



## The Islamic Republic of Iran in the Rhetoric of the Nation of Islam

Foad Izadi<sup>1</sup>, Hassan Hosseini<sup>2</sup>, Setareh Sadeqi Mohammadi<sup>3</sup>, Susan Anjomerooz<sup>4</sup>

1. Associate Professor of American Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (f.izadi@ut.ac.ir)
2. Assistant Professor of American Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (hahosseini@ut.ac.ir)
3. PhD in North American Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (corresponding author) (Setareh.sadeqi@ut.ac.ir)
4. PhD in Comparative Religion and Mysticism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (Su.anjomerooz@ut.ac.ir)

(Received: Jul. 15, 2019 Revised: Oct. 28, 2019 Accepted: Dec. 17, 2019)

### Abstract

When the Nation of Islam was first established in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad, it managed to attract a segment of African Americans and persuade them to convert to Islam as taught by the organization. Despite the fact that the Nation of Islam has walked through a path of modifications and controversies, to this date it continues to attract African Americans in the United States. In fact, a significant number of well-known African Americans converted to Islam through the Nation of Islam. Drawing from Jowett's neutral definitions of propaganda, this paper employs Jowett and O'Donnell's 10-step propaganda analysis to examine how the Islamic Republic of Iran is presented in the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam. A study of the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam produced on the Islamic Republic of Iran as presented in the organization's most important outlet, the Finalcall.com, shows that the NOI utilizes resonance, opinion leaders, and particular language in order to maximize the effect of its propaganda regarding Iran on its target audience and to reinforce ideological, emotional closeness with the Iranian nation.

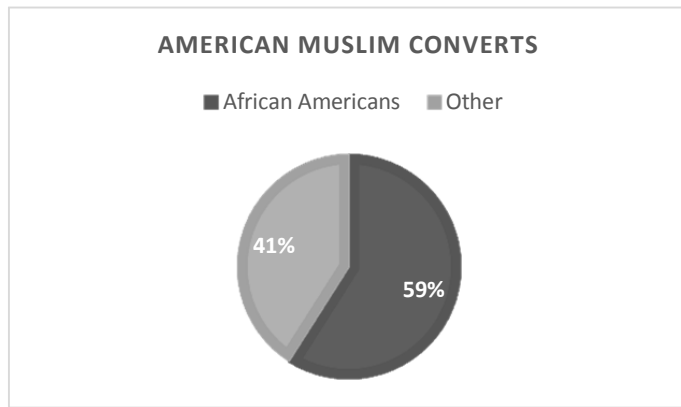
**Keywords:** Islamic Republic of Iran, Nation of Islam, Propaganda analysis, Rhetoric, Social movement.

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to study the Nation of Islam's rhetoric regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran using Jowett and O'Donnell's 10-step propaganda analysis. The research tries to answer the following questions:

- What is the ideology and purpose of NOI's propaganda as observed in its rhetoric regarding Iran?
- What are some of the techniques the NOI uses to maximize the effect of its propaganda?

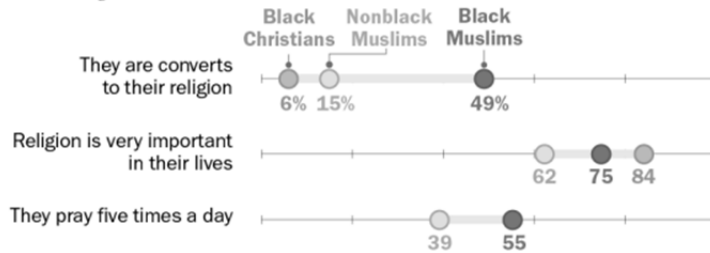
Based on a 2015 PEW study, 23% of the entire American Muslim population are converts. Of all the converts, 59% are African American. The study further indicates that 23% of the U.S.'s Muslim population are African Americans, out of which 40% are native born (PEW, 2015).



Another PEW poll concluded in 2014 that approximately half of African American Muslims are converts to Islam and 2% of African American Muslims surveyed identified with the NOI (Mohamed & Diamant, 2019).

### Roughly half of black Muslims are converts to Islam

% who say ...



Source: Data for Muslims come from survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017. Data for black Christians come from the 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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**Figure 1.** Percentage of Black Muslims and Black Christians in the U.S. (Mohamed & Diamant, 2019)

NOI is believed to have had about 250,000 members at its strongest times (Carter, 2017). The organization is currently believed to have between 10,000 and 50,000 members (Melton, 2012; McFarquhar, 2007).

It is believed that the NOI and its leader Farrakhan enjoy significant popularity among African Americans (Piazza & Sniderman, 2002, p. 83; Joseph, 2020; ADL, 2020). According to scholars, the NOI owes its increasing size and popularity in the 1930s to Fard and later to Elijah Muhammad, and its largest conversion during the 1950s to Malcolm X (Schaefer, 2008, p. 920). It is also claimed that under Farrakhan’s leadership, the NOI developed into “the most popular Black Muslim movement in the world” (Jeffries, 2019, p. 6). Lee argues that the NOI is considered the most successful religious-political group in fighting White

supremacy and striving to find a resolution to the African American plight against the U.S. government (Lee, 1996, p. 2). It is also believed that the NOI is the most successful movement to convert Americans to Islam (Berg, 2015, p. 15). Critics of the NOI attribute the movement's popularity among African Americans to the community's loss of faith in the white U.S. society (Singh, 1997, p. 234).

### **1.1. The Birth of the NOI**

When the NOI was first established in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad, it managed to attract a segment of African Americans and persuade them to convert to Islam, as taught by the organization (Shalaby & Chilcott, 1972, p. 4). The NOI emerged out of a combination of messianic and nationalist backgrounds of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) and the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA). Fard Muhammad adopted and reshaped the teachings of UNIA and MSTA and established his own separatist doctrine. According to Gibson, Fard Muhammad's teachings fulfilled and made use of the needs of the African American proletariat in Detroit (Gibson, 2012, p. 13). The NOI considers itself 'the catalyst for the growth and development of Islam in America' (Farrakhan L. , 2017)

Elijah Muhammad became Fard Muhammad's first officer and appointed the Minister of Islam. After Fard's mysterious disappearance, in 1934, Elijah took the leadership position, moved to Chicago and began to reshape the movement (Shalaby & Chilcott, 1972, pp. 3-5). According to Edward Curtis, the NOI was influenced by Ahmadiyya movement; Elijah Muhammad and the intellectuals around him recurrently quoted from Ahmadi literature,

including translations of the Quran by the movement (Curtis, 2007, p. 868).

