

THE BELOVED GREAT SATAN: THE PORTRAYAL OF THE U.S. IN THE IRANIAN MEDIA SINCE 9/11*

Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar

INTRODUCTION: THE IRANIAN MEDIA, A SHOWCASE OF POLITICS

Throughout the contemporary history of Iran, the media has played an increasingly important role in shaping the political battleground and influencing the masses. The Iranian revolution of 1978-79 began after an editorial piece¹ called Ayatollah Khomeini a corrupt foreign agent. That article unleashed a wave of nationwide protests that ended in the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime and the ascendance of the Islamic Republic in a mere 13 months. Twenty years later, after the conservative establishment shut down the reformist daily *Salaam*, massive student protests unfolded all over the country and seriously challenged the Islamic government in a manner not seen since the revolution. The government eventually had to resort to force to suppress this growing movement.

The media, however, has not only created social and political upheaval in Iran. It has also provided the intellectual rendezvous and a critical public sphere in which scholars, activists, and journalists have gathered to discuss a variety of topics from politics to society and culture. *Kiyan*, a monthly journal established in 1990, is an example of the latter phenomenon. In addition to publishing original and theoretical articles ranging from the philosophy of religion to political sociology, it also brought together religious intellectuals to discuss contentious issues such as the relationship between religion and politics². The fruit of the “*Kiyan* Circle,” as it was called, was a newly educated generation of former revolutionaries who resurfaced in the aftermath of the landslide election of President Mohammad Khatami in 1997 to become the intellectual engine of the reform movement.

The 1997 election heralded a new and challenging era for the Iranian media. It became increasingly political and played a role that in a more democratic country would have been filled by political parties. The reformists and conservatives brought their fight to the media and got into the business of accusation and aggression. In this highly politicized and contentious public sphere, the reformists had less hard power than their opponents and gradually lost ground to the conservative establishment, which held a monopoly over key institutions

including the state controlled TV and radio, as well as the judiciary. Despondent over the frailty of their internal political leverage, the reformists gradually shifted their focus on an external force, or threat, to use as an instrument to increase their bargaining power.

This tactical shift in Iran's reformist camp coincided with a strategic shift in the U.S.'s post-9/11 foreign policy, in which the undemocratic nature of states was perceived as relevant to national security. One of the first ramifications of this shift was Bush's branding of Iran as a member of "axis of evil." As the U.S. attacked Afghanistan and Iraq while simultaneously bringing Iran's nuclear activities to the center of world politics, Iran's political factions used the U.S. threat as a tool to undermine their rivals. The reformist newspapers warned the conservative establishment that the only way to preempt the U.S.'s imminent threat was to democratize Iran's political system and allow other groups to participate in the political process. In other words, internal legitimacy was the single best solution to preempt the external threat. On the other hand, the conservatives argued that 9/11 was nothing but a premeditated project carried out by the U.S. government to declare war on Islam, and therefore Iranians needed to stand firm and defend their governmental system. However, they also tried to minimize the American threat by portraying the U.S. as a paper tiger who was about to fall and bring about the inevitable end of Western civilization.

The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the different ways in which the United States has been portrayed in the Iranian media since 9/11. I have selected a number of newspapers and news agencies belonging to both conservatives and reformists. In the first part, I will focus on the conservative media's portrayal of the U.S., its conspiracy theories with regard to 9/11, and its apocalyptic vision of the West. In the second part of the paper, the reformist newspapers' instrumental use of the U.S. threat against Iran is illuminated and explained.

THE CONSERVATIVE MEDIA

APOCALYPSE NOW: THE INEVITABLE COLLAPSE OF THE WEST

In January 1989, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, sent a religious delegation to the Kremlin to meet with Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union. The founder of the Islamic Republic had a very simple message for Gorbachev: your empire will collapse; convert to Islam. He wrote: "Your country's main problem is not ownership, economics, or freedom. Your main problem is lack of true belief in God." He added: "Now, ... I wish you to seriously investigate Islam- not because Islam or the Muslims need you, but because Islam can bring comfort and salvation to all people and solve the problems of all nations."

