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Conflict-Conditioned Communication:  
A Case Study of Communicative Relations Between the United States and Iran  
From 2005-2008

by  
Erin Leigh McKee

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science  
in  
Conflict Resolution

Thesis Committee:  
Harry Anastasiou, Chair  
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Portland State University

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## **ABSTRACT**

In protracted international conflicts, truth is often sacrificed in the name of victory. Political realists see international politics as a competition to win power, retain power, and demonstrate power; misleading the enemy in the name of strategy and misleading the public in the name of security are necessary elements of the game. A less obvious condition is that those caught in the cycle of intergroup conflict also withhold truths from themselves. This denial of truth and reality—to the Other, to the public, and to the self—is especially prevalent in the communicative relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This study explores the communicative relationship between the United States and Iran via mass media with a particular focus on propaganda as “natural.”

The literature review explains how conflict-conditioned communication grows and operates within the context of intergroup conflict, including the significance of globalization and information technology. The communicative relationship between the United States and Iran is used as a case study to explore conflict-conditioned communication. A snapshot of the U.S.-Iran communicative relationship was taken from May 1, 2005 - May 1, 2008. Articles from three print and online media sources were combed and analyzed for examples and patterns of conflict-conditioned communication. The method is based on an approach to understanding conflict-conditioned communication that was developed by Dr. Harry Anastasiou, a conflict

resolution professional and educator. The method additionally utilizes the work of Dr. William O. Beeman, an expert on misperceptions between the United States and Iran.

The conflict-conditioned communicative relationship between the United States and Iran shows how legitimate concerns and human needs are filtered through collective psychology, history, and national identity and absorbed into misperceptions. These misperceptions are perpetuated through propaganda and lead to unyielding political positions. The dual phenomena of globalization and advanced information technology amplify these unyielding political positions by spreading propagandized misperceptions faster and farther than ever before. As the United States and Iran become more entrenched in unyielding political positions, communication reduces to competing systems of propaganda, thus making peaceful conflict resolution less likely.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

When studying human behavior, perceptions of reality are as important as reality itself. Perceptions are built and reinforced through communication, and in an increasingly interconnected and technically advanced global society, states are in constant communication with each other. Even blacklisted enemies cannot avoid indirectly communicating with each other via mass media. While the quantity of messages being sent and received expands, the quality of that communication often decreases (Bohm, 1996). As communication technology becomes more efficient and farther-reaching, communicative problems and manipulations become more pronounced. Exploring how conflict-conditioned patterns of communication operate across borders—literal, social, and cultural— is a fundamental task for conflict resolution professionals. A clearer understanding of how conflict influences intergroup communication will aid in the development of more competent and holistic conflict management strategies.

Studies show that conflict adversely affects the communication process, but most of these studies focus on interpersonal or intergroup conflict within a nation-state (Allred, 2000; Barash, 1994; Brewer & Miller, 1996; Volkan, 1997). When the focus is on policy-makers within international conflict, the analysis often takes place at the micro-level of direct negotiations (Cohen, 1996). The lessons learned are not always applicable to international disputes where the two conflicting states have no official diplomatic relations and very limited direct communication. While this research is



helpful in understanding the general ways in which conflict affects communication, it also highlights a gap in conflict resolution research that this study attempts to narrow.

Exploring how propagandized misperceptions develop and obscure legitimate concerns in the U.S.-Iran conflict will help peacebuilders better understand how conflict-conditioned communication perpetuates postmodern conflict. This study shifts the focus from individual cultural competency and conflict strategies to how misperceptions are institutionalized through mass-mediated communication.

I anticipated that the communicative patterns I discovered would share some similarities with other conflict-conditioned communicative relations. For example, deep mistrust, suspicion, and enmification are common characteristics of conflict-conditioned communication, and I expected to find an abundance of these markers within mass-mediated political speech by policy-makers in the United States and Iran. However, I also expected some unique distinctions in communicative patterns because of the unusual relationship between the United States and Iran. The U.S-Iran conflict is notable because of the absence of any sustained formal relationship. Also, both states are extremely powerful. The United States has been the reigning (but now waning) world superpower since the abatement of the Cold War, and Iran is arguably the most influential state in the Middle East, one of the most volatile regions in the world.

I chose to study mass-mediated communication because of its global significance; its potential to help form public opinions; and the accessibility of evidence. I focused on the United States and Iran because they are engaged in a

uniquely postmodern conflict characterized by indirect modes of communication, much of which is conducted through mass media. In addition, too few studies adequately address the impact of globalization and advanced information technology on communicative and diplomatic relations between conflicted states. Globalization and technology continue to swiftly change the dynamics of international relations. As Jacques Ellul (1964) asserts in *The Technological Society*, technology expands exponentially, not linearly. Therefore, research on its impact on international conflict needs to be conducted in a timely manner in order to retain relevance and contribute to developing theory.

Dr. Harry Anastasiou (2007) has developed a widely applicable approach to understanding conflict-conditioned communication within the context of the increasingly globalized and technicized world. Due to the closeness in theme to the present research and the opportunity to work closely with the author, who is currently my academic adviser, this study uses Anastasiou's (2007) approach as the framework for its method. By discovering how the approach works within this specific case study, the present research will illuminate its general applicability.

As with all qualitative research, there are limitations to this study. As the researcher, all the data was filtered through the particular lens of my political, cultural, and socioeconomic identity. Also, I am limited by language and did not employ a translator. Therefore, I was confined to sources available in English. In light of these limitations and the lack of research on conflict-conditioned intergroup communication, I have kept the study exploratory in nature. The present research seeks less to

definitively answer questions as it does to help better understand intergroup conflict-conditioned communication. By better understanding intergroup conflict-conditioned communication, this research will contribute to an intellectual framework that can be used to sharpen future analysis and facilitate peacebuilding.

The purpose of this case study is to explore conflict-conditioned communication between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The findings and analysis of this study will contribute to the small but growing body of conflict resolution literature that addresses conflict-conditioned mass communication. As conflict resolution theory develops around these issues, ideally so will practical conflict management and peacebuilding tools.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **2.0 Establishing a framework**

Relatively little scholarly and peace-oriented research has been conducted on conflict-conditioned communication in international conflict. This review of literature establishes a framework for the present study, including the conditions that make it viable and timely. To better understand the antagonistic communicative relationship between the United States and Iran, literature has been reviewed on the following subjects: the significance of globalization and technology within the context of this study; relevant qualities of intergroup conflict; communication under conditions of conflict; and propaganda. In an analysis of conflict-conditioned patterns of communication between the United States and Iran, messages exchanged via mass media must be evaluated not only for content but also within their globalized and technological contexts.

#### **2.1 Significance of globalization and technology**

“Globalization” is a term often used and seldom defined. Although there are many possible definitions and frameworks for understanding globalization, in general it can mean one of two things. First, it can mean the flow and integration of standards, practices, and values across state borders, sometimes called “cultural globalization” (Fischer, 2009). Second, it can mean transnational private, and sometimes public, business ventures, also called “economic globalization” (Fischer, 2009). While transnational trade is hardly a new concept, the rapid acceleration of economic

globalization has created an entirely new paradigm of international trade, which has had widespread effects on state governments, local economies, and foreign relations. The advantages and disadvantages of economic globalization are hotly debated, but for purposes of this paper the discussion is limited to how economic globalization has fundamentally changed the way nation-states interact and communicate within the international arena.

In *Predatory Globalization*, Richard Falk (1999) describes how economic globalization increasingly usurps the primacy of the sovereign state and makes it impossible for nation-states to disengage. The primacy of the sovereign state was first established through the Treaties of Westphalia (1648), which are the two treaties that ended the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) and the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) in Europe. Westphalian logic laid down the principles by which nation-states have been founded and operate, the foremost being that within a state's own sovereign realm it can do as it pleases. Falk (1999) dismantles this logic and shows that, applied to the present reality of the world order, there are holes in this approach. For example, in Westphalian logic, accountability is self-centered. This is a critical point of dissonance between globalization and sovereign statehood. The interconnectivity inherent in globalization means that decisions made by one state can unintentionally and disproportionately affect other states. States are accountable for the effects of their decisions. Therefore, self-centered accountability is incompatible with the globalized world. Due to the irreversibly globalized nature of the world and the

respective hegemonic authority held by the United States and Iran, these two states are profoundly implicated with each other.

States, in general, have been maladaptive to globalization. Economic globalization has sharpened inequalities, mainly between developing countries of the South and developed countries of the North, which have in turn weakened struggling states. If states worked toward economic parity at the global level, much like the European Union has done at the regional level, this pattern of inequality might be reversed.

Some states, including Iran, have also resisted cultural globalization by means of hardened nationalism. During the Islamic Revolution, Iranians charged that the Shah had capitulated to the West, particularly the United States, and that the West was stealing their resources and eroding their traditional cultural values. The encroachment of the West is part of cultural globalization. Iran's fear of and anger toward Western encroachment are significant factors in the origin of the U.S.-Iran conflict. To further understand globalization's impact on international relations generally, and U.S.-Iran relations specifically, one must explore its infrastructure: technology.

Technology creates the environment in which communication between states is formed, exchanged, evaluated, interpreted, responded to, and documented for future use. Additionally, technology informs the way political institutions and societies organize themselves. Conflict analysis can also pivot on technology, in particular communications technology. Conflict analysts examine not only misperceptions but

also how those misperceptions are transmitted. It is difficult to study the impact of technology on human relations and international relations because the omnipresence of technology, e.g. digital media, protects it from scrutiny.

Propaganda succeeds by making people feel connected to the whole, and the most efficient means of making people feel connected is digital media. While the term “electronic media” generally refers to analog radio and television, digital media—sometimes called “new media”—includes digital television, the Internet, smartphones, and any computer-related media. Static media (e.g., newspapers and magazines) and electronic media can be, and often are, digitized. Therefore, most media have digital potential. With digital media, new modes of communication have also developed, such as blogging and online chatting. Additionally, all modes of communication happen much more quickly and often instantaneously. Marshall McLuhan (1964) argues that “the medium is the message”, meaning that the medium can have as great an impact on society as the content. Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) furthers this theory by delineating how electronic media, as a form, elicits social change.

According to Meyrowitz (1985) social changes elicited by electronic media are primarily due to the reorganization of the social settings in which people interact. As people lose their former “sense of place”, they change their behaviors to match their new sense of place via the media (Meyrowitz, 1985). Electronic media have heightened different groups’ awareness of each other but have removed the one-on-one aspect of communication. For example, children access the adult world via media. This new information transforms the traditional perceptions that social groups

had of each other and that were once maintained by the groups' divisions between experiential worlds. Digital media poke holes in those divisions, creating porous borders through which information flows much more quickly, thus limiting the time available for people to evaluate messages in that flow of information. Every topic potentially becomes a valid concern for every member of society (Meyrowitz, 1985). Meyrowitz's (1985) assertions are particularly prescient considering he was writing before the existence of the Internet. Our senses of identity, social expectations, and social responsibilities change in light of new information via digital media.

In sum, understanding the dynamics of technology and globalization is key to understanding the underpinnings of conflict-conditioned intergroup communication. Technology in the form of digital media makes it exceedingly easy and effective to promulgate propaganda. Propaganda via digital media invades our lives in such pervasive and holistic ways as to overwhelm our abilities to distinguish propaganda from other information.

### **2.3 Relevant features of intergroup conflict**

Post-Cold War, intergroup conflict has tended to occur along cultural fault lines, suggesting that cultural differences affect, and may form the crux of, intractable conflict (Avruch & Black, 1991; Cohen, 1996; Huntington, 1993; Ting-Toomey 1997; Lederach, 1995, 1997). Beeman (2005) suggests that competing cultural values between the United States and Iran result in misperceptions that in turn define the U.S.-Iran conflict. Chief among these misperceptions are those concerning the perception of power. In the present case study, each state is protecting its seat of



hegemonic influence as the global or regional superpower (Bill, 1999). This battle for power is often fear-based and anger-driven.

According to Keith Allred (2000), fear-based misperceptions produce anger-driven conflict, which is maladaptive because anger makes disputing parties less effective at resolving conflict. Misperceptions often lead to anger via the fundamental attribution error, which means that people tend to attribute others' negative behavior to poor character while attributing their own negative behavior to circumstances (Ross, 1977). When applied to intergroup conflicts, the attribution error occurs when one attributes the negative behavior of an out-group member to character and the negative behavior of an in-group member to circumstance. According to Allred (2000), intergroup attributional bias occurs mostly between groups with a long-standing history of conflict, like the United States and Iran. It also indicates a competitive approach to conflict.

Indeed, the United States and Iran have a competitive conflict process. According to Morton Deutsch's crude law of social relations (1991), the type of processes and qualities resulting from a given social relationship (e.g., cooperative or competitive) also tend to promote that type of social relationship. The more competitive, fear-based, and anger-driven their messages regarding the other are, the more competitive, fear-based, and anger-driven their conflicted relationship will become.

Deutsch (1991) characterizes competitive conflict processes by the following traits: 1) communication is unreliable and impoverished; 2) both sides work under the

assumption that a solution can only be imposed by one side over the other with the use of superior force or deception; 3) parties have increasingly suspicious and hostile attitudes toward each other that make them more sensitive to similarities. Errors in perception lead to errors in communication, and errors in communication lead to errors of perception.

Applying Deutsch's competitive conflict traits to the U.S.-Iran conflict, it is clear that communication is unreliable and impoverished—indeed, the U.S. and Iran have completely severed official diplomatic ties. Also, as is discussed further below, neither the United States nor Iran is willing to make the necessary compromises to initiate dialogue. Namely, during this study's timeframe, the United States has been unwilling to discuss anything but Iran's nuclear activities and Iraq, and Iran has been unwilling to suspend the enrichment of uranium. This suggests a battle of the wills, where each side imposes its competing demands with little effect toward authentic dialogue. Finally, attitudes between the United States and Iran also became increasingly hostile during this study's timeframe, as the United States maintained its assertion that military intervention in Iran was not out of the question and Iran repeatedly labeled the United States as the imperialistic "Great Satan" and "Great Arrogance."

In addition to the general traits of competitive conflict processes, Deutsch (1991) names common errors of perception in intense conflicts. Those errors include the following: interpreting something out of context; autistic hostility, in which you break all communication with the other out of anger; self-fulfilling prophecies; self-

serving biases, often in the form of nationalism; an intolerance for ambiguity; demonizing the other; the idea that there are fewer and fewer choices, often to the point that it feels as though the only choice left is violence; and the fundamental attribution error (Deutsch 1991, pp. 43-47).

Deutsch (1973) also says that perceiving differences enhances differences. In addition, differences must be dictated as such by a “prestigious authority” in order to form distinct beliefs and attitudes toward the different categories (p. 69). Finally, complementation is more important than similarities/dissimilarities in predicting conflict (Deutsch, 1973). Attitudes about the other in the United States and Iran are perfect examples of these phenomena. The more oppositional the United States and Iran thinks the other is, the more oppositional the other becomes. As Beeman (2005) indicates in his analysis of symbolic discourse between the United States and Iran, the complementation of differences between the two states is a stronger prediction of conflict than actual differences. In other words, it is not simply that they are different but that they are different in the same areas that are critically important to each cultural group. Each state represents the epitome of wrongness to the other state.

The perception of differences is the first step in enemy-making, or enmification. Enmification is a dynamic process that describes the development of enemy images, or specific forms of negative stereotypes (Oppenheimer, 2006). According to Oppenheimer (2006) and Janice Gross Stein (1996), enemy images can be self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing. For example, if I enmify you, I am likely to act aggressively toward you; my aggressive behavior is likely to provoke a hostile

response from you; and your hostile response confirms the original enemy image of you that prompted my aggression in the first place. The snowballing nature of enmification is consistent across many diverse cultures.

