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Are the Western-dominated mass media involved in ethnic conflicts in the Middle East?
A case study of the BBC's role in ethnic tensions in Iran

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Declaration

I, Leila Orand, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

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ABSTRACT

At 17:00 on January 14, 2009, the Persian television of BBC World Service began broadcasting its programs in Persian. BBC Persian Radio has been broadcasting since 1940, and the radio's website has been publishing news and reports in Persian on its output since 1999. Since the launch of BBC Persian TV in 2009, several TV stations, radios, and websites in Persian have been launched by world-renowned media brands, including Euronews (TV and website), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty TV (the radio service of this media from 2003 is active in the Persian language), Manoto TV, Iran International TV, Persian Independent news website and Asharq Al-Awsat news website. VOA radio has been broadcasting in Persian since 1979 and VOA TV in Persian since 1996. Radio France has had a Persian language service since 1991 and Deutsche Welle since 1962.

Most of these media outlets, as it turns out, are a subset of the Western media. Asharq Al-Awsat, the Independent Persian, and Iran International are backed by Saudi Arabia and have offices in the UK. Manoto's sponsor (based in London) is also unknown. The Islamic Republic of Iran authorities believes that the sponsors of this network are the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia.

What is the purpose of these media? Have they been set up to provide unbiased and impartial information and inform the Iranian people? What are the advantages of this information for Western governments or Saudi Arabia, which generously pay enormous prices for public awareness in another country and another continent? Were these media created to contribute to the emergence of the "public sphere" as Habermas et al. (1974) argue, in Iran/ the Middle East? Or are they created for the benefit of the media/politics owners?

I. R. Iran authorities claim that these media outlets have caused much unrest in Iran, including ethnic tensions. On the other hand, some Iranian and international academic researchers confirm the same claim in academic language. Therefore, this thesis tries to answer the question of whether these media cause ethnic tensions in Iran.

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List of Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBCP	BBC Persian
CNN	Cable News Network
I. R. IRAN	Islamic Republic of Iran
IRNA	Islamic Republic News Agency
FNC	Fox News Channel
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
VOA	Voice of America
VOA-PNN	Voice of America Persian News Network
WBMEM	Western-based Middle East Media
WBPM	Western-based Persian Media

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Two hundred sixty foreign-based Persian-language TV channels broadcast programs for the Iranian people for free with the support of some Western countries (SNN, 2020). Iranian officials are constantly warning about the destructive effects of these media and believe that these media are the tool of soft war, and its news is the bullets (Mehrnews, 2020). Also, in recent years, war and media analysts in Iran constantly write academic articles about the crises that these media have created or can create. Among the Iranian authorities, Ayatollah Khamenei (Supreme Leadership Authority of the I. R. Iran) talks about *"the enemy's plans"* and goals in creating media and satellite networks in most of his speeches. For example, in one of his speeches in September 2018, he said:

> *According to the information we have, the US and Israeli spy agencies, with the financial support of the regional powers around our country, have set up an organization for this media war and are seriously planning and polluting the propaganda and intellectual atmosphere of the society* (Young Journalists Club, 2018).

Iranian political and military officials take many such positions too (Lap, 2014), (ZamanehMedia, 2011). In addition, the state media of the I. R. Iran always writes about the destructive role of the Western Persian-language media in the national security of Iran. From the point of view of the I. R. Iran, Western media pursues several goals to threaten the national security of the target countries, including creating a sense of pessimism in society about the government, stimulation of internal and external opposition groups, plan to increase popular power to engineer the color revolution, creating identity crises in young people and escalating ethnic and religious differences (Asre Houshmandi, 2020).

But it is not just Ayatollah Khamenei and Iranian officials or some Middle Eastern officials who are talking about the media war. In the academic world, much research has been done on the role of the media in wars. For example, Lee Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2008) remind that there are some reasons to prove that media plays a decisive role in the parties to the conflicts and the outcome of the conflicts. In other words, the news media is accelerating the shift in the wartime situation to the detriment of peace, and the needs of the news contradict the requirements of peacetime.

All these comments and researches and my background as an Iranian journalist and daily news monitoring of various media outlets worldwide made me pay attention to the role of the

media in the conflict in the Middle East for this research. This could be of interest to a broader audience worldwide because of the Middle East's special position and the ongoing wars in the region. In recent years, with the emergence of terrorist groups in the Middle East including ISIS, the Syrian conflict, and the wave of migration from the Middle East to the West, world powers and people have realized that the Middle East crisis and how the wars and tensions in this region intensified are issues that can affect everyone. Is WBPM trying to create tension and conflict in Iran (as Iranian officials say)? Sometimes in the comments of these news posts on social networks, headlines are seen in the BBC and other Western Persian-language media that are not written in terms of the principles of professional journalism and cause linguistic conflict between Iranian ethnic groups. Is this intentional? Or are the journalists of these media outlets not adhering to professional principles and ethical charters?

Kamalipour and Snow (2004) writhe that the historically established notion of a bad Muslim has been precious for Western governments to invading Muslim-majority countries. If public opinion in their country is convinced that Muslims are violent and savage, it seems more acceptable to kill them and destroy their property. This advertising template is usually disseminated through the mass media. Despite the journalistic principle of objectivity, a country's mass media often reflects its government's foreign policy in its coverage. Coverage of Muslim countries in the Western media is usually within the guidelines of powerful Western governments. Some academics have also played a political role by painting a small picture of a Muslim warrior representing Islam. That is the Muslim whose terrorist acts make the headlines of the critical news (Kamalipour and Snow, 2004). Thus, the Western mass media help to implement their governments' foreign policy by stimulating their own public opinion to the detriment of the target country.

In addition, ccording to Lee Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2008), political conflict refers to an apparent dispute over political influence or political control between two or more political antagonists. In the political communications field, the researchers investigate the role of news media in political conflicts. The next noteworthy point is that the news in the news media is often ethnocentric. This means that the news and reports of the major news media often show that one ethnic is more prominent. While we want to try to create reconciliation between those two ethnicities, we must have a little understanding of the needs of both ethnicities. Also, by entering the homes of the people of the target country and covering the news of that country, taking into

account the policies of their respective countries, these media can shape the minds and actions of the people of that country in favor of their own policies. Kamalipour and Snow (2004) believe that the media has an essential role in deepening the gap between social classes in times of internal conflict and how minority news is covered is crucial. It is vital to determine whether the media is fundamentally involved in this issue and what their role is.

1.1 Research Question

This study investigates the role of WBPM focusing on BBCP in ethnic tensions in Iran. And with using qualitative research methods, I will try to clarify whether the purpose of these media is merely to inform and provide information to the people or are the tools of soft power, soft threats, or tools of psychological operations against independent governments and nations (as Iranian officials claim)?

The main research question is:

How is the impact of Western Based Persian Media on ethnic tensions in Iran?

The sub-research questions are:

1. Can Western-based Persian media create tension and discord between the Iranian nation and neighboring nations?

2. Why do Western governments establish media in Persian without a paid subscription for Iranian people?

3. Has the Western-based Middle Eastern media played a role in wars and tensions of recent years in the Middle East? If it played a role, has it been because of free and impartial information to help improve the situation of the people? Or do the interests of the founding countries or the media owners require the creation of the media?

1.2 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis outline consists of four chapters and several sub-chapters. The first chapter provides information about the thesis's objectives and discusses the necessity of research on the subject.

The second part is the Research Methodology chapter, which describes the methods used to answer the research question, and there is a description of the research design. This chapter

also discusses data collection methods and how to select respondents. Finally, this chapter also covers the case study, reliability, validity, and data collection limitations.

  The third chapter is the literature review of the previous finding and presents the theoretical framework for the thesis. This section explains theories of public diplomacy, framing, and agenda-setting. It will also discuss why this thesis requires an interdisciplinary approach.

  The fourth chapter will discuss the WBPM and how to cover Iranian news in these media in detail. Here, public diplomacy, framing, and agenda-setting theories relate to the news that the BBCP posts on its website or television. The last part is the conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Qualitative Research Approach

As mentioned in the first chapter, the primary purpose of research is to examine the role or impact of Western-Based Persian Media on ethnic tensions or ethnic differences. Media content must be read, focused on, and then analyzed to examine this issue. It is the words and concepts that make up the content of the medium. Thus to investigate this issue and reach the answer, the qualitative method was considered the most appropriate method since Bryman (2012) writes, "qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. Therefore, in data collection, we should focus more on words than numbers. Furthermore ‹this method looks pretty suitable for this research because it can use open-ended questions, and because the views, opinions, and experiences of media audiences are essential to this research, they can express their views broadly and openly in open-ended questions.

In addition, qualitative research encompasses a complex and interconnected set of terms, concepts, and assumptions. Qualitative researchers try to gain an understanding of the state of social processes (Bryman, 2012). Here, ethnic groups' interactions and interaction between ethnicities and government as a social process are explored and researched. Moreover, the exploratory nature of qualitative research seems to be very helpful because it allows the researcher to improve and develop the questions in the research process.

2.2 Research Design

The research design selected for this study is a case study design. In this method, the researcher selects a "case" and examines it from different aspects. This case can be a unit or system with a definite boundary consisting of numerous and related elements and factors. The general purpose of this method is to observe in detail the dimensions of the "case" under study and interpret the observations from a holistic perspective. Therefore, the case study is done more qualitatively, emphasizing processes and their understanding and interpretation (Bryman, 2012).

Case study research is an in-depth and rigorous study that helps to understand the different angles of an event. Hence it is a powerful tool in research. In case study research design, the focus is on the uniqueness of each case rather than highlighting common patterns (Lune & Berg, 2017. p. 180). Since the situation in the Middle East is a unique situation, and also Iran has a

unique position among its neighboring countries in terms of the history of being a nation-state, so the case study research method seems appropriate for this study.

In this study, the researcher develops their idea during the research, and the study decides whether to use one method for their research or several methods (Lune & Berg, 2017. p. 172). The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the Western-Based Persian Media on Iran's ethnic tensions. A case study helps to examine this issue from different angles, and during the research, the researcher is free to add other research methods. The case study method allows this paper to use a variety of documents (such as cultural and historical artifacts, interviews, and observations), which can help improve this research. In addition, the researcher can change the research methods in the case study method. Therefore, this method can help improve this research because a new event happens every day in Iran. For example, as the story of Khuzestan protests happened during this research, the researcher added the questionnaire.

2.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the similarity of tools in measuring data. That is, to what extent will the measuring instruments have the same results under the same conditions. As Bryman (2012) argues, reliability is "the consistency of a measure of a concept." In his view, the three factors, stability, internal reliability, and inter-observer consistency, indicate how reliable the measurement is. Stability means making sure that the results of the measure do not change over time or the changes are too small. Internal reliability means ensuring the compatibility of indicators with each other. And inter-observer consistency means that if more than one observer is involved in the research, it must be ensured that none of the observers interferes with their subjective judgments in the data collection process (Bryman, 2012).

As Bryman (2012) says, validity determines the research's accuracy and integrity and measures the research results' agreement with the real world. According to Baker (1999) the meaning of validity terminology is whether the measuring instrument in question can measure the feature and characteristic for which the instrument is designed or not? In other words, this concept answers how much the measurement tool measures the desired element.   Therefore, the validity of a tool depends on how the concept is defined and how it conforms to its measurement's empirical indicators (Baker, 1999). About this research, the documents used warrant an understanding of the impact of WBPM on ethnic tensions. Therefore, here are some

examples of changing ethnic civil protests trends after being framed and highlighted by WBPM.

The researcher used her old Instagram account to publish a request to participate in the questionnaire in this research process. Her followers have been following her for nine years as a journalist on Instagram, and it might be argued that they trust her, that they still see and read her. Also, they are the audience of the news and try to stay up to date with the day's news. Because people in Iran have less trust in state media and state journalists than independent journalists. Regarding cooperation with WBPM journalists, also, they are afraid because of the restrictions imposed by the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this regard. Furthermore, this research has used three sources: first, Facebook users, second, Instagram users, and third, news and documents on the Internet. And in this regard, it can be said that, given that the results of this study are duplicated of WBPM content, this article has validity. Because the question is to be answered: Can Western-based Persian media create tension and discord between the Iranian nation and neighboring nations? And since the questionnaire results show that the participants are more targeted by WBPM, especially BBCP, than Iranian state or domestic media, it can be said that the influence of these media is strong. Therefore, if the goal of these media is to create tension, they can create tension in Iran and other countries in the region. In the questionnaire, items are written that are mentioned by the WBPM. The BBCP is also the source of information for the majority of respondents.

In addition, at the beginning of the questionnaire, it is written that it is not necessary to write the names, details, and even the email address of the participants, and the answers will be kept confidential. Therefore, the data are reliable, considering that the respondents filled in the questionnaire with complete confidence.

2.4 Case study

The case study in this study is about the impact of WBPM on ethnic tensions among Iranian ethnic groups or between Iranian ethnic groups and the government. Therefore, the Iranian ethnicities, the government of Iran, the WBPM, specifically the BBCP, and the audience of these media on social media are the propositions of this case design. I decided to focus more on Iran than the whole Middle East because the scope of the debate was extensive. It means that to investigate the whole of the Middle East, the domestic and international events of all the countries of this region had to be examined and all the Western media that broadcast in Arabic,

Turkish, Kurdish, etc. Therefore, it is very time-consuming and requires mastery of all the region's languages. In addition, concentrating on one medium was to make the research more detailed and address the issue better. Moreover, the positioning of other WBPM is close to the BBC in their news coverage strategies when it concerns Iran or Iranian audiences. The BBCP is the oldest Persian-language media in the West and employs are the most experienced and skilled Iranian journalists. It has also been the most popular Persian language media in the West for many years (Mazrooei et al., 2019). Therefore, BBCP is now the most serious among these media and uses three tools: TV, radio, and website to cover Iranian news or publish world news for Iranians.