The NOI laid the foundation of its leaders' ideology on Islam, albeit, a reading of Islam that differs from the mainstream Islamic ideology. Despite those differences, and although the NOI's perception of Islam is centered on a black liberation perspective, the movement shares two fundamental tenets with the Islamic Revolution of Iran:

- the existence of an Islamic doctrine;
- the existence of opposition to oppressing establishments.

It should be noted that the NOI's reading of Islam differs from Islam practiced in Iran and other Muslim countries. The IRI's official religion is Shia Islam that considers the Quran as the divine scripture and holds monotheism, the prophethood of Muhammad, and Imamate of the 12 Imams as core beliefs. Similarly, the NOI considers Prophet Muhammad the last divine prophet and Quran as the divine scripture; however, it also holds that Fard was God incarnate and later that he was the Great Mahdi incarnate—a belief considered heretical by other Muslims. When Farrakhan revived the NOI, he made efforts to reinterpret Fard and Elijah's teachings in order to move his organization closer to other Muslims. His efforts included appointing a national Imam, teaching Arabic and Quran to members, organizing weekly Friday prayers, establishing ties with other Muslims, etc. (Berg, 2009, pp. 53-54).

## 1.2. NOI Funds

The NOI does not publicly announce its financial resources; however, it claims to be funded by public donations (including

religious obligations) as well as its own local businesses. It is also reported that the NOI received \$364,500 from the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and Department of Justice between 2008 and 2019 to teach inmates. The highest payment was reportedly under Obama and amounted to \$47,000; this sum was later decreased under Trump administration (Goodman, 2018). Demetric Muhammad defended the NOI by writing, “The Nation of Islam, which is comprised of tax paying citizens, has a right to do business with the American government” (Muhammad D. , 2018).

### **1.3. The NOI Relation with Muslim Governments**

Elijah Muhammad established political relations with a number of Muslim countries. He entrusted Malcolm X with contacting Arab and African officials at the U.N.; in 1957, Malcolm organized a conference on colonialism attended by delegates from Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, and Morocco. Moreover, Elijah Muhammad supported and established ties with Nasser and in 1959, Malcolm met him in Egypt (Fishman & Soage, 2013, pp. 64-65). After Elijah Muhammad, W.D. Muhammad tried to move the NOI towards the mainstream Islam practiced in the Muslim world, which ironically came with a withdrawal from an anti-Western rhetoric that originally helped the NOI to become popular with Nasser and the likes (Fishman & Soage, 2013, p. 66). When W.D. Muhammad was appointed, he maintained close ties with the Saudi government from 1980 until 1994. As part of a mission to religiously influence African Americans, the House of Saud put W.D. Muhammad in charge of deciding on U.S. Muslim hajj pilgrims’ visa and paid his organization an annual \$70,000 stipend in return for supporting U.S. foreign policy decisions that benefitted the Saudi government, including the 1990 intervention in Iraq (Skeery, 2005, p. 23).

However, according to certain reports, while he oversaw the NOI approaching to Sunnis Islam, W.D. Muhammad “led his organization to variously accept and resist Saudi efforts to dictate the terms of Islam in America to African-Americans (Diamant, 2016, p. 71)”. When Farrakhan resurrected the NOI, he began to establish ties with Muslim countries including Libya and later Iran. He was offered \$1 billion by Gaddafi, which President Clinton tried to block (Stevenson, 1996).

## **2. Propaganda Analysis**

Jowett and O’Donnell describe propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett G. , 2008, p. 1).

It should be noted that the methodology of the research used in this study is named by its original developers as ‘Propaganda Analysis’; however, in this paper the word propaganda is used as a neutral term that does not hold negative or favorable connotations. The definition of the term propaganda in this research is closest to the following definition—also offered by Jowett: “Propaganda, in its most neutral sense, means to disseminate or promote particular ideas” (Jowett G. , Propaganda, Visual Communication of, 2008, p. 1). Hence the research does not intend to portray NOI’s media activities as either favorable or negative.

Jowett and O’Donnell have designed a 10-step plan of analysis that incorporates the major elements of propaganda. They argue that the plan may not be perfectly applicable to the study of propaganda in progress, for the outcome is yet to be known. However, studying propaganda in progress allows the analyst to

observe media utilization and audience response directly and within the actual settings, even though long-range effects could remain unknown for some time in a contemporary study (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, p. 314). The 10 divisions for propaganda analysis are as follows:

1. The ideology and purpose of the propaganda campaign
2. The context in which the propaganda occurs
3. Identification of the propagandist
4. The structure of the propaganda organization
5. The target audience
6. Media utilization techniques
7. Special techniques to maximize effect
8. Audience reaction to various techniques
9. Counterpropaganda, if present
10. Effects and evaluation

## **2. 1. Ideology and Purpose**

The ideology of the NOI mainly emphasizes on a history of White evilness and deception (Gibson & Berg, 2017, p. 139). The NOI's creed has been shaped around notions that are most relatable for African Americans and their collective experience of being victimized by discrimination and White supremacy in the United States. The NOI was originally comprised of lower class African Americans and with improved standards of living among the members, the organization began to attract middle-class African Americans (Lee, 1996, p. 94).

NOI's ideology provided a view of the history that overturned white supremacists myths, and gave tidings to its members that the horrendous situation would end, if only African Americans would adopt the Islamic identity (Berg, 2009, p. 140).



