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IRAN'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN AFRICA

Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to identify the ways that Iran has used to become an influential power in Africa. By utilizing the “Export of the Islamic Revolution” and the ideology of “Resistance against Global Arrogance”, Iran has been able to strengthen its soft power by combining classic and modern methods. Consequently, some communities in Africa are not only Iran’s allies but also part of Iran’s identity. Therefore, Iran has made a vast community of adherents in Nigeria and supported them in Ghana and Tanzania. In this regard, Iran is endeavoring to consolidate its power in geopolitical competition with the Western as well as regional powers such as Saudi Arabia. It goes without saying, economic trouble and international sanctions have caused Iran to face some obstacles in its policy in Africa in recent years. Employing an analytical approach, the authors look at the diplomatic, media and economic strategies that paved Iran’s way to being an appealing actor for some societies, especially in Africa. Hence, this research helps to understand Iran’s soft power in Africa, as well as assess Iran’s foreign policy in general.

Keywords: soft power, Iran, revolution, foreign policy, Africa

Introduction

The discussion of public diplomacy began in the United States during World War I when US officials sought to paint a new picture of the United States in the war-torn world.³ The issue was closely related to the power project,⁴ however, the

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³ William A. Rugh, *Front Line Public Diplomacy How US Embassies Communicate with Foreign Publics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, p. 8.

⁴ Nancy Snow, “Rethinking Public Diplomacy”, in: *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (eds.), Routledge, New York and London, 2009, p. 3.

term public diplomacy was conceptualized in 1965 by Edmund Gullion.⁵ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, public diplomacy became a key factor in foreign policy. As Wang mentions “countries, large and small, are now keenly aware that their image and reputation can be vital strategic resources in world affairs.”⁶

This type of diplomacy encompasses dimensions of international relations that go beyond traditional diplomacy. For this reason, directing public opinion in other countries by governments and managing the interaction of private groups and the interests of the country of origin with the target country are among the objectives of public diplomacy. The goal of public diplomacy is to increase the international prestige of an actor in competitive conditions of the international arena.⁷ The new sphere in international relations has made troubles as well as various opportunities, therefore, although the old concepts like national security and military priorities have not lost their importance yet, it can be claimed that new dimensions of foreign policy have been placed on the government’s agenda. Values like freedom, democracy, a secure image and a prosperous society are key elements of the foreign policy of the globalization age. Technology is the lubricant oil of the new era and in parallel with that information technology has been a predominant tool in the foreign policy of states. One of the most important dimensions of diplomacy in the new era is the use of the Internet to provide an acceptable and attractive view of the country to foreigners. For example, while Iran and the United States have had no diplomatic relations since 1980, the U.S. Department of State has a virtual embassy in Iran on the internet. The US Virtual Embassy wrote on its website that the purpose of the website is to communicate directly with the Iranians so that the Iranian people can obtain the necessary information in all matters related to the United States without intermediaries.⁸ Thus, the United States attempts to launch direct relations with Iranians without getting the permission of Iran’s government.

In 2008, the U.S. State Department outlined four goals for public diplomacy through digital technology, which include “understanding, informing, engaging, and influencing foreign publics.”⁹ Today, looking at the phenomenon of the Internet, it can be conclusively argued that all states use these tools. For instance, when Hassan Rouhani’s government came to power in Iran in 2013, government institutions seriously entered the social media. More specifically, the Foreign Minister himself and all embassies, ambassadors and senior staff of Iranian embassies abroad have joined Twitter while Twitter is blocked in Iran. Thus, the Internet has provided a unique opportunity for Iran to eliminate the barriers that the United States and its allies have built around Iran and communicate easily with people across the world.

⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, “Public Diplomacy before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase”, in: *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (eds.), Routledge, New York and London, 2009, p. 19.

⁶ Jian Wang, “Introduction: China’s Search of Soft Power”, in: *Soft Power in China Public Diplomacy through Communication*, Jian Wang (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011, p. 1.

⁷ William A. Rugh, *Front Line Public Diplomacy How US Embassies Communicate with Foreign Publics*, Palgrave, New York, p. 62.

⁸ “Why Virtual Embassy Tehran?”, available at: <https://ir.usembassy.gov/tehran/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

⁹ Ilan Manor, *The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy*, Palgrave Macmillan, Gewerbestrasse, 2019, p. 178.

Methodology

There are various difficulties in research on Iran's foreign policy. It is important to note that Iran does not publish official documents on its expenditures, and this is one of the barriers to research on Iran-related issues. Therefore, the authors have spent a long time in this way to assess the accuracy of the sources. For these reasons, the authors chose a systemic thinking approach to analyze Iran's soft power in Africa. The indicators mentioned in the article are among the main principles of soft power in the new world. Therefore, the combination of classical methods and the benefits of technology have enabled Iran to pursue its goals. Extensive media activity to break the monopoly of Western and rival media, setting up training centres in Africa and giving scholarships to African students and helping the needy are among the methods that Iran utilizes. The main theoretical resources in the field of soft power, especially books and articles authored by Joseph Nye are inevitable in this regard, which has been used in the research. Also, official news from Iran that has been reflected in the Iranian press has increased the effectiveness of the current research.

The tool of this research is systemic thinking. As Lipman points out¹⁰, this type of thinking is the process of finding the connection between problems, separating them, or making connections between problems. Emphasizing this definition, Bermudez¹¹ believes that systemic thinking helps to overcome the obstacles to transparency that obscure the causes and consequences of social phenomena. In this regard, by using a systematic research method, as Bermudez points out, the researcher performs four key thought operations, which include nesting, networking, threading and unearthing. Nesting involves placing discrete phenomena and drawing larger images that show the range and nature of the isolated elements. Networking, through analysis, dissects the various elements of the phenomenon and identifies the multiple relationships that connect them. Threading connection involves tracing the various manifestations of phenomena over time and linking them together and ultimately unearthing helps the process of exploring and revealing the deep and wide-ranging social structures of the phenomenon. Therefore, this method is used in this study.

Soft Power

For research about soft power, it is inevitable to ask simple questions. Why it is called soft? What soft power mechanisms are and how do they work? Why do states try to increase soft power and what do they want to achieve? Janice believes that soft power should not be considered as opposed to hard power, but should be considered as an extension of it through various tools. Thus the success of actors

¹⁰ Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 23.

