



## Iran's objectives and approach towards Afghanistan

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**Abstract:** This paper emphasizes how Iran created a "brotherhood sense" node with its Afghanistan audience. Iran's affinity with Afghanistan makes it possible for Iran to express its foreign policy priorities by demonstrating how Iranian presence favors the Afghan people and appeals for current Afghan ideals. This paper also finds that Iran devotes significant resources to these discourses through different institutions in Afghanistan. These activities' main focus is on language, educational, and cultural concerns, which draw on the popular relations between the Afghan audience and Iran. Finally, this analysis reveals the geopolitical calculation of Iran's response to soft power. Iran uses soft influence specifically, which breaks from the original concept. Activity by Iran indicates that the origins of attraction can be built by speeches focused on each target audience.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Iran, Foreign Affairs, Identity, and Soft Power.

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### 1. Introduction

In the interconnected world, any person, agency, organization, or business can express its opinion more easily and obtain a public forum. It is not shocking that states have been forced ever more directly to engage the people and to fulfill their demands. Whereas public diplomacy and soft power in decades past appeared as the jurisdiction of just a few nations, even minor international players now concerned with public attitudes and how they use different tools to maximize their impact. The study of soft power in foreign relations is a comparatively recent issue. However, soft power becomes more important since more global public views soft power as a more rational way of achieving national goals rather than acts using hard power. In terms of the increasing significance of soft power across the global, the soft power analytical research focuses exclusively on a Western viewpoint, whose nations wield soft power and exercise those control. The non-dominant and non-Western states' soft power strategies remain widely understudied, and we know very little about how soft power functions in non-Western contexts.

The purpose of this paper is to use soft power by conducting a qualitative case of Iran's approach to soft power, especially in its efforts to achieve its foreign policy goals in Afghanistan. As the traditional principles of soft power complexities, Iran is a developing and non-Western state, making it impossible to gain much progress in the

use of soft power because there is no resource to be viewed as a suitable or appealing model. This paper also contradicts the conventional definition of soft power, emphasizes the importance of going beyond the standard soft power paradigm in the international relations discipline, and broadening its theoretical application. I would clarify how nations that are less likely to have soft influence can also exert themselves and demonstrate how Iran's unorthodox case study undermines the global order's conventional Western hegemonic vision. I assume that Iran's definition of soft power differs from the West's sense by treating soft power attraction capabilities as localized and contextual rather than universal and normative. Also, Iran recognizes and cultivates a human attraction resource targeted to each target audience.

## **2. Research Question**

How is Iran using soft power in favor of its foreign policy goals in Afghanistan?

## **3. Methodology**

The paper is largely a case study using Afghanistan as an exploratory framework. A question of exploratory study aims at identifying or exploring an occurrence. In contrast, a descriptive question tries to characterize an event adequately, and an explanatory question attempts to interpret an event, defining causal associations between variables. This approach encourages the use of multiple intellectual instruments to interpret the historically ignored case of Iran: a new explanation of a given fact from a different point of view.

## **4. Iran's Foreign Affairs**

### **4.1. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action**

The JCPOA lists the foreign policy goals of Rouhani. Iran is aimed at ensuring complete compliance by all the signatories of the agreement of the JCPOA. The JCPOA is by no means subject to any amendment, renegotiation, correction, or other modifications from Iran's perspective. The agreement's key aim was to lift international sanctions imposed on Iran over its nuclear program to allow Iran to seek full economic growth and prosperity through its economic benefits. Iran has also declared that as long as this primary target is achieved, and all other stakeholders are committed to the JCPOA. If not, it is not in the interests of Iran to stay in the nuclear agreement. In this sense, all political groups in Iran are unanimous. The major thrust of controversy and conflict here is about the JCPOA breaches by America, the extent to which Iran profits from it, the protection of the JCPOA following the potential America withdrawal, and Iran's reaction after America ends the nuclear deal. Any opponents of the Rouhani government claim that he needs to take a stronger stance on breaches of the JCPOA and new restrictions imposed by America. They also claim that the practical demise of the agreement is a retreat from America. There is another party, including the Rouhani government, which argues that the JCPOA will survive if Europe stays faithful to the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan and challenges America's pressure. They also agree that it is important to retain the JCPOA and also essential to sustain the stability and dignity, and global position of the European Union.

