

Political Influence Tools in Iran Foreign Policy: Diplomacy and Propaganda

Anar Aliyev ¹ & Dr.KM Ashifa²

¹ Administrative Staff, Expert at External Relations Office, Istanbul Gelisim University, Turkey

² Asst. Professor in Social Work, Faculty of Health Science, Istanbul Gelisim University, Turkey

Abstract: The present paper tried to analyse political influence tools which effecting Iran’s foreign policy. The determination of the mental, psychological, physical environment and conditions in which decision makers make their foreign policy decisions is considered as one of the important facts in terms of foreign policy analysis. It is known that besides external factors, internal factors are also effective in determining foreign policy decisions. However, realist movements made a basic distinction between domestic and foreign policy and did not address the role of internal factors in influencing foreign policy. This study will attempt to answer the question of how effective political influence tools such as diplomacy and propaganda are in the process of Iran’s regional influence capacity building. The idea of whether the foreign policy behavior of states is directed to a specific purpose is a frequently discussed topic in the international policy literature.

Key words: Foreign Policy, Political Influence tool, Propaganda, policy, decision making

Introduction

It is possible to say that the realistic goal of Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East region is the effort to resist the influence of the USA and its allies in the region. The Islamic regime pursues a strategy to eliminate this threat, which it sees as vital to its security and survival, and to secure its regional goals, expanding its sphere of influence in various countries through the Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah. In line with these strategic goals, Iran continues to use political influence tools to expand its sphere of influence in many countries, especially in the conflict areas of the Middle East. This study will attempt to answer the question of how effective political influence tools such as diplomacy and propaganda are in the process of Iran's regional influence capacity building. First, it will focus on the tool of political influence and an evaluation will be made on which mechanisms are included in the political tools. As a result of these evaluations, based on the examples of different authors, it will be seen that tools such as propaganda and diplomacy stand out among the foreign policy instruments used by states to create political influence in neighboring and close geographies. Finally, examples of propaganda and diplomacy in Iran's regional foreign policy-making process will be mentioned. The idea of whether the foreign policy behavior of states is directed to a specific purpose is a frequently discussed topic in the international policy literature. There are two main views discussed in this direction in the international policy literature. Advocates of the first view argue that the foreign policy behavior determined by the states is aimed at a certain purpose. On the other hand, those who defend the second view state that states conduct their foreign policy behaviors not based on specific goals but on daily needs, and that the determined foreign policy has the nature of an action/reaction rather than an objective.

Review of literature

Mehmet Gonlubol has determined a classification according to different criteria while analyzing the foreign policy objectives of the states. Gonlubol, divided the foreign policy aims of the states into two as *short-term and long-term goals* in this classification. Gonlubol's foreign policy classification is given in the table (1)

Table 1: Short-term and Long term Foreign Policy Objectives of States

Short-Term	Long- Term
Survival or defense of the homeland Maintaining the political, social, and economic system of the country Provide the security To hold strategic and important places Keeping the people who are identical in terms of religion, language, and ethnicity within their own boundaries Meeting the general and specific needs of people Increase the prestige	A total change of the political and ideological structure of the international system Gaining power in the international area

Arnold Wolfers used different criteria while listing the foreign policy goals of states. Wolfers' relevant study on the foreign policy objectives of states are possession goals; milieu Goals; Ideological or Revolutionary goals; traditional National Goal; General Interest; Private Interest; Self extension; self-preservation; self-abnegation.

States can make use of different foreign policy impact tools in countries and regions within their sphere of influence to realize these foreign policy goals. Countries aiming to create influence in different geographies use political, economic and military and various foreign policy mechanisms for these purposes. In this section, the tool of political influence will be emphasized and which mechanisms are included in the political tool will be evaluated.

Mehmet Gonlubol makes a general assessment in his study, in which he analyzes foreign policy instruments, and divides foreign policy instruments into 5 categories such as *diplomatic tool* ; *economic tool*; *psychological or propaganda tool*; *intervention in internal affairs*, and *military tool*

Stating that decision-makers have chosen the necessary tools to realize their decisions after determining the goals and objectives that the state wants to achieve in the international arena and providing the power required by the situations, Gonlubol emphasizes that states do not always have to act actively in this sense. Gonlubol argues that when states decide to realize their foreign policy goals, today's international system allows states to apply various behaviors, methods, and techniques such as diplomatic, military, propaganda, and economy as a tool. .

