The Foreign Policy Centre

IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS REVIEW: ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Edited by Tahirih Danesh and Nazenin Ansari
Preface by Dame Anne Leslie

Iran Human Rights Review: Access to Information

Edited by Tahirih Danesh and Nazenin Ansari
Preface by Dame Ann Leslie

About the Iran Human Rights Review

Following the success of the inaugural issue, the Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) is delighted to publish this second issue in what we hope will be a series of Iran Human Rights Reviews. These will bring together the thinking of established and emerging analysts, activists, academics and politicians around the world to examine the many human rights challenges in Iran and put forward positive recommendations for policymakers and other interested stakeholders.

Tahirih Danesh, FPC Senior Research Associate, is leading the project with support from FPC's Policy Director, Adam Hug, who oversees the Centre's work on human rights and the Middle East.

Acknowledgements

The editorial team looks forward to working with Iranian experts, activists and Western colleagues who are not only dedicating their lives to the struggle for human rights, but are also making every effort to listen to the views of others, work with each other and create the main building blocks of a true democracy: a new culture of harmony and trust within Iranian society.

Special Dedication: Siamak Pourzand

We wish to dedicate this issue of Iran Human Rights Review to the memory of Siamak Pourzand. As one of the most courageous and outspoken journalists in Iran, he spent much of the past decade in custody. Mr. Pourzand was barred from leaving the country and spent the last few years of his 80-year-long life separated from his family, who were forced to live outside Iran. He killed himself in Tehran on 29th April 2011. This final act in his lifelong struggle for freedom and expression is an indication of the culture of self-censorship that is pervading throughout the Iranian nation.

We offer our deepest condolences to his wife, Dr. Mehrangiz Kar, Iran's pioneering and most respected Iranian feminist lawyer, and his 3 daughters, Banafsheh, Azadeh and Lily. For more information on Siamak Pourzand's case please visit:
http://www.scribd.com/doc/17774648/Mockery-of-Justice-The-Framing-of-Siamak-Pourzand

Contents

Preface by Dame Ann Leslie

While working undercover in Iran (swathed like a waddling bin-bag in top-to-toe black chador and hejab) I got wearily used to hearing variants of the following nonsense from that ancient nation's current slew of cruel and corrupt masters, 'The leaders of the Islamic world need to be brave and announce: Islam and Western democracy have nothing in common. Islam has nothing in common with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Islam has nothing in common with Western liberalism and that kind of freedom. Islam stands in opposition to these ideas.' Thus spoke Mohammed Reza Jaafari, the Iranian commander of the Lovers of Martyrdom Brigade, which recruits potential suicide bombers, in 2005.

Well, he and the mullahcracy of theocratic Iran must be mighty miffed by what is going on in the Muslim Middle East. During the spontaneous demonstrations which gave rise to the so-called 'Arab Spring', no one in the vast crowds of ordinary people in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, shouted 'Death to the United States!' or 'Death to Israel!' that are the staple chants of highly organised 'spontaneous' demonstrations in Iran, nor was a single American or Israeli flag burned. The cry was for 'Freedom!' Freedom from their native dictators, freedom of speech, freedom of thought and, above all, freedom from the fear that has crippled, impoverished and enslaved them for generations.

True, these demonstrators were Muslims who shouted 'Allah-u-Akbar' (God is Most Great) but for them Islam evidently does not 'stand in opposition' to the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. But when leaders of nations declare that the Western idea of 'human rights' is not 'appropriate' for their own people, they almost invariably mean 'if our people start demanding so-called rights like freedom of speech, assembly and religious belief, we will be in real trouble! As for democracy – don't be ridiculous! Our people are not mature enough for the privilege of having their wishes heard or acted upon by their governments!'

In the holy city of Qom I interviewed an allegedly 'moderate' young mullah, wearing the black turban which denotes direct descent from the Prophet, who told me that the Koran states 'there must be no compulsion in religion' - but when a young Muslim converted to Zoroastrianism, the original religion of Persia, he was hanged for the 'crime' of apostasy. No compulsion in religion? The mullah suddenly concluded that the interview was at an end.

