

**PUBLIC DIPLOMACY FOR A GLOBAL WORLD:
THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN**

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Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY FOR A GLOBAL WORLD: THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN

by Sarah Abigail Aghazadeh

Complex global challenges – including environmental, economic, diplomatic, and health-related – span national boundaries and increasingly necessitate international cooperation. As a result, diplomacy has broadened from government-to-government relations to include government-to-public relations in an extended constituency of the global whole. Public diplomacy is a process by which governments attempt to attract and persuade various external publics to maintain relationships and encourage an environment for the approval of policies. Examining globalization, diplomacy, and power provides the foundation to assess a specific case of US public diplomacy with Iran. Systems theory provides a focus on the critical interactions, feedback processes, and relationships that are particularly helpful for analyzing public diplomacy in our global world.

The history of US-Iran bilateral relations reflects embedded negative perceptions that each nation has for the other, maintaining a relationship of enmity. The findings of this thesis most notably suggest that public diplomacy should be an integral part of any diplomatic effort, necessitating credibility and legitimacy to function best. The Obama administration's efforts have been successful in some specific diplomatic developments, yet internal and external conflicts impede the building and maintenance of the essential elements that are needed for sustainable, meaningful public diplomacy.

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CHAPTER 1

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN A GLOBAL WORLD

Introduction: Unexpected Inspiration

The city smog hit my eyes and burned while I tried to walk quickly to the corner bakery. Upon my arrival, I ordered two loaves of bread. I was searching my pocket for tomans to pay when the baker asked me if I was American. I responded with a nod and a yes in Persian, adjusting my hijab in a way that showed my discomfort. “What are you doing in Iran?” he asked with a chuckle. I tried to translate and answer in my head, but ended up just smiling and handing him the money for the fresh loaves of bread. As I walked back to my aunt’s house, I reflected that I would have had trouble answering the man even with perfect Persian.

During my trip to Iran, I was asked many questions about the United States and general views that US citizens have about social and political issues. Very similarly, I was trying to grasp the general perspectives of Iranians. Ultimately, we were all seeking a better understanding of one another and our respective countries. However, I had the advantage of seeing Iranians in their own national context. Many of the Iranians I met had never been in the US and did not foresee the possibility of ever visiting. But in Iran, I saw the busy cities with my own eyes, heard the singing prayers with my own ears, and smelled the food cooked on the street with my own nose. The Iranians I spoke to could rely only on secondhand sources to assemble an understanding of my country. My attempts to answer their questions were limited by my own narrow understanding of the

US, its people, and its interactions with the rest of the world. I lacked the skills to express those realities with the deserved accuracy, finesse, and wisdom.

As difficult as it was to describe the only country I know, attempting to communicate as an individual is very different from representing an entire nation. My trip to Iran strengthened my curiosity about the myriad ways in which governments must now communicate in the global world I was learning about in my graduate studies. This world is much more intricate, complicating issues like the economy, the environment, and security by interconnecting so many actors and constituents. I had conversations with Iranians about global issues and their views of the US. A reoccurring theme in their responses was “we like the US people, but we don’t like the US government.” When I returned home, I decided to learn more about non-conventional types of diplomacy and communication.

In particular, I am interested in public diplomacy. It is a challenging concept to grasp and also to execute. However, in its simplest form, public diplomacy is the answer to my questions about how governments connect with foreign publics. The Obama administration’s public diplomacy with Iran has been convoluted, considering the thirty years of tense relations between the two countries and the toll that tension has taken on conventional communication and information exchanges between them. This focus on public diplomacy is an effort to look at the projection of US American power abroad and draw some conclusions about the present and future realities of doing so, using Iran as a timely example. The nexus of perceptions, reality, and politics is something that

fascinates me and has a fundamental impact on foreign policy. I value my heritages from both the US and Iran. In this thesis, I try to bridge them through an analytical journey so I can better understand the relationship in general as well as policy analysis specifically.

New Complications: Globalization, Power, and Public Diplomacy

Globalization has created unprecedented opportunities to better the lives of people around the world.... Yet the forces of globalization that have stitched the world together can also tear it apart. (Jones, Pascual, and Stedman 2009, xiii-xiv)

Defining globalization is not only a lofty goal, but it is an arguably impossible task. Globalization is difficult to define because it manifests itself in many ways and in numerous fields. Politics, economics, health, and education are only some of the disciplines in which deep interconnections have entangled issues, crises, and consequences. While defining globalization is tricky, it is clearly distinguishable from international or internationalization (Daly 1999, 31-32). The substantial difference is that international maintains the nation as the defining component whereas global does not (Daly 1999, 31-32).

Globalization also entails a component of inescapability that international does not (Fried 2012). In an international world, citizens are able to pick and choose when and where they would like to interact with the rest of the world. A global world comes to them (Fried 2012). Brent Scowcroft (2009, xi), former National Security Advisor to US Presidents Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush, observed that “globalization has eroded national borders everywhere and brought new transnational challenges to the fore: weak states, global warming, emerging deadly infectious diseases, and the possibility of

catastrophic terrorism.” Other critics and scholars offer their own views of globalization and its consequences, but a clear definition is evasive.

The inability to clearly define globalization is acknowledged by scholars such as Garrett Wallace Brown, in the Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield. He argues that “...there seems to be a growing consensus that the processes of globalization are often dialectic and contradictory, with the existence of many indeterminable links which limit our ability conclusively to define globalization and its impacts” (2008, 50). “Connections” and “interrelated complexities” are characteristics used to describe globalization and its realities at large (Brown 2008, 43). Consequently, globalization cannot be defined by placing a value judgment on its net impacts; how it is conceptualized often depends on the “relationship one has with its processes and how these processes impact our lives” (Brown 2008, 45). Globalization might be the beacon of a more positive and connected world for some scholars, while for others it is the doom of humankind brought on by myriad inescapable global crises. Both may be correct considering that “...globalization can provide positive opportunities as much as it poses negative consequences” (Brown 2008, 50). This multifaceted view of globalization therefore transcends the views of individual scholars and exists in different disciplinary perspectives as well.

Defining globalization according to discipline presents challenges similar to defining it broadly. Simon Reich, former Director of the Division of Global Affairs (DGA) at Rutgers University, argues that there are four prospective definitions of

globalization (Reich 1998, 1-23). These definitions are not all-inclusive single-sentence explanations, or unanimously agreed upon by sources within each discipline, yet each provides some specific context for respective subjects (Reich 1998, 1-23). From historical, economic, sociological, and technological perspectives, each definition suggests just how difficult it is to generalize aspects of globalization (Reich 1998, 1-23). Each view is distinctive in its characterization and points of focus, but there is a common acknowledgment of interconnections between areas of study including political, economic, and social issues (Reich 1998, 22). Ultimately, one definition of globalization is not attainable or desirable because broad definitions as “clear” and “uncontested” are what have contributed to confusing its meaning, particularly for those who study international relations (Reich 1998, 4). Attempting to force a comprehensive definition, ironically, only adds to the confusion.

Understanding key tenets of globalization provides more insight than seeking a definitive or disciplinary explanation. Manfred Steger (2009, 8), former Director of the Global Research Center at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Australia, asserts that definitions of globalization further convolute its conceptualization by stating that it is “a process, a condition, a system, a force and an age.” He argues that globalization’s complex nature is not properly captured in many subject-specific definitions because each definition only presents a single dimension (Steger 2009, 12). The following are Steger’s key points of globalization based on his synthesis of multiple definitions:

- New and current social networks are transcending conventional boundaries of “political, economic, cultural, and geographic” nature (Steger 2009, 14)
- Relations and interconnections in the social realm are “stretching” and growing (Steger 2009, 14)
- Social transactions and activities are escalating and gaining momentum (Steger 2009, 14)
- Processes of globalization are occurring in multiple dimensions and not “merely on an objective, material level but also involve the subjective plane of human consciousness” (Steger 2009, 15)

A condensed definition, including the elements discussed above, would hold that globalization is the “expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space” (Steger 2009, 15). After reviewing this literature, it is clear that defining globalization is challenging; its main features include complexity, interconnectivity, intensity, and countless perspectives (Brown 2008; Reich 1998; Steger 2009). For the purposes of this thesis, globalization is defined as the increasing interdependence of various social systems that defy physical borders, which brings challenges and benefits to people, groups, and nations. Globalization is important to this thesis because it is the broad contextual element for many important foreign policy issues, especially those concerning Iran. It has also impacted the nature of power in international relations, which is deeply entrenched in the tensions of US-Iran relations.

Power: A Brief Introduction

According to psychologists empathy and social intelligence are vastly more important to acquiring and exercising power than are force, deception, and terror. (Nye 2011, 17)

Until the 1980s, US foreign policy was predicated on Cold War ideals and its bipolar threat to international security (Reich 1998, 2). US foreign policy is still adapting to unexplored terrain in transitioning from the relative simplicity of Cold War tensions to the complex chaos of globalization (Scowcroft 2009, xi). Globalization has significant impacts on power, an essential element to international relations, and a better understanding of its present realities is essential to navigating and adapting to these challenges.

While the idea of power can be as evasive as globalization, its manifestations are generally agreed upon – the ability to obtain a result aligned with one’s goals. Joseph Nye (2011, 6-9), former Dean of John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, defines power as “the capacity to do things in social situations to affect others to get the outcomes we want.” In his view, power is a continuum between hard power (force) and soft power (attraction) using military or economic resources and behaviors such as coercion or diplomacy (Nye 2011, 20). Hard power and soft power “sometimes reinforce and sometimes undercut each other” (Nye 2011, 24). Nye and his colleague, former US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, co-chaired a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Commission Report on Smart Power to address the conflicting notion of power types (CSIS 2007). The commission argued for a circumstantially appropriate balancing of hard and soft power which it deemed “smart

power” (CSIS 2007, 7). While it can be helpful to distinguish differences between a twist of an arm, a conversation to obtain desired outcomes, and the space in between, not all experts agree that these distinctions exist.

Leslie Gelb (2009a, xiv), president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, takes a more straightforward approach to power. He argues that power is neither hard nor soft; rather it is “...the capacity to get people to do what they don’t want to do, by pressure and coercion, using one’s resources and position.” Recognizing that power derives from good policies and well-defined strategies, Gelb (2009b) argues for a simpler foreign policy that includes a realistic understanding of what is and is not achievable based on one’s power. He critiques Nye’s ideas, claiming that soft power is too intangible and includes too many elements like economic incentives, leadership, persuasion, and values (Gelb 2009a, 69). His essential message is that the main problem with US foreign policy is that the US government does not have the strategy necessary to wield power desirably, not that it lacks a balance of nebulous hard and soft powers (Gelb 2010).

Despite disagreement about the nuances of power, Nye and Gelb both agree that the growing interdependence between nations makes using force more difficult and undesirable (Gelb 2009a; Nye 2010; Nye 2011). To be sure, the ability to use force is still an essential element in overall power and adds a foundation for persuasive powers to flourish, yet the actual practice of coercion signifies that one’s more desirable options have failed (Gelb 2009b). The interdependence of nation states in a global world has

complicated the inconvenience, self-destructiveness, and indication of failure when using force. This truth is exemplified when generally applied to US involvement in Middle East issues, and more explicitly, with Iran.

Interdependence of Nations

The net result of globalization is profound interdependence. Our prosperity and security depend greatly on the actions—or inaction – of people and governments all over the world. (Jones, Pascual, and Stedman, xiii-xiv)

Interdependence provides an overarching challenge to overcoming global threats by posing an additional layer of complexity for nation states. The pool of affected stakeholders expands with globalization and has made governing much more complicated (Jones, Pascual, and Stedman 2009, xiii-xiv). Simply put, even the most powerful nations in the world cannot always get or do what they want. Take the relationship between the US and China as an example. These two countries are so interdependently linked that any actions by one country can have dire consequences for both:

Some observers have described this as a great shift in the global balance of power because China could bring the United States to its knees by threatening to sell dollars. But in doing so, China would not only reduce the value of its reserves as the price of the dollar fell, but it also would jeopardize American willingness to continue to import cheap Chinese goods, which would mean job loss and instability in China. If it dumped dollars, China would bring the United States to its knees, but might also bring itself to its ankles. (Nye 2011, 56)

However, this state of interconnectedness and interdependence does not mean that power or leadership responsibilities are distributed evenly.

The effective use of power in a global world requires an understanding of how to unite various interests in order to achieve necessary goals and overcome shared

challenges. Because issues, interests, and consequences are communal, the stakes are now in favor of collaborating – if not for the global whole then for self-interested purposes (Nye 2004). Moreover, interdependence also increases the likelihood of contention due to the sheer number of nation states and interests involved (Gelb 2009a, 74). As the major power that emerged after the Cold War, this is especially significant for the US because it must play a leadership role to help navigate the interconnections of the global world (Gelb 2009a, 74).

Gelb notes that US leadership is essential to finding harmony in the cacophony of globalization. The number of nations that have the power to obtain actual results is much fewer than those nations that can hold up progress, making strong leadership all the more momentous (Gelb 2009a, 74). Vast resources – economic, military, and cultural – give the US an opportunity to serve as a strong international leader for addressing the myriad challenges that face the international community (Gelb 2009a, xv). However, US leadership in a global world is a vision that has yet to be solidified by US government itself.

Previous US administrations have attempted to address the necessity of cooperation and diplomacy while still maintaining a leadership role in world affairs. In both of its *National Security Strategies*, the Bush administration identified the end of the Cold War era as significant, promoting cooperation and transformation to address unfamiliar threats such as terrorism (US White House 2002; US White House 2006). The 2006 National Security Strategy stated,

There was a time when two oceans seemed to provide protection from problems in other lands, leaving America to lead by example alone. That time has long since passed. America cannot know peace, security, and prosperity by retreating from the world. America must lead by deed as well as by example. This is how we plan to lead, and this is the legacy we will leave to those who follow. (US White House 2006, 49)

Despite the promising language, the legacy of the Bush administration ended with world opinion ratings diminished in the turbulent Middle East region (Zaharna 2009, 1). Nye argues that because global audiences perceive the US in a negative way, particularly after the 2007 US invasion of Iraq, US soft power has deteriorated (Nye 2008, 96). In addition to the consequences negative perceptions have for US power in general, global confidence in specific US administrations also suffers.

International publics have doubts about US leadership that manifest in different ways. A Pew Research Center study compares President Obama's 2013 global confidence rating of 55% with former President Bush's 2007 confidence rating of 26%, citing respondents from twenty-eight countries (Pew 2013a, 20). Yet the same study notes that President Obama's global opinion was also declining, especially in the Middle East where only two in ten approved of his foreign policies (Pew 2013a, 21). Negative perceptions of the US abroad create "a kiss of death" effect for the leaders in other countries and their domestic politics, making conciliations in US-led projects increasingly improbable (Nye 2004). Falling global faith in the US leadership role make it more difficult for other countries to collaborate with the US on pressing challenges like global warming and economic concerns, as well as other communal issues.

Ascent to Power: Non-State Actors

Diplomacy in a traditionalist view is depicted as a game where the roles and responsibilities of actors in international relations are clearly delineated. This picture no longer resembles the much more fuzzy world of postmodern transnational relations – a world, for that matter, in which most actors are not nearly as much in control as they would like to be. (Melissen 2005b, 5)

Interdependence is only one piece of the globalization puzzle – non-state actors also contribute to the complexities involved. Interlacing interests of non-state actors with other governmental and public groups adds further complication to the global world (Nye 2010). The number of non-state actors is significant, as is their influence (Gelb 2009a, 81). Causes and issues of such groups range from innumerable topics including human rights, terrorism, and global media (Gelb 2009a, 81). Although these groups are not associated with government, they matter to public diplomacy professionals in the way that Jan Melissen, director of the Clingendael Diplomatic Studies Program at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, describes as “unthinkable as little as 25 years ago” (Melissen 2005a, xix). Contributing both perspective and chaos to international relations, non-state actors find audiences on unprecedented terms.

Barriers to communication have diminished quickly over the last few decades, easing access of non-affiliated groups to global publics and obscuring institutional influence. “Governments compete for credibility not only with other governments but with a broad range of alternatives including news media, corporations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations, and networks of scientific communities” (Nye 2008, 100). Non-state actors serve as important, tangible examples

of the changes in the nature of power in the global context. Developments in technology and communication are challenging the abilities of governments to regulate information in general, but the state remains the major governing entity (Nye 2011, 114).

The nation-state itself is not obsolete, rather the function of the nation-state within the global context is evolving. Bruce Jones, Director of the Project on International Order at the Brookings Institution; Carlos Pascual, former US ambassador to Mexico; and Stephen Stedman, senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, discussed their ideals for transnational norms in their book *Power & Responsibility* (2009). Their term “responsible sovereignty” illustrates a global world in which nation-states are still the major organizing component, but clarify that those states have responsibilities that extend beyond their physical borders (Jones, Pascual, and Stedman 2009, 9-13). Each nation has obligations, not only to serve or protect their own citizens, but also to contribute to overcoming shared challenges (Jones, Pascual, and Stedman 2009, 9-13). The long-established view of sovereignty as nonintervention in the affairs of other states is no longer possible or acceptable because of common threats (Jones, Pascual, and Stedman 2009, 12). In order to actualize this concept, governments must develop and utilize more ways to reach publics beyond their own borders.

International relations practitioners and scholars have identified public diplomacy as a means to better navigate the growing importance of both foreign opinions and non-state actors. While some experts refer to public diplomacy as a tool of soft power and other experts refer to it as a primer for wielding more tangible forms of power, it is an

increasingly vital aspect to diplomacy as a whole (Gelb 2009a, 225; Nye 2011). Public diplomacy is an essential element to building the credibility and legitimacy the US needs to effectively lead the world in overcoming shared challenges (Gelb 2009a, xiii; Nye 2008, 101). Valuable public diplomacy necessitates honorable lynchpins to flourish in the global world, but it is misunderstood and controversial because of its past association with propaganda.

Public Diplomacy and Propaganda

To succeed in a networked world requires leaders to think in terms of attraction and co-option rather than command. Leaders need to think of themselves as being in a circle rather than atop a mountain. That means that two-way communications are more effective than commands. As a young Czech participant at a Salzburg seminar observed, "This is the best propaganda because it's not propaganda." (Nye 2011, 101)

History has not served public diplomacy's image well. Its use by the US and Soviet Union during the Cold War "in antagonistic relationships to achieve long-term results in foreign societies" created an unfavorable meaning that haunts its study (Gilboa 2006, 59). However, scholarship suggests that academic disagreements rest in the use of the term public diplomacy rather than in the characteristics of successful communication abroad. Some scholars still equate public diplomacy with blatant propaganda, although this is not the norm.

