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### EVALUATING THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

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#### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the role of 'public diplomacy' as an instrument of soft power in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy. It looks at the importance and conduct of public diplomacy in this country's foreign policy. The paper specifically attempts to see how is 'public diplomacy' viewed by the Iranian foreign policy and public diplomacy elites, and how is Iran conducting its public diplomacy on the ground. The research among others found that the nature of the public diplomacy activities is in line with late Ayatollah Khomeini's doctrine of 'exporting revolution'. It also found that this country is conducting a rigorous public diplomacy across the world. It has also established a mammoth machinery of public diplomacy consisted of different organizations. These entities are active in the area of public diplomacy, conducting numerous programs ranging from dissemination of information and developmental programs to educational and cultural activities across the world.*

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## **Introduction**

'Public diplomacy' is an important part of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy. The Islamic Republic of Iran uses public diplomacy as an instrument of 'soft power'. It is conducting its public diplomacy in various ways. This country is sponsoring a host of cultural, educational, and developmental programmes across the world. This research investigates both the relevance of public diplomacy as an important component of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy and the way Iran conducts it. For this purpose, first, the paper presents a critical survey of the literature related to Iran's public diplomacy. Second, it highlights the importance of public diplomacy in the light of Iranian foreign policy goals and objectives. Third, it looks at the element of culture as a key component of Iranian public diplomacy. Finally, the paper presents a survey of public diplomacy activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran across the world. A word of caution is in order. Iran is an ideological state. It has a theocratic political system based on Shia belief system with a defined worldview. Therefore, the religious values and principles are internalized as well as constitutionalized in all aspects of this country's foreign policy, public diplomacy included in it. That is why, while assuming that the Iranian foreign policy is formulated within conventional frameworks, the role of religion and ideological and revolutionary values in this country's foreign policy cannot be ruled out.

## **Theoretical Considerations**

In the changing international political environment the classical foreign policy is under extensive pressure to go beyond its old tradition of state-to-state interaction. (Pahlavi, Pierre, 2012, p. 21). In this scenario, 'public diplomacy' has become one of the central elements in the modern diplomatic practices. (Millissen, Jan, 2005a, pp. 3-4). McDowell defines public diplomacy as the "actions of a government to inform and influence foreign publics." (McDowell, Mark, 2008, pp. 7-8). Paul Sharp defines public diplomacy as the "process by which direct relation with people in a country are pursued to advance the interest and extend the values of those being represented". (Millissen, 2005a, p. 8).

Public diplomacy is a key element in Joseph Nye's conception of 'soft power' (Nye, Joseph S. 1990, p. 154). According to Nye, besides military power (hard power), states should try to be eye-catching in terms of culture, wish, and ideology. (Nye, 1990, pp. 153-171). Consequently, he regards 'public diplomacy' as an important instrument in countries' quest for soft power. (Kalin, Ibrahim, 2011, p. 11).

As matter of fact, public diplomacy is not new to foreign policy practice. Even in the ancient times the rulers would try to communicate with publics beyond their political boundaries. (Melissen, Jan 2005b, p. 3). In contemporary era, public diplomacy gained momentum during the inter-war period. Later on, during the Cold War “conventional diplomatic activity and public diplomacy were mostly pursued on parallel tracks”. (Melissen, Jan (2005b, p. 4). The U.S. and U.S.S.R extensively utilized public diplomacy initiatives to extend their influence over each other’s sphere of influence. (Nakamura, Kennon H. and Weed, Matthew C. December 18, 2009; Lord, Carnes, 1998, p. 51).

The phenomena of globalization and the ongoing revolution in the area of information technology have also added to the importance of public diplomacy. (Melissen, Jan (2005b, p. 13). The international relations experts have realized that public relations techniques should be employed in the arena of international relations to enhance countries’ national interests. (Taylor, Humphrey, 2006, p. 48).

The advantages of public diplomacy are many. While it is cost-effective, it leaves long lasting results, and its impacts remain for generations. It is particularly an effective means of promoting a country’s basic values and interests. It is even more effective tool for those states who propagate a specific political ideology or a belief system, as it can serve as an effective way of indoctrination of state philosophy. However, the most important benefits of public diplomacy is that it infiltrates official limitations and directly reach out to the masses.

