

Book Review

Soft Power and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Hossein Pourahmadi, *Soft Power and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Qom: Boostane Ketab, 2010, 688 pp.

Power is the key parameter determining countries' status and their ties in the realm of international relations. Developments in the global political economy, through changes in the nature and forms of power, have decreased the significance of soft power sources over hard power in the process of foreign policy-making in various countries in order to attain national interests and goals. The main objective of this book is to provide an understanding of soft power and its application in foreign policy, within the framework of developments related to the global political economy.

Each country's foreign policy is related directly to elements of its national power. Taking advantage of the changes in the nature of power, which have unfolded particularly as a result of the unprecedented expansion of influence of tools of power, national

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and international actors pursue their interests in a far broader, more effective and more diverse arena, often relying on a variety of types of soft power in parallel with hard power.

The author argues that foreign policy, particularly through use of suitable diplomacy, is successful when it is based on precise appraisals of international and domestic realities in relation to other players in the world system, while understanding the conditions of specific times and places. Furthermore, it is argued that foreign policy should be proportional to long-term and short-term needs, and on occasion, devoid of various conflicts as it is backed by domestic forces and factors. Moreover, foreign policy has to be deemed acceptable and interactive on part of international institutions to be successful. The book also argues that it needs to be augmented by economic, political, industrial, cultural and strategic soft and hard power sources of the country in question.

Inattention to developments occurring in the new global setting, especially in terms of power shifts and notably the increasing importance of soft power in directing national interests, will cause inefficiency and further costs for states in the realm of foreign policy and diplomacy. Therefore, presenting an understanding of soft power and its application in foreign policy within the framework of developments in the global political economy, which is an undeniable necessity, is one of the book's main objectives.

The main question the book tries to answer is what soft power is and what impact it has on the foreign policy and diplomacy of states, and the Islamic Republic of Iran in particular. The book contains seven chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. Each chapter intends to answer the main question and secondary questions. In order to explain and understand the nature and foundations of soft power, including the bases of the Islamic Republic of Iran's soft power, chapter one addresses the concept of power in dominant theories of international relations in order to examine the nature, dimensions and elements of types of power.



The second section of this chapter extrapolates the theory of soft power. In order to define soft power more precisely, the author deals with forms and dimensions of such power in section three.

Since security represents one of the most important functions of power, security and threats are examined in the fourth section of this chapter. New information-communication technologies provide one of the most prominent arenas for the appearance and use of soft power, which is addressed in the fifth section of this chapter. An appraisal of the degree of access and sources of soft power in the Islamic Republic of Iran is made in the sixth section of this chapter.

To describe and explain how soft power influences foreign policy-making, including foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the author first deals with the concept and nature of foreign policy in major theories of international relations, presenting a constructivist model of normative foreign policy in line with the use of soft power. Then, he assesses the status of power in general and that of soft power in particular in the foreign policy-making process in the second section of this chapter. He continues with explaining that since the positivist approach in the study of foreign policy, which deems material rationality as its main assumption, has been faced with post-behavioralist epistemological and ontological challenges, elements such as the impact of culture as a parameter of soft power in shaping and influencing foreign policy are something which have been neglected in scientific and positivist studies.

Information-communicative instruments as the origin of knowledge-based power and one of the arenas of soft power have significant functions in directing and influencing foreign policy is discussed in the third section of this chapter. The fourth section deals with culture as one of the main areas of the appearance and implementation of soft power within normative foreign policy. In the fifth section, elements such as the arena for the emergence of this power in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy are



examined. The sixth section addresses the necessity of the smart promotion of Iranian foreign policy, which is achieved through a purposeful synthesis of elements and tools of the country's soft and hard power.

The third chapter of the book seeks to study the quality of the relationship and influence of soft power in the formation and use of efficient diplomacy in states' foreign policies. It also debates interaction among various factors of domestic and foreign elements of soft and hard power in influencing efficient diplomacy as well as solutions for the effective promotion of diplomacy. For this reason, the first section addresses the impact of the global political economy, which has been expanded and structured the rise of soft power and complex interdependence among all actors and power elements in the process of world politics, as the main arena for efficient diplomacy. In the second section, the author studies multilateralism, which is a result of complicated interdependence in the world system, as the principle of efficient diplomacy. The third section exemplifies the function of media as well as national and global information and communications networks in efficient diplomacy for furtherance of states' strategic goals and interests. It also discusses operational models of efficient diplomacy in the fourth section, while the formation and direction of efficient diplomacy are examined in the fifth section of the third chapter.

In the fourth chapter, the author seeks to offer a theoretical framework and related concepts for studying the role of the information-communication revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy. He deals with the implications of the information-communication revolution for world politics, including its pathology and threats. The author also explores the impact of the information-communication revolution on foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the third section. In the fourth section, requirements for Iranian foreign policy in the direction of enhanced exploration of the information-communication revolution are



stressed.

Seeking to study the place and role of culture as an element of soft power in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the fifth chapter first offers concepts and a theoretical framework. The writer explores the role of cultural values and norms in the arena of world politics before and after the Cold War, especially following the September 11th events, and their repercussions. Cultural power in Iranian foreign policy is studied in the third section, using a critical and pathological approach that extrapolates the role of culture in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. The latter is followed by an analysis of identity parameters influencing foreign policy as well as the impact of the Islamic Revolution's identity on the foreign policy-making process. The fourth section is also devoted to a discussion of certain measures and mechanisms for promoting the efficiency of cultural power in Iranian foreign policy at both internal and external levels.

Chapter six discusses the effects of feminism as an important element of soft power in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The author initially offers a brief review of literature constituting the theoretical basis of feminism. In the second section, he deals with the interaction of states and international governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with a feminist approach in order to better understand the role and place of feminism in world politics. Considering the importance and special place of feminism as one of the analytical parameters of soft power in world politics, the author explores interaction between the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and feminism. The fourth section of this chapter includes a review of suitable measures for the promotion of efficiency in Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy when it comes to implementing women's rights.

In order to present a clear view of the role and place of NGOs in promoting the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy, the seventh chapter studies the theoretical framework governing NGOs



and their importance in changing the global political economy. In the second section, the place and role of NGOs in various trends of world politics are examined. The status and part played by NGOs in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran are addressed in the third section. Lastly, certain measures are proposed for the promotion and effectiveness of NGOs in Iranian foreign policy in the fourth section of the chapter.

Overall the book is a contribution to the study of foreign policy of Iran. It touches upon an issue which is quite multidimensional in foreign policy analysis in general and in the Iranian case in particular.