



The role of BBC in Iran's Politics: From the Shah to Khamenei

Mansoureh Ganjian* & Hasmah Zanuddin**

Abstract

This study investigates the role that the British Broadcasting Corporation Persian Service (BBCPS) played in Iran's internal politics both before and after the Islamic revolution. It focuses on two historical conjunctures. First, it explores the assistance that the BBCPS gave to Ayatollah Khomeini while in exile, to broadcast his speeches against the Shah's regime. Second, the study explains the BBCPS assistance to Iranian people during the presidential election protests in 2009. The research attempts to provide an answer to the reasons that the BBCPS has been engaging in Iran's internal politics, for instance by assisting the Iranian revolutionaries against the Shah during the 1979 revolution, and assisting the Green Movement in the 2009 presidential election protests against the Iranian government. It is assumed that the BBCPS acts as a tool of British interest and integral part of British policy-making in Iran.

Keywords: BBC Persian Service, Iranian Islamic Revolution, The Green Movement, Pahlavi Dynasty, Soft Power

* PhD Student, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Media Department, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. ORCID: /0000-0002-4881-4121, ganjian.mansoureh@yahoo.com

** Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Media Department, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. ORCID: /0000-0001-7849-7940, hasmahmedia@gmail.com



İran Çalışmaları Dergisi
ISSN: 2536-5029 - E-ISSN: 2651-4370
Cilt: 2, Sayı: 2, ss. 63-82
Geliş Tarihi: 31.10.2018
Kabul Tarihi: 13.02.2019
DOI: 10.33201/iranian.476828

İran Siyasetinde BBC'nin Rolü: Şah'tan Hamaney'e

Mansoureh Ganjian* & Hasmah Zanuddin**

Öz

Bu çalışma, İslam Devrimi'nin hem öncesi hem de sonrasında İngiliz Yayın Şirketi Fars Servisi'nin (BBCPS) İran'ın iç siyasetinde oynadığı rolü incelemektedir. Çalışma, iki tarihi konjonktüre odaklanmaktadır. Birinci olarak çalışma, BBCPS'nin sürgünde bulunan Ayetullah Humeyni'nin Şah karşıtı konuşmalarının yayımlanmasına verdiği desteği ortaya çıkarmaktadır. İkinci olarak çalışma, BBCPS'nin 2009'daki başkanlık seçimleri protestoları sırasında İran halkına verdiği desteği açıklamaktadır. Araştırma, 1979 devrimi esnasında Şah karşıtı devrimcileri ve 2009 hükümet karşıtı başkanlık seçimi protestoları sırasında Yeşil Hareket'i destekleyen BBCPS'nin İran'ın iç politikasına angaje olma nedenlerine bir cevap üretmeye çalışmaktadır. Şu kabul edilmektedir ki, BBCPS İngiliz çıkarlarının bir aracı ve İran'daki İngiliz politika yapımının bütüncül bir parçası şeklinde faaliyet yürütmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: BBC Fars Servisi, İran İslam Devrimi, Yeşil Hareket, Pehlevi Hanedanı, Yumuşak Güç

* Doktora Öğrencisi, Malaya Üniversitesi, Sanat ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi, Medya Bölümü, ORCID: /0000-0002-4881-4121, ganjian.mansoureh@yahoo.com

** Doç. Dr., Malaya Üniversitesi, Sanat ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi, Medya Bölümü, ORCID: /0000-0001-7849-7940, hasmahmedia@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Theory and Practice of Soft Power: Adjusting the Case of Iran

During and after the Second World War, states have not only tried to protect themselves through forming unions and associations, but also attempted to create a system of interdependence. Institutional states to gain both, international legitimization for their decisions and justify their behaviors besides receiving help for the projects contemplated by them. At this phase, it seems that psychological dimensions and public opinion received more attention in international policy to advance states' interests. Actually, the 1930s and 1940s came to perceive the birth of modern techniques of public opinion research. The efflorescence of media theories like "CNN effect" theory or "manufacturing consent" or coining the terms like "soft power" against "hard power" confirm the political power of media.¹

Considering the association of diplomacy with communication as an indispensable part of diplomacy is insofar that gradually it turned to an inseparable label like "media diplomacy" or "digital diplomacy" that explore the dynamic interactions between, media, politics and international relations. Although setting up news channels like CNN, BBC, VOA, Sky News or Al-Jazeera ended the long-held monopoly of states over their national news, it widened their political horizon in order to accelerate their regional or international policies.²

The prominent point that should be considered in the transformation of diplomacy is related to psychological dimensions that include informational, social, and normative influence of media. Obviously, the most informational influence and internalization occur when "heightened media need" happens, and it mostly comes into play when a community is engaged with the political or social problems or when the political changes are imminent.

¹ Adam J. Berinsky, "American Public Opinion in the 1930s and 1940s, the Analysis of Quota-Controlled Sample Survey Data," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70, No. 4, (2006): 499–529, Josef S. Nye, Jr., "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, No.80, (1990): 153–171, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (USA: Pantheon, 2002).

