

Cooptation — Coercion or Dialogue?
A Critique of ‘Smart Power’ Informed Foreign Policy in US-Iran
Relations as a Prerequisite for Sustainable Diplomacy

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While an increasing number of scholars attempt to develop alternatives to the current practice of diplomacy based on promoting national interests, these alternatives are neither taken seriously by political-practitioners nor by most scholars. To change this trend, this paper argues that the strategic ontology of diplomacy must be challenged first before moving on to alternatives such as sustainable diplomacy. In order to do so, this paper shows the effects of the ‘smart power’ informed U.S. foreign policy towards Iran from 2006 onwards. It shows that ‘smart power’ enabled to sustain this strategic ontology by changing means for others instead of calling the ends of U.S.-Iran diplomacy into question. Through a genealogical approach, this paper shows what ‘smart power’ did to U.S. foreign policies of cultural diplomacy, human rights promotion, broadcasting, student exchanges and sanctions toward Iran. As Said, this paper concludes that the future of U.S.-Iran relations remain bleak as long as both parties will not construct knowledge about the ‘other’ for the service of a better standard of co-existence (1997).

Keywords: Smart Power, Soft Power, Politics of Knowledge, Iran, United States, Sustainable Diplomacy.

COOPTATION-COERCION OR DIALOGUE? A CRITIQUE OF ‘SMART POWER’ INFORMED FOREIGN POLICY IN US-IRAN RELATIONS AS A PEREQUISITE FOR SUSTAINABLE DIPLOMACY

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INTRODUCTION

At such a time — which has already begun — the production of knowledge and diffusion of knowledge will play an absolutely crucial role. Yet, until knowledge is understood in human and political terms as something to be won to the service of coexistence and community, not of particular

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... races, nations, classes, or religions, the future augurs badly.
Edward Said (1997)

In an original contribution, Paul Sharp advocated *sustainable diplomacy* instead of *smart power* as a framework to build a better relationship between the U.S. and Iran (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010). Sustainable diplomacy meant a mutual diplomacy practiced for the purpose of maintaining respectful co-existence instead of advancing self-interests. In other words, a relationship can be understood as sustainable when both States do not take for granted peaceful co-existence between them, but when they both invest resources, efforts and willpower to that end (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010). Sharp argued that sustainable diplomacy, in US-Iran relations, would mean a mutual understanding of the whole ensemble of factors making enmity possible, mutually taking distance from the arguments and language employed to make sense of each other, valorising listening the 'other' and valorising 'apeasement' (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010). Sharp defined 'apeasement' as the recognition that accommodating the other's demands would most likely lead to better outcomes than not taking them into consideration. Khatami's *Dialogue of Civilizations* initiative, as Obama's political discourse of 'engagement' when he was Senator can be both understood as attempts to develop a more sustainable relationship between Iran and the U.S. (Khatami, 1998).

Sharp brilliantly developed what a mutual sustainable diplomacy would look like between Iran and the U.S. Yet, he left aside his critic of 'Smart power'. This concept developed by International Relations (IR) scholar Joseph Nye praised that the success of any foreign policy depended on the right balance between 'hard power' (i.e. economic and military coercion or incentives) and 'soft power' (i.e. co-optation or attraction) (Nye, 2011b). Both Republicans and Democrats gradually praised 'smart power' as the self-evident way to conduct an effective

foreign policy in the 21st century⁽¹⁾. For instance, Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense from 2006 to 2013, made ‘smart power’ a key concept to adjust U.S. defense strategies. Mitt Romney, the Republican candidate for the presidential election in 2012, equally promoted using U.S. ‘soft power’ in the Middle-East (Romney, 2012). Hillary Clinton, the U.S. Secretary of State from 2009 to 2012, made ‘smart power’ the key framework of U.S. foreign policy-making. She even praised ‘smart power’ after her tenure as Secretary of State and some predicted that the concept will be central to her prospective presidential campaign (Clinton, 2012). In sum, ‘smart power’ gradually became the ‘new mantra’ of U.S. policy-makers and served as a framework to think and design U.S. foreign policy towards Iran from W. Bush second mandate to this day.

While I am sympathetic to Sharp’s ambition of developing alternatives ways of thinking and practicing U.S.-Iran relations, a prerequisite is missing. Before developing diplomatic alternatives, the powerful myth that a U.S. ‘smart power’ informed policy towards Iran would provide a mutually sustainable relationship must be debunked. ‘Soft-war’, the Iranian response to U.S. ‘smart power’, must also be called into question. The task of this paper is precisely to bring into consciousness the strangeness of these concepts to any citizen, policy-makers or scholars that would be tempted to use them. Only then political communities will take more seriously exploring sustainable diplomatic alternatives.

This paper follows an increasing volume of literature challenging ‘smart power’ (Berenskoetter and Williams, 2007, Cammack, 2008, Parmar and Cox, 2010, Biegón, 2013, Lagon, 2011). However, instead of challenging ‘smart power’ as a theory, I aim to contribute to the debate by showing what, speaking in terms of ‘smart power’, in theory and in political-practice, did and is still doing to U.S.-Iran relations. In order to do so, I draw upon Foucault’s genealogy to show that changes

in conceptual language to make sense and apply foreign policies towards another entity are neither banal nor self-evident (Foucault et al., 2003). These changes are in synch with the evolution of power... an evolution that was necessary to sustain the international status quo.

‘Smart power’ *did something* to the way U.S. policy-makers thought and conducted foreign policy towards Iran. Senior officials understood more and more the whole spectrum of policies towards Iran — ‘engagement’, ‘human rights’ promotion, broadcasting and even student exchanges — in terms of ‘smart power’. Student exchanges, while understood in the Khatami-Clinton rapprochement experience as a broader mean for dialogue, were now understood as a mean of power politics for instance. Smart power led to translate any instruments employed in U.S. foreign policy towards Iran as power politics instruments. And platforms of interaction between Iranians and Americans, which were not understood in ‘smart power’ terms, morphed into untapped ‘soft power’ resources. In concordance with Mattern, senior officials’ understanding of ‘smart power’, comforted by many U.S. IR scholars, enabled a power politics of identity where a ‘self’ struggles to get the upper hand against an ‘other’ (Mattern, 2001). ‘Smart power’ made possible to combine ‘narratives’, economic pressure or military deterrence as banal tools to succeed in this struggle. In other words, the popularization of ‘smart power’ contributed to the idea that the problem in U.S. foreign policy towards Iran was not the objectives, but the means. It contributed to strengthen the ‘strategic’ ontology of U.S. relationship towards Iran instead of legitimating ‘engagement’ policies for greater holistic ends. To the contrary, ‘smart power’ led to ever-expending means to ‘deal’ with the other while silencing the purpose of these means in the first place.