2.5 Limitations

Lack of transparency and ambiguity in the sample selection process, data collection, and analysis on achieving results are among the challenges that a qualitative researcher should pay enough attention to. Qualitative researchers have been inaccurate in sample selection, data collection, and analysis (Bryman, 2012, pp. 405-406).
Therefore, this qualitative research, like any other research, has its limitations. The first limitation is the fear of the I. R. Iran officials when the foreign media is involved. Because some experts and journalists have been imprisoned in recent years for collaborating with foreign media, so people are afraid to participate; however, my respondents, given their knowledge of me, can be an exception ; because they know me as an independent journalist. To counter this fear, I did not ask for any personal details (even email addresses) from the participants in the questionnaire.

The second limitation was distance. This restriction was created because my target group lives in Iran, and I could not travel to Iran. However, given that the primary data of this research is Internet-based and the secondary data is library research, this limitation is greatly diminished. On the other hand, the distance for this research can be a good thing considering the limited fear of the Iranian authorities. In addition, because participants did not attend a face-to-face meeting with the researcher, they became more confident that their details would remain confidential.

About the problems of generalization, also, it can be said that the scope of qualitative research findings is limited, and it cannot be generalized to all members of society. The results of qualitative research can be generalized in the form of a theory and not generalized to all

members of the community in question (Bryman, 2012, p. 406). Also, the qualitative researcher seeks relative generalization in which the dimensions of the research focus are considered examples of a broader set of recognizable features. Thus, qualitative research studies are assumed to represent a large community. However, a general challenge is that these studies are minimal in terms of conclusions and this research is no exception to this challenge.

2.6 Data Collection Methods

2.6.1 Internet

For this research, using the Internet-based research method as a platform for data collection and collection of secondary resources has been considered mandatory. The Internet was also an essential tool for this research which needs study of online interaction on social media.

"Qualitative research using online focus groups" and "online social surveys" have been used in this research. These fields have advantages over traditional research methods regarding time and cost savings, access to large numbers of people, eliminating distances and travel, and data collection speed, but they also have disadvantages. The disadvantages are the lack of universal Internet access, the unwillingness of people to participate in research and the lack of communication between the interviewer and the interviewee. This paper's research mechanisms had to be followed through the WBPM websites and their social media accounts from the beginning of the idea formation. So, the disadvantages probably do not include my research. In addition, most WBPM outlets have websites, and those with TV and radio do the most maneuvering on the Internet by sharing the news published on their websites on social media.

However, the Internet has become more global today than in 2012 (a few lines below in the social media section, you can see the Internet use statistics in Iran). Internet users are more willing to participate in discussions, as can be seen from social media. Concerned about hackers or scams among the focus group was not my research process because I shared the questionnaire through my old Instagram account; also as my followers have known me as a journalist for many years& so, they filled out the questionnaire with confidence. Of course, in this sampling, it is not possible to be sure that the participants' opinions are the opinions of all Iranians because they have volunteered to participate in the study and have probably had strong views on the subject of the questionnaire, which has encouraged them to participate in the process.

2.6.2 Social Media

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan&Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

As Duggan et al. (2015) points out, the increasing development of social media technologies and the significant and moment-by-moment increase in the audience of these media has made social media research a vital field of study today. As Digital 2021 reported, 4.55 billion users have used social media. And as datareportal.com writes, 36 million users used social media in January 2021, which was among the 59.16 million internet users in Iran. It is also reported that the number of social media users increased by 3 million (+9.1%) between 2020 and 2021. Thus, the number of social media users in Iran was equivalent to 42.6% of the total population in January 2021 (Datareportal, 11 February 2021).

Therefore, due to the high number of Iranian social media users, these media are suitable platforms for research. Also, since the Internet in Iran is cheap, and everyone who has mobile access also has access to the Internet and social media, it seems that these platforms do not belong to a particular social class, and anyone who has a mobile can also be a member of these networks. Today, Iranian businesses are prevalent on Instagram, as rural housewives or cheap and marginalized neighborhoods also sell their homemade food products on Instagram. For this reason, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have been selected because they are the most popular social media among Iranian users. I published a request to participate in the questionnaire via Instagram, and I made the online observation and social media observation on these platforms. This popularity has caused WBPM to create accounts on these three platforms and place their news headlines and reports. Hence, these media accounts on these three platforms have become an environment for discussion and exchange, and in many cases, a conflict and tension between followers. The advantages of using these platforms in the research process include their availability and savings in travel costs. However, one of their drawbacks is the hacking of pages, and the information used in the research can become inaccessible after a while. In some cases, the page admins also delete some comments and ideas.

2.7 Selection of Respondents

In this research, volunteer or self-selection sampling and snowball samplings methods have

been used via the internet (Google Forms) and social media (Instagram). Self-selection sampling is based on easy access to samples. In fact, instead of the researcher selecting the participants and communicating directly with them, individuals enter the study voluntarily (Sharma, 2017). Given that one of the benefits of voluntary sampling is time savings, this sampling was appropriate for this study. After seeing the call to participate questionnaire on Instagram, the samples of this research expressed their desire to fill out the questionnaire.

Snowball sampling was also used to find samples through other samples. In this way, through communication with a small group of the target population, the researcher asks them to inform others about the research and fill out the questionnaire if they are interested. In snowball sampling, the number of people you can reach is far greater than direct contact with the audience (Bryman,1999, cited in Bryman, 2012). For example, my target audience was Iranians, who are the audience of WBPM. In this regard, some questionnaires were filled out voluntarily (self-selection), and some through the snowball samplings method. In addition, the statistics mentioned above show that a significant part of Iranians is on social media, and they are the audience of WBPM pages on social media.

As read in the Case study and Data collection methods parts, my initial idea for data collection was an online observation or social media observation. It seems that the titles and texts of the news of these media are not professionally prepared and did not show the adherence of the journalist and the WBPM owners to the ethical charters of journalism. For example, the BBC Persian wrote in its headline that an Afghan attacked several Iranians in Germany. Such headlines had increased in a period on BBC Persian. Iranian journalists do not have a written Ethical Charter of Journalism. Still, at the beginning of all journalism classes or workshops, they are taught that the issue of ethnicities and minorities is sensitive. Therefore, these sensitivities should be taken into account in covering the news of ethnic groups and minorities.

Failure to pay attention to these sensitivities could jeopardize national security and cause ethnic unrest and conflict in Iran's multi-ethnic regions. In the west and east of Iran (from north to south), all cities live a combination of several ethnicities, several religions, and several languages. Some of these ethnicities speak Persian (or dialects of Persian), and the rest speak Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Baluch, etc. The religion of some of these ethnic groups is Sunni, which is a religious minority in Iran compared to Shiism, which is the official religion. Separatist groups operate among these groups and explain their views on these areas. In addition, there are

threats outside the borders of each of these ethnic areas. For example, groups among Pakistani Baloch people are trying to separate Baluchistan province from Iran and annex it to Pakistan. In north-western Iran, whether in the regions of Azerbaijan or the Republic of Azerbaijan (north-western neighbours of Iran), there are separatist groups whose goal is the separation of the Turkish provinces of Iran and unification with the Republic of Azerbaijan. Or, in Kurdistan province, with the majority of Sunnis, some groups want the separation of Kurdistan from Iran. These issues and the failure of the central government to keep the ethnic groups satisfied have created many sensitivities, and there is always the fear of creating inter-ethnic wars in these areas.

There may be a problem with methods biases reaction effects. Gerhard (2008) believes that systematic error in a research study leads to bias. Also, reaction effects in research occur when participants know they are involved in research. Therefore, using the method of unobtrusive measures or non-reactive methods, participants do not need to know that they are participating in the research (Webb et al., 2000). This research has tried to reduce the biases caused by the influence of the researcher or measuring instrument by using the unobtrusive measurement method. For example, in reviewing the comments of Persian-speaking audiences on WBPM pages on social media, commenters do not know that their opinions are to be included in the research. In simpler terms, where Iranians' opinions are analyzed in response to WBPM news on social media, given that this review and observation are not facing to face, and commenters do not know that their views will be included in the research process, they wrote their opinions without any bias or prejudice towards the subject of the research.

On the other hand, the offices of WBPM outlets are in countries with laws in content production, and non-compliance with these laws is a crime and carries a fine. Searching through the ethical charters of British, American, German, or French journalists (the countries that host the most WBPM) is not the work of this research, but the researcher, for her interest, had translated to Persian the Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press many years ago. For example, in 4.3. article of Publication Rules mentions that: "Always respect a person's character and identity, privacy, ethnicity, nationality, and belief. Be careful when using terms that create stigmas. Never draw attention to personal or private aspects if they are irrelevant."

In another case, six years ago, an Iranian journalist from Deutsche Welle wrote on Twitter that if you put those who believe in hijab in incinerators, the world would be a better place to

live. His remarks provoked so many reactions on social media that Deutsche Welle was forced to fire him, but he has since appeared as an expert on various WBPM programs. Moreover, the primary sources were websites and media outlets and their social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram. This research has also used secondary sources produced by academic researchers and journalists. It means that methodological triangulation is used to promote the use of several data collection methods.

2.8 Data Collection

After reading the experience of Brotsky and Giles (2007) in Bryman (2012), I also found the covert participant observation method in cyberspace suitable for this research for the part that will be observed online. The only difference is that I did not participate and only observed the participants' contributions to the topics under the WBPM, and more BBCP, posts on social media. I started online observation of WBPM news online, focusing on the impact of these media on ethnic events in the Middle East since I submitted my thesis contract to my supervisor. I used to monitor these media out of habit and because of my many years of career.

Accordingly, I tried to take notes from the BBC news about relatives and observe the audience's reactions on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). During this observation, I came across a significant issue, and that was the spelling of the name of one of the cities of Iran in the style of a separatist Arab group carrying out armed activities. In one of the southern provinces of Iran, mass demonstrations had taken place in protest of water shortages and unemployment. However, when referring to the slogans of the people, the BBCP wrote the name of the capital of this province in the way that the terrorist group writes, not in the way it is written in Persian. This particular type of writing of a city in Iran on the BBCP reinforced the idea that the media wanted to confiscate the people's protests against poverty and dehydration in favor of the Arab separatists in southern Iran (I will explain more in detail about it in Chapter 4). It was there that I decided to use the focus group method in addition to observation.

As a consequence, I designed a Self-completion questionnaire (see Annex). The purpose of this questionnaire was to examine the influence of the Iranian audience on the BBCP news about the protests of the people of southern Iran; also, how the audience thinks about the ethnicity of these protests. In this questionnaire, both closed-ended and open-ended questions were used. The sentences are short and straightforward and try to consider all the possible conditions and options

for the answer. Open-ended questions were chosen to make the respondent feel free to answer. Also, because the case study is media content, and analysis and interpretation are an essential part of media content, it was decided for this research to have the analysis and interpretation of media audiences. Closed-ended questions were also considered because they are easy for everyone to answer.

I asked my Instagram followers to fill it out using self-selection sampling and snowball samplings methods. Indeed, I used both Web-based and communication-based methods. Through the former, I published a questionnaire that I had designed in the Google Forum, and the respondents completed it through asynchronous methods. Through the latter, I used Instagram as a social media to accompany the questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, both closed and open questions, but most of the open questions were designed to take advantage of the benefits that Bryman (2012) offers for open questions, including the respondent's free will to write answers, achieve unusual responses, and exploring new areas.

Of the 108 respondents, 75% are between 30 and 50 years old, and 70.4% live inside Iran. Among the respondents living in Iran, 82% live in Tehran, and the rest are from twelve other cities, including southern Iran and Tabriz, which also protested in support of the south. 90% of the respondents follow the news of the Khuzestan protests through social media, 36% through WBPM, and only 9% through the state media of the I. R. Iran. Some have either followed the news through non-Persian language media, and some do not follow Khuzestan news. Among those who listen to the WBPM, the BBCP has the largest audience. Also, on social media, the most respondents were BBCP accounts on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram. Plus, a significant number wrote that they follow the accounts of BBCP reporters to follow the news of Khuzestan.

2.9 Ethics and anonymization

As it is necessary to follow the rules and regulations everywhere, some principles and rules must be observed in the research process, including research ethics and anonymity. In all scientific research, observing the scientific research process is a necessary and undeniable thing that all researchers should consider. Ethics in research guarantees the quality of research and helps the researcher to complete the whole process with double accuracy. As Bryman (2012) cited Diener and Crandall (1978), in discussing the ethical principles of social research, four

things must be observed, and in Bryman's (2012) opinion, these cases are a valuable classification of the observance of ethical principles in social research. The first is not to harm the participants, the second is to get informed consent from the participants, the third is to consider privacy, and the fourth is to avoid deceiving the participant.

In this research, all these ethical issues have been observed. In the questionnaire section, questionnaires have been made available through social media to those who gave informed consent to fill out the questionnaire. Respondents will not be harmed because the questionnaires are anonymous. I protected respondents from harm by assuring them that their names and details would not be published and that they would not even need to write an email address. This questionnaire is designed in Google form, and each person / ID can fill in only one questionnaire. The names and personal details of the respondents have not been requested, although if necessary, the IDs can be identified using the software features. However, at the beginning of the questionnaire, the participants were assured that the answers would remain confidential with the researcher. And at the end of the research process, the forms will be deleted. Also, given that the questions were asked impartially and without giving direction to the minds of the participants, so there is no deception. In the section on using the comments of the followers of BBCP pages in the social media space, I also used the comments without writing the name of the commenters. Although it is argued that those who comment on social media in public with their names and profiles have implicitly consented to the use of the name, however in this research, no name is mentioned except the famous people announced many times through the WBPM. It means that the questionnaire participants were reassured that they would not be identifiable based on the researcher's quotations.

Chapter 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Some social science theories are related to the research questions in this article; among these are media dependency, gatekeeping, stimulus-response model, hypodermic needle model, conflict theories, public sphere, public diplomacy, hyperreality, soft power, and soft threat. Some of these theories are interdisciplinary, and some are specifically related to one of the branches of the social sciences. But theories that have been chosen for this research are media diplomacy, soft power, agenda-setting, and framing. As a tool to promote public diplomacy, media diplomacy discusses the role of the media in international relations. Therefore, this theory can help answer one of this paper's research questions: why Western governments create Persian media. It means that governments and powers use the media to implement their foreign policies, pressure other governments to accept their policies, and direct public opinion in favor of foreign policies.