White deception and evilness are stressed and ubiquitous in the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam: “whites in general and Britons and Americans in particular are regarded as Allah’s greatest enemies” (Gibson & Berg, 2017, p. 139). Hence, the NOI has always maintained an anti-Israeli perspective when it comes to the development in the West Asian region where there is a Muslim majority population. A key part of the NOI’s association with the larger Muslim community stems from their “shared political goals, commonly held anti-Western and anti-colonial rhetoric, and perceived cultural and ethnic ties” (Fishman & Soage, 2013, p. 60).

In line with the organization’s condemnation of Whites in power, particularly the U.S., and dubbing them as ‘Allah’s enemies’, Farrakhan has always denounced the United States’ aggressive policy against the Islamic Republic. Farrakhan was first invited in 1996 by President Rafsanjani to visit Iran to attend the annual celebration of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. Farrakhan defied the United States quest for controlling oil in the Middle East, including Iran; he has criticized CIA’s coup against the democratically-elected Prime Minister Mosaddeq as well as U.S.’s cooperation with Saddam Hussain during his invasion of the country for 8 years. He warned George Bush (Detroit News, 2002) against the war in Iraq, and Barack Obama (Farrakhan L. , 2012) and Donald Trump (Farrakhan L. , 2020) against any military action targeting Iran.

The NOI has tried to make it clear to its audience that while it does not agree with the anti-American sentiments and slogans observed by nations in the West Asian region, it considers those sentiments an anticipated consequence of U.S. foreign policy in the region. Hence the NOI’s core beliefs in their rhetoric regarding Iran can be summarized as follows:

- The aggressive U.S. policy against Iran makes the United States the enemy of Allah, the demon, or Satan;
- The U.S.'s foreign policy towards Iran accelerates the Fall of America;
- Iran is the only nation in the world to seek true theocracy (Farrakhan L. , 2020).

## 2. 2. The Context

To fathom the underlying context for the Nation of Islam's rhetoric regarding Iran, it is necessary to take into account the hostile relations between the U.S. and the Islamic Republic since the 1979 Revolution.

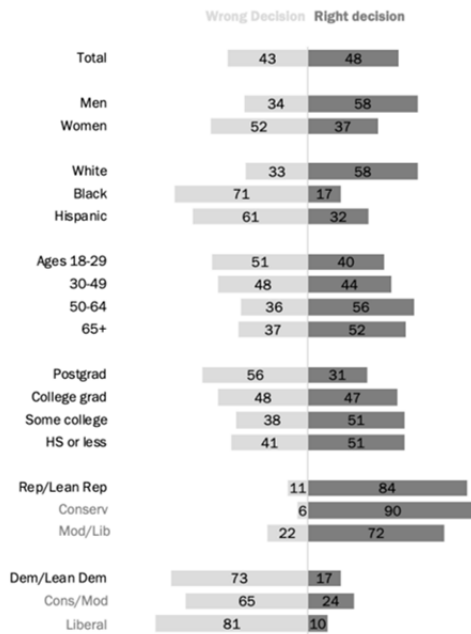
The NOI found overlapping concerns with the Islamic Republic in two main areas: the first common concern was the opposition to the U.S. for its hostile policies that targeted non-Whites and Muslims at home and abroad. In other words, joining Iran in its condemnation of the United States' aggressive foreign policy against Iran, in particular and against the West Asian region in general became an integral part of the Nation of Islam's rhetoric regarding Iran. Second, in line with the Nation of Islam's efforts to proliferate its perceived legitimacy among Muslims, the organization stretched out to the Muslim World including Iran to establish ties with Muslim states and hence win more legitimacy among Muslim nations. In doing so, the NOI elaborated on shared Islamic rituals and concepts; yet, the organization did not leave out core beliefs that radically contradict those held by orthodox Muslims.

The rhetoric of the NOI takes place in a context of challenges that have always existed, even though the spectrum and strength of those challenges have varied over time. For instance, regarding the

more recent escalation of tensions between the United States and Iran following the U.S. assassination of General Soleimani in Iraq, Americans of different races and different political parties demonstrated varying opinions regarding U.S. airstrike that killed General Soleimani. According to a survey conducted by PEW in January 2020, shortly after the assassination, 48 percent of adult U.S. citizens assessed President Trump’s decision to conduct airstrikes that led to the assassination of General Soleimani as ‘the right decision’; however, this percentage is drastically different for African Americans (PEW, 2020).

**Wide partisan, demographic differences in views of U.S. decision to conduct airstrike that killed Soleimani**

*% who say U.S. decision to conduct the airstrike that killed Iranian Gen. Soleimani was the ...*



Notes: Don't know responses not shown. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 8-13, 2020.

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**Figure 2.** American's view of Trump's decision to assassinate General Soleimani (PEW, 2020)

In other words, among those surveyed, African Americans were the demographic group whose members mostly considered the terrorist act of Trump as a wrong decision. In fact, 71% of African Americans, regardless of their political party, believed that the strike that killed General Soleimani was a wrong decision made by Trump.

### **2. 3. Identification of the Propagandist**

On the frontline of the Nation of Islam's propaganda stands its top leader, Louis Farrakhan who plays the role of a powerful rhetorician for the organization. Nonetheless, the Nation of Islam's propaganda is not merely produced by him. The Nation of Islam's various ministers, with designated missions as well as the organization's media outlets and social media platforms including the Final Call website, YouTube channel, Facebook accounts, 'Twitter Army', snapchat, and Instagram accounts are among the most active means of propaganda from which the organization benefits. A search of the word 'Iran' in the website of Final Call demonstrates 2,820 results. In fact, "the Final Call unapologetically covers the abuse of power by the U.S. government and military against less powerful countries such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria" and "maintains a close eye on American dealings with Iran and provides a needed account of Israel and its dealing with Palestinians" (Jeffries, 2019, p. 7).

### **2. 4. Structure of the Propagandist Organization**

Minister Farrakhan stands at the highest rank of the Nation of Islam as the leader and the foremost decision maker of the organization; his words are therefore regarded as the words of Elijah Muhammad. In other words, he is considered to shoulder a mission

assigned by Elijah Muhammad to continue his legacy of saving African Americans from the evils of the white supremacist establishment in the United States and expand his message across the world. When Minister Louis Farrakhan speaks, he echoes the NOI.