U.S. ‘smart power’ informed foreign policy towards Iran did not contribute to dialogue. Nor did it contribute to a negotiated settlement of disputes. Instead, ‘smart power’ contributed to the development of

the hybrid concept of ‘soft war’ in Iran in 2009. Iranian senior officials’ discourse defined ‘soft war’ as a conflict taking place on all social components of a political system and waged through ‘cultural invasions’, ‘psychological operations’, ‘education’ and military deterrence (Adelkhah, 2010). ‘Soft war’ is, in other words, a struggle over political legitimacy in all spheres of social life including the cyberspace. While mirroring ‘smart power’ in the U.S., the ‘soft war’ concept became a ‘new mantra’ in Iran by taking center stage in everyday political language and by being institutionalized through several programs. These programs ironically replicated, in part, U.S. ‘smart power’ informed programs towards Iran. For instance, Iran senior officials mustered ‘soft war’ special military forces, the Majlis subsidised cultural production and international broadcasting channels to wage the ‘soft war’, Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, portrayed Iranian students as ‘soft war’ officers, and Iranian authorities legitimated blocking access to social networking applications such as facebook, twitter and skype through the concept of ‘soft war’ (Price, 2012). ‘Smart power’ as ‘soft war’ sustained enmity, not peaceful co-existence. They reduced the likelihood of a lasting negotiated settlement of the Iranian nuclear crisis in particular, and of normalizing the U.S.-Iran relationship in the long run.

After exploring the concept of smart power and its development in theory and political-practice, this paper looks at what —thinking in terms of ‘smart power’ —*did* to U.S. foreign policy towards Iran. This chapter explores the effect of smart power on cultural sensitivity, human rights promotion, broadcasting programs, student exchanges and sanction policies towards Iran.

THE CONCEPT

In the late 1980s, the recurrent debate on the coming decline of the United States' status as a superpower re-emerged. Historian Paul Kennedy, in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, compared the United States to the UK before World War I. Both great powers overstretched themselves around the world and both failed to muster enough resources to sustain their great power status (Kennedy, 1987). Nye, in *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, replied otherwise (Nye, 1990). Kennedy's concluding prognostication neglected 'soft power' to emphasise, rather, 'hard power' composed of military and economic power. According to Nye, the United States remained, and would likely remain, the 'strongest nation' for the near future thanks to a great balance of economic, military and soft power (Nye, 2004).

Soft power was the capability to attract others and persuade them to want what you want. Soft power would be involved in a relationship when an actor did not require 'carrots' (inducements) or 'sticks' (threats) to reach one objective over another. In contrast to 'hard power' based on coercion, soft power 'co-opts' its target (Nye, 2004). Soft power can be wielded through public, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. Opening channels to diffuse 'high' and 'popular' culture, local language broadcasting, foreign student exchanges, international development, participating in and setting the agenda in international institutions, and using military forces for rescue missions are all examples of policies mustering soft power. In turn, these policies would strengthen the political legitimacy of the soft power concept provided they would be perceived as successful (Nye, 2004).

The success of Nye's soft power policies depended on the attractiveness of a culture, keeping consistency of political values and sustaining foreign policies perceived as legitimate (Nye, 2004). The

liberal concept of culture was the main foundation of Nye's soft power. In his own words:

... culture is the set of values and practices that create meaning for a society. ... When a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty it creates. Narrow values and parochial cultures are less likely to produce soft power. The United States benefits from a universalistic culture. (Nye, 2004)

The agency of individuals was paradoxical in Nye's understanding. On the one hand, as Eriksson and Norman observed, Nye relied on a 'thin liberal understanding of culture'. This understanding emphasised that the 'rational' individual was free to pick and choose values, religion and ideas (Eriksson and Norman, 2011). The individual could select these by comparing them as a consumer would compare goods in a market. The individual was, in other words, unconstrained by discourses in his society. Provided they had access to accurate information and provided the authorities did not coerce them towards a specific choice, individuals would convert to the best culture, values and ideas available. On the other hand, this understanding of unconstrained individuals enabled a total instrumentalist view of culture, values and ideas. Since individuals can select their culture, values and ideas of their own free will, they can also change them, in Nye's understanding. This possibility of changing for a 'better product' enables culture, values and ideas to be understood as 'resources' that can be used for the sake of power politics. If 'targeted' individuals change their culture, values and ideas without coercion, they become soft power vessels that may, in turn, convert their peers, in this understanding. The only thing necessary for that to

happen would be to remove external coercion (by an enemy state for instance) and to be a good seller of culture, values and ideas.

For instance, Nye understood foreign student exchange in the U.S. as a soft power policy. This policy was based on the assumption that the 'American way of life', with its 'universalistic' values and culture, was attractive (Nye, 2011b). Once these foreign students became familiar with this 'American way of life', it would likely become their own way of life. Following Nye's soft power reasoning, foreign students would probably want to change their 'home' culture in the light of their exchange experience, once back in their home country. Nye understood these students as 'minds' to export American ideas and values. Once these minds were co-opted, American ideas would trickle up to foreign leaders (Nye, 2004). In Nye's writings, when foreign students experienced the real American way of life and its values and culture, they seemed to lose their agency, and therefore, their criticality towards their host country. In terms of soft power, foreign students were no longer foreign students. They were no longer considered as individuals seeking a cultural and learning experience for its own sake or individuals motivated in enhancing their position in a competitive job market, to name just a few possibilities. Foreign students morphed into a homogenous collective subject understood as soft power vessels.

Thinking, writing and implementing foreign policy in terms of soft power *did* something, *does* something and *will continue to do* something as long as it is used. It contributes in transforming all spheres of social life into prospective 'power' assets worth exploiting. It contributes to expanding the practice of 'power politics' to all spheres of social life. Nye was explicit on this expansion of power politics: 'Not only do actors try to influence each other directly and indirectly through soft power; they also compete to deprive each other of attractiveness and legitimacy, thus creating a disabling environment

either in public opinion in the other country and/or in the eyes of relevant third parties' (Nye, 2011b). In sum, Nye's soft power normalised the use of any 'Track II' diplomatic initiatives as potential soft power channels. These channels, such as foreign student exchanges, lost their previous significance, such as increasing the economic potential of an individual, and morphed into the soft power level of power politics.

While Nye has put most emphasis on developing soft power in his recent contributions, he has advocated the application of 'smart power' — the appropriate combination of 'soft' and 'hard' power customised for any issue — in U.S. foreign policy-making since 2003 (Nye, 2009a). Nye did not employ the concept of 'narratives' in his seminal 2004 book on soft power, but later integrated it to refine the 'third face of power' in 2011. This integration followed the popularisation of 'narratives' from the critical margins of American IR to its mainstream. U.S. senior officials simultaneously popularised the concept of narrative, especially in the context counterinsurgency since 2007 (Petraeus, 1987, Amos and Petraeus, 2006). According to Nye, 'politics, in an information age, may ultimately be about whose story wins'. Following this reasoning, 'narratives became the currency of soft power' (Nye, 2011b). They gave visibility to some issues versus others. They emphasised some facts and downplayed or suppressed others. Public diplomacy, Track II diplomacy and broadcasting became key instruments in achieving the dominance of one narrative over others (Nye, 2011b).