Gorbachev thanked the Iranian delegation for the long trip but preferred to remain godless. Two years later, the Soviet empire fell apart and with it the communist ideology. That event further hardened the beliefs of many of the Ayatollah's followers to the point that today they invoke his other prediction: the West will be next. Many in Iran, including the conservatives and their mouth-pieces, argue that Western civilization will implode as a result of corruption, immorality, and injustice. The underlying tone of many editorials in various conservative media outlets is the inevitability of the fall of the U.S., and with it Western civilization. They postulate that this will be followed by the resurgence of Islamic civilization and its golden era. Hence, the 9/11 attacks, regardless of who the perpetrators were, constitute the beginning of the end.

Five weeks after September 11th, 2001, the ultraconservative newspaper Kayhan ran an editorial entitled "The end of history is the beginning of our path." After selectively quoting famous scholars such as Francis Fukuyama, Karen Armstrong, and Jurgen Habermas, Kayhan concluded:

"Today is the end of history for the failed liberal democracy. The train of progress has collided against the fortress of capitalism. In the midst of the ruined remains of democracy we will be able to lead mankind towards salvation and security, with the light of guidance which Imam Husayn, peace be upon him, has placed in our hands for shedding light of the bewildered humanity at the end of history³".

The Conservative newspaper Jomhuri Eslami cited the French author Emanuel Tode's work, *After the Empire*, in order to argue that: "The U.S. is imploding, because of its growing budget deficit and the fact that it is no longer on the cutting edge of science, knowledge, democracy, and freedom.⁴" According to Jomhuri Eslami, Tode writes that this explains why the U.S. "needs" terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda in order to justify its attacks on other countries and to postpone its eventual fall.

Similarly, Resalat, another conservative newspaper, wrote an editorial in which it claimed that "no philosopher or sociologist has any doubt about the fall of the West.⁵" It quoted the Supreme Leader as saying that the West has committed "a capital crime" by preventing woman from playing "her unique role in the family." Resalat wrote that: "reducing the value of women to a consumer good" and ignoring her humanity and her "shining" status in the center of a civilization constitutes a capital crime. According to Resalat, what the two important Western philosophies, namely liberalism and socialism, have done to humankind by ignoring their human rights, especially with regard to women, has put Western civilization "on a slide towards collapse." The same newspaper also warned that American society is on the brink of disintegration because of its lack of morality. To bolster its claim, Resalat lists numerous statistics, including the "fact" that: "10 percent of American male chefs are suspected of having a kind of sexual disease called 'fetishism.'⁶"

THE COVERAGE OF THE 9/11 ATTACKS

The Iranian government was one of the first governments to condemn the September 11 attacks. Within hours after the tragedy took place, then-President Khatami strongly denounced the attacks and expressed his condolences on behalf of the Iranian people: "I condemn the terrorist operations of hijacking and attacking public places in American cities, which have resulted in the death of a large number of defenseless American people." The Iranian population expressed their sympathy by holding candlelight vigils, signing the condolence book at the Swiss Embassy in Tehran (which represents U.S. interests), and holding a moment of silence at a soccer game.

However, the conservative media, including the state owned television, radio, and newspapers, followed a different path. On September 12, 2001, Tehran radio said: "The planning of operations, the selection of targets, and the savage way in which the operations were carried out on America show that non-American groups are incapable of carrying out such attacks."⁷

English language conservative paper Kayhan International wrote:

"Six months after the September 11th hijacking of aircraft from Boston airport and their crashing into the financial and military symbols of the U.S., some startling facts are coming to light. The [events] bear striking resemblance to the Boston Tea Party in 1773, when a group of New Englanders disguised as Red Indians boarded His Majesty's ship to dump crates of Indian tea into the Atlantic. The initial blame was on the poor Amerindians before the British realized that it was the handiwork of rebellious American colonists. We had doubted in this column the involvement of Arabs or any outside forces in the flattening of the 110-story twin-tower World Trade Centre in New York and the simultaneous crashing of a third 'hijacked' aircraft in[to] the Pentagon in Washington. Our views have been corroborated with the revelation that the whole scenario was planned by American Intelligence in league with the Zionists. ... One-time U.S. presidential candidate Lyndon Larouche has disclosed that the intricate operation was a prelude to a war of civilizations against Islamic countries by the American administration. ... According to Larouche, who serves as Contributing Editor to the Executive Intelligence Review Magazine, among the culprits in this terrorist campaign, which has claimed the lives of thousands of Americans, brought death and misery to Afghanistan, and worsened the plight of Palestinians, are former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and ex-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. ... Like King George III who misjudged the Boston events and lost the American colonies, God-willing President Bush will preside over the end of the U.S. as a world power, but not unless he creates more catastrophes for other civilizations⁸".