² Yoel Cohen, *Media Diplomacy: The Foreign Office in the Mass Communications Age*. (New York: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1986), 4, Wilson Dizard Jr., *Digital Diplomacy: US Foreign Policy in the Information Age*. (Washington DC: Cooperation of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2001), 19.

Therefore, the lack of non-governmental media and media transparency in closed and non-democratic societies, would increase social admission and social internalization.³

On this ground, the present paper is an attempt to address Iran as a proper case study due to its vicissitudes history that has always been noteworthy for world news agencies, regarding its regional geopolitical position. Also, the lack of private media in Iran and appearance of tens of foreign-based news channels can be advanced to support the debates on determinative role that the transnational TV channels play in Iran's political arena; the news channels like BBCPS, Voice of America (VOA), Iran National TV (INTV), Radio Farda and Manoto TV, that cover the latest news in Iran, from outside for the people living in the country and Iranian diaspora. In this vain the role that the BBCPS plays as an integral part of Britain soft power in Iran, which aimed 100 million Persian speakers around the world, is more prominent.⁴

In retrospect, during the Second World War, when international broadcasting became an important tool of diplomacy, "Bush House" was allowed to lunch BBCPS under the strict supervision of Britain's Foreign Office (FCO) to the access of widen sphere of influence. However, the neutrality of the covered news has been always under the question by individuals and political parties, but it came to be a reliable source of news and information for its overseas Persian-speaking audiences. Evidently, the BBCPS gains its reputation after the World War II and through specific media policy in confronting with the propaganda of Germany's radio station in Iran.

Some of those involved in the Persian Service, do not hesitate to say that institute of the BBCPS was due to frustrate influence of Berlin radio campaign on Iranian public opinion and putting pressure on Reza Shah to follow the allied force's policies. In 1941 the Britain used the BBCPS to spearhead the Britain propaganda and justify the Anglo-Soviet invasion to Iran that ended to removal of Reza Shah. Indeed, regarding the course of

³ Herbert Kelman, "Compliance, Identification, and Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2, No.1 (1958): 51-60, Sandra J.Ball Rokeach and DeFleur ML, "A Dependency Model of Mass-Media Effects," *Communication Research*, (1976): 3-21.

⁴ "BBC to launch Farsi-language TV channel," *Al Arabiya News*, January 14, 2009, Accessed November 20, 2018, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7828363.stm.

events in that time was the starting point to provide the undeniable role of the BBCPS as a projection of Britain's soft power in Iran.⁵

By the beginning of Iran's oil movement in 1951, once again, the BBCPS in line with the Britain government's interests, appeared as a defender of financial policies of Britain; first by providing reports and positive interpretations of Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's (AIOC) activity in Iran, and then through commencing propaganda against the incumbent prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq, and justifying Iran's 1953 coup under the name of "TPAJAX Project."⁶

The anti-Iranian propaganda in the 1970s, when Iran was a regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, and the obvious role that the BBCPS played in the months leading to the 1979 Iran's revolution, made Mohammad Reza Pahlavi suspicious and skeptical of Britain and British media. He thus blamed the BBCPS for promoting the revolution and called it his "number one enemy."⁷

Reengagement in the 2009 Iran's presidential election, the BBCPS appeared as a main conduit of information for Iranians, in sensitive political moments of Iran, but in a new form. The BBC Persian TV (BBCPTV) was launched on January 14, 2009, under the provision of FCO, a few months before the 2009 Iran's controversial presidential election. The BBCPTV came to prominence with covering the street riots from London for Iranians, attempted to circumvent the control of information by Iran's government. It caused great criticism of Iran's authorities, accused the BBCPTV for fomenting "illegal rallies" and manipulating "soft topple" of the Islamic Republic. Also, Iran's supreme leader addressed the BBCPTV as the "most malicious" of western powers and "Axis of 88's sedition".⁸

⁵ Reza Shah Pahlavi (15 March 1878 – 26 July 1944), was the Shah of Iran from 15 December 1925 until he was forced to abdicate by the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran on 16 September 1941.; Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was the Shah of Iran from 16 September 1941 until his overthrow by the Iranian Revolution on 11 February 1979.; Shapour Ghasemi, "History of Iran: Pahlavi Dynasty." *Iran Chamber Society*, edited by Mike Denino (2016).

⁶ Torey L. McMurdo, "The Economic of Overthrown: The United States, Britain, and the Hidden Justification of Operation TPAJAX," *Studies in Intelligence*, 56, No.2 (June 2012): 15-26.

⁷ Annabella Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh, *Persian Service: The BBC and British Interest in Iran*. (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2014).

⁸ The annual budget of £15 million is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.; The 88's sedition is the name that Iran's authorities address the postelection events in 2009.