¹¹ Angela Bermudez, Four Tools for Critical Inquiry in History, Social Studies, and Civic Education, *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, Vol. 52, 2015, pp. 111-112.

who aim to use soft power depends on knowing how to make their ideas, policies and themselves appealing to other communities.¹² In this line, the most beneficial dimension of soft power is its cheapness as actors do not use hard power to achieve it. The induction of soft power through socialization increases its success chances, and so socialization is even more important than persuasion because it makes it easier for others to accept new ideas or norms.¹³

Nye argues that soft power is not a function of the size of a geographical area, military power, or even economic power. Because a powerful country like the Soviet Union, while geographically large, lost its prestige when it took military action in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. While a small country like Norway has remarkable soft power in the world with its mediation activities in international crises. Even the Vatican, which was ridiculed by Soviet officials, has considerable soft power in the world.¹⁴ The important point is the production of soft power, usually in the context of time and in a gradual process. Needless to say, important events such as winning a major war in unjust circumstances can also change the image of an actor and pave the way for future policies. It should also be noted that countries do not necessarily need enormous hard power to produce soft power. Actors who could convert hard resources to soft power sources can pursue their policies without serious resistance.

The requirements of diplomacy in different periods reflect the characteristics of international politics and the international and domestic circumstances in which they are located. New developments in foreign policy in the early 21st century require new ways of working with networks of governmental and non-governmental actors.¹⁵ These networks convert power from hard to soft. Joseph Nye, the main theorizer of "soft power" and "smart power" argues that the recent changes in international politics have made the unfamiliar and new dimensions of power play a significant role in international interactions. Domestic unity, global values and international institutions have taken on a new role. Thus, capital-based power loses its efficiency and the role of information becomes increasingly important. Information is becoming wider, but classical political systems have little flexibility to adapt to it and they are not capable to use it.¹⁶ Nye mentions that: "Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. When you can get others to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction. Hard power, the ability to coerce, grows out of a country's military and economic might. Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced."¹⁷

¹² Janice Bially Mattern, 'Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2005, pp. 583-84.

¹³ Yong Wook Lee, "Soft Power as Productive Power" in: *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power in East Asia*, Sook Jong Lee and Jan Melissen (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011, pp. 34-36.

¹⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, *Public Affairs*, 2004, pp. 8-10.

¹⁵ Brian Hocking, "Diplomacy and Foreign Policy", in: *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr and Paul Sharp (eds.), SAGE Publications, London, 2016, p. 74.

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power" *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 80, 1990, p. 154.

¹⁷ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 119, No. 2, 2004, p. 256.

Thus, the concepts of “soft power” and “smart power” show the importance of bilateral interaction and the need for diplomatic efforts to attract citizens of other countries.¹⁸ Today, soft power is a key concept in the international arena and most actors use soft power to enhance their influence in the international system. Some countries like Switzerland that have an attractive prestige in the world could use it more easily than countries which are not comfortable with the international system structure like North Korea. According to liberal institutionalists, actors could use soft power to earn profit over expenses. Ideology and culture is the key factor in attracting others.

Today, the definition of the concept of power in the form of military force has lost its classic meaning.¹⁹ New factors such as technology, education, and economic power have emerged in the international arena, meaning that classical factors, such as geography, high population, and raw and fossil resources, play a secondary role. The information revolution after the collapse of the Soviet Union helped in the strengthening of soft policy in international relations. In the past, people in the Far East did not know about Latin America and the reverse is also true. The emergence of satellite TV channels and shortly thereafter, an explosion of internet technology highlighted the role of culture and ideology in foreign policy.

Soft power is a product of smart public diplomacy, which takes place intentionally. Policymakers attempt to legitimize their goals with soft and understandable language. They use various tools in different geographic areas. In fact, in soft power-based foreign policy, policymakers conquer “the mind and heart”²⁰ across borders at a lower cost than military spending.

Recently, the term “smart power” entered international relations theoretical discussions. In this regard, smart power is the actors’ ability to combine elements of hard and soft power reinforced mutually. It goes so far as to make the actor’s goals progress effectively and powerfully. Therefore, a strong conceptual framework related to smart power policy should be based on several main considerations. If those who utilize the power element are unaware of these demographic and geographical features of the target areas, they cannot exercise smart power. Actors also need to know enough about themselves and their goals and capacities. The tools used by governments, as well as how and when they should be deployed, should also be specified separately and in combination.²¹ Smart power is closely related to the two discussed concepts. However, if the soft side of power is strong, its efficiency would be effective. For instance, in a UN Human Rights Council vote on the human rights situation in Iran proposed by Canada in 2006, none of the Afri-

¹⁸ Kelly Vibber and Jeong-Nam Kim, “Diplomacy in a Globalized World: Focussing Internally to Build Relationships Externally”, in: *International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Communication and Engagement*, Guy J. Golan, Sung-Un Yang & Dennis F. Kinsey, (eds.), Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2015, p. 131.

¹⁹ Hongying Wang and Yeh-Chung Lu, The Conception of Soft Power and its Policy Implications: a comparative study of China and Taiwan, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 17, No. 56, 2008, p. 431.

²⁰ Jan Melissen, “The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice” in: *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Jan Melissen (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005, p. 4.

²¹ Ernest J. Wilson III, Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power, *ANNALS AAPSS*, 616, 2008, p. 115.

can countries voted against Iran.²² This poll shows Iran's diplomatic and soft power, which has been enabling Iran to convince and mobilize African actors to cooperate with Iran in international forums.

The Iranian Soft Power

Jenkins mentions that much has been documented about the hard power might of the Islamic Republic of Iran but less attention has been given to its soft power. According to him, the rhetorical lexicon of politicians and academics in the Islamic Republic has been occupied by soft power. Policymakers in Iran view soft power as fundamental to the foreign policy of the state. In 2013, during his presidential campaign, Hassan Rouhani explicitly mentioned that Iran needs new tools like soft power.²³

Soft power generally refers to the capability of an entity or a state to influence the action of others through persuasion.²⁴ It is believed that religious soft power expands the use of soft power terminology beyond Nye's original argument. This is because Nye originally believed that an actor uses soft power to influence another state to achieve its goals. In the 2000s, soft power experts began to acknowledge the legitimacy of a non-state entity, such as Hezbollah, as it possessed soft power advantageous for Iran among Muslim nations. Religious entities through establishing cross-border networks make deliberate efforts to spread influence. Transnational religious actors such as Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Catholic Church have sought to apply soft power to achieve their interests.²⁵