Against this background, the public diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is examined in the context of this country’s foreign policy goals and objectives. Specifically, the study answers the following questions: (1) What is the importance of public diplomacy in the Iranian foreign policy? (2) How do Iranian ruling elites perceive public diplomacy? (3) What objectives and goals does the Islamic Republic of Iran pursue through its public diplomacy? And (4) what are the public diplomacy strategies and activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

The study is guided by the assumption that the Islamic Republic of Iran is an ideological state based on Shia belief system. This ideology profoundly influences the Islamic Republic of Iran’s foreign policy goals and objectives. So much so, Ayatollah Khomeini’s doctrine of ‘exporting the revolution’ is the guiding principle for this country’s foreign policy; and public diplomacy is employed by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the process.

## **Literature review**

Studies on the Iranian foreign policy are many. Nevertheless, these studies mostly focus on Iran's official foreign policy or state-to-state diplomacy, thus partly ignoring the Islamic Republic of Iran's public diplomacy. To be more specific, despite the Islamic Republic of Iran's emphasis on public diplomacy, this dimension of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy is overshadowed by this country's controversial stands on the issues of global importance such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, Middle peace process etc.

Therefore, volume of literature related to the Islamic Republic of Iran's public diplomacy is thin in terms of quantity and scope. For instance, Pierre Pahlavi focuses only on the role of media in Iran's public diplomacy. He argues that the Iranian media diplomacy remains traditional, the one which was norm during the Cold War era. (Pahlavi, Pierre, 2012, p. 22).

Syed Jalal Firouzabad focuses on the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Gulf region. He divides Iran's cultural diplomacy activities into two types: first, those aimed at promoting the values, ideology and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran; and, second, those observatory initiatives formulated to monitor the success level of this country's cultural initiatives. (Dehghani Firouzabadi, Syed Jalal, 2011, p. 106). Suzanne Maloney's work on the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Muslim World links Iran's public diplomacy to the idea of the 'exporting the revolution' proposed by the Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic. (Maloney, Suzanne, 2008, p. 68). However, the work essentially tries to analyze what these factors mean for the U.S. policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran.

There are some other works in which the Iranian public diplomacy is discussed under a broader theme. For instance, Christopher Forrest in analyzing the Islamic Republic of Iran's influence in Iraq gives a solid analysis of Iranian public diplomacy in the light of the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with various Shia groups. But, his focus is on the nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran's influence in Iraq, with particular reference to the American presence in that country (Iraq). (Forrest, Christopher, 2009, p. 101). Similarly, Hamid Naficy, in his work on "Social History of Iranian Cinema" devotes a section to the role of cinema in the Islamic Republic of Iran's public diplomacy. He argues that the Iranian media, as part of Iranian public diplomacy, targets two main groups: first, the West and the U.S.; and second, the Iranian diaspora and expatriates in order to delegitimize them. (Naficy, Hamid, 1983, pp. 269-270).

The overall review of the literature on the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy shows the factor of public diplomacy as understood in Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power' is largely overlooked; though reading between the lines, the literature particularly those dealing with post-revolution Iran's foreign policy highlight the importance of public diplomacy in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy practices. Yet, in most of these studies, at least one of the following gaps can be found:

First, they either analyze Iran's public diplomacy under a broader theme, or only focus on one particular aspect of the Islamic Republic of Iran's public diplomacy. As result, many aspects of the Islamic Republic of Iran's public diplomacy are not explored. Second, although some studies mention a number of ideals such as peace, justice, reforms in the U.N., as prime goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy, none of these studies gives a concrete and well-specified account on how these objectives and goals are being pursued, and what is the role of public diplomacy in this process. Moreover, these studies do not discuss on the Iranian public diplomacy institutions, their operational mechanisms, strategies, and activities.