According to David Barash (1994), the meeting and making of enemies is a shared human experience, and our images of the other emphasize, exaggerate, and even create negative characteristics. An enemy image describes the other, invokes emotions toward the other, and prescribes behavior toward the other. Furthermore, enemy images become deeply rooted and resistant to change (Stein, 1996). Finally, “stereotyped enemy images, generally simple in structure, set the political context in which action takes place and decisions are made” (Stein, 1996, p. 94). In sum, identity conflicts are heightened when one group feels that recognizing the other’s identity compromises its own, and the results of those heightened identity conflicts can result in far-reaching political decisions.

Conversely, political regimes and powerful corporate interests can manipulate identities by controlling media. Keen (1986) said that paranoia is the human condition, and history illustrates this common psychological tendency to construct enemy archetypes. Research has established at least three different enemy archetypes: imperials, barbarians, and degenerates (Cottam, 1977; Herrmann, 1995; Herrmann, 1988; and Herrmann and Fischerkeller, 1995). In the context of the U.S.-Iran conflict, Iranian media often portrays the United States as imperialistic and U.S. media often portrays Iran as barbaric.

According to Vamik Volkan (1997), misperceptions, bias, and enmification are psychologically triggered by “chosen glories” and “chosen traumas.” By recalling an historical victory, “chosen glories” reactivate a group’s self-esteem (Volkan, 1997). By recalling an historical loss or tragedy, “chosen traumas” reactivate a group’s suffering and the subsequent desire for justice or vengeance (Volkan, 1997). Chosen glories and traumas elicit the degree of strong emotion and denial necessary for the dehumanization process to occur. The rationale that informs dehumanization can be as radical as thinking that by killing the enemies, one is actually saving them from themselves and their sins. Examples of chosen traumas in the context of this case study are the 1953 U.S.-backed coup in Iran and the 1979 hostage crisis at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

## **2.4 Communication under conditions of conflict**

Protracted conflict affects the communication process between adversarial groups in several ways. For example, people become more defensive. They look for someone to blame for their suffering, and they become more reluctant to listen. Elements of difference that were once amusing are perceived as threatening. Also, people, especially leaders, employ strategic manipulation. Anastasiou’s (2007) approach to conflict-conditioned communication suggests that communicative relationships between adversarial groups progress from mere civil dislike to complete non-communication, where competing systems of propaganda “naturally” evolve out of wrong perceptions.

In *On Dialogue*, David Bohm (1996) explores the process of perception; deconstructs the nature of thought; and illuminates their implications for human relationships, especially those of conflict. Bohm's (1996) premise is that thinking is deficient because thoughts that originate in the culture and pervade us as individuals are often experienced as assumptions. According to Bohm (1996), assumptions are necessary for thinking, but they are not always porous enough to breathe. Bohm (1996) says that perception *presents* something, while thought *re-presents* something in abstraction. They portray two different versions of reality, which combine to create what Bohm (1996) calls the "net presentation" (p. 64). This deficiency in thinking enables propaganda.

## **2.5 Propaganda**

Traditionally, propaganda has been studied as a tool used by megalomaniacal state leaders to control the unwitting public. The word "propaganda" often arouses images of Hitler's Germany and Mao's China. Certainly, these are examples of aggressively overt propaganda at their most technically efficient and destructive. However, Ellul (1973) makes important distinctions among the various strands of propaganda that are often overlooked in academic research. Although Ellul wrote in 1973, he stands alone in his unique understanding of propaganda, an understanding which supports and elaborates Anastasiou's (2007) framework for conflict-conditioned communication. Below is a brief synopsis of Ellul's (1973) nuanced conception of propaganda, with particular attention paid to that which characterizes the communicative relationship between the United States and Iran.

Generally, propaganda is any method of communication that incites individuals to actively or passively participate in a mass movement or ideology (Ellul, 1973). Moreover, it relies on psychological manipulations to psychically unite people (Ellul, 1973). This psychic union is akin to what Benedict Anderson (1999), in his seminal study on nationalism, called the “imagined community.” In order to create this imagined community, propaganda must address itself at once to the individual and the mass. According to Ellul (1973), one is never considered as an individual but always in terms of what one has in common with the mass, such as one’s motivations, feelings, and myths. The individual must feel alone in a crowd; this is when one is most vulnerable to propaganda.

Ellul (1973) suggests several distinctions among types of propaganda, the three oppositional pairs being: 1) political vs. sociological propaganda; 2) agitation vs. integration propaganda; and 3) vertical vs. horizontal propaganda. Political propaganda moves people to a specific political action. Sociological propaganda conditions people to accept certain “truths” and to be receptive to political propaganda. In this way, it can also be considered pre-propaganda. In fact, sociological propaganda is necessary for overt political propaganda to work (Ellul, 1973). Propaganda of agitation moves people to intense political action during times of crisis (Ellul, 1973). Again, Hitler’s propaganda is the extreme example. Propaganda of integration is always sociological because it is a propaganda of conformity (Ellul, 1973).

Vertical propaganda originates from a leader and is directed at the masses. Horizontal propaganda spreads from inside the group in order to create a collective consciousness around ideological tenets; it is the psychic web that sustains an ideology. The primary psychological tools used to create this web are symbols and stereotypes. U.S. president George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union address, where he labeled Iran, Iraq, and North Korea the "axis of evil", is an example of vertical propaganda because it originated from a state leader, directly targeted policy-makers and their constituents, and indirectly targeted the global community. One of the effects of this vertically propagandized speech is that it spurred horizontal propaganda through small group discussions (in casual conversations, classrooms, meetings, web forums, etc.) where people reinforced its ideas, both through their support and dissent.

Sociological propaganda is also a means of promoting a particular "way of life" as superior to other lifestyles and worldviews. Through advertising, film, education, technology, social services, laws, etc., propaganda produces a general conception of society. Ellul (1973) contends that a "society actually expresses itself through this propaganda by advertising its kind of life" (p. 65). Any symbol, stereotype, or discourse that explicitly or implicitly names what/who is inside and outside of Americanness or Iranianess is a vehicle for sociological propaganda. Through the production of a national sense of self, society deeply engages in propaganda.

People crave coherence in this violently chaotic world, and propaganda is eager to satisfy. Propaganda furnishes people not only with ideologies but also with



rationalizations. When rationalizations are successfully provided at the individual and collective levels, propaganda is most effective. Propaganda permits people to participate in the world without being in conflict with it because the actions they are asked to perform are supposed to remove “all obstacles from the path of realizing the proclaimed ideal” (Ellul, 1973, p. 159).

Ellul (1973) says that psychological groundwork must be laid in order for propaganda to be effective, and that this groundwork relies less on personal neuroses than on collective sociological presuppositions and social myths. According to Ellul (1973), collective sociological presuppositions are a “collection of feelings, beliefs and images by which one unconsciously judges events and things without questioning them, or even noticing them,” and propaganda “not only reflects myth and presuppositions, it hardens them, sharpens them, invests him [or her] with the power of shock and action” (pp. 39-41).

In propaganda, the propagandists and propagandees seemingly—and certainly unconsciously—work together. As technology and economic globalization expand, people are subjected to more and more information. As previously discussed, people believe that they need to have opinions (Meyrowitz, 1985). However, even “informed” citizens, who may read one or two newspapers (print or online), watch the nightly news, and read the occasional news magazine rarely have the time or expertise to make informed opinions regarding the news they encounter.

Propaganda that roots itself in current events cannot permit time for critical thought and self-reflection; an individual caught up in the news must remain on the

surface of the event. Ellul (1973) contends that modern peoples do not *think* about current problems so much as they *feel* them. A person may react to a problem, but rarely do they truly grasp or take responsibility for the problem. Because critical thinking is often eschewed for ready-made opinions, people are also less likely to locate inconsistencies among successive facts. This is certainly not because modern peoples are stupid; rather, modern conditions shape people in such a way as to make it nearly inevitable.

People often argue vehemently for policies they cannot explain. They may read a news clip and *instantly* adopt a strong opinion on a topic. Strong opinions rationalize the externalization of blame (or, conversely, the avoidance of responsibility). Critical thinking is often summarily bypassed: read, opine; watch, opine; listen, opine. I call attention to these observations not to criticize individual people but to question and politicize the relationships between the public, the state, and the media. Publicly arguing these opinions, teaching them to children, and sitting quietly with the satisfaction of being opinionated are all examples of the effects of propaganda because they demonstrate how propaganda provides one with a complete system for explaining the world and clarifying values.

Most people think that propaganda consists solely of lies and tall stories. This attitude leaves people susceptible to propaganda because they assume they are capable of distinguishing truth from propaganda. However, propagandists use truth insofar as they use plain facts, albeit uncontextualized and often meaningless. The deception exists in the intentions and interpretations of the propagandized speech, text, etc.

Therefore, truth and propaganda are not always distinguishable; according to Ellul (1973), this is a fundamental rule for propaganda analysis.

## **2.6 Summary of literature as related to the present study**

Technique comprises the infrastructure of globalization. Globalization has drastically changed the nature of international relations by eroding the primacy of the sovereign state. It has done so by increasing the porosity of geopolitical and cultural borders, therefore ushering in a new age of interconnectivity and the awareness that all states and environments are, to lesser or greater degrees, profoundly implicated with each other. Much of peoples' new interconnectivity is facilitated by communications technology, specifically digital media.

Digital media connects people in a superficial way, creating quantitatively more connections but qualitatively less authentic dialogue. One can watch, read about, and listen to the other at any given moment, but that moment is constantly mediated. McLuhan's (1977) premise that the medium has more social effect than the message itself led the way to Meyrowitz's (1985) conclusion that media alters one's sense of social place and therefore social behavior. This is also true of international relations. Digital communication creates new political situations that make possible, and even demand, new political behaviors. For example, the steady streams of information that policy-makers send and receive allow little time for reflection. Policy-makers must respond quickly and strongly so as not to seem politically weak or incompetent, or worse yet, to be ignored or deemed irrelevant. This situation creates fertile ground for misperceptions, which can escalate and dominate conflict.

In the context of U.S.-Iran relations, the CIA-directed coup overthrowing the democratically elected leader of Iran in 1953 was the beginning of the “slippery slope” of communicative disorders that eventually eroded communication across conflict lines. This first stage of communicative erosion moves from dislike to suspicion to complete distrust. According to Anastasiou (2007), if suspicion is not managed effectively and early enough, communication between conflicted groups will devolve into severed mental worlds. This proved true in U.S.-Iran relations. Initially after the coup, the general Iranian attitude toward the United States stagnated at a simmer of resentment and suspicion. After some time, however, frustration and anger compounded the distrust, culminating in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

In sum, misperceptions form the crux of conflict-conditioned communication, and the globalizing force of digital media, unmitigated by real experiential human contact, enables the proliferation of misperceptions. The conflict between the United States and Iran may have started as a struggle for hegemonic power—and it still is to a large extent—but the driving and multiplying forces are the misperceptions and the consequential distrust, suspicion, propaganda, and other communicative disorders experienced by both nation-states.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Method & Research Implementation**

#### **3.0 Principles of method**

This study uses a social-psychological approach to conflict resolution, which Kelman (2003) says explains conflict phenomena that traditional realist approaches do not. Political realists claim that nation-states are motivated primarily by political power and will act accordingly in order to gain, keep, or demonstrate that power. International peace and conflict professionals widely regard political realism, or *realpolitik*, to be an outdated and ill-suited lens through which to manage foreign policy (Rasmussen, 2003). A social-psychological approach works with other conflict resolution perspectives by acknowledging that international conflict is not only about coercive power politics but also about collective needs, fears, and perceptions (Kelman, 2003; Retingzer & Scheff, 2000).

While there is some research on media's influence on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East (O'Heffernan, 1994; Bennett & Paletz, 1994) and on how different communication styles can breed conflict (Avruch & Black, 1991; Augsberger, 1992; Cohen, 1996; Rosenberg, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 1997; Singer, 1998) little has been learned about the systemic impact of conflict on intergroup communication. Some of the most recent research to date is by Harry Anastasiou (2007). Anastasiou has posited and explained several effects of conflict-conditioned relationships on intergroup communication. Therefore, I performed an exploratory document review in which I examined the presence of those effects in mass-mediated communication between the United States and Iran.

Anastasiou (2007) lists six major patterns in conflict-conditioned communication, discussed below. To substantiate the claims I make regarding conflict-conditioned communication between the United States and Iran specifically, I have employed the work of William O. Beeman (2005), which elaborates the foreign policy myths of the United States and Iran. Beeman's (2005) assessment of the symbols, stereotypes, and myths that characterize and exacerbate the U.S.-Iran conflict is applied within the framework of Anastasiou's (2007) approach.

### **3.1 Rationale for choice of method**

The method was chosen for several reasons. First, there are no published methods suitable for replication. Second, this study presents an opportunity to contribute to the development of Anastasiou's approach by testing it in a specific case study. Third, the addition of Beeman's (2005) approach to understanding U.S.-Iran relations structurally delimits the general conflict-conditioned patterns of communication that I analyzed according to Anastasiou's (2007) approach. Fourth, both studies provide enough structure to contain the present study and enough flexibility to retain its exploratory nature. The exploratory nature of this study is aimed at refining an approach, and perhaps an eventual theory, of conflict-conditioned intergroup communication.

### **3.2 Anastasiou's effects of protracted conflict on intergroup communication**

Anastasiou (2007) suggests that the following communication patterns develop within protracted intergroup conflict:

- A. **Suspicion, mistrust, and frustration over other side's intentions,**  
characterized by a focus on ulterior motives, a focus on motives at the expense of content, and viewing the other side as untruthful.
- B. **Subjective reality due to intergroup violence,** which occurs when perceptions of reality are interpreted through and colored by suffering experienced at the hands of the other.
- C. **Separation and alienation,** which occur when the only direct knowledge of the other is through the exchange of violence.
- D. **No direct knowledge of the other leads to construction and reliance on assumptions and enemy images formed by those assumptions,**  
characterized by enmification patterns illustrated in the review of literature and specifically drawn from images of the other described by Beeman (2005).
- E. **Propaganda as “natural,”** characterized by leaders' use of propaganda as the logical step, “irrespective of whether they are manipulative personalities or not” (Anastasiou, 2007, p. 65).
- F. **Severing of mental worlds with no common point of contact for communication to take place,** characterized by competing systems of propaganda and hollow exchanges between monologues, as described by Ellul (1973).

These six stages may occur in order and progressively build upon the last. However, conflict has its own logic, and it is not always linear. Conflict-conditioned communication patterns ebb and flow in relation to many factors, including the

tumultuous political world stage; the effects of natural disasters; the effects of expanding technology; and the vibrancy of grassroots movements and intellectual classes. One key distinction between the U.S.-Iran conflict and many other protracted conflicts is that there has been little direct warfare. The Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1988 may be seen as a proxy war between the United States and Iran because the United States provided material support to Iraq. However, violence within the U.S.-Iran conflict has been primarily structural or cultural in nature.

### **3.3 Beeman's foreign policy myths in U.S.-Iran symbolic discourse**

Beeman (2005) outlines the “foreign policy myths” of the United States and Iran, and the differences between these myths stoke the conflict. According to the United States’ foreign policy myth, the normal conduct of foreign policy consists of elite leaders of nation-states meeting in seclusion and discussing matters of economics and power, presumably in the context of a dichotomous world order where other nation-states are either “with us or against us.” Beeman (2005) also says that the predominant mythic qualities of American leadership are the “willingness to confront evil, to have America ‘go it alone’ and serve as protector not only of the United States itself, but of American ideals wherever they can be detected” (p. 21).

The Iran foreign policy myth revolves around the historical and religious theme that there is a great struggle between the pure forces of the inside and the corrupted forces of the outside (Beeman, 2005). Throughout Iranian history, this has been depicted as a struggle between the invading conquerors and the core of Iranian civilization (Beeman, 2005). Iranian foreign policy often focuses on what is morally



and ideologically at stake as opposed to the United States' position that economic prowess and military strength are every state's primary concerns.

### **3.4 Brief summary of method**

In this analysis, the communicative patterns outlined by Anastasiou (2007), and the specific myths described by Beeman (2005), are interpreted to explore holistic patterns of conflict-conditioned communication between the United States and Iran.

