice, Condoleezza, "Statement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice", *Department of State*, online document, 2006, retrieved [on 2008-05-06] from:<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/67088.htm>

[31] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Opening Statement of Goli Ameri*, Hearing on Nomination as Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, online document, 2008, retrieved [on 2008-05-15] from: <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2008/AmeriTestimony080130.pdf>

public diplomacy practitioners. NIAC (National Iranian American Council), AIC (American Iranian Council) and many other NGOs (see below) are examples of this aspect of public diplomacy.[32]

Computer mediated communication and *games*, the item which I partly referred to in the section on international broadcasting, refers to attempts made by public diplomacy practitioners to achieve their aims through very modern communication technology, namely computer and internet. Internet, which is only one aspect of this computer mediated communication, offers somewhat a revolution in terms of contacts within the public sphere. Through its multifaceted capabilities, internet creates "unlimited communications one-to-one (via email), one-to-many (via a personal home page or electronic conference), many-to-one (via electronic broadcast), and also most importantly, many-to-many (via online chat rooms and other social networking websites)."[33] These types of communication give people a chance to overcome traditional barriers such as distance, time, and even government control. Just as an example of the importance of this aspect of communication technology, one can refer to the U.S. President's *Nowrouz Message* to Iranians solely broadcasted online via popular social networking websites which has not only the capacity to send the message to a population which is officially barred from hearing it but also makes it feasible to receive proper feedback. Changing minds and winning hearts has been made easier with the advancement of digital and online games as well. In today's global market, children and even adults living thousands of miles away from a country like the United States (in Bahrain, for example), can experience the same cultural and psychological peculiarities as that of an American. This type of public diplomacy program, as I will show throughout the dissertation, is increasingly becoming very crucial to the development of a post-9/11American public diplomacy strategy towards Iran.

Reconstructions and *development initiatives* are other forms of practicing public diplomacy, which weigh significantly in the campaign for winning hearts and minds. A good example for this would be the cultural and development projects undertaken by the United States Peace Corps, a volunteer organization established in 1961 under President Kennedy. It used to be extremely active during the last decades of the 20th century. At the height of the Cold War, Peace Corps volunteers helped various third world nations in their path to reach western standards of civility. Another prominent American organization is the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which undertakes almost similar tasks but covers broader issues and regions of the world.

Last, but not least, *providing support for favorable groups and factions in a target nation* is an important component of what can be referred to as *aggressive public diplomacy*. Based on such an approach, governments often nurture certain native groups and their viewpoints in a particular society. The influence which such groups can have on public opinion can always be portrayed as genuine rather than foreign-born. Also, a better scenario might happen when the same groups or factions achieve political success and take control of government or leadership of a nation. The United States has been proactive in implementing such an approach both in the past, during the Cold War, and present during the 'war on terror'. Such U.S. strategy is usually referred to as *democracy promotion* or *civil society promotion*.

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[32] Timmerman, Kenneth R., "The Mullahs' Voice", *FrontPageMagazine*, online document, 2007, retrieved [on 2008-05-25] from: <http://frontpagemag.com/Articles/Printable.aspx?GUID=02549A0A-61FB-4A13-A574-756C67F9155B> .

[33] Nye, Joseph S., *The Paradox of American power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 52.

America's Public Diplomacy

Review of literature about the aims and activities of the U.S. government under the name of public diplomacy throughout the last century shows that the definition of the term includes almost every possible approach ranging from symmetrical two-way cultural relations, to one-way exchanges, to pure public relations and image making, to information campaigns, to the most negative: disinformation and propaganda. That is, U.S. public diplomacy has been about utilizing the most effective instruments and techniques at its disposal to influence public opinion in other nations and increase U.S. soft power in the regions of its interest. To explain such a notion, a short historical consideration of U.S. public diplomacy will be helpful.

Although *public diplomacy* was coined during the 1960s, the information campaign - one aspect of public diplomacy - officially started in American history by President Woodrow Wilson. Established in 1917 by Wilson as a response to the strong anti-war sentiments inside the United States, the Committee on Public Information (CPI) not only engaged in a kind of public advocacy at home, but also very soon developed a network of foreign agencies abroad which disseminated information about America and its foreign policy.[34] Its foreign branches were charged to propagate U.S. contribution to the European war and generally to create a positive atmosphere and image for the United States. Wilson's burning desire to start what we can call the American century project was to such an extent that by the end of the First World War, the U.S. government had created public *information* offices in more than fifteen countries around the globe.[35]

Another significant transformation period for American public diplomacy was the Second World War. Then, Roosevelt, in a similar move to Woodrow Wilson's, established the Office of War Information (OWI), to coordinate the information and psychological operations of the war. Even though the war ended in 1945, the need for an active U.S. role in the international arena led other subsequent administrations to continue this particular public diplomacy approach which some scholars tend to identify as policy advocacy or "information advocacy".[36] Of course, such public diplomacy was greatly under the influence of military warfare and thus a war-time necessity. Hence, there were some immediate controversies over its functionality after the war. But the subsequent entanglement with the Soviet Union and the following military engagements in Korea and Vietnam only solidified the position that policy advocacy and introducing the American way of life was an ever more necessary aspect of foreign policy for the rest of the century.

Media outlets such as Voice of America (VOA), which had emerged to counter Nazi propaganda during the War, thus outlived WWII and operated continuously only under the provision that (based on Congress' Smith-Mundt Act of 1948) their information campaigns do not target and affect the U.S. public. The Congressional concern was mostly due to the fact that the content of such broadcasts was policy advocacy and thus could be used as leverage for a particular political party in power to influence not only the foreign public but also American citizens at home.

The turning point in the history of American public diplomacy was the creation of the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1953. As Nicholas Cull has shown it in his book, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*,

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[34] Wolper, Gregg, *The Origins of Public Diplomacy: Woodrow Wilson, George Creel, and the Committee on Public Information,*PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1991.

[35] Mock, James R. and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1939.

[36] Wang, Jian, "Telling the American story to the world: The purpose of US public diplomacy in historical perspective." *Public Relations Review*, vol. 33, no.1, 2007, pp. 21-30.

several reasons were behind the creation of USIA.[37] The abundance of the task was simply a huge burden for the State Department. And there were simply too many organizations and entities involved in the business of selling America to the world. This had led into disparities, overlaps, and also difficulties in the process of defining the strategy, management, and measurement of U.S. information programs oversees. It was during the heat of the Cold War that the Eisenhower administration took the war of ideas to another level when the president declared that "it is not enough to have sound policies dedicated to the goals of universal peace, freedom, and progress. These policies must me made known to and understood by all peoples throughout the world."[38] Very soon, the U.S. government launched several inquiries to improve the structure of U.S. public diplomacy, and based on the recommendations of investigation committees decided to bring all U.S. public diplomacy programs under one umbrella agency (i.e. USIA).[39] There was hope that this centralization and the independence of the agency from the State Department could help the credibility, efficiency, and velocity of the U.S. information programs. The USIA was charged "to promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries."[40] Since the scope of its mission was broadly defined, relative to the tendency of a particular American administration and the international environment, the main focus of the projects and programs would swing between two-way, dialogue-structured approach and sometimes mere one-way communication and information advocacy methods. The agency had its competitions and rivalries inside the U.S. government as well. Institutions such as the CIA, the National Security Council, the Department of Defence, and even the State Department, were often times concerned about their say in American foreign policy and its public diplomacy. If a USIA director was close to the President or could make his case in front of the boss, then the agency could foresee better prospects and financial as well as political support. During almost 50 years of their work (1953-1999), the USIA directors felt responsible for advocating U.S. foreign policy through international broadcasts and information programs, introducing American culture through cultural and exchange diplomacy, and listening to the world and analyzing the international opinion about the United States.[41] The geographical extent of USIA activities was as vast as the Soviet threat (and by that standard, it was global). Accordingly, the USIA established more than 190 outposts in more than 142 countries to attack or contain USSR's cultural and military incursions. It resorted to personal contacts, radio and television broadcasting, libraries, book and journal publications, motion picture production and distribution, cultural as well as technological exhibitions, and English language instructions to win the battle of ideas.[42] The USIA launched exhibitions such as *The Family of Man*, entered into agreements with Hollywood (particularly Motion Picture Association of America) to produce and consult about movies and documentaries about the United States, and published or distributed books and journals such as George Orwell's *1984,* expanded Voice of America's coverage and language services in a global scope (particularly throughout the eastern blocs), and advanced English language teaching in Asia, Latin America, and Middle East in particular.

Almost all USIA programs were designed to prove the emptiness of Soviet promises (i.e., equality and justice), the isolation and failure of Communism, the universality of American perspectives, and the ultimate victory of American liberal democracy even in the face of temporary hurdles. The policy proved to be

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[37] Cull, Nicholas J., *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 81-96.
[38] Quoted in Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, p. 81.
[39] Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, p. 81-82.
[40] Wang, *Telling the American Story to the World*, p.24.
[41] Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, p. 486.
[42] Elder, Robert Ellsworth, *The Information Machine; the United States Information Agency and American Foreign Policy*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1968, p. 4.

a success, when the Berlin Wall fell and Soviet Union collapsed, but with it also the USIA.

When the Cold War finished, it was believed that the United States no longer needed such extensive organizations as the USIA and hence, in 1999, the Agency was dissolved into the State Department. The number of projects and programs dedicated to fight the spread of communism also began to shrink or change focus. It was only after 9/11 that public diplomacy re-emerged in the policy making circles as an indispensable component of foreign policy. This time, the new challenge which had replaced Communism, was the threat of Islamic extremism prevalent mostly in the Middle East region.

Analysis of such agency transformations and debates about U.S. public diplomacy programs points to the fact that the U.S. government has resorted to multiple instruments and techniques throughout history to advance its position in the international arena. I have referred to some particular public diplomacy initiatives such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Liberty, Radio Marti, and other international broadcasting networks, *Amerika* Magazine, American Corners, economic development projects, Fulbright scholarships, America Houses, national exhibitions, and, rather lately, various online initiatives such as America.gov. Some of these programs have an information-dissemination orientation and represent the asymmetric one-way end of the public diplomacy spectrum and some others (like the Fulbright program) are more likely to be close to the other end of the communication spectrum, and that is, symmetric two-way communication, where one not only speaks and teaches but also listens and learns.

Based on the discussion above then, public diplomacy as a phrase can refer to various, and almost any, cultural or information campaign which has the sponsorship of a particular state behind it and is aimed at influencing the public opinion of a foreign nation for particular foreign policy gains. In this dissertation, as long as such operations are overt and are sanctioned and supported in any way by the government of a country, they could be categorized as public diplomacy.

As it was proven in the examination of the history of the term, public diplomacy had a different meaning at the beginning. It should also be mentioned that the present definition is subject to change and in 2050, for example, it could have a totally different meaning based on the approach of its practitioners. According to Cull, we should be aware of this fluidity when it comes to the definition of such a term:

> Practitioners and scholars of 'public diplomacy' as presently defined should at least consider that their interlocutors may understand nothing by the term, or still understand the term in its 1856 or 1916 meaning, or may already understand the term in a 2016 sense of which we are not yet aware.[43]

The foundation of this dissertation, in terms of its treatment of public diplomacy, is based on the particular practices of the United States government during the last century and especially after 9/11. And there are some changes after 9/11. For one thing, with the advancement of information technology and globalization, there is more emphasis on the role of non-state actors and NGOs in undertaking the tasks that had previously been accomplished by state agencies. Encouraging the role of non-state actors is a recurrent theme during the contemporary discussions among the practitioners and agencies receiving the public diplomacy fund.[44] As Wang argues about recent American public diplomacy:

> Aside from the commonalities of the mission of U.S. public diplomacy across time, the current endeavor has one aspect that

[43] Cull, *Public Diplomacy before Gullion*, p.22.
[44] "The Mission of Public Diplomacy", Karen Hughes Testimony at the Confirmation Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 2005.

> represents some departure from the previous goals. And it is the emphasis on including American citizens and non-government actors in the process. Historically, public diplomacy has focused on government communication with foreign audiences.[45]

Such a partnership between the state, non-state actors and NGOs has major implications for U.S. public diplomacy towards Iran because, as I will show in the following chapters, due to the estrangement between both governments, a significant proportion of cultural as well as democracy promotion activities have been handled by NGOs.

According to the literature, some of which I referred to in the above sections, American public diplomacy has been about influencing the foreign public through short-range to long-range initiatives (see table 1). Such initiatives strive to "inform, engage, exchange, educate and empower" preferably all segments of a foreign society and particularly the elites and its leadership.[46]

Table 1: American Public Diplomacy Programs (Short-range vs. Long-Range)

Range/Purpose	Public Diplomacy Initiative
Short-medium term/Information and advocacy	International broadcasts Magazines Books and pamphlets Online media outlets Media hubs
Long and Medium range/ Dialogue and mutual understanding Cultural relations	American libraries NGO empowerment and partnerships Exchanges (academic, athletic, etc.) Language training programs Reconstruction and aid projects Democracy promotion projects

Chapter Outline

Based on the major questions and definitions which I presented above, the current work will have several chapters. In the first chapter, I start with the historical underpinnings of relations between Iran and the United States. This chapter will connect the pre-Islamic revolution debates of U.S.-Iran relations to the present problems between the two nations. It shows how two bosom friends during the Cold War, the United States and Iran, separated after Iran's 1979 revolution. As a result of this, a new Cold War-style hostility emerged between the two nations which continues until today. The chapter ends with mapping the public diplomacy programs initiated or reinforced during the presidency of George W. Bush, so that they could be studied within the next chapters.

The next three chapters (that is, chapter two, three, and four) will address each of the major categories in American public diplomacy towards the Islamic Republic

[45] Wang, *Telling the American Story to the World*, p.28.
[46] Wang, *Telling the American Story to the World*, p.28.

of Iran. Analyzing American international broadcasts to Iran will be the first subject matter which will appear in chapter two. The background to the contemporary broadcasts, their structure, their transformation during the Bush administration, and their reception by Iranians will be the subsections of the third chapter. I will show how Voice of America and Radio Farda, two short and intermediate-range instruments of public diplomacy, rose from the ashes of the Cold War and became important pillars of U.S. public diplomacy. The third chapter will be an investigation of cultural diplomacy between Iran and America. It starts from the very first days of cultural contacts between Persians and Americans in the 1830s and culminates in the discussion of the very last exchanges happening in the 21st century. I argue that unlike the case of international broadcasting, cultural exchange is very much dependant on the mutual agreement between the governments of Iran and the United States, hence it is of great significance to see how the contemporary discourses among politicians both in Washington and Tehran contribute to the exchange of cultures. The fourth chapter, the promotion of democracy in Iran, will explore the very last major instrument of U.S. soft power. Based on the data retrieved from official democracy promotion institutions as well as the Congress, I will discuss the extent of democracy promotion initiatives under George W. Bush as part of a greater American Middle East policy. The overt U.S. support for the Iranian opposition both inside and outside Iran is the center piece of this chapter. I will show how through its Cold War-style democracy promotion programs, the U.S. government cultivates a network of Iranian elites opposing the Islamic Republic.

Finally, the conclusion chapter will draw connections between the argumentative lines of different chapters. As an under-appreciated aspect of public diplomacy, *democracy promotion* enjoyed a pivotal position in the formulation of post-9/11 American cultural policy towards Iran. Scholars and practitioners of public diplomacy are thus encouraged to acknowledge this pivotal position when they engage in theoretical discussions of public diplomacy in general.

1. CONTEXTUALIZING AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOWARDS IRAN

In terms of foreign policy, U.S. engagement with Iran consists of three historical phases. One can classify them as three distinct periods of *indifference*, *alliance*, and *divergence*. Each of these phases has generated specific sets of public diplomacy strategies. In order to identify and understand these strategies, we should first try to gain an understanding of the political context surrounding each of these three phases.

The indifference period, which I also call the pre-Cold War times in U.S.-Iranian relations, covers a time span when the U.S. government had very little official interest in the region in general. In this period, there was almost no official public diplomacy strategy. The second phase is the "Cold War period" which was an apt moment in history, for both governments, to form alliances against a common threat, the Soviet Union. Due to the strategic location of Iran, special Cold War public diplomacy programs were initiated by the U.S. government to fight communism both inside and outside Iran. The third phase, the post-Islamic revolution era, began and continued with constant misunderstandings by both sides. As a result, all their previous alliances disappeared in almost like a flash when the United States admitted the fleeing Shah of Iran and Iranians took the American embassy hostage. In 1979, this long-married couple went into a bitter divorce, to borrow a term from Iran-expert Barbara Slavin, and a new divergence period with torrents of U.S. public diplomacy programs started.[47] To understand the nature of U.S. public diplomacy strategies towards Iran, an overview of significant events in the relations between the two nations is necessary.

1.1 Early Contacts: the Official Indifference Period (1830s-1940s)

In 1830, Harrison Gray Otis Dwight and Eli Smith, two ardent missionaries, boarded a ship bound for northwestern Iran. They soon settled in the City of Urummyah (in the northwest) and began building their Christian community there. This event is recorded to be the very first set of contacts between Americans and Iranians.[48] And ironically, this and many other similar encounters happened during a time when there was almost no official contact between the governments of the two nations.

This pilgrimage is highly significant when we study the evolution of U.S. public diplomacy towards Iran. The Christian missionaries of 19th century America were perhaps the most ardent emissaries of not just their Gospel but their nationality which was woven inextricably to their faith. These missionaries were among the first and yet largest transnational cultural organizations since the emergence of the nation-state system (and even before that), to engage in cross-cultural exchanges. Their importance comes from the fact that, despite the validity of real-politics in international relations, culture and cultural institutions have remained significantly influential in the process of defining not only the national interest but also the means to achieving it.[49] As Emily Rosenberg mentioned in 1982, American missionaries were of the belief that Protestant Christianity (or conversion to it) was the precondition for material progress and thus spread on earth to share their American Dream with the heathen inhabitants

[47] Slavin, Barbara, *Bitter friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2007, p.6.
[48] Bill, James A., *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989, p.15.
[49] Iriye, Akira, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997, p. 11-12.

of the globe.[50] Christian missionaries in Iran were thus an example of such cultural institutions fervently determined to formulate cultural parameters for the Persian people. It was through the process of evangelizing Iranians that American churches defined and redefined the shared visions of a desired world for the converted Iranians.

There was also another public diplomacy aspect to the work of missionaries. Since the activity of private or non-profit groups and NGO's- and I think we can include missionary organizations within the NGO category- is important to the image of the country of their origin, they should also be taken into account as relevant to the discussion of public diplomacy. For example, German companies such as Siemens or Mercedes Benz may be officially irrelevant to German government's public diplomacy programs, but their performance abroad will affect the image of Germany either for better or worse. From this point of view, we can track down American engagement with Iranians to the early decades of the 19th century. In this case, it was America's evangelical church which played the role of a non-governmental institution to bridge between the nations. Mathew Mark Davis, a religious historian, in his comprehensive study of American missionaries in Iran, refers to the 1830s as the first years of America's engagement with Iranians.[51] Davis delves into Iranian-American history and identifies an era of non-governmental relations when religious organizations played a prominent role. He writes:

> In an area of limited official U.S. interest, American citizens and non-governmental organizations played a significant role in American-Iranian relations… whether opening schools and hospitals or taking evangelistic tours across the country, American missionaries were concerned with preaching the Christian gospel to Iranians… and enjoyed a continuous presence in Iran from 1832 to 1979.[52]

During the period between the 1830s and 1940s, America and Iran turned from almost indifferent states into bosom allies. As mentioned, there was little of an official relationship, but politics soon followed the people (i.e., missionaries) when in 1856, the king of Persia, Nassereddin Shah Qajar, commenced the political relations by officially dispatching an ambassador, Mirza Abolhasan Shirazi, to Washington D.C. America, in a rather late but positive response, sent Samuel Benjamin in 1883 as the first U.S. diplomatic envoy to Iran. Nonetheless, relations remained mediocre and both countries had to wait until the 20th century when Iran's oil reserves were discovered and could feed the newly emerging industries in many western countries, including the United States. It was only then that the countries were willing to take the relations into full *ambassadorial* levels.[53] Other than the church engagement mentioned earlier, which led into establishing quite a handful of schools and other institutions, one can hardly find evidence of a systematic public diplomacy engagement between the nations until the early 20th century.[54]

It was during Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign in Iran, around 1920s, that academic and cultural relations began to blossom. The United States had just experienced one of its very first international entanglements in the First World War, and although

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[50] Rosenberg, Emily S., *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion*, 1890-1945, Hill and Wang, New York, 1982, p. 8.

[51] Davis, Mathew Mark, *Evangelizing the Orient: American Missionaries in Iran*, 1890-1940, PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 2001, pp.330.

[52] Davis, *Evangelizing the Orient*, p. 3.

[53] Lesch, David W. *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., 2003.p. 52.

[54] Schools such as the *American Girls School* and the *American College* were established in 1873. See: Badiozamani, Badi and G. Badiozamani, *Iran and America: Re-kind[l]ing a love lost*, East-West Understanding Press, California, 2005.

there was some reluctance within Congress, various American institutions began to prepare themselves for a more active U.S. role in the world. Iranians, on the other hand, had a new dynasty (*Pahlavi*) rule over Iran. Reza Shah (1878–1944) tended, cautiously, to see the West as a development model and it was during his reign that significant modern roads and railroads, as well as education projects (e.g., the University of Tehran) were introduced. Consequently, as early as the 1920s, Iranian-American institutions such as "Iran-America Society" were established and cultural programs such as English language teachings, exchanges, and exhibitions were initiated.[55] One of the prominent examples was the Persian art exhibition held in 1925 due to relentless efforts of Arthur Pope, an ardent American Iranologist; located in Philadelphia, the exhibition, which introduced Iranian architecture and historical artifacts, had drawn great interest towards Iran.[56] Due to such citizen-inspired efforts, hundreds of people in both nations, especially the well-educated ones, came to learn about and share cultural values and norms. However, all such efforts bore little weight in contrast to the amount of systematic public diplomacy which was to follow the Cold War period.

1.2 Cold War Years: the Alliance Period (1945-1979)

The most significant part of American-Iranian relations came during the Cold War when American democracy and Soviet communism entered a painstaking battle against each other not long after their joint alliance against Nazi Germany in the Second World War. During the years after 1945, Iran, located at the southern border of the USSR, emerged as a geopolitically important country to the U.S. and that heavily influenced the U.S. decision making process. To lose Iran in the international domino game to communism was such a nightmare that Americans were ready to pay an extraordinary price to eschew such an outcome.[57] Iranians, on the other hand, aware of such a position, were more than happy to ally with a great power to get enough strength to fend off the traditional and constant Soviet, as well as British, incursions into their land, economy, and politics. Aptly fit to the context of the Cold War, American public diplomacy included almost all kinds of cultural programs known to American politicians of the day. These public diplomacy tools, which were designed to dam against waves of communist propaganda towards Iran and propagate American values, included radio broadcasts, cinematic initiatives, publication and distribution of books, pamphlets, and newspapers, cultural and educational exchanges, and countless other related initiatives.

From the end of the Second World War until the Iranian revolution in 1979, Iranian politicians and especially its last monarch, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, looked earnestly to the New World for almost every kind of support to westernize the country and also to tighten the rule of the monarchy over an increasingly unstable internal political atmosphere. The Soviet Union's vicinity to Iran had of course its revolutionary effects (i.e., communist ideas of justice and a classless society leaked into Iran through its long border with USSR) and added to the already boiling hatred towards Iranian monarchs who were mostly considered inept in political as well as economic affairs. Iran was a perfect battle ground then, with the Shah and his political entourage looking at America and its values on the one side, and some Iranians aspiring for representation, justice and equality in both politics and the economy, on the other side. There was a third

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[55] Arndt, Richard T., *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Potomac Books, Dulles, Va., 2005. p.191.

[56] Gluck, Jay, Noël Siver, Sumi Hiramoto Gluck, and Arthur Upham Pope, *Surveyors of Persian Art: A Documentary Biography of Arthur Upham Pope & Phyllis Ackerman*, SoPA ; Distributed by Mazda Publishers, Ashiya, Japan; Costa Mesa, CA., 1996.

[57] Over the years during the Cold War, United States, fearing communist takeover of Iran, provided the country with generous economic aids and supplied its military extraordinarily up-to-date armaments which were only available to really favored countries such as Israelis and U.S. military itself.

party as well, the religious clerics and their followers who had their own system of beliefs. Religious leaders liked industrial modernization but hated its cultural implications (western dress codes, etc.), and believed in justice and equality but loathed communist's negative view of religion.

At this stage of history, U.S. involvement in Iran revolved around two major themes: fighting communism and a tepid, but rapidly evolving, interest in Iran's oil reserves. As Henry F. Grady (then U.S. ambassador to Iran) wrote in a 1953 confidential letter to the State Department, the main objective of U.S. public diplomacy was fighting the USSR. It also intended to cover issues such as the Anglo-American rivalry over Iranian oil resources by showing the U.S. as not being that much interested in the country's oil.[58] During this time, the United States government focused on Iran both for "propaganda directed at Iranians and for propaganda broadcast outside the country."[59] The main theme, as mentioned, was fighting communism and Iranian cooperation with the U.S. government was very vital in order to reach "Soviet people in sensitive Caucasian and Central Asian areas."[60] Actions included VOA broadcasts, cultural events, publications, and, last but not least, the blockade of Soviet propaganda efforts towards Iran through Iranian proxies. As a result of this last strategy, for example, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), an organization responsible for distributing official news from Moscow, was repeatedly blocked by joint U.S.-Iran efforts. There were cultural activities as well, and screening of motion pictures and filmstrips had become omnipresent in Iran's major cities. In some specific cases, for instance, movies sympathetic to Soviets (such as *Fall OF Berlin* and *North Star*) were removed from the screens of Iranian cinemas and were replaced with motion pictures (such as *Two Cities*, *Why Korea*, *One Year in Korea*, and *Azerbaijan Day*) which were favorable to the United States or anti-communist camps. The U.S. embassy in Iran had felt "certain" that to publicly display films "which praise the Soviet Union, can do considerable harm at this time."[61] It was not an easy process of course. For such purposes, the U.S. government needed to enhance Iranian audience capability in every sense of the word, in order to prepare them to absorb the propaganda. For example, it must have provided technical and infrastructural assistance to Iran. In just one case, in a deal with the Iranian officials, the U.S. government pledged to provide "thirty-one video projectors of sixteen and thirty-one mm…, development of film libraries…, transportation equipment, and the maintenance parts" for its *urban showings* and "25 mobile units fully equipped" for the rural screenings of movies which were either cultural or developmental in nature.[62]

On the publication and press side, the United States tried to develop libraries (e.g., in Tehran and Isfahan- Iran's major cities), distribute original or translations of books and magazines (such as *Time, Life, Newsweek,* and *Reader's Digest*) throughout the public places and among Iranian leaders of public opinion.[63]

As mentioned before, there was political rivalry inside Iran and one of its consequences was that the United States did not have a totally free hand there. Such U.S. public diplomacy efforts did not pass unnoticed by the rival parties (like the communists or the ultra-nationalists) who were quite active to disclose

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[58] Iran Cable from Henry F. Grady to the U.S. Department of State titled: "Proposed New Program for USIE, Iran", July 6, 1950. Source: National Archives, Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State. Decimal Files, 1950-1954.

[59] Iran Cable from Henry F. Grady, July 6, 1950.

[60] Iran Cable from Henry F. Grady, July 6, 1950.

[61] Iran Cable from Edward C. Wells to the U.S. Department of State, "Motion Pictures-- The Film Two Cities", May 16, 1950. Source: National Archives. Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State. Decimal Files, 1950-1954.

[62] Iran Cable from Edward C. Wells to the U.S. Department of State titled: "Notes on Expanded Program for Iran" [Includes Memorandum], January 12, 1951, p. 5. Source: National Archives, Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State. Decimal Files, 1950-1954.

[63] Iran Cable from Edward C. Wells, January 12, 1951, p.6.

and disrupt any propaganda effort by the United States. In order to avoid and overcome such suspicions, Edward Wells, then the U.S. embassy's Public Affairs Officer, had even recommended to "have the program[s] appear to be an Iranian venture."[64] He further noted that "the major portion of the program[s] would have to be in the educational field, and developing knowledge of better agricultural and public health methods…. The successful penetration of the country on this level would ultimately provide a sound foundation for the dissemination of information about the USA and its policies."[65] Such policies in the 1950s indicate how the U.S. mindset had totally been fixed on Iran as a strategically important *domino* in the Cold War game. And the boiling pot of internal politics in Iran was sometimes a clear setback for such policies. Such was the case with the oil nationalization movement in the 1950s.

In 1951, while the country was still officially under the rule of the Shah, the Iranian parliament elected the popular Mohammad Mosaddeq as Iran's new prime minister. He had been an ardent supporter of preserving Iranian sovereignty and nationalizing Iran's oil industry when such reserves were virtually under total British control. The nationalist atmosphere during the office of Prime Minister Mosaddeq produced hatred towards foreign (mostly British) manipulation. When Mosaddeq actually nationalized the oil industry in May 1951, Britain responded with embargoes and sanctions and encouraged other nations, especially the United States, to follow.[66] Controversies began to emerge during the crisis and reflected not only on the political and economic spheres but also on the cultural relations. It led, in part, to a temporary closure of U.S. information and cultural centers outside of Tehran. An Iranian official expressed regret to the American embassy about the closings but had reasoned that "some foreign cultural institutions in provinces had . . . engaged in activities contrary to the interests of Iran."[67] Trends in the oil market were not clearly in favor of the United States and Britain. Thus, simultaneous to negotiations, a plan for removing Mosaddeq from power was hatched by the two powers.

Oil Negotiations and Mosaddeq's popularity did not last long and in August 1953, to the despair of many Iranians who had ardently fought for their country's independence and democracy, Mosaddeq's democratically elected but excessively nationalist government was overthrown by a joint British and American coup.[68] The Shah who had fled the country returned and gained an even greater control over the country. Meanwhile, Iran's oil concessions to the West continued. The coup and its aftermath should be identified as a milestone in shaping the Iranian psyche about the United States. The event came to act as a surprisingly non-exhaustive source for Iranian resentment and distrust towards anything coming from Washington for a very long period of time.[69] Tired of a longtime British-Soviet disrespect for Iran's sovereignty, Iranians had looked at the U.S. as not only an emerging superpower but also a beacon of hope in international affairs, but their hopes had only been shattered with the U.S. involvement in the plot.

Whatever the long term consequences, the U.S. government was to enjoy an immediate period of uninterrupted cooperation with the Iranian monarchy to

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[64] Iran Dispatch from Edward C. Wells to the Department of State titled: "IE: Local Newspaper Item on USIE Radio Scripts," January 14, 1952. Source: National Archives, Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State, Decimal Files, 1950-1954.

[65] Iran Dispatch from Edward C. Wells to the Department of State titled: "IE: Local Newspaper Item on USIE Radio Scripts", 1952.

[66] Diba, Farhad, *Mohammad Mossadegh: Political Biography*, Croom Helm, 1986, p. 179.

[67] Iran Cable from Loy Henderson to the Department of State titled: "Closure of Foreign Information and Cultural Centers", February 3, 1952.Source: National Archives, Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State, Decimal Files, 1950-1954.

[68] Battle Joyce (ed.) "U.S. Propaganda in the Middle East - The Early Cold War Version", *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 78*, 2002, P.12, from: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB78/essay.htm>

[69] Kinzer, Stephen, *All the Shah's Men: an American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, John Wiley & Sons, 2008, p. x.

contain the Soviets in the south. During this time (i.e., from 1953 until the Islamic Revolution in 1979), the ban on cultural centers was removed and U.S. public diplomacy programs showered down on Iran. Americans even received exclusive privileges to cultivate Iranian hearts and minds. Iranian Censorship Commission, for instance, allowed the U.S. Information Service (USIS) "to show anti communist films", meanwhile "no exhibition permits were granted for films that contained any reference to communism, Soviet Russia, or even pictures of the Soviet Leaders."[70] Similarly, various USIS employees were dispatched to many Iranian cities to "develop personal contacts . . . supply as much servicing as possible to newspapers and magazines, conduct film showings, provide materials for radio, and develop English language classes."[71]

U.S. public diplomacy had its own target groups in Iran during the cold war. A 1953 letter from the American embassy in Tehran reveals a list of target groups plus the USIE role (United States Information and Educational Exchange Program) in achieving certain goals with regard to such audiences. The list includes the following target groups: 1) "Shah, the Court and the few hundred families who dominate the economic life and control the government", 2) "Opinion leaders among the illiterate masses--Mullahs, village headmen, tribal chief", 3) "Army" 4) "Labor", 5) "intellectuals, particularly those in the educational field" 6) "men and women of western origin", 7) "literate 10% as a whole", and 8) "Leaders of linguistic and religious minorities."[72] It is obvious that the U.S. approach was based on a top-down model with trying to influence the leadership first, and then other respective segments of Iranian society. It was believed then that the trickle-down effect would benefit the United States. That is, if you affect the top of the pyramid, since it has the power and also the legitimacy over its subservient constituency, then a similar affect would be seen in the lower levels of the society.

Major instruments of public diplomacy, educational and academic exchanges were among the ways to influence the Iranian socio-political pyramid. The U.S. government supported the International Educational Exchange (IEE) "to handle Iranians visiting the United States under Government auspices and send distinguished Americans to Iran."[73] By the mid 1970s, as many as 30,000 Iranian students had been studying in the U.S. under various educational and cultural initiatives.[74] On the other hand, the United States would compensate this generosity by dispersing the view "that Iran[ian] leaders [Shah and Zahedi[75]] and [the] public have chosen to align themselves with the free world and to indicate that it is in interest of Iranian security and prosperity to cooperate closely with Western democracies."[76]

The Shah of Iran, whose main priority seemed to resurrect the Persian Empire, was particularly interested in America's involvement in the country. He developed a particular affinity towards the United States and made more than 20 state visits to the United States during his nearly 4 decades of absolute rule over Iran. He repeatedly asked for American military and economic support for the country. During this period of time, involvement of hundreds of U.S.

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[70] Iran Dispatch from Edward C. Wells to the United States Information Agency titled: "Mo Pix: Recent Action by Censorship Commission in Connection with The Korea Story and Let Us Live", September 2, 1953. Source: National Archives, Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State. Decimal Files, 1950-1954.

[71] United States Embassy, Iran Cable from Edward C. Wells to the United States Information Agency. "Media Guidance regarding Iran", September 15, 1953. Source: National Archives. Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State. Decimal Files, 1950-1954.

[72] Iran Cable from Henry F. Grady to the Department of State titled: "Proposed New Program for USIE, Iran," July 6, 1950, p. 4.

[73] Iran Cable from Edward C. Wells, *Media Guidance regarding Iran*, 1953.

[74] Asgard, Ramin, "U.S.Iran Cultural Diplomacy: A Historical Perspective", *Al Nakhlah*, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts , Spring 2010, p.4.

[75] Fazlollah Zahedi had replaced Mossadegh as Iran's post-coup prime minister in 1953.

[76] Iran Cable from Edward C. Wells, *Media Guidance regarding Iran*, 1953.

missionaries in the cultural, military, and economic affairs of Iran came to form the story of the U.S.-Iran alliance during the Cold War.

While the Shah was busy with his dream of resurrecting the Persian Empire, another significant event was happening in Iran: the rise of religious leaders in popular opinion and their tendency to assume political power. Despite the apparent efforts of the Shah, the Iranian political system had remained wasteful and corrupt, the economic gap between the rich and poor had increased, and the nation's anger with the Shah's humiliating concessions (e.g., Status-of-Forces Agreement[77]) to the U.S. government had only grown. Religious leaders, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, a humble but very powerful cleric, began to lash out on the dynasty, gaining an ever increasing popularity among the people. It was quite ironic, but real, that all the Shah's effort to culturally westernize Iran resulted in the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the ascendance to power of the politicians with religious orientations. The revolution came as a shock to the Shah and also to Washington. It sealed off more than nearly three decades of close ties between Iran and the United States and opening a new era with a totally different direction in goals and strategies of both nations.

1.3 The Post-Revolution Iran and the Divergence Period (1979-present)

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was and still is a memorable time for almost all of Iranians. It brought many changes, among which was a great u-turn in contemporary Iranian foreign policy. Based on one of the revolutionary appeals, Iran was now opposed to any interference in its internal affairs. The famous slogan "Neither East, nor West, but an Islamic Republic" chanted by the revolutionaries, besides being an emphasis on the ideal political model, was a serious signal for the future of Iranian relations with either of the two world superpowers.[78] Due to the transformations in Iran, the United States was to face one of its more serious challenges in the Middle East. Entirely unlucky and based on a wrong premise[79], the U.S. government relentlessly supported the Shah during and even until the very end of his reign.[80] To make matters worse after the revolution, the Carter administration decided to admit the ailing Shah to the U.S. despite repeated objections from its embassy in Tehran that it may endanger the United States' image among the populace.[81] Already enraged by the past U.S. interference in their internal affairs (e.g., the notorious 1953 Coup), a group of Iranian students took over the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979. They asked for the extradition of the Shah and return of his assets to Iran. Originally intended to be a less-than-a-day sit in, the *hostage crisis* lasted for 444 days, thanks to the boiling anti-American sentiments and the support from Iranian leaders. The event added to the already complex nature of the relationship but it was only the beginning. Since then, both countries have eyed each other's behavior with utmost suspicion and have devised policies and strategies to outsmart and change the behavior of each other. It is in this light that U.S. public diplomacy towards the *Islamic Republic of Iran* should be studied.

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[77] In October, 1964, Iran signed a status-of-forces agreement with the United States and based on one of its clauses American personnel and their families were given judicial immunity from criminal and civil laws.

[78] Library of Congress, Federal Research, D., *Iran: A Country Study*, Kessinger Publishing, Whitefish, Mont., 2005, p. 253.

[79] U.S. politicians believed that he was the best option for an Iranian-American alliance and that the Shah would remain in power, despite growing protests throughout the country. See: Carter, Jimmy and D. Richardson, *Conversations with Carter*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p.158.

[80] Keddie, Nikki R. and Yann Richard. *Modern Iran :Roots and Results of Revolution*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 2003.

[81] Limbert, John W., *Negotiating with Iran: Wrestling the Ghosts of History*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C., 2009.

1.3.1 Responding to the Anti-American Revolution

With the Islamic revolution's "anti-imperial" motto, much of U.S. public diplomacy programs and institutions were knocked down and nationalized.[82] For instance, the offices of the Iran-America Society, a highly active organization which served as a venue for the United States Information Service, were bombed during the heat of the revolution and American Cultural Centers in Tehran and Isfahan were shut down. Some American cultural officers and employees like Kathryn Koob, then the head of the Iran-America Society, were among the hostages in 1979. These events constituted the beginning of a bitter estrangement between the two nations. Events of the 1980s like the hostage crisis and the 8-year-long Iran-Iraq war further "radicalized Iran's politics and helped propel anti-Americanism to new heights."[83]

By the time Reagan came to power in 1981, the United States policy towards the post-revolutionary Iran and its leaders had changed radically. The Reagan administration, initially announcing to be neutral in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), sided with Saddam after signs of his defeat by offering him military and intelligence support and restoring official relations with Iraq in 1984.[84] The United States also became the very first resort for Iranian expatriates opposing the Islamic Republic. During the 1980s, these opposition groups created several cultural and political television networks aiming at the Iranian audience both in the U.S. and at home.[85] Parallel to this, the State Department resumed its Farsi broadcasting of Voice of America (VOA) after it had severely restricted its programming in 1966.[86] VOA first started as a one hour radio program and slowly became one of the major instruments of U.S. public diplomacy towards Iran. The Iranian government regarded these as continued interference from America, or the "Great Satan" (in the words of Ayatollah Khomeini), in Iran's internal affairs and did its best to block any communication efforts between the two countries.

Post-revolutionary Iran was under the significant influence of such intellectuals as Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati, and its prominent leader, Ayatollah Khomeini.[87] They all looked at western cultural influences, especially those of capitalism, as a "cultural assault" and a "disease" which, in their view, was against moral and ideological standards of pure Islam.[88] There was even a distinction between what was named "pure Mohammedan Islam" and an "American Islam".[89] The latter was a label on politicians and policies that showed any tendency towards America and its capitalistic world view. Such view was prominent and shared among almost the majority of Iranian politicians from 1979 to 1997 when some reformist politicians in Iran came to power through presidential elections and decided it was time for trying to settle with the United States.

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[82] Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 534.

[83] Asgard, *U.S.-Iran Cultural Diplomacy*, p. 5.

[84] Battle, Joyce (ed.), "Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein: The U.S. Tilts toward Iraq, 1980-1984", *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 82*, February 25, 2003.

[85] Naficy, Hamid, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. XVII.

[86] Broadcasting Board of Governors, Office of Inspector General, *Voice of America's Persian News Network*, Report of Inspection, report no. ISP-IB-09-27, March 2009, p.4.

[87] Samiyee, Alireza, "*Discussion with Mohamad Rajabi: Gharbzadegi Nazde Jalal va Fardid*", *Iran Newspaper*, No 3732, 18/06/86, p.10; Ahmadi, Mohamad Mehdi, "Toseeye Farhangi Az Didgahe Imam Khomeini", *Hozour* (Magazine), autumn 1377, No 25; Al-e Ahmad, Jalal, *Plagued by the West* (Gharbzadegi), translated by Paul Sprachman, Center for Iranian Studies, Columbia University, Delmor, NY, 1982.

[88] Markaz e Pazhuheshhaye Majles, *Barrasi Rahnamoudhaye Emam Khomeini* (Understanding Imam Khomeini's Guidelines), News No: 765973, 2010, Tehran.

[89] Khomeini, Rouhollah, *Sahifeye Noor* (The Bright Tablet), Farsi Edition, Sazmane Madareke Farhangi Enghlab Eslami va Soroush, tehran, 1990.

1.3.2 Khatami, the United States, and the Wall of Mistrust

The political system which replaced the monarchy in 1979 was an *Islamic Republic*. That is, religious and democratic institutions should work together and out of a dialectic relationship between the two, a true Islamic Republic will emerge which will bring prosperity to the nation. In practice, it allowed people to elect politicians under the supervision of religious institutions. Ever since the revolution, elections on different levels had been held. Each had its own ebbs and flows, but perhaps the most striking was the presidential election of 1997 which brought into power a mildly different group of Iranian elites: the reformists.

In May 1997, Khatami won a landslide victory (69.6%) in the Iranian presidential election. His platform was that of freedom of speech, rule of law, and democracy. Iranian youth, the economic elites, and even the *rouhani* (Farsi word for the *clergy*), having partially recovered from the traumatic miseries caused by the Iran-Iraq war, astonished the political establishment with their turnout for Khatami against the right-wing candidate, Nateq Nuri, who only secured 25% of the votes.[90]

From the point of view of an observer, Khatami's platforms seemed a bit demanding and hard to be realized at home, and yet he took a more ambitious stand when it came to his country's foreign policy. While the world was musing over Huntington's "clash of civilizations", Khatami responded to it with his own prescription: "dialogue among civilizations".[91] His discourse soon caught the attention of the United Nations and the year 2001 was named the year of dialogue among civilizations and, based on this very same premise, reformists tried to open doors to many western countries, especially the United States.

In his famous 1998 speech-interview with CNN's Christian Amanpour, Khatami talked about how "American civilization is worthy of respect", and that the Iranian-American wall of mistrust should be cracked, especially through "dialogue and exchanges" between the two nations. Conservatives in Iran were certainly unhappy with the reformists, but except for their own strongholds within the political structure, they could do nothing but merely observe, at least for the time being.

On the other side of the planet, in America, the political atmosphere was in a fairly good mood. Democrats, although under pressure from a Republican-dominated Congress, still had Bill Clinton in the executive branch. The Clinton administration was still upset over the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia (which was partly blamed on Iran) and the continuing problems in Lebanon and Palestine, but found it reasonable to listen to Khatami and approach his olive branch with openness.

Recent documents from the National Security Archive show that later in 1999, Clinton sent a direct letter to his Iranian counterpart Khatami ensuring him that "the United States has no hostile intentions towards the Islamic Republic of Iran and seeks good relations with your government."[92]

The assumption was that engaging him, and possibly supporting his discourse would leave reformists with better hands in the internal affairs of their country over the conservatives and they would push more vigorously for their agendas. It was also a matter of geopolitical interest for the U.S. if Iran and America were to

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[90] The total turnout for the election was about 29 million people (80% of the eligible voters).

[91] UNESCO, *Round Table: Dialogue among Civilization*, Transcript of President Mohammad Khatami's speech at the U.N.-sponsored Conference of Dialogue Among Civilizations in New York on 5 September, 2000, From: <http://www.unesco.org/dialogue/en/khatami.htm>

[92] Clinton, Bill, "Message to President Khatami from President Clinton", cited in *National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 318*, 2010, retrieved [on 2011-08-22] from: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB318/doc02.pdf>

get an inch closer to each other. Not counting Israel, Iran had a powerful military in the Middle East, with its shadow completely cast upon the oil rich Persian Gulf. It also had significant leverage over its neighbors like Afghanistan and Lebanon. All this could have been reason enough for any American administration to try rapprochement with Iran, especially when they were eager, too. One can add that, perhaps like Khatami, Clinton came to believe that change could come even within the Islamic republic system- it just needed patience and support.

Consequently, the Clinton administration decided to advocate for people-to-people contacts. Responding to Khatami's call, Clinton regretted the "estrangement of two nations" and hoped for more exchanges between the people.[93] This was the beginning for many cultural as well as educational exchanges between two countries. However, it should be noted that even before all this, the United States had come to understand the significance of communicating with foreign publics in strategic regions (e.g., Iran) especially via international broadcasts and, based on such a premise, in 1996 had established VOA's Farsi television network. VOA's one hour program to Iran was expanding on the already running radio broadcasts. With reformists in Iran, the big difference was in the realm of two-way communication which was to be accompanied by other forms of public diplomacy such as cultural exchanges.

One of the first steps for the nations was to open the doors to each others' citizens. The entry of Iranian citizens into the U.S. was always an inconvenience, thus the Clinton administration decided to relax the visa restrictions for visitors of Iranian origin.[94] Students could then travel to the U.S. more easily, provided they could sustain themselves financially. Iranian students constituted a major portion of foreign enrollers in the U.S. during the years prior to the revolution: a New York Times report mentioned a peak of 50,000 students for 1979, but it began to drop steadily, as relations worsened. With the reform scent in the air, students opted more often to study in the U.S. and since 1998 there was a feeble increase in their enrollment at American universities[95]. There are a few reasons for that, especially the coming to age of revolutionary baby-boomers who had benefited from a relatively modest education in Iran but had higher academic ambitions that were difficult to be fulfilled inside the country. Hence, they would choose to go abroad, and their first destinations were, despite the political tensions, countries like Canada and the United States. Developments in Iranian communication technology in the late 1990s provided also a good avenue for students to communicate with universities abroad more easily.

In addition to students, Iranian politicians and clergies visited the United States, met with American scholars and even gave lectures in various institutions. In this period, NGOs were mostly responsible for such contacts. Search for Common Ground (SFCG), a respected American NGO founded in 1982, is an example of such organizations dedicated to finding commonalities between nations and reducing misunderstandings. SFCG began its Iran projects immediately after Khatami's call for dialogue in 1998, and introduced Iranian and American scholars, athletes and artists to each other's culture and society.

SFCG, in cooperation with other institutes like the American Film Institute, Iranian *Khaneh Cinema* (Cinema House in Farsi), Film House of Makhmalbaf, screened movies of celebrated Iranian directors, such as Majidi, Kiarostami, Ghobadi, and Makhmalbaf. It also organized several trips by American

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[93] Kamalipour ,Yahya R. "Window of opportunity", *Iranian.com*, online document, August 11, 1998, retrieved [on 2011-08-22] From: <http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/Aug98/Media/index.html>

[94] Pollack, Kenneth M., *The Persian puzzle: the Conflict between Iran and America*, Random House, New York, 2004, p. 320.

[95] Torbati, Yeganeh J., "New Wave of Iranians Seek U.S. Studies", *New York Times*, August 9, 2010, p.12.

filmmakers like Michael Almereyda (director of *Hamlet*) to Iran to meet and discuss with filmmakers and actors there.[96]

Iranian clergies also visited the United States. In an effort to counter the *clash of civilization* argument, institutes like the aforementioned SFCG, facilitated a number of conferences and seminars in which religious issues were discussed. For instance, Ayatollah Mahallati and Abdolkarim Soroush, leading Iranian theologians, visited Washington's National Cathedral and lectured on the role of Jesus Christ in Islam.

Sport was another arena where people-to-people contacts were prevalent. With the support of both governments, and active participation of non-government institutions, several exchange events were organized. Athletes from such fields as wrestling, soccer, ping pong, and basketball came to visit each other's country bringing messages of peace and understanding for their host nation (see next chapter on sports). Such initiatives soon became one of the favorite tools in American cultural diplomacy towards Iran and continued even after both Clinton and Khatami had left offices and gave their place to Bush Jr. and Ahmadinejad.

Parallel to all this, the United States expanded on its already running broadcasts to Iran by increasing their budgets and programming. In April 1998, for example, the U.S. government, especially Congress, began beaming a new radio service called Radio Azadi to Iran, arguing that it was not designed to undermine the Iranian government but to "enrich domestic political debate" inside the country.[97] James Rubin, then the State Department spokesman, made it clear that the Clinton administration favored "increased Farsi language radio broadcasts by the U.S. Government" and that they are "working closely with Congress on how best to accomplish that goal."[98]

As Clinton's days in office came to their end, there were even more attempts for improving relations, but for many reasons, including the fierce political battle between the reformists and conservatives inside Iran, a complete renewal of relations did not happen. On January 2001, the Republican George Walker Bush became the 43rd President of the United States after defeating the democratic candidate Al Gore in the disputed presidential elections.[99] This and the terrorist attacks in September of the same year had a tremendous effect on U.S. concerns and policy responses towards Iran in the first decade of the 21st century.

