

Iranian Perceptions of the U.S. Soft Power Threat

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Amir Toumaj is an independent Iran researcher, and a cofounder of Resistance Axis Monitor, which provides coverage and analysis of Iran and its proxies.



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Fearing a Western-inspired overthrow, Tehran has intensified enforcement of morality laws, purged professors from universities, and poured billions of dollars into the creation of a separate national intranet.

To understand Iranian anxieties about Western cultural invasion, one need look no further than *Psychological Operations Quarterly*, a journal published until recently by the IRGC's Social-Cultural Directorate. Focusing on the "soft war" waged by various Western entities, the periodical covers such material as supposedly anti-Iranian films (*Alexander*, *The Wrestler*, *Argo*), the relationship between McDonald's franchises and the fall of the Soviet Union, and the harm done by English-language textbooks to the Iranian mind. Since 1979, in response to such perceived threats, the Islamic Republic has intensified enforcement of morality laws, purged professors from universities, and poured billions of dollars into creating a national intranet separate from the wider internet, among other repressive moves.

In this deeply sourced Policy Note, Iran expert Amir Toumaj discusses the many dimensions of Tehran's paranoia, all of which lead back to fears of a U.S.-spurred "soft overthrow." Unfortunately, he argues, American leaders will struggle in vain to change the minds of Iran's ruling hardliners, but they can facilitate longer-term progress by promoting access to diverse viewpoints for the Iranian people. ❖

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