Therefore, this theory can help address Western governments' interests in creating media for other countries. Also, since the media is the most important tool of soft power, and in Joseph Nye's writings of the last three decades, states can use their soft power - media, information, and communication - to advance their international policies in their own interests, this theory selected for this paper. In addition, to study the role of the WBPM on ethnic tensions, we have to examine the two theories of agenda-setting and framing because these two theories discuss media techniques to direct public opinion in favor of the policies of media owners. Moreover, the two theories are common to the social sciences, including international relations, political science, communication science, psychology, and philosophy. Therefore, this paper discusses approaches of agenda-stinging and framing from international relations and communication sciences views.

3.1 Media Diplomacy

As reviewed in the introduction, some of the great powers of the West spend huge sums of money to create and maintain media in the languages of other countries، and this is while they do not charge any money or taxes from the audience of this media. What is the purpose of these countries? Is it to improve the quality of life of the people of those countries or to preserve or expand the interests of the great powers? There is a concept in international relations theories called media diplomacy. But what is media diplomacy?

Media diplomacy is, in a way, a subset of public diplomacy. Therefore, there is a need to provide a brief definition of public diplomacy as a platform for media diplomacy. The term public diplomacy was first coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, a retired American diplomat. The term quickly gained popularity in the United States. The US intelligence service used the term to say that it should have control of VOA radio and that the rest of the cultural work done by the State Department should be left to that organization (Sazmand & Barati, 2014).

Despite the long history of public diplomacy in practice, the literature in this field is very new. Edmund Gullion, the inventor of the term public diplomacy, defines this concept as: "the role of the press and other media in international affairs, public opinion cultivation by governments, the non-government interaction of private groups, and the impact of these transnational processes on the formulation of policy and the conduct of foreign affairs" (Tiedeman, 2005, p. 2).

Accordingly, today, an essential part of a country's public diplomacy activities includes media activities. The origins of media and social media diplomacy are the emergence of new issues in the information and communication age (globalization) and the need to manage them in the information society. To manage knowledge and information as a centre of virtual and media diplomacy, advanced technologies and tools, and means of communication and notification are inevitable. Because these dramatic changes in information and communication have created patterns of interaction and different types of relations in the international arena, making the formation and use of virtual and media diplomacy necessary. Media diplomacy is led by many individuals and groups who do not serve in the State Department and are not professional diplomats (Sazmand & Barati, 2014).

In the present era and after World War II, new concepts have been introduced in combination with the word diplomacy to distinguish it from formal or pure diplomacy and transfer new concepts in this informal field of foreign relations. Public diplomacy in general and sports diplomacy, art diplomacy, and university diplomacy, in particular, are examples of these new concepts. Media diplomacy is a branch of public or non-governmental diplomacy that means using the mass media as an instrument of influence. Media diplomacy in the field of interdisciplinary sciences overlaps with political connections and forms the intersection and interaction of media and politics in foreign relations (Shiralilou, 2017).

Media diplomacy in each country's foreign policy is realized in two ways: first in the form of management of the official diplomatic organizations of the country, and second spontaneously and in line with the macro policies of countries. In the first method, governments either establish special diplomatic media or oblige the existing media to take action in their foreign policy. The establishment of overseas media is of the first type. In the second type, they achieve their goals in foreign fields by achieving news censorship, restricting journalists, etc. It should be noted that in this method, the planning of the ruling apparatus is necessary to coordinate all sections with the media, and in the absence of planning, its failure will be final. The second way is for the media to keep pace with their respective countries' goals and foreign policies. In this way, although the media do not receive specific instructions from the government, they act because of their professional maturity and professional responsibility for the macro-policies of their system worldwide and because they are more independent of government and sovereignty (Rezaeian, 2008).

Rezaian (2008) generally knows media diplomacy as a complement and promoter of foreign policy, transnational psychological operations, creating hatred and enmity towards the target country's government, applying political, cultural, and military pressures of other countries against the target country, creating citizens interest of the target country towards the invading country and legitimize and justify the actions of war agents.

Shiralilou (2017), like Rezaian (2008), believes that one of the essential applications of media diplomacy is in foreign propaganda or psychological operations. He says that print, radio, television, and digital media influence foreign public opinion. Accountable governments also exchange messages through the media in cases where the risk of dialogue through official channels or embassy diplomacy is significant, reducing their national interests' threats while minimizing potential harm. Media diplomacy is not considered an alternative to formal diplomacy but is used as a compliment and accelerator (catalyst) and in parallel with diplomatic actions (Shiralilou, 2017). These claims explicitly address one of the sub-questions of this research: what are the interests of the founding countries or the media owners in creating the media? This aspect of media diplomacy helps clarify and answer the primary and secondary questions of this research. In addition, it sheds light on the impact of WBPM on ethnic tensions and why Western governments establish Persian media without a monetary share for the Iranian people.

Shiralilou (2017) argues that as one of the main branches of the diplomatic apparatus and foreign policy activities, media diplomacy has emerged since the beginning of the present century and has become a significant part of the public diplomacy of the powerful countries of the world. New information and communication technologies have now shifted the scope of diplomacy and foreign policy from the editorial offices of world newspapers, television, and radio to social media. This factor has necessitated forming an atmosphere of interaction between diplomats and the media in the age of information society. An environment in which the advancement of foreign policy and diplomacy has become increasingly dependent on the effectiveness of news and media tactics; The more powerful and effective the tactics, the smoother the wheels of foreign policy (ibid).

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Regarding the influence of the media, we can refer to the CNN Effect Theory. Livingston (1997) argues that the CNN Effect Theory means the impact of live media on diplomacy and foreign policy. The main feature of CNN Effect theory on the free and increasing flow of information is the dissemination and short news cycle on public opinion in free societies. This theory emphasizes the role of the major international media in shaping ideology, directing public opinion, and prioritizing the political and security goals of governments (Livingston, 1997).

"Media diplomacy concerns the way the media link policymakers to foreign governments and to the public" by disseminating government attitudes in editorials as well as disclosing information that has the potential to change policies (Cohen, 2005, p. 8). Gilboa believes that media diplomacy requires close cooperation between officials and the media. According to him, media diplomacy involves using the media by leaders to express their interests in negotiations,

building trust, and mobilizing support for agreements. Ebo defined media diplomacy as 'the use of the media to articulate and promote foreign policy' (Gilboa, 2001).

These statements in the field of international politics increase the likelihood that the media created by Western superpowers in the language of other countries is to protect and promote their interests and not necessarily to upgrade the knowledge and lives of the people of the destination countries. In this regard, Gilboa (2002) also says media diplomacy uses the media, particularly in the promotion and smoothing of foreign policy. In other words, media diplomacy refers to a set of mechanisms through which policies can be applied to people, parties, politicians, groups, institutions, international organizations, and even other governments. Media diplomacy in general means using the media to complement and promote foreign policy. Also, American researcher Ramaprasad has defined media diplomacy as the role that the media play in diplomatic activities between countries (Ramaprasad, 2002, as cited in Azar et al. (2016). And Taylor believes that media diplomacy should be considered the art of communication between countries, resolving international disputes, and persuading other societies through global media. Global television plays an important role here (Taylor, 1997, as cited in Azar et al., 2016).

About one of the questions of this paper, "Why do Western governments establish media in Persian without a paid subscription for Iranian people while their people pay for media?" Shiralilou (2017) believes that these days, world leaders use global communications as an essential tool for advancing negotiations and mobilizing public support for agreements. He says media diplomacy, which takes shape in the space of interaction between media and politics, has become a powerful tool these days to influence world public opinion; A tool that should be used as much as possible and more appropriately.

Today, a country's position in the world community and its place in the global hierarchy is tied to its media diplomacy. For policymakers, diplomats, the people, ministers, and members of parliament, the media is both a source of information and a source of political ideas. Politicians connect with the people through the media because they are the tribune of politicians in foreign policy and acquaint the public opinion with this field and the measures of politicians in international relations. Moreover, the media can change policies because they decide which areas and which topics to cover (Shiralilou, 2017).

In this regard Cohen (2005) believes that, the media directly influence the principle of politics and is a source of information for the people and politicians. The presence of the media

complements the formal diplomatic network between states and can hinder or advance policies. Therefore, they are used by policymakers to disclose information and gain public support for the policies formulated (Cohen, 2005, p. 5).

According to Azar et al. (2016), an essential part of the strategic power of countries now lies in the ability and talent of their media diplomacy. As an influential dimension of countries 'diplomatic dimensions, media diplomacy spins heavy cycles of countries' diplomacy and foreign policy. As long as the media is responsible for the rotation of diplomatic and foreign policy ideas and promoting a particular image of countries and societies, and as long as the facts behind them influence people's thoughts and actions, the world media will play a diplomatic game. As well as in the formation of media diplomatic discourses, the realities within the speeches and the depiction of them are done to lay the groundwork for gaining wealth, increasing power, and promoting diplomatic prestige (Azar et al., 2016). Therefore, we can come closer to answering whether the creation of WBPM is in the interest of the Iranian people or the interest of the media and the role of the western media in the recent tensions in the Middle East.

For years, global discourse and mainstream media have pushed national, regional, international, and global politics into the editorial offices of global newspapers, Internet networks, television, and radio. Today, new media from the Web 2.0, Web 3.0 family. An environment in which policy advancement has become increasingly dependent on the effectiveness of news and media tactics and tactics. The more intelligent, powerful, and effective these tactics and news coverage are designed and disseminated, the smoother domestic and foreign policy cycles (ibid).

There is also a discussion in the literature on media diplomacy that specifically addresses the role of the media in psychological warfare and military warfare. These discussions can help this paper reach the answer: Can Western-based Persian media create tension and discord between the Iranian nation and neighboring nations?

The early 1920s to the 1950s were the years of growth of politicians in media in Europe and America. In all the twentieth-century wars, the media was used as a tool of psychological warfare and war propaganda by many countries, such as in World War II when Nazi German forces were severely defeated in February 1943 and surrendered to Russian forces. But German Radio lied that German troops were continuing to resist Russian troops (Rezaeian, 2008).

In the 1983 occupation of Granada, the United States revised its media policies and prevented journalists from entering war zones, following a lesson learned from the Vietnam War and the practice of the media. In 1991, during the first Persian Gulf War, the Western media were also barred from entering the front lines. During the Kosovo war, NATO held a daily press conference in which it provided pre-produced images to the media in a specific framework (Kissinger, 2001 as Cited in Rezaeian, 2008).

In 2003, during the Second Gulf War, the visual media came out of the monopoly of BBC and CNN, and emerging media including Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, Abu Dhabi, and Al-Alam announced their existence. In this war, special attention was also paid to the field of the Internet as a competitor of print and electronic media, so that in the United States and Europe, the use of Internet users reached over 70% after the beginning of the war (Hables Gray, 1997 as cited in Rezaeian, 2008).

Rezaeian (2008) believes that some of the great Western powers are seeking media war through the media. According to him, using the media to weaken the target country and use the capability and capacity of the media to defend national interests is the most fundamental definition of media war, which is a new war and so-called soft war. He writes that this media war or soft war is waged through media diplomacy.

Mottaqi's (2010) opinions can, also, be helpful to arrive at one of the questions of this study, which asks whether the Western media is involved in the wars in the Middle East, and if so, whether it is in the interest of the media owners or the people. He believes that psychological warfare (according to him, media warfare) is a subset of soft war and can control the minds and hearts of the people. This kind of war seeks to destroy the thought and thinking of the target society to weaken its intellectual and cultural circles and inject instability into the ruling socio-political system by bombarding it with news and propaganda. The goal of the media warfare, and generally soft warfare, is that attempts are made to damage the centers of gravity of the soft security reference issues, namely the legitimacy of the political system, the national unity and integrity of the country, national trust, and national political consensus (Mottaqi, 2010).

Nye (2008), who considers the media the most important tool of soft warfare, similarly has Mottaqi's views. He believes that efforts in soft warfare are made to reduce people's satisfaction with the system's efficiency as much as possible. Decreasing people's satisfaction plays a significant role in reducing national flexibility and political sensitivity. In soft warfare, the threat

agent seeks to provide persuasive patterns through the media and tries to influence the audience to understand their preferences and priorities according to the demands of the threat agent (Nye, 2008).

3.1.1 Media Warfare

Has the WBPM played a role in wars and tensions of recent years in the Middle East? Kamalipour and Snow (2004) answer this research question to some extent. They write that after 9/11, US international relations continued under the Bush doctrine with the slogan, "The best defense is a good offense." Accordingly, the Freedom Promotion Act was passed by the US Congress in 2002 to promote American values around the world through international exchanges, sister cities, English language teaching, and the international media. But American values are not in America's interests. Economic interests and military presence are American interests determined by Washington and New York, while American values are cultural, social, and political. "This battle, between interests and values, is a battle between realpolitik (might makes right) and soft power (right makes might). So far, realpolitik has always won because a sole superpower can change the rules of the game at will. The United States is so powerful that it can be inconsistent in its foreign policy and get away with it." (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004, p. 20).

Kamalipour and Snow (2004) point to the soft power of the United States in the Iraq war, say that the United States lost to Al-Jazeera in the media war in Iraq, referring to the lack of connection between US news coverage and international news coverage. Because it could not control the message's sender and the message itself, the war reported through the American media differed from the war declared through the international media. For example, the headlines of a news item on FNC: Operation Iraqi Freedom; On CNN: The Final Battle Against Saddam; Al Jazeera: US Imperialist War for Dominion and Occupation (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004, p. 21).