Gelb argues that competence and problem-solving skills are what improve the image of nations and that attributing such success to "salesmanship" of public diplomacy is overly simplistic (Gelb 2009a, 229). While Gelb's point is valid, he misconstrues the definition of today's public diplomacy as presented by other experts. Melissen describes

public diplomacy more dynamically, for example, highlighting that it can include communication or dialogue with foreign publics spanning a variety of topics, tactics, and goals (Melissen 2005b, 14). Nye defines public diplomacy as communication with long-term objectives to produce desired results for foreign policy (Nye 2008, 101). In contrast to Gelb, Nye argues that common associations of public diplomacy with manipulative communication terms are not valid (Nye 2008, 94). The rationale for his argument is that,

Skeptics who treat the term public diplomacy as a mere euphemism for propaganda miss the point. Simple propaganda often lacks credibility and thus is counterproductive as public diplomacy. Good public diplomacy has to go beyond propaganda. Nor is public diplomacy merely public relations campaigns. Conveying information and selling a positive image is part of it, but public diplomacy also involves building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies. (Nye 2008, 101)

While Gelb does not use the term public diplomacy in a positive light, his term of “stage setting” is defined by elements similar to that of other scholars who explain successful public diplomacy (Gelb 2009a, 229). Leading by example, wielding the power of attraction, and valuing other nations through diplomacy and policies are examples of the approaches that Gelb uses to describe his idea of “stage setting” (Gelb 2009a, 229). Experts in international relations disagree on the definition of public diplomacy but agree that lasting communication with and buy-in from foreign publics is essential to improving US policy abroad (Gelb 2009a, 227; Nye 2011, 100-103). Their explanations indicate they agree that such efforts necessitate the intangible elements of credibility and legitimacy for execution (Gelb 2009a, 227; Nye 2011, 100-103).

While credibility and legitimacy are often used terms, their definitions specifically in relation to policy and politics are essential to understanding the processes of public diplomacy. For the purposes of this thesis, credibility is defined as the trust and reputability that one nation holds for another (Nye 2008, 100), while legitimacy is defined as society's acceptance of a nation's or governing body's rightful authority to take on particular roles in political settings (Burton 1968, 45). In essence, public diplomacy is a spectrum that includes trust and acceptance on one side, the bias and manipulation aspects of propaganda on the other side, and everything in between. However, the realities of a global world make propaganda increasingly feckless with respect to national objectives and are changing the way leaders execute public diplomacy. Applied to the long-standing hostility between the US and Iran, propaganda is not only ineffective but also detrimental.

The Obama administration seems to understand the potential of effective communication with foreign audiences. The first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) of 2010, titled *Leading Through Civilian Power*, specifically outlines the State Department's arguments for the use of public diplomacy (US Department of State 2010). Factors such as the growth of electoral democracies, open markets, information and communication revolutions, demographic shifts, and the trend in societies (either democracies or autocracies) to hold their governments accountable to the public are cited as evidence that public diplomacy is a necessity for today's diplomats (US Department of State 2010, 60). In the current global context,

public diplomacy and conventional diplomacy are more difficult to differentiate, thereby creating a stronger argument for the Obama administration's focus on integrating the two.

Bruce Gregory (2011, 353), an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's Institute of Public Diplomacy and Global Communication, explains that "it is because public diplomacy is now so central to diplomacy that it is no longer helpful to treat it as a subset of diplomatic practice." In a global world, public diplomacy is both a valuable tool for holistic diplomacy and a necessary element. The reality that diplomacy today requires a mix of concentrated efforts blurs the lines of distinction between different types of diplomacy. However, an attempt to categorize these types provides insight into the various audiences and objectives involved.

Public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, conventional diplomacy, corporate diplomacy, and public affairs are often misunderstood and oversimplified. Table 1 illustrates how this manuscript distinguishes public diplomacy from other types of diplomacy by focusing on their differences in communicators and audiences. These are the major forms of diplomacy, although some scholars suggest that NGOs, private individuals, media outlets, and other organizations should be included in the communicator roles rather than governments alone (Gilboa 2006, 57).

To be sure, these groups all execute public diplomacy in concert with, against, or irrespective of government goals. Yet, theoretically, government is the only entity committed to communicating with the rest of the world with a coherent voice of national interest. While NGOs and non-state actors have gained opportunity and power to

conduct different forms of diplomacy, they often target publics smaller than an entire nation. For these reasons, public diplomacy in this thesis focuses on presidential administrations and is defined as the efforts of a government entity to inform or attract foreign audiences with the objectives of creating opportunities for policies more favorable to national interests, building long-term relationships, collaborating on global challenges, and establishing credibility and legitimacy.

Table 1. Types of Diplomacy

Term	Communicator → Audience	Example
Public Diplomacy	Government → Foreign Publics	President delivers speech abroad about the historic relations between his/her country and the host country
Cultural Diplomacy	Government → Foreign Publics	Government deploys musicians and artists to perform in countries abroad to restore relations
Public Affairs	Government → Domestic Publics	Prime Minister launches campaign to explain newly established domestic healthcare policy
Conventional Diplomacy	Government → Government	P5+1 negotiates nuclear deal with Iran
Corporate Diplomacy	Corporation → Foreign Publics	Tech company CEO meets with foreign government officials to discuss launching new products in that country

Sources: Data adapted from Bailey 2013, Melissen 2005a, and Melissen 2005b.

Conclusion

The US-Iran relationship is a modern day example that clearly illustrates public diplomacy's importance in a global world. Iran and the US have a complicated relationship that requires effective public diplomacy to achieve complex policy goals relating to Middle East stability and other common challenges. Despite the tense relations between the two countries, Iran is a major regional player in the Middle East and the US is arguably the only truly global leader in the world as a whole. Their increasing interdependence provides an insightful case study of the difficulties involved in conducting public diplomacy amongst conflict.

CHAPTER 2

THE US & IRAN: A HISTORY OF ENMITY

The Case for Iran

Friend or foe of the West, Iran is at the center of the world's geopolitically sensitive stage and will continue to play a pivotal role in global affairs. (Kamiar 2007, 3)

The objectives of building relationships, collaborating, and establishing credibility and legitimacy associated with public diplomacy are major ordeals particularly when international disagreements persist. The US-Iran relationship exemplifies the challenges of public diplomacy, with a tainted history of conflict and potential for international contention. However, some experts are optimistic about future relations between the two countries. Zbigniew Brzezinski (2013), former National Security Advisor for the Carter administration and Director of Center for Strategic and International Studies, discussed the possibilities of nuclear talks between the US and Iran on Bob Schieffer's *Face the Nation* program. He stated that nuclear compromise with the global community and Iran is difficult but attainable and that the potential for crisis in the Middle East is encouraging the development of a coalition for peace between the US, Russia, Western Europe, and China (Brzezinski 2013). In his view, an amicable US-Iran relationship is not impossible yet it is not simple either. The history of relations between the US and Iran provides many reasons why any agreement between the two nations would be revolutionary and affords a more specific context to analyze public diplomacy's role in reparation.

Common global concerns necessitate cooperation from various nations in order to overcome challenges such as population growth, climate change, and the negative consequences of economic interdependence. Yet the ability of nations to address global issues and achieve other objectives specific to bilateral relationships is limited if long-held grievances between countries make particular collaborations unpopular or unlikely. An interesting case that exemplifies this scenario is the “34-year-old enmity” that is the relationship between the US and Iran (Rezaian 2013). Although distrust and conflict characterize US-Iran relations, such a characterization is counterproductive considering the significant role each country plays in the global community.

Despite decades of poor relations, Iran’s position in the Middle East has contributed to US interest in Iranian affairs. Keith Crane (2008), Senior Economist at the Rand Corporation and Director of its Environment, Energy, and Economic Development Program, and his colleagues explain the strategic reasons for this awareness:

Iran plays a central role in the politics of the Middle East and is influential in the Muslim world. Although not an Arab state, Iran’s leadership perceives the country as a regional leader in spearheading the Islamic Revolution and supporting Muslim ideals. Iran is a leading exporter of oil, with the third-largest reserves in the world. Iran’s decisions about its foreign policy, becoming a nuclear power, oil and gas production, and religion ripple through the region and the world, rebounding on its neighbors and countries further afield. (Crane, Lal, and Martini 2008, 2)

Iran is now the fourth largest producer of oil, the second largest producer of natural gas, and the sixteenth largest country in the world (US Energy Information Administration 2013; Naji and Jawan 2011, 102).

Combining the factors of resources, size, geographic position, and overall power to impact other nations, it is no wonder that the US would pay attention to Iran's domestic and international affairs. The Strait of Hormuz is critical to Iran's geographic significance because it is one of the world's major choke points limiting access to vital energy resources (Naji and Jawan 2011, 102). The global oil market could be in jeopardy should this crucial shipping route be blocked (Naji and Jawan 2011; Burleigh 2011).

In addition to its physical and resource-based attributes, Iran has also revealed its potential to mitigate threatening regional dilemmas. According to Thomas Erdbrink (2014a), Tehran Bureau Chief for the New York Times, the recent international campaign of Sunnis "raising the black flag of Al Qaeda along sectarian fault lines in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen" has highlighted this prospect by simultaneously aligning US and Iranian interests. While not only (but significantly) at odds for religious reasons, the two sects of Islam exist in sparse clusters with different countries holding majorities and minorities (Fisher 2014). Radical Sunni fighters in the Middle East jeopardize both US and Iranian interests (Erdbrink 2014a). "At the same time, Shiite-dominated Iran, the magnetic pole for the Shiite minority in the region, has its own reasons to be nervous with the ragtag army of Sunni militants threatening Syria and Iraq, both important allies, and the United States drawing down its troops in Afghanistan" (Erdbrink 2014a). Iran offered to collaborate with the US by sending troops to Baghdad in January of 2014, starting a conversation about Iran's potential to work with the US on

other issues in the Middle East like the Syrian Civil War (Erdbrink 2014a). But this potential is certainly complicated by conflicting interests.

Iran's support for Bashar al-Assad contrasts with US interests to remove Syria's regime (Erdbrink 2014b). Iran has provided weapons, money, and advisors during the country's internal conflict (Erdbrink 2014b). However, Iran also has influence with the Assad regime that could ensure more favorable outcomes for the US including the possibility of a more graceful exit from power (Erdbrink 2014b). Moreover, it was both invited to and then uninvited to a Syrian peace process in January 2014. The latter was due to complaints by Syrian opposition groups and American officials about the Islamic Republic's inclusion, although scholars and experts argued that the process would benefit from Iran's participation (Erdbrink 2014b). Iran's geographic location and its impact on conditions in the Middle East make it a reasonable choice for Washington to partner with in resolving issues like those cited above (Erdbrink 2014a). Unfortunately, while these factors underline Iran's potential to play a pivotal role in Middle Eastern affairs, experts still disagree on its degree of importance for US interests in general.

Despite possible points of collaboration, the relationship between the US and Iran is not a symmetrical one. Kenneth Pollack, former CIA intelligence analyst and Middle East expert, explains

I think that we would benefit from a warmer relationship with their country [Iran]. But I will say very bluntly, that I don't think the United States needs Iran; we have been isolated from Iran for twenty-five years and in that time experienced the most extraordinary economic prosperity in our history, coupled with strategic developments that have made the United States the most powerful nation the world has ever seen. (Pollack 2004, xxi)

But need is a subjective term and other experts argue that better relations are required to ensure Middle East stability. Trita Parsi (2012b, 6), president and founder of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), argues that the conflict between the two countries “harms both and benefits neither.” While assistance with Syrian and other Middle East interventions are examples of Iran’s potential benefit to the US, Parsi notes that substantial areas of potential collaboration also include peace efforts for the Israel-Palestine conflict and collaboration on addressing threats from terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda or the Taliban (Parsi 2012b, 6). Fostering a better US-Iran relationship will not be easy, though, and the United States will need to overcome widespread misconceptions about Iran, US and Iran history, and the Iranian regime.

Understanding Iran and Iranian National Identity

Many Americans know almost nothing about the sources of Iranian grievance against the United States, where our own grudge against Tehran came from, and why the two sides have found it so difficult to overcome their differences. (Pollack 2004, xxi)

For many US Americans¹, Iran triggers images of “mad ayatollahs,” “terrorists,” and “hostage takers” (Pollack 2004, x). Yet, Iran is a nation with thousands of years of history in which its actions are neither insane nor insignificant but are the products of internal and external difficulties that have threatened its national survival in the view of

¹ In an email exchange with the author, Dr. Reinhold Wagnleitner reminded me of his point during a session of the Global Citizenship Program at the Salzburg Global Seminar that there are other Americans beyond citizens or residents of the United States. North, Central, and South Americans are also Americans and “US Americans” is an important distinction. His term is used in this thesis to reference people of the US to avoid confusion and minimize ethnocentrism. Wagnleitner is an Associate Professor of Modern History at the University of Salzburg, Austria (Wagnleitner 2012a).

Iranians and their government (Brzezinski 2013; Naji and Jawan 2011). Iran is a conglomeration of different ethnicities, religions, and backgrounds united by one national identity. Although ‘Persian’ is often used as a generic adjective referring to the history and culture of anyone from Iran, the country includes Persians as well as other groups (Kamiar 2007, 3-4). Some mistakenly believe that the name of the country was changed from Persia to Iran in 1935 through a memorandum sent from the Iranian government to foreign embassies in Tehran (Kamiar 2007, 10), but it has always been known as Iran to its residents and the rest of the world has taken decades to use its preferred name.

This confusion can be traced back 2,500 years when Europeans referred to Iran by its “mistaken Greek name [Persia] without respect for the indigenous population’s preference or the original native name, and it was only in 1935 that a polite corrective was issued” (Kamiar 2007, 10). Many Iranians are of Persian descent and 89% are Shia Muslim, but there are also various minorities who contribute to Iranian society (Beehner 2006; Hassan 2008, 6). These include ethnic groups such as Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, and Baluchis (Beehner 2006). While Shi’ism is the national religion of Iran, it also includes Sunni Muslim, Baha’i, Jewish, and Christian citizens (Hassan 2008, 3). The Iranian government faces many difficulties in integrating these groups and has been accused of human rights abuses in relation to its ethnic and religious minorities (Hassan 2008, 1).

The diversity of Iranian ethnicities and religions adds an additional layer of complexity to how US Americans perceive the country, especially because interactions between them and the Iranian government are convoluted. Too many US Americans tend

to see Iran as a theocracy led by Muslim extremists, even though Iran has a long history of combining faith and governance in ways not based on Islam. As Hamid Ahmadi from the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Tehran explains

Religion has been central in Iranian history and politics for at least two millennia. The Achaemenian kings (fifth and sixth century BCE), for example, associated themselves with the Iranian God Ahura Mazda and with the gods of their numerous subject peoples. The Sassanians (second to sixth centuries CE) established Zoroastrianism as the state religion, and the Safavis (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) did the same with Shi'i Islam. (Ahmadi 2005, 140)

There is no widespread agreement about the extent of religious influence on Iranian culture and national identity, primarily due to disputes over whether Islam was embraced voluntarily by Iranians or imposed on them (Ahmadi 2005, 140). All in all, religion is yet another example of the complexities within Iran that are overgeneralized by US Americans.

Iran's national identity is one that has been able to unite the Iranian people by "either defending Iran as a whole vis-à-vis external threats or promoting the condition of the nation through internal political upheavals" (Ahmadi 2005, 131). To Iran, the US government is seen as an external threat exerting unwanted and unwarranted power on Iranian citizens and leaders (Milani 2009). Numerous historic events have solidified the Iranian perspective that the US government is a danger to Iranian sovereignty.

US-Iran Events and Examples: A Struggle for Power

Iran is a nation with a rich cultural heritage, national identity, and pride that have grown over time and in the context of outside intervention, according to professor of journalism and US foreign policy at Boston University, Stephen Kinzer (2008). Power to make decisions regarding Iran's own destiny is the essential factor to Iranian nationalism (Kinzer 2008). Historical events over the past 75 years have solidified Iranian perceptions that the US meddles in Iranian affairs, using assorted hard and soft power approaches, without much thought to the consequences for Iranians (Kinzer 2008). This is a particularly important notion for the context of public diplomacy because much of the analysis will rely on understanding the perceptions and attitudes of the audience that public diplomacy is trying to reach. It is not feasible to document all of the possible points of grievance or a linear history of US-Iran relations in this thesis. However, a discussion of major events in US-Iran history that have contributed to solidified perceptions of each side is crucial.

The 1979 Iranian Hostage Crisis is arguably the pivotal event that defines US American opinions of Iran. It also denotes the end of formal relations between the two countries after US American hostages were taken for 444 days at the US Embassy in Tehran (Kinzer 2008). Iranians do not perceive the event as an insane immoral hostage taking, as do many US Americans (Kinzer 2008). Iranians see the hostage crisis and corresponding Iranian Revolution as an attempt to take back control of their country's destiny in response to various bouts of western intervention, particularly from the US

(Kinzer 2008). While western intervention in Iran can be traced back far into history, the mid-twentieth century is the period when much of contemporary Iranian resentment began to fester (Kinzer 2008).

An important event that exemplifies the intrusion mentioned above was the 1941 British and Soviet invasion of Iran. Great Britain and the Soviet Union believed the leader of Iran, Reza Shah, was “incapable of countering Nazi influence” and required his resignation from power (Powell 2011). Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Reza Shah’s son, took over as leader of Iran and was compliant with the wishes of Great Britain and the Soviets (Powell 2011; Marsh 2005, 85). In 1948, a disagreement between Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which was controlled by the British, and the Iranian government arose from the latter’s attempts to renegotiate 1933 concessions that had limited compensation for its oil (Marsh 2005, 82). The disagreement was a serious matter, with potential implications for the global community:

From 1950 to 1954, the United States faced the perplexing Anglo-Iranian oil crisis, nominally a commercial dispute between Iran and the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) but in practice laden with a potent mixture of concerns such as the Cold War, Anglo-American relations, international oil, and Middle Eastern security. (Marsh 2005, 79)

Quickly thereafter, the Shah was pressured by the Iranian parliament, known as Majles, to appoint Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, a popular parliamentarian driving for nationalization of Iran’s oil, as Prime Minister (Katzman 2012, 1).

The global oil market was threatened with an oil crisis and major financial catastrophe, in particular to a great ally of the US, the United Kingdom (Marsh 2005, 82).

By 1953, the Eisenhower administration and counterparts in the British government took action and executed a coup d'état (Operation Ajax), which overthrew the leader, Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh (Marsh 2005; Kinzer 2008; Ghosh 2012). Iranian General Fazlollah Zahedi replaced Mossadegh as Prime Minister at the approval of the United States, Great Britain, and the Shah (Ghosh 2012). Although indecisive while the coup d'état was in its planning stages, the Shah eventually cooperated and enjoyed more authoritarian power after Mossadegh's removal (Ghosh 2012). The actual coup d'état and the reinstatement of leaders amenable to various interests served as a major source of Iranian resentment of the US, but additional contributions to this antipathy continued into the Shah's revived reign.