1.3.3 George W. Bush, 9/11, and the U.S. Approach towards Iran

When George W. Bush won the 2000 presidential elections, Iran was almost of no priority in his foreign policy list. In fact, the word “Iran” came up very little during the campaigns. Bush did try to press Al Gore over the issue of Russian arms sales to Iran once, but that was it.[100] Ironically, some analysts even believed that Bush’s and his team's background in the oil industry was positive for the

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[96] Reines, Sonya, “US-Iran Program: Film”, Search For Common Ground, online document, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-08-22] from: <http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/iran/iran_film.html>

[97] Feuilherade, Peter, “New Radios Beam into Iran and Iraq”, *Clandestine Radio Watch*, Issue 17 - November 12, 1998, from: <http://clandestineradio.com/crw/news.php?id=&stn=27&news=125>

[98] U.S. Department of State, *Daily Press Briefing*, Briefer: James P. Rubin, April 15, 1998.

[99] The dispute was over counting of votes in Florida the result of which was a close win for Bush. Initially, Al Gore had won the Florida Supreme Court’s ruling to do the recount but it was finally the U.S. Supreme Court which decided to stop the procedure. Consequently, Bush got all of Florida's electoral votes and won the general elections very closely. See: “Bush v. Gore” No: 00-949, Supreme Court of the United States, 12 December 2000.

[100] Associated Press, “Bush Criticizes Gore over Mideast Record”, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 14, 2000, p. 2A.

prospects of U.S-Iran relations.[101] They simply saw Iranian oil reserve as another potential to tap. Former Vice President Dick Cheney had, in fact, opposed the oil sanctions on Iran in the mid 1990s and had labeled them as "self-defeating" and he even had gone further in one of his speeches just before the campaigns saying: "we're kept out of there primarily by our own government, which has made a decision that U.S. firms should not be allowed to invest significantly in Iran and I think that's a mistake."[102] After taking the oath, Bush showed little interest in following the path of Clinton on Iran, and this country continued to be the lowest priority compared to countries like Iraq or Afghanistan. As Kenneth Pollack, a former senior analyst in the U.S. National Security Council, puts it in his book, the *Persian Puzzle*, the administration was initially ambivalent and dubious towards Iran.[103] The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which was up for renewal in August 2001, was an exemplary case in point. The administration took a compromising position and decided not to opt for the usual five year prolonging of the ILSA and instead tried, unsuccessfully, to push Congress for a two-year renewal.[104] This policy changed when 9/11 happened. Governments in both Iran and the United States had to make considerable decisions.

The response from Tehran was solid and clear. President Khatami, "on behalf of the Iranian people and the Islamic Republic", denounced terrorist attacks and expressed "deep sorrow and sympathy with the American people".[105] On the other side of the Atlantic, in Washington, Bush was making up his mind on a bigger paradigm though: *the war on terror*. This would include recommendations on the future conduct of U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East and Iran as well.

In his doctrine, Bush defined America as fighting a global war against terror and even went further as to call it the "monumental struggle of good versus evil".[106] The enemies of the United States were the terrorists and those who harbored them. Bush promised American people that "the United States of America will use all its resources to conquer this enemy".[107] The *National Security Strategy* which was published in 2002, emphasized on this theme by mentioning that "America will hold to account nations that are compromised by terror, including those who harbor terrorists— because the allies of terror are the enemies of civilization."[108] Nine years after 9/11, Bush published *Decision Points*, his memoir, in which he further elaborated on his presidential doctrine and policy options:

> After 9/11, I developed a strategy to protect the country that came to be known as the Bush Doctrine: First, make no distinction between the terrorists and the nations that harbor them—and hold both to account. Second, take the fight to the enemy overseas before they can attack us again here at home. Third, confront threats before they fully materialize. And

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[101] Anderson, John Ward, "Iran Throwing Off Its Isolation", *Washington Post*, 31 March 2001, p.A18

[102] Begala, Paul, *It's still the economy, stupid: George W. Bush, the GOP's CEO*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2002, p.142.

[103] Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, pp. 343-345.

[104] Mitchell, Alison, "Senate Extends Sanctions on Libya and Iran", *New York Times*, July 26, 2001, p. A6.

[105] "Candle Power: Iran mourns America's dead ', Photo-essay, *Time Magazine Europe*, September 18, 2001, retrieved [on 2010-08-22] from: <http://www.time.com/time/europe/photoessays/vigil/2.html>

[106] Bush, George W., "Remarks following a meeting with the national security team" in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States 2001*, Volume 2, , 12 September 2001, p.1100-1101.

[107] Bush, George W. "Remarks following a meeting with the national security team", 2001.

[108] *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America September 2002*. Morgan James Pub, Washington D.C., 2009, p.III.

> fourth, advance liberty and hope as an alternative to the enemy's ideology of repression and fear.[109]

With Khatami's condoning message, Bush's Iran policy needed another two years to blossom, however. There were other countries to pay for 9/11 first. Initial investigations after the attacks brought Afghanistan to the forefront as the first target country to take the blame. Iran and the United States, fortunately, had a lot in common in the deposing of the Taliban. The Taliban had risked an almost whole scale war with Iran in September 1998 when its members had killed 9 Iranian diplomats in the Afghan city of Mazar Sharif. At that time, Iran immediately deployed more than 70,000 troops along its border with Afghanistan but soon changed its mind after assessing the usefulness of a military victory.[110] It was more than a blessing, though, for Iran to see the United States now at war with the Taliban. Iran and the United States began to cooperate on a plan to attack the Taliban. They held quiet discussions under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva. The Geneva Contact Group (as it was called), initially consisted of Italians, Germans, Iranians, and Americans, but soon was reduced only to Iranian and American counterparts meeting in various locations in Europe and discussing tactics of the war and even the future government for Afghanistan.[111] By the end of 2001, both sides were almost satisfied with the process, and Iranian reformists, who had been strengthened by their takeover of yet another government branch, the 6th parliament in 2000, were eager to explore more avenues for normalizing the relationship.[112] But, as it has often been the case with recent contacts between the U.S. and Iran, things were to take a different direction in 2002 with almost a personal blunder involved.

It began with George Bush's State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002 where he gave Iran the title it hardly deserved, at least after all of Iran's cooperation on Afghanistan.[113] Bush named Iraq, Iran, and North Korea the "Axis of Evil"; that was despite the objections from his own constituency including Stephen Hadley (then Deputy National Security Advisor) over including the name of "Iran" in the list.[114] Reformists who had worked hard to placate the Iranian taste for better relations with the United States then had a new headache at home. This was just enough to remind Iranians (especially those suspicious of U.S. intentions) of their history with the United States. As a result, Iran decided to drop from Geneva discussions soon after the Address. Except for the 2003 Iraq war, which Iranians reluctantly embraced and during which their military and security forces behaved constructively, the two governments failed to solve previous issues as well as new ones (such as Iran's nuclear technology) which were slowly emerging.

One could argue that it was mostly the Bush administration which was reluctant.[115] The Khatami administration had even tried to approach the Bush administration by offering it, unsuccessfully, what was often regarded as a *grand bargain*. It was supposed to put an end to decades of hostility between the two nation-states.

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[109] Bush, George. W. *Decision Points*, Crown Publishers, New York, 2010, p. 370-2.
[110] Douglas, Jehl, "For Death of Its Diplomats, Iran Vows Blood for Blood", *New York Times*, September 12, 1998: p. 4.
[111] Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p. 345-7.
[112] Douglas, *New York Times*, 1998, p. 4.
[113] Bush, George W. "The 2002 State of the Union" in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, McMurry Inc., 2002, p. 258.
[114] Woodward, Bob, *Plan of Attack,* Simon & Schuster, New York, 2004, p.57.
[115] Kessler, Glenn, "In 2003, U.S. Spurned Iran's Offer of Dialogue", *Washington Post*, June 18, 2006. p. A.16.

1.3.3.1 The Chance for a Grand Bargain

The 2003 American attack on Iraq had raised security alarms among Iranian political and security elites. It rarely happens with the revolutionary Iran, but in "the spring of 2003" the Iranian foreign ministry sent a two-page letter (see Appendix 1) to the State Department outlining what was later labeled a *grand bargain*.[116] The initiative was the work of Sadegh Kharrazi (then Iranian ambassador to France, nephew of Kamal Kharrazi, then Iranian foreign minister, and also a close confidante of Ayatollah Khamenei) who had worded it on after painstaking consultations with Khatami and the Supreme Leader Khamenei. The document was sent via the Swiss Embassy in Tehran (which also serves as a protective power for U.S. interests in Iran since the revolution). The grand bargain covered almost every major issue of concern to both Iran and the United States, including the nuclear issue, the Palestinian problem, and the U.S. sanctions on Iran. The letter mentioned the aims and expectations of each country and had discussed its own proposals for each of the issues. It first discussed the Iranian demands and then the American expectations for which the Iranians had proposed some resolutions:

Iranian aims and demands: Surprisingly, Iran's first goal in its bargain with the United States was to be able to engage in dialogue based on *mutual respect*. The Iranian demand for American respect is rooted in two major historical issues: first, the very rich Iranian historical and cultural heritage which makes its population feel extremely proud of their nation, and second, the long time mistreatment of this very nation by the foreign powers such as Russia, Great Britain and the United States during the last few centuries. Dialogue based on *mutual respect* is thus the recognition of all this by the United States and had a highly symbolic importance for Iranians.

Iranians also asked the United States for "rectification of status of Iran in the US."[117] That is, to stop interference in the internal and external affairs of the Islamic Republic, the removal of Iran from the State Department's list of State-sponsors of terrorism, and to make sure that no comments such as the "axis of evil" happen at the top levels of leadership in America.

Iran's third demand was the American suspension of all sanctions and its release of Iranian assets long held in the United States. Iranians also expected the U.S. to stop impeding in the international trade agreements between Iran and other nations.

The future of Iraq was also important to the government of Iran. The letter asked for cooperation on building a fully democratic, representative, and responsible government in Iraq.

Other demands on the part of Iran were: first, the recognition of its rights to peaceful nuclear technology, biotechnology and chemical technology, if not nuclear enrichment; second, the recognition of Iran's legitimate security interests in the region which alluded to the fact that Iran should be allowed some advancement in military armament; and finally, their mutual cooperation in the pursuit of anti-Iranian terrorists, above all the Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) and the repatriation of their members in Iraq and their affiliated organizations in the United States.

US aims and demands: The grand proposal by Iran was not to address the demands of Iranians alone and thus included some issues of great concern to Americans as well: the anti-American sentiments in Iran, Iran's pursuit of WMDs, the reconstruction of Iraq, and its support for groups hostile to the United States and Israel.

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[116] Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*, p. 204.
[117] Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*, p. 229.

Iranians also accepted that they would pay the same respects to Americans which they demand in their dialogue. They assured that Iran will address the concerns of the United States on the issue of nuclear technology. Iran pledged to follow full transparency in its nuclear program and adopt all relevant international protocols, especially those of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

On the issue of terrorism, Iran also promised decisive action against any terrorists (above all, Al Qaida) on Iranian territory. It was believed that due to the American intervention in Afghanistan, some Al Qaida members had fled to and were in custody of Iran, and the United States had demanded their extradition on several occasions. The Iranian bargain included the full cooperation and exchange of all relevant information on this issue. On the subject of peace in the Middle East, Iranians were willing to "stop any material support to Palestinian opposition groups (Hamas, Jihad, etc.), from the Iranian territory, pressure on these organizations to stop violent action against civilians within the borders of 1967", and to accept the Arab League's 2002 Beirut declaration which called for a two-state solution in Palestine, and action on Hezbollah to become a "mere political organization within Lebanon."[118] And finally, Iran vowed to coordinate its excessive influence in the country itself in supporting the political stabilization of the country, and the establishment of democratic institutions and a "non-religious government."[119]

The Iranian offer was obviously a rough draft that, if cultivated, could have had significant implications not only for better relations between the two countries but also could transform the geopolitics of the Middle East. But the entire initiative fell on deaf ears at that time and, as Iran expert Barbara Slavin wrote, "was never seriously considered at the highest levels of the Bush administration."[120] There could be two reasons for that. First, Americans were busy enough with their hassle in Iraq and could not concentrate on Iran at such a rather great scale. Second, the *hawks* in the U.S. government were intoxicated enough with their initial success in toppling Saddam and were probably thinking of a similar prescription for their Iran problem.[121] There were other emerging issues as well. Iran's nuclear program which first surfaced in early 2002 soon became a serious concern for the Bush administration, especially after its initial relief over Iraq.[122]

1.3.3.2 George W. Bush Goes for Public Diplomacy towards Iran

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the United States was perturbed about Iran's revolutionary policies and feared that the country's nuclear program had military purposes. It would further jeopardize American as well as Israeli interests in the Middle East. Hence, after the military conquer of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush administration came to focus on Iran and devised a more unified strategy. To change Iran, the U.S. government resorted to instruments of both hard and soft power. Bush called this the "two clocks" strategy in his memoir.

First, his administration focused on the nuclear issue (as *a clock*) and tried "to push back the time when the Iranian regime would have a clear path to a nuclear weapon".[123] It was based on the hard power approach which included pressures and incentives. The United States pushed for a multilateral set of economic

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[118] Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*, p. 230.
[119] Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*, p. 230.
[120] Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*, p. 205.
[121] Lobe, Jim, "Bush Hawks Quickly Turn Sights On Iran", *Albion Monitor*, Issue 111, May 26, 2003.
[122] Eisenstat, Michael, "Iran's Nuclear Program: Gathering Dust or Gaining Momentum?" *Policy Watch*, no. 707, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, online document, 2003, retrieved [on 2010-12-14] from: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1585>
[123] Hadley, Stephen, "The George W. Bush Administration" in *Iran Primer*, Robin Right (ed.), United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C., 2010, p. 143.

sanctions to pressure the Iranian government to abandon its nuclear ambitions. It also "explored a wide variety of intelligence programs and financial measures that could slow the pace or increase the cost of Iran's nuclear weapons program".[124]

Second, he advocated political change inside Iran (as another *clock*) to transform it into "a government more likely to make the strategic choice to deal with the international community."[125] This was the soft power approach and included many public diplomacy programs to be studied here in this dissertation. Bush later wrote that his administration "would encourage dissidents and democratic reformers suffering under repressive regimes in Iran, Syria, North Korea, and Venezuela".[126] He also mentioned that he had "worked to speed the reform clock by meeting with Iranian dissidents, calling for the release of political prisoners, funding Iranian civil-society activists, and using radio and Internet technology to broadcast pro-freedom messages into Iran".[127]

The wielding of American soft power on Iran was aligned with the United State's overall push for a more robust public diplomacy abroad. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, under the wrong impression that the collapse of Communism equals the *end of history*, American public diplomacy and its relevant agencies had been literally dismantled. After 9/11, the U.S. government began to rethink the role of public diplomacy. While slightly increasing the overt public diplomacy budget from less than $1 billion in 2000 to approximately $1.5 billion in 2008 (a 30percent increase), the Bush administration redirected most of such resources towards the Muslim world. It is very cumbersome to come up with reliable figures, but a 2006 Government Accountability Office (GAO) study concluded that the administration had "increased public diplomacy resources to countries with significant Muslim populations in recent years."[128] It should, however, be mentioned that these amounts, although significant, represent less than 1percent of the American military budget (by way of comparison) and it implies the central position of a hard power military approach to U.S. foreign policy.[129] What is more relevant to the discussion here is the meaningful allocation, increase, and redirection of funds for public diplomacy towards Iran, especially during the second term of George W. Bush (see Table 2).

Based on the two-clock strategy, the United States continued its previously-run programs and began to increase "the flow of information and news into Iran."[130] Hence, *Voice of America* restructured its Persian service into the new form of Persian News Network (PNN) to be able to focus much better on Iran, and *Radio Azadi* (*Freedom* in Farsi) was replaced by *Radio Farda* (*tomorrow* in Farsi). There was even more emphasis on this in George W. Bush's second term in office. In May 2006, Condoleezza Rice (then U.S. Secretary of State) heralded Iranians on what was called the U.S. "turnabout", but was, in fact, an extension and expansion of public diplomacy programs already targeting Iranians both during Bush's first term and even before that- during other American presidents' terms. Rice, speaking on behalf of the U.S. government, mentioned that "President Bush wants a new and positive relationship between the American people and the people of Iran — a beneficial relationship of increased contacts in education, cultural exchange, sports, travel, trade, and investment" and at the same time urged Iran to halt its Uranium enrichment activities.[131] That came almost as no surprise to Tehran, because earlier that year in February, Rice had

[124] Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 392.
[125] Hadley, *Iran Primer*, p. 6.
[126] Bush, George W., *Decision Points*, 2010, p. 370-372.
[127] Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 392
[128] Ford, J.T., *US Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges*, DIANE Publishing Company, Washington D.C., 2006, p.3.
[129] Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy, *Changing Minds Winning Peace*, 2003, p. 25.
[130] Hadley, *Iran Primer*, p.6.
[131] Karon, Tony, "Behind Washington's Turnabout on Talks with Iran", *Time Magazine*, May. 31, 2006.

asked Congress to dedicate more than $75 million to promote change inside Iran. Steven Weisman of the New York Times put it this way:

> Ms. Rice said the State Department was requesting $75 million to promote democracy in Iran, which she said would be added to $10 million already appropriated for that purpose . . . Until recently, the administration has been cautious about embracing the "regime change" approach, but some conservatives at the Defense Department and Vice President Dick Cheney's office are known to be resigned to a nuclear-armed Iran and to argue that the best way to address that problem is by opening Iran to democracy and reform.[132]

Nicholas Burns, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs in 2006, provided Congress with the blueprints on how this money would be spent: more than 50 million would be dedicated to expand "TV and radio broadcast through Voice of America and Radio Farda", 10 million would go to supporting Iranian NGOs, and the rest would be spent on various exchange programs between Iranians and Americans.[133] According to state department documents, Congress only appropriated $66 million of that request and they were allocated to the following programs:

- $36.1 million for the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG):
  - $10.274 million in International Broadcasting Operations;
  - $25.826 million in Broadcasting Capital Improvements.
- $20 million for democracy programs in Iran through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs;
- $5 million for Internet and other interactive programming through the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP);
- $5 million for education and cultural exchanges through the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).[134]

Although Congress provided Condoleezza Rice with a budget amount less than she had requested, it endorsed almost all of her initiatives. According to such appropriations, the U.S. government engaged in three major areas of soft power activity with regard to Iran:

- International Broadcasts
- Educational and Cultural Exchanges
- Democracy promotion via civil society enhancement programs

As I mentioned earlier, appropriating money for an enhancement of American soft power in Iran was nothing new- especially in light of previous attempts by the Clinton administration in such realms as international broadcasting and people-to-people exchanges- but the extent of the 2006 budget, and the subsequent budget requests for 2007, 2008, and even 2009 (all totaling more than $200 million), implied a more ambitious approach in U.S. foreign policy reminiscent of the Cold War period (see Table 2).

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[132] Wiseman, Steven R., "Rice Is Seeking $85 Million to Push for Changes in Iran", *New York Times*, February 16, 2006, p. 14.

[133] U.S. Congress, House, *United States Policy towards Iran-Next Steps*, Congressional Hearing before Committee on Foreign Relations, Serial No. 109–183, March 2006, p.14, retrieved [on 2009-01-10] From: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/archives/109/26438.pdf>

[134] U.S. Department of State, "Update on Iran Democracy Promotion Funding", Media Note, Office of the Spokesman, Washington, D.C., online document, June 4, 2007, retrieved [on 2008-10-22] from: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/jun/85971.htm>

Table 2: U.S. Funding for Public Diplomacy and Democracy Promotion Projects in Iran[135]

FY2004	Foreign operations appropriation (P.L. 108-199) earmarked $1.5 million for "educational, humanitarian and non-governmental organizations and individuals inside Iran to support the advancement of democracy and human rights in Iran." The State Department Bureau of Democracy and Labor (DRL) gave $1 million to a unit of Yale University, and $500,000 to National Endowment for Democracy.
FY2005	$3 million from FY2005 foreign aid appropriation (P.L. 108-447) for democracy promotion. Priority areas: political party development, media, labor rights, civil society promotion, and human rights.
FY2006	$11.15 for democracy promotion from regular FY2006 foreign aid appropriation (P.L. 109-102). $4.15 million administered by DRL and $7 million for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.
FY2006 supp.	Total of $66.1 million (of $75 million requested) from FY2006 supplemental (P.L. 109-234): $20 million for democracy promotion; $5 million for public diplomacy directed at the Iranian population; $5 million for cultural exchanges; and $36.1 million for Voice of America-TV and "Radio *Farda*" broadcasting. Broadcasting funds are provided through the Broadcasting Board of Governors.
FY2007	FY2007 continuing resolution provided $6.55 million for Iran (and Syria) to be administered through DRL. $3.04 million was used for Iran. No funds were requested.
FY2008	$60 million (of $75 million requested) is contained in Consolidated Appropriation (H.R. 2764, P.L. 110-161), of which, according to the conference report $21.6 million is ESF for pro-democracy programs, including non-violent efforts to oppose Iran's meddling in other countries. $7.9 million is from a "Democracy Fund" for use by DRL. The Appropriation also fully funded additional $33.6 million requested for Iran broadcasting: $20 million for VOA Persian service; and $8.1 million for Radio Farda; and $5.5 million for exchanges with Iran.
FY2009	Request was for $65 million in ESF "to support the aspirations of the Iranian people for a democratic and open society by promoting civil society, civic participation, media freedom, and freedom of information." H.R. 1105 (P.L. 111-8) provides $25 million for democracy promotion programs in the region, including in Iran.

Based on George W. Bush's two-clock strategy, the United States was thus clearly devoted to changing either Iran's behavior or its political regime. That was the default policy of the Bush administration until the very final days of the Neo-Conservatives' rule in the White House. In Iran, things weren't promising either. Contrary to their previous choice for presidency, Iranians had elected Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 - a *Principalist* in terms of party affiliations.[136] His platform was that of "humble life among politicians, fighting corruption, advancing Iran's nuclear program, and bringing real economic justice to Iranians".[137] This was extremely appealing to the population. In terms of foreign policy, Ahmadinejad came to be known for his strong language on the American presence in the region and Israel's future in the Middle East.[138] There was little tendency in America for him to be politically recognized too. In fact, just a few days after Ahmadinejad's victory, the White House raised concerns that he "may have been involved in the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran."[139]

Consequently, despite reconciliatory attempts by some politicians both in Iran and the United States, the gap began to increase. Iran began to counter the American "regime change" campaign by launching its own instruments of soft power such as the *Press TV*, Iran's major international broadcasting network which started operating in July 2007, and by getting closer to Lebanese Hezbollah, Palestinian Hamas, and Iraqi Shiite groups.

Such measures by the Bush administration and countermeasures by the Iranians created a volatile period in the history of relations between Iran and America.

[135] Katzman, Kenneth, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, Congressional Research Service, Access No. , Washington D.C., August 8, 2011, p. 66.

[136] *Principalism* is a label for an almost political party adhering to the true principles of the Islamic Revolution. *Principalists* are the equivalent of "conservatives" when it comes to political and social issues. Inside Iran, *Principalists* are often struggling with Reformists over the control of the country.

[137] See: Iran's 9th Government Plan, Farsi Edition, Iranian President's Official Website, July 2005, From:<http://www.president.ir/fa/government/plan/index.htm>

[138] Fathi, Nazila, "Wipe Israel 'off the map' Iranian says", *New York Times*, October 27, 2005, p.1.

[139] Radio Free Europe, "White House Says It Is Investigating Ahmadinejad's Past", *Radio Free Europe*, June 30, 2005, From:<http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1059604.html>

The ascendance of Obama into power and his promise for change in American foreign policy behavior resonated not only at home but also abroad and particularly within the Muslim world (including Iran). To understand such anxieties, one needs to understand the way the Bush administration devised its strategies and implemented them when it came to countries like Iran. During the rest of this work, I will focus on the historical pillars of American public diplomacy towards Iran and explain the role of the Bush administration in ways in which such programs were implemented. As it was repeatedly mentioned during the appropriation hearings of 2006 and later years, there are three main pillars for American public diplomacy towards Iran: International broadcasting, cultural diplomacy, and civil society promotion. The following chapters will consequently be the study of such initiatives in a historical as well as investigative fashion.

2. U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTS TO IRAN

One of the valuable instruments of public diplomacy is international broadcasting.[140] It was in the 1920s with the advent of overseas radio that governments started broadcasting to foreign publics.[141] Radio Moscow was established in 1922 and was the "first powerful transmitter in the world."[142] Britain began its own overseas radio transmissions, *BBC Empire Service*, in 1932, primarily to its colonies.[143] The tool was also used later by the Germans and Americans during the Second World War. International broadcasting is still considered a major agent to wield soft power with more countries setting up international networks.[144] As Boyd states, every country pursues at least one of the four aims in this kind of information campaign: "1) to enhance national prestige; 2) to promote national interest; 3) to attempt political and religious indoctrination; and 4) to foster cultural ties."[145]

The United States joined the international broadcasting club in 1942 by establishing the Voice of America to cover World War II. Ever since, and thus for almost 70 years, various forms of international broadcasting have constituted significant elements of the U.S. public diplomacy campaign. Its value only increased when the United States engaged the Soviet Union during the Cold War and also during the first decade of the 21st century with the American crusade against terror.

In mid-1941, President Roosevelt, in a similar fashion to President Hoover's creation of the Committee on Public Information during WWI, established the Office of Coordinator of Information (OCI). It was at first more like a press-release agency which would provide written material to private American companies in order to get broadcasted to Europe. When the United States officially entered the war in 1942, the OCI changed into the U.S. Foreign Information Service to consolidate all U.S. information activities. As a result of this, Voice of America was created and began broadcasting in German. Only a few months later, and in an effort to boost up the information campaign, Roosevelt created the larger Office of War Information (OWI) which would integrate not only government broadcasts but also Hollywood productions and press publications.[146]

During the Cold War, the U.S. government, under President Eisenhower, replaced the OWI with the United States Information Agency (USIA) to "understand, inform, and influence foreign publics in promotion of the U.S.

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[140] Zaharna R.S. "Mapping out a Spectrum of Public Diplomacy Initiatives: Information and Relational Frameworks", in *Rutledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Snow, Nancy, and Philip M. Taylor (ed.), 2009, p.90.

[141] Nye, Joseph S. "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616, 2008, p.97.

[142] Taylor, Philip. M. *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Era*: Manchester University Press, 2003, p.205.

[143] BBC World Service, *World Service timeline*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2010-12-21] from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/history/story/2007/02/070123_html_1930s.shtml>

[144] Some of the most recent examples are Russia (Russia Today), Saudi Arabia (*Alarabiya*), Iran (*PressTV*), and Qatar (*Aljazeera*).

[145] Boyd, Douglas A. "International Radio Broadcasting in Arabic." *International Communication Gazette* 59, No. 6, 1997, 445-72. p. 446.

[146] Zaharna R.S."From Propaganda to Public Diplomacy in the Information Age", in *War, Media, and Propaganda: A Global Perspective*, Kamalipour, Y. R., and N. Snow (ed.), Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland, 2004, p.220.

national interest".[147] For almost half a century, USIA engaged foreign publics through its broadcasting, cultural exchange, and publication programs. With the end of the Cold War, USIA, like many other organizations, underwent changes. It was partially dissolved into the State Department due to the Foreign Affairs Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998; and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), an independent agency within the U.S. government, took operational as well as supervisory control of USIA's major broadcasting programs.[148] Since then, BBG has carried out the task of promoting, what it calls, "freedom and democracy by broadcasting accurate and objective news and information about the United States and the world to audiences overseas."[149] According to its 2009 survey, the BBG claimed that its broadcasting services attracted a global audience of more than 171 million people.[150] While the U.S. government seeks listeners and viewers from all around the world, there have historically been some countries of particular interest. Iran, for geo-strategic reasons mentioned before, has been one of the countries of primary interest for the United States.

The United States' broadcasts to Iran have a 70 year history. It began during the Second World War when the Voice of America's radio service transmitted news specifically in the Persian language. It was to cover the war and help advance the allied interests among the Persian speaking population. Since then, Persian radio and television (and also internet) networks had been major tools of U.S. public diplomacy towards Iran. Changes in the political atmospheres of both countries (particularly the Islamic revolution and the 9/11 attacks) have led to the inception and expansion of broadcasts such as Voice of America's Persian News Network, Radio Farda, and numerous exile TV channels. As I will discuss below, each of these media outlets has had its own particular agenda, content, and distinctive ways to appeal to Iranians. I will also argue that with the presidency of George W. Bush and his particular two- clock strategy of pushing reforms in Iran to stop it from becoming a nuclear power, broadcasts to Iran received substantial financial and organizational support and soon gained a central position in the U.S. public diplomacy apparatus.

2.1 Voice of America: The Old Gains Ground

President Roosevelt initiated the Voice of America in 1942 with special assistance from his speechwriter, Robert Sherwood. Sherwood believed that they were "living in an age when communication has achieved fabulous importance" and that there was "a new decisive force in the human race, more powerful than all the tyrants."[151] He began to write "materials for broadcast to Europe by privately-owned American shortwave stations" and soon asked John Houseman, a theatrical producer, author, and director, to help him broadcast directly. German was the first language service in the VOA and it was soon accompanied by more than 40 other languages, Persian being one of them.

The Office of War Information, as mentioned before, was the first organization to parent Voice of America during WWII. Almost a decade after the war (1953), the USIA was established and took control of the VOA and its affiliates from the State Department. Finally, after the demise of the USIA in 1999, the Broadcasting Board of Governors assumed full supervision of all U.S. international broadcasts including the VOA. BBG is still in charge and sporadic

[147] USIA, *United States Information Agency*, United States Information Agency's Office of Public Liaison, Washington, D.C, 1998, p.5.
[148] USIA, *United States Information Agency*, p.5.
[149] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "About the Agency", BBG website, undated, retrieved [on 2010-12-23] from: <http://www.bbg.gov/about/>
[150] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "Quick Facts", BBG Website, undated, retrieved [on 2010-12-23] from: <http://media.voanews.com/documents/11_16_10_BBGFactSheet.pdf>
[151] Alonso, Harriet. H. and Robert E. Sherwood, *The Playwright in Peace and War*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2007, p.244.

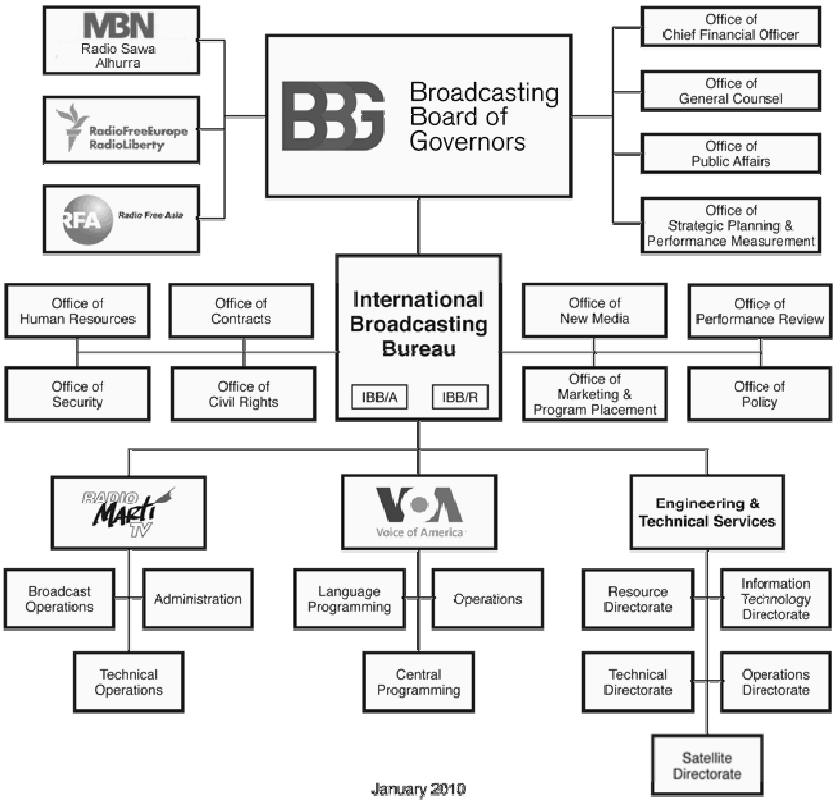
efforts of the former USIA members as well as some politicians (e.g. Sen. McCain Rep. Az) to resurrect their old organization has been futile.[152]

The BBG is a federal agency supervised by a nine-member board of directors. One permanent member is the Secretary of State and the other eight (including the chairman) are appointed by the U.S. President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. It has authority on all U.S. non-military broadcasts which includes Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Asia, Office of Cuba Broadcasting (Radio/TV Marti), and Middle East Broadcasting Network. As its fact sheet states,

> BBG is authorized to evaluate the mission, operation, and quality of broadcasting activities; to allocate funds among various broadcasters; to ensure compliance with broadcasting standards; to determine addition and deletion of language services; and to submit annual reports to the President and the U.S. Congress.[153]

There is also the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) which operates under the supervision of the BBG and is responsible for most of the technical and engineering services as well as authority over two of the BBG's networks: VOA and Radio TV Marti (see BBG's Organizational Chart below).

Broadcasting Board of Governors' Organizational Chart[154]



The organization's most cherished mandate is its *Charter*. It was in 1960 that VOA staff under USIA director George Allen drafted a "directive" later to be

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[152] Hughes, John, "Mccain: Bring Back the U.S.I.A." *Miami Herald Blog*, online document, June 20, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-01-06] from: <http://miamiherald.typepad.com/nakedpolitics/2007/06/mccain-bring-ba.html>

[153] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "Fact sheet", IBB Website, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2010-12-07] from: <http://ibb7-2.ibb.gov/pubaff/bbgfact.html>

[154] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "Organizational Chart", BBG Website, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-01-14] from: <http://www.bbg.gov/about/orgchart/>

called *the charter* which outlined their formal broadcasting principles such as "accuracy, objectivity, representing American society, and discussing U.S. government policies."[155] After 16 years, in 1976, Congress approved VOA's Charter and it became public law (94-350). Today VOA and its various language services, including Persian, are obliged by its charter to adhere to the following principles:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.[156]

The charter has a particular emphasis on issues of credibility and presenting U.S. foreign policy. It has been the responsibility of the VOA, then, to operate according to these particular principles. Whether the agency, at least in its Persian service, has been capable of adhering to its own principles is a question that will be discussed during the following sections.

2.1.1 Inception of VOA Persian

During WWII, providing news in Persian was a priority for the U.S. government since Iran was a major route for the American and British forces to send assistance to the Russians in the northern front. The end of the World War brought an end not only to military confrontations but also to many information programs. The Persian service went off the air as a result. However, between 1945 and 1979, based on the political necessities of the times, it has operated irregularly. In 1949, for example, when the first signs of the Cold War had appeared and Iranians themselves began nationalizing their oil industry under Mosaddeq, VOA Persian resumed its transmissions. It was President Truman who, on the eve of the Persian New Year (that is March 22, 1949) inaugurated the network with his personal message. The half-an-hour program consisted of news and music which, as cited by *The New York Times*, was to "correct distortions concerning the United States in propaganda broadcasts beamed to Iran by other countries [i.e., USSR]."[157] After almost a decade, VOA stopped its transmissions to Iran again, apparently because of some disagreement among VOA personnel in representing the United States' internal problems due to the U.S. civil-right unrests[158] and also some technical difficulties (e.g., weak signals).[159] In 1964, however, the relaying began again but lasted only two years and never went back on air until the Iranian revolution of 1979. The revolution led to the re-establishment of the Persian service by the U.S. government and since then it has continuously been on the air via radio, television and, later, internet.

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[155] Heil, Alan L., *Voice of America: A History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003, p. 65.
[156] Waller, J. Michael, *The Public Diplomacy Reader,* Institute of World Politics Press, Washington D.C., 2007. p. 159.
[157] New York Times staff, "Broadcasts to Iran begun by Truman", *The New York Times,* March 20, 1949, pg. 12.
[158] Washington Post staff, "Broadcasts to Iran Defended by USIA Aide", *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1958, p. A13.
[159] Sulzberger C.L., "Foreign Affairs: Fourth Place Isn't Good Enough", *The New York Times,* August 7, 1961, p. 22.

2.1.2 VOA Persian after the Islamic Revolution

On April 8, 1979 the U.S. government resumed its Persian transmissions to Iran with a half-hour program. The content of the broadcasts covered the ongoing revolutionary executions in Iran, American response to the events, and other international news (such as the energy crisis).[160] It was to deal with the plummeting American influence in the country. When the American embassy in Iran was seized, the VOA increased its airing and by December 1979, it was producing two hours of daily programs.

Next year (i.e., 1980) with the Hostage Crisis still unresolved and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, VOA Persian added another 4 hours to its programs.[161] This development came partly as a result of President Carter's approval for a budgetary boost (over $1 million) to Persian broadcasts in 1979.[162] As the New York Times reported, the 6-hour content was influenced heavily by the political events in Iran and Afghanistan leaving little room for other topics (e.g., science and sports).[163]

Finding correspondents and experts who could speak Farsi, the dominant language among Iranians, has been difficult ever since the network began its operations. Hence, most of its employees (if not all) come from the Iranian-American community. Most of the staff in the 1980s belonged to the generation of so-called "Iranian exiles" who, with the demise of the Pahlavi Dynasty, had migrated to the U.S. in the early years of the Revolution. Some of them (e.g., Ahmad Baharloo) had formerly held positions inside Iran's national radio network, while others were individuals with some academic background looking for jobs in the U.S. and also were disillusioned with the post-revolutionary events in their home country (e.g., Bijan Farhoodi). More recently, with the veterans aging and the network expanding every year, younger Iranians have joined the VOA. Some of them where student activists who had spent some jail time in the 1990s in Iran (e.g., Ahmad Batebi and Ali Afshari) while others had journalistic as well as media experiences (e.g., Kambiz Hosseini, Luna Shad, and Siamak Dehghanpour). Various and greatly differing backgrounds among the employees has not been particularly positive for the network and has generated problems and controversies of its own, which I will discuss later in the *problems* part of the chapter.

VOA Persian continued to broadcast towards Iran only via radio until 1996 when its first television show also went on the air. The first TV broadcast of VOA Persian was a simulcast of a call-in program on Friday the 18th of October, 1996. *Roundtable with you,* as the show was called, was presented by Ahmad Baharloo, a veteran journalist at VOA who had worked there since 1979. Alan L. Heil, former deputy director of VOA, who was present at the studio and witnessed the first simulcast, later wrote:

> Observing the inaugural broadcast from the new television studio at the Voice was like being in the NASA mission control. The scene: VOA's first radio-TV simulcast to Iran of the VOA Farsi weekly call-in program, roundtable with you.... But division director lsmail Dahiyat, Farsi service Chief Bill Royce, emcee Ahmed Baharloo, and Worldnet Television producers had no idea whether the people of Iran could actually watch-as well as hear- his weekly Friday broadcast… Finally, at precisely thirty minutes past the hour, Mehrdad, of Tehran, called in…. The control room erupted in applause. The

[160] Associated Press, "U.S. Resumes Persian-Language Broadcasts after 19 years", *The Toledo Blade Newspaper*, April 9, 1979, p.2.
[161] Hovey, Graham, "Voice of America Aims More Programs at Moslems" *New York Times*, January 10, 1980, p. A12.
[162] Binder, David, "U.S., Wary of Islamic Upheaval, to Increase Broadcasts to Moslems", *New York Times*, December 17, 1979, p. A16.
[163] Hovey, *New York Times*, p. A12.

> broadcaster offered to send his first viewer a prize. "No need", responded Mehrdad. "You've just given me the greatest gift of all".[164]

One of the reasons that satellite TV came to accommodate radio broadcasts was the initial difficulty in its jamming. As some of the directors, including Geoffrey Cowan, believed then, radio and even internet could be jammed by hostile governments, but satellite jamming would cause some "international problems" for the countries who undertake to do that.[165] Such notion, however, later proved to be wrong when the Iranian government as well many other countries (e.g., China, North Korea, and Cuba) repeatedly jammed such broadcasts for the fear of their propaganda effects on their populations. A more plausible explanation for the shift from radio to television by the U.S. broadcast, could involve the argument about the popularity of television in countries like Iran. According to Brian Conniff, former executive director of BBG, "90 percent of Iranians say they get their news that way — so VOA has developed a range of TV products beamed to Iran by satellite".[166]

Roundtable with you was a call-in show often with a guest, very much akin to *CNN's Larry King Live*. In fact, BBC did mention that the show's anchor, Ahmad Baharloo, was "dubbed the Iranian *Larry King*."[167] It has proven to be the longest running Persian radio show in service until today. *Roundtable* was at first a weekly talk show and soon turned into a daily program dedicated to popular guests (mostly Iranian exiles) from various fields of politics, culture, and economy to discuss contemporary Iranian events and also U.S. foreign policy issues regarding Iran. Viewers did get a chance to participate via sending direct telephone calls and emails. The theme of the program was the problems of political Islam and dealt with issues such as human rights, freedom of cultural activities, Iranian government "suppression", its regional influence in the Middle East, and U.S. confrontations with Iran and its heavy toll for irrational politicians in Tehran. *Roundtable with you* was finally replaced with *Straight Talk* in 2008, apparently because of some disagreements between Baharloo and his managing editors about the format and content of the show.

One of major issues for VOA Persian was the coverage of the Iranian elections. The directors at the broadcast have arguably a special affinity towards covering elections in Iran and any other country of significance to U.S. national interest. During every election period in Iran, the topics and agendas of the service would shift towards the polls. The 2000 parliamentary election is a case in point. George Mackenzie of IBB wrote that "the Voice of America's Farsi Service went live to provide comprehensive coverage as voters in Iran flooded the polling stations to give the pro-reform forces a landslide victory in last week's landmark parliamentary elections". VOA even had his correspondent, Scott Bobb, stationed in Tehran to report on the events.[168] Such extensive coverage became an important policy within VOA, especially during the presidential elections of 2005 and 2009 and with George W. Bush's (two-clock) strategy towards Iran.

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[164] Heil. L. *Voice of America*, p. 345.
[165] BBC, "New VOA satellite TV in Persian", BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, November 1, 1996.
[166] Conniff, Brian, "New Directions in US International Broadcasting", *Foreign Service Journal*, January 2004, p. 22-23.
[167] Beale, Jonathan, "Iran exiles struggle for US influence", *BBC News*, Washington D.C., May 5, 2006, retrieved [on 2011-01-10] from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4970284.stm>
[168] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "VOA's Extensive 'Live' Coverage of Iranian Elections", *BBG Press Release*, February 2000, retrieved [on 2011-01-8] from: <http://ibb7-2.ibb.gov/pubaff/farsi003.html>

2.1.3 VOA Persian after 9/11

When the Bush administration came to power, VOA was producing no more than 3.5 hours of "news, information, and cultural programming each day via radio, TV and the Internet."[169] After the attacks of 9/11 and the U.S. government's concentration of both its hard and soft power assets on the Middle East, VOA Persian, like many other Muslim-related broadcasts, received extraordinary budgets. In 2002, the BBG received a budget of $544 million, a $100 million increase from the previous year's appropriations, and could then expand its coverage and programming in more than 16 countries, including Iran.

In 2002, Kenneth Tomlinson, a long time "conservative" media chief, replaced Marc B. Nathanson, as the chairman of the BBG.[170] On Iran, Tomlinson believed that the BBG should aim some of its assets on "Iran's under-30 audience."[171] It meant some changes to the VOA and in the same year the Persian service introduced *Next Chapter* (later to be replaced by a similar *Shabahang*), an MTV-influenced weekly television show that illustrated the lifestyles of hip Iranian youth. It added another hour to the TV broadcasts to Iran and by July 2003, *News and Views* was introduced, another 30-minute (then turned into an hour-long) show which included local and world news stories, analysis of issues and events, reports from inside Iran, and cultural and special interest programs.

A huge boost to the network came as a result of Condoleezza Rice's 2006 initiative, the *Iran Freedom Support Act*. It was a $75 million dollar request from Congress to help the State Department promote democracy in Iran.[172] As I mentioned earlier, Congress only allotted $66 million, but it was still enough for the whole Iran-aimed public diplomacy apparatus to undergo unusually rapid changes. Almost half of this fund, more than $36 million, was to supplement U.S. broadcasting operations in Iran (namely VOA and Radio Farda) in 2006.[173] This, and later years' budgets, led to extraordinary expansions of the networks.

The 2006 war between Iran-backed Hezbollah and Israel was another reason for BBG directors to increase their broadcasting to Iranians. During the time of such conflicts, which make politicians in Washington worry about the Middle East more, it is much easier to gather support from Congress and the government. *Late Edition* was the first outcome of such reactions, a one-hour program "designed for young Iranian viewers" which blended news and stories on science, technology, medical sciences, and other world events. Kenneth Tomlinson, in fact, promised for more programming in a press release by the BBG in July 2006:

> The United States is fortunate that at this critical point - especially since the start of hostilities between Israel and the Tehran-supported Hezbollah terrorist organization - we have a way to communicate directly with the people of Iran every night. . . Thanks to the support of the Bush administration and Congress we will continue to increase our original television

[169] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "VOA Farsi Celebrates the Iranian New Year with Two-Hour Simulcast", *BBG Press Release*, February 2000, retrieved [on 2011-01-1] from: <http://ibb7-2.ibb.gov/pubaff/farsi005.html>

[170] Farhi, Paul, "Kenneth Tomlinson Quits Public Broadcasting Board", *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2005, p. C01.

[171] Tomlinson, Kenneth, "BBG Chairman Kenneth Y. Tomlinson's Letter To The Washington Post", *BBG Press Release*, No: 52, December 2002, retrieved [on 2011-01-11] from: <http://www.bbg.gov/pressroom/press-releases/BBG-PressRelease-52.html>

[172] See: U.S. Congress, House, *United States Policy towards Iran-Next Steps*, Congressional Hearing before Committee on Foreign Relations, Serial No. 109–183, March 2006, p. 14.

[173] Department of State, "Update on Iran Democracy Promotion Funding", Media Note, Office of the Spokesman, Washington, DC, June 4, 2007.

> programming to four hours plus repeats by September and six hours plus repeats early next year.[174]

The promise was kept indeed. One of the major lines followed by the Bush administration officials was to support human rights movements in the country and related to this was *Today's Woman*- another daily show added to VOA TV's list of live programs to Iran in September 2007. The show focused on women and their socio-economic status in Iran and often criticized the government for its treatment of women's rights.

The Bush administration's support for the VOA continued in 2008 when the State Department requested again more than $75 million from Congress for its public diplomacy programs in Iran. Congress only appropriated $60 million for this purpose, but made sure that VOA Persian will receive the budget it had requested: Almost a third of this fund (i.e., $20 million).[175]

By the time that George W. Bush left office in 2008, VOA Persian was producing more than seven hours of original programming. It also repeated the same content more than two times to fulfill the 24-cycle broadcast. During the time of this research, there were more than 83 full-time employees and 15 correspondents working on various levels of the network (close to a total of 100). It also produced one hour of radio programming in the morning (Iran time). The network broadcasts from its headquarters in Washington, DC and its programming can be accessed via satellite in Iran and Europe. The following table shows the list of current VOA TV programs.

Table 3: List of VOA TV Programs[176]

Name	**Iran time**	**Description**
Today's Woman	6:10 - 7:00pm	The one-hour program features influential women, mostly from Iran, discussing social, medical, human rights, law, sports, and business problems concerning women.
News and Views	7:00 - 8:00pm	PNN's flagship, features live news coverage of the latest headlines from the U.S., Iran and across the globe.
News Talk	8:00 - 9:00pm	*NewsTalk* is a journalists' roundtable discussion program that features a news update followed by an examination of the day's top stories and looks at issues mostly relating to Iranian politics.
Straight Talk	9:00-10:00pm	*Straight Talk* discusses issues like Iranian politics, economics, science, technology, social issues, the environment, arts and culture. News about the United States and the lives of Americans is also featured.
Late Edition	10:00-11:00pm	The broadcast begins with a wrap up of the day's news and a closer look at a top story. Targeted to a younger demographic, the show also features health, technology, sports, entertainment and cultural segments.

As it is evident from the table, the shows are mostly news-oriented and VOA Persian is in fact a news network. VOA Persian does broadcast some music videos during the week, but that is all outside of news-oriented programming. It

[174] BBG, "BBG Increases Persian Television with Debut of VOA's Late Edition", *BBG Press Release*, No 137, July 2006, retrieved [on 2011-01-11] from: <http://www.bbg.gov/pressroom/press-releases/BBG-PressRelease-137.html>

[175] Katzman, Kenneth, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, RL 32048, Washington D.C., 2011, p. 67.

[176] Vice of America Persian, "About Us", VOA Persian Website, undated, retrieved [on 2011-01-14] from: <http://www.voanews.com/persian/about-us/aboutus/>

does not dedicate its airwaves to covering, for example, an entire sport event (e.g., soccer or the Super Bowl), or feature any soap operas or TV series.

2.1.4 VOA TV Content

In order to see how VOA Persian is fulfilling its public diplomacy task, I chose to conduct a content analysis of the network's programs. The sampling process had a particular limitation and that was due to the problem of accessing the archive. That is, finding a sizable and yet generalizable sample of VOA content was a major challenge, especially when there was no physical access to VOA's archive. The only way to tackle the problem was to download some of the shows via the VOA website. Due to the accessibility reasons, a 2007 thirty-day sample of VOA Persian's content was chosen for the study. It led to encoding of more than 90 hours of television programs. A content analysis questionnaire was also developed with two major (and several minor) questions to be answered:

1- In what proportions were topics related to Iran, the United States, and the rest of the world covered?

2- What major political, cultural, economic, and social agendas were followed by the VOA?