Faruk Sonmezoğlu divides foreign policy instruments into 3 categories by conducting a broader and in-depth analysis in his study, in which he analyzes foreign policy instruments like *political influence tool*. *economic influence tool* and *military influence tool*

Sonmezoğlu then made a comprehensive evaluation by dividing these three categories into subtitles. According to Sonmezoğlu political influence tools include *diplomacy and propaganda*, economic influence tools include *measures for foreign trade*, financial measures, and military influence tools include *war and weapons*. Sonmezoğlu stated that in the foreign policy followed by states, one of these means of influence can take priority, or as well as states can benefit from all other means of influence.

K.J. Holsti divided the political influence tools that states apply to create a sphere of influence in international politics into 3 categories such as *diplomacy*, *propaganda* ; and *intelligence and information acquisition*

According to Holsti, states can use different versions of diplomacy, such as *shuttle diplomacy*, *silent diplomacy*, *coercive diplomacy*, and *nuclear diplomacy*, according to the different regional and international conditions in which countries are located. Padelford and Lincoln, on the other hand, emphasize *diplomacy* as the most important tool to realize international prestige, which states consider as one of the foreign policy objectives, while *culture and political values* are emphasized as important foreign policy tools to create political influence.

Methodology

The present investigation mainly discussing factors effecting the foreign policy of Iran. The Determination of the mental, psychological, physical environment and conditions in which decision-makers make their foreign policy decisions is considered as one of the important facts in terms of foreign policy analysis. It is known that besides external factors, internal factors are also effective in determining foreign policy decisions. Researchers have applied qualitative techniques to get inferences from the available data. Content analysis and documents analysis had been used and data were collected through secondary sources from the ministry of foreign affairs and annual reports of external affairs. In the present study, the different reports related to Iranian foreign policy published monthly by the Institute for Political and International Studies, which operates under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, were used.

Result and Discussion

Based on the data collected, Iran's foreign policy behaviors in international policy through the objectives set by the decision makers in advance. The study states that the use of political, economic and military influence tools for foreign policy behaviors that are determined as one of these objectives and aim to create spheres of influence in different countries and regions. Based on the examples given by different authors who have worked

on the field above, it is possible to say that *diplomacy and propaganda* come to the fore as a means of political influence. In this context, through the tools of *diplomacy and propaganda*, Iran's tools of political influence will be analyzed.

Propaganda : Based on the assumption that propaganda has the purpose of persuading, influencing, directing and controlling the masses, we can say how important propaganda is for both domestic and foreign public opinion for a country like Iran that feeds its political existence with historical accumulation. In terms of the existence and power of propaganda arguments, it is seen that Iran uses this instrument as an effective foreign policy tool to create influence in its regional activities. In this sense, propaganda, which is considered as one of the most powerful foreign policy instruments of political and institutional structures at the state level, has the power to mobilize actions and incidents, sometimes with the characteristic of defence and sometimes attack. In the course of the development of the Iranian revolution, it was seen how effectively and systematically the radical groups under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini used this technique both inside and outside.¹

In the 21st century, with the expansion of propaganda activities and types, its capacity of influence has also strengthened. Iran's hard power instruments, especially its nuclear tests, cause it to be partially isolated from the international community and to face embargoes. Iran uses its soft power instruments against these "black propaganda" activities carried out towards it. It conducts counter-propaganda activities in the regions it considers within its own geostrategic area, especially the Gulf countries. Therefore, propaganda, which has become one of the soft power instruments, is used in Iran's foreign policy as a strategy of spreading its effectiveness towards groups that it can integrate into common points through ethnic and religious phenomena in the regions under its sphere of influence.²

The strategic position of Iran offers it the opportunity to use and develop its regional influence. In this sense, it is possible to say that one of the most important advantages of the country's strategic position for Iran is the propaganda activity. As an effective actor in the equation of the struggle for influence in the Middle East region, Iran conducts a serious propaganda activity to ensure its own security, neutralize the embargoes imposed against it and protect its national interests. These political and cultural propaganda activities of Iran in both domestic and foreign policy are directed by the³Islamic Culture and Communication Organization, consisting of a high council of 15 people, which are 5 of them appointed by the Supreme Leader.⁴

