

US and Israeli Strategies Towards Iran in the Context of Demographic Engineering, Emotional Provocation and a Post-Colonial Perspective

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Abstract

This article analyses the strategies of the US and Israel towards Iran, moving beyond the traditional military deterrence paradigm, within the framework of the concepts of demographic engineering, emotional provocation and post-colonial theory. The power struggle centred on Iran in the Middle East exhibits a hybrid character, conducted not only through nuclear capabilities or regional military presence, but also through the management of social perceptions, the manipulation of sectarian dynamics, and elements of psychological warfare. The study examines the demographic engineering strategies of the US and Israel within a framework targeting Shia networks in Iran's spheres of regional influence, whilst analysing the dimension of emotional provocation through perception operations conducted via the media, digital platforms and political discourse. Postcolonial theory, particularly Edward Said's thesis on Orientalism, Frantz Fanon's conceptualisation of resistance, and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, provides a conceptual framework for understanding how these strategies are intertwined with historically constructed power relations and forms of representation. The study also examines the resistance mechanisms developed by the Iranian regime against these strategies and how social heterogeneity limits the effectiveness of external interventions. Based on qualitative case analysis and discourse analysis, the study demonstrates that military, social, psychological and post-colonial dimensions must be evaluated together to understand the current nature of Middle Eastern conflicts.

Keywords: *The U.S.–Israeli Strategy Toward Iran, demographic engineering, emotional provocation, hybrid warfare, Middle East.*

Introduction

For the past twenty years, the Middle East has been the scene of an increasingly deepening and multi-dimensional strategic rivalry between Iran and the US–Israel alliance. This rivalry transcends the boundaries that could be explained by traditional theories of international relations such as military deterrence, balance of power and nuclear control mechanisms and constitutes a complex power struggle that encompasses social, ideological and psychological dimensions. Iran's doctrine of 'exporting the revolution', adopted following the 1979 Revolution, the network of influence it has established through regional proxy actors, and its nuclear programme have long been defined by the US and Israel as a structural threat to the regional security architecture. This perception of threat has led to the strategic approaches of these actors towards Iran evolving in a multi-layered manner, extending beyond mere military and diplomatic tools.

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The aim of this study, titled “US and Israeli Strategies Towards Iran in the Context of Demographic Engineering, Emotional Provocation and the Post-Colonial Perspective”, is to reveal the mechanisms through which the US and Israel utilise demographic engineering and emotional provocation as complementary tools of power struggle in their strategies towards Iran, beyond military and diplomatic means, and to assess the analytical capacity of the conceptual framework of post-colonial theory’s conceptual framework in explaining the historical and discursive origins of these strategies.

The study’s central hypothesis is that the strategies of the US and Israel towards Iran are not shaped solely within the framework of the traditional security paradigm; rather, they possess a hybrid nature, encompassing forms of intervention aimed at influencing regional demographic balances, as well as provocative strategies designed to produce perceptual and psychological effects on Iranian society. When evaluated within the framework of postcolonial literature, which critically examines the West’s representations of the East, this strategic approach offers a broader analytical perspective. While Edward Said’s Orientalism approach exposes the epistemological structure through which the West represents the East via discourses of threat, irrationality and backwardness, it is evident that security discourses regarding Iran are also produced within similar discursive patterns. Conversely, the Iranian regime’s functionalisation of the external threat discourse for the purposes of national consolidation and the production of political legitimacy can be linked to Frantz Fanon’s conceptualisation of resistance and identity construction in post-colonial societies. Iran’s complex and often contradictory relationship with the West, when examined through Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, contributes to an understanding of the hybrid political identity emerging between revolutionary ideology and modern state practice.

This study is based on the qualitative case study method. During the analysis process, discourse analysis and historical description techniques are used in conjunction; official discourses, policy documents and academic literature are evaluated in a comparative manner. In the study, the concepts of demographic engineering and emotional provocation are first conceptualised within the framework of international relations literature, followed by an examination of the fundamental approaches of postcolonial theory. Subsequently, the demographic engineering strategies of the US and Israel targeting Iran’s regional spheres of influence are examined through concrete examples, whilst emotional provocation strategies are analysed within the context of media discourse, the cyber domain and political communication. Furthermore, the analytical contribution of postcolonial theory in explaining these strategies is discussed, and the limits of external interventions are assessed within the context of Iran’s ethnic, sectarian and socio-political diversity and the counter-strategies developed by the regime. The findings are discussed alongside the theoretical and political implications at the conclusion of the study.