As for the right not to be tortured: the Iranian regime thinks torture is a jolly good thing and is sometimes extraordinarily upfront about it: 'Homosexuals deserve to be tortured or put to death, preferably both', Mohsen Yahya, a high-ranking Iranian official told an astonished British parliamentary delegation in 2007.

Homosexuals are 'enemies of Allah' and so are feminists: Feminism, particularly if it 'infects' devout women, is not popular with the authorities.

The influential Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda recently preached in the holy city of Mashad that Iranian feminists are 'whores who, clutching a piece of paper in their hands to gather signatures, are working for foreign powers and want to destabilise the Islamic Republic'. And that unveiled women automatically 'turn men into beasts'.

In Tehran I attended a secret meeting of these dangerous creatures, a large group of young women who had gathered in a private house to discuss the lack of human rights for women

in Iran. Several of the women were devout Muslims and wore full hejab even though there were no men present. Perhaps the noisy discussion had alerted the police because we were soon raided; as soon as they realised the police were in the building, the women smuggled me out of a back door to safety. Several of them were then arrested.

All totalitarian regimes feel particularly threatened by the Internet and of course do their best to block or censor it. Over the years, both before and after the Tiananmen massacre in China, I would secretly interview grassroots activists who had the temerity to protest against the state's denial of their rights. All too often these brave souls were condemned to long prison sentences or were brutally 're-educated' in the Lao Gai, the Chinese equivalent of the Soviet Gulag. Now with the Internet several Chinese bloggers have become household names – and all too often many have paid the price for their courage with imprisonment.

For far too long, oppressed peoples have been treated like idiot children by their masters. Increasingly those 'idiot children' will not accept that humiliating role any more. The road to freedom and democracy will be long and rocky, with many a bloody set backs, but millions of brave and implacable people round the world are now determined to reach that longed-for destination.

Introduction and Policy Recommendations

Nazenin Ansari and Tahirih Danesh

This review is being published at a time when people's awakening in the Middle East and North Africa has shifted the politics of the region and beyond onto a new course. There is widespread hope that this course will ultimately lead the people to retain the right and responsibility to devise their own governments.

Building a successful democracy, however, is a process. Therefore, how it will be achieved and when, can have lasting impact on the most urgent issues facing the region and the international community: nuclear proliferation, peace, security and sustainable development through socio-economic prosperity.

As the individual plays a more significant role in the heart of politics, smart power has become more influentially entrenched in partnership with people, rather than only governments. Power is now optimally exercised when every individual is empowered to become a constructive citizen in this march forward. Accordingly, the free flow and access to information and knowledge is the blood that flows through the heart of technologies and expands dialogue and open lines of communication.

One of the main articles of the International Bill of Rights is the right to freedom of expression. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the Islamic Republic of Iran remains a signatory to, stresses that freedom of expression throughout the world is a universal right. It includes the right of individuals to freely search, receive and share information. However, with the establishment of state organs such as the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and Intelligence, the Revolutionary Guards Cyber Division and state policies on mass media and its many amendments, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to ensure access to information is one of the most restricted spheres of activity for all Iranian citizens both within and outside its borders.

In examining its human rights records, it is evident that the Islamic Republic authorities and codes encourage a culture of censorship, prevention, harassment and punishment of its citizens who seek to access or impart information through communication devices, radio or TV satellite broadcast, and the Internet. State-sponsored interference, such as restriction or blocking mobile communication, jamming satellite transmission or limiting residential bandwidth, hacking sites marked by the Iranian Cyber Army, arrest and torture of bloggers by intelligence and security forces, passing bills and approving policies set to criminalize ordinary citizens and revolving door policies on interrogation and imprisonment of journalists, bloggers or media personalities are among the characteristics of this state-imposed culture.

The Islamic Republic's approach to access to information is rooted in its Constitution, in particular Articles 24 and 175, and directed by its Press Law of 1986. The Press Law serves to mandates the press with the sole aim of 'propagation and promotion of authentic Islamic culture' (Article 2. d.) reinforced with the amendments in 2000 extending the same mandate to electronic publications. Additional amendments in 2008 and the 2009 Cyber Crimes Act place further general restrictions justifying Internet surveillance imposed upon Iranian citizens or any source targeting the Iranian audience. This ambiguous approach to legislation and policy allows various government arms to act with considerable freedom and impose maximum restrictions.

