Renata TARASIUK

Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Poland

Faculty of Social Sciences

Institue of Security Studies

renata.tarasiuk@uph.edu.pl

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8919-6713

VISUAL PROPAGANDA AS A FOREIGN POLICY TOOL OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN IN RELATIONS WITH THE STATE OF ISRAEL

ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this article is the explanation of the relationship between satirical drawing as a propaganda tool and the vectors of the international policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with particular emphasis on the State of Israel. The subject of the description is the use of satirical drawing by Iranian cultural institutions in creating anti-Israel policy and striving for its broadest visibility in an international perspective. Propaganda, due to its persuasive potential, transforming perception and leading to manipulation of behaviors, requires appropriate tools with which symbols, slogans and keywords are activated to – paraphrasing John Austin – create the desired reality with the help of an appropriate narrative[1]. The article adopts the hypothesis that Iranian visual propaganda plays an important role in creating an anti-Israel discourse. Detailed research questions focus on the way in which Iran uses images (icons/ symbols) to implement its anti-Israel campaign, institutions constructing propaganda discourse, situations conducive to creating such discourses, and the nature of relations between propaganda and other political activities towards Israel, as well as towards USA. The article refers to selected contents of visual propaganda which, according to the author, refer to the most important aspects of Iranian-Israeli relations (in the Iranian-American context as well), including in particular the importance of the Holocaust remembrance policy and its relation to the contemporary Middle East situation, especially the Palestinian problem. In the empirical process, the visual forms of propaganda discourse were analyzed in terms of hybrid multisemiotic structures, and in the theoretical part, the most commonly used classical formal methods in this type of research were used.

KEYWORDS: propaganda, satirical drawing, foreign policy, the Holocaust, Israel, Iran

PROPAGANDA WIZUALNA JAKO NARZĘDZIE POLITYKI ZAGRANICZNEJ ISLAMSKIEJ REPUBLIKI IRANU W RELACJACH Z PAŃSTWEM IZRAEL

ABSTRAKT: Głównym celem poniższego artykułu jest eksplanacja powiązań między rysunkiem satyrycznym jako narzędziem propagandy a wektorami polityki międzynarodowej Islamskiej Republiki Iranu, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Państwa Izrael. Przedmiotem opisu jest wykorzystywanie przez irańskie instytucje kulturowe rysunku satyrycznego w kreowaniu polityki antyizraelskiej i dążenie do jak najszerszej jej widoczności w perspektywie międzynarodowej. Propaganda, z uwagi na swój perswazyjny potencjał przekształcający percepcję i prowadzący do manipulowania zachowaniami, wymaga odpowiednich narzędzi, przy pomocy których uaktywniają się symbole, hasła, słowa kluczowe, by –

---

[1] For more on Austin's theory see: R. Tarasiuk, *Językowe aspekty bezpieczeństwa informacyjnego,* [in:] W. Fehler (ed.), *Informacyjny wymiar bezpieczeństwa państw i jednostek*, Siedlce 2021.

parafrazując Johna Austina – wykreować pożądaną rzeczywistość przy pomocy odpowiedniej narracji. Przyjęto hipotezę, że irańska propaganda wizualna zajmuje istotne miejsce w kreowaniu antyizraelskiego dyskursu. W szczegółowych pytaniach badawczych skoncentrowano się na: sposobie, w jaki Iran przy pomocy obrazów (ikon/symboli) realizuje swoją antyizraelską kampanię; instytucjach konstruujących dyskurs propagandowy; sytuacjach sprzyjających kreowaniu takich dyskursów oraz naturze relacji między propagandą a innymi działaniami politycznymi wobec Izraela, a także wobec USA. Szczegółowej analizie poddano te treści propagandy wizualnej, które, zdaniem autora, odnoszą się do najistotniejszych aspektów relacji irańsko-izraelskich (w kontekście również irańsko-amerykańskich), w tym zwłaszcza do znaczenia, jakie w tej relacji zyskuje polityka pamięci Holokaustu i jej odniesienie do współczesnej sytuacji bliskowschodniej, zwłaszcza do problemu palestyńskiego. W procesie empirycznym dokonano analizy wizualnych form dyskursu propagandowego traktowanych w kategoriach hybrydycznych struktur multisemiotycznych, a w części teoretycznej wykorzystano najczęściej stosowane w tego typu badaniach klasyczne metody formalne.

INTRODUCTION

On December 11, 1978, in Tehran, a crowd of 2 million by acclamation passed a resolution calling for the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran[2]. Two months later, Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, returning to the country after years of exile, seized power in Iran, thus proclaiming the victory of the religious revolution[3].

Shi'ite clergy, among whom Ayatollah was "God's sign", opened a new political era in Persian history. A modern political reinterpretation of Islam, combined with republican power structures (including the elected president – the head of the executive power), has contributed to a new body of state structures. Many spheres of life were institutionalized in order to maintain the gains of the revolution and combat all manifestations of Western imperialism. The Revolutionary Guard Corps became the symbol of the new Iranian world[4].