After the coup d'état, the Shah became protector of the Persian Gulf for the United States and was seen by the Iranian people as a US "puppet" according to author and contributing columnist to PBS-Frontline's *Tehran Bureau*, Andrew Scott Cooper (2011, 22). As President Nixon and the Shah built a close personal relationship, the Shah purchased more US weapons than were healthy for the Iranian economy to make himself both "indispensable" and "untouchable" (Cooper 2011, 55, 92). He then threatened to increase oil prices to pay for his obsession, which created international oil shocks and squabbles for the oil market when Saudi Arabia offered to offset the Shah's demands with its oil (Cooper 2011). As a result, Iranians were suffering from the policies of the Shah and were "deeply unhappy that the Shah was squandering money on military

equipment and foreign policy adventures that they assumed were being dictated by Washington” (Pollack 2004, 125).

Iranians resented the relationship between the Shah and the US government. Anti-American sentiment rose in Iran, and the US was blamed for “just about everything” by the early 1970s (Pollack 2004, 126). In addition to militarization, the Shah wanted westernization at the expense of “marginalizing” the cleric community in Iran (Katzman 2012, 1). In 1964, the Shah exiled religious leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to Iraq where Khomeini and his Iraqi Shiite peers advocated for rule by Islamic law, *velayat-e-faqih* (Katzman 2012, 1). After the Shah came to an agreement with Baathist leaders in Iraq, Saddam Hussein encouraged Khomeini to depart for France in 1978 (Katzman 2012, 1). From there, the Ayatollah still retained influence in Iran and encouraged pro-Khomeini and anti-Shah protestors to become more active participants in national affairs (Katzman 2012, 1). This led to a rift between the monarchy and the Iranian people that quickly erupted into the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Cooper 2011, 303).

After the Shah fled Iran, Khomeini returned to the country in February 1979, declared it to be the Islamic Republic of Iran, and began to establish the current regime based on Islamic law and resentment of US-intervention (Katzman 2012, 1; Nasr 2011). This anti-US notion grew stronger and precipitated the Iranian Hostage Crisis in November of 1979, further solidifying enmity between the two countries (Katzman 2012, 1). The Iran-Iraq War began shortly after the Iranian Revolution and resulted in over 1 million deaths over an extremely violent eight-year period, according to David Crist

(2012, 84), a Senior Federal Historian and Middle East scholar. Despite the hostility between Iranian and Iraqi leaders, Iranians perceived the US as the main factor for their grievances (Karim 2014).

Even though it was Iraq that attacked Iranian airfields in September, 1980, most Iranians viewed the US as a major factor influencing Iraq's choice to invade their country (Crist 2012, 89). Crist states that

Just as Iranians believed that the Shah had been admitted into the United States to play a countercoup rather than for humanitarian reasons, the prevailing view on the streets of Tehran was that Iraq would not have attacked without the permission of the American superpower. (Crist 2012, 89)

Iranian suspicions were confirmed when the Reagan administration secretly gave Iraq intelligence early in the war, tipping the balance to guarantee neither country had an upper hand in such an important, oil-dominant region (Hersh 1992). It was later learned that the US participated in ways much more offensive to the Iranian psyche.

Two decades after the war, CIA files further confirmed grievances against the US, providing proof for Iranian claims that the US was aware Hussein had used chemical weapons against its country (Harris and Aid 2013). The Reagan administration looked to secure an Iraqi victory "whatever the cost" (Harris and Aid 2013). US compliance with Hussein's use of chemical weapons burned bitterness into the minds of Iranians already inclined to disapprove of US action in the contentious Middle East. The lack of knowledge by US policymakers and the US American public about Iranian history, issues, and grievances keep the two countries locked in a stalemate.

Communication between the US and Iran has been almost nonexistent since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. This lack of dialogue makes coming to any understanding or reaching agreement much more difficult. Public diplomacy provides a way for the US leadership to reach Iranians in hope of achieving these objectives. To better appreciate public diplomacy's role in moving past the crystallized perceptions that both nations still hold, it is particularly useful to utilize an integrated framework that incorporates wisdom from multiple disciplines rather than relying on single disciplinary perspectives.

Theory and International Relations

Interdisciplinary studies provide multiple lenses with which to view the world. Borrowing or using theories from different subject areas to understand an issue can provide refreshing perspectives for unsolved dilemmas. Moreover, discipline-specific lenses often hinder collaboration because of the strictness they instill. But a more universal template can help to break professional silos and provide a common language among various experts, according to Professor of Leadership and Systems at San José State University, Dr. William Reckmeyer (2012a).

Scholar and former diplomat John W. Burton explains the importance of theory to international relations:

The role of theory cannot be stressed too much. Whether we are interested in explaining an event, a situation, a policy, or even in studying a branch of International Relations like International Institutions, a theory is in the background. It determines what will be observed, and how what is observed will be interpreted. (Burton 1968, 150)

Different scholars of international relations use different theories to help sift through the abundance of information and possibilities that account for the current state of world affairs. According to Ann Marie Slaughter (2011), President of the New America Foundation and former Director of Policy Planning for the Department of State, there are four major theories that have been vetted in the international relations arena. She explains those theories and differentiates them based on the “variables they emphasize” (Table 2). She goes on to explain that each of them emphasizes different values and that they should not be seen as opposing but simply different (Slaughter 2011).

Table 2. International Relations Theories

IR Theory	Basic Elements
Realism	State survival in an uncertain world: anarchy and balance of power are dominant elements
Institutionalism	States are driven by self-interest with cooperation in the interest of rational acting states – reciprocity for state survival
Liberalism	States are collections of individuals and groups that have their own interests and motivations such as ideology, commercial interests, etc.
Constructivism	Uses history, perceptions, ideas, norms, etc. to asses a mix of factors to explain state behavior (ontology)

Source: Data adapted from Slaughter 2011.

Although these theories are valuable for viewing specific international relations issues, none of them illustrates relationships between nations in the context of our global world. To successfully analyze public diplomacy in an increasingly complex world, Reckmeyer (2012a) and Dupont and Reckmeyer (2012) argue that the framework for addressing

global concerns should be systemic and strategic, incorporating elements of “there and then” in addition to “here and now.”

Systems Theory in Political Science and International Relations

Systems theory is a framework applicable to any field and transcends professional silos by integrating various areas of expertise (Reckmeyer 2012a; 2012b). Just as in any area of study, there are different branches of systems theory that emphasize different aspects of systems. Table 3 outlines General Systems Theory (GST) and other related frameworks. These approaches use many of the basic tenants of systems science, which are extremely advantageous to analyzing complex cross-disciplinary issues. For clarity and efficiency, this thesis uses the larger framework of systems with the understanding that these theoretical distinctions exist.

One major benefit of systems theory is the conceptualization of systems in their greater environments. The metaphor for explaining systems in this way, which was used by the biologist and founder of General Systems Theory, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, was that of a biological organism (Morgan 38, 2007). It is convenient to view organisms as systems because systems theory stresses the importance of environment, adaptation, and survival, which are innate concepts in the biological sciences (Easton 1957, 386; Morgan 2006, 33). Much like biological organisms, which have anatomical subsystems to aid in survival, political systems are made up of subsystems that interact with the greater global world. While environments are essential factors in systems theory, systems are also

shaped by internal factors and a system's makeup often provides information about how it might behave in various situations (Easton 1957; Meadows 2008).

Table 3. Systems Theories and Distinctions

Systems Theory	Distinctions
General Systems Theory (founded late 1930s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts, relationships, and the forming of some recognizable whole • Observer defined • Organized internal parts and relationships • Organized external whole and relationships • Feedback (both positive and negative)
Cybernetics (founded late 1940s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful, goal-directed behavior of systems with a focus on the use of feedback for learning • Feedback (both positive and negative) • Self-organization
System Dynamics (founded early 1960s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior of system rather than structure • Feedback (both positive and negative)
Complexity/Chaos Theory (founded early 1960s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Regeneration • Self-Organization • Complexity brings unpredictability and also pattern

Sources: Data adapted from Meadows 2008, Morgan 2007, Reckmeyer 2012a, Reckmeyer 2012b, Reckmeyer 2014a, Reckmeyer 2014b, Reckmeyer 2014c, and Wiener 1948.

Scholars also sought to better understand the application of systems in the social sciences (Easton 1957; Cairney 2012; Morgan 2006). By focusing on numerous elements of systems, they explain various social phenomena in fields such as political science and international relations. David Easton (1957, 386), distinguished research professor of

political science at UC Irvine, emphasizes inputs and the “processes through which they are transformed into outputs.” Easton’s basic model is particularly helpful for viewing political systems included in public diplomacy because it provides a visual representation of the realities of inputs on governance and takes context into account.

Outputs “have consequences both for the system and the environment in which the system exists” (Easton 1957, 384). Two basic inputs argued by Easton are demands and support (1957, 387). Support can be the physical action or the “state of mind” that provides this reinforcement of certain issues or particular decisions (Easton 1957, 390). Inputs of demands and support are “raw material” that, when finished, produce decisions and policies as outputs of political systems (Easton 1957, 390). Support and demands are particularly important for the discussion of public diplomacy because they serve as the various internal and external influences that impact the messaging and tone (Easton 1957). However, a reduced and general representation of a very complex system leaves room for disagreement. Burton, for example, argues that Easton’s “uniformly structured” image of political systems is not conducive to reality and stems from a more traditional view than systems theory is meant to provide (Burton 1968, 10).

Burton claims that states are not systems, however, but are comprised of clusters of systems that are both political and administrative (Burton 1968, 13-20). He stresses the differentiation of administrative and political systems by highlighting the directional organizing quality that administrative systems provide for the entire nation (Burton 1968, 20). He also notes that, “state administrative systems have abilities to adapt to the

environment, to alter it, to change direction and circumvent obstacles, and if necessary to change goals and values” (Burton 1968, 20). For Burton (1968, 33), the fundamental purpose of the state is to coordinate national response to a changing environment. Easton argues that system “structure” and “internal needs” often dictate conduct but supports Burton’s claim that response to environment is also a crucial indication of behavior (Easton 1957, 386). Overall, both Burton and Easton suggest that systems act purposefully to achieve different goals based on the corresponding context, while they disagree on exactly how to generalize their ideas.

Burton and Easton are scholars from a different era. Their publications used in this thesis are from the 1950s and 1960s. But this is not a negative attribute of using systems theory; on the contrary, it is yet another argument for its value. The relevancy of the work of systems scholars, from both current and historic times, demonstrates the versatility and timelessness of the framework. This enduring quality of systems theory is extremely appropriate for international issues, especially those in which contextual history, perceptions, and communication are particularly significant.

Perceptions, Systems, and Public Diplomacy

Perceptions of various systems and nations are key to international relations and the processes of decision making (Burton 1968, 66). Perception is the “operative link between subject and environment” and is when “decision making commences, and any misperception automatically renders responses inappropriate” (Burton 1968, 66). Public diplomacy is not only influenced by perceptions, but also seeks to change or maintain

perceptions. This suggests that success closely hinges on images that one nation's people hold of another nation's government or vice versa.

Perceptions often generate expectations about international situations, from anticipated behavior in a nuclear standoff to predicted aid following a natural disaster. These expectations are very difficult to change once past actions have solidified them (Burton 1968, 69-70). Burton notes that "historically based expectations seem to be held more firmly than behaviourally based ones, and this means that States have difficulty creating images of themselves different from that already created by them, and perceived by others" (Burton 1968, 70). In the case of the US and Iran, the history of their relations has served to solidify unfortunate perceptions within and by both nations. However, the overlapping element of power is also crucial to a more complex explanation of both state perception and behavior.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Nye (2011, 6-9, 20) defines power as "the capacity to do things in social situations to affect others to get the outcomes we want" by using a spectrum of actions of coercion and/or attraction. Similarly, Burton's explanation of power in relation to systems is that the power held by a nation dictates its ability to choose between adapting to change, changing the environment itself, or imposing an obligation of change upon other nations or systems (1968, 39). Burton (1968, 35) explains the potentially adverse consequences of one nation forcing change on another by stating, "change that is inflicted by a foreign agent, that is discriminatory against one

State, that occurs in conditions of inflexibility, and is sudden will certainly be unacceptable and lead to desperate responses.”

When considered with Burton’s explanation of perception as the active connection between a system and its environment, the use of power to elicit a particular response requires understanding of how actors perceive elements of the situation. As the US attempted to inflict change upon Iran without a clear sense of Iranian perceptions of the context (notably the 1953 coup d’état), desperate responses followed just as Burton predicts (especially the Iranian Hostage Crisis). In this example, US power was used coercively without a deep appreciation of the context.

Conclusion

The US and Iran’s troubled history exemplifies the consequences of using power inefficiently with perceptions as feedback. Iranians perceive US government as an entity willing to use force at the expense of others with historic examples such as the 1953 coup d’état and reinstatement of the Shah. US Americans perceive Iran as an irrationally led country filled with radicalism and quests for regional power, examples being the hostage crisis and nuclear program. In the context of the global world, these images do not stop at either border and shape mirroring, negative beliefs in the publics of both countries. The perpetuation of such perceptions and corresponding behavior of both countries overtime creates a deficit of the essential elements to making public diplomacy valuable.

Applying models of political systems as well as notions of power, the use of attractive power such as public diplomacy can be thought of as a process fed by resources

of credibility and legitimacy. Ideally, a nation conducting public diplomacy would have support and demands that correspond with its foreign objectives. Messaging with other nations would include credibility and legitimacy as the preliminary resources to employ. Figure 1 is a general view of the systems and processes involved that help visualize this ideal model of public diplomacy. The general focus of this thesis is on the US as a nation, in terms of assessing various purpose-driven behaviors associated with public diplomacy with Iran. The more specific focus of analysis is on the Obama administration as a government system because of its societal role and its ability to make authoritative decisions on behalf of the nation as a whole (Easton 1957, 385). However, the thesis also

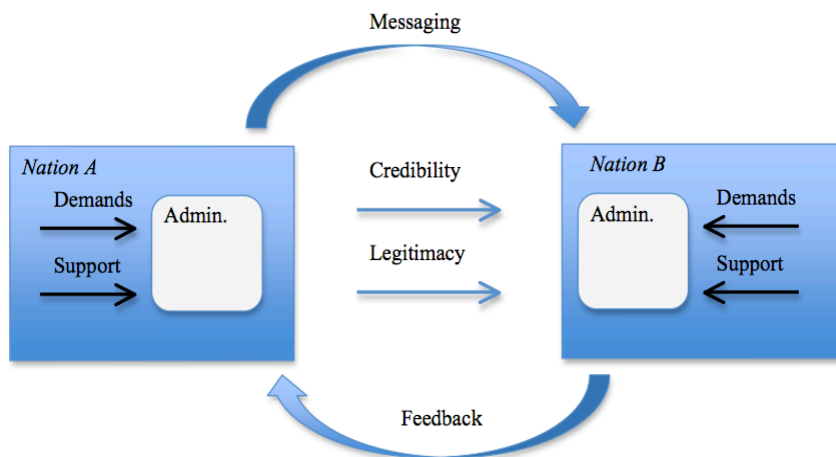


Figure 1. Ideal Process of Public Diplomacy

examines other internal political subsystems such as the US Congress because of their role in public diplomacy. In addition to the importance of various inputs, systems, and

processes, the actual tone and specific efforts of messaging are of primary importance to understanding US public diplomacy with Iran.

CHAPTER 3

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Public Diplomacy with Iran

The primary purpose of public diplomacy in a global world is to enhance a government entity's ability to inform or attract foreign audiences with the objective of creating opportunities for policies that are more favorable to national interests, building long-term relationships, and collaborating on common challenges. Although this thesis focuses on the Obama administration's public diplomacy with Iran, its predecessor's adversarial history has greatly affected its efforts to build a better future with that country. Each administration approached relations with Iran very differently. The general demeanor of the Bush administration's Iran policy is of significance to the analysis of the Obama administration's public diplomacy efforts because it is the contextual foundation on which the latter had to build its own public diplomacy.

Bush Administration (January 2001 – January 2009)

According to Shahram Akbarzadeh (2011, 472-473), Professor of International Relations, East European, and Middle East Studies at Melbourne University, the Bush administration based its policies towards the Middle East on promoting democracy while simultaneously advocating the end of the Iranian regime. President Bush believed that Iran did not deserve to be engaged by the US and that doing so would strengthen the Iranian regime (Parsi 2012b, 7). Furthermore, his administration did not see value in

negotiating with Iran, primarily because US interests could be fulfilled by “simply removing” the Iranian government (Parsi 2012b, 4). Yet Stephen Hadley (2010), former National Security Advisor in the Bush administration, noted that it made significant contributions to communicating with the Iranian people. Citing the role of Voice of America (VOA) and Congressional appropriations of 60 million dollars to promote democracy in Iran, Hadley argued that the Bush administration created a structure for engaging the Iranian people (Hadley 2010). Furthermore, President Bush made stark distinctions between the Iranian people and Iranian government in various examples of rhetoric (Hadley 2010). In my view, though, examples of unproductive messaging regarding Iran imply that the Bush administration’s strategy miscalculated key aspects of internal Iranian realities.

One significant example of the Bush administration’s approach to Iran was the 2002 State of the Union Address, in which President Bush shared his administration’s perspective on Iran, Iraq, and North Korea just four months after 9/11 (Parsi 2012b, 40-41; Crist 2012, 440). “States like these [Iraq, North Korea, and Iran], and their terrorist allies, constitute an *axis of evil*, arming to threaten the peace of the world” (Bush 2002). This “axis of evil” statement in particular provided fuel to Iranian hardliners arguing against cooperation with the US and undercut relatively moderate Iranian President Khatami’s international and domestic standing (Parsi 2012b, 40-41). This seemingly simple state-ment furthered enmity between the two countries and generated missed opportunities for collaboration and diplomacy.

Although Iran helped the US in Afghanistan and used its political influence to align various tribal divisions in the country, the Bush administration adopted a policy of cooperating with Iran and other rogue states only in relation to the “war on terror” (Parsi 2012b, 41). “In other words, regardless of how fruitful US-Iran collaboration in Afghanistan would be, it simply would not change the definition of Iran as a mortal enemy of the United States” (Parsi 2012b, 41). This approach reduced the opportunities for constructive diplomacy, including the rejection of a 2003 Iranian proposal negotiating nuclear oversight, assisting US efforts to eradicate Al-Qaeda, and halting support for Hezbollah (Parsi 2012b, 2). While experts interpret the overall policies and actions of the Bush administration, its public diplomacy clearly affronted the Iranian regime.