For instance, the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution has approved to employ filtering systems and has opted to appoint the committee in charge of Determining Unauthorized Sites to simply block what they consider to be unapproved sites. Under the direct auspices of the Council, this committee, which embodies representatives from various governmental arms, including the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security and Tehran's Prosecutor General, acts as the central executive body in charge of blocking access to information with considerable freedom. On another front, Ali Aqamohammadi, the head of economic affairs of the Islamic Republic Presidency, announced the upcoming creation of a halal Internet that will "increase Iran and the Farsi language's presence in what has become the most important source of international communication,"[1] blocking Iranians from the Internet that the entire global community has access to.

Iranians, on the other hand, are among the most sophisticated and eager consumers of information. They continue to find creative and imaginative ways to get around these limitations. Over the past three decades, particularly the younger generation of Iranians have become increasingly cosmopolitan in their outlook and have developed an insatiable thirst for global news and views. Their long-standing experience in handling state-sponsored censorship has equipped them with a keen ability to read between the lines and distinguish between genuine and manufactured information. This ability to compare and comprehend the underlying realities of communication stands out in their sense of objectivity and self-reliance manifested during the recent months of consistent uprising, both in Iran and around the globe.

Although the aspirations of the Iranian movement for freedom and human rights may be more similar to the American spirit, one of the emerging realities of this ever-evolving movement is the increasing tendency of Iranians to disregard the American-based sources of information in favour of their European counterparts. Over the past few years, majority of Iranian citizens and Diaspora have opted to appreciate the objective and more professional approach of Persian news and entertainment programs by sources such as Radio Farda, Al-Jazeera, Euronews or BBC Persian TV over Voice of America or various US-based TV programs and publications.

The second is despite the fact that often users have to manoeuvre their way through proxy servers to access the information they are after or that they may have to face the confiscation of their equipment, or even face imprisonment. Figures indicate that between 2000 and 2008 the number of Internet users in Iran grew by 22 million, the highest rate of growth anywhere in the Middle East.

Third, since the 2009 post-election demonstrations and the concomitant rise in suppression of dissidents, a number of the more influential figures have either chosen or been forced to leave Iran and many have either permanently or temporarily established roots in Europe. These, among other factors, may indicate an increasingly influential and effective role for UK and other European community policymakers in affecting the course and direction of the Islamic Republic's approach to human rights as well as assisting those who are striving for a culture of human rights, both in and outside of Iran, through access to information.

---

[1] To see the full article go to http://www.hindustantimes.com/Now-a-new-halal-internet/Article1-686190.aspx [Accessed 17 April 2011]

It is in this light that we wish to offer the following policy recommendations:

- Take multilateral action in response to Iran's violations of its international commitments regarding access to information
- Proactively implement and follow up action regarding recent steps taken by the European Union including EU Council Regulation No 359/2011 and EU Council conclusions on free access to information CL10-057EN
- Include access to information as a priority for the Special Rapporteur on Iran
- Hold Iran accountable for its attacks against international sources providing access to information for Iranians
- Hold businesses, such as Nokia, responsible for their planned or past dealings with Iran in order to prevent a culture of impunity
- Provide widespread financial and technical assistance, including circumvention technology, necessary to facilitate access to information
- Facilitate and encourage greater dialogue on exploring access to information among donors and implementers
- Research, develop and provide free or subsidized technical training for the Diaspora with respect to projects focused on access to information and human rights education
- Provide specialized and small media resources to closely knit populations with greater networks that provide an effective means for cross-border access to information, such as student activists and minority communities
- Exempt useful software, hardware and services from the list of sanctioned items on Iran
- Research, develop and provide licenses to basic secure tools to facilitate access for Iranian activists

The Emperor Has No Clothes

Nasrin Alavi

Abstract

Today Iran is moving beyond the 1979 revolution embodied by a religious-secular binary; we are witnessing the children of the revolution's retrieval through very modern cyber-methods of the moral legitimacy of the Iranian 'cause'. Yet paradoxically, many who are fighting an Islamic state have chosen 'Allah-o-Akbar' or 'God is great' as their battle cry. This is a new generation that has largely responded to tyrannical violence with democratic nonviolence, yet which calls those killed on its protests Shahids (Islamic martyrs), much to the annoyance of religious and secular elders.