The results for the first issue (i.e., the coverage for Iran, United States, and the rest of the world) showed that most of the content was, in many ways, related to Iran. Almost 56 hours (i.e., 62 percent) of the programs covered issues related directly to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Next was the United States which received 46 hours of airtime. And finally, *the rest of the world* was also discussed within VOA broadcasts, but only for less than 11 hours. It should, of course, be mentioned that there were overlaps of the topics on many occasions, hence the excess of the combined airtime of all three topics sums over the 90 hours of content (see table 4). For example, some content dealt both with the United States and Iran at the same time. An Iranian living in the United States and getting engaged in its political system or celebrated in the entertainment industry, is a topic touching both categories of Iran and also the United States.

Table 4: Coverage of Iran, United States, and the World during ONE month (90 hours) of VOA TV broadcasts	
Iran	56 hours
United States	46 hours
Rest of the World	11 hours
Total Time (deducing overlaps)	90 hours

The content was also coded (see appendix: VOA Content Analysis Form) to find the major agendas of the programs. The coding results showed that when it came to Iran, *Human Rights*, as an issue, was a prime concern for VOA producers-followed by the *Nuclear Crisis*, Iran's *Internal Politics*, its *Foreign Policy*, and *Persian Culture* (See Table 5).

As for the United States, there were topics high on the agenda as well: U.S. *Foreign Policy* (vis-à-vis the Middle East), and news on its *Medical and Technological Advancement*. These were followed by topics such as *Hollywood*, U.S. *Internal Politics*, and discussions of the achievements of *Iranian Americans* living in America.

For the rest of the world, however, it was usually *World Sport*s, followed by news on the *European Union* and *Other Countries* relevant to U.S. foreign policy (e.g., Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Pakistan, and Afghanistan).

Table 5: Major Themes found in Iran-related content and their dedicated airtime	
Issue	Time
Human Rights	26 hours
Nuclear Crisis	15 hours
Internal Politics	8 hours
Foreign Policy	4 hours
Persian Culture	3 hours

Table 6: Major Themes in VOA's U.S.-related Content	
Issue	Time
Foreign Policy	22 hours
Science and Medical Treatments	6 hours
Hollywood	5 hours
Internal politics	3 hours
Iranian Americans	3 hours
Other	5 hours

Table 7: Major Themes in VOA's World.-related Content	
Issue	Time
World Sport and Others	3 hours
European Union	3 hours
Other countries	5 hours

As the results of the content analysis indicate, VOA Persian television has managed, to some degree, to cover issues of outmost importance to U.S. public diplomacy towards Iran. There is, of course, the question of how does the network present this amount of content. There have been some experts evaluating the ways in which the producers and anchors present their topics and the problems that they face (this will be discussed next in this chapter). Yet here, if one attempts to explain U.S. foreign policy, its culture, its mutual relationship with the targeted country, and its indoctrination of certain ideas (secularism, human rights), then as the above tables testify, it is very clear that VOA Persian's airtime of these specific issues and agendas is in line with the stated aims of U.S. public diplomacy, at least in terms of quantity, if not quality. This, however,

should not mean that the network is exerting a proportionate amount of influence on its targeted audience. It is only in the area of content and only in the realm of quantity that the network is in line with U.S. policy. But, there are some fundamental problems with VOA Persian when its quality and the way it is presented to the Iranians are discussed.

2.1.5 Problems of VOA Persian

One of the major problems of VOA is the degree to which the network is being associated with the U.S. government. In fact, VOA makes no hesitation to introduce itself as the official voice of the U.S. government, and interestingly enough, the majority of its Iranian audience are aware of this.[177] The problem occurs when one is reminded that Iranians, as a people, have always been skeptical of foreign intentions in their country, especially with the U.S. involvement in their internal affairs (see previous chapter). Thus, they take for granted that VOA Persian will represent only news stories which are in line with the American national interest. It is very difficult for an average Iranian, with even limited knowledge of U.S.-Iran relations, to accept VOA as an independent and unbiased media with reliable and comprehensive news. An informal survey of some of the network's Tehrani audience, conducted by the author in early 2008, showed that a significant number of viewers (from different political strata) had no disagreement on considering VOA as a media outlet established with orientations to serve U.S. government policies (see Table 8).[178]

Table 8: Views about the VOA What do you think of VOA?	Percent
No difference between VOA and other media outlets	7.5
Based on unbiased information	13.3
In line with U.S. policy	48.6
Critical with useful insights	10.6
Total	80.0
System Missing (NA)	20.0
Total	100.0

Being seen as an arm of U.S. government is in itself a disadvantage, but sometimes serving U.S. interest is in contrast to Iranian national security and clearly damages the credibility of the network. One such problem arose from the U.S. government's support for some Iranian opposition groups. As part of its broader strategy towards Iran, the U.S. government provided support to some separatist groups in Iran. These groups are abhorred by the majority of Iranians since they adhere to terrorist and other military tactics (e.g., suicide bombing) and the U.S. government's support has mostly been covert.[179] However, in the case of Jondollah, a separatist militia in Iran's south-eastern province of Baluchistan, VOA gave one of its most objectionable impressions when it interviewed, in 2007, the head of the militants, Abdol-Malik Riggi and called

[177] Voice of America, "About Us", VOA Website, undated, retrieved [on 2011-01-13] from: <http://www.voanews.com/english/about-us/>

[178] The survey methodology was based on cluster sampling, asking more than 120 Tehran residents from three regions of the city (north, center, and south) to fill out a multiple questionnaire (see appendix). All the respondents were adults between the ages of 25 to 60. Other variables such as gender or education were not considered.

[179] Reuters, "Iran Rebel, on Death Row, Says US Supported Group", Reuters Website, August 25, 2009, retrieved [on 2011-01-13] from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLP446118> and
ABC News, "ABC News Exclusive: The Secret War Against Iran", ABC News Website, online document, April 03, 2007, from: <http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/04/abc_news_exclus.html>

(and subtitled) him "the leader for the movement of the Iranian people's resistance."[180] The network received significant amounts of criticism for this from both Iranian-Americans and also those in Iran. In fact, the Iranian local media (television, newspapers, websites, and blogs) made sure to this day that Iranians never forget VOA's support for a terrorist group.[181] *Baztab* (later renamed to *Tabnak*) the number-one news website in Iran, for instance, used tense occasions like a suicide bombing attack by the Jondollah to remind its readers that VOA Persian called the group truly a "liberation movement" instead of naming it a "terrorist group".[182] It would also show an image of Riggi's face on the VOA TV screen (while being interviewed by the anchor) knowing that it would enrage the readers of VOA's support for a suicide bomber (see Image 1).[183]

Image 1: VOA Persian interviewing Jondollah's leader

Cases like above, which discredit VOA Persian in the eyes of the majority of Iranians, often happen and when they occur it is very difficult to rectify them. One prominent example is the special treatment that Mohammad Reza Shah's family receives from appearing on the VOA. Farah and Reza Pahlavi (the last Shah's widow and son) frequently appear on VOA TV and criticize the current political system in Iran, but they hardly get questioned about the Shah's disregard for human rights and democracy during the dynasty. Besides, by showcasing the remnants of the monarchy, VOA disrespects Iranians' resentment towards the Shah (which led to the 1979 revolution) and consequently loses more credibility among viewers. Mehdi Khalaji, the Iran expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, refers to this problem as "VOA's lack of impartiality" and explained it with a particular case in mind:

> In Iran, like many European countries, at the beginning of every year (Nowrooz) high-ranking officials send greetings to the public that contain political statements. On the first day of

[180] Khalaji, Mehdi, *Through the Veil: The Role of Broadcasting in U.S. Public Diplomacy toward Iranians*, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, DC, 2007, p.13.

[181] PressTV, "VOA interviews Iranian terrorist culprit in a sign of backing", *PressTV* Website, Apr 2, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-01-13] from: <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/4710.html>

[182] Based on statistics retrieved from Alexa.com, Tabnak is ranked first among news websites visited by Iranians.

[183] Baztab, "Voice of America interviews the killer of Baluchistan People", Baztab News Website, April 2, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-02-08] from: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070407004657/www.baztab.ir/news/63969.php>

> the Iranian New Year, Iranian television has traditionally hosted the country's leader, who presents his New Year's message, similar to what is done in many continental European countries. On March 21, 2007 (the first day of the Iranian calendar), VOA hosted Reza Pahlavi…the interviewer frequently asked him about his message for the New Year and treated him like an official, not a political activist. Referring to him as "prince," the interviewer did not contest any of his ideas or statements. This kind of interview in such a context may suggest to Iranian audiences that the U.S. government is promoting a return of the monarchy in Iran.[184]

Representation of the monarchy and its remnants happens more often than not. And there are also other groups like the Iranian group Mojahedeen-e-Khalgh Organization (MKO), a militant entity already on the terrorist list of the State Department. MKO is admittedly a terrorist organization in the U.S. but since the group opposes the Iranian government, it is sometimes allowed to operate inside the United States. VOA Persian sometimes manages to conduct interviews with its spokesmen and officials. However, it does so for the sake of providing only a platform for the group to get rid of its harsh criticism and lobby in Washington against VOA directors. The group is also detested among Iranians for its terrorist operations inside Iran and its joining and supporting of Saddam Hussein during the eight year Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).

Another relevant criticism of VOA is the disconnectedness of its anchors and employees from contemporary Iran. It is often argued that VOA began its work in 1979 with a team that consisted mostly of Iranian monarchists which deeply affected the network's journalistic standards and professionalism.[185] Although this problem has recently been alleviated by replacing the old veterans with youth, there are still journalists who have left the country when 70 percent of the Iranian population had not yet been born. They had real difficulties in understanding the mentality of Iranian youth, their concerns in their every-day life, and even their political views and understanding of issues. This physical, as well as psychological, separation from the current Iranian street has often led the producers and anchors to choose topics which are only relevant to the exiles themselves and their memories about the past Iran, rather than the real present Iran and Iranians.

Hiring new staff has caused its own problems concerning a lack of professionalism at VOA Persian. Some new employees, although young and fresh in their experience of Iranian society, have little background in journalism and join the network with a background as human rights activists. According to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the U.S. Department of State, these young employees, as well as others, "appear to lack a clear understanding of the mission of PNN and the centrality of the VOA charter to their work, underscoring the need for additional training."[186] As the OIG found, VOA Persian's staff should also be trained in other areas such as technical training in television production, communication between the English speaking executives and directors (who have the authority) and Farsi-speaking staff and anchors who (who have little authority), and managerial skills.[187] The work environment has been identified as one of the most "unpleasant" ones among the U.S. media outlets with "disgruntled employees and destructive rumors" with one of its biggest challenges to be "maintaining an atmosphere of trust and mutual

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[184] Khalaji, Mehdi, *Through the Veil*, p.14.
[185] Khalaji, Mehdi, "Getting the Message Across: Better Broadcasting to Iran", *PolicyWatch #1651*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington D.C. 2010.
[186] Broadcasting Board of Governors, Office of Inspector General, *Voice of America's Persian News Network*, Report of Inspection, report no. ISP-IB-09-27, March 2009, p. 6.
[187] Office of Inspector General, "Voice of America's Persian News Network", p.19.

respect".[188] The OIG believes that most of such discrepancies happen because of the rapid expansion which VOA Persian has experienced during the last decade.[189] That expansion, however, has had its positive outputs too, especially in the realms of content production (which was discussed earlier) and of audience reach.

There are varying (and sometimes contradictory) claims about the degree of VOA's audience in Iran. Official reports released by the BBG and the State Department, show that the Voice of America (both radio and TV) had managed to reach approximately seven million Iranians in 1996.[190] After 9/11, with the expansion of the network, this number dramatically increased to more than 14 million in 2006.[191] Currently, according to the latest correspondence between the author and VOA's public relation's office, that number has subsided to less than 10 million viewers in 2010. There are two major problems with this controversial data. First, due to restrictions imposed by the Iranian government, it is very much difficult for the VOA staff to conduct reliable surveys in the country, and second, the data is questionable because it is being presented by the same organization which undertakes the broadcasting. There is, of course, anecdotal evidence which has always existed but hardly reflected upon the numbers. The anecdotes published by the media outlet itself are almost always positive while anecdotes published by the news agencies in Iran are always critical of the network and reflect upon its shortcomings.

Another channel to gauge VOA Persian's success among its intended audience is the internet. I will be discussing the internet aspect of the network in the chapter, but only after reflecting upon Radio Farda, another instrument of U.S. broadcasting to Iran.

2.2 Radio Farda: The Legacy of the Cold War

In June 1995, Republican senator Alfonso D'Amato introduced for the first time, *The Radio Free Iran Act*, which although was unsuccessful at the time, laid the foundation for what later became known as Radio Farda. *Radio Free Iran*, in the words of a D'Amato aide, was to "do for Iran what Radio Free Europe did for the Soviet Union."[192] As mentioned, the attempt initially failed but the idea remained resilient. The pressure from the Republican side in Congress led to the appropriation of $4 million in 1997 in order to fund a Farsi language radio station. It was a move that would face reluctance from the Clinton administration. After the reformist Khatami had come to power in Iran, Clinton was looking for rapprochement and sought to sabotage the radio initiative as a gesture towards Iran and the reformists. The administration, however, soon gave way and changed its policy deciding to support the project by initially providing the station with a $900,000 fund.[193] In response to Iranian objections to the radio program, the State Department said that it was supposed to "enrich domestic political debate inside Iran, and not to undermine the Iranian government".[194] In

[188] Office of Inspector General, "Voice of America's Persian News Network", p.35.
[189] Office of Inspector General, "Voice of America's Persian News Network", p.16.
[190] Christina, Pino-Marina, "Next-generation VOA channeling into Iran", *USA TODAY*, November 4, 1996, Monday, p. 4A.
[191] Blaya, Joaquin, *Testimony of Joaquin Blaya*, Washington, DC, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-01-14] from: <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/bla051607.htm>
[192] "*The Iran Brief*", *Middle East Data Project*, June 1, 1995, online document, retrieved [on 2011-01-17] from: <www.lexisnexis.com>
[193] Sciolino, Elaine, "White House Agrees to Radio Broadcasts to Iran", *New York Times*, Apr 15, 1998, p. A3.
[194] Feuilherade, Peter, "New Radios Beam into Iran and Iraq", *World Media Watch*, BBC Monitoring Website, October 30, 1998, retrieved [on 2011-01-17] from: <www.lexisnexis.com>

a move to placate the Iranian side, the state department also insisted that the name of the radio should change from *Radio Free Iran* to a more neutral the *Persian service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, apparently because of the belief that the former would sound hostile and would not send a good signal to Iran. The White House also appointed Stephen C. Fairbanks, a long-time intelligence officer on Iran and an advocate of closer U.S.-Iran relations as the director of the network hoping that the tone of the radio program remains benevolent to Iran.[195]

Once the proposed U.S. radio broadcasts to Iran acquired an unceasing momentum, the next move for Washington was to find a country and venue for the headquarters. At first, two cities of London and Paris were mentioned. But eventually it was decided that it was better if the new service was produced in the RFE/RL stations located in Prague. Prague used to be the base for the U.S. funded *Radio Free Europe*/*Radio Liberty* stations throughout the Cold War and ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the stations and facilities were in a state of anxiety to find a post-Cold War role. While they were being re-deployed away from eastern bloc to central Asia, some of their facilities were designated for such new initiatives as broadcasts to Iran and Iraq (which was also another country of concern to the U.S.). *The Persian service of RFE/RL* or *Radio Azadi* ("freedom" in Farsi), as it was initially called despite White House reluctance, began its transmissions in October 1998.

Radio Azadi was run under the RFE/RL directions, itself under the supervision of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and initially transmitted a 30-minute daily program to Iran for several weeks of a trial period. The very first program presented Thomas Dine, then President of RFE/RL, who explained the purpose and nature of the radio program to its Iranian audience. His statement reflected upon the more neutral position of the Clinton Administration in this regard:

> We will provide news and information of interest to the Iranian people. This will be news and information about what is taking place within Iranian society as well as the areas around Iran, and international news that affects all of us as citizens of the globe.[196]

In reality, Radio Azadi borrowed its mandate from its parent organization, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. The station is supposed to "promote democratic values and institutions by reporting the news in countries where free press is banned by the government or not fully established."[197] The organization's mission statement is comprised of five items signifying its general direction. Based on this mission statement:

> 1. RFE/RL provides objective news, analysis, and discussion of domestic and regional issues crucial to successful democratic and free-market transformations.
>
> 2. RFE/RL strengthens civil societies by projecting democratic values.
>
> 3. RFE/RL combats ethnic and religious intolerance and promotes mutual understanding among peoples.
>
> 4. RFE/RL provides a model for local media, assists in training to enhance media professionalism and independence, and develops partnerships with local media outlets.

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[195] Timmerman, Kenneth, "The wrong man at Radio Free Iran", *Washington Times*, August 13, 1998, Part A; Commentary, p. A21.

[196] BBC, "FE head says new Iran service not propaganda", BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, online document, November 6, 1998, retrieved [on 2011-01-18] from: <www.lexisnexis.com>

[197] Waller, J. Michael, *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, 2007.p 254.

> 5. RFE/RL fosters closer ties between the countries of the region and the world's established democracies.[198]

There is a particular difference between RFE/RL's mandate and VOA's Charter. In the case of VOA, the network is obliged to present and discuss the policies of the United States government and also reflect upon American society. Meanwhile, in the case of RFE/RL, there is little mentioning (at least explicitly) of the United States government and even its society. In other words, RFE/RL and its affiliates had been established with a target-country orientation to generate and stir discussions in the target society while VOA is relatively a U.S. image entity with particular tendency to advocate for U.S. policies and its society. Nevertheless, in reality, both entities focus on the same issues and countries of concern to U.S. foreign policy.

With a mandate giving more space to focus on the internal issues of Iran, Radio Azadi soon increased its broadcast to Iran from half an hour to three hours (plus three hours of repeats) in order to cover more issues and consequently exert more influence on its listeners.

A content analysis of the radio programs in March 2000, conducted by the author, shows that the greater part of the radio items discussed Iran's politics and culture. As the White House and also Congress had expected, the station dedicated two thirds of its content to issues of *Iran* only. Iran's internal politics, especially the struggles between the reformists and conservatives, and subjects such as human rights, constituted the majority of topics in this realm. The station also closely covered and criticized Iran's foreign policy when it came to coincide with the U.S. government's concerns. In the case of Iran-Russian relations, for example, agreements between the two countries and the U.S. position on them were extensively discussed and the U.S. concerns were asserted. Radio Azadi also devoted a good part of its airtime to Iran's culture and entertaining Iranians. The Station explored the works of Iranian artists, poets, musicians, and writers. A close look at the topics and individuals shows that they were chosen from among those affiliated with either the reform or the opposition movement in Iran. Presenting news and debates over the works of such poets and musicians such as Feredoon Moshiri, Ahmad Shamloo, and Mohammad Reza Shajarian, all of whom were often cherished and admired in the reformist and opposition circles, are examples of Radio Azadi's work in its early years of operation. The station also covered U.S. foreign policy- but in a very brief and concise manner. Instead, it tended to cover regional issues of concern to the U.S. government (such as the Taliban's Afghanistan, Arab states of the Persian Gulf, the Israeli-Palestinian problem, and also the oil market).

2.2.1 The Bush Administration: from Radio Azadi to Radio Farda

Radio Azadi continued to broadcast programs to Iran during the early years of the Bush administration. In 2002, it was broadcasting 11 hours of daily programming to Iran. However, in December of the same year, the BBG discussed plans for a new station to target more Iranians. It took Radio Azadi off the air and replaced it with a new radio station: *Radio Farda* (*tomorrow* in Farsi).

The decision had its roots in the 9/11 attacks and the designation of the Middle East as the most volatile region of the world. The war on terror as a paradigm had replaced the Cold War approach to world politics and based on the strategy of fighting terrorism, not only on the battle ground but also in the war of ideologies, the Bush administration had widely supported broadcasting initiatives to the Middle East. The United States sought to communicate with the Muslim nations and thus initiated such broadcasts as Radio Sawa (in 2002), AlHurra

[198] Waller, *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, p 254.

Network (in 2004), Afghanistan Radio Network (in 2002), and also Radio Farda (see Table 9).[199]

Table 9: U.S. Government Media Initiatives in Support of the War on Terrorism

Initiative	Launch date	Project description
Radio Sawa (recently added to the Middle East Television Network)	March 2002	A modern Arabic-language network that broadcasts music, news, and information to a target audience of 15- to 29- year olds in the Middle East via a combination of FM, medium wave, short wave, digital audio satellite, and Internet transmission resources. Separate streams are targeted to Iraq, Jordan and the West Bank, the Persian Gulf, Egypt, and Morocco. All five streams have a differentiated music program; however, the news is similar on the four non-Iraq streams. Board officials say that Radio Sawa broadcasts between 10 to 15 minutes of news each hour.
Afghanistan Radio Network	August 2002	Afghanistan Radio Network is a coordinated stream of VOA Dari and Pashto and RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan radio programming. The network targets the broad Afghani population and currently broadcasts 24 hours, 7 days a week on FM and the Internet. It broadcasts 12 hours in Dari and 12 hours in Pashto daily. It features hourly regional and global news and information coverage as well as reports on issues such as health, education, politics, human rights, women's rights, and economic reconstruction.
Radio Farda	December 2002	Radio Farda combines the efforts of VOA and RFE/RL into a single service managed by RFE/RL. Radio Farda targets its broadcasts to the under-30 youth in Iran. It broadcasts a combination of popular Persian and Western music and a total of 8 hours of news and information content daily, focusing on regional coverage and developments relating to Iran. News updates are given at least twice an hour, with longer news programming in the morning and evening. It broadcasts 24 hours a day, 7 days a week via medium wave, digital audio satellite, and the Internet, as well as 21 hours a day via short wave.
Alhurra (part of the Middle East Television Network)	February 2004	With a focus on attracting a broad audience in the Middle East, the Alhurra satellite television channel provides news, current affairs, and entertainment programming on a 24 hours, 7 days a week basis. Programming focuses on news and information, including hourly news updates, daily hour-long newscasts, and current affairs talk shows. The channel also broadcasts information or educational shows on subjects including health and fitness, entertainment, sports, and science and technology.

Source: United States General Accounting Office

Iranian demographics also played a special role in the creation of Radio Farda. At the turn of the century, the Iranian population was very young. More than two-thirds of the country were (and still are) under the age of 30. In order to connect to this audience, the BBG had to devise a new medium, a radio station which could attract young listeners and influence a much larger segment of the society. This led the BBG to develop and discuss the idea for the new Radio Farda. It was finally in November 2002 that RFE/RL director Thomas Dine announced the creation of Radio Farda which was to be co-produced by RFE-RL's and Voice of America's Persian service staff. He sent a memo to the RFE/RL's staff outlining the nature and purpose of the project. Parts of the memo read:

> Radio Farda ' 'Tomorrow' in Farsi -- will go on the air in mid-December. It will be an around-the-clock radio station for Iran, targeted primarily at Iranians under the age of 30, which is about 70 percent of the country's population.[200]

It was initially stipulated that, in order to attract the youth, the station, in addition to its only 5 hours of news and commentary, will mostly broadcast music and entertainment content- "a combination of Western and Persian songs."[201] As

[199] Ford, Jess, BBG, and the United States Office of General Accounting, *U.S. International Broadcasting: Challenges Facing the Broadcasting Board of Governors,* U.S. General Accounting Office, Washington D.C., April 29, 2004, retrieved [on 2011-02-03] from: <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS48845>

[200] Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, "Tom Dino's Memo on Radio Farda", *Public Diplomacy Alumni Association*, online document, November 18, 2002, retrieved [on 2011-01-20] from: <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org>

[201] Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, "Tom Dino's Memo on Radio Farda", 2002.

Dine wrote, the music was "aimed at attracting young Iranians to Farda's news products."[202]

In December 2002, the BBG started the transmissions of its ambitious Radio Farda with twenty-four-hours of Persian-language programs. Its staff consisted of former employees at the Radio Azadi accompanied by ten Persian speaking staff from the Voice of America.

Steven Fairbanks was replaced with Mardo Soghom, a Persian-speaking Armenian who had been raised in Iran. Putting an almost native speaker as the director of the station helped Radio Farda to evade such challenges as the miscommunication between the boss and employees, thus paving the way for better performance.

It was only a few days after the initial transmissions of Radio Farda that President George W. Bush sent a message to Iranians through the station inaugurating the station officially and assured the Iranian reformists and opposition of U.S. support:

> I'm pleased to send warm greetings to the people of Iran and to welcome you to the new Radio Farda broadcast.
>
> For many years, the United States has helped bring news and cultural broadcasts for a few hours every day to the Iranian people via Radio Freedom [Radio Azadi]. Yet the Iranian people tell us that more broadcasting is needed, because the unelected few who control the Iranian government continue to place severe restrictions on access to uncensored information. So we are now making our broadcast available to more Iranians by airing news and music and cultural programs nearly 24 hours a day, and we are pleased to continue Voice of America and VOA TV services to Iran.[203]

2.2.2 Radio Farda Content

Radio Farda mixed news and entertainment to appeal to its intended audience. A usual hour of broadcast consisted of fifteen minutes of news, with frequent intervals filled with Persian and Western music. The entertainment content was designed on having a happy tone to it and a sample play-list included songs from artists such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, Abba, Enrique Iglesias, Phil Collins, and Celine Dion. There were also Persian pop stars such as Googoosh, Dariush, Siavash Ghomayshi, Mansour, Hayedeh, and Ebi. The media consultant Bert Kleinman was the person behind the idea of moving away from the news-dominated style of networks such as VOA and taking entertainment to public diplomacy radio. In an interview with Washington Post's David Finkel, Kleinman mentioned that, the core of the broadcast was to be news, but since the network was "tasked to reach out to the younger generation" and news items were not enough, amusement content should have been added to make it attractive to the youth.[204]

In order to find out the general discourse dominating Radio Farda's broadcasts, the writer conducted a content analysis. The study was to cover one month of the station's programs selected randomly and it focused solely on the news items rather than the entertainment items (which were already discussed). Because of accessibility reasons, the selected sample came to be the news items from July 2007. The results of the coding showed that the programs mainly focused on issues related to Iran. A proportionate amount of such news dealt with human rights abuses in the country. For example, prosecution of journalists and women

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[202] Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, "Tom Dino's Memo on Radio Farda", 2002.
[203] Bush, George W., "Radio Remarks to the People of Iran", *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Volume 2, 2002, p. 2211.
[204] Finkel, David, "U.S. "station seeks ear of Iran's youths", *Washington Post*, June 5, 2006, p. A3.

rights activists was a regular topic on Farda's talk shows during this period of time. Iranian politics and economic management of the country by Ahmadinejad, and reformists' criticism of that, was another recurring theme of the programs. Events and stories related to United States foreign policy were also covered extensively. There was also a small amount of time dedicated to news about technology and science (see table 10).

Table 10: Issues discussed in Radio Farda's programs (July 2007)

Issue	***News Items***	***Examples***
Human Rights	23	Journalists in jail, juvenile execution, women's rights
American politics and foreign policy	13	Iraq War, Afghanistan, Pakistan,
Iranian politics and economy	10	Oil revenue, inflation, political feuds
Other world news	4	New medical discoveries, hijacking in Turkey

2.2.3 Staff and Audience for Radio Farda

Although the station's main headquarters are in Prague, the non-news content is prepared and delivered from Radio Farda's other office in Washington, DC. According to Finkel, in 2006, there were over 10 employees stationed in Washington, DC and close to 30 in the city of Prague.[205]

According to Alan Heil, a vertebral VOA journalist, Radio Farda could claim that, in 2004, it had a weekly audience of around 7 million people (that is, 15 percent of the Iranian adult population). However, after this initial surge in the number of listeners, Radio Farda's appeal to the people plummeted significantly and by 2009, when the Bush administration had completely left the office, the weekly audience fell less than half of the 2004 estimates. Radio Farda now reaches hardly less than 2 million people (4.5 percent of the adult population) in the country.[206]

One reason for such plummeting numbers could be the constant pressure from the Pentagon, in 2006, on Radio Farda to be harsher in criticizing the political system in Iran and be more active in presenting American views. Such politicization when reflected in the content would naturally repulse those Iranians who had turned to the station for entertainment rather than politics.

2.2.4 Radio Farda's Problems

Like VOA Persian, Radio Farda has also been the subject of some criticism. It has often had difficulties in creating a balance between presenting American perspectives and steering debate inside Iran, a problem common among less sophisticated international broadcasting stations. In other words, in order to be genuinely helpful to the process of Iranian reform, Radio Farda needed to take some distance from directly projecting American views on Iranian politics. At the same time, if the radio station does not advocate American policies, it would mean that it has abandoned one of its primary public diplomacy tasks, and that is presenting American views on events. The BBG board member, Enders Wimbush, referred to this vicious circle in an article he wrote for the *Weekly Standard*. He maintained the position that the station should not be solely an

[205] Finkel, *Washington Post*, 2006, p. A3.
[206] Email communication between the author and Alan Heil in January 23, 2011.

advocacy tool and criticized it for falling "into the public diplomacy trap of advocating for America rather than stimulating debate within the targeted society." Wimbush, himself a former RFE/RL director for over 5 years (1987-1992), believed that if Radio Farda was going to help the United States win the *war of ideas*, Radio Farda should be totally overhauled and put more emphasis on its "menu of ideas" rather than use it merely as a tool "which aims to make people like America".[207]

In addition to the above, Radio Farda has sometimes been criticized for not being harsh enough on the Islamic Republic. It is a charge mostly emanating from hard-line circles in the United States. The Pentagon, for example, particularly emphasized this when in 2006 it released a six-month study of VOA and Radio Farda conducted by its special Iran Steering Group. The report, authored by the Iranian-American Ladan Archin, one of the close associates of Donald Rumsfeld, claimed that, first of all, the media outlets failed in framing sensitive issues with proper analysis and discussion, and secondly, neither of the stations (that is VOA and Radio Farda) were primary sources of news for Iranians. Archin had partially focused on the networks' staff and guests, and found that Radio Farda had hired journalists whose most recent experiences were with Iran's state-run broadcasts. On guests and experts appearing on the shows, she wrote that while the outlet "often invites guests who defend the Islamic Republic (of Iran)'s version of issues, it consistently fails to maintain a balance by inviting informed guests who represent another perspective on the same issue."[208] One example for such experts, the report mentioned, was Hooshang Amirahmadi who was identified to be anti-American or pro-Islamic Republic. It was strange for Archin to view Amirahmadi in this light since he was a long-time political lobbyist in the U.S. who advocated for rapprochement between Iran and America. The author of the report, however, had argued that Amirahmadi was so close to the Islamic system that he became "one of the few candidates vetted and accepted by the Guardian Council for the 2005 Iranian presidential race." This claim was later rebuffed by Amiahmadi himself arguing that although he indeed ran for candidacy, he was disqualified because of his American citizenship. Still, the report had some grains of truth in it since in the eyes of Archin and many other anti-Islamic Republic Iranian-Americans, Amirahmadi was not holding the same grudge against the Islamic Republic politicians as those of the neo-conservatives in the U.S.

The report also criticized the broadcasts, and especially Radio Farda, for not fulfilling their capacity as being primary sources of news in Iran. While one of the major aims of U.S. broadcasts, and in fact, every other broadcast, is to be able to function as a credible source of news for their audience, it appeared (based on the Iran Steering Group Report) that instead of achieving this level, Radio Farda had become a follower (in a sense) and had relied heavily on Iranian-state sources of news like the Islamic Republic News Agency, and local news websites such as Tabnak, Alef, Asriran, and official press releases by Iranian government organizations. Such criticism could be relevant since the station has failed to secure any office or hire and deploy a permanent correspondent in Iran due to thr reluctance of the Iranian government. As I will discuss in a separate part of this chapter, this is not only Radio Farda's setback and most other international broadcasts face the same obstacles when it comes to covering Iran in their news.

In order to appease its critics, Radio Farda often conducts exclusive interviews with American and Israeli politicians. In 2008, for instance, Radio Farda

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[207] Wimbush, Eners, "Radio Free Iran: Down with Music, Up with Ideas", *Weekly Standard*, Vol. 012, Issue 14, December 18, 2006.

[208] Strobel, Warren P. and William Douglas, "Pentagon study claims U.S. broadcasts to Iran aren't tough enough", *McClathcy Newspapers*, online document, September 26, 2006, retrieved [on 2011-08-25] from: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2006/09/26/14705/pentagon-study-claims-us-broadcasts.html#ixzz1C3YIItM6>

interviewed U.S. President George W. Bush and a few months later gave platform to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. In their interviews they reassured Iranians that they "support freedom movements all around the world" and emphasized on U.S. policies vis-à-vis the Iranian nuclear program and its military capabilities.

During and immediately after the 2009 election violence in Iran, Radio Farda and many other news organizations gained short grounds in Iran, but in a matter of few months their popularity plummeted again. The massive protests, however, helped the status of the stations by giving the politicians in Washington further hope and encouragement that supporting them will eventually lead to a change in the political climate in Iran. Today, with the Iranian politics boiling more than ever, it is expected that such media outlets will continue to operate for the foreseeable future.

2.3 Iranian Exile Networks

The Islamic revolution of 1979 was not only a revolt against western imperialism but also a rebuke of the lavish lifestyle often adhered to by the Shah's circle of supporters. As a result of this, most of the Shah-lovers, as they were called back then, left Iran and chose to be exiles abroad. There were also people who left Iran for religious reasons as well. After the revolution, Islam resonated greatly in the everyday life of Iranians by putting religious minorities in a cultural dilemma to choose between either living in a predominantly Muslim population or immigrating to Christian-friendly societies like the United States.

Some of the Iranian exiles then went to Europe, but the majority chose to spend their life in the U.S. where they could easily get settled and not worry about the wrath of Iranian people. Estimates show that from 1979 to 2000, the number of Iranian-Americans who had been born in Iran increased from 34,000 up to approximately 300,000.[209]

Some of these Iranian-Americans believed that the Islamic system will collapse sooner or later and that the monarchy (or a secular system) will triumphantly replace it. They decided to help this process by accomplishing two major tasks:

1- Preserving their exile culture (which consisted of art, music, and everything else related to ancient Persia)
2- Encourage dissidents and people to oppose the Islamic system

It was based on such thinking that the exiles established several radio and television channels. Soon, the networks aiming at either Iranian exiles themselves or their countrymen in Iran mushroomed. According to Hamid Naficy, writer of *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*, there were around 20 radio stations and more than 40 TV channels established in the U.S between 1980 and 1990. These networks produced, and mostly borrowed, entertainment content, political news, and teachings on religion.[210]

Despite their surprisingly large numbers, these networks had peculiar characteristics which made them relatively ineffective when it came to influencing Iranian politics at home:

[209] Hakimzadeh, Shirin and Dixon David, *Spotlight on the Iranian Foreign Born*, Migration Policy Institute, June 2006, retrieved [on 2011-01-26] from: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=404>
[210] Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures*, 1993, p.201, 207.

- They were run by very few staff, mostly unskilled, that had little knowledge of media and communications.
- They produced very small segments (30 to 60 minutes) and were far from being able to produce programs for a 24-hour cycle.
- They had little control over their content especially if it was live. Both callers and even anchors themselves would use inappropriate language (e.g., cursing) which would degrade the quality of the content for a family-oriented society like Iran.
- They were very short lived due to the above and to financial difficulties. With little financial stability, these networks emerged and disappeared usually after a couple of years.

The U.S. government was not indifferent towards such networks. After all, allowing them to target Iranians from U.S. soil was a kind of support. According to the Algeria Accords of 1981 between Iran and the United States, Iran had agreed to release the American hostages while the U.S. government had agreed "not to intervene, directly or indirectly, politically or militarily, in Iran's internal affairs".[211] Letting Iranian exiles broadcast to Iran was clearly a violation of the accord and a significant help to Iranian dissidents.

The U.S. government also limited some of the networks which it deemed hostile to U.S. interests and foreign policy. One such case was Simay-e-Azadi, the TV station affiliated with the People's Mojahedin of Iran (PMI). PMI was a leftist revolutionary organization inside Iran which soon diverged from the Islamists and began fighting the very revolution that it had supported to occur. It had its anti-imperialist tendencies though and had killed a number of American citizens before and after the revolution. The State Department had listed PMI as a terrorist organization. However, after the bloody street battles between the PMI and the post-revolutionary Iranian government, the U.S. government chose to take a moderate stance towards the group (now deemed dissident) but still kept the organization in its list of terrorists. In 1986, the organization launched its broadcast, Simay-e-Azadi (*Freedom TV* in Farsi), but was soon ordered by the State Department to be taken off the air because it was the voice for a terrorist group. As Hamid Naficy writes, when it became clear to the U.S. government that the PMI is more Anti-Iranian than Anti-American, it permitted Simay-e-Azadi to resume its broadcasts to Iran.[212]

As Naficy states, these networks receive considerable amount of revenue from their advertisements, but it is not sufficient for them to survive, and thus they turn to political anti-Islamic Republic groups for financial support as well. This makes the networks appear to be political pundits in the eyes of their viewers and diminishes their credibility.[213]

There is also a huge amount of rivalry among these stations and is often considered a humiliating aspect of Iranian exile television. It is hard to find a television channel, for example, which does not curse other exilic producers. They target each other with various charges ranging from un-professionalism to pro-Islamism, to such conspiracy theories as working solely to tarnish each other's media image.

Because of these shortcomings, these networks have been all but potent in influencing Iranian society and politics. These stations are so weak that after

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[211] Adlam, J. C. and S. R. Pirrie, *Iran-U.S. Claims Tribunal Reports*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p.4.
[212] Naficy, Hamid, "Narrowcasting in Diaspora: Iranian Television in Los Angeles", in *Planet Tv: A Global Television Reader*, Lisa Parks, and Shinta Kumar (ed.), New York University Press, New York, 2003, p.387.
[213] Naficy, Hamid, "Narrowcasting in Diaspora", p.386.

almost three decades, there is very little data about their audience inside Iran or their popularity in the country. It is a almost a certainty that Iranians who have access to satellite channels inside Iran do get to watch exilic television, but even then it is mostly for entertainment and music videos rather than serious political debates.

In 2006, Ladan Archin, the writer of the Iran Steering Group's assessment of Radio Farda and VOA, along with David Denehy, reportedly traveled to California to explore possible avenues for supporting regime change in Iran through Iranian exile television. Arching and Denehy, who was then heading the State Department's newly established Office of Iranian Affairs, met several of those producers, but found the chances of their success very slim, probably because of the above-mentioned problems.[214]

The level of direct financial support from the U.S. government is unclear and it is probably carried out through covert channels. The only clues are the official statements in the policy area where politicians in Washington mention their support for such networks generally. For instance, in a 2006 Congressional hearing on U.S. policy towards Iran, Nicholas Burns, President George W. Bush's Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, testified that the U.S. government would try to utilize the power of such private networks in support of change in Iran:

> We will use tools we already have through the Broadcasting Board of Governors while supporting the development of competitive and independent Farsi television and radio. We intend to work through U.S. Government sponsored media, such as the Voice of America and Radio Farda, as well as broadcasting organizations in the private sector…. We would like to work with some of the private American radio and TV stations from the State of California and New Jersey and the Washington, DC area to help them get the American message into Iran itself.[215]

With a renewed interest in such networks due to the particular approach of the U.S. government, the exile broadcasts to Iran are still robust but they have lost most of their Royalist tones and have begun to focus more on the Iranian-American community in the U.S. and possibly provide platforms for the liberal-democratic voices of Iran.

2.4 The Digital Age: U.S. Broadcasts through the Internet

A significant enhancement of U.S. broadcasting to Iran came as a result of using the internet. It was due to a general policy of the United States to expand its contacts with Muslims through the use of new media technologies and especially by the use of the internet. According to the report of the *Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World*, otherwise known as the *Djerejian Report* (after its chairman), in order for the United States to succeed in the war of ideas, the U.S. government should, among many other tactics, "tap the resources of the Internet and other communication technologies more effectively."[216]

Going online was particularly a charming idea in the case of Iran. Iranians constitute the largest group of Muslims in the Middle East with access to the

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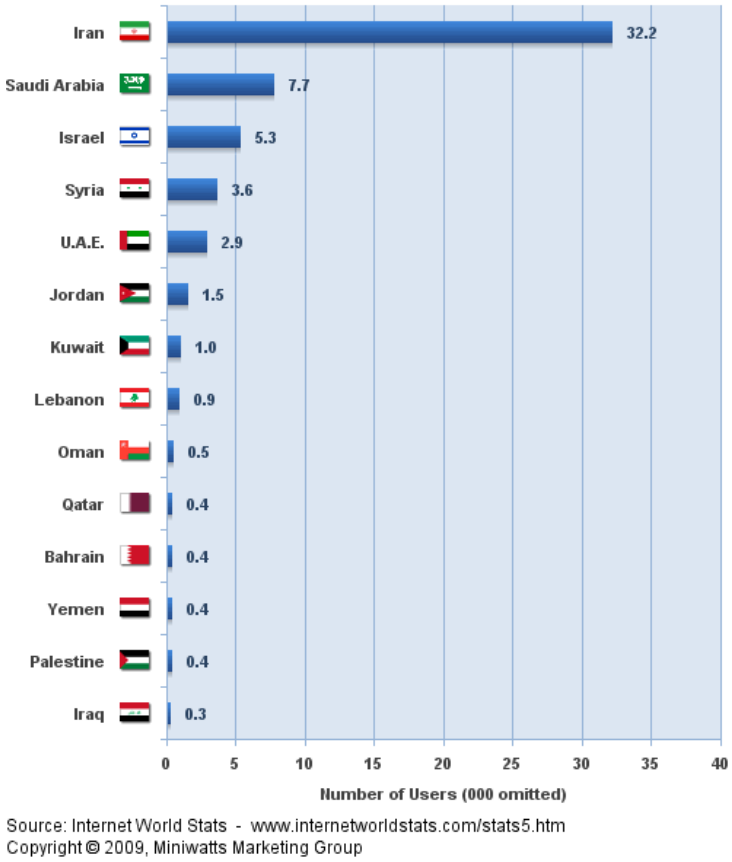
[214] Strobel and Douglas, *McClathcy Newspapers*, 2006.

[215] Testimony of Nicholas Burns in *U.S. Policy towards Iran- Next Steps*, U.S. Congress, House, Hearing before the House International Relations Committee, Serial No. 109–183, March 10, 2006, p. 35- 48.

[216] Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, *Changing Minds, Winning Peace*, U.S. Dept. of State, Washington D.C., October 2003, p. 9.

internet. The 2009 data for internet users in the Middle East shows that more than 33 million people in Iran, close to half of the population, use internet. This is particularly interesting when one comes to find out that the entire population with access to the internet in the Middle East is only 63 million. Thus, in a way, Iranians are the ones who constitute half of Middle Eastern internet users (see Figure 1).[217]

Figure 1: Internet Users in the Middle East (2009)



With an ever increasing number of Iranians connecting to the internet, it became the policy of the U.S. public diplomacy apparatus to engage Iranians online. VOA Persian and Radio Farda tried to connect to their audience and present their materials via the internet.

Voice of America was reportedly the first international broadcast in 1996 to offer its content through the internet, and VOA Persian was among the very first of VOA services that utilized the internet to reach its audience.[218] The Persian section of the VOA began by offering audio files of the programs to be listened to and downloaded by the users. VOA's first internet address was www.voa.gov but it later changed into www.voanews.com which acted as a home page for all its services, including the Persian service. Users could log onto the homepage, choose their language preference, and access news and content.

[217] Miniwatts Marketing Group, "Internet Usage in the Middle East", *Internetworldstats*, online document, 2009, retrieved [on 2011], from: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>

[218] Manning, Martin J. and Herbert Romerstein, *Historical Dictionary of American Propaganda*, Greenwood Press, 2004, p. 309.

VOA Persian soon began to improve its capacity to offer live webcasts of its programs. One of the major characteristics of the webpage is its ever-changing structure and format. The webpage which was at first static became more user-friendly when other options such as watching videos online were added to it. One of the latest products of the VOA Persian website has been its English Learning service. The directors hope that this initiative would increase the number of VOA's internet viewers, and expose them to American culture and way of life while teaching them a standard version of English spoken in the United States.[219] It was estimated that in 2007, VOA Persian's website had been visited more than 36 million times. However, later figures indicated that this number fell significantly, probably due to technical as well as decreased public interest in the content.[220]

In 2009, I compared the rank of the VOA Persian website with that of its competitors in Iran and the results were not promising for a website which aims to bring about meaningful change to a country. According to Alexa.com, a web information company which releases statistics on websites, VOA Persian has a rank of 41,000 among Iranians, while Tabnak.ir, an Iranian news website run from inside the country by the conservatives, for example, has a rank of 9 in Iran (see table 11).

Table 11: Comparing Traffic Rank of Websites in Iran (2009)[221]

Website	Traffic rank in Iran
Tabnak.ir (top news website)	9
Radiofarda.com	2,162
VOAPNN.com	41,285

VOA Persian also asked its staff to publish their own blogs where they could communicate with their audience and fans. They created more than 6 blogs, all of which have very low quality in terms of subject matter (e.g., blogging about fashion) and format (colors, fonts, pictures, etc.).[222] The staff used the Blogspot services, probably due to financial considerations of buying a whole new website address and also because of Blogspots' low-maintenance attributes. This makes the audience think of the blogs as informal venues which would not have real substance (news and lively debates) except for personal communication with the anchors themselves. These blogs merely recount whatever the staff had previously presented in their TV and radio programs and a glance over the statistics of these blogs shows that they have been all but successful in establishing contacts with Iranian internet users either. VOACapitol, for instance, a blog by VOA Persian anchor Siamak Dehghanpour, has been online for more than three years now and the writer has been publishing an average of 30 posts per month of material. But he has only managed to have 9 followers . Another sign of being unattractive is that readers leave very few comments, if at all. This is nearly applicable to all other VOA Persian blogs, and seems to imply that this particular initiative has failed- probably due to the blogs' low quality and recycled content.

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[219] The website was launched in 2009. See the following internet address: <farsi.goenglish.me>

[220] Broadcasting Board of Governors, Office of Inspector General, *Voice of America's Persian News Network*, Report of Inspection, report no. ISP-IB-09-27, March 2009, p.23.

[221] Source: *Alexa*, the web information company, online document, retrieved [on 2009-12-03] from: <www.alexa.com>

[222] These blogs are: <pnnketab.blogspot.com>, <rooyekhat.blogspot.com>; <voacapitol.blogspot.com>; < peechdarpeech.blogspot.com>; < zangevarzesh.blogspot.com>; <sigarchi.net/roznegar/>

VOA Persian also used social media such as Facebook and twitter to link to its audience. The employees have also been asked to have active participation in the new media. The results have so far been positive. Siamak Dehghanpour, for example, whose blog was studied earlier in this chapter, had a username for himself and also another one for his show, *Ofogh* (Horizon in Farsi). Although the content was still similar to his blog (VOACapitol), it received good feedback from the Iranian community on Facebook. Many people followed the talk show and in fact, unlike the blog, commented on the topics and issues raised by Dehghanpour.[223] This is very much true of other VOA shows and staff with significant numbers of friends and fans in social media. One explanation of this success could be the general popularity of Facebook among Iranians which helped VOA Persian to use the social networking site as a pool to reach this population even more. Youtube.com is another website where most of VOA Persian's television programs can be viewed. Like most of its internet activities, VOA's YouTube page was established in mid-2008 and from then on it uploaded videos of its programs. The statistics for the YouTube channel has mixed implications. By the end of 2010, that is two years after the inauguration of VOAPNN's YouTube Channel, it has only managed to attract 1,700 subscribers. It is not a high number but still significant when one compares the subscription data to those of CNN (7,000 subscribers) and Iran's PressTV (4,000 subscribers). The response to its videos was also mixed. There are clips which have received close to 70,000 hits and there are those with less than 1,000 hits, all uploaded two years ago. Since the technical quality and format of the clips are identical, one can argue that the major factor in a video's success is its particular topic and issue. Some video clips, for example, in which celebrities (from the worlds of cinema, music, and sports) receive good feedback from the viewers while those with special topics such as economics, law, or an in-depth study of history and literature gain little attention from the internet users.[224]

In addition to using social networking websites, VOA Persian has tried to explore the possibilities of utilizing mobile technology to reach Iranians inside the country as well. Communication technology is interestingly advanced in Iran. As late as 2008, there were over 41 million cellular subscribers in the country, almost 60% of the population, and it is predicted that by 2012, that number will grow to 80%.[225] VOA used this chance and in late 2008 made its website and television content available to mobile users too. Cellular subscribers in Iran who have an iPhone can even watch VOA television programs live.

Last but not least, VOA Persian has used podcasting technology and online newsletters to make sure its audience can listen to, watch its programs, and read its news items of the day.

Like VOA Persian, Radio Farda has invested a lot in the internet. From the very first days of its inception (in 2002), Radio Farda had its own webpage. Since the purpose of Radio Farda's programming was mainly to cover stories related to Iran and since there was a particular tendency for its website to be a significant online source of news for Iranians, RadioFarda.org has performed far better than VOA Persian. The webpage benefits from good-quality graphics, its archive is active and its previous materials are almost available from the year 2000 when the station was called Radio Azadi and had not yet been replaced by Radio Farda. Unlike VOA Persian, Farda's website, which also offers live broadcast of its programs, receives comparably higher numbers of comments for its postings.

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[223] Data retrieved [on 2011-02-01] from: <www.facebook.com/pages/Ofogh/113943965346156>

[224] Data for this part was retrieved from Youtube.com and VOA Persian's YouTube Channel [on December 23, 2010].

