

Diplomatic 'Fantasy'

Analysis of the Representation of Iran in 'The Diplomat'

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The recently released Netflix series "The Diplomat" is gaining attention for its IMDb rating of eight. The show falls within the political thriller genre and prominently features Iran in its storyline. Unlike earlier depictions, this series provides a novel viewpoint on Iran, highlighting its diminished condition due to Western sanctions. Reports suggest that the series is already in the process of producing its second season.

However, what truly sets this series apart is Iran's significant role within the narrative's development. Historically, Western representations of Iran often echoed the portrayal expressed by George Bush Jr. post September 11 attacks, labeling Iran as part of the "axis of evil." In contrast, the image of Iran depicted in "The Diplomat" differs from the past. There has been a noticeable shift in how West-

erners perceive Iran. The series showcases Iran as a nation heavily impacted by Western sanctions, no longer willing to confront Western powers. Throughout the show, Iranian leaders exhibit a keen interest in cooperating with the West, aiming to extricate themselves from their predicament, even if such collaboration strains Iran's relationships with its friendly nations. Crafting such depiction of

Iran in the Netflix series seems to be a response to prevailing Western public sentiment. Presently, Western societies grapple with questions surrounding the efficacy of the US-imposed sanctions that were originally intended, according to Western politicians, to bring Iran to reason. The series raises inquiries about whether these sanctions have truly achieved their intended impact or if Iran can still

pursue its international foreign policy goals in spite of them. Additionally, the series appears to conduct a psychological maneuver against Iranian society. Westerners are seemingly striving to position themselves as the victors in the sanctions scenario, thereby influencing Iranian perceptions. Ultimately, "The Diplomat" aims to depict Iran as an untrustworthy ally capable of betraying its partners at any juncture.



Former political representations of Iran

Although it's not the first instance of Iran being featured in the American entertainment industry – consider the movie 'Argo' or the video games 'Battlefield 3' and 'Splinter Cell' – what elevates the significance of this particular series is its contemporary emergence and its novel portrayal of Iran. This contrast sets it apart from earlier productions that predominantly depicted Iran through the lens of the "axis of evil."

Overview of the series' scenario

The series opens with a British aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf facing a missile attack, causing sailor casualties. Due to its proximity to Iran's coast and the presence of an IRGC fast boat, suspicion arises regarding Iran's involvement, leading both the British and American governments to question Iran's role. In a bid for collaboration, the American president appoints a seasoned diplomat, experienced in resolving West Asian crises, as the ambassador to England.

Despite prevailing anti-Iran sentiments among American and British officials, the diplomat and her colleague's husband, given their engagement with Iran and regional knowledge, believe that Iran's weakened condition mitigates the likelihood of escalating

tensions. However, this conviction is challenged when Iranian intelligence agents abduct the diplomat's husband and establish a connection with Rasoul Shahin, a prominent figure and Iran's deputy foreign minister. Rasoul, linked to JCPOA negotiations, owes a debt to the diplomat's husband for his care during illness. He refutes Iran's involvement in the attack and proposes demonstrating goodwill by halting an operation targeting an American general linked to the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani. Meanwhile, the British Foreign Ministry summons the Iranian ambassador to address public unrest. In a discreet meeting with the British Foreign Minister and an undercover American ambassador, the Iranian envoy reveals information about the attack's orchestrator, Lenkov, and his group, symbolizing Russia's Wagner forces. The Iranian ambassador's sudden death from a heart attack follows the meeting, prompting the American ambassador to flee to evade exposure. Russia, displeased with the actions of the Lenkov group, cooperates with the West, disclosing Lenkov's location. The season concludes with uncertainty about whether Lenkov and his group were hired by the British Prime Minister, leaving viewers intrigued.

Iran's representation

Rasoul, a character with a pivotal but concise role in propelling the narrative forward, emerges as a close associate of the Iranian Leader, holding the title of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, Rasoul shares a historical bond with the Leader, deepening his

familial connection. His significance lies in his instrumental role during the JCPOA agreement negotiations, functioning as a bridge for information exchange between the US and Iran. Despite his proximity to the Leader and his role as a confidant, Rasoul diverges from the common perception that "America is the great devil." This unique perspective allows for smoother cooperation with Americans. Notably, Rasoul holds a sense of indebtedness towards the Americans, stemming from their support during his illness and subsequent treatment. Rasoul's character encapsulates a faction within the system striving for compromise with the West. Despite their influential positions in the decision-making echelons, they actively seek avenues for reconciliation. Given their perception of Iran's vulnerable stance, these individuals aim to mitigate tensions and foster preliminary collaborations with Western counterparts. The Iranian intelligence agents are depicted as a male and a female character. Under Rasoul's command, they incapacitate and abduct the diplomat's spouse. Rasoul expresses disapproval towards these agents after becoming aware of the details of the abduction. The series portrays Iran's intelligence personnel as acting capriciously, often disregarding superior orders. Additionally, Rasoul portrays them as impulsive and lacking control when discussing them with the diplomat's husband. The role of the Iranian envoy in England and his deputy are played by two Afghan actors who speak to each other

completely in the Dari dialect, which shows that despite the use of an Iranian actor for the role of Rasoul, the filmmakers don't have a correct understanding of the various Persian dialects and the difference between Iranians and Afghans. The ambassador's appearance and clothes and his deputy are messed up and are not worthy of diplomatic agents at all. In this series, the ambassador, who represents Iran's diplomatic agents, is very timid, and when the tension rises a little, the Iranian ambassador has a heart attack and dies. Even though Iran does not have diplomatic ties with the US, he readily agreed to meet with the American ambassador in the office of the British Foreign Secretary, provided that the rest of the ministry's staff did not find out. The exchanged dialogues between the Iranian and the American ambassadors, as well as the storyline, are designed to create the image of an unreliable ally from Iran. In a part of the series, Iran's ambassador to England is assigned by the Iranian authorities to provide the American ambassador and the British foreign minister with information about their allies, namely Russia and the Lenkov (Wagner) group, to prevent the West from getting angry at Iran. It can be concluded that due to the positive image that the Russian people have of Iran, as well as the effort of the Putin government to strengthen the positive feeling of the Russian people towards Iran. The Westerners, who are unhappy with this situation, try to destroy this image and the positive feeling of the Russian people about Iranians. Discussions about Iran often

emphasize its economy's collapse due to Western sanctions, with both Westerners and Iranian officials highlighting this point. Iranian authorities show reluctance to escalate tensions with the West, fearing severe repercussions that could further harm the economy. Consequently, they readily cooperate with Western entities. While recent harsh Western sanctions have undeniably inflicted significant damage on Iran's economy and people's lives, Western research institutions and experts suggest that these measures have not fully achieved their intended objectives. Over time, the sanctions' impact has lessened, and Iran's economy has adjusted. Despite this, Western sources seemingly aim to manipulate Iranian public opinion by accentuating the idea that sanctions have completely crippled Iran's economy. Recent TV series and movies centered on Iran suggest a comprehensive media effort from the West. This campaign not only targets Iranians, particularly the middle class, but also people in allied nations and those seeking to collaborate with Iran. Its goals include distorting perceptions among Iranians and their allies and undermining Iran's credibility as a dependable partner in the eyes of nations seeking increased cooperation. To counter this, media outlets are advised to highlight Iran's real-world influence and capabilities on the global stage, showcasing its potential as a significant international player. This approach aims to enhance public awareness of Iran's ability to shape the behavior of other nations.

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