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran also means a new quality of diplomatic relations and strengthening the image of an external enemy for the purpose of social consolidation. Aspiring to the role of a local hegemon, Iran tries to use all channels of exerting pressure on its near abroad and other countries in the region. The doctrine of hatred that Iranian Shi'ite clergy preach against Israel and the US is materializing mainly in soft power, and according to Bloomberg experts, Iran has still not fully exploited its operational potential in the area of propaganda[5].

---

[2] See E. Abrahamian, *Historia współczesnego Iranu*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 209-211.
[3] It should be emphasized that the religious opposition began to form at the beginning of Reza Khan's rule, mainly due to his policy of radical occidentalization of Iran, implying, for example, prohibitions on: traditional outfits by men, chador by women, celebrating certain holidays in public, or depriving Muslim schools of legal powers.
[4] M. Stempień, *Irański system polityczny a proces nuklearyzacji Islamskiej Republiki Iranu*, [in:] E. Kowalewska-Borys, K. Chomicz (ed.), *Współpraca międzynarodowa a rozwój regionalny. Wyzwania i perspektywy*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 25-36.
[5] CyberDefence24, *Propagandowa ofensywa Iranu dopiero przed nami*, 10.01.2020, https://cyberdefence24.pl/bezpieczenstwo-informacyjne/propagandowa-ofensywa-iranu-dopiero-przed-nami. We can cautiously risk a statement that the successively built potential of Iranian propaganda may even exceed that of Russia.

The main purpose of this article is to explain the connections between Iranian propaganda and the vectors of the international policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The detailed focus is on satirical drawing, which is considered to be an effective tool of propaganda. Attention was paid to how Iranian cultural institutions use caricature to create vectors of foreign policy, striving to disseminate it as widely as possible in the international community.

The following narrative assumes the hypothesis that Iranian visual propaganda, represented by satirical drawing in its various forms (poster, animation, murals, and even performative art), occupies an important place in creating an anti-Israel discourse. The detailed focus is on the following questions: how does Iran implement its policy of visual propaganda, what are the most popular symbols of propaganda content, what institutions are mainly involved in creating the propaganda discourse, what ground-breaking situations/ events particularly generate such discourses, and what is the nature of the relationship between propaganda and other soft power actions taken by Iran against Israel and the United States. The content of visual propaganda which, in the author's opinion, relates to the key aspects of Iranian-Israeli and Iranian-American relations, especially the so-called "Palestinian problem" and the importance that in this context the Israeli policy of Holocaust remembrance have been analyzed in detail. The basic material for the analysis is a satirical drawing, which, in the author's opinion, is a valuable source of information for research undertaken in various disciplines, including security sciences. Despite the opinions of some researchers about the alleged insufficiency of a systematic research apparatus for the study of iconic sources, the author considers the satirical drawings used as source material to be credible and valuable sources in the social sciences (of which security sciences are a part). Satirical cartoons are an opinion-forming medium that reflects the attitudes of the public, therefore they provide important information about political and social life and mental attitudes towards political and social reality[6].

In the empirical process, the visual forms of propaganda discourse were analyzed in terms of hybrid multisemiotic structures. In the theoretical area, the most frequently used formal methods in this type of research were used: induction, deduction, analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization, analogy, inference and verification.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF IRANIAN PROPAGANDA

For four decades, Iran's foreign policy has been based continuously on the achievements of the revolution[7]. Its driving force is the demonization of real and imaginary enemies. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini believed in the export of revolutionary Islam to the entire Muslim

---

[6] See also: P. Hamera, *Rysunek satyryczny w polskich i anglojęzycznych badaniach historycznych oraz medio-znawczych* [*A Satirical Drawing in Polish and English-Language Historical and Media Studies*], „Naukowy Przegląd Dziennikarski" 2020, 4, pp. 84-88.
[7] The roots of Iranian visual propaganda can be found back in the Pahlavi era, where the iconic message was one of the elements of the political struggle. Nationalist propaganda in the last years of Reza Shah's rule was largely influenced by German National Socialism and was associated with its strong influence on Iranian public opinion. See more: L.W. Michael, *National socialist propaganda in late Reza-Shah Iran: the case of Khaterat-e Hitler by Mohsen Jahansuz,* "British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies" 2021.

world, the more he perpetuated in his consciousness the symbolic hostility towards the United States as "the Great Satan"[8]. As Supreme Leader, he convinced the Iranians that the US is the contamination of capitalist decadence and imperialist corruption – the moral antithesis of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic values were also contrasted with the Middle Eastern neighbor – Israel, which the Islamic Republic of Iran consistently denied the right to exist, even eliminating the official name of the State of Israel from its political narrative, describing the Jewish state as the "Zionist regime"[9].