### **Public Diplomacy in Iran's Foreign Policy**

The importance of public diplomacy in Iran's foreign policy maybe understood within the framework of Khomeini's doctrine of 'exporting the revolution', proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nonetheless, he is quoted that "the best advice that can implement the revolution in Iran and export it into other places is sound advertising." (Rajaei, Farhang, 1983, p. 13). In line with Ayatollah Khomeini's advice the Iranian leaders believe that public diplomacy can best export the 1979 Islamic revolution. They think that public diplomacy approach can influence cultural elites and scholars in other countries. It also helps Iran to establish relationship with civil societies in other countries. The Iranian leaders also regularly claim that Iran is fighting a 'soft war', and lay emphasis upon the role of public diplomacy as a key instrument in this soft war.

The advocates of the doctrine of 'exporting the revolution', who hold high rank political and military positions within the state, are divided into three groups. The first group believes on physical export of the revolution. It suggests that peoples prone to the message of the revolution should be invited to Iran, necessary institutions and structures are to be established, and, the anti-state organizations are to be supported and provided with sanctuaries as well. This approach was dominant in the early years of the Islamic Republic. In line with this, special offices, known as 'Freedom Movements Unit' were established in the Foreign Ministry and the

Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. A number of conferences were held, being attended by people wearing masks from the Philippine to Palestine, and Lebanon to Iraq. Some military adventures such as military coup in Bahrain in 1981 were also initiated. (Tavakkoli, Yaqoub, 2010, p. 56).

The second group argues that Iran should build a role model society, and pursue a peaceful policy along with 'opportunism'. It suggests that whenever and wherever it deems necessary, and when the situation is right, Iran should strike on non-conformist regimes through whatever means; otherwise, it should compromise with them. This group believes that Iran should gradually enter into confrontation with international community and its surrounding environment. (Poor Muhammad, Muhesn, January 2009, p. 21). In line with this approach, Muhammad Khatami's Government (1997-2005) tried to establish good relations with international community, particularly the Muslim World. (Dean, Lucy, 2004, p. 385).

Yet, Iran clandestinely kept on supporting anti-establishment elements in a number of countries. For instance, Iran, in Yemen, allegedly provided the Shia Houthi rebels with arms, (See. Worth, Robert F. & Chivers, C.J., 3 March 2013), or in Kuwait, despite having a good relation, Iran was accused of plotting against that country. (See. Duniyā-e Iqtisād, 11 April, 2011, p. 2).

The third group believes that the revolution should be exported through public diplomacy and promotion of its values, so that, the ground would be prepared for the change in the long run. (Tavakkoli, 2010, p. 56). It seems that Khomeini found this method effective, when he said that "the most important thing can consolidate the revolution here and export it abroad is propagation". (Khomeini, Rouhullah, 1999, vol.15, p. 321.) In line with this he stated:

*When we say we want to export our revolution we mean would like to export this spirituality which dominates Iran.... The best advice that can implement the revolution in Iran and export it into other places is sound advertising. Do not exaggerate anything. We have such a commodity that it requires no exaggeration. We have in reality then no choice but to destroy those systems of government that are corrupt in themselves and also entail the corruption of others.... This is a duty that all Muslims must fulfill in every one of the Muslim countries. (As cited in. Rajaei, 1983, p. 83).*

The current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in his address to the officials of the Foreign Ministry said, "The Islamic Republic has messages and ideas to be said, but they should be said in artful and effective ways." (Iran Daily, 1 December 2009, 2). Asghari, the former

Head of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Iran, narrates the Supreme Leader who had instructed him to work for enhancing the spiritual strength of Iran through propagation of its revolutionary values: (Chashmandāz e irṭibātāt e farhangī, July 2003, pp. 6-7). According to Sariul-Qalam, a renowned Iranian public intellectual, the trend in Iran's foreign policy shows that Iran prefers to be in contact with the public rather than the officials of other countries. (Fat'hi, Mujtaba, & Kharazmi, Mehraveh, 6 June 2012, pp. 1 & 10-11). Perhaps, that is why, the Supreme Leader, on February 4, 2012 delivered his speech in Arabic, and directly addressed the people of Arab Spring stricken countries (excluding Syria), and regarded the uprising as continuation of the 1979 Revolution of Iran. (Kayhan, 4 February 2012, p. 3).