In 2002, the Bush administration began increasing its dissemination of news to Iran, which expanded its opportunities for public diplomacy there (Hadley 2010). These efforts sent mixed messages, unfortunately, communicating respect for the Iranian people (Hadley 2010) while conveying a clear distaste for the Iranian government (Akbarzadeh 2011, 471). For example, President Bush’s interview with Voice of America’s (VOA) Persian Service in 2008 emphasized the regard that US Americans have for Iranians while simultaneously pointing out the economic hardship and struggle for democracy in Iran (Bush 2008a). “It’s just sad that the leadership is in many ways very stubborn, because the ... Iranian people are not realizing their true rights” (Bush 2008a). President Bush (2008a) made it clear that his administration attributed economic hardships within Iran to the regime’s actions, particularly the pursuit of nuclear power. While stating that

Iran should have the right to develop civilian nuclear power, he argued that the regime had not been transparent and that the Iranian people must understand their government had lost the trust of the US regarding this issue (Bush 2008a). Aside from interviews, President Bush also sent yearly messages to people around the world who celebrate Nowruz (the Persian New Year). These messages were an intentional effort to engage in public diplomacy, but unfortunately they did not include communication elements that would resonate with most Iranian people.

President Bush's Nowruz message in 2008 offered a brief message that included wishes for a happy new year along with an emphasis on US pride in the general diversity of its citizens and their various heritages:

I send greetings to those celebrating Nowruz. For the millions of people who trace their heritage to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia, Nowruz is a time to celebrate the New Year with the arrival of spring. This cherished and ancient festival brings together family and friends to reflect on what has come before and celebrate a season of new beginnings. Our country is proud to be a land where individuals from many different cultures can pass their traditions on to future generations. The diversity of America brings joy to our citizens and strengthens our Nation during Nowruz and throughout the year. Laura and I send our best wishes to all those celebrating Nowruz, both here in the United States and abroad. May the year ahead be filled with peace and many blessings. (Bush 2008b)

This message is extremely similar to Nowruz messages in 2003-2007, signifying a static type of communication. The Bush administration's intentions for its public diplomacy are subject to interpretation, of course, but the eventual outcome of its efforts can be best gauged by assessing the public opinions of Iranians, which were not positive at the end of the President's second term.

In a 2007 World Public Opinion Organization (WPOO) study (2007, 11), 93% of Iranians reported a negative view of the US government and 92% reported an unfavorable opinion of President Bush. Iranian opinions of Americans were mixed, with 49% responding with a negative view of Americans and 45% with a positive view (WPOO 2007, 11). In summary, the study noted that

Very large majorities of Iranians have negative views of the United States overall, its current government, its current president, and its culture. Views of the American people, however, are almost evenly divided. Large majorities perceive that US foreign policy is threatening and that US bases in the Middle East are destabilizing the region and threatening to Iran. (WPOO 2007, 11)

Despite disagreement over the Bush administration's efforts and intentions, there are credible statistics that its efforts and policies were not well received by Iranians. In all, the Bush administration was unable to foster a favorable or even a questionable Iranian view of the US government. Consequently, the administration's approval rating and its lack of successful conventional diplomacy bred an environment in which "a new president had to occupy the White House before diplomacy would be given a chance" (Parsi 2012b, 5). The 2008 presidential elections provided this chance. Yet by the time of his transition into the White House, President-elect Barack Obama had not persuaded many Iranians that his election signaled an opportunity for improved relations nor had their disfavor for past US policies dissipated.

During that transition and early into President Obama's first term, Iranians held mixed views about their hopes for the future of the US-Iran relationship. According to a 2009 RAND Corporation study that measured Iranian willingness to support rapproche-

ment, it was clear the Obama administration had a difficult legacy to overcome (Elson and Nader 2011). Out of the study's 1,002 respondents, 52% said that the 1953 coup d'état negatively impacted their perceptions of the US; another 61% indicated that the 1979 Revolution had the same impact on their views; and, finally, 62% replied that the US and Iran had mostly divergent interests (Elson and Nader 2011, 40). Moreover, President Obama's election did not encourage improvement in Iranian perceptions regarding the future of US-Iran relations; three percent of Iranians responded that they thought the relationship would improve, and 16% responded that relations would get "somewhat better" (Elson and Nader 2011, 23). Overall, attitudes of Iranians before and at the beginning of Obama's election signified overwhelming suspicion with slight glimmers of hope. As President Obama settled into the White House, his administration set out resolve issues with Iran diplomatically and change the nature of the relationship, beginning with a different demeanor towards the country.

In addition to negative Iranian perceptions of the United States at the onset of the Obama administration, the US and the world also had concerns with the history of interactions between the two countries as well as Iran's role in the world. According to the same 2007 study by the WPOO, a majority of US Americans held unfavorable views of the Iranian government and its influence in the world, although the intensity of their negative feelings were not as strong as those felt by Iranians toward the US government (WPOO 2007). A majority of US Americans also held negative views of the Iranian people, in contrast to the more divided views Iranians had of the US American people

(WPOO 2007, 14). Eighty percent of US Americans believed that Iran's influence in the world was negative overall, although the same percent of US Americans also supported direct talks with Iran (WPOO 2007, 14-16).

The misperceptions and distaste that US Americans had for Iran are not completely unfounded. While the Iranian hostage crisis provided a sense of control for some Iranians reeling from the 1953 coup d'état and 1979 revolution, it solidified certain themes in the minds of US Americans:

The tragedy of the hostage crisis is that in terminating a type of relationship, it crystallized a particular impression and stopped the process of reengagement. There were to be no more attempts to connect with and understand the revolutionary process. And in targeting diplomats, revolutionary Iran not only alienated the international diplomatic corps but also eliminated the one branch of the US government that was likely to offer a sympathetic and constructive reading of events. (Ansari 2007, 90)

This hostage crisis during President Carter's presidency, along with the Iran-Contra scandal during President Reagan's presidency, speak to the ineffectiveness of different US administrations to negotiate and collaborate with Iran (Ansari 2007, 2). This pattern of behavior only adds to the negative associations that many US Americans have for Iran, particularly considering the general lack of knowledge about US-Iran history. Despite the negative image Iran has with the American public, however, President Obama continued applying his domestic platform of change to international relationships.

Obama Administration (January 2009 – January 2017)

The 2009 RAND study indicated that Iranians were not immediately optimistic about the Obama administration's ability to improve US-Iran relations (Elson and Nader

2011). Despite Iranian public opinion, scholars argue that the election of President Obama offered some symbolic hope (Parsi 2012b; Akbarzadeh 2011). Barack Obama ran for president promising a foreign policy of engaging nations such as Iran. Considering his name *Obama* directly translates to *he is with us* in Persian, it was understandable how he might resonate with Iranians (Parsi 2012b, 31). “His [Obama’s] offer to stretch an unclenched hand to Iran was nothing short of revolutionary” (Akbarzadeh 2011, 470). But President Obama faced negative Iranian perceptions of the US government and a hardline Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was elected in 2005 following the administration of the more moderate President Khatami (Parsi 2012b, 33). While President Obama’s election was promising for many Iranians and reformist Iranian leaders, hardliner Iranian leaders perpetuated a “cynical” mistrust of American politics and argued that President Obama’s administration would simply be a continuation of previous US American administrations and their policies (Parsi 2012b, 35). Yet, various examples of the administration’s early policy choices were starkly different from those of its predecessors.

The early Obama administration stepped away from democracy promotion in Iran and avoided involvement in internal Iranian affairs, which signified a strong break from previous US administrations (Akbarzadeh 2011). A specific example of this change was when the Obama administration attempted to keep a “careful distance” during protests regarding the 2009 Iranian elections and subsequent violence (Akbarzadeh 2011, 471). The Obama administration was attempting to change a “master to servant” relationship to

one where both countries can be seen as significant entities able to deal with their own internal dilemmas (Parsi 2012b, 10). While this tone toward Iran was groundbreaking, it was ultimately unsustainable.

At the end of 2009, the Obama administration's policy towards Iran shifted to a focus on sanctions and "containment" due to the Iranian regime's lack of cooperation on the nuclear issue and to criticism of the administration's abandonment of US democracy promotion by groups in both the US and Iran (Akbarzadeh 2011). This led to characterizations of President Obama's policies as inconsistent (Holmes 2013). President Obama's 2012 State of the Union address provides an example of harsher rhetoric denoting a more coercive approach. "Let there be no doubt: America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take *no options off the table* to achieve that goal" (Obama 2012b). The "no options off the table" remark was understood to include the possible use of military force to stop Iran's suspected pursuit of nuclear weapons.

To be sure, the Obama administration's efforts to open the opportunities for diplomacy by giving Iran respect was and has been coupled with a US commitment that Iran never obtain nuclear weapons (Lander 2012). These goals are inherently contradictory, so it is not surprising that internal political battles with US hardliners and Congress made it more difficult for the Obama administration to maintain a conciliatory tone while also saving political face (Parsi 2012b). While the President's commitment to diplomacy with Iran continued to unravel, his outreach to the Iranian people has remained

a relevant fixture in the broader diplomatic process and should be more concretely cataloged to better analyze outreach effectiveness.

Speeches and Addresses: Pertinent Rhetoric

The speeches included in this section are those that were intended for more global consumption than presidential election speeches or State of the Union addresses. While none of them were prepared for the Iranian people alone, they reveal expectations of the Obama administration's policies as they relate to globalization, power, and the US-Iran relationship in particular. As previously cited, the election of President Obama brought hope for a break from the foreign policies of the Bush administration. Consequently, the President's 2009 inaugural address was watched by millions globally and was viewed as the symbolic manifestation of this change in tone vis-à-vis Iran (Parsi 2012b, 9).

President Obama's 2009 inaugural address highlighted "mutual respect," a key term that Iranian leaders and civilians were waiting to hear from the new US President (Parsi 2012b, 9-10). Though his address did not name Iran specifically, he stated, "to the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect" (Obama 2009a). While this may seem like a simple technicality about verbiage, the US government's suppression of Iranian interests made such remarks of mutual respect resonate with Iranians. Furthermore, the new President extended the anticipated diplomatic opportunity with imagery. "To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist" (Obama 2009a).

Though not specifically naming Iran, institutions such as the National Iranian American Council cite this line as a gesture of reparation and opportunity towards the Iranian regime (Khajehpour, Marashi, and Parsi 2013, 4). President Obama's later speeches evolved to include less general statements about Iran.

One good example was the President's first address to the UN General Assembly in September, 2009, which was specific in its mention of Iran and of the differences between the Bush and his administration's policies (Obama 2009c). The speech was an opportunity for the administration to explain its stance on issues ranging from Guantanamo Bay and terrorism to the global economy and climate change (Obama 2009c). While this address emphasized themes of common global interest and collaboration by urging attendees to focus on working together to address mutual challenges, Obama's (2009c) statements also clearly warned the Iranian regime against nuclear ambitions. As further evidence of his cautionary tone, the President addressed Iran and North Korea simultaneously and argued that their pursuit of nuclear weapons upset the stability of their respective regions, and he advised each country to take responsibility for their international duties (Obama 2009c).

President Obama's (2009c) general comments also included some that could apply to the Iranian regime's handling of internal human rights issues: "True leadership will not be measured by the ability to muzzle dissent, or to intimidate and harass political opponents at home." Yet this stern tone was balanced by a different perspective on power in international relations, noting that "no one nation can or should try to dominate

another nation” (Obama 2009c). He later made general comments that again used the keywords of “mutual interest and mutual respect” (Obama 2009c). Overall, it was clear that he was focused on warning the Iranian regime that its nuclear desires would not be tolerated while simultaneously interjecting signs of cooperation. As an extension of this commitment to cooperate, the President attempted to engage the Muslim world as a whole early in his presidency.

In June 2009, Obama (2009b) gave an address at Cairo University highlighting a respect for Islam, despite extremists from various groups attempting to draw divisions between Muslim and non-Muslim populations. Significant to US-Iran relations, he admitted US involvement in the 1953 coup d'état in a keynote speech:

In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians. This history is well known. Rather than remain trapped in the past, I've made it clear to Iran's leaders and people that my country is prepared to move forward. The question now is not what Iran is against, but rather what future it wants to build. (Obama 2009b)

The President also mentioned the lack of trust between the US and Iran as a significant challenge to the relationship, one that must be met with persistence and determination (Obama 2009b).

President Obama (2009b) subtly addressed Iran by arguing that the US was not attempting to make decisions regarding their nuclear capabilities, but was dedicated to creating a safer global environment where there are eventually no nuclear weapons. This address was specific in its outreach to the Middle East region and in its declaration of

policies different from previous US administrations. Its overall message was also less stern and forewarning about Iran's nuclear program than the 2009 UN General Assembly speech. In 2010, President Obama (2010c) specifically mentioned the relationship between the US and Iran again in his second speech to the UN General Assembly, although his comments pertained mostly to nuclear non-proliferation. He limited his points to summarizing the diplomatic solutions his administration had previously offered regarding the nuclear dilemma with Iran (Obama 2010c). He also stated that the offer for diplomacy was still available, but noted that the international community was waiting for Iran to offer proof of a peaceful nuclear program (Obama 2010c). One year later, events attesting to the instability of the Middle East would inspire the bulk of President Obama's next address to the UN General Assembly.

That 2011 speech cited timely events of the Arab Spring (specifically those in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya) to couple the difficulties of peace with optimism of change in the countries fighting against dictators (Obama 2011a). He specifically criticized the Iranian regime by stating that it "refuses to recognize the rights of its own people," while he also spoke of the atrocities in the Syrian civil war (Obama 2011a). Again, the President linked Iran and North Korea together by referencing their nuclear dilemmas, specifically noting that the Iranian regime had not been able to prove that its program was peaceful and that it had ignored offers to assist it with further development of such capabilities (Obama 2011a).

In his 2012 UN General Assembly address, President Obama would again cite current issues to make his points, particularly regarding the attack on the US Embassy in Benghazi, Libya. He blended recent accounts of the attack with the ongoing challenges of international cooperation, arguing that the interdependent nature of the world required global cooperation “in working towards greater opportunity and security for our citizens” (Obama 2012c). He emphasized that the embassy attack and Ambassador Chris Steven’s death were not only assaults against the US, but also attacks against ideals of the UN. These included peace over violence, diplomacy over war, and the importance of solving problems together (Obama 2012c). Indirectly, President Obama (2012c) referred to Iran by bringing attention to countries that do not necessarily use violence, but “hatred of America, or the West, or Israel, as central organizing principles of politics.”

President Obama (2012c) directly called out the Iranian regime for restricting the rights of its citizens, its support of the Assad regime in Syria and terrorist groups, and its failure to prove that its nuclear program was peaceful. Again, the President made it clear that he wanted to improve relations between the US and Iran diplomatically but that time would run out eventually (Obama 2012c). He also stated that Iran’s success in obtaining a nuclear weapon would have negative ramifications for the security of Israel, global economy, and the security of the Gulf nations (Obama 2012c). President Obama (2012c) reiterated that the United States and a coalition of other like-minded nations were committed to preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. As such, he followed a

similar pattern of messaging in his UN addresses, which stressed a commitment to diplomacy with Iran and the intolerable nature of their pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Yet this address emphasized the finite nature of a diplomatic solution. The internal US political context for both the 2011 and the 2012 address was the presidential election in November 2012. This understandably put pressure on him to find a solution with Iran, especially considering US American desires to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. Regardless of how pressing US-Iran relations were during the foreign policy discussions leading up to the 2012 election, President Obama did not directly mention Iran in his second inaugural address.

Similar to his first inaugural address, President Obama (2013a) spoke of the Middle East region more generally in that “we [the US] will support democracy from Asia to Africa, from the Americas to the Middle East, because our interests and our conscience compel us to act on behalf of those who long for freedom.” In all, both inaugural addresses were not particularly revealing of his administration’s Iran policies, but they did communicate his broad goals in the Middle East (Obama 2013a). Later in the year, he would make specific remarks about Iran and its regime at the UN General Assembly.

Shortly after President Obama’s re-election, in June 2013, Hassan Rouhani (2013) was elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran based on a platform of moderate policies. Later that year, President Obama (2013b) specifically mentioned the particular issue of Iran’s nuclear program as a “focus” of American diplomatic efforts while

outlining US core interests in preserving oil flow, eradicating terrorism, and suppressing nuclear weapon ambitions. Once again, the President integrated “mutual respect” and “mutual interests” into his remarks and once again placed blame for sanctions on the regime (Obama 2013b). He indicated that President Rouhani’s election and the Supreme Leader’s words against nuclear weapons showed possibilities of agreement but further emphasized that actions must be seen (Obama 2013b). Although the President did not promise that diplomacy would be successful, he highlighted the importance of trying such means (Obama 2013b). A particular portion of his remarks explained how foreign perceptions of the US in the Middle East were presenting difficulties for US foreign policy:

The United States is chastised for meddling in the region [Middle East], accused of having a hand in all manner of conspiracy, at the same time, the United States is blamed for failing to do enough to solve the region’s problems and for showing indifference toward suffering Muslim populations. (Obama 2013b)

The President argued that foreign stakeholders had unreasonable expectations for US involvement in the Middle East, an idea that is particularly important to the analysis of his Nowruz messages in the following section.

In summary, many of these addresses included consistent conflicts of messaging, paralleling the overall tone of the administration towards Iran. Considering that his commitment to diplomacy was accompanied by a stern tone warning Iran against nuclear ambitions, the President was clearly attempting to strike a balance between messaging “mutual respect” and “no options off the table.” Those speeches were only one aspect of his administration’s efforts at public diplomacy and were inherently limited in their

ability to reach or impact Iranian citizens due to their formal nature. However, President Obama's Nowruz messages specifically targeted the Iranian people and provided a much greater opportunity to not only reach but engage various publics in that country.

Nowruz Messages – Persian New Year

During each year of his presidency, President Obama produced and disseminated Nowruz (Persian New Year) messages that were the most transparent form of public diplomacy with the Iranian people. In 2009, President Obama (2009d) was clear about wanting “to speak directly with the people of Iran” as well as with the Iranian leadership in his video messages for Nowruz. The first of his Nowruz messages has been characterized as “unprecedented” in tone and structure (Crabtree 2013). The President's messages focused on communicating respect for Iranians as they celebrated an important Iranian holiday while also summarizing the current conditions of their relationship. Often quoting famous Persian poets like Hafez, President Obama used this form of diplomacy to connect the two nations through humanity. His Nowruz messages from 2009-2014 have followed the pattern below (Obama 2009d, Obama 2010b, Obama 2011b, Obama 2012a, Obama 2013c, and Obama 2014b):

1. Wishing a happy holiday and acknowledging the importance of Nowruz to Iranian culture
2. Acknowledging the past hardships and/or climate of relationship between the US and Iran

3. Providing information about recent developments, and present problems the US has with the Iranian regime and/or what is needed to facilitate a better relationship
4. Expressing hope for a better relationship and life for Iranians

With varying degrees of focus on any one of these items above, President Obama touched upon each of the above points (see Appendix A for examples of each point found in the Nowruz messages).