Iran takes the most radical anti-Israel stance in the entire Muslim Middle East. Taking the Palestinian side and breaking formal contacts with the State of Israel was a literal act of Iran's opposition to "Zionist domination". However, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict plays an instrumental role in Iran's foreign policy, it is a kind of diplomatic game that uses anti-Israel arguments. Most of them are aimed at creating a more or less visible barrier to the country's occidentalization. Even in terms of Internet use, Iranians are offered native portals, free from "inappropriate content", such as the cloob.com portal, an alternative to Facebook, the Iranian Virtual Society, controlled in accordance with Iranian law, deactivated after 12 years of operation, in August 2021[10].

Public opinion in the Islamic Republic of Iran must fully follow the direction of the Iranian ruling elite. The political, socio-cultural and religious narrative since the victory of the Ayatollahs has been shaped in line with the position of the Supreme Leader. The Islamic regime, which enforces a strict version of Islamic law, uses institutionalized forms of propaganda influence and shaping public opinion[11]. The government provides financial, material and infrastructural support for the distribution of these activities.

ICONIC PROPAGANDA

The fact that the photomontage technique and all kinds of photographic retouching used to enhance the expected effect were known from the end of the 19th century is a proof of an influential power of the image on the dissemination of propaganda content. In political narratives, iconic propaganda spread in the 1930s in the US, Germany, Italy, and the USSR[12]. The image is an extremely effective tool of political communication, it creates reality by exerting a force greater than the word. A spectacular example is a propaganda poster, used

---

[8] *Advertisement for Gathering of World Liberation Movements, Tehran,* January, 1980 Middle Eastern Posters Collection, Box 4, Poster 212, *Demonizing the Enemy. The Graphics of Revolution and War. Iranian Posters Arts,* The University of Chicago Library, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/graphics-revolution-and-war-iranian-poster-arts/demonizing-enemy/ (04.05.2022).

[9] Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini had already exposed his anti-Israel rhetoric long before he took power. In 1962, shortly before his arrest, he accused Jewish spies and Zionists of a hostile plot against Islamic values.

[10]*Iran's replacement to Facebook Cloob.com shuts shop,* GD3News, October 25, 2017. https://www.gd3news.com/irans-replacement-facebook-cloob-com-shuts-shop/ (27.04.2022).

[11] See more: M. Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran. A History of the Islamic Republic*, London 2014.

[12] K. Stelmach, *Mediatyzacja propagandy – propagandyzacja mediów: wczoraj i dziś*, "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" 2014, 57(2), p. 411.

especially during the two world wars, and during the Cold War, to perpetuate the image of the bipolar order – by influential powers.

Nowadays, in the era of the so-called "image culture", "pictorial" and "eyecentric" democracy reception of visual messages is a constant element of the functioning of entire societies. In the light of the concept of "double coding", human perception of information takes place on two levels: verbal and visual, with the visual message being able to condense many intertexts into one image[13].

Iconic propaganda occupies a special place in the propaganda discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Manipulating the image for short-term political goals is present especially in shaping the contemporary politics of memory, including the memory of the victims. Its most spectacular form are murals depicting martyrs for the nation and for Islam, who died during the religious revolution and during the Iran-Iraq war. Ubiquitous on the streets of Tehran, wall paintings are used to control the masses, strengthen the power of the elite, and marginalize opposition[14].

In 2019, on the 40th anniversary of the victorious revolution, 14 satirical, anti-American murals, emphasizing the difference between "us" and "them", were displayed on the walls of the former American embassy in Tehran (now the headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards). They discount representative American symbols, such as Disney's Mickey Mouse, the Statue of Liberty and the colors of the United States flag.

When General Qasem Soleimani was killed in a US rocket attack in Baghdad in January 2020, his images – as a national hero and martyr – appeared on posters and huge banners all over Tehran[15]. The humiliation suffered by supporters of Soleimani's policy from the US also resulted in a series of propaganda posters on which the US flags and the head of President Donald Trump were "burned"[16].

Perpetuating the anti-American narrative undoubtedly serves to strengthen Iran's efforts to maintain a hegemonic position in the region. The more so because the image of Iran as a "rogue power", enemy of the world order, gained international visibility mainly due to the rhetoric of the then US President George W. Bush[17].

---

[13] G.H. Bower, M.B. Karlin, A. Dueck, *Comprehension and Memory for Pictures*, "Memory & Cognition" 1975, 3, pp. 216-220.

[14] B. Rolston, *When everywhere is Karbala: Murals, martyrdom and propaganda in Iran,* "Memory Studies" 2020, 13(1), pp. 3-23.

[15] R. Zimmt, *Portrait of Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force, Instigator of Iranian Subversion and Terrorism in the Middle East and around the Globe*, The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Informatin Center at the Israeli Intelligence & Heritage Commemoration Center, October 29, 2015. Respect and admiration for Suleimani's Middle Eastern policy was also expressed on an individual basis, by hanging posters with the face of the general in semi-public spaces – In shop windows or service salons, and even on motorcycles and baby strollers. See: N. Tavakolian, *"The City Had Transformed". Scenes from Tehran's Mass Mourning of Qasem Soleimani*, "Time" 2020, January 10, https://time.com/longform/qasem-soleimani-tehran-iran-photos/ (04.05.2022).

