

Thumbnail Image:



Nov 04, 2016 by *Sohaela Amiri*

President Obama's 2016 Nowruz Address ^[1]

President Obama has produced a video every Nowruz in which he directly talks to the Iranian people inside Iran as well as the Iranian diaspora. His messages have not always been the

most appealing, but in the last couple of years, they have drastically improved to connect with the majority of his audience. Judging from social media, Iranians have been receptive to the latest YouTube video (see below); hundreds were sharing this video with positive comments, within only a few minutes after the video came out.

In the battle for winning hearts and minds of the Iranian people, U.S. Presidents have not always been very successful, but President Obama has changed that. Making a YouTube video represents close to zero cost for the U.S. government, but its impact is potentially huge. And the return on investment is literally infinite. The reason is simple: it starts by listening! Every sentence in this video appeals to the majority of Iranians as a result of Obama (or his team) doing the type of audience analysis and formative research that is required for any successful public diplomacy initiative. Now compare this to some million-dollar projects that the State Department runs with close to no return on investment because they are based on assumptions, not facts.

The future of the Presidency of the United States doesn't seem to be very promising with Donald Trump, and Hillary Clinton as the leading candidates. But if the future U.S. President decides to tap into public diplomacy to connect with certain stakeholders and specific audiences, they need to listen first! They are of course listening to big campaign donors now, no surprise there. But will they listen to foreign publics, especially in the Middle East, whose attitude, knowledge, and behavior towards the U.S. will play a very important role over the next decade?

Photo credit: Haft Seen at the White House via Wikimedia Commons