Next in order stands Ishmael Muhammad, who is regarded as the National Assistant Minister for the NOI. He is the son of Elijah Muhammad and his secret wife, Mother Tynnetta Muhammad, who publicly declared being a widow of the top leader of the organization only after his death. Ishmael Muhammad is his oldest son who often flanks Minister Louis Farrakhan in his public speeches. Furthermore, he delivers weekly speeches for the Nation of Islam, which are widely broadcast to his audience through the official website of the organization as well as Minister Ishmael's personal social media accounts. He is considered one of the main communicators of the Nation of Islam.

At the same level of significance stands the most important woman of the NOI, Dr. Ava Muhammad. She is the National Spokesperson to Minister Farrakhan, a status formerly held by Malcolm X. Titled as the Student National Spokesperson to the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, she also delivers weekly speeches that are broadcast on the official website of the Nation of Islam, at times shared by her official social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook. She became the first female Minister in the history of the organization. A member of the New York Bar Association after she was suspended from practice of Law in 2013, Ava Muhammad earned her Juris Doctorate from Georgetown University Law Center in 1975. In addition to her weekly speeches, she hosts a radio show called *Elevated Places*. Dr. Ava Muhammad was dubbed one of the most powerful African American women by *Essence* magazine (Shakir-Muhammad, 2018).

Another high ranking position within the Nation of Islam is that of the International Representative of Farrakhan. The position is held by Minister Akbar Muhammad. He has traveled extensively as the International Representative of the NOI to many countries and has met with important figures and personalities of other nations in a bid to establish connections with various countries and enhance the organization's international reputation. He is particularly well-known in the African continent where he enjoys stronger influence and connections. Among missions he pursued in Africa on behalf of the NOI was the Ghana Mission. Later the NOI expanded its international outreach and established mosques and study groups across the African continent as well as in Britain, France, and throughout the Caribbean (Pinn, 2009, p. 249). In line with the international missions headed by Minister Akbar Muhammad, the NOI sent delegates to Iran on a few occasions upon formal invitations by official conventions, leading to further cooperation between the NOI and the IRI on common grounds.

Minister Akbar Muhammad's position comes particularly in the spotlight when examining the NOI's relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, for the reason that, to this day, the NOI views the ongoing plight of the African American community in their pursuit of equal human rights along the lines of the Muslim world's struggles of the Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Iranians and the rest in their fight against the Western imperialism and European-American capitalism as well as white supremacy (Jeffries, 2019, p. 10).

Equally influential in terms of spiritual position, next stands Sultan Rahman Muhammad, the National Imam of the NOI. Imam Sultan Rahman Muhammad is the great grandson of Elijah Muhammad, who was appointed to the position in 2012. His position is of particular significance since he is the first person to be appointed as a National Imam for the NOI. The decision by

Farrakhan to define a new position within the NOI that leads the spiritual and Islamic education of the organization suggests yet another step by the leadership to bring the NOI closer to the mainstream Islam. The Final Call, the NOI's most important media outlet, describes the purpose pursued by the decision as “connecting Muslims worldwide undergirds the reason for the initiative, fulfilling a commission from Elijah Muhammad to find a way to unite with the Islamic World” (Muhammad B. E., 2013). He leads the weekly Friday congregational prayer at the NOI's headquarter in Chicago, Mosque Maryam. He was missioned by Farrakhan to assist ministers to enhance their knowledge of Islamic prayers as well as other Islamic practices. He teaches Arabic and Islamic Civilization at NOI's schools which are called “Muhammad University of Islam”.

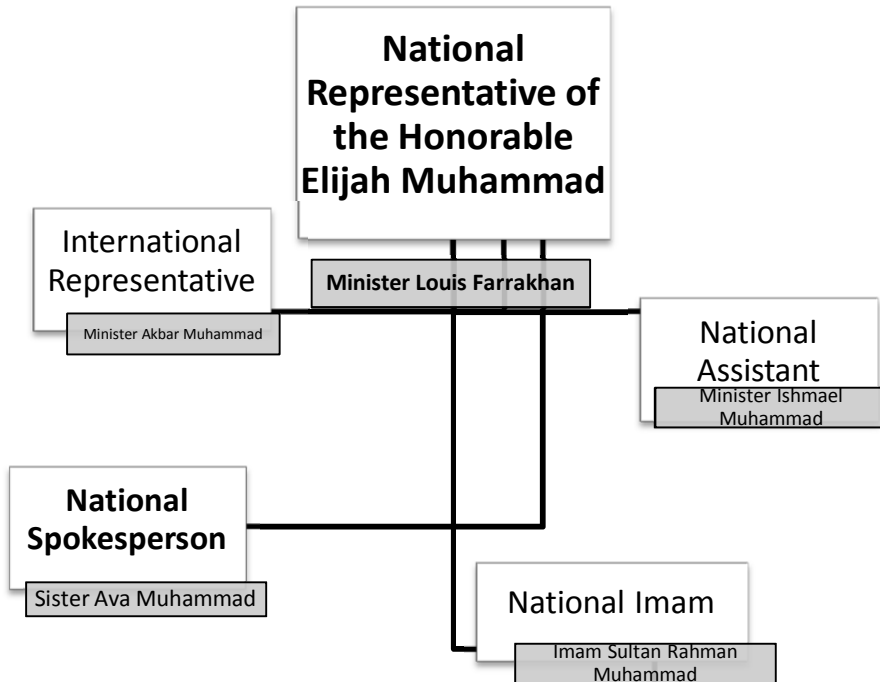


Figure 3. Senior Membership of the Nation of Islam

NOI is also comprised of ten different Ministries. The organization defines its ministries as collective executives. It maintains that each ministry “is responsible for providing public service in a specialized field of government, led by a senior public servant known as minister” and they are meant to “afford or give things needed by the people to help sustain an acceptable quality of life in the society they serve” (The Ministries, 2020). The ten ministries of the Nation of Islam are Ministry of Spiritual Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Trade and Commerce, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Arts and Culture, and Ministry of Science and Technology.

