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A Soft Power, Noopolitik Approach: **President Ahmadinejad's Letter to** **President Bush** ^[1]

The letter of President Ahmadinejad to President Bush, its wide range of topics on different context and in various dimensions, deserves detailed discussions by the people of knowledge and experience in the related fields. The purpose of this writing however, is not to analyze and judge the content of the letter, rather it's a small contribution to ring the bell that the noopolitik is already on its dawn, at the doorstep of the new century, and people of creeds and values should not miss the opportunity.

Many scholars of politics and international relations are of the view that the world has already entered the new era, termed "the information age" by some and "the golden age" or "the era of the information revolution," by others. To cope with the new situation and in conformity with this new world atmosphere, the international relation is to experience a new paradigm in politics. This new paradigm is introduced, in a conceptual and emphatic triplex, as cyberpolitik, infopolitik and noopolitik, based on their corresponding evolutionary realms of cyberspace, infosphere and noosphere. This new paradigm of politics and international relations is expected to win superiority over the realpolitik (power politics) and the liberal internationalism and will establish itself as the prevailing approach in the twenty first century, no doubt, by the use of soft power and through the benefits of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as its vehicle.

In a more detailed description, keeping with the point that the root word "noos" refers to the mind, noopolitik means having a systematic and structured ability to conduct foreign interactions in knowledge-related terms -- benefiting the power of thinking, addressing the thoughtful people and mobilizing the rightful ones.

Moreover, the rise of soft power makes noopolitik feasible. Whereas, realpolitik often aims at coercion through the exercise of hard power, whose essence is military; noopolitik aims at attracting, persuading, and enjoining with soft power -- whose essence is nonmilitary and based on mindfulness and understanding.

The observation in this article is that, the letter of President Ahmadinejad to President Bush, with or without his regard to the forces of change in the "Information Revolution Age," has triggered socio-political waves that can best represent the ongoing expansion of the knowledge-environment towards the "noosphere" -- a world prevailed by knowledge, learning, dialogue and public understanding -- making "noopolitik" the dominant paradigm of the twenty-first century.

Here is some evidential reasoning for this observation:

1. The very form of communication, "a letter," not necessarily, "a diplomatic letter or a note, etc.," or even as referred to by some, "the unorthodox letter" is unprecedented or undefined in the existing frameworks of "realpolitik-based international relations."

President Bush, himself can not put it into any known or practiced category, at least on the side of the United States, but calling it interesting: "I thought it was interesting" and describing it by the number of its pages, the "18-paged letter," indicating that he is facing a new phenomenon, or finding himself in a new political atmosphere. Thus, the letter does not follow the "power politics practiced diplomatic protocol."

2. The Carnegie Web site, reporting on this letter, refers its readers to an article by George Perkovich under the headline, "Giving Justice its Due"; criticizing President Bush for his negligence of the creeds of the U.S.

Part of the article reads, "Unfortunately, the elision of the notion of justice from the president's speech matches its elision from his foreign policy, with the result that in recent years, U.S. diplomacy -- public and private -- has been limping along on one leg and stumbling."

Inference from President Ahmadinejad's letter to make references to such articles is an indication that the letter has caused contemplation on U.S. values, instead of triggering arrogant references to the U.S. capacities of raw power politik. Moreover, Perkovich suggests that the U.S. should not ignore the challenge by Ahmadinejad on a contest over whether the positions he and Iran pursue are more just than those of the Bush administration, but rather take it head on.

Perkovich calls for President Bush to address "growing international demands for justice to complement the freedom doctrine." Therefore, we can induce that Ahmadinejad's letter may force to put the forgotten values back on the political table and make them new agendas -- not only for U.S. diplomacy but for many other countries, including Iran itself. This political behavior is justifiable in noopolitik, where "right makes the might" and not in power politics, where "might makes the right."

