



JOURNAL FOR IRANIAN STUDIES

Specialized Studies

A Peer-Reviewed Biannual Periodical Journal

Year 6, Issue 16, October 2022

ISSUED BY



RASANAH
المعهد الدولي للدراسات الإيرانية
International Institute for Iranian Studies

IRANIAN MEDIA DISCOURSE: MANUFACTURING OF IMPACT AND INFLUENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD

Yassine Bouchaouar

Researcher on the sociology of religious
transformations and political communication,
Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco

Introduction

This paper attempts to examine a central question about Iran's political and ideological discourse in the Arab world that is projected through its various domestic and regional media outlets. The paper also looks at the impact of Iran's media discourse on public opinion. This is based on the premise that media outlets are strategically important tools for Iran, particularly for projecting its political and sectarian project. These tools could be used to aid Iran's export of the Iranian revolution or to deter global powers and their allies as well as to push Tehran's influence in the region and limit the influence of regional political and religious actors. Understanding Iran's clout and influence remains difficult without first understanding how its propaganda-based media outlets operate. This can only be done through examining their patterns, strategies, and resources.

Iran has presented a unique model of propaganda in terms of style, scale and results which was noticed during major regional events including the Iranian revolution in 1979, the two Gulf Wars, the Lebanese wars in 2000 and 2006, and the so-called Arab Spring. Tehran attempted, via its propaganda campaigns, to influence public opinion and deepen its clout through these events, while undermining influential regional actors. This influence of public opinion has been part of Iran's "axis of resistance" soft power policy to create spheres of Iranian clout.

Based on the aforementioned, the study aims to answer two key questions: what are the primary premises of Iran's political and sectarian propaganda project in the Arab world? To what extent can we understand Iran's expansionist mindset by studying its media discourse?

Iranian Propaganda: Deconstructing the Mechanisms of Creating Influence

The discussion of Iranian propaganda is, in fact, inextricably linked to the history and identity of the post-1979 revolution. It can be further explained as follows:

A Revolution for all Muslims

The revolutionary media network established an effective propaganda model, even before removing the shah and establishing the new republic. It consisted of a wide range of variables to influence and direct public opinion at home and abroad toward the desired outcomes of the Iranian revolutionaries. The revolutionaries were able to complete their mission by basing revolutionary propaganda on two key themes: the first was to ensure the acceptance of a "theocratic theory" based on Wilayat al-Faqih, which was promoted to fill the vacuum left by the shah's departure; and the second was to generate revolutionary populist rhetoric primarily based on demonizing others and absolving the revolutionaries of blame. Hence, Iran created an "axis of rejection" which promoted the "axis of good" in the face of the "axis of submission" which reflected the "axis of evil."

Immediately after overthrowing the shah's regime, Khomeini used all available means at his disposal to entrench his rule, achieve domestic legitimacy, and harness international support. He waited for the right moment to export the revolution to the entire Muslim world, which was armed with slogans such as "Death to America, Death to Israel, God is One, Khomeini is the Leader," and other slogans that aimed to influence public opinion in the Islamic world and turn the Iranian revolution into a revolution for all Muslims against American hegemony and Western-backed regimes.

The propagation that the Khomeini-led revolution was an "Islamic revolution" was part of the revolutionary propaganda. According to this propaganda, the revolution had the support of all Muslims, not only "conservative" Iranians.⁽¹⁾

This discourse aimed to bond ideologically with Sunni Islamist movements — especially as they viewed the Iranian revolution as a chance to practically implement their slogan of “Islam is the solution” and establish a parallel Islamic state modeled on its sister government in Iran — taking advantage of the political circumstances that the Arab countries were experiencing at the time. This prompted several figures and leaders of Sunni Islamist movements to bless the revolution and express sympathy with it to the point of expressing fascination and complete alignment with it. Those leaders included Abdesslam Yassine, the founder of the Moroccan Al Adl Wal Ihsan (Justice and Charity) Group, that published the *Jama'a* magazine shortly after the Iranian revolution's success. Yassine devoted many pages in the first issue to introducing Ayatollah Khomeini's book *The Islamic Government*,⁽²⁾ and in the first issue he chastised Sunni scholars, saying that they were “in complete heedlessness.”⁽³⁾

Morocco's official religious elites supported the Iranian revolution. The League of Moroccan Religious Scholars acknowledged Khomeini's so-called victory of the Islamist movement in Iran. In a letter signed by its Secretary General Abdellah Guennoun in February 1979, the league said, “It is a blessed movement that you lead with wisdom and vision in pursuit of the Islamist awakening and liberation from the foreign hegemony imposed by the East and West on politicians, Arabs, and Islamic peoples.” However, the league later reversed its support, issuing a fatwa in 1980 declaring Khomeini to be an unbeliever.⁽⁴⁾

The Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), now known as the Nahda Movement, led by Rachid Ghannouchi, dedicated the third issue of the fifth year of its *Al Maarifa* magazine to the Iranian revolution, with a cover picture showing Khomeini raising his hands and supplicating. The picture was accompanied by the headline “Islam Has Triumphed” written in red (see Figure 1).⁽⁵⁾ The magazine released a cover with the headline “Prophecy Comes True: The Prophet Chooses Iran for Leadership” in the eighth issue of the same year.

Figure 1: Covers of *Al Maarifa* Magazine

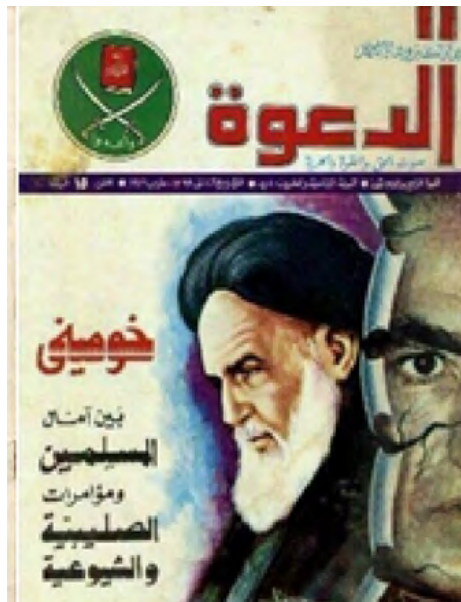


Translation of titles from left to right: “Prophecy Comes True: The Prophet Chooses Iran for Leadership,” “Islam Has Triumphed,” and “Leaders of the Contemporary Islamic Movement.”

Note: All covers were published in the same year, 1979.

Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt welcomed the Iranian revolution and this was reflected in its famous *Al Dawa* (Islamic Call) magazine. The magazine dedicated some of its issues to celebrate Iran's triumph. It published a photo of Khomeini (see Figure 2) along with the caption "Khomeini Between the Hopes of Muslims and the Conspiracies of the Crusades and the Communists."

Figure 2: Cover of *Al Dawa* Magazine



Translation: "Khomeini Between the Hopes of Muslims and the Conspiracies of the Crusades and Communists," *Al Dawa*, Issue 2, March, 1979.

The influence of the Iranian revolution on Sunni Islamist revolutionaries was clearly visible. The Iranian revolution generated feelings of liberation under the banner of religion, and the revival of the caliphate which fueled momentum among Sunni movements despite the sociological, historical and religious differences between the Sunni and Shiite political models.