The Islamic Culture and Communication Organization aims to spread the Persian language and culture in the whole region and close countries, to create influence on Shiite communities, to expand Iran's influence in regional and distant countries. For this purpose, the organization has turned into one of the most important political and cultural forces of the religious leader in international platforms, with offices in many countries of the World. The organization carries out policies towards the transformation of this population into elements defending the interests of Iran by establishing close relations with influential clergy in the regions where the Shiite population predominantly lives. In addition, the Iranian regime, through the Organization, sends the mullahs from Qom and other religious cities to these regions at certain periods and pioneers different religious activities on days considered important for the Shiites. With these and similar activities, the regime, which aims to dominate its own understanding of Islam, provides the Organization with a significant authority and budget to expand its sphere of influence.⁵

Iran effectively uses visual and conventional media communication tools to carry out its propaganda activities on international platforms. In this context, Iran finances newspapers such as Iran News, Iran Daily, Tehran Times, Keyhan English, El Vifak and Keyhan Arabic. On the one hand, Iran is trying to break down prejudices stemming from the embargo, on the other hand, it aims to expand its political sphere of influence in Europe, North America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East region, through these media.⁶

Iran effectively makes use of visual communication instruments as a propaganda tool in close and distant geographies. 10 television channels affiliated to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) broadcast on

¹Seçil Özdemir, **Propaganda as a Foreign Policy Instrument of Iran**, Ankara, IRAM, 2017, p.6-7.

² Ibid., p.8.

³ a.g.e., 10.

⁴ <http://www.sajam.ir/>, Accesed, 16.07.2020

⁵Abdullah Yegin, **Regional Activities and Elements of Power of Iran**, SETA, Istanbul, 2017, p.20-21.

⁶ Ibid., p.24.

international platforms. the Iranian regime aims to increase the power of the regime by broadcasting with several languages in different geographies through Jam-e Jam TV 1-2-3, Al Alem TV, Sahar TV 1-2-3, Al Kevser, Press TV and Hispan TV channels. One of these channels, Jam-e Jam 1-2-3 is trying to influence Persian-language audiences living in different countries of the world by broadcasting in Persian.⁷ The broadcast language of the Al Alem channel is Arabic, and it addresses the Middle East region with its 24-hour broadcasting policy. In addition website of the channel provides services in English, Arabic and Persian. Another channel of Iran broadcasting in different languages is Sahar TV. The channel plans to influence a wide audience in 5 languages (Azeri, Bosnian, Kurdish, Kirman, and Urdu). The channel's website was also created in 5 different languages.^{8,9} Another international channel in Iran is Press Tv. The channel broadcasts in English and also has offices in 26 different countries. Iran also carries out propaganda activities for the geography of Latin America¹⁰. Iran also carries out its propaganda activities intended Latin American geography. Iran continues its propaganda activities in countries such as Spain, Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and Cuba through Hispan TV channel broadcasting in Spanish. Along with all these visual and conventional media propaganda tools, Iran has a radio broadcasting network broadcasting in 25 different languages^{11, 12}.

Diplomacy : Iran continues its propaganda activities in close and distant geographies, primarily through education and different cultural diplomatic activities. Opening university branches in countries such as Venezuela, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Armenia, and Tanzania, Iran plans to carry out these activities in countries such as Malaysia and Canada. With more than 600 Iranology centers established in 45 different countries of the world, Iran aims to spread the Persian language and expand its cultural influence through language. 13 are located in the Middle East, 38 in Asia-Pacific, 203 in Central Asia, 281 in Europe, 1 in Ghana, and 99 in North America of these Iranology centers . In addition, there are more than 100 Persian learning centers under the control of the Iranian regime in various countries of the world.¹³

Iran also dynamically uses diplomacy, another instrument of political influence. Iran has embassies in 155 countries in the world, including 40 in Europe, 39 in Asia, 9 in the Middle East, 44 in Africa, 21 in America, and Australia, and New Zealand. This shows that Iran has an intense experience and tradition of diplomacy despite the embargoes and political pressures it faced. Along with political representations, Iran has many cultural representations in the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe, Africa, the Pacific, and Pakistan. In addition, Iran carries out cooperation activities with more than 40 international organizations, including different specialized organizations, economic and strategic organizations operating under the United Nations. Organizations such as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which Iran participates as an observer member, can be cited as examples of economic and political organizations that Iran is a member of the international system.¹⁵