[225] Mehr News Agency, "Iranians send 80 million SMS every day", *Mehr News*, online document, November, 24, 2008, retrieved [on 2011-02-02] from: <http://mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=789161>

Its Facebook page has more than 72,000 fans, almost four times bigger than those of VOA Persian (with only around 18,000 fans). Radio Farda also provides newsletters for its readers, podcasts for its listeners and some of its programs are on Youtube.com. It does not have a YouTube channel like that of VOA Persian because of being a radio channel. Listeners can also listen to the radio from their cell phones.[226]

Most of the aforementioned efforts by both of these stations have come as a response to the challenges they often meet in Iran. Some of these challenges are technical. For example, some segments of the population no longer tune into radio as a communication device and instead spend a significant amount of time on the internet or their cell-phones. Consequently, these stations are obliged to provide an internet platform for their audience as well. There are other challenges such as censorship and jamming of the radio and television signals by the Iranian government which leads these stations to resort to new communication technologies. In the next part, I will thoroughly discuss the Iranian response and the challenges it creates for U.S. broadcasts to Iran.

2.5 The Iranian Response to U.S. Broadcasts

When discussing the response from Iran, one should distinguish between the government, the local media, the ordinary Iranians' reaction to the U.S. broadcasts, and other media outlets posing as competitors. The response from the government has always been negative. Officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran, from very early on, have repeatedly condemned such broadcasts. They consider U.S. efforts a violation of the aforementioned *Algiers Accord* between the two countries and direct interference in Iran's internal affairs. One official, Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's Speaker of Parliament during the 1980s, never hesitated to raise the issue of these Persian transmissions to Iran as one of the grievances that Iranians held against the U.S. government whenever discussing the Hostage Crisis.[227] Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, who succeeded Rafsanjani as the speaker of the parliament and served there during the 1990s, also reacted angrily to the transmissions. In one such case, when he was asked what he thought about an agreement between the United States and Kuwait to use Kuwaiti soil to enhance transmissions to Iran, Nateq-Nuri stressed that "America's use of transmitters against us is intolerable."[228]

The response has not only been verbal. The government has always tried to diminish the chances of the U.S. broadcasts' success through a host of other options. Jamming has traditionally been one of those options. The government tries to block and jam the stations' signals. BBG directors have usually voiced their concerns over the jamming. In 2005 for example, Kenneth Tomlinson referred to the Iranian efforts to block the American information campaign:

> That the government of Iran would jam Persian television and other US international broadcasts illustrates how threatened the authorities are by truth.[229]

Jamming happens when, for example, Iranians send their own signals similar to those of U.S. transmitters in the air. Sometimes, Iran seeks assistance from other countries to help counter U.S. broadcasts. For instance, Cuba has reportedly been providing such assistance to Iran since 2003 by jamming radio and television

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[226] Data gathered from Radio Farda's website and its Facebook page on December 24, 2010.

[227] Glasgow Herald, "Hostage Plea Read In Iran", *Glasgow Herald*, Jul 31, 1980. p. 2.

[228] BBC, "Iran says VOA Kuwait relay intolerable", *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, May 23, 1996, Retrieved [on 2011-02-02] from: <www.lexisnexis.com.>

[229] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "BBG Works to Overcome Iran's Jamming of Persian Satellite News Broadcasts", *BBG Press Release*, No; 127, Washington, D.C., June 17, 2005,

signals emanating from the United States. In one case, BBG condemned Cuba for its "jamming of U.S. international broadcasts to Iran".[230]

Another impediment to the networks is the outlawing of satellite dishes in Iran. Iranian Parliament in 1995 passed a law which prohibited the private use of satellite dishes for fear of outside influence from foreign and Iranian exile broadcasts. Iranians were given a month to dismantle the equipment or risk its confiscation and fines from $730 to $2,200 at that time. It was believed that Iranians owned more than 250,000 dishes throughout the city of Tehran and probably more in other large cities.[231] Although the move has not been a success and people have been obtaining satellites in ever increasing rates, it has been effective in delaying the process in general, especially when it comes to middle and small size cities where the roofs are not that high and the discourse among people tends to be of a more conservative tone. [232]

Iran has also been following a policy of taking to court those Iranian and foreign citizens who, in any form, cooperate with the stations which it considers hostile to the Iranian national interest. As a result, VOA and Radio Farda correspondents, as well as some of the guests who appear on their shows, have often been prosecuted. In one recent case, for example, Parnaz Azima, a correspondence for Radio Farda who had traveled to Iran in January 2007 to "visit her ailing mother" was charged and "convicted by an Iranian court of spreading anti-state propaganda."[233] Her passport was confiscated and it was only after 8 months of waiting and a bail of $440,000 that she was allowed to leave Iran for Prague (Radio Farda's headquarters).

U.S. broadcasts to Iran have also faced fierce challenges by many other competitors, specifically the Iranian local media itself. In the early days of the revolution, the U.S. government was concerned about Soviet propaganda activities in the country. In fact, Voice of America's radio broadcasts were partly a response to that concern. William Beeman, then advisor to the State Department on Iran in the 1980s, wrote an article for the *Los Angeles Times* warning about the Soviet Union's powerful propaganda apparatus in Iran. He also criticized the U.S. government for being negligent about the *war of words*:

> The soviets are gradually gaining an edge in the war of words, not to the merits of their case, but through a superior ability to understand and communicate with the people elsewhere in the world.… Radio Moscow broadcasts 23 hour a day over 23 frequencies in Persian, Azeri, Turkish, Kurdish, Baluchi, and Arabic [ethnic languages in Iran].[234]

With the threat of Soviet propaganda diminished after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the only concern remained to be Iran's own media community. As a State Department official confided in a teleconference with the students of the University of California's Center for Public Diplomacy, Iran is "a very multimedia country" compared to other countries of the Middle East.[235] In fact, Iran's investment in state television and other media outlets has dramatically increased since the revolution. The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is a giant, nationally-owned corporation which nowadays runs more than 10 national channels providing entertaining, newsworthy, religious, and educational content to viewers. There are also close to 30 provincial television channels

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[230] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "BBG Condemns Cuba's Jamming of Satellite TV Broadcasts To Iran", *BBG Press Release*, No 85, Washington, D.C., July 15, 2003.
[231] Binyon, Michael, "Iran ready to rip down TV dishes in war on 'indecent West'", *The Times London*, January 3, 1995.
[232] Fathi, Nazila, "World Briefing Middle East: Iran: Police In Tehran Remove Satellite Dishes", *The New York Times*, August 15, 2006, p. 12.
[233] Hiss, Kimberly, "Facing Prison", *The Prague Post*, March 12, 2008 Issue, p.3.
[234] Beeman, William, "War of Words: Soviets Are Gaining: They Make America Look Bad to People Elsewhere", *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1981. p. C7.
[235] Author's personal question from the official in a tele-communication in 2010.

reflecting upon the ethnic and local diversity of the country. In the realm of radio transmissions, the Islamic Republic also operates more than 12 radio stations inside the country and 27 world service channels.[236] The appeal of the IRIB channels among Iranians is high, creating a really tense environment for other foreign broadcasts to exert influence on Iranians.

The very latest competitors to U.S. broadcasts come from Europe. Radio Zamaneh, operated from the Netherlands, BBC Persian, established in January 2009 in the United Kingdom, and Euronews' Persian service, which is in the planning stages, are only some of the most recent rivals to VOA Persian and Radio Farda. Apart from their pan-European angle, these stations follow almost the same lines of policy with Washington. Consequently, Washington has shown little worry about such stations and, in fact, sees competition with these networks as a chance for all of them to perform better.[237]

2.6 Broadcasting in Retrospect

U.S. broadcasting to Iran began during the Second World War, when the Allied Forces were in need of a friendly environment in countries like Iran so that they could supplement each other's armies. Voice of America's Persian Service was the pioneering station in taking this path. Throughout the Cold War, the United States and consequently its broadcasting apparatus focused on fighting the spread of Communism. Much of U.S. broadcasting efforts in Iran had occurred based on the same line of policy: fighting Communist propaganda in the region. In 1979, however, to the surprise of many in the West, the Iranian society underwent an anti-American Islamic Revolution. Iranians deposed the Shah and installed the Islamic Republic instead of the monarchy. The United States resumed its radio broadcasts to Iran in the hope of diminishing revolutionary resentment towards America. From the early days of the revolution up until the present, the purpose of U.S. broadcasts have been to diminish anti-Americanism and promote political change inside the country.

It was in 1996 that the U.S. government began beaming VOA Persian's programs via satellite television (in addition to radio) in the hope of reaching more of an audience in Iran. While VOA Persian's radio service shortened its original programming in favor of the television service, other initiatives were to materialize. Radio Azadi, as it was explained, emerged in 1998 out of a consensus within the U.S. government that the existing media outlets were not enough and it needed more work to exert meaningful influence on Iranians.

When George W. Bush took power and the attacks of 9/11 happened, the U.S. government re-aimed and restructured some of its Cold War broadcasting apparatuses to fight the war on terror. For instance, Radio Free Europe's facilities in the Czech Republic, which were once used by USIA to fight Communism in the heart of Europe, were then given to such new initiatives as Radio Azadi and its successor Radio Farda.

Radio Farda, which came to supplement Voice of America's Persian service, targeted Iran's proportionately youth population. With its twofold content of music and news commentary, the station soon gained grounds in Iran and proved itself a worthy tool for public diplomacy towards Iran.

It was also during the Bush administration, and as a result of the State Department's particular focus on Iran, that VOA Persian's original television programming expanded almost fourfold (See Table 12). As Alan Heil wrote in an email communication with the author, when the Obama administration took office, VOA's Persian News Network was on the air eight hours a day, repeated around the clock.

[236] Data gathered from the IRIB's official website (www.irib.ir) on 2011-04-25.
[237] Author's communication with one VOA public relations staff on 2009-08-25.

Table 12: Historical Timeline for VOA Radio/TV performance

Year	VOA Shows Added and Other Significant Events	Total Airtime (daily)	Content	Audience
Before 1979	News and Commentary	30 minutes of Radio	News and Commentary	---------
1979	News and Commentary	Radio (30 minutes-to-2 hours)	News and Commentary	---------
1980	News, Commentary, Music	Radio (6 Hours)	News, Commentary, Talk Show	---------
1996	First TV program: Roundtable with You	90 minutes of TV + Radio	News, Commentary, Talk Show	7 million weekly (combined VOA Radio and its TV)[238]
1998	Radio Azadi was launched	Began by 30 minutes of radio programming	---------	--------
2001	No Change	No Change	---------	---------
2002	*Next Chapter* (Radio Farda launched)	2.5 hours of TV with Radio Simulcast	MTV-influenced show that illustrates lifestyles of Iranian youth	---------
2003	*News and Views*	3 hours of TV and Radio Simulcast	News and views	8 million weekly for VOA and Radio Farda[239]
2004	No Change	No Change	--------	--------
2005	No Change	No Change	--------	--------
2006	*Late Edition* and *News Brief*	4 hours of TV with repeats	Features health, technology, sports, and entertainment	14 million (20% of population for VOA and 10.3% for Radio Farda)[240]
2007	*Today's woman*	5 hours of TV with repeats	Features influential women debating social, medical, human rights, and business	----------
2008	Some weekly shows	7-8 hours of TV and Radio	---------	10 million weekly[241]

Due to the popularity of new communication technologies like the internet and cell-phones in Iran, U.S. broadcasts have also vigorously explored the possibilities of reaching to their audience through the new media. VOA Persian and Radio Farda initiated web-castings of their programs and both networks and

[238] Christina, Pino-Marina, "Next-generation VOA channeling into Iran", *USA Today*, November 4, 1996, Monday, p. 4A.

[239] Broadcasting Board of Governors, "VOA-TV Gains Large Audience in Iran", *BBG Press Release*, No 97, November 19, 2003, retrieved [on 2011-01-14] from: <http://www.bbg.gov/pressroom/press-releases/BBG-PressRelease-97.html> .

[240] Testimony of Joaquin Blaya before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia Committee on Foreign Affairs, Washington, D.C., online document, 2007, retrieved [2010-08-25] from: <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/bla051607.htm>

[241] Glassman, James, *U.S. Public Diplomacy and the War of Ideas*, Transcript of speech in Foreign Press Center Briefing, online document, July 20, 2008, retrieved [on 2011-01-14] from: <http://www.america.gov/st/texttransenglish/2008/July/20080716173657eaifas0.1154749.html>

their employees have been encouraged to have an active presence in social media.

There are, of course, various internal and external challenges to U.S. broadcasts to Iran. Internally, the networks suffer from an atmosphere of discontent among Iran-American employees, miscommunication between them and their American directors, and lack of communication and media skills among the staff. Externally, the networks face fierce competition from Islamic Republic of Iran's broadcasts and other foreign media outlets. There is also constant, as well as purposeful, jamming of radio and television signals. Despite all these challenges, the BBG estimates show that the networks have managed to reach a considerable audience in Iran. As the above table (12) shows, the numbers vary from 15 to 20 percent of the adult Iranian population.

A major pillar of American public diplomacy has been international broadcasting. The findings in this chapter indicate that international broadcasting has always been a favorite tool of soft power in the American policies towards Iran. While radio transmissions to Iran started almost 70 years ago, the post-9/11 policies of the Bush administration resulted in an enormous increase in the verity and extent of American broadcasting methods to Iran.

3. U.S.-IRAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The world of scholarly debate on international relations is still divided over such issues as the inherent qualities of nation-states, the best policies to avoid bloody conflicts, all while securing a nation's interest through reliable strategies. Among many approaches, it is the realists and liberals (sometimes referred to as 'idealists'), whose voices are the most resonant and particularly at odds with each other. While, the realists[242] believe in a Hobbesian environment where the weak are doomed to fail, the strong are fated to succeed, the inevitability and continuity of conflicts among nations, and a strong need for coercive measures, the liberals argue for the existence of hope, the evolution of unbound societies, the interconnectedness of nations, and the possibility of everlasting peace based on communication and globalization.[243] Proponents of these two views and their variants have always been in conflict over the legitimacy of their arguments. Realists resort to historical periods blemished by bloody wars as their irrefutable evidence while liberals, mostly on the defensive, refer to periods of tranquility and cooperation to justify their arguments.[244]

After WWII and during the Cold War, it was the realist doctrine which was on the offensive in debates between the scholars, but after the demise of the Soviets in the 1990s and the tiresome post-9/11 battles, the liberal's appeal has gained an increasing momentum. It has been in such a context that ideas such as *soft power* have emerged, claiming that nations can not succeed in securing peace and their national interest if they are not able to win hearts and minds. Joseph Nye, the originator of the term, believes that traditional coercive methods based on military or economic might are yielding to the more sophisticated arts of persuasion and influence. He also gave credit to such foreign policy tools as cultural diplomacy. In his book, *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Nye mentions that one of the ways to increase communication between nation-states is "cultural diplomacy".[245]

According to political scientist Milton C. Cummings, cultural diplomacy is "the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding."[246] It is called *diplomacy* since the interactions usually happen under the auspices of governments. Some of the components of cultural diplomacy are:

- Educational exchanges and scholarships
- Cultivation of ties with foreign elites (e.g., journalists, academics, religious leaders, athletes, and key opinion makers)
- Cultural visits of artists (painters, movie makers, dancers, and musicians)
- International culture-related conferences, symposiums and workshops
- Publications and development of cultural centers

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[242] Some classical scholars are Hans Morgenthau, George F. Kennan, and Herman Kahn. In addition, there are U.S. statesmen like Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Berzezinski who believe in a realist doctrine. See: Jackson, Robert H., and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches,* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

[243] See: Keohane, Robert O., and Joseph S. Nye. *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1977; Iriye, Akira, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

[244] Jackson, R.H. and G. Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.

[245] Nye, *Soft power,* 2004, p.102.

[246] Milton C. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, Center for Arts and Culture: Washington D.C., 2003, p. 1.

Unlike international broadcasting, which is usually a one-way communication process, cultural diplomacy is often expected to be a two-way avenue. Through cultural events, nation-states enter into a bilateral or multilateral environment where all members truly exchange their cultures. The ideal outcome is often expected to be cultural gains for all sides so that while one side presents elements of its culture, it simultaneously learns about the culture it faces. There are of course, some scholars such as the adherents of the cultural imperialism theory, who argue that based on the historical realities so far, governments have shown very little tendency for honest two-way communications whenever they have sponsored cultural events.[247] For Edward Said, for example, imperial powers tend to exercise their power "through the consent of the ruled by incorporating and transforming their ideologies" and cultural exchanges are examples of such an incorporation.[248] This perspective has, in fact, followers in many third world countries where an imperial presence has been felt. The idea of preserving one's own culture, rather than giving it away for a foreign (and often superior) culture plays a prominent role in the decision making process of many developing countries. As I will argue later on in the chapter, the Iranian government's approach towards the U.S. government's cultural diplomacy is very much affected by a similar approach.

In studying this case, I will investigate the history of U.S. cultural involvement in Iran, explore the potentials of cultural diplomacy between two hostile states of Iran and the United States, and also show how states are still in charge of many variables in such processes even when it comes to people-to-people exchanges. I will also try to shed light upon the functional dimensions of cultural diplomacy as an instrument of soft power.

3.1 The Good 150 Years (1830-1979)

As it was mentioned in chapter 2, the very first signs of contact between the two nations of Iran and the United States date back to the 1830s. In that era, Iran was a weak and poor country (oil was not yet discovered) and the United States was still a project in the making. Understandably then, the Iranian kings and the American Presidents had very little interest in each other's country. One group however, the American Presbyterian church, found it a divine duty to send missionaries to Persia and protect the work of Jesus as there were some Christian Assyrians living in the northwestern part of the country. Upon his return from Persia, Justin Perkins, the leader of this missionary group, published a book about his observations and claimed that he was the first American to ever enter and live in the country.[249] The book, *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia*, in fact, can be called the first product of a cultural exchange between the Americans and Iranians. He traveled to help his Christian brethren, but also engaged the non-Christian Persians (i.e., Muslims and Jews) and their culture:

> While my work in Persia, has been principally among the Nestorians [i.e. Assyrians]… my intercourse with the Mohammedans of that country, has been habitually familiar; and notices of that class are introduced almost as extensively as of the native Christians.

Throughout the 19th century, with their government officials still weighing the possibilities of a beneficial relationship, these missionaries expanded their work. They built institutions such as the Medical School of Urmia (1879), the first modern institution of its kind in the region and also an American College (1873)

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[247] See: Said, Edward W., *Culture and Imperialism,* Knopf, Distributed by Random House, New York, 1993.

[248] Cited in Hamm, B. and R.C. Smandych, *Cultural Imperialism: Essays on the Political Economy of Cultural Domination*, Broadview Press, 2005, p. 314.

[249] Perkins, Justin, *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia Among the Nestorian Christians*, Morrill & Wardwell, New York, 1843, p. VII.

in the Christian neighborhoods of Tehran.[250] The college (later called Alborz) soon turned into a successful enterprise which trained not only Christians but also Muslims in order "to enter every phase of life in Iran"- as its catalogue would read.[251] Despite all this, Iran-U.S. cultural relations had yet to fully flourish. And it happened in the 20th century.

Iran of the 19th century was a land overtaken by two great powers of the time: Britain and Russia. These two colonial powers had virtually divided Iran into two spheres of influence. The rise of the United States provided an opportunity for the Persian Kings to release some of the pressure by turning to Americans whenever the Anglo-Russian subjugation was intolerable.

It was mostly in the early 20th century that Iranians and Americans expanded their political and cultural ties. In 1910, the Persian foreign minister Husayn Kuli Khan asked his American counterpart to send financial advisors to Persia in order to reorganize the King's troubled treasury.[252] In one important step in 1925, Hossein Aala, Iran's ambassador to a bilateral commission of Iranians and Americans established the *Iran-America Society*. Comprised of leading scholars and politicians from both nations (especially graduates from the previously mentioned Alborz College), this society soon became the mother organization for most of the cultural exchanges between Iran and the United States which would continue for almost another half a century (i.e., until the Islamic Revolution of 1979).[253] As mentioned earlier (in the second chapter), the alliance between the United States and Iran grew during the mid 20th century and thus was the case for their cultural diplomacy. The Iran-America Society developed rapidly and opened branches in Iran's major cities of Mashad, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Tabriz. In the 1970s, it had more than 270 staff deployed only in Tehran to administer such cultural programs as weekly lectures (by Iranians and Americans), movie screenings, live performance of Iranian and American music, Student Center activities, publication of bilingual journals, and English language teachings.

Teaching English constituted a significant proportion of U.S. cultural diplomacy in Iran. In order to facilitate the process, the society, established a center in Tehran, with its teaching materials produced by American scholars. It soon became a successful cultural enterprise. Records show that during the 1960s, the center received 5,000 applications per year.

The U.S. government also established (in 1945) the Lincoln Library and Resource Center in Tehran. With more than 9,000 books (a sizable amount for its time), this open library soon provided services to more than 7,000 registered users (almost half of them students). The books were mainly about the United States and in six general fields of international relations: economy, education, technology, political science, and also sociology. One of the challenges for the library, shared almost by every other USIA library, was to be relevant and applicable to the Iranian society's various and sometimes different demands.

During this period of time, most of the programs were formulated to inform Iranians of American culture, but there were some cases as well in which the society undertook introducing Iran to the Americans. Such was the case with an exhibit of Iranian art and cultural artifacts which toured the United States in 1964. The "7000 Years of Iranian Art" had been inaugurated by the Shah of Iran, and Lyndon B. Johnson had hailed it as the "new kind of exchange with a

[250] Aramjani, Y., "Alborz College", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol. I, Fasc. 8, 1985, pp. 821-823.
[251] Salih, A.li P., *Cultural ties between Iran and the United States*, Tehran, 1976, p. 179.
[252] Shuster, W.M., *The Strangling of Persia*, The Century Co., New York, 1912, p.3.
[253] Ashena, Hessamodin, "Diplomacy-e Farhangi-e Amrika dar Iran" (U.S. Cultural Diplomacy in Iran), *Faslnamey-e Motaleat-e Tarikhi* (Journal of Historical Studies), No: 9, Tehran, 1384, p.16.

country sharing so many common interests with the United States in the international field."[254]

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was another organization involved in the process of aiding Iranians both culturally and economically. Soon after its establishment in the 1961, the USAID entered Iran and expanded its operations in that country until the end of the monarchy. USAID undertook projects in various development fields such as agriculture, politics, industry, and also education. Through its various dispatches to Iran, the organization approached Iranian farmers and addressed some of their critical challenges. It devised and monitored the implantation of strategies to westernize Iran's political culture, and introduced new methods of education to reduce an almost omnipresent illiteracy among Iran's 17 million inhabitants.[255]

The Peace Corps also became very active in Iran. Established in 1961 under President Kennedy, the Peace Corps would send American volunteers to almost every part of the world to help the development and also the westernization of the third world nations. Between 1961 and 1970, the U.S. government sent more than 1,300 Peace Corps volunteers to Iran. These volunteers were mostly efficient in the realm of education and particularly teaching English at secondary schools and universities in Iran. They not only taught English to the emerging Iranian middle class but also introduced modern methods and instruments of education.[256] Iran was of course not the only nation in the region with a significant Peace Corps, and many other countries, including Afghanistan and Turkey, also received volunteers (see Table 13).

Table 13: Peace Corps in Iran and other Middle Eastern Countries (until 1970)[257]

	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	Sched-uled) 1969	Est. 1970
India	26	115	153	401	754	1,133	750	585	735
Pakistan East	29								
West	28	172	191	141	35			—	—
Morocco	56	102	133	117	83	94	120	125	
Tunisia	94	48	135	192	252	230	113	135	
Afghanistan	35	62	136	181	207	171	204	150	
Ceylon	36					42	35	45	
Cyprus	23						—	—	
Iran	41	36	149	272	267	167	196	145	
Nepal	65	96	120	150	221	179	160	185	
Turkey	39	114	338	481	225	158	128	85	
Libya						18	13	172	195
Totals	**83**	**676**	**802**	**1,553**	**2,182**	**2,406**	**1,804**	**1,713**	**1,800**

3.2. The 1979 Revolution: the Collision Course

Throughout the third quarter of the 20th century, both governments continued their cultural exchanges at excessive speed until everything was interrupted by the Iranian Revolution of 1979. During the last years of the monarchy in Iran, the U.S. government, under a wrong impression, had believed that supporting the ruler of Iran would guarantee its interests in the country as well as the Middle East. In a time-span of almost 25 years, from the fall of Mosaddeq, to the very first objections to the U.S.-Iranian capitulation treaty by Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1960s, to the last days of monarchy in Iran, the United States

[254] Woolley, John T. and Gerhard Peters, "Lyndon B. Johnson's Message to the President of Iran-American Society", *The American Presidency Project*, Santa Barbara, online document, May 27, 1964, retrieved [on 2011-04-08] from: <presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26275> .

[255] USAID, *Highlights of the USAID Program in Iran*, USAID Communications Resources Branch, Washington D.C., January 1964.

[256] Peace Corps, *Peace Corps Congressional Presentation: Fiscal Year 1969*, Washington D.C, March 1968, p. 31.

[257] Peace Corps, *Peace Corps Congressional Presentation: Fiscal Year 1970*, Washington D.C., May 1969, p.5.

continued to drain its reservoir of goodwill among Iranians by supporting an increasingly hated regime.[258]

During the revolution, the wave of anti-American sentiments forced most of the cultural institutions into closure. Such was the 1978 bombing of the Iran-America Society office in Isfahan (Iran's cultural capital) and other forms of protest against the U.S. support for the Shah. And it was in this context that, one year after the revolution, the Revolutionary Court designated the Iran-America Society as an anti-revolutionary organization and dissolved it for ever. When the Hostage Crisis happened in 1979, Kathryn L. Koob and William B. Royer, two Iran-America Society directors, were also among the prisoners. Academic ties between the two nations were also severely damaged. For example, the number of Iranian students residing in the U.S., one of the highest in its time, plummeted from 50,000 to less than 5,000 during the first decade of the Iranian revolution.[259] USAID also halted its operations in the country and closed down its offices in various provinces.

The post-revolutionary anti-American discourse was a strong driving force while the Islamic Republic of Iran, the new system to replace the monarchy, was still in the making. Except for very few factions, almost all political parties and social communities (e.g., leftists and Islamists) shared this sentiment. Consequently, Iran of the 1980s became very much disinterested in engaging with the United States both diplomatically and also in the cultural sphere. Saddam's eight-year war against Iran (1980-1988), and the United States' partial support for Iraq[260], which even led into a limited conflict with Iran and a shoot-down of its civilian airliner with 290 passengers on-board, were further causes for an even more robust anti-American sentiment among Iranians. [261]

During this tense period, American officials, especially those in the CIA and the National Security Council were under heavy criticism for not having a clear cut cultural policy towards Iran. Since the revolution, they had been cut off from Iran's cultural market and the U.S. government had only managed to operate a very weak covert program: The initiative had aimed to insert US-approved information into Iranian media outlets and also expose Iranians to western culture. One particular method was to smuggle the classics of western literature into Iran. In general, the program was a fiasco even in the eyes of the CIA staff themselves. Kenneth Pollack, who had interviewed some of the individuals involved in the initiatives, quoted an official later:

> However, the effort was making little progress: "it was a joke and everyone knew it was a joke". . . In other words, it has been nothing but a bureaucratic cover-your-ass exercise: no one wanted to have to go before Congress and say that there was no CIA program against a country as troublesome as Iran.[262]

It took nearly two decades for the two nations to begin weighing the possibility of rapprochement. This happened during the mid-1990s when Iranian politicians lowered their revolutionary guards and took a more liberal approach. In the Iranian presidential election of 1997, the reformists won a landslide victory and chose to follow a liberal line in their foreign policy.

The U.S. government, on the other hand, was under Democratic control. With Bill Clinton as President, the prospect for rapprochement appeared highly

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[258] Bill, James A. "The Cultural Underpinnings of Politics: Iran and the United States", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 17.1, 2006, 23-33.
[259] Torbati, Yeganeh, "New Wave of Iranians Seek U.S. Studies" *New York Times*, August 9, 2010, p. 12.
[260] Battle, Joyce (ed) "Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein: the U.S. Tilts toward Iraq, 1980-1984", *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book no.82*, 2003, retrieved [on 2011-04-11] from: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/>
[261] Friedman, Alan. *Spider's Web: The Secret History of How the White House Illegally Armed Iraq*, Bantam Books, New York, 1993.
[262] Pollack, *Persian Puzzle,* p. 274.

realistic. As I explained in the second chapter, it was President Khatami of Iran who, in January of 1998, stepped forward and addressed the American people with the most positive comments one could expect from the Iranian officials:

> The American civilization is worthy of respect… There must first be a crack in this wall of mistrust to prepare for a change and create an opportunity to study a new situation… nothing should prevent dialogue and understanding between two nations, especially between their scholars and thinkers. Right now, I recommend the exchange of professors, writers, scholars, artists, journalists, and tourists.[263]

The presidential election of 1997 in Iran had been a perfect battleground for a fierce fight between the conservatives and the reformists. The victory of reformists shocked not only the conservatives but also the reformists themselves as well as western governments earnestly eyeing a revolutionary Iran. Western powers assumed that Khatami's victory was about negating the revolution and thus tried ardently to revitalize their fractured relationship with Iran and Iranians.

Twenty-three days after Khatami's CNN interview, President Clinton responded to his call for dialogue and addressed Iranians:

> "To the people of Iran, I would like to say that the United States regrets the estrangement of our two nations. Iran is an important country with a rich and ancient cultural heritage of which Iranians are justifiably proud. We have real differences with some Iranian policies, but I believe these are not insurmountable. I hope that we have more exchanges between our peoples and that the day will soon come when we can enjoy, once again, good relations."[264]

Hence, the United States and Iran focused on bringing down the wall of mistrust through various cultural exchanges between Americans and Iranians.

3.3 Reformists Resume Cultural Diplomacy

With both Khatami's and Clinton's approval, non-governmental organizations entered the arena in order to facilitate the process of exchanges. It was from this point on that the longtime-abandoned exchanges in fields such as education, sports, arts, and religion were revitalized.

It was not an easy process to start though. Doing business with Iran was still prohibited under the ILSA act of 1996, and only those American NGOs which had secured a waiver from the Treasury Department could organize cultural events. One powerful organization which swiftly applied for and received a waiver was the Search for Common Ground (SFCG). SFCG, a non-profit organization founded in 1982 with a focus on conflict resolution and collaborative problem solving, began to approach Iran's case by designing, facilitating, and administering a wide range of cultural exchange programs. There were also other institutions such as the Ilex Foundation, a non-profit NGO co-founded in 1999 by Olga M. Davidson, an appreciator of Iran, which undertook to promote Iranian culture in the United States. These and many other non-profit organizations soon became the virtual arms of both governments in implementing and executing cultural exchange agreements between the two countries.

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[263] "Transcript of Interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami", *Cable News Network*, online document, 1998, retrieved [on 2011-05-27] from: <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html>

[264] Kamalipour ,Yahya R., "Window of Opportunity", *The Iranian*, online document, 1998, retrieved [on 2009-11-15] from: <http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/Aug98/Media/index.html>

As Khatami had mentioned, the Iranian government expected a renewal of exchanges between the elites first. The SFCG concentrated on bringing religious scholars, film makers, environmental activists, students, and athletes from both nations together.

The Iranian society of the second half of the 20th century had given birth to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khatami himself was after all a cleric. Hence, it was prudent for the exchange organizers to establish dialogue between religious scholars and nurture avenues for a convergence of religious views held by Iranians and Americans. Based on this belief, the SFCG administered lectures, seminars and conferences on the theme of religion and philosophy. The main attempt here was to give voice to those who preached friendship and tolerance from a religious point of view.[265]

In December 1998, for example, the SFCG arranged for a lecture by Abdolkarim Soroush, a prominent Iranian theological scholar, on the possibilities of a religiously more pluralistic society. The audience who attended the lecture in Washington's National Cathedral applauded the initiative. In a similar move in 1999, Mohhammad Jafar Mahallati, another Islamic scholar and a former Iranian diplomat who helped achieve peace between Iran and Iraq after eight years of war, gave a lecture on the common grounds between Islam and Christianity. In his Washington National Cathedral lecture, attended by many experts of religion and politics, Mahallati elaborated on the role of Jesus in Islam and the respect for him found among Muslims. Other individuals who visited the U.S. include Muhammad Legenhausen, Nasser Hadian, Sussan Tahmasebi, and Amir Zekrgoo - all distinguished scholars in Iran.

The individual lectures by scholars soon led to large seminars and conferences. In April 2000, SFCG and ILEX Foundation of Boston cosponsored a conference aimed at (and tilted so) *Building Bridges between the United States and Iran*. Iranian and American theologians, philosophers, literary scholars, and former diplomats presented their views and discussed chances for a better future for U.S.-Iran relations. Hossein Elahi Ghomshei, a popular literary theologian in Iran, lectured on the hidden similarities between Eastern and Western literary traditions while Coleman Barks and Sidney Griffith, both experts on Persian literature and mysticism, discussed the influence of Persian poets such as Rumi in American literary circles. Former Iranian and American diplomats who had also attended the conference exchanged observations on the possibility of further engagement between Iran and the U.S. The significance of the event was marked by the presence and remarks of Robert William Ney, Ohio's Republican Congressman, who had taught English in Tehran before the revolution.

To move a step ahead, the SFCG, which reached Iranian officials directly and in cooperation with the *Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran* in Washington D.C. and the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, coordinated a conversation event in August 2003 for the Iranian Mostafa Mohaghehg Damad. He was a reformist cleric, university professor, and judge. Damad was the Head of the Department of Islamic Studies at *Shahid Beheshti University*, Iran's prominent law school and a member of the *Institute for Interreligious Dialogue* created during Khatami's presidency.

In his talk, Damad concentrated on the possible methods for inter-religious dialogue. A month before his lecture in the United States, Damad had mentioned during a discussion that "Muslims and Christians can talk and interact on new subjects that form the issues of today's world instead of abstract discourse debates or recalling the hostile memories of the past."

The audience for Mohaghegh Damad included members from the aforementioned Washington National Cathedral, scholars from George

[265] Search for Common Ground, "Philosophy/Theology Exchanges", SFCG, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-04-29] from: <http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/iran/iran_philosophy.html>

Washington University, the Catholic University, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Center for Religion and Diplomacy.

As a major player in the interfaith dialogue with Iranians, the Washington National Cathedral continued to solicit Iranian scholars to present their views through several conferences. In September 2006, it hosted Mohammad Khatami for a lecture on the topic of interfaith dialogue and the role of religion in creating peace among human beings. Khatami's address in the Cathedral reminded the audience once again of his philosophy which he painstakingly implemented during his presidential tenure:

> Great religions, particularly Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, can help mankind solve modern problems and challenges by a return to their vital, vibrant and common essence. At the same time, the East needs to utilize the rationality and prudence of the West in its worldly affairs and must embark on the important path of development.[266]

The traveling of religious elites was not strictly one-way. Theologians and scholars of religion from the United States also visited Iran and mingled with their Iranian counterparts. In one case, again facilitated by SFCG and the Tehran-based *Cultural Research Bureau* in June 2004, American professors Richard Rorty, of Stanford University, and Reverend George McLean, of the Catholic University of America, attended the *Democracy and Philosophy Today* conference in Tehran.

The Mennonite Church of America also sent its scholars, Matt and Laurie Pierce, to Iran's city of Qom for three years to study in the Imam Khomeini Institute. This exchange was modeled after similar programs existing during the Cold War. In addition to the above, several other religious and philosophical organizations repeatedly exchanged members to engage in faith diplomacy.

Interfaith dialogue continued to be an important part of cultural diplomacy between the two nations of Iran and the United States. When President Ahmadinejad took office in 2005, however, the process and the structure of cultural diplomacy underwent some changes. He ordered some of the Khatami-established institutions, such as the *International Center for Dialogue among Civilizations*, to merge into other general agencies. The government also discouraged the exchange between reformist-oriented scholars and Americans and preferred a dialogue which would reflect mostly conservative's views. In a prominent case, Mohammad Khatami and Mohaghegh Damad were both discouraged to leave the country to attend the Washington National Cathedral's 2010 Christian-Muslim Summit in the U.S.[267] Despite these challenges, the religious dialogue continues to be an important part of people-to-people exchanges between the two nations.

3.3.1 Iranian Art in America

Experts of cultural diplomacy have always appreciated the role of the arts in triggering understanding between nations. If artistic products represent and introduce the intricacies of life among members of a society then exchanging them will establish dialogue in profound ways, too. Bringing Iranian and American artists together was indeed an important step in filling the knowledge gap between the two nations. The Iranian government encouraged several Iranian and American film-makers to visit each others' country. Several organizations were also involved including the prominent Search for Common

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[266] Khatami, Mohammad, "Interfaith Dialogue and the Role of Religion in Peace", Transcript of Lecture, online document, September 7, 2006, retrieved [on 2011-04-29] from: <http://www.nationalcathedral.org/learn/lectureTexts/MED-42VN7-QK0004.shtml>

[267] Schwartz, Stephen, "Distorted Dialogue at the Washington National Cathedral", *Weekly Standard*, online edition, March 5, 2010, retrieved [on 2011-04-29] from: <www.weeklystandard.com>

Ground and the ILEX Foundation. This film diplomacy, which began in 1999 and continues until today, has brought many Iranian and American directors, actors, and critics together. Makhmalbaf, Majidi, Kiarostami, Meshkini, Panahi, Ghobadi, and Rezaeian were some of the famous Iranian cinematographers who visited the United States. On the other side, Micheal Almereyda (director of *Hamlet*), Bob Chartoff (producer of *Rocky*), and David Guc were among the American movie experts who traveled to Iran and expanded their cinematic ties into the country's film industry.

As one of the first initiatives of its kind, in 1999, the American Film Institute in Washington hosted the Iranian film-maker Majid Majidi and screened his award-wining movie *Color of Paradise*. Majidi's movie, which later won several international awards, was a perfect example of the way Iranian society perceives God and religion and thus an appropriate choice for a cultural exchange. It was a window into Iran's intricate social and spiritual design. One American citizen who had watched another screening of the movie in New York was highly impressed when she urged others to watch it:

> I'm sure no one who has not been to Iran has any idea at all that it is this beautiful. There is plenty of symbolism for any particular point of view, which makes it fun to talk about after you see it, and although it is probably intended to be religious from the Islam point of view, you could probably find in this movie your own brand of spirituality, or lack of it, if you cared to try.[268]

Majidi's works were soon appreciated in the U.S. and his *Children of Heaven*, *Baran* (*Rain* in Farsi), and *Color of Hope* were all purchased by major American film companies (e.g., Miramax Films in the case of *Baran*) and distributed not only in the U.S. but also worldwide.

Another famous Iranian moviemaker, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, repeatedly visited the United States through several exchange programs. He and his family had established a film school in Tehran named "Film House of Makhmalbaf". In 2002, the American Film Institute, the National Gallery of Art, and the SFCG opened a one-month screening of works by the Makhmalbaf. More than 20 movies from the film house were screened for the American audience and discussed by critics.

Through several other projects of similar nature, movies such as Ghobadi's *Crimson Gold*, Rezaeian's *Perspolis Receated*, Rakhshan Bani Etemad's *Our Times*, Milani's *Unwanted Woman*, Mehrjui's *Santoori*, and dozens of other movies by prominent Iranian directors were screened for American art elites.[269] These films heralded the emergence of a specific Iranian cinema with its straightforwardness in storytelling, exploitation of everyday happenings, ordinary people, and real locations. Interestingly enough, like the visiting religious scholars, most of these moviemakers who traveled to the U.S. came from the ranks of reformists. Their productions often reflected on the difficulties of life in their home country. While some of them, like Tahmine Milani, have also proven to be a strong champion of women's rights in their works, others have been politically active in times of crisis. During the 2009 presidential election, most of the above movie-makers were outspoken supporters of the reformist candidate Mousavi. Makhmalbaf, for example, turned out to be a fervent spokesman for Mousavi and later a castigator of the whole Iranian political system.[270] Jafar Panahi, very well-known for his *The Cyclist* and the

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[268] Dexter, Cecily, "Make Every Effort to See this Movie", *Internet Movie Database*, online document, March 2000, retrieved [on 2011-05-02] from: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0191043/usercomments?filter=chrono;start=70>

[269] ILEX Foundation, *Cultural Events*, ILEX Foundation, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-05-03] from: <http://ilex.ilexfoundation.org/cultur/index.html>

[270] Makhmalbaf, Mohsen, "I Speak for Mousavi, and Iran", *Guardian*, June 19, 2009, retrieved [on 2011-05-03]

White Balloon, was arrested and sentenced to prison for attempting to produce a documentary on the post-2009 election unrests criticizing the government.[271] Majid Majidi was also reported to have bluntly criticized, in front of Iran's Supreme Leader, the treatment of the 2009 protests by the security forces. Evidently, there is no direct link between the aforementioned exchanges and political activism shown by these artists; however, it will also be very difficult to dismiss the argument that the continued engagement of them with their American counterparts has affected their aspirations and judgment.

It wasn't only Iranian filmmakers who took part in the art diplomacy between Iran and America. Photographers and painters also visited the country and held exhibitions. Jamshid Bayrami, Bahar Behbahani, Mostafa Darehbaghi, Hamid Severi, and students from Tehran University (Iran's top university) were among the many who shared their notion of photography and painting with their American counterparts. These events were also facilitated and administered by organizations such as the Ilex, the State Department, and several museums.

In May 2007, the State Department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs invited 14 Iranian art students to feature their paintings in the United States. The students had come from Tehran University and had participated in the exhibition under the auspices of the International Leadership Visitor Program of the State Department and the Meridian International Center. The title of the exhibition which was held in Washington was *Wishes and Dreams: Iran's New Generation Emerges*. The event was so significant for the U.S. government that Condoleezza Rice, then U.S. Secretary of State, paid a personal visit to the exhibition and talked to the students in private. She praised the whole project afterwards:

> They are representing so well the great culture that Iran has, the great culture that goes back for so many centuries but that is being brought here today so that the American people can see another side of Iran.[272]

Rice had obviously seen this effort in line with the Bush administration's two-clock strategy regarding Iran. And even though the Iranian students were hesitant about meeting any U.S. government official on their trip (preferring contacts with ordinary Americans), some of them still appeared in front of the press and for photos with Secretary Rice. They were aware of the difficult times between the governments of Iran and the United States but hoped that if they could "do anything for the peace of the world, that [exhibition] is something they would be proud of."[273]

It was also through their photography that Iranians and Americans tried to trigger understanding. One exemplary symposium in 2007 was titled *Walls of Martyrdom: Tehran's Propaganda Murals*. Held in Cambridge, the exhibition of over 130 images of the towering political murals which had dominated Tehran's urban space, tried to be an avenue to understand Iranians' sense of sacrifice for their religion and country and also the complexities of life in contemporary Tehran.[274]

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from:<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jun/19/iran-election-mousavi-ahmadinejad>

[271] Fathi, Nazila, "Iran Arrests Filmmaker Who Backed Opposition", *New York Times*, online document, March 2, 2010, retrieved [2011-05-03] from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/03/world/middleeast/03iran.html>

[272] Lee, Matthew, "Unease as Rice meets Iranian artists", *USA Today*, online document, May 10, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-05-04] from: <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-05-10-1581227588_x.htm>

[273] Lee, *Unease as Rice meets Iranian artists*, 2007.

[274] Christia, Fotini, "Walls of Martyrdom: Tehran's Propaganda Murals", *Centerpiece*, Newsletter of the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, Vol. 21 No: 1, winter 2007, p.4.

Art diplomacy continues to be a window of opportunity for establishing dialogue between American and Iranian elites. Even though such exchanges became extremely difficult to arrange after the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005 and especially after the 2009 unrests in Iran, some third parties with very weak connections to the governments in both countries, continued to bring artists of the two nations together. For instance, the US-based non-profit *International Arts & Artists* (IA&A) facilitated, on several occasions, the visit of Iranian visual artists to the United States. In 2005, the organization exhibited *Persian Visions*, an exhibition of works from more than 20 Iranian photographers in several states.[275] As late as 2008, the IA&A planned and implemented a specific program, *ArtBridge*, through which several groups of Iranian and American visual artists were exchanged between the two countries. Another institution, the *American Foundation for Contemporary Iranian Art*, with its close ties to Tehran's Gallery of Contemporary Arts, has arranged for several exhibitions of young Iranian artists' works in the United States throughout the first decade of the 21st century.

While Americans enjoy hosting the Iranian artists' works, the Iranians have been particularly interested in learning the art of cultural management from their American counterparts. As the Iranian artists continue to prosper in their careers, especially the baby-boomers of the Islamic Revolution period, it is very much expected that exchange between the two nations will only grow.

3.3.2. Preserving the Environment Together

If culture is about various ways of life, and living environmentally friendly is inserting itself upon the lifestyle of many people on the planet nowadays, then it is fair to expect that nations exercise cultural exchange in this area as well.

Iran and America have found common ground in environmentalism where they could really share knowledge and their findings. Through their joint conferences and exchanges, Iranians and Americans have contributed to the improvement of their relations in one of the most tangible ways. When Iranian and U.S. environmentalists learn about the methods that each other use to preserve their habitat, the exchange process becomes a real win-win event. Environmental exchange has the potential to become a symmetric exchange where every party benefits from the output.

In 1999, Search for Common Ground facilitated the trip of a group of Iranian environmentalists to the United States. The trip was ripe with constructive discussions and fruitful visits. A one day conference where Iranians explained the quality of environmental protection in their country, the role of Iranian NGOs in this process, and heard from their American counterparts about the situation of environmental laws in the United States. They also visited some national parks and were introduced to American models of park preservation. They also met with several environmental groups and exchanged ideas inspiring for both of sides. Several other Iranian delegates visited the U.S. in the years that followed including the 2001 trip of four prominent Iranian environmentalists to Washington. In this visit, Iranian academics and activists collaborated with Americans (e.g., Georgetown University and the University of Maryland) on introducing environmental laws to Iran's university curriculum and also its judicial system.

Reciprocity was also taken into account, especially since Iranians were very eager about increasing their awareness and knew that it was the least harmful to the political system of Iran. Many Americans were invited to Iran as a consequence. In 2001, for example, four American environmentalists traveled to Tehran and attended an international conference on urban management issues. They also traveled to Isfahan to meet with officials and

[275] International Arts and Arts, *Persian Visions: Contemporary Photography from Iran*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-05-27] from: <http://www.artsandartists.org/exhibitions/persianvisions.html>

NGOs to discuss the development problems facing the historic city of Isfahan and its river upon which the city is built. They managed to form strong relations with the Iranian environmentalist in the country.

Other Americans who visited Iran include professors and experts from such institutions as the University of Maryland, Georgetown University, the Earth Policy Institute, and Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide. Lester R. Brown, a renowned global environmentalist, was a participant in a 2002 exchange with Iran. He traveled to Iran to learn about the environmental and population challenges that Iranians face. His travel report is indicative of potentials for environmental exchanges:

> My trip to Iran went very well. I could not have been more warmly received… that there are so many NGOs working on environmental issues is an encouraging civil society development. I also noted with interest how many women were involved in these groups… There is no question that the country is becoming a fertile field for environmental ideas and initiatives.[276]

Janet Larson, another member of the Earth Policy Institute who had taken part in an international conference on the environment and dialogue among civilizations, wrote a fascinating report about her experience in Iran. In her nine-page travelogue, Larson pointed out various aspects of Iranians' lives, their appreciation of American people, and the environmental events which she attended. In her last line of report, she recalls a friendly Isfahani carpet seller, who pointed to the fact that Iranians treat their guests best and they do it not only traditionally but also with a public diplomacy string attached to it: "we want you to have beautiful memories, because beautiful memories for you mean no bombs on us."[277]

When Mohammad Khatami left office in 2005 (after eight years), most of his initiatives, including those in the environmental field, were left behind and while the U.S. government was still eager to boost such ties, Iran's newly elected president and his constituency showed reluctance, at least when it came to environmental issues. Even though today the environmental exchanges with Iran are in decline, that short period of engagement between Iranian and American environmentalists and NGOs deeply influenced their way of conduct in the future.

3.3.3 Iranian Natural Disasters and U.S. Aid diplomacy

Back during the days of the Shah, Iran had benefited to a great extent from U.S. aid agencies, particularly USAID and the Peace Corps. Archives of the USAID show that due to the geopolitical importance of Iran after WWII, during the Cold War, and also because of the close relations between the two countries, Americans were deeply involved in the socio-economic development of Iran.[278] During their presence in Iran, specialists from the United States planned and carried out several development projects in many areas, especially education, agriculture, health, industry, community development, public administration and safety.

The Iranian Revolution put an end to the humanitarian and developmental assistance of the United States and it remained that way for the first decade of the 21st century. It took natural disasters to occur in order to witness the involvement of USAID in Iranian affairs once again.

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[276] Search for Common Ground, "Environment Exchanges", online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-05-04] from: <http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/iran/iran_environment.html>

[277] Larsen, Janet, "My Journey to Iran", Report for the Search for Common Ground, Search for Common Ground, Washington, 2005, p.9.

[278] See: USAID, *Highlights of the Aid Program in Iran*, USAID, Communications Resources Branch, 1964.

Natural disasters like earthquakes, floods or drought, are often political occasions, especially when governments fail to respond well. The relief work provides a chance for icy international relations to be improved. Earthquakes in Iran and the United States' offering of assistance are examples of this.

Since the revolution, several earthquakes have struck Iran and in some emergency situations, the U.S. government has provided assistance despite political tensions. In 1990, for example, a private American plane landed in Iran carrying medical and emergency relief after a devastating earthquake in Iran's northern cities which killed more than 50,000 people. In 2002 as well, a small scale earthquake in northwestern Iran prompted the Bush administration to send food, temporary housing, and some water purification equipment to the country via the Swiss embassy (which represents its interests in Iran).[279] But these were only rudimentary measures compared to what the U.S. directly offered during the 2003 earthquake relief operations in Iran.