3. Furthermore, the letter has triggered an intervention by NGOs, engaging those concerned about the practice of justice, and particularly those of churches and religious circles. Such NGO's wish for the issues related to human destiny to be released from the confines of the "no entrance, classical diplomatic zone" and be played before the eyes of people of the world in a collaborative "positive-sum political game" and in the interest of the people of the world all over. This again is an aspect associated with the noopolitik paradigm which is supposed to umbrella the networked value-based world of knowledge, understanding and cooperation -- the world eventually, to be led in large parts of it, by the NGO's very much willing to collaborate with the governments on these very lines.

4. Let us recall that at least some aspects of "soft power" are to achieve desired outcomes through reliance on norms and values and to give in to sharing with others in both national and transnational scales so as to win through attraction rather than coercion. As in the words of Nye, soft power "works by convincing others to follow or getting them to agree to norms and institutions that produce the desired behavior. Soft power can rest on the appeal of one's ideas or the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others." On the

basis of these descriptions, one may conclude that soft power politics is well reflected and highlighted in the content of the letter of President Ahmadinejad. The very content of the letter and the points it is trying to make is very much mind-provoking in the direction of setting new agendas for international dialogue.

"Regardless of Ahmadinejad's intentions, many regard the letter favorably. The Peninsula, a Qatari news site, sees it as "a taboo-breaking initiative ... an opening—even if only slim—for the longtime foes to engage in a dialogue." Arab News of Saudi Arabia hails it as "remarkable and encouraging ... an unexpected diplomatic opening." Germany's Der Spiegel calls it: "a deft move for Ahmadinejad's image in the Middle East." Many, after all, agree with his characterization of Israel and of the contradiction between Bush's principles and actions."

The direct and indirect reactions and responses, and even various forms of propaganda around it may be interpreted in the same context. After all, in all such activities, one way or the other, particular goals are to be achieved by soft power means. Even those who flash back to challenge the internal situation of Iran make reference to the very content of the letter and are therefore using a soft power political tactic which is in fact well interpretable in noopolitik paradigm.

5. The very media coverage of this letter and the reactions to it, which is multiplied by manifold, in any form -- positively confirming or negatively criticizing; anxiously and politely analyzing it or angrily and impolitely reacting to it; availing it as an opportunity to introduce new issues of human needs and interests or showing a sense of humor or even unjustly ridiculing it -- all are manifestation of the expanding realm of noosphere, both in content and volume. It would be interesting to compare statistically the public, or more precisely, elite participation with regard to this letter with any similar dialogue between any two heads of states, particularly with the ones taking place in the modern classic diplomacy era of the twenty's century, when the vast use of internet had not facilitated living in the noosphere and playing the noopolitik.

6. No matter what the reaction of President Bush or others will be, this letter will remain as a document of civil correspondence addressed to the appropriate world through President Bush; and this is certainly a public diplomacy which may not have necessarily immediate result, especially when power politics is making its last noisy moves out. It has created a turning point or a benchmark in diplomacy, to advise presidents to come out of the confines of the so-called "classic diplomatic correspondence" and enter into "civil correspondence."

As Fred Kaplan puts it: "In short, it provides a perfect opportunity for Bush to do what he should have been doing for the last few years -- to lay out what America stands for, what we have in common with Muslim nations, and how our differences can be tolerated or settled without conflict. In fact, civil correspondence with the Iranian president could be touted as a sign of Bush's good intentions and his desire for diplomacy.

To summarize, this article's purpose is only to touch on a few points to support the idea that noopolitik, as a suitable paradigm for the information age, is already flourishing through the expansion of ICT, and "noo-diplomacy," a transparent diplomacy based on values, norms, knowledge and common understanding and collaboration, is prevailing the modern classic diplomacy, the tools for which, was mainly arm twisting behind curtains and in the absence of

peoples.

The letter of Dr. Ahmadinejad to his American counterpart, regardless of how it may be interpreted, is a case study that demonstrates the new paradigm of politics and international relations, in conformity with the new era of Information Revolution, that is "noopolitik," in which knowledge based soft-power, has the say is already getting dominance. Although, according to Josef Joffe, "this does not mean that hard power and realpolitik are obsolete, or even in abeyance," nevertheless, understanding the merit of the desirable newcomer makes the undesirable old version leave the scene faster.
