

# Understanding Iran's Media Diplomacy

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International actors have long complemented their foreign policy agendas with strategies aimed at enhancing their influence. With the emergence of democracy and modern media, the contemporary era has brought about a fundamental novelty: the entrance of average citizens into the heart of the political scene, and the concomitant development of new strategies of swaying the "ordinary folk." In today's environment of hyper-media operations, however, many aspects of classic foreign affairs have come under pressure. The multiplicity of actors on the international stage and the growing threat of public opinion as a real and formidable impediment to governmental action necessitate the combination of direct force and alternative means of persuasion. Mass media technology has indeed become an indispensable new weapon in today's wars of influence. Recent years have witnessed the development of an increasingly sophisticated version of state-to-foreign population diplomacy based on the use of the latest communication technologies. This has acquired a central position within a number of foreign affairs systems.

Iran has embraced this form of strategic diplomacy as a relatively affordable way to fill its power deficit, increase its influence, and defend its interests. Since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic regime has undertaken a multitude of cultural, educational, and religious initiatives to promote a sympathetic image of Iran in the international arena. In recent years, this strategy of influence has been reinforced with an impressive infrastructure of audiovisual technology—television and internet—allowing Tehran to disseminate its values even more widely. Given the importance that we ascribe to Iran's geopolitical ambitions, surprisingly little attention has been focused on how media diplomacy in the Islamic Republic of Iran is structured. What are the governmental institutions responsible for conducting such activity? What are the means and instruments at its disposal?