In the fall of 2003, a 6.6.M earthquake struck Bam, a city of more than 80,000 residents. The earthquake was destructive with a death toll of more than 25,000 and injuring more than 30,000 people. As many as 40 countries offered assistance- among them the United States and Israel. Iran accepted and even supported the aid from the U.S. but rejected Israel's offer because the country was considered "a force of occupation", rather than a legitimate government.[280] As for the U.S. grant, USAID and the U.S. Department of Defence provided an estimated amount of $5,000,000 in assistance (see Table 14).

Table 14: U.S. Government's Overall Earthquake Assistance to Iran[281]

Implementing Partner	*Activity*	*Location*	*Amount*
USAID/DART ASSISTANCE			
USAID*	Logistics and commodities	Earthquake-affected regions	$1,421,785
IFRC	Contribution to Preliminary Appeal for commodities	Earthquake-affected regions	$600,000
UN OCHA	Coordination	Earthquake-affected regions	$211,610
USAR*	Urban Search and Rescue Team Support	Earthquake-affected regions	$668,200
FEMA*	Medical Assistance Team Support	Earthquake-affected regions	$720,000
Administrative		Earthquake-affected regions	$81,050
TOTAL USAID/DART EARTHQUAKE ASSISTANCE TO IRAN			**$3,702,645**
DOD ASSISTANCE			
DOD*	Commodities and air transportation	Earthquake-affected regions	$2,012,285
TOTAL DOD EARTHQUAKE ASSISTANCE TO IRAN			**$2,012,285**
TOTAL USG EARTHQUAKE ASSISTANCE TO IRAN			**$5,714,930**

Planes from the Department of Defence which had never landed in Iran since 1980 (during the failed Operation Eagle Claw) were once again allowed to enter Iran's airspace. They carried disaster response teams as well as relief equipment. The USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Team helped in the assessment of damages, search and rescue operations, and medical and surgical treatment of the injured.

USAID and the Department of Defence also sent several airlifts of relief supplies consisting of sheets, blankets, tents, and kitchen sets as well as medical supplies, and offloading machinery. After two weeks, the U.S. team finished its

[279] "Iran: Khatami Accepts U.S. Aid Offer after Earthquake", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website*, online document, June 25, 2002, retrieved [on 2011-05-13] from: <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1100093.html>

[280] "Iran's hope fades for quake survivors", *China Daily*, online document, December 29, 2003, retrieved [on 2011-05-13] from: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-12/29/content_294086.htm>

[281] USAID, "Iran Earthquake", *Fact Sheet No:10*, Fiscal Year 2004, online document, January 15, 2004, retrieved [on 2011-05-13] from: <http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/countries/iran/fy2004/Iran_ND_FS10_1-15-2004.pdf>

operations by donating their equipment to international agencies which were still present in Iran, and left the country.[282]

The assistance from the U.S. government created a notable but temporary aura of goodwill among Iranians. Iran's senior politicians even began to think about the possibility of official dialogue if there were only some further changes in American foreign policy towards Iran. They were, however, engulfed by the catastrophe of the earthquake and could hardly engage in discussions on such grand foreign policy issues as the rapprochement with the United States. When asked about U.S. assistance and its political implications, President Khatami thanked the United States but also stated that "humanitarian issues should not be intertwined with deep and chronic political problems… If we see change both in tone and behavior of the U.S. administration, then a new situation will develop in our relations."[283]

The disaster in Bam had its positive implications though and one of them was Iran's attempt to reciprocate in a similar manner whenever the United States faced trouble at home. In 2005, for example, Iran offered 20 million barrels of oil (worth roughly 5 million dollars) as humanitarian assistance following the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans.[284]

It is true that displaying such degrees of humanitarianism from both sides leads to holding a better moral ground for them. However, since the recipient and the donor both often claimed not to interpret their gestures politically, such assistance hardly made a dramatic breakthrough in diplomatic relations.

3.3.4 Educational Exchange for Change

Before the Islamic revolution, the number of Iranian students who had traveled to the U.S. to study was surprisingly high. As I mentioned before, the United States had hosted more than 50,000 Iranian students on the eve of the Iranian Revolution. According to the IIE, this was the highest number of students sent by any country to the U.S. during the 20th century and was only matched by the Chinese in 2000.[285] However, after the 1979 revolution, academic and educational ties between the two countries were severely damaged. Ceaseless tensions between the nations in the 1980s and 1990s had their detrimental effects on academic exchanges as well and the number of Iranians studying in the U.S. continued to fall (to only 1,600 students in 1998, for example).[286]

It was only in the *late* 1990s that the academic flow resumed and a positive trend began. A few years before Khatami's presidency, the Iranian government led by Hashemi Rafsanjani had started a huge reconstruction program. As an important part of the development plan, Iran had asked its students abroad to return home after graduation. It also began to send Iranian students abroad to learn the most modern techniques in engineering and other branches of science. When Khatami came to power, the policies began to blossom. Due to this, the number of Iranian students in the U.S., which was taking a nosedive since the revolution, began to rise. It was partly due to the reformist tendency to open up Iran to ideas from the United States again. One area where the governments admitted to having people-to-people exchanges was the educational exchange. After 1997, universities and

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[282] USAID, "Iran Earthquake", Fact Sheet No: 10, 2004.

[283] Associated Press, "Iranian Leader Thanks U.S. for Quake Aid", *MSNBC*, online document, December 30, 2003, retrieved [on 2011-05-30] from: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3840946/ns/world_news/t/iranian-leader-thanks-us-quake-aid/>

[284] Kelman, Ilan, "Hurricane Katrina Disaster Diplomacy", *Disasters*, vol. 31, no. 3, Malden, MA, 2007, p.291.

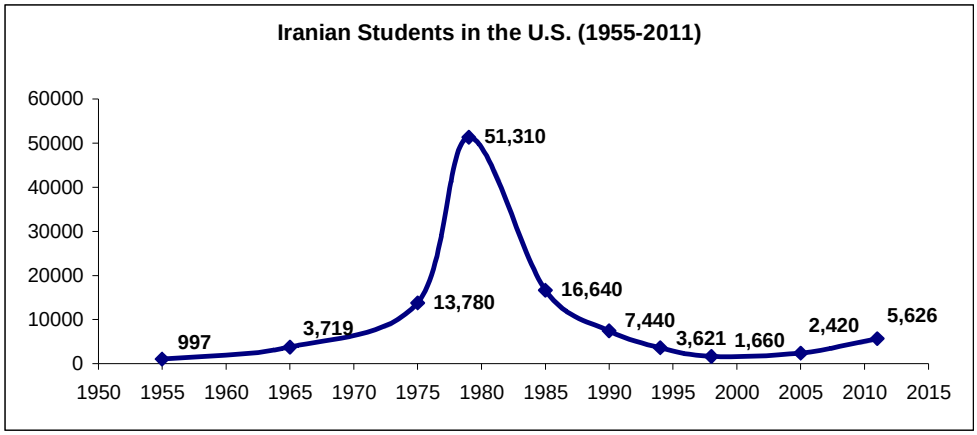
[285] Davis, T.M. and E. Institute of International, *Open Doors, 1996-1997: Report on International Educational Exchange*, Institute of International Education, New York, 1997, p. 20.

[286] Davis, T.M. and E. Institute of International, *Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange*, Institute of International Education, New York, 2000, p. 27.

educational institutions as well as some NGOs in both countries began connecting with each other.

IIE studies show that between 2000 and 2010, the number of Iranian students enrolled in U.S. institutions once again began to rise. In 2000, only 1,660 students were present in the U.S., but by 2011, this number had significantly increased and reached 5,600 students. It is not a high number compared to the previous records, but since it is on a rising curve, the trend is highly significant (see Figure 2).[287]

Figure 2: The Number of Iranian Students in the U.S. (1955-2011)



This particular surge was mostly due to Iranian students' renewed tendency to enter American universities and the U.S. government's easier hold on visa regulations for Iranians.[288]

In addition to the private sector, the governments of Iran and the United States also encouraged educational exchanges. Several projects like those in the realm of arts and religion were launched to engage both academia and students in the two nations.

The work of Search for Common Ground was again remarkable. Looking for real common grounds where students from both countries would benefit, the SFCG designed some initiatives. These projects were not massive in scale but were valuable for their symbolic significance and their proven potential.

One exemplary initiative was in the field of astronomy. The Iran-U.S. astronomical exchanges, which began in 1999 and continued throughout Khatami's presidency, involved not only respected and distinguished astronomers but also the young teenager students with insatiable demands for knowledge.

Under the auspices of the SFCG, in August 1999, the first group of American astronomy delegates visited Iran. Its members included astronomers Alan Hale (who had discovered the Hale-Bopp comet in 1995) and Russel Schweickart (a former Apollo astronaut). The American delegates visited the historic city of Isfahan and held several meetings with Iranian astronomers and researchers. The astronomers met surprisingly hospitable hosts not only at the universities where they lectured but almost everywhere they traveled. And although they saw clear differences between a strong Islamic society and theirs (for example in dressing

[287] Source: Institute of International Education, *Open Doors Data*, online document, 2010, retrieved [on 2011-08-29] from: <http://www.iie.org>
[288] Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*, p. 320.

codes), these astronomers were also impressed by such cultural traits as Iranian hospitality and interest in building friendships.[289]

Because of this successful experience, another delegate visited Iran a year later. In July 2000, Alan Hale led, for the second time, a delegate of American space experts who attended an international conference on astronomy. The visit signified a strong willingness from both parties for a continued dialogue in the scientific field. The thirst for American knowledge was high among Iranian scientists and heralded a new era ripe for cooperation in the field of astronomy. On the other hand, as the accounts of American visitors show, there was a similar tendency to gain insight about a country most influential in the Middle East and yet little known to American citizens. A common theme in the accounts of U.S. visitors to Iran is the stark contrast between their mental image of Iran and the reality which they tangibly felt during their short stay. An example is the astronomer Doug Biesecker's report on his 2000 trip along with other astronomers which reveals such a recurrent theme among American travelogues:

> Never in my life did I think I would visit the country which had such a vivid, negative impression on me in my teenage years. Now I've been there twice and would recommend it to any American.... In my mind, the images of the hostage crisis at the US Embassy have been replaced by images of a country with friendly, beautiful people. The history is compelling and the tourist sites are unparalleled.[290]

Accounts such as Doug Biesecker's and his impressions of a cultural-educational exchange between the two nations substantiated once again the need for expanding the dialogue. The impact of such initiatives in breaking stereotypes was greater than often expected. Bruce McCandless, another astronomer who visited Iran, penned down this feeling of discovering a new country in a report for the SFCG:

> From an American perspective…it's risky to generalize, but I initially was loaded down with apprehension and concern built up over years of news media but I was favorably impressed by the country and the apparent freedom we had within the country, such as to walk the streets and participate in scheduled activities. It struck me that it was a going economy and that the situation was probably still evolving only 20 years since the Revolution. I was pleased, while riding on Iran Air, that they always had an English language copy of newspapers. I was surprised to learn that Farsi is an Indo-European language written with Arabic script. I didn't notice any significant shortages…Japanese cars and occasional Mercedes and the latest in computer technology, including Internet cafes. I was pleasantly surprised at the amount of agriculture. There are plenty of deserts but plenty of land under cultivation, and the produce was delicious. They seem to be working hard to diversify their economy.[291]

Such reports about the personal experiences of the exchangees also reveal a weakness, if not failure, in the broadcast media's ability to depict a real picture of the country they represent and as such further necessitate for any public

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[289] Hale, Alan and Russell Schwienckart, "Global Focus: American Scientists in Iran", *Washington Post*, online document, August 10, 1999, retrieved [on 2011-05-06] from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/zforum/99/inatl081099.htm>

[290] Biesecker, Doug, "Amazed: Never Did I Think I Would visit Iran", *The Iranian*, online document, August 17, 2000, retrieved [on 2011-05-06] from: <http://www.iranian.com/Features/2000/August/Astronomy/index.html>

[291] Search for Common Ground, "Interview with Bruce McCandless", *SFCG*, online document, August 9, 2000, retrieved [on 2011-05-06] from: <http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/iran/pdf/bruce.pdf>

diplomacy program to include those cultural exchanges which involves first-hand experience of a society.

In addition to NGOs, the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) also took an interest in educational diplomacy with Iran. In 2005, ECA tasked the Institute of International Education (IIE) to bring Iranian students to the U.S. through its Foreign Language Teaching Assistantship program (FLTA). The students were supposed to teach Farsi to Americans and at the same time learn about the United States during their 9-month stay. The FLTA was the first systematic program for overt U.S. educational exchanges with Iranians since the Revolution which for many reasons failed to flourish into a fully functional initiative.

As I mentioned earlier, the Bush administration had approached the issue of Iran with a two-clock strategy: speeding Iran's reforms and stopping its nuclear program. In an address to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Condoleezza Rice stated:

> The United States will actively confront the policies of this Iranian regime, and at the same time we are going to work to support the aspirations of the Iranian people for freedom in their own country.[292]

One of the ways to help Iran's reform discourse was through the exchange of young Iranian students. The FLTA, already a program established by USIA in 1968, was chosen to be the framework for bringing Iranian students to the United States.

FLTA had already received special financial support in 2001 in order to facilitate the exchange of students from countries whose language is less commonly taught in the United States.[293] It was after 9/11 that the U.S. government took a national security approach towards the need for learning the languages of critical areas in the world (particularly China and the Middle East). It prompted Congress to introduce the National Security Language Act in 2003. House representative Rush D. Holt (D-NJ) who introduced the bill explained that:

> We can no longer keep our nation safe if we do not commit ourselves to learning the languages and cultures of critical areas around the world. The security of our troops overseas and the American people here at home demand that we act quickly to eliminate the severe shortage of critical need language professionals in this country.[294]

The Bush administration took a bolder step in 2006 when it launched the *National Security Language Initiative* and requested a budget of $114 million for a joint venture by the State Department, Department of Education, Department of Defence, and the Director of National Intelligence in this area. The initiative aimed at increasing the "number of Americans learning, speaking, and teaching critical-need foreign languages."[295] The fund boosted the position of exchange programs such as the FLTA by assigning them with the task of targeting Iranians and other Middle Eastern language teachers and students.

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[292] Zacharia, Janine, "Rice Seeks $75 Million to Support Iran's Democrats", *Bloomberg*, online document, February 15, 2006, retrieved [on 2011-04-14] from: <bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aKwsWNjn4u2k&refer=us >

[293] IIE, "FLTA Program History", Institute of International Education, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-04-21] from: <http://flta.fulbrightonline.org/about_program_history.html>

[294] "Introduction of National Security Language Act," Rush D. Holt, Congressional Record: December 9, 2003 (Extensions), E2493.

[295] Ford, J.T., *US Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges*, DIANE Publishing Company, Washington D.C., 2006, p.39.

In addition to the U.S. government's financial plans, some Iranian-American organizations as well as individual citizens provided monetary support for the program. Foundations such as the *PARSA* community, an American organization (constituted mostly of Iranian expatriates) dedicated to advancing Persian heritage in the United States, and wealthy Iranian-American individuals like Maryam Ansary, Nazgol Shahbazi, and Layla Khadjavi, were reported to be helping the IIE, particularly its FLTA program through their donations.[296] In fact, the PARSA community has publicized on its website a donation of more than $10,000 to IIE and Ansary, Shahbazi, and Khadjavi have also created the Iran Opportunities Fund within the IIE in order to "involve the Iranian community in the U.S. in improving cultural and educational relations between Iran and the United States."[297]

The FLTA program aimed to strengthen foreign language instruction in the United States and to provide the opportunity for both foreigners and Americans "to learn about each others' cultures and customs, thereby enhancing mutual understanding."[298]

These Iranian teaching assistants would help language instructors in their designated American universities by teaching their native language. In the meantime, they would interact with ordinary Americans and share their cultural norms and beliefs.

The first group of Iranian students entered the U.S. in 2006. They were English language instructors who had applied to the program from among Iran's top universities. Hence, they were expected to have a great chance of finding professionally influential positions upon their return to their homeland. They could arguably be good cultural ambassadors for the United States too since their main profession was English language instruction. It is believed that between 2006 and 2010 more than 30 Iranian assistants have entered the United States upon their application to the program. The number is not high, but considering that it was one of the first direct U.S. government projects with a clear public diplomacy aim, and is very much likely to continue in other forms, it is worthwhile to study the process, immediate results, and the response of Iranian students as well as their government to a program of this nature.

Compared to international broadcasting, which usually attract higher amounts of funding dedicated to confronting Iran, educational exchanges receive little financing, but they are still considered a significant part of U.S. outreach to Iranians. A 2006 U.S. government's budget request for Iran made it clear that more than 55 million dollars were intended to be spent on various forms of broadcasts to Iran while only 5 million dollars could be dedicated to exchanges:

> Fifty-five million dollars, the largest portion, will be dedicated to communicating our message to the Iranian people, offering them unbiased information. Funds will be used to greatly expand our television broadcasting in Farsi into Iran to penetrate Iran's government dominated media..… We will spend $5 million on Iranian student education and international exchanges, providing scholarships as well as creating professional, cultural, sports and youth exchanges designed to build bridges between our two nations. If Iranians are banned

[296] Other Iranian Americans include Mohsen Moazami, Hamid Biglari, Kambiz Shahbazi, S.k. Adamiyat, and Kave, Leila, Mina, Behdad, Hossein, and Nazgol Alizadeh.

[297] "Iran Opportunities Fund", Institute of International Education, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-04-26] from: <http://www.iie.org/en/The-Power-of-Giving/Featured-Event/IOF>

[298] "FLTA Program history", Institute of International Education, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-04-15] from: <http://flta.fulbrightonline.org/about_program_history.html>

> from playing Mozart in Iran, we will help them to do so in our country.[299]

Such a focus on broadcasts, which usually have short-term aims rather than long term agendas, is indicative of a U.S. public diplomacy strategy based on gaining short- term results instead of building long-term relationships. Meanwhile, this approach could perhaps be a matter of practicality as well. That is, while international broadcasts are less risky to administer from headquarters located outside of a targeted country, exchange programs could be difficult and in some cases perilous since they involve a physical presence in each other's country. Interestingly, in the case of exchanges with Iran and especially the FLTA program, the second issue was evidently more salient. As I will discuss, there were many challenges in the process, the first being the finding of a place to operate and contact Iranian students.

Since the hostage crisis of the 1979, the American government had lost its ability to have a hard presence in Iran. Shortly after the revolution, the U.S. embassy and most of its cultural as well as economic institutions were shut down. This had hampered the ability of the U.S. government in circumstances where a hard presence was necessary- such as the conduct of cultural exchanges. And even though international broadcasts to Iran were difficult without having offices or technical equipment in the country, there was still hope in this area since it was possible to transmit signals either through another country or even from the U.S. territories. The case with cultural exchanges was thus relatively different and difficult.

To initiate the program, some of the IIE staff, with the support of the Search for Common Ground and the American Institute of Iranian Studies, made some preliminary visits to Iran in 2004 during Khatami's amicable administration and managed to approach some universities. However, in order to receive applications and interview the applicants, the U.S. government needed to have a physical address. To tackle this issue, as well as other general concerns about Iran, the Bush administration decided that, in the face of no official presence in Iran, it would use U.S. consulates in Iran's neighboring countries instead. United Arab Emirates (particularly Dubai), Turkey, and other countries such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan, were designated as places where U.S. embassies could handle issues related to Iran through their specially-deployed Iran experts. According to recent State Department documents released by Wikileaks, these offices were established so that the United States could fill its knowledge gap about Iran and preside over operations such as the exchanges.[300] Dubai is probably the most important of these since there were more than 200,000 Iranian residents in the country in 2006. It is often referred to as the *State Department's Iran Regional Presence Office* (IRPO) and it was modeled after *Riga Station* in Latvia which was a vital source of information for the United States in its battles against the Soviet Union. Undersecretary Nicholas Burns was the official voice who compared the Dubai office to the Riga Station:

> We sent a young kid from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1926 out to Riga station: George Kennan…. We said: Go and learn Russian. Sit in Riga. You be our window into the Soviet Union…. That is what we are saying to these young kids today. 'You go to Dubai. We can't be in Iran. You interview every Iranian you can find, get to know them -- all the Iranians who

[299] See: U.S. Congress, House, *United States Policy towards Iran-Next Steps*, Congressional Hearing before Committee on Foreign Relations, Serial No. 109–183, March 2006, p. 20.

[300] Strobel,Warren P., "State Department Cables Reveal US Thirst for All Things Iranian", *McClatchy Newspapers*, online document, April, 17, 2011, retrieved [on 2011-04-18] from: <www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/04/17/112290>

> come out and do their banking there and do their weekends there -- and you tell us how we should understand Iran. [301]

The FLTA program was one of the operations that IRPO and the Institute for International Education undertook to accomplish. The IIE contacted Iran's major universities in Tehran and Isfahan. It asked them to introduce their top English language students for the exchange program. The candidates were first picked up by the university officials and would then fly to Dubai. During their 3-4 day stay in Dubai, which would all be financed by the IIE, the candidates would be interviewed and monitored by the IIE and IRPO staff. They would then fly back to Iran, and would be contacted by the IRPO staff in a few weeks if their files were approved. The approved Iranian candidates would then travel to the U.S. and settle in their host institutions (located in various states) to teach the Farsi language. The costs would again be covered by the IIE.

During their nine-month residence in the U.S., these FLTA assistants would help Farsi language teachers with preparing class materials, homework assignments, and giving a native tone to the language instruction. Since the FLTA was a non-degree scholarship, Iranian students were not able to study and receive a degree. This was one of the major dilemmas for the Iranian students upon their application to the program because they preferred to receive a degree after spending over a year abroad. With this in mind, these candidates would participate in the program in favor of increasing their understanding of the host society as well as sharing their culture.

The Outcome of the FLTA

The success of a cultural exchange is very much dependant on the satisfaction of its participants as well as some other factors such as the degree to which the goals of the program are achieved. Although the program administers can control some of the variables, it is ultimately the overall experience of an exchangee which is significant in the evaluation of a program. Below are some of the basic criteria, often used by evaluation institutions (including the State Department's evaluation units), to measure the immediate success of an exchange initiative. An exchange program is successful if there are positive results in each of the following indicators:

- Participant's personal satisfaction
- Linkages and ties
- Educational/Cultural/professional learning
- Behavioral change

Understandably, the immediate success may not guarantee a tangible impact for an exchange program (such as delivering foreign policy benefits or creating change within a larger target society). However, if performed successfully and on a large scale, it definitely plays a catalytic role in achieving that goal.

In the case of the Iranian FLTA students, it is feasible to assess the immediate results of their cultural and educational journey. But it would be premature to try to evaluate the overall impact of this exchange program in the overall patterns of U.S.-Iran relations and even impossible to draw a causal line between the two.

Based on these assumptions, I tried to find and contact those Iranian students who had participated in the program. I soon found out that there are still more challenges when it comes to Iranian participants.

As I mentioned earlier, the Iranian government has been very much cautious of any dealings with the U.S. government since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This concern is also significant when it comes to cultural relations. Except for the Khatami era in Iran (1997-2004), the government frowns upon such

[301] Hassan M, F., T. Nazila Fathi, and W. Thom Shanker, "U.S. Sets up a Perch in Dubai to Keep an Eye on Iran", *New York Times*, November 20, 2006, p. 3.

exchanges and almost every experienced diplomat is aware of such complexities in Iranian politics.[302] Iranian students are also aware of this, and try to be discreet about their experience abroad. Hence, some of the students refused even to participate in my study. One student's negative response in just one sentence revealed this sense of insecurity and mistrust around a topic which could have been more than ordinary if circumstances were different. A female student, to whom I had written an email introducing myself and the purpose of my research in an honest manner, responded:

> I generally try to avoid talking about Iran or Iranian students' issues because I do not know where that information will be used. I am sorry I could not be helpful.[303]

There were, however, a few students who opened up to the issue but asked for anonymity in their communications. As I discovered, almost all of them were very satisfied with their new experience. They regarded this as a chance to improve their English language skills and managed to use this asset for their future career. One student mentioned that "you could use the chance and improve your English through contact with native speakers as well as adding your one year residence in the USA to your CV."[304]

They also claimed a better understanding of Americans and their lifestyle, often in contrast to the projections of mainstream Iranian media. One participant referred to the knowledge gap between Americans and Iranians and the need to address it through the exchange:

> Americans are cool. You could find biased Americans too, but you need to inform them about yourself and your culture and take your head up. They are very warm and friendly. You would be totally surprised to find them very different from the image you got from the media. You might find Americans very much uninformed about Iranians and Iran, but they are open to learn.[305]

Iranian FLTAs were very positive about their cultural experience in the U.S. and almost all of the respondents had succeeded in building relationships with American students and other foreign students in the United States. One FLTA student who had traveled to the U.S. in 2007 mentioned that she "was surprised to see Americans that sociable and friendly."[306] She had even kept open the line of communication with her professors and language students as well as her other American friends since her return to Iran.

Iranian exchangees also praised the program for its emphasis on cultural activities while teaching the language. They stated that FLTA asks and even encourages them to organize workshops, cooking get-togethers, parties, movie screenings, and talks about their homeland. Teaching Farsi was itself a useful cultural experience to the participants.[307] Assistants had spent hours in bringing a taste of native Farsi to classes attended by an average of 20 students.

There were, however, signs of dissatisfaction with the FLTA being a non-degree scholarship. Most of the students had ranked high in their home institutions before the application. They had aspired to reach high levels of formal academic education as well. Since the IIE prohibited students from getting a degree during

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[302] For further study on complexities of Iranian politics and its effects on Iran's foreign policy see: Stone, Jeremy J., *Catalytic Diplomacy: Russia, China, North Korea and Iran*, Booksurge LIC, Carlsbad, CA, 2010, p. 319.

[303] Author's communication with FLTA participant No1 (Initials: V.R.) [on April 15, 2011].

[304] Author's communication with FLTA participant No2 (Initials: F.B) [on June 8, 2011].

[305] Author's communication with FLTA participant No3 (Initials: Z.R)[on June 8, 2011].

[306] Author's communication with FLTA participant No2 (Initials: F.B) [on June 8, 2011].

[307] Author's communication with FLTA participant No4 (Initials: A.C) [on April 24, 2011].

their visits, they found the FLTA a distraction from their ambitious educational plans. One participant from the University of Georgia believed that "FLTA was ok but you'd better apply for a grad program if interested…exiting for a month or two, nothing else, no degree just a certificate; its rewarding personally. If you have a career in Iran one year program is not worth risking that. I mean you can apply for a PhD or M.A. program. Much better than FLTA. It's not that big a deal!"[308]

Like every other cultural exchange, it is expected that FLTA participants return to their homeland once their cultural journey ends and apply their new learning to their careers. This is the area where the exchange faces some challenges since most of the Iranian participants showed a strong tendency to remain in the United States even after the FLTA period. The majority of those participants with whom I communicated had either overstayed in the U.S. or planned to go back to the U.S. in the future. The reasons are probably similar to that of other Iranian students who travel to and remain in the United States. A 1994 study of factors involved in the returnability of Iranian students to their homeland found that variables such as having personal freedom, better work conditions, higher salaries, and the appropriate use of a scholar's skills, significantly correlated with students' intention to remain in the United States.[309] The same factors could be the cause of Iranian FLTA's un-returnability to Iran.

Meanwhile, there were some FLTA respondents who said they retuned to Iran and had managed to build a good career with the help of their experience abroad. One of them who had found a job in the international relations office of an Iranian cultural center believed that the FLTA grant gave her an advantage over other applicants for the position. Another one, who had returned to his middle-sized hometown in Iran, applied his Fulbright experience into devising new methods of teaching English at such advanced levels as TOEFL and IELTS.

It would have been a perfect result for the FLTA if a participant could enter the ranks of government. But almost none of the FLTA grantees managed to secure a career either in the government or the media (at least so far). The reason lies in the Iranian government's response to an exchange program which it does not approve. Rather than a shining point in their resumes, the FLTA award is often perceived negatively by the officials (even though in the private business sector it is an advantage).

Like every other post-Iranian-Revolution exchange with the U.S., the Iranian government had approached the FLTA scholarship with presentiment. And although it had allowed some FLTA organizers to visit Iran in late 2004 and early 2005, the Ahmadinejad administration found it very difficult to agree with its counterpart on the specifics of the exchange; facing mounting pressure and criticism from the conservatives, his administration finally refused to recognize the FLTA program and cancelled the agreement. As I mentioned, recruitment for the FLTA program was accomplished through offices of international relations in Iran's top universities. With the government's disapproval of the initiative, these universities ceased to cooperate with FLTA officials deployed in Dubai and even though the program is still active in its underground form, the setback forced many students to choose between having a government approved career in Iran and an important cultural experience like that of the FLTA. The majority of those who applied for the grant were aware that it would be very difficult to enter the ranks of government in Iran upon their return. It might yet be premature to determine the results of their decision -- especially with the very volatile situation in Iran -- but so far I have found very few FLTA grantees holding public positions or even venturing into political activity.

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[308] Author's communication with FLTA participant No4 (Initials: A.C) [on April 24, 2011].

[309] Arasteh, Hamid, *Evaluation of Iranian Students in the United States and Their Returnability to the Islamic Republic of Iran*, ERIC document, reproduction service No. ED 380031,1994.

Based on the criteria introduced earlier, an exchange program is successful in the short term if the participants are satisfied with their experience, develop linkages, increase their professional and cultural knowledge, and experience a change in their personal behavior. The majority of respondents to my questions were satisfied with the general outline of the initiative (except for being a non-degree program). They had managed to expand their social and professional network especially with their American students of Farsi, and had also improved their English language skills since their main profession back in Iran was teaching English. It is, however, difficult to ascertain a change in their personal behavior and their direct involvement in political and foreign policy affairs of their country. Taking all these into account, it can be concluded that the FLTA program was a successful cultural diplomacy initiative if it could only address challenges such as reaching an agreement with the Iranian government for a more symmetric approach in the exchange, and presenting participants the opportunity to receive a university degree.

3.3.5 International Visitor Leadership Program for Iran

The State Department's interest in bringing Iranians to the U.S. extended to the country's future leaders as well. It was based on a classic Cold War strategy and was implemented through an initiative called the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). The IVLP is basically the State Department's way of identifying and inviting young and potential leaders of the world to visit the United States.[310] Since its inception in the 1940s, more than 200,000 individuals have participated in the program- among them are such renowned leaders as Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher, Gerhard Schröder, Anvar Sadat, Hamed Karzai and many other heads of state and government officials.[311]

The IVLP is currently sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in the State Department. In the past, the IVLP (under other names such as the Foreign Leader Program) was established to counter Nazi propaganda, and brought, for example, Latin American elites (specialists, journalists, and potential leaders) to the U.S. to expose them to U.S. culture and politics. The same procedure followed with the German citizens after WWII, the newly independent African nations, and later with the Soviet block and Muslim countries. During more than half a century, foreign elites form these regions visited the United States. The goals were 1) to link foreign leaders with their U.S. counterparts 2) to enable visitors to understand and appreciate the culture and heritage of the United States.[312]

The exact time is unknown, but according to the latest State Department cables released by Wikileaks, the IVLP began to focus on Iran during the second term of George W. Bush . Shortly after the establishment of the State Department's Iran Regional Offices, the search for finding Iranian elites with bright futures began. For example, the U.S. Embassy in London reported on sending five Iranian citizens to the United States in 2006 under the auspices of the IVLP.[313] Unlike most of the other programs which received publicity, the State Department and its offices abroad kept a low profile on its IVLP program; if not

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[310] "International Visitor Leadership Program", Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-05-11] from: <http://exchanges.state.gov/ivlp/ivlp.html>

[311] Congressional Record, V. 146, Pt. 3, March 21, 2000 to April 4, 2000: Government Printing Office, p.3646.

[312] Muller, Sherry, "Professional Exchanges, Citizen Diplomacy and Credibility", in *America's Dialogue with the World*, William P. Kiehl, ed, Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council, School of Media and Public Affairs, George Washington University, 2006, p. 63.

[313] "Embassy London's Outreach to Democracy Activists", *The Telegraph*, online document, February 4, 2011, retrieved [on 2011-05-11] from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/london-wikileaks/8305045/EMBASSY-LONDONS-OUTREACH-TO-DEMOCRACY-ACTIVISTS.html>

for the Wikileaks' documents, it would have been difficult to discuss the topic here.

According to a 2009 cable from Alan Eyre, former director of the IRPO in Dubai, his office had been successful in sending "nearly 250 Iranians" to the U.S. Although the paragraph does not make it clear if all these visitors have been IVLP participants, the general theme of the cable, which is about IRPO's handling of IVLP, hints at the possibility. The cable even notes that IRPO's activity has been stictly limited to public diplomacy programs rather than democracy promotion projects (which I will discuss in the next chapter):

> To insulate our public diplomacy programs and maintain IRPO's low profile, IRPO has had no involvement in civil society and democracy programs run by the Department. Our recommendation only extends to IVLP exchange programs.[314]

Iranians who participated in the IVLP were chosen from among student activists, academics, lawyers, journalists and women rights activists residing either in Iran or abroad. Despite the fact that they were not directly related to power circles in Iran, these participants were expected to later use their experience more on the grassroots level. In other words, in contrast to the claims by IRPO in Dubai, the IVLP became an instrument of social change when it comes to Iran. For instance, a number of Iranian students and journalists who traveled to the U.S. as IVLP participants later initiated the establishment of the Confederation of Iranian Students (CIS), an institution for student activism in Iran. The CIS would later ask for grants from the State Department and organize conferences to bring together "student movement leaders, international thinkers and secular democrats, in order to form a united front for promotion of democracy".[315] Another IVLP alumnus, Mohamad Ali Pedram, was reported to be extremely involved in several democracy promotion projects. In 2008, he submitted more than five proposals to the U.S. Embassy in London requesting financial support to the UK-based Durham University and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in order to launch seminars and workshops in areas such as "Women's NGOs", "Civil Society", "Iran-U.S. Civil Society Engagement", and "Media Training."[316] The Durham University later admitted that it received more than $320,000 from the State Department for its Iran projects.[317]

The Iranian government's response to the IVLP program was mixed. According to some of the participants in the program, Iranian officials have been prudent in giving a *carte blanche* to visitors of the United States. In fact, some participants like Arash Alaei and Mohammad Ehsani were arrested for their visits to the U.S. and some were "intimidated and threatened" to withdraw from such programs. Tehran has once again followed a cautious path in the case of IVLP and except for a short period of time between Obama's election and Iran's election unrests, when there was a window of opportunity for better relations between the two governments, the Iranian government kept on obstructing the process.

3.3.6 Sports Come to the Arena

Sports exchanges are a prominent tool of public diplomacy, capable of entering some of the most impenetrable areas of the world. Such a catalytic role is often

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[314] Iran Regional Presence Office Dubai, "Iran: Tehran Show Trial Again Cites USG Exchange Programs as Velvet Revolution tools", *Wikileaks*, online document, August 25 2009, retrieved [on 2011-05-11] from: <wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/08/09RPODUBAI349.html>

[315] U.S. Embassy London, "Iran: Democracy Small Grants Proposals", *Wikileaks,* online document, April 24, 2008, retrieved [on 2011-05-11] from: <wikileaks.ch/cable/2008/04/08LONDON1163.html>

[316] U.S. Embassy London, "Iran: Democracy Small Grants Proposals", 2008.

[317] Cox, Simon, "Durham University defends accepting funds from Iran", *BBC Radio 4*, online document, March 31, 2011, retrieved [on 2011-05-12] from: <www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-12908507>

recognized by American statesmen in their prescriptions for their country's foreign policy. For example, *The U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy* pinpoints the role of sports and gives a considerable position to it in the American public diplomacy apparatus. The strategy refers to sports exchanges as "activities [which] forge a common bond and teach teamwork, discipline, respect for others and abiding by rules."[318]

It is almost a paradox to see how a highly competitive and war-like event seen in sports could be capable of bringing peace to communities and nations. On occasion, the degree of violence seen during some sporting events is so significant that it may lead to unthinkable tragedies.[319] Sport-related violence is thus a common concern for researchers and thinkers of the field as well.

Despite these concerns, public diplomacy experts[320] believe that athletic activities and their symbolic significance are extremely effective in bringing people together, creating bonds and contributing to the image of the involved countries.[321] Sports work well in diplomacy because "they are controlled by a specific set of rules that are commonly agreed upon."[322] In fact, it was because of its magical potential that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan ordered a special task force in 2002 to cultivate the capacities of sports for development and peace-building in the third mellenium. Elaborating on just one of the blessings of sports, the task force concluded:

> The potential links between sports and peace are also powerful. From international events to the grassroots, sport brings people together that can cross boundaries and break down barriers, making the playing field a simple and often apolitical site for initiating contact between antagonistic groups.
>
> Consequently, sport can be an ideal forum for resuming social dialogue and bridging divides, highlighting similarities between people and breaking down prejudice.[323]

The United States, like many other countries, has also been using sports as an instrument to break down barriers and elevate its national prestige in the international arena. The use of sporting exchanges was specifically emphasized after 9/11 and with the 2005 appointment of Karen Hughes as the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy it regained its position. Hughes recognized such exchanges as an official and integral part of U.S. public diplomacy and was one of its strongest proponents in the U.S. government. During her tenure, the annual budget dedicated to sports diplomacy was markedly increased.[324] The U.S. Government's recognition of sports as an

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[318] U.S. Department of State, *U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*, p. 24.

[319] One unfortunate example is the 2009 soccer match between Egypt and Algeria that ended in riots among both populations and resulted in the death of 35 people. See "Egypt-Algeria World Cup anger turns violent in Cairo", *British Broadcasting Corporation*, online document , 2009, retrieved [on 2011-09-01] from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8369983.stm>

[320] See For example: Leadership Group on U.S.-Muslim Engagement, "Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World", *Report of the Leadership Group on U.S.-Muslim Engagement*, Washington DC, 2008, p. 89.

[321] Rein, I. and B. Shields, "Place branding sports: Strategies for Differentiating Emerging, Transitional, Negatively Viewed and Newly Industrialized Nations." *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* Vol. 3, No.1, 2007, : 73-85.

[322] Gants, Connor, and Rune-Wen Huang, "Diplomacy in the Sports Arena." *U.S.-China Today,* USC U.S.-China Institute, online document, 7 March, 2008, retrieved [2010- 1-24] from: <http://www.uschina.usc.edu>

[323] UN Inter-Agency Task Force, "Sport as a Tool for Development and Peace", United Nations website, online document, 2005, p. 3-4, retrieved [on 2011-05-13] from: <http://www.un.org/sport2005/resources/task_force.pdf>

[324] Walters, Caroline, "Sports Diplomacy is the New Comeback Kid", *USCpublicdiplomacy.org*, online document, 2007, retrieved [on 2012- 04-14] from: <www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org>

effective tool of diplomacy was also highlighted in a statement by then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice:

> Sports and athletes have an ability to bring people together across the divisions of religion, and race, and region. Through sports, we are sending messages across the globe of international understanding, cultural tolerance and mutual respect.[325]

There are many past and present examples of successful sports diplomacy, but the classic case is the ping pong diplomacy between the United States and the People's Republic of China in the 1970's. At that time, China and the U.S. had strained relations, partly due to disagreements over the Vietnam War. The behind-the-scenes story is unknown, but the official narrative is about an honest accident: After missing his own flight at a tournament in Japan, the American ping pong player Glenn Cowan is said to have boarded the Chinese ping pong team's flight. This flight was where a friendship between the American athlete and Chinese ping pong star Zhang Zedong began. It leads to some follow up mediations from both sides and soon after, the U.S. ping pong team is formally invited to China. It was the first time that Americans had been allowed in China since the Communist takeover of the country in 1949, and signaled a new era in U.S.-China relations. This exchange marked an easing of tensions between the U.S. and China and opened an opportunity for U.S. President Richard Nixon to visit Beijing. It would be an overstatement to identify a single sports event to be the sole cause for renewal of relations between nations. Yet at the same time, it is very difficult to negate the catalytic role which it could play in bringing the positive sides together. That is why the significance of such events is often recognized by politicians. In the ping pong case, the Chinese Premier Chou Enlai, for example, is reported to mention that "Never before in history has a sport been used so effectively as a tool of international diplomacy…. It was the week that changed the world."[326]

Interestingly, athletics has in fact been the first officially recognized field of cultural exchange between the post-revolutionary Iran and the United States back in 1998.

In February 1998, a month after the conciliatory remarks by both Iranian and American presidents (see above), an American wrestling team participated in the Takhti Wrestling Cup in Tehran. And thus, the wrestling mat became the first place where Iran and the U.S. could commence stitching up their old wound.

The U.S. team's visit to Iran had been orchestrated by the Search for Common Ground which, as I mentioned before, soon turned out to be a major player in running U.S.-Iran exchanges.[327] Interestingly enough, the SFCG had benefited from the political linkages of Bruce Laingen, the senior American official who had been held hostage in 1980, in order to contact the American Olympic Committee. Through negotiations and intermediations by the SFCG, security and political concerns of both sides were addressed and finally a team of five American athletes competed in a 17-nation competition in Iran.[328] The wrestling tournament has been a very popular event among Iranians and that particular set of games drew nearly 12,000 Iranians to the packed *Azadi Sports Complex* in

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[325] Condoleezza Rice's Remarks at the Women's National Basketball Association Inspiring Women Luncheon, in Women's National Basketball Association website, online document, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-05-13] From:<http://www.wnba.com/features/notesandquotes_070715.html>

[326] DeVoss, David A., "Ping-Pong Diplomacy", *History & Archaeology*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, online document, April 2002, retrieved [on 2010-09-27] from: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com>

[327] For a summary of their U.S.-Iran exchange programs see Search for Common Ground, Sports Exchanges, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-05-13] from: <http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/iran/programmes_iran.html>

[328] Marks, John, "Wrestling Diplomacy Scores in Iran", *Peace Review*, Vol. 11 Issue 4, 1999, p. 548.

Tehran. The tournament was broadcasted by Iran's national television channels and almost every Iranian citizen was eagerly following the event. In public diplomacy terms, the result was very positive for both the U.S. and Iran. An eyewitness journalist Thomas Omstad who was sent to Tehran later reported on the enthusiasm among Iranians and the promises for such an event:

> After winning a silver medal in a wrestling tournament here last Friday, American Larry "Zeke" Jones waved a hand-sized Iranian flag, and the 12,000 fans packed into a Tehran arena went wild with delight. "America! America!" they chanted in response--a sudden, unscripted reversal of the ritual "Death to America!" chorus that Iranians usually chant at public events. [329]

After receiving Iranian appraisal of the exchange, the Americans responded that they "have been treated with more hospitality here than in any other country [they]'ve been in."[330]

The success of the event was so noteworthy that then President Bill Clinton received the U.S. team in the White House and encouraged more people-to-people exchanges with Iran.[331] It was then Iran's turn to send its teams to the U.S.

On April 1998, the Iranian wrestling team flew to Oklahoma with the expectation that, within the new political environment, their U.S. counterparts would reciprocate their hospitality in Iran. All these hopes were shattered when the Iranian team was delayed for two hours upon arrival in Chicago so that its members could be fingerprinted and photographed by U.S. immigration officers. The Iranian coach, Amir Khadem, later complained: "We were not treated like the other teams… We do not understand why we were treated like criminals."[332]

Although it was said to be a State Department routine, the security procedures were upsetting to the Iranian wrestlers and resonated bitterly in Iran. Iranian public opinion was quick to interpret the incident as inhospitality shown from the American side and a further cause to believe that the American hosts did not respect the rules of reciprocity. And in light of a long-time mistrust between the nations, the incident promoted the sentiment that once again Americans could not be trusted. Even Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei raised doubts on the motives for such engagements by asking "how could the Iranian nation extend a hand of friendship toward an enemy who continues to harbor a malicious and bitter heart?" Iran's foreign ministry also condemned the incident.[333]

In an attempt to clean up the mess, the White House invited the 18-member Iranian team on a special tour of the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum, hosted by Donna Shalala, then the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services who was also fluent in Farsi (thanks to her experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Iran during the 60s). The Iranians, however, angry with the treatment, were reluctant to meet a U.S. official and declined the offer. The fingerprinting was almost certainly a failure in the process and should have been atoned for.

The opportunity came on July 26, 1998 two months after the wrestling World Cup, when the Iranian wrestling team agreed to return to the mat and compete in

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[329] Omestad, Thomas, "Wrestling with Tehran" *U.S. News & World Report*, Vol. 124, No. 8, 1998, p. 44.
[330] Omestad, Thomas, "Wrestling with Tehran", p.44
[331] European Centre for Conflict Prevention, *Wrestling a Route to Peace*, online document, February 20, 1998, retrieved [on 2009-11-13] From: <http://www.gppac.net/documents/pbp/8/3_wrestl.htm>
[332] Wright, Robin, "Iran Wrestlers Try to Pin down Detente at US Meet", *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1998, pp. Al, A3.
[333] Wright, *Iran Wrestlers Try to Pin Down Detente*, pp. Al, A3.

the *Goodwill Games* held in New York. Unlike the first visit, arrangements were made so that the team was not fingerprinted, a good sign for the exchange, but still, the game brought controversy of its own. Iranian wrestlers took offense when a group of Iranian exiles [primarily affiliated to the now-terrorist group MKO] shouted anti-Iranian government slogans in the 5,500-seat theater. The coach asked the players not to go to the ring until the uproar calms down. The Associated Press painted a vivid picture of the uproar and police response to it:

> Hundreds of Iranian fans were wearing T-shirts bearing the name and picture of Maryam Rajavi, head of the National Council of Resistance in Iran, and appeared to be the center of the dispute.
>
> When the match resumed, a dozen security guards flooded the area where the protest was centered, and large banners bearing the portrait of Rajavi appeared to have been removed. At least eight fans with either Rajavi T-shirts or banners were taken from the hall by city police or Madison Square Garden security.[334]

The protesters had felt that that Iranian government was using the wrestling event to enhance its image in the U.S. and thus protested it. It was only after things calmed down that the Iranian wrestlers entered the ring waving the Iranian flag and finishing the matches.[335]

Apart from this third party buzz, the team had spent a fairly fruitful time in America. They visited an Oriental rug gallery and were given a tour of Manhattan. The event even prompted some discussions among Iranian organizers who felt that the exchange was "important, because it means opening good relations with the people of the United States" and that it could "open a dialogue between the governments."[336]

Unlike the previous cultural exchanges, and despite the bumpy road at the beginning, wrestling matches took off and continued for years to come. The Clinton administration managed to initiate a trend of exchanging wrestling teams which continued under the Bush administration as well. American wrestlers have repeatedly visited Iran since their historic trip in 1998 and five out of seven visits were sponsored by the U.S. government under the Bush administration. The Iranian teams have competed in the U.S. during the World Cup and other championships. Among all sport exchanges, wrestling has the highest occurrence rate in Iran-U.S. relations. It has, however, not been the sole athletic venue.

3.3.6.1 Soccer as a Bridge Builder

Unlike Americans, Iranians are fascinated by soccer. In addition to the almost universal favoritism towards this sport, the Iranian tendency is partly due to their government's investment in motivating youth to play soccer.[337] Because of almost opposite levels of interest in soccer in both countries, the United States and Iran have only played soccer three times.

The first match in the 1998 World Cup resulted in an Iranian victory which poured thousands of Iranians into the streets celebrating not only a precious

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[334] Associated Press, "Political Protest Disrupts Iran-U.S. Wrestling", *Cable News Network*, online document, 1998, retrieved [2009-11-20] from: <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/goodwillgames>

[335] Associated Press, "goodwill Games: Protesters Upset Iran Wrestlers", *Los Angeles Times*, July, 26, 1998, p.11.

[336] CNN, "Iranians at Games for Wrestling, Not Politics", *Cable News Network*, July 23, 1998, online document, retrieved [on 2011-09-02] from: <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/goodwillgames>

[337] For example, Iran's National TV service, in the 1990s, dubbed and continually broadcasted several popular series of a soccer animation which had an extraordinary effect on Iranian youth's appreciation of soccer as a sport.

score but also triumph over an *old enemy*. The competition went well and both teams received the International Federation of Association Football's (FIFA) fair-play award. However, in terms of relationship building between the two nations, the event did not lead into a mutually favorable situation. Iranians saw their win as symbolic revenge for only some of the grievances caused by the U.S. during the past decades. Based on this specific theme, Iran's Supreme Leader sent an open message to the Iranian players: "Tonight, again, the strong and arrogant opponent felt the bitter taste of defeat at your hands… Be happy since you have made the Iranian nation happy."[338] This certainly did not bode well in the process of friendship building.

The second match, organized as more of a friendly event rather than a competition, took place in Los Angles, only a few months after the World Cup. Los Angeles was the chosen city because it had (and still has) the largest Iranian population residing outside Iran, giving some parts of the city the nickname of *Tehrangeles*. Interestingly enough, the seeds of this competition had been sown one night before the World Cup match in France.[339] Tom King, then the Managing Director of the Administration for the U.S. Soccer Federation, noted that the event was the product of a security meeting held in which delegations from both the U.S. Soccer Federation and the Iranian Football Federation pledged to work towards a better relationship between the two by engaging in symbolic friendly gestures before and after the game.

The second match was less formal. One of the topics of discussion, as usual, was the issue of fingerprinting and the Iranian's concern over the treatment of its sportsmen entering the U.S. territories. After this demand was positively addressed, Iranian players headed to the United States.

Based on the reports, the Iranian team had been well received by both Americans and the Iranian community in Los Angeles. Khodad Azizi, a celebrated Iranian player at the time, pointed to this fact in an interview:

> Our American hosts have been welcoming and we have had no problems so far. They have done everything possible for us to feel at home. We have also been overwhelmed by the Iranian community here in L.A. They, like other Iranians throughout the world, have been more than welcoming.[340]

Jeff Agoos of the U.S. soccer team also recognized the significance of the event when he was quoted in saying that the game "bridges the gaps and ties countries together sometimes, and I hope we can do a little bit of that."[341]

On the day of the match, January 17, 2000, the Rose Bowl stadium was filled with 50,000 spectators, most of them Iranian-Americans. Both teams played amicably and the result was a fair 1-1 draw. At the end of the game, both teams exchanged T-shirts and there were even negotiations for a future rematch. The Iranian players were invited on a tour of Universal Studios to get a taste of Hollywood. It is important to analyze the significance and impact of this rare match up.