The Conceptual Framework of Demographic Engineering, Emotional Provocation and the Postcolonial Approach

The concept of demographic engineering is defined in the academic literature, particularly through the work of Myron Weiner, as a set of strategies involving the deliberate transformation of the population structure in conflict zones through migration, resettlement policies, assimilation or incentive mechanisms. According to Weiner, particularly in regions where ethnic and sectarian conflicts are intense, states may develop planned policies to



reorganise the demographic structure in line with their own political and security interests. These policies can be implemented through various means, including population exchange, forced migration, incentivised migration, resettlement schemes, land reforms and settlement policies (Weiner, 1971, p. 666). In this context, demographic engineering is not limited solely to the physical mobility of the population; it also has a direct impact on elements such as identity, belonging and political representation. Particularly in regions with multi-layered ethnic and sectarian structures, such as the Middle East, demography ceases to be merely a matter of numerical balance and becomes a strategic tool that directly influences the distribution of political power (Turan, 2017, p. 112). For this reason, regional actors address population movements and identity politics from a security perspective; the demographic structure is viewed as a key component of states' security strategies.

In addition to demographic engineering, another dimension that is gaining increasing importance in modern conflict dynamics is that of emotional provocation and perception management strategies. In this context, the concept of 'soft power' developed by Joseph Nye provides an important theoretical framework. Nye defines soft power as an actor's capacity to shape the preferences of other actors through cultural appeal, ideological appeal and institutional influence, without resorting to military or economic coercion (Nye, 2016, p. 59). However, more aggressive and manipulative forms of this concept have emerged in recent times and have taken on a new dimension, particularly within hybrid warfare strategies. This strategic approach, which could be described as emotional provocation, aims to direct the perceptions of the target society, manipulate social emotions and undermine trust in political systems. In this process, the media, social media platforms, propaganda activities and disinformation campaigns are used as key tools (Kubatov, 2025, pp. 143-144). The literature on hybrid warfare analyses multi-dimensional forms of conflict conducted not only through traditional military methods but also via psychological operations, cyberattacks, economic pressure mechanisms, information warfare, and proxy actors (Hoffman, 2009, pp. 34-36). Within this framework, emotional provocation represents the psychological and perceptual dimension of hybrid warfare and aims to create political instability by undermining the social cohesion of the target society.

A significant theoretical approach that complements these discussions is postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory emphasises that the experience of colonialism is not merely a historical process, but continues to exert its influence on knowledge production, identity politics and power relations in contemporary international relations. In this context, the works of Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha provide important conceptual tools. Edward Said's approach to Orientalism reveals how the West's ways of representing the East reflect the strong link between knowledge production and power relations. According to Said, the West has constructed a discursive framework that defines the East as an irrational, despotic, emotional and backward 'other', and these representational forms have become an ideological tool that legitimises the West's political and cultural superiority (Said 2001, pp. 128-129). For this reason, Orientalism should be regarded not merely as an academic discipline, but also as a discursive regime that reinforces the West's hegemonic position over the East.

Frantz Fanon's work, meanwhile, offers an important perspective for understanding the processes of identity, resistance and national consciousness in post-colonial societies. Fanon argues that colonial administrations did not merely establish economic and political domination, but also profoundly affected the psychological structure and cultural identity of

indigenous societies. According to him, colonialism produces a form of psychological violence that undermines the colonised people's sense of self and devalues them culturally (Fanon, 2007, pp. 44-45). For this reason, the national liberation movements that emerged in the post-colonial era should be regarded not merely as a quest for political independence, but also as a process of psychological and cultural emancipation.

Homi K. Bhabha, meanwhile, has made significant contributions to postcolonial discourse through the concepts of 'hybridity' and 'mimicry'. According to Bhabha, identities in postcolonial societies are not fixed or pure structures; rather, they are complex structures that are constantly reproduced as a result of diverse cultural interactions. Colonised societies, whilst mimicking the coloniser's language, culture and institutional practices, simultaneously transform and reinterpret these practices (Bhabha, 1994, p. 85). This process weakens the absolute control of colonial authority and leads to the emergence of new hybrid identities. Consequently, the concept of hybridity emphasises that cultural identities are not fixed and homogeneous structures, but rather dynamic structures that are constantly negotiated and transformed.