Biography

Nasrin Alavi is the author of We Are Iran2 (Portobello Books, 2006), which has been translated into a number of languages. More recently she has contributed to The People Reloaded "The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future[3]" (2011 Melville House Publishing). She has written for publications including the Financial Times Magazine, The Times, The Independent and Private Eye, in addition to writing for non-English language publications such as Spain's La Vanguardia and Germany's Das Parlament. She is a regular contributor to OpenDemocracy on Iran[4] and has written extensively for Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung[5] (Germany's Federal Agency for Civic Education).

The Emperor Has No Clothes

An Iranian blogger writes: "The child said: The emperor has no clothes. The anti-riot forces rushed in and the tear gas filled the air.[6]"

It is no secret that most of the rulers in the Middle East are at odds with their youth, and Iran is no exception. Those who lived through the Iranian Revolution of 1979 are now a minority. Every two out of three people you see on the streets is likely to be under thirty.

I compiled a book about the early years of Iran's vibrant blogosphere, We Are Iran. At the time these blogs largely mirrored the uncensored banter you would hear around campuses echoing the voices of a post-war (that is, the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88) baby boom generation that will determine the future of their country (hence the title We Are Iran).

Following a contested presidential election in June 2009, Iran saw the largest street protests in 30 years of the Islamic republic. The hashtag #iranelection dominated the micro-blogging site Twitter and even inspired a worldwide solidarity campaign. The voice of a nation's

---

[2] For more information and reviews of this title see: http://www.portobellobooks.com/page/3032/We-Are-Iran/6489 [Accessed 17 April 2011]

[3] A new book by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel available at: http://mhpbooks.com/book.php?id=493 [Accessed 17 April 2011]

[4] See profile and list of article at http://www.opendemocracy.net/author/nasrin-alavi [Accessed 17 April 2011]

[5] http://www.bpb.de/suche/?all_search_action=search&all_search_text=%22nasrin+Alavi%22&url_dossier_search=bpb [Accessed 17 April 2011]

[6] See http://be-kasi-nagoo.blogspot.com/2011/02/blog-post_21.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+bekasi+%28%D8%A8%D9%87+%DA%A9%D8%B3%DB%8C+%D9%86%DA%AF%D9%88%29&utm_content=FriendFeed+Bot [Accessed 17 April 2011]

resistance was heard in the real-time YouTube footage of protests, and the deluge of tweets and blog reportage.

The New Islamic Rebels

The Huffington Post hailed the micro-blogger @persiankiwimm[7], --with over 35000 followers— as "one of the most reliable and prolific Iranians on Twitter". Most of his readers could understand his non-violent fight for democratic rights, but perhaps many failed to notice that his posts were threaded with verses from the Koran. Paradoxically those choosing to fight an Islamic state have chosen the Islamic battle cry "Allah-o-Akbar" or 'God is great' that has been heard in every "Green" protest since.

Twenty-seven-year-old Golshifteh Farahani is widely recognised as one of Iran's most prominent and talented actresses of her generation. In a song in tribute to the green movement, she breaks every theological rule in the book. Women singing solo before a male audience is considered un-Islamic in Iran and has been banned since 1979. She sings "kiss me for the last time, as I go forth towards my destiny, I utter Allah-o-Akbar, for the dreams I behold in my head". Golshifteh's song went viral within days of it being posted during February 2011 on YouTube.[8]

This is a song for a new contradictory generation that has largely confronted tyrannical violence with democratic nonviolence, while it calls the fatalities of its protests Islamic shahids or martyrs; much to the mutual annoyance of its religious and secular elders.

New Shahids

Such dissent has been met with a brutal state crackdown that includes mass arrests -- with those targeted ranging from senior ex-state politicians to vulnerable religious minorities -- Stalinist-style show-trials, systematic violations of prisoners' rights, drenching media propaganda and the killing of unarmed street-protestors.

The fallen are a new generation's martyrs. Google their names in Farsi and they come up continually with the Islamic prefix shahid. Philosophy student, "Shahid Neda" Soltan, whose fatal shooting was captured and distributed by camera phone and has been viewed millions of times online. Or 26-year-old doctor, Shahid Ramin Pour'andarjani, who died of poisoning after his refusal to sign falsified death certificates at the Kahrizak detention centre. Or the 19-year-old, Shahid Mohsen Ruholamini, a member of the conservative student basij who died in the very same centre after protesting against election fraud.