It goes without saying that in the context of Iranian foreign policy, Islamic conceptions have had a powerful and meaningful framework. The cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic in the 1980s was concerned primarily with revolution export. Therefore, as part of its goal, the Islamic Republic aimed at a universalistic concept of Islamic solidarity. For that matter, every corner of the world received its share of the exports in a way.²⁶ According to Westridge, the period of export of revolution was seen as appropriate for Iran to let the world know of this brand of Iranian culture. The foreign policy under the supervision of Ayatollah Khomeini was a practicable soft power resource most notably in the Islamic world. Both Mohammed Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad utilized cultural diplomacy elements through the concept of "Dialogue among Nations" or the use of cultural links in their foreign policy. In total Iran operationalizes some of its soft power through the cultural exchange and outreach activities of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO).²⁷

²² Mohsen Movahhedi Qomi, Reviewing Islamic Republic of Iran's Relations with the Continent of Africa's Countries with a Look at the Relations between Iran and Africa before the Islamic Revolution, *Pedjuheshname-ye Afrika*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2009, pp. 74-75. (in Persian)

²³ William Jenkins Bullock, "Bonyads as Agents and Vehicles of the Islamic Republic's Soft Power", in: *Iran in the World*, Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2016, p. 155.

²⁴ Edward Lock, "Soft Power and Strategy Developing a 'Strategic' Concept of Power", in: *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (eds.), Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 32.

²⁵ Jeffrey Haynes, *Religious Transnational Actors and Soft Power*, Routledge, New York, 2016, pp. 10-15.

²⁶ John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1987, p. 17.

²⁷ Edward Wastnidge, The Modalities of Iranian Soft Power: From Cultural Diplomacy to Soft War, *Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 3-4, 2015, p. 368.

Like other actors, one of the most important tools of Iran's public diplomacy and soft power is cyberspace. Press TV (with more than 4 million followers on Facebook, 188 thousand on Twitter, 142 thousand on Instagram and 139 thousand on YouTube), Al-Alam in Arabic (with 6 million followers on Facebook and 625 thousand on Twitter and 104 thousand on Instagram), Alkawtar in Arabic (with more than 2.9 million followers on Facebook and 308 thousand on Instagram) and Hispan TV in Spanish (with more than 1.1 million followers on Facebook) were among the bases of Iranian soft power. At the same time, there is various state websites in foreign languages. These vital channels legitimize Iranian foreign policy in cyberspace, despite the vast wave against Iran's policy in the world.²⁸ However, under pressure from the US, international internet companies adopt sanctions against Iranian media. For instance, in April 2019 Google blocked the YouTube channel of Press TV.²⁹

Thus, foreign policy activities helped in increasing Iranian prestige, especially in Africa. A wide range of cultural and religious centers and websites plus cinema products have legitimized Iranian foreign policy. As Nye points out, soft power is usually based on a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies.³⁰ In the case of Iran, culture and foreign policy can be considered as a source of its soft power. Religious culture in societies that have the potential to accept it has become a powerful resource in Iran's foreign policy. Also, Iran's foreign policy based on the "Fight against Imperialism" has a high degree of acceptance in a wide range of developing societies. In this study, these two options have been evaluated based on Iran's strategies.

The Relations between Iran and Africa

Since the 1950s, Iran has focused on Africa to establish diplomatic relations. Generally, in the 1950s and 60s, the attention of Iran was on the anti-colonial movement. In this regard, Iran was an active member of the Special Committee on Decolonization set up by the United Nations at that time. This was partly because of the state's experience with colonial masters. The interest in the Horn of Africa by 1960 was attributed to the growing security concerns that resulted from increased Soviet inroads in it. It was the worrying influence of the Soviet Union that precipitated the Shah government's increasing assistance which included the military. This was to ensure the safety of the maritime oil-export routes.

²⁸ The updated statistics have been extracted by the authors on September 2020. However in 2021 and 2022, Facebook deleted Press TV and other Iran's affiliated accounts. See "Iran: Facebook deletes Press TV page", available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/iran-facebook-deletes-press-tv-page/a-56204883> (accessed November 14, 2022); "Facebook, in fresh attack on free speech, deletes al-Alam TV page permanently", available at: <https://www.press-tv.ir/Detail/2022/03/07/678127/MP-Facebook,-in-fresh-attack-on-free-speech,-deletes-al-Alam-TV-page-permanently> (accessed November 14, 2022).

²⁹ Zak Doffman, "Google Cuts YouTube Access for Iran's Press TV and Hispan TV 'Without Any Warning'", available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/04/23/google-blocks-iranian-state-tvs-youtube-and-gmail-after-anti-israel-propaganda/#148904ef77bd> (accessed September 23, 2022).

³⁰ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics, Public Affairs*... p. 11.

However, in the first decade of the Islamic Revolution, four factors influenced the Iranian interest in Africa. These factors are:

- Iran had difficulties in its foreign trade sector with the US and prominent European countries;
- The increasing Shia Muslim population in countries that have the capacity for accepting revolutionary ideas;
- The introduction of the Islamic Revolution as a way out of colonialism and racism and introducing Islam as a divine and revolutionary ideology that can lead to human dignity and help independence of states, and
- International utilization and the use of African countries, especially during the Iran-Iraq war.³¹

At a time when Iran was exploring Africa, diplomatic visits by both sides increased, and Iran expanded its support for some African countries. During those times, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei toured the continent in 1986. Getting to the end of the 1980s, there were efforts by the Islamic Republic of Iran to market its military hardware as part of its manufacturing goods. In 1984, the US Department of Intelligence claimed that Iran has started vast activities to form a strong network in Africa. Forming of a clerical network, sending delegations and university activities was the initial activities in countries like Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger and Senegal.³²

Some claim that the foreign policy results of Iran in Africa were mixed. In politics, the Islamic Republic failed to garner the maximum support of the African nations in its war with Iraq. Also, some policies of Iran to spread revolutionary ideology created problems in its relations with some African states like Senegal. This led to the falling-out of diplomatic relations with Dakar in 1984. The Senegalese authorities accused the Iranian diplomats of involving in activities that violated international norms and diplomacy. The diplomats were suspected of involvement in fundamentalist propaganda among the Muslim associations in Senegal.³³

Despite an acceptable image in Africa, Iran's presence has also provoked some opposition. Iran's efforts to promote its ideology in countries like Nigeria have caused protests. They are accusing Iran of converting the Sunni Muslims in Africa to Shia. In Nigeria and some parts of Africa for instance, the Islamic Revolution has increased Shia Islam attractiveness. Nigeria is currently the country with the most Shia population in Africa. While before 1980, Shiite Islam had no significant followers in Nigeria, today Nigerian Shia leader Zakzaky believes that there are about 13 million Shiites in Nigeria.³⁴ Other sources estimate it to be around four million.³⁵ In

³¹ Mohsen Pakayin, "Iran and Africa, Before and After the Islamic Revolution", available at: <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/167265/> (accessed October 2, 2022). (in Persian)

³² "Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity", A Research Paper, CIA Director of Intelligence, 1984, pp. 2-8.