### **4.2. Expand regional ties and improve neighborhood policies**

The Iranian Foreign Ministry declared expanding relations with other nations in the region as one of its high priorities and fostering a strong neighborhood strategy. President Rouhani plans to devise and introduce an all-out, active community strategy to play a more positive role in the city in his second term in office. His government particularly focuses on correcting misunderstandings in ties with some regional countries to minimize tensions and create confidence in a more prosperous and peaceful environment. His government's critics contend that Iran's

regional diplomacy has been undermined and marginalized in reality due to President Rouhani's goals in nuclear negotiation, officially known as JCPOA, and their maintenance and implementation during his first term of office. Therefore, during the second term in the office of Rouhani, regional policies shall take greater precedence. Unlike some views and studies, Iran's regional external policy is by no means invasive, aggressive, expansionary, or hegemonic. However, it's defensive and security oriented. Over the last 200 years, Iran has never invaded any of its neighbors. It has simply sought to ensure national security under the nation-state logic and its requirements in a hot-threats revolutionary, volatile and crisis-ridden region. Therefore, the Iranian regional foreign policy is not aimed at hegemony but is based on multilateralism and overall partnerships. As in all cases, Iranian activism in Syria and Iraq will then be based on the principle of ensuring national security and survival through repelling security threats and the preservation of territorial integrity. For example, Iran's principal attitude to Syria and Iraq was to maintain both countries' stability and regional integrity, as their disintegration and division would pose direct threats to Iran's national security and regional integrity. As a result, there have been no differences of opinion regarding all the political factions in Iran. Iran believed that establishing regional peace, security, and stability calls for dialogue and regional cooperation. To build confidence with the regional countries and reduce tensions, international powers must also play a responsible and positive role within a comprehensive regional security system. Tehran also maintains that any form of non-inclusive and comprehensive regional security system will not ensure regional security and stability. Similarly, any kind of provocative policy to increase tensions in the region will help detriment regional actors.

#### **4.3. Economic Diplomacy**

Another important priority that the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has announced is to promote comprehensive economic diplomacy to facilitate the country's economic development. Iran strives to expand its economic relations with other countries to this end. The Rouhani government argues that Iran's national economy has until now served foreign policy. Still, the time has come for foreign policy to be in the interest and support of the country's economic development. Similarly, the Supreme Leader of Iran has also set economic developments as one of the country's main objectives that the government pursues both at the local and regional levels. European Union Member States and other countries such as Japan, China, and Russia can play an important role here.

#### **4.4. Combat existential threats and hostile policies by America**

President Rouhani also has a major foreign policy objective of countering America's hostile and threatening Iran policies. Iran's position regarding America is also founded on the same principles of reducing tensions, peaceful coexistence, respecting each other, and non-interference in Iran's internal affairs. The main foreign policy guidelines of Iran towards America are its national security and national interests. Of course, every country will defend itself against all existential threats by another country and take steps to boost its defensive and disruptive capacity. In addition to Washington's efforts to change Iran's structure and political system, the new American policies on Iran are completely based on coercion and threat. It is true even though this strategy, based on Iran's isolation, restriction, and containment policies, has proved to be a failed and counter-productive strategy. On the other hand, America's commitment policy to change Iran's behavior and structure failed, given that Iran's status, position, and legitimate national interest were not well recognized and understood, in particular, in the region. A successful policy with Iran will be based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and non-interfere in Iran's internal affairs. This policy should also recognize Iran's regional status, importance, and legitimate national interests, especially at regional levels, and promote mutual interest-based interaction. It must also distinguish between different issues and avoid interconnection problems despite the substantial ideological differences between them. In practice, Iran has shown that it is prepared to cooperate based on these principles and interact with all legitimate countries. The JCPOA was a good example of Iran's policy of a win-win approach. This claim is testified in Iran's cooperation to solve various

crises, including Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Iraq. It is important to note that Iran has consistently met its threat and containment policy in response to its peaceful cooperation policies.