The debate among the Iranian leaders over public diplomacy focuses on the notion of 'soft-war'. The various public diplomacy initiatives backed by the Iranian government across the globe aim to polish Iran's image and enhance its soft power. However, looking at the contents of these activities, one can easily find that these programs have religious footing, and directly or indirectly relate to the spread of Shia ideas and doctrinal values. The Iranian leaders see all these initiatives as different dimensions of a single powerful project which should define the trajectory of globalization. They perceive globalization as a 'process' with an undetermined end, rather than a 'project' with a predefined ends, thus argue that Iran should exploit it, and globalize shi'ism through public diplomacy. (Tawassoli, Ghulam Abbas, July 2007, pp. 31-33).

### **Culture in Iran's Public Diplomacy**

The element of culture plays a key role in Iran's public diplomacy. Araghi, the head of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Iran, argues that culture speaks more in the future. (Chashmandāz e irṭibātāt e farhangī, July 2003, p. 6). The Iranian elites view culture as Iran's civilizational heritage and the ideals of the Islamic revolution based on Shia values and principles. Therefore, in Iran's conduct of foreign policy, cultural diplomacy means promotion of Iran's culture through cultural activities such as organizing memorial events, sport activities, intellectual activities such as conferences, student exchange etc.

According to Hussain Salami, there are two perceptions of culture among the Iranian foreign policy theoreticians: one group perceives culture as an instrument, and argues that the official ideology of Iran should be promoted through the promotion of Iranian culture and the other group believes that the culture and official ideology of Iran are the same. Therefore, promoting Iranian culture is equal to the promotion of Shia ideology. However, Salami argues that in both

cases, the main task of Iran's cultural representatives is to propagate Shia ideology even at the cost of Iran's national interest. (Chashmandāz e irṭibātāt e farhangī, July 2003, pp. 85-86).

According to Dehshiri, Deputy President for Research and Education Affairs in Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Iran, there should be an ideological look into the culture in Iran, but it should be promoted with neutral words in order to prevent sensitivity. He forewarns that the announcement of policies and strategies related to Iran's cultural diplomacy should take place with special care. Iran should not disclose aims and objectives of its cultural activities. It should observe the principle of gradualism in its conduct of cultural diplomacy. Dehshiri suggests that the messages Iran conveys should be attractive. The focus of these messages should go beyond written elements of Iran's culture and must include other aspects of culture such as art, painting, etc. (Chashmandāz e irṭibātāt e farhangī, July 2003, pp. 90).

Firouzabadi, one of the influential theoretician of foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, and a former diplomat and cultural attaché of the Iranian embassy in the United Arab Emirates, maintains that cultural diplomacy of Iran will enhance Tehran's foreign policy goals and objectives in various ways: (1) it will influence the elites and scholars in other countries; (2) it prepares the ground for direct contact with the public opinion in other countries; (3) it establishes close contact with social groups, civil society, youths, and ordinary people; and (4) it facilitates easy access to cultural products of Iran. (Dehghani Firouzabadi, Syed Jalal, Winter 2011, p. 109).

Firouzabadi argues that Iran's cultural diplomacy will shape the minds and thoughts of elites in other countries. Therefore, the foreign policy of these nations will directly or indirectly benefit Iran's foreign policy goals and objectives in a more meaningful way. He emphasizes that cultural diplomacy would enable Iran under the guise of cultural relations to export Shia values and the Islamic Revolution. (Dehghani Firouzabadi, Winter 2011, pp. 106-107). Similarly, Dehshiri maintains that security, political, and strategic objectives of Iran can also be pursued under the guise of cultural programs. In this case, he argues, cultural activities serve as cover for Iran's non-cultural programs, such as security, military, intelligence, etc. (Dehghani Firouzabadi, Winter 2011, pp. 106-107).