³³ Alfred Stepan, "Stateness, Democracy, and Respect: Senegal in Comparative Perspective" in: *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, Mamadou Diouf (ed.), Columbia University Press, New York, 2013, p. 234.

³⁴ "Nigeria, the Third Shiite Country/Nigerian's Interest in the Islamic Revolution", available at: <https://www.mehnews.com/news/2790314/> (accessed August 15, 2022). (in Persian)

³⁵ Solomon Timothy Anjide and Al Chukwuma Okoli, New Trajectory of Islamic Extremism in Northern Nigeria: A Threat-Import Analysis of Shiite's Uprising, *International Journal of African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, 2017, p. 44.

this regard, countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania have the most Shiites respectively. Although Zakzaky was detained by the Nigerian government until 2021, his influence has spread to neighboring countries. Zakzaky seems to have been able to attract people and in this respect, he has supported Iranian foreign policy in crises between Iran and other countries. For instance, during Ahmadinejad's presidency, when Israel threatened Iran with a military strike, Zakzaky announced that any attack on Iran would have a response in Nigeria.³⁶

Other African countries that have recently undergone political changes have been very important but challenging for Iran. In the case of Egypt, Iran did not even have diplomatic relations with Egypt after the Islamic Revolution due to the escape of the former Iran's Shah to Egypt and only had initial relations with Egypt for a very short time during the era of Mohammad Morsi (2012-2013). In the case of Tunisia, Iran was so enthusiastic, however, Tunisia followed a reluctant policy. Relations between Iran and Tunisia after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and especially during the years of the Iran-Iraq war, due to Iran's insistence on exporting the revolution, as well as the Tunisian government's clear support for Iraq's position in the war and its approach in international organizations against Iran, was tense and unfriendly to the extent that even the relations between the two countries were completely cut off in 1987. Although diplomatic relations between the two countries were re-established in 1990, these relations were never strong and close. Under these conditions and with the beginning of mass uprisings in Tunisia and with the hope of a fundamental change in the relations between the two countries and the establishment of a government like the government of Iran, Iranian authorities, especially the Supreme Leader and Iran's foreign policy apparatus, expressed their clear support for the uprising in Tunisia. In this regard, the leader of Iran pointed out that Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, which overthrew the Shah's regime, is a good example for those under governments similar to the Shah's regime. He asked the people of Egypt and Tunisia to gather around the axis of religion and confront the West.³⁷ Although President Ahmadinejad did not visit Tunisia, his general approach to the African continent had a significant effect on improving Iran's relations with Tunisia, hence, high-ranking officials of Iran, including the first vice president, made several trips to Tunisia. However, Ben Ali's government was suspicious of Iran's approach to promoting the Shiite religion and therefore did not allow Iran's cultural and religious activities in Tunisia. After all, in the 2010s Iran could not export its political system to Tunisia.³⁸

³⁶ Alireza Shaker, "A Genealogy of Nigerian Shias", available at: <http://irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1954835/> (accessed August 27, 2022).

³⁷ Mehdi Sabouhi and Rahmat Haji Mineh, A Comparative Study of Approaches Taken by Iran and Turkey towards Arab Spring; Case Studies of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, *Quarterly Foreign Relations*, Vol. 5, Issue, 20, 2013, pp. 99 -133.

³⁸ Hassan Yousefi; Hassan Khodaverdi and Garineh Keshishyan Siraki, Foreign Relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Tunisia: A Comparative Study of the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani Governments, *World Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2022, pp. 65-68.

Iran-Africa Diplomatic Relations

Iran-Africa relations in the post-Islamic Revolution period have always fluctuated due to the Iran-Iraq war. In the first period (the 1980s) due to the domestic criticisms of the government, Iran had not given priority to Africa. Sudan remained the only African state which expanded its relations with the Islamic Republic in the late 1980s to 1990s. In 1991, President Rafsanjani visited Sudan. Following his visit, Arab and Western sources have accused Iran of training military forces as well as exploiting its military presence in the State to gather intelligence. Several African leaders like Ali Hassan (President of Tanzania), Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Nelson Mandela all visited Iran between the years 1988 to 1994. This indicates that the relationship between Iran and Africa was not completely ignored and there were some diplomatic efforts.³⁹ In this path, there was a strong comeback in strengthening relations between Iran and Africa in 1996 when the United States imposed sanctions on Iran. President Rafsanjani visited Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and South Africa in 1996, after which relations were restored.⁴⁰

In 2004, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa announced that the amount of South African investment in Iran is up to \$1.5 billion and also the investment of Iran in South Africa had reached \$150 million. This was a result of the expanding diplomatic relations between the two countries, which have continued ever since. Relations with other important African countries have followed the same pattern during the Khatami administration. President Khatami, for instance, in 1998 hosted Daniel Arap Moi, the prime minister of Kenya. More improvement was witnessed in the African and Iran relations when Khatami toured seven African states including Senegal, Nigeria, Benin, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and Uganda in 2005. The visit by Khatami was an indication of another beginning of bilateral relations between Iran and these countries. Kamal Kharrazi, the Foreign Minister of Iran visited Ghana where he signed an agreement donating \$1.5 million to Ghana.⁴¹

The selection of Ahmadinejad for the presidency in 2005 after 8 years of flexibility in approach to the world, highlighted the Third World in the foreign policy of Iran. He believed that "the whole world is not Europe and the USA and all countries have a vote at the United Nations".⁴² During his presidency, he visited African countries 20 times and likewise, the Iranian foreign minister visited Africa several times. It seems that Iran's foreign policy in this period was based on utopian idealism with an unbalanced foreign policy. Ahmadinejad's "Look East" policy highlighted developing countries in Iran's foreign policy and almost completely ignored the West, which

³⁹ Shirin Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era Resisting the New International Order*, Praeger, California, 2010, p. 228.

⁴⁰ Hussein Al-Nadeem, Iranian Mission to Africa is Bad News for the British, *EIR International*, Vol. 23, No. 38, 1996, p. 32.

⁴¹ Shirin Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era Resisting the New International Order* . . . p. 229.

⁴² "Review Ahmadinejad's 60 Trips to 38 Countries", available at: <https://fararu.com/fa/news/25471/> (accessed August 27, 2022). (in Persian)

after 16 years marked an unprecedented period in Iran's approach.