On the first anniversary of the attacks, Kayhan International published an editorial in which it claimed that "research done on the September 11, 2001 in-

cidents by independent investigators inside the United States and outside it leave little doubt that the said attacks could not be the work of al-Qaeda or any other foreign organizations.⁹” In order to prove this claim, Kayhan International referred to a book¹⁰ that a French investigator by the name of Thierry Meyssan wrote on this subject.

In a story that was reprinted by other conservative newspapers including Resalat¹¹ and Jomhuri Eslami¹², the conservative Fars and the centrist IRNA news agencies quoted an American pilot, Russ Wittenberg, as saying that “the 9/11 attacks were carried out by the U.S. government.” Fars translated this story from Arctic Beacon¹³, a website which is based in Alaska. This is an example of the conservative media using fringe sources from the Western media or taking more legitimate quotations out of context to lend credence to their view that the American government had itself caused the events of September 11th.

After the former CIA official Michael Sheuer published a book¹⁴ describing how the U.S. administration failed to capture Bin Laden in Afghanistan, the conservative media interpreted this as having been an intentional plan by the White House all along. The Mehr News Agency wrote: “Bin Laden’s escape was America’s work¹⁵” Referencing the same book, Kayhan quoted Sharif News Agency (a newly born conservative news outlet): “A CIA agent revealed: Washington intentionally let Bin Laden escape when it attacked Afghanistan¹⁶” In fact, the actual story was that the former CIA operator claimed that the administration failed to act quickly to arrest Bin Laden in Tora Bora. He did not write anything about a U.S. conspiracy or plot revolving around Bin Laden’s escape.

The same technique was employed when Kayhan used the 9/11-commission report to claim that Bush was “aware” of the attacks¹⁷. In fact, the report did not refer to any specific warnings of the attacks, but rather referred only to general warnings that Bush had received from his advisors in his daily briefings. Again, Kayhan in its coverage of the London Bombings, used a British fact-finding report to conclude that Washington and London were involved in 9/11 and 7/7 attacks on the U.S. and U.K. respectively¹⁸.

THE U.S. INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ: “A GOOD OMEN”

Iranian conservatives often argue that the U.S. “needed” the 9/11 attacks in order to have a justification to wage its war against Islam, to protect Israel, and to sustain the oil flow to the West. They interpret the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq from this angle, but at the same time point out that this is the beginning of the end of the American era.

Twenty days after the U.S. attack on Afghanistan, Kayhan wrote:

“All the indications and evidence suggest that the United States and its allies are carrying out attacks on Islam. The Moslem nations have no doubt that Bin Laden and [the] Taliban are nothing but excuses to attack the Islamic world. ... the Americans, by their own decisions, have set foot in [a] swamp, and the Islamic world and Moslem nations have for years waited for this moment. From this perspective, although the military attacks by the United States and its allies on Afghanistan and the massacre of the oppressed people of that country are ugly, deplorable, and painful, the presentation of the real face of America and the open entanglement of this bloodthirsty imperialist power in the dreadful swamp of Afghanistan should be taken as a good omen¹⁹”.

A few months before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Kayhan wrote:

“The attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York were planned and implemented jointly by the rulers of the United States and Israel. Afterwards, they could blame Muslims for this and in the light of the media propaganda against Islam and Muslims, they could undertake a major massacre of the Palestinian people, thereby resolving Israel’s problem forever. This is exactly what they did.... Today, America’s main aim for an attack against Iraq is once again the matter of Israel. ... America does not and has never had a problem with Saddam. Just as he stepped alongside the United States during the eight years of the imposed [Iran-Iraq] war and acted in coordination with the United States, today it could be the same. ... Through an attack on Iraq, the United States wants to bully and force the real owner of Palestine to abandon their homes and become homeless refugees or else be imprisoned in their homes. On the one hand this would bring peace and security to the occupying Zionists and on the other, it would strengthen U.S. control over the richest oil fields in the world considered to be the lifeline of the industrialized world²⁰”.

Iran’s state-owned TV and Kayhan’s front pages have rarely missed an opportunity to display images of U.S. soldiers’ brutality in Iraq and Afghanistan. Kayhan also uses derogatory words to describe U.S. actions and casualties in Iraq. For example, they often refer to U.S. casualties as *halakat*, which has a negative connotation and roughly translates as “dying for nothing.” This is the same word used for the Iraqi casualties during the Iran-Iraq war.