The ideological conception of the culture is more dominant in Iran's public diplomacy discourse. The ruling elites of Iran have devised a specific version of culture discussed earlier. They try to export it to the world. This culture has much to do with Shia doctrine from which the political system is gaining its legitimacy, and is considered as being in service of 'exporting the revolution'.



## **Sources and Instruments of Iran's Public Diplomacy**

In order to enhance Iran's soft power, the public diplomacy theoreticians of Iran suggest various sources to be utilized. In a report prepared by Iran's Islamic Consultative Assembly's Research Center, the sources of Iran's soft power are categorized into five categories: (1) Islamic knowledge and Shia values; (2) Persian cultural heritage and historical figures; (3) Persian arts source, such as film, music, painting, and handicraft; (4) specialization sources such as archaeology, seminaries, research centers, and manuscripts; (5) media source, such as publication, radio and TV programs. (Kalhor, Sinad & Sadeqhi, Muhammad Masoud, 2010, p. 6).

Similarly, Afsaneh Ahadi identifies three sources of Iran's public diplomacy: the first source is Iran's old civilization. Ahadi argues that Iran "possesses customs, traditions, arts and national characteristics with which Iran's national and cultural prestige can be reinforced." The second source is Shia values. According to Ahadi, Shi'ism has granted separate identity to Iran vis-à-vis other Muslim countries. In this category she also includes Shia followers from other countries as an important factor. The third source, is Iran's policies such as its anti-imperialism policy, and the call for U.N reform. (Ahadi, Afsaneh, 2013, pp. 116-118).

Based on the above sources, Firoozabadi suggests following public diplomacy initiatives: (1) that Iran should establish Shia and Iranian studies centers, and offer scholarship, and study opportunities for students interested to study culture, civilization and religion of Iran; (2) that to teach Persian language and literature, and establish Persian Chair(s) at universities and specialized institutions across the globe; (3) that Iran should organize cultural events, such as film and music festivals, and arts exhibition such as photo, book, calligraphy etc.; (4) that Iran should conduct joint cultural activities such as workshop, symposium, cultural exchange, and museum exchange, as joint initiatives will minimize the existing sensitivity and suspicion toward the Iranian cultural activities; (5) that Iran should actively participate in scientific and cultural programs being organized in the world; (6) that Iran should introduce Iranian personalities and historical figures under memorial programs, preferably through regional and international organizations such Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); (7) that Iran should take the advantage of modern information technology, such as playing active role in cyber space, offering online training courses, and establishment of satellite channels. (Dehghani Firouzabadi, Winter 2011, pp. 118-119). Likewise, Hassan Hijazi enumerates the following initiatives as capabilities of Iran in its soft war against its enemies.

They include: (1) promotion of the idea of cultural, religious and civilizational dialogue; (2)

condemnation of Israel in every available forum in the world; (3) establishment of cultural, economic and religious relationship with other countries; (4) production and promotion of film with cultural messages; (5) promotion of Persian language; (6) being active on issues such as Salman Rushdi case. (Hijazi, Sayed Hassan, 18-24 March 2008, p. 14).

In line with the above ideas and suggestions, Iran is extensively engaged in public diplomacy. There is a large conglomerate of 30 governmental institutions active in the area of public diplomacy. Each institution is gaining its legitimacy from different authority. Thirteen institutions are endorsed by the parliament, ten institutions are working under statutes endorsed directly by the Supreme Leader; two Institutions have their statutes endorsed by High Council of Cultural Revolution, two institutions are based directly on Iran's constitution, and one institution has its statute endorsed by the Council for Promotion of Higher Education. The remaining two (Imam Ridha Shrine Authority (Āstān e Quds e Raḍawi), & International Bureau of the supreme Leaders office), are considered above the law, having no clear legal ground. Some of these institutions are supervisory bodies, some of them are influential policy making institutions, yet some others are active on the ground. See. Sinad Kalhor, and Muhammad Masoud Sadeqhi, 2010). Almost all of them are government-funded institutions. Some of them even have separate budget line in the country's public budget. (See. Planning and Budgeting Organization, 2017, Table, 7, pp. 63-189). Some of these institutions' budget is equal or even great than a ministry. For instance, the budget of al-Mustafa International University (MIU) (an institution in charge of Iranian educational diplomacy) is more than the combined budgets of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and the National Organization for Food and Drug. (See. Planning and Budgeting Organization, 2017, Table, 7, pp. 99-101). The majority of these institutions, besides receiving public budget, have their own sources of income as well. One institution (Imam Ridha Shrine Authority) is so sound in terms of resources that, the government of Iran is indebted to it. (See. Mehr News, n.d.).