His presidency was characterized by the return to the values and principles of the early years of the Islamic Revolution in domestic and foreign policies. This means that Ahmadinejad's greater concern would have been the expansion of relations with developing states, but factors like Western pressures and the imposition of economic sanctions also contributed to the shift of Iranian policy. Therefore, Iranian authorities needed Third World states, including African states, to sympathize with Iran. However, rising oil prices caused an improvement in Iran's financial conditions, making Iran a more attractive partner for African states. Finally, Ahmadinejad's appealing policy in Africa helped him to gain the status of the observer for Iran at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 2006.⁴³

Abdoulaye Wade, the Senegalese president, visited Iran six times after 2003 and most of his trips took place during the Ahmadinejad era. Affected by this diplomatic traffic, economic ties between the two states were strengthened. His visits in 2009 further saw the involvement of Iran in several projects. As part of the expansion of relations, Iran established a car factory which aimed to produce an Iranian car brand "Samand". The investment in this car factory caused \$ 158 million in damage to Iran, as the project was done without careful study of all aspects.⁴⁴ In response to Wade's visits, Ahmadinejad visited Senegal.⁴⁵

In an attempt to solicit support for respective projects in their countries, President Ahmadinejad visited other African states like the Gambia, Tanzania, Gabon, Djibouti, and Malawi. Also, in a visit to Mali where Iran had already built a medical center in Bamako, foreign minister Mottaki announced that Iran would help build the Kanai Dam. He expressed the willingness of Iran to assist the Malian state in the fields of energy, agriculture, water, and construction of factories. President Ahmadinejad, when again visited Africa in 2009, made official visits to states like the Comoros, Kenya, and Djibouti and during the trip, he signed five economic cooperation agreements. In Kenya, another agreement was signed to establish a direct air link between Tehran and Kenya as well as the setting up of the shipping line from Mombasa to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas.⁴⁶

A two-day summit was held in Tehran in September 2010 with the participation of leaders, businessmen, and diplomats from about 50 African countries. In his attempt to stir up the non-aligned states, President Ahmadinejad called for more cooperation between Iran and Africa. He noted that Iran and the African states could launch an international system based on respect for these countries' rights and dignity.⁴⁷

⁴³ Shirin Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era Resisting the New International Order* . . . p. 228.

⁴⁴ "How Ahmadinejad Wasted \$ 158 Million?", available at: <https://shoaresal.ir/fa/news/277305/> (accessed August 27, 2022). (in Persian),

⁴⁵ Charlie Szrom, "Ahmadinejad in West Africa: What Iranian Outreach to the Region Reveals about Tehran's Foreign Policy", available at: <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/ahmadinejad-in-west-africa-what-iranian-outreach-to-the-region-reveals-about-tehrans-foreign-policy> (accessed August 27, 2022).

⁴⁶ Shirin Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era Resisting the New International Order* . . . p. 230.

⁴⁷ Brandon Fite and Chloe Coughlin-Schulte, "The U.S and Iranian Strategic Competition: The Impact of Latin America, Africa, and the Peripheral States", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012, p. 22.

It would not be inappropriate to assert that the Iranian objectives in Africa are only partially achieved despite the massive entry and several agreements made between Iran, especially Ahmadinejad's government and the African states. Iran's investments are often limited due to sanctions and the impossibility of easy money circulation and so Iran has not been able to do much. Today, despite serious efforts, Iran's trade volume with South Africa is about \$100 million, and the authorities attempt to raise this level. Iran's total trade with Africa reaches \$1.2 billion⁴⁸ which indicates the high volume of problems in this direction. Politically also, Iran made equally an inadequate achievement. For instance, South Africa which appeared to be the friendliest and powerful African state to Iran voted cautiously in the vote about Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology. South Africa even went ahead to abstain during the voting in the IAEA.⁴⁹

When Hassan Rouhani became president in 2013, he announced a new and balanced policy to the world in foreign relations. He has only visited South Africa and sought to balance Africa's role in Iran's global politics. Nonetheless, due to the Arab Spring, Iran's activities increased during his presidency, especially in the field of public diplomacy and religious policy. Rouhani sought to provide a soft face of Iran to African countries, however, he believed that these countries did have not the capacity to respond to Iran's strategic interests.

Economic Diplomacy of Iran in Africa

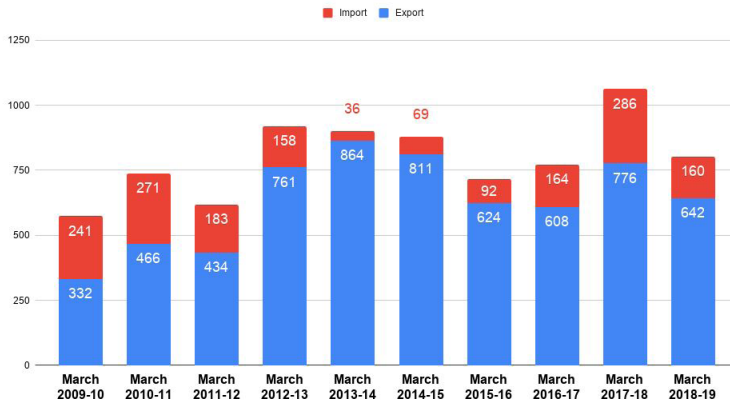
The Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, as an arm of Iran's economic diplomacy alongside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pursues Iran's economic goals in Africa. Based on Iran's grand plans and strategy in the field of trade development with Africa, the organization has implemented various measures. These activities include participating in joint commission meetings with African countries, holding conferences to identify problems, informing Iran's international exhibitions and accepting business delegations from African countries at the same time, providing business advice and informing African business opportunities to the private sector, developing a joint three-year business roadmap with Iran's new ambassadors in Africa, pursuing the implementation of cooperation documents with African countries, pursuing the removal of obstacles to Iran's projects in Africa, pursuing the launch of a regular and direct sea transportation line to the south of Africa and identifying business opportunities in African countries has been the most important actions of this organization. Today, Iranian companies operate in the field of construction of industrial factories, power plants, urban infrastructure such as water and sewage, and road construction in African countries. In Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya and similar countries, activities have been formed by Iranian companies in the field of technical

⁴⁸ "Iran's Little Share in Trade with Africa", available at: <http://www.tpo.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=1&pageid=1840&newsview=8461> (accessed September 27, 2022). (in Persian)

⁴⁹ Shirin Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era Resisting the New International Order*... p. 231.

and engineering services.⁵⁰ It is important to note that Iran is facing severe international sanctions and economic activities are facing huge problems. Iran's total exports to African countries from 2009 to 2019 were \$3.6 and its imports were \$7.1 billion.⁵¹ In recent years, Iran has made limited investments in some African countries and in return has been able to attract some companies for investment in Iran from Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania. But the volume of investments is low and not comparable amount to Iran's regional competitors.