[16] Kayah Barzegar, *The Assasination of Quassem Soleimani Institutionalizes Anti-American Sentiment in Iran, Middle East and Economic Institute*, https://mepei.com/the-assassination-of-qassem-soleimani-institutionalizes-anti-american-sentiment-in-iran/ (02.01.2023).

[17] In 2002, George W. Bush proposed including this country in the so-called "Axis of Evil". See also M. Çetin, M. Ali Gazi, C. Çaki, *The Examination of the Anti-USA Propaganda Posters in the Iran Revolution*

By expropriating the symbols of Western culture that have been legible for many decades, Iranian propaganda creates its own content. Visually, the United States is presented as a symbol of capitalist repression. Using iconic elements functioning in the public consciousness, Iranian caricaturists, for example, presented a grotesque image of President Jimmy Carter, creating him as a "corrupt pig" – an exemplification of the moral decadence of Western consumptionism[18]. The United States is constantly condemned by the Iranian authorities as a morally failed imperialist power whose influence of civilization must be openly opposed[19]. The burning of the Jimmy Carter effigy during anti-American protests in front of the former US embassy building was made a ritual identical to the burning of the effigy of traitor Umar, a usurper of undue power. The propaganda poster illustrating these events shows the connection between Shi'ite religious rituals and political ambitions – the victorious religious-political merger of the Iranian revolution[20]. Another clear anti-American message is a large red arrow aimed at President Carter and the White House, symbolizing the collective opposition of the Muslim world to Western civilization. In turn, on the poster ordered for the Conference of International Liberation Movements in Tehran, Uncle Sam's cylinder – the national personification of the United States since the colonial American-British war – is placed on a human skull crushed by a fist, which is a symbol of opposition towards American hegemony[21].

AGAINST ISRAEL

Contemporary Israeli-Iranian relations are largely a function of U.S. – Iranian relations. Although Iran's foreign policy has ideologically softened after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Israeli-Iranian relations constitute an exception to this general pattern. Iran's attitude towards Israel and the Middle East peace process is often explained as a remnant of its revolutionary past, contrary to Iran's national interest. It is assumed that the Oslo Accords ultimately worsened Iran-Israel relations since the first Gulf War. However, important systemic changes that have taken place throughout the Middle East region, first after 1991 and then in the perspective of the Arab Spring, should also be taken into account here[22]. The essence of these changes (especially the Arab Spring) is Israel's readiness to improve relations with Muslim states.

According to Claude Lévi Strauss, „International Journal of Social Science" 2018, vol. 1, Issue 3, https://www.re-searchgate.net/publication/330090428_THE_EXAMINATION_OF_THE_ANTI-USA_PROPA-GANDA_POSTERS_IN_THE_IRAN_REVOLUTION_ACCORDING_TO_CLAUDE_LEVI-STRAUSS'_BI-NARY_OPPOSITION (02.01.2023).

[18] *The Corrupt Carter, 1979,* Middle Eastern Posters Collection BOX 3, Poster 94, 3, [in:] *Demonizing the Enemy…,* op. cit.; See also: R. Tosun, *Oblicza wroga w propagandzie współczesnego Iranu*, "Bliski Wschód" 2005, 2, pp 177-193.

[19] E. Morel (ed.), *Orwellian State: Islamic Republic of Iran's State Media as a Weapon of Mass Suppression*, "Fidh. Justice for Iran" 2020, No. 749a, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/iran749aweb.pdf, p. 8.

[20] K. Shishegaran, *Scarecrow!,* ca. 1980, Middle Eastern Posters Collection Box 3, Poster 145, [in:] *Demonizing the Enemy…,* op. cit.

[21] *Uncle Sam Skull Strangulated by a Collective Fist,* 1979 Middle Eastern Posters Collection Box 1, Poster 12, [in:] *Demonizing the Enemy…,* op. cit.

[22] Back in 1987, Israel called Iran a "geostrategic friend", and today it labels this country as the main threat to its security, despite the fact that after 1991 two significant common threats, both from the Iranian and Israeli perspective, were eliminated – the disintegration of the post-Soviet space and the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. Relations between Israel and Iran have been strained for many years, but now there is even talk of the coming

The content of the anti-Israel propaganda created by the Islamic Republic of Iran is intended to justify the refusal of Israel's right to exist. This direction of anti-Israel policy has continued uninterruptedly since the Ayatollahs took power. Iran, playing the role of a local hegemon, addresses this rhetoric to all audiences in the Middle East, striving to become the strongest catalyst for anti-Zionist sentiment there.

The anti-Israel propaganda of the Islamic Republic of Iran relies on the authority of high-ranking Shiite Iranian clerics and officers of the Revolutionary Guard Corps. Today, it is also based on the statements of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who held the office in 2005-2013, who repeatedly announced that Israel would be wiped off the map and appeared in public as a Holocaust denier. The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Hosseini Khamenei, also fits into this aggressive rhetoric. This position is supported by other, significant, high-ranking clergymen.