## 2. 5. Target Audience

The target receiver of the NOI’s message is meant to reach beyond the members of the organization. The NOI often addresses issues that resonate with the African American community as a whole. When Louis Farrakhan speaks, he aims to address and speak on behalf of all African Americans irrespective of their religious faith (Damak, 2019, p. 72). However, African Americans are not the only receivers of the NOI’s message. Even though the NOI has pursued on top of its agenda the transformation of the African American community into a new collective identity that embraces blackness, the organization’s anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist stances—particularly positions taken in support of Palestine and other nations that have been a target of U.S.-Israeli aggression—have hit with an audience larger than the African American community.

As for the Nation of Islam’s rhetoric regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran, the target audience includes all of the



abovementioned groups of potential receivers, yet, given the political nature of the discourse, it can be argued that apart from the members of the Nation of Islam, who regularly follow up on their leaders' statements, the focus of the message will most resonate with an audience that pursues political developments in an anti-imperialist context.

## 2. 6. Media Utilization Techniques

During the early days since the inception of the Nation of Islam, the organization utilized print media to propagate its message to as many African Americans as it could. Malcolm X and a group of the NOI ministers started the *Muhammad Speak* newspaper in 1961 and developed it into one of the most widely-read newspapers ever printed by an African American organization. It is believed that *Muhammad Speaks* was the largest circulating Black newspaper on those days (Muhammad A. , 2009). The newspaper continued to be published from 1961 until 1975, but *Muhammad Speaks* was not the first medium used by the NOI to spread its message. The first outlet by the NOI was a newspaper called *The Final Call to Islam*, which was distributed as early as 1934, together with various other pamphlets including a magazine titled *The Supreme Wisdom*<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the NOI used widely published newspapers to convey Elijah Muhammad's message to the African American community. The NOI even employed its men to sell the *Crusader* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Amsterdam News*, and the *Westchester Observer* because they covered Elijah Muhammad's message that often appeared on the same page as advertisements for Muslim-

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1. See The Supreme Wisdom at the National Museum of African American History & Culture Website: [https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc\\_2014.150.11.11](https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2014.150.11.11)

owned businesses supportive of the message by the NOI's leader. The *Courier* and the *Crusader* contained a column called "Mr. Muhammad Speaks", the *Amsterdam News* entailed a section entitled "The Islam World", while the *Observer* reproduced Mr. Muhammad's message in a series called "White Man's Heaven is Black Man's Hell" (Muhammad A. , 2009).

Today, the NOI has swiftly shifted to the digital world to continue reaching out to its target audience. The *Final Call* is missioned to follow in the footsteps of the *Muhammad Speaks* and has thus developed to be the number one media plan for the Nation of Islam with a digital edition published on a designated website with the same name. Moreover, the *Final Call* is also available through social media accounts created to represent the newspaper online to take full advantage of outreach potentials. Updates are regularly made on the website as well as on its Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. accounts. All events by the organization, as well as relevant African American issues of the day, are covered by the *Final Call* and the full texts of the speeches delivered by Farrakhan are published on the website. In addition to the *Final Call* and its social media platforms, the Nation of Islam runs an official website<sup>1</sup> that broadcasts weekly speeches by the National Imam, the National Assistant of Minister Farrakhan, and the National Spokesperson for Minister Farrakhan.

It can be argued that the NOI's message not only does not invite the target audience to take actions without thinking, but that on the contrary, it actually provokes the recipients of the message to think and reflect upon the issues raised.

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1. <https://www.noi.org/>

## **2. 7. Special Techniques to Maximize Effect**

As argued by Jowett and O'Donnell, there are several special techniques used by a propagandist in order to maximize the effect of its propaganda. However, the authors also stress that they have deliberately avoided offering a comprehensive list of propaganda techniques for propaganda is too multifaceted to shortlist its techniques (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, p. 299). Some of the techniques used by the Nation of Islam are reviewed below:

## **2. 8. Resonance**

The Nation of Islam knows the African American community's struggle very well; the leadership and the top members are from within the community and have gone through the very same struggles. Many African American organizations and social movements came to existence particularly in midst of the Civil Rights era in the United States of America during the 1960s, however, few movements managed to last despite enduring challenges.

Congruent with the prerequisites of creating resonance in the target audience, the Nation of Islam's rhetoric on the Islamic Republic of Iran is replete with links made to beliefs and values that are assumed to be widely held by the members in particular, and by the African American community in general. For instance, the Nation of Islam's rhetoric regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran includes condemnation of the aggressive behavior of the United States towards non-White nations and particularly non-White Muslim nations. That oratory reverberates with the feelings and experiences of the broader African American community who have been the victims of the white supremacist system dominating

their past and present. Despite progress made in the realm of civil rights for the African Americans and racial minorities, systematic racial discrimination continues to be the number one predicament that afflicts people of color in the United States. Modern day African American men and women are far from enjoying equality and impartiality. The government of the United States is viewed as the main perpetrator of the adversity that to this day continues to plague the African American community. Any condemnation of the United States that is made in that context resonates with the target audience of the Nation of Islam. Hence, the United States' aggressive foreign policy towards the Iranian nation appears to be another act of the evil enemy that sits on top of the domineering system that has for centuries stricken the African American community with oppression and discrimination of various degrees and types. In other words, the Nation of Islam canalizes the existing belief among the African American community—the belief that comes from their generations' of suffering under the white supremacist system in the United States—into explaining the oppressive foreign policy by the same system towards a non-White Muslim nation: the Islamic Republic of Iran. This, not only creates resonance but also provokes solidarity in the target audience.

## 2. 9. Source Credibility

Hundreds of thousands of African Americans celebrate Louis Farrakhan as an inspirational leader that strongly defends the rights of the oppressed Black Americans (Kelso, 2001). According to an article published in *The Guardian* in 2001, “Mr. Farrakhan is one of the most charismatic and controversial political and religious leaders to emerge in the US since the Second World War” (Kelso, 2001). Americans of other races, even Whites, have called

Farrakhan a hero on a number of occasions. For instance, Hollywood actor Bruce Willis, who is himself a White American, pronounced Louis Farrakhan “a hero of mine”, an incident that provoked controversy and criticism against the celebrity (AP, 1998) (Muhammad D. , 2013). In his 1997 book, Singh argues that the revival of the Nation of Islam’s perceived popularity among U.S. citizens, particularly African Americans—which he associates with the success of what he calls Farrakhan Phenomenon—manifests the broader changes of post-civil rights era in the United States, an era that brought about distrust among African Americans in pursuing as both a potential and a desire to break into the U.S. political, social, and economic mainstream. It was in such a climate that many African Americans turned to the Nation of Islam and the charismatic Louis Farrakhan as an appealing new source of collective support, solidarity and possible emancipation (Singh, 1997, p. 98).