Figure 1. Iran-Africa Non-Oil Trade Volume from 2009 to 2019 (Million USD)



Source:

<https://www.en.eghtesadonline.com/Section-economy-4/30471-year-review-of-iran-africa-trade>

Cultural Diplomacy and Nye's Triangle Soft Power Projection

Nye lays the assertion that soft power produces cultural influence and power. Power according to Nye is the ability to change the behavior of people or provoke them in other countries to achieve what is desired. Basically, there are three ways of doing that; "coercion (sticks), payments (carrots), and attraction (soft power)".⁵² Due to the circumstances, Iran wants to set up close relations with African countries through payments and attraction. Confrontation with the West especially the USA and Israel has legitimized Iran's policies in Africa. By using media, university scholarships, and language courses, Iran has been able to construct considerable prestige in the continent, especially in Muslim communities.

After the Islamic Revolution, Iran tried to expand its cultural activities in Africa. Thus, in the 1980s, contact with Muslims and assistance to anti-colonial movements, as well as civil and propaganda activities were among Iran's activities on the conti-

⁵⁰ "Dissection of Iran's Trade with Arab and African Countries in 1398/ 20% Growth in Trade", <http://tpo.ir/index.aspx?keyid=&siteid=1&pageid=701&newsview=8900> (accessed May 27, 2021). (in Persian),

⁵¹ "10-Year Review of Iran-Africa Trade", available at: <https://www.en.eghtesadonline.com/Section-economy-4/30471-year-review-of-iran-africa-trade> (accessed May 27, 2021).

⁵² Joseph S. Nye, Think Again: Soft Power, *Foreign Policy*, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2006/02/23/think-again-soft-power/> (accessed October 10, 2022).

ment. During Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency in the 1990s, Iran made lasting efforts in the cultural arena in Africa. The establishment of cultural and religious centers, the establishment of Red Crescent sanctuaries in Africa and the formation of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization are among the steps that have been taken by Iran during this period. During Mohammad Khatami's term (1997-2005), Iran based its foreign policy on the theory of "dialogue of civilizations" and in this direction, a great responsibility was placed on cultural and scientific institutions.⁵³ For example, Al-Mustafa University, the main educational centre of Iran abroad, has seventeen main branches in sub-Saharan Africa. The university also has about 100 schools, mosques, and seminaries in 30 African countries. Today, 5,000 African students are studying at Al-Mustafa University. Among them, 2,000 are studying at Al-Mustafa's campuses in Iran, and 3,000 in the university's branches in Africa.⁵⁴

Iran could not coerce a state to do its policies in Africa as some Western actors do. As Nye mentions, Iran as an intelligent actor has understood its policies' attractiveness in African countries. The policy of "Resistance against Global Arrogance" is an attractive and convincing discourse among poor societies whether they are Muslim or not. Due to the sociological situation of some African societies, they tend to have anti-Western ideologies. Therefore, it could be noted that Nye's concept of absorption has been used by Iran in different ways. The conversion of millions to the Shiite sect, especially in Nigeria, shows Iran's strategic depth and success in Africa. Considering Iran's facilities and expenditures compared to other equal competitors including Saudi Arabia shows that Iran has pursued a more attractive policy and this is due to the acceptability of its ideals among anti-Western societies. Also, Nye's concept of payments (carrots) is not widely observed. Due to severe international sanctions and financial problems after the 2000s and especially in the 2010s, Iran did not invest considerable amounts in Africa, and its main investment is in education. Therefore, Iran has achieved an optimum result albeit with huge international pressure. Due to the lack of accurate statistics, the expenditures of different Iranian governments in achieving soft power cannot be obtained. However, it is obvious that these activities took place more intensively during the Ahmadinejad presidency.

The Soft Power Tools of the Islamic Republic in Africa

Islamic Culture & Relations Organization (ICRO)

The Islamic Culture & Relations Organization (ICRO) was established in 1995 and is normally seen as a key instrument of Iran's cultural diplomacy. The organization serves as a channel for regulating the multifarious cultural diplomacy networks of the Islamic Republic. ICRO like the British Council and Goethe or Confucius institu-

⁵³ Mohsen Movahhedi Qomi, *Reviewing Islamic Republic of Iran's Relations with the Continent of Africa's Countries with a Look at the Relations between Iran and Africa before the Islamic Revolution...* pp. 78-85.

⁵⁴ Wagdy Sawahel, "Iran's 'branch campuses' reach Sub-Saharan Africa", available at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20180925134208657> (accessed October 6, 2022).

tion is responsible for coordinating the bilateral cultural initiatives of Iran with other states. This organization is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and operates under the guidance of the Supreme Leader and aim to promote the ideals of the revolution, encourage Islamic unity, and strengthen relations with Muslim countries.⁵⁵

It is important to note that this organization is powerful as far as Iran's soft power is concerned. This is because it is the body that appoints the senior cultural consular serving abroad. Though the consulate works independently, it collaborates with the Iranian embassies. The Al-Hoda International is also run by ICRO which is responsible for the publication of Islamic literature on Islam and the Iranian culture in about 25 languages. ICRO offices are spread across the world, including several European capitals and in Pakistan and Turkey.

Bonyads (Foundations)

Many foundations directly or indirectly affect Iran's foreign policy and especially public diplomacy. Given the fact that these foundations have strong financial resources, they are highly effective. However, they are a special feature of the Iranian economy and their activities are in the fields of commerce, industrial production, as well as religious and political issues, social services, and art. It is estimated that the Bonyads' economic capacity is about 30 to 40 per cent of the Iranian economy.⁵⁶

In 2003, the Expediency Discernment Council of the System approved the Twenty-Year Vision Document. The main purpose of this document is to transform Iran into a developed country with the first position in economic, scientific, and technological development in the region, with an Islamic and revolutionary identity, inspirational culture in the Islamic world and constructive and effective interaction in international relations. The document is very comprehensive and guides Iran's foreign policy, especially in Africa up to 2025. Attempts to liberate the region from the foreign military presence, strengthen relations with the Islamic world and present a clear picture of the Islamic Revolution and the political achievements of the Islamic Republic and promote Iran's rich culture, art and civilization and religious democracy are among the most important aspects of this document.⁵⁷ It is obvious that the African Muslim countries, as well as those African countries with some kind of Muslim societies, are crucial in the program because Iran needs their votes in international forums.