In addition, the conservative media selectively quotes and misquotes American scholars and Western media to suit their own purposes. For example:

- “Noam Chomsky: The U.S. president should be executed”²¹ Then under this headline the newspaper adds: “The war crime law that was ratified by the 1996 Republican dominated Congress says that disobeying the Geneva Convention is a war crime which has a capital punishment.”
- “Samuel Huntington: The U.S. will not win in Iraq”²²
- “Along with 540 thousand Americans, 105 U.S. congressmen want to impeach Bush”²³

In an attempt to show how unpopular the U.S. and by contrast how popular Iran is in Iraq, Fars News Agency published a story with this headline: “The Christian Science Monitor: Unlike America’s rule by force, Iran has a place in the heart of the Iraqi people”²⁴ There is a bit of exaggeration here. In reality, The Christian Science Monitor simply quoted an Iran analyst, Karim Sadjad-pour, as saying: “The Americans have hard power in Iraq, but the Iranians have soft power, and they are able to do things. It is a much more subtle influence than the Americans.”²⁵ There was no mention of the word “heart” in The Christian Science Monitor story.

The gruesome stories of massive human rights abuses in Guantanamo and Abu-Ghraib prisons were indeed surprising gifts for Iran’s conservative politicians and their media. They have run countless front page stories of America’s human rights violations abroad as well as inside U.S. territory to “expose” Washington’s hypocrisy and double-standards with regard to human rights.

- Fars News Agency published Amnesty’s report on U.S. human rights with the following headline: “The U.S. is the leader of human rights violators in the world.”²⁶
- Kayhan published this headline: “Amnesty protests use of deadly American weapon.”²⁸
- Jomhouri Eslami had a special report on U.S. torture of Afghan prisoners.
- Jomhouri Eslami quoted Newsday as saying: “Bush is the defender of torturing prisoners”
- Kayhan claimed: “Because of the Abu Ghraib scandal: Bush and Rumsfeld are summoned to court”²⁹
- When the tragic bridge stampede took place in Iraq in summer 2005, Kayhan indirectly blamed the U.S. and published this front page headline: “Massacre in Kazemeyn under the occupiers’ watch”³⁰

World-wide hatred towards the U.S.

Increasing anti-American sentiment throughout the world is another running story in the conservative media, especially Kayhan. For example, in the past year the paper has carried these headlines:

- “Tens of thousands of Greeks call Bush world’s most dangerous terrorist”³¹
- “200 thousand Cubans scream against the U.S. with one voice”³²
- “The people of Ecuador overthrow the U.S.-backed president”³³
- “The Europeans’ growing hatred of the United States”³⁴
- “Labor Day demonstrations in several countries turn into anti-American protests”³⁵. In addition, Kayhan International has characterized the U.S. as a “Symbol of Worldwide Hatred”³⁶

America, a paper tiger against Iran

The conservative media also portrays the United States as a paper tiger caught in a quagmire in Iraq and Afghanistan. The American media and U.S. scholars are often selectively quoted to prove the claim. For example, Kayhan ran the headline “An American Quarterly: Iran will lead developments Middle East”³⁷ In fact the author of this article was a Russian strategist, but Kayhan preferred not to put this in the headline and instead emphasized that it was an American journal that made this claim. In addition:

- Kayhan quoting Zbigniew Brzezinski: “Unlike Eastern Europeans, the Iranian people cannot be separated from their governments”³⁸
- Again Kayhan quoting Brzezinski: “Washington’s accusations against Iran are demagoguery and imaginary”³⁹
- Kayhan quoting The New York Times: “Possible U.S. attack on Iran would be disastrous”⁴⁰
- Kayhan quoting Rice: “Our speculations about Iran always turn out wrong”⁴¹
- Kayhan quoting Kissinger: “We cannot bring Iran to its knees”⁴²
- Kayhan: “An American analyst: What can we do against Iran? Nothing!”⁴³
- Kayhan quoting Time magazine: “The foreign media’s reaction to Iran’s action [restarting its uranium enrichment program], Time: Tehran can play with Washington as long as it wants”⁴⁴
- Resalat quoting Professor William Beeman: “Professor William A. Beeman, Director of Middle East Studies at America’s Brown University: The U.S. cannot deprive Iran of its nuclear technology”⁴⁵

In addition, the conservative media often covers natural disasters in the U.S. and their aftermath to prove how weak the administration is in taking care of its own people and cleaning up the mess in its own backyard. Kayhan’s front page in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina reads: “A disaster more terrifying than Hurricane Katrina, America on the verge of a political crisis.”⁴⁶

In conclusion, the conservative media ties America’s “moral corruption” to its decreasing global stature (both soft and hard power) partly to neutralize the reformists’ use of the U.S. as a threat, which will be examined below.