As a matter of fact, after over 75 years of broadcasting in Iran, from short wave radio in 1941 to the settling a professional Persian TV in 2009, the name of the BBC alongside with Britain is intertwined with key events in political history of Iran. What could guarantee a heated discussion, especially in academic circles, is the BBCPS's ambivalent policies toward Iran. In other words, its twofold stance toward the Shah can be traced in the 1953 coup and in the 1979 revolution. The former was taken as the aid of the Shah and the latter as the debilitation of him. And finally, full support of the protestors in the aftermath of 2009 Iran's presidential election, provide a compelling reason that BBCPS acts as a tool of British interest and integral part of British policy-making in Iran. In fact, change the political position, but permanent presence, has encouraged debate on finding out the reasons that the BBCPS has been engaging in Iran's internal policy. To shed light on this issue, the discussion will continue on the evaluation of Iran-Britain relations in two historical junctures, before and after the 1979 Iranian revolution.

2. The BBCPS and Iran-Britain Relations during the Pahlavi Dynasty (1940-79)

Iran's geopolitical stance puts it at the central attention of the European superpowers since the 18th century. It brought Iran as a buffer state into the realm of fierce competition and valuable geopolitical alley for the colonialist powers. The relations between Britain and Iran have always been accompanied by intrigue background and unreliable relationship was resumed by foundation of constitutional monarchy in Iran in 1925. In this year, the fragmented and isolated Persia under the rule of Qajar was handed over to Reza Shah, founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, with the connivance of the British as the only obvious solution to Iran's serious problems.⁹

Modernization and industrialization of Iran were the major projects of Reza Shah as well as downgrade foreign interference to keep the independence of Iran. But Iran needed Western assistance in economic and indus-

⁹ Wrigh Denise, *The English Amongst the Persian: Imperial Lives in Nineteenth-Century Iran*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001), Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: Deciphering the Twenty-five-Year Conflict between the Iran and America*, (New York: Random House Group, 2004).

trial projects. Therefore, trading with Germany appealed to Iran because “the Germans did not have a history of imperialism in the region, unlike the British and Russians.” The close relation of Reza Shah with Germany excited Britain to accuse him of supporting Nazism and Axis powers during the WWII. Although he had declared Iran’s neutrality at an early stage of war, it did not fully convince the Allied powers.¹⁰

Along with strategic pressure on Iran, the BBCPS was obliged to start anti-Shah propaganda and bring Reza Shah under severe attacks. Defaming the Shah of Iran followed by the BBCPS with two purposes; first, to convince the Shah to the delegation of power and second, to pave the way for the occupation of Iran for Allied forces’ strategic goals in the World War II. Anglo-Soviet invasion on September 16, 1941, Britain dethroned the old Shah in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. But the way that the 22-year old Shah came to power, coupled with Britain’s interventionist policy toward Iran, planting the seed of Anglo-phobia and conspiratorial thought, both, in the Shah’s and Iranian mindset. This thought was reinforced by the 1953 coup and the nationalization of Iran’s oil company.¹¹

After World War II, most of the countries took effective measures toward democracy and the nationalization of their private property. In Iran, also nationalists demanded to revise concessionary agreement of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), founded in 1908, in order to get appropriate condition for Iranian workers. In 1950, Iran via the AIOC’s activities, had become hugely important to the global oil industry. It was the second largest exporter of crude petroleum and contained the third largest oil reserves, and in Abadan, the AIOC had the world’s largest refine. Thus, the nationalization of Iran’s oil movement, was followed by Mohammad Mossaddeq, the Iran’s democratically elected prime minister in the parliament and later in March 1951, the nationalization of AIOC was voted by Iran’s parliament.¹²

The nationalization of oil industry not only compromised Britain’s huge financial profits and divested its control over Iran’s oil and half a century

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ E. R. Nodere, “When the Foot Was on the Other Shah,” (1971).

¹² Edward Henniker, “Nationalization: The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, 1951 Britain vs. Iran,” *Seven Pillars Institute Moral Cents.* 2, No. 2, (Summer/Fall 2013): 16-34.

of interference in Iran's internal affairs, but also, bolster the danger of falling Iran behind the "Iron Curtain." As a result, the CIA with encouraging of Britain joined in the operation to remove the popular prime minister, Mosaddeq. No doubt, under the intense nationalist pressure in Iran, the operation needed a strong "social engineering" to shape public opinion. Regarding Mosaddeq's political position among the Iranians, personal attacks on him must be avoided due to his "widespread acceptance" as a national hero.¹³

In this regard, on the one hand, the CIA published several anti-Mosaddeq stories in both, American and Iranian press and contributed to the psychological war against the prime minister. On the other hand, the BBCPS as the Britain propaganda machine set up a secret operation, simultaneously with engineering a coup against Mosaddeq's government. Thus, the British ambassador to Tehran, Sir Francis Shepherd, sent a lengthy telegram on the "Persian publicity directive" for the BBCPS in order to convince Iranians for the admission of coup and prevent sever public reaction. According to this letter, Iranians should at first be praised for their desire of nationalization, but they must be certain that the present government policy would go nowhere, but lead to the collapse of the oil industry and thus of Iran's economy and the destruction of the Anglo-Persian friendship that in turn could relapse Iran into anarchy and communism."¹⁴