#### **4.5. Iran's Foreign Policy Principles in Afghanistan**

Since the Islamic Revolution, Kabul has been the center of the foreign policy of Iran. In the first place, Afghanistan is of geopolitical importance for Iran, which means the geopolitical and geographical situation of Iranian foreign policy has been considered. In other words, Afghanistan was and still is regarded as Iran's neighbor, and besides the nature of the politics and government in that country, Iran must agree with the government. In terms of ideology, language, civilization, and culture, Afghanistan is also important to Iran. Deep religious, historical, and cultural links exist between Afghanistan and Iran. Thus, Iran has always tried to gain from the geo-cultural principle to promote its interests and objectives in Afghanistan. So, in Afghanistan, Iran tried to strengthen and support groups that are religiously and culturally closer to Iran, such as the Hazaras, and backing them to assured their position in the future Afghan government and politics. In turn, it could lead to more Iranian influence in Kabul. Afghanistan is also of geostrategic importance to Iran. The presence and influence of major powers in Afghanistan have created a severe danger to the national security of Iran. Therefore, Iran sought to prevent the influence and penetration of the great powers in Afghanistan. In the meantime, the Persian civilization zone axis would be implemented as a strategic axis by developing Iranian influence in Afghanistan. The scope of Iran's influence and presence may provide the basis for accomplishing its economic benefits. It seems that Afghanistan's importance for Iran in many ways made it hard for Iran to choose what dimension to prioritize and thus unable to take a clear decision about Afghanistan. As one author contends, Iran's strategy towards Afghanistan suffered from diverse views within decision-making circles and thus non-decision and confusion.

#### **4.6. Iran's approach to Afghanistan**

With regard to Afghanistan, the Iranian support with the U.S. attack on the Taliban and the very significant positive role played by Tehran at the 2001 Bonn Conference show that U.S. hostility and the fear of the U.S. attack are by no means the only factors that determine Tehran's security priorities. Tehran explicitly acknowledges that a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan was not consistent with the security interests of Iran. It is also aware that by eliminating the Taliban and Saddam Hussain, America has relieved Iran of its instant neighbors from two significant security threats. The fact that Iran's conduct toward Afghanistan is characterized by ambiguity, it gives the Karzai Government economic and political support and provides covert military support to certain Taliban insurgency components. Such ambiguity can be seen as a timely attempt to hedge its bets, but there is more. Tehran favors certain destabilization of America's presence and the NATO in Afghanistan, but the government of Karzai and the Taliban's return will not collapse. Therefore, it wants an American withdrawal but not a precipitated, disruptive retreat, a Talibanization of Afghanistan, and chaos on its eastern border. The concern about "regime security," a concern that does not coincide totally with Iran's security, complicates this delicate act of balance. The Iranian regime knows it will not guarantee its survival until it recognizes its existence on America's part: that is until Washington abandons its more or less explicit.

#### **4.7. Islamic Culture and Relations Organization**

The ICRO is the first strategic entity to set up, coordinate, and implement Iran's cultural diplomacy strategies with over 80 foreign cultural representative offices. The ICRO is directly subject to the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. Reflecting the significance of the organization within the Ministry, a 15 members management council chaired by the Minister of Culture shall oversee the organization. In an interview with the Fars News Agency, Ebrahimi-Turkman, who ended his tenure as ICRO's head in 2017, has described cultural synergy' as a major achievement in ICRO: The most significant work of the last three years has been on synergy. He said "We welcomed more than 43

organizations to the Islamic Culture to see if they have the capacity to undertake operations abroad. Luckily, this was also fruitful, and we were able to deliver Iranian cultural capabilities abroad". He also stated that most of ICRO's investment is spent developing ICRO associated cultural centers. The budget of ICRO was 90 million dollars in 2016, with a slight rise from its 2015 budget. The primary goal of ICRO is to lead and endeavor, with international audiences, to introduce the cultural diplomacy of Iran, with the emphasis on bringing cultural and historical civilization to other nations. Their roles include cultural relations with other communities and nations; unification of cultural ties between Iran and other countries; the proper appearance of Iranian civilization and culture; the preparation of grounds for reconciliation among Muslims. These goals are squarely in line with Iran's expressed anti-hegemonic rhetoric for its foreign policy goal in Afghanistan. The website of ICRO on Afghanistan illustrates the history of cultural ties between nations and literary personalities from both nations using brotherhood and family terms. It also articulates the 'brotherhood' seen in Iran's speeches on Pan-Islamism, anti-imperialism, and others. ICRO's Jalalabad, Herat, and Kabul Cultural Centers operate along with the Iranian Embassy and the four Consulates in Afghanistan. These centers are made up of cultural consultants who oversee the activities, events, and seminars of the ICRO independently of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's official intervention.

