

The Ideological Appeal and Its Impact on Iran's Strategic Depth in West Asia

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The article's redefinition of soft power as inherently "Islamic-revolutionary" lacks engagement with foundational Western scholarship (e.g., Nye's original framework in *Soft Power*, 2004) and fails to establish how this model differs empirically from established soft power mechanisms. Without comparative analysis, the claim of a "novel form" remains unsubstantiated and theoretically underdeveloped.

The article repeatedly uses "normative legitimacy" as a key outcome but never defines it operationally. How is "normative legitimacy" measured? Through diplomatic recognition? Public opinion surveys? The lack of clear metrics renders this central concept untestable and theoretically vague.

The role of Commander Soleimani (Section 3.3.3) is presented as undisputed historical fact, yet scholarly debates about his strategic impact (e.g., whether he created the Resistance Axis or merely amplified existing networks) are ignored. This risks presenting partisan narrative as academic consensus.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The methodology is entirely absent, making it impossible to assess how the "six main axes" of soft power were identified or validated. Were these derived from qualitative analysis, expert interviews, or textual discourse analysis? Without methodological transparency, the framework appears arbitrarily constructed rather than evidence-based.

The concept of the "Resistance Axis" is treated as a monolithic, cohesive entity, yet scholarly literature (e.g., Bakhash, 2021; Rizvi, 2023) documents significant internal divisions among groups like Hezbollah, PMF, and Ansarullah. The article ignores these tensions, overstating the Axis's "high cohesion" and "sustainability" without evidence.

The analysis of cultural tools (e.g., Ashura, Arbāeen) conflates religious practice with political influence. For instance, the claim that Arbāeen pilgrimages "directly contributed to strengthening social and political convergence" requires empirical data—e.g., surveys of pilgrims' political attitudes—not mere assertion. Without such evidence, this causal link is speculative.

Section 4.3 on sanctions' impact is superficial. It states sanctions "reduced Iran's capacity to produce cultural messages" but provides no data on how (e.g., decline in Press TV viewership, reduced academic exchanges). The claim that "sanctions have not fully weakened soft power" is asserted without counter-evidence from Western media coverage or regional public opinion polls.

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2. Revised

Editor's decision: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.