THE HOLOCAUST IN CARICATURE

Caricatures of the Holocaust are the flagship part of Iran's anti-Israel propaganda. Their subject matter, both in literal and figurative terms, is intended to perpetuate hate speech mainly against Jewish citizens of Israel, but also against the entire Jewish community scattered throughout the Diaspora. Focusing on the Holocaust to justify hostile actions against Israel is a very important element of the entire mechanism of Iranian actions. In the figurative layer of the propaganda message, the Zionist regime is based on the ideology of "burnt offering" or the Holocaust, which, according to Iranian deniers, the Zionists use to justify the occupation of Palestine in the eyes of the world. Iran, engaging from the beginning of Ruhollah Khomeini's era in the so-called "Palestinian cause" actually promotes anti-Israel rhetoric, and Iran's support for Palestinians has further hampered Israeli-Iranian relations. This rhetoric has been consistently maintained by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as well as of Khomeini's successor, Ali Khamenei, since he took office.

Both leaders gave their full support to the initiative of the first edition of the international Holocaust caricature competition, in line with the architecture of Iranian propaganda. This happened shortly after the twelve cartoons of Muhammad were published in the Danish newspaper "Jyllands Posten". The event was organized and sponsored by the Hamshahri Institute, an institution funded and managed by the municipal authorities of Tehran and the publisher of an illustrated newspaper until 2009. The competition was announced on February 6, 2006 by Farid Mortazavi, graphic editor of Hamshahri. Over 1,100 caricatures from over 60 countries were submitted, and the winning works were presented at an exhibition in November 2006[23]. Grand Prize winner – Abdoullah Derkaoui compared the situation of

---

Middle East crisis with Israel and Iran as major players. See more: T. Parsi, *Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed: Strategic Competition from the Power Cycle Perspective*, "Iranian Studies" 2005, 38(2), pp. 247-269.

[23] The use of visual elements in Iranian propaganda was preceded by many years of practice. Already in 1996, the Iranian House of Cartoon educational center was established in Tehran, specializing in cartoons and animations,

Palestinian refugees to that of Jews in concentration camps in his iconic message. In many of the works submitted to the competition, zoomorphic motifs were used, depicting Israelis as dangerous and disgusting animals, as well as the contamination of the Star of David with a swastika, the Star of David on German helmets, or turned into barbed wire choking the Palestinian population[24].

Iranian visual propaganda is complemented by the verbalization of a Holocaust-denying discourse. In December 2006, Iran hosted an international conference on the Holocaust organized in Tehran by the Institute of Political and International Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran. Due to the fact that the main message of the event was Holocaust denial, the most representative supporters of this trend took part in it[25]. President Ahmadinejad, then on the threshold of the new presidential administration, attended the closing ceremony, thus giving his full support to the initiative.

For the second time, the caricature competition about the Holocaust was organized on May 14-30, 2016, as part of the eleventh edition of the International Cartoon Biennale in Iran, by the Iran House of Cartoon and the Sarcheshmeh Cultural Complex[26]. The spokesman of the organizers and the secretary of the competition board – Masoud Shojaei Tabatabaei, indicated three important goals of the event: a response to the publication by the left-wing French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad causing controversy in the Muslim world[27], refusal to recognize Israel as a sovereign entity of international relations and recognition of the historical Holocaust as an element of the false mythobiography of the State of Israel[28]. The best works were to be exhibited at the Palestinian Art Museum of the Iranian capital, as well as other symbolic exhibition venues of the city.

Of the more than one hundred presented drawings, a large part were representations of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, compared to the Nazi leader – Adolf Hitler. Attention was also drawn to the Israeli control of Palestine, comparing its situation to the Nazi occupation by using the most representative emblems of World War II and the Nazi occupation.

---

whose purpose was to organize temporary exhibitions, act as the permanent secretariat of the Tehran International Caricature Biennale, and support for cartoonists and cartoon fans.

[24] *La Shoah en caricature à Téhéran*, "Le Figaro", 16.08.2006, https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2006/08/16/01003-20060816ARTWWW90265-la_shoah_en_caricature_a_teheran.php (04.05.2022).

[25] Among the Holocaust deniers, there are clear leaders such as David Irving in Great Britain, David Duke and Artur Butz in the United States, Robert Faurisson in France. Negationism in its most literal form seeks to recognize the Nazi genocide against six million European Jews as absolute confabulation in the sole interest of the State of Israel. In a more symbolic form, it equates the Jewish experience of the Holocaust with the justification for Middle Eastern expansionism - especially towards the Palestinian people, as exercised under "Israel's right to exist".

[26] M. Mohammadi, I*ranian Holocaust Cartoon Competitions and Exhibitions: Goals, Sponsors, and Themes,* May 11, 2016, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/PoliticalAnalysisEnglishFINAL.pdf.