The reformist media: in search of external leverage for internal gain

There is no love lost between the reformists and the United States. It is worth mentioning that a number of the leaders of Iran’s reform movement were among the students who occupied the American Embassy in 1980. However, many of them have since modified their attitudes toward the United States. Un-

like the conservatives, the reformists do not necessarily argue that the only superpower is about to collapse but rather that its influence might be decreasing in the world due to several factors such as the rise of China, the emergence of the E.U., and, the repercussions of the U.S. war on terror. Many of them envision the possibility of a multi-polar world in the future. However, in the meantime they assert that the U.S. is an important country and is the key in solving some, if not most, of Iran's problems. On another level, the reformists, who have been losing their share of power since 2000, emphasize the U.S. threat against Iran to advance their own domestic agenda. According to the reformists, only by increasing the political legitimacy of the government by power-sharing with the reformists can Tehran prevent Washington from taking action against it. One example of this trend occurred when the White House spokesman announced two conditions under which the U.S. would not oppose Iran's bid for WTO membership: the first of which was a complete halt on Iran's nuclear activities. However, the reformist daily Aftab Yazd, published only the second condition in its headline: "The U.S.'s condition for supporting Iran's WTO membership: a free presidential election"⁴⁷

The U.S. attack is imminent: let's share power

The reformists' few remaining newspapers, especially Aftab Yazd, often publish stories pertaining to the seriousness of U.S. threat towards Iran. Therefore, it is not surprising that statements of hawkish members of the Bush administration such as Condoleezza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld often make their way into the front pages of the reformists' papers. This is the case even though the Supreme Council for National Security has reportedly warned the media not to disturb the public by publishing stories about a possible U.S. attack on Iran. The followings are examples of this trend:

- "Rice: Iran continues its secret nuclear program."⁴⁸
- "Rice: The international community should not tolerate Iran."⁴⁹
- "Rice: America is committed to bringing about change in the Middle East."⁵⁰
- "Rice: Military attack against Iran is not ruled out"⁵¹
- "Rumsfeld: Iran is behind the explosion in Israel."⁵²
- "Rumsfeld: Iraq should take an offensive position against Iran."⁵³
- "Deputy to the U.S. Secretary of State: We are losing hope because of Iran's [nuclear] actions"⁵⁴
- "In the NPT conference, the U.S. is seeking to impose more constraints against Iran"⁵⁵
- "Bolton's presence necessary in the U.N. to put pressure on Iran"⁵⁶
- "The U.S. is preparing a plan of nuclear attack on Iran's 450 military sites"⁵⁷

- “U.S. State Department spokesman: We are in the moment of great historic change [with regard to Iran]”⁵⁸
- “Bush and Karzai agree on a long term presence in Afghanistan”⁵⁹
- “The U.S. is selling Israel 100 bunker-busting nuclear bombs”⁶⁰
- “The U.S. prepares to attack Iran and Syria through Turkey’s Incirlic base”⁶¹
- “Madeline Albright: Iran’s nuclearization is not acceptable”⁶²
- “New York Times analyst: American neo-cons are preparing to attack Iran.”⁶³

Aftab Yazd sometimes runs stories to counter the conservatives’ over-confidence in dealing with the U.S. For instance, the newspaper writes: “The three month revenue of a single American oil company is 1.5 times more than Iran’s annual oil revenue”⁶⁴

Aftab Yazd also emphasizes that, unlike Iran, the rest of the world, even sworn enemies of Israel, would like to engage Washington in dialogue:

- “ Hamas is ready to talk to the U.S. and England”⁶⁵
- “Syria requests an improvement in its relationship with the U.S.”⁶⁶

Reformist newspapers often argue that, unlike what conservatives believe, the Europeans and the Russians cannot be used as counterweights against U.S. threats, because those countries are concerned with their own national interests, which include full coordination with U.S. policies:

- Aftab Yazd: “The coordinated position of Bush and Putin on Iran’s uranium enrichment program”⁶⁷
- Aftab Yazd: “Iran’s nuclear file, nexus of Bush and Putin’s negotiation”⁶⁸
- Aftab Yazd’s top headline: “Asefi [Iran’s foreign ministry’s spokesman]: ‘Our agreement with the Europeans is the result U.S. pressure.’”⁶⁹
- Aftab Yazd: “Mojtahedzadeh [an Iranian political scientist]: Europe has fallen in line with the U.S.”⁷⁰
- Aftab Yazd: “U.S. and France seek Iran’s concrete guarantees”⁷¹
- Aftab Yazd: “France is after the U.S.: It has been reported that France has promised that during the nuclear negotiations that the French will follow America’s desire to get concessions from Iran.”⁷²

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq: “the dawn of democracy”

The reformist media had a markedly more positive approach toward the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the subsequent developments in these two countries than the conservatives. While conservative newspapers such as *Kayhan* focused on America’s Islamophobia, the reformists emphasized America’s support of Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance, Iran’s longtime ally. For example, the daily *Towse’a* implicitly welcomed the collapse of Taliban

and published this headline: “With the support of Americans, the Northern Alliance forces are moving toward seizure of Kabul”⁷³

Whereas the conservatives were hoping to see the U.S. mired in Afghanistan and Iraq, the reformist newspapers focused on the democratic future of Iraq, for example, Hambastegi optimistically projected “The Dawn of Democracy in Iraq”⁷⁴ The conservative media instead reacted to the Iraqi election as a victory for the Shiites, and therefore an indirect victory for the Shiite regime in Tehran. However, for the reformists the free nature of the election was more important and enviable. For instance:

- Reformist Shargh wrote: “72% of Iraqis participated in the election: The Iraqi nation’s choosing day”⁷⁵
- Shargh: “The world welcomes the Iraqi election”⁷⁶
- Shargh: “The United Iraqi Coalition wins”⁷⁷

American art, culture, and science:
broadening audience, maintaining the battleground

Unlike the conservatives, who believe an American “cultural blitz” is directed to against Muslim nations, the reformists publish stories about culture, art, and science in the U.S. on a daily basis. These stories include the latest released movies and music albums, books published in the United States, Hollywood gossip about actors or actresses, and latest scientific developments.

- Hambastegi: “Will Basic Instinct 2 be made? A fourteen million dollar offer to Sharon Stone”⁷⁸
- Aftab Yazd: “The American directors chose Clint Eastwood”⁷⁹
- Aftab Yazd: “Nicole Kidman’s \$435,000 demand for a 25-minute speech”⁸⁰
- Shargh: “Robert Redford turns 68”⁸¹
- Marlon Brando’s death was Shargh’s lead story (including a large picture) with this headline: “The Death of Cinema’s Godfather”⁸²
- Aftab Yazd: “Clinton’s saxophone album is released”⁸³
- Aftab Yazd even included this bit of celebrity gossip: “The reason that Rice attacks Iran is her failed relationship with a young Iranian man.”⁸⁴ The newspaper also quoted an Iranian member of the parliament saying that Iran is ready to compensate Rice for her broken heart.⁸⁵
- When the Nobel committee announced some of the winners of the Nobel Prize in 2004, Shargh noticed that most of them were Americans. The lead story of Shargh was: “Nobel is in the hands of Americans”⁸⁶

It is important to note that art, science, and culture stories do not necessarily have political messages, but rather they simply help the newspapers to

have higher circulations among the increasingly politically disillusioned people, especially the youth. Unlike the political sections, which are battlegrounds for political factions, these pages are more reflective of popular taste. This type of content maintains the newspaper's circulation so they can survive and remain on the political battlefield. Needless to say, it also paints a markedly different image of the United States than what is publicized by the conservative media.

CONCLUSION

With the absence of political parties in Iran, newspapers have become the main battleground for the country's domestic tensions. Since 9/11, the issues surrounding the United States and its relationship with Iran have become an important part of the struggle between reformists and conservatives. Each side attempts to portray the U.S. in a way that undermines the other side in order to maximize its own influence and popularity among the people.

The conservative media focuses on stories that "reveal" the U.S.'s weaknesses, hypocrisies and double-standards. It attempts to illustrate that President Bush was supposedly aware of the 9-11 attacks but refused to prevent them. The conservatives also selectively translate and reprint the U.S. press to "prove" that American soldiers are bogged down in Iraq and therefore cannot challenge Iran. The Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo prison fiascos were boons for the conservative media. State-owned TV and radio channels, as well as newspapers, continually display pictures and report stories pertaining to Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo in order to demonstrate American double-standards with regard to human rights and to provoke the public against U.S. For some ultra-conservative newspapers such as Kayhan, the U.S. is a purely evil power whose very nature leads it to stand against the Islamic Republic.