I chose three media sources through which to explore the communicative relationship between the United States and Iran: *The International Herald Tribune*, *Economist*, and *The New Yorker*. All three were chosen in part for their mainstream quality. They are all widely read and available in print and online, and they are all established news outlets. As such, they fulfill two requirements of the study: 1) they should be relatively accurate sources for the basic facts, and 2) they are ideal vehicles for the spread of the most effective kind of propaganda, that which subtly misconstrues facts in order to provide a complete system of understanding of the world (Ellul, 1973). Additionally, articles from each source frequently drew information from Iranian news agencies, which allowed for inclusion of Iranian media that would otherwise be precluded due to issues of access and translation.

*The International Herald Tribune* is an international daily. While based in Paris, it publishes stories from media outlets worldwide, including *The New York Times*. *Economist* is a weekly international economic liberalist magazine based in London. *The New Yorker* is a weekly U.S. periodical. It was chosen for its rigorous coverage of U.S.-Iran relations, especially by its longtime investigative reporter

Seymour Hersh. Throughout the literature that I read in order to better understand U.S.-Iran relations, Hersh was the one reporter whose name consistently appeared as a source for excellent coverage of U.S.-Iran relations. While Hersh's articles were originally published in the United States, many have been reproduced in other international publications. The three sources also lean in slightly different political directions. This helped shape a more complete picture of U.S.-Iran communicative relations instead of relying on sources from the same political persuasion, although journalistic bias is an inherent limitation in any media analysis. *Economist* is a bit right of center; *The International Herald Tribune* is generally moderate; and *The New Yorker* is a bit left of center.

### **3.5 Limitations**

Using the academic database *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*, I searched for articles that included "United States" or "U.S." and "Iran" within the respective sources from May 1, 2005 to May 1, 2008. I chose this timeframe in order to limit the analysis to a manageable size and to use the most current articles I could before I began the analysis and writing process. I sorted through the 1,000 most relevant results from each main source searching for relevant, full-length news articles and opinion-editorials. I then eliminated duplicate articles, letters to the editors, short "blurbs", and irrelevant material, e.g., a story about Persian rugs. The screening process produced 307 full articles for close reading.

### 3.6 Supplementary research

As supplementary research, I scanned the archives of the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*, which were recommended to me by Dr. Ervand Abrahamian, historian and expert on U.S.-Iran relations. I used the same method to search the *Post* and the *Journal*. However, in order to limit the study, I did not take detailed notes to use in the analysis. They were supplementary in the sense that they helped paint a fuller picture of U.S.-Iran communicative relations so that I was better equipped to competently perform the analysis.

### 3.7 Document review

I read each article and compiled notes in a spreadsheet. Using Anastasiou's (2007) approach, I noted U.S.-Iran communicative disorders as defined in the methods section. References to any elements of the conflicted symbolic discourse described by Beeman (2005), such as accusations of human rights abuses or indications of their respective foreign policy myths, were also noted.

In reviewing the articles from the three main sources, a narrative of the conflict revealed itself. I made a list of the narrative's turning points and searched for articles about them in the online archives of the following sources: *The Washington Post*; *The Wall Street Journal*; *The Tehran Times*; *The Iran Times*; independent radio/tv/internet broadcaster *Democracy Now!*; and professor Juan Cole's highly regarded political blog on Middle East affairs, *Informed Comment*. I also reviewed several Iranian blogs, including Ahmadinejad's official blog. Blogging in Iran has taken off at a phenomenal rate, despite the risk of state retribution to bloggers who comment

negatively about the Islamic Republic. Again, I did this in order to build a holistic narrative as background research.

In sum, 307 articles from *The International Herald Tribune*, *Economist*, and *The New Yorker* were identified through a screening process. Anastasiou's (2007) and Beeman's (2005) taxonomies of conflict-conditioned communication and U.S.-Iran foreign policy myths, respectively, were applied and the articles read and coded accordingly. To deepen understanding and to increase reliability, other new sources were scanned but not included in the analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **4.0 Brief review of U.S.-Iran relations**

Prior to the U.S.-backed coup of Iranian President Mossadegh in 1953, which engendered the current state of modern U.S.-Iran relations, Britain was the most influential foreign power in Iran. Although Iran was never a formal colony, beginning in the early 1900s, Britain and Russia exercised much influence in the country (Abrahamian, 2008). Russia's influence deflated after the Russian revolutions in 1917, and in 1919 Britain drafted the Anglo-Persian Agreement to incorporate Iran into the British Empire (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007). The Anglo-Persian Agreement ensured that a British oil company controlled the country's oil production and export, and it gave Britain the exclusive right to, *inter alia*, provide Iran with arms, advisors, and military instructors (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007).

In 1951, the Iranian parliament, the Majlis, formally established a state-run oil company, but Britain withdrew its skilled personnel, refused to export Iran's oil, and illegally blockaded Iran's ports, which effectively stopped any other country from exporting the oil (Ehrlich, 2007). However Iran, with Mossadegh as its prime minister, continued to resist British imperialism. Mossadegh's resistance made him very popular with other nations engaged in their own anti-colonial struggles, and many in the United States sympathized with him (Keddie, 2003). *Time* magazine even named him "Man of the Year" in 1951, calling him the "Iranian George Washington" (Ehrlich, 2007, p. 55).

After Dwight Eisenhower was elected president of the United States in 1953, however, the U.S. government reversed its policy toward the Iran-Britain oil conflict (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007; Keddie, 2003). While Britain had thus far failed in enlisting U.S. government support in its quest to control Iran and its oil, the Cold War was now in full force and the United States wanted to ensure that the Soviet Union did not take control of Iran (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007; Keddie, 2003). The United States participated in the coup partly as a British ally, but also to instate an American-friendly regime and to control the production, distribution, and sale of oil (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007; Keddie, 2003).

The coup renewed the Shah legacy and cut short the fledgling democracy. According to Gasiorowski (1987), the United States' role in the coup permanently altered U.S.-Iran relations for the worse, leading to the vocal anti-American sentiments heard during the 1979 Islamic Revolution and beyond. According to Barsamian (2007), the 1953 coup not only ended the democratic experiment and reinstated the Shah, but also greatly diluted British influence in Iran. Most mainstream U.S. media at the time of the coup reflected the official story that there had been a popular uprising against the communist-leaning Mossadegh (Ehrlich, 2007). Today, Barsamian (2007) notes that while Iranians, and even citizens of other predominantly Islamic nations like Syria and Lebanon, are intimately familiar with the 1953 coup, most Americans know little if anything about it, including the effect it continues to have on Iranian perceptions of the United States.

After the coup, the United States reinstated the Shah and held Iran as a close ally in the Middle East (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007; Keddie, 2003). The Shah sold most of Iran's oil rights to foreign firms, with about 50% going to U.S. companies and 40% to Anglo-Iranian, the British company (Barsamian, 2007). U.S. military contractors enjoyed much work in Iran during this period, and the Shah spent tens of billions of dollars buying U.S.-made weapons (Barsamian, 2007). The United States also established more military personnel in Iran (Barsamian, 2007; Ehrlich, 2007). As was and still is typically done, the United States stipulated that its military personnel not be subject to other countries' civil or criminal justice systems. When the Shah signed a contract to that effect in 1964, however, Iranians saw the agreement as a "great capitulation" to the West (Ehrlich 2007, p. 60).

The Shah legacy reigned until the Revolution of 1979. The Iranian Revolution was widely supported by socialists, communists, and religious fundamentalists, all of whom were united by their opposition to Reza Shah Pahlavi's irresponsible modernization and Westernization of Iran (Barsamian, 2007; Ehrlich, 2007). Under the Shah, certain political dissidents and minority groups, like the Baha'i, were often victims of direct violence by the state. Most Iranians experienced structural violence due to the mismanagement of public funds, in addition to the democracy crushing effects of jailing opponents, closing newspapers, and banning political parties (Barsamian, 2007; Ehrlich, 2007).

In January 1978, religion students in Qom demonstrated and demanded the return of the exiled religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich,

2007; Keddie, 2003). During the demonstration in Qom, police shot 70 students and wounded 500 (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). Forty days later, at the end of the traditional Shiite mourning period, Iranians demonstrated again (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007; Keddie, 2003). Further demonstrations culminated in “Black Friday,” when pro-Shah forces killed several peaceful protesters (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). Although the Shah declared martial law, demonstrations continued (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). In January 1979, the Shah fled into exile, and formerly exiled cleric Ayatollah Khomeini returned to take power during the Revolution, instating an Islamic regime (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003).

In October 1979, the Shah went to the United States for cancer treatment, although at the time many Iranians were suspicious of his motives for the prolonged visit (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). Many believed he did not have cancer and was instead conspiring with the United States (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). In response, militant students took over the U.S. Embassy and demanded the Shah’s return (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). The students took 66 hostages the first day, and they released fourteen of the hostages, all women or African Americans, within the first few weeks (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). Although the students did not plan on maintaining the takeover for long, Khomeini stepped in to support them (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). With Khomeini’s support, the hostage crisis lasted 444 days (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). U.S. President



Jimmy Carter attempted a disastrous rescue mission, which failed to rescue any hostages and resulted in the deaths of eight American soldiers and one Iranian civilian (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich 2007; Keddie, 2003). In 1980, when Carter was up for reelection, his opponent Ronald Reagan sent emissaries to Iran to arrange the release of hostages after the election (Abrahamian, 2008; Ehrlich, 2007; Keddie, 2003). Under the terms of the Algiers Agreement, negotiated by the former Carter Administration, the United States returned some of the impounded money, granted Iran immunity from lawsuits, and pledged not to interfere with Iranian politics (Ehrlich, 2007). The hostages were released almost immediately after Reagan's election as president.

During the Iran-Iraq War and Reagan's second term, Israel offered to help arm Iran (Parsi, 2007). Although Israel was technically an enemy of Iran, it was very concerned with an unstable and powerful Iraq, therefore it clandestinely supported Iran in the war (Parsi, 2007). In total, Iran purchased more than \$500 million in arms from Israel from 1980-1983, according to the Jaffee Institute for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University (Parsi, 2007). Publicly, Iran continued to denounce Israel and deny any arms trade, because much of its image relied on its opposition to Israel's occupation of Palestine (Parsi, 2007). Although the United States officially supported Iraq in the war, it also sold Iran weapons and other war supplies, partly in return for the release of American hostages in Lebanon (Parsi, 2007). In direct opposition to Congress, the Reagan administration used the money from selling arms to Iran to secretly fund the Contras in Nicaragua who were fighting a leftist government. The

Iran-Contra Affair is a scandal in U.S. history, but does not have much effect on current U.S.-Iran relations (Ehrlich, 2007). The Iranian government has largely dismissed the moment of cooperation as a necessity of war and no more (Ehrlich, 2007).

In 1988, a U.S. naval ship, the USS Vincennes, shot down civilian Iranian Air flight 655 (Ehrlich, 2007). Two-hundred ninety people, including 66 children, died (Ehrlich, 2007). The United States initially claimed that flight 655 was illegally outside the civilian air corridor, and that, although it regretted the civilian deaths, its Navy had done no wrong (Ehrlich, 2007). Not only did it admit no wrongdoing, it awarded all the crew of the USS Vincennes combat ribbons (Ehrlich, 2007). The Iranian government argued that the United States had intentionally shot down the flight in part to help Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War (Ehrlich, 2007). More likely, the shooting was accidental (Ehrlich, 2007). However, the United States' refusal to admit fault, its award of combat ribbons to the crew, and its relatively small compensation to victims' families has left a dark stain on U.S.-Iran relations from many Iranians' perspectives (Ehrlich, 2007).

In recent years, U.S.-Iran relations have been mostly hostile, although there have been brief moments of cooperation. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Iran helped the United States organize forces against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Iran had always opposed the Taliban, and many Iranians believed that the cooperation would open doors to wider U.S.-Iran dialogue (Ehrlich, 2007). However, in his 2002 State of the Union address, then President Bush called Iran part of the "axis of evil," along with

North Korea and Iraq. While the implications of this phrase will be expounded more fully throughout this paper, needless to say it destroyed hope of renewed political dialogue in the near future.

#### **4.1 Summary of the conflict**

Four main issues continue to sustain the conflicted relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. First, from Iran's side, it accuses the United States of being imperialist, specifically in terms of its occupation of Iraq and its opposition to Iran's nuclear program. According to Anastasiou (2009), Iranians view its nuclear program not only as a matter of national pride and security, "which in the nationalist mind are non-negotiable", but also as a means of defending the Muslim religion and all Muslim states (p. 35). Moreover, "in its Islamic fundamentalist mode, Iranian nationalism configures all these elements in a manner that inevitably presents the nation of Iran as a moral force, compelled by a moral imperative" (Anastasiou, 2009, p. 35). The Iranian government frames nuclear technology as a sign of progress, and it contends that Western impediment to that progress is an imperialist strategy to retain power over a developing country.

Second, Iran condemns the United States' unconditional support for Israel, which Iran does not officially recognize due to its occupation of Palestine. Essentially, Iran positions itself as the Islamic neighborhood protector against external bullies.

Third, from the side of the United States, it accuses Iran of sponsoring terrorism throughout the Middle East, specifically in Iraq where militias have created

mortal havoc for the U.S. military. For example, the United States accuses Iran of supporting Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon, both of which the United States considers to be terrorist groups.

Fourth, the United States does not want Iran to have nuclear weapons technology, because it fears that Iran might share that technology with terrorist groups and begin a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, a historically volatile region.

While these four issues occupy much of the media attention regarding U.S.-Iran relations, the broad foreign policy myths proffered by Beeman (2005) continue to underpin the conflict. The specific symbols, stereotypes, and myths that Beeman (2005) names in his assessment of symbolic discourse between the United States and Iran perpetuate misperceptions that later harden into entrenched political positions. According to Beeman (2005), the central themes of those misperceptions are that Iran characterizes the United States as an imperialist bully and the United States characterizes Iran as irrational and oppressive. Beeman (2005) says that the “Sins of the United States” in the eyes of Iran are the following:

- 1) Protecting the Shah during the revolution;
- 2) Helping Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War;
- 3) Shooting down domestic Iran Air Flight 655;
- 4) Economic sanctions; and
- 5) Naming it part of the axis of evil.

It is perhaps surprising that Beeman (2005) did not include “support for Israel” as one of the sins. Iran sees itself as a brother and protector of Palestine and frequently cites the U.S.-Israel friendship as an oppressive partnership.

The “Sins of Iran” from the United States’ perspective include the following:

- 1) 1979 hostage crisis;
- 2) Iran’s assistance to alleged terrorist organizations;
- 3) Oppression of Iranian women;
- 4) Persecution of minorities in Iran; and
- 5) Development of full nuclear capabilities, including enriched uranium (Beeman, 2005).

Currently, the nuclear dilemma continues to dominate news coverage. The dilemma consists of this: Iran refuses to concede to U.S. demands to stop enriching uranium. During this study’s timeframe, the United States insisted that it would only talk on the condition that Iran suspend uranium enrichment. Meanwhile, the six-power group, consisting of the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany, continues to strategize how to curb the development of nuclear weapons in Iran. The six-power group has been creating incentive and disincentive packages with the aim of slowing Iran’s nuclear progress. Throughout the debate on what to do about Iran, Iran has begun enriching uranium and continuing its nuclear program. Iranians feel that capitulating to the precondition to suspend enrichment would be conceding that they—a developing country, a former colony of Britain, and a former Cold War puppet of the United States—are not worthy, intelligent, or civilized enough

to have what the other “great powers” have.

## **4.2 Data and discussion**

The following is a summary of the conflict narrative that emerged from the documents reviewed. Particular attention has been paid to conflict-conditioned communication as described in Anastasiou’s (2007) approach. The summary is presented chronologically in order to reveal the progression of the communicative relationship between the United States and Iran from May 2005-May 2008.