In addition, most of these institution have various international branches, and affiliated institutions. For instance, the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization is parent to 67 international offshoots. (Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, n.d.). It has 16 cultural centers in Latin America (Johnson, Stephen, March 2012, p. 25), eleven cultural houses in nine countries in the Middle East (Hersich, Hussain & Toee'serkani, Mujtaba Spring–Fall 2009, p. 184), one cultural council, seven cultural houses (in seven cities), and one Persian Research Center in Pakistan (Islamic Republic of Iran's Embassy- Islamabad-Pakistan, n.d), and two cultural houses in India. (Islamic Republic of Iran Embassy, New Delhi- India, n.d). In addition

to the above, there are 52 libraries in 42 countries established and maintained by Iran. (Maleki, Reza, Spring 2008, p. 194).

Although all of the above institutions admit that they are engaged in public diplomacy, the report released by Iran's Islamic Consultative Assembly's Research Center clearly mention that they are involved in religious activities. However, it divides them into two categories: first, those partially engaged in religious activities; and second those specifically involved in religious activities. (Kalhor, Sinad & Sadeqhi, Muhammad Masoud, 2010, pp. 11-12). As noted in the previous sections, the religious activities are related to the promotion of Iran's official ideology. The personnel of these institutions especially those stationed outside the country are known as cultural ambassadors. They are believed to be promoting and defending the Islamic Republic in the so called 'soft war'. The Supreme Leader of Iran in his address to them said that giving a proper image of Iran the people of the world and their leaders is the main duty of the cultural ambassadors. He emphasized, "The cultural ambassadors of the Islamic Republic of Iran are at the front line of the 'cultural war' in the international arena". (Dunyāyi Iqtisād, 2 May, 2009, p. 2).

### **Iran's Public Diplomacy: Programs and Activities**

Iran's public diplomacy programs are diverse. They can be classified into four broad categories. First, communication efforts aimed at presenting the Iranian interpretation of regional and global events to foreign audience. In this regard, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is operating in 45 countries and 25 languages. Its website (<http://www.irib.ir>) also operates in 24 languages. Besides, Hispan TV and its website (<http://www.hispantv.com>) is presenting content similar to IRIB in Spanish targeting South America. ANNUR TV (<http://www.annurtv.com/>) in Argentina is another satellite channel which along with its internet website is presenting pro-Shia programs targeting the same audience. Even in countries with few Muslim population such as El Salvador and Bolivia, Iran is present with well-updated websites such as *Revista Biblioteca Islámica* ([www.redislam.net](http://www.redislam.net)) and *Islam en Bolivia* ([www.islamenbolivia.com](http://www.islamenbolivia.com)). (Johnson, March 2012, p. 25). There are six English and Arabic newspapers and five satellite channels (Jam e Jam, Sahar, Kauthar, Press TV. & al-Alam) mainly targeting the Muslim World. Al-Alam has regional offices in Ramallah and Ghaza, and its reporter even is stationed in 1948 occupied territories. It has offices in Washington and New York, and has 52 reporters in 40 other countries. (Hersich, Hussain & Toee'serkani, Mujtaba Spring–Fall 2009, pp. 184-185). As noted by Johnson, Iran's engagement in media is not comparable to any other Muslim state. Even, he argues, Qatar with Al-Jazeera TV, is quite