Since foundations operate as charities, they usually do not pay taxes to the government, and even the government cannot restrict their activities. They also can use funds, and according to Saeedi⁵⁸, these foundations use the currency at the govern-

⁵⁵ "Introduction," available at: <http://en.icro.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=257&pageid=9292> (accessed October 6, 2022).

⁵⁶ William Jenkins Bullock, *Bonyads as Agents and Vehicles of the Islamic Republic's Soft Power*. . . p. 158.

⁵⁷ Samane Alavi, *Evaluation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy Based on the 20-Years Perspective Document and General Politics (2005-2009)*, *Strategic and Macro Policies*, Vol. 4, No. 15, 2016, p. 151.

⁵⁸ Ali A. Saeidi, *The Accountability of Para-governmental Organizations (Bonyads): The Case of Iranian Foundations*, *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2004, p. 485.

ment rate easily.⁵⁹ These foundations have a direct impact on Iran's foreign policy. For instance, when President Hashemi Rafsanjani attempted to change Iran's revolutionary policy in 1989, one of the Bonyads announced that they would increase the reward for the assassination of Salman Rushdie.⁶⁰ Hashemi Rafsanjani rejected the announcement and said that it was not a governmental institution and their position does not represent Iran's official position.

Again, for instance, Imam Khomeini (RA) Relief Foundation works directly in charity in countries such as Tanzania, Zanzibar Island, Union of the Comoros, Sierra Leone and Madagascar. For the Union of the Comoros alone, the Foundation has undertaken the following activities in 2008: (a) Inauguration of Imam Khomeini Relief Committee Representative Office on the Comoros; (b) Conducting a special round-table discussion on Africa in cooperation with the Department of State; (c) Holding a meeting with the Foreign Minister of the Comoros Union; (d) Initiating housing construction for orphan girls on the brink of marriage in the Comoros; (e) Supporting the 1,000 displaced households with 6,200 people worth more than a million dollars; (f) Assistance to the protected families during 2008 was equivalent to 65 tons of food, including 40 tons of rice, 15 tons of oil, and 10 tons of sugar; and (g) Setting up a technical and professional workshop on sewing, computer, electricity, and carpentry for young people in need of employment. In this regard, in 2008, 680 people received the necessary technical and vocational training.⁶¹

The International Media of Iran

As mentioned above Iran's effort is to attract people with its soft power and in this line, Iran's policymakers have learned they should use new ways in the digitalized world. Hence, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) attempts to adapt itself to the new realities, as a result of which the scope of international government channels has increased. These channels use the internet and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to attract people around the world, especially in Africa. In addition, Iranian movies are uploaded to YouTube with subtitles in different languages. The most important goal of Iran's media strategy is to provoke anti-American and anti-Zionist sentiments through the news to form a resistance front among the people of the world. Today, Iran's Radio is broadcasting in 32 languages throughout the world. Moreover, 14 television channels in various languages are promoting Iran's ideals.⁶² In this line, Reuter's experts have claimed that Iran operates more than 70 multilingual online websites worldwide.⁶³

⁵⁹ Since Iran's economy is almost state-owned, the currency policy is also determined by the government. As such, the government exchange rate is usually cheaper than the ordinary exchange rate.

⁶⁰ Salman Rushdie is a British-Indian writer who wrote the *Satanic Verses*. In his book, Rushdie insulted the Prophet of Islam. In 1989, Iran's Leader, Ayatullah Khomeini issued a Fatwa condemning Salman Rushdie to death.

⁶¹ "Description of Relief Foundation's Supports of the Deprived People in Comoros", available at: <http://www.shafaf.ir/fa/news/18226/> (accessed October 25, 2022). (in Persian)

⁶² "Vice President of External Broadcasting: PressTV Has Entered the World's Giant Media Area", available at: <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/04/05/2041365/> (accessed December 8, 2022). (in Persian)

⁶³ Jack Stubbs and Christopher Bing, "Special Report: How Iran Spreads Disinformation around the World", available at: <https://www.>

Iran uses a strong media network for Islamic and developing societies which are controlled by the state institute of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). The IRIB aims to promote Iranian culture and civilization by expounding the worldview of Iran to an international audience. The IRIB operates five different international news channels including Al-Alam, Al-kowthar, Press TV and Hispan TV. Al-Alam became Iran's first 24-hour foreign language channel, which is international. It began in 2003 with news coverage from Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Iran, and Africa launched in 2006, Al-Kowthar is also the second Iranian Arabic Channel that concentrates on broadcasting religious programs for the Arab Shiite communities. Arguably, the most known Iranian media outlet in the West is Press TV which was launched internationally in 2007. This television channel offers 24-hour English-language news programs.⁶⁴

Press TV appears as an alternative that gives its viewers another news perspective which is not given by CNN, Aljazeera, and BBC. Hispan TV was also launched as a Spanish-language television channel that broadcasts news to Latin America and Spain. This was vital during Ahmadinejad's period. Hispan TV channel reflects the ties between Iran and Latin American states such as Venezuela and Cuba. The channel, like Press TV, was removed from the main satellites in 2013 when Iran was sanctioned. However, the most popular media organization in African countries is Press TV, and it seems that the channel has succeeded in attracting the attention of Muslims and anti-imperialists. For instance, Kwesi Pratt, a Ghanaian journalist, anti-imperialist and a strong advocate of Iran, during a program in April 2008 on the premises of Islamic University, encouraged students to adopt Press TV as an alternative to CNN, BBC, and Aljazeera. The journalist blamed the Western Media for their imperialistic and ideological broadcast.⁶⁵

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2004 and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt both accused many Shiite-Arab communities in the Persian Gulf region of showing more loyalty to the Islamic Republic of Iran instead of their states.⁶⁶ In this regard, Hashiru has observed that many Ghanaian Shiites and non-Shiites show more loyalty to Iran than they do to their state. Some of these people express that Iran is more appealing to them as a true Islamic state than their home state. More important is the fact that some of these people have not yet embraced Shia as their religion. They maintain their faith as Sunni Muslims but have a soft view of Iran. This means that Iran has gradually attracted the Ghanaian Muslim community.⁶⁷

From the family level, these sympathizers have named their offspring and association after some important figures in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, some

reuters.com/article/us-cyber-iran-specialreport/special-report-how-iran-spreads-disinformation-around-the-world-idUSKCN1N21FT (accessed December 14, 2022).