### **A. Summary of 2005 data**

This study begins its analysis of conflict-conditioned communication in May 2005. As discussed above, the United States and Iran had long been in a uniquely postmodern conflict by this time, and the first articles reviewed showed that communication between the two states had been reduced to competing systems of propaganda as described in Anastasiou’s framework for conflict-conditioned communication (2007). The 2005 Iranian presidential campaigns included much anti-American speech and conduct, which employed several of Beeman’s (2005) “sins of the U.S.” The campaigns also stressed the importance of nuclear capabilities to Iranian national pride and identity. This is a prime example of vertical propaganda as defined by Ellul (1973), in which leaders direct propagandized speech down to the masses in order to move the people to action, namely to vote for one candidate over another.

After Ahmadinejad won the Iranian presidency, he gave two controversial speeches that drew international attention, one ostensibly calling for Israel to be “wiped off the map” and the other accusing the United States of practicing “nuclear apartheid.” Throughout this period, the United States exhorted the international community to take a tougher stance against Iran’s ambitions for increased nuclear capabilities.

#### **i. Iran’s 2005 presidential elections**

Competing political parties in Iran often use anti-American sentiment as a rallying point for support. In the 2005 Iranian presidential campaign, ex-president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was running again, said, ““there is only a veneer of democracy in the United States, and we have a real democracy”” (MacFarquhar, 2005a, p. 8, *IHT*). Rafsanjani also commented, ““election laws are so complicated in your country that people have no choice but to vote for one of the candidates who are with one of the two parties”” (MacFarquhar, 2005a, p.8, *IHT*). The use of anti-American sentiment primarily attempts to juxtapose an arrogant but inferior U.S. political system with the superior theocratic democracy of the Islamic Republic.

However, Rafsanjani also portrayed himself as the one candidate who could improve relations with the United States (MacFarquhar, 2005b, *IHT*). In a rare interview with *The New York Times*, Rafsanjani repeated a demand he made during his prior presidency, which was that the first step to repairing U.S.-Iran relations should be the release of what he estimated to be \$11 billion of Iranian assets frozen after the 1979 hostage crisis at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran (MacFarquhar, 2005a, *IHT*). Hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “dismissed the idea that Iran needed to build any

relationship with the United States and vowed to continue Iran's nuclear program....

'As for the haughty Europeans,' Ahmadinejad proclaimed, 'they must leave their ivory towers and speak to the Iranians as equals'" (Milani, 2005, p. 6, *IHT*). Although Ahmadinejad used more extreme language, both statements position Iran as resisting Western imperialism. Iran's historical experiences with imperialism, such as Britain's co-optation of its oil industry and the United States' role in the 1953 coup, underlie legitimate concerns about maintaining national autonomy and pride. However, both Rafsanjani's and Ahmadinejad's statements are aimed less at resolving legitimate concerns and more at coalescing support for their respective campaigns.

In a further display of anti-Americanism, Ahmadinejad stepped on a painting of the American flag on his way to vote in the presidential election, while Iranian citizens who saw this cringed with embarrassment (Milani, 2005, *IHT*; Slackman, 2005, *IHT*). One Iranian, Hamid Reza Solimani, working in his tire-repair shop, commented, "'the government has imposed this on people's minds, painting flags on the road. Almost all people hate this'" (quoted in Slackman, 2005, p. 1, *IHT*).

Anti-American imagery is not uncommon in Tehran. For example, on one route into the city center, drivers come upon a five-story tall painting of the American flag on the side of an apartment building. However, in place of the stars there are skeletons and in place of the stripes there are bomb trails (Slackman, 2005, *IHT*). At the top of the flag, in English, it says "Down With U.S.A.", and on the bottom, in Farsi, it says, "We won't go along with America, even for one moment" (Slackman, 2005, p. 1, *IHT*). The former U.S. Embassy is also rife with anti-American slogans,



particularly on the red brick wall that surrounds the compound. “We will never go along with the United States, the Great Satan” reads one tag, and “The United States is the top of all criminals” reads another (Slackman, 2005, p. 1, *IHT*).

This commonplace enmification of the United States is an example of Iran’s foreign policy myth that it is constantly battling external forces (Beeman, 2005). It also indicates the conflict-conditioned stage of communication where the absence of direct knowledge of the other leads to the construction and reliance on assumptions and enemy images of the other (Anastasiou, 2007). Additionally, these constant reminders of conflict with the United States work to reinforce Iranian identity as antithetical to U.S. imperialism. Therefore, even when political leaders are not engaging in vertical political propaganda as defined by Ellul (1973), these images operate as sociological propaganda by constantly providing a ready worldview of Iranianess as juxtaposed with Americaness.

Throughout the final presidential campaign, both Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad framed the nuclear issue as a matter of national pride and portrayed themselves as a force of resistance against the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (MacFarquhar, 2005b, *IHT*; Milani, 2005, *IHT*). Although many Iranians distance themselves from the anti-American rhetoric of hard-liners, there is popular belief that the nuclear issue is a matter of national pride. In one article, a 29-year-old graduate student in energy management said, ““For a country to have nuclear energy means that it has made progress in all other fields as well, so other countries have to respect its technology”” (quoted in MacFarquhar, 2005b, p. 7, *IHT*). A 26-

year-old seminary student in Isfahan cited a parable from Imam Ali, the inspiration for the Shiite branch of Islam, “‘They can offer me everything from the earth and heaven,’ he said, paraphrasing the prophet, ‘but in exchange if they want me to so much as take the food from an ant’s mouth that is his right to eat, I won’t do it.’ Achieving the peaceful use of technology is really a matter of pride and we will not stop this for anything” (quoted in MacFarquhar, 2005b, p. 7, *IHT*).

This kind of rhetoric and behavior represents the stage of conflict-conditioned communication where propaganda has become “natural.” Many Iranian politicians use anti-American rhetoric to garner domestic support of Iran’s continued defiance of the IAEA and to tell the international community that no external force—not even the United States—can break Iran’s will. By continually depicting the United States as the driving force of corruption in the world, both Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad perpetuated the Iranian foreign policy myth that Iran is a beacon of light fighting a dark external enemy (Beeman, 2005). Both candidates rhetorically situated the IAEA, which is also seen as an arm of the United States, as the obtrusive outsider trying to thwart Iran’s deserved progress. This is an example of Iranian leaders using the threat of an enemy to coalesce their public images as protectors of the Iranian people and of Iranian national pride.

When Ahmadinejad unexpectedly won the election by a landslide, stories about his past began to circulate. Ahmadinejad was accused of being one of the students who overtook the U.S. Embassy in 1979. At first, only a few of the hostages were convinced that Ahmadinejad was a captor. The *Washington Times*, a politically

conservative newspaper, bannered the story across its front page and quoted former hostages who called Ahmadinejad a “devil”, “terrorist”, “bastard”, and “very cruel-like, stern, a very narrow, beady-eyed character” (Knowlton, 2005, p. 4, *IHT*). Photos from that time reveal a man who resembles Ahmadinejad, but they are ultimately inconclusive. Later, the Iranian government confirmed that Ahmadinejad was part of the student group but was neither a captor nor a guard of the hostages. The U.S. government did not make an official comment, except to say that Ahmadinejad was “no friend of democracy” (Knowlton, 2005, p. 4, *IHT*).

The enemy images used in this article, such as calling Ahmadinejad a “beady-eyed character” and a “devil”, were quotes from former hostages, who have the freedom of speech to say such things. More importantly, the way this article is written speaks to the journalistic choices of the *Washington Times*. In this case, the *Washington Times* chose to publish quotes with strong and belligerent imagery and no direct quotes from hostages who were unsure or did not believe that Ahmadinejad was a captor. This article is an example of how journalistic choices can greatly impact and shape perceptions of the other and thus perpetuate conflict-conditioned intergroup communication. This article also gave U.S. policy-makers the opportunity to reiterate the inferiority of Iran’s theocratic democracy compared to American-style democracy. This repetitive “battle of the democracies” is also an example of what Beeman (2005) describes as the complementation of grievances between the United States and Iran, i.e., that each accuses the other of the same offense. In this case, both the United States and Iran accuse each other of having flawed democracies.

Throughout August 2005 and into September 2005, the United States insisted that Iran stop enriching uranium, and Iran refused. On September 15, 2005 the United States sweetened the pot by expanding the range of issues it was willing to discuss, thereby implying that the two states might eventually resume diplomatic relations (Gordon, 2005, *IHT*). However, the precondition that Iran stop enriching uranium stood.

## **ii. Ahmadinejad's speeches draw international attention**

In October 2005, at a conference titled “A World Without Zionism”, Ahmadinejad spoke to 4,000 students, and it was reported that he called for Israel to be “wiped off the map” (Demagogue in Iran, 2005, p. 6 *IHT*). Farsi translators say that it was not necessarily a direct threat, and that it would be more appropriately translated as “this regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time” (Ehrlich, 2007, p. 38). It was also compared to the United States’ desire to wipe out Communism. Absent from most of the articles about this infamous comment is that it is not original; Ayatollah Khomeini coined the phrase during the Islamic Revolution. To the imam’s quote, Ahmadinejad added, ““Anybody who recognizes Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic nation’s fury”” (Demagogue in Iran, 2005, p. 6 *IHT*).

Although Ahmadinejad’s comments captured headlines across the globe, this statement was more likely a strategic move to coalesce domestic support than a direct threat to Israel. This contentious call for Israel to be “wiped off the map” or for the “Zionist regime to be erased from the pages of history” exemplifies normalized propaganda. Specifically, it is an example of sociological propaganda that situates a

group toward a certain ideology or social/political disposition (Ellul, 1973). This is done partly in preparation for a time when direct or overt propaganda is needed to incite action by group members (Ellul, 1973). In this case, Ahmadinejad situated Iranians against the alleged imperialism of Israel and the United Nations, whose policy is often dominated and manipulated by the United States and its allies.

On September 17, 2005 Ahmadinejad gave his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly, where he insinuated that the United States' objection to Iran's nuclear program is a discriminatory imposition of "nuclear apartheid" (Brinkley, 2005, p. 4, *IHT*). This speech marked a turning point in U.S.-Iran relations because it implied that Iran was ready to reassert its regional power, and that it was brave enough to stand up to the United States in the international arena. It also persuaded the IAEA that Iran may have to be referred to the UN Security Council if it does not fully cooperate with the Non-Proliferation Treaty and its Additional Protocol, which allows for more inspections. Being reported to the Security Council is an international slap in the face to UN members.

### **iii. U.S. opposition to Iran's nuclear program intensifies distrust**

In November 2005, the United States revealed a stolen laptop that was retrieved from a German double-agent who had once worked for U.S. interests in Iran (Broad & Sanger, 2005, *IHT*). The contents of the laptop allegedly proved that Iran was working on a nuclear weapon (Broad & Sanger, 2005, *IHT*). While many Europeans were skeptical, especially given the botched U.S. intelligence in the run-up to the 2003 War in Iraq, the evidence did persuade the IAEA to take Iran's threats

more seriously (Broad & Sanger, 2005, *IHT*). Mohamed ElBaradei, then the head of the IAEA, wanted a diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear issue. ElBaradei suggested that the six-power package should allow limited enrichment subject to rigorous monitoring (Broad & Sanger, 2005, *IHT*). In response to this increased pressure from the international community, Iranian hard-liners Ahmadinejad and nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani increased their defiance. Larijani promised to retaliate, saying, ““there is no winning for them in this game”” (Slackman, 2006a, p. 1, *IHT*). Iran then promised to end its voluntary commitment to the Additional Protocol of the Non-Proliferation Treaty if the IAEA reported Iran to the UN Security Council (Slackman, 2006a, *IHT*).

By framing it as a game, Larijani again utilized the “us against them” discourse without the threat of direct violence. The two states rarely threaten direct violence, but rather allude to it or assume it due to the militaristic nature of much foreign policy. As political strategy, it is possible that Iran was waiting for some controversy to arise that it could use as an excuse for reneging its commitment to the Additional Protocol. At the base level, the political speech surrounding the laptop incident represents the kind of mistrust and suspicion characterized in the first stage of conflict-conditioned communication (Anastasiou, 2007). The “game” analogy suggests mistrust and suspicion rather than blatant enmification. This kind of suspicious speech skirts direct threats and demonstrates how communicative relations ebb and flow, and it reaffirms that Anastasiou’s (2007) stages of conflict-conditioned communication are not necessarily linear.

## **B. Summary of 2006 data**

Communicative patterns between the United States and Iran in 2006 continued to demonstrate the common ebb and flow of conflict-conditioned communication. According to Anastasiou (2007), conflict-conditioned communication often cycles and shifts through the various stages. Although the United States and Iran seriously flirted with the idea of direct talks in 2006, ultimately both states remained locked in their political positions. Moreover, each state frequently reverted to the common themes of their conflicted relationship, e.g. that the United States is imperialistic and hypocritical and that Iran threatens international security and oppresses its own people. The nuclear issue and Iraq were the most frequently cited outstanding issues between the two states, but a public letter from Ahmadinejad to Bush also highlighted many of the historical grievances between the United States and Iran. This back-and-forth dance with the idea of direct talks was quickly interrupted by the Israel-Hezbollah war. Henceforth, propagandized speech intensified, particularly on the part of the United States. Even after the Iraq Study Group recommended that the United States engage in direct talks with Iran to improve the situation in Iraq, the Bush administration continued to accuse Iran of supporting terrorism.

### **i. Iran increases aid to Hamas to fight Western oppression**

In February 2006, Iran publicly provided aid to Hamas in order to help them “resist America’s cruelty” (Erlanger, 2006, p. 4, *IHT*). Iran’s assertion that the aid was to “resist America’s cruelty” further frames the United States as an imperialist force. It also demonstrates how the Israel-Palestine conflict is a constant, but often implicit, backdrop to the conflicted U.S.-Iran relationship. By asserting itself in

resistance to Western oppression, Iran establishes itself as the morally right protector of the Middle East. Again, Iran framed the conflict in terms of a righteous battle between good and evil, a religious dichotomy that heavily informs the collective identity of Iranians and others in the Muslim Middle East (Beeman, 2005). Thus, the cyclical nature of cultural conditioning becomes evident. Many Iranians, including policy-makers, are culturally conditioned to see the world through this moral dichotomy (Beeman, 2005). Therefore, Iranians often interpret foreign policy through this lens. The more evident this dichotomy appears, the more people expect to see it. This is the type of self-fulfilling prophecy that Deutsch (1991) names as a common error of perception in competitive conflict relationships. Moreover, as the moral dichotomy myth is reinforced, policy-makers become savvier in using it to their advantage.

#### **ii. Iran and U.S. make unsuccessful moves toward direct talks**

In March 2006, the Bush administration proposed direct talks with Iran, on the condition that discussion be limited to the subject of Iraq, and Iran agreed (Slackman, 2006b, *IHT*; Talking with Iran, 2006, *IHT*; Weisman, 2006c, *IHT*). Although Iran later reneged, interesting speech emerged from the proposition. The United States especially wanted to talk to Iran because the situation in Iraq had become chaotic, and the United States largely blamed it on Iran's "meddling" (Knowlton, 2006c, p. 5, *IHT*). U.S. officials' ambiguous language, such as "Quds-force type people", allowed the United States to plant suspicions without outright misrepresenting the truth (Knowlton, 2006c, p. 5, *IHT*). Meanwhile, Iran began strategically courting moderate



Muslim states, like Indonesia, with whom the United States also needs to maintain friendly relations (Vatikiotis, 2006, *IHT*). Articles around this time suggest a shoring up of allies on each side in preparation for greater conflict. Both sides benefit from this type of propaganda that leads people toward a nationalist closing of ranks.

### **iii. U.S. uses violent language and moves closer to direct force**

By April 2006, Tehran had already made considerable progress with its nuclear program. A seminal article in *The New Yorker* by Pulitzer Prize-winner Seymour Hersh (2006c) revealed that the Bush administration was secretly preparing for an air attack on Iran. In the article, a senior intelligence official is quoted as saying, “‘Bush and others in the White House view him [Ahmadinejad] as a potential Adolf Hitler....That’s the name they’re using. They say, ‘Will Iran get a strategic weapon and threaten another world war?’” (Hersh, 2006c, p. 30, *NY*). Another high-ranking diplomat is quoted as saying, “‘This is much more than a nuclear issue....That’s just the rallying point, and there is still time to fix it. But the Administration believes it cannot be fixed unless they control the hearts and minds of Iran’” (Hersh, 2006c, p. 30, *NY*). Another House member, speaking of President Bush, said, “‘The most worrisome thing is that this guy has a messianic vision....The President’s deep distrust of Ahmadinejad has strengthened his determination to confront Iran’” (Hersh, 2006c, p. 30, *NY*). Calling Ahmadinejad a “potential Hitler” who will instigate another world war illustrates distrust, frustration, enmification, and ultimately how dangerous the complete severance of mental worlds can be.