When these theoretical approaches are considered together, they provide an important analytical framework for understanding the complex relationships between power, discourse and identity in international politics. In particular, when assessing the policies of the US and Israel towards Iran, Said's Orientalism approach helps to understand how Iran has been constructed as a 'threat' in international discourse. Fanon's conceptualisation of resistance and psychological mobilisation, meanwhile, offers a key analytical tool for explaining the ideological and political mobilisation strategies Iran has developed in response to external pressures. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, on the other hand, demonstrates that Iran's relations with the West are shaped not merely through opposition, but also through processes of interaction, adaptation and transformation. In this context, when demographic engineering, emotional provocation and post-colonial discourse analyses are considered together, it becomes clearer that regional power struggles are conducted not only through military or economic dimensions, but also through discursive, psychological and demographic strategies.

The Demographic Engineering Strategies of the US and Israel

The demographic engineering dimension of the US and Israel's strategies towards Iran is viewed as a strategic variable not only within Iran's borders but also in its spheres of regional influence. The doctrine of 'exporting the revolution' adopted by Iran following the 1979 Revolution has materialised through its proxy power strategy, which it has pursued via Shia populations and sectarian networks in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Hezbollah, the Popular Mobilisation Forces (Hashd al-Shaabi), the Houthis and Iranian-backed militias in Syria are the visible elements of this strategy at the regional level.

The US and Israel view the Shia populations and sectarian networks created through these proxy forces as factors capable of altering the regional balance of power. In particular, Israel's "Shiite Crescent" narrative is based on the thesis that Iran is creating a demographic and ideological encirclement along a line stretching from Lebanon to the Persian Gulf. This narrative has been frequently articulated by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and forms the basis of Israel's perception of the Iranian threat. The concept of the "Shiite Crescent" was actually first introduced by King Abdullah of Jordan in 2004 and is based on



the idea that Iran's regional influence poses a threat encircling the Sunni world (Yüksel, 2025, p. 179).

In this context, the presence of Hezbollah's armed wing in Lebanon and its decisive role in the country's politics constitute one of the conflict's indirect fronts. Hezbollah is not merely a military force; it also serves as the political representative and provider of social services for the Shia community in Lebanon, thereby strengthening the demographic foundations of Iran's regional influence (Alami, 2018). Whilst Israel defines Hezbollah's presence on its northern border as an existential threat, it has developed various military doctrines to counter this threat and has undertaken diplomatic initiatives on international platforms calling for the disarmament of Hezbollah.

The Syrian civil war presents one of the most concrete examples of Iran's regional demographic engineering strategies. Whilst Iran became involved in the war alongside the Syrian regime, it did not merely provide military support; it also pursued a strategy aimed at influencing post-war demographic balances by transferring Shia militias from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Syria (Smyth, 2015). The permanent settlement of some of these militias in Syria carries the potential to alter the country's sectarian balance. The US and Israel view this demographic transformation as a threat to their own interests and are attempting to sever Iran's land link by cooperating with Kurdish forces in north-eastern Syria.

In Iraq, the 'state-within-a-state' structure of the Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation Forces) forms the institutional foundation of Iran's influence over Iraq. The PMF was formed to combat ISIS but has since evolved into a structure where Iran-aligned militia forces have been integrated into state institutions following the war (Mansour & Jabar, 2017). Whilst the US carries out air strikes targeting pro-Iranian groups within the Popular Mobilisation Forces, it is simultaneously exerting pressure on the Iraqi government to disarm these groups.

The sectarian balance policies implemented by the US following the invasion of Iraq constitute another example of demographic engineering practices in the region. The US restructured the political system in post-invasion Iraq through sectarian quotas, thereby paving the way for the rise of Shia parties (Gür, 2024). Whilst this policy aimed to ensure stability in Iraq in the short term, it has resulted in an increase in Iran's influence over Iraq in the long term. The military doctrines developed by Israel in response to Hezbollah's presence on its northern border, whilst targeting these demographic and ideological networks, support demographic engineering practices in the region through both military and political means.

Reports by think tanks such as the Washington Institute, the RAND Corporation and the International Crisis Group identify Iran's proxy forces strategy as one of the primary sources of regional instability, whilst also constructing a rhetorical framework that legitimises US and Israeli operations targeting these networks. For example, a report published by the RAND Corporation characterised Iran's expansion of regional influence through proxy forces as "aggressive behaviour" and emphasised that military options must be kept on the table to deter such behaviour (Tabatabai et al., 2021). Such reports serve to confer legitimacy on political choices by employing academic language.