Former deputy head of ICRO Ghahraman Soleimani, referring to profoundly ingrained, ancient relations between Afghanistan and Iran, says that "We like Afghanistan, its entire vibrant cultural and ethnic diversity organization, and hope that the degree of dealings between Afghanistan and Iran will grow. Intercultural exchanges will become more important than ever before for the two states' officials". ICRO's Training Department monitors the survival of manuscripts and documents exchanged by the authorities of both nations. Soleimani said "Both nations have ancient civilizations in which a dynamic society is developed. The proof of this is a transition from the oldest civilization in Afghanistan and Iran to the Islamic civilization and its positive position in thriving Islamic civilization and culture". As a case of the ICRO's educational work in Afghanistan, one of the key needs of society in Afghanistan was to advance their education facilities. The ICRO in Afghanistan has therefore donated 20 Qurans, 350 Roshd journals, and 2,400 books to 11 institutes in the Badakhshan. It aims to establish tourists' cultural and science skills in Badakhshan libraries, where it claims to be a location for scientists, investigators, and the public.

#### **4.8. Activities of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Afghanistan**

In terms of employees and budget, Iran's MFA is one of the government's main ministries, and the Majles personally appoints the Foreign Minister. Within Iran's structure, the supreme leader is responsible for international relations. Even the president needs to check on the appointment of ministry leaders, and they have to fulfill the clear endorsement of the Office of the Supreme Leader. The MFA is solely responsible for overseeing the 111 Iranian embassies and consulates around the world. In institutional terms, each embassy has directly responsible for cultural programs and public diplomacy in the host country in addition to its economic and political portfolios. The MFA also houses the Public Diplomacy Centre of Iran, led by the MFA Speaker. This organization has grown in recent years and is managing the MFA's website, holding interviews, addressing media questions, and supporting the ministry's social media activity. The MFA has played a growing role in public diplomacy in Afghanistan by directly financing programs promoting Iran's wider soft power plan. For instance, the MFA coordinates to invite Afghan professors to academic conferences and support Iranian involvement in Afghan conferences. Mohammad Kazem Kahduni, Cultural Affairs Attaché in Afghanistan, said in an interview, "Starting from the beginning of our work in 2003 to now, we have given more than 100,000 literary and science books to libraries, universities, and colleges in Afghanistan." In 2012, Naser Jahan-Shahi (Iranian cultural attaché) hosted a dinner inviting leaders of Afghan broadcast firms and print outlets to suggest establishing an embassy-funded "Journalists' Union" to organize pro-Iran media work.

#### **4.9. The Beneficial Economic Impact of Iran**

In 2001, Iran's approach towards Afghanistan indicated a need for neighborhood peace. Iran has promised over \$550 million in foreign aid. The bulk is invested in schools, electricity facilities, and highways. The government of Afghanistan, specifically President Karzai, views Iran's economic position as positive. Iran is now one of the main trade partners in Afghanistan. The two countries' bilateral trade amounted to almost \$5.5 billion in 2013. While this number doesn't seem to be important according to American expectations, it indicates a close economic partnership between Afghanistan and Iran. Iran exports to Afghanistan, a nation very dependent on Iran for its cement, fuel, drugs, and food goods. Trade between the two is still lopsided. Iran exports to Afghanistan much more than it imports from its weaker neighbor though Iranian export accounts for nearly 75% of the commodities exchanged. Overall, Iran favors the economic deficit between the two nations. It is primarily attributed to the weaker commercial and manufacturing base in Afghanistan. In some ways, Iran has used its economic superiority for strategic reasons. The stopping of oil in the winter to Afghanistan, which had a detrimental effect on ordinary Afghans, seems to have been an effort to pressure ISAF and America in Afghanistan. Overall, Iran's trade ties with Afghanistan have a positive impact. In addition to the advantages of bilateral trade, Iran supports Afghanistan's growth by other regional powers. For example, India allows Iran to establish the port of Chabahar to promote Indian trade with Central Asia and Afghanistan. Chabahar will be linked to Afghanistan by Iran-India railways and roads. Geopolitically driven is an Iranian-Indian endeavor; New Delhi wants to circumvent Pakistan and establish stronger links with Kabul. Afghanistan wants to diversify the country's trading routes and become less dependent on Pakistan. Chabahar could pull business away from Karachi, which is heavily dependent on Afghanistan. Pakistan has also used strategic advantages to threaten Afghanistan.