This Sunni Islamist enthusiasm worked in favor of Iran's propaganda apparatus. Sunni Islamists helped in promoting the notion that the Iranian revolution had unified and rallied Islamic public opinion around a single goal (establishing an Islamic government). Sunni religious elites had at the time clearly expressed their desire to break free from the shackles of Western hegemony and oppressive rulers in order to establish the Islamic caliphate. Iranian propaganda was successful in enticing the Sunni Islamist movement,

and it also served as a means for the Sunni world to open up to the Shiite ideological experience, which was based on propagating and revitalizing Shiism. This was a politically defining moment in the history of the new republic, especially as the revolutionaries opposed submission and advocated rejectionist policies and resistance. This paved the way for an increase in the number of people embracing Shiism.⁽⁶⁾

Iranian propaganda was driven by Tehran's objective to increase its presence in the region and export its revolutionary model to the rest of the Islamic world. This is in addition to using Sunni religious elites and their media outlets to spread sympathy and the spirit of the revolution throughout the Islamic world. The concept of investing in figures and religious memory were important aspects for Iran's propaganda machine. Khomeini made every effort to present himself as a descendant of Ahl al-Bayt (the Household of the Prophet) to win over the support of Iranian, Arab, and Islamic peoples. Furthermore, this enhanced Khomeini's religious legitimacy and credentials as the new republic's spiritual supreme leader. Iran went to great lengths to portray itself as a victimized Islamic country. From its inception to the present day, the notion of victimhood has remained a key pillar of Iranian political and religious discourse. To strengthen its position and gain more sympathy, the Palestinian cause was incorporated into the Iranian propaganda campaign, whether by antagonizing Israel and the United States, or through forming and supporting its regional proxies such as Hezbollah, which turned into a profitable franchise for Iran after serving as an icon for Islamic resistance. This was especially apparent during Hezbollah's major battlefield and propaganda victories against Israel in 2000 and 2006.

Creating Prestige: Political Posters as an Example

Whoever reflects on the birth of the "Islamic Republic of Iran" will notice, without much effort, that its establishment was primarily attributed to the effectiveness of its propaganda machine, which played a decisive role in creating and promoting its image. This new image was evident through analyzing posters and graffiti that explained the revolution's orientations, that had been carefully constructed to influence domestic opinion, strengthen its external position, and achieve more support and solidarity. To fully review the propaganda during and after the revolution, one needs to analyze political posters because they are deemed as documents which sum up the history of Iran's propaganda machine. Posters are still prominent and play an important role as part of Iran's contemporary propaganda tools — to be discussed in detail in this study.

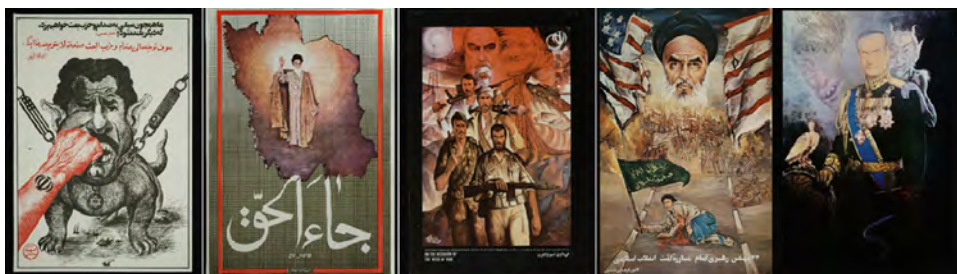
When the hegemony of one ruling system reaches its climax, society resorts to expressing its ambitions and dreams via new methods, including art. Society utilizes art to craft new symbols or myths that oppose tyranny, accordingly, art

creates new meanings. The political posters created and distributed during the Iranian revolution by artistic and creative figures, particularly by those who were committed to the revolution's spirit, clearly redefined the values and social criteria for people to embrace. ⁽⁷⁾ During wartime, posters were always used to disseminate various ideological messages. These messages typically covered social, political and religious topics, and are usually delivered through text and images. Iranian posters and graffiti were an influential means to mobilize the people and communicate during the Iranian revolution. ⁽⁸⁾ Overall, the employment of posters was carefully done and part of the propaganda campaign. Portraits of "Khomeini the Hero" were ubiquitous across all modes of communication. They were strongly presented in posters or in graffiti in public places. ⁽⁹⁾ The political posters that were produced and published during the Iranian revolution were not an exception, but they were rather a defining feature of the revolution.

Iranian propaganda attempted to create a framework of good and evil, with "We and the Others" often presented to depict this dichotomy. This framework was used to demonize adversaries (the Others) such as the shah, the United States, Israel, and the former late Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, etc. Iran's propaganda machine, on the other hand, worked to create an iconic image of the revolution's leader, Ruhollah Khomeini. Most of the time, he was depicted as a superhero (see Figure 3).

It was self-evident that Iran's propaganda reflected the revolution's general political parameters. As a result, good versus evil was used to present Iran's foes in such a way so that all societal segments understood and expressed feelings of attachment to the revolution and were willing to resist in defense of the revolution. In sum, this dichotomy of the world was used to shape public opinion to ensure loyalty to the revolution and its values and secure support for the new political and religious decisions and choices.

Figure 3: Posters During the Iranian Revolution and the First Gulf War



Note: Phrases are written in Arabic and Persian.

As previously mentioned, metaphorical expressions transmitted through political posters had a significant impact on creating a specific perception about the revolution and rallying support for it. The propaganda focusing on a single personality was in harmony with the fragile psychological state of Iranian society at the time. Society at that time was ready to be rallied and mobilized behind a person capable of leading the rebellion against the status quo, in the hope of ending the deadlock and decline that society was experiencing. Therefore, the iconic image of Khomeini fitted the general context and nature of Iranian society, which had long waited to achieve its unfulfilled dreams.

In fact, political posters played a critical role in the struggle for change as they outlined the ideology and social ideals.⁽¹⁰⁾ The use of political posters and graffiti as well as other means of communication during the early stages of the revolution was not by chance. Their use reflected the social reality where illiteracy and poverty prevailed. These propaganda tools were critical in spreading revolutionary sentiments throughout Iranian society and the wider Islamic world. Illiteracy was prevalent in Iranian society; people were unable to read or write and most people had little political knowledge. Alternative sources of information were absent and society was fed with stereotypes and information was framed by “one source of media and one truth.”

The objective of the Iranian propaganda machine was to transmit revolutionary sentiments to the masses and unite them in a careful way without excluding any social segments. Thus, at the time, political posters were an effective tool in unifying the sentiments of those who were either literate or illiterate, without consideration for social categorizations. From the projection of the new Guardian Jurist system to exporting the revolution, the new ruling elite did not hesitate to use all available means, including printed papers, posters, graffiti and cultural magazines as well as other means to promote the new revolutionary ideology and values.