Emotional Provocation Strategies: Media, Discourse and Cyberspace

The emotional provocation strategies employed by the US and Israel against Iran become particularly evident during times of crisis and within the media environment; they aim to create

perceptual fractures within the target society, undermine confidence in the existing political system, and manipulate emotional responses. These strategies portray Iran as an existential threat, both through its nuclear capabilities and its regional proxy forces.

Statements by US and Israeli officials regarding Iran are consistently framed in threatening language, with repeated emphasis on Iran being an actor that disrupts regional stability. During the Donald Trump era, the Islamic Republic of Iran was labelled the “principal sponsor of terrorism”, and this characterisation formed the rhetorical basis for the policy of maximum pressure against Iran (Trump, 2018). Even under the Joe Biden administration, whilst diplomatic channels have been kept open, the threatening rhetoric towards Iran has been maintained at a rhetorical level. Presentations by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu at the United Nations podium, featuring caricatured visuals depicting Iran’s nuclear programme, demonstrate how this threatening rhetoric is reinforced through visual and symbolic means (Netanyahu, 2012). In these presentations, Iran has been portrayed as an irrational, dangerous and unstoppable actor.

One of the most concrete tools of emotional provocation is the media and digital platforms. The Farsi service of Voice of America, funded by the US, BBC Persian, and Iran-based but overseas-operating satellite television channels broadcast programmes that amplified anti-regime rhetoric during the 2009 Green Movement and the economically driven protests between 2017 and 2019. These broadcasts served not only to convey news but also to provide moral support to protesters, assist in coordinating actions, and condemn the regime in the international public sphere (Afkhani, 2017, p. 63). Targeted content aimed at Iranian users on social media platforms seeks to provoke an emotional response by highlighting the regime’s economic failures, allegations of corruption and repressive policies. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Telegram, in particular, have played a significant role in the organisation of protest movements in Iran and in helping them gain international visibility.

Cyberattacks such as the Stuxnet virus are examples that combine the physical and symbolic dimensions of emotional provocation. Stuxnet was designed as a cyberattack targeting the centrifuges at Iran’s Natanz nuclear facility, causing serious physical damage (Zetter, 2014, pp. 6-8). However, this attack did not merely cause physical damage; it also aimed to erode perceptions regarding Iran’s technological capabilities and the security of its nuclear programme. The security vulnerability exposed by Stuxnet raised questions in the Iranian public sphere regarding the cost and security of the nuclear programme, whilst reinforcing the perception in the international community that Iran’s nuclear programme could not be brought under control. Such cyberattacks function as strategic tools that combine the psychological and physical dimensions of hybrid warfare.

All these strategies function as strategic tools aimed at creating a foundation of discontent towards the regime within Iranian society or at strengthening reformist tendencies. However, the effectiveness of these strategies is limited by the heterogeneous nature of Iranian society and the regime’s capacity for internal mobilisation.

A Post-Colonial Perspective: Orientalism, Resistance and Hybridity

The conceptual framework provided by post-colonial theory offers significant opportunities for situating the US and Israel’s discourses and practices regarding Iran within a historical perspective. Edward Said’s thesis on Orientalism reveals how the West’s representations of



Iran reflect the organic link between knowledge production and power relations. According to Said, Orientalism is a discursive regime that legitimises the West's hegemony over the East (Said, 1979, 5-6), and this discourse legitimises the West's right to intervene by defining the East as an irrational, despotic, emotional and resistant entity.

The strategies of the US and Israel towards Iran can be read as a contemporary manifestation of this Orientalist discourse. The portrayal of Iran as a 'threat', a 'sponsor of terrorism', an 'irrational actor' or 'barbaric' reproduces the fundamental codes of historical Orientalism. These representations serve an ideological function that legitimises a specific power dynamic, going beyond an objective effort to understand Iran's regional policies, nuclear programme, and social dynamics. For instance, Western discourse on Iran's nuclear programme is frequently coupled with an emphasis on the "irrationality" of Iranian leaders, and this emphasis lays the groundwork for legitimising the option of military intervention against Iran. The characterisation of Iran as the "principal sponsor of terrorism", meanwhile, serves to delegitimise Iran's regional policies, serves to legitimise the military presence of the US and its allies in the region.