## **2. 10. Opinion Leaders**

For the Nation of Islam, association with opinion leaders popular with the broader African American community as well as the general American public has occurred on several occasions. Moreover, the Nation of Islam’s leadership and top members have also met with opinion leaders and popular figures at an international level. At an international level, as far as Iran is concerned, Minister Louis Farrakhan has met with former Iranian presidents Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad, has been photographed together with Ayatollah Jannati, a prominent member of Iran’s Assembly of Experts, Dr. Mohsen Rezaee, a senior officer with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the secretary of Iran’s Expediency Discernment Council, as well as Iranian TV

personalities. The Nation of Islam appeared as a major partner in the call to free a famous TV anchor with the Iranian English speaking international news channel Press TV—Marzieh Hashmei, born Melanie Franklin of New Orleans (Hsu, 2019) (Muhammad C. , 2019). She is an African American journalist of dual Iranian and U.S. nationality who was arrested by FBI in January 2019 when flying to the U.S. to visit her family. She was never charged with any crimes and was detained to attend a court as a witness (Waterson, 2019).

Moreover, even though it is not clear if any of the Nation of Islam's members or the leadership ever met with the popular martyred General Soleimani, Farrakhan condemned his assassination by the U.S. forces on the Iraqi soil. During his annual Savior's Day speech, attended by several mayors of Michigan towns as well as the chief staff of Detroit City Council President Brenda Jones (Louis Farrakhan: 'America is No. 1 on the Mahdi's list to be destroyed', 2020), delivered on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 at the TCF Center in Detroit and streamed live on the Nation of Islam's official website, Minister Louis Farrakhan said he "thinks" he and his companions on the trip to Iran met with the Iranian General Soleimani. Minister Farrakhan described General Soleimani as "his brother" who was killed by Donald Trump. He condemned the illegal assassination of the Iranian General and criticized President Trump's labeling him as a 'terrorist'. As stated by Minister Louis Farrakhan:

Mr. Trump, this part of my lecture is talking to you. Mr. Trump, I respect you because you're the president of the United States of America. You said that my brother is a terrorist, and you've got the power to define people. You may not like me so you might call me a terrorist tomorrow to justify what the government is planning to do to me and the Nation of Islam (Farrakhan L. , The Unraveling of A Great Nation, 2020).

Farrakhan's reference to his visit to Iran and his 'probable' meeting with the martyred IRGC General Soleimani appears to occur in a bid to prove more credibility of his opinion on the Islamic Republic of Iran, but also to show his ties with opinion leaders in the country that he is talking about.

Farrakhan also met with the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, during his visit to the country. Even though there are no footages of the meeting available to the public, Farrakhan elaborated on his meeting with Ayatollah Khamenei during a public speech he gave after his visit. He opened his account of meeting with the Leader by reiterating how he explained to Ayatollah Khamenei about the origins of the Black people and how his master Elijah Muhammad preached Islam as an ideology that helped liberate African Americans. Quoting Ayatollah Khamenei, Farrakhan tried to convey to his audience that he has received confirmation of his ideology from a renowned Islamic scholar running "the only true theocracy" in the world. He then expounded:

In the end I asked the great leader: "What would you have me do when we get back to America?" He said, "Continue preaching Islam the way you do." After that meeting was over, we had a luncheon the next day and they told us all the doors that were closed to you before are open to you now (Farrakhan L. , Special Report on Trip to Iran Delivered At Mosque Maryam, 2018).

## **2. 11. Group Norms**

Jowett and O'Donnell maintain that group norms are embodied in beliefs, values and behaviors that develop through membership (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, p. 301). It can be argued that group norms are among the strongest assets of the Nation of Islam and

ergo one of the most powerful techniques that the organization employs to maximize the effect of its propagated message. As Bernard M. Bass argues, mankind's need for status is satisfied by belonging to a particular social group. He concludes that members of a given group intend to believe that the values and ideology of the group they are a part of is superior to those outside the group (Henry, 2006, p. 5). As Akom argues, new members of the Nation of Islam are required to discard their previous selves and adopt new identities; this includes changing their names, religion, language, clothing style, moral and cultural values, and life goals (Akom, 2003, p. 313).

Members' conforming tendencies are exploited to endorse individuals' feeling of belonging to a collective, sometimes also known as "herd instinct". When every member is required to adopt the same last name 'Muhammad'—which is a reference to the original founder of the Nation of Islam W.D. Muhammad—and when men and women of the organization adopt almost the same dress code, new religious, moral and cultural values, as well as ethics that rule their language and manners, a homogenous effect is created among followers.

## 2. 12. Language Usage

According to Jowett and O'Donnell, verbal symbolization has the potential to generate a sense of power. They further argue that "propaganda uses language that tends to deify a cause and satanize opponents" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, p. 303). Moreover, verbal symbolization has an impact on the audience based on associations that they make with the symbols. Exaggeration and innuendo are also associated with Propaganda. In the early NOI language, the White man was described as the devil and God described as Black.



Using verbal symbolization, the Nation of Islam's founder attacked in every possible way the White supremacist system that had plagued African Americans. Anti-white terms and stories were ample in the teachings of the early Nation of Islam with an audience from the often poverty-stricken uneducated African American communities. However, as the conditions for education and progress of African Americans improved, the Nation of Islam's language also changed and became less brazenly anti-white.