Hersh’s investigative articles differ markedly from other articles reviewed in

this study. They go beyond repeating the manipulative talking points from each side by providing context and insight. Partly, Hersh was able to do this because his articles are long, feature-pieces with a holistic eye toward foreign policy. In contrast, daily papers like the *International Herald Tribune* publish much shorter articles with less depth. Hersh's articles also stand apart from the more removed and macroscopic economic analysis characteristic of the *Economist*. Also, Hersh's reputation for excellence in reporting and the connections he has cultivated throughout his career likely gave him an edge on insider information. Hersh's rigorous analysis and reporting also highlight the impact of journalistic choices.

Unsurprisingly, throughout this period, stances hardened between the two regimes (Clarke & Simon, 2006, *IHT*; Knowlton, 2006a, *IHT*; Weisman, 2006b, *IHT*; Weisman, 2006c, *IHT*). While diplomats met in Moscow to discuss the Iranian nuclear issue, Bush reiterated that, if diplomacy fails to stop Iran's development of nuclear weapons, "all options are on the table" (Knowlton, 2006a, p. 1, *IHT*). In Tehran, just hours before the Moscow meeting, Ahmadinejad told the Iranian military to be "constantly ready", and he warned that Iran would "cut off the hand of any aggressor and place the sign of disgrace on their forehead" (Knowlton, 2006a, p. 1, *IHT*). Ahmadinejad qualified that Iran would only use force if attacked, stating that Iran "is humble toward friends and a shooting star toward enemies" (Knowlton, 2006a, p. 1, *IHT*). Ahmadinejad made this public warning during a parade commemorating Iran's Army Day, declaring that "today, you are among the world's most powerful armies because you rely on God" (Knowlton, 2006a, p. 1, *IHT*). At

this point, the United States and Iran had clearly moved to the stage of severed mental worlds, where communication between the states took the form of competing systems of propaganda (Anastasiou, 2007). Policy-makers said little of substance and regurgitated the standard foreign myths described by Beeman (2005).

**iv. Ahmadinejad directly addresses Bush in letter**

On May 9, 2006, reports of a personal letter written by Ahmadinejad to Bush surfaced in the media (Hauser, 2006a, *IHT*; Hauser, 2006b, *IHT*). The letter, sixteen pages in Farsi accompanied by an eighteen page English translation, condemned liberal democracy for being an oppressive failure. It also suggested that only through obedience and faithfulness in the divine can humanity restore the world on a peaceful and righteous path. In it, many of Beeman's (2005) "sins of the United States" are enumerated, including human rights abuses at Guantanamo Bay; protecting the Shah in 1953; aiding Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War; shooting down Iran Air Flight 655; and economic sanctions. The letter did not address the "axis of evil" comment, which was the fifth "sin" named by Beeman (2005). However, it did address the United States' support of Israel, which arguably should have been included in Beeman's list. Ahmadinejad also speculated that 9/11 was enabled by U.S. intelligence insiders' betrayal and incompetence.

According to Goodall, et al (2006), Ahmadinejad intended the letter to reach a broad international audience, and it represents a traditional *dakwah*. A *dakwah* is a call to Islam, and it can also be a prelude to violence (Goodall, et al, 2006). Traditional Islam decrees that an enemy must be given the chance to convert to Islam

before one can instigate violence toward them (Goodall, et al, 2006). The foreign press largely condemned the United States for ignoring the letter and said that it signified a real chance to thaw relations for the first time in nearly thirty years. Washington officials, on the other hand, dismissed it as a “meandering screed” (Goodall, et al, p. 2, 2006). In an interview with the Associated Press, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, ““this letter is not the place that one would find an opening to engage on the nuclear issue or anything of the sort. It isn’t addressing the issues that we’re dealing with in a concrete way”” (Goodall, et al, p.3, 2006).

Washington ignored the symbolism in the letter, including that its broader audience was the international community, particularly the Muslim world. Ahmadinejad put the ball in Bush’s court in a way that the Muslim world could more intimately understand and interpret, and Bush famously dropped it because he would not set aside mistrust or suspicion of Iran. It is also possible that Ahmadinejad was counting on Bush to thus respond, thereby strengthening his own position in the eyes of the Muslim, especially Shiite, Middle East. Whatever the true meaning of the letter was, it is strong evidence that the historical grievances Iran holds toward the United States are very much alive and well in Iranian collective consciousness and national identity and continues to inform U.S.-Iran communicative relations.

#### **v. Possibility of direct talks over nuclear issue resumes**

Through May 2006, the United States continued to offer direct talks regarding Iran’s nuclear program on the precondition that Iran stop enriching uranium. Ahmadinejad continued to volunteer Iran’s participation if the precondition were

dropped, stressing that Iran will not be “forced into obedience” (Hauser, 2006c, p. 6, *IHT*). Essentially, Iran wants to be treated as an equal at the table. A recent poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org shows that sixty-three percent of Iranians support renewed dialogue with the United States (Iranian Public on Current Issues, WorldPublicOpinion.org, 2010). However, the Islamic regime uses the theme of unfair and unequal treatment by the West as a coalescing force for domestic support. If the United States concedes to talk without precondition, then the Iranian government may win a symbolic victory in the short-term, but it will also lose a key rallying point for support among its constituency.

Many Iranian exiles in the United States think that Iran should be treated like South Africa during the apartheid era, banning it from international organizations and sporting events, barring its officials from traveling to the West, and seizing rulers’ foreign assets (MacFarquhar, 2006, *IHT*). Many exiles also believe that an armed attack by the United States on Iran would destroy the widespread support from the general Iranian population that the United States as a country—not necessarily the government—enjoys. One Iranian journalist in exile, Sharam Homayoun, commented, “The place that the Americans hold in the minds of the Iranians right now couldn’t be bought with millions of dollars of propaganda” (MacFarquhar, p. 2, 2006, *IHT*). Abbas Milani, head of the Iranian studies at Stanford and co-director of the Iran Democracy Project, said, “The more they beat the drums of war here, the more Ahmadinejad can shut down the democratic movement” (MacFarquhar, 2006, p. 2, *IHT*).

In June 2006, the United States agreed to talk about all outstanding issues between the two states if Iran suspended enrichment. The articles studied framed this concession as a giant carrot in the six-power incentive package (Toward talks with Iran, 2006, *IHT*; Weisman, 2006c, *IHT*; Brooks, 2006, *IHT*; Sanger, 2006, *IHT*; Slackman, 2006b, *IHT*; Breakthrough or stalemate, 2006, *E*; Cohen, 2006, *IHT*; Cooper & Sanger, 2006, *IHT*). A member of Iran's Supreme Security Council and deputy in charge of international security, Javad Vaeidi, said that the United States' overture was a positive step but that to give up enrichment would be "humiliating" (Slackman, 2006b, p. 1, *IHT*). Vaeidi said, "The Bush administration thinks the Iranian people are willing to lose their rights just to create a dialogue with the West" (Slackman, 2006b, p. 1, *IHT*). Vaeidi also commented that since the Islamic Revolution, the United States has pursued a policy toward Iran of "denial and containment", denying the legitimacy of the Islamic government and containing Iran's regional influence (Slackman, 2006b, p. 1, *IHT*). According to Vaeidi, the threshold for substantive talks with the United States "is when they accept our rights, our interests, our security" (Slackman, 2006b, p. 1, *IHT*). However, despite the seemingly conciliatory move, Rumsfeld continued to call Iran "one of the leading terrorist nations in the world" (Gordon, 2006, p. 3, *IHT*). In response, Supreme Leader Khamenei threatened to disrupt oil shipments if the United States makes a "wrong move," which would have disastrous effects worldwide, (Shanker, 2006a, *IHT*; Risky bargaining, 2006, *E*; Knowlton, 2006, *IHT*).

Vaeidi's defense of Iran's autonomy, his insistence that Iran and Iranians'

rights be taken seriously, and Rumsfeld's assertions that Iran supports terrorism typify U.S.-Iran communicative relations. Each set of grievances represents legitimate concerns that have arisen from historical experiences. Iran has seen its autonomy usurped by the United States, Britain, and the Shah in the 1953 coup, and the more recent economic sanctions and threats to its nuclear program reverberate those feelings of powerlessness and condescension by the international community, especially the United States. Similarly, the United States has experienced terrorism at home with 9/11. Although that terrorist act was not perpetrated by Iran, the United States has legitimate reasons to fear terrorism, especially in the Middle East. Further, the 1979 hostage crisis continues to occupy the memories of many Americans, and U.S. policy-makers take seriously the possibility that Iranian forces have been involved in the deaths of U.S. troops in Iraq.

While these concerns on both sides are legitimate, they have also led to severe misperceptions of the other. These misperceptions have fossilized into uncompromising political stances. It is at this point that communication devolves into competing systems of propaganda and resolution is impossible until authentic dialogue or some other phenomena pierces the wall of propaganda.

In July 2006, *The New Yorker* reported that Bush was secretly continuing his war plan against Iran, while he publicly called for "freedom for the Iranian people" in an effort to agitate the Iranians toward regime change (Hersh, 2006a, p. 94). Meanwhile, Iran refused to accept or reject the six-power incentive package. According to Iranian officials, Khamenei does not trust the world powers to keep their

promises (Sciolino, 2006, *IHT*). The United States and Iran remained in intractable conflict and did not engage in direct communication.

**vi. Israel-Hezbollah war; violent speech intensifies**

Late summer 2006 saw the Israel-Hezbollah war, which some speculated was a preview of the kind of proxy wars that could transpire between the United States (an Israeli ally) and Iran (a Hezbollah ally). News media portrayed the Israel-Hezbollah conflict as the possible start of World War III, which echoed the Bush administration's rhetoric predicting some kind of major warfare between the Western allies and the Islamic Middle East. Using language like "World War III" may have been pre-propaganda that prepares people's psyches to accept and support another world war as a necessary evil. It also exemplifies the type of "war journalism" that exacerbates conflict and promulgates propaganda.

In August 2006, Washington intensified its allegations that Tehran supported Shia militias in Iraq (Wong, 2006, *IHT*). As related to the nuclear issue, the United States tried to paint a dangerous and extremist picture of Iran in order to 1) shift some of the blame for failures in Iraq from U.S. shoulders and 2) make a case for harsher curtailment of Iran's nuclear development. Ahmadinejad, in a signature and flamboyant move, challenged Bush to a live televised debate under the conditions that it be "broadcast live and without censors, especially for the nation of the U.S." (Slackman, 2006c, p. 4, *IHT*). The offer was widely thought to be a publicity stunt, and Bush ignored it. On one hand, ignoring the offer represents the kind of suspicion, frustration, and fixation on ulterior motives characteristic of the first stage of conflict-



conditioned communication as developed by Anastasiou (2007). On the other hand, most of the world, including Iranians, understood Ahmadinejad's offer to be antagonistic posturing with little ambition toward an authentic debate or dialogue.

In September 2006, Bush and Ahmadinejad traded accusations at a UN General Assembly meeting. Bush spoke to "the broader Middle East", saying "“extremists in our midst spread propaganda claiming that the West is engaged in war against Islam. This propaganda is false, and its purpose is to confuse you and justify acts of terror”" (Rutenberg & Cooper, 2006, p. 4, *IHT*). Bush also spoke directly to Iranians.

““To the people of Iran,’ Bush said, ‘The United States respects you. We respect your country. We admire your rich history, your vibrant culture and your many contributions to civilization. You deserve an opportunity to determine your own future, an economy that rewards your intelligence and your talents, and a society that allows you to fulfill your tremendous potential. The greatest obstacle to this future is that your rulers have chosen to deny you liberty and to use your nation’s resources to fund terrorism and fuel extremism and pursue nuclear weapons”" (Hauser, 2006d, p. 1, *IHT*).

Bush reiterated that the United States has no objection to a peaceful nuclear power program in Iran (Hauser, 2006d, *IHT*). In response, Ahmadinejad said that the United States was a hypocrite who lacked the ability and political will to stop the violence in

Iraq (Knowlton, 2006b, *IHT*). Ahmadinejad also accused the United Nations of being too dependent on U.S. resources (Knowlton, 2006b, *IHT*). Once again, communicative tensions peaked and the two sides remained isolated from the other, but there were no direct threats of violence.

**vii. Iraq Study Group report; Iraq remains major outstanding issue**

In October 2006, the Iraq Study Group released its much anticipated report, with a notable section calling for the United States to talk with Iran and Syria to get the Iraq situation under control (Cooper, 2006, *IHT*). In November 2006, Iraq officially asked Iran to talk to the United States, but Iran said it would only do so by U.S. invitation (Ministry suggests talks, 2006, *IHT*). At this point, Bush still rejected talks unless Iran stopped its uranium enrichment program (Knowlton, 2006c, *IHT*).

In another extensive article, Hersh of *The New Yorker* cited high-level government sources saying that many people in the Bush administration saw “the weakening of Iran as the only way to save Iraq” and that the goal of military action was less about regime change and more about sending a signal that America can still accomplish its goals (2006a, p. 42). Hersh (2006a) also reported that Israelis were quickening their war drums against Iran, and that Israel alluded to Iran as the new Hitler’s Germany.

By saying that weakening Iran is the “only” way to save Iraq, and by comparing the Islamic Republic to Hitler’s Germany, the United States and its ally, Israel, signaled a communicative shift from suspicion, distrust, and sociological propaganda to more overt political propaganda. Further, the high-level government

sources quoted in Hersh's article indicate that many of the U.S. actions were driven by pride and the desire to save face. This suggests a critical point where volatile issues of security and national pride were escalating on each side.

In another blow to Iran, the United States arrested five Iranians in Iraq on charges that they were aiding Iraqi militias (Neighbourly mumblings, 2007, *E*). Iran insisted they were diplomats, and the truth of the situation remains unpublicized (Neighbourly mumblings, 2007, *E*). Iran also began spending money in a variety of Middle Eastern countries, ostensibly as a way to position itself as an ascendant regional power (Rohde, 2006, *IHT*). Much like the United States' display of naval power, Iran's display of regional influence inched closer to direct violence. Although there was no official warfare between the United States and Iran at this time, the regional power plays and war rhetoric arguably moved the communicative process into the stage where subjective reality is colored by intergroup violence (Anastasiou, 2007). This is even more apparent considering the United States' accusations against Iran of contributing to the deaths of American troops in Iraq and Iran's sustained rhetoric that the United States' support of Israel perpetuates the oppression and suffering of Palestinians.

#### **viii. Ahmadinejad questions Holocaust; U.S. engages in pre-war posturing**

In December 2006, Ahmadinejad hosted a conference that questioned the historical accuracy of the Holocaust, and some participants went so far as to deny the Holocaust (Hauser, 2006e, *IHT*). The international community roundly condemned this, and fervor escalated over Iran's possible threat to Israel. December also marked

the quiet increase of U.S. naval power in the Gulf. The United States positioned its navy to counter Iranian attempts to block oil shipments, something it had been threatening to do for some time (Shanker, 2006b, *IHT*). This pre-war posturing was the closest the two states came to intergroup violence during this study's timeframe.

### **C. Summary of 2007 data**

In 2007, Bush's last year as president, the United States displayed an increasingly confrontational attitude toward Iran (Cooper & Mazzetti, 2007, *IHT*). After the November 2006 U.S. congressional elections saw a swing toward Democratic policies, hawk Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld resigned and was replaced by Robert Gates, a former member of the Iraq Study Group. While some thought that Gates signaled a more conciliatory shift in policy, he proved himself unable to stand up to the extremely hawkish Vice President Dick Cheney, whom Bush deeply trusted for foreign policy advice.