[27] The most legible sign of opposition was the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo on January 7, 2015, killing 12 people, to which the Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has confessed. See: *Notatka BBN: Reakcje świata muzułmańskiego na zamach w Paryżu*, https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/informacje-o-bbn/publikacje/analizy-raporty-i-nota/6404,Notatka-BBN-Reakcje-swiata-muzulmanskiego-na-zamach-w-Paryzu.html (04.05.2022).

[28] M. Mohammadi, *Iranian Holocaust Cartoon...,* op. cit.

The winner of the second edition, at the same time the winner of the first prize of 12,000 dollars, was the French artist Zeon[29], for presenting the entrance gate to the Nazi death camp at the top of the cash register with six million cash inside[30].

From August 2010, there was also an Iranian satirical website called *Holocartoons*, launched in order to promote anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda, the main content of which was to question the Holocaust, defined as a lie created by Jews (and in particular by the State of Israel) to justify the occupation of Palestine. The website, presenting content in three languages: English, Arabic and Persian[31], was dedicated to "all those who were killed under the pretext of the Holocaust"[32]. The page opened with a musical theme from The Pink Panther by Henry Mancini. The published content was based mainly on Omid Mehdinejad's comic book, illustrated by caricaturist Maziyar Bazani. According to the independent Iranian news agency Fars, funding of the Holocartoon website belonged to independent cultural foundations, and the views of the site administrators contained content in line with the historic policy vectors of the government site.

These satirical drawings depicted long-nosed Jews plotting to spread a great Holocaust lie. A clear image of a long-nosed, greedy Jew-usurer, whose inseparable attribute is a purse full of money, has been used here, rooted in the European consciousness since the interwar period. Israeli soldiers stationed in Israel-controlled Palestinian territories have been compared to the Nazi occupiers[33]. Holocaust denial was mainly spoken of using caricatures[34]. On one of them, the Israeli tank is filling up with fuel at the Nazi gas station. Another depicts a soldier with a star of David on a helmet and a tank on the back loaded with cyclone B. The transition to the following pages was accompanied by a swastika icon[35]. Abraham H. Foxman, saved from the Holocaust, ADL National Director pointed out that the purpose of the creators of the Holocartoons website was to present contemporary Israelis, and in a broader context also Jews dispersed in the

---

[29] Zeon was arrested in the past in France for a drawing made during the 2009 Gaza massacre of a Palestinian child stabbed with a knife in the shape of the State of Israel, eventually acquitted in 2013. See: T. Firma, *French Cartoonist Zeon Arrested for Anti-Zionist Art,* March 13, 2015, https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/2015/03/13/french-cartoonist-zeon-arrested-for-anti-zionist-art/ (04.05.2022).

[30] *Winners of Iran's Holocaust CartoonContest Announced*, June 2, 2016, ADL Fighting Hate for Good, https://www.adl.org/blog/winners-of-irans-holocaust-cartoon-contest-announced (04.05.2022).

[31] *Iran Launches Cartoon Website Aimed as Questioning the Holocaust*, „Haaretz" 2010, August.

[32] The 1948 war that broke out after the proclamation of the State of Israel in May 1948 was fought between the allied Arab states and Israel. In Israeli historical rhetoric it is referred to as the war for independence, in the Palestinian perspective it is referred to as the catastrophe (*Nakhba*).

[33] The term Israeli occupation, occupied territories, or apartheid is present in the rhetoric of Palestinian human rights organizations, as well as Israeli human rights defenders (B'Tselem, Hagai, El Ad, Combatants for Peace), publicists and scholars. See: I. Papee, *Czystki etniczne w Palestynie,* trans. A. Sak, Warszawa 2017; Ben White, *Apartheid izraelski,* trans. P.M. Bartolik, Warszawa 2010. For example, the global social movement: *Boycott. Desinvestitions, Sanctions*, known as the BDS movement, popularized the notion of Israeli apartheid, see: official website of the organization: BDS. Freedom Justice Equality, https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds

[34] *Iran Launches Cartoon Webside Aimed at Questioning the Holocaust,* "Haarec" 2010, August 5. https://www.haaretz.com/1.5095700 (04.05.2022).

[35] A. Heller, *Iran Holocaust-denying website angers Israel*, "The Associated Press" 2010, August 6.

diaspora, as murderers and manipulators, trying through conspiracy and intrigue to achieve the goal of using the Holocaust also for getting rich[36].

The inspiration for creating Iranian anti-Zionist caricatures comes from several sources: medieval European anti-Semitic engravings (*Judensau* – Jews sucking sow udders, snake, the main theme of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion), Koranic representations of Jews as descendants of monkeys and pigs[37] and Persian figurations of Jews as dogs, unclean animals[38]. In terms of unclean creatures, Jews are also depicted as a swarm of flies arranged in the Star of David[39], a sly fox[40], or a voracious wolf[41].

It is important to include in these symbolism clear caricatures of figures from the Israeli establishment – mainly the multiple Prime Minister of Israel in 2009-2021 – Benjamin Netenyahu. The propaganda message is then carried out by deprecating and discrediting the political opponent, evoking appropriate associations with the help of clear signs and symbols.