Thus, according to Kamalipour and Snow (2004), the Western media play a role in the wars in the Middle East. But is this active role in wars to improve the situation for the benefit of the people of the war zones or the policies of the media owners? They believe that today, the interests of many Western great media empires are tied to the interests of the United States. And the dominant US ideology is evident in the international news structure of these media. For

example, in the Second Iraq War, in 2003, FNC news and analysis supported the US and British invasion of Iraq. After media mergers in the 1980s and 1990s, nine media collections were created, and all of these media emperors are under the media empire of Rupert Marduk, including FNC.

Arab countries were also suspicious of the war and criticized the United States. Al-Jazeera played the most crucial role in the Arab media. The Qatari satellite network, the most-watched satellite network in the Arab world, expressed its anger at Bush both before and during the war. But the United States was able to infiltrate Qatar through news and analysis through the exercise of power. However, the media kept announcing that it was a neutral medium. Al-Jazeera media, and consequently the Qatari government, play an essential role in shaping Arab public opinion, and this is due to the Qatari government's support for the network's independence. In this way, Al Jazeera was able to essentially refine US media coverage, taking a wide range of ideas (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004, p. 238).

Media technology acts as a means of serving or against governments and dramatically molds and orientations human imagery and ideas. Satellite and modern media have eliminated time and place and are essential for physical boundaries. Accordingly, domination of the media is a fundamental strategy to advance the political goals of governments. Political developments in Arab countries since 2013 are also placed in line with the impression of the media (Omidi & Rashidi, 2014).

Kamalipour and Snow (2004) say that news should not be seen only as a tool for disseminating information but also the media as an essential tool for advertising. They claim that in the Iraq war, the big media served the interests of the United States and its allies, not the intelligence. By motivating and encouraging popular emotions, the media can guide them to anti-government to create pressure tools to provide the interests of their supporters. Therefore, we see in the representation and framing of Syrian events by the Al Jazeera news organization on the same axis. At the wavelength of the Egyptian people's revolution, this network tried to maintain the identity of a neutral media and act prudently. But with the onset of unrest and civil wars in Syria, this media attempted to use any instrument for their supporters' goals and hit the system of Bashar al-Assad ((Kamalipour & Snow, 2004).

According to Omidi and Rashidi (2014), the media giant violated journalism standards in support of the Syrian rebels, abandoned the news accuracy, and referred to unknown people

instead of releasing accurate reports. From the perspective of the Qatari state, the destiny of Syria directly plays a role in the future of Doha and the country for political reasons demanding the fall of the Syrian system (Omidi & Rashidi, 2014).

The most important reason for this Al Jazeera network policy towards the events of Syria, which has been abundant in its public news, is that Qatar is next to Saudi Arabia in the region. Therefore, it is away from rationality that the axis of the Al Jazeera movement is different from the policies of the Qatari government and the Hamad ibn Khalifa Al Thani, the former Amir of Qatari, the sponsor, and founder of this news organization. As the content analysis of reports on Syria confirms such a claim. As Omidi and Rashidi (2014) cited Calderon (2012), Argentine expert, Al Jazeera, the Ministry of Advertising of Amir Qatar, has taken the same way in the Syrian crisis, which Joseph Goebbels, the Hitler Advertising Minister of World War II (ibid). Who doubts that the second Gulf War was an effective relationship between the army and the media and a failure for the media lunches that could challenge the government's leadership? (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004, p. 24).

3.2 Soft Power

In the last two decades, soft power has been one of the most controversial concepts in international politics and international relations. Joseph Nye first introduced the concept of soft power in 1990 in a book entitled "The Changing Nature of American Power " and gave a detailed account of soft power. According to him, soft power is the ability to influence others to achieve the desired results through positive planning, persuasion, and attraction. He writes "Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion or payments." (Nye, 2005, p. 11).

Nye (1990) emphasizes that a distinction must be made between the direct exercise of power in an authoritarian manner and the indirect exercise of power in a compelling way. The first method uses encouragement, threats, and coercion to change the behaviour of other actors, which is known as hard power. But in the second method, ideas and values are attractive. This power also can set the political agenda to shape the tendencies and priorities of other actors and, consequently, to change their behavior in favor of the superior power. Nye has named this power soft power.

Nye (2002) believes that future policies are complicated by the growth of non-state actors and multinational corporations, significant developments in communications and transportation, as well as the expansion of technology and the globalization of economic interactions. Accordingly, the ability of powers to rely on traditional sources of power and compel governments to fulfil the will of a country is fading. Thus, soft power is the ability of a country to create conditions in which other countries define and pursue their own interests in a way that is consistent with that country's interests. For example, this mechanism can attract one country's culture and values to others, or that country can advance the global agenda and international norms following the wishes and norms of its own country.

Nye (2004) enumerates the characteristics of the information age and the expansion of mass and individual media for the rapid and cheap transfer and exchange of information. Therefore, a country with powerful media management capability can play an influential role in managing world politics.

According to Nye (2014), the critical feature of the 21st century is not the speed of information and communication exchange but the considerable reduction in the cost of information and communication exchange around the world, which leads to extensive changes in power sources and their importance.

Nye (2004) also proposes methods and tools for the optimal use of soft power, including media, entertainment, student exchanges, and institutionalization. Joseph Nye also pays close attention to public diplomacy as one of the essential soft power methods and outlines three key components, including day-to-day communication, strategic thematic communication, and the development of long-term relationships with key people in target countries.

Therefore, according to Nye, information and communication and the media, in general, is the most important tool of soft power, and controlling the flow of information and managing it can strengthen power. Thus, the theory of soft power can clarify the answer to the question of this research that why do Western governments establish Persian media without a paid subscription for the Iranian people, whether these media were created for free and impartial information, or whether the interests of the founding countries or media owners require the creation of media?

3.3 Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting theory refers to the influence of the media on our cognition and attitude and the determination of mental priorities by certain magnifying events in the form of news and reports. The media focus on specific events, making this theory vital because it suggests how the media can influence society. And this replacement is done to change the attitude. There is also evidence that the media shapes people's perceptions of the fundamental problems facing society. Therefore, the issues and problems that have been highlighted in the media may not be the same as they are in reality.

Agenda-setting in international relations research is more common among articles on international non-governmental organizations. Also, many researchers in international relations and political science have developed agenda-setting theory because it is a fundamental issue in communication, and communication is an essential tool of global politics and diplomacy, especially public diplomacy. For example, Bjola and Holmes (2015) examine agenda-setting in the role of social media in public diplomacy. In their book, Digital Diplomacy: theory and practice, they explore the digital diplomacy strategies of the United States, the European Union, and Japan.

They believe that agenda-setting is essential when examining the role of digital media in public diplomacy. They have also made it clear that agenda-setting on social media is crucial. They believe that agenda-setting is essential when examining the role of digital media in public diplomacy. They have also made it clear that agenda-setting on social media is crucial. They have, indeed, reviewed the strategies of the three embassies in China and concluded that it forces diplomats to pay more attention to their audience and set the agenda of discussion with their audience. They also explored the common understanding and common interests of embassies and their audiences on Chinese social media (Bjola & Holmes, 2015, pp. 71-72). The United Nations also uses agenda-setting to study policy formulation and policy processes (Sumida, 2017). But in the field of communication and media, among the theories and hypotheses that discuss the tricks and techniques used by the media to "deliberately manipulate the minds and behaviour of the audience," agenda-setting is one of the most important. Indeed, agenda-setting and framing (we will talk about framing later) are the two most important commonalities in the sciences of communication and international relations.

In the concept of agenda-setting, it is believed that news media, by presenting and disseminating their favourite news and information, shape people's thoughts on specific topics. In a more straightforward sense, agenda-setting states that the media's attention to particular issues increases the importance of those issues to the public. In other words, the media influences public perceptions of the significance of the problems. Also, mass media, with their extensive news coverage, determine how people prioritize general issues. The mass media imposes its priorities on the people. Thus, they shape the importance of the masses. And in some cases, the mass media, by their news coverage and content, determine the mental orientation of politicians, managers, and leaders of the country (Robinson, 2003 as cited in Eliasy, 2007). Therefore, if the existence of political and ethnic tensions in the targets countries comes to the attention of the media owners, they can create these tensions in the targets countries through agenda-setting. The concept of agenda-setting has attracted extensive research and study over the past few decades. For example, Lippmann (1965) believes that "mass media shapes the images of our minds" and encourages researchers to explore the dimensions and requirements of media agenda-setting.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) were among the first to systematically study the effects of media agenda-setting by examining the impact of the media on the US election. Their research showed that the media, with its unique and exaggerated news coverage, has a profound effect on "indecisive voters" and motivates them to vote for a particular candidate while running in the election. Other researchers, such as Ingram et al. (1990), have studied television agenda-setting and its effects on audiences. They have shown that television can influence the minds and behaviors of audiences by covering some issues and ignoring others. According to these researchers, television exposure has a more significant impact on audiences less aware of the topics covered. The research has also shown that television coverage increases public awareness of an issue by reviewing research on television agenda-setting. However, they emphasize that television can only suddenly increase people's awareness and attention about an issue if it covers it in a broad and "exaggerated" way.

Severin and Tankard (1992) have also shown that television coverage increases public awareness of an issue by reviewing research on television agenda-setting. However, they emphasize that television can only suddenly increase people's awareness and attention about an issue if it covers it in a broad and "exaggerated" way (Eliasy, 2007 In this regard, news coverage

of Western-based Persian TV channels on ethnic issues can help create disputes between ethnic groups if it is aimed at creating tension. But on the other hand, it can also strengthen peace and harmony between ethnic groups, but it must be seen whether tensions will benefit the media or peace.

Eliasy (2007) helps clarify the research question of how the media can create tension and war. According to Eliasy (2007), media outlets can highlight an issue and introduce it as the people's main priority if they follow techniques such as finding a topic, formatting the selected subject, comprehensive coverage, special naming, using the nominal code, and accelerating the issue through famous and acceptable people.

This world of communication and information, in turn, has introduced the media as the most prominent and influential actor on the world stage. Media functions have reconstructed our understanding of space and time. Reality through human contact with the world is what the media offers him. Severin and Tankard (1992), as cited in Eliasy (2007), believe that the mass media focuses on specific issues. They make public images of political figures and constantly present topics that represent issues that the masses need to think, know and feel about. Also, today the advertising role of the media is more prominent than their educational role. Rather than increasing people's knowledge, different media seek ideological justification and instill political beliefs and attitudes towards them (Eliasy, 2007).

The first step in agenda-setting is finding a critical topic and prioritizing the media. The media usually chooses such an issue based on criteria such as the prevailing ideology, the words of community leaders, the positions of a particular party, or their preferences. Formatting the selected subject is the second step. The topic chosen is considered by the public when it has a specific semantic and emotional load. Such meaning and format should be attractive and relevant to the audience. The third step is comprehensive coverage. A meaningful formatting topic is at the forefront of the audience's importance when repeated with different words. Special naming comes as the fourth step. A unique name should be chosen for a selected topic with a special meaning and introduced to the community. "Political scandal," "electoral scandal," "embezzlement," "serial killings," "Watergate," "Iran Contra," "chain newspapers," and "embezzlement of public property" are examples of particular and influential naming. The fifth step is using the nominal code. The subject for penetration in the audience's minds must be associated with old concepts familiar to the audience's minds. And finally, the sixth step is

accelerating the issue through famous and acceptable people. The media often use political, sports, scientific, and other figures to highlight a subject quickly. When the subject is introduced in the language of such people, it will soon become a popular topic of public opinion. There is no need to argue that agenda-setting will gradually occur, and the highlighted issue's importance will not last long. Therefore, the mass media shift their attention from one or more topics to other topics after a while.

Furthermore, researchers, for example, Manheim (1987), have shown that other factors also influence the agenda-setting process and the media. According to Manheim, agenda-setting results from the media's priorities, political institutions, and the masses. Based on the above, it can say that firstly: the media can focus on the part of the facts and facts, and its comprehensive coverage, to focus the minds of a broad group of people in society on specific issues. Second, the media can influence the values of society by valuing specific facts and exaggerating that valuation with their needs and wants. Fourth: Prominence is more likely to occur in areas that align with the political priorities of society (Eliasy, 2007).

3.4 Framing

Framing in the social sciences, communications, and media studies mean constructing the formats through which the world is represented. Frame and framing are not new terms or phenomena. According to Pan and Kosicki (1993), framing is an interdisciplinary concept that goes back to psychology and sociology (Pan & Kosicki, as cited in Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013, p. 123). This concept includes the "discursive process of strategic actors utilizing symbolic resources to participate in collective sense-making about public issues" (Pan & Kosicki, cited in Marek & Wolfsfeld, 2003, p. 65).

Goffman (1974) first used this concept in his sociological research. According to him, we use interpretive schemes to organize and categorize our life experiences to make them meaningful. These interpretive schemes are called framing and force people to find, understand and identify facts and events and label them. According to Goffman, the framing is a model that people can use to make their life experiences meaningful by placing them in these frames (Pan & Kosicki, 1993 as cited in Marek & Wolfsfeld, 2003, p. 65). "Fames are "central organizing ideas to understand and organize political reality" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987 as cited in Marek & Wolfsfeld, 2003, p. 65).

The discussion of framing theory is essential for this research because it shows that the media have capabilities that politicians can use to advance their own interests. Specifically, on the subject of this research, the media have the potential to be tools of the superpowers to create any tension in the target countries, including inter-ethnic tensions.

There is the concept of framing in prospect theory in International Relations. As Mintz and Redd (2003) argue, "framing is the least well-developed central concept of prospect theory. Framing is both fundamental to prospect theory and remarkably underdeveloped in the prospect theory literature." (Mintz & Redd, 2003, p. 193)

Policy framing of organizations and institutions or individuals and groups is very common in international relations and foreign policy. These organizations or individuals often also frame the policies, actions, and goals of others. For example, Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union the Evil Empire, or George W. Bush called Saddam Hussein Hitler. So "framing an oftused technique in international relations and foreign policy discourse" (Mintz & Redd, 2003, p. 193).