In Iranian politics, Khamenei began distancing himself from Ahmadinejad's posturing on the nuclear issue after stricter sanctions were imposed. Again, it was unclear whether it signaled a shift in policy or a mere public relations move. Further, in addition to the increased military presence in the Gulf, the United States issued harsher and more specific allegations that the Revolutionary Guard was training anti-American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Regarding Iran's role in Iraq and Afghanistan, national security adviser Stephen Hadley said that the United States was resisting an Iranian effort "to basically establish hegemony" (Sanger, 2007a, p. 1, *IHT*). During this period, Iraq was virtually redefined as a battle between the United

States and Iran.

**i. U.S. increases accusations of Iranian interference in Iraq**

In January 2007, the United States became increasingly impatient with Iran's assertion that it wanted to pursue a diplomatic course of action while, according to the United States, Iran Quds forces continued to supply Iraqi insurgents with a specific type of bomb that was used to kill American troops (Cooper & Mazzetti, 2007, *IHT*). ““They’re training to kill coalition forces,” said one senior American counterterrorism official, requesting anonymity. “Their comments about wanting to see a stable Iraq are belied by this type of activity”” (Cooper & Mazzetti, 2007, p. 5, *IHT*). According to one report, “the United States has grown frustrated with what one administration official described as the ‘molasses-like’ pace of diplomatic efforts at the United Nations to impose broad sanctions on Iran related to its nuclear program”” (Cooper & Mazzetti, 2007, p. 5, *IHT*).

Ahmadinejad refused to address the United States’ accusation that bombs supplied by Iran were killing American troops in Iraq. Instead, Ahmadinejad said, ““There should be a court to prove the case...I think Americans have made a mistake in Iraq and unfortunately are losing. This is a shame for Americans of course, and that’s why they are trying to point their fingers to other people and pointing fingers to others will not solve the problem”” (Fathi, 2007c, p. 8, *IHT*). An Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mohammad Ali Hosseini, commented, ““Such accusations cannot be relied upon or be presented as evidence. The United States has a long history of fabricating evidence. Such charges are unacceptable”” (Fathi, 2007c, p. 8,

*IHT*). In response, Bush stated, ““The Iranian people are good, decent, honorable people, and they’ve got a government that is belligerent, loud, noisy, threatening...a government which is in defiance of the rest of the world, and it says that we [Iran] want a nuclear weapon”” (Fathi, 2007c, p. 8, *IHT*).

Here, the United States and Iran are engaging in hollow exchanges between monologues, as described by Ellul (1973), and the two states remain in severed mental worlds where communication is reduced to competing systems of propaganda (Anastasiou, 2007). Within the propagandized speech there are kernels of truth. For example, the United States has fabricated evidence and deceived other states before, not only in reference to Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction but also in its role in the 1953 coup. Additionally, Iran has often stood in defiance of the rest of world and has not been always been in full compliance with the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty and the Additional Protocol. However, so long as the United States and Iran use the truths to strengthen their systems of propaganda instead of engage in authentic dialogue, then the two states will remained locked in their political stances and in the conflict itself.

**ii. Iran’s nuclear program remains point of domestic support and U.S. ire**

In February 2007, Ahmadinejad asserted that UN sanctions would not deter Iran’s nuclear program, and that Iran’s strength and power were increasing (Fathi, 2007a, *IHT*). On the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, after laying flowers on the tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini, Ahmadinejad said, ““We are rapidly becoming a superpower”” (Fathi, 2007a, p. 2, *IHT*). The Islamic state news agency further quoted Ahmadinejad as saying,

“Our strength does not come from military weapons or an economic capability. Our power comes from our capability to influence the hearts and souls of people, and this scares them. That’s why they are using psychological warfare and impose sanctions. But the language of sanctions belongs to the past” (Fathi, 2007a, p. 2, *IHT*).

The night before the six-power group met to discuss its response to Iran’s enrichment activities, Ahmadinejad said, “The train of the Iranian nation is without brakes and a rear gear. We dismantled the rear gear and brakes of the train and threw them away sometime ago” (Knowlton, 2007, p. 1, *IHT*). Ahmadinejad also “said Western countries were not genuinely interested in the centrifuge used to enrich uranium. ‘They are concerned about the collapse of their hegemony and hollow power’” (Knowlton, 2007, p. 1, *IHT*).

Also during this period, Khamenei, who usually allows Ahmadinejad to speak for the government despite Khamenei’s superior role as Supreme Leader, warned the United States that Iran would retaliate against American interests worldwide if the United States attacked Iran (Fathi, 2007b). ““No one would commit such a blunder and jeopardize the interest of his country and people,”” Khamenei said (Fathi, 2007b, p. 4, *IHT*). Khamenei also dismissed the significance of sanctions. ““The United States and some other countries have imposed sanctions on Iran for many years now,” he said. ‘But we achieved great scientific and technological progress under such circumstances. So they cannot scare this great nation with sanctions’” (Fathi, 2007b,

p. 4, *IHT*). Both Ahmadinejad's and Khamenei's statements during this time echo one of the "sins of the United States", economic sanctions (Beeman, 2005). They also reveal Iran's legitimate interests in technology and national pride. However, these statements leave little room for dialogue.

Even as tensions rose and both the United States and Iran expressed willingness to use force, the state-run media in Iran shielded the Iranian public from all the facts. According to one article by Iranian journalist Ladane Nasseri (2007, *IHT*), most Iranians receive their news from state-run media, and the government limits access to independent news sources through recurring raids on satellite dishes and filtering of websites. State-run media depicts Iran as pursuing its indisputable right to nuclear technology and bravely standing up to "the Global Arrogance", the United States (Nasseri, 2007, *IHT*). Further, Iran is portrayed as enjoying widespread global support, even if it is from states like Venezuela and Zimbabwe, and the Bush administration is portrayed as being crippled by domestic opposition and its numerous mistakes in Iraq (Nasseri, 2007, *IHT*). According to Nasseri,

"Iranian state television backs these assertions with gripping footage of havoc in Iraq and anti-war rallies in the West. The Islamic Republic, on the other hand, is depicted as a regional hegemon, somewhat in control of international matters. Frequent speeches by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—spiced with warnings that America's 'bullying times are over'—are broadcast live on state television. The television also regularly reports on Iran's war games, in



which innovations in military techniques and successful missile launches boost the national ego” (p. 6, *IHT*).

This report shows how Iranian propaganda works to establish itself as a regional hegemon within the eyes of its own citizenry.

### **iii. U.S. and Iran attempt to display strength prior to first direct talks**

In May 2007, Dick Cheney used the deck of an American aircraft off the coast of Iran as a backdrop to warn Tehran that the United States was prepared to use naval power if the Islamic Republic tried to disrupt oil routes or transport material for its nuclear weapons program (Sanger, 2007b, *IHT*). While Cheney visited several allies in the Middle East, Ahmadinejad also went on a tour of regional allies. Both Cheney and Ahmadinejad likely did this in an attempt to boost support in anticipation of a diplomatic meeting on Iraq (Slackman & Fattah, 2007, *IHT*). During a visit to Dubai, Ahmadinejad spoke to a crowd of several hundred people and, speaking of the United States, said, ““The nations of the region can no longer take you forcing yourself on them”” (Slackman & Fattah, 2007, p. 5, *IHT*). Again, Ahmadinejad uses this language to situate the United States as the oppressive foreigner, thus tapping into Iran’s foreign policy myth and capitalizing on historically legitimate injuries to Iranians’ national pride.

Later in May 2007, the United States and Iran held their first high-profile talks in thirty years, although the agenda was limited to improving conditions in Iraq (Semple, 2007, *IHT*). U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, was frustrated after the

first talks in May, saying that he had ““laid out before the Iranians a number of our direct, specific concerns about their behavior in Iraq”” but that the Iranians were more focused on ““mechanisms, if you will, and principles rather than the detailed security substance that we need to see improvement on”” (Semple, 2007, p. 1, *IHT*).

In July 2007, Crocker, and Iranian ambassador to Iraq, Hassam Kazemi Qomi, met with the Iraqi foreign minister, Hoshyar Zebari, in another rare opportunity for direct communications between the United States and Iran (Farrell & Elsen, 2007, *IHT*). However, Crocker was again frustrated by the results, stating,

“I was as clear as I could be with the Iranians that this effort, this discussion, has to be measured in results, not in principles or promises, and that thus far, the results on the ground are not encouraging....you can go through hours of discussion and find at the end of it that the actual concrete result can be distilled into a discussion of a few minutes” (Farrell & Elsen, 2007, p. 3, *IHT*).

Crocker said the Iranians focused on establishing political frameworks for discussions, ““none of which seemed to me terribly relevant”” (Farrell & Elsen, 2007, p. 3, *IHT*).

These talks signaled another shift in policy without an actual shift on the ground.

However, Crocker’s dismissal of Iran’s wish to discuss frameworks for discussion may also evidence a significant cultural difference between the pragmatic American-style diplomacy and Iran’s primacy on being respected by the international community. Until each side recognizes that they bring to the table fundamentally

different priorities and values, future diplomatic efforts will likely be similarly frustrated.

**iv. U.S. puts Revolutionary Guards on terrorist list, violent rhetoric ensues**

In August 2007, the Bush administration pushed for the Iranian military's Revolutionary Guards to be put on the United States' foreign terrorist list, citing their assistance to anti-American militias in Iraq and Afghanistan as evidence of its terrorist activities. This independent move suggests that the United States was losing patience with the UN sanction process and wanted to punish Iran sooner than later (Cooper & Fathi, 2007, *IHT*).

Through August and into September 2007, Bush and Ahmadinejad traded insults with alarming ferocity (The other struggle in the Gulf, 2007, *E*; Sanger, 2007c, *IHT*; Cooper, 2007, *IHT*). On August 28<sup>th</sup>, Bush called Iran the world's leading supporter of terrorism, asserted that Iran's nuclear program had placed the Middle East "under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust", and authorized U.S. military commanders to confront Iran's "murderous activities" (The other struggle in the Gulf, 2007, p. 16, *E*). For his part, Ahmadinejad told a group of Iranian students that as a "master of tabulation and calculation" he had concluded that Iran's enemies "dare not fight us" (The other struggle in the Gulf, 2007, p. 16, *E*). The heightened propaganda and militarized rhetoric put the international community on edge. Eventually, in late September 2007, the U.S. Senate approved a non-binding resolution to put the Revolutionary Guards on the foreign terrorist list and increase economic sanctions against Iran (Herszenhorn, 2007). Again, speech by the United States and

Iran revealed their entrenched political positions, how propaganda had become “natural” for political leaders, and the complete severance of mental worlds (Anastasiou, 2007).

#### **v. Ahmadinejad visits New York**

Ahmadinejad also visited the United States in September and made a controversial speech at Colombia University in New York City, in which he suggested that Iran does not have gay culture. This assertion was endlessly mocked by U.S. liberal media. During that same visit, Ahmadinejad made an address at a National Press Club event, where he denied that Iran was supplying weapons to Iraqi insurgents and said that any talk of war with the United States was a “propaganda tool” by the West (Hauser, 2007, p. 6, *IHT*). Ahmadinejad was unequivocal in his disapproval of the United States government. “We oppose the way the U.S. government tries to manage the world,” he said. “We believe it’s wrong; we believe it leads to war, discrimination and bloodshed” (Hauser, 2007, p. 6, *IHT*). Ahmadinejad also commented on Israel, saying that Iran could not recognize Israel “because it is based on ethnic discrimination, occupation and usurpation, and it consistently threatens its neighbors” (Hauser, 2007, p. 6, *IHT*). Ahmadinejad’s comments on dominance and discrimination by the United States reflect the complementation of “crimes” as described by Beeman (2005). Namely, both the United States and Iran accuse the other of discrimination, human rights abuses, and asserting undeserved hegemonic power. So long as each side perceives the other to be the epitome of wrongness on the same issues, then each side will remain locked in their political positions and the

conflict will remain intractable.

Also while in New York, Ahmadinejad hosted an *iftar*, which is a traditional sundown meal to break a Ramadan fast. During a speech to his guests, Ahmadinejad said ““When they can’t break our will [referring to the United States], they try to insult our history”” (Majd, 2007, p. 34, *NY*). Ahmadinejad spoke of the film “300”, which was a stylized and dramatized retelling of the Battle of Thermopylae, a battle during the Greco-Persian Wars. Many Iranians were offended by the film’s barbaric portrayal of ancient Persians and by historical inaccuracies. At the *iftar*, Ahmadinejad said, ““That film claimed that under Darius the Great twenty-seven nations paid tribute to Iran.’ The audience hissed. ‘But in a meeting I was in, I corrected that impression. ‘No,’ I said, ‘Under Darius *forty-two* nations paid tribute to Iran!’” (Majd, 2007, p. 34, *NY*). This speech shows how Ahmadinejad positions himself as a leader who defends the historical greatness of Iran and also how important history is to modern Iranian national identity. Ahmadinejad additionally addressed the nuclear issue. ““Iranians have never tried to oppress anyone,’ he said. ‘But the world should know that if they trample on our rights they’ll meet a shameful regret stamped on their foreheads!’” (Majd, 2007, p. 34, *NY*). To this, the crowd of guests erupted into cheers of “Iran! Iran!” (Majd, 2007, p. 34, *NY*).

The crowd’s response to Ahmadinejad’s spirited speech shows how deeply important Iran’s history is to present-day Iranians’ national pride and identity. It also suggests that any attempt to shift the United States and Iran away from their hardened political positions and toward authentic dialogue will have to address Iran’s legitimate

interest in maintaining its national pride and identity.

**vi. Repetitive posturing from both sides; NIE report made public**

October 2007 saw more of the same posturing from both sides with little progress toward authentic dialogue. Bush went so far as to say that a nuclear Iran raised the risk of a World War III, and that those wishing to avoid World War III should actively work to stop Iranian nuclear activity (Knowlton, 2007b, *IHT*; Stolberg, 2007a, 2007b, *IHT*; Knowlton, 2007b, *IHT*). Sanctions against the Revolutionary Guards were officially enacted (Cooper, 2007c, *IHT*). Somewhat in response to these new sanctions, according to a “semi-official local news agency”, the head of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said that, ““If Iran’s enemies are foolish enough to invade, they will receive a strong slap”” (Tightening a loose noose, 2007, p. 37, *E*).

In December 2007, a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate report found that Iran had halted its enrichment program in 2003, two years before the United States found the laptop that allegedly proved Iran was still developing nuclear weapons capabilities. Iran reveled in this report, while the Bush administration rushed to defend its policy, claiming that the report only confirmed that Iran could not be trusted. Some U.S. conservatives even speculated that U.S. intelligence services were deliberately trying to undermine Bush’s Iran policy (The spooks change their tune, and the politicians recalibrate, 2007, *E*).

After the rather embarrassing NIE report, the Bush administration focused on a particular weapon that was being used to kill many U.S. troops in Iraq. The weapon is called an explosively formed projectile (EFP) and has been historically manufactured

only in Iran. However, while EFPs are Iranian weapons, there is no way to tell whether the ones used against U.S. troops in Iraq came directly from the Iranian military, were leftover from the Iran-Iraq War, or were purchased on the black market.

#### **D. Summary of 2008 data**

##### **i. Revolutionary Guard accuses U.S. of faking video; Bush visits Middle East**

In January 2008, on the eve before a visit by Bush to the Middle East, Iran's Revolutionary Guard accused the United States of faking a video showing five Iranian speedboats confronting U.S. Navy warships in the Gulf, according to a state-run media agency (Fathi, 2008, *IHT*). The Pentagon dismissed the assertion as “absurd, factually incorrect and [that it] reflects the lack of seriousness with which they take this serious incident” (Fathi, 2008, p. 2, *IHT*). According to the Pentagon, the four-minute video shows speedboats maneuvering among U.S. Navy ships, with a “heavily accented voice” saying “I am coming to you. You will explode after a few minutes” (Fathi, 2008, p. 2, *IHT*). Navy officials said the voice was recorded from the internationally recognized bridge-to-bridge radio channel, and Bush administration officials said they believed that Iran was trying to provoke the United States (Fathi, 2008, p. 2, *IHT*). Bush responded, “Iran was a threat, Iran is a threat, and Iran will continue to be a threat if they are allowed to learn how to enrich uranium....And so I’m looking forward to, you know, making it clear that the United States of America sees clearly the threats of this world, and we intend to work with our friends and allies to make that part of the world more secure” (Fathi, 2008, p. 2, *IHT*).