Following the success of the revolutionary propaganda machine in achieving the goal of the revolutionaries – seizing power – Iran sought to export the revolution to the rest of the Islamic world. It conveyed the message as Khomeini claimed, that the establishment of the Islamic government in Iran was only the first step toward establishing a globalist Islamic state.⁽¹¹⁾ This expansionist vision sparked conflicts, feuds and schisms throughout the Islamic world. The First Gulf War between Iraq and Iran was one of the consequences of this vision.⁽¹²⁾ Iran’s expansionism has been clearly visible in the middle of the 21st century, and it has exploited satellite television channels to spread its ideological clout throughout the region. Various regional countries, blocs and organizations have competed fiercely in the field of satellite television channels to win the battle of influence and create

awareness for their respective political and religious ends. As a result, satellite television channels have become a new arena for soft wars, with objectives shifting depending on context and interests.

The Iranian republic attempted to curb the influence of foreign media outlets. At the end of the 1970s and 1980s Islamic programs were broadcasted primarily to enhance the religious legitimacy of the Iranian leadership. Angry local viewers described Iranian television — in protest against its content — as “mullah-vision” due to its tediously repetitive content. When satellite technology entered the arena in 1993, foreign shows were popular among the Iranian public in the beginning. In response, and to protect society against the potential moral mischief of foreign shows, the Iranian government imposed a ban on satellite dishes in 1995 (a law still officially in place). However, the Iranian masses quickly developed strategies to circumvent this ban.⁽¹³⁾

In light of this foreign competition, Iranian authorities worked to develop media infrastructure as a key pillar of the revolution. The death of Khomeini, the first Iranian supreme leader, changed little about the revolutionary propaganda’s orientations (the spirit of the revolution). Rather, his successor Ali Khamenei continued down his path and imposed control, enhanced his legitimacy and extended influence. Tehran did not hesitate to employ different propaganda tools to export the revolution.

Dominance and Monopolizing Media and Press Discourse

Iran’s radio and television organization is directly linked to the supreme leader. This linkage was in response to concerns that media outlets could be used against the new revolutionary setup by counterrevolutionary forces. However, the continued linkage between the highest source of political authority and the media apparatus and its later evolution made it the chief mouthpiece of the revolution’s political orientations. This connectivity also revealed the importance of this media apparatus in building public opinion internally and externally. Over the years, it has undergone major developments in terms of structure and focus, as well as the creation of affiliated media outlets, which have aided the promotion of Iranian discourse on strategic issues.⁽¹⁴⁾

Imposing control over the media and banning satellite dishes as well as tightening control over the internet was clearly reflective of the republic’s approach to the media. The Iranian state established exclusive control over radio and television broadcasting as stipulated in Article 44 of the Iranian Constitution. In the same context, Article 175 states, “The appointment and dismissal of the head of the Radio and Television of the Islamic Republic of Iran rests with the Leader.” In light of such political restrictions, Iranian media has become merely a political tool to impose control and secure the aspirations of the supreme leader and his allies.

Local media has typically been used to eliminate all forms of Iranian opposition as well as to smear the reputation of dissidents. During the 2009 presidential election, for example, Khamenei denied former late Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani access to media outlets to respond to corruption allegations leveled against him and his family by presidential candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during a televised interview. One month after the election, Rafsanjani's Friday prayer sermon, in which he blasted the repression of protests and called for political reconciliation to overcome what he called a crisis, was banned from broadcast.⁽¹⁵⁾

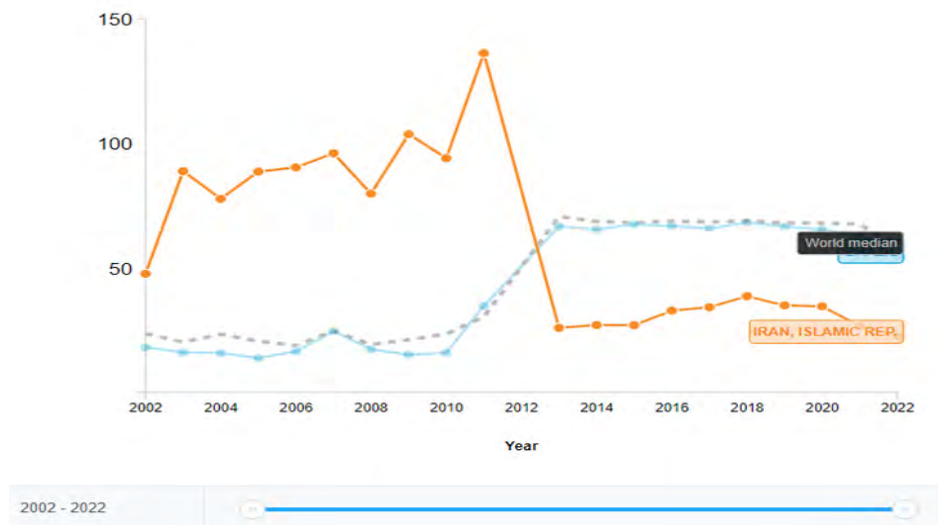
As a result of the supreme leader's control over power and, by extension, control over media outlets, opponents faced cooptation or elimination after their resources were hijacked or nationalized. The media was used to justify acts of repression against opposition forces, whether individuals or groups. This negatively impacted public perceptions toward media and severely restricted freedom of expression. As a result, hundreds of newspapers and magazines whose editorial policy was inconsistent with the republic's political and religious orientations were banned.

Absolute control over media outlets and means of communication is important in Iran's policies and strategies. As Iran's media is under the direct supervision of Iran's supreme leader, this reflects the fact that it is as important as other institutions or apparatuses like the military and religious organizations in the Iranian republic.

To this day, restrictions on media outlets are still in place. Several journalists have faced prosecution, arbitrary arrests, and heavy sentences. Iran is one of the most dangerous places to work as a journalist. According to the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, Iran ranked third-to-last out of 180 countries in 2022, ahead of only North Korea and Eritrea, a ranking that reflects the reality of press freedom in Tehran. There are currently 512 male and female journalists imprisoned in Iran.⁽¹⁶⁾

Repressive practices toward journalists, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting's (IRIB) exclusive control over news, clearly reflects the state's continuous attempts to impose dominance over the generation and dissemination of news, thereby controlling the flow of information. As previously mentioned, Iran has been significantly isolated from the rest of the world due to its controlled political reality and difficulty in accessing independent news information. The aforementioned have also contributed to widening the gap between Iran and the rest of the world, especially when it comes to press freedom (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index (2002-2022)



Sources: World Bank website; data from Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index ⁽¹⁷⁾

Since 1979, the Iranian government has arrested, detained, and even executed at least 1,000 journalists and bloggers. The brutal crackdown on press freedom, however, is not limited to the local press; the consequences of such repression extend to Iranian correspondents working for foreign media outlets.⁽¹⁸⁾ All of this is justified under the guise of protecting the republic's principles, as stipulated in Article 24 of the Iranian Constitution, "Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public." According to the "Mass Communication Media" in the Preamble of the Iranian Constitution, "The mass communication media, radio and television, must serve the diffusion of Islamic culture in pursuit of the evolutionary course of the Islamic Revolution." This restriction and control over the press and media institutions is evident in Iranian press law, which allows the Supervisory Press Board to issue decisions and assess the press in the country according to the board's political orientations.