CONCLUSIONS

In the propaganda message, iconography (posters, drawings, paintings, photos, allegories, caricatures), strongly influencing emotions, plays an important role. The image reaches the recipient more effectively than the read text and is easier to remember. The power of visual content is particularly evident in the era of "pictorial society", [42] where the image becomes not only a source of information, but a tool that shapes the perception of reality. The time of the world-picture, paraphrasing Martin Heidegger, is the world perceived as a picture and a picture perceived as the world.

Współuczestnictwo ma usprawiedliwiać agresywną irańską politykę wobec Izraela, rozkładając jej ciężar także na inne podmioty. A satirical drawing fits perfectly into this mechanism, preserving the strength of stereotypes in the consciousness of the potential recipient. That is why propaganda constituted in a satirical picture becomes an effective tool for shaping views in order to achieve the goals of the state as one of the determinants of *soft power* in foreign policy. By means of figurative visual messages, the Islamic Republic of Iran conducts an aggressive foreign policy aimed at weakening the image of individual countries, especially Israel and the United States, on the international arena, using various transmission

---

[36]*ADL: Iranian Web Site A Cesspool Of Anti-Semitism And Holocaust Denial*, https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-iranian-web-site-a-cesspool-of-anti-semitism-and-holocaust-denial (04.05.2022).

[37] *Rooz (Iran),* 2 February 2013*;* Khalaji, *Fars (Iran),* 16 September 2012, Shared by MEMRI cited after: E. Zigron, *Obraz Żyda w oczach islamskiego reżimu Iranu. Cz. III. Dehumanizowanie Żydów w karykaturach inspirowanych klasycznym antysemityzmem europejskim,* The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), 2 May 2013, https://www2.memri.org/polish/obraz-zyda-w-oczach-islamskiego-rezimu-iranu-czesc-iii-dehuma-nizowanie-zydow-w-karykaturach-inspirowanych-klasycznym-antysemityzmem-europejskim/2917# .

[38] Shahin Kalantari, *Fars (Iran),* 16 April 2013*; Aviny News (Ira*n), 29 January 2012 *,* Khalaji, *Fars (Iran),* 14 November 2011; Reza Bagheri Saraf, *Fars (Iran),* 3 December 2012, Shared by MEMRI,

[39] Kamran Sokhanpardaz, *Jam News (Iran),* 3 July 2012, Shared by MEMRI (as above).

[40] Saed Sadekhi, *Fars (Iran),* 12 April 2012, Shared by MEMRI (as above).

[41] *Zitova.ir(Iran),* 20 May 2012; Abbas Goodarzi, *Fars (Iran), 5 June 2012*, Shared by MEMRI (as above).

[42] The visual content predominates primarily on the Internet.

channels: competitions, websites, murals, propaganda posters, creating them in such a way that that they can reach the international community undisturbed, and at the same time that the international community can contribute to their creation. Participation is intended to justify Iran's aggressive policy towards Israel, distributing its burden also to other entities.

The anti-Zionist rhetoric has basically two goals – first, it is to engage the international community to legitimate hostility towards the State of Israel and thus to justify Iran's continued hostility towards Israel; second – it is to perpetuate the dominant position of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a leader in the fight against occidentalism in a geopolitical space dominated by Islam. The anti-Israel narrative serves Iran to become hegemonic in the region.

REFERENCES

Abrahamian Ervand. 2008. Historia współczesnego Iranu [The History of Modern Iran], Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.

ADL. 2016. Winners of Iran's Holocaust CartoonContest Announced. ADL Fighting Hate for Good. June 2, In https://www.adl.org/blog/winners-of-irans-holocaust-cartoon-contest-announced.

ADL. 2013. ADL: Iranian Web Site A Cesspool Of Anti-Semitism And Holocaust Denial, https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-iranian-web-site-a-cesspool-of-anti-semitism-and-holocaust-denial.

Axworthy Michael. 2014. Revolutionary Iran. A History of the Islamic Republic. London: Oxford University Press.

Barzegar Kayah. n/a. The Assasination of Quassem Soleimani Institutionalizes Anti-American Sentiment in Iran, Middle East and Economic Institute, https://mepei.com/the-assassination-of-qassem-soleimani-institutionalizes-anti-american-sentiment-in-iran/

BBN. n/a. Notatka BBN: Reakcje świata muzułmańskiego na zamach w Paryżu [Note by BBN: Reactions of the Muslim World to the Attack in Paris], In https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/informacje-o-bbn/publikacje/analizy-raporty-i-nota/6404,Notatka-BBN-Reakcje-swiata-muzulmanskiego-na-zamach-w-Paryzu.html.

BDS. n/a. Freedom Justice Equality, In https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds.

Bower Gordon H., Karlin Martin B., Dueck Alvin. 1975. "Comprehension and Memory for Pictures". Memory & Cognition 3: 216-220.