Nye recommended focusing on 'American freedom' and on replacing the 'war on terror' with a benevolent power 'providing for the global good' through development to assemble an effective narrative (Armitage and Nye, 2007). In this context, 'knowing' the 'other', the chosen target of smart power, would be essential in framing the right narrative (Nye, 2011b). Any sources, ranging from

intelligence to experts that can answer the question ‘What do they think?’, became part of the implementation of a smart power strategy. These sources would set the benchmark to calibrate the right recipe mixing economic, military and soft power to influence the ‘other’. In sum, Nye’s smart power promoted the strategic use of knowledge — including IR knowledge — to increase the power relationship of one state with another, an organisation or even a whole civilisation.

RELYING ON SMART POWER TO ‘RESOLVE’ THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR CRISIS

“We don’t want to see continuation of pressure, or carrot and stick. We never liked that idea and still don’t.”

Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Twitter Account, August 6th, 2013

Most U.S. foreign policies towards Iran ranging from cultural diplomacy, human rights promotion, broadcasting and student exchanges became more and more thought and applied in terms of ‘smart power’ from 2006 onwards. This section shows the evolution of the language used to think these policies towards understanding them in terms of ‘smart power’. And most importantly, this section explores the effects of this ‘new thinking’ in terms of ‘smart power’.

THE RISE OF CULTURAL SENSITIVITY? NOWRUZ SPEECHES ANALYSIS

This cultural sensitivity in both U.S. military and foreign policy translated into the evolution of presidential greetings on the occasion of Nowruz. Nowruz is the Persian New Year, marking the beginning

of spring. It is one of the oldest celebrations in Iran, dating from the Persian Empire around 500 BC. Despite this being an ancient tradition, U.S. presidents began offering broadcast greetings on this occasion from March 2000. Bill Clinton was the first president to deliver Nowruz greetings, in a context of U.S.–Iran rapprochement in 2000. George W. Bush made Nowruz greetings an annual ritual, offering them every year except 2001 and 2004. In 2008, the Bush administration supplemented Nowruz greetings with a wider public diplomacy effort through presidential interviews conducted by both the Voice of America (VOA) Farsi service and Radio Farda. These two U.S.-funded media stations broadcast to Iran. The Obama administration continued the tradition, and developed it as a more ambitious public diplomacy instrument. What had been two or three paragraphs of greeting became an Address aimed at persuading the ‘Iranian people’ about U.S. policy towards Iran. It is for this reason that it is particularly insightful to analyse Nowruz greetings. White House speechwriters directly framed presidential greetings for an ‘other’ audience for every Nowruz celebration. The evolution of the language used in these greetings demonstrates the evolution of the knowledge used to understand, interact with and persuade the ‘other’. In other words, these greetings offer a developmental barometer of the relationship between power and knowledge involved in U.S. foreign policy towards Iran in general.

The target audience for the White House’s Nowruz greetings changed significantly between 2000 and 2014. The greetings explicitly addressed collective subjects as the audience when the U.S. public became aware of them. This visibility mostly depended on ‘U.S. national interests’ and the form of theory-political practice discourse at the time. Bill Clinton’s 2000 Nowruz greeting addressed its audience as ‘American-Iranians’ and the ‘Iranian people’ in the context of U.S.–Iran rapprochement (Clinton, 2000). By contrast,

George W. Bush's Nowruz greetings in 2002 addressed 'Afghans' as the main collective subject and audience (W. Bush, 2002). White House speechwriters wrote these messages in terms of 'freedom' and 'democratisation' to show the benefit of the NATO campaign in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime. Since the previous 'Taliban regime' had banned Nowruz, celebrating Nowruz was in itself a ritual directly positioning 'Afghans' against the Taliban. In 2003 and 2005, the White House framed Nowruz greetings in the context of the Iraq war. While these greetings explicitly addressed the U.S. people celebrating Nowruz, they also attempted to legitimate the Iraq and Afghan wars in terms of 'freedom' (W. Bush, 2003). Finally, from 2006 to 2008 the greetings shifted the audience to the millions of people around the world celebrating Nowruz. The White House framed these greetings in celebration of American diversity as something making the U.S. 'stronger and better' (W. Bush, 2005).

From 2009, the audience explicitly mentioned in Nowruz greetings changed again. The eye of power gazed on the Iranian nuclear programme, understood by some as 'the greatest threat' to U.S. national security. Following the growing attention given to this issue for 'U.S. national interests', the White House narrowed down their target audience. This audience shrank from the wider 'Persian' people to the 'Iranian people' and their 'leaders'. Nowruz greetings became a platform for attracting the 'Iranian people' and to position them against their 'leaders'.⁽²⁾ From 2009 onwards, the messages stressed the common humanity and the similarities in customs between the Iranian and the American people. Presidential Nowruz greetings, in other words, attempted to attract the Iranian people through common identification by bridging the us-and-them divide. In the meantime, these greetings hardened the dichotomy between the 'Iranian people' and their leaders. For example, Obama repeated this pattern by following up the 'extended hand' metaphor of his

Inauguration speech during his Nowruz message in 2010: ‘Faced with an extended hand, Iran’s leaders have shown only a clenched fist’ (Obama, 2010). However, Obama’s first Nowruz speech, in 2009, had differed in this regard in creating a context of ‘engagement’ with Iran. While Obama praised the Iranian ‘people’, he did not try to position them against their ‘leaders’. Instead, he sought to engage both groups by leaving aside the language of threats and by emphasising ‘mutual respect’ (Obama, 2009).

This does not mean that the Obama administration removed soft power in order to make sense of U.S. policy towards Iran. But the White House realigned these greetings with Nye’s prescription: U.S. soft power in Iran could only be effective by co-opting the Iranian ‘people’, and especially the ‘youth’, in the long run, not their leaders (Nye, 2008a). For instance, Obama’s words directed at the ‘youth’ in 2011 reflected Nye’s prescription:

You — the young people of Iran — carry within you both the ancient greatness of Persian civilisation, and the power to forge a country that is responsive to your aspirations. Your talent, your hopes, and your choices will shape the future of Iran, and help light the world. And though times may seem dark, I want you to know that I am with you. (Obama, 2011)

In 2012, Obama put the emphasis on U.S. policies that used Nye’s soft-power instruments: American sailors rescuing Iranian citizens taken hostage by ‘pirates’, the U.S. ‘virtual embassy’, and the State Department’s Twitter, Facebook and Google+ accounts in Farsi (Obama, 2012). Conversely, the message condemned Iranian leaders for imposing an ‘electronic curtain’ preventing interaction between the ‘Iranian people’ and the world. In March 2013 and 2014, White House speechwriters addressed Iranian leaders, as in 2009. This enabled the possibility of ‘engagement’ to be re-opened in the context of a

presidential election in Iran in June 2013 and to sustain the ongoing ‘rapprochement’ in 2014 (Obama, 2013, Obama, 2014).