One example of such a crisis was the decision to close down a local newspaper called *Kalid* [Key in Persian] for insulting the country's highest authority. The newspaper published a caricature implying that the country's poverty is the fault of the supreme leader. A hand and a pen were also depicted in the caricature, referring to Khamenei's hand (see Figure 5).⁽¹⁹⁾ This decision

was based on Article 27 of the press law, which stipulates that if the supreme leader is insulted, the publication's license will be revoked and withdrawn. Moreover, the newspaper's editor-in-chief and editor will be subject to judicial proceedings. This raises a number of questions: is this type of criticism considered an insult? What are the characteristics of criticism? What are the characteristics of an insult?

Figure 5: Caricature Showing Khamenei's Hand Drawing the Poverty Line



Despite having total control over the media and journalism, new Iranian media spaces have arisen. These are led by activists and journalists who are opposed to the Iranian political system. These media spaces pose a significant challenge to official Iranian propaganda, especially given the country's ongoing social unrest and tensions. As a result of the decline in trust in state media and the public turning to foreign channels, the Iranian ruling elite spared no effort to eliminate foreign channels and accused new media spaces of collaborating with external enemies. It is worth noting that these activists

and journalists prefer foreign media discourse over Iranian local media due to their background and past experiences; they were forced to leave their country.

The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), an independent research foundation specialized in analyzing and comprehending positions in Iran, carried out an opinion poll covering the period from February 17 to February 26, 2022. The poll had a sample of 27,000 to determine the direction of public opinion and Iranian sources of news. According to the poll, Iran International, Manoto TV, BBC Persia and Voice of America were the most popular and influential news sources in Iran. More than half of the sample polled expressed trust in Iran International and Manoto TV. BBC Persia received 27 percent of the respondents' trust, followed by state-run television, which received 14 percent. In the same context, 74 percent of respondents stated that they had no trust in Iranian state television. According to the poll results, 33 percent of the respondents said they watched Iran International on a daily basis, making it Iran's most popular foreign Persian-language channel.⁽²⁰⁾

Some local press reports indicate that the decline in Iranians tuning into local media outlets is because of increased levels of political pressure imposed on new media spaces. This has prompted several of them to leave the country. Iran's Shargh newspaper⁽²¹⁾ stated that Iran International channel's performance as a key influencer of public opinion is because of its recruitment of talented journalists who left the country. It recruited talented Iranians who were unable to work under the harsh circumstances in Iran.

However, despite leaving the country, campaigns of targeting foreign channels and new Iranian media spaces have not stopped. In 2017, authorities in Tehran opened a criminal investigation against 150 BBC employees, including contributors, on charges of conspiring against Iran's national security; all their assets in the country were frozen.⁽²²⁾

Iranian state-run media outlets published photos of Iranian reporters residing in London, describing them as a mafia gang.⁽²³⁾ These UK-based reporters have not escaped the attention of the establishment even though they reside outside the country. A report published by The Times newspaper in December 2019 stated that the Iranian authorities had waged an intimidation campaign targeting journalists and employees of Iran International based in London. Iranian officials interrogated their relatives and froze their assets and possessions and threatened to kidnap them from the streets of London if they did not stop working for this channel (which aired footage of the widespread protests that swept across Iran in the wake of the hike in gasoline prices).⁽²⁴⁾

Dozens of journalists working for BBC Persia received the same treatment. The channel held a conference to condemn the Iranian campaign that targeted its employees. The threats against journalists included confiscating

their passports and banning them from selling or purchasing properties. An internal poll conducted by the BBC showed that 45 employees of BBC Persia said that Iranian authorities had interrogated their fathers while 40 others said their brothers and sisters had been interrogated.⁽²⁵⁾ There is no doubt that such campaigns make it difficult for journalists to work and for information to flow.

Over the course of four decades, media outlets have been used not only to convey Iranian propaganda, but also to intimidate journalists and dissidents both inside and outside Iran. Through television interviews and shows dedicated solely to defamation and misinformation, the IRIB has promoted all forms of psychological torture, defamation, aired coerced confessions, and violated the privacy of dissidents and their families.

A report released by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in 2020 titled "Orwellian State: Islamic Republic Of Iran's State Media As A Weapon Of Mass Suppression"⁽²⁶⁾ sheds light on the employment of media outlets to suppress dissent. The report provides a detailed analysis of 151 media shows aired on the IRIB over the past decade, including confessions of 355 individuals. This is in addition to defamatory content against 505 individuals. "The impact of these programmes is not limited to the victims. It also affects the victims' families and their reputation. Many of the victims described these programmes as a means of mental and psychological torture with long-lasting impacts. They asserted that the impact of these programmes on their family life and their reputation cannot be easily undone and that many of the audiences who have no access to independent sources of information believe the defamatory accusations made in these programmes. The majority of the interviewees mentioned the illegal use of their private data as the most damaging and traumatizing part of their experience," the report highlighted.⁽²⁷⁾

There is no doubt that the Iranian media environment is restrictive, if not repressive, making it difficult for the media to flourish and for journalists to survive. According to Reporters Without Borders, Iran is still one of the world's five-biggest jailers of activists and journalists. The Iranian ruling elite sees media outlets as a tool to penetrate the region and support its ideological and sectarian platforms.

To achieve this end, Iran continues to massively invest in its media industry, making efforts to establish a competitive diplomatic media (as some major powers do in the region). The diplomatic media aims to speak on behalf of the Iranian political system and create a better environment for the system at home and abroad, whether through proxies or figures officially linked to the status quo. However, the ultimate goal is to create a local public opinion that is in harmony with the ideals of the Iranian political system. This is in addition to establishing external media outlets that express the view of Iran's political

system and export the values of the 1979 revolution on a wider regional scale to serve Iran's presence as a regional power and expand its sphere of influence beyond the region.

Iranian Media and Its Hegemonic Tendencies: Shifting From Making an Impact to Creating Influence

Propaganda is an integral part of the Islamic republic's history. It would later take shape and advance further with the establishment of the IRIB, a monolithic media octopus that expresses the revolutionary ideology and promotes the doctrine of resistance. It promotes a pro-revolutionary line at all levels. Iran's media discourse is in line with the narrative pushed by major state-run institutions such as the supreme leader's office, the IRGC, economic/diplomatic entities, and Tehran's proxies, whether parallel organizations or militias. The media industry is quite significant for the Iranian political system, this is evident in Khamenei's call for a media jihad⁽²⁸⁾ to counter the media invasion, as he has labelled it.

Iran is depending on media outlets to promote its orientations and shape opinion internally and externally as part of its efforts to expand and achieve regional clout. It has been observed that Tehran's investment in the media industry is as significant as its investment in other strategic industries such as the military and security industries. It spares no effort to broaden its media reach in the region, as evidenced by the findings of a vast array of reports that focus on Iran's media landscape.