Although all of his Nowruz messages reflected a common format, they included specific points based on important contextual and environmental realities of the US-Iran relationship. An example is President Obama's (2013c, 2014) use of "dorood" as the opening greeting in both the 2013 and 2014 Nowruz messages. His use of the Persian "dorood" contrasts with the Arabic origin of salaam and suggests that the President was trying to reach a population more attached to the roots of its Persian heritage (Crabtree 2013). In 2014, praising President Rouhani and the historical interim agreement that had recently been negotiated, President Obama (2014) commented that "if Iran seizes this moment, this Nowruz could mark not just the beginning of a new year, but a new chapter in the history of Iran and its role in the world – including a better relationship with the United States and the American people, rooted in mutual interest and mutual respect." Overall, the Nowruz messages have been the hallmark of US public diplomacy with Iran and were concentrated efforts to ensure that President Obama communicated with and informed the Iranian people in a structured yet dynamic way.

BBC Persian Interview

Another significant effort was the President's 2010 interview with Bahman Kalbasi of BBC Persian, during which he explained the reasons for sanctions against Iran while expressing his hope for better relations (Rhodes 2010; Obama 2010a). The first question posed by Kalbasi focused on then-President Ahmadinejad's statements at the UN General Assembly "faulting" the US for the September 11 attacks (Obama 2010a). President Obama responded that the remarks were "inexcusable" and pointed out that the Iranian people showed compassion towards the US following the attacks, highlighting the divisions that persisted between Iranian leaders and civilians (Rhodes 2010; Obama 2010a). Particularly due to statements like that of President Ahmadinejad, he noted that engaging Iran increased the "political cost" because such extremism deters US Americans from wanting his administration to deal with the regime at all (Obama 2010a). Much of the interview included the President's explanation of his administration's Iran policies and provided a roadmap for the Iranian regime to improve relations.

Kalbasi asked the President about the simultaneous use of sanctions in combination with public diplomacy efforts such as the Nowruz messages (Obama 2010a). Obama (2010a) explained that sanctions were a multilateral effort imposed on Iran by members of the international community, including nations such as Russia and China that have often been opposed to Iranian sanctions. As the interview progressed to discussing the impact of sanctions on the Iranian people, the President added that sanctions were a result of decisions made by the Iranian regime to prioritize nuclear weapons above serving its

people (Obama 2010a). He stated throughout the interview that war was not a desirable option for his administration and that there was no reason the US and Iran needed to have poor relations, making it clear that improved diplomacy and a better relationship were possible *if* the regime decided to partake in such efforts (Obama 2010a).

President Obama took the possibility of cooperation one step further by mentioning the potential for the US and Iran to jointly address a variety of challenges, including the stabilization of Afghanistan (Obama 2010a). He outlined steps the regime would have to take in order to improve relations, including a conscious decision to change its process of maintaining power by promoting hostility towards the US:

And if that shift in orientation takes place, I think the opportunities for tremendous progress for a great nation and a great civilization exists. If it doesn't, then it's going to continue to be isolated and it's going to continue I think to cause friction not just with the United States, but also with the world community. (Obama 2010a)

President Obama (2010a) also provided something of a roadmap for what Iran could do to have the sanctions lifted and avoid war, which included a “mechanism whereby [it] can assure and prove to the international community, including the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]” that its nuclear program is peaceful and that it will engage in “serious negotiations.” Among these possibilities and explanations, there were points of commonality sown into his answers including “mutual understanding and mutual respect” (Obama 2010a).

Virtual Embassy

President Obama's speeches, his Nowruz messages, and the BBC Persian interview were substantial efforts of communication but they were not tangible forms of public diplomacy. This changed when his administration launched a Virtual Embassy of the United States for Iran in December 2011 (2014). That initiative marked a move away from the words and rhetoric of President Obama's previous forms of public diplomacy and into a form that directly communicated with the Iranian people, according to Barbara Slavin, Atlantic Council nonresident senior fellow (2013). This Virtual Embassy served other diplomatic purposes such as attending to visa applications, educational opportunities, and appointments in US consular offices in Turkey, Armenia, or the UAE (Slavin 2013). The creation of this Virtual Embassy was an act of public diplomacy in itself; an even more tangible form of outreach was the actual content on its website. Considering that its *About Us* page speaks directly to the Iranian people, the site contained numerous opportunities to communicate with Iranians who visited the Virtual Embassy (Virtual Embassy of the United States 2014). Officials stated that the US used this site to counter Iranian regime portrayals (Slavin 2013). The Virtual Embassy linked Iranians to social media tools that included Google+, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Slavin 2013).

Not surprisingly, the Iranian regime did not welcome the US government's initial attempts to connect the Iranian people to this site. Just hours after the Virtual Embassy was launched, the Iranian government blocked it. Yet the site is believed to have been

successful due to virtual private networks (VPNs) that were able to provide means around the blockage (Reuters 2011). By 2013, there had been 2 million distinct page hits and half a million distinct visitors to the site with 78% in Farsi (Slavin 2013). Although Nigeria was the source of the website hits, they were assumed to be Iranians circumventing the system, as Nigeria does not have a large Iranian population (Slavin 2013). The website and related websites such as Facebook have been blocked at times, but officials have reported that Iranians have reconnected (Slavin 2013). The “About Us” page of the Virtual Embassy (2014) mentions that its website was created based on feedback from Iranians and that the US encouraged further suggestions. Although the Virtual Embassy is not a replacement for a typical physical embassy, it provides the possibility for two-way communication that is vital to successful public diplomacy.

Role of Sanctions

Aside from the various forms of public diplomacy detailed in this chapter, the current status of the US-led sanctions shape Iranian perceptions of the US government in a way that cannot be overlooked. These sanctions are central to Iranian perceptions of US government because they impact the everyday lives of Iranians. While they are not an example of public diplomacy, they are a current staple of the US-Iran relationship and the Obama administration has had to address them on various occasions. President Obama has used various public diplomacy efforts to explain why the US and the UN have issued sanctions against Iran, which is because Iran cannot prove that its nuclear program is peaceful (Crabtree 2013). President Obama’s 2013 General Assembly speech

illustrated the recurring message that his administration has communicated to the Iranian people:

After all, it's the Iranian government's choices that have led to the comprehensive sanctions that are currently in place. And this is not simply an issue between the United States and Iran. The world has seen Iran evade its responsibilities in the past and has an abiding interest in making sure that Iran meets its obligations in the future. (Obama 2013b)

The use of sanctions against Iran is complex and a brief understanding of the reasons for their implementation is warranted.

According to Patrick Clawson (2010), Deputy Director of Research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "sanctions have been a regular feature of US policy toward Iran for more than three decades." US-Iran sanctions have had multiple objectives in different times. In the 1980s, the US used sanctions to limit Iranian power in the Middle East and stifle Iran's support of terrorism (Katzman 2014, 1). In the late 1990s, the US (with the help of the international community) used sanctions to ensure the peacefulness of Iran's nuclear program (Katzman 2014, 1). However, the interim nuclear deal (Joint Plan of Action or JPA) temporarily halted Iran's nuclear plan while promising an easing of economic sanctions (Landler and Weisman 2014). Legislators pushed to further sanction Iran, but President Obama vowed to veto the various bills claiming they would impact the prospects for a permanent agreement between the two countries (Katzman 2014, 64).

Even though these efforts are in no way exhaustive, they provide a window into President Obama's attempts to communicate directly with Iranian people in order to

improve relations between the United States and Iran. To be sure, the efforts of the administration have included many more speeches, actions, and messages from various cabinet members and associated staff. One significant example was the appointment of Alan Eyre as the administration's Persian spokesman (Katzman 2012, 76). For the most part, however, the efforts examined in this chapter provide the best basis for understanding the Obama administration's public diplomacy with Iran. Imperative to analyzing such efforts is a discussion of particular goals the Obama administration set for itself in relation to public diplomacy in general and with Iran in specific.

Goals of President Obama's Public Diplomacy

The overarching goals of public diplomacy include the facilitation of perceptions that ultimately aid foreign policy interests. This definition is expansive, though, and requires a narrower explanation for both US and administration-specific objectives. The LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas (2010, 7) presented a report to the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy and argued for three basic outcomes of public diplomacy, which included "increasing understanding of US policy and culture, increasing favorable opinions towards the US, increasing the US's influence in the world." These are helpful summaries of public diplomacy goals for the US, but the most important ones for the Obama presidency's public diplomacy are those that the administration stated itself in various government documents.

The Obama administration's major documents spelled out both broad and specific goals regarding policy challenges and opportunities. One important source was the

Quadrennial Diplomacy and Defense Review (QDDR) of 2010, which outlined broad goals of public diplomacy based on a strategic framework presented by Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy, Judith McHale. The goals read as follows:

1. “Shape the Narrative”
2. “Expand and Strengthen People-to-People Relationships”
3. “Counter Violent Extremism”
4. “Better Inform Policy Making”
5. “Deploy Resources in Line with Current Priorities”

(US Department of State 2010; Office of the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs 2010)

The QDDR then identified various tactics to promote success, but it did not outline public or conventional diplomacy goals or tactics for dealing with Iran. In turn, the Obama administration’s National Security Strategy of 2010 specifically addressed the following priorities regarding Iran:

- Present a clear choice to Iran: choose not to pursue nuclear weapons or become increasingly isolated from the global community (US White House 2010, 23)
- Transform Iranian policy away from the pursuit of nuclear weapons (US White House 2010, 24)
- Promote a responsible Iran (US White House 2010, 26)

These specific objectives, when combined with general public diplomacy goals, provide a broad framework for assessing results and for determining whether the Obama administration’s efforts have achieved its desired outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ANALYSIS

The Obama Administration's Efforts

President Obama appeared on Arab television and said that negative perceptions lay at the heart of Middle East quarrels. By implication, he was sending a message that Iran and the United States needed to get beyond the usual knee-jerk reactions that each side was inherently out to get the other.” (Crist 541)

Public diplomacy is essential for better relations and necessary for a holistic diplomacy strategy. President Obama's public diplomacy has been wide-ranging. His efforts attempt to kindle a more optimistic relationship with Iran by focusing on key aspects of mutual respect, combined with the vision of an Iranian regime that acts in accord with international norms. In order to draw conclusions about the outcomes of these efforts there must first be a definition of success and methods by which to evaluate public diplomacy.

How to Assess Public Diplomacy: Criteria and Methodology

According to Robert Banks, former US diplomat in residence at the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy, evaluating this evolving form of diplomacy is inherently difficult (2011, 7). Public diplomacy's impacts are long term, they are often intangible, and its cause-effect arguments are allusive (Banks 2011, 11-17). He argues that the method of evaluating their success “should reflect its public diplomacy objectives” and defines those objectives as supporting foreign policy goals while fostering mutual understanding with other nations (Banks 2011, 25).

A recent Government Accountability Office report provided a variety of methods to do this (2007, 3). According to that study, important measurements for analysis include, “ (1) opinion and behavior tracking, (2) media monitoring, (3) tracking of objective outcomes, (4) evaluative research” (GAO 2007, 39). Because not all of these elements are available for analysis, nor are they necessarily useful for the context of US-Iran relations, I have used the following ones to evaluate the Obama administration’s public diplomacy efforts.

1. Select appropriate public opinion polls and events from no earlier than 2012 for evaluation (**The year 2012 is used to allow for the completion of President Obama’s first term*)
2. Compare outcomes to stated and implied Iran policy goals of the Obama administration
3. Use systems theory to further assess findings in the context of the global world

This analysis evaluates Iranian perceptions of US government, internal US perceptions of US-Iran relations, and both US and Iranian public opinion regarding various US policies and messaging. This thesis specifically examines if these perceptions were influenced to align with a more positive US-Iran relationship.

Changing perceptions is difficult to do and it often takes time to show progress. As such, even moderate changes in administration or policy approval ratings can indicate the relative success of diplomatic efforts. Similarly, events that suggest a more civil relationship and more opportunities to achieve policy goals are also considered successes. In addition to other indicators, the Obama administration’s outreach to the Iranian people

also included the nuclear issue and sanctions as focal topics in recent polls and studies of Iranian perceptions.

Feedback and Reaching Policy Goals

Public diplomacy efforts are ultimately intended to inform and/or change opinions of foreign publics to promote a nation's interest. Polling is one quantifiable measurement to evaluate success, so public opinions of Iranians are the most direct sources of feedback in US public diplomacy with Iran. However, obtaining polling data from Iranians is often difficult considering the tense US-Iran relationship and the isolation of Iran from the global community (Akbarzadeh 2011, 476). Available and relevant Iranian public opinion polls conducted after 2012 include two Gallup World Public Opinion Polls (Ray 2012; Younis 2013) and a Zogby Research Service Poll (2013). A study conducted by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans provided relevant and timely insight into the attitudes of the Iranian-American community (Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans 2013).

The Obama administration's stated policy goals included presenting Iran with a clear choice between further isolation or integration into the global community, transforming Iranian policy away from nuclear weapons, and promoting a responsible Iran that lives up to international obligations (US White House 2010). Although this message was communicated clearly, it did not steer Iranian public opinion away from a desire for nuclear power nor did it convince Iranians that sanctions were the fault of their

government. Such changes in Iranian opinion would certainly be advantageous to US policy with Iran and are arguably the intent of numerous public diplomacy efforts.

As of December 2012 and January 2013, many Iranians not only blamed the US government for the sanctions, but also wanted to continue pursuing nuclear weapons (Younis 2013). A Gallup World poll based on telephone surveys with 1,000 respondents (15 or older) reported that 63% of Iranians believed Iran should continue to develop nuclear capabilities despite the sanctions (Younis 2013). This same study showed that

- 56% of Iranians believed sanctions hurt Iranian livelihoods “a great deal” (Younis 2013)
- 47% of Iranians held the US “most responsible” for sanctions against Iran (Younis 2013)
- 10% of Iranians held the Iranian regime “most responsible” for sanctions against Iran (Younis 2013)

Despite finding that a majority of Iranians wanted to continue the nuclear program in the face of sanctions, additional polls showed that Iranians did not hold the nuclear issue or sanctions high on their list of priorities.

President Obama’s efforts did not encourage the Iranian people to prioritize a nuclear deal among national issues. Out of 1,205 Iranians surveyed by the Zogby Research Service, only 7% responded that resolving the nuclear issue to relieve sanctions was one of two top priorities for their country when asked to choose from a list of issues (2013). The top priorities for Iranians included improving employment and strengthening democracy as well as issues of civil, personal, and women’s rights (Zogby 2013, 7).

These findings indicated that Iranians would not allow external pressure to define the status or importance of national issues.

Iranian-Americans had similar attitudes towards the importance of human rights and democracy in Iran. While Iranian-Americans are not the ultimate audience of public diplomacy efforts by the US government, many still have family in Iran and keep close ties to the country. Furthermore, their views are based on an arguably greater understanding and appreciation of both countries, bringing an enlightening combination of interests to their perceptions. The 2013 study by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans showed that

- 56% of Iranian Americans reported that democracy and human rights promotion within Iran were one of two priorities for US-Iran relations (Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans 2013)
- 31% responded that the promotion of regime change was the second most important issue (Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans 2013)

Iranians and Iranian-Americans held human rights and democracy as their top priorities regardless of the US government's focus on resolving the nuclear issue. Interestingly, Iranian-Americans highly prioritized regime change, while the Obama administration's step away from regime change and democracy promotion may have been revolutionary for conventional diplomacy with Iran. But President Obama's focus on the nuclear issue did not translate into a significant increase in Iranian public approval of the US government.

Another Gallup World Poll, conducted December 2011 to January 2012, reported that 8% of Iranians approved of US leadership (Ray 2012) and that 53% of the Iranian-

Americans approved of President Obama’s overall handling of Iran (Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans 2013). Table 4 provides a visual representation of these important statistics.

Table 4. US-Iran Relations Approval

Study	Sample	Findings
Gallup January Poll January 2012	Iranian Perceptions	US leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67% disapproved • 8% approved • 25% unknown
PAAIA Poll February 2013	Iranian-American Perceptions	Obama’s overall handling of Iran <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53% approved • 47% disapproved

Sources: Data adapted from Ray 2012 and Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans 2013.

Although the Obama administration’s efforts were still unfolding, these data showed that President Obama’s prior messaging had not significantly improved Iranian approval ratings of the US government. However, disapproval of the US government was reduced from 92% during the Bush administration to 67% during the Obama administration (WPOO 2007; Ray 2012). This signifies a transition from a strong to a more divided Iranian opinion of the US government.

Public diplomacy did not drastically change Iranian perceptions, but the Obama administration engaged the Iranian regime and encouraged it to fulfill international expectations (US White House 2010). Breakthroughs in conventional diplomacy, such as the September 2013 phone call between Presidents Obama and Rouhani and the

November 2013 Joint Plan of Action regarding an interim nuclear deal, indicated that the Obama administration's approach to diplomacy created opportunities that had not been available to previous administrations. Focusing on the apolitical connection between US Americans and Iranians based on a message of humanity created a political environment in which both sides could begin a dialogue and create the political will for the type of positive relationship President Obama spoke about in his efforts.

In the context of the relationship between the US and Iran, evaluation of Iranian regime behavior as feedback is tricky and may be counterproductive. US intervention throughout the history of US-Iran relations makes conducting public diplomacy for the specific goal of changing regime behavior detrimental. While transforming Iranian policy away from the pursuit of nuclear weapons and human rights abuses was arguably the ultimate goals of diplomatic efforts, admitting or focusing on these aspects of behavior contradicts the attraction of attractive power. In essence, attractive power should set the context for the informed to make a change, not to create the change itself. Developments in conventional diplomacy during the Obama administration indicate that the public diplomacy process utilized attractive power efficiently, maximizing opportunities and minimizing counterproductive pitfalls.

Although diplomatic achievements were inarguably bred of political goodwill fostered by President Obama's commitment to public and conventional diplomacy with Iran, many overlook this reality. The election of Iranian President Rouhani in June of 2013 was an exciting moment for US-Iran relations, considering that Rouhani ran on a

platform of moderation quite opposite to former extremist President Ahmadinejad (Rouhani 2013). However, some argue that sanction pressures are the primary reason for President Rouhani's victory and overlook the importance of tools like public diplomacy. This argument theorizes that the Iranian people want their government to provide moderate presidential candidates who can ultimately end sanctions (Katzman 2014, 50). The interim nuclear deal in November 2013 is another event that is often attributed to the "crippling" sanctions against Iran (Parsi 2014). Even the Obama administration has boasted that sanctions coaxed Iran to negotiate its nuclear program (Parsi 2014).

This notion is contested by scholars like Trita Parsi, however, who attribute Rouhani's election and corresponding agreements with the West as a desire for change by the Iranian public, which is unrelated to blatant external pressure (Parsi 2014). He explains his viewpoint that such claims about the impact of sanctions on internal Iranian developments are unfounded:

The idea that the United States has the ability to engineer the outcome of elections in a country that is thousands of miles away, with which it has no trade, where it has had no diplomatic presence for 35 years, and where only a handful of current U.S. diplomats have ever served or even visited, expands the concept of arrogance to new and exciting frontiers. (Parsi 2014)

Internal political realities of Iran drive decision-making and behavior of the Iranian regime just as internal political demands drive decisions of the Obama administration (Nader 2014). While it is inconclusive whether outside pressure or internal demands dictated Iranian political events, there were indications that engagement and optimism from the US fostered more moderate leadership in Iran.