Conclusion

As a result, we can say that Iran is trying to use soft power instruments effectively in close and distant geographies. Especially in today's world, with the spread of modern communication tools, we see that propaganda activity has become one of the important tools of influence in Iranian foreign policy. Iran, which carries out an effective propaganda and diplomacy activity especially in its close geography through culture, ideology, religion, sect, and other facts, has turned into one of the countries with the most regional experience and knowledge in creating influence through soft power elements. One of the points that should be noted is that the significant positive benefit provided by Iran in return for all these activities creates a geostrategic superiority over its regional rivals in the long term to expand its sphere of influence, and gains effectiveness in the close geography through a sectarian code such as Shi'ism. However, on the one hand, Iran using soft power instruments to expand its sphere of influence, on the other hand, by putting military influence instruments on

⁷ <http://www.jjtvn.ir/>, Accesed,, 15.07.2020

⁸ <https://www.alalamtv.net/>, Accesed, 15.07.2020

⁹ <https://sahartv.ir/>, Accesed, 16.07.2020

¹⁰ <https://www.prestv.com/>, Accesed, 16.07.2020

¹¹ <http://www.hispantv.com/>, Accesed,, 16.07.2020

¹² <http://worldservice.irib.ir/fa>, Accesed,, 17.07.2020

¹³Abdullah Yegin, **Iran's Regional Activities and Elements of Power**, Ibid., p.25-26.

¹⁴ The Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://en.mfa.ir/>, Accesed, 18.07.2020

¹⁵ Sabir Askeroglu, Iran's International Organizations Politika, Ankara, IRAM, 2020, p.4.

the field in countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq increases its potential for conflict with other regional rival states.¹⁶

References

1. Faruk Sönmezoğlu, **Uluslararası Politika ve Dış Politika Analizi**, İstanbul, Der Yayınları
2. Mehmet Gonlubol, **Uluslararası Politika, İlkeler, Kavramlar, Kurumlar**, Ankara, A.Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 2014
3. Arnold Wolfers, The Pole of Power and the Pole of Indifference, **World Politics**, Vol: 4, No: 1, 1951, p.39-63
4. Peu Ghosh, **International Relations**, New Delhi, PHL Learning, 2016
5. Seçil Özdemir, **İran'ın Bir Dış Politika Enstrümanı Olarak Propaganda**, Ankara, İRAM, 2017,
6. Abdullah Yegin, **İran'ın Bölgesel Faaliyetleri ve Güç Unsurları**, SETA, İstanbul, 2017
7. Sabir Askeroğlu, **İran'ın Uluslararası Örgütler Politikası**, Ankara, İRAM, 2020
8. Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Free and Confined: Iran and the International System", **Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs**, Vol :2, No :1, 2011 p. 9-34.
9. Anar Aliyev, Dr.KM Ashifa, "Internal and External Factors Determining Foreign Policy of Iran: Prospects and Perspectives", **Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government**, Vol: 27, No:3, 2021, p.1158-1167.
10. Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Free and Confined: Iran and the International System", **Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs**, Vol 2, No 1, 2011, p.9-34.
11. Abdul Gaffar, "Iran as a Regional Power in West Asia", **The Journal of International Issues**, Vol 19, No 3, 2015, p.64-83.
12. Barry Rubin, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power", **Middle East Review of International Affairs**, Vol 10, No 3, 2006, p.142-151.
13. Mahan Abedin, (2011).**The Domestic Determinants of Iranian Foreign Policy: Challenges to Consensus : Strategic Analysis**, p. 613-628.
14. Penelope Kinch, **The US-Iran Relationship: The Impact of Political Identity on Foreign Policy**, London, I.B.Tauris, 2016
15. Mahan Abedin, "The Domestic Determinants of Iranian Foreign Policy: Challenges to Consensus", **Strategic Analysis**, Vol 35, No 4, 2011, p.613-628.
16. The Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://en.mfa.ir/>, Accesed, 18.07.2020
17. <http://www.jjtvn.ir/>, Accesed,, 15.07.2020
18. <https://www.alalamtv.net/>, Accesed, 15.07.2020
19. <https://sahartv.ir/>, Accesed, 16.07.2020
20. <https://www.presstv.com/>, Accesed, 16.07.2020
21. <http://www.hispantv.com/>, Accesed,, 16.07.2020
22. <http://worldservice.irib.ir/fa>, Accesed,, 17.07.2020
23. <http://www.sajam.ir/>, Accesed, 16.07.2020

¹⁶ Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Free and Confined: Iran and the International System", a.g.e., s.23-24.