When Bush arrived in the Middle East for his visit, he called on the United States' Gulf allies to rally against Iran ““before it's too late”” (Iran a risk to world's security, Bush asserts, 2008, p. 1, *IHT*). In the same address, Bush stated, ““Iran's actions threaten the security of nations everywhere. So the United States is strengthening our longstanding security commitments with our friends in the Gulf and rallying friends around the world to confront this danger before it is too late”” (Iran a risk to world's security, Bush asserts, 2008, p. 1, *IHT*). According to an Iranian state-run news agency, during Bush's visit, and apparently in response to U.S. and UN sanctions against Iran, Khamenei declared, ““Americans mistakenly think they can bring the Iranian nation to its knees with pressure”” (Iran a risk to world's security, Bush asserts, 2008, p. 1, *IHT*). Bush and Khamenei's statements respectively reveal the United States legitimate interests in security and Iran's legitimate interests developing technology and maintaining its national pride. However, these statements also reveal that both U.S. and Iranian political leaders remain frozen in their political positions and resistant to authentic communication.

## **ii. American cultural influence growing among Iranians**

In February 2008, *The International Herald Tribune* published an interesting article describing Iranians' love for American culture (Slackman, 2008, *IHT*). One Iranian, who sold bootlegged copies of American films, said, ““When it comes to disputes between Iran and America, that is between governments. But when it comes to people, I don't see any problem between the people”” (Slackman, 2008, p. 5, *IHT*). The article described various copycat versions of American businesses, like Iranian



versions of the American chain restaurant T.G.I. Friday's and ice cream shop Baskin-Robbins. The Iranian owner of the copycat Baskin-Robbins commented,

“‘I used to be the one who chanted death to America...It was a slogan that came up during the revolution. People don't mean it now.’ With a smile and his hand raised in the air he said: ‘I like American goods, and I prefer American people. It's just the government I don't like’” (Slackman, 2008, p. 5, *IHT*).

The ice cream shop owner also commented that the Iranian government occasionally shuts down his shop for being “too American” (Slackman, 2008, p. 5, *IHT*). Articles like this suggest some hope for renewed relations between the United States and Iran. Although the political leaders remained entrenched in the symbolic discourse of the U.S-Iran conflict, this article reveals that at least some Iranian citizens have a more multifaceted and nuanced opinion of Americans as a people.

### **iii. Communication stagnates, conflict at impasse**

For the remainder of 2008, things stayed at a near-impasse, with the United States slowly convincing some members of the international community to further isolate Iran with harsher sanctions. While Iran flirted with the idea of talking with the United States on the subject of Iraq, it eventually backed out before any substantial progress was made. The United States continued to push Iran to halt uranium enrichment, but the six-power incentive package was virtually ignored by Iran.

Meanwhile, the United States accused Iran of engaging in a proxy war with it in Iraq, and Iran continued to rail against American imperialism.

#### **4.3 Summary of findings**

From May 2005 to May 2008, the United States and Iran related to each other in a state of severed mental worlds, where communication was reduced to competing systems of propaganda and the opportunities for dialogue that arose were summarily bypassed. Each side accused each other of the same crimes, or a complementary crime, although they each referred to different events, facts, and dates for evidence of those “crimes.” The “same crimes” include preventing peace in the Middle East, not being a legitimate democracy, and not respecting human rights. The complementary crimes are that Iran believes it has the right to full nuclear capabilities and the United States believes it has a duty to protect the world from a nuclear Iran. These complementary crimes are rooted in the driving beliefs of their respective foreign policy myths. Iran’s foreign policy myth is driven by the belief that it is one of the greatest civilizations in history and, thus, it needs to protect itself from external forces that seek to corrupt it or impede its progress (Beeman, 2005).

The United States’ foreign policy myth is driven by the doctrine of exceptionalism, or the belief that it is the great protector and liberator of the world and, therefore, it needs to protect the world and the Iranian people from the dangers of a nuclear Iran (Beeman, 2005). The rhetoric that surrounds these tired myths has built the framework for each side’s system of propaganda. In an effort to psychically unite people within these systems of propaganda, policy-makers from each state recycled

these engrained misperceptions and mythic qualities of the state. Specifically, policy-makers gave propaganda structure by linking legitimate grievances and human needs with idealizations of the nation-state and national identity. Thus, propaganda becomes a tool of nationalism, and the role of conflict resolution professionals is to untangle the legitimate human needs from the “framework of supra-factual assumptions of the absolute and uncompromising value of that nation, and all its derivative implications” (Anastasiou, 2009, pp.34-35).

#### **A. The United States’ system of propaganda**

Post 9/11, policy-makers, media, and private actors inundated Americans with propaganda. Many Americans’ sense of civic nationalism heightened, and public figures drew upon the fear of further terrorist attacks on the United States to elicit specific actions in support of the state, such as reporting “suspicious” behavior and supporting a military response. Fear, and sometimes force, silenced many who disagreed, especially those without a historical or cultural sense of American civic nationalism (e.g., recent immigrants and non-immigrant temporary residents). Dissenters were ridiculed and labeled anti-American. During this time of intense grief and fear, policy-makers, media, and private pundits used overt political propaganda to build support for the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

This political propaganda worked for some time, but as Ellul (1973) shows, in order to survive, modes of propaganda need to shift. If a system of propaganda goes in the same direction by the same methods for too long, it will eventually self-destruct. When reports surfaced of the flawed intelligence leading to the 2003 invasion of Iraq,

the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in 2004, and other American transgressions, the heavy patriotic propaganda began to break down under its own weight. U.S. policy-makers engaged in public relations damage control before the media machine self-destructed. However, this retreat showed that propagandized speech in the United States can change directions fairly quickly. Although the “freedom” of the press in the United States is arguable given the corporate strongholds on major media outlets, the Bill of Rights and liberal democracy at least provide a legal framework for these aspirational goals. This framework makes it more difficult for overt propaganda to thrive. In contrast, Iran’s theocratic democracy and its state-run media make it much easier to perpetuate a single strain of propaganda and to employ overt propaganda. While overt propaganda is more prevalent in Iran, U.S. policy-makers, media, and private actors engage in the subtler sociological propaganda of integration.

As discussed in the review of literature, sociological propaganda of integration seeks to conform by psychically uniting people through a set of ideological tenets. While sociological propaganda of integration is always at work to a degree, in the absence of overt political propaganda of agitation it becomes more important. The general American public is dissatisfied with the way the Bush administration handled military operations in Iraq, which is widely considered to be a debacle. The U.S. government has less moral authority with its own constituency, therefore the same tools of propaganda that worked immediately after 9/11 and through the lead-up to the Iraq War eventually became untenable.

Within the timeframe of this study, May 2005 - May 2008, the Bush

administration toned down its direct appeals to the American public to support military intervention on behalf of justice and democratic values. According to Ellul's (1973) understanding of propaganda, when overt propaganda recedes, then sociological propaganda of integration moves in to fill the void by promoting a society's Way of Life.

Media, private communication, and the collective assumptions from which Americans carry out their days disseminate propaganda of integration. However, digital media may be the most effective medium for propaganda because it seamlessly and quickly addresses the human who is alone in a crowd. Furthermore, the more dialed into digital media, the riper one is for propaganda. On the other hand, the wealth of information available via digital media can conceivably introduce chinks in the armor of sociological propaganda, if a person takes the initiative to seek out alternative news sources. Keeping with the cyclical nature of conflict-conditioned communication, propaganda of integration creates the conditions for the covert propaganda tools that the U.S. government uses against and, perhaps more accurately, in collusion with the American public.

At the end of this study's timeframe, U.S. propaganda regarding Iran sought not to earn Americans' support as much as their complacency. After being inundated with the sound-byte that "all options are on the table," i.e., that the United States may attack Iran, few Americans would have been shocked if such an attack occurred during the Bush administration. Returning to Ellul (1964) and Chomsky's (2007) discussion of the technicization of responsibility and Meyrowitz's (1985) theory of how new

media changes people's "sense of place," then it is plausible that the American collective psyche was positioned to accept more military intervention in the Middle East.

This study suggests that most mass-mediated U.S. rhetoric regarding Iran was intended to persuade the international community to impose more severe sanctions against Iran, thereby fulfilling a main requirement of Ellul's (1973) definition of propaganda, that it move people to action. By accusing Iran of meddling in Iraq, the United States tried to shift the blame for the Iraq fiasco off its shoulders and also to show that Iran is a dangerous rogue state. The Bush administration tried to make a case for itself as a global protector, in accord with the United States' foreign policy myth (Beeman 2005). However, the lone ranger attitude has been losing support in today's increasingly interconnected world. Therefore, the United States began advertising itself as willing to talk and pushing for a diplomatic solution first.

Behind closed doors, however, the Bush administration persisted in intense planning for a military attack on Iran (Hersh, 2006b, *NY*). By making the suspension of enrichment the precondition for talks, it gave the impression that it is Iran that was being obstinate. The Bush administration knew that its international and domestic reputation had been badly tarnished by the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its aftermath, in addition to its general cowboy-style foreign policy post-9/11. It needed to sustain suspicion of Iran so that when the time was right, the American public would be ripe for supporting military intervention. Thus, by May 2008, the United States primarily engaged in sociological propaganda. It knew the American public was not ready to be

moved to overt political action, but that they could still be conditioned in that direction, ready to activate when the time is right.

Finally, the Bush administration furiously tried to prove to the international community that harsh actions against Iran's nuclear program are needed in order to prevent terrorism and a Middle East arms race. While a nuclear arms race would be frightening in any region of the world, the U.S. government may have also been concerned that a nuclear Iran would diminish its role as global superpower.

### **B. Iran's system of propaganda**

The Islamic Republic's system of propaganda used its anti-colonial sentiments from the past to gain regional support from other Middle Eastern states and to secure allegiance from the Iranian constituency, which otherwise might press the government for reform. The Ahmadinejad administration used nationalist rhetoric to garner support from the population, even though only 10% of Iranians support the Islamic Republic as it stands (MacFarquhar, 2005b, *IHT*). However, it was more important to the collective Iranian identity that Iran not concede to U.S. imperialism.

The Iranian government has framed nuclear technology as an issue of national pride and technical progress. Despite the fact that many Iranians were unhappy with their government as a whole, the Islamic Republic managed to tap into a coalescing issue in the right to a "full-fuel-cycle nuclear program," which is a term widely used in the Iranian press to describe the uranium enrichment program. Ahmadinejad's posturing in opposition to the United States purposefully stoked Iranian nationalism. Specifically, his fiery speeches were directed at the Iranian public even though they

were addressed to the international community and the United States in particular. According to Professor Abbas Milani, an Iranian exile in the United States, who was interviewed for an article in the *International Herald Tribune*, “The more they [Washington] beat the drums of war here, the more Ahmadinejad can shut down the democratic movement” (MacFarquhar, 2006, *IHT*).

The Islamic State also gained regional support by promising Mideast and other predominantly Muslim states, like Indonesia, friendship and protection from the United States. Although the Bush administration and other neoconservatives gave predominantly Muslim states valid cause for concern, the Islamic Republic capitalized on this fear and painted itself as the one state that will not capitulate to U.S. imperialism. Further, Iranian propaganda regarding the United States during this study’s timeframe was especially potent because it made effective use of truth. It argued that the United States overstepped its bounds in the Middle East generally and in Iraq specifically, and most global citizens, including Americans, agree (World Opinion Poll.org, 2007). However, the aim of the Islamic Republic’s propaganda is to delegitimize the United States to make itself more powerful. In other words, Iranian propaganda does not, in fact, empower the people who have been most oppressed by U.S. military intervention and imperialism in the Middle East.

### **C. Summary of legitimate concerns underlying misperceptions**

In the U.S.-Iran communicative relationship, propaganda emerged as the natural way to achieve desired effects on both sides. The scripts, including the necessary assumptions and misperceptions, were already written and needed only to



be triggered. In Iran's case, those misperceptions arose from the Iranian foreign policy myth that there is a great struggle between the internal, holy forces of Iran and the corruptive forces of the external world. Iranian nationalism perceives nuclear development to be a matter of national pride and identity. Because Iran's national identity is inextricable from Islam, nuclear development also becomes a way of protecting its faith and fulfilling Iran's self-perceived role as guardian of Islam. Thus, when the United States tries to prevent Iran from enriching uranium, it becomes "the Great Arrogance" that is attempting to diminish the greatness of Iran and Allah. Calling the United States "the Great Arrogance" is simply a more modern version of "the Great Satan," and use of "the Great Satan" grew from a long history of external conquering and colonialist forces.

The United States' misperceptions, also borne from the U.S. foreign policy myth of being the global superpower, are that it is the moral authority and protector of the international arena, and that it needs to protect the world from a nuclear Iran, which is part of the "Axis of Evil." In doing so, the United States has made clear that "all options are on the table," including the implicit threat of using nuclear weapons.

It must be acknowledged that Iran has legitimate concerns about its cultural identity, energy resources, and international isolation, and that the United States has legitimate concerns about terrorism and international security. However, the nationalist propaganda that grow from these legitimate concerns ultimately "eclipse and obscure even the legitimate needs they purport to be striving to secure" (Anastasiou, 2009, p. 35). Thus, until the United States and Iran can disengage from

their nationalist positions and propagandized rhetoric, the conflict will remain at a stalemate and the legitimate concerns of each nation-state will remain inadequately addressed.

#### **D. The citizen story**

While this study does not focus on communication between the American and Iranian publics, citizens and residents from both sides were interviewed in a slim portion of the articles. One article in *The New Yorker* described a citizens' dialogue initiative in New York City where the anti-war group Enough Fear set out five red phones in City Hall Park and invited passersby to talk to Iranian volunteers they recruited via their website on the other side (Majd, 2008, *NY*). While there was one case of an angry exchange across the line, according to organizers, most of the exchanges were friendly (Majd, 2008, *NY*). Anecdotal evidence from some of the articles reviewed for this study also suggests that Iranians by and large like American people but not the U.S. government (Fathi, 2005, *IHT*; Slackman, 2005, *IHT*).

A 2007 poll by World Public Opinion.org in conjunction with the conflict resolution non-governmental organization Search for Common Ground suggests otherwise. According to the poll, seventy-six percent of Iranians said their opinion of the United States is unfavorable, and ninety-three percent said their opinion of the U.S. government was also unfavorable (World Public Opinion.org, 2007). Further, more than seventy-eight percent had unfavorable opinions of American culture (World Public Opinion.org, 2007). However, only forty-nine percent of Iranians had unfavorable opinions of Americans as a people (World Public Opinion.org, 2007).

Interestingly, of the Americans polled, fifty-nine percent held unfavorable views of Iranians as a people, and seventy-eight percent had unfavorable views of the Iranian government (World Public Opinion.org, 2007). However, fifty-four percent of Iranians and fifty-six percent Americans believe that the divide between the two countries can be bridged (World Public Opinion.org, 2007).

#### **4.4 Comparison of findings to the review of literature**

Throughout the document review, it became apparent that the features of intergroup conflict, communicative styles in times of conflict, and U.S.-Iran symbolic discourse are all tools and effects of propaganda, whether consciously employed or not. Anastasiou's (2007) framework does not negate previous research on symbolic discourse within intergroup conflict. Rather, it provides a coalescing perspective through which the individual theories and ideas discussed in the review of literature make more sense.