The IRIB's budget is 140 trillion riyals (\$560 million), according to a report by the Iranian Parliament's research center. This figure excludes the IRIB's share of the government budget, which is equal to the total annual taxes paid by all government employees. From the government budget, its share amounts to 50 trillion riyals (\$200 million).⁽²⁹⁾ In addition, the Iranian government updated its budget, allocating an additional \$71.4 million to the country's cyberspace program which the IRIB has benefited from, whose share in the budget was \$63 million. The "cyber section" of the Islamic Development Organization (IDO) received another \$8.4 million.⁽³⁰⁾

In the same vein, a report by the European Journalism Centre's (EJC) Media Landscapes website provides a general overview of Iran's media landscape. Because of its enormous human investment potential, it considered the IRIB to be one of the most important media institutions in the Asia-Pacific region, if not the world. The IRIB employs over 40,000 people worldwide and has branches in over 20 countries, offering services in multiple languages. In addition, it runs 17 national channels, 30 regional channels, and nine international channels. Among the most important of these channels is Al Alam TV in Arabic, which debuted in 2003 in a style similar to Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. Additionally, the IRIB owns the English-language Press TV

channel, which was launched in 2007 and Sahar channel, a multilingual channel whose activities began in 1990, with shows broadcasting in Kurdish, Urdu, Azeri, Bosnian and French⁽³¹⁾ as well as in African languages such as Swahili and Hausa.⁽³²⁾

Iran also owns the Spanish-language Hispan TV media network, which is considered among the most popular networks in Latin America, according to research conducted by The Polish Institute of International Affairs.⁽³³⁾

On the other hand, Iranian news agencies are among the most active in the world, with the Islamic Republic News Agency topping the list. It is the state's sole official news agency. Other news outlets consider themselves to be independent but in fact they are affiliated with the IRGC. There are a significant number of news agencies that offer services in multiple languages. Mehr News Agency which specializes in providing news on Iranian foreign policy was founded in 2003 and is the most important of these mentioned agencies. The news agency also covers political, economic, cultural and religious issues in Arabic, English, Turkish, Russian, Persian, and Dutch. Over 300 correspondents work for the news agency which has five regional offices. It has signed agreements with over 17 foreign news agencies in Asia and Europe.

Aside from these news agencies, there are other specialized agencies that focus on specific internal or external issues. The most important of these news agencies is the Al-Quds News Agency which focuses on Palestinian issues. The Iranian Students' News Agency, the Women's News Agency, and the International Quran News Agency are also prominent.⁽³⁴⁾

Against this backdrop, an important conclusion can be drawn: Iranian penetration into the region was not accidental or the consequence of Arab, US or Israeli clout in the region. Rather, Iran's understanding of the value of news and propaganda has played a key role in furthering its clout in the region through shaping opinion and putting pressure on regional governments. Iran has worked for four decades to expand its media network to the point where its scope and influence have expanded to encompass regional and international domains as well. Previously, the United States shut down a number of websites associated with various Iranian media outlets, some official and others affiliated with groups linked to it. They spread false news and participated in targeted misinformation campaigns such as the Houthi-run Al Masira channel, Al Alam channel, LuaLua TV channel, Palestine Today channel, Al Naba, Al Kawthar, and other channels. Iran condemned the US move, calling it a flagrant violation of freedom of expression. In light of this, Iran took advantage of the opportunity to promote the axis of resistance versus the axis of submission. According to the IRIB, "while the democratic government of the United States reiterates support for free expression, it practically shuts

down media outlets with support from Israel and Saudi Arabia, Washington's two historic allies in the Middle East."⁽³⁵⁾

Through the US move, Iran aimed to demonize some of its adversaries in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia. In terms of international relations, Saudi Arabia serves as a bridge between the Sunni and Shiite worlds. Iranian media channels have penetrated Arab media networks in recent years, primarily through Arabsat and, to a lesser extent Nilesat, placing Iran at the heart of a strategic battle to win the hearts and minds of the Arab people. Iran has attempted to discredit its main regional competitors by slandering the reputation of their media outlets. It continuously promotes the notion that rival news outlets are close to the White House to weaken their credibility in the region. Iranian media outlets frequently accuse Gulf media outlets of being pro-Zionist, while Iranian propaganda pulls at the heartstrings of the Muslim world, especially by exploiting anti-US feelings in the region. Iran hopes to strengthen its position and promote its political model by doing so. The Yemeni crisis is regarded as a clear example of this, as proven by media coverage and ground realities. As a result, all Arab attempts to resolve the Yemeni crisis, whether through political or military options, have been sabotaged by the Iranians. Pro-Iranian media refers to US forces as "foreign forces," while Gulf forces are referred to as "mercenaries." This labelling helps in Iran's political and military defamation of these countries and their allies, as well as propping up the legitimacy of any potential military or logistical support it provides to the Houthis.⁽³⁶⁾ This is in addition to other Iranian media practices through which Iran spreads its views on the world but without credibility or neutrality.

Iran has been able to develop a comprehensive propaganda model, whereas the Arab media landscape has yet to recognize the importance of the propaganda machine in reaching out to other peoples to influence the way they think and to shape positions of governments. The limited data available reflects the scarcity of Arab media outlets that broadcast in more than 10 languages, unlike Iranian media outlets. Thus, the expansion of Iranian propaganda activity beyond Iran's boundaries is not coincidental but planned and targeted. This includes a focus on Eastern Europe, the United States, Africa, and Asia.

The major Arab channels, whether funded by Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, or other countries such as Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera, have formed a powerful media model and have helped in shaping local and international public opinion, as well as in providing competition to the Iranian media octopus. However, the lack of coordination between regional media outlets — each country operates its media unilaterally to strengthen its own views on the

region and the world — impacts their media dominance and allows Iran to spread further its own narrative in the region.

This competition may have some impact on Iran's influence in the region. However, this impact is nominal primarily due to the tensions and ongoing disagreements between the countries in the region, which impacts their media policies and effectiveness in shaping public opinion. While Iranian propaganda focuses on defaming regional countries and increasing Tehran's clout by establishing religious, political and economic prestige, Arab media outlets focus more on internal disputes and communal conflicts.

The Iranian propaganda machine has had a significant impact in the region for Iran at various levels. Despite a string of internal crises and the persistence of international sanctions, Tehran has managed to strengthen its position as a regional power in recent years, particularly following the 2011 Arab Spring. This is despite major regional countries exerting efforts to limit its expanding regional role. Tehran has made great strides in its expansionist policy, which has been implemented on an unprecedented scale. It controls four Arab capitals: Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus and Sana'a, not to mention its growing clout in the Horn of Africa and some African countries.

Based on the foregoing, Iranian media has a presence almost everywhere, catering to all social segments and age groups. For example, when compared to Arab countries, Iran's media has gone a long way, particularly its cinema industry. Every year, Iranian cinematic works compete for international awards such as the Oscars, which they have won on two previous occasions in the category of foreign films. The first time Iranian cinema won an Oscar was in 201 for the movie "A Separation," and the second time was in 2017 for the film "Salesman." The movies were directed by Asghar Farhadi who chose to boycott the Oscars in protest against US President Donald Trump's decision to bar citizens of certain countries, including Iranians, from entering the country.⁽³⁷⁾ "Wolf and the Herd," an Iranian animated movie for children, was nominated for an Oscar for short animation in 2021.⁽³⁸⁾ Iran's interest in making movies for children will enhance Iranian media and Shiite networks dedicated to children such as Hodhod and Taha, which are broadcasted through Nilesat and Arabsat satellites that cover the entire Middle East.