As a famous Afghan businessman stated, Pakistanis have made it costly at the moment. It has placed pressure on the government and the people of Afghanistan. They bill over \$500 million a year. It might push businessmen to use Chabahar ports. The cooperation between India and Iran also allows Tehran to reduce its foreign isolation and increase its regional effects. But the net result would also benefit Afghanistan. Its western regions may become more advanced and less reliant politically and economically on Pakistan, which is traditionally distrusted by Afghanistan's government.

#### **4.10. Military support to Afghan rebels**

Iran's military support included rifled-powered grenades, light weapons, and even military preparation for Iranian Taliban forces. Iran's assistance to the Taliban rebels was not as comprehensive as its support for Shia insurgents, which in Iraq inflicted thousands of American troops' deaths. The intelligence and army of Iran with the Taliban are also considerably less important than relations with other anti-American organizations like the Lebanese Hezbollah. It may be partly because the Taliban is a fundamentalist Sunni party contrary to Shia. However, Tehran's calibrated support of the Taliban could be related to very particular targets; its legitimacy with certain Taliban groups should be improved, communication with the Pashtun citizens of Afghanistan strengthened, and its levers with the Afghan central government could be expanded without unnecessarily harming mutual relations. It will also give America a warning: Iran can dial the pressure against American forces in Afghanistan in a military confrontation. Tehran's support for insurgents in Afghanistan may also be inspired by Iran's war against Baluchi's separatist insurgents. The Sunni Baluch, who lives in southeastern Iran in border areas near Afghanistan and Pakistan, is one of Iran's most marginalized ethnic minority groups. Iranian Baluchistan remained undeveloped even under the Shah and defied central authority. The Islamic Republic has reacted with repression to Baluchi's socio-economic demands, especially under the Ahmadinejad Presidency.

In addition, Tehran has adopted a Persianization strategy whereby Farsi-speaking Iranians are based in major cities such as Baluchi and Zahedan. Iranian Baluchistan has seen an uptick in violence in recent years. Jundallah, an insurgency faction of Sunni militant Baluchi, has been blamed for attacks against Iranian troops and

officials, including a suicide bombing in Pishin district, where top Revolutionary Guard commanders were killed. The Iranian government has repeatedly stated that in addition to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the Baluchi militants, like Jundallah, are funded by America. Ayatollah Khamenei also reported that Iran had received intercepts showing conspiracy in America. There is no definite indication that America funded Jundallah. It would not be far-fetched to believe that Saudi Arabia, Israel, and other anti-Islamic factions, sponsored Iranian Baluchis. Israel, widely accused of carrying out nuclear program assassination attacks—including the murder of Iranian scientists—has recently associated with the Iranian Kurdish rebel group. Saudi Arabia also has a tradition of funding Tehran through Sunni forces. Iran sees that America and its leaders are in favor of separatist aggression against Baluchi. The Taliban armament can be used as a countermeasure. The scope of Iran's aid to rebel groups suggests that this is not a product of the rogue intervention. However, it appears that Iran's military funding has diminished in recent years. It may be attributed to various reasons, including reactions from the Afghan government and rising anger among Afghanistan citizens over the alleged intervention of Iran in Afghan affairs.

## **5. Problems to Iranian authority in Afghanistan**

### **5.1. Tensions of water sharing**

In the last few years, both Afghanistan and Iran have suffered from protracted droughts. Afghanistan is directly hit by the worst drought in 2019. Roughly 11 million Afghans have been seriously affected by the drought, and at least 350,000 have been displaced. The water shortage problem in Afghanistan is motivated by a combination of environmental and human factors. Although the lack of water has been compounded by climate change, human interventions have been the main factor. The position has been played by unsustainable livestock and agriculture husbandry methods, fiscal deficits, years of confrontation, and the absence of drought control institutions. Increasingly regular droughts trigger friction in surface water management between Iran and Afghanistan. The River Helmand is a specific point of discontent between the two nations, each arguing that the other takes more water than is entitled to under a deal on water sharing in 1973. According to Iran, the two hydroelectric dams in Afghanistan have decreased water levels across the border, diminished water share from the river, and harmed the ecosystem. Meanwhile, Afghanistan maintains that Iran draws more than 26 cubic meters per second by diverting water into man-made reservoirs. In 2014, Afghanistan tried to prioritize water supply production and dam development. This development, Pakistan and Iran, their neighbors downstream, saw it as a challenge to their economic ambitions, as less enthusiastic. In the past, there was a belief that Iran had supported the Taliban to try to disrupt Afghanistan's ambitions to build a dam. Historically, promising signals have been seen that Afghanistan and Iran will one day agree on cross-border water problems. The Helmand River's Commissioners' delegation was formed several years ago and meets periodically to foster water cooperation. Likewise, both nations have sought to rehabilitate the Hamoun wetlands that stretch along the border between Iran and Afghanistan. While these moves demonstrate that both nations are willing to agree on water matters, mistrust on both sides remains strong.