The correlation between smart power and senior officials’ discourse towards Iran can also be found in the rise of cultural sensitivity. Once again, this is expressed in the evolution of presidential Nowruz greetings. Gradually, Nowruz messages became increasingly sophisticated by drawing upon cultural knowledge of the ‘other’ and by including a call for ‘listening’. The cultural sensitivity behind Nowruz greetings evolved significantly between 2007 and 2009. In 2007, Bush’s Nowruz greetings were one paragraph long and did not include any interviews with media broadcasting in Iran. In 2008, Bush made the effort to say ‘best wishes’ in Farsi (‘Nowruz tan Mubarak’) in an interview with VOA (W. Bush, 2008a).

The Obama administration continued Bush’s public diplomacy campaign, but increased cultural sensitivity to an unprecedented level. In contrast to Bush, the Obama administration realised that U.S. support for Iranian political groups was counterproductive. Senior U.S. officials held line of thought during the repression that followed the Iranian presidential election in June 2009. Moreover, in 2009 and 2013, Obama’s Nowruz greetings echoed the tradition in Iranian political speech of quoting an Iranian poet to emphasise a statement.⁽³⁾ In 2009, the Nowruz message quoted Saadi to stress that Iranians and Americans were part of a common humanity: ‘The children of Adam are limbs to each other, having been created of one essence’ (Obama, 2009). In 2013, the greetings quoted Hafez to emphasise friendship and to condemn enmity: ‘Plant the tree of friendship that bears the fruit of fulfillment; uproot the sapling of enmity that bears endless suffering’ (Obama, 2013). Besides acknowledging the important position accorded to poetry in Iranian culture, Obama’s Nowruz messages also attempted to attract the ‘Iranian people’ by moving Iran from a negative ‘other’ to an exotic ‘other’. This shift consisted in

praising Iran as a ‘great civilisation’ thanks to its innovations in art, music, literature and films, such as the Oscar winner *A Separation*. The use of Farsi to begin and close the greetings also manifested an increase in cultural sensitivity from 2009 to 2014 (Obama, 2014). For instance, instead of using the more familiar word ‘Salaam’, Obama used ‘Dorood’ as a welcoming word. While the former is used in everyday Farsi, its etymological roots are found in Arabic; the latter’s etymological roots are, by comparison, found in traditional Farsi.

The problem with smart power is that it does not advocate cultural sensitivity as a means for better co-existence and dialogue. Neither does it advocate dialogue for mutual enrichment through communicative rationality, to borrow Habermas’ concept (Habermas, 1984). Smart power advocates dialogue for the sake of strengthening a power relationship of one versus ‘others’. In return, understanding culture in terms of smart power reinforced Iranian senior officials’ discourse about culture. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iranian senior officials’ discourse has understood culture as a type of struggle against foreign influences. A foreign policy towards Iran informed by smart power, in which knowledge about the ‘other’ and cultural influence are assets in a struggle, sustains mistrust in intercultural dialogue. As a prayer leader put it at the University of Tehran in March 2014: ‘Cultural officials must be careful not to let our enemy inject its dangerous culture into our society’ (Rezaian, 2014). President Khamenei’s reply to Barack Obama’s 2014 Nowruz greetings also expresses this tendency. Instead of welcoming cultural sensitivity within these messages and the more positive tone in the 2014 version, Khamenei condemned U.S. senior officials’ rhetorics of ‘engagement’ (Peterson, 2014a). The rise of cultural sensitivity, as part of a smart-power foreign policy towards Iran, stabilized and comforted Iranian senior officials’ discourse, sustained mistrust and enmity between Iran and the United States (Azimi, 2007, Rezaian, 2014).

Promoting Human Rights in Iran in Terms of ‘Soft Power’

U.S. senior officials, human rights advocates among them, understood human rights in terms of values and strategic (or national) interests while calibrating U.S. foreign policy towards Iran (Rice, 2013, Kerry, 2013). Partly understanding human rights in terms of strategic interests was not a novelty. It has been a repeatedly debated theme in humanitarian intervention literature (Wheeler, 2000). Political practitioners in particular started to understand human rights in terms of strategic interests after signing the Helsinki Accords between East and West in 1975. Failed humanitarian intervention missions, such as the battle for Mogadishu in 1993, sustained this trend in the post-Cold War era.

Understanding human rights in terms of values and interests facilitated their translation into ‘smart power’ terms during the Obama administration. Human rights became both an end in itself in a ‘smart power’ foreign policy, and a soft power ‘asset’ in its own right. While some U.S. senior officials were already convinced advocates of human rights for their own sake, this was not the case for the whole U.S. political community. Tingeing human rights with the language of smart power helped to convince sceptics to embed the promotion of human rights in U.S. foreign policy following George W. Bush’s administration (Brimmer, 2014). Human rights issues involved in U.S.–Iran relations and their depiction by senior officials and by many American IR scholars followed the same path. They understood human rights as an end in itself on the one hand, and as a means for (smart) power politics on the other. For instance, Michael Posner, the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor from 2009 to 2013, emphasised policies promoting human rights for their own sake in Iran when testifying to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2011). However, following Hillary Clinton, Posner also understood human rights in terms of smart power during his

confirmation hearing in 2009 (Posner, 2009). As for cultural sensitivity, partly understanding human rights in terms of smart power helped to sustain the expansion of power politics to include human rights in U.S.–Iran relations.

Nye's concept of smart power reified this dual understanding of human rights — as both values and strategic interests. On the one hand, Nye asserted that human rights is a 'milieu goal' of U.S. foreign policy, meaning that they benefit everyone instead of being an advantage 'possessed' by one state. He understood human rights, in other words, as an intangible structural norm in the making (Nye, 2011b). As he put it, the promotion of human rights was 'not best handled with the barrel of a gun' (Nye, 2009b), but rather 'better achieved' by soft power (Nye, 2004). On the other hand, Nye understood 'human rights' as a seductive value. Human rights could thus become a soft-power 'asset' to increase one's edge in ('smart') power politics (Nye, 2004). U.S. senior officials followed this dual understanding of human rights corresponding to Nye's production of knowledge. For instance, Susan Rice even implicitly referred to Nye by using employing the 'barrel of a gun' metaphor when arguing that, while advancing human rights through soft power was desirable, hard power might sometimes be necessary to prevent abuses (Rice, 2013). By the same token, she implicitly understood the means to promote human rights in terms of smart power. Pre-eminent American IR scholars and senior officials' understanding of human rights in terms of smart power was problematic in that it helped sustain the normalisation of power politics within international law and international institutions. This understanding portrayed human rights simply as 'strategic' rather than being advanced for their own sake, i.e. for a better universal standard of coexistence.