Beyond Rouhani's election, recent diplomatic events signify that the Obama administration's public diplomacy efforts were successful in providing momentum to enhance conventional diplomacy between the two countries. The phone call between President Barack Obama and President Rouhani on September 2013 was the first direct talk between an Iranian and US leader since Iran's 1979 revolution (Roberts and Borger 2013). The nuclear negotiations themselves also signified a change in the relationship. As described in an article for *The Economist*, "both sets of negotiations were conducted in an atmosphere of constructive endeavour, a far cry from the sterile declarations and mutual suspicion of the past" (2013). While there is still a long and challenging road ahead to make negotiations final and to create a sustainable, positive relationship between the US and Iran, diplomatic events signify the slow harvesting of public diplomacy successes.

Goodwill between the US and Iranian governments has inspired a more positive dialogue. Mutual respect was an essential first step to promote amity between the countries and to create opportunities for diplomacy, despite the lack of approving Iranian perceptions. However, the perceptions Iranians held of the US government and its own government's policies indicated that such diplomatic successes might not be sustainable because credibility and legitimacy are still believed to be absent. The lack of favorable Iranian opinions of the US government and the difficulty in influencing these opinions exposes the deficiency of these essential elements in the US-Iran public diplomacy process.

As defined in Chapter 1, credibility is the trust and reputability that one nation holds for another (Nye 2008, 100). Legitimacy is the acceptance of a body to fulfill some kind of role particularly in a political setting using some variation of power and authority (Burton 1968). Figure 2 shows the process of public diplomacy lacking the prime foundations of credibility and legitimacy.

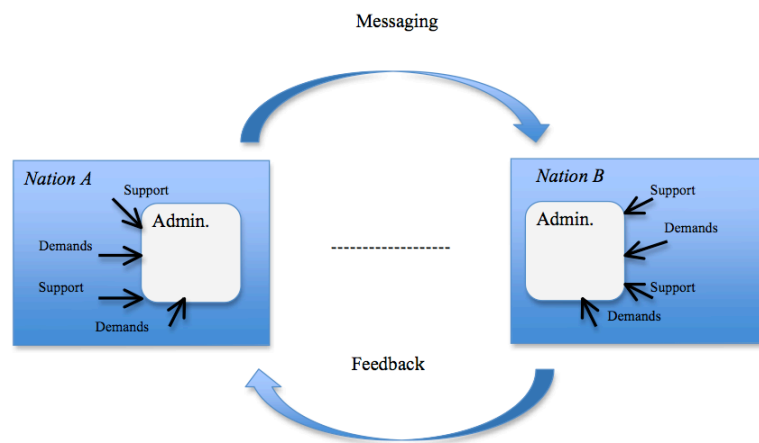


Figure 2. US Public Diplomacy Without Credibility and Legitimacy

Without the establishment of credibility and legitimacy, public diplomacy messaging is much more likely to be lost in the noise of demands on the administrative systems in each country. The preservation of these elements is an ongoing process. Such a process has consequences not only on global perceptions, but also on future policy objectives.

From some systems perspectives, particularly cybernetics and system dynamics, objectives and purposeful behavior constitute a significant focus of study. Public diplomacy is an extremely purposeful endeavor. The Obama administration conducts

such efforts for both general and specific goals relating to better relations and national interest. The observation that the lack of credibility and legitimacy in the process of public diplomacy has an impact on the overall effectiveness of the efforts is an unpretentious one. The reasons behind such a deficiency are more complicated.

Image and Insults

An important distinction in this case is that “public diplomacy should help a government achieve its foreign policy objectives, rather than spending money on ‘propaganda’ or image making” (GAO 2009, 38). To be sure, public diplomacy with Iran is not and should not be used as propaganda or a public relations campaign. Reliability, consistency, and competence are necessary for an administration to actualize policy goals on an international level and avoid this very pitfall.

Understandably, credibility and legitimacy have not been cultivated between the US and Iran. Based on their history and Iranian public opinion, it would be difficult to dispute this statement. Credibility and legitimacy are inherently intertwined, complex, and intangible. Yet the dilemma is simple; to Iranians, US leadership does not have any of these qualities, making its messages much less likely to influence their perceptions. While the history of the US-Iran relationship provides context to understand the persistent absence of credibility and legitimacy, there are deeper reasons for this problem.

On the whole, the messaging of mutual respect by the Obama administration created political space for diplomacy to occur (Gelb 2009a, 229; Nye 2008, 101). President Obama’s efforts planted the political seed for Iranian politicians to

communicate and negotiate with the US, regardless of Iranian public opinion. The US government's engagement of Iran started a virtuous cycle of civility, but revisions to its messaging strategy are necessary to strengthen this momentum.

The Obama administration's messaging, at its best, emphasized common threads of humanity and built a basis for amicable relations. At its worst, its efforts crossed the fine line between propaganda and public diplomacy. Effective public diplomacy in a global world incorporates two-way communication, research, and truthful messaging. Successful efforts also build and use credibility and legitimacy. Propaganda is based on manipulation and coercive persuasion. The "no options off the table" statement and the North Korea-Iran nuclear quandaries are examples of propagandized communication by the US government.

At the same time, the Obama administration continued to insult Iran and the Iranian regime. While it lessened in the Obama administration, simultaneously speaking of the Iranian people's greatness while calling out US grievances with the regime served as a backhanded compliment to a country already disengaged by US leadership (Peterson 2014). Criticisms of the Iranian government in messages specifically meant to reach out to the Iranian people hindered positive components of the messages, but allowed President Obama to maintain credibility with the US government and the American people so a healing process could still proceed at all. In addition, harsh US rhetoric fuels Iranians who oppose better US-Iran relations, supplying reasons to downplay diplomatic developments that the Obama administration inspired. The combination of the sting from

insults with this aftermath of anti-US sentiment is a two-fold threat to US credibility and legitimacy. Such examples are apparent in President Obama's messaging and are certainly counterproductive. Although they were not the norm, these bouts of questionable communication left a stronger impression than the positivity of mutual respect. In the early stages of better US-Iran relations, positivity must be cultivated in a way that makes it more resilient in the long term.

Sustainability and Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy and meaningful policy should take advantage of opportunities to use minor changes to enact meaningful results. A focus on leverage points brings efficiency to policy strategy that further demonstrates systems science benefits to policy issues. As systems scientist, Donella Meadows (Meadows 1999, 1) explains, leverage points are "places within a complex system (a corporation, an economy, a living body, a city, an ecosystem) where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything." A noteworthy leverage point on her list of most influential places to intervene in a system is the paradigm (Meadows 1999, 17). For a nation, a paradigm is the set of beliefs that are accepted as social values (Meadows 1999, 17).

At its very core, the Obama administration's public diplomacy must change paradigms associated with Iran, those persistent structures and frameworks in both US American and Iranian society that prevent the relationship from being amicable and positive. Changing these paradigms encourages sustainable, positive developments in the US-Iran relationship by tackling the broader force that perpetuates a cycle of enmity. But

changing paradigms is extremely difficult and will necessitate persistence, commitment, and integration from the US as a whole.

President Obama has begun the long process of building better relations with Iran by focusing public and conventional diplomacy on mutual respect and optimism, which are beneficial to diplomacy with Iran in general. These diplomatic developments signify some glimmers of tangible success. The fundamental issue with the Obama administration's public diplomacy outreach is that it was unable to cultivate legitimacy and credibility to improve the relationship between the US and Iran for the long term. Building and maintaining these elements of public diplomacy by changing paradigms transcend ad-hoc policy and diplomacy successes. In order to achieve them, the Obama administration must first look inward.

Credibility and Legitimacy at Home

Public diplomacy is inherently complex and includes a relationship not only between the nation attempting public diplomacy and the country of interest, but also internal demands within the country conducting public diplomacy. Ali M. Ansari, founding director of the Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of St. Andrews, explains that globalization and mass media have broadened the interest in international affairs (2007, 4). "It [foreign policy] is a domestic concern driven by domestic needs, and the popular imagination matters. The practice of foreign policy has become politicized to an extent that would have been inconceivable a generation ago." Domestic publics are integrated into the processes of foreign affairs, and the inability of the Obama

administration to improve US-Iran relations has a negative impact on its credibility and legitimacy abroad.

President Obama has not convinced US publics that his administration has the competence to handle the US-Iran relationship desirably. Forty-four percent of Americans disapproved of the President's management of US-Iran relations, according to a New York Times/CBS poll taken in September 2013 (Sussman 2013). Other significant responses in this study as well as a 2013 Pew Research study showed that

- Less than 25% of US Americans believed that the relationship between the US and Iran would improve in the next few years (Sussman 2013)
- 69% of US Americans had an unfavorable view of Iran (Pew 2013b)
- 64% of US Americans would prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon even if that meant using military action (Pew 2013b)

These results suggest that US Americans not only disapprove of Iran and its government, but they are also pessimistic about the Obama administration's prospects with Iran. This perpetuates a communal US outlook that makes diplomacy with Iran inherently incongruous.

To be fair, the Obama administration has been able to drum up support for US nuclear negotiations with Iran, but that progress is mixed with elements of stagnation. A Reuters/Ipsos poll taken after the JPA interim deal was reached in November 2013 showed 44% of US Americans approved of the nuclear deal (Spetalnick 2013). The same poll showed that 49% wanted to further sanction Iran and 20% would support military action should the deal fail, leaving only 31% committed to diplomacy regardless

of a future permanent deal (Spetalnick 2013). The US American public's strong support of sanctions and consideration of military action presents major hurdles as the Obama administration attempts to move the US-Iran relationship forward.

Iranian President Rouhani also conducted public diplomacy, providing more opportunity to change the attitudes that US Americans have about US-Iran relations and the Obama administration's efforts. In a September 2013 editorial for *The Washington Post*, President Rouhani attempted to persuade US Americans that Iran is worthy of US engagement by stating, "I'm committed to fulfilling my promises to my people, including my pledge to engage in constructive interaction with the world" (Rouhani 2013).

President Rouhani's administration has also utilized various social media platforms and television interviews to engage the world. These offerings from President Rouhani are certainly positive and could help to ease US American pessimism for US-Iran relations. However, President Obama is the key actor responsible for convincing US publics that Iran should be engaged and that his administration has the capacity to do so.

The US public's uncertainty about President Obama's handling of Iran and pessimism regarding betterment of relations brings inconsistency to the stances of the US as a nation and taints diplomatic processes. Without a US public commitment to diplomacy with Iran, public diplomacy messaging is hindered by internal opposition. This lack of agreement and commitment has made diplomatic milestones with Iran a fight for the Obama administration, particularly with the US Congress.

Navigating Internal Conflicts

There are few opportunities for democrats and republicans to cooperate or agree in the partisan environment of Washington DC. Even so, prominent members of both parties have voiced concern over negotiating with Iran. Shortly after the interim deal was announced in November of 2013, even powerful democrats such as Sen. Chuck Schumer (NY), Sen. Robert Menendez (NJ) and Sen. Steny Hoyer (MD) called for further sanctions against Iran as reported in *The Hill* (Becker 2013). Sen. Schumer stated the deal was “disproportionately good for Iran” and that sanctions were the only form of leverage for the US (Becker 2013). In contrast, House Minority Leader Sen. Nancy Pelosi cited the interim deal as a significant development that could prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, but the discussion of further sanctioning Iran continued (Becker 2013). Despite the diplomatic success that an agreement signified and support from some top DC politicians, President Obama faced criticism and obstruction.

As specifics of the Joint Plan of Action interim agreement became operational in January 2014, a bipartisan proposal to further sanction Iran was proposed (Cohen 2014). This serves as another example of how a lack of the Obama administration’s internal legitimacy and credibility has manifested itself in domestic political battles (Cohen 2014). This specific proposal delayed the implementation of additional sanctions until negotiations with Iran were complete (Cohen 2014). Legislators were pessimistic that the interim deal would become final and were preparing for its failure. Such proposals undercut and threatened efforts of President Obama’s public and conventional diplomacy

deficient in optimism for US-Iran relations (Cohen 2014). Internal dilemmas continued to arise for the Obama administration's Iran diplomacy.

A particularly complex example of the Obama administration's lack of internal legitimacy regarding Iran was an amendment to the US-Israel Strategic Partnership Act that Sen. Bob Corker (R- TN) proposed in May 2014 (Pecquet 2014). It would have forced the Obama administration to subject any final Iran agreement to hearings and a vote in Congress, taking negotiating power from the executive branch (Pecquet 2014). Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) withdrew the legislation to avoid attaching this amendment, arguing that support for Israel and Iran negotiations should be separate issues (Pecquet 2014). Sen. Corker claimed that his intent was not to force democrats to vote against the President's Iran deal, which would weaken party unity and create contention within the Democratic Party (Pecquet 2014). A senior administrator stated that the amendment would further impact the President's ability to negotiate foreign policy, bringing over 535 congressional voices to the negotiating table (Pecquet 2014). Regardless of the intentions of Sen. Croker and possible divisions within the Democratic Party regarding Iran, this action raised questions about the Obama administration's ability to lead the country to better US-Iran relations.

This proposed amendment also brought the nexus of Israel, US, and Iran relations into the analysis for US-Israel amity and Israel-Iran enmity have further challenged US-Iran diplomacy. The reasons for tensions among the three countries are complex and require a separate analysis on their own, yet a few key developments illustrate the reasons

behind the hostilities. Interestingly, Iran and Israel had good relations until the 1979 Iranian Revolution (Simon 2010). But events such as Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and Iran's support for Hezbollah further diverted interests of the former allies (Simon 2010). Steve Simon (2010), senior fellow for Middle East Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, explained the political ramifications, "Iran's real-politik hostility toward Israel was reinforced by ideological and obsessive enmity. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is the most visible purveyor of anti-Semitic notions, but such beliefs have circulated among Iran's leadership since the revolution" (Simon 2010).

Parsi concisely explained more recent dilemmas for Israel, Iran, and the US. He argued that the Israel lobby and aligned DC politicians stifled US-Iran diplomacy by limiting time for diplomacy to succeed, pushing to take apart Iran's nuclear program, pushing for sanctions before diplomacy, and arguing for military action (Parsi 2012a). Such Israeli efforts are ongoing. In June 2014, Israeli leaders like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked for negotiators to remain strict on Iran's nuclear program as a final deal deadline approached, specifically demanding that they deny Iran the right to enrich uranium (Williams 2014).

Most significant to this analysis was the chaos that ensued from Israel and Israel-aligned US representatives pressing for a harsher approach towards Iran, including additional sanctions and possible military action, while the Obama administration pursues diplomacy. A very strong Israel lobby in the United States combined with general public support for a commitment to Israel make supporting negotiations with Iran a toxic

political issue. In the eyes of Iranian leaders, democrats and republicans alike respond to Israel's will (Crist 2012, 542). "These [Iranian] hard liners countered that the Jewish lobby controlled both parties, so in spite of Obama's rhetoric, no American president would make any real substantive change in policy toward Iran" (Crist 2012, 542).

Although Israel is an external factor in US policy, its interests manifested internally and consequences could be found both in the order of US priorities and in the distrust it bred with Iran. President Obama's attempts to convince US publics that his administration would find a reasonable solution with Iran were stifled by this manifestation.

Debates, lobbies, and disagreements define the US political system and should not be eradicated. But for diplomacy to succeed in the current global context, such discussions have to be conducted in an appropriate setting and should not undercut efforts of rapprochement. These factors can partially explain internal political demands on the administration and their impact on US consistency in communicating with Iran. In addition, the Obama administration has been faced with the challenges of acting in an increasingly complex world and the fact that US Americans are conflicted about the future of US power.

Defining American Power and the Element of Time

President Obama cited a paradox of American power in his 2013 UN General Assembly speech, observing that the US is simultaneously reprimanded for not doing enough to help and for meddling too much in the Middle East. Publics outside the United States are conflicted about when and how the US should use its power, which creates an

unattainable expectation of policy perfection domestically and abroad. Furthermore, the leaders and publics of the US are not only conflicted, but are also unsure of how to wield American power in the global world. This contributes to the inconsistencies of the Obama administration's foreign policy detailed earlier and illustrates a challenge that transcends US-Iran relations.

Kim Holmes (2013), a fellow at the conservative think-tank Heritage Foundation, acknowledges the complexities of internal political demands and provides a more basic explanation of the inconsistencies in President Obama's foreign policy. US Americans want a strong nation with the capacity to use force, but they feel "guilty" about using such force (Holmes 2013). He attributes this confusion to a "new international liberalism" (Holmes 2013). However, there are other indications that the conflict over how to use US power is not limited to specific political ideologies (Pew 2013c). The American public is torn about the most effective, decent use of its entire power spectrum in the context of the global world. As Council on Foreign Relations Senior Vice President John Lindsay and research associate Rachel Kausss explain:

Americans are conflicted about the U.S. role in the world. On one hand, record numbers of Americans think the United States should mind its own business internationally and focus on problems at home. On the other hand, they want the United States to play a leading role in world affairs, and they see the benefits of greater involvement in the global economy. (2013, 52)

The Obama administration has attempted to carve a path for such a vision. While some find his foreign policy inconsistent, others find it entirely consistent with President

Obama's stated outlook on force and foreign policy that have been deemed the "Obama Doctrine" (Rohde 2012).

The "Obama Doctrine" entails a use of force, particularly military, when US national interests or those of US allies are directly at risk; otherwise, multilateral coalitions are constructed to deal with the situation (Rohde 2012). While this doctrine is used by some scholars to help explain US actions abroad, it is clear that the Obama administration still lacks a more explicit vision for US leadership. As the President stated in his West Point commencement address, "The question we face, the question each of you will face, is not whether America will lead, but how we will lead – not just to secure our peace and prosperity, but also extend peace and prosperity around the globe" (Obama 2014c). President Obama has started this process of determining the character of US international engagement, but the uncertainty is unsettling as the nation sorts out how to present a united front and vision of US leadership to the global community.

The uncertainty of the future of US power drains consistency and confidence from US communication with the world and also creates an unattainable end-result for foreign policy professionals. Because US Americans are unsure of what they want from US leadership or how they want the US to use its influence abroad, it is unlikely that a satisfactory result will occur. Specifically related to US-Iran relations, the perceptions that US Americans have of Iran create a confusing jumble of a desire to use force for controlling a perceived rogue regime with the longing for a better relationship with the country. Minimal internal credibility and legitimacy, US political conflicts, and the

dilemma of US power help to explain some of the factors that hinder the Obama administration's public diplomacy with Iran. However, a common theme among these challenges is the element of time and its impact on influencing perceptions.