behind, as Al-Jazeera, to a large extent, is operating professionally, while the content of Iranian media are “muddled by an ideology fixed in the past with religious overtones.” (Johnson, March 2012, p. 27). In addition to the above, every public diplomacy institution of the Islamic Iran has its own mammoth communication apparatus. For instance, the portal of Ahl-ul Bayt World Assembly (ABWA), (an institution in charge of Iran’s networking diplomacy), is operating with 30 websites accessible in five languages and provides its audience with different products ranging from children games to audio visuals. It offers free access to Shi’ite reading materials. These materials are available in 21 languages. One of its websites is *Ahl-ul-bayt News Agency* (www.abna.ir), which gives coverage of Shi’ite news worldwide in 20 languages. Likewise, ABWA is publishing eleven journals in eight languages, and sponsors over 40 other journals and magazines. ABWA is also running *Thaqalayn* satellite channel. (See. Raees, Wahabuddin & Bani Kamal, Abdol Moghset, 2017, pp. 589-614).

Second, developmental and community services aim at leaving a ‘memorable public image’ among the poor. To take a few evidences, the Iranian Red Crescent is operating 29 hospitals and health centers in 19 countries of the world. (Iranian Red Crescent Society, n.d).

In 2008 Iran announced that the Iranian Red Crescent would set its regional office in Bolivia from where it would launch low cost clinics across Latin America. (Johnson, March 2012, p. 26). In 2009, Iran reportedly contributed one million US dollar for the establishment of a dairy facility to support poor families in the village of Achacachi near La Paz, Bolivia. (Johnson, March 2012, p. 26). Similarly, in 2008 it promised to donate \$1.5 million to \$2 million for the construction of a hospital in Nicaragua. (Johnson, March 2012, p. 27). Iranian sponsored Khomeini Hospital in Malir area of Karachi, Pakistan is offering health service to the poor with a lower cost as compared to other hospitals of the same rank. Iran has established a number of community service centers in Moroni, Comoro Islands. (Mouigni Mohamed, 9 October 2013). Recently, in October 2017, Iran opened an hospital in Kampala, Uganda, which was inaugurated by the Iranian foreign minister. (Islamic Republic News Agency, October 26, 2017).

Third, cultural and educational activities aimed at creating and supporting like-minded groups. The activities under this category are at the heart of Iran’s public diplomacy, and are wide in terms of volume and variety. They include overt and covert religious propagation, organizing cultural and religious public events and exhibition, offering Persian and religious courses, production and publication of books and magazine, and networking among the local Shias. To take a few examples, in December 2008 the Iranian cultural council in Chile organized a film festival in collaboration with Chile’s National Council of Culture and Arts and the

*Catholic Pontificia University*. (Johnson, March 2012, p. 26). In March 2012 the Iranian Cultural Week was organized in Jakarta (Indonesia) which was inaugurated by the Iranian Minister for Cultural and Islamic Guidance. (Daily Iran, 8 March 2012, p. 9). In May 2013 Iran organized a Cultural Week in Thailand city of Ayutthaya, which was inaugurated by a delegation of 40 Iranian officials, in addition to artists and cultural activists. It is noteworthy, that the slogan printed on the poster of the event, was "Qom-Ayutthaya". Choosing Qom, the religious hub of Iran, instead of Iranian capital city or even other cities such as Isfahan, and Shiraz which are popular for their cultural heritage, in fact, denotes the religious tendency of such events. (Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, 20 May 2013).

Moreover, Iranian cultural councils are engaged in producing and publishing reading material in local languages. For instance Iranian cultural council in Dhaka, Bangladesh is publishing two newsletters for children and adults. In November, 2010, it also, launched a book translated in Bengali Language entitled "Radiance of Velayat: an analytical life history of Amirul Momenin Hazrat Ali (AS)", authored by Ayatollah Subhani, an influential cleric in Qom. (Iranian Cultural Council, Dhaka, Bangladesh, n.d).