The portrayal of Iran as an existential threat stems not only from security concerns but also reproduces the figure of the 'other' through which the West constructs its own identity. In this context, the emotional provocation strategies of the US and Israel, by reproducing Iran through an Orientalist lens, seek both to gain legitimacy in the international public sphere and to influence anti-regime elements within Iran through these representations. However, there are also instances where these strategies have produced unexpected outcomes. The Iranian regime utilises these Orientalist representations to its advantage, presenting external intervention as an 'imperialist conspiracy' and using this narrative to foster social mobilisation.

Frantz Fanon's work, meanwhile, offers important conceptual tools for understanding the dynamics of national consciousness and resistance in the post-colonial era. Fanon analysed the psychological damage inflicted by colonial administrations on indigenous peoples and the forms of resistance developed in response to this damage. According to him, colonialism is not merely a physical relationship of domination, but also a form of violence that transforms the colonised people's sense of self, cultural identity and psychological structure. In the post-colonial era, national liberation movements emerge as a practice of resistance and emancipation against this psychological devastation (Gazeteduvar, 2020).

The Iranian regime's strategy of countering the discourse of external threats with a discourse of national unity and resistance can be interpreted through a Fanonian lens. Under the leadership of Ali Khamenei, the external threat is constantly emphasised to consolidate support by appealing to the people's nationalist and religious sensitivities. The theme of the imperialist conspiracy, frequently highlighted in Khamenei's speeches (Ahishali, 2019), serves to legitimise Iran's resistance against external interventions and to reinforce social support. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its affiliated Basij forces play a critical role in mobilising the conservative segments that form the regime's social base, whilst official media outlets constantly reproduce the narrative of 'imperialist conspiracy' in relation to external interventions.

The mass mourning ceremonies held across Iran following the killing of Qasem Soleimani by the US in January 2020 are one of the most striking examples of how an external threat can be transformed into a tool for social mobilisation. Soleimani's funeral processions took place

with the participation of millions of people, and the regime utilised this mass mobilisation to reinforce the narrative of national unity and resistance (The Guardian, 2020). What is striking here is that emotional provocation has evolved from a unilateral strategy into a form of reciprocal discursive and perceptual struggle. Whilst the Iranian regime utilises the provocative rhetoric of the US and Israel to reproduce its own legitimacy, it simultaneously conducts symmetrical psychological operations targeting Israeli and US objectives through its regional proxy forces.

Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of 'hybridity' and 'mimicry' may also prove illuminating in understanding Iran's relationship with the West. According to Bhabha, in the post-colonial era, former colonised peoples mimic the coloniser's language, culture and political practices, whilst simultaneously transforming and reinterpreting these practices, thereby destabilising colonial authority (Uyghur Research Institute, 2025). Iran's nuclear programme, ballistic missile technology and network of regional proxy forces can be seen as a form of 'imitation' and challenge to the West's supremacy in the fields of modernity and technology. Whilst emulating the West's scientific and technological achievements, Iran combines this with an anti-Western discourse, thereby both questioning modernity's universalist claims and strengthening its own basis of legitimacy.

Iran's nuclear programme provides one of the most concrete examples of this hybridity. On the one hand, Iran defends its right to develop nuclear technology within the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT) and invokes international law. On the other hand, it presents its nuclear programme as a symbol of resistance against the West's technological superiority and characterises this programme as a 'scientific jihad'. This hybrid discourse positions Iran neither as fully integrated into Western modernity nor as completely rejecting it, whilst also complicating the strategies of the US and Israel towards Iran.

Iran's strategy of regional proxy forces also exhibits a similar hybrid nature. On the one hand, Iran seeks to protect its regional interests by operating within the logic of the nation-state; on the other, it is building a transnational resistance network through non-state actors. This strategy is an example of hybridity that challenges the categories of the traditional international relations paradigm and blurs the boundaries between state and non-state actors. Hezbollah, as both a Lebanese political party and a militia force affiliated with Iran, is the institutional expression of this hybridity.

The Heterogeneous Structure of Iranian Society and the Limitations of External Interventions

The effectiveness of the US and Israel's emotional provocation strategies is constrained by the heterogeneous structure of Iranian society and the regime's capacity for internal mobilisation. Iran does not possess an ethnically homogeneous structure; it is home to various ethnic groups such as Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis and Turkmen (Demirtürk, 2020, p. 343). The relationships of each of these groups with the central government, their perceptions of foreign policy and their reactions to external interventions vary.