⁶⁴ Edward Wastnidge, *The Modalities of Iranian Soft Power: From Cultural Diplomacy to Soft War*. . . pp. 372-73; Seth G. Jones and Danika Newlee, "The United States' Soft War with Iran," CSIS Briefs, Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2019, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Muhammed Hashiru, "Using Foreign Policy as a Tool for Spreading Ideology: the Case of Iran in Ghana (1979-2016)", MA Thesis, Sakarya University, 2017, p. 68.

⁶⁶ Natalia Paunic, *The Rising Shi'a Crescent: Iranian Smart Power and Implications for the Middle East Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf*, *Carleton Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, 2016, p. 70-76.

⁶⁷ Muhammed Hashiru, "Using Foreign Policy as a Tool for Spreading Ideology: the Case of Iran in Ghana (1979-2016)". . . p. 68.

of them appear to monitor the political and religious affairs of the Islamic Republic. They do not only follow the Marj'a⁶⁸ in Iran but also have a keen interest in Iranian politics as well as give great reverence to the Spiritual leaders of Iran. Many Shiite adherents have abandoned Western Media and have subscribed to watching Press TV and as mentioned above, even Muslims who aren't Shiites also watch Press TV.⁶⁹

Iranian Soft Power Obstacles in Africa

Although Iran's soft power is working in the entire Africa, at the same time Iran has some problems on the continent:

1. Due to the international sanctions, the facilities that Iran uses in Africa are not comparable to the diplomatic and economic facilities of global competitors such as the US and China or regional competitors like Turkey and Saudi Arabia;

2. If African-Iranian relations keep African actors away from Western powers, they avoid such relations;

3. Iran's domestic problems and international sanctions have put pressure on Iran and due to this Iran failed to maximize its relations with Africa in economic terms. For example, South Africa has had high-profile relations with Iran, and even has supported Iran's right to develop peaceful nuclear technology, however, under international pressure, the country's officials have reduced economic ties with Iran, and some companies have even stopped operating in Iran.⁷⁰

4. Iran is closely monitoring Israel's activities in Africa and in response, Israel tries to put obstacles on Iran's Africa policy. In 2012, for example, an Israeli plane attacked an arms factory under construction, and Israeli officials announced that Iran was building it. After the attack, Israel attacked Sudan's facilities several times.⁷¹ Israel has been trying to prove that the Iranian and Sudanese governments help Hamas in Palestine.

5. Iran and Saudi Arabia are ideologically in fierce competition in Africa. After attacks on Saudi Arabia's Embassy in Iran in 2016, Saudi Arabia was able to force some African countries like Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and the Comoros Islands to cut ties with Iran. It matters because Saudi Arabia is in a better economic situation and is backed by the US, so Iran has various constraints in the continent.

⁶⁸ The person (men) who is on the top level of Shia Islam's cleric system and he is so respected. Hence, ordinary people obeying his orders.

⁶⁹ Muhammed Hashiru, "Using Foreign Policy as a Tool for Spreading Ideology: the Case of Iran in Ghana (1979-2016)". . . p. 69.

⁷⁰ Najla Mari, Iran in the Face of the International Scramble for Africa, *Journal for Iranian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2017, p. 64.

⁷¹ Ian Black, "Israeli Attack' on Sudanese Arms Factory Offers Glimpse of Secret War", available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/25/israeli-sudanese-factory-secret-war> (accessed December 22, 2022).

Conclusion

In the globalized world, state actors are fiercely competing with each other. Hence as Nye believes culture, values, and political system are the main factors in public diplomacy and soft power. The goal is to absorb people who are not from the origin countries. When people in a society accept and support the policies and actions of another country, the action of absorption has taken place. After all the efforts, the policies of a country in the receiving society will be legitimate. Therefore, the citizens of the target community will think in a way that the motherland thinks and will do whatever the mother country does. When a country like Iran promotes universal and spiritualist values, it is possible to achieve the desired results. Minor values and minor cultures cannot help soft power, as can be seen in North Korea. Therefore, in a globalized world, when hard power combines with soft power and attraction, is successful.

As mentioned, soft power is a low-cost tactic to gain foreign policy strategies. Cultural and educational activities are very vital in this way. Also, it is vital to give a strong message to persuade people in host societies. Providing academic scholarships, holding conferences in recipient communities, writing and translating books in local languages, creating various websites, conducting scientific and research trips, establishing radio and television in local languages and such issues are among the activities that lead to the efficiency of public diplomacy and soft power.

After the 1979 revolution, Iran has used public diplomacy in a very wide way. Political elites had well understood that for survival in the short term, they needed for different tactics, and it was through this that they were able to secure their strategic survival. Moreover, the elites were able to send their pattern to other societies, and these measures provided the long-term survival of the Iranian revolution and its strategic messages in poor societies. Therefore, Iran has been able to create a complex network of soft power and ultimately smart power in the Third World, especially in Africa. In the case of African policy, it is clear that Iranian officials tend to use African countries' support in their global policies. Moreover, Iran has been able to make parallel power in countries like Nigeria and Tanzania. What has helped the strategy of Iran is the influential power of its ideology on the continent. Although, Iran faces fierce obstacles, the authorities attempt to assist African countries in any possible way and instead, these countries support Iran at international summits.

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ИРАНСКА ДИПЛОМАТИЈА И РЕЛИГИЈСКА МЕКА МОЋ У АФРИЦИ

Сажетак

Овај чланак анализира како је Иран успео да постане утицајна сила у Африци. Користећи се „извозом исламске револуције“ и идеологијом „отпора против глобалне ароганције“, Иран је успео да оснажи своју меку моћ комбинујући класичне и модерне методе. Као последица такве политике, неке заједнице у Африци не само да су постале савезници Ирана – већ и део његовог идентитета. Тако Иран има велику подршку у Нигерији, али и у Гани и Танзанији. Због тога Иран покушава да консолидује своју моћ у геополитичким играма са Западом, али и са регионалним центрима моћи као што је Саудијска Арабија. Ипак, иранска политика у Африци наишла је на неке препреке, што је резултат међународних санкција. Користећи се аналитичком методом, у овом раду анализирају се дипломатске, медијске и економске стратегије које су довеле до тога да Иран постане важан актер у Африци. На тај начин овај рад доприноси нашем разумевању иранске меке моћи у Африци, али и иранске спољне политике уопште.

Кључне речи: мека моћ, Иран, револуција, спољна политика, Африка