The 2000 U.S.-Iran soccer game was certainly popular and important for the Iranian-American population who went to the stadium in Los Angeles, but the same was not true for the majority of Iranians living in Iran and naturally for the Americans in the U.S. (they are not, after all, fans of soccer). When asked

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[338] Associated Press, "Joyous Iranians Fill the Streets in Celebration", *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1998, p. 12.

[339] From *Iran Vs USA (Soccer Match in L.A.)*, documentary video, online video, 2000, retrieved [on 2010-1-09] from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQcb-ZkyVP8>

[340] From *Iran Vs USA (Soccer Match in L.A.)*, documentary video, online video, 2000, retrieved [on 2010-1-09] from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQcb-ZkyVP8>

[341] From *Iran Vs USA (Soccer Match in L.A.)*, documentary video, online video, 2000, retrieved [on 2010-1-09] from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQcb-ZkyVP8>

about the match, hardly any Iranian living in Iran could even remember it, much less comment on its importance, even though soccer is Iran's favorite sport.[342] A valid explanation would be that the public was unable to watch the game because it was not broadcasted on Iranian national television (unlike other sporting events). The prevalence of Iranian-Americans' oppositional gestures and the political slogans towards the Iranian government that could be seen at the game, triggered the government to shut down the live broadcast of the game on Iran's national TV channels. The best publicity that the game received was a brief reference to its result during the sports news.

In the U.S., the soccer fan base was, and still is, significantly lacking when compared to that in Iran, or anywhere else in the world, for that matter. The majority of the American population favors such sports as football, basketball, and baseball.[343] Although a positive exercise in bridge-building, the match would have been more effective in that regard if it was better promoted by media outlets in both countries, or had been held in Iran. And if there were negotiations to reciprocate the American gesture, then it would have also been a more effective bridge-building event. Unfortunately, this rematch, and other subsequent arrangements never materialized, partly due to the 9/11 panic in the United States which led to more security measures.

Chances for bridge-building through football were tested once again in 2004 when the Iranian national soccer team was invited by the U.S. *Galaxy*, a regional club based in California, in order to play a friendly game in Los Angeles. The date was set, ticket prices were fixed, and major players for each team were even introduced.[344] But, like the previous match, the arrangement headed into an unfortunate impasse and the Iranian team never left Iran for Los Angeles, the setback being, once again, the fingerprinting controversy. Up until today, the 2000 game remains the first and the last friendly match between the two national soccer teams.

Despite the setbacks on the national level, there were also attempts to utilize soccer in the sub-national level for bridge-building. In a particular case, prominent soccer clubs from both countries' major leagues, the American *Galaxy*, and the Iranian *Persepolis*, expressed interest in holding a friendly match. Persepolis was a legendary club with a significant number of dedicated fans throughout Iran and even Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the game, which could have been another major breakthrough in the development of mutual understanding and trust between Iranians and Americans, faced an impasse over the controversial issue of fingerprinting upon entry to the U.S.[345] According to Sergio Del Prado, then Vice President of Business Operations at Galaxy, all efforts were made "for a resolution to this impasse in order to reschedule the game" but they failed. [346] Discussions over holding friendly matches between Iranian clubs like Persepolis and their American counterparts are still going on to this day, but it seems that the moment has already gone.[347]

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[342] Bauer, Bernard, *Iran: a Question and Answer Book*, Capstone Press, Mankato, Minn., 2005, p.18.

[343] The Harris Poll, "Professional Football Continues Dominance over Baseball as America's Favorite Sport", *Harris Poll*, Rochester, New York, online document, 2009, retrieved [on 2009-11-27] from: <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/vault/Harris-Interactive-Poll-Research-Fave-Sport-2009-01.pdf>

[344] Parstimes, "L.A. Galexy to Play National Team of Iran in International Friendly April 28 at the Rose Bowl", *Parstimes*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2009-12-2] from: <http://www.parstimes.com/news/archive/2004/galaxy_iran.html>

[345] Associated Press, "Iran team's exhibition against Galaxy postponed", *Iranian*, online document, 2000, retrieved [on 2009-05-13] from: <http://www.iranian.com/News/2000/May/post.html>

[346]. Associated Press, "Iran team's exhibition against Galaxy postponed", *Iranian*, online document, 2000, retrieved [on 2009-05-13] from: <http://www.iranian.com/News/2000/May/post.html>

[347] "Estefadeye Rezaee az Varzesh Baraye Tafsire Pasokhe Ayatollah Khamenei be Obama" (Rezaee Uses Sports to Explain Khamenei's Response to Obama), *Tabnak*,

3.3.6.2 Republicans in Sports Diplomacy

The patterns of sports diplomacy in the final years of the Clinton administration faced a bit of challenge at the outset of the Republican ascendance into power. A strong reaction to 9/11, the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq proved that politicians in Washington are ready to opt for militarism and a hard power approach to international relations. This had its own effects on Iran-U.S. relations and while reformists in Iran were more than ready to come to terms with Washington's demands, George Bush had other plans in mind. It was only during his final years in power, that Bush, tired of his adventures abroad, submitted to moderates in his administration and put more emphasis on diplomacy with Iran, rather than war.[348]

As mentioned above, Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice and her Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes had a sweet tooth for sports diplomacy. Hughes had a special interest in Iran as well and she managed to resume what has been left from the Clinton era by introducing a sizable number of new sports exchanges. It was based on a larger strategy to restore harmonious relations between United States and the Muslim world. Along with Iran, the countries of Syria, Lebanon and Afghanistan were focal points of such programs. Under this State Department initiative, the U.S. Olympic Committee negotiated a program that the *Daily Telegraph* called "a groundbreaking exchange program of coaching, training facilities and sports technology" between the United States and the aforementioned countries.[349] As a result of the negotiations with the Iranian National Olympic Committee, Iranian sportsmen from such fields as water polo, kayaking, basketball, and ping pong were invited to visit the United States. Each of these exchanges had its particular promises and upheavals.

Water polo, for example, is seen as a luxury sport in a Middle Eastern country like Iran. Its special facilities are not available to every ordinary Iranian. Because of this, it is not a popular sport in the country; yet, its national and sub-national teams certainly have an eager circle of people appreciating it. In August 2007, Iran's water polo team traveled to the U.S. to participate in the Fédération Internationale de Nattion (FINA) Men's Junior World Water Polo Championship. A press release by the State Department on August 22nd, 2007 revealed that after the tournament the U.S. State Department, via the U.S. Olympic Committee, organized a "comprehensive American cultural and sports experience that included interaction with American youth, collegiate and Olympic athletes as well as visits to distinctive American cultural sites."[350] Local media in Iran and other news outlets failed to recognize the symbolic implications of the event which meant little publicity for the athletes. It was probably only the Iranian water polo community which was the target group for the State Department. This was evident in the State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' press release:

> Throughout the program, the participants were incredibly patient, flexible, motivated, and hard working. Participants came away with an enhanced understanding of their sport and of the U.S. as a result of the exchange. When not training, the

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online document, 2009, retrieved [on 2009-05-13] from: <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=41271>

[348] "U.S. and Germany Vow to Pursue Diplomacy on Iran", *Cable News Network*, online document, 2007, retrieved [2011-05-13]: <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/U.S./11/10/>

[349] Miller, David, "Exclusive: U.S. Offer Iran Olive Branch", *Daily Telegraph*, online document, April 25, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-09-02] from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/2311807>

[350] U.S. Department of State, "Iranian Junior Men's Water Polo Team Attends U.S. Olympic Qualifiers", *State Department website*, 2007, online document, retrieved [on 2009-08-31] From: <http://exchanges.state.gov/sports/visitor/iran-water-polo.html>

> Iranians visited the Queen Mary, went to Universal Studios Hollywood, and enjoyed Disneyland.[351]

The water polo experience thus proved to be a positive and yet quiet case of exchange between the two nations. Similar events were to follow and one of them was the real ping pong diplomacy.

It is almost impossible to find an extended newspaper report about Iran-U.S. sports exchanges without a reference to the famous conciliatory *ping pong diplomacy* between the U.S. and China. Whenever there was a sport event, the media, through their U.S.-China lenses, would cultivate the possibility of rapprochement between Iran and America. Even though Iranian wrestlers and soccer players had met a decade ago, no real ping pong match had happened until July 2008. As it was often the case, the American side stepped forward and invited Iranians to play a friendly game of ping pong against their U.S. counterparts in an international tournament. The program had been organized by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which invited the President of the *Iranian Ping Pong Federation* and his team to the United States. Mindful of past issues, the bureau greeted the delegation with a welcome lunch rather than fingerprinting. Before the games, the team was exposed to the idea of cultural diversity in American life. A State Department's report, for example, noted that Iranian female players attended lunch-lectures where "American women spoke about their individual business success stories, learning to develop their own business plans, and being encouraged to become leaders."[352]

The table tennis match received some media attention from a few American media outlets as well as some of the Iranian sports press. Its video recordings were uploaded on YouTube too for world-wide viewing.[353] Both teams, and their governments, seemed to be satisfied with the program; however, the scale was not that large to be able to create a crack in the wall. Only one of many problems was that ping pong was not as popular with Iranians as it was with the Chinese. Believing that public diplomacy is a long-term process and hoping to put the small pieces together, the State Department still invested in this and other sports as well.

Of the various sporting events in which the U.S. and Iran met, basketball served as the most celebrated during the Bush Administration. The National Basketball Association (NBA) seemed to make its own strides in basketball diplomacy. It all began before the 2008 Chinese Olympics when the U.S. Basketball Commissioner David Stern invited the Iranian national team to compete in July's NBA summer league in Utah, allowing the Iranian team a pre-Olympics tune-up.[354]

It had taken 60 years for the Iranian basketball team to qualify for the Olympic Games. The team's robustness had dazzled the Iranian public, especially after the country had witnessed repeated international failures in more popular sports such as soccer and wrestling.

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[351] U.S. Department of State, "Iranian Junior Men's Water Polo Team Attends U.S. Olympic Qualifiers", *State Department website*, online document, 2007, retrieved [on 2009-08-31] from: <http://exchanges.state.gov/sports/visitor/iran-water-polo.html>

[352] U.S. Department of State, "Myths and Making New Friends: U.S. - Iranian Table Tennis Friendship Tour", *State Department website*, online document, 2008, retrieved [on 2009-12-08] from: <http://exchanges.state.gov/sports/visitor/072408.html>

[353] Iranian Ping Pong Federation, "Aya ba Safare Teame Melli Iran be America Diplomacy-e Ping Pong-e Chin Tekrar Mishavad?" (Would Iran-US Ping Pong be Simlilar to U.S-China Game?), *IranPingPong*, online document, 2008, retrieved [2011-05-13] from <http://www.iranpingpong.ir/Daily_Notes.asp?Sec=Archive&S=14>

[354] Wojnarowski, Adrian. "NBA Teams Cleared to Negotiate with Iranians" *Yahoo! Sports*, online document, 20 Aug. 2009, retrieved [on 2010-09-25] from: <http://sports.yahoo.com/olympics/beijing/basketball/news?slug=aw-nbairanianplayers082008>

Iranian basketball players traveled to the U.S. in July 2008 and were greeted with open arms and enthusiasm. They played four games in Salt Lake City, Utah and enjoyed an array of cultural events scheduled for them by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The publicity was positive as well and their participation in the tournament resonated back home in the Iranian news networks. Events were also covered by Voice of America's Persian service which had just begun focusing on covering sports news in Iran, too. Both Iranians and Americans celebrated the event; some evidence of this, for example, reverberated in the comments section on video recordings of the event on YouTube.

The talent of one of Iran's players, Hamed Haddadi, even later led to the Memphis Grizzlies recruiting the NBA's first Iranian player. Haddadi had played in the Iranian Basketball Super League and Saba Mehr Qazvin Basketball Club and had finally made his world debut at the 2008 Summer Olympics. He was offered basketball contracts in other countries but was quoted in saying that playing for the NBA had been his dream.[355] The recruitment even made national news in both the United States and Iran. A CNN report read: "From nuclear weapons to human rights, the image of Iran is quite negative in America. But with little fanfare, one Iranian man has won hearts and cheers battling Americans on the court in basketball arenas around the country."[356] This seemed not to be an exaggeration. Teammates and fans seemed unconcerned with the heated political discourse about Iran reverberating throughout the country. Media even covered a *kebab fest*, which Haddadi had taken his teammates to in a Persian restaurant. But Haddadi's début into NBA stardom was not without political drama. U.S. sanctions on Iran had prohibited any American individual or organization from conducting business with Iranian nationals.[357] In order to recruit Haddadi, the NBA had to apply for a U.S. government license to get permission for Haddadi to play. Fortunately, like many other cases of cultural transactions, the license was approved.

Haddadi gained national attention again for his Iranian heritage when L.A. Clipper announcers Ralph Lawler and Mike Smith made what was deemed inappropriate jokes about the player. "You're sure it's not Borat's older brother?" said Smith during a live show. "If they ever make a movie about Haddadi, I'm going to get Sacha Baron Cohen to play the part."[358] Although both anchors were suspended for one game and later apologized for offending their viewers, the event left a bitter taste for Haddadi's Iranian fans.

When interviewed by CNN, Haddadi's manager Mayar Zokaei mentioned that "He's gotten more press then any of his teammates this year and the past couple of years, just for the sole reason that he's Iranian-American. Iranian playing basketball in America ... that's rare. [There aren't many] Iranians doing anything in bona fide sports arenas in the U.S." Off the court, Haddadi has been using his influence to help bridge the gap between Iranian-Americans and basketball, too. He helped create the Hamed Haddadi Javanan Foundation, a charity organization which aims to award college scholarships to student athletes particularly in the field of basketball. In 2009, Haddadi co-hosted a successful children's basketball camp aimed at the Iranian-American community.

In September 2010, Haddadi briefly rejoined the Iranian basketball league against the United States in the World Basketball Championships in Turkey. By all accounts, the teams faced off with great sportsmanship, with many accounts

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[355] Wojnarowski, "NBA Teams Cleared to Negotiate with Iranians", *Yahoo! Sports*.

[356] Yisrael, Michaela and Richard Roth, "Iranian playing in NBA scores with America", *Cable News Network*, April 15, 2010, online document, retrieved [on 2011-08-31] from: <http://edition.cnn.com>

[357] Yisrael, Michaela. "Iranian Playing in NBA Scores with America", *Cable News Network*, April 14, 2010, retrieved [on 2010-08-31] from: <http://www.cnn.com/2010/SPORT/04/14/iranian.basketball.player/index.html>

[358] Yisrael, Michaela. "Iranian Playing in NBA Scores with America", *Cable News Network*. 2010.

of players and fans expressing a wish for the two countries to have friendly relations off the court, blaming politicians for the tensions.[359] The game attracted little political attention, and despite the U.S. winning the game 88 to 51, it was clear that fans and players alike walked away with feelings of respect for their counterparts. By this time, the United States and Iran were deeply entangled in their controversy over Iran's nuclear program. It was also partly due to Iran's reluctance to engage the United States after its post-election unrest in 2009.

In addition to admiring bi-national agreements, public diplomats have often recognized the role which individual citizens play in sports diplomacy. Haddadi was certainly a popular Iranian sportsman in the U.S., but he was not the only citizen athlete to get engaged in sports and give it a diplomatic swing. Sarah Kureshi, an American, was also involved in citizen diplomacy, even before Haddadi.

Kureshi was the first American female athlete who visited Iran after the 1979 revolution. In 2005, while not sponsored directly by any government, she traveled to Iran as a private citizen to attend the Muslim Women's Games. Kureshi and her coach learned about the 4th Muslim Women's Games being held in Tehran and applied to participate as a runner athlete. She was the only American in the games and her presence was continuously noticed by the local and international media covering the event. The games were an attempt by Iran's Women's Sport Federation to build mutual understanding among Muslim women. Kureshi, from a Pakistani background, was delighted to see that Iranians had prepared for her a *big American flag*, something that she had not anticipated. She also mentioned later that she was happy that she could represent Muslim Americans in Iran and that she hoped she would publish articles about Iranians when she returned home. A *Christian Science Monitor* report on the eve of the games was indicative of this positive experience:

> Iranians have shown a deep interest in her presence and her perceptions, she says. Kureshi expects that Americans, too, will be interested in hearing from a person who has visited a nation President Bush labeled as part of the "axis of evil".[360]

The findings on Kureshi's experience, as well as official sport exchanges between Iran and the United States, show that sports have a certain capacity to transcend political dilemmas and let populations engage each other in the form of individual citizens and teams. There are of course cases where the sport "Trojan horse" is unsuccessful in penetrating the boundaries. This could be due, however, to a multiplicity of factors some of which will be discussed now.

3.3.6.3 Failed Attempts in Sports

The previously mentioned soccer mismatches were not the only failures in sport diplomacy between Iran and the United States. One of the controversial cases of sport exchanges was kayaking.

On June 2007, an Iranian kayaking team planned to travel to the U.S. to train for the upcoming Beijing Olympic Qualifiers. The coach, Katayun Ashraf, was in charge of coordinating the details with the American partner. When the Iranian Kayaking Federation was asked to approve the event, they granted them permission but with a conditional clause: only if there was no fingerprinting. Since the American partner could not guarantee that, the Iranian Federation backed off from supporting the event.[361] A strange incident occurred when the

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[359] Peterson, Scott. "U.S. and Iran Face off at World Basketball Championships", *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 30, 2009, p.3.

[360] Patterson, Scott, "In Iran, U.S. Runner Joins the Races", *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 30, 2005, p.A4.

[361] Anonymous, "Federatione Ghayeghrani Iran Dokhtarane Ghayeghrane Teame Melli ra Belate Raftan be America Ekhraj Kard", (Iranian Kayaking Federation Fires Kayakers

Iranian coach maintained contact with his American counterpart and in a defiant move decided that the team would still travel to the U.S.

The Iranian players entered the United States and underwent their training as scheduled. Media outlets in the U.S., such as Voice of America, also reported on the event. Its headline read "Athletic Diplomacy between Iran-US"[362] while *USA Today* once again juxtaposed the kayaking exchange with the famous U.S.-China's "ping pong diplomacy." [363]

Based on these reports, Iranians were well received in the U.S. and there were discussions about important issues such as the role of women in Iran and how sports can foster better relations between the two countries. In Iran, however, the Iranian Kayaking Federation, angry with Ashraf's personal initiative, issued a statement repudiating the event and fired the coach from her position.

The USA Today report mentioned that the four Iranian paddlers were exchanging ideas, as was hoped, but because the Iranian government and its federation were not on board, prospects of progress for tangible diplomacy proved to be unproductive, especially after the angry statement from the Iranian federation.

At the beginning of the Obama era, many Americans and Iranians had hoped for progress in diplomatic and non-diplomatic relations. Unfortunately, his administration proved to be very ineffective especially in areas such as sports diplomacy. One such setback occurred when the U.S. women's badminton team was not granted visas to enter Iran.

The plans for such an exchange were arranged well before President Obama took office. Apparently, the U.S. team was to participate in the 2009 *Fajr International Badminton Tournament* in Iran. As the first American women's team to travel to Iran since 1979 was making preparations, the Iranian and American media took notice of the trip. The trip was discussed in both reformist and conservative newspapers in Iran. CNN also labeled the attempt as "badminton diplomacy with Iran."[364]

When theU.S. badminton team arrived in Dubai, preparing to fly to Tehran, they were informed that the trip had been cancelled because the Iranian embassy believed their entry visas would not be ready in time for the team to participate in the tournament. A sense of disappointment echoed in both countries' media. The U.S. badminton team issued a statement regretting the incident:

> USA Badminton is very disappointed that our team did not receive visas to enter Iran and…Our athletes were very much looking forward to the event and are very disappointed that they will not be able to compete and meet new friends. Friendship through sport is a good thing that should be respected and cherished…It's unfortunate that we will not be able to compete and sincerely hope we will be extended another invitation in the near future.[365]

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for U.S. Visit), *Final Sport News*, online document, 2007, retrieved [0n 2011-05-13] from: <http://www.finalsportnews.com/ContentDetail/?ID=07o8wg4d83&Type=191>

[362] Voice of America, "Athletic Diplomacy Between Iran, U.S.", *Voice of America*, online document, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-09-02] From: <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2007-08-27-voa31.html>

[363] Ruibal, Sal, "Iran's Paddlers Take Crash Course in America", *USA TODAY*, August 6, 2007, p. 12.

[364] "Badminton Diplomacy with Iran", Cable News Network, online document, 1998, retrieved [on 2010-06-07] from: <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0902/02/sitroom.02.html>

[365] USA Badminton, "Statement Regarding Team Not Receiving Visas to Enter Iran for the 2009 Fajr International Badminton Tournament", *USA Badminton Website*, 2009, retrieved [on 2009-10-06] From: <http://usabadminton.org/news/2009/02/04/usa-badminton-statement-regarding-

The Iranian counterpart (i.e., the Badminton Federation) was equally disappointed. Among other Middle Eastern nations, Iranians have always prided themselves on their high level of hospitality and such an event was inexcusable. Even Iran's Badminton Federation objected to the country's Foreign Ministry for its failure to issue the visas.

The event did not pass unreciprocated on the American side. To hit back, the U.S. State Department refrained from issuing visas for three Iranian karate referees who were scheduled to attend a training event in Las Vegas soon after the badminton games in Iran.[366] Such a failure at such an early stage of Obama's presidency loomed paradoxical and ominous.

A similar fiasco happened in the realm of citizen diplomacy**.** After Sarah Kureshi's accomplishment, Philip Roth, an American citizen in Bulgaria, made a request to participate in Iran's Alpine Skiing contest in March 2009. Although the Iranian Ski Federation had sent a letter to its embassy in Bulgaria for a speedy process of the visa application, the American skier saw his hopes dashed when he was denied entry into Iran.[367]

During the Obama administration, early negotiations between athletic organizations in both countries promised to produce more results than the Bush administration's efforts. Official reports even surfaced hinting at the possibility that the U.S. soccer team would visit Iran for a friendly soccer match. But, because of Iran's political unrest after its disputed presidential elections in June 2009, and continuous controversy over its nuclear issue, this and other sports programs were to be put on hold.

After conducting almost 30 sports exchanges between two hostile governments, important lessons can be learned from such cultural diplomacy between Iran and the United States.

First, sports are very much likely to bring people together but that is by no means always the case. High-stakes competitions are more likely to foster violence and bitter sentiments than friendly competition, as in the case of the World Cup soccer games between Egypt and Libya in 2010 or even between Iran and the United States in 1998. Both teams implemented extreme precautions yet still the feedback on the part of the spectators and the public in general was negative, leaning towards harboring animosity rather than friendship (see above). On the other hand, sports diplomacy is more likely to be effective in winning the hearts and minds of the people when the events are *friendly*. The mediocre level of rivalry during friendly games leads the athletes and the public to move beyond emotionally negative feelings towards each other and thus is more likely to result in peace-building.

Second, a central theme in sports exchange is respect. Ensuring the elementary standards of hospitality and respect are especially important when it comes to nations with a history of mistrust towards each other. Related, and of course opposite to this idea has been the practice of fingerprinting the Iranian athletic delegations by U.S. government officials upon their very first exposure to America. Based on my findings, such incidents have proven to be reoccurring and controversial in the history of U.S.-Iranian sports diplomacy. Such acts are detrimental to the core values of hospitality and mutual respect in exchanges and can hinder diplomacy efforts.

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team-not-receiving-visas-to-enter-iran-for-the-2009-fajr-international-badminton-tournament/9446>

[366] "Saye Chaleshe Diplomacy Badminton bar Ravabete Varzeshe Iran va America", (Badminton Diplomacy Affects Iran-U.S. Sports Relations), *Tabnak*, online document, 2009, retrieved [on 2011-05-13] from:<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=35642>

[367] "Mokhalefate Iran ba Hozoore Eskibaze Amricaee dar Darbandsar" (Iran Refuses Visa to U.S. Skier), *Tabnak*, online document, 2009, retrieved [on 2011-05-13] from: <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=37504>

Third, probable sabotage committed by third parties or factions against the dialogue should be taken into account. Such reactions at sporting events, if sizeable, undermine the initiative's success. For example, the protests of some Iranian-Americans who tend to view an athletic event as a political tool for the Iranian administration they dislike, and the uproar among the spectators who recognize the political opportunity of the events can be detrimental to the way such events are covered by the media and can sometimes derail them from their intended purpose.

Fourth, there should be an overall strategic outlook in selecting a particular type of sport. Sports with the highest impact factor should be selected. Such characteristics as a sport's popularity, number of athletes involved, the appeal to the public and the media, socio-economic implications, and also expenses, should be taken into account. A good example in the Iran-U.S. case has been the wrestling match. A classic sport with a huge fan base especially among the middle and lower class youth in Iran, wrestling always receives national attention through broadcast and traditional media. As it has been the case, the Iranian local media covers Iranian wrestling matches that take place in the United States. These events leave both nations a pleasant memory about each other even though their capacity is ultimately limited.

Successful cases of exchange between Iran and the U.S. are evidence to the fact that sports will greatly enhance the image of both nations and create a friendly environment. If there is honesty in governments to increase their people-to-people exchanges without politicizing them, then they can manage variables such as angry spectators or produce an atmosphere of friendship through fair-play advertisements and activities.

Since the famous ping-pong match between the U.S. and China in 1971, which is often referred to as the ice-breaker for their official diplomatic relations, sports have been a desirable tool for the U.S. government to bridge gaps and thaw frigid relationships.[368] Relying on that model in 1998, sports became the first arena in which the United States and Iran tried to put aside their hostilities.[369] My analysis of U.S.-Iran sports initiatives here concludes that, except in very few cases, sports do reduce tensions between these two nations, but the capacity can not surpass beyond real expectations. There are many other variables, like economic or security disputes, which affect official relationships between governments; dealing with them in an official environment is as important as dealing with the wall of mistrust between the nations.

3.4 US-Iran Cultural Diplomacy in Retrospect

It is the task of cultural exchanges to bring about understanding of cultures, fill knowledge gaps between nations, and repair or consolidate relations.

The history of cultural contacts between Iran and the United States dates back to the 19th century when amid official indifference shown from both the Persian and American governments, Christian missionaries (e.g., those from the Presbyterian Church) aspired to expand the reach of American religiosity and ethics to a country located 6,000 miles away from their homeland.

Throughout the 19th and 20th century, as the United States ascended into the international arena as a major player and later a mighty superpower, the Iranian rulers developed a special fondness for America. It was during the three quarters of the 20th century, and especially after the Second World War, that the Shahs of Iran began to emulate the United States in almost every fashion. Multitudes of military and economic co-operation agreements were signed and were

[368] Wang, Guanhua, "Friendship First: China's Sports Diplomacy in the Cold War Era", *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 12.3-4 (Fall-Winter, 2003, pp. 133-153.

[369] Omestad, T., "Wrestling with Tehran." *U.S. News & World Report*, 124(8), 1998, p. 44.

accompanied by a plethora of cultural and educational exchanges. American and Iranian educators from various branches of science such as agriculture, health, engineering, language, history, and politics met each other and exchanged views. It was mostly a one-way relationship. While the United States supported change in almost every aspect of Iranian life, the Iranian society could only listen and in exchange, at best, open its vast reservoir of historical heritage for joint exploration projects.

During the better part of the 20th century, the poor and underdeveloped country of Iran was in dire need of modernization and Iranian rulers had eagerly sought this from their relationship with the United States. Such eagerness was very evident in the case of sending tens of thousands of Iranian students to the United States in the 1970s. As mentioned, there were around 50,000 Iranian citizens studying in the U.S. on the eve of the Iranian Revolution - more than any country in the world and a record number during the 20th century.

In 1979, the monarchy in Iran collapsed and with it the wall of friendship built between Iran and the United States. The Islamic Revolution became, after all, an anti-American movement. The revolutionary discourse was composed of a strong sense of anti-imperialism especially shaped by the aversion about the encroachment of western culture into the everyday life of Iranians. Ayatollah Khomeini, the clergyman who led the Islamic revolution, repeatedly chastised the United States in his anti-imperialist sermons:

> The United States would not hesitate to commit any crime in order to secure its cultural, military, economic, and political dominance over the oppressed nations. It uses its propaganda tools to further colonize the tyrannized community.[370]

The result of such sentiments was to fight imperialism in its many forms including cultural imperialism. Thus, all the ties with the western powers, especially the United States, were severed. The policy of fending off the United States soon became a strong pillar in Iranian foreign policy. Leaders and statesmen who ruled Iran after Ayatollah Khomeini also continued the same policy. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the second leader of the revolutionary Iran who succeeded Khomeini in 1989, reiterated the same policy lines about Iran's approach towards the United States:

> We talk to the United States from our public tribunes. We call upon their statesmen to stop their threats and inducements. They won't be able to influence the will of the revolutionary Iran and its politicians. Like in the past, we call once again that we don't want relations with the United States.[371]

It took more than two decades for the temper to be tamed. The revolutionary mood only shifted after the election of the reformist Mohammad Khatami to the presidency in Iran. Based on his idea of dialogue among civilizations, Khatami opened the door to cultural relations between the United States and Iran. The earnest American Democrats in the White House seized upon the chance, too. 1997 became the year when the first open and officially-recognized cultural exchanges took place between the nations. People-to-people exchanges in fields such as art, sports, education, science, religion, and the environment occurred. The open door policy by President Khatami of Iran provided a perfect ground for active cultural diplomacy pursued by the U.S. government. Until 2005, when reformists in Iran lost their eight-year hold on executive power to the Conservatives, cultural relations were only intensifying. During the heyday of

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[370] Khomeini, Ruhollah, *Sahife Noor* (Bright Tablet), Vol, 13, Institute for Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeni, Qom, 2005, p. 84.

[371] Khamenei, Ali, quoted in "Mozakere va Rabete ba Amrika az Didgahe Rahbare Moazzame Enghelab", (Negotiations with the U.S. from the Supreme Leader's Point of View), Jonbeshe Edalatkhahe Daneshjuyee, online document, 2009, retrieved [on 2011-05-17] from: <http://www.edalatkhahi.ir/005465.shtml>

U.S.-Iran cultural diplomacy, hundreds of Iranian elites visited the United States, bringing a taste of Iranian culture and civilization to the American people and learning, with deep respect, from their encounters in America.

Iranian elites who visited America were mostly from the ranks of reformists and moderates. They would feel and experience in person the civilization they admired. In their accounts about their trips (see above), these visitors have often revealed a sense of confirmation of their belief in America and their quest for a better relationship between their countries. The foundations of their beliefs reinforced, these participants would later vocally support change not only in their society but also in their nation's behavior abroad. Several merits existed in this process which would encourage every American politician and congressman to continue their support for further exchanges; however, it could be argued that a major fault with such a trend was neglecting those who still hated the United States and everything it represented. If it is only the open minded and the pro-western who take part in cultural diplomacy it will leave intact those segments of society who are reluctant towards western-oriented change.

There is another problem with U.S. cultural diplomacy which I call the *kiss of death* situation. With a special tendency on the part of the United States to engage the reform-minded citizens of Iran, political circles in the country assume that this engagement is a sign of support for a particular political faction and thus a clear sign of interference in Iran's sovereignty. They consider contact with the United States as little less than a betrayal. In this situation, being welcome by the United States implies taking a huge risk on the part of the participants since it may also mean a termination of their political activity in their home country. Activists themselves have often echoed their concerns over such a trend as well.[372] Perhaps the most palpable example for the interplay of such concepts could be the 2009 presidential elections in Iran and its aftermath.

The presidential election of 2009 was a time for the United States government to reap the rewards of its assertive public diplomacy programs. During the campaign, most of those elites who had taken part in cultural exchanges supported the reformist candidates Karroubi and Mousavi. Other U.S. public diplomacy instruments such as broadcasts to Iran dedicated a sizeable amount of time and space to vocally supporting the reformists and their platforms.[373] What happened after was the official victory for Ahmadinejad, a refusal from the reformist camp, and a series of street protests which was later termed the *Green Revolution*.[374] During the aftermath, reformists' contacts with the United States were exposed by security officials and this fatal stigma enabled the officials to jail the activists and crack down on the protests. The two-clock strategy of the Bush administration and the budget, which was overtly dedicated to change in Iran, were more than visible to Iranians then. The vulnerable central government in Iran rushed in to cut any unofficial ties with the United States and even jailed those who had once taken part in people-to-people exchanges.[375] In an intimidating move, the Iranian intelligence ministry released a list of more than 50 American institutions which it deemed "subversive" entities and outlawed any business or interactions with them (see Table 15).

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[372] Haleh Esfandiari and Robert Litwak, "When Promoting Democracy Is Counterproductive," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 54 No. 8, 2007, pp. B7-B9.

[373] Timmerman ,Ken, "State Department Backs 'Reformists' in Wild Iranian Election", *Newsmax*, online document, June 11, 2009, retrieved [on 2011-05-18] from: <http://www.newsmax.com/KenTimmerman/iran-elections-reformists/2009/06/11/id/348747 >

[374] Mackey, Robert, "A Green Revolution for Iran", *New York Times*, online document, June 10, 2009, retrieved [on 2011-05-24] from: <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/10/a-green-revolution-for-iran/>

[375] Iran Regional Presence Office Dubai, "Iran: Tehran Show Trial Again Cites USG Exchange Programs as Velvet Revolution tools", *Wikileaks*, online document , August 25 2009, retrieved [on 2011-05-11] from: <wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/08/09RPODUBAI349.html>

Table 15: List of Western Institutions outlawed by Iran's intelligence ministry in 2009[376]
1. Soros Foundation – Open Society
2. Woodrow Wilson Center
3. Freedom House
4. National Endowment for Democracy (NED)
5. National Democracy Institute (NDI)
6. National Republican Institute (NRI)
7. Institute for Democracy in East Europe (EEDI)
8. Democracy Center in East Europe (CDEE)
9. Ford Foundation
10. Rockefeller Brothers Foundation
11. Hoover Institute at Stanford Foundation
12. Hivos Foundation, Netherlands
13. MENAS UK
14. United Nations Association (USA)
15. Carnegie Foundation
16. Wilton Park, UK
17. Search for Common Ground (SFCG)
18. Population Council
19. Washington Institute for Near East Policy
20. Aspen Institute
21. American Enterprise Institute
22. New America Foundation
23. Smith Richardson Foundation
24. German Marshal Fund (US, Germany and Belgium)
25. International Center on Nonviolent Conflict
26. Abdolrahman Boroumand Foundation at Yale University
27. Meridian Center
28. Foundation for Democracy in Iran
29. Republican International Institute
30. American Initiative Institute
31. Private Trade International Center
32. American Center for International Labor Solidarity
33. International Center for Democracy Transfer

[376] Whitaker, Brian, "Method in Iran's Conspiracy Madness", *Guardian*, online document, 6 January 2010, retrieved [on 2011-05-18] from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/06/iran-conspiracy-list-western-organisations>

34. Albert Einstein Institute
35. Global Movement for Democracy
36. The Democratic Youth Network
37. Democracy Information and Communication Technology Group
38. International Parliamentarian Movement for Democracy
39. RIGA Institute
40. Berkman Institute
41. US Council on Foreign Relations
42. Foreign Policy Society, Germany
43. MEMRI, Israeli Institute
44. Center for Democracy studies, UK
45. Yale University and all its affiliates
46. National Defense University, USA
47. Iran Human Rights Documents Center
48. American Center FLENA, Active in Central Asia
49. Committee on the Present Danger
50. Saban Center, Brookings Institution
51. Human Rights Watch

The list included almost every political and cultural organization in the U.S. which had established any ties with Iranians throughout the 2000s. As I will explain in the next chapter, while some of these organizations were heavily involved in "democracy promotion" projects in Iran, some were only cultural organizations with the least amount of interest in changing Iran's political regime. Nevertheless, they all became victims to the political turmoil in Iran and rather belligerent U.S. foreign policy during the George W. Bush administration.

Although the list is still valid to this day and no official change in the list has been reported, a few exchange initiatives are active. Based on the Wikileak reports, a few months after a relative calm in Iran's politics, some exchange programs (e.g., the IVLP) were allowed to resume, but the number of cultural exchanges has heavily declined and has never returned to those of the Khatami era.[377]

According to the Interagency Working Group on the U.S. Government-Sponsored International Exchanges and Training, between 2000 and 2008, more than 1,400 Iranian citizens attended various U.S. cultural exchanges and other training programs.[378] The reports hardly provide any detail on the direct results and impacts of such visits and it is very difficult here to generalize on that as well. However, the numbers reveal the extent of U.S. interest and success under the Bush administration in targeting Iranian elites and establishing contact with Iranians in general. As I explained in every case throughout the chapter, there are many variables affecting the outcome of cultural exchanges and it remains to

[377] Lucas, Scott, "WikiLeaks and Iran: How the "Tehran Trial" Killed US Exchange Programmes with Tehran", *Enduring America*, online document, January 3, 2011, retrieved [on 2011-09-02] from: <http://www.enduringamerica.com/home/2011/1/3l>

[378] See Interagency Working Group on U.S. Government-Sponsored International Exchanges and Training's annual reports for Fiscal Years 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, Office of Exchange Coordination, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Washington, DC, e-mail: gsimms@usia.gov.

be seen that cultural diplomacy between the United States and Iran leads to the same outcomes as those of the Cold War era.

4. AMERICAN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN IRAN

In the previous chapter I studied the potential cultural diplomacy has for building bridges between the two nations. I also mentioned the belief that cultural engagement would keep the doors of peace open and provide a better chance for inter-dependence among nation-states in the international arena. In this chapter, I will discuss another pillar of American foreign policy towards Iran: the promotion of democracy.

The idea of promoting democracy is based on an idealist doctrine which claims that in order for the nations to lead a peaceful co-existence, they better have the same politically democratic systems.[379] Following the same logic, the United States government has, at least for the last century, engaged in the promotion of American democratic and liberal values abroad. The history of the U.S. government's democracy promotion initiatives goes back to World War I when Woodrow Wilson called upon Congress "to make the world safe for democracy."[380] A similar policy line was followed after the Second World War and also during the Cold War. It was, however, after the 9/11 attacks that the U.S. government took an even more robust approach in positioning democracy promotion as a central focus in its foreign policy, particularly towards the Middle East. The *2002 National Security Strategy* of the United States, also referred to as *The Bush Doctrine*, which was developed as the first coherent and long-term strategy in the war on terror, emphasized that the United States would use its "foreign aid to promote freedom and support those who struggle non-violently for it, ensuring that nations moving toward democracy are rewarded."[381] It was in his second inaugural address that George W. Bush reassured his audience of the U.S. commitment to this pillar of American foreign policy:

> Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation's security and the calling of our times…So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.[382]

Broadly defined, democracy promotion is about making a nation implement pro-American reforms in its political and sometimes economic system. The promotion often happens in areas such as the elections and election processes, political parties, judicial system, civil society and non-governmental institutions, and the media.[383]

As Jeffery Kopstein, professor of political science at the University of Toronto, argued in an article for the *Washington Quarterly*, the U.S. government tends to interpret democratic transition as a bottom-up movement. Thus, Washington views democracy as the product of vibrant civil society institutions mentioned above. In fact, this approach has particularly been successful in triggering the so-called Color Revolutions of the early 2000s in the former Soviet bloc countries.

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[379] See for example: Doyle, M.W., "Liberalism and World Politics", The American Political Science Review, 1986. 80(4): p. 1151-1169.

[380] Wilson, Woodrow, *War Messages*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess. Senate Doc. No. 5, Serial No. 7264, Washington, DC., 1917; pp. 3-8.

[381] Bush, George W., *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*: September 2002, Morgan James Publishing, 2009, p.4.

[382] Bush, George W., "Inaugural Address", in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Superintendent of Documents, 2005, p. 74.

[383] Epstein, Susan B., et al., *Democracy Promotion: Cornerstone of U.S. Foreign Policy*? Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, Access No. RL34296, 2007, online document, retrieved [on 2011-06-03] from: <www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34296.pdf>

Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan were some of the most notable countries which have been affected by such a phenomenon. In almost all these revolutions, civic organizations, political parties, and non-governmental organizations backed by the U.S. government led mass demonstrations against the ruling parties, exerted tremendous pressure on them, and finally succeeded in toppling their rulers.[384]

The U.S. assistance in promoting democracy comes in various forms and through various covert and overt channels. While the CIA and the Department of Defense could be the main agencies for promoting democracy covertly, many other organizations engage in this process in an overt way. According to a 2007 *Congressional Report*, the State Department is often considered to be the lead agency for such activities; other notable entities often involved in democracy promotion include the USAID, the Justice Department, the Departments of Defense and also the formerly discussed Broadcasting Board of Governors. There are also numerous non-governmental organizations which are financially supported by the U.S. government and play powerful roles in promoting democracy abroad.[385] When explaining U.S. democracy promotion in Iran, I will discuss these organizations and their functions in detail in this chapter.

4.1 A Background for U.S. Democracy Promotion in Iran

U.S. democracy promotion in Iran first began in the mid-20th century by providing the country with economic aid. In 1949, Iran's ruler, Mohammad Reza Shah, was reportedly the first Middle Eastern king who paid an official visit to the United States. During his stay, the Shah solicited U.S. economic and military assistance and successfully secured the support of President Truman for his ongoing seven-year economic and social development plan.[386] It was not the Shah's only visit; in fact, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi visited the United States more than 20 times throughout his reign (1941-1979). During each of these visits, he would ask for more military and economic assistance from the United States to fund his modernization and westernization projects in Iran. The United States, on most occasions, yielded to the Shah's demands and, in addition to expensive military aid, pushed for some social and political developments as well.[387] This became the basis for U.S involvement in western-oriented reforms in Iran.

It should be emphasized that due to the close relationship between the Shah of Iran and the U.S. government, the nature of U.S. assistance was mostly economic and military. There were always U.S. expectations from the Shah to implement political reform as well, but they never aspired beyond those which the Shah himself was willing to implement. In other words, the output of the political status quo in Iran had secured the interest of the United States since it was pro-western and anti-communist. Thus, there was little need to push for regime change. In fact, in some cases, the United States suppressed the democratic movement of Iran so that the Shah could remain in power. The 1953 coup which brought down the democratic government of Mosaddeq in Iran was, after all, a manifestation for such tendencies on the part of the U.S government.

It can be argued that the U.S. government was only interested in the promotion of democracy when the Shah himself undertook it (which he rarely and poorly did). During nearly four decades of the Shah's reign, some U.S. organizations deployed their staff in Iran in order to transform its institutions. And

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[384] Kopstein, Jeffery, "The Transatlantic Divide over Democracy Promotion", *Washington Quarterly*, 2006, 29(2): pp. 85-98.

[385] Epstein, Susan B., et al., *Democracy Promotion*, p. 18.

[386] "Aid Pledged Iran as Shah Departs: Ruler and Truman Agree on Economic and Military Assistance to Kingdom", *New York Times*, December 31, 1949, p.3.

[387] It was estimated that from 1962 to 1978, the United States provided more than 1.0 billion dollars of aid to Iran, of which 80% was military support. See: Guess, George M., *The Politics of United States Foreign Aid*, Croom Helm, 1987, p. 253.

organizations such as the U.S. Import-Export Bank, the Foreign Operations Administration, and the International Cooperation Administration, which were all later merged together to form the U.S. Agency for International Development in 1961, funded such American-style development plans in Iran.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the USAID's involvement in Iran dates back to the 60s. As part of the aid plan for Iran, the agency deployed hundreds of its staff in the country to promote its economic and social growth. According to a 1964 USAID report (titled *Highlights of the USAID Program in Iran)*, most of the economic developments, intended to be achieved in those years, first required significant alterations in organizational and institutional features of a society which was traditional by all standards. For instance, one problem was found to be the low-level utilization of natural and human resources due to the socio-economic inequalities in Iran's rural areas:

> Villages were landlord owned. The owners' control over rural economics led to the perpetuation and continuance of his political and social control of the villager. For this reason, most of Iran's rural population was unable to develop or apply the basic principles of self -government found in a democratic society.[388]

The USAID strained to trigger some changes in this direction by introducing western models of local government, for example. Throughout the 50s, its parent organizations helped establish more than 30,000 *village councils* which undertook local development projects financed by landlords. It was hoped that through such processes, villagers manage to practice decision making for themselves. Later in the 1960s, women were also permitted to vote or serve in the councils as well.

Another initiative, the Labor Advisory Program, administered jointly by the USAID and the Iranian government, aimed to introduce and reform basic labor standards such as sanitation, safety, minimum wage, insurance, training, and labor statistics. As a result of this, several new legislations and decrees were introduced into the country and labor laws were reinforced.

A key feature of USAID's operations in pre-revolutionary Iran was its emphasis on economic and technical development of the country. Except for the examples mentioned above, the agency had very little to do with encouraging dissent or challenging the political system in the country. And in fact, in some cases it assisted the government to develop programs to counter the challenge of an increasing number of dissenting organizations (e.g., the communists). According to the USAID report, the agency developed programs to bluntly "counter subversive youth organizations" in Iran:

> A Youth Activities program was developed to counter subversive youth organizations and to provide wholesome activities for young people. The Boy Scout movement was strengthened, playgrounds and other sport facilities provided, leadership trained and camping programs instituted.[389]

A public safety program of the USAID involved the institutional development of security forces in Iran. In the short term, Iran's national police force were trained and retrained according to the most recent western standards introduced by agency specialists. And in the long term, new transformations were introduced in areas such as recruitment, communications, reporting and records, investigation techniques, and patrolling. One interesting contribution was the "development of an effective anti-subversive and civil disturbance control capability" which was probably linked to the need for countering communism in the country.[390]

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[388] USAID, *Highlights of the USAID Program in Iran*, USAID Communications Resources Branch, Washington D.C., January 1964, p. 19.
[389] USAID, *Highlights of the USAID Program in Iran,* p. 23.
[390] USAID, *Highlights of the USAID Program in Iran,* p. 68.

In the mid-1960s, the USAID reduced the number of its staff in Iran, probably due to American public discontent over U.S. development projects abroad and also because Iran's economy, enjoying its abundant oil revenue, was growing at a more desirable rate. The agency was proud to report in 1964 that after more than a decade of U.S.-sponsored work in Iran, it had affected not only the economy but also the political system of the country. In 1963, more than 10 percent of Iran's parliamentarians came from the ranks of those who had formerly received training in the U.S. under the auspices of the USAID. There were also powerful politicians within the Shah's administration who had participated in the USAID's programs and then were elevated to lead organizations such as the Literacy Corps, the Land Reform Organization, Iran's Telephone Company, the state railways, and several government ministries. One should certainly be aware of the existence of some self-serving biases in such success stories; nevertheless, they clearly show the tendency on the part of both the United States and Iran in promoting what is best described as the *American style* of socio-economic development in Iran.

On the eve of the Iranian Revolution, the Carter administration, firmly supporting the monarch, again pushed for some political reforms via the Shah himself but failed to stop a revolution which brought down both the monarchy and the American flag in the country.[391]

4.2 Democracy Promotion after the Revolution

The Islamic Revolution in Iran took the American government by surprise. The fact that a progressive and friendly nation would suddenly make a "u-turn" in almost every aspect of its political and cultural affairs baffled the American statesmen. The closing down of many American institutions in Iran, including its embassy, had further handicapped the American government in its assessment of the revolutionary politics in the early years of the revolution. In fact, during the 1980s, the U.S. government policy on Iran was all but anything close to promotion of democracy in the country. The policy options for the United States were limited to economic embargos and international isolation of an unruly Iran. The support for Saddam Hussein in his eight-year war with Iran was also another option usually pursued. Regime change was hardly feasible and the United States could accomplish very little except for harboring Iranian expatriates and resuming, very weakly, its international broadcasts (e.g., Voice of America) to Iran.

One prominent move in order to change the political climate of Tehran in favor of the U.S. government was the sending of arms to Iran in 1985 and 1986. In what was later known as the *Iran-Contra Affair*, the U.S. government provided arms to Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages held in Lebanon and also as a signal to moderates in Tehran's government to boost both those moderates' position and prepare the grounds for rapprochement between the United States and Iran. The plan was exposed by the extremist segments of Iran's political elite, and a scandal erupted both in Iran and the United States. President Reagan on March 4th, 1987 mentioned both the purpose of this move and also regretted its failure:

> As the Tower Board reported, what began as a strategic opening to Iran deteriorated, in its implementation, into trading arms for hostages. This runs counter to my own beliefs, to administration policy, and to the original strategy we had in mind. There are reasons why it happened, but no excuses. It was a mistake.

[391] Cody, Edward, "The Shah of Iran Given Assurance Of U.S. Support : Carter Administration Gives Assurances to Shah of Iran", *The Washington Post,* November 1, 1978, p. A1.