Indisputably, the 1953 coup was a turning point in Iran's modern history that revealed the blueprint for advancement of Britain policy in Iran. In spite of years of denials, in a documentary program, aired on the 60th anniversary of the nationalization of Iran's oil industry on March 19, 2010, The BBCPS admitted, the crucial role of the service as the "propaganda arm" of Britain's government in 1953 coup. Furthermore, the document released

¹³ Andrew Scott Cooper, "The Fall of Heaven: The Pahlavis and the Final Days of Imperial Iran. (Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2016): 65, F. Safiri and H. Shahidi "Great Britain xiii. The British Broadcasting Corporation BBC," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 2002, Accessed October 12, 2018, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/great-britain-xiii>.

¹⁴ Donald Newton Wilber, *Regime Change in Iran: Overthrow of Premier Mosaddeq of Iran*. (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2006), Floreeda Safiri, "Lawrence Paul Elwell-Sutton (1912-1984)", *Iranian Studies*, 17, No.4 (1984): 485-487.

by the CIA, confirmed all skepticism about the interference of the British Secret Intelligence Service in Iran's policy.¹⁵

Following the coup, Mohammad Reza Shah brought major changes in Iran's foreign policy in order to have more compatibility with Britain and especially US policies. Subsequent to the military withdrawal of Britain from the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf and dangerous strategic vacuum of power in this region, the US decided to have a trusted local power to support its interests in the Persian Gulf. The incumbent US president of that time, Richard Nixon, believed that Iran, which had been turned into an economic power due to the international oil crisis (1973), deserved to receive any necessary military equipment to enforce its new responsibilities. It allowed the Shah to play a major role in the Middle East and his dreams came true as the regional hegemony that forced Britain to keep its appeasement policy toward Iran.¹⁶

In October 1971, the Shah organized the 2500-year celebration of the Persian Empire to present Iran's old civilization and magnitude history of Iran and affirm the strength and glory of Iranian monarchy. The BBC World Service reporter, Richard Oppenheimer, was allowed to cover and report the splendor of Iran to the world; although, he had been dismissed for biased reporting of the Shah visiting Germany and his "Land Reform" and national development programs. But the years leading to 1979 recorded another destiny for Iran. In those years, the underground opposition movements turned to wide political unrests that replaced Pahlavi monarchy by Iranian Islamic Republic.¹⁷

Intense political conflicts and demonstrations in Iran grabbed international news agencies' headlines and it was another opportunity for the BBCPS to flaunt its proficiency and intervention in Iran's internal affairs. Regarding the growing resonance of internal censorship of the local media, Iranian

¹⁵ Malcolm Byrne, "CIA Confirms Role in 1953 Iran Coup," *The National Security Archive*, (2013).

¹⁶ Alex Guittard, "IRAN and the Nixon Doctrine: American Arms and the Rise and Fall of the Shah," Elements, Boston College Undergraduate Research (2010), Hugo Jackson, "British Diplomacy and Iranian Angst: British Iranian Relations, 1973-1979," *International Relations Students*, September 14, 2011, Accessed December 11, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2011/09/14/british-diplomacy-and-iranian-angst-british-iranian-relations-1973-1979>.

¹⁷ Safiri and Shahidi, 2002.

people resorted to foreign radio stations to hear the latest news. Therefore, the BBCPS come again in center of attention as the main information resource. What made the BBCPS the proper counterweights, was its closest relation to the opposition leaders and direct transmission of information and providing the revolutionaries with valuable reports.¹⁸

Moreover, reporting the violation of human rights in Iran by the BBC World Service in January 1978, was a serious challenge for the imperial government on that critical situation. The report was based on specific complaints due to accusations of the Shah to torturing over 3000 political prisoners. Therefore, the BBCPS coverage of Iran's events had turned to a serious dilemma in Iran-Britain relations and considering the BBCPS as an important part of Britain policy in Iran, the Britain was receiving Iranian officials' reproach.¹⁹

Alongside with dispatching high ranking delegations to London, the Iranian ambassador in London, Parviz Radji, expressed the Shah dissatisfaction with the "tone" of the BBCPS toward the events in Iran. However, the British government, emphasized on independency of the BBC's editorial guide, but nothing could convince the suspected Shah. According to Jerard Mensel, general director of the BBC world service (1972-1980), even mentioning the name of Khomeini in BBCPS made the Shah upset. He added that "but, we had to report his words as a part of the general pictures." And finally, when the Nofel Loshato became the most important news center in the world, because Ayatollah Khomeini resided there, the BBCPS took lead to reporting his revolutionary messages.²⁰

Although during the reign of the Shah, the BBCPS's media policy had never been a transparent policy, but on the verge of Iran's Islamic revolution, it became too explicit, while it was obvious that the Shah was no longer

¹⁸ Massoumeh Torfeh and Annabelle Sreberny, "The BBC Persian Service and the Islamic Revolution of 1979", *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 3, No. 2, (2010):216-241.