In Albania, the *Fondacioni Kulturor Iranian 'Sadi Shirazi'*, is translating and publishing books including a magazine entitled PERLA. (Fondacioni Kulturor Iranian, n.d). Similarly, Ahl-ul-Bayt World Assembly, introduced earlier, through its multilingual website provides its audience with different products ranging from children games to audio visuals. It offers free access to Shi'ite reading materials. These materials are available in 21 languages. ABWA is publishing eleven journals in eight languages, and sponsors over 40 other journals and magazines. (See. Raees, Wahabuddin & Bani Kamal, Abdol Moghset, 2017). In this category one should also include Iran's scholarship grants to international students enrolled in the Iranian universities and religious seminaries. On 27 September 2013, Ayatollah Makarim Shirizi, announced that only his organization was paying tuition fees for student of nine countries. (Shargh, 28 September 2013, p. 2). In addition, a number of universities are specifically established to attract international students. In the regard the most important institution is al-Mustafa International University (MIU), a sizable university with 60 overseas branches operating across the Muslim World. As mentioned earlier, the MIU is the key in charge of Iran's educational diplomacy. (See. Bani Kamal, Abdol Moghset & Raees, Wahabuddin, 2018).

Finally, there are various task oriented initiatives and programs. For instance, soon after the start of Arab Spring, the Islamic Republic of Iran established World Assembly of Islamic Awakening (WAIA), with Ali Akbar Velayati, the former foreign minister of the Islamic

Republic of Iran and the Current Foreign Affairs advisor to the Supreme Leader, as its head. WAIA organized its first international conference in September 11, 2011, in that 700 delegates from 84 countries were invited. (Mohseni, Payam, April 2013). Related to the so-called Islamic Awakening, a news agency namely Tasnim News Agency (*Khabar Gozari Tasnim*) (<http://www.tasnimnews.com>) has also been launched, which aims at covering and disseminating information related to Islamic Awakening. (Risālat, 17 June 2012, p. 1).

All these initiatives and programs show that public diplomacy is of utmost importance for Iran in persuasion of its foreign policy goals and objectives.

However, as noted through the above discussion, these entities are different parts of the single whole. Therefore, although they are working in different areas of the public diplomacy, in many areas their activities overlap, to the extent that it becomes difficult to identify the leading actor. Technically speaking, the Iranian Cultural attaché of Iran's Embassy is the main coordinator of Iran's public diplomacy in his or her respective host country. These cultural attachés are not the personnel of Iranian foreign ministry. Their parent institution is Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, which is called by its head, Khurramshad, as Iran' Cultural Foreign Ministry. (Islamic Culture and Relations Organizations, n.d).

The Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy goals and objectives, and the employment of the public diplomacy activities in their materialization, can best be realized by Joseph M. Humire's statement before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency of the Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives, US. Giving statement over the Islamic Republic of Iran's public diplomacy and its involvement in Latin America he said:

*Too often we, as analysts, make the mistake of looking for the smoking gun--the activist terrorist plot, a million-dollar wire transfer, or the missile silo on a peninsula. But in reality, Iran [is] too clever for that. After all, Iran is the country that invented chess. After every move they make in the hemisphere, everything is calculated, thinking at least two steps ahead. But just because we don't see anything on the surface does not mean that there is nothing beneath the surface. Better said, the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.* (Hearing before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency of the Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives, US. 9 July 2013).

## **Conclusion**

As shown through the above discussion, public diplomacy has attained an important place in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy to promote its ideological and revolutionary values

in other countries under the guise of public diplomacy activities. Iran has established a mammoth machinery of public diplomacy consisted of different organizations. These entities are active in the area of public diplomacy, conducting numerous programs ranging from dissemination of information and developmental programs to educational and cultural activities targeting mainly the Muslim World as well as non-Muslim underdeveloped nations.

The study finds that the Islamic Republic of Iran's public diplomacy is in line with the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini's idea of 'exporting the revolution' he suggested during the early days of the 1979 revolution in Iran. Having realized the setbacks of using hard power, the Iranian leaders have found the use of public diplomacy less-costly, and also an effective method to enhance Iran's ideological interest and soft power. Iran is using public diplomacy to augment its power and influence, and promote its ideology. Therefore, the Iranian leaders have opted for public diplomacy to export the revolution to the world without causing any suspicion. To be specific, the successors of Ayatollah Khomeini have kept the idea of 'exporting the revolution' in low profile, and are pursuing it through public diplomacy.

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