On the other hand, the reformists' few newspapers constantly warn of the imminent military threat that the U.S. is posing towards Iran and call for political reforms. They remind the conservatives of how reckless the Bush administration's foreign policy can be. The White House's harsh rhetoric usually makes it to the front page of reformist papers. In their editorials, the reformists make the case that the only way the Iranian leadership can prevent a possible U.S. attack is through democratization and free elections. They argue that with the expansion of political participation in Iran, Washington will have no leverage to take action against Tehran. They contend that political reform is the single best way to isolate the U.S. on the nuclear issue and bring the E.U. closer to Iran's side. Unlike the conservatives, for many of the reformists, the U.S. is not necessarily a sworn enemy of Islam or Iran. It is an important country and without it Iran cannot achieve a prosperous future.

The Iranian media is a revolving door: Political activists become journalists,

and journalists take high positions within the government. For example, Kayhan's managing director has been appointed as the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Hopeful reformist presidential candidates often establish a newspaper in order to bolster their political legitimacy and therefore increase the cost of their elimination by conservative institutions. As long as there are no viable, strong, and independent political parties in Iran, the media will remain to be an important venue for political confrontations, as well as a crucial instrument to mobilize and manipulate the masses. In the context of this fluid boundary between politics and journalism, the U.S. will continue to be an important instrument used by the two sides for political gain.

NOTES

- ¹ “Black and red reactionism in Iran,” Ettelaat, 6 January, 1978.
- ² Kiyān was shut down in 1991 by Iran’s conservative judiciary.
- ³ Kayhan, 20 Oct 2001, FBIS.
- ⁴ Jomhourī Eslami, 11 August 2005.
- ⁵ Mohammad Kazem Anbarlouie, “The Capital Crime of Western Civilization,” Resalat, 30th July 2005, p.2
- ⁶ Pejman Karimi, “On the Brink of Collapse,” Resalat, 22 August, 2005.
- ⁷ Cited in RFE/RL, Iran Report, vol. 9, No 27, 13 July 2005.
- ⁸ S. Nawabzadeh, “From Boston to Boston,” Kayhan International, 12 March 2002.
- ⁹ H. Ja’farzadeh, “Terror Alert in Amreica,” Kayhan International, 12 September 2002.
- ¹⁰ 911: The Big Lie, (London: Carnot Publishing Ltd., 2002)
- ¹¹ Resalat, 20 July 2005.
- ¹² Jomhourī Eslami, 21 July 2005.
- ¹³ www.arcticbeacon.com
- ¹⁴ Michael Scheuer, Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror, (Virginia: Brassey’s Inc., 2004)
- ¹⁵ Mehr News Agency, 8 August 2005.
- ¹⁶ Kayhan, 30 July 2005, p.1.
- ¹⁷ Kayhan, 12 April 2004.
- ¹⁸ “Untold stories of September 11th and London Explosions,” Kayhan, 24 August 2005.
- ¹⁹ Hossein Sharaitmadari, “Note of the day” column: “This Train is Being Derailed,” Kayhan, 28 October 2001. p.2, FBIS.
- ²⁰ Alireza Malekian, “Note of the day” column: “America should not be too optimistic,” Kayhan, 12 October 2002 p.2, FBIS.
- ²¹ Resalat, 16 August 2005, p.1.
- ²² Jomhourī Eslami, 26 May 2005, p.1. and Kayhan, 26 May 2005, p.1.
- ²³ Kayhan, 18 June 2005, p.1.
- ²⁴ Fars News Agency, 22 May 2005. The story was reprinted by another conservative newspaper, Resalat, 22 May 2005, p.17.
- ²⁵ Scott Peterson, “Iran flexes its ‘soft power’ in Iraq,” Christian Science Monitor, 29 May 2005.
- ²⁶ Fars News Agency, “Amnesty International: US is the leader of human rights violators in the world” 25 May 2005.
- ²⁷ Kayhan, 12 December 2004.