This 'smart' understanding of human rights became established in the shape of the theory-political practice discourse sustaining U.S.

foreign policy towards Iran, at least from 2006 onwards. U.S. senior officials did not put much emphasis on implementing human rights policies towards Iran prior to Condoleezza Rice's Iran Democracy Fund initiative (2006). This initiative increased the U.S. democracy and human rights promotion budget for Iran from \$11 million to \$75 million. The programme dedicated \$20 million of this amount specifically to funding groups promoting human rights in Iran. The Obama administration subsequently abolished this fund in line with an increasingly knowledge-based foreign policy towards Iran. Many Iranian human rights activists complained that the fund politicised human rights in Iran and thus hindered their cause (Azimi, 2007). The Obama administration listened, and responded by implementing the Near East Regional Democracy Fund, including Iran and preserving the anonymity of grant holders. This \$40-million fund was intended to support democracy and human rights through so-called 'soft power' programmes (Feith and Weiss, 2009, Price, 2012).

The Obama administration, like Nye's book *The Future of Power*, also understood human rights as both a foreign policy end and a means through the same historical analogy the Helsinki Accords, signed during the Cold War. The Accords were the final agreement signed by the participating states of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The objective was to set norms of coexistence in Europe between the West and Warsaw Pact states. As part of these norms, Principle VII of the Helsinki Accords was a milestone. By signing the CSCE Final Act, the leaders of Europe's communist states had to explicitly endorse this article promoting 'respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief' (Csce, 1975). Some scholars, such as Daniel Thomas, claimed that these accords, and especially this article, laid the ground for the fall of communism by leading communist states to implicitly legitimate the promotion of

human rights (Thomas, 2001). Senator Ben Cardin and Hillary Clinton reiterated Thomas' statement during Clinton's confirmation hearing. Clinton reiterated the benefits of the Helsinki Accords for the promotion of human rights for their own sake, but also for their strategic benefits. Principle VII of the Accords was useful in undermining the enemy of the time. According to this reading of history, human rights should, again, be both an end in itself and a strategic tool under the Obama administration (2009). Nye reiterated the same statement, referring to the Helsinki Accords by quoting Robert Gates, who understood them in similar terms while he was Director of the CIA in George Bush's administration (Nye, 2004). Ray Takeyh, the Iran expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, reiterated the Helsinki strategy applied to Iran in a *Washington Post* op-ed (Takeyh, 2013); see also (Khalaji, 2012). In other words, the Helsinki analogy was another intertextual connection establishing U.S. senior officials', Nye's 'smart power', and some IR-related experts' understandings of human rights as both a means and an end in U.S. foreign policy towards Iran.

The smart-power discourse also underpinned the U.S. bid for membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2009 and the 'struggle' against Iran within this institution. Actors taking part in public debate over U.S. membership of the UNHRC, whether for or against membership, mostly framed their argument in terms of 'national interests'. John Bolton, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. between 2005 and 2006 during the Bush administration, was against U.S. membership. Interviewed in 2009, he had not changed his position. As he put it: 'This is like getting on board the Titanic after it's hit the iceberg. ... This is the theology of engagement at work. There is no concrete American interest served by this, and it legitimizes something that doesn't deserve legitimacy' (Lynch, 2009). U.S. senior officials advocating U.S. membership did not base their

argument only on defending human rights for human rights' sake or for the global interest – they employed the language of 'smart power'. For instance, Suzanne Nossel, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs between 2009 and 2012 and Executive Director of Amnesty International U.S. in 2012–13, reiterated the 'smart power' discourse to justify U.S. membership. She understood the UNHRC in terms of a struggle for power. As any multilateral institution, the UNHRC was, in her words, 'a critical stronghold that must be kept ready and used wisely' (Nossel, 2011). Specifically, she understood the council as a sort of power competition against Iran:

Turning multilateral institutions into effective instruments of power also involves countering those that want them to be anything but. Iran, for example, looks to the UN as a forum to gain legitimacy, win friends, and multiply its influence. We have pushed them back at every turn. ... When Iran ran for a seat on HRC, we reached out worldwide to make the point that their record made them unqualified for membership. Their bid got no traction, and they dropped out of the race rather than face humiliation. (Nossel, 2011)

In this excerpt, Nossel confessed that understanding the UNHRC as an instrument of power was partly in reaction to Iran's understanding of multilateral institutions as such. However, she failed to understand that, by doing so, the U.S. helped to sustain the extension of power politics to the council. Her position reflected the lack of reciprocity embedded in the 'smart power' discourse. She allowed the common good that could have been provided by the UNHRC to be overshadowed while power politics were at work.

Following the 'smart power' discourse, U.S. senior officials were more transparent in their controversial human rights records in 2010

(Lynch, 2010). While this increased transparency might have contributed to the advancement of human rights, smart power morphed this gesture into a strategic move. This transparency was closely related to Nye's advice that self-criticism was an effective means of soft power by 'leading by example' (Nye, 2011b). Similarly, U.S. senior officials understood self-criticism on human rights as a key step in restoring the U.S. image around the globe. Partially understanding human rights in terms of smart power through U.S. policy towards the UNHRC proved paradoxical. On the one hand, advocating U.S. membership as a soft power 'asset' and as an enabling agenda setting minimised controversy in the U.S. Only few members of the U.S. political community, such as, reacted negatively to renewed U.S. membership in 2009 (Lynch, 2009). U.S. membership became possible by being framed primarily in terms of 'national interest', and then in terms of human rights for human rights' sake. On the other hand, U.S. policy, understood in terms of smart power, eroded the possibility of transforming the UNHRC into something other than a forum where the struggle for power politics took place at the expense of human rights. Human rights became predominantly an instrument to legitimise or de-legitimise one state in relation to another, instead of being a common good to be achieved together.