¹⁹ "The last conflicts of Britain and Iran," BBCPTV, December 12, 2010, Accessed December 1, 2018, http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/12/101221_l41_bbc_70th_anniversary.shtml.

²⁰ Adrew Walker, *A Skyful of Freedom: 60 Years of the BBC World Service*. (London: Broadcast Books, 1992), "Here is London," Directed by Ali Hamedani, (London: BBC, 2011). Accessed December 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3zeGFh5yG4>.

capable of keeping his crown. Nicholas Barrington, the Foreign Office man in charge of supervising BBC external services at the time, explains it as the general policy of the foreign-language broadcasting. He points out that rationale behind it was “to operate in the medium and long-term, influencing those who might one day form an alternative government.”²¹

However, the conflicts between the Shah and the BBCPS ended with the Islamic republic of Iran, but so far, conducting a constant propaganda battle against Reza Shah and preparing the public opinion for occupation of Iran and abdication of the Shah, involvement in the 1953 coup and playing a crucial role in conduction of the revolutionaries’ messages in 1979, are sufficient to believe the BBCPS as a part of the British exploitative power or in another words the British “soft power.”

3. The BBC and Iran-Britain Relations after Islamic Revolution (1979-2009)

The 1979 revolution, replacing the Iran monarchy with theocracy, and more prominent with the concept of neither East nor West policy, a policy initiated by Khomeini and his close associates condemned both the Soviet Union and the United States as equally malevolent forces in international politics. Accordingly, the diplomatic relations between Iran and Britain was suspended and Britain did not have an embassy until it was reopened in 1988. Consequently, the BBCPS correspondences were expelled in the early months of the establishment of the Islamic government. In fact, the British government and the BBCPS were more suspicious in the eyes of the governors of the Islamic Republic than the imperial government because they accused Britain and the USA of supporting the Shah, and of preventing the foundation of an Islamic government until the Islamic Revolution.²²

In 1989, a year after the re-establishment of the British embassy in Tehran, Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic republic, issued a “fatwa,” bound up Muslims across the world to kill the British author Salman Rushdie, the writer of “The Satanic Verses,” who was accused of what is called

²¹ Sreberny and Torfeh, 79.

²² Peter Neville, *Historical Dictionary of British Foreign Policy*, (UK: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 157.

“blasphemy” in Islam. Thereupon, the diplomatic relations with Britain were frozen on the order of Ayatollah Khomeini, and resumed at a chargé d’affaires level in 1990. In February 1990, Britain deported nine Iranian diplomats, due to hostage of four British nationals by pro-Iranian group in Lebanon, and Iran retaliated by closing the BBCPS office in Tehran. This reaction, practically, illustrated Iran’s conspiratorial concept as well toward the BBCPS as the Britain representative in Iran.²³

In 1992, when Britain held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Iran-Britain relations entered a new phase. Britain asked the European Union to commence a “critical dialogue” policy toward Iran to engage Iran with the best way to promote Iranian moderation and reforms. In this policy, the sensitive issues like Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism, Middle East peace process, violation of human rights, pursuing weapons of mass destruction, were on top of discussion matters. And after five years, when Britain’s Labor Party won the general election in May 1997, the government underlying the “ethical dimension” in foreign policy to put into effect, with the strategy of leadership in international organizations. Accordingly, Britain must play an active part in the international community to protect and enforce “social democratic values of human rights, democracy and good governance.” In this regard, after Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran seemed an obvious case in this respect.²⁴

Alongside with the European Union’s concern about shocking and deteriorating violation of human rights record in 2005, 2007 and 2008, the FCO’s human rights report, drive the Britain government commitment to follow a wider scope of policy toward Iran. The matter of concern targeted the wide violation of human rights in Iran, although support of terrorism remained unconvinced in international communities.²⁵

²³ Paul Hamilton, “A Contemporary Review of Western/Iran Relations,” *Royal College of Defense Studies*, (2009).

²⁴ Michael Rubin, “Europe’s Critical Dialogue with Iran: An Assessment,” *The Washington Institute*, January 10, 2000, Nicholas J. Wheeler and Tim Dunne, “Moral Britannia? Evaluating the Ethical Dimension in Labor’s Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Policy Centre*, (2004).

²⁵ MEPs review progress on human rights in the world in 2007, *Human Rights Committee*, April 12, 2016, Accessed December 7, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_in_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Iran#cite_note-27](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_in_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Iran#cite_note-27;).; “EU Annual Report on Human Rights 2008,” *Council of European Union*, (November 2008), James Crawford, 2009, *British Year Book of International Law* 2008:683.