Framing needs to be developed and expanded in the formal prospect theory literature because this concept seems necessary and fundamental for prospect theory. "This makes the use of framing in social science modeling a methodological issue of serious import. It is particularly serious in international relations since political leaders often use information and rhetoric to induce decision-makers (allies, adversaries, the public, the media, constituencies, voters and third parties) to adopt particular frames i.e., by the use of political manipulation." (Mintz & Redd, 2003, p. 194).

In this regard, Mintz and Geva (1997) argue that the thematic framing is content-based communication and/ or marketing, generally chosen by national leaders and then is led by the leaders to the public *that concern policy, or product, attributes and/or the introduction of "organizing themes" into the policy debate."* In other words, the framing can sensitize the people to political, diplomatic, national, or economic security issues. *" The thematic frame also affects the salience of the attributes that national leaders have called attention to in encouraging support for preferred policy positions. There- fore, the thematic characteristic of framing can influence popular attitudes by prioritizing the content considered during the policy debate"* (Mintz & Redd, 2003, p. 195).

3.4.1 Media Framing

Framing in communication science is something similar. There are editors and journalists who become tribunes for the more influential politicians and also frame the news and reports themselves. Every day different events happen in different parts of the world, but the media chooses the reality they want from these various events. They take a picture of these facts, frame them, and put an image in front of our eyes that they have created. This is the central claim of media framing theory, which holds that the media even determines how the audience sees and thinks.

In communications and media, the concept of framing was first used by Giltin (1977) and Tuchman (1978) to examine how journalists effectively package and present media news. They discussed specific media framing for how news information is sent and disseminated to audiences and how users interpret these news additions. Minsky considers the framing to be a structure that contains various pieces of information. These mental or argumentative structures are closely related to the description of the outline. He adds that the media play a significant role in constructing and forming these outlines and patterns. People create their cognitive framing with the help of existing patterns and outlines. These mental frames do not depend on one's particular way of thinking or approach but are created through discourse (Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013, p. 124).

Giltin calls framing stable models of cognition, interpretation, presentation, choice, emphasis, and exception in his research on the relationship between the new media and the new student left movement. He believes that symbolists use them to organize discourse every day. Gamson considers the framing to be the central idea of the organizer or the trajectory of the report, which is characterized by symbolic tools such as metaphors, examples, words, descriptions, and suggestive images. A pre-existing template in which the event is cast and presented to the audience. At the same time, being a role model implies selectivity. That is, only parts of the event are selected and presented that fit into this format. Other sections are ignored or marginalized. In this way, as Tankard points out, it can be assumed that framing is rooted in the process of selecting, emphasizing, excluding, and detailing news through the news organization (Dimitrova et al., 2005 as cited in Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013, p. 124). Considering the two characteristics of modeling and selectivity of framing, Entman (2008) defines framing as selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and agenda-setting them in a

communicative text to define the problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and develop solutions suggested for that topic. According to Entman (2008), the framing used by the media conveys moral judgments by defining problems in society and identifying the reasons for them. Entman's definition gives a comprehensive view of the concept of framing. However, this concept still faces many ambiguities and complexities. Part of this ambiguity has to do with the relationship between framing as a theory and agenda-setting.

Communication research shows a great deal of convergence between agenda-setting and framing, as McCombs and Shaw, and Weaver believed that the effects of framing and agenda-setting are interrelated. Framing is an extension of the theory of emphasis. They used the term "second-level agenda-setting" to describe the impact of the prominence of news coverage features on the audience's interpretation of these news stories. From their point of view, agenda-setting first selects topics for the attention of public opinion. It then provides a framing for thinking about these topics, thus diverting attention to certain features and diverting them from other elements (Lee, 2010 as cited in Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013, p. 125). In other words, agenda-setting believes that the media tells us the topic of the day and prioritizes certain events. While based on framing theory, they can even make some aspects meaningful by putting a specific news angle or news rotation on these elements to tell us from which angle to look at each event.

The other part of this ambiguity goes back to the scope of framing research. Entman (1993) points out that framing have different situations, including communicator, text, message receiver, and culture. These are integral parts of the framing process, including framing, framing, and the social and individual consequences of framing. This expanded field of research provides a variety of approaches to framing that limit the possibility of comparing experimental results in these studies to the extent that Scheufele (1999) believes that the concept of framing is unlikely to be a consistent theoretical model. Entman also argues that framing leads only to case studies that provide a kind of scattered conceptualization. Of course, studies that address the general concept of framing can alleviate these concerns to some extent. However, the ambiguity that Entman is looking for still exists in the field of framing (Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013, p. 126).
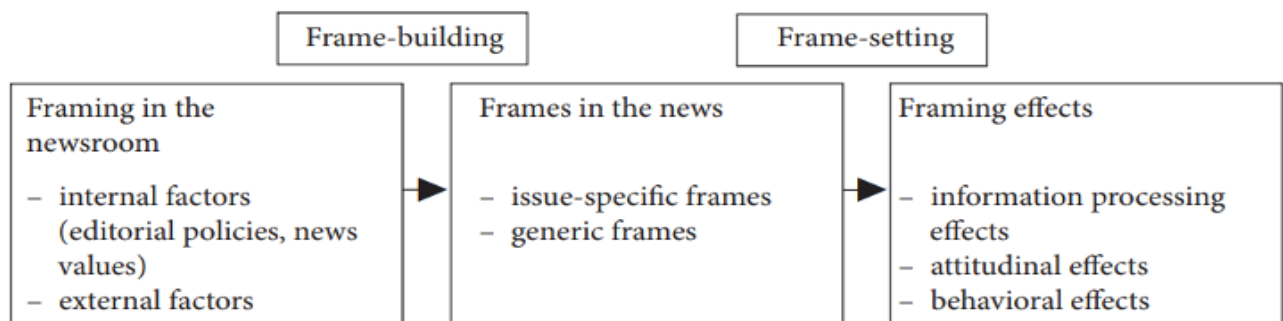
3.4.2 Framing process

In the past, it was thought that news could convey events directly to the audience, but numerous studies of news content have shown that absolute objectivity is not possible in setting information; As far as it can be said, news reflects the interests of media owners (Giles, 2003, p. 206)

In other words, in organizing the news, what is considered is the interests, demands, and views of media owners on the event in the surrounding world. Therefore, events are selected based on media preferences for news coverage. Many events with relatively high news value do not have the opportunity to be covered in the media.

Over time, more evidence emerged that the media did not present issues without bias. Still, each adjusted the news according to the policy of its news organization in a specific way, and each was more exposed to a particular aspect. They put the audience insight. They may overlook or downplay parts of the news story and emphasize other features. This evidence eventually led to the development of message framing theory, emphasizing the replacement of messages within predefined framing (Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013).

Accordingly, the structure takes place in a three-step process; The first stage, which is related to forming these patterns in the media, is called framing, in which frames are thought of as dependent variables that are influenced by internal and external factors. The second step is to identify the framing in the news, which can be considered for two general forms and subject oriented. The third stage is related to the different effects of communicating on the audience (Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013).

De Vreese illustrates this process in the following figure:

Frame-building		Frame-setting	
Framing in the newsroom	**Frames in the news**	**Framing effects**
– internal factors (editorial policies, news values) – external factors	– issue-specific frames – generic frames	– information processing effects – attitudinal effects – behavioral effects

(De Vreese, 2005, p. 52)

The first step in framing refers to the factors that affect the structural features of the news frame. The framing process is complemented by an ongoing relationship between journalists, elites, and social movements. Finally, this relationship or framing process shows itself in the text (De Vreese, 2005, p. 52).

Based on the model presented by Gans (2004) on news selection processes, three sources influence the emergence of framing in the text:

The first source of influence is the journalistic focus. Journalists actively create frames for constructing and making meaningful information entered. The framing of structures is mediated by variables such as ideology, attitudes, and professional norms, and finally, it is reflected in the method of raming news coverage by journalists. The second influential factor in framing news is the selection of frames due to factors such as the type of political approach of the media or, in Ganz's words, organizational procedures. The third source of influence is external geniuses of influence, including political activists, officials, interest groups, and other elites (Gans, 2004).

The second stage relates to when frames appear in the news. In this section, the frames appear in two general forms, subject-oriented and general. Subject-oriented framing relate to specific topics and events. General frames go beyond thematic constraints and can be identified concerning a variety of topics. Some of them even occur in different cultural situations beyond time (De Vreese, 2005, pp. 54-56). This typology organizes previous research in framing that emphasized differences and helps explain the use of the general term framing. At this stage, media frames can be considered as dependent variables or, in other words, the result of the production process, including organizational pressures, routine journalistic work, and elite discourse.

In the last step of the framing process, it reaches the audience. As De Vreese (2005) points out, media frames can be explored as independent variables, or in other words, antecedents of convergent interpretations. Thus, depending on the type of use, framing can be considered both independent and dependent variables in this process (De Vreese, 2005).

So Western Based Persian Media can cause ethnic tensions in Iran or anywhere globally through the process De Vreese illustrates in his famous framing figure. The media are equipped with tools to create war and discord, whether civil war or cross-border war. WBPM, given that the great powers have made them at exorbitant costs has great strength in forming frameworks that can disrupt the existing order and cause ethnic tensions in Iran or Iranian people with the

people of neighboring countries. Therefore, more discussion on framing seems necessary for this research. For example, it should be known that intermedia discourse also affects how news is framed in the newsroom. In many cases, the newsroom in the media is influenced by the views and opinions of journalists, who in turn follow journalists or thought leaders or infiltrate the national media through opposition media. Hence, journalistic framing is influenced by these factors by newsroom staff and tends towards them.Non-media discourses such as parties, non-governmental organizations, and pressure groups play an essential role in delivering regulated content in the newsroom. These groups use the levers of power at their disposal to, directly and indirectly, influence the biases of the newsroom (Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013).

A 2006 study by Sooting Lee et al. comparing news coverage of the Iraq war and the Asian civil war in eight newspapers from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines found that Asian newspapers used a war-writing frame to cover the conflict. They use their internal affairs, but they use peace journalism to cover the Iraq war. The study also found that news from outside sources obtained from news agencies contained more of a war journalism frame and less of a peace journalism frame than local sources (Lee et al. 2006, as cited in Zabolizadeh & Afkhami, 2013).

Framing analysis can reveal hidden support for specific views or ideologies in the news media, particularly views and doctrines related to the current situation. Akhavan and Ramaprasad (1998) believe that framing is often done consciously and pursues specific goals. Examining their claim that there is an inherent relationship between the ideology of news frames, they concluded that there is a tendency towards framing that contains common social assumptions in news coverage. In their view, the interpretive and value-making process of the framing for describing and detailing the new issues under consideration is not based on individual values but the induction of collective constructs of society and traditional perceptions. From this perspective, frames create common stereotypes and help reinforce them. Thus, framing has always been the subject of research that has been done around the axis of legendary belief. Because the frame of reference that the audience accepts can be influenced by how news producers choose to highlight certain features of the content (Akhavan and Ramaprasad, 1998, p. 136).

However, Giles (2003) does not believe that the media has the undisputed power to dominate the public mind. According to him, the mentioned framing work relatively and,

depending on the audience's previous background and prior knowledge, lead to a deep or superficial impact. Ultimately, the positions of different audiences determine how these discourses influence the formation of public opinion.

Here the question arises whether the media use these existing techniques to promote peace or whether achieving peace is not the primary goal? The answer to this question is essential because we can approach the research question of whether the media can use itself as a tool to create ethnic tensions.

Lee Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2008) believe that researchers in political communication have paid close attention to the role of news media in political conflicts because of two factors: first, there are some reasons to prove that media plays a decisive role in the parties to the conflicts and the outcome of the conflicts. And second, citizens turn to the news media for information on political conflicts. They often know that these media are the primary source, and the news media play a significant role in these conflicts. They have specifically addressed the issue of the relative independence of the news media during the conflict. Studies show that news media defend their governments in times of conflict or war (especially in the early days).

According to Lee Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2008), the conclusion reached by researchers in this field is very similar. On this basis, the news media during the war changed their role based on the current political atmosphere and is accelerating the shift in the wartime situation to the detriment of peace. Also, researchers have paid less attention to the role of news media in peacetime processes. But those who have researched this field have written that the needs of the news contradict the requirements of peacetime. Typically, the media tends to report on conflicts worldwide, except on special occasions when a discovery has been made. The media do not give news value to the occurrence of peace processes, including complex and lengthy negotiations (Lee Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2008). In the next section, there will be empirical examples supporting Lee Kaid and Holtz-Bachas's (2008) view on the performance of the Persian-language media in favor of tension and that these media are accelerating the change of situation to the detriment of peace.

Chapter 4: DISCUSSIOND AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will discuss the role of the WBPM in the war and the creation of national security crises and ethnic tensions, relying on secondary sources and the data of this research. Since the area under discussion of this Iranian research and case study is the WBPM, the opinions of researchers inside Iran about the role and destructive impact of these media will also be mentioned. Examples of the influence of the Western media on the Iraq war and US media hegemony have also been documented to clarify the matter.

4.1 Media as an Instrument of War or peace?

Can Western-based Persian media create tension and discord between the Iranian nation and neighboring nations? This question reminds us whether the media's job is not to inform and help humans progress and achieve peace and tranquility? Because is often thought that the media is a tool for impartial information and the advancement of peace and can prevent war. Thus, the media can create friendship and brotherhood between nations and ethnicities, and it certainly does. But there is research showing that the media can also create tension and war.

According to Wolfsfeld (2004), the media covers war more than peace. Collaboration and compromise between countries or groups do not work for the media. Sometimes even the violence perpetrated by terrorist groups and hated by journalists encourages them to cover the news of the war. The standard norms and procedures used in the news context also make peace-loving journalists a pretext for advancing the fight. Because in political conflicts, it is essential to compete on the news agenda, and "it is often better to receive negative coverage than no coverage at all." (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p. 24). The authorities who have the power and possibilities of political control also can control the news media and quickly turn these media into their tribunes, and media control is exercised in continuation of political authority (ibid).