> I undertook the original Iran initiative in order to develop relations with those who might assume leadership in a post-Khomeini government.[392]

The Iran-Contra Affair was the last move from the Reagan administration to engage the moderate politicians inside Iran. Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush, was also deeply concerned about Iran, but Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process were significant distractions for the Bush administration to focus on Iran's internal politics. The administration, however, tested once again the possibility of coming to terms with Iran's moderate president Hashemi Rafsanjani, especially in the case of the American hostages held in Lebanon. In his 1989 inaugural address, Bush alluded to Iran when addressing the issue of hostages with a positive tone:

> There are today Americans who are held against their will in foreign lands, and Americans who are unaccounted for. Assistance can be shown here, and will be long remembered. Good will begets good will. Good faith can be a spiral that endlessly moves on.[393]

Iranians did secure the release of American hostages in Lebanon, but according to Richard Hass, the National Security Council staff director under Bush, other incidents such as the 1989 Fatwa on Salman Rushdi's death, and the assassination of former Iranian Prime Minister (under the Shah) Shahpur Bakhtiar by Iranian agents created a negative discourse which heavily overshadowed the rapprochement and a return of the favor by the Bush administration.[394]

4.2.1 Clinton and Democracy Promotion

When Clinton came to power, the United States still had no clear strategy towards Iran, and especially about influencing its internal politics. During his first four years in office, Clinton developed and pursued a strategy which came to be known as "dual containment" of Iran and Iraq. Regarding Iran, the plan was to seek ways to isolate it economically and militarily.[395] The obstruction of a $750 million contract between the Boeing Company and Iran's government (the sale of 20 passenger planes), the pressure on the oil company Conoco to cancel its 1 billion-dollar agreement to develop Iran's oil fields, and the passage of the Iran-Libya Act of 1996 were only a few measures to undermine Iran's growing influence in the region. As with the U.S. support for Iran's opposition groups, there were some pre-election overtures by Clinton to groups like the Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO), but because of its close ties to Saddam Hussein and a record number of terrorist attacks against the United States in the past, the idea of partnering with the MKO was unacceptable at the time.[396]

During the first half of the decade, there were few open discussions (in Congress or among statesmen) about promoting regime change inside Iran. The U.S. strategy was mostly centered on changing the behavior of the government. Nevertheless, there are now documents which prove that some Iran-focused democracy-promotion organizations inside the United States received financial support from the U.S. government during this period. The financial process

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[392] Reagan, Ronald, *The Greatest Speeches of Ronald Reagan*, NewsMax.com, 2004, p. 225.

[393] Various and C. Kessinger Publishing, *U.S. Presidential Inaugural Addresses*, 2004: Lightning Source Inc. p. 285.

[394] Hass, Richard, "The Bush I Presidency", in *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*, Wright, Robin, (ed.), United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C., p.137.

[395] Riedel, Bruce O. "The Clinton Administration", in *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*, Robin Wright, (ed.), United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C., p.139.

[396] Jehl, Douglas, "U.S. Seeks Ways to Isolate Iran; Describes Leaders as Dangerous", *New York Times*, May 27, 1993, p. A1.

involved the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a grant-making American foundation established in 1983 to sponsor large-scale projects aiming at creating political change in societies of U.S. interest (particularly the Eastern bloc countries). The establishment of the NED was a systematic effort to replace the intelligence agencies such as the CIA, in order to promote American-oriented change abroad in a more open but less antagonistic fashion.

The Reagan administration in 1983 requested $65 million for his initiative titled *Project Democracy*, to promote change in the Eastern bloc. The initiative faced resistance in Congress and a compromise led to the creation of the NED (P.L. 98-164, signed Nov. 22, 1983). The NED was to fulfill the same promises of Reagan's 'project democracy'. It was not to conduct any operations directly but to provide grants to democracy-promotion organizations and only supervise the process. Since then, there have been four core groups, in addition to a multitude of other small and medium-scale institutions, which have received NED grants. These four groups have been the American Center for International Labor Solidarity which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO (ACILS), the Center for International Private Enterprise affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (CIPE), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the National Democratic Institute of International Affairs (NDI). While the NED has largely been funded by U.S. Congress, some private conservative foundations such as the Bradley Foundation, the Olin Foundation, and the Whitehead Foundation have also supported its cause in the past.[397]

Based on its own background documents open to the public, the NED's work in Iran goes back to the early 1990s when it had two organizations listed as its beneficiaries which were committed to bringing change in Iran.

According to the NED's online database, Iran's Teachers Association (ITA) and the Foundation for Democracy in Iran (FDI) received financial support from the NED on several occasions during the 90s.[398] As I will explain, each of these two organizations used such endowments to develop their underground networks in Iran in order to pursue their democracy promotion agendas.

4.2.2 NED's First Beneficiaries in Iran: ITA and FDI

The Iran Teachers Association was originally founded inside Iran in the 1950s. First acting as a club, the ITA members were composed of teachers, students, and other Iranian intellectuals. Its long-time former president Mohammad Derakhshesh was reportedly a vocal critic of the Shah. It was after all one important organization, in addition to many other groups, helped overthrow the Shah. Due to the level of its involvement, the head of the association even met with Ayatollah Khomeini in order to discuss the future contributions of his organization to the revolutionary cause. The ITA, however, soon broke away from the ruling establishment over some disagreements and even turned against it. As an outcast in the post-revolutionary Iran, its estranged members traveled abroad. According to its website, from 1981 onwards, the ITA "continued open operations abroad and underground activities inside Iran, primarily through its publications program."[399]

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[397] Epstein, Susan B., *National Endowment for Democracy: Policy and Funding Issues*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, Access No. 96-222, 1999, Online document, retrieved [on 2011-07-13] from: <http://congressionalresearch.com/96-222/document.php>

[398] National Endowment for Democracy, "NED Grantees and Former Grantees on the Internet", National Endowment for Democracy, online document, November 12, 1996, retrieved [on 2011-06-16] from: <http://web.archive.org/web/19961112011555/http://www.ned.org/page_3/grantees.html>

[399] Iran Teachers Association, "History", *Mehregan.org*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-06-17] from: <http://web.archive.org/web/20011214191602/http://www.mehregan.org/history/history.html>

In 1991 the NED provided a $50,000 grant to the Iran Teachers Association. The purpose of the fund, according to the NED's online database again, was to support "a program of democratic education, including publication of a newsletter and other civic education materials for distribution in Iran." The financial support of the ITA continued in the following years (until 2003). In 1992, 1993, and 1994, the association received a combined amount of more than $180,000 in grants.[400]

Before the revolution, the members who formed the ITA were from among the most enlightened intellectuals in the country. Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, Abdolhossein Zarrinkoob, and Mohsen Hashtroodi were only a few notable names among many other western-educated intellectuals who had established the association and enjoyed a considerable amount of leverage among the intellectual circles in Iran.[401] The idea behind supporting the ITA was based on the premise that the association is a network of Iranian intellectuals who naturally wield influence over public opinion and if the network and its political agenda receive U.S. assistance then it will eventually lead to tangible political changes inside Iran.

The democratic-education initiative developed by the ITA under the auspices of the NED was in fact a fairly small-scale project: The serial publication and distribution of a political and cultural journal titled *Mehregan.* The journal was aimed at encouraging discussions on human rights, freedom, and democracy. With a circulation of more than 1,100, the Mehregan quarterly was the main pursuit of the ITA during its years of activity abroad. Mehregan would make it possible for the ITA to maintain its network of loyal Iranian intellectuals and also reach out to new activists from among the Iranian public. A significant journal then, Mehregan continued to be published for years to come and encouraged change inside Iran.

In order to review the content of Mehregan and also to study the network of the ITA, I chose to analyze a practical but random sample of six copies of the journal published in 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2001, and 2002. According to the editorial in the first issue, Mehregan was to perform as "a journal on Iranian cultural and political affairs whose primary purpose is to serve as an educational vehicle for the promotion of the values of freedom and democracy in Iran."[402] The following findings are based on the analysis of the five copies mentioned above.

Producing materials for the journal was based on solicitations from experts and scholars who were based in the United States, Europe, and also Iran. Some of the prominent Iranian contributors were Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr (Iran's first President after the revolution), Ahmad Karimi Hakkak, Homayun Katouzain, Sadeq Zibakalam, Hooshang Amirahmadi, Abbas Milani, Abdolkarim Lahiji, Shirin Ebadi, Fariborz Rais Dana, and Shahram Choobin. Except for a very few, Iranian writers of the journal were mostly liberals with strong opposing views towards the clerical system in Iran. The discourse presiding over the journal articles produced by these experts and political activists similarly reflected upon the democracy promotion agenda of the association. Almost all issues began with editorials by Dr. Derakhshesh who continued to preside over the ITA even during exile. He repeatedly called for the unity among the opposition and self-awareness among the people in order to bring down the dictatorial system in Iran. In a 1993 editorial, Derakhshesh wrote:

> Those of us living abroad, approximately three million, claim we believe in freedom and democracy. If this is so, why have

[400] National Endowment for Democracy, *Democracy Projects Database*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-06-17] from: <www.socialhost05.inmagic.com>

[401] Iran Teachers Association, "A Short History of Mehregan", *Mehregan.org*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-06-17] from: <http://web.archive.org/web/20020608113054/http://www.mehregan.org/history/fh-01.htm>

[402] Derakhshesh, Mohammad, "Editorial", *Mehregan*, Volume:1, No:1, Spring, 1992, p. 3.

> we not taken advantage of the freedom we enjoy outside Iran to organize to put our ideals and beliefs into action?
>
> We are now at a fork in the road. We can either decide that our situation is hopeless and continue to sit by and complain and watch the further deterioration of our nation and culture, or we can honestly look at and acknowledge our errors and work to regain our self-reliance and sense of self-defense and combine and organize our talents and energies to move together to achieve the rewards of independence, freedom and democracy for our land and people.
>
> It is because of these weaknesses, especially the lack of committed, mutual support that our nation continues to be ruled by an oligarchy that uses its own perverted interpretation of Islam to persecute our people and to perpetuate terrorism abroad in the name of Islam.[403]

Unlike Derakhshesh's editorials mostly edging towards leadership-style manifestos, other writers tried to discuss Iran's contemporary politics more scholarly – although with a democracy promotion orientation. Some of the mentioned writers extensively discussed issues such as Iran's political parties, the country's democracy movement and its challenges, civil society and the role of women, economic policies of the government, the human rights violations, and also U.S.-Iran relations. For instance, the university professor Homa Katouzian had submitted articles to the journal which discussed Iran's politics during Mosaddeq's era and analyzed the causes of his downfall.[404]

A considerable number of articles were written by political activists inside the country. Individuals such as Shirin Ebadi, Mohsen Sazgara, Simin Behbahani, and Sadeq Zibakalam had been vocal critics of the political establishment who also wrote for the journal. For instance, Shirin Ebadi, a lawyer who was later awarded the Noble Peace Prize in 2003, discussed human rights abuses in her country extensively. Two issues for her were children's and women's rights. In her 2002 articles for the journal, she discussed the plight of Iranian children during wars, the role of the Iranian government in conscripting children into conflicts, but also its positive treatment of refugees during such wars.[405] Mohsen Sazgara, another opposition figure who helped establish the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the early days of the Islamic Revolution, but broke away from it a few years later, wrote articles castigating Iran's supreme leader and the Islamic Republic system. Sazgara wrote an article in 2003 titled "A Nation Belittled and Insulted" in which he blamed the "totalitarian" nature of the "dictatorship" for the "resentment and hatred" that existed among the public.[406] Sazgara later fled the country for the United States in 2003 after being arrested for his political activities inside Iran. It can be ascertained from a review of other articles that following the agenda of political change in the country was the sole purpose of Mehregan, its publishers, and also its financial supporters.

As for the success of the journal, except for the contributors, it is very difficult to trace the ITA network inside Iran. Some of its writers are still in Iran working either as university professors (e.g., Sadegh Zibakalam) while some of them chose to leave the country because of retributions levied by the government.

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[403] Derakhshesh, Mohammad, "Editorial: On Self-Defense", *Mehregan*, Vol:2, No:1, online document, Spring 1993, retrieved [on 2011-06-20] from: <http://web.archive.org/web/20020301195219/http://www.mehregan.org/journal/english/v2-1-ab.html>

[404] Katouzian, Homayoun, "Mossadeq and the World Bank Proposal", *Mehregan*, Vol.12, No.1-2, Spring 2003, p. 14.

[405] Ebadi, Shirin, "Children and War", *Mehregan*, Vol.12, No.1-2, spring and summer 2003, p.33-37.

[406] Sazgara, Mohsen, "A Nation Belittled and Insulted", *Mehregan*, Vol.12, No.1-2, Spring and Summer 2003, p. 24-27.

The extent of the ITA's success in engaging Iranians is also unknown. The NED's funds had made it possible for the ITA to survive and publish Mehregan as a platform for some Iranian intellectuals to engage in dialogue; but what is unclear is the capacity of the journal in connecting with a fairly large segment of the nation in order to materialize its dreams.

The ITA managed to publish Mehregan abroad for more than 12 years. Its present status however is uncertain. The ITA has probably ceased to exist because since 2004, the ITA has neither updated its website nor published any journal. Similarly, it has disappeared from the list of Iranian organizations supported by the NED. The main reason behind the demise of the ITA could be the death of its founder Mohammad Derakhshesh in 2005.[407]

The ITA was not the only institution which was supported by the NED in the early 1990s. The *Foundation for Democracy in Iran* (FDI) was the next institution to receive an NED grant of $50,000 in 1995. The grant actually assisted the founders of the FDI to start from scratch.

In 1995, a group of former middle-ranking American politicians, namely Joshua Muravchik, Peter W. Rodman, and Kenneth R. Timmerman, founded the FDI in order to "promote democracy and internationally-recognized standards of human rights in Iran".[408] The FDI is still active in the U.S. and differs from the aforementioned ITA in many respects. First, unlike the ITA, the FDI has undertaken a more aggressive approach towards the political establishment in Iran. Secondly, it has endeavored to act as an Israeli-American entity by choosing some of its senior members from the Israeli-Farsi broadcasting media (e.g., Menashe Amir) and the Iranian Jewish Public Affairs Committee (e.g., Pooya Dayanim).[409] And thirdly, while Mehregan was mainly published in Farsi to connect with Iranians, the FDI has concentrated more on lobbying the American politicians in the United States rather than developing a network of Iranian intellectuals like that of the ITA. The fact that the staff at the FDI continued to publish an online weekly *Newswire* in English to monitor Iran's politics is based on such an approach. Similarly, FDI members have occasionally written articles, appeared on American media, testified before Congress, and attended think tank events solely in the United States to present ideas and recommend strategies regarding U.S. policy towards Iran.[410]

At times, the FDI has proved to be particularly influential in lobbying the decision making process in Washington. The most notable success for the FDI was the case of Voice of America's Persian Service which, according to FDI president Kenneth Timmerman, had turned to broadcasting in favor of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Timmerman's criticism of the network led to a major Congressional investigation of the VOA and an eventual restructuring of the Persian service.[411] The FDI is still in operation and plays a significant role in supporting the case of Iranian opposition in shaping U.S. policy towards Iran.

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[407] Holley, Joe, "Iranian Activist Mohammad Derakhshesh Dies", *Washington Post*, Thursday, June 9, 2005, p. B.08.

[408] "About FDI", *Foundation for Democracy in Iran*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-06-22] from: <http://www.iran.org/about.htm>

[409] Ibid

[410] Timmerman, Kenneth, "The Russian Missiles We Could Have Stopped", Testimony by Kenneth R. Timmerman, before the House International Relations Committee, Hearing on U.S. Policy toward Russia: Warnings and Dissent, Washington, DC, online document, October 6, 1999, retrieved [on 2011-06-22] from: <http://www.iran.org/tib/krt/hirc991006.htm>

[411] Timmerman, Kenneth R. "Sen. Tom Coburn: Voice of America Harming U.S. Interests in Iran", *Newsmax.com*, online document, February 14, 2007, retrieved [on 2011-06-22] from: <http://archive.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2007/2/13/154601.shtml>

4.2.3 The 104th Congress and Regime Change in Iran

Even though organizations such as the ITA, the FDI, and probably some Iranian exile broadcasting networks had received financial support from the U.S. government, it remained for the 104th Republican-dominated Congress to pass the first significant legislation in 1996 openly aiming at triggering political change inside Iran. According to a New York Times report, it was the brainchild of the speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich who had openly advocated for a $20 million intelligence bill to conduct covert operations to "force the replacement of the current regime in Iran."[412] The plan not only angered the Iranian government but also met serious criticism at home where the White House and also the U.S. intelligence community had believed that such a program would be ineffective. The failure of the U.S. in its previous secret operations in Iran (e.g., Operation Eagle Claw and the Iran-Contra Affair) plus the inability of the Iranian dissident groups abroad to forge serious alliances, and also the absence of any reliable opposition group inside Iran were among the reasons usually brought to attention by those American officials who opposed the plan.[413]

Despite the mentioned resistance from the White House and the intelligence community, the bill passed through Congress and the Clinton administration could only manage to get Gingrich's agreement to spend the money not on *regime change* explicitly but on changing the behavior of the regime. As for the projects emanating from the fund, it is very difficult to track down the money since, first of all, it was particularly granted to the CIA for *covert* operations, and secondly, the CIA itself was indecisive about figuring out effective solutions for its Iran problem.[414] The allocated budget was probably spent on some programs. Peter Feuilherade of the BBC's Media Monitoring Unit referred to the $20 million plan in an October 1998 report where he discussed that parts of this budget had been spent on the newly established Radio Free Iran.[415] But except for the 1998 launch of Radio Free Iran (later renamed Radio Farda) with a budget of $4 million, and continuing support for the ITA and the FDI, there is almost no evidence or unclassified documents over the existence of any other significant project during the Clinton administration dealing with the promotion of democracy in Iran.

When the 9/11 attacks happened, the U.S. government had a weak record in promoting democracy in Iran. After 9/11, the momentum for challenging Iran increased and the idea of promotion of political change inside the country was then feasible in the eyes of American politicians. It was after the reformists' victory in Iran and the presidency of George W. Bush in America that the United States followed the democracy promotion strategy more forcefully.

4.3 George W. Bush and Democracy Promotion

If the Cold War was partly about bringing democracy to the Eastern bloc, the War on Terror, commenced under George W. Bush administration, was about changing regimes in the Middle East. During its first tenure in office, the Bush administration was primarily engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq and it remained mostly for the second term to concentrate on Iran's challenge. More importantly, the rule of reformists in Iran from 1997 to 2005 had created a situation in the country where opposition to the clerical establishment was not only open but also encouraged. There were signs of a relatively different group of political

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[412] Weiner, Tim, "U.S. Plan to Change Iran Leaders Is an Open Secret Before It Begins", *New York Times*, Jan 26, 1996, p. A1.
[413] Risen, James, "Congress OKs House Plan to Fund Covert Action in Iran", *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1995, p. A18.
[414] Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*, p.274.
[415] Feuilherade, Peter, "New radios beam into Iran and Iraq", *World Media Watch*, BBC Monitoring's Foreign Media Unit, online document, October 30, 1998, retrieved [on 2011-06-23] from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/204509.stm>

elites in Iran. After nearly two decades after the revolution, there were politicians (i.e., reformists) in Iran who adhered to an increasingly different version of the Islamic Republic. The United States government was aware of this rift and thus decided to assist and speed the process of radical reform inside the country.

4.3.1 Formation of the policy

In his second inaugural address in 2005, as the president of the United States, George W. Bush outlined a U.S. foreign policy concentrated on promoting democracy:

> So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.[416]

As I mentioned earlier, the Bush administration's two-clock strategy about Iran involved stopping its nuclear program while speeding political change inside the country. This strategy got a renewed life during George Bush's second term, when in 2005 Congress approved a $10 million bill, later enacted under the Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2005, to support opposition groups challenging the Iranian government.[417] A more forceful pronouncement of the Bush administration policy came when Condoleezza Rice in 2006 requested Congress to increase the $10 million budget to $85 million for the same purpose of promoting democracy in Iran. During the Congressional hearing, Rice stated that the money would enable the Bush administration to increase its support for dissidents, reformers, and human rights activists, improve U.S. radio and satellite television broadcasts, and increase cultural and educational exchanges with Iranians "through expanded fellowships and scholarships for Iranian students".[418] During the following years, the Bush administration continued to request money from Congress and allocate it to its reform-clock in Iran. It is estimated that during his second term in office, George W. Bush dedicated more than 200 million dollars for changing the regime in Iran.[419]

In order to implement and supervise its Iran strategy, the Bush administration had made some structural changes to the State Department as well. It established the Office of Iranian Affairs within the State Department in 2006. This office was headed by David Denehy (2005-2007) and was charged with implementing the Iran Freedom Support Act. Denehy was formerly a specialist with the International Republican Institute and his appointment had significant implications for U.S. policy towards Iran.[420] When in office, Denehy tended to support revolutionary (rather than evolutionary) ideas regarding the needed change in Iran. In 2008, Denehy wrote an article for the Journal of International Security Affairs in which he explained this revolutionary vision which he had implemented while in office:

> Revolutionary change does not mean violent revolution; rather, it articulates the theory that absent an indigenous movement for

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[416] Bush, George W., "George W. Bush: Second Inaugural Address", in *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents*, 2009, Applewood Books. p.182.

[417] *Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2005*, S. 333, 109th Congress, 1st Session, online document, February, 2005, retrieved [on 2011-06-27] from: <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_bills&docid=f:s333is.txt.pdf>

[418] Weisman, Steven R, "Rice Is Seeking $85 Million to Push for Changes in Iran", *New York Times*, February, 16, 2006: p. 14.

[419] Katzman, Kenneth, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, Access No. RL32048, Washington D.C., p. 66.

[420] Laura Rozen, "US Moves to Weaken Iran," *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 2006, p. A29.

> liberalization that is independent of Iran's theocratic regime, no reform of the system is probable—or even possible.[421]

For this revolutionary change to then happen, the Office of Iranian Affairs began to support Iranian dissidents, reformers, and human rights activist both inside and outside Iran. In order to distribute the money and channel it to Iranian organizations, several organizations were involved. The previously mentioned National Endowment for Democracy along with the United States Agency for International Development, and the State Department's Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor (DRL) and its Middle East Partnership Program (MEPI), were chiefly involved in channeling the money to various civil society projects conducted inside and outside Iran.[422]

Unlike the rather easy process of obtaining Congressional approval, the channeling of funds had been precarious for several reasons. From Washington's point of view, the ultimate and ideal recipients of the financial support would have been the political entities with active, on-the-ground presence in Iran's political process, namely reformists and western-oriented politicians and elites and those who inherently opposed the clerical establishment. Nevertheless, efforts to support this very specific network have proved to be very problematic. First, the ghosts of previous U.S. involvements in Iran's politics (like the 1953 Coup) still haunt the political elites on both reformist and conservative camps, and accepting such funds would be interpreted as clear signs of making similar mistakes as that of the 1953 Coup. Second, even if any welcoming groups exist, they face Iran's security apparatus and its harsh reactions towards foreign plots, especially those of the United States. Thus, assisting these groups would jeopardize them by putting them on the spotlight for brutal crack downs. Third, the U.S. government does not have an official presence in Iran and the same holds true for the grant-making organizations mentioned above.[423] Consequently, direct contact between representatives of such groups and the American officials has almost been impossible inside Iran.

To circumvent these challenges, the Bush administration undertook to engage Iranians where it could access them more easily – namely, the Iranian diaspora in the United States and elsewhere in Europe and the Middle East. The Iran Regional Presence Offices (mentioned earlier) were particularly established to engage Iranians in order to develop and exploit their networks aimed at political change in Iran. As I found out, for practical reasons most of the institutions and NGOs which received the original financial support were based not in Iran but in the U.S. and EU countries.

Acting like *front companies* (if we borrow a term from economics), these transformative institutions would establish linkages with the Iranian dissidents and activists both abroad and inside Iran to administer various civil society promotion projects without being noticed by the Iranian intelligence community. I already mentioned two of these institutions already active during the Clinton administration, namely the Iran Teachers Association and the Foundation for Democracy in Iran. Here I will try to examine other organizations and their performance during the Bush administration.

4.3.2 Implementation and Institutions of Reform

Democracy promotion is a general concept and in order to find particular issues and agendas in this realm, several resources should be examined. When it comes to U.S democracy promotion in Iran, prominent resources are Iran-related texts of the budget requests published by the Bush administration and transcriptions of Congressional hearings based on those requests, the legislations passed by

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[421] Denehy, David, "The Iranian Democracy Imperative", *Journal of International Security Affairs*, No. 15, Fall 2008, p. 99.
[422] Izadi, *U.S. Public Diplomacy towards Iran*, p. 125.
[423] Azimi, Negar, "Hard Realities of Soft Power", *New York Times Magazine*, June 24, 2007, p. E50.

Congress, the databases and even application calls by the grant-making organizations such as the NED and USAID, and also those press releases and statements appearing in reliable newspapers and media outlets. A review of these documents (some of which I mentioned previously in this chapter) shows that the U.S. government is primarily concerned with the following areas, when it comes to pushing for democratic change in Iran:

- Providing support for establishment and development of NGOs
- Constant encouragement of human rights activism
- Facilitating freedom of information
- Promoting a liberal approach towards the economy
- Research on Iranian political views inside the country and among the diaspora

The emphasis on the above realms has been permanent in such official resources as texts of budget requests made by the State Department and also in Congressional appropriations such as the 2004 Foreign Operations Appropriation (Public Law, 108-199), the FY2005 Foreign Aid Appropriation (P.L. 108-447), the FY2006 Foreign Aid Appropriation (P.L. 109-102), the FY2006 Supplemental (P.L. 109-234), and the 2008 Consolidated Appropriation (H.R. 2764, P.L. 110- 161).[424]

Unlike the clarification in purpose and realms of democracy promotion in Iran, institutions and entities which have received the funds usually remain anonymous and difficult to locate. The best and only resource available is the National Endowment for Democracy's online database, which until very recently released the names of its grantees, and media reports about such institutions and their activities. Based on NED's database, many organizations and their affiliates are identifiable as well. I have tried methods of investigative journalism in finding out more about such institutions and their projects as well as their extended linkages and affiliations.[425] There are certainly many other institutions which are involved in the process of democracy promotion in Iran, but they are not simply discussed here because of their very remote or not-overt links to the U.S. government.

According to the NED's online database, the following major institutions have received Iran-related democracy promotion grants during the Bush administration:

- Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation (ABF)
- National Iranian American Council (NIAC)
- Iran Teachers Association
- Women's Learning Partnership (WLP)
- Center for the International Private Enterprise (CIPE)
- Reporters Without Borders-Canada
- Vital Voices Global Partnership
- American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS)
- International Republican Institute
- Institute of World Affairs (IWA)

[424] For a detailed discussion see chapter two.

[425] Investigative journalism uses methods such as analysis of lawsuits, tax records, annual reports, professional links, and anonymous interviews to discover various aspect of a story.

- Association for Civic Society in Iran (ACSI)
- Research Initiative for Contemporary Iran (RICI) [426]

Each of the above institutions has received occasional grants ranging from $25,000 up to $150,000. As it can be inferred from even their names, each of these entities operates based on a specific theme of democracy promotion. Women's Learning Partnership, for example, tackles issues of women's rights while Reporters without Borders-Canada, addresses journalism in Iran. What will follow now will be a more in-depth case study of these institutions in order to understand the nature of their projects and the real significance of democracy promotion in the U.S. strategy towards Iran.

4.3.2.1 Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation (ABF)

Founded in 2001 by the Boroumand family - who were Iranian exiles - the ABF was a frequent grantee of the NED. The Boroumands have had a long history of political activism originating mostly from Abdorrahman Boroumand, the father of the family, who opposed the Islamic Revolution and was assassinated in 1991. After their father's death in Paris, Ladan and Roya Boroumand founded the ABF based on the belief that "promoting human rights awareness through education and the dissemination of information are necessary prerequisites for the establishment of a stable democracy in Iran."[427] The very personal connection that Ladan and Roya had with the case of human rights issues in Iran (i.e., the assassination of their father) had secured them a position to be regarded as trustworthy in implementing democracy promotion projects.

The foundation is among those entities which are generously supported by the NED. Based on the NED's database, between 2002 and 2008, the ABF received more than $585,000 in grants.[428] Meanwhile, according to the ABF itself, such NED funds constitute only one sixth of its annual budget, meaning that its financial expenditures could range from $600,000 up to a million dollars per year. [429]

The ABF mandate was derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 seeking to "ensure that human rights in Iran are promoted and protected without discrimination, whether it be on the basis of one's gender, race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin."[430] To achieve its aims in Iran, the foundation sponsored (and continues to do so) a series of programs including research, documentation, publications, and outreach.

Aiming to act as a resource center for human rights issues in Iran, the ABF has initiated several documentation projects. One prominent initiative named *Omid* (*Hope* in Farsi) is an electronic database about human rights violations in Iran. Omid lists over 13,000 executions in Iran after 1979. It draws its information from the statements released by official authorities in Iran, as well as political organizations such as the MKO and the media. According to ABF, the project is "homage to the victims of persecution and political violence" and a useful tool for statistical analysis in human rights issues concerning Iran.[431] The database

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[426] National Endowment for Democracy, *Democracy Projects Database*, National Endowment for Democracy, online document, June 12, 2011, , retrieved [on 2011-06-29] from: <http://socialhost05.inmagic.com/Presto/home/Default.aspx>

[427] "About the Foundation", The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, Online document, 2011, retrieved [on 2011-06-30] from: <http://www.iranrights.org/english/foundation.php> .

[428] National Endowment for Democracy, *Democracy Projects Database*, undated, retrieved [on 2010-09-06] from: <http://www.ned.org> (note: the database was later closed to the public).

[429] *About the Foundation*, 2011.

[430] *About the Foundation*, 2011.

[431] "Omid, A Memorial in Defense of Human Rights in Iran", Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-06-30] from: <http://www.iranrights.org/english/memorial-about.php>

offers browsing possibilities based on the deceased's nationality, gender, age, religion, and charge. Since one significant pillar of the political pressure on the Islamic Republic has always been the human rights issue, an initiative such as the Omid, could be effective when pressure on Tehran is needed. The Omid project in general serves as an encyclopedia of human rights abuses in Iran and feeds politicians and activists inside and outside the country by providing a comprehensive set of information on victims of torture or violence under the Islamic Republic system in Iran.

While projects such as Omid are historical in nature, some ABF initiatives aspire to educate and increase awareness among both the public and the political elites. One recent example was an exhibition titled "Interrupted Lives: Portraits of Student Repression in Iran" in 2010. Constituted of posters and billboards of portraits of prominent student activists in Iran, the exhibition was displayed in several cities in the United States. Human rights activist Haleh Esfandiari of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, who had also served a prison term in Iran, had attended a display of this exhibition in Washington's Georgetown Law School. She elaborated on the sophistication of the exhibition:

> The record on display of students arrested, jailed, tortured and executed makes for grim viewing, all the more striking for its spareness and understatement. Beside each photograph is a brief description, powerful in its simplicity, providing name, age, university affiliation, circumstances and dates of arrests, sentencing, eventual fate. At the bottom of each panel, in tiny print, are the names of the thousands of students caught in the web of Iran's intelligence apparatus, its secret police, and its judicial and prison system.[432]

A frequent task of the founders of the ABF has been to appear in various Congressional, academic, think tank, and public events which explore the topic of human rights violations in Iran. Since the inception of their foundation, Ladan and Roya have regularly attended meetings with American and European politicians. An example is Ladan's 1997 testimony before the Congressional Caucus on Human Rights when the ABF was not even formed. In an address which also testified on her political connections in Washington, she lashed out against the positive approach of the Clinton administration towards the newly elected reformist president of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, and urged the U.S. government "to firmly defend human rights."[433] In addition to this, the Boroumands have been prolific writers and interviewees for media outlets such as the New York Times, Huffington Post, Washington Post, and Voice of America's Persian Service.[434] The ABF closely monitors political events in Iran and provides updates on the situation of anti-Islamic republic opposition groups imprisoned in Iran. By supporting a network of human rights activists inside Iran, the foundation upholds the cause of human rights and pressures the Islamic Republic for a change in both behavior and nature.

4.3.2.2 Association for Civic Society in Iran

Not all the funds were channeled through the U.S.-based organizations; European institutions also received grants from the United States, particularly the NED. A case in point is the Association for Civic Society in Iran, a non-profit organization based in Switzerland. Founded by three Iranian student activists,

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[432] Esfandiari, Haleh, "Iran's Interrupted Lives", *New York Review of Books*, online document, September 27, 2010, retrieved [on 2011-06-30] from: <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/sep/27/irans-interrupted-lives/>

[433] Boroumand, Ladan, Testimony before the US Congress Human Rights Caucus, online document, 1997, retrieved [on 2011-07-01] from :<http://impact.users.netlink.co.uk/namir/tstmny.htm>

[434] For example see: Boroumand, Ladan, "Brutality Still Reigns in Iran", *Washington Post*, June 17, 2005, p. A.31.

namely Akbar Atri, Ali Afshari, and Nima Rashedan, the ACSI served as an instrument to promote social and political activism, and support Iranian human rights players inside Iran. The main task of the association, as stated in NED's database, was to build a solidarity network for Iranian political activists through monitoring of prosecution, trial, and imprisonment of anti-Islamic Republic activists inside Iran. Since its inception in 2008, the association has launched a bilingual website to publish reports on Iranian human rights records, and to garner support from among western politicians and think tanks to put more pressure on the Iranian government. The *Iran Human Rights Voice*, the association's online website, is less organized compared to the ABF's online database, but covers similar human rights issues.[435]

4.3.2.3 Women's Learning Partnership (WLP)

In 2000, the Iranian exile Mahnaz Afkhami founded the WLP to empower women particularly those living in countries with a Muslim majority. The National Endowment's database shows that WLP received a grant of $115,000 dollars to advance women's rights in Iran. The Partnership has since approached Iran in two particular ways: First, educating Iranian women about women's rights movements and their shared demands; and second, mobilizing female activists inside the country in order to put political pressure on the government for political and legal reforms.

Like the Boroumand Foundation, the WLP has reportedly managed to develop a network inside Iran and conduct some on-the-ground activism. As mentioned above, a pillar of WLP's activity involves the education of Iranian women through publications and online trainings. Since its establishment, the WLP has translated and published various books on women's rights issues. For instance, the institution published the local-language editions of *Leading to Choices*, a handbook for women rights, in 2003. The Persian edition of this book was distributed among Iranian female activists in order to be used as a manual during both training workshops held inside Iran and internationally sponsored workshops (e.g., in Thailand) where Iranian women activists would attend.[436] A review of the content of the handbook shows that the WLP aims to empower female political activists via enhancing their leadership, mobilization, and consensus building skills. The writers take a liberal feminist approach in discussing the condition of women in developing countries and depict the future of such societies.[437] In addition to political issues, women's domestic rights have also been the center of attention for the WLP. For instance, the *Guide to Equality in the Family*, published in 2006, is a book which concentrates on women's rights issues in Muslim families and the need for putting discursive pressure on legislative bodies in order to change the existing laws in their respective societies. In its efforts to create a rich library for Iranian feminists, the WLP also publishes literature produced by Iranian activists (e.g., the personal memoir of the activists themselves).[438] It also supports several other projects in the education realm such as online distance learning programs (known as eCourse) and an online Feminist School, a virtual website established in a similar fashion to a real-life school to teach feminism to Iranians and to act as a forum for discussions on the contemporary feminist movement in Iran and the benefits of using innovative strategies to engage in grassroots activism. Another project, the

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[435] Association for Civic Society in Iran, "About IHRV", *Iran Human Rights Voice*, online document, February, 20, 2008, retrieved [on 2011-07-05] from: <http://www.ihrv.org/inf/?page_id=2>

[436] Women's Learning Partnership, *2005 Annual Report*, Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace, Bethesda, Maryland, 2006, p. 4.

[437] Afkhami, M., A. Eisenberg, and H. Vaziri, *Leading to Choices: a Leadership Training Handbook for Women*, Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace, 2003.

[438] Ahmadi Khorasani, Noushin, *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story*, Women's Learning Partnership, Bethesda, Maryland, 2010.

Holocaust Online Encyclopedia in Farsi, directed under the supervision of Iranian activist Naghmeh Zarbafian was partially supported by the WLP and its director Mahnaz Afkhami.[439] The project seems to be a response to the anti-Israeli sentiments in Iran and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's questioning of the causes and results of the Holocaust back in 2005 early during his presidential career.

The WLP's most daring project, however, could be the One Million Signature Campaign (OMSC). In the spring of 2006, a network of Iranian female activists organized a mass protest in Tehran to "demand changes to discriminatory laws against women." This campaign was later known as the One Million Signature Campaign because of its founders' attempt to collect one million signatures from Iranian women for its cause: equality for women. According to the WLP's 2007 annual report, it supported the One Million Signature Campaign "through issuing a series of human rights alerts, facilitating strategy exchanges with activists in Muslim-majority countries, creating curriculum and convening trainings to bolster campaigner's advocacy efforts, and providing media and web publicity."[440] The fact that the OMSC was to be implemented through direct, face-to-face contact with Iranian women to mobilize and organize them in the face of a government suspicious of foreign interventions, makes the WLP's attempts seem very audacious and, in some respects, dangerous to the cause itself. The response from the government was predictably strong and within a year since the inception of the campaign, over 40 female activists were arrested on charges of engaging in acts of regime change under the auspices of foreign governments. Nevertheless, the campaign continued to survive and its website, 1million4equality.info, continues to update and receive inputs from female activist both inside and outside the country. The WLP continues to garner support from the American government and closely follows issues of women's rights and political activism in Iran.

4.3.2.4 American Center for International Labor Solidarity

It would be very difficult to foresee political change in Iran without strong advocacy and participation by the labor class. In 2005, the NED provided a grant of $185,000 to the American Center for International Labor Solidarity to encourage and support labor movements inside Iran. The Solidarity Center was launched in 1997 in order to assist "workers around the world who are struggling to build democratic and independent trade unions."[441] It is through its training, research, legal support, and technical assistance that the Solidarity Center helps union workers in countries like Iran to organize against the government. The labor unions in Iran are more than a century old and they have played major roles in the Iranian political upheavals, particularly the 1979 revolution when they joined the cause of the clerics in uniting against the Shah.

Since the discovery of oil in Iran, the state and the population have dramatically been relying on oil revenues. Consequently, many development projects in the country were state run and ultimately state-owned. It has only been during the last few years that a strategic shift in favor of private businesses has happened in the economic policies of the Tehran government. Since the 2000s, the push for privatization in small-scale and large-scale development projects in the country has led to ever increasing demands on the part of the workforce for a more protective legal system.

When it comes to Iran, the Solidarity Center is not directly involved in its labor movement, but channels the funds to other organizations stationed in other

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[439] Women's Learning Partnership, *2009 Half-Year Report*, Women's Learning Partnership, Bethesda, Maryland, 2009, p. 46.

[440] Women's Learning Partnership, *2007 Annual Report*, Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace, Bethesda, Maryland, 2008, p. 5.

[441] American Center for International Labor Solidarity, "About Us", *American Center for International Labor Solidarity*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-07-06] from: <www.solidaritycenter.org>

countries which have ties to the labor movement in Iran. Monitoring Iranian workers' political struggles against the government has been the first task of the center. Based on its observations then, the Solidarity center and its affiliated organizations, such as the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Transport Workers Federation, launch large-scale campaigns to support labor protests and call for the release of labor leaders imprisoned in the country.

The organization has been particularly successful in following closely the prosecution of Iranian transport union leaders during the last decade. In a particular case, the aforementioned International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), managed to mobilize a global network of transport unions to rally globally for the release of one of Tehran's bus union leaders, Mansoor Osanloo, and his comrades after their 2005 protest and subsequent arrest. In the global campaign to pressure the Iranian government into releasing union leaders, union members from various countries such as South Korea, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Ukraine, the UK, Australia, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Norway, and Japan were connected through the ITWF and held extended public rallies in support of the labor movement in Iran.

Due to the support from the NED, the Solidarity Center and its affiliated organizations continue to monitor union activism in Iran and provide its members with every possible platform to be active on the political stage.

4.3.2.5 Center for International Private Enterprise

A change in the nature of Iran's economy is a prerequisite for a sustainable western-friendly political structure in the country. Iran's almost dilapidated economy has always been prone to forces of both socialism and capitalism. While some powerful statesmen (e.g., Rafsanjani) have envisaged a prosperous free-market economy for Iran, some others (mostly on the left) have favored a welfare state. To ensure western-friendly political change in Iran, the U.S. government has adopted a strategy of supporting adherents of free-market economy. Based on this approach, NED has donated funds to organizations such as the Center for International Private Enterprise to "inject the voice of business into the reform debate."[442] An opposition can hardly grow strong without addressing the economic grievances of the larger population. The U.S. government believes that a free-market approach in criticizing the government in Iran would bolster the position of the opposition.

As I found out, the projects undertaken by the CIPE were mostly educational in nature. Organizing workshops, translating and distributing publications, and creating online communities were the main concerns of the center.

The CIPE in 2002 hosted a series of workshops in Cairo, Egypt, where over 20 economic policy institutes from the Middle East, including Iran, were invited. The purpose of the workshops was to train participants in advocacy skills in order to promote the cause of private sector and a free-market economic reform.[443]

In a more particular project, the center received in 2004 a grant of $55,000 to translate four books into Farsi and distribute them among the Iranian economic elite. It is believed that Classic books by famous scholars of liberal economy (e.g., Adam Smith) have been translated, published, and distributed in hard and soft copies.

A favorite of NED in its Iran grants, the CIPE went on to receive more than $156,000 in 2006 and $141,000 in 2008, to hold workshops in Iran, develop

[442] National Endowment for Democracy, *Democracy Projects Database*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-06-17] from: <www.ocialhost05.inmagic.com>
[443] Center for International Private Enterprise, *2002 Annual Report*, Center for International Private Enterprise, Washington D.C., 2002. p.36.

Farsi-language websites on liberal economy, and place articles inside the Iranian local media in order to "raise awareness among Iranians of means in which civil society can pursue reforms that address their economic, social, and political problems."[444] Through its education, exchange, and outreach campaigns, the CIPE has attempted, on its part, to influence the climate on economic discourse in Iran.

4.3.2.6 Institute of World Affairs

In addition to providing financial and technical support to human rights, labor, and free-market activists, the U.S. government has also encouraged purely research-based projects about Iran and the prospects of political change inside the country. Such a strategy would lead to three precious results: First, it would, in the short-term, provide further financial support to the opposition elites (who conduct such research) and help them remain focused on the preferred agendas, rather than be caught up in every-day financial entanglements. Second, in the face of the lack of knowledge about Iran and its political ambiance, research projects would provide ample information for U.S. politicians and intelligence communities. Third, the output would boost the opposition movement by enriching its narrative, outlining the preferred strategies for the opposition figures, and depicting the foreseeable political future for the country.

Research and scholarly publications have been recurring elements of democracy promotion projects in Iran. In fact, almost all of the aforementioned institutions have incorporated research and investigation in forming the basis of their miscellaneous democracy promotion projects. As an example, the Mehregan journal, which I discussed earlier, could be labeled the first systematic effort in this field.

The Institute of World Affairs, a research-based think tank in the United States, received $45,000 from NED in 2005, to conduct research on the possibilities of judicial reform in Iran. The IWA was specifically funded to organize conferences and seminars in the United States and Europe in order to "start the debate for judicial reform through research, training programs, and legal consultations focusing on problematic issues of law and justice in Iran."[445]

On February 6-8, 2006, the IWA and the Spanish think tank FRIDE, co-sponsored a workshop in Madrid to bring in Iranian and western scholars of religion and law together in order to discuss the problems of democracy, law, and Sharia. More than thirty scholars from Iran, the United States, and Europe reportedly attended this workshop and presented their ideas.

What is interesting in the case of the IWA is the fact that some of its board members have had direct ties to the CIA in the past. Clare Lopez, for example, was a director in the IWA with a particular focus on Iran whose official biography often mentions her affiliation to the CIA as a former officer working for the agency. Clare Lopez has had a particular interest in Iran during her career and has been, through her affiliations with the Mojahedeen-e-Khalq's Iran Policy Committee, a vigorous supporter of stopping Iran's nuclear program and bringing a forceful regime change to the country.[446] Thus, it would not be far from reality to assume that the IWA's output could also benefit the American intelligence community as well. The fact that the Intelligence Summit, a network formed on the basis of cooperation among international intelligence communities published

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[444] National Endowment for Democracy, *Democracy Projects Database*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-06-17] from: <www.ocialhost05.inmagic.com>

[445] National Endowment for Democracy, "Middle East and North Africa, Iran", *2005 Annual Report*, National Endowment for Democracy, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-07-08] from: <http://www.ned.org/publications/annual-reports/2005-annual-report/middle-east-and-north-africa/description-of-2005-gra-3>

[446] Iran Policy Committee, *Appeasing the Ayatollahs and Suppressing Democracy: U.S. Policy and the Iranian Opposition*, Iran Policy Committee, Washington, DC., 2006, p.170.

a book on Sharia, titled *Shariah: The Threat to America*, based on analysis from experts such as Clare Lopez, alludes to such possibilities that research in the area of democracy promotion in Iran would likely be also used for the U.S. intelligence communities as well.[447]

4.3.2.7 National Iranian-American Council

It is almost a fashion nowadays for every country to establish, nurture, and run a lobby group in Washington in order to tilt U.S. foreign policy in its favor. Iran is no exception; yet, Iran's most powerful lobby group in the United States has ironically been funded by the U.S. government itself.

The non-profit National Iranian American Council was founded in 2002 by a group of young Iranian Americans (mainly Trita Parsi and Siamak Namazi) in order to help Congressmen and administration officials develop a more coherent and meaningful policy towards Iran.

The relatively positive political climate during Khatami's rule in Iran provided a space for organizations such as the NIAC to attract some support from Washington's political elites. The immediate task of the NIAC was to establish contacts among the significant but dispersed Iranian community in the United States, and then to act as a forum for Iranian NGOs both inside and outside Iran. NIAC received grants from the NED on several occasions - including one in 2002 ($25,000) and another in 2005 ($64,000) to launch an online website.[448] The purpose of the project was to "foster cooperation between Iranian and international civic groups" through translations of capacity building materials into Farsi.[449] The NED continued to support the NIAC in 2006 by granting it $107,000 to conduct a three-week training program for 14 Iranian NGO leaders. What is interesting in the case of NIAC is that since its inception, it has often played the role of an Iranian lobby group pushing for dialogue between Iran and the United States, too. With the post-9/11 cloud of war over the Middle East, the founders of the NIAC became the voice of Iranian moderates in the U.S. which called for détente with Iran. Working as a lobby group in Washington, and often in fierce battles against the Israeli lobby (particularly AIPAC), NIAC has supported initiatives such as stopping Congress from passing resolutions calling for blockade against Iran, lifting of economic sanctions against Iran, fighting Iranophobic discourse among politicians and inside the American media, and facilitating meetings between Iranian officials and American elites.[450]

Despite facing challenges from some anti-Iran or anti-Islamic Republic political groups (e.g., the FDI), the NIAC continues to play a significant role in representing the Iranian-American community and engage American officials for a more lenient approach towards Iran.[451]

4.3.2.8 United States Institute of Peace

The U.S. government's support for reliable and applicable research about Iran involves not only those funds flowing from the NED but also grants from some other non-partisan organizations such as the U.S. Institute of Peace. Established

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[447] Lopez, Clare and Center for Security Policy, *Shariah: the Threat to America*, Washington, DC: Center for Security Policy Press, 2010.

[448] National Endowment for Democracy, "Statement on Grant Relationship between NED and NIAC", National Endowment for Democracy, online document, July 3, 2008, retrieved [on 2011-07-11] from: <http://www.ned.org>

[449] National Endowment for Democracy, "Middle East and North Africa, Iran", *2005 Annual Report*.

[450] Lobe, Jim, "Iran Resolution Shelved in Rare Defeat for "Israel Lobby", *Inter Press Service*, Washington, online document, September 26, 2008, retrieved [on 2011-07-11] from: <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=44031>

[451] Lopez, Clare M., *Rise of the Iran Lobby*, Occasional Paper Series, Center for Security Policy, 25 February, Washington D.C. 2009.

in 1984 as a non-profit corporation (Public Law 98-525), the USIP has entirely been funded by the U.S. government and is mainly tasked with research, education and training to pre-empt or stop hostilities through conflict resolution and dialogue. USIP is often regarded as a powerful institution in the decision-making process through presenting efficient solutions to regional problems. Based on such a mandate, the institute has encouraged research on Iran and the roots of its ever-increasing estrangement with the United States.

According to USIP's online database, the institution has been supporting various Iran-related research projects since the late 1980s to the present day. The issues of concern for the USIP include understanding Iran's political system and foreign policy, research on U.S. policy options regarding Iran, broadening the exchange of Iranians and Americans, and curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions.[452]

Much of the early research projects conducted under the auspices of the USIP in the late 1980s have examined the nature of the Iranian Revolution, its political system, and more importantly the nature of Iran-Iraq war. In 1988 for example, the institute granted $40,000 to Mark Juergensmeyer of the University of California, Berkley to study religious nationalism in the Middle East and elsewhere and investigate the prospects of a *New Cold War* between the emerging religious nations and their counterparts – secular states.[453] Another grant ($27,000) to another professor, Gholam H. Razi of the University of Houston in 1988, was aimed at comprehending the domestic politics of the revolutionary Iran and its relationship to the Iran-Iraq war.

In the 1990s, however, the emphasis of the USIP was more on understanding the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and also the dynamics of democratization in countries such as Iran. It was only in the late 1990s that studying US-Iran relations and Iran's nuclear ambitions slowly became the center of attention for USIP's funding preferences. In this period, initiatives such as Kenneth Katzman's compendiums on Iran-U.S. relations began. In what later became a series of powerful reports to Congress, Katzman simply outlined a concise history of U.S. policies, laws, and regulations regarding Iran.[454]

After 9/11 and the increasing tensions in the Middle East, USIP narrowed its focus onto Iran's nuclear program and the possibilities of political change inside the country. In 2000, for instance, the USIP commissioned the Nixon Center to conduct research and workshops on Iran's nuclear program capabilities and examine U.S. options in curbing Iran's ambitions.[455] After the surge in U.S. economic support to Iranian opposition groups in the mid 2000s, the USIP launched some training and research projects, too. These included projects related to cultural exchanges between Iran and the United States, research to understand Iranian negotiating behavior, launching online education initiatives in fields such as journalism, and the possibilities of dialogue between Iran and the United States.