In the annual report on human rights in 2008 by FCO, Iran has highest execution rate per capita in the world (at least 320 people in 2008), and specially execution of Juvenile offenders in 2008, were on top of concerns. The next worrying issue comprised freedom of speech, press and publication and also violation of freedom of belief; Iran has overtaken China in the number of detained journalists. Growing repression against women's rights defenders, violation of minorities right and ill treatment of trades unionists and labor activists, were all mentioned in the FCO annual report, as concerning matters with Iran. Also in this report the Britain has given favorable promise to Iran's human rights activists that along with EU partners, will monitor the human rights situation in Iran.²⁶

The very impressive point in this report is emphasizing on forerunner 2009 presidential election in Iran. In this report, it was noted that "we will be closely monitoring developments in the presidential elections in June 2009, as we have concerns over how free or fair the electoral system really is." Therefore, setting up the BBC Persian TV (BBCPTV), on 14 January 2009, a few months before the election was not too far-fetched.²⁷

The tenth presidential election in 2009 sets another milestone in Iran's history after 1979. Following a heated campaign between reformist candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi and incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iranians turned out in record numbers to vote in the presidential election. Shortly after the polls closed, the re-election of President Ahmadinejad was announced by Interior Minister, with a turnout of 62% of Iranian. The result of the election was rejected by the candidates as well as participants in election and Iran's authorities were accused of manipulating ballot boxes and rigging the election.²⁸

Growing post-election protests and tensions led to the reformist Green Movement that changed the Iran's status quo. The severe confrontations of people and governmental forces, grabbed the headlines of international

²⁶ "Annual Report on Human Rights 2008", *United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office*, (March 2009).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Casey L. Addis. "Iran's 2009 Presidential Elections", *Congressional Research Service*, (2009), 4, Steve Williams, "Launching Persian TV," *The News Magazine*, , 24, (January-February 2009): 21.

news agencies, among them the BBCPTV. Simultaneous with 2009 Iranian disputed election, the BBCPTV inaugurated with annual budget of £15 million founded by FCO, to “show the Iran’s regime another way to interface with the world.”²⁹

While the Iran’s state-own TV, IRIB, ran into blatant news censorship of wide protests, to keep national and political security, the BBCPTV among other opposite Persian satellite channels covered minute by minute of street riots for those who were prevented to know about the current situation. The constant coverage of the aftermath of the election, the BBCPTV received the strongest criticism by the Iran’s government. The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, also addressed the British government as the “most evil” while accusing Britain of orchestrate the street riots. He accused them and their media of flaming the street riots and attempting to “soft topple” of Islamic Republic of Iran.³⁰

Following the expelling the foreign journalists from Iran, on June 28, nine local staff members of the British embassy in Tehran were reportedly arrested due to “inflaming post-election tensions in Iran.” It promoted the EU nations’ anger and British foreign ministry called it a “bare misinterpretation” of what comprises a legitimate activity for embassies and foreign and local staff in each country based on the world standard. On the other hand, the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, condemned Iran’s use of violence, and asked Iran to show the world that “the election has been fair.” Although Iran’s officials, strongly condemn the Britain for “keeping interference in Iran’s internal affairs.”³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Juan Cole, “Supreme Leader Khamenei’s Friday Address on the Presidential Election,” Informed Comment, June 19, 2009, Accessed December 25, 2018, <http://www.juancole.com/2009/06/supreme-leader-khameneis-friday-address.html>.

³¹ “Local Staff of British Embassy in Iran said Arrested,” U.S. Open Source Center Document IAP20090628950012, Tehran Press TV Online in English, June 28, 2009.; “British official warns Iran on embassy staffer arrest”, *CNN*, Accessed October 5, 2018, July 5, 2009.; Ariel Farrar-Wellman, “United Kingdom-Iran foreign Relations,” *Iran Tracker*, 2010.; “Iran summons ambassador and threatens Britain with ‘a slap in the mouth’ as it accuses West of stirring up anti-government protesters”, *Mail Foreign Service*, December 30, 2009, Accessed November 19, 2018, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1239170/Iran-summons-British-ambassador-accuses-West-siding-anti-government-protesters-Tehran.html>.

While foreign reporters largely expelled or confined to their bureaus and many local journalists already languishing in jail, a new phase of collaboration appeared between the BBCPTV newsrooms and citizen-journalists. In this phase, the task of reporting the news had fallen to the millions of young, tech-savvy Iranian protesters, armed with video phones to support the BBCPTV with significant amount of user-generated content (UGC). According to the BBCPTV reports, they have been received 1000 email a day and 10 videos a minute from people wanting to take part in interactive programs. Richard Sambrook, Head of Global News for the BBC, pointed out that “the audience content had a double benefit because it gives a direct relationship between the service and people of Iran and it gives them a level of engagement, a level of accuracy which you would not get from formal television coverage.”³²