"*The medium is the message"* says Marshall McLuhan. But this is not the case because media messages serve owners and managers in times of war. The state media follow government policies. The commercial media's view of war news is even more dramatic and entertaining, like movies where good people are pitted against evil people. Meanwhile, the public media operate differently from the previous two media, but financial resources are also essential for these media and affect the way news is covered. Community media attention to the war also depends

on the audience's view of these media and their financial resources (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004, p. 237).

The fact is the first victim of any war. However, there is no single fact. It is usually the case that the warring parties shamelessly turn their facts into propaganda. Journalists, like other people watching the war, have their views and perceptions. Moreover, they are also enclosed through political, economic, and social structures. Journalists are always afraid of losing their jobs or being called traitors, so they cannot be impartial (ibid).

Kamalipour and Snow (2004) believe that today, one of the essential advertising tools is the mass media. The exclusive media in our minds form the statement that war is inevitable. This request is ingrained in our minds like the lyrics of a song, and we should try to replace it with the proposition that peace is possible or that "peace is permanent; war is temporary." News bombardment of limited sources such as FNC or CNN must be stopped. Now, every night we sleep, war propagandists, governmental or non-governmental, dominate the media. This is not surprising because many people see war as an effective way to eliminate the centralized spheres of power - the power of control and domination, both by message and force (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004, p. 24).

Propaganda for peace requires a great deal of effort. If we waste a lot of time, then governments and other influential groups will seize this opportunity and use propaganda methods for their violent purposes. Thus, if you are looking for peace, then use communication effectively and efficiently. It is a call to arms, that is, to arm oneself with knowledge, content, and frameworks derived from free and diverse communication channels. The news conferences of the White House, CNN, and Al Jazeera should not be seen in a vacuum and apart from the world's people; otherwise, the world will be in the hands of the propagandists of the war (ibid). Therefore, the issues clarify that Western-based Persian media can create tension and discord between the Iranian nation and neighboring nations, and the media, in general, can do that. In addition, in international relations discussions, there is a theory of soft power that explicitly recognizes the role of the media in promoting the interests of governments in foreign policy.

4.2 Media and Soft Power

Why do Western governments establish media in Persian without a paid subscription for Iranian people? To a large extent, soft power theory can answer this sub-question of the paper.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, public diplomacy is the most important soft power tool, and the media is the essential tool of public diplomacy. Therefore, the media is the most important tool of soft power, and soft power replaces hard power and military warfare, proposed by Joseph Nye. Thus, the media can create tension and war between nations and ethnicities if this tension and conflict are in the interests and policies of the giant media owners. On the other hand, if the continuation of the war is not in the interests of the media owners, the media can prepare public opinion to end the war by using techniques such as framing and agenda-setting. An up-to-date example of this practice is the end of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan. Nye (2020) writes that the United States must change its strategy in Afghanistan, or it will fail. According to him, a military force that is a source of hard power can become credible and influential by using soft power. Nye (2005) refers to the "impressive performance" of the U.S. military in using soft power in 2005 and writes that this made the U.S. image more attractive to the world. That year, the U.S. military was responsible for delivering humanitarian aid to earthquake and tsunami victims in South Asia. In addition to diplomacy and the media, he cites economic aid as a tool of soft power. He emphasizes the need to allocate more funding to soft power tools in the national interest of the United States (Nye, 2011, p. 2-3). Therefore, the use of soft power and the allocation of funds to the media to produce content in the languages of the target countries in international politics is in the national interest of the United States or the national interests of each country that uses this strategy. Hence, the media are created and, taking into account the policies of media owners, carry out skillful and attractive programming for the people of the target countries, and through this, promote the interests and policies of media owners in the target countries.

The American war in Afghanistan ends with the story of the American rescuer at Kabul airport and many pictures of Afghan children in the arms of American soldiers (NDTV, 2021). The United States, which has been the target of protests for leaving Afghanistan to the Taliban, now has to show a different face to the world and say that it has done so for the sake of the Afghan people (Global Times, 2021). Therefore, using the soft power and tools of media and image, it tries to place itself in the hearts and minds, and the American media giant and the brilliant journalists work to show this image of the United States (International Business Times, 2021). But, on the other hand, in the same hours of the Kabul airport incident, the same army killed ten people, including seven children, in a mistaken attack a little further from the airport

(New York Times, 2021). And this news does not have significant coverage in the American media, so it is not seen much.

Moreover, the media prepares the public opinion for the beginning and end of the war and can censor parts of the reality of the war and reflect the facts that it chooses and separates (this will be discussed in detail in the Framing and Agenda-setting sections). In this way, the people of the world will see a few months baby in the arms of an American soldier who is escaping from the hustle and bustle of a population fleeing the war, but will not see a few months baby who is killed a little later by the same military force. Because seeing the first one is in line with American policies and interests, and seeing the second one is not in line with American policy. And the first one is not only shown and advertised by the English-language media in the United States but also in the Persian-language media of this country for the people of Afghanistan and Iran, and in this way, develops its policies.

In this regard, Dana Hull, an American journalist, recounts a memory of his presence in Iraq when a 12-year-old Iraqi boy was killed on the roof of a house. The boy played on the roof when he was shot five times by an American soldier. The journalist writes about her surprise that none of the American media that covered the news of the war at any time covered this issue. She also notes that Arabic-language newspapers often reported events that we did not hear from our media and that these sources were the only way for us to learn about the deaths of Iraqi citizens. Because whichever one we followed, we got the news right; For example, the sudden firing of American soldiers at a wedding party in Samarra and the killing of civilians. The U.S. military closely monitors the number of American soldiers killed or wounded in Iraq. For example, when a roadside mine kills a soldier, the news is immediately reported to the press by email, but this was impossible for Iraqis. It let people know how many Iraqis were killed intentionally or accidentally (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004, pp.131-139). Therefore, as the agenda-setting theory mentioned in Chapter 3, the media does not tell all the facts and shows the part of the facts in the media owners' interest. Here, the tools of soft power do not even give us the news of the child's face and name, but we will see the statistics of the killed soldiers and the faces and characteristics of all of them through the media in the direction of soft power and national security. If this form of news coverage is only for American audiences, it can be said that it is naturally more important for the American audience to kill an American soldier, and the media should also think about the wishes of its audience and the sale of its content. However, it should

be noted that the American media broadcasts this news in different languages to people all over the world, especially the people of the Middle East.

Another example is American news coverage of two plane crashes, according to Entman (1991). He compares news coverage of two similar events in the United States in the 1980s. In the first incident, in 1983, a South Korean Airlines passenger plane was shot down by a Soviet fighter jet, killing 269 passengers and crew. But in the second incident, which took place five years later, the US Navy targeted an Iranian airliner (Iran Air), killing 290 people on board. Entman (1991) compared the two incidents in terms of agency, empathy, categorization, and generalization, citing Time, Newsweek, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and CBC. Words, images, and reports have formed new ideas. The Korean Airlines incident has become a moral discourse, and the Iranian Airlines event has become a technical discourse (Giles, 2003, pp. 214-215).

4.2.1 Identity Threat

Buzan (1991) has ideas that bring us closer to answering the questions of this study about the effect of the media on ethnic tensions in Iran and how to create these tensions. He says that the identity threat posed by conflict formation in previous ideologies is one of the main threats to national security. This type of threat involves efforts to spread cultural and ethnic identity separation between groups in the target country (Buzan, 1991). As Buzan (1991) argues, the social threat cannot be easily separated from the political threat. The main problem of social threats in terms of national security is that most of them have taken place within the country since social security is based on traditional patterns such as language; Culture, religious identity, ethnicity, and customs are concerned. These values are often threatened throughout the country. Castells (2010) believs that these crises can be created through the media. Thus, the identity crisis is first formed in individual and social dimensions and poses many dangers to national security. It is emphasized that in this process, the strong influence of the media has been undeniable. Regarding the analysis of the role of media use in undermining national identity, it should be argued that with the increasing expansion of media, especially in societies in transition, modernization leads to the weakening of traditional ties. These media can influence citizens' attitudes, behaviours, and identities and reduce empathy and a sense of national belonging. Castells believes that new media communication with the fundamental transformation

of communication plays a decisive role in changing and shaping citizens' cultures and national identity (Castells, 2010).

Today, the media use effective direct and indirect methods to influence identity and control the narrative. News and reports are powerful tools because they can use professional techniques and strategies to produce programs that magnify and majorize topics to shape the audience's imagination (Tileaga, 2008). One of the factors influencing the media on government power is their role in shaping the three sources of identity. According to Castells, the media play a vital role in forming identity-based movements (Castells, 2010). Doagouyan and abdolrahmani (2017) argue that in line with US goals, the production of these media outlets provides a variety of propaganda and misinformation about ethnic groups. Examples of what these media outlets do are instigating identity, creating differences between sub-identities, creating dissatisfaction among people and ethnic groups, and internationalizing the issue of sub-identities in Iran. According to Doagouyan and abdolrahmani (2017), the political propaganda of WBPM has played an essential role in creating conditions of conflict and unrest in the West Azarbaijan province of Iran, which has a Turkish majority and a Kurdish minority. However, in section 4.6 of this research and the two stories of the Khuzestan protests and the case of Abbas Lesani, we see the implementation of Castells, Doagouyan and abdolrahmani's claims in parts of Iran by manipulating the BBCP.

4.3 WBPM and Ethnic Tensions

How is the impact of Western Based Persian Media on ethnic tensions in Iran? Countries inhabited by different ethnicities and religions are always facing some potential threats. The Western media abusing this space and trying to influence the country's national security create new challenges for the country. The tendency to evacuate ethnic groups, the escalation of ethnic conflicts, and finally, the issue of separatism, especially in the country's border provinces, are the result of the efforts of these media (Asre Hooshmandi, 2020).

The mass media are among the most influential social institutions alongside the family and the formal education system (Katz et al., 1974). This is because these media are becoming more, more qualitative, and popular. According to McQuail (1987), bringing together the tastes, desires, and expectations of the inhabitants of a society is one of the essential missions of the mass media, called homogenization. However, according to Azar et al. (2016), although

homogenization can ultimately be considered in cultural melting and creating a dominant and unified culture, this role can effectively bring closer the mindset and attitude of a single audience but belonging to different ethnicities (Azar et al., 2016). Thus, in multi-ethnic societies, the media play an essential role in converging ethnic groups at all levels of society and culture.

Today, developing countries and nations have no choice but to use the mass media to achieve balanced and harmonious development to achieve comprehensive standards. Moreover, mass media with a wide audience coverage in human societies can familiarize public opinion with innovations and essential growth elements more than any other medium. Therefore, correct and appropriate information to the audience to create effective communication and change their behavior can be very effective and efficient (Azar et al., 2016).

Jean Cazeneuve, a communication scientist, believes that conscious agreement on convergence will lead to voluntary solidarity. According to him, by strengthening its awareness-raising function, the media can create convergent motivations and build a coherent culture and public opinion (Azar et al., 2016, p. 76).

In today's world, known as the Small Global Village, homogenization or more optimistic view, a positive media approach to increasing ethnicity and closeness to one another is not simply a matter of media pluralism. Thus, inside the country, a centralized management system of media and their content has been established, but outside of it, there are a wide range of news, political, cultural, etc. media that produce their products in comprehensive global coverage. It broadcasts regionally through tools such as satellite TV and the virtual Internet. According to research conducted in recent decades, these media have also attracted many Iranian audiences. This phenomenon of media diversity can be conceptualized in a parallel media competition. Although the nature and function of the media are based on homogenization and convergence, the assortment of media and diversity in media productions and their primary goals has created a wide range of cultural tendencies and pluralities and a variety of identities. (Azar et al., 2016, p. 76).

Azar et al. (2016) researched that in the ethnic cities of West Azerbaijan province, the first reason for creating a sense of divergence in national unity and cohesion is the relative deprivation of these cities. But the following reason is the ethnic political elites who have had a powerful influence in shaping this sense of divergence. Cross-border mass media, especially

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satellite TV networks and Internet websites, have been the tools and channels of the impact of these elites on the general public (Azar et al., 2016).

In addition to these media, Internet sites can also influence Iranian users' values and inter-ethnic tendencies. Under the concept and paradigm of Web 2.0, these Internet tools have a powerful influence among Iranian ethnic groups, and their growth rate is very high. According to theoretical and research studies, in addition to mass media and social media, the feeling of relative deprivation, geographical proximity, and causal relationships between groups have the most significant impact on inter-ethnic convergence. Therefore, the researcher has tried to measure the effects of various media and mass media on the intersection of ethnic groups by controlling the impact of face-to-face and inter-ethnic relations. In addition, of course, the media and mass media themselves have examined the two levels of exposure and the type of content used (ibid).

Korybko (2015) believes the United States has been waging a full-scale hybrid war against Iran for decades. Korybkos's focus is specifically on hybrid warfare as a means of regime change in target countries. He writes that identity differences in target countries, including ethnic, linguistic, religious, regional, social, economic, and political differences, are essential to creating war. Conflicting governments use these in favour of political concessions, regime change, or regime re-establishment and can use their propaganda and media to turn these differences into wars or colour revolutions in their favour. Scores from target countries (Korybko, 2015). He refers to events such as what happened in November 2019 in Iranian cities after the increase in gasoline prices. People took to the streets in many cities to protest the sudden rise in gasoline prices (Reuters, December 2019). At the same time, one of the media outlets outside Iran, whose editors lived in Western countries, incited people to burn banks and gas stations and destroy public property on its social media pages (Dailymail, January 2018). As a result, banks, telecommunications, refueling, and urban transportation networks were destroyed, and government stores were looted in some urban areas. According to Iranian security agencies, 29 provinces and hundreds of cities were in turmoil after increasing gasoline prices. Amnesty International says 304 people were killed (Amnesty, December 2019), and 7,000 were detained during the protests (Etemadnewspaper, December 2019). Thus, the WBPM has a direct impact on tensions in Iran. In the Framing and agenda-setting sections, direct examples will be provided to show that the media also has a direct impact on ethnic tensions.