Although Iran has generally supported development in Afghanistan, particularly where it will help Tehran, its water needs have undermined the pragmatic Afghan development strategy. Meanwhile, Kabul has no incentive to negotiate the existing arrangement because any discussions would lead to a lower proportion of water urgently needed for economic growth. Afghanistan also insists that it cannot measure flows due to a 30-year lag in data acquisition, poor technological capability, international law, and negotiation personnel shortage. However, the statement may be a stalling tactic, as America has offered negotiators to argue for Kabul. Though there is a suspicion of water problems between Iran and Afghanistan, both nations need to revise water conservation practices as a matter of urgency. Iran has caused substantial ecological harm by aggressive agricultural activities, which are core drivers of water insecurity. Meanwhile, decades of violence also hindered Afghanistan's capacity to develop sustainable practices. The unregulated water use and lack of respect for riparian's could cause additional tensions,

particularly when water stress is high on both sides. Before Iran and Afghanistan find permanent alternatives to their cross-border conflict over water, these conflicts will stay in the future.

### **5.2. The conflict between Iran and America**

The killing in the US drone attack in Baghdad of top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani caused fears of a border war between Iran and America. Iranian military commanders announced that Iran did not hasten to take retaliation and would cautiously follow its objectives. A missile was fired at a military base in Iraq. Amidst such heightened tension, the confrontation between Iran and America risks breaking into Afghanistan. It could become a new war theater between the two nations if Iran attempts to make its way against America. In the meantime, the Taliban refused to stop the violence until the peace settlement, including the evacuation of American troops from the region, was signed. A visible target for Iran-backed insurgents is the US presence of around 13,500 troops in Afghanistan. And, based on the saying, "My enemy is my friend's enemy," there is a risk that an Iran-Taliban nexus will develop. Iran now has far stronger links than before with the Taliban and can militarily support the party that has been warring with America for the past eighteen years. Tehran welcomed a Taliban delegation for dialogue a week after peace talks between the Taliban and America failed. To increase its control in western Afghanistan, the Government of Afghanistan has already accused Tehran of supplying the resources, arms, and explosives to Taliban.

In recent decades, Iran has housed millions of Afghan refugees fleeing war. From the mid-1990s, Tehran was directly opposed to the rise, after the 9/11 attacks, of the hardlines Sunni Taliban in Afghanistan and supported the US war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. However, after President Bush listed Iran among the so-called 'axis of evil,' it turned against Afghanistan's US military presence. With the re-emergence of the Taliban after 2003, Tehran changed its Afghan approach by providing silent assistance to its insurgent group, such as Mansour, the Afghan Taliban leader, who was in Iran shortly before he was assassinated in a drone strike in Pakistan in 2016. Afghan experts are worried over the potential encouragement of a proxy war in Afghanistan by the assassination of Soleimani. Tehran could use its impact to sabotage the peace process between the Taliban and America or force the Taliban to end talks with America. Thousands of hardline Fatemiyoun soldiers, most of whom were members of the Shiite Hazara minority, could be recruited in Iran and trained by the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps. Kabul called on America and Iran to avoid an outbreak of violence following the Soleimani assassination. After a phone call from Mike Pompeo, President Ashraf Ghani announced that Afghanistan was impartial in the dispute between Iran and America and pointed out that Afghan soil was not being used for international disputes. If Iran uses Afghanistan as a battlefield for retaliation against America, what could be China and Pakistan's responses, both bordering Afghanistan? Pakistan has made attempts to promote the peace process between the Taliban and America and is likely to resist any moves to spoil talks. A secure Afghanistan would mean a stable Pakistan. America would possibly use Pakistan's power on the Taliban to deter any effort to sabotage the peace process. Islamabad has announced that it will not be part of Iran and America's dispute and has offered to serve as a crisis mediator. China, which shares a short border with Afghanistan, will likewise not help Tehran's attempt to sabotage the Afghan peace process. China, as Afghanistan's biggest foreign investor, will closely track the situation in Afghanistan. China wants to ensure that Afghanistan's unrest does not spill over into Xinjiang and stability in Afghanistan to protect the economic investment.