The Nation of Islam's rhetoric on Iran barely differs, in terms of the use of language, from the organization's rhetoric regarding other issues. This is mainly because the fundamentals of the Nation of Islam's rhetoric include elements of Black Nationalism and a particular reading of Islam. Hence, the NOI leadership, as well as senior members and journalists, all of whom walk in the footsteps of Minister Louis Farrakhan, deploy strong words and draw analogies to address the African American community as the main part of their target audience. For instance, when Farrakhan delivered a speech reporting on his 2018 trip to Iran, he set the context for his audience by elaborating on the belief that 'America' has to not only pay for the crimes it has committed against humanity—which includes crimes against African Americans, but also for its aggressive foreign policy against other nations including Iran.

There is a dichotomy of white vs. black, evil vs. good, enemy vs. friend, truth vs. falsehood, warner vs. political hucksters, etc. that rules the relation between the Nation of Islam—that often describes itself as a 'U.S.-based religious movement'—and the United States of America as a political entity.

## 2. 13. Audience Reaction to Various Techniques

In the case of the Nation of Islam's target audience, public contributions are made largely to the organization and apart from the businesses that the Nation of Islam owns—and are themselves founded as a response to the call by Elijah Muhammad to Black economic independence—the revenue of the organization is earned through public donations. Public donations include the Islamic taxation plan, Zakat, which is obligatory as part of the Islamic law—Shari'a—as well as voluntary donations made by members to promote the cause pursued by the Nation of Islam. Members are encouraged to pay their Zakat to the organization; they are also encouraged to support Black-owned businesses, which include those run by the Nation of Islam.

Another common form of response from the target audience of the Nation of Islam can be traced in Internet activism by fans and followers of the movement. Minister Louis Farrakhan's official social media accounts, including his Instagram and twitter profiles, enjoy a relatively large number of followers who actively take part in watching, 'liking', and commenting on the accounts' updates. Moreover, there are a number of members particularly from among the youth of the community, who have launched their own social media accounts and actively work on training and educating fans and followers about the Nation of Islam.

Regarding the rhetoric of the NOI on Iran, one common form of audience reaction in confirmation was chanting "yes, sir" and "Allahu Akbar" and standing up in applause. For instance, audience at Mosque Maryam stood up from their sits to chant 'Allahu Akbar' and applause in affirmation when Farrakhan told them about his meeting with Ayatollah Khamenei, wherein the Iranian leader advised Farrakhan to continue preaching Islam the way he does. Similarly, Farrakhan praised Iran as the only nation

trying to be a real theocracy in the East, while the NOI does the same in the West:

Iran is the only nation on earth that is trying to be a true theocracy. Saudi Arabia isn't that. Jordan isn't that. Egypt is not that. They are Muslims, not theocracies. Iran is trying to live its life according to the word and the will of God. They are that in the East and we are that in the West (Farrakhan L. , 2018).

## **2. 14. Counterpropaganda**

It can be argued that counterpropaganda in the case of the Nation of Islam is ample and explicit, mainly because the Nation of Islam is considered a grassroots opposition movement that aims to challenge and criticize the ruling establishment in the areas of race and racial equality. Thus, counterpropaganda from the ruling establishment which possesses massive media sources never runs out; it is never underground and is easy to track.

It is interesting to note that a major part of the counterpropaganda against the Nation of Islam is provoked by the Anti-Defamation League, whose self-asserted mission is to “timelessly protect the Jewish people” and who takes the lead to label criticism against Zionism as ‘anti-Semitism’, as well as other entities whose jobs are primarily focused on pinpointing any criticism of Israel and Zionism and labeling it as hate speech or anti-Semitic bombast.

Another pivot around which the counterpropaganda against the Nation of Islam revolves particularly in the case of the organization’s rhetoric regarding Iran is that which tries to portray the movement as anti-American or contrary to the national interests of the United States. Thus, it can be argued that the

counterpropaganda that exists against the Nation of Islam can be broadly categorized into two main tactics:

- a) Labeling the Nation of Islam and its rhetoric as Anti-Semitic;
- b) Portraying the Nation of Islam as anti-American.

After Farrakhan's first visit to Iran to meet with President Rafsanjani in 1996, the United States congress condemned Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. The 104<sup>th</sup> congress of the U.S. held a session on February 27, 1996 in the House of Representatives that made the following statement:

Condemning the visit of Louis Farrakhan to Libya, Iran, and Iraq as well as certain statements he made during those visits, and urging the President to take appropriate action to determine if such visits, statements, and actions resulting from agreements or understandings reached during these visits violate Federal law (H.Res. 365 (104th), 1996).

The resolution that followed the statement on the same session of the congress claims that the decision has been made due to the fact that the United States designates the countries to which Farrakhan traveled as 'state sponsors of terrorism' under section 40(d) of the Arms Export Control Act, title 22, United States Code, section 2780(d). The document continues to specifically accuse the three countries citing statements that the leader of the Nation of Islam made during his visits.

In case of Iran, the resolution issued by the congress employs the decades-long anti-Iran rhetoric by making accusations against the Islamic Republic. The congress resolution is a clear example that the counterpropaganda against the Nation of Islam is occasionally coupled with the anti-Iran propaganda by the United States. In the words of the resolution, Farrakhan's visit to Iran is reprehensible because the Islamic Republic:

- a) Was involved in the 1979 overtaking of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, in which students dubbed the facility as a spy den;
- b) Continues to pose exhibit hostility towards the United States;
- c) Poses a threat to the peace and stability of the Persian Gulf region;
- d) Supports Hezbollah;
- e) Organizes massive rallies where people chant ‘Death to America’.

The congress resolution further slashes Farrakhan for having joined the annual popular rally that celebrates the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, quoting him as having expressed what the congress perceives as anti-American. Towards the end of the congress document, the House of Representatives makes demands to curb the influence of the Nation of Islam and its unconventional ties with the three mentioned governments. The resolution concludes:

Now, therefore, be it Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

- (1) condemns the visit of Louis Farrakhan to Libya, **Iran**, and Iraq;
- (2) condemns statements made by Mr. Farrakhan during those visits which are **derogatory of the foreign policy of the United States** and which support the governments of these countries, all of which are on the list of countries which support terrorism; and
- (3) calls upon the President to direct appropriate Federal government agencies to determine if any United States laws were violated by Mr. Farrakhan by these visits or in statements made by him during these visits or in actions which result from agreements or understandings reached during these visits, and, if so, actively to **prosecute any such violations of United States law** (H.Res. 365 (104th), 1996).