4.4 BBCP Framing

How is the impact of Western Based Persian Media on ethnic tensions in Iran? In this section, we try to look at data showing how the BBCP, using framing, is trying to create tension between ethnicities, people, the regime, and religions.

On August 9, 2018, the BBC published a news item with the following headline: Israeli airstrikes "kill woman and baby" (Thenews, 2018, August 9). But after a few minutes, he replaced the headline: "Gaza air strikes kill woman and child' after rockets hit Israel" (BBC, 2018, August 9). The audience gets angry when they read the first headline about Israel, but when they read the second, they will probably say, do not attack Israel so that Israel does not kill you. However, with the first headline, the emotion tends towards the Palestinians and the woman and toddler. But with the second headline, the feeling gives Israel the right to respond. The word "toddler" has also been changed to the child so that the audience's emotions are less aroused.

One of the news items that has made headlines in WBPM is the arrest of Abbas Lesani. He is an Iranian Azeri who is imprisoned in Ardabil, northwestern Iran. The media and Amnesty International write that he is a civil activist and is in prison for defending the right to education in his mother tongue or defending the rights of minorities. But there are videos on YouTube of his speeches in Azeri. In these videos, he says that we (West Azerbaijanis Turks) should have a civil struggle against Persian chauvinism, but we need weapons against the Kurds given that the Kurds living in the province of West Azerbaijan have weapons in their homes (Meeting of Activists of the Azerbaijan National Movement, 2018). West Azerbaijan Province is one of Iran's provinces with an Azeri majority and a Kurdish minority. In the maps in which the Kurds have restricted the future of Kurdistan, the whole province is part of Kurdistan. There are also groups of Kurds born in this province's cities and are now fighting in Iraqi Kurdistan, and some believe in armed struggle. The Lesani's reference to the Turks having weapons in this province is due to the association of these Turks with the Kurds, some of whom probably believe in armed struggle. In the Modern Kurdistan Map, designed by groups of Kurds, the province of West Azerbaijan of Iran is also a region of the future Kurdistan (The Kurdish Project, 2014). This could be a reason for the anger of all Turks in the three Turkish-speaking provinces of Iran. But can mere anger justify giving a civil activist the right to call a gun? Why did none of these media outlets mention his literature, which violates the civilization of his struggles? If a person is introduced to the people as a hero of civil and peaceful struggles and the fact is removed that his views are

dangerous, the people will accept him and make him their role model and follow him. In simpler terms, his point of view is gradually becoming the point of view of groups of people. Moreover, when it comes to his imprisonment because of his affiliation with an ethnic group and because of his peaceful struggle, not because of his belief in armed struggle, many people clash with the central government over these arrests and unjust sentences. Added to this is the escalation of tensions between his proponent and his opponent (including Iranian Turks and Kurds).

Some news headlines in these media about Abbas Lesani:

Abbas Lesani, a Turkish activist, was sentenced to 15 years in prison (Radiofarda, July 2020)

Abbas Lesani's wife: If he keeps Abbas's regime in prison for the rest of his life, he will not be able to break our will (VOAP, March 2008)

Abbas Lesani, a prominent Azerbaijani national activist, stated in an interview with the Azerbaijani Turkish section of the BBC that we are ready to bear any punishment to realize the rights of our nation (BBCAzeri, January 2019)

Amnesty International calls for an end to Abbas Lesani's "arbitrary" detention and no harassment of his family (Iranintl,November 2020)

Abbas Lesani and his associates ended their hunger strike in Ardabil Prison (Radifarda, June 2021)

The news above has repeatedly emphasized his civic and peaceful activities to realize minority rights and the right to education in the mother tongue. But there is no mention of his belief in possession of weapons by some of these minorities.

Morover, Entman's (1991) comments on news coverage of two plane crashes can also help clarify the issue of framing and answer whether the Western media covers news for the benefit of the people or the benefit of the media owners. It means that the Korean plane crash is framed as a Soviet invasion and a crime against humanity. In contrast, the Iran Air crash is considered a technical error for which only the American ship is responsible, and these are the frames that the American media has given to the audience through framing.

4.5 BBCP Agenda-Setting

How is the impact of Western Based Persian Media on ethnic tensions in Iran? Here are some examples of how the BBC Persian uses agenda-setting to create ethnic and religious tensions among the Iranian people.

Another issue that could be mentioned is the double standards strategy of these media in the face of terrorist groups or terrorist incidents. Bellow, a story is reviewed to clarify these research questions: *How is the impact of Western Based Persian Media on ethnic tensions in Iran?* There is a group called the "Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz." This group is an armed separatist group that wants the separation of Khuzestan province in southeastern Iran, a region with most Arabic speakers (ahwazna.org). In 2018, the group carried out a terrorist attack during a parade of the armed forces in Ahvaz, the center of Khuzestan province, in which 25 people were killed and 70 were injured. Civilians were also watching the parade, and among those killed were soldiers, civilians, including children, and a battle-scarred from the Iran-Iraq war (BBC, September 2018).

The head of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, said that the attackers fired indiscriminately at the people (Isna, September 2018). Before and after that attack, BBCP gives tribunes to the activists of this group under various pretexts and never mentions the terrorist group in the headlines and news content. For example, the BBCP headline for the news of the group's terrorist attack on the city of Ahvaz was: Armed assailants attacked the Ahwaz parade (BBCP, September 2018). Meanwhile, the same media headlines the news of the terrorist attack with a knife in the London Underground: Three people were injured in the terrorist attack with a knife in London (BBCP, December 2015).

In the text of this news, it is published that the British police have declared that this action is a terrorist attack. Therefore, the terrorist attack is in the headline inside the quote. Regarding the terrorist incident in Ahvaz, the news headlines and reports related to this incident never mention the terrorist attack. However, in the last lines of some news related to this group, BBCP noted that Iranian officials say the incident was a terrorist attack. In the news and reports of BBCP, it is said that this group is against the I. R. IRAN. Since these groups are not directly mentioned as terrorists or violent, people feel sympathy for these groups because many Iranians are either opposed to the regime or are not happy with their government.

This is in line with the agenda-setting theory that by repeating the group's title several times in two forms, "Arab Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz" and "Al-Ahwaz National Resistance," in the opening lines of the news, they highlight their goals. In this way, an armed separatist group that also carries out explosive operations for its purposes is hacked into the audience's minds as a national resistance movement that aims to liberate the people who are being held captive by the Iranian authorities.

In another story, on June 25, in the German city of Würzburg, a man stabbed three people to death and seriously injured five others. The assailant was injuring people when Chia Rabiee confronted him. Mr. Rabiee's resistance prevents the attacker from attacking the people anymore. Until the police arrive and shoot the attacker in the leg, preventing him from further attacks. In this BBCP news coverage, there are two points that, according to the theories of framing and agenda-setting and monitoring the comments of this news on social media, can achieve significant results. The first point refers to the fact that the Iranian asylum seeker is a Kurd, and the second point refers to the Islamist tendencies of the killer in the same BBC report. In a June 26 report, police said the attacker had a history of violence and mental disorders and had recently undergone psychiatric treatment. Police also said the attacker had a criminal record, but none of his previous offenses were related to terrorism (MacGregor, 2021).

But it is BBCP production report titled "Kurdish asylum seeker receives medal of courage in Germany; Description of dealing with the 'coward with a knife in hand.' This report was published three days after the first news item is written that the aggressive man might have had Islamist motives (BBC Persian, June 2021).

However, in the English news of this event, only the fact that the asylum seeker is Iranian is mentioned, and nothing is written about the extremist Islamism of the immigrant (Dailymotion, June 2021). Only in a website that is clear from the news and the logo of the website that it has separatist tendencies, the English report highlighting the ethnicity of the asylum seeker with this headline:

> "*Chia Rabiee from East Kurdistan confronts the terrorist who killed three people in Würzburg.*"*(*KMMK, 2021)

This site refers to East Kurdistan, the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and parts of the region of West Azerbaijan. These three provinces are in the northwest and west of Iran. The provinces of Kurdistan and Kermanshah are Kurdish and Lor people, with a majority of Kurds.

The province of West Azerbaijan is a combination of Turkish and Kurdish people, with a majority of Turks.

On the same day, June 29, when the BBC published its report, it posted a link to the news report on its Facebook and Twitter (see the list of references) pages with this short text:

"An Iranian Kurdish asylum seeker named Chia Rabiee will soon receive the Bavarian State Medal of Courage. He risked his life to save the lives of citizens from a knife attacker."

In covering the news, the BBCP has used both framing and agenda-setting strategies to put what it wants into the audience's mind and some of the BBCP's followers on Facebook and Twitter have realized this. The audience of the BBCP page on Facebook, which is a combination of Iranians and Afghans, has written 722 comments for this news (links in the reference list). Afghans whose language is Dari understand Persian because Dari is a branch of Persian. Usually, other ethnic groups in Afghanistan also understand Persian. Of these 722 comments, 66 were written explicitly in appreciation of the asylum seeker's courageous action. In addition, 55 Comments explicitly mention his Kurdish ethnicity and note that only a Kurd can have such courage. Some have asked why the BBC only highlights Kurdish ethnicity in the news and does not do so against Turks and Arabs. Some have asked why the BBC does not cover news regardless of ethnicity. For example, someone wrote:

If he was from Shiraz, would you write that he was an Iranian Shirazi asylum seeker?

As usual, on many BBCP news on Facebook, tensions between Iranians, Afghans, Muslims and anti-Muslims are high in the comments, and most of these fights end in vulgar words to the point where the BBC is forced to delete many comments. The same thing happened with the link to this news report on Instagram.

But about the aggressive behaviour of a man in Germany (probably an extremist Muslim as the BBC claims), some have written that Islam, in general, is a religion of violence. On the other hand, some have noted that Islam is a religion of kindness. They mentioned that the police have declared that the attacker has a mental illness. Some who have complete confidence in the BBC's journalism are concerned about the endangerment of the Muslim position in Germany after the incident.

On Twitter, however, the number of comments on the link to this news was 15 comments. According to statistics, out of 36 million Iranian Internet users, 2.44% use Facebook, 2.54% use

Twitter and 78.65% use Instagram (StatCounter Global Stats, December 2021). Therefore, it seems that most of the followers of the BBCP page on Twitter are Iranians, and this is the difference between this page and a similar page on Facebook, which always has a lot of comments from Afghans. Of the 15 Twitter comments, most were critical of the BBC's coverage of asylum seekers. For example, one user wrote:

"Do you tell others, for instance, an Iranian Persian, or are you just going to mention the Kurd's ethnicity in addition to being Iranian? Of course, if it were always like this positive news, it would be perfect, but you also mention some ethnicities in the bad news."

The purpose of mentioning these stories was to clarify the fact that the BBC Farsi, when covering news about Iran and Iranians, emphasizes ethnicities and religions, and this emphasis often creates a verbal conflict between the audience of this Media on social media of different ethnic groups in Iran and neighboring countries. Thus, these examples show that the media not only do not seek to resolve ethnic tensions in Iran and establish peace between ethnicities but, in some cases, even create and strengthen tensions.

4.5.1 BBCP, Ethnicity and Religion

On July 15, while working on my master's thesis, people took to the streets to protest the drought in some cities in Khuzestan province, southwest Iran. They chanted slogans about their thirst, gardens, domestic animals' thirst, and slogans against the government's Mismanagement in exacerbating drought problems. The protests lasted for several nights. Then, after a few days, people took to the streets in the cities of Tabriz, the capital of West Azerbaijan Province in northwestern Iran, and Tehran, in support of the Khuzestan protests (BBC, July 2021).

Like all the street demonstrations in Iran in recent years, these demonstrations have both killed and arrested people. And, as usual, the Western media method is to declare the government the killer of those killed. The government's strategy is to say that the dead were either military forces and forces loyal to the government or ordinary people killed by rioters. The regime also usually announced that these rioters are also the subjects of some Western countries, most notably the United States or those the Western media have deceived.

But Khuzestan province, Iran's fifth-most populous province, is a very strategic and vital region for Iran because it is located on the shores of the Persian Gulf and is the center of Iran's oil and gas production. During the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, parts of the province were occupied

by Saddam Hussein's forces, but Iranian fighters liberated all occupied areas during the same war. Moreover, this province has different ethnic groups due to its large size, including Lor, Arab, Kurdish, Turkish (Qashqai), and Parsian people (Khuzestan natives with their language). Of these, Arabs make up one-third of the province's population. Simultaneously with the beginning of the protests of the people of Khuzestan, following the online observations I made in this research, I realized that the news of the protests has become ethnic in most WBPM, meaning that the Arab people have been highlighted in an organized manner.

There are two letters in the Persian alphabet that sound H. The name of the city of Ahvaz is written with this letter: ه (اهواز) among Persian or Arabic speakers of Iran. With the difference that in Arabic, an AL comes first in the noun (الاهواز). There is only one terrorist group, "Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz," that writes the name of this city with ح instead ه like that: الاحواز / احواز. And the BBCP reported the protesters' slogans in the same way as the terrorist group (BBCP, 2018).

In addition, during protests in Khuzestan province cantered on water scarcity and unemployment, the BBCP continued to cover the demonstrations and ethnicize them, producing a roundtable discussion on the connection between the protests and clashes in southwestern Iran and the differences between Shia and Sunnis. (In Khuzestan province, both Shiites and Sunnis live). On July 31, the BBC posted a link to the roundtable on its Facebook page and asked the following question:

> To what extent are the conflicts and discrimination you see or are aware of rooted in the differences between Shiites and Sunnis? What turns the Shiite-Sunni conflict into something more than a religious difference?