Whilst anti-regime sentiments are stronger in regions with a high Sunni population, such as Baluchistan, or in areas predominantly inhabited by Kurds, the impact of foreign-sourced media content may also vary in these regions. Sunni militant groups operating in Baluchistan



are waging an armed struggle against the Iranian central government and these groups occasionally receive external support (Baran, 2025). Similarly, Kurdish opposition groups active in Iranian Kurdistan also seek support from external actors in their struggle against the Iranian regime. In these regions, foreign-sourced media content can fuel dissatisfaction with the central government and reinforce separatist tendencies.

On the other hand, the educated and urbanised young population in major cities such as Tehran, Isfahan or Shiraz may distance themselves from the regime due to economic problems and social pressures and may be more receptive to foreign media. This segment has, particularly as seen during the 2009 Green Movement, led mass protests against the regime and has been the focus of foreign media attention (Sanhan, 2023, p. 231). However, the reaction of these groups to external intervention does not always result in pro-regime consolidation; in some cases, external pressure may trigger nationalist reflexes, providing the regime with temporary social support.

During the 2009 Green Movement, the intense interest and support from the international media, whilst contributing to the movement's acquisition of legitimacy on the international stage, also provided a platform for the regime to reinforce its 'external forces' narrative and discredit the opposition. By presenting the protests as a conspiracy instigated by external forces, the regime mobilised nationalist and religious sentiments and cast the opposition in the role of "traitors" (Akbarzadeh et al., 2025, pp. 333-334). This situation demonstrates, as post-colonial theory highlights, that external intervention does not always produce predictable outcomes; rather, by interacting with local dynamics, it can generate unforeseen consequences.

A similar dynamic was observed in the context of the post-2022 Mahsa Amini protests. During the protests, developments in Iran were rapidly conveyed to the global public via social media platforms, diaspora media and international news networks; this increased the international visibility of the protests, contributing to the global legitimisation of anti-regime discourse. However, during the same period, the Iranian government framed the protests as a "hybrid intervention directed by external powers" and developed a narrative specifically targeting Western actors.

This trend became even more pronounced during the 2025–2026 period, amid rising regional tensions and information warfare conducted in the cyber domain. The Iranian government characterised calls for protest and mobilisation efforts rooted in economic discontent, particularly those spreading via digital platforms, as "psychological warfare" and "operations supported by foreign intelligence". In contrast, international media organisations and human rights groups have continued to emphasise that social discontent in Iran is linked to structural economic problems, sanctions and political restrictions. These opposing narratives have created two distinct discursive spheres that compete not only at the level of information production but also in shaping public perception.

This complex structure prevents the impact of external perception operations from being one-dimensional, thereby providing the Iranian regime with significant room for manoeuvre. The regime seeks to limit the impact of external interventions and maintain its social support through differentiated strategies, such as religious and revolutionary rhetoric targeting conservative segments, economic promises aimed at the urban middle class, and an emphasis on cultural rights for ethnic minorities. In this context, both the 2009 Green Movement and the protests following 2022, extending into the 2026 period, demonstrate that the influence

of foreign media and international actors possesses a dual-natured character: on the one hand, it enhances the visibility and international legitimacy of the opposition, whilst on the other, it enables the regime to strengthen its internal consolidation by reinforcing its 'external intervention' narrative. This situation demonstrates, as post-colonial theory suggests, that the relationship between external intervention and local dynamics is not linear, but rather based on mutual interactions and often produces paradoxical outcomes.

The Dialectic of Demographic Engineering and Emotional Provocation

In such a complex conflict environment, demographic engineering and emotional provocation function as two complementary and mutually reinforcing strategic dimensions. In this context, the US and Israel seek not only to limit Iran's regional influence, which it exercises through proxy forces, but also to influence both domestic and international public opinion through discursive and psychological means (McNamee & Zhang, 2019, p. 291). Demographic engineering, in this context, does not merely refer to population movements or settlement arrangements; it should be understood as a long-term strategic form of intervention targeting the social, ethnic and sectarian structures that form the basis of Iran's regional influence. Such interventions aim to reduce the influence of specific population groups, limit the operational effectiveness of proxy forces, and thereby weaken the sustainability of Iran's regional engagements.