Çetin Muharrem, Mehmed Ali Gazi, Caner Çaki. 2018. "The Examination of the Anti-USA Propaganda Posters in the Iran Revolution According to Claude Lévi Strauss". International Journal of Social Science 1(3).

CyberDefence24. 2020. Propagandowa ofensywa Iranu dopiero przed nami [Iran's Propaganda Offensive is Yet to Come], January 10, https://cyberdefence24.pl/bezpieczenstwo-informacyjne/propagandowa-ofensywa-iranu-dopiero-przed-nami.

Demonizing the Enemy. The Graphics of Revolution and War. Iranian Posters Arts, The University of Chicago Library, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/graphics-revolution-and-war-iranian-poster-arts/demonizing-enemy/.

Fira Terry. 2015. French Cartoonist Zeon Arrested for Anti-Zionist Art, March 13, In https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/2015/03/13/french-cartoonist-zeon-arrested-for-anti-zionist-art/.

GD3News. 2017. Iran's replacement to Facebook Cloob.com shuts shop, October 25, In https://www.gd3news.com/irans-replacement-facebook-cloob-com-shuts-shop/.

Haarec. 2010. Iran Launches Cartoon Webside Aimed at Questioning the Holocaust. August 5, In https://www.haaretz.com/1.5095700.

Hamera Paweł. 2020. „Rysunek satyryczny w polskich i anglojęzycznych badaniach historycznych oraz medioznawczych [A Satirical Drawing in Polish and English-Language Historical and Media Studies]". Naukowy Przegląd Dziennikarski 4: 83-106.

Heller Aron. 2010. "Iran Holocaust-denying website angers Israel". The Associated Press August.

Le Figaro. 2006. La Shoah en caricature à Téhéran, August 16, https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2006/08/16/01003-20060816ARTWWW90265-la_shoah_en_caricature_a_teheran.php.

Michael Leonard Willy. 2021. "National socialist propaganda in late Reza-Shah Iran: the case of Khaterat-e Hitler by Mohsen Jahansuz". British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. online first. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1945430

Mohammadi Majid, 2016. Iranian Holocaust Cartoon Competitions and Exhibitions: Goals, Sponsors, and Themes. May 11, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/PoliticalAnalysisEnglishFINAL.pdf.

Morel Éléonore (ed.). 2020. Orwellian State: Islamic Republic of Iran's State Media as a Weapon of Mass Suppression. Fidh, Justice for Iran, No. 749a, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/iran749aweb.pdf.

Parsi Trita. 2005. "Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed: Strategic Competition from the Power Cycle Perspective". Iranian Studies 38(2): 247-269

Rolston Bill. 2020. "When everywhere is Karbala: Murals, martyrdom and propaganda in Iran". Memory Studies 13(1): 3–23.

Stelmach Katarzyna. 2014. "Mediatyzacja propagandy – propagandyzacja mediów: wczoraj i dziś [Mediatization of Propaganda – Propagandization of the Media: Yesterday and Today]". Zeszyty Prasoznawcze 57(2): 408-421.

Stempień Marta. 2015. Irański system polityczny a proces nuklearyzacji Islamskiej Republiki Iranu [The Iranian Political System and the Nuclearization Process of the Islamic Republic of Iran], In Współpraca międzynarodowa a rozwój regionalny. Wyzwania i perspektywy [International Cooperation and Regional Development. Challenges and Perspectives]. Warszawa: Difin, 25-36

Tarasiuk Renata. 2021. Językowe aspekty bezpieczeństwa informacyjnego [Linguistic Aspects of Information Security]. In Informacyjny wymiar bezpieczeństwa państw I jednostek [Information dimension of Security of States and Individuals], Siedlce.

Tavakolian Nevsha. 2020. "The City Had Transformed". Scenes from Tehran's Mass Mourning of Qasem Soleimani. January 10, https://time.com/longform/qasem-soleimani-tehran-iran-photos/.

Tosun Roszan. 2005. „Oblicza wroga w propagandzie współczesnego Iranu [The Faces of the Enemy in the Propaganda of Modern Iran]". Bliski Wschód 2: 177-193.

Zigron E. 2013. Obraz Żyda w oczach islamskiego reżimu Iranu. Cz. III. Dehumanizowanie Żydów w karykaturach inspirowanych klasycznym antysemityzmem europejskim [The Image of the Jew in the Eyes of Iran's Islamic Regime. Part III. Dehumanizing Jews in Caricatures Inspired by Classical European Anti-Semitism]. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), 2 May, https://www2.memri.org/polish/obraz-zyda-w-oczach-islamskiego-rezimu-iranu-czesc-iii-dehumanizowanie-zydow-w-karykaturach-inspirowanych-klasycznym-antysemityzmem-europejskim/2917# .

Zimmt Raz. 2015. Portrait of Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force, Instigator of Iranian Subversion and Terrorism in the Middle East and around the Globe, The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israeli Intelligence & Heritage Commemoration Center, October 29.