A comment of a follower for the link of this roundtable:

> Even if these conflicts exist, the BBC's program and its master is Britain to pursue their own interests. For many years, tribes and groups have lived together in the Mesopotamia region historically. There is no such thing as a Shiite-Sunni conflict unless you create the BBC and, most recently, Israel and make a program for it every day! Later, tell yourself and others why the rightful protests of the people of Khuzestan are related to the separatists? The answer is that wherever a righteous voice is raised, you are somehow stubborn to cause chaos and benefit in your own favour! This date has been from the beginning until now. Either you officially printed people with the empire, or now you are

doing the same thing invisibly and secretly! Which discrimination? Is there anyone in Iran now who is not dependent on the government and does not live in poverty, disease, and misery? Which minority and majority? Do Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Yazd have water and electricity, and the rest do not? Didn't thousands of people die in Tehran from Kuwait? Shame on you and the murderous masters whose wealth came and still comes from blood, bloodshed, and war! Shame on you! (BBCP Facebook, 2021, July 31)

The reference to this audience's lack of electricity in Iran's cities is related to this summer when the electricity was cut off several times in all cities. Electricity demand exceeded the average annual growth trend, and the inability of Iranian power plants to respond to existing requests was cited as the reason for this power outage.

Making Shia-Sunni titles about events that have nothing to do with religion has a long history on the BBCP. For example, in 2017, a suicide attack took place in a mosque in Kabul. The BBCP headlined immediately after the attack: *Four killed in ISIL deadly attack on Kabul Shiite mosque* (BBCP, June 2017).

Three days later, the Afghanistan Journalists' Center strongly criticized the BBCP for its coverage of the suicide bomber attack on a mosque in Kabul, urging the media to commit to professional information and refrain from agenda-setting the targets of terrorist attacks with religious titles, *which is a form of divisiveness*. The center wrote in a statement:

Instead of focusing on the attack on a mosque and, of course, a civilian place, the BBC Persian, in the title and text of the news, has tried to instill in the audience the feeling that the attackers had hated mentioned religion.

The Afghanistan Journalists' Center believes that given the bloody history of civil war in the country and the escalation of foreign intervention and proxy war, direct reference to the religion of the victims of a terrorist attack can somehow contribute to the propaganda and psychological warfare of terrorists and promote to spread religious hatred in the country (Avapress, June 2017).

Even before this event, the Federation of Journalists, Afghan media outlets, and the National Union of Journalists called on the BBC not to stir up religious strife in Afghanistan (Avapress, June 2017). Therefore, the answer to this research question becomes more evident than before that has the Western-based Middle Eastern media played a role in wars and tensions of recent years in the Middle East or not.

The mentioned BBCP roundtable and the comment of that follower led the researcher of this paper to make a questionnaire being considered for this research. The mentioned BBCP roundtable and that follower's comment led the researcher of this paper to make a questionnaire being considered for this research. This questionnaire focuses on how Iranians follow the news of the protests in Khuzestan. The purpose of this questionnaire is to answer the main question of this paper how is the impact of Western Based Persian Media on ethnic tensions in Iran? If most participants follow the news of the Khuzestan protests through the BBCP, their views and analysis should be the same as the BBCP analysis, and the BBC's framing and agenda-setting should have subconsciously affected the participants' positions. However, the result of this questionnaire is detailed in the next section.

4.6 Questionnaire result

As mentioned in subsection 4.5.1, at the height of the Khuzestan protests, I noticed the framing and agenda-setting of the BBCP in favor of ethnicizing the Khuzestan protests. Therefore, I designed the questionnaire (see in the Research Metodology) and asked my followers to fill out the questionnaire via Instagram. As for a reason for the protests of Khuzestan, 93% of respondents have chosen the wrong management in the Islamic Republic of Iran (for example, mismanagement in dam construction). In addition, 54% blame the drought on the dissatisfaction and anger of the people; among the participants in the questionnaire, 43% believe that poverty is the reason for the protests. However, 12% know that the US and Western sanctions cause economic problems, followed by the dissatisfaction and anger of the protesters, and 4% attribute the protests to foreign interference. And some do not follow the Khuzestan news. Respondents refer to inefficient management as the most common mistake in natural resource management (improper dam construction, industrial consumption of drinking water, and water for farms and animals. Also, many unfriendly environmental activities are the cause of water shortages and protests in Khuzestan. In addition, ethnic and religious discrimination is blamed on the government. In these protests, some believe that the government should have paid more attention to Khuzestan, which was severely damaged in the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. The open-ended questions of the questionnaire left the participants free to analyze and interpret the topic. And the analysis and interpretation were a repetition of the analysis and interpretation and the look of the BBCP. Therefore, it becomes even more important to note that the BBCP was the

desired media outlet for the more participants of the questionnaire and that participants' direct influence on the BBCP's programs and its outlook was evident. In simpler terms, this shows that the media can create or escalate tensions by providing one-sided information continuously.

For example, one of the respondents considers the root of protests in Khuzestan and dissatisfaction of people of this region with the government in the following problems:

> *Lack of proper and accurate planning based on the principles of a natural ecosystem for sustainable development, unbalanced development without careful study of climatic conditions in the region, dams in the wrong areas, lack of long-term vision to prevent possible drought, disregard for the crisis, disregard for national interests And natural resources, providing solutions and cross-cutting solutions to the problems and troubles that have arisen, and not paying attention to the root and foundation of environmental issues.*

In the options for answering the question of the reasons for the protests in Khuzestan, I did not include the issue of ethnic and religious discrimination so as not to line the audience's mind, and in the next question, I asked the respondent to write what they meant if they chose other cases. Twelve people have written what they mean by other cases. Some of these twelve have referred to ethnic and religious discrimination. Including a respondent who wrote:

> *The government intends to exclude some ethnic groups (Baluchis, Kurds, Arabs), most of whom are also Sunni.*

And another wrote:

> *systematic ethnic discrimination, the cycle of assimilation (deprivation of the mother tongue, showing inferiority of ethnic minorities, etc.), disrupting the population fabric by marginalizing and displacing the indigenous people of the region and replacing the people of other regions in this District.*

In response to the question "What is meant by foreign interference," only one person wrote:

> *By foreign interference, I mean biased news coverage of foreign media. Entering the protests and ethnicizing them does not allow the people's words to be adequately understood. Because of this interference, some people who complain about the management situation evaluate these protests as secessionist issues and do not participate in these protests.*

In addition, 63% of respondents indicated that they knew nothing about separatist groups in the next question. Of the 37% who know about this, 22 have written in writing about separatist groups. Of these, 12 have noted that they know something about the Al-Ahwaz separatist group and have gathered their knowledge from the media. One wrote in a little more detail:

> *Most separatist groups are not from the mainstream but from an expatriate minority who only appear in public when needed. The primary nature of these groups is to try to destroy the unity of Iran. The aim of these groups is not to oppose the central government but to divide Iran, upset the regional balance, and destroy the country.*

According to about 48% of respondents, separatist groups are also somewhat involved in the Khuzestan protests. However, 44% believe that these groups have no role and the rest consider the role of these groups in the protests in Khuzestan to be very high.

The result of the questionnaire shows that the opinions of most of the participants are repetitions of BBC Persian analyzes and reports. This seems to be true considering that the most significant number of participants in the questionnaire were the BBC Persian audience, either through television or the website or through the pages of this media on social media. Finally, the results of this questionnaire clarify the answer to the question: How is the impact of Western Based Persian Media on ethnic tensions in Iran? In the case of Khuzestan, the Western media tried to ethnicize the protests due to poverty, drought, and government control by producing moment-by-moment content and covering the protests with framing and agenda-setting techniques (Persian-Arab/ Arab-Government).

In simpler terms, the media significantly influences ethnic tensions in Iran. This effect is not in the interest of repairing gaps and citizenship education and citizenship rights to ethnicities. On the contrary, this role is to the detriment of the solidarity of the ethnics and damaging peace between them; the media even widens the gap. And in this way, they have played a profound and influential role in the wars of the Middle East in recent years.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to find the power of media influence in ethnic tensions in Iran. During this thesis, it became clear that war is more newsworthy for the media than peace. On the other hand, it became clear that the media have a clear role to play in creating ethnic and religious differences and deepening the differences in the communities or areas where these differences exist.

Sub-chapter 3.1 revealed that the media is a subset of public diplomacy and essentially a tool of diplomacy. Although public diplomacy is a new concept in international relations, it has a long history in practice. It is also found that governments' instrumental use of modern media to incite people to revolt against their rulers dates back to the early twentieth century and the invention of the radio. Thus, public diplomacy addresses the role of the media in international affairs. Therefore, media diplomacy is a subset of the importance of public diplomacy; it is so important that today, the development of foreign policy and diplomacy depends on the effectiveness of news and media tactics as we have the CNN Effect Theory in this area. The theory is that the major international media play a role in shaping ideology, guiding public opinion, and prioritizing governments' political and security goals (Livingston, 1997).

Indeed, the media is a source of soft power, and sometimes governments exchange their messages through the media to reduce security threats and potential harm. Thus, as Gilboa (2001) argues, political leaders rely on media diplomacy to advance their interests in negotiations and mobilize public opinion to support their interests. In simpler terms, they use the media to smooth foreign policy, and that is media diplomacy. In other words, the media is a platform for policymakers, and people are informed about the actions of politicians through the media. Moreover, given that the media decides which news and topics to cover, the media can also change policies.

In addition, in sub-chapter 3.4 of this thesis, the theory of agenda-setting is discussed. This theory is one of the fundamental theories of communication, and communication is an essential tool of politics and diplomacy, especially public diplomacy. Therefore, this theory is one of the topics discussed in international relations. This theory states that the media can focus on issues that are not the same as reality. Therefore, Agenda-setting is one of the most crucial media techniques for deliberately manipulating the mind and behavior of the audience. In this way, the

media shapes public perceptions of the importance of issues, prioritizes people's problems, and even determines the mental orientation of politicians and leaders (Robinson, 2003 as cited in Eliasy, 2007).

Sub-chapter 3.5 also discusses framing theory and states that framing means making the templates through which the world is represented. Framing theory is essential in international relations because it is also addressed in the subset of prospect theory and is a technique used in international relations and foreign policy discourse (Mintz & Redd, 2003). Moreover, it means that politicians often use the framing process to manipulate politics and persuade decision-makers, including allies, the opposition, the people, and the media, to pursue their interests. Framing is also one of the essential theories of communication sciences and thus plays a fundamental role in international relations; Because this theory is about media techniques for influencing foreign policy and diplomacy. On this basis, the media are sometimes more effective than politicians in world political events. It is because the press and journalists frame their handmade images and show them as reality and truth, shaping the audience's point of view and thought.

The two theories of agenda-setting and framing show that journalists do not present political events without prejudice or impartiality. Sometimes they ignore events that have high news value and choose events that media owners approve. Then, a section is highlighted among the selected events, and an area is ignored or deleted.

These theories and strategies show that the most crucial issue for the media is financial satisfaction and the interests of media owners. Thus, the media is not just an information tool, but in many wars, it is a propaganda tool, as explained by Kamalipour and Snow (2004) in the Iraq war and Omidi Rashidi, 2014 in the war in Syria.

It is also found that the media try to separate cultural identity from ethnic identity between groups in the target country. Through this identity crisis, then ethnic tensions are formed. Thus, by doing so, the media directly threatens the national security of the target country.
The primary and secondary sources of this research and the literature review show that the BBCP (and WBPM) are involved in ethnic tensions in the Middle East. And, incidentally, they are trying to create these ethnic and religious tensions in Iran, as they deepened it in Afghanistan and fueled in Syria and Iraq.

Iran is a country with ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. However, today, some of

the border ethnic groups are more deprived and damaged than the people of other parts due to the drought and the mismanagement and sanctions of the United States. For this reason, there is a lot of dissatisfaction among them. Meanwhile, the BBCP, which is aware of this issue, has seen an opportunity to create crisis and tension between the ethnicities, the ethnicities, and government or intensify the existing differences.

The interests of the governments that own these media outlets in creating and exacerbating these tensions are not the work of this study and require a detailed investigation separately. This study showed that the BBCP tries to make Iranian news ethnic or religious by framing and agenda-setting, even where the events have nothing to do with ethnic or religious issues. And given the history of other Middle Eastern countries involved in civil wars and the role of the Western media in these conflicts, can it not be concluded that the creation of a civil war in Iran is one of the Western plans pursued by its major media organization?

Simultaneously with the BBC's coverage of the Khuzestan protests, some Iranian elites criticized the way the BBCP covered the protests news.. Of course, there is much criticism of these media from the I. R. Iran and its speakers, but in many cases, those who are critical of the regime and are in exile criticize the BBC; Among them is Mehdi Pourian, an Iranian graphic artist living in Canada. On July 26, he published this poster on his Facebook page with the headline of "*the BBC trying to divide Khuzestan*." I got his permission to use the poster in my thesis, and he generously sent me the original size.

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APPENDIX - QUESTIONNAIRE

Age

Under 30

30 to 50

Above 50

Country of residence

Iran

Abroad

If the answer to the above question is Iran, in which city of Iran do you live?

How do you follow the news of Khuzestan? (Multiple options)

I do not follow

Through the media of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Through Persian-language networks outside Iran

Through social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, Clubhouse, etc.)

Through non-Persian language media

If, in response to the above question, you have chosen Persian-language media outside of Iran, specifically which media are your source of information?

If you have chosen social networks in response to the above question, which social network do you mean? (Multiple options)

Facebook

Instagram

Twitter

Telegram

Clubhouse

Other:

If you have chosen one or more social networks in the above question, please write through which media pages or groups you follow the news.

What do you think is the reason for the protests of the people of Khuzestan? (Multiple options)

Poverty

Drought

Boycott

Inefficient management

Foreign intervention

Other cases

If you chose inefficient management in the above question, what do you mean by ineffective management? Where did he go wrong?

If you have selected other items in the above question, please write which items briefly.

If you have chosen foreign intervention in the above question, what do you mean by foreign intervention? Involvement of specific countries? Involvement of special groups? Involvement of particular people?

Have you heard or read about separatist groups?

I do not know anything

I know

If I know the answer to the above question, what do you know about Arab separatist groups? Where have you heard or read about them? Write the name of the group/groups if you know? And please write down the actions they have taken or are giving if you know?

Do you think these groups are involved in the protests in Khuzestan?

Very much

To some extent

They have no rol