Continually referring to Amnesty International reports on human rights status in Iran, and bringing up the number of detainees and fatalities since the unrests, besides the Iran's detention conditions, sexual abusing, torturing and forced confession of detainees, the BBCPTV displayed a disastrous picture of violation of human rights in Iran. On this ground, one of the victims that the BBCPTV had paid particular attention was Neda Agha-Soltan, a young girl who was shot and died in front of camera with open eyes that became a symbol of Green Movement in Iran and for the dissident Iranian diaspora. Furthermore, the Oxford University, also, had set up the scholarship program in memory of Neda Agha-Soltan to help Iranian students to study at Oxford; that was interpreted by Iran's authorities as “another nail into the coffin” of relations between Britain and Iran.”³³

Although success or failure of the Green Movement is still open to discussion, what is almost certain is that the political landscape of Iran has been transformed by the reformist movement. Evidently, for an astute observer, regarding Iran's media repression situations, the role that transnational

³² Nice Newman, “The Rise of Social Media and Its Impact on Mainstream Journalism: A study of How Newspapers and Broadcasters in the UK and US Are Responding to a Wave of Participatory Social Media, and a Historic Shift in Control towards Individual Consumers,” *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, (September 2009).

³³ Barry Nellid, Iran condemns Oxford University over Neda scholarship,” *CNN*, November 11, 2009, Accessed December 27, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/11/11/iran.uk.neda/index.html>.

news channels as the main conduit of information, is not negligible. If we consider the “legitimacy” as the most important challenge for departure from collective identity to collect actions, a closer look at the BBCPTV’s programs, provide strong convincing evidences that giving legitimacy to the Green Movement through delegitimizing of the Islamic system has been always on top of the BBCPTV’s media framing.

However, the BBCPTV received severe criticism from Iranian officials in charge of coordinator of riots, but the 2009 Iran’s election enhanced its importance as a world news service. The BBCPTV, on November 4, 2009 was honored by Association for International Broadcasting for “clearest coverage of a single news event-television.”³⁴

4. Conclusion

The study set out to investigate the role that the BBCPS has played in Iran’s internal politics before and after the Islamic revolution. It has been engaging in Iran’s internal politics acting as a tool of Great Britain’s interest and integral part of British policy-making in Iran. While in exile, the BBCPS enabled Ayatollah Khomeini to deliver his message to the Iranian people to shore up against the Shah’s regime. By the same taken, the BBCPS assisted Iranians during the presidential election riots at 2009 to protest against the Iranian regime. To some extent BBCPS approach has been successful in influencing the perception of Iran’s society and shaping Iranian public opinion against the government.

By reviewing BBCPS activities in Iran, the study confirms the significant role that this media plays in Iran’s politics and more particularly the role that it has been playing in Britain diplomacy. The BBCPS has been acting as an effective check on the Iranian government’s power and influence over its citizens by taking one side of the political spectrum and acts like virtual propaganda machines to actively influence Iran’s politics.

³⁴ “Winners of the 2009 AIBs Announced”, *Association International Broadcasting*, January 2010.

Bibliography

Addis, Casey L. "Iran's 2009 Presidential Elections", *Congressional Research Service*, (2009).

Annual Report on Human Rights 2008, *United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office*, (March 2009).

Berinsky, Adam J. "American Public Opinion in the 1930s and 1940s, the Analysis of Quota-Controlled Sample Survey Data," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70, No. 4. (2006): 499–529.

Byrne, Malcolm. "CIA Confirms Role in 1953 Iran Coup," *The National Security Archive*, (2013).

Cohen, Yoel. *Media Diplomacy: The Foreign Office in the Mass Communications Age*. (New York: Frank Cass and Company, 1986).

Cooper, Andrew Scott. *The Fall of Heaven: The Pahlavis and the Final Days of Imperial Iran*. (Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2016), 65.

Crawford, James. *British Year Book of International Law 2008, 2009*.

Denise, Wrigh. *The English Amongst the Persian: Imperial Lives in Nineteenth-Century Iran*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001).

Dizard Jr. Wilson. *Digital Diplomacy: US Foreign Policy in the Information Age*. (Washington: Cooperation of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2001).

Donald Newton Wilber, *Regime Change in Iran: Overthrow of Premier Mosaddeq of Iran*. (Spokesman, 2006).

"EU Annual Report on Human Rights 2008," Council of European Union, (November 2008).

Ghasemi, Shapour. "History of Iran: Pahlavi Dynasty." *Iran Chamber Society*, February 18, 2019.

Guittard, Alex. "IRAN and the Nixon Doctrine: American Arms and the Rise and Fall of the Shah," *Elements, Boston College Undergraduate Research*, (2010).

Hamilton, Paul. "A Contemporary Review of Western/Iran Relations," *Royal College of Defense Studies*, (2009).

Henniker, Edward. "Nationalization: The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, 1951 Britain vs. Iran," *Seven Pillars Institute Moral Cents*, 2 No. 2. (Summer/Fall 2013): 16-34.