The USIP, NED, USAID, and the State Department are not the only institutions working to speed the reform-clock in Iran. Several other private organizations, such as the National Democratic Institute, the National Republican Institute, the Soros Foundation, Freedom House, and the Carnegie Endowment for Democracy, have been playing an active role in conducting research on the feasibility of political change in Iran, establishing contacts with Iranian opposition figures and reformists, and creating a network of financial support for

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[452] The data for this part is largely drawn from USIP's Funded Grant Search Tool, accessed [on 2011-07-13] from: <http://applications.usip.org/grants/index.php>

[453] Juergensmeyer, Mark, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, University of California Press, 1994.

[454] Katzman, Kenneth, *U.S.-Iranian Relations: An Analytic Compendium of U.S. Policies, Laws, and Regulations*, Atlantic Council of the United States. Washington, DC., 1999.

[455] Kemp, G., *Iran's Nuclear Weapons Options: Issues and Analysis*, Nixon Center, Washington, DC: 2001.

their constituencies. The nature of overt operations by these organizations is almost similar to those of the above mentioned organizations.

With George W. Bush out of office in 2009, many of these initiatives faced the danger of cancellation and extinction. The Obama administration's initial strategy of engaging the Iranian government had heralded the stop, or at least slowing down, of some democracy-promotion projects. As a result of this for example, the White House ceased its support to the Freedom House in 2009 and many of its Iran-related projects were cancelled. Ironically, the 2009 presidential elections in Iran and the subsequent violence in Tehran's streets once again raised hopes in Washington that the projects could in fact be effective. It led to a change of policy in Washington returning back to the Bush doctrine of speeding the reform-clock. A 2011 CRS report to Congress by Kenneth Katzman shows that despite Obama's minimal overtures to Iran, the budget requests for democracy promotion remained fairly significant.[456]

Democracy promotion projects have not gone unnoticed in Iran. After all, they were intended to shake the very foundations of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy and possibly change the political regime in the country. A comprehensive discussion of democracy promotion in Iran demands a study of the response from the Iranian government as well.

4.4 Iranian Response to U.S. Democracy Promotion

If there are some governments in the Middle East (e.g., Jordan) who welcome U.S. democracy promotion in their countries, the Iranian response to such a strategy has been unconditionally dismissive. As I have explained the roots of such antipathy earlier in this work, the Persian discourse on U.S. involvement in Iranian politics is rich with historical betrayal and malign manipulations. The 1953 Coup and the subsequent U.S. support for the Shah are manifestations of such betrayals for Iranians and the 1979 Hostage Crisis was, in fact, construed by some Iranians as the only viable response to American colonialism in Iran. Since the American betrayal for the cause of democracy in Iran in 1953, the politicians in Iran have been utterly skeptical of U.S. intentions not only in Iran but also in the entire Middle East. In some cases, even anti-Americanism has become the leading torch for the Iranian foreign policy makers.

In this light, it would not be unimaginable to expect a tough and anxious Iranian response to U.S. democracy promotion projects. If the democracy promotion discourse in the west is about helping the developing nations achieve democracy and political reform, the Iranian interpretation is nowhere near this. In the eyes of a historically struggling Iranian government, such democracy promotion is the new “Trojan horse” wheeled by the west towards Iran for the sole purpose of a continued domination of their land and resources.

That said, the fight against U.S. democracy promotion in Iran comes in not so many forms. Even though Iran has historically been exposed to foreign manipulations and interventions, its politicians have been following a simple protocol in defending themselves:

1- Condemning, in public, democracy promotion as an interventionist policy

2- Finding and prosecuting the Iranian beneficiaries of such U.S. funds

3- Engaging in retaliation and counter-democracy promotion activities

Iranian leaders have generally been quick to lambaste any new policy approach taken by the United States. When it comes to democracy promotion projects such as the initiatives discussed in the previous sections, the statesmen in Tehran use every available public venue to criticize U.S. policies. Depicting them as a

[456] Katzman, Kenneth, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, Congressional Research Service, Access No. RL32048, Washington D.C., 2011.

continuation of American hegemonic tendencies, they argue that such efforts are bereft of any sincere intentions (such as true democracy). The argument benefits from the legal umbrella provided by the 1981 Algiers Accord between Iran and the United States, in which the latter pledged not to intervene directly or indirectly, politically or militarily, in Iran's internal affairs. Thus, any time a new initiative (like those of Condoleezza Rice) was announced, Tehran berated it as a plot breaching the Algiers Accord, and of course, doomed it to fail.

Iran's Supreme Leader has often been the foremost vocal critic of the U.S. democracy promotion projects. Since his replacement of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, Khamenei has often voiced his concerns over foreign plots, particularly those of the United States, against Iran's political establishment. The criticism, of course, is rooted in the very lively anti-colonial discourse prevalent among politicians in Iran. Democracy promotion projects are thus not taken at face-value but interpreted as cultural and political assaults on the Iranian nation which endanger its identity, unity, and integrity. Iran's Supreme Leader adhered to this position from the very beginning of his leadership. In a 1993 speech, for example, Ayatollah Khamenei addressed a crowed of workers and teachers and warned them of the enemies' "cultural assault" upon Iran:

> I have mentioned the cultural assault before. This is true and God knows that it is so. Some people don't understand it; that is, they can't see the scene, otherwise they would feel the depth of the enemy's [United States'] plots.[457]

In the eyes of the Iranian revolutionaries, democracy projects constitute the third level of assault on the Islamic Revolution. The western opposition to Iran has usually been defined to happen on three levels or "front lines": first, military confrontation, second, economic isolation, and third, cultural transformation. The Iran-Iraq war is often interpreted as the level were the west supported Saddam Hussein to fight and topple the Islamic Revolution. Since the end of the war and Iraq's inability to achieve its objectives, Tehran thus considers itself the winner of the confrontation in the military field. As for the second front in this confrontation (i.e., the economic isolation of Iran), Iran believes that it survived the shallow and unilateral economic sanctions of the 1980s and 1990s imposed by the United States. The only realm that Iranian politicians have been worried about is U.S. cultural confrontation. Ayatollah Khamenei in 1999 referred to this category when he stated:

> The truth is that today, the international economic and military empire, headed by the United States, is fighting to the fullest in order to stop the Iranian revolution. The United States and the international Zionist network have failed in the military and economic front, and have concentrated their efforts on the political and cultural aspect of their confrontation.[458]

Regardless of its validity, such interpretation and categorization reflects upon the mindset of Iranian politicians upon their encounters with the West and its democracy promotion projects.

The public condemnation of the U.S. policies forms the basis for targeting and prosecuting the beneficiaries of such political and financial support. Viewing the issue as a national security threat, Iran's top intelligence agencies allocate significant resources to identify Iranian and foreign institutions which receive U.S. government grants. Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) has evidently been tasked with dismantling such 'subversive' organizations anywhere it can access them.

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[457] Ayatollah Khamenei's speech on Labor and Teacher Day, 1993, in Naini, Alimohammad, "Shenakht Shenasi Jang-e Narm az Didgah-e Rahbar-e Mohazam-e Enghelab", *Amalliat-e Ravani*, No:24, Winter 2009, p.15.

[458] Naini, *Amalliat-e Ravani*, 2009, p.15.

The prosecution of opposition groups is nothing new in Iran's history, but when it comes to political upheavals and U.S. democracy promotion projects in the post-revolution era, the stance has been tough. A majority of Iranian opposition leaders abroad have experienced, in one way or another, prosecution by the MOIS.

In recent years, namely the 2000s, political imprisonments connected with democracy promotion projects have been significant. In this period, many reformists and NGO activists in Iran who had established contacts with American institutions were summoned to court and received prison sentences. Political activists such as Kian Tajbakhsh, Hale Esfandiari, Emadedin Baghi, Ali Afshari, Akbar Atri, Akbar Ganji, Silva Haratounian, Arash Alaei, Kamyar Alaei, Hassan Ashkevari, Mehrangiz Kar, Mohsen kadivar, Roxana Saberi, Atollah Mohajerani, Jamile Kadivar, Amir Yaghoubifar, Nahid Keshavarz, Ramin Jahanbogloo, and Parvin Ardalan, are only a handful of prominent opposition figures who were prosecuted for their connections to foreign organizations. The campaign of intimidation against NGOs implementing the democracy promotion projects has been so strong that some activists have called for a halt in American financial support to reform movement in Iran. They have constantly argued that due to the anti-colonial atmosphere in Iran, such western supports not only endanger the ones really connected to foreign governments but also further weaken and endanger organic networks which come to existence due to legitimate demands. Only a few months out of the Iranian prison in 2007, Akbar Ganji, wrote a piece for the Washington Post in which he begged Congress to ban such support instead of extending them to other organizations:

> So here is our request to Congress: To do away with any misunderstanding, we hope lawmakers will approve a bill that bans payment to individuals or groups opposing the Iranian government. Iran's democratic movement does not need foreign handouts; it needs the moral support of the international community and condemnation of the Iranian regime for its systematic violation of human rights.[459]

In addition to prison punishments, sending opposition figures into exile and isolation is another defensive strategy against democracy promotion enterprise in Iran. As I showed earlier in the chapter, almost all organizations which receive NED or USAID grants are located abroad. Iran's security apparatus has displayed a zero-tolerance policy on democracy promotion activities on its soil. In the case of any significant operation inside the country, the members would be prosecuted and after serving terms in prison, are pressured to leave the country. As a result of this policy, a large but loosely-woven network of political opposition groups has evolved in the European Union and America since the revolution.

As the third move in countering U.S. policies, the Iranian government has chosen in some very limited cases to engage in retaliatory programs. Encouraging American dissident voices and criticizing American human rights records in the international arena are some recent tactics used by Iran. Following a similar fashion to American public diplomacy programs, Iran's international broadcasting outlets, such as PressTV, Sahar, and Al-alam, employ and invite western analysts and statesmen who oppose the dominant discourse in the west to criticize the American narrative of 'world order'. The case of employing George Galloway, a British politician and journalist, by Iran's Press TV, could arguably be the most successful attempt on the part of Iran in countering the western discourse on Iran in the media sphere. Presenting call-in shows on the network, Galloway engaged his English speaking audience in a range of topics

[459] Ganji, Akbar, "Why Iran's Democrats Shun Aid", *Washington Post,* October 26, 2007, p. A21.

favored in Tehran.[460] Galloway was no exception, and with significant funds dedicated to them, Iran's international broadcasting networks have recently become the safe haven for numerous critics of U.S. and European foreign and even internal policies.

As I mentioned, a tactic in the Iranian toolbox for fighting U.S. pressure was to retaliate against it; that is, to investigate and expose U.S. failures in similar areas of contention - for instance, human rights.

Based on this strategy, in 2005, Iran's foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki asked UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to investigate various U.S. human rights violations, especially in such notorious cases as the Abu Ghraib prison, Guantanamo Bay detention camp, and renditions.[461] Iran's Parliament also launched a task force in 2007 to investigate U.S human rights records and report them to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to be used against the U.S. government in every possible international venue. An initial report of the task force in the same year found that in addition to the historical human rights problems (such as racism in its various forms), the post-9/11 America has witnessed a significant increase in the maltreatment of religious and ethnic minorities. The linchpin of the report was, of course, a critique of the United States for what it considered interventions in the internal affairs of other countries while the U.S. was itself in deep trouble.[462] Subsequent to the Parliament's request, Iran's Foreign Ministry also launched a U.S. Human Rights Documentation Initiative to study and publish human rights violations happening in contemporary American society.

Such Iranian efforts were small in scale and quite incomparable to the American democracy projects. However, the post-2009 election violence in Iran radicalized the government further and accelerated the process for Iran to perceive itself in a "soft war" against the United States in particular and the West in general. A strong US-scare in the post-2009 period led the Iranian Parliament to take unprecedented measures to counter the United States in its soft war against Iran. In early 2010, the Majlis (Farsi for parliament), authorized the government to spend more than $500 million on "soft war" against Iran's adversaries.[463] There is some evidence that the fund was channeled to several organizations and government ministries to design and execute some soft power projects. In mid 2010, *Aftabnews*, a reformist media outlet in Iran, reported that $20 million had been channeled to Iran's *National Organization for the Youth* in order to support NGOs which intend to empower and educate the Iranian population about the western 'cultural assault'.[464] In the post-2009 Iran, programs and workshops were organized throughout the country to educate the very young generation of Iranians over the American public diplomacy projects and the threats they pose to Iran's national security.

Whether such an Iranian response is effective or not is itself an exhaustive question and beyond the aspirations of this project, but it would not be faulty judgment to expect that as long as Iran enjoys its abundant and ever-increasing

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[460] Sweney, Mark, "George Galloway Rapped by Ofcom over Impartial Press TV Chatshows", *Guradian*, online document, 3 August 2009, retrieved [on 2011-07-15] from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/aug/03/george-galloway-ofcom-press-tv>

[461] "Iran's FM turns Annan's Attention to US' Human Rights Violations", *Islamic Republic News Agency*, online document, December 17, 2005, retrieved [on 2011-02-18] from: <http://www.irna.ir/en/news/view/menu-236/05121744961141l3.htm>

[462] Majlis Research Center, *Naghz-e Hoghughe Bashar va Nahanjarihaye Ejtemaee dar Amirak* (Human Rights Violations in America), Office of Political Studies Report, Majlis Research Center, No: 8619, Tehran, 2007.

[463] "500 Miliard Toman Baray-e Jange Narm" ($500 Million for the Soft War), *Fars News*, March 4, 2010, p.3.

[464] "Budgey-e 20 Milliardi Baraye Jange Narm" ($20 Million for Soft War), *Aftabnews*, July 19, 2010, p.21.

oil revenues, it will not hesitate to fund projects which counter the United States in every possible fashion and technique.

4.5 Democracy Promotion in Retrospect

In her 1999 book "Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War", Frances S. Saunders gave a detailed account of the U.S. government's soft power strategies to counter the Soviet Union. She mentions the CIA and its creation, or penetration, of various cultural, philanthropic, and aid organizations in Europe and America for the sake of countering the spread, and eventually defeat, of communism.[465] Through the provision of funds and technical support to its vast and often loosely connected networks, the CIA then orchestrated a myriad of lavish projects such as cultural exhibitions, concerts, publications, conferences, and translations. The CIA was even able to get some Soviet and East European intellectuals on its direct payroll. These scholars and their orbital disciples harshly criticized the communist ideology while hardly discussing defects they could easily observe in the American liberal democracy. Surprisingly, according to Saunders, when the cover for such affiliated organizations was blown, some of these scholars claimed ignorance of the existing CIA connections.[466] Saunders' book was only fairly successful, probably because it was published almost a decade after the end of the Cold War and the defeat of the Soviets. What is significant, however, is the fact that the CIA never refuted the information Sounders provided and only downplayed its importance and pertinence. In a book review for the CIA journal, *Studies in Intelligence*, the then CIA analyst Thomas M. Troy in 2002 discussed *Who Paid the Piper?* and did not invalidate Saunders, yet only differed with her in judgments and conclusions while giving the CIA credit for its brilliance. For example, it once again confirmed the involvement of the CIA in running, for 15 years, Encounter Magazine, a literary journal run by prominent Anglo-American literary figures, but refused to draw the conclusion that it was unjust or manipulative in terms of its content or function. Summing up his argument, Troy wrote:

> To over-simplify the historical background: In the late 1940s, Washington did not take it for granted that the people in Western Europe would support democratic governments …. To help promote democracy and to oppose the Soviet Union and West European communist parties, the CIA supported members of the non-communist left, including many intellectuals. Because the CIA's activities were clandestine, only a few of the beneficiaries were witting of the Agency's support, although a large number suspected Agency involvement.
>
> Frances Saunders evidently was dismayed and shocked! shocked!... She finds the Agency's activities to be reprehensible and morally repugnant and believes that the CIA's "deception" actually undermined intellectual freedom.[467]

As I mentioned early in my work, it would be very difficult to investigate the CIA's post-revolution cultural operations in Iran due to the scarcity of evidence. However, from analyzing the nature of the U.S. government's democracy promotion projects in Iran, I find an ever-evolving similarity between these projects and those of the Cold War era run by the CIA and other American organizations. The NED, for example, as the main organization funding many Iran democracy projects for the last two decades, was after all a Cold War

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[465] Some of these organizations are: Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Congress for Cultural Freedom which were either established or penetrated by the CIA.

[466] Saunders, F. Stonor, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, Granta Books, Great Britain, 1999.

[467] Troy, Thomas M., "The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters", Book Review, in *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 46, No. 1, online document, 2002, retrieved [on 2011-07-19] from: <www.cia.gov>

institution founded in 1983 to contain the spread of communism. There is also a strong similarity between the projects. The translations of prominent liberal democracy textbooks which I referred to previously in describing the works of institutions such as the Women's Learning Partnership, the National Iranian American Council, and the Center for International Private Enterprise sound very similar to Saunders' account of CIA translations during the Cold War (the only difference is the language of the translations). Further proof for this argument could be the CIA's Great Books Initiative (see previous chapter) which aimed at opening up Iran's intellectual sphere to western classical thought in a very similar fashion to the CIA's Cold War initiatives mentioned by Saunders.

U.S. cultural policy towards Iran resembles the Cold War in another aspect as well. That is, putting a large segment of opposition elites on the payroll. It is true that the first generation of Iranian exiles that fled Iran during the revolution settled in the U.S. without much support from the U.S. government, thanks to the abundant wealth they had amassed under the Shah's rule. However, the recent generation of political activists such as the reformist politicians, journalists, and female activists has found it hard to financially sustain themselves after their exodus to the U.S. or Europe. A major function of U.S. democracy promotion funds and individual grants seems to be the provision of financial support to activists in order to sustain them. By doing so, the U.S. government makes sure that an army of Iranian intellectuals will always be ready to attack the foundations and principles of the Islamic Republic whenever they are required. One can argue that, based on the open and unclassified data on the U.S. support for the Iranian opposition (some of which were discussed here), most of the funds were channeled into organizations and institutions based not inside Iran, but in Europe and America. These organizations, founded by the Iranians or run by a significant number of Iranian staff, plan and execute projects which, as I discussed throughout the chapter, will eventually affect Iran's internal politics. An examination of the NED, USIP, Freedom House, or WLP's databases and annual reports shows that prominent Iranian individuals are either employed by these organizations or have received their grants in order to conduct research on Iran's politics. Political activists such as Akbar Mousavi Khoeini, Ali Afshari, Babak Payami, Ramin Jahanbegloo, Hossein Bashiriyeh, Haleh Esfandiari, Siamak Namazi, Ladan Boroumand, Nikahang Kosar, and numorous women rights champions like Fariba Davoodi Mohajer, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Azar Nafisi, Mehrangiz Kar, and Mahnaz Afkhami, have all directly been supported by the NED. These individuals and hundreds of other Iranian activists connected to them, who work as research assistants, translators, or journalists, have been on the constant, if not generous, payroll of the U.S. government. The financial support has either been through direct grants to mother organizations such as the WLP or NIAC, or in the form of individual fellowships, research projects, and annual awards.

I have already discussed the extent of such direct grants to organizations, and here I will concisely allude to some exemplary individual fellowships provided by the NED.[468]

In 2001, Ramin Jahanbegloo, an Iranian intellectual and scholar of politics, received a grant from the NED to work on a project titled *Intellectuals and Democracy in Iran* which theorized "the role of Iranian intellectuals in promoting Iranian democracy, including the attitude of the youth and young professionals."[469] Even though research on such a topic is not prohibited in Iran, and there are many books written on Iran's intellectual life and its connection to democracy, the financial support that Jahanbegloo received from the NED led to

[468] The data here are all based on official and open reports from the NED and its affiliated organizations.

[469] For this and other NED fellowships see: National Endowment for Democracy, "Past Fellows", *NED's Online Database*, online document, undated, retrieved [on 2011-07-21] from: <http://web.archive.org/web/20080415023119/http:/www.ned.org/forum/past.html>

his arrest in 2005 by the Iranian government. He was later released and left Iran for Canada where he taught at the University and continued to voice his criticism of the Iranian government.

In another case, Ali Afshari, a student activist who spent more than a year in solitary confinement in Iran and left the country for the U.S., received the NED's 2006 Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellowship to research on a similar topic, namely the challenge of democratization in Iran. Having been only a student activist, Afshari could hardly afford a life in the United States if it was not for the NED's grants and also other public diplomacy programs (such as appearing on VOA Persian's shows as an analyst).

Similar to Afshari, Manouchehr Mohamadi received the NED's grant in 2007 to work on a project about the history of student activism in Iran. Mohammadi had spent years in prison due to his hyper-active role in Iran's 1999 student uprising. The financial support from the NED had certainly helped him settle down in the U.S. and persist on his political path.

Female activists have also been on the NED's payroll. Mahnaz Afshar, the chairwoman of the Women's Learning Partnership, is perhaps the top beneficiary of the NED when it comes to the women's rights movement in Iran. I have previously discussed her role and ties to the NED in detail. Next to Mahnaz Afshar is Mehrangiz Kar who is another prominent women's rights activist. In 2001, she was granted the Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellowship in order to examine Iran's legislative developments concerning women's rights.

What is interesting in the case of such grants is the fact that some of the grantees do not hesitate to defend themselves against accusations of being paid by the U.S. government. For instance, Farbia Davoudi Mojaher, an ardent supporter of women's rights in Iran, defended her NED grant when an Iranian conservative media outlet questioned her financial record in a rare interview. After having been asked about the U.S. government support of the regime change in Iran and the money she receives from the NED, Davoudi Mohajer, responded that it was purely academic research for the NED and that she was not working for the CIA, as far as she was concerned.[470]

In addition to the above, there are tens (and perhaps hundreds) of other cases where the U.S. government's budget goes to the Iranian opposition. My aim here is not to raise questions about the potentials of such projects for instigating a real, on the ground, political change in Iran. That certainly is dependant on several other variables. The purpose, however, is to show a function of democracy promotion funds: nurturing a large network of opposition figures so that they remain robust in order to megaphone their anti-Islamic Republic points of view.

When president Obama assumed office in 2009, the overall U.S. policy of engaging the Iranian opposition seemed to be on the verge of change. He had promised a new approach towards the Iranian government in his campaign: "engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect."[471]

In order to show his seriousness in engaging the government, the Obama administration began a series of preliminary gestures towards Iran. He appointed John Limbert, a fluent Farsi-speaking diplomat, as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iran. Limbert was an ardent supporter of U.S.-Iran engagement. He was in fact the only U.S. diplomat who had met the then-president Ayatollah Khamenei back in the 1980s, when Limbert was a hostage in Tehran. Appointing such a person would imply that Obama was seriously considering a dialogue with Iran's current Supreme Leader Khamenei. The administration also eased

[470] Talebi, Hamed, "Interview with Fariba Davoudi Mohajer", *Mashreghnews*, online document, November 23, 2010, retrieved [on 2011-07-21] from: <www.mashreghnews.ir>

[471] Limbert, John, "The Obama Administration", In *The Iran Primer*, Robin Wright, (ed.), United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C., 2010, p. 142.

some sanctions on selling passenger planes to Iran. It also temporarily cancelled Condoleeza Rice's initiative in promoting democracy in Iran. As a result of this new tone, some of the projects faced the threat of cancellation. Freedom House's Iran projects, for example, fell victim to this preliminary change of policy. Due to lack of such financial support, *Gozaar*, an online database which had the primary function of putting a segment of Iranian journalists and commentators on the payroll (in the name of covering Iran's politics) was shut down. It seemed for a while that the atmosphere was in the mood for a radical change. Everything backfired however, when Iran's 2009 presidential election turned violent. The constant pressure from the republicans, Iranian exiles and also prominent opposition figures, compelled the administration into changing both its rhetoric and policy. Obama stopped writing to Iranian leaders and began addressing the Iranian people.[472] The U.S. government's democracy promotion funds were also revived, although under variant names and in a more secretive fashion.[473] For instance, the NED, unlike during the Bush administration, stopped releasing the names of Iranian opposition groups which received its grants, due to security reasons. The number of Iranian opposition figures and their determination to change the political regime in Iran also increased due to the fresh and populous demonstrations in the post-2009 era. All this created a discourse in the United States that supporting political change, rather than engaging the current government, could be the right answer. It would be rational then to expect that democracy promotion funding will continue for the foreseeable future.

[472] Limbert, *Iran Primer*, p. 142.

[473] According to Katzman, the Obama administration dedicated more than $140 million to democracy promotion programs in 2009, 2010, and 2011. See Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, 2011.

CONCLUSION: PATTERNS OF A NEW COLD WAR

The U.S. interest in Iran dates back to the 1830s, the time of the Great Awakening in America, when Christian missionaries rather than government officials were interested in preaching the Gospel to foreigners.[474] From that time up until the Second World War, a relationship - best to be described as indifference - existed between the statesmen in Iran and the United States. As I explained in chapter two, the politics of the Second World War and the subsequent rivalry between the Soviet Union and America, brought Iranian and U.S. rulers closer and a period of deep friendship followed. The 1979 Islamic Revolution, for the reasons I discussed earlier, was in part anti-American and heralded an end to a significant period of partnership between the two countries. Since then, Iran and America have been adversaries in many respects. Iran's importance, as a "rogue state", in U.S. foreign policy has not, however, diminished. Reasons could involve the ever increasing role of oil politics in international relations, Iran's restless drive for power in the Middle East, its controversial nuclear program, and its strong anti-American policies.[475] To all these, one can also add the conflict between Israel and Iran as another source of tension between the Islamic Republic and the United States, which is often regarded as the benefactor of Israel in the region. There is of course this argument that such a tendency on the part of the U.S. government to view Iran as a substantive threat is merely a ritual display for the domestic political consumption, rather than a reaction to a real clear danger, but that does not reduce the need to study this increasing anxiety and the public diplomacy aspect of it.

Since the revolution then, U.S. government has been engaged in designing a two-track strategy of utilizing hard and soft power in order to instigate either a change in Iran's behavior or a radical change in its political system. The hard power approach was almost immediately implemented after the revolution. As a response to the Hostage Crisis of 1979, the Carter administration froze Iran's assets in Western banks (estimated at $12 billion), stopped the shipments of American military arsenal to Iran which had been purchased during the Shah's rule, and prohibited the import of Iranian oil.[476] The Reagan administration continued Carter's path by trying to isolate Iran economically, as it was the case when Congress vetoed any provision of international financial loans to Iran. The economic and military sanctions against Iran continued under subsequent American presidents and the policy has recently taken a more multi-lateral tone with other Western countries joining the United States.

The soft power approach, however, has been a more interesting, and yet less discussed, dimension of U.S. policy towards the revolutionary state of Iran. Throughout this dissertation I uncovered the story of U.S. soft power towards Iran: the capacity to attract Iranians through various cultural and public diplomacy projects and to make them want what the U.S. government wants. Throughout the three decades of estrangement between the United States and Iran, the American government has gradually developed broadcasting, cultural, and democracy promotion projects in order to engage Iranians and diminish their devastating sense of anti-Americanism. This all happened of course, despite the 1981 Algiers Accord (the latest mutual agreement between the two governments)

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[474] Zirinsky, M.P., "A Panacea for the Ills of the Country: American Presbyterian Education in Inter-War Iran", *Iranian Studies*, 1993, 26(2), p. 119-137.

[475] By "rationally directed", I mean that Iran understands its position as an actor in international relations, and does not, for example, engage in direct acts of terrorism against the United States like those of the Taliban or Al-Qaeda, both of whom have anti-American sentiments but engage in irrational terrorist activities.

[476] Sick, Gary, "U.S.-Iran: The Carter Administration", in *The Iran Primer*, Robin Wright, (ed.), United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C., 2010, p.127.

in which the United States pledged not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs in any conceivable way, "directly or indirectly, politically or non-military" (see appendix).[477]

Boosting U.S. international broadcasting under the soft power paradigm was perhaps the very first response to the Iranian Revolution. Even though Voice of America's Persian radio periodically transmitted signals to Iran before the revolution, it was primarily aimed at fighting the spread of communism in the country. After the revolution, however, VOA's sole task became to address the Iranians on their conflicts with the United States. Starting from half-an-hour of broadcast, VOA radio reached a point where, by the end of the 1980s, it produced more than 6 hours of radio programming. The 1990s was the decade for the satellite TV and it was in 1996 that VOA began its TV broadcasts to Iran. Later in 1998, another radio network, Radio Azadi, was added to the list of American broadcasts to Iran, thanks to Senator D'Amato's relentless support for regime change in Iran.

After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government took a more concentrated and forceful approach towards the Middle East. The Bush administration changed the name of Radio Azadi to Radio Farda and increased its budget. It also pushed VOA Persian to become a full-fledged network by increasing broadcasts from two and a half hours of original programming in 2002 up to seven hours in 2008.

I also found in my research that not all American public diplomacy was short-range in nature. The U.S. government, in the 1990s and 2000s, with some degree of political openness in Iran due to Khatami's presidency, began to encourage cultural exchanges between Iranians and Americans. The breakthrough was exemplified by sports diplomacy, when the American wrestling team visited Tehran in 1998. Since then, Iranians and Americans from almost all aspects of culture - sports, arts, education, religion, environment, and science - have visited each others' countries and established lasting, sometimes personal, relationships. In his second term in office, George W. Bush encouraged the State Department to engage the Iranian youth directly. Under Karen Hughes, as the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy (2005-2007), youth groups from Iran's sports and arts clubs visited the United States. The Fulbright Program which had cancelled its scholarship programs in Iran during the revolution, began to operate again by launching the FLTA, a language program in which Iranian students would visit the U.S., get exposed to the American way of life, and meanwhile teach their language of Farsi to American students.

The 2007 appointment of Goli Ameri, an Iranian-American, as the head of the State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs was in part due to the Bush administration's tendency to expand cultural relations with Iran.

A more ambitious effort by the Bush administration came however, when Condoleezza Rice requested $75 million from Congress in 2006, to encourage political change in Iran, a measure relentlessly followed in later years both during the Bush administration and after. The promotion of democracy and civil society in Iran was nothing new, as there were other instances of supporting Iranian opposition groups in the 1990s and early 2000s, but the proportion of the funds was in sharp contrast to the past. The Bush administration's two-clock strategy to stop Iran's nuclear program while engineering change in the country was in full fledge after the allocation of the funds. The money was distributed through the State Department and other federal or non-profit organizations such as the USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy. My study found that the primary organizations which received the grants were located not inside Iran but at its periphery - the United States and Europe - the reasons being first, their access to U.S. politicians and secondly, the de-legitimizing and existential threat of funneling money to Iran-based organizations in the face of an anti-American government in Iran.

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[477] "Text of Agreement Between Iran and the U.S. to Resolve the Hostage Situation", *The New York Times*, Jan 20, 1981, p.4.

The early cases of U.S. financial support to institutions such as the Iran Teachers Association signals an attempt to engage Iranian political and intellectual elites. Finding groups among Iranians who, unlike the remnants of the dynasty believe in democracy and western values and help them voice their ideas as opinion leaders, was the primary concern of the U.S. government in its quest for promotion of political change in Iran. As a result of U.S. policy, some strong organizations emerged whose primary function was to voice criticism of the political system in Iran. The work of the Boroumand Foundation, for example, was to document human rights abuses under the Islamic Republic so that it could be used against Iran in the international arena as well as in political discourse inside Iran. Such organizations also provided a support network for those civil society activists working inside and outside Iran. If political activists received prison sentences in Iran, for example, these organizations would use their media and lobbying power to put Iran's government under pressure in order to release them. As another form of support, the opposition networks abroad help new Iranian exiles who leave the country for political reasons by offering them employment in research or journalistic jobs, in addition to making sure that the cause for political change is pursued.

The discussion over the impact of such forms of U.S. public diplomacy is ripe with controversy and methodological loopholes. Some of the U.S. public diplomacy programs (such as in the case of educational and cultural exchanges) are long-range in their purpose and thus almost impossible to assess for real impacts. Meanwhile, a significant proportion of the programs (e.g., international broadcasts) were expected to bear immediate or intermediate results. Despite the difficulty of drawing a causal link between public diplomacy programs and political changes, one can find evidence of U.S. soft power programs affecting Iran's cultural and political discourse.

To discuss an example for the sake of tangible results, one could study the impact of competition between American broadcasts and Iran's national audio-visual networks. A constant and collective pressure from the foreign-based Farsi-language media, particularly VOA and BBC Persian during the last decade, has led the IRIB, Iran's national broadcasting company, to increasingly expand in areas such as outreach, content, quality and diversity. In order to dissuade the nation from turning to satellite networks, IRIB has turned into a multi-media giant operating over eight national TV channels, four international news channels, 30 provincial channels plus 12 radio networks. The IRIB has lately been under pressure to compete with foreign political media after the election unrests in 2009. In a recent speech, the IRIB's director Ezzatollah Zarqami asserted that despite some upheavals in the audience market because of the foreign networks operating in Iran, the IRIB continues to have the upper hand when it comes to competition against the foreign media. Referring to IRIB's strategy, Zarqami stated:

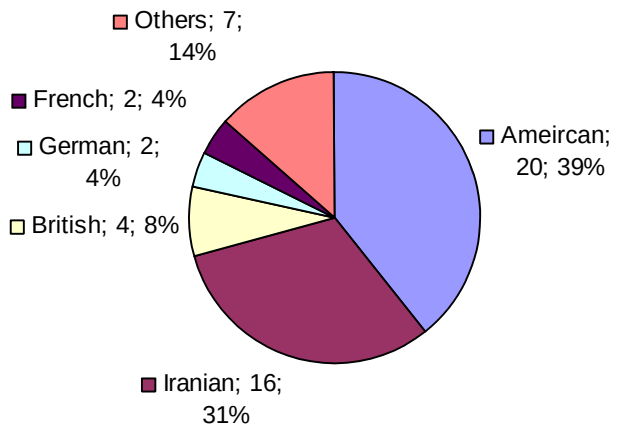
> We are not worried that more than 10 satellite Farsi networks are operating to broadcast entertainment materials for the Iranian audience…. However, we consider it necessary to be able to attract the audience to turn into IRIB's products during the prime time.[478]

Such expansions on the part of the state-owned media in Iran have their unintended consequences. For instance, one of the ways to keep up with the nation's ever diversifying taste has been an increase in broadcasting *foreign* TV programs such as documentaries and movies (especially from Hollywood), not to mention the robust production of its own original and native television and radio programs. In order to engage its audience during the weekends in the summer of 2011, for example, the IRIB broadcasted tens of foreign-made movies, the

[478] "30% Mardom Mahvare Darand" (30% of People own Satellite), *Mehrnews Agency*, online document, September 29, 2010, retrieved [on 2011-07-28] from: <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1161603>

majority of which were foreign and almost half were Hollywood productions (see figure-1).[479]

Figure 3: IRIB's Weekend Movies (Only July 2011) Country of origin, number and percentage



In recent years, controversies have evolved over the capacity of the IRIB to compete with and counter foreign media influence in Iran. Some recent discussions after the 2009 political unrest involved the IRIB's performance. It seems that the present strategy for the IRIB is to maintain its audience at any rate, for fear of losing them to the politically motivated foreign media outlets such as VOA or BBC. The price for IRIB, as I mentioned, has been to follow a culturally liberal policy in the entertainment section while adhering to strict political standards. In a particular case, for example, in order to dissuade people from watching *Parazit*, a recent success at VOA Persian, the IRIB bombards the audience with action or thriller movies during the exact time-slots. The irony in such a move lies in the fact that a fight to stop western influence also becomes a venue where the fighter himself (i.e., IRIB) presents Hollywood productions to its audience. It would not be imprudent to expect that this dichotomy would ultimately lead to further liberalization in the realm of culture, if not politics.

There are other methods which are to counter the foreign media influence but also to help open up the Iranian society as their byproduct. One exemplary case is the process of making copycats of successful foreign media productions. Again in the case of the successful VOA show *Parazit*, the IRIB produced a somewhat similar satirical show, *Dige Che Khabar* (*What Other News?* in Farsi) to counter its effects. Unlike the Parazit, the IRIB did not encourage people to take to the streets or denounce the whole regime in Iran, but it did poke fun at the President and the political establishment in Iran. The production of such a "Daily Show"-style program was unprecedented in the revolutionary Iran and the pressure from VOA's Parazit was indeed an important factor in creating an environment for its existence.

VOA Persian and other international broadcasting media continue to challenge Iran's IRIB in the Iranian market. The IRIB experts in Iran continue to monitor the international broadcasts and their favorability ratings among Iranians. They seem to be ready to consider changes to the IRIB's outputs whenever a strong public tendency towards a particular foreign-base network emerges.

[479] "Che Filmhayee Akhar-e Haft-e az Television Pakhsh Mishavand" (Weekend TV Guide), *Khabaronilne*, online document, July 7, 2011, retrieved [on 2011-07-28] from: <www.khabaronline.ir/news-161397.aspx>

Another more important arena where American public diplomacy dedicated resources was the elections in Iran. As I found out in my research, a particular concern of the VOA, Radio Farda, and some democracy promotion initiatives, was to influence the results of the elections in Iran. It would be an overstatement to claim that they could, or have managed to, determine the results; but trying to discourage voter turnout or to at least set the election agendas have always been on the table. The best case study is perhaps the 2009 presidential elections and the continuous round-the-clock coverage of the election campaign and its aftermath. In the run-up to the elections, VOA and Radio Farda frequently invited Iranian opposition figures to comment on the election. Reformist figures from inside Iran were even interviewed via telephone. Throughout the coverage, agendas such as the inability of the conservatives to run the economy and their disrespect for human rights were perhaps the main topics of the discussions.

When the conservatives (Ahmadinejad) won over the reformists (Mousavi and Karroubi) and the violence erupted, VOA and Radio Farda invited and interviewed many of the opposition figures and crackdown victims who had either escaped Iran after the election or lived abroad and called openly for the change of the regime. Mohsen Sazgara, a frequent commentator on VOA Persian set up a website and called for civil disobedience and an end to Ayatollah Khamenei's rule. Today, two years after the elections, the spokesmen and members of the Green Movement are frequent guests of these networks and democracy promotion institutions. Since the government has managed to control the unrest, it could be argued that despite the efforts by the American public diplomacy apparatus, many other variables are involved in the process of political change inside Iran.

Considering the format and nature of American soft power programs towards Iran, it would not be imprudent to deem the U.S. strategy emulating that of the Cold War. U.S. public diplomacy as a tradition is heavily influenced by the Cold War paradigm.

As Frances Saunders stated more bluntly, and many other scholars of American public diplomacy in a more careful fashion have argued, the U.S. government had been behind many of the apparently genuine cultural phenomena during the Cold War by encouraging specific intellectual groups, funding countless cultural exhibitions and writings, and publishing on western-oriented thought and philosophy.

One could also argue that the backbone of the present American international broadcasting is a legacy of the Cold War. The current Radio Farda, which was called Radio Free Iran/Radio Azadi at the beginning, was not only identical to the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in name, but was literally built on the very Cold War infrastructure of the RFE/RL in Prague. A 1999 Congressional Research Center report actually referred to the idea of applying the same Cold war techniques to the new threats posed by countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran:

> With the end of the Cold War, advocates of an assertive American foreign policy have supported applying cold war techniques to address specific new threats to U.S. security interests, including those posed by the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the Islamic revolutionary government of Iran […].The Administration and Congress have agreed on using broadcasting once again to help blunt the strategic threats to the United States, this time posed by Iraq and Iran, though important issues remain unresolved.[480]

[480] Epstein, Susan B., *Radio Free Iraq and Radio Free Iran: Background, Legislation, and Policy Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, No: 98-539, Washington D.C., 1999, p.1.

A tool in the hands of the reluctant Clinton administration, which was looking to improve its relations with Iran during Khatami's rule, Radio Azadi soon became a full-fledged public diplomacy instrument under the Bush administration when in 2002 it was renamed Radio Farda and its budget was progressively increased throughout the 2000s.

The story for VOA is almost the same, even though VOA Persian was first born as a response to the Second World War's psychological operations. VOA radio existed during the Shah's rule in Iran, but its purpose was mainly to fight communism and Soviet influence in Iran. After the Islamic Revolution, the network expanded rapidly while presenting the U.S. government's point of view but, in a sharp contrast to the Shah's period, focused on criticizing the Islamic establishment in Iran.

This tendency to emulate the Cold War strategies in order to promote democracy in Iran goes even beyond structural tendencies; government officials have repeatedly appraised the possibilities of change in Muslim countries, and especially Iran, by drawing juxtapositions between the Cold War and the present day. This view was shared among many during the Bush administration including the President himself. In a 2005 address at the National Endowment for Democracy, George W. Bush referred to this reality when he drew similarities between the fight against radicals and the struggle against communism in the 20th century:

> The murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century. Yet, in many ways, this fight resembles the struggle against communism in the last century. Like the ideology of communism, Islamic radicalism is elitist, led by a self-appointed vanguard that presumes to speak for the Muslim masses.[481]

When submitting the 2006 budget supplemental to Congress (asking $75 million in democracy promotion funds for Iran), Condoleezza Rice also proposed yet another Cold War prescription for Iran when she likened the opposition in Iran to that of Poland's Solidarity movement during the Soviet era:

> I think the Solidarity model is a good one, where you had numbers of people come together. You had the labor unions in Poland come together, but they also then were joined by the academics, by human rights activists. When people organize themselves and really become unified in calling for change, then you get the change that you need, and we believe that the Iranian people deserve change.[482]

As a socio-political movement emerged in 1980 Poland, it was born out of the convergence of the union workers and within only a decade had succeeded in changing the Polish government through civil resistance strategies. This tendency among the American politicians to copy the Polish Solidarity movement in Iran was evident, not only in remarks referred to above but also in the financial support to the Iranian workers' unions mentioned in the previous chapter.

Iran's Regional Presence Offices were also built on a Cold War model. As I mentioned in the chapter on cultural diplomacy, offices such as the one in Dubai and other American outposts surrounding Iran were established after Latvia's Riga Station in the 1920s when the U.S. government was short of information on

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[481] U.S. Congress, Congressional Record, V. 151, Pt. 17, October 7 to 26, 2005: United States Congress, p. 22744.

[482] Shelby, David, "State Department Wants $75 Million To Promote Democracy in Iran, February 15, 2006", *Washington File*, Washington D.C., online document, February 15, 2006, retrieved [on 2011-08-01] from: <http://usinfo.org/wf-archive/2006/060215/epf308.htm>

the Soviet Union and sent such well-known figures as George Kennan to be the "window into the Soviet Union."[483]

If the American government is following a Cold War public diplomacy pattern in its Iran policies, it does not mean that the Islamic Republic is as powerful as the USSR. Such a comparison would simply be misleading the truth. Iran is in many respects smaller and weaker than the United States. If the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union ended in the Soviet's demise, the New Cold War between Iran and the United States has had no winner so far.

This study showed the limits of projecting a cultural view towards foreign policy and international relations. Comparing the U.S. expenditure on instruments of hard power with those of soft power (see chapter one) it is fair to conclude that culture is far from taking a central position in the American foreign policy decision making process.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

The 2003 Iranian Proposal for a Grand Bargain with Washington

Iranian aims:
(The US accepts a dialogue **"in mutual respect"** and agrees that Iran puts the following aims on the agenda)

- **Halt US hostile behavior and rectifications of status of Iran in the US:** (interference in internal or external relations, "axis of evil", terrorism list.)
- **Abolishment of all sanctions:** commercial sanctions, frozen assets, judgments (FSIA), impediments in international trade and financial institutions.
- **Iraq:** democratic and fully representative government in Iraq; support of Iranian claims for Iraqi reparations; respect for Iranian national interests in Iraq and religious links to Najaf/Karbal.
- **Full access to peaceful nuclear technology, biotechnology and chemical technology.**
- Recognition of **Iran's legitimate security interests** in the region with according defense capacity.
- **Terrorism:** pursuit of anti-Iranian terrorists, above all the MKO and support for repatriation of their members in Iraq; decisive actions against anti-Iranian terrorists, above all the MKO and affiliated organizations in the US.

US aims: (Iran accepts a dialogue **"in mutual respect"** and agrees that the US puts the following aims on the agenda)

- **WMD:** full transparency for security that there are no Iranian endeavors to develop or possess WMD; full cooperation with IAEA based on Iranian adoption of all relevant instruments (93+2 and all further IAEA protocols)
- **Terrorism:** decisive action against any terrorists (above all Al Qaida) on Iranian territory; full cooperation and exchange of all relevant information.
- **Iraq:** coordination of Iranian influence for activity supporting political stabilization and the establishment of democratic institutions and a nonreligious government.
- **Middle East:**

1) Stopping any material support to Palestinian opposition groups (Hamas, Jihad etc.) from Iranian territory; pressure on these organizations to stop violent actions against civilians within the borders of 1967.
2) Action on Hezbollah to become a mere political organization within Lebanon
3) Acceptance of the Arab League Beirut declaration (Saudi initiative, two-states-approach)

Steps:
I. communication of **mutual agreement on the following procedure**
II. **mutual simultaneous statements "**we have always been ready for direct and authoritative talks with the US/with Iran in good faith and with the aim of discussing – in mutual respect – our common interests and our mutual concerns based on merits and objective realities, but we have always made it clear that, such talks can only be held, if genuine progress for a solution of our own concerns can be achieved."
III. **a first direct meeting** on the appropriate level (for instance in Paris) will be held **with the previously agreed aims**

A. Of a **decision on the first mutual steps**

a. **Iraq:** establishment of a common group, active Iranian support for Iraqi stabilization, US-commitment to actively support Iranian reparation claims within the discussions on Iraq foreign debts.
b. **Terrorism:** US-commitment to disarm and remove the MKO from Iraq and take action in accordance with SCR1373 against its leadership; Iranian commitment for enhanced action against Al Qaida members in Iran; agreement on cooperation and information exchange
c. Iranian general statement "to support a peaceful solution in the **Middle East** involving the parties concerned"
d. US general statement that "Iran did not belong to the 'axis of evil'"
e. US-acceptance to halt its impediments against Iran in international financial and trade institutions

B. **Of the establishment of three parallel working groups** on disarmament, regional security and economic cooperation. Their **aim is an agreement on three parallel road maps,** for the discussions of these working groups, each side accepts that the other side's aims (see above) are put on the agenda:

1) **Disarmament:** road map, which combines the mutual aims of, on the one side, full transparency by international commitments and guarantees to abstain from WMD with, on the other side, full access to western technology (in the three areas)

2) **Terrorism and regional security:** road map for above mentioned aims on the Middle East and terrorism

3) **Economic cooperation:** road map for the abolishment of the sanctions, rescinding of judgments, and un-freezing of assets

C. of agreement on a time-table for implementation

D. and **of a public statement after this first meeting on the achieved agreements**

Appendix 2:
Algiers Accord (1981)

Declaration of the Government of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria (Summary)

The Government of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, having been requested by the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America to serve as an intermediary in seeking a mutually acceptable resolution of the crisis in their relations arising out of the detention of the 52 United States nationals in Iran, has consulted extensively with the two governments as to the commitments which each is willing to make in order to resolve the crisis within the framework of the four points stated in the resolution of November 2, 1980, of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran. On the basis of formal adherences received from Iran and the United States, the Government of Algeria now declares that the following interdependent commitments have been made by the two governments:

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The undertakings reflected in this Declaration are based on the following general principles:

- **A.**Within the framework of and pursuant to the provisions of the two Declarations of the Government of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, the United States will restore the financial position of Iran, in so far as possible, to that which existed prior to November 14, 1979. In this context, the United States commits itself to ensure the mobility and free transfer of all Iranian assets within its jurisdiction, as set forth in Paragraphs 4-9.
- **B.** It is the purpose of both parties, within the framework of and pursuant to the provisions of the two Declarations of the Government of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, to terminate all litigation as between the Government of each party and the nationals of the other, and to bring about the settlement and termination of all such claims through binding arbitration. Through the procedures provided in the Declaration, relating to the Claims Settlement Agreement, the United States agrees to terminate all legal proceedings in United States courts involving claims of United States persons and institutions against Iran and its state enterprises, to nullify all attachments and judgments obtained therein, to prohibit all further litigation based on such claims, and to bring about the termination of such claims through binding arbitration.

Point I: Non-intervention in Iranian Affairs

- **1.** The United States pledges that it is and from now on will be the policy of the United States not to intervene, directly or indirectly, politically or militarily, in Iran's internal affairs.

Points II and III: Return of Iranian Assets and Settlements of U.S. Claims

- **2.** Iran and the United States (hereinafter "the parties") will immediately select a mutually agreeable central bank (hereinafter "the Central Bank") to act, under the instructions of the Government of Algeria and the Central Bank of Algeria (hereinafter "the Algerian Central Bank") as depositary of the escrow and security funds hereinafter prescribed and will promptly enter into depositary arrangements with the Central Bank in accordance with the terms of this declaration. All funds placed in escrow with the

Central Bank pursuant to this declaration shall be held in an account in the name of the Algerian Central Bank. Certain procedures for implementing the obligations set forth in this Declaration and in the Declaration of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria concerning the settlement of claims by the Government of the United States and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereinafter "the Claims Settlement Agreement") are separately set forth in certain Undertakings of the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran with respect to the Declaration of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria.

- **3.** The depositary arrangements shall provide that, in the event that the Government of Algeria certifies to the Algerian Central Bank that the 52 U.S. nationals have safely departed from Iran, the Algerian Central Bank will thereupon instruct the Central Bank to transfer immediately all monies or other assets in escrow with the Central Bank pursuant to this declaration, provided that at any time prior to the making of such certification by the Government of Algeria, each of the two parties, Iran and the United States, shall have the right on seventy-two hours notice to terminate its commitments under this declaration.

  If such notice is given by the United States and the foregoing certification is made by the Government of Algeria within the seventy-two hour period of notice, the Algerian Central Bank will thereupon instruct the Central Bank to transfer such monies and assets. If the seventy-two hour period of notice by the United States expires without such a certification having been made, or if the notice of termination is delivered by Iran, the Algerian Central Bank will thereupon instruct the Central Bank to return all such monies and assets to the United States, and thereafter the commitments reflected in this declaration shall be of no further force and effect.