Within this framework, the relationship between demographic engineering and emotional provocation has a dialectical character. Whilst the demographic foundations of Iran's regional influence are directly targeted on the one hand, the atmosphere of uncertainty and tension created by these operations provides fertile ground for the implementation of emotional provocation strategies on the other (Morland, 2016, pp. 2-3). For example, Israel's air strikes against Iranian-backed targets in Syria are not limited to merely destroying military targets; they also aim to heighten doubts within the Iranian public regarding the sustainability of the regime's military spending and regional engagements. These attacks have become a strategic rhetorical tool designed to spark debates among the Iranian public regarding the regime's effectiveness in foreign policy, its ability to protect national interests, and the efficiency of resource allocation. Thus, military operations acquire a psychological and perceptual dimension, generating social and political impacts.

Conversely, Iran's cross-border operations against Israel, conducted through proxy forces, alongside the harsh and threatening rhetoric of actors such as Hezbollah, deepen security concerns within Israeli society. This creates an effect that legitimises the government's hardline policies towards Iran and strengthens the public's tendency to support these policies. Regular public opinion surveys conducted in Israel indicate that the perception of an Iranian threat is widespread within society and that this perception has the potential to increase public support for the government's hardline security policies. Thus, emotional provocation does not merely generate individual fear or anxiety; it also becomes a strategic tool that reinforces states' regional policies and consolidates public approval.

On the other hand, the Iranian regime seeks to counterbalance these efforts by employing mobilisation strategies based on rhetoric of external threats and national resistance. The regime uses external attacks and threats as a strategic tool to reproduce its own legitimacy and maintain public support. Particularly during periods of escalating economic problems and internal pressures, the emphasis on external threats diverts public attention away from



domestic issues, strengthens national unity and enhances the regime's internal resilience. This approach demonstrates that, within the current conflict environment of the Middle East, it is not merely military or diplomatic competition that lies at the heart of the conflict, but also social perception, ideological struggle and strategic communication.

The emerging process demonstrates that demographic engineering and emotional provocation function as two complementary strategic axes. Whilst demographic engineering targets long-term population and proxy power balances, emotional provocation reinforces the strategic objectives of the parties by managing the perceptual and psychological effects of these changes. Thus, the multi-dimensional conflicts in the Middle East are conducted not only through physical force and diplomatic manoeuvres, but also through strategic communication processes that shape societies' perceptions, emotions and ideological orientations. This situation demonstrates that social psychology and perception management play a central role in modern war and conflict analysis.

Conclusion

The strategies of the US and Israel towards Iran are not limited to military and diplomatic tools but reflect a hybrid approach encompassing demographic, ideological and psychological dimensions. The demographic engineering dimension targets Shia networks and proxy forces within Iran's regional spheres of influence, whilst the emotional provocation dimension seeks to influence the perceptions of Iranian society through the media, digital platforms and political discourse.

The perspective offered by post-colonial theory demonstrates that these strategies cannot be explained solely by security concerns but are also intertwined with historically constructed forms of representation, identity politics and power relations. Edward Said's thesis on Orientalism offers an important framework for understanding the historical roots of the US and Israeli discourse that constructs Iran as a 'threat', whilst Frantz Fanon's work helps to conceptualise the resistance and mobilisation strategies developed by the Iranian regime in response to external threats. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, meanwhile, is illuminating for understanding the complex and contradictory nature of Iran's relationship with the West.

The Iranian regime seeks to balance these efforts and maintain its social support through a discourse of external threat and mobilisation strategies based on national resistance. However, the heterogeneous structure of Iranian society means that the impact of external perception operations is not uniform, leaving the regime some room for manoeuvre. The differing reactions among ethnic minorities, the urban middle class and conservative segments demonstrate that external interventions can produce unpredictable outcomes.

This situation demonstrates that in Middle Eastern conflicts, the dimensions of inter-state power competition and social and ideological factors cannot be separated from one another. The findings of this study reaffirm the importance of the concept of hybrid warfare in contemporary international relations, whilst also highlighting the limitations of external perception operations in countries such as Iran, which possess a complex social structure and high political mobilisation capacity.

Future research examining the attitudes of different ethnic groups and social classes in Iran towards foreign perception operations through field studies will contribute to enriching the theoretical framework in this field. Furthermore, studies that conduct an in-depth analysis of

the relationship between Iran's regional proxy power strategy and its demographic engineering dimension could make significant contributions to understanding the power struggle in the Middle East. Finally, the application of other concepts from postcolonial theory (such as 'national narrative', 'trauma' and 'memory') within the Iranian context will provide an opportunity to test the explanatory power of this theoretical framework.

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