It is worth noting that the animated film industry is not viewed merely as a source of extravagance and entertainment in Iran's propaganda strategy. Rather, the industry is at the heart of its propaganda strategy. It has created a number of animated films in support of Tehran's agenda, including a short, animated film depicting Donald Trump's assassination, which sparked widespread outrage. Following the assassination of Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, it was immediately released. Tehran spent \$100 million to create a series of children's films demonizing and distorting the image of

the United States such as the one produced after Soleimani's assassination in early 2020.⁽³⁹⁾

Overall, Iran has used its propaganda power to secure more support and divert the attention of adversaries, particularly in the Gulf region. A protracted media war has erupted, with both sides employing every possible media and propaganda tool. Iran has maintained its strong presence on Arab broadcasting networks such as Nilesat and Arabsat. As previously stated, Iran's propaganda drive is motivated by its expansionist ambitions. Its media apparatus is no less important than its various diplomatic and political apparatuses.

This extensive Iranian media presence with two of the Middle East's leading satellite operators; Nilesat and Arabsat, reflects the Iranian political system's expansionism. The political system, through its expansionism, aims to enhance its influence in the region under the pretext of defying Western dominance, leading to the implementation of an Islamic ruling system all over the region. This is in line with the Shiite doctrine that supposedly opposes surrender, i.e., surrender to the West or the "oppressors" as Twelver Shiites claim. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has been presenting itself as the sole legitimate representative for all Shiites in the region. Meanwhile, it enhances its ambition to become the sole and biggest representative of all Muslims.⁽⁴⁰⁾ This expansionist ambition dominating the Iranian mindset has translated into the establishment of various media channels supportive of its sectarian project in the region.

Today, there are hundreds of channels disseminating Iranian sectarian and political orientations. Through a random survey of media channels, whether those broadcasting directly from Tehran or through its proxies in Arab and European countries, we find that Tehran has 85 channels promoting its political and doctrinal ideology.

Throughout the Iranian establishment's 42-year rule, these channels have helped to promote Iranian propaganda in the region. Iran has essentially promoted the idea that the Arab regimes are clients and pawns of major world powers, and has sowed the seeds of sectarianism by questioning Sunni Islam, paving the way for the spread of Shiism and Iranian expansionism. In addition, Iran has exploited the Palestinian cause for the sake of its political aims.⁽⁴¹⁾ The establishment of similar media outlets will continue. Over time, channels like Al-Mayadeen, iFilm, Al-Alam, Fadak, Al-Hod Hod, Taha, Al-Kawthar and others have achieved widespread acceptance in Sunni spheres, without ignoring the local Shiite social makeup, which constitutes cultural, social and religious realities which cannot be bypassed or denied. However, the concept of "We and the Other" is deeply entrenched in some Iranian media outlets that operate in the region. Fadak TV channel is an example of this hate-based

sectarian Iranian propaganda. Thus, sectarianism is an important dimension of Iranian propaganda in the region.

Its media strategy of creating various media outlets whether television, radio, newspapers, or social media, helps Iran to create a balanced, unrestricted, and flexible media network that targets all segments of society.

To fully examine Iran's media propaganda in the region, one needs to also review its performance on social media platforms. In its strategy of establishing diverse media outlets, Iran has utilized social media platforms as they are deemed instrumental in enhancing the country's influence in the region. On the other side, opponents of Iran's political system also resort to social media to express their opinions away from the severe restrictions imposed by the IRIB. The Iranian authorities always ban platforms that are against the revolutionary and doctrinal values of the ruling system.

Iranians, as previously stated, prefer to follow news via the internet and foreign satellite channels. Despite the Iranian government banning the use of satellite dishes and blocking social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Telegram, nearly 70 percent of Iranians are still connected to such platforms, albeit illegally. However, millions of citizens, including activists and dissidents, use filtering systems to access banned websites and platforms (such as changing a VPN). The most prominent opponents have personal Facebook and Twitter accounts.⁽⁴²⁾

Due to the notable impact of social media on Iran's media propaganda, the Iranian political system has attempted to control social media platforms through imposing restrictions on the flow of information and freedom of speech and has launched misinformation campaigns. Twitter and Facebook have banned Iranian accounts linked to spreading misinformation in favor of the Iranian political system.

For Iran, information dominance is central for both its domestic and foreign policy. Iran sees itself involved in an ongoing information war with Sunni Arab powers and neocolonial Western powers, particularly the United States. Several Iranian officials believe that if the country loses the information war, the Iranian state will implode. Based on this perception, Iran has prioritized the development of digital broadcasting which is much more difficult for the United States or its allies to target. Iranian hackers affiliated with the political system use sock puppets (fake identities that malicious individuals use to deceive other people online)⁽⁴³⁾ on various social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to control the flow of information. When the United States and Iran began negotiating, the number of accounts increased exponentially. These accounts were used to mislead the public and promote the Iranian version of events. Until 2020, 2,200 accounts for 6 million Facebook users were identified, while 8,000 accounts were identified for

nearly 8.5 million Twitter users.⁽⁴⁴⁾ In data analyzed by a host of researchers from the Computational Propaganda Project at Oxford University, tweets from 770 Twitter accounts potentially linked to Iran were analyzed. They concluded that the use of Arabic content on Twitter was intended to promote other Iranian digital and media sites rather than to communicate with Arab users. According to the study, the impact of Iranian propaganda on Twitter remains very limited compared to other websites and digital platforms, owing to the limited use of this platform in the Arab world. However, it is the preferred platform for elites instead of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Notwithstanding its limited impact, Iranian propaganda aimed at Arab users has promoted the Iranian narrative in the region, particularly against Saudi Arabia and its royal family, while expressing support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the Houthi militia. The study discovered a link between the use of hashtags and the issues that concern Tehran by analyzing data from over 23,000 Arabic hashtags. Among the most popular hashtags, one most frequently finds anti-Saudi hashtags like (#Anti-SaudiArabia/ #Saudi Arabia), Yemen is second with the hashtag (#Breaking Al-Masira/ #Yemen), Syria is third (#Syria), Iraq is fourth (#Iraq), Palestine is fifth (#Palestine), and Libya is sixth (#LibyaAlMukhtar). The Iranian propaganda machine has used a variety of methods to popularize these hashtags, including impersonating news and political entities, as well as public figures such as media professionals, human rights defenders, politicians, and clerics. Furthermore, in these hashtags and posts, Iran has used less formal Arabic language (local Arabic dialects).⁽⁴⁵⁾

The methods used can be traced to the early days of social media platforms in the region. In 2009, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei openly called for promoting Iranian content via digital platforms. He invoked a similitude, “Promoting content is the most effective international weapon against our foreign rivals.” Upon this call, the IRIB in 2011 established seven digital brigades consisting of media specialists and experts. They are composed of 84,000 members specializing in producing and disseminating Iranian content on social media platforms.⁽⁴⁶⁾