The smart power discourse encouraged a pattern of action and reaction between Iran and the United States with regard to human rights. In March 2011, the UNHRC appointed Ahmed Shaheed of the Maldives as its first Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran (2011). In response, Iran denied Shaheed access for conducting his report and he had to rely mostly on telephone interviews to obtain material for his investigation. Using the UNHRC as an instrument of smart power proved effective for U.S. policy towards Iran and as a result of U.S. efforts the UN General Assembly

passed a Resolution in December 2013 condemning Iran's human rights record (Unga, 2013a). 83 Member States voted for the Resolution, 36 voted against and 62 abstained (Unga, 2013b). In addition to this action at the UN, the U.S. Senate authorised \$30 million to investigate human rights violations in Iran. In response, Iranian legislators authorised \$20 million to investigate human rights violations in the United States (Nye, 2011b). This pattern of action and reaction shaped Iranian senior officials' discourse about human rights, portraying human rights as 'western' and as a strategic means for the U.S. to get the upper hand in a 'soft war' against Iran. Understanding human rights in terms of 'strategic', 'soft power' or 'smart power' helped to establish human rights as an instrument in a so-called 'soft war' between Iran and the United States. Understanding human rights in those terms reduced human rights to being a means of power politics instead of an end in itself for a better universal standard of coexistence.

BROADCASTING IN IRAN IN TERMS OF SOFT POWER

The same capabilities-centric mindset soon took hold even in the midst of the communication revolution ushered in by the emergence of the internet: counting of nuclear arsenals and conventional weapons has been replaced with counting Twitter or Facebook followers and State Department language streams.

Roselle et al. (2014)

Cross-border broadcasting for political purposes is as old as broadcasting itself. But the language of 'soft power' or 'smart power' was not used to make sense of this effort during World War II or the Cold War. The same can be said of Voice of America's (VOA) Farsi

service and Radio Farda, the two main U.S.-funded media stations broadcasting to Iran. Many IR scholars, from Nye to more applied literature on public diplomacy in Iran (e.g., Izadi, 2009, Asgharirad, 2012) and senior officials fell into the soft-power trap by translating past broadcasting efforts in terms of soft power (Nye, 2008b). However, the U.S. official discourse used to understand broadcasting efforts in terms of ‘information warfare’, ‘propaganda’, the ‘war of ideas’, ‘selling’ (i.e. marketing) or ‘democratisation’ before the development of ‘soft power’ in 1990. Understanding these earlier broadcasting efforts in terms of ‘soft power’ is an anachronism. In other words, these authors understand these historical cases through the current regime of truth embedding soft power, rather than the context of the regime of truth of the time. This section analyses the moment when U.S. senior officials moved from understanding broadcasting in Iran in terms of ‘regime change’ and ‘democratisation’ towards a soft-power interpretation.

S. Enders Wimbush’s article in the *Weekly Standard* in 2006 expressed a shifting moment on how senior officials made sense of U.S.-funded broadcasting in Iran. Wimbush, director of Radio Liberty from 1987 to 1992 and a former member of the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), drew a line between ‘public diplomacy’ and the ‘war of ideas’⁽⁴⁾. He claimed that Radio Farda was only focusing on the former in the struggle between Iran and the United States. He claimed that Radio Farda, like ‘most [of] America’s international broadcasters’, fell into the ‘public diplomacy trap’ (Wimbush, 2006). Instead, Radio Farda should have been ‘unleashed’ to directly call into question Iran’s regime. Radio Farda’s public-diplomacy agenda was only designed to ‘make people like America’, according to Wimbush. Republican Senator Tom Coburn reiterated the same discourse with regard to VOA’s Farsi service in 2007. According to him, VOA Farsi should have been ‘harder’ on the

Islamic Republic (Azimi, 2007). The new understanding in terms of soft power was under pressure. Jeffrey Gedmin, president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in 2007, advocated understanding broadcasting more and more in terms of soft power. According to him, surrogate broadcasters like Radio Farda were the ‘ultimate soft power’ with ‘a measurable impact of success’ (Kaminski, 2007). He understood broadcasting as having one of the best average cost-benefits ratios for achieving the aims of U.S. foreign policy. By comparison, and in terms of Nye’s soft power, Wimbush argued that ‘attraction’ was not enough. Broadcasting should destabilise and directly incite Iranians to change their regime. While this discourse was pre-eminent during the later stages of the Cold War, the soft-power discourse shared by Gedmin contributed in slightly changing the role of U.S.-funded broadcasting programmes in Iran towards ‘attraction’.

The more a space, like Iran, fell into the ‘U.S. interests’ or ‘national security’ categories of U.S. official discourse, the more Congress invested in broadcasting programmes towards this space. In other words, broadcasting and diffusion campaigns over the Internet were in sync with the eye of power. VOA Farsi followed this trend. It started to broadcast in Farsi to Iran during World War II, when the Allies used Iran as a supply route to support the Soviet Union, and VOA Farsi’s role was to broadcast propaganda to keep this supply route open. Notwithstanding several failed attempts to definitively relaunch this service during the Cold War, the Islamic Revolution in 1979 convinced Congress to act. Since then, VOA’s coverage gradually expanded from two hours programming per day in 1979 to 6 hours in 1980, reaching 24 hours a day in 2008. Following the U.S. foreign policy doctrine of the time, in 1998 the BBG focused VOA’s mission on promoting freedom and democracy. The events of September 11th, 2001 provided momentum to increase spending on

broadcasting programmes in the Middle East. The U.S. government inaugurated Radio Farda in this context in 2002, with Iranian youth below 30 years of age as its main target audience (Asgharirad, 2012).

Radio Farda's first mission was to 'provide objective news, analysis, and discussion of domestic and regional issues crucial to successful democratic and free-market transformations (Quoted in Asgharirad, 2012). This mission statement was an oxymoron by combining 'objective analysis' and 'democratic and free-market transformations'. As observed in the fourth chapter of this thesis, democracy as teleology and its application through 'democratisation' were so rooted in the American public imagination that they were taken for granted as 'objective'. Radio Farda's questions during an interview conducted with George W. Bush during Nowruz 2008 was revealing on this aspect.

Mr. President, while democracy is everyone's rightful way of life, in Iran, on the other hand, there is no respect for the basic rights of Iranian citizens, there is no rule of law, and there is certainly no freedom of speech. Do you believe the people of Iran stand a chance against this regime to bring about a positive change anytime soon, with your support? (W. Bush, 2008b)

Bush would not even have to respond. The reporter's question was already confirming senior officials' discourse on Iran and the wider U.S. regime of truth. As shown in previous chapters, this discourse reproduced a binary opposition between the Iranian 'people' and Iranian 'leaders' and took for granted democracy as teleology.