For example, the review of literature discussed the qualities of fear-based and anger-driven conflicts. In tracing the historical conflict dynamics from 1953 through May 2008, it is evident that fear-based and anger-driven messages emerged in 1953 and at key turning points throughout post-1953 U.S.-Iran relations. In the present study, however, the United States and Iran manipulated the legitimate fears and grievances of their publics to garner more support for the nation-state and manage public discontent. The conflict became a political power-struggle orchestrated by hard-line elites rather than a nation against nation, although the risks involved—nuclear proliferation and further U.S. military engagement in the Middle East—were

concrete.

Deutsch's (1991) crude law of social relations held true. U.S. and Iranian officials both displayed competitive conflict traits. For example, both sides demonize the other; exhibit self-serving biases, especially in the form of nationalism; and feel like they have dwindling choices, to the point where violence might seem like the only choice. Deutsch's (1973) maxim that perceiving differences enhances differences, especially when dictated by an authority was slightly supported by the dataset. However, the dearth of citizen and resident voices in the documents reviewed made it impossible to determine that with confidence. As expected, enemy images, as described by Barash (1994), Keen (1986), and Stein (1996), were present on both sides, due in part to the flamboyant colloquialism shared by both Bush and Ahmadinejad.

This study supports the work of Abrahamian (2007), Beeman (2005), and Bill (1999) to varying degrees. It supported Beeman's (2005) assertion that misperceptions drive the conflict, in addition to his observation that the complementation of differences contributes to the intractability of the conflict. Abrahamian (2007) took the next analytical step by identifying the hard-liners who capitalize on those misperceptions in order to get what they want, which, according to Bill (1999), is hegemonic power. The documents reviewed reveal that Bush and Ahmadinejad, both hard-liners, did indeed capitalize on misperceptions and focused on gaining and maintaining international and regional influence. Further, misperceptions and hard-line rhetoric "appear" logical once an external enemy is

identified as a clear threat to the nation.

This study partly supports Beeman's (2005) assessment that both U.S. and Iranian leaders, in their foreign policy decisions and pronouncements regarding the other, primarily appeal to their domestic constituencies. Outwardly, Iran did this more, although the assessment of the United States' system of propaganda, *supra*, shows that the United States also made direct appeals to its constituency. The Bush administration lost much of its popular support and seemingly banked on creating a legacy on which history will smile more kindly than public opinion during its last days of tenure. While Ahmadinejad and Bush's approval ratings both plummeted at various points during the study, most Iranians consistently supported the government's official assertion that Iran should be able to develop the same nuclear capabilities as other states, especially the "great powers."

On the other hand, especially in light of the Iraq fiasco, many Americans disapproved of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. While U.S. policies at the time of Beeman's (2005) research may have been directed at the American constituency, the documents reviewed for this study suggest that the United States became more focused on promoting its foreign policies to the international community. The Bush administration tried to convince the international community that Iran is a substantial threat, which requires strict authority and measures to rein it in. Meanwhile, the United States continued to prepare sociological propaganda to condition the American public for action when the time is ripe.

To a much lesser degree, the United States and Iran have experienced the communicative disorders associated with and fostered by direct violence. The closest the two states came to direct violence within this study's timeframe include the military posturing by the United States in the Gulf; the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's possible involvement in the deaths of U.S. troops in Iraq; and the violent war rhetoric employed by each side. These events further segregated the two states and skewed perceptions of reality. Ultimately, however, the U.S.-Iran communicative relationship shows that communication breakdown can be complete even in the absence of direct warfare between the conflicted groups.

#### **4.5 Limitations of generalizing from these findings**

This is meant to be just one of many case studies needed to fully explore the possibilities of Anastasiou's (2007) approach to understanding conflict-conditioned communication. There is nothing exact about conflict resolution. There is no formula to understanding conflict that can account for all the quirks of human nature. There is, however, merit in trying to understand the dynamic patterns of conflict. Any research that might illuminate a new way of understanding conflict and therefore new ways toward building peace is worthwhile, as long as its inherent limitations are understood.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

This study supports Anastasiou's (2007) approach to understanding conflict-conditioned intergroup communication. I performed a case study of the U.S.-Iran relationship because the absence of diplomatic relations intensified the importance and meaning in political speech by policy-makers in each state, and it was in the news frequently enough to document. I began my exploratory research with a simple inquiry into the nature of conflict-conditioned communication. I asked whether this study corroborated Anastasiou's postulation of the effects of intractable conflict on intergroup communication and Beeman's assessment of symbolic discourse between the United States and Iran.

Regarding the method, I performed a document review of three major media sources in which I examined political communication by policy-makers regarding the U.S.-Iran conflict. Using Anastasiou's schema of protracted conflict's effect on intergroup communication as the framework, I studied whether U.S.-Iran communicative relations fell into that schema. The document review revealed much distrust, suspicion, enmification, and propaganda, congruent with Anastasiou's schema and the literature review.

Generally, each side propagandized the superiority of themselves and the inferiority of the Other. The United States primarily directed propaganda toward the international community, and Iran directed propaganda toward Iranians and other states in the Islamic Middle East. Due to the waning political currency of the Bush

administration, overt political propaganda toward the American public was not as effective as it was directly after 9/11. However, sociological propaganda, which promotes a way of life and prepares people to be ripe for future overt propaganda, was still active during this time.

U.S.-Iran communicative relations continue to be unique in that each side's grievances with the other have become ammunition toward domestic ends. Hard-liners in the United States and Iran essentially need the other side to "sin" in order to pursue their own domestic agendas. The absence of the enemy "Other" for rhetorical sparring and contradictory talking points more starkly exposes propagandized political speech from a hard-liner like Bush or Ahmadinejad. This conclusion is further supported by recent events.

Since this study began three years ago, the evolving political landscape suggests the possibility of change in the broken U.S.-Iran relationship. The story of present-day U.S.-Iran relations is really the story of two elections, the 2008 presidential election in the United States and the 2009 presidential election in Iran. Barack Obama won the U.S. presidential election, partly on his promise to renew America's broken relationships with the international community, particularly with the Muslim Middle East. During the campaign, Obama repeatedly said that he was open to negotiations with Iran. As a newly elected president, Obama gave a personalized video greeting to Iranians on the Iranian holiday, Nowruz, and he ended the greeting by speaking a familiar Farsi phrase of well wishes. Obama also instructed U.S. embassies around the world to invite local Iranian diplomats to the 2009 Fourth of



July celebrations. Then, on June 4, 2009 in Cairo, Obama delivered his first major address to the Muslim world. In that speech, he praised Islam's contribution to all civilizations and the richness of its culture. Regarding Iran, specifically, Obama made a key acknowledgment of the U.S. participation in the 1953 coup. As discussed in the literature review, the anger surrounding the coup is still deep within the collective Iranian psyche, therefore this acknowledgment was significant.

Iran's presidential elections on June 12, 2009 resulted in the re-election of Ahmadinejad by a surprising landslide. Evidence of election fraud prompted thousands of Iranians, many supporters of the reformist candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, to take to the streets in protest. The reformist protests became known as the Green Movement. Some civil unrest after an election is not unusual in Iran. However, the sheer number of protesters, the duration of the protests, and the protesters' tenacity in calling for a new election was unprecedented in post-revolution Iran. Many protesters were arrested, injured, tortured, or killed, primarily by the state militia known as the Basij. There is much that could be said about the post-election aftermath. However, for the purposes of this study, there are three features of particular note.

First, hard-liners in Iran, including Ahmadinejad and Khamenei, blamed the protests on foreign powers, insinuating that countries like the United States had incited a revolution. Consistent with what this study has shown, blaming foreign influence for social unrest is a standard political practice in Iran. However, unlike the competing systems of propaganda in full force during the timeframe of this study, the

Obama administration did not rush to criticize Ahmadinejad or the Islamic Republic. This speaks to the second feature of the post-election aftermath that relates to this study.

Second, Obama did not outright condemn or support the Iranian election. Instead, Obama insisted that the United States would not interfere with the domestic politics of Iran. He also voiced support for the general right to fair elections, free speech, and civil disobedience. Like Obama's other overtures to Iran, this signaled a shift away from the hard-line communicative strategies of the Bush administration.

Third, the online social networking tool, Twitter, was instrumental in organizing election protests in Iran and publicizing them to the international community. Twitter allows short posts of 140 words or less and is accessible by smartphone, therefore it is an ideal medium to quickly spread information about events as they occur. Although the Obama administration made a point of not interfering, it did ask Twitter to postpone a scheduled maintenance that would have shut the server down for a day. The United States did this to enable Iranians to use the site. Obama's request underscored the potential importance of online social networking tools in political reform, especially in countries like Iran where the state press is the primary messenger to the outside world. While this study's literature review suggests that advanced information technology is primarily detrimental to effective communication and conflict resolution, the successful use of Twitter suggests that, at least in crisis, it can be useful.

The online video site YouTube was also instrumental in coalescing support for the protesters, particularly after video surfaced of a beautiful young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, gunned down and killed during a protest. The young woman's image galvanized the opposition and was used as the face of Iranian protests. Protesters even wore Neda masks, as a means of highlighting the violent tactics that the Basij used to quash protesters. During this time, foreign press was severely restricted and the Iranian state press was badly skewed. Interestingly, the medium that was most instantaneous and fleeting, Twitter, was also the most able to perforate the cloak of propaganda.

Since then, Iran and Ahmadinejad have maintained the same hardened stance and flamboyant speech. There continues to be no official dialogue between the two states, and, as of June 2010, the UN Security Council issued four sets of sanctions against Iran because it refuses to halt enriching uranium.

Regarding the possible resolution of this decades-long communicative impasse, there is no magic policy or superhero-politician that can alone resolve the conflict. The deeply wounded relationships that have been forged and trapped under the umbrella of the "U.S.-Iran conflict," are far from healed. These wounded relationships clearly include those between the states and peoples of the U.S. and Iran. However, they also include the wounded relationships between the U.S. government and the American people; between the U.S. government and the international community; between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Iranian people; and between the United States and the Islamic Middle East. I believe that we will be able to trace

the communicative relationships among all of these factions and see similar themes and patterns emerge in accordance to Anastasiou's (2007) approach to understanding conflict-conditioned intergroup communication.

Furthermore, future studies can use a similar method to study communicative relationships between other conflicted states. For example, the same method could be applied to the communicative relationship between the United States and Russia, and between India and Pakistan. By testing the method in a variety of conflict situations, peacebuilders can better understand the nature of conflict-habituated communication. Better understanding may then lead to more creative steps toward conflict transformation.

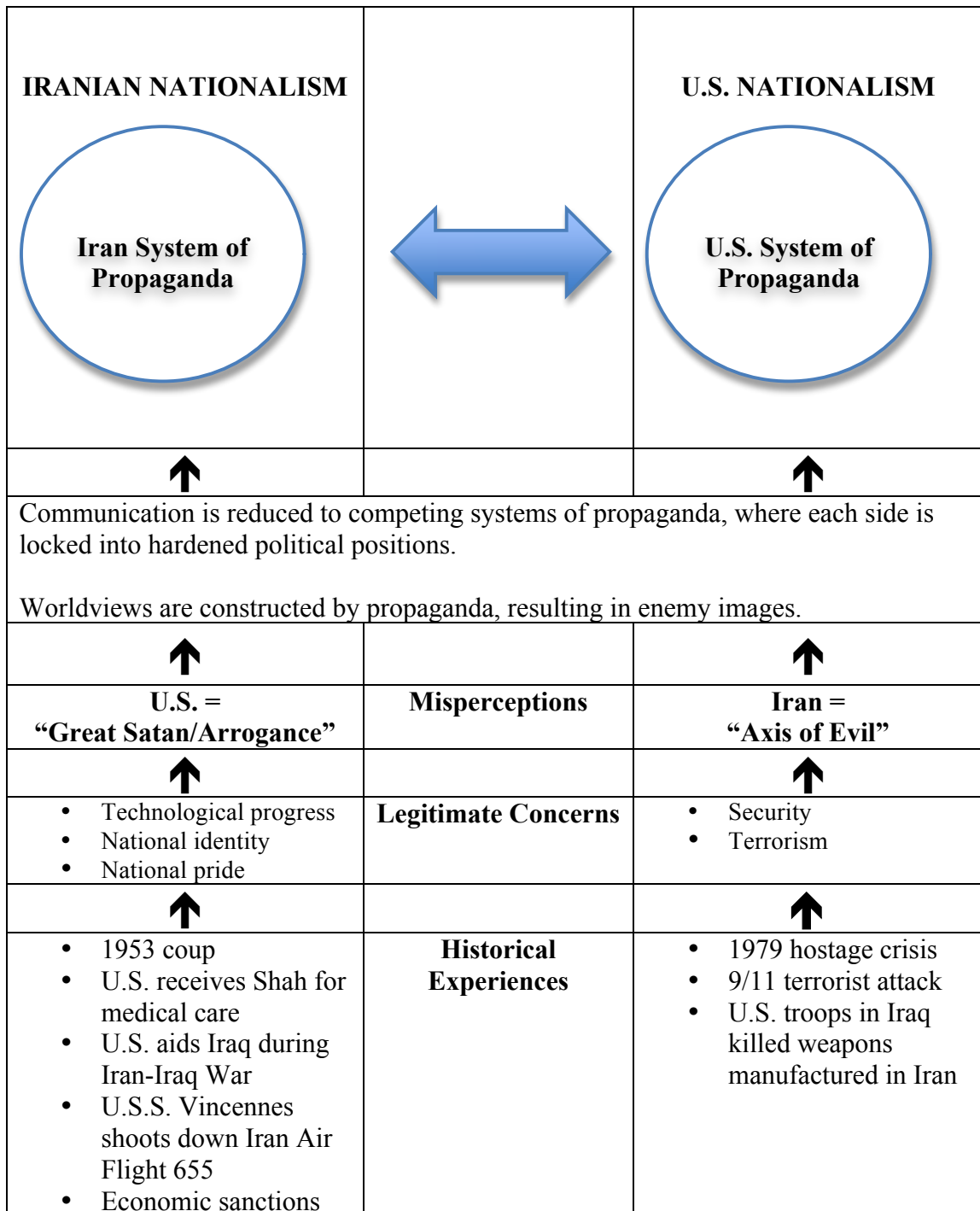
Foremost, people need to cultivate comfort with ambiguity and learn how to suspend agendas in the name of understanding the legitimate concerns of the Other. Supporting and practicing peace journalism will facilitate this endeavor. According to Galtung (2000), peace journalism gives an equal voice to all parties. Peace journalists should be willing to humanize all sides, but not legitimize all goals (Galtung, 2000). Peace journalism, as opposed to war journalism, should put a special emphasis on suffering, "give voice to the voiceless and name the evil on all sides" (Galtung, 2000, p. 163).

Too often, journalists choose academics and intellectuals to provide an "outside" expert opinion on current issues. However, experts often ape political administrations in order to give themselves more credibility, or are chosen for interviews primarily because they support the status quo. The expansion of peace

journalism may open a door to a new, non-elitist intellectual class. Propaganda in the Ellulian sense cannot be stopped by simple awareness. Change needs to be institutionalized for it to have a significant effect on the decisions of policy-makers. Supporting peace journalism, both ideologically and economically, is an important first step.

Finally, each conflict has its own “logic,” but all conflicts have cracks that show how that “logic” fails in the face of reality. As conflict resolution professionals, it is our job to find those cracks and make them bigger. Globalization from below, as Falk (1999) calls global civil society, is crucial to that end. In the context of the U.S.-Iran conflict, change will not come solely from above unless a leader at some point makes an extraordinary move toward peace, as Anwar Sadat did when he addressed the Knesset in 1977. Further, according to Ellul (1973), “propaganda ceases where simple dialogue begins” (Ellul, 1973, p. 6). If policy-makers and civil societies can move closer to authentic dialogue, both within their own movements and with each other, then there is a better chance of *institutionalizing* dialogue. Strict focus on foreign policy has limited people’s ability to imagine a new ethos of international relations. Instead of taking a technical approach to human problems and cementing propaganda through war journalism, institutionalized dialogue can be a mainstay method of providing a constructive and safe space for creative conflict resolution.

**Figure 1**  
Conflict-Conditioned Communication between the United States and Iran



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