In 2018, the International Union of Virtual Media (IUVM), which is affiliated with Iran, declared its intention “to become the largest virtual media network across the globe, in line with our steadfast determination to defend the oppressed peoples of the world.”⁽⁴⁷⁾ It is a massive organization that seeks to influence internet users and is behind a major disinformation campaign. It creates content in over 11 foreign languages and focuses on internet content creation, such as breaking news services, the release of mobile apps, the production of animated cartoons and caricatures, as well as religious content and other communication content. The goal is to promote Iranian media platforms, including conducting a systematic misinformation campaign

and spreading fake news in a way that is compatible with Iran's strategic interests. Khamenei himself underpinned the significance of digital influence operations for Iran's survival. His view reflects how Iran's political system has used digital media outlets as a strategy parallel to its diplomatic and geopolitical strategies. Ben Nimmo, a fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, said the IUVM network displayed the extent and scale of the Iranian operation.⁽⁴⁸⁾

All of these propaganda campaigns, which can be examined and easily accessed on social media platforms, demonstrate how Iran views its objectives and geopolitical disputes, whether by emphasizing Tehran's role as part of the regional resistance axis or by emphasizing foreign intervention and demonizing Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies. As previously seen, the same process is clearly visible in official media outlets or those affiliated with Tehran. In a nutshell, all of these communication mechanisms aim to keep the establishment's clout intact, and maintain its interests by winning new allies, whether within the traditional spheres of Tehran's influence or beyond — at the expense of its regional rivals.

In contrast, as previously stated, we can see that Iran's media discourse, in all of its forms, is based on the promotion of a media network that carefully crafts political and religious messages. These messages are aligned with the aspirations of large segments of the grassroots in the region because they stimulated the popular uprisings across the Arab world because of a decline in trust in governments in light of their poor performance. To make this media network effective, Iran has adopted a central media strategy to influence and manufacture public opinion through using sock puppets and creating new media outlets.

Some may believe that political propaganda promoted through traditional media outlets has become obsolete as a result of technological advancements in the media industry, the spread of open broadcasting platforms, and easy access to information. Iran, on the other hand, is aware of the role and benefits of traditional propaganda. It uses traditional methods not only to communicate its point of view to the rest of the world, but also to create some sort of balance between the messages it transmits internally and externally. It blocks access to international broadcasting, bans digital website platforms, defames dissidents at home, and implements other practices based on "internal intimidation" with the goal of limiting the flow of opposing media discourse internally and externally, with opponents depending on traditional media outlets and social media platforms. These practices aim not only to influence and defame the credibility of anti-Iranian messages, but also to make Iran's propaganda content more effective throughout the Arab sphere in order to achieve the highest level of impact through the "bias framing" of events. This

Iranian media strategy encourages listeners and viewers to sympathize with any content that is related to the network of deliberately crafted messages, i.e., the core of Iran's media propaganda. Therefore, viewers/followers are subliminally influenced by Iran's media discourse — as illustrated by Sunni media outlets which in the past were a medium to promote the “spirit of the Iranian revolution.”

Conclusion

Iran has been able to promote its political and sectarian narrative over the past decades thanks to its propaganda machine. It has been successful in dominating the Middle Eastern political and media landscape. But there is an important conclusion to be made: making a positive or negative statement about the level of influence and impact of Iranian propaganda remains highly relative, given the fact that Iran's media propaganda may have varying degrees of success on the ground; and regional and international geopolitical shifts may accelerate the pace of influence, hence extending its ambitions on a larger regional scale. To develop a mechanism that can accurately monitor and assess the influence of Iran's media propaganda, one needs to take into consideration the variations of this influence and its varying degrees of success. This is in addition to exerting more effort to better comprehend the process of making propaganda influential, and the history of Iran's ideological incursions into the Arab and Islamic world.

Apart from Iran's pursuit to lead the Islamic world and its activities to penetrate sovereign nation-states and spread its influence, there are three main observations one needs to consider when measuring/assessing the influence of Iran's propaganda. First, the success of Iran's propaganda is evidently linked to the failure of counter-balancing actors, i.e., politicians, media professionals, and clerics. The potential power vacuum resulting from the failure/absence of influencers opens the gate for Iran to promote anti-Western sentiments amid growing public discontent in the region. Iran's propaganda always claims to be neutral, but it supports the narrative of the oppressed and tarnishes the images of rivals — as previously explained. The second observation is based on understanding what Iranian media aims to convey about “us?” Who are “we” according to Iran's propaganda? Finding answers to these questions helps in understanding the extent of Iran's influence. Yet, one also needs to examine these questions in light of sociological factors, social presentations of individuals about their homeland, and their social representations of Iran and its promoted issues. Only then does the real extent of Iran's influence and the penetration of its ideology into the collective mindset become clear. This also includes measuring the possibility of inefficiency/weakness of Iran's anti-Western propaganda in the region. The third observation is based on fully

comprehending Iran's propaganda since the manufacturing of the so-called axis of resistance and using it as a tool for political mobilization in the region. The future of Iran's influence relies on its ability to acquire new allies whether from its traditional spheres of influence or beyond. Iran provides unflinching support to its militias to penetrate territories that are seemingly marginal to Arab states, i.e., they are not of great strategic significance. Iran, therefore, developed its media propaganda apparatus to cover all regions across the world, including North and East Africa, Latin America and some Asian countries. The structure of this media apparatus extends across a vast regional scope, like an octopus. It not only spreads informative content, but it has evolved to the extent of being able to compete with mega international news networks. Iran has become aware of the significance of advancing through its media industry. In a nutshell, turning a blind eye to Iran's far-reaching media octopus may eventually lead to it curbing its rivals in the region.