In addition to broadcasting, the Department of State opened a Farsi-language website in 2003. As Roselle put it in the quote above, success began to be measured in terms of internet metrics rather than military capabilities. This is exactly how Condoleezza Rice sought to

legitimate this programme during her confirmation hearing in 2005 (2005). The Obama administration expanded these diffusion programmes through the Internet by opening a ‘virtual embassy’, and State Department Facebook, Twitter and Google+ accounts in Farsi in 2011 (Katzman, 2013). While the language of democratisation was still present to legitimate these programmes, ‘public diplomacy’ focused on ‘attraction’ took over. Senior officials’ discourse put the emphasis on opening and keeping open as many channels of dialogue with Iranians as possible to share ‘America’s story’ (2009). As Secretary of State Clinton suggested during her confirmation hearing: ‘We recognize that our biggest challenge is to ensure that our messages are listened to, considered and, we hope, acted upon by people in the Middle East, and Muslim societies around the world’ (2009). Understanding broadcasting and diffusion through the concept of narratives — shared by Nye’s smart power — was taking centre stage. This objective was consistent with Rice’s ambition of strengthening the U.S. narrative where it was suppressed or squeezed out by competing messages in the Middle East in general and Iran in particular. The language of regime change nonetheless waned from 2008 onwards. ‘Regime change’ was more and more understood in terms of the struggle over narratives. For example, the explicit mission of the virtual embassy, as presented on the VOA website, involved challenging ‘pervasive myths’ conveyed in Iranian senior officials’ discourse. These myths included that U.S. policy sought regime change, that sanctions were targeted at the Iranian ‘people’ and that the U.S. was against Iran’s nuclear energy programme (Voa, 2011). The regime-change narrative lost the competition and would be replaced by narratives inspired by soft power.

While Rice focused on developing U.S. public-diplomacy expertise in Farsi to tell the ‘U.S. narrative’ on all media platforms, the Obama administration fought to keep channels open for this

narrative to stand a chance (2005). Obama's campaign against what senior officials' discourse called the 'electronic curtain' in Iran was especially focused on keeping the Internet channel open for U.S. soft power through 'listening' to the 'other'. Internet metrics legitimated this campaign. Close to half the population in Iran browsed the Internet, accounting for half of all Internet users in the Middle East (Asgharirad, 2012). Accordingly, in his 2012 Nowruz message, Obama condemned the 'electronic curtain' preventing this 'listening' from happening through the Internet: 'I want the Iranian people to know that America seeks a dialogue to hear your views and understand your aspirations' (Obama, 2012). Wendy Sherman, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, followed this theme and reiterated the need to listen to Iranians: 'We are committed to raise the cost of repression and help Iranians break through the "electronic curtain" the regime is erecting to communicate with one another and share their story with the world' (Sherman, 2013). This discourse focusing on 'listening' is in line with Nye's smart power. As seen above, while Nye recommended broadcasting as an instrument of soft power, he favoured means of listening to the 'other'. Social networking applications are one platform among many to conduct this 'listening'. Listening would enable the Iranian people's preferences to be understood. In turn, these preferences would become a key to design a 'soft power strategy' to attract the 'other' (Nye, 2011b). Some IR scholars reiterated this theme in op-eds (Glassman and Doran, 2010).

The shift in understanding U.S. broadcasting policies in Iran in terms of smart power was more implicit than explicit. The popularisation of the concepts of narrative, 'listening' and 'attraction' within smart power became the main driver in making broadcasting and networking policy, in comparison to previous broadcasting policies that had been understood more in terms of directly

challenging Iran's leaders for 'regime change' to take place. All in all, understanding broadcasting in terms of smart power sustained the expansion of power politics to cyberspace, and contributed to legitimate censorship policies enabled by the soft-war discourse in Iran (Price, 2012).

IRANIAN STUDENTS IN TERMS OF SOFT-POWER

American officials have been inviting Iranian figures to so-called academic seminars over the past few years. ... However, when the Iranians attend these sessions, they realise they have gathered to discuss measures to topple the Iranian government.

Mohammad-Javad Zarif, former Iranian Ambassador to the UN, 2008 (Zarif, 2008)

In 2012, *Times Higher Education* delved into diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks to investigate how governments understood student mobility behind closed doors. Soft power was again taking centre stage. Most senior officials, including those from the U.S., the UK and China to name just a few, understood higher education in general and the ability to attract foreign students in particular as instruments of soft power (Matthews, 2012). While Rice advocated an increase in Iranian student exchanges with the U.S. in terms of democratisation during her confirmation hearing in 2005, this policy became more and more understood in terms of smart power (2005). Smart power normalised the expansion of power politics to universities.

Nye strongly emphasised the Iranian 'youth' as a soft power subject. He advocated Iranian student exchanges as one of the most effective soft-power policies by mobilising the younger generation.

Nye based this policy on the assumption that the Iranian youth was fond of American culture. This led Nye to deduce that a soft-power strategy towards Iran would probably succeed over the long term, but not in the short term, which would require co-optation at the leadership level (Nye, 2004). Using American culture to attract a theocracy defined by its opposition to the U.S. would indeed be an unlikely scenario. Nye suggested that a military strike on nuclear facilities — a hard-power measure directed at the Iranian government — would be counterproductive. According to him, this would lead the U.S. to ‘lose the whole generation of younger Iranians, who would respond in a nationalistic way’ (Nye, 2008a). Since co-optation of the leadership level is unlikely and since a military option would be counterproductive, the only soft-power option that remained was to target the Iranian youth directly. Hence, Nye portrayed student exchanges as a soft power means par excellence in comparison to any other means. This thinking applied to U.S.–Iran foreign policy gradually influenced senior officials’ discourse on Iranian student exchanges from 2006 to 2014.

The State Department has devoted growing importance to Iranian student exchanges since 2006. In parallel, the attention of senior officials focused on Iran as ‘one of the highest foreign policy priorities for our Government over the next decade’ (Rice, 2006a). The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as Iranian president, reports of ‘Iran’ meddling in Iraq, the ‘unchecked Iranian nuclear programme’ and so-called ‘terrorist activities’ put Iran back at the top of the agenda for U.S. senior officials. Yet, in addition to this context, the limits of ‘hard power’ were recognised. Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State between 2005 and 2009, responded by developing ‘transformational diplomacy’, a doctrine akin to soft power while still being framed in terms of democratisation (Rice, 2006b). In an unclassified cable, Rice urged hiring the next generation of Iran experts in Washington, Dubai

and Europe. The United Arab Emirates was the most strategic location, due to its proximity to the ‘Iranian people’, its 560,000 Iranian expatriates and its 10,000 Iranian students. According to the same cable, the primary mission of the Deputy Director of the Regional Presence Operation based in Dubai was to attract Iranian students.

