

Distribution of US Public Diplomacy in the Gulf Using the Example of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract: Now a days, the most successful country concerning the dissemination of public diplomacy in the Middle East and the Gulf countries, in particular in the Islamic Republic of Iran is performed by the United States. The US State Department provides annually considerable funds to implement the projects in the field of “digital diplomacy” using a variety of tools to influence the policies of other countries through information technologies, radio, digital TV and internet resources. The study discusses the steps and methods of distribution of US public diplomacy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, namely the opening of “Virtual US Embassy in Teheran” the increase of radio “Farda” and TV “Persian news service” broadcast hours. In its turn, the Islamic Republic of Iran started to fund and distribute the projects in the field of public diplomacy within the countries of Central and Middle Asia and the Persian Gulf. Every year, the United States improve information technologies which subsequently lead to a successful US public diplomacy and the spread of democracy in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Key words: Public diplomacy, digital diplomacy, democracy, information technologies, Tehran

INTRODUCTION

Public diplomacy is one way to influence the opinions and behavior of the population in most Foreign countries. Today, the strategy of US public diplomacy is one of the most successful in the world, due to the fact that the White House provides annually the significant funds for the implementation of such projects.

“Among the objectives set by the American public diplomacy, the spread of liberal ideas and the support of opposition trend in the “non-democratic states”. Before the appearance of the internet, the USA public diplomacy used such methods to influence the policies of other countries, such as the promotion of information which was carried out through radio, films, television, through the exhibitions. Its essential element was the provision of educational opportunities for the representatives of certain socio-professional groups in order to develop a loyal elite. The spread of the Internet allowed to influence a foreign audience by placing radio and television programs in this network and the distribution of literature about the US in digital format (Tsvetkova, 2011). US public diplomacy has been abegan to distribute its cultural, political and economic values worldwide.

After the events of 9/11, the administration of George. W. Bush formulated the basic provisions of the

US public diplomacy distribution in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, in particular in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The main tasks of George. W. Bush public diplomacy was the change of the authoritarian and theocratic regime and the support of local opposition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Tools and methods US public diplomacy: Obama administration, in general, continued the program of President Bush, aimed on the expansion of public diplomacy in the Middle East. Iran became a special purpose. This is explained by the fact that the Iranian government foresees the policy of Iran information and cultural projects popularization on the territory of Central Asia and the Persian Gulf area. In this regard, the White House took the decisions aimed at the implementation of a more ambitious program concerning the performance of projects in the field of democratization as well as the realization of public diplomacy towards Iran.

In recent years, the relations of Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States were very tense that led to the ideological war between these two countries. Iran started to prevent the spread of US public diplomacy not only in the Gulf but also in the countries of Central and Middle Asia. Due to the constant increase of internet users

number and the rapid development of the blog spheres, the Iranian government tries to respond immediately to calls from the United States. The Iranian government prevents the access of its citizens to the information, in particular to the US site, lowering an electronic curtain in the country.

The development of own “digital diplomacy” in Iran is a quite effective response to the US actions. Currently, international broadcasters such as “Press TV”, “The Voice of Iran” “Iran” are established and used actively. These broadcasters are broadcasted in 26 languages. Since 2007, Iran has been developing an ambitious program in the field of culture, promoting a positive image of the country. The result of this program was the creation of cultural centers in the Iranian Embassies.

It should be noted that during Obama’s first presidential term an attempt was made to soften the sanctions for some items concerning the implementation of public diplomacy such as the support of the opposition, the establishment of more robust relations between Iran and the United States in the field of culture, education and sports. In his video message to Iran in March 2013 Barack Obama said that the US desires to improve relations but the US administration continues to develop the strategy of struggle with the Iranian regime using “soft power” (Anonymous, 2013). Besides in 2013, the first telephone conversation of the two leaders, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and US President Barack Obama took place after the Iranian revolution of telephone conversations which brought US Iranian relations to a new stage of cooperation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Currently, the short-term training programs are the main projects of the United States public diplomacy in Iran, within which the preparation of the political elite of the country takes place. The US State Department supported several scholarship educational programs for students and the political elite of Iran. The most significant project was the “International Visitor Program” (International Visitor Leadership Program) which is a short-term training program for the members of the political elite. It gives the opportunity for Iran citizens to visit the White House, the State Department, as well as to attend the meetings of the Congress. “International Visitor Program” is one of the most effective projects of the State Department of the United States, contributing to the effective influence on Iranian politicians and intellectuals who, in their turn will significantly influence the educated part of the society in Iran.