- ²⁸ Jomhuri Eslami, 4 August 2005.
- ²⁹ Kayhan, 22 July 2004, p.1
- ³⁰ Kayhan, 1 September 2005, p.1.
- ³¹ Kayhan, 10 October 2005, p.1.
- ³² Kayhan, 22 June 2004, p.1.
- ³³ Kayhan, 21 April 2005, p.1
- ³⁴ Kayhan, 25 June 2005, p.1
- ³⁵ Kayhan, 3 May 2005, p.1
- ³⁶ S. Nawabzadeh, "Viewpoint" column: "Symbol of Worldwide Hatred" 2 November 2003, p.2.
- ³⁷ Kayhan, 3 September 2005, p.1
- ³⁸ Kayhan, 20 July 2004 p.1.
- ³⁹ Kayhan, 21 November 2004, p.1.
- ⁴⁰ Kayhan, 21 November 2004, p.1
- ⁴¹ Kayhan, 22 December 2003, p.1.
- ⁴² Kayhan, 3 May 2005, p.1
- ⁴³ Kayhan, 30 July 2005, p.1
- ⁴⁴ 16 August 2005, p.1.
- ⁴⁵ Resalat, 28 August 2005, p.1
- ⁴⁶ Kayhan, 4 September 2005, p.1.
- ⁴⁷ Aftab Yazd, 25 May 2005, p.4
- ⁴⁸ Aftab Yazd, 21 April 2005, p.1.
- ⁴⁹ Aftab Yazd, 25 May 2005., p.1.
- ⁵⁰ Aftab Yazd, 25 May 2005, p.3.
- ⁵¹ Hambastegi, 2 February 2005, p.1
- ⁵² Aftab Yazd, 14 July 2005, p.11.
- ⁵³ Aftab Yazd, 28 July 2005, p.1.
- ⁵⁴ Aftab Yazd, 28 August 2005, p.1.
- ⁵⁵ Aftab Yazd, 2 May 2005, p.1
- ⁵⁶ Aftab Yazd, 28 April 2005, p.1.
- ⁵⁷ Aftab Yazd, 28 July 2005, p.11.
- ⁵⁸ Aftab Yazd, 20 August 2005, p.1
- ⁵⁹ Aftab Yazd, 25 May 2005, p.3.
- ⁶⁰ Aftab Yazd, 28 April 2005, p.1.
- ⁶¹ Aftab Yazd, 23 April 2005, p.1.
- ⁶² Aftab Yazd, 23 April 2005, p.11.

- ⁶³ Aftab Yazd, 26 July 2005, p.2
⁶⁴ Aftab Yazd, 2 May 2005, p.1
⁶⁵ Aftab Yazd, 24 May 2005. p.1.
⁶⁶ Aftab Yazd, 28 July 2005. p.1.
⁶⁷ Aftab Yazd, 30 April 2005, p.1.
⁶⁸ Aftab Yazd, 9 May 2005, p.1.
⁶⁹ Aftab Yazd, 9 May 2005, p.1.
⁷⁰ Aftab Yazd, 23 April 2005, p.11
⁷¹ Aftab Yazd, 7 July 2005, p.1.
⁷² Eqbal, 14 April 2005, p. 3.
⁷³ Towse'a, 6 October 2001, p.1.
⁷⁴ Hambastegi, February 2005, p.1
⁷⁵ Shargh, 31 January 2005, p.1.
⁷⁶ Shargh, 1 February 2005, p.1.
⁷⁷ Shargh, 2 February 2005, p.1.
⁷⁸ Hambastegi, 11 June 2001, p.11.
⁷⁹ Aftab Yazd, 1 February 2005, p.1
⁸⁰ Aftab Yazd, 13 July 2005, p.1
⁸¹ Shargh, 18 August 2005 p 17.
⁸² Shargh, 4 July 2004, p.1.
⁸³ Aftab Yazd, 16 August 2005, p. last.
⁸⁴ Aftab Yazd, 30 June 2005, p.1.
⁸⁵ Aftab Yazd, 30 June 2005, p.1
⁸⁶ Shargh, 6 October 2004

* This paper was originally prepared for delivery at the Annual US-Iran Relations Conference, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, September 8th - 10th, 2005. The author would like to thank Tara Bahrampour, William Beeman, Hanne Lolland, Abdelslam Maghraoui, John Newhouse, Naomi Lee Parker, Ahmad Sadri, and Hadi Semati for their helpful comments and suggestions, and especially Caitlin Elizabeth Browne for her invaluable advice and support.

Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Government, Georgetown University, Washington D.C. - USA