... Identifies and processes exchange candidates for ECA [Energy Communities Alliance] efforts. Targets and increases Iranian participation in MEPI [U.S.–Middle East Partnership Initiative] and FPC [U.S. Foreign Policy Colloquium] programs. Increases engagement with Iranian people and UAE’s huge Iranian community through Iran-related speaker programs, DVCs [Direct Video Conferences], and American Studies programs to promote U.S. policy on human rights, democracy, terrorism and non-proliferation. ... Establishes American Studies targeted at Iranian students and UAE universities. ... Arranges ‘Study in the United States’ seminars for U.S. universities to recruit Iranian students; advises Iranian students wishing to study in the United States.(Rice, 2006a)

The U.S. Consulate-General in Dubai remained the main hub for attracting Iranian students during the Obama administration. Consulate staff were in charge, for instance, of welcoming and giving advice in Farsi to prospective Iranian students through the U.S. virtual embassy in Tehran.⁽⁵⁾ This virtual embassy served, in part, as a platform for guiding prospective Iranian students (Clinton, 2011). U.S. embassies in Ankara, Turkey and Yerevan, Armenia also offered services in Farsi designed to attract Iranian students. A study revealed a steady 20–25% growth in Iranian students registered in U.S. universities under the Obama administration. The number of Iranian

undergoing higher education in the U.S. increased from 5,600 in 2010–11 to 6,982 in 2011–12 and 8,744 in 2012–13 (Education, 2013). While it is not clear whether these numbers are directly related to the State Department’s policy, senior officials tended to rely on these international student statistics as a soft-power metric.

Some American IR scholars reiterated senior official discourse and encouraged the use of U.S. universities as instruments of soft power to attract Iranian students. For instance, James K. Glassman and IR Scholar Michael Doran advocated this ‘soft power solution’ in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed. According to these authors, the U.S. government should use ‘America’s comparative advantages’ to attract Iranian students. They suggested rallying CEOs of companies in California to offer seminars to ‘Iranian engineering students’ on high-tech entrepreneurship. They even suggested California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger as a prospective spokesperson to persuade Iranian students to apply (Glassman and Doran, 2010).

Kayhan Barzegar, Ph.D. in IR and the Chair of the Department of International Relations and Political Science at the Science and Research Branch of the Azad University and the Director of the Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies (IMSS), a policy think tank based in Tehran, expressed how ‘soft power’ applied to student exchanges did not make sense by not taking the agency of Iranian students into account⁽⁶⁾. After completing his Ph.D. in IR in Iran, Barzegar conducted research at the London School of Economics (LSE), the Harvard Kennedy School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Through his own experience and contra Nye, Barzegar claimed that U.S. ‘soft power’ might work as long as Iranian students do not take off from Iran. They could, then, better preserve a romantic representation of U.S. culture, values and ideas shielded from experiencing the ‘American way of life’ in practice in their everyday life. However, the more Iranian students experienced the so-

called ‘American way of life’, and the more they tended to develop their own appreciation. And more often than not, Iranian students tended to develop an either more nuanced or critical view of the ‘American way of life’ than what Nye would have hoped, Barzegar argued. In other words, Nye’s blind patriotism and universal view of American culture, values, and ideas disallowed him to conceive other possible opinions than his own about the American way of life. Simply reloading agency, in the ‘soft-power’ understanding of Iranian students exchanges, generate a totally different picture.

Ironically, considering international student mobility in terms of soft power brought U.S. senior official discourse closer to that of pre-eminent Iranian senior officials, and they reinforced one another. For instance, in August 2009 Ali Khamenei, the Supreme leader, portrayed Western liberal arts and Western social sciences in humanities as being in opposition to the principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Following this speech, many professors were fired and some students were taken into custody. Iranian senior officials legitimated these actions as defensive moves in a so-called ‘soft war’ with the U.S. (Matthews, 2012). In many speeches, Khamenei portrayed Iranian students as ‘soft-war’ officers (Niayesh, 2014). This Iranian discourse rejecting Western social sciences might have taken place even without U.S. official discourse speaking the language of ‘soft power’. But U.S. senior officials’ interpretation of international student mobility in terms of soft power did not help to keep power politics out of the Iranian campuses. In 2013, Hassan Rouhani, the newly elected President of Iran, promised the de-securitisation of universities and took specific steps to invite expelled students back (Peterson, 2014b). It remains to be seen, however, if this will change the relationship between higher education and politics in Iran in the long run.

Iranian students admitted to U.S. universities and the success of

U.S. exchange programmes were once understood in terms of democratisation. During Rice's tenure as Secretary of State, they were understood in terms of both democratisation and soft power. Nowadays, the focus on 'democratisation' had slightly faded and 'regime change' has waned from U.S. official discourse. Soft power, which used to be a means for achieving the objective of 'regime change', is now taking the centre stage in discourse to understand U.S. international students programmes. The invasion of the campus by power politics has become normal through the language of smart power. Once again, a means has morphed into an end in itself.

CONCLUSION

The problem of 'smart power' — especially when it is applied as a government foreign policy framework — is that it falls in what Said would call a knowledge to the service of particular nations, not to the service of coexistence and community (1997). Smart power, in other words, traded the Habermasian dialogue for pure strategic communication as an end in itself. A 'smart power' informed foreign policy could not be sustainable. To the contrary, the smart power-soft war inspired foreign policy of the United States and Iran became a mutually reinforcing self-fulfilling prophecy. Understanding U.S.-Iran relations in terms of 'smart power'-'soft-war' strengthened mistrust, escalated enmity and expanded power politics competition to all spheres of social life. 'Smart power'-'soft war' kept U.S.-Iran relations at the strategic level through replacing former means by new means to get the upper hand against or to resist the 'other'. Most IR scholars writing and experts contributed in sustaining the strategic ontology of this relationship, in part through 'smart power', instead of imagining alternatives that could move the relationship beyond this action-reaction model. Paul Sharp's sustainable diplomacy advocating continuous dialogue and appeasement in U.S.-Iran relations was

among the rare exception to this rule (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010). Thinking the ‘other’ in terms of ‘smart power’ or in terms of ‘soft war’, therefore, did not contribute in resolving differences between Iran and the United States. Co-existence can only start with sustainable concepts to understand the ‘other’ and calibrate foreign policy accordingly. ❖

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1. They, nonetheless, did not necessarily follow-on Nye's policy recommendations as reflected in U.S. congress budget priorities. Reporter. 2011a. The War on Soft Power. Newspaper, Issue April 12..
2. Bush's 2008 Nowruz message repeated the earlier model. However, Bush supplemented this speech with two interviews on Voice of America and Radio Farda attempting to attract the 'Iranian people' and to condemn their 'leaders'.
3. Vladimir Putin, during his official visit to Iran in 2007, relied on the same type of rhetoric drawing upon Iran's 'local' culture. Putin mentioned several times his admiration for Omar Khayyam's poetry. Putin, V., 2007, Interview with IRNA Information Agency and Iranian State Television and Radio, Russia, P. O., Tehran.
4. The BBG is a bipartisan panel of eight private citizens appointed by the U.S. President (the Secretary of State is an ex officio member), and acts as the oversight body for official U.S. international broadcasts by both federal agencies and government-funded corporations.
5. The virtual embassy project replaced Condoleezza Rice's project to open a U.S. interests section in Tehran, which failed in 2008.
6. Interview conducted in Tehran on May 31st, 2014. Identifiable data consented.