### **5.3. Migrants from Afghanistan**

Afghans pass the border regularly into Iran and are also captured and deported back to Afghanistan. They are being handled inhumanely by smugglers and sometimes losing their savings. Deportees are exploited by the Iranian authorities, especially if tensions between the two nations are high. Many of these Afghans are faced with economic and political challenges, and numerous attempts to enter Iran are not unusual for them. Others go to Iran for seasonal work and come back home after earning income. When Iran has the highest COVID-19 cases, thousands of people

fled to Afghanistan. Many of the returnees were from Mashhad, one of the hotspots of Iranian coronavirus. As a result, some Afghans took the virus to the province of Herat, which became a COVID-19 hotspot in Afghanistan. With Iran's economy steadily opening up, the Afghans are slowly returning to Iran. With the intensification of tensions between Iran and America, pressure has also risen on Afghan migrants and refugees in Iran. Araghchi, Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran, said last year that "we may ask our Afghan brothers and sisters to leave Iran" if U.S. sanctions cut Iran's petroleum exports to nothing. His comments hit back later, calling it an incomprehension." Resentment has also been sparked by Afghanistan-led drug trafficking in Iran, which has made Iran the main road to European drug trafficking and the rest of the world. Many migrants and refugees work hard and have little to do with slavery. This vulnerable group makes the Iranian authorities' inability to stop the trade in narcotics.

Water tension concerns Afghan migrants and refugees. A delegate from Iran stated that "we have nearly four million Afghans in Iran. If any human consumes 100 liters of water a day, Afghans in Iran use 400 million liters per day." The Iraqi-Afghan tensions have escalated with Afghan dam development projects, such as the Salma Dam. In recent years, Iran has formed relations with some of the rebels in Afghanistan, controlling more regions to fight the repressive Islamic State in the Khorasan Province. It has also triggered rancor among the Afghans in Tehran. Despite attempts to negotiate a reconciliation deal with the Taliban, events such as the alleged drowning will inevitably lead to more negative emotions against Iran.

## 6. Conclusion

Iran's approach to diplomacy in soft power is substantially different from the philosophical approach used to describe Western states' soft power where attraction capabilities are normatively and uniformly seen. However, the Iranian case shows that the target population may also own soft power tools. To accomplish this soft force, Iranian officials astutely locate local attraction opportunities in the target audience's social world. The Iranian approach, in particular, tends to include seeking local tools with a lot of emotional reaction instead of a purely pragmatic or practical interaction. The Iranian leaders use this resonance aspect to establish what I call affinity with the audience's subjective judgments. Another dimension that separates Iran is its tools for public diplomacy and its use of cultural aspects as part of the diplomacy. This Iranian initiative is intended to promote an enticing opportunity that resonates with local public subjective assessments in Afghanistan instead of the normative attractiveness assessments appropriate to Western sensibilities.

The critical argument here is that Iran's soft power activities deliberately express its preferred rhetoric to attain its desired foreign policy aim that an external power should not control Afghanistan. The soft power policy of Iran is focused on a topic-oriented interpretation of attraction and its origins. Iran offers the opportunity to develop its cultural and public diplomacy activities around a particular affinity between Iran and its target audience rather than being restricted by a static range of universal tools identified by political science theorists.

Iran has used its cultural and economic strength to undermine US-Afghan relations. Iran has also provided calculated assistance to the rebels in Afghanistan who fight against America and allied forces. Tehran believes that America will use Afghanistan as a pretext to overthrow the Islamic Republic by helping anti-Iranian militants and sabotage and spy on Iran's nuclear installations. However, Iran may have many reasons to minimize or even avoid helping the anti-American rebels. U.S. forces' withdrawal will relieve Iranian fear because Tehran will no longer have to battle a potentially and massive hostile army at its gates. A negotiated settlement of the nuclear problem and lowered tensions between America and Iran are likely to minimize Iran's incentives to support Taliban elements.

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