After Farrakhan's visit to Iran in 2018, U.S. congressman from Louisiana Ralph Abraham joined the accusations orchestrated against Farrakhan that claimed he chanted "Death to America" at a gathering in Tehran and offered to buy him a one-way ticket to Tehran to dispense with him, because his rhetoric would not fit in the 'American discourse'. Abraham said:

Since Louis Farrakhan seems so comfortable chanting 'Death to America,' I'm offering him a one-way ticket to Tehran where he'll feel more at home. His hateful calls to kill Jewish people and his rants against the United States and Israel have no place in American discourse. I hope he accepts my offer so that we can bid him good riddance (Bolden, 2018).

With regards to the Nation of Islam's rhetoric surrounding the U.S. assassination of the General Qasem Soleimani on the Iraqi soil, the condemnation by Minister Louis Farrakhan was also received by counterpropaganda that aimed to both vilify him and demonize the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, since the assassination was condemned by many non-governmental organizations and social movements in the United States and abroad, the attempt to repudiate Nation of Islam's denunciation of the attack appeared to be weighed down as compared to, for instance, the counterpropaganda that accused Farrakhan of having led a "Death to America" chant while visiting Iran. This is also related to the majority of U.S. citizens' disapproving the decision by the State to authorize the assassination of General Soleimani and particularly with over 70% of African Americans disavowing the measure, many considering it an act that could further pull the trigger of a war between the U.S. and Iran.

## 2. 15. Effects and Evaluation

When propaganda is produced by a non-compliant movement or organization within a much larger society, it is clearly a more

challenging task to detect and evaluate the effects as effects are to be “detected as adjustments in mainstream society” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2012, p. 306).

It is difficult to track changes in the audience when the propaganda comes from a grassroots organization that does not monitor or publish the results of monitoring the results of the campaign or simply any data that showcases the spectrum of the propaganda’s outreach. In the case of the Nation of Islam’s rhetoric regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is more increasingly challenging to evaluate the effects of the propaganda campaign by the movement because the issue at hand does not necessarily lead to the adoption of the propagandist’s language or behavior and it can merely affect the audience’s belief.

**Table 1.** Top 10 most visited YouTube videos by NOI on Iran till May 2020

|    | Video title  | Publisher       | Views   |
|----|--|-----------------|---------|
| 1  | The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan Speaks July 21, 2019                                  | NOI             | 499,016 |
| 2  | Minister Farrakhan Challenges Critics After Returning From Iran                              | NOI             | 307,576 |
| 3  | Feb 9, 2016- Minister Farrakhan holds Iran Press Conference                                  | NOI             | 181,269 |
|    | Farrakhan in Iran: Interview in The Islamic Republic of Iran                                 | Final Call News | 148,738 |
| 4  | Pt. 35: Farrakhan warns against Syria military strike, sends letter to congressional leaders | Final Call News | 108,259 |
| 5  | Minister Farrakhan meets with the Supreme Leader of Iran                                     | Jesse Muhammad  | 84,729  |
| 6  | Minister Farrakhan in Iran, Full Press Conference Video                                      | NOI             | 64,321  |
| 7  | Iran: Minister Louis Farrakhan speaks to Students at Tehran University                       | NOI             | 56,900  |
| 8  | Minister Farrakhan's Full Iran TV Interview with Nader Talebzadeh                            | Final Call News | 27,387  |
| 9  | Minister Louis Farrakhan Interview w/ Marzieh Hashemi of PressTV                             | NOI             | 26,583  |
| 10 | Minister Louis Farrakhan Interview w/ Nader Talebzadeh                                       | NOI             | 15,358  |

Describing the NOI's rhetoric regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran on a binary scale of success versus failure would fall short of effectively taking into account the multiple facets of the organization's campaign.

### 3. Conclusion

This study analyzes the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam as a social movement with considerable influence in the African American community. Using the 10-Step Propaganda Analysis by Jowett and O'Donnell, the study breaks down the propaganda by the Nation of Islam as emitted through its rhetoric regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran. The analysis offers an overview of the ideology and purpose of the Nation of Islam's propaganda message that includes discussions on Iran. It also elaborated on the special techniques used by the Nation of Islam to maximize the effect of its rhetoric regarding Iran.

The findings suggest that the NOI shares values with the Islamic Republic. Accordingly, the Nation of Islam sees the Islamic Republic as a friend nation that supports the oppressed African Americans and hence defends any movement that seeks to emancipate them.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic mentioned two pieces of advice to the NOI leader, Minister Farrakhan: 1) Continue preaching Islam the way you do; 2) Become familiar with the structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Farrakhan L. , 2018). This should set the guidelines in communicating with the Nation of Islam for both state sponsored diplomacy professionals and individual grassroots interactions. Furthermore, Article 154 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic contains that, "it supports the struggles of the oppressed for their rights against the oppressors



anywhere in the world” (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1989).

Given the significance of the Nation of Islam as a social movement that stands against the oppression of African Americans and the influences of its anti-white supremacy rhetoric, interactions with the Nation of Islam can pave the ground for the realization of the Article 154 of the constitution with regards to oppressed African Americans. Moreover, Iranian diplomacy practitioners can derive similar media techniques to reach out to the African American community. Additionally, tactful interactions and public diplomacy exchanges with the Nation of Islam can be considered for more constructive presentation of the Islamic Republic of Iran to African Americans.

However, since only 2% of African American Muslims associate themselves with the NOI, there is a risk of repudiation by at least two groups: 1) Muslims who consider the NOI as unorthodox; 2) African Americans who consider the NOI as anti-Semitic. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further studies and surveys on the risks of associating with the NOI. This research was aimed to fill the gaps in the literature on how the NOI’s rhetoric engages on Iran; further studies need to be conducted to minimize the aforementioned risks in relevant public diplomacy decisions.

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