Reliability and consistency are paramount in the building of credibility and legitimacy. Understandably, the process of transforming existing paradigms and fostering sustainable public diplomacy between the US and Iran requires time. Both internally and with Iran, President Obama's ability to keep actions and messages as consistent as possible for the duration of this administration and beyond is what will produce success in diplomacy. The enmity between the US and Iran took decades to unfold, and it is only realistic to expect that it would take a substantial amount of time to repair.

Eliminating the paradigms of enmity in both countries is a difficult task, but addressing the issues of credibility and legitimacy both internally and within Iran will help the Obama administration obtain approval for better US-Iran relations. This will not only allow the Obama administration to continue its work, but it will also influence subsequent administrations to keep on this path. Leaders must often make decisions based on incomplete information and ambiguous possible outcomes. In the process of public diplomacy and execution of various types of power, this means acting imperfectly.

Paul Quirk (2006, 148), Phil Lind Chair in US Politics and Representation at the University of British Columbia, argued that "the effort to design the best possible organization for presidential coordination of the executive branch is exceedingly complex

and uncertain – fundamentally, it’s a matter of hard trade-offs and guesses, not elegant solutions.” While perfection is not attainable, a critical look at policy and processes as well as options to help mitigate weaknesses is not only necessary, but also expected from leaders. Recommendations in this thesis are based on a spectrum of actions that a presidential administration can employ in order to make progress and help mitigate limitations in legitimacy and credibility.

Public diplomacy is not a silver bullet and neither are the components that make up its successful execution. It is going to take a mix of efforts to not only better the relationship with Iran, but also define the US role in the global world. Improving US credibility and legitimacy at home and abroad to more effectively utilize power approaches like public diplomacy produce a more accepted, sustainable, and manageable foreign policy direction by creating and maintaining the environment for policy successes. It will also take a wide-ranging list of actions for various administrations to build on the momentum in diplomacy that the Obama administration began.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

Broad Visions and Scenarios

The broad quandary to fostering sustainable, successful public diplomacy with Iran is the US government's lack of credibility and legitimacy in both internal and external contexts. Partisan politics, legislative and executive battles, the Israel lobby, the uncertain vision for US power, and scarcity of time are dilemmas that contribute to and arise from this greater problem. Relating to this larger challenge are three broad scenarios for the future of US-Iran relations. These scenarios are in no way exhaustive, but they are still helpful to determining a preferred direction for the relationship. In short, the US-Iran relationship could improve by continuing current diplomatic endeavors, the relationship could plateau and stay about the same, or the relationship could regress with more hostility and war. The ultimate argument for public diplomacy with Iran rests on the assumption that hostility and war are extremely undesirable and should be avoided unless there are no other options.

Military confrontation with Iran could have dire consequences for US national security (Mazzetti and Shanker 2012). War with Iran could have lasting negative consequences for both the US and Iran, including broader regional conflicts in the Middle East (Mazzetti and Shanker 2012). A 2012 simulation of an Israeli attack on Iran showed that one possible result of a military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities was that it could

instigate terrorism and cause an increase in oil prices (Mazzetti and Shanker 2012).

Overall, the policies of the Obama administration and public opinion of the US American people indicate that our country would like to avoid war with Iran. With war crossed off the list of desirable scenarios in the future of US-Iran relations, stagnation and progress are left.

Stagnation between the US and Iran, that is, maintaining the status quo, creates problems for US national interests. A 2014 report by the National Iranian American Council examined specific consequences of US-imposed sanctions on Iran (Leslie, Marashi, and Parsi 2014, 3). The report estimated that \$134.7 - \$175.3 billion and 51,043 - 66,436 US job opportunities have been lost every year in potential exports since 1995 (Leslie, Marashi, and Parsi 2014, 3). These are tangible consequences of the current situation with US-Iran relations.

Progress between the US and Iran is the most desirable option. This includes normalization of relations between the two countries, not predicated on demonization, and encouraging collaboration to solve bilateral and global dilemmas. A resilient public diplomacy process that is unabated by opposition groups is necessary to achieve this objective. The following set of recommendations is based on the most meaningful policy choices and leverage points from a systems perspective. They seek to build legitimacy and credibility for sustainable, successful public diplomacy which would increase long-term policy successes between the US and Iran.

Including Perspectives: Addressing Ineffective Messages

The first recommendation addresses the most easily controllable aspect of public diplomacy for the administration, the actual messaging. Messaging in public diplomacy is an integral part of the entire diplomatic effort. Messages are the vehicles of an administration's attempts to communicate with internal and external entities. In the context of public and foreign policy, words not only communicate policy, they also define it.

President Obama's public diplomacy has included instances of borderline propaganda that insulted the Iranian government and the Iranian people. Lumping Iran and North Korea together in speeches, faulting the Iranian regime for sanctions, and arguing that no options were off the table are examples of this. The consequences of such messaging are manifested in the lackluster change in Iranian opinion regarding the US government and the Iranian nuclear program. The Obama administration's approach is an improvement over predecessors for the reasons addressed earlier. However, for a more successful messaging program, comments based on the bias of the US perspective should be avoided in the future.

Truth and accuracy are essential to legitimate and credible public diplomacy messaging. Presenting US perspectives as fact is not only erroneous and egocentric, but counterproductive with Iran considering the two nations are so often at odds. President Obama's 2009 Cairo University speech was an astounding outreach to the Muslim world in general and the Iranian people specifically and is an example of effective public

diplomacy with Iran (Obama 2009b). The speech provided a representation of how to avoid insults and take a more approachable tone by speaking to the following points:

- **Acknowledgement of different perspectives particularly the difference in opinion of the US and Iran on Iran’s nuclear issue**
Example: “I understand those who protest that some countries have weapons that others do not. No single nation should pick and choose which nation holds nuclear weapons. And that's why I strongly reaffirmed America's commitment to seek a world in which no nations hold nuclear weapons ” (Obama 2009b).
- **Relevance of the 1953 coup d'état and other events to US-Iran tensions while also stating the hostage crisis, etc. as US grievances**
Example: “In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians” (Obama 2009b).
- **Negotiating with Iran is not solely based on American interest, but also the safety of the Middle East region**
Example: “This is not simply about America's interests. It's about preventing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East that could lead this region and the world down a hugely dangerous path” (Obama 2009b).

The University of Cairo speech is an example of a multiple perspective approach that any administration should strive to achieve.

Overall, this more effective messaging contrasts with messaging in the 2012 UN General Assembly speech, which referred to the Iranian regime’s “violent and unaccountable ideology” while also threatening time limits on diplomacy (Obama 2012c). Even messaging that is mostly focused on mutual respect and common humanity is drowned by such criticism. Avoiding insults in public diplomacy messages to Iran is not simply to appease Iran; US views can still be communicated. But it does not make

sense to simultaneously insult and praise Iran. It also does not make sense to flirt with propaganda in a global world that is increasingly smart to such efforts.

Incorporating messaging like President Obama's 2009 University of Cairo address could help to ensure that communication with the Iranian people about US interests is done in a way that better expresses smart power. No messaging is perfect, and there will still be the possibility of propaganda or insults. It will also be difficult to overcome the tendency of US special interests and political leanings to incentivize counterproductive communication. US Americans and the Obama administration understand that war with Iran is undesirable (Parsi 2012a). However, temporary political concerns such as the Israel lobby and a weak commitment to diplomacy with Iran increased war rhetoric, particularly during 2012 when former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated that an Israeli attack on Iran was highly probable (Parsi 2012a).

Thomas Friedman, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, and Michael Mandelbaum, Director of American Foreign Policy at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, argue that lobbying in the US does not serve the nation as a whole (2011, 257). There are positive attributes of lobbying as it provides channels for smaller groups to be heard in the democratic process (Friedman and Mandelbaum 2011, 259). "No less than hyper-partisan politics, super-funded and super-empowered special interests are crippling our capacity to define and act in the national interest ..." (Friedman and Mandelbaum 2011, 257). Strong special interest groups and an unengaged US public should not be used as an excuse for ineffective public diplomacy. To combat the impacts

of partisan politics and override special interest groups, the US public must be informed about specific realities of US-Iran relations. Over time, informing perceptions can change the incongruous demands on the US government pertaining to public diplomacy with Iran. Better educating the American public about Iran and the realities of dealing with the regime is essential to influencing the demands on the system.

Partisanship and Ignorance: Addressing Internal Challenges

While the Obama administration failed to convince US Americans that it was capable of building a better relationship with Iran, it was able to help solidify the understanding that war with Iran is an unfavorable option. The dilemma is that the US public still has negative perceptions of a hostile Iran. As a result, some politicians have perpetuated the narrative of Iran as a great enemy of the US. What may seem like political gain for those continuing the demonization of Iran is actually a short-term sell-out to special interests and ill-informed groups that are unconcerned with potential better futures for both countries. As noted, President Obama contributed to this narrative by including more war-based rhetoric with Iran throughout 2012. For the long term, supporting diplomacy with Iran is beneficial for politicians on both sides of the aisle.

As republicans and democrats struggle to define the future of American power, both have neglected the reality that successful policies often breed success in politics. Author Patrick Buchanan's view is that it is not politically savvy for republicans to take a hardline stance and possibly ruin future diplomatic developments with Iran, just as it is not for democrats to do so (Buchanan 2013). This is the reality because Americans do

not trust, but do not want war, with Iran (Buchanan 2013). While it is arguable that numerous republicans and prominent democrats have been working against the Obama administration's diplomatic efforts, it is not in the long-term interests of either party to sabotage an opportunity to integrate Iran into the international community and repair a three-decade hostility (Buchanan 2013).

The goal of elected officials in a representative democracy is to serve their constituents' interests to the best of their ability. But when constituents lack the knowledge to demand outcomes that are in their best interest, it is then the job of policy-makers to educate their citizens. As Brzezinski stated in an interview, the American public is ignorant about the world and this is a primary concern of his. He describes this fear in more detail when discussing the topic with Charlie Rose:

Yes, I think that is the fundamental problem [American ignorance]. We can't have an intelligent foreign policy unless we have an intelligent public, because we're a democracy. Look at what happened in Iraq in 2003 – the public basically supported it. We have set impossible goals for ourselves in Afghanistan. We had to go in because of what they did to us from there – al Qaeda. But the goals we set were extreme. We don't have a public that really understands the world anymore and in the age of complexity, that problem becomes much more difficult. (Brzezinski 2012)

The American public must be informed about Iran and the importance of engaging the nation despite minor setbacks. Realities about Iran's geopolitical position, its contributions to the oil market, its potential to aid common interests in the Middle East, and the consequences of giving up on diplomacy need to be communicated clearly and often. Specifically, the Obama administration must take every opportunity to communicate to US Americans the complexity and significance of US-Iran relations.

The Obama administration must take advantage of every opportunity to change the narrative of enmity between the US and Iran, particularly with messaging to internal audiences. In his 2014 State of the Union Address, President Obama missed a significant opportunity to abandon Iran's nuclear taboo and educate the US public and Congress about Iran (Obama 2014a).

These negotiations will be difficult. They may not succeed. We are clear-eyed about Iran's support for terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, which threaten our allies; and the mistrust between our nations cannot be wished away. But these negotiations do not rely on trust; any long-term deal we agree to must be based on verifiable action that convinces us and the international community that Iran is not building a nuclear bomb. If John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan could negotiate with the Soviet Union, then surely a strong and confident America can negotiate with less powerful adversaries today. (Obama 2014a)

President Obama supported the administration's negotiations with Iran, vowed to veto any new sanctions against Iran while negotiations continued, and simultaneously stated that his administration was ready to put new sanctions into effect should negotiations fail (Obama 2014a). Administrations must be more specific about what such negotiations mean for the US public and must abandon the narrative of Iran as the enemy in order to better the holistic diplomacy process.

The Obama administration has created informational materials such as *Fact Sheet: First Step Understandings Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program* that provide a more detailed explanation about the international negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear program (White House 2013). The facts included in this document are both technical and general, concluding with a summary of what a final deal would mean for US Americans (White House 2013).

The American people prefer a peaceful and enduring resolution that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and strengthens the global non-proliferation regime. This solution has the potential to achieve that. Through strong and principled diplomacy, the United States of America will do its part for greater peace, security, and cooperation among nations. (White House 2013)

This message is central to US-Iran relations and the nuclear issue, but it has not made its way into discussions or the consciousness of the US public. Internal communication must be as consistent as public diplomacy. It must take every opportunity to reiterate the message that the US and Iran would benefit from improved relations, attempt to avoid rhetoric of animosity, and go beyond strictly nuclear topics.

This recommendation emphasizes opportunities to provide non-demonized information about US-Iran relations and outlines the consequences of failing to better the relationship. Communication needs to focus on giving diplomacy a persistent, committed chance. Both countries have reason for grievance, and both must move on. The cost of war with Iran and the fiscal consequences for the US regarding Iran sanctions could help educate Americans on the direct impacts of US foreign policy on domestic issues. Integration of internal communication efforts would benefit from a sizeable education campaign. A significant example is the Obama administration's efforts to educate the US public about health care reform, which went well beyond expected messaging from cabinet members or presidential remarks (Zigmond 2013).

Learning By Example: Health Care Reform Education Campaign

The information campaign about the 2010 Affordable Care Act brought further attention to an issue of health coverage for US Americans, gaining so much traction as to

become the premise for a Saturday Night Live spoof (Jackson 2014). Even though the Affordable Care Act, or “Obama Care,” developed a negative connotation for many US Americans over the course of its development and implementation, the administration was still committed to informing people about deadlines and providing them with updated information. The administration joined forces with prominent community members, multiple levels of government, health care providers, and hospitals to spread information to Americans in an effort to “...overcome huge public skepticism, particularly among young and healthy consumers, that the new plans are worthwhile” (Reuters 2013).

The Affordable Care Act is divisive, according to a long-term RAND Corporation study (RAND 2013-2014). Yet, as shown in Table 5, Americans became more solidified

Table 5. RAND Study of Health Care Reform Public Opinion 2013-2014

Month and Year	Favorable	Unfavorable	Don't Know
September 2013	35.5%	45.6 %	18.6%
May 2014	41.4%	48.4%	10.1%

Source: Data adapted from RAND 2013-2014.

in their convictions throughout the duration of the administration’s education campaign that most notably took place in 2013, before the 2014 implementation (RAND 2013-2014). An interesting point about this particular study is that the same individuals were questioned in both 2013 and 2014, providing more consistency to the findings of changed perceptions (RAND 2013-2014). Perception changes cannot be specifically or solely

contributed to the national campaign, but such a large-scale promotion is certainly a factor (RAND 2013-2014). The ultimate lesson is that the Obama administration stood by health care reform and collaborated with the appropriate groups to grow support instead of crumbling in the face of political opposition. Divided as public opinion is on the legislation itself, the attempt to educate the public was organized and valuable.

A similar campaign could and should be used to educate US Americans about Iran policy. Partnering with prominent bi-partisan organizations, think tanks, universities, and government agencies to sponsor events and spread discussion about US-Iran relations would benefit the US public by continuing the conversation. The ultimate objective of this specific recommendation for an education campaign is not to promote particular Iran policies. The true objective in public education is to provide enough information to the public so that US Americans gain a new perspective about Iran and construct their views based on facts. With straightforward and truthful information, the end goal is to promote a less demonized narrative about Iran and lasting support for better relations.

To be sure, health care reform directly impacts US Americans in ways that some might argue foreign policy does not. Considering US Americans' lack of knowledge about the world, it is understandable that it would be difficult to convince them that Iran policy matters in their daily lives. However, playing into US American ignorance is neither good governance nor leadership and ignores the reality that foreign policy does impact internal US issues in significant ways. Rather than painting Iran as a great

challenge to the US, an administration must be more specific and relate diplomacy with Iran to greater concerns for sustainable leadership in the world (Haas 2013). Connecting and relating US issues with those abroad to better align American demands with the realities of pressing global issues.

From a systems perspective, the recommendations of this thesis seek to change the demands for harsher Iran policies and rhetoric into support for the US government's outreach to Iran. Changing the demands on its executive branch is an essential element for bringing more consistency to messaging with and about Iran. While special interests, lobbyists, and open discussion are integral to the US political process, this recommendation introduces a view that is often missing from the national conversation. Communicating the realities of US relations with Iran and the adverse impacts on both countries can slowly normalize the national debate. For these recommendations to have a chance at succeeding, they will need consistent commitment from presidential administrations as well as the US public.

Persistence and Commitment

Time is an essential element to seeing paradigm shifts. Reevaluated, lasting perception changes often come to fruition much later than the persuasive efforts themselves. It is clear that the Obama administration has provided momentum for the betterment of relations with Iran and achieved basic policy successes, especially in comparison with prior administrations. It could conceivably continue on the path it has set, with a few minor improvements such as those detailed earlier, and build legitimacy

and credibility for itself. Subsequent administrations could also continue to pursue public diplomacy with Iran in a fashion similar to that of the Obama administration. Consistency over the course of time will help to refill the empty basins of credibility and legitimacy, however slow and ineffective.

In this sense, it is helpful to apply an analogy to policy and political change. Success in any human activity, whether it is learning a language, playing an instrument, or training for the Olympics, very rarely comes without persistence, discipline, and commitment. Changes in paradigms and policy attitudes mirror these activities of mastery. Persistence will need to take place despite political posturing and minor setbacks like those inconsistencies in the Obama administration's Iran diplomacy. Parsi argues that the deadlock in US-Iran relations "has more to do with domestic political limitations Obama and his Iranian counterparts face than it does with a genuine failure of diplomacy" (2012b, ix). It has taken the persistence of opposing internal groups to continue the enmity between the two countries, and it will take just as much if not more persistence to achieve positive change.

The forces opposing the Obama administration will continue to point out their disagreements with the administration's Iran policy. The JPA interim deal deadline is a prime example. The deadline to finalize the nuclear agreement by July 20, 2014, was not met and instead extended until November 2014 (Zengerle 2014). The disappointment of not reaching a final deal by the initial deadline sparked controversy for groups in both Iran and the US (Mostaghim 2014; Zengerle 2014). However, Wendy Sherman, US

Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, was cited for her refusal to provide a new deadline for nuclear talks (Zengerle 2014). The significance of a US official's refusal to pre-determine a time frame for agreement with Iran is an example of the commitment and persistence that is needed to ensure the requisite time for diplomacy to succeed.

If the next administration is not interested in engaging Iran, the successes in public and conventional diplomacy that were begun by the Obama administration will be threatened. This would not only impact the relationship of the next administration with Iran, but also those of future administrations. Such regression in legitimacy and credibility would further solidify in both Iranian and US American minds that neither side can be trusted. In other words, progress is slow, but regression is swift. In order to avoid such a threat to progress, a US-Iran strategy must transcend administrations and maximize goal-directed behavior.