Also, the US State Department created a new educational project for the citizens of Iran, “the Iranian democratic program” which seeks to promote democracy in Iran and support the Iranian opposition groups (Anonymous, 2009). This project is performed by the democracy, human rights and labor department of the US State Department and secured at “Democracy development fund” (National Endowment for Democracy). From three to five members from Iran which pass a short educational training in the United States take part in the program annually. They attend the State Department and Congress in the US. Upon completion of the program each participant produces publications about his stay in the United States.

It should be noted that after the events of 9/11, the US State Department provided 116 million dollars for the development of broadcasting in Iran and in the Middle East focused on the (Arab) Muslim world (Lee and Paul, 2011). Since 2002, the main means of American broadcasting in Iran are the radio station “Farda” and channel “Persian news service” (Persian News Network, PNN), implementing the broadcasting in Farsi (24 h a day online). The target audience of the broadcasting is young people aged up to 30 years. Most of the air is occupied by the broadcasting of the famous Western movies and music which are broken by news releases. Radio “Farda” management believes that the broadcasting of contemporary music may help to change the political thinking of the youth in Iran.

In early 2011, the US State Department created the microblog Twitter “USA adarFarsi” and Facebook “US AadarFarsi” in Farsi in order to develop further contacts with the Iranian public. Since the creation of the Twitter account “US AadarFarsi”, the number of its internet users reached more than a thousand people in a day. Thus, microblogging on Twitter and Facebook became the most popular means of information transmission to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

There is no doubt that the proliferation of computer technology in Iran becomes an important tool overcoming the blocking of some internet resources that will enable citizens to use any Foreign internet portals easily.

The funding of these projects was performed since the Spring 2010, i.e., after the adoption of “Law of the Iranian censorship victims” (Voice Act) by the US Congress. The basic purpose of this law is the spread of democracy and human rights among Iranian citizens using certain tools, such as opposition support, the increase of radio and television broadcasting hours on the internet, as well as the increase of active internet users.

Another object of this project is the development of information technologies which would allow Iranian

citizens to have free access to Internet resources, as well as the ability to overcome their blocking. The US Broadcasting Board of Governors implements this task. The main purpose of this government institution is to provide accurate information to foreign audience as well as serve a reliable source of news and freedom of speech in the countries where independent media are absent. The Board of Governors on the issues of USA broadcasting received \$14 million for the spread of modern digital information technologies in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Anonymous, 2010).

It is interesting to note that the US State Department within the program on the spread of public diplomacy and the development of public democracy and human rights protection, created a “virtual embassy in Teheran”. This resource was directed at the Iranian people as after the Islamic revolution of 1979, the contact between the citizens of the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran was lost. “The virtual embassy” is presented in two languages; Farsi and English and the content of the two sites is identical. The creation of the site became the first step in the struggle against the political regime in Iran and will allow to raise the information curtain in the future.

In this regard, President Obama addressed the Iranian youth: “You are the young people of Iran, bear the greatness of the ancient Persian civilization, your talents, hopes and decisions will determine the future of Iran. I want you to know that I am with you”. “The Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, opening a virtual US Embassy in Teheran also appealed to the people of Iran: “With this platform, we may have the dialogue about culture, politics and traditions of the American people openly and without fear”.

The most relevant headings on the website of “Virtual US Embassy in Teheran” are the following ones: links to the groups in social networks, the information about the possibility of admission to US universities, the methods of learning English as well as the information on the procedure of US visa registration and obtaining. The primary audience of “virtual embassy” is young people under 29 years old. “Virtual US Embassy in Teheran” is not a formal diplomatic structure, as it was not accredited by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

CONCLUSION

Thus, one of the main ways to implement the US public diplomacy is the spread of information through the

mass media and internet resources, i.e., with the help of “digital diplomacy” which is the most effective tool today. Today the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the main opponents for the United States concerning the spread of public diplomacy in the Gulf countries and the Middle East. Iran uses quite an effective protection in the information space, eliminating the informational US presence by blocking US sites.

However, not all Iranian attempts to block the US broadcast channels provide a positive result because the US government spreads the information on Iranian territory effectively, using a large number of satellites as well as through the creation of Apple applications for mobile devices. These tools allow the Iranian citizens to view information on social networks and download additional software. Currently, 20% of Iranian citizens listen to American radio and watch American TV every day, some of them are the active users of the internet. It is important to note that the attendance at the American sites is constantly growing which is the result of the successful spread of US public diplomacy in the Gulf countries.

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