The films, images, tweets and blogs that are cast out like messages-in-bottles across the cyber-waves are a central part of people's struggle to narrate their own stories and present a case for justice.

Also in existence are thriving cyberspace-memorials to the fallen that further belie the Western media cliché of an Iran where political affiliations neatly divide along class lines and discontentment is limited to the urban upper class.

---

[7] http://twitter.com/persiankiwi [Accessed 17 April 2011]
[8] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HLL_l2rysk [Accessed 17 April 2011]

Many of those arrested or killed have been young accomplished students who represent a growing population that is educated and ambitious, jobless and discouraged, stifled and angry. At the same time, a large number of fatalities are from Ahmadinejad's purported working class support base. They include 20-year-old Bahman Jenabi, an apprentice plumber; 20-year-old Sajjad Ghaed Rahmati, a casual labourer; 34-year-old Moharram Chegini, an office clerk from one of the poorest neighbourhoods of south Tehran; 27-year-old Saeed Abbasi, a shoe-shop assistant shot in front of his father on Salsabil Street; and 16-year-old Meysam Ebadi, a tailor's apprentice shot in the stomach as he tried to rescue a young woman being beaten by riot police (and whose father was taunted by authorities who questioned why his son was in north Tehran so far from the family home).

Old Shahids

"My throat smells of hot lead, father. The Baathist hit you with two bullets. They… every day, Shoot me in the mouth". These are the words of Fatemeh9 who like hundreds of thousands of Iranians lost a family member in the epic Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88 that was launched by Saddam Hussein.

These fallen occupy a special place in the Islamic Republic of Iran's political and moral iconography: almost every official speech on a national theme refers to the sacred blood of "martyrs" who - like Fatemeh's father - are forever exalted. But this is not an innocent act, for it involves a posthumous conscription of their loyalty: to the revolution of 1979, to Islam, to the Islamic Republic's leaders.

Yet today in the ranks of the "green" movement that gathered around Mir-Hossein Mousavi are the children of these very revolutionary icons, such as Mehdi Zeinadin, Mohammad-Ebrahim Hemmat, and the brothers Mehdi and Hamid Bakeri. It seems that even the children of "martyrs" – often hailed as the "protectors of the revolution" -- are now trying to remember history differently in order to create a different future.

At the age of 26, Mohammad-Ali Jahanara commanded ordinary townsfolk of Khorramshahr who acted as a border town buffer. They fought against the Iraqi army invasion of their town inch-by-inch for 45 days before it fell to the enemy. A common tweet in the post-election period read: "Tell Jahanara the Baathist are in Tehran, they are firing on our girls".

Memorial of the fallen

Twenty months after the "stolen elections" on Valentine's Day February 14; no sooner had Iranian protesters taken to the streets than activists began flooding cyberspace with footage of misty teargas-filled scenes of fury and solidarity.

Citizen journalists were once again narrating their own stories. The YouTube footage made the chants that resounded during Tehran's post-election rallies in 2009 ("where is my vote?") appear to belong to a remote past. The stakes had been raised, dangerously so for an Islamic Republic forced by the depth of internal opposition to exist in an existential condition of high alert. The chanting YouTube soundtrack of the new protests targeted the Supreme Leader himself, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei: "Mubarak, Ben Ali, now it's the turn of Seyyad Ali!"[10]

---

[9] Reference withheld for security concerns for the author
[10] See clip at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=resdmP5s_F4&feature=player_embedded [Accessed 17 April 2011]

If cyberspace is a channel of dissent, it is also a permanent memorial of the fallen in the ongoing political contest. That day left hundreds behind bars and two students, Mohammad Mokhtari (22) and Saneh Zhaleh (25) dead. Yet not only were both hailed as shahids by the state media, Zhaleh was given a funeral where he was honoured as a member of the Basij who had died fighting "seditionists".

State media claims of Saneh's basij membership were denied by his brother who was arrested, following a telephone interview with Voice of America. Meanwhile Saneh's friends and lecturers at Tehran Art University – many of whom were also arrested during the day of his "fake funeral" – published numerous online accounts of a young artist, with modest provincial roots, a student opposition activist with dreams of becoming a filmmaker like his hero Bahman Ghobadi.