Kelman, Herbert. "Compliance, Identification, and Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change," *Harvard University*, (1958).

"Local Staff of British Embassy in Iran said Arrested," *U.S. Open Source Center Document IAP20090628950012*, Tehran Press TV Online in English, June 28, 2009.

McMurdo, Torey L. "The Economic of Overthrown: The United States, Britain, and the Hidden Justification of Operation TPAJAX," *Studies in Intelligence*, 56, No.2 (June 2012): 15-26.

Neville, Peter. *Historical Dictionary of British Foreign Policy*, (UK: Scarecrow Press, 2013).

Newman, Nice. "The Rise of Social Media and Its Impact on Mainstream Journalism: A study of How Newspapers and Broadcasters in the UK and US Are Responding to a Wave of Participatory Social Media, and a Historic Shift in Control towards Individual Consumers," *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, (September 2009).

Nodere, E. R. "When the Foot Was on the Other Shah," (1971).

Nye, Josef. "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, No.80, (1990): 153-171.

Pollack, Kenneth. *The Persian Puzzle: Deciphering the Twenty-five-Year Conflict between the Iran and America*, (Random House Group, 2004).

Reza Shah Pahlavi (15 March 1878 – 26 July 1944), was the Shah of Iran from 15 December 1925 until he was forced to abdicate by the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran on 16 September 1941.

Rokeach, Sandra J. Ball and DeFleur ML. "A dependency model of mass-media effects," *Communication Research* (1976): 3-21.

Rubin, Michael. "Europe's Critical Dialogue with Iran: An Assessment," *The Washington Institute*, January 10, 2000.

Safiri, Floreeda. "Lawrence Paul Elwell-Sutton (1912-1984)", *Iranian Studies*, 17, No.4. (1984): 485-487.

Sreberny, Annabella and Torfeh, Massoumeh. *Persian Service: The BBC and British interest in Iran*. (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2014).

“The annual budget of £15 million is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office”, The 88’s sedition is the name that Iran’s authorities address the postelection events in 2009.

Torfeh, Massoumeh and Sreberny, Annabelle. “The BBC Persian Service and the Islamic Revolution of 1979,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 3, No. 2, (2010): 216-241.

Walker, Adrew. *A Skyful of Freedom: 60 Years of the BBC World Service*. (London: Broadcast Books, 1992).

Wheeler, Nicholas J. and Dunne, Tim. “Moral Britannia? Evaluating the Ethical Dimension in Labour’s Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Policy Centre*, 2004.

Williams, Steve. “Launching Persian TV,” *The News Magazine*, No.24, (January/February 2009): 21.

Internet Sources

Barry Nelld, Barry. Iran condemns Oxford University over Neda scholarship,” CNN, November 11, 2009, Accessed December 27, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/11/11/iran.uk.neda/index.html>.

“BBC to launch Farsi-language TV channel,” *Al Arabiya News*, 8 January, 2009, Accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/01/08/63804.html>.

BBC, “The last conflicts of Britain and Iran,” BBCPTV, December 12, 2010, Accessed December 1, 2018, http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/12/101221_141_bbc_70th_anniversary.shtml.

“British official warns Iran on embassy staffer arrest”, *CNN*, July 5, 2009, Accessed October 5, 2018, http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/07/05/iran.election/index.html?eref=edition_meast&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+rss%2Fedition_meast+%28RSS%3A+CNNi+-+Middle+East%29.

Cole, Juan. “Supreme Leader Khamenei’s Friday Address on the Presidential Election,” *Informed Comment*, June 19, 2009, Accessed October 9, 2018, <http://www.juancole.com/2009/06/supreme-leader-khameneis-friday-address.html>.

Farrar-Wellman, Ariel. "United Kingdom-Iran foreign Relations," *Critical Threats*, 2018, July 27, 2010, Accessed November 27, 2018, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/united-kingdom-iran-foreign-relations>.

"Here is London," Directed by Ali Hamedani, (London: BBC, 2011), Accessed December 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3zeGFh5yG4>.

"Iran summons ambassador and threatens Britain with 'a slap in the mouth' as it accuses West of stirring up anti-government protesters", Mail Foreign Service, December 30, 2009, Accessed October 19, 2018, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1239170/Iran-summons-British-ambassador-accuses-West-siding-anti-government-protesters-Tehran.html>.

Jackson, Hugo. "British Diplomacy and Iranian Angst: British Iranian Relations, 1973-1979," *International Relations Students*, September 14, 2011, Accessed December 11, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2011/09/14/british-diplomacy-and-iranian-angst-british-iranian-relations-1973-1979>.

MEPs review progress on human rights in the world in 2007, *Human Rights Committee*, 12 April 2016, Accessed December 21, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_in_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Iran#cite_note-27.

Safiri and Shahidi, Encyclopedia Iranica, "Great Britain xiii. "The British Broadcasting Corporation BBC," 2002, Accessed October 13, 2018, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/great-britain-xiii>.