Endnotes

- (1) Abd al-Hakim Abu al-Louz, Yassine Bouchouar, *Foundations and Strategies of Iranian Propaganda in Morocco* (Dubai: Al Mesbar Center for Studies and Research, Book 140, August 2018), 175.
- (2) Muhammad Darif, *The Moroccan Religious Field, The Trilogy of Politics, Religiosity and Security*, (Rabat: Publications of the Moroccan Journal of Political Sociology, 2017), 264. [Arabic].
- (3) "O you, Muslim scholars, you salt of the earth, you heedless ones, you are the people of truth, so speak up, and the turban has restored its glory to your brothers in Iran..." See "Al Adl Wa Al Ihsane," in *Al-Jama' ah Journal* 1, no. 1, , 1979, accessed August 15 2022 <https://bit.ly/3TiJoUf>. [Arabic].
- (4) Abd al-Hakim Abu al-Lawz, "The Transformations of the Official Moroccan Position on the Martyrdom 1981, 2014," *Iran and the Maghreb: The Shiite Question* (Dubai: Al-Mesbar Center for Studies and Research, July 2016), 40. [Arabic].
- (5) Yassine Bouchouar and Jamal Saifi, *The Transformations of the Tunisian Position on Shiism 1981-2016, in Iran and the Maghreb The Shiite Question* (Dubai: Al-Mesbar Center for Studies and Research, Book No. 115, July 2016), 145. [Arabic].
- (6) Yassine Bouchouar, "Patterns of Religious Transformation and the State's Management of the Public Sphere: A Study of Religious Transformation" MA thesis (Rabat: Higher Institute of Information and Communication, 2017). [Arabic].
- (7) Haggai Ram, *Multiple Iconographies: Political Posters in the Iranian Revolution*, In: *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, Shiva Balaghi, Lynn Gumpert (eds), (London: IB Tauris, 2002), 90.
- (8) "The Graphics of Revolution and War: Iranian Poster Art," The University of Chicago, (2011), accessed August 12, 2022, <https://bit.ly/2Hj9xBm>
- (9) For more information on posters and murals during the revolution and war, see the University of Chicago Digital Gallery.-Guide to the Middle Eastern Posters Collection 1970s-1990s, the University of Chicago, 2010, accessed on: 12. 08.2022, <https://bit.ly/3dEMql3>
- (10) Haggai Ram, *Multiple Iconographies*, 90.
- (11) Hakim and Abu al-Lawz, *Shifts of the Official Moroccan Position on Shiism 1981*, 39.
- (12) Iran's strategy in this war has included the dissemination of false and misleading information. It has purposefully avoided discussing its battlefield losses while exaggerating the losses of its adversaries. When the Iraqi broadcast ends, Iranian apparatuses were able to penetrate the Iraqi television network and broadcast on the seventh and eighth Iraqi channels. Iran also prepared special programs for Shiite occasions using upbeat Arabic songs like the anthem "God is one... Khomeini is a leader" and Shiite propaganda: *From the Basement of the Imam to the Throne of the Jurist*, Nihal Omar Al-Farouq, (Cairo: Al-Arabi for Publishing and Distribution, 1st edition, 2017), 59. After Saddam Hussein's regime fell, Iran attempted to seize control of Iraq by supporting Shiite incubators loyal to it on the one hand and militias opposed to the American presence on the other using all available means, politically, militarily, financially, religiously, and through the media.
- (13) "Media in Iran," *Fanack Chronicles*, May 15, 2017), accessed August 5, 2022 <https://bit.ly/3AKd3hH>. [Arabic].
- (14) Hossam Miro, *Iranian Media and Its Discourse Towards the Arab Gulf States* (Doha: Harmon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2017), 7. [Arabic].
- (15) "Iran. European Journalism Centre, Media landscapes Expert Analyses of the State of Media," (2021), accessed 011 August 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Aq5RWL>.
- (16) "Current Violations: The State of Iran," *Reporters Without Borders*, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Cl4R8R>. [Arabic].
- (17) World Bank database, accessed August 13, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3TbhjOz>
- (18) "The Case of Iran," *Reporters Without Borders*, accessed August 5, 2022 <https://bit.ly/3Kbjo92>.
- (19) "A Caricature Closing the Newspaper: Khamenei's Hand Above Poverty Figures in Iran," *Al Arabiya*, November 8, 2021 accessed September 11, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3wujcvV>. [Arabic].
- (20) "Iran International TV Most Popular News Channel In Iran, Poll Shows," *Iran International*, April, 3, 2021, accessed September 12, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Q6bfnd>.
- (21) " Iranian newspaper: "Iran International" the Most Influential Foreign Media on the Iranian Street," *Iran International*, August 8, 2022, accessed August 19, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3D1PmTN>. [Arabic].
- (22) Matthew Moore, "Iran Tries to Silence BBC Persian by Harassing Journalists' Families," *The Times*, November 18, 2017, accessed September 12, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3RsHApL>
- (23) Marc Horne, "BBC Adds to Accusations of Intimidation," *The Times*, May 15, 2019, accessed September 12, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3wM7wot>

- (24) "Iran International Wields the Most Foreign Media Influence on the Iranian Street," *Iran International*.
- (25) Horne, "BBC Adds to Accusations of Intimidation."
- (26) "Orwellian State: Islamic Republic of Iran's State Media as a Weapon of Mass Suppression," *International Federation For Human Rights (FIDH)*, (June 2020), 17.
- (27) *Ibid.*, 5.
- (28) For more, see "The Iranian Guide Calls for Jihad to Confront the 'Media Invasion'... and Confirms: the Regime Is Under a Complex Attack, *Iran International*, August 2, 2022, accessed August 11, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3e1VWvN>.
- (29) "Big Budget For Iran's State TV Leads To Criticism Amid Money Crunch," *Iran International*, February 3, 2022, accessed August 14, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3AT2k4y>.
- (30) Catalin Cimpanu, "Iran Updates budget to Allocate \$71.4 Million to 'cyberspace' operations," *Future*, (28 April 2021), accessed on: 14 Aug 2022, <https://bit.ly/3AsPpov>.
- (31) "Iran," *Media Landscapes Expert Analyses of the State of Media*, (2021), accessed August 11, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Aq5RWL>
- (32) Abu al-Lawz and Bouchouar, "Foundations and Strategies of Iranian Propaganda in Morocco," 182.
- (33) Danny Citrinowicz, Ari Ben-Am, "The Iranian Information Revolution: How Iran Utilizes Social Media and Internet Platforms to Incite, Recruit, and Create Negative Influence Campaigns," *European Eye on Radicalization*, (July 2020), 11, <https://bit.ly/3Bi00mO>.
- (34) Miro, *Iranian Media and Its Discourse*, 11.
- (35) "Washington Shuts Down Iranian and Pro-Tehran Media Websites," *DW*, June 23, 2021, accessed August 9, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3wCJBrh> [Arabic].
- (36) Anne Hagood, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Tale of Two Media* (Cairo: American University, Arab Media and Society, 2010), 10: 14.
- (37) "An Iranian Film That Wins the Oscar for Best Foreign Film," *Al Arabiya*, February 27, 2017, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3pQagNH>.
- (38) "An Iranian Animated Film on the List of Films Nominated for the Oscars," *Iran Press International News Agency*, January 4, 2021, accessed August 12, 2022 <https://bit.ly/3Kpm572> [Arabic].
- (39) "Big Budget for Iran's State TV Leads To Criticism Amid Money Crunch."
- (40) Anne Hagood, "Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Tale of Two Media," *ibid.*, 4.
- (41) Muhammad bin Saqr Al-Sulami, "The Iranian Propaganda machine Faces the Specter of Closure," *Arab News*, June 15, 2020, accessed August 8, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3G4NPhg>.
- (42) "Iran," *Media Landscapes*.
- (43) Aaron Delwiche and Mary Margaret Herring, "Sockpuppets," *Propaganda Critic*, August 8, 2018, accessed October 27, 2022, <https://propagandacritic.com/index.php/core-concepts/sockpuppets/>.
- (44) Emerson Brooking, Suzanne Kianpour, *Iranian Digital Influence Efforts: Guerrilla Broadcasting for the Twenty-First Century* (Washington: Atlantic Council, 2020), 6.
- (45) Mona Elswah, Philip Howard, and Vidya Narayanan, *Iranian Digital Interference in the Arab World, Data Memo* (Oxford: Project on Computational Propaganda, 2019), 1850-1867.
- (46) Brooking, Kianpour, *Iranian Digital Influence Efforts*, 15.
- (47) *Ibid.*, 16.
- (48) Jack Stubbs, and Christopher Bing, "Iran-based Political Influence Operation-Bigger, Persistent, Global," *Reuters*, August 29, 2018, accessed August 21, 2022, <https://reut.rs/3QbTD9P>.