US-Iran Strategy: Transcending Administrations

The transition of US presidential administrations often creates chaos and miscommunication within the government. This chaos has a ripple effect that eventually destabilizes the nation and the global system. The dismantling of agency records, presidential records, and additional dismay that have occurred during the transitions of administrations necessitates planning to prevent instability (Halchin 2008). A seamless transfer of information from past to future president undoubtedly helps to ensure some consistency in foreign policy. However, even when presidents collaborate, the drastic

change in policy that can occur when a new President takes office can destabilize US positions unless there is a resilient vision and strategy.

The transition from President Bush to President Obama was rocky. President Bush and his advisors attempted to fully brief the Obama administration as well as maintain consistency with Iran during the presidential transition (Crist 2012, 540). The challenge was that the strategy and justifications the Bush administration communicated to President-elect Obama did not match the new administration's vision of diplomacy (Crist 2012, 540). Ultimately, the Obama administration not only disagreed, but it also openly criticized the Bush administration's Iran policies (Crist 2012, 539-540).

However, this incongruity had consequences. Iran was unconvinced by the Obama administration's initial outreach because of this drastic change (Crist 2012, 539). A valuable approach for mitigating abrupt changes in policy is to develop a consistent strategy that transcends administrations. A few essential aspects of a strategy for US-Iran relations must address long-term concerns, including those of the opposition, and be flexible enough to adapt to various developments in the relationship. Relating this notion to public diplomacy, the US must have a strong sense of the direction of its communication with Iran. Not only must an administration outline such a vision of public diplomacy, it must create public buy-in to help support it for the long term.

Short-Term and Long-Term Concerns: Beyond the Nuclear Dilemma

Before the July 20, 2014, deadline for a final nuclear deal, prominent individuals voiced concerns about negotiating with Iran and sought to dismantle any final agreement

(Hudson 2014). Mark Dubowitz, Executive Director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and Richard Goldberg, former senior policy advisor to Illinois Sen. Mark Kirk, provided arguments about Iran's sponsorship of terrorism and global economic threats in their paper *Smart Relief After An Iran Deal* (2014, 3; Hudson 2014). Using examples such as "money laundering and illicit finance" of the Central Bank of Iran, the authors highlighted concerns about Iran in the global community and consequences of sanction relief associated with a final deal (Dubowitz and Goldberg 2014, 3). They provided guidelines on how Congress and the Obama administration could maintain sanctions in a way that ensures Iran will meet its obligations (Dubowitz and Goldberg 2014, 2). While such an argument might not be ideal for the Obama administration on a public relations or short-term diplomatic level, it is a crucial aspect of planning that must be acknowledged (Hudson 2014).

Dubowitz and Goldberg (2014) summarized how an administration might work with Congress to remove congressionally imposed sanctions. Removal of those sanctions requires the President to demonstrate that Iran "poses no threat to United States national security, interests, or allies" (Dubowitz and Goldberg 2014, 3). The concerns raised in their paper are exactly those that the Obama and preceding administrations must be prepared to both counter and seriously consider in the future of US-Iran relations. In addition, each administration must communicate to US American and Iranian publics that these kinds of issues are addressed in its Iran policies.

In order to properly address changing circumstances and opposing arguments, a long-term Iran strategy will also need to be flexible. The manner and extent of flexibility depends on the context, but there must be opportunity to reassess and adapt to evolving developments in relations. Strategy is imperative to purposeful behavior. However, there must also be enough variance in strategy to deal with the situations that could occur while attempting to achieve a particular objective.

Structure and Variety: Elements of Successful Strategy

The US needs an Iran strategy that transcends any particular administration. Such a strategy needs bipartisan and public support to ensure that future administrations are held accountable and demonstrate US commitment to normalized relations with Iran. The strategy must accommodate various viewpoints from prominent members of political parties as well as experts in US-Iran history and culture. This strategy must be long term and specific to the US and Iran in the context of broader Middle East realities. It should also be integrated into more general US diplomatic strategy. Successful development and implementation of such a strategy will benefit from consulting experts in international affairs from government, academia, and other sectors.

Harsh rhetoric, military advances, failure of nuclear talks, and Iranian human rights violations are just a handful of possible if not probable occurrences that could derail potentially successful public diplomacy efforts. Reiterating Burton's (1968, 33) views on the role of the state in international relations, a government must be able to handle the rate of environmental change to ensure desirable outcomes. In a global world,

coping with change requires the freedom to change. Cybernetician Francis Heylighen (1992) notes an important theoretical element that relates to handling variability: “The larger the variety of actions available to a control system, the larger the variety of perturbations it is able to compensate.” Heylighen’s description originates from the Law of Requisite Variety, as formulated by Ross Ashby (1956, 210), one of the major founders of cybernetics. Applying this to public diplomacy, the more easily multiple perspectives can be summoned and communicated in a situation the more likely appropriate responses to global policy concerns will arise.

Systemic leverage points, according to Donella Meadows (1999, 19), clarify that changing paradigms is a significant point of intervention in a system. However, the power to transcend paradigms, or to understand that any particular paradigm may or may not be totally accurate, is the most influential point of leverage (Meadows 1999, 19). The significance to this specific recommendation is that the current or future administration must be able to look past a deeply held paradigm and find answers that are not obvious. “If no paradigm is right, you can choose whatever one will help to achieve your purpose” (Meadows 1999, 19). The flexibility to pursue long-term goals must be part of any US paradigm for improving relations with Iran and is essential to building sustainable forms of legitimacy and credibility that are currently lacking in public and conventional policy towards Iran. Implementing these recommendations requires more persistence and time than has been the case thus far because the Obama administration’s particular approach has not been given an appropriate chance to succeed. However, leaders must be able to

identify when a particular paradigm is no longer useful and to effectively change the thinking of themselves and those they lead.

US-Iran strategy must incorporate public diplomacy as an instrument to enable successful communications and build healthy relations. The basic elements of successful public diplomacy (such as avoiding propaganda-like tactics, utilizing perspectives as feedback, and focusing on credibility and legitimacy) need to be linchpins of US-Iran relations. Because poor communication and understanding between the two countries has been the primary contributing factor to their tense relationship, any strategy must be based on the foundation of building amicability and common humanity. Yet the same recommendations that apply to US-Iran strategy more generally apply to the use of soft power methods such as public diplomacy. The ability to communicate successfully, to question held paradigms, and to incorporate various perspectives are essential skills for successful public diplomacy in an interconnected global world.

Overall, these recommendations look to address the main points of contention within the larger dilemma of sustainable, efficient public diplomacy with Iran. Improving messaging, educating the internal public, committing to diplomatic endeavors, and planning for the future of US-Iran relations are feasible options for the US government to consider. These recommendations promote US credibility and legitimacy at home and in Iran, therefore addressing a major deficiency.

Conclusion: The Big Picture

There are three major conclusions from the research into and consolidation of information about the Obama administration's outreach to the Iranian people that deserve emphasis in closing. First, public diplomacy is much more than propaganda, nation branding, or public relations. It requires the building of trust through credibility and legitimacy necessary for messages to have a viable environment to inform publics. It is a tool for both persuading and a tool for understanding when done in ways that are most appropriate for a global world. Yet, public diplomacy it is not a panacea for US-Iran tensions, nor will it solve all US foreign policy issues. But focusing on improving public diplomacy with Iran, in conjunction with other forms of diplomacy, has the potential to produce significant returns. Government communication with foreign publics provides a mirror in effect, forcing US policy to be reflected back on those who make it.

Second, it is increasingly important for US policymakers to examine past challenges, acknowledge present challenges, and prepare for future challenges in a way that includes holistic evaluations of causes, symptoms, and solutions. The example of US-Iran relations is a case for managing tensions within the context of globalization and requires an assessment of broader sets of options regardless of political party, ideological theory, or discipline. There are many valid perspectives on and arguments about any complex issue (Reckmeyer 2012a). Public diplomacy is part of a larger effort to find and communicate common interests. Pressing global challenges rely on the ability of people

around the world to understand and live by the belief that cooperation and collaboration can lead to greater benefits than conflict.

Third, public diplomacy and the international collaboration it is intended to foster are not only beneficial to the global whole, but also to national interest. Broad challenges to the global community require thoughtful and creative solutions. As former President Bill Clinton (2010, 10:34) explained in his address to the 2010 graduates of Yale University, "...the world you live in for all of its joys has three problems not very much in evidence here today. It is too unstable, it is too unequal, and it is completely unsustainable." These problems will impact US Americans in one way or another. As national borders protect citizens less from transnational threats like terrorism, global warming, and pandemics, it makes sense to desire solidarity in the global community.

There are plenty of cynical arguments that state the world is simple and that power shapes all decisions. Self-interested individuals and nations decide the trajectories for everyone in a way that maintains their power. Yet this argument misses the essential tenet of globalization and the central purpose of public diplomacy. Due to the context of the global world and the turbulence it has been generating, collaboration is advantageous. It is true that this notion of national interest is different from the wicked connotation that is often associated with the term. But it is also not about world peace or even finding amicability with previous enemies. It is self-interested in the way that the political games played both domestically and internationally are increasingly self-destructive.

As author Robert Wright (2000, 21), explains, various nations, tribes, and civilizations have understood that, “the more important big game is, the more non-zero sumness there is, the more society organizes to harness that non-zero-sumness – to turn it into positive sums.” In situations which there is no clear winner or loser (i.e., not zero-sum), there is an unavoidable incongruence in remaining unwilling to negotiate or unwavering in one’s convictions. A more specific, scientific example includes Robert Axelrod’s *Evolution of Cooperation*, where a computerized game of Tit-for-Tat found that players employing reciprocity often had the largest payoff (Axelrod 1984). The significance of such findings is that self-interest and cooperation are not mutually exclusive (Axelrod 1984). But the largest lesson learned from these discoveries, as it relates to diplomacy, is that the global world blurs the lines and closes the gap between national and common interest.

Furthermore, the United States must pave the way and communicate this reality to its domestic and international publics. US leaders must encourage constituencies to engage at all levels of community, including a global one, because common challenges do not equally divide responsibility (Reckmeyer 2012a). The influence of the United States, despite its positive and negative contributions to the world, is unmatched and entails an obligation to use it sensibly (Gelb 2009a). A recurring theme in US international relations must include a message that “...the only way that you can make the most of the world that lies before you is to believe that as interesting and fascinating and profoundly important as all of our diversities are, our common humanity matters

more” (Clinton 2010, 8:36). Public diplomacy is at heart a vehicle to this end: to inspire people to find solutions and find them together.

APPENDIX A

PRESIDENT OBAMA’S NOWRUZ MESSAGES: GENERAL FORMAT WITH EXAMPLES

1. Wishing a Happy Holiday and Acknowledging the Importance of Nowruz to Iranian Culture

2009 “Today I want to extend my very best wishes to all who are celebrating Nowruz around the world. This holiday is both an ancient ritual and a moment of renewal, and I hope that you enjoy this special time of year with friends and family.”

2010 “Today, I want to extend my best wishes to all who are celebrating Nowruz in the United States and around the world.

2011 “Today, I want to extend my best wishes to all who are celebrating Nowruz in the United States and around the world... This is a holiday for the Iranian people to spend time with friends and family; to reflect on the extraordinary blessings that you enjoy; and to look forward to the promise of a new day. After all, this is a season of hope and renewal. And today, we know that this is also a season of promise across the Middle East and North Africa, even as there are also enormous challenges.”

2012 “Today, Michelle and I extend our best wishes to all those who are celebrating Nowruz around the world. In communities and homes from America to southwest Asia, families and friends are coming together to celebrate the hope that comes with renewal.“

2013 “Dorood. As you and your families come together to celebrate Nowruz, I want to extend my best wishes on this new spring and new year. Around the world, and here in the United States, you are gathering at the Nowruz table—to give thanks for loved ones, reflect on your blessings and welcome all the possibilities of a new season.”

2014 “Dorood. As you and your families gather around the Nowruz table, I want to extend my best wishes on this new spring and new year. As always, this holiday is a chance to give gratitude for your blessings and to reflect on our hopes for the year ahead.

2. Acknowledging the Past Hardships and/or Climate of Relationship Between the US and Iran

2009 “For nearly three decades relations between our nations have been strained. But at this holiday we are reminded of the common humanity that binds us together.”

2010 “For three decades, the United States and Iran have been alienated from one another. Iran’s leaders have sought their own legitimacy through hostility to America. And we continue to have serious differences on many issues.”

2011 “So far, the Iranian government has responded by demonstrating that it cares far more about preserving its own power than respecting the rights of the Iranian people.”

2012 “To the people of Iran, this holiday comes at a time of continued tension between our two countries. But as people gather with their families, do good deeds, and welcome a new season, we are also reminded of the common humanity that we share.”

2013 “I have had no illusions about the difficulty of overcoming decades of mistrust. It will take a serious and sustained effort to resolve the many differences between Iran and the United States. This includes the world’s serious and growing concerns about Iran’s nuclear program, which threatens peace and security in the region and beyond. Iran’s leaders say that their nuclear program is for medical research and electricity.”

2014 “Since taking office, I’ve offered the Iranian government an opportunity—if it meets its international obligations, then there could be a new relationship between our two countries, and Iran could begin to return to its rightful place among the community of nations.”

3. Information about Recent Developments, Present Problems the US has with the Iranian Regime and/or What is Needed to a Facilitate Better Relationship

2009 “You have that right -- but it comes with real responsibilities, and that place cannot be reached through terror or arms, but rather through peaceful actions that demonstrate the true greatness of the Iranian people and civilization. And the measure of that greatness is not the capacity to destroy, it is your demonstrated ability to build and create.”

2010 “Finally, let me be clear: we are working with the international community to hold the Iranian government accountable because they refuse to live up to their international obligations. But our offer of comprehensive diplomatic contacts and dialogue stands. Indeed, over the course of the last year, it is the Iranian government that has chosen to isolate itself, and to choose a self-defeating focus on the past over a commitment to build a better future.”

2011 “For nearly two years, there has been a campaign of intimidation and abuse. Young and old; men and women; rich and poor – the Iranian people have been persecuted. Hundreds of prisoners of conscience are in jail. The innocent have gone missing. Journalists have been silenced. Women tortured. Children sentenced to death.”

2012 “Because of the actions of the Iranian regime, an electronic curtain has fallen around Iran - a barrier that stops the free flow of information and ideas into the country, and denies the rest of the world the benefit of interacting with the Iranian people, who have so much to offer.”

2013 “Finding a solution will be no easy task. But if we can, the Iranian people will begin to see the benefits of greater trade and ties with other nations, including the United States. Whereas if the Iranian government continues down its current path, it will only further isolate Iran.”

2014 “Now we’re engaged in intensive negotiations in the hopes of finding a comprehensive solution that resolves the world’s concerns with the Iranian nuclear program. As I’ve said before, I’m under no illusions. This will be difficult. But I’m committed to diplomacy because I believe there is the basis for a practical solution.”

4. Hope for Better Relationship and Life for Iranians

2009 “With the coming of a new season, we’re reminded of this precious humanity that we all share. And we can once again call upon this spirit as we seek the promise of a new beginning.”

2010 “I want the Iranian people to know what my country stands for. The United States believes in the dignity of every human being, and an international order that bends the arc of history in the direction of justice – a future where Iranians can exercise their rights, to participate fully in the global economy, and enrich the world through educational and cultural exchanges beyond Iran’s borders. That is the future that we seek. That is what America is for.

2011 “Let this be a season of second youth for all Iranians – a time in which a new season bears new life once more.”

2012 “So in this season of new beginnings, the people of Iran should know that the United States of America seeks a future of deeper connections between our people - a time when the electronic curtain that divides us is lifted and your voices are heard; a season in which mistrust and fear are overcome by mutual understanding and our common hopes as human beings.”

2013 “As a new spring begins, I remain hopeful that our two countries can move beyond tension. And I will continue to work toward a new day between our nations that bears the fruit of friendship and peace.”

2014 “Because for the first time in many years, we have the opportunity to start down a new path. If Iran seizes this moment, this Nowruz could mark not just the beginning of a new year, but a new chapter in the history of Iran and its role in the world—including a better relationship with the United States and the American people, rooted in mutual interest and mutual respect.”

APPENDIX B

EXCERPTS OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S ADDRESSES: COMPARISON OF IRAN MESSAGING

2009 President Obama's University of Cairo Address

“This issue has been a source of tension between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. For many years, Iran has defined itself in part by its opposition to my country, and there is in fact a tumultuous history between us. In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians. This history is well known. Rather than remain trapped in the past, I've made it clear to Iran's leaders and people that my country is prepared to move forward. The question now is not what Iran is against, but rather what future it wants to build.

I recognize it will be hard to overcome decades of mistrust, but we will proceed with courage, rectitude, and resolve. There will be many issues to discuss between our two countries, and we are willing to move forward without preconditions on the basis of mutual respect. But it is clear to all concerned that when it comes to nuclear weapons, we have reached a decisive point. This is not simply about America's interests. It's about preventing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East that could lead this region and the world down a hugely dangerous path.

I understand those who protest that some countries have weapons that others do not. No single nation should pick and choose which nation holds nuclear weapons. And that's why I strongly reaffirmed America's commitment to seek a world in which no nations hold nuclear weapons. (Applause.) And any nation -- including Iran -- should have the right to access peaceful nuclear power if it complies with its responsibilities under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That commitment is at the core of the treaty, and it must be kept for all who fully abide by it. And I'm hopeful that all countries in the region can share in this goal.”

2009 President Obama's General Assembly Address

“In their actions to date, the governments of North Korea and Iran threaten to take us down this dangerous slope. We respect their rights as members of the community of nations. I've said before and I will repeat, I am committed to diplomacy that opens a path to greater prosperity and more secure peace for both nations if they live up to their obligations.

But if the governments of Iran and North Korea choose to ignore international standards; if they put the pursuit of nuclear weapons ahead of regional stability and the security and

opportunity of their own people; if they are oblivious to the dangers of escalating nuclear arms races in both East Asia and the Middle East -- then they must be held accountable. The world must stand together to demonstrate that international law is not an empty promise, and that treaties will be enforced. We must insist that the future does not belong to fear.”

2012 President Obama’s General Assembly Address

“In Iran, we see where the path of a violent and unaccountable ideology leads. The Iranian people have a remarkable and ancient history, and many Iranians wish to enjoy peace and prosperity alongside their neighbors. But just as it restricts the rights of its own people, the Iranian government continues to prop up a dictator in Damascus and supports terrorist groups abroad. Time and again, it has failed to take the opportunity to demonstrate that its nuclear program is peaceful, and to meet its obligations to the United Nations.

So let me be clear. America wants to resolve this issue through diplomacy, and we believe that there is still time and space to do so. But that time is not unlimited. We respect the right of nations to access peaceful nuclear power, but one of the purposes of the United Nations is to see that we harness that power for peace. And make no mistake, a nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained. It would threaten the elimination of Israel, the security of Gulf nations, and the stability of the global economy. It risks triggering a nuclear-arms race in the region, and the unraveling of the non-proliferation treaty. That’s why a coalition of countries is holding the Iranian government accountable. And that’s why the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.”

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