One blogger wrote "[As Iranians] always say an egg thief will steal your camel too, we now have to say that the vote thief will steal your shahid too."[11]

Another, with typical Iranian trench humour, shared a threat she had received from a parent about going out on further protests. She told her online readers[12] "Mother says: 'if you go and become a shahid tomorrow, I'll give them your photo and tell them that you were a member of the Basij, I'll say you were a diehard. Now you know best.'"

No Khomeini or Che

Mohammad Mokhtari, left behind a personal online narrative too. His heartbreaking Facebook page bursts with a joyous mix characteristic of this Iranian generation - at once politically and pop-culturally aware, modern and traditional, discontented and hopeful. [13]

You would search his Facebook page in vain for any sign of the ideological revolutionary hero-worship of his parent's generation; there is no sign of a Khomeini or Che.

The melange includes Mohammad's loving praise of his football heroes (Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Lionel Messi), and photos of him in the company of friends or carrying banners at an Ashura (Shi'a) ceremony in December 2010. There is also a link to footage of an Egyptian protestor shot dead only days earlier. The last message wishes friends a happy Valentine's Day, accompanied by an ominous note: "Dear God, help me die standing, for I despise a life sitting humiliated". Hours later, Mohammad was killed.

Tahkim-e Vahdat, Iran's oldest student union, has attacked the state's appropriation of the fallen. They put out a statement saying the "tyrants and their collaborators have merely hung the bloodied gowns of our martyrs of freedom on their flagpoles of disgrace". [14]

Iran's largest national student union was formed after a decree by Ayatollah Khomeini urging the expulsion of liberal and leftwing student groups from campuses. But things have moved on: today, it is banned and has become one of the most vocal critics of the state. Yet no hard-line Islamic student group has been able to replace it by gaining control of any Iranian campus in the land through free elections. Thirty years after the Revolution the state

---

[11] Link not published as it may prove dangerous for the writer
[12] Link not published as it may prove dangerous for the writer
[13] Link not published due to security concerns for the family of the deceased
[14] http://www.sahamnews.net/?p=17047 [Accessed 17 April 2011]

is grappling with its own demographic "success" and does not seem to know how to come to terms with one of the youngest and most educated populations in the region.

Double-Edged Cyberwar

Iranian blogger opium tells us "Islamic Republic: here to be a man is a crime and a woman a sin". [15] Only time will tell if cyberspace is merely a place for the beleaguered to blow off steam or a modern day Gutenberg press that would usher in an age of democracy.
As the vast cyberspace remains a mere tool without intrinsic value, part of the problem is that although it gives the opposition in Iran a chance to be heard and to mobilise, it also equips the state with the power to monitor, track, disrupt, confuse and arrest critics. In the post-election security onslaught, the personal computers of imprisoned activists were confiscated and their email correspondence used in endless hours of interrogation. The revolutionary courts then cited the resulting "evidence" when handing down lengthy prison sentences for the crime of "instigating war against God".

Commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guards, Mohammad Ali, asserts that Iran is in "a state of online soft-war" that is "more dangerous than a military confrontation". The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has called on "young soldiers" to confront those "spreading lies and rumours, doubt and divisions among the nation."

But even in the segments of Iranian blogosphere championed by the state, the medium has proved its capacity to be liberating and it is filled with calls for accountability. In a recent example many young conservative bloggers have taken Ahmadinejad to task, outraged at the allegations of high-level corruption against First Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi.

The state is heavily investing in cyber-political-combat. The majles (parliament) has provided a $500 million budget for cyberwarfare; lavish "cyberwar" conferences are held that "reveal" the reformist ex-president Mohammad Khatami to be a "freemason"; emerging groups like the "Basij cyber committee" boast of training "1,500 active bloggers engaged in battle".

Yet the online grandstanding can take ludicrous forms; the official Fars news agency claimed that an article on France24.com about Ahmadinejad's speech at the United Nations general assembly in September 2010 reaped 2.2 billion reader comments - the true figure,[16] France 24 pointed out, was thirty-one.

A growing band of well-staffed and funded news agencies spew out the archetypal worldview of a mighty nation conspired against by global Iran-obsessed enemies (one story even asserts that the rescue of the trapped Chilean miners was a Zionist conspiracy to undermine Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon).

The Enemy Within

Yet even a paranoid person can have real enemies - and delights in conjuring more from its delusions. Three decades of sanctions and suspicion from the west have nurtured revolutionary Iran's sense of siege. The regime uses every particle of hostility to blame any domestic problem or upheaval on foreign powers, the United States and Britain above all. It

---

[15] Link not published as it may prove dangerous for the writer
[16] http://observers.france24.com/content/20101004-france-24-article-ahmadinejad-speech-gets-22-billion-comments-says-teheran [Accessed 17 April 2011]

is skilled too in sustaining the alarmist message that internal enemies are in the pay of, or serving the interests of, these nefarious outsiders.

One blogger mockingly asks if there is anyone "around to give me an exact address; the place where America and the west pay out dollars and Euros for rioting and turning up on the streets... Especially with Eid[17] coming up I can go and get some money and heal a few pains. I've fallen back on all my loan repayments."[18]

As another puts it, "A dictator is a dictator, it doesn't matter if he's America's Friend like [Hosni] Mubarak or America's enemy like Gaddafi. People hate dictators."[19]

Three decades after the Revolution, Iran has become the only country in the Middle East where people do not have the luxury of blaming an American-backed leadership for the tyranny, corruption, mismanagement, waste and daily hardship that blights their lives. If there is one larger political truth in Iran today it is that the children of the 1979 Revolution, in their non-violent fight for civil rights, are demanding that we Iranians should hold ourselves accountable for our failures and successes.

Iranian society is no longer what it was. Those who once believed no longer do; those who claim still to believe are fast losing credibility; those who never believed have no reason to. But the future lies with those born later: the countless educated young people with whom the regime can no longer afford to pick fights that it will inevitably lose.

---

[17]Eideh Noruouz- Iranian New Year

[18] Link not published as it may prove dangerous for the writer

[19] Link not published as it may prove dangerous for the writer

Beyond the Electronic Curtain

Ramin Asgard

Abstract

The following compares the challenges of Iranians to that of the citizens of the Soviet Union a few short decades ago in overcoming the barriers that keep them from exchanging information with the free world and contributing to the advancement of global civilization. It also addresses the current and future role of the Voice of America in providing Iranians with an alternative means of establishing and maintaining a constructive dialogue on the ideals of the Iranian people.

Biography

Mr. Asgard is a career Foreign Service Officer with the Department of State. In February of 2011, he assumed the office of Director of the Voice of America's Persian News Network. VOA began broadcasting to Iran as the VOA Persian Service in 1942, and now provides the U.S. government's primary communications channel to Iran. Prior to joining VOA, Mr. Asgard served as Political Advisor to the Commanding General of U.S. Central Command, first for General David Petraeus and later for General James Mattis. Before CENTCOM, Mr. Asgard served as Director of the Iran Regional Presence Office in Dubai, the U.S. government's primary field operation concerning Iran.

Prior to IRPO-Dubai, Mr. Asgard served as Deputy Political Counsellor in Riyadh, Economic/Commercial Officer in Kabul, Political/Economic Officer in the UAE, and as a Consular Officer in Turkey. Mr. Asgard has also served domestically as an International Affairs Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, and as Desk Officer for Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. He has received the 2007 Secretary's Award for Public Outreach, the 2003 Charles Cobb Award for Trade Promotion, and several Superior and Meritorious Honour Awards. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, Mr. Asgard practiced law in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He received his Juris Doctor degree from Tulane University, his Master's degree in International Relations from the University of Pennsylvania, and his Bachelor's degree from Temple University. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and the Council on Foreign Relations.

Beyond the Electronic Curtain

Just over two decades ago, a large part of the world lived behind an Iron Curtain. The Soviet Union, in its effort to shield its citizens from outside influences, deployed a massive internal security apparatus, all available surveillance technology, and imposed severe limitations on movement, speech, press, assembly, and association. Eventually, after decades of such repression, the most evocative symbol of the Iron Curtain - the Berlin Wall - came down at the hands of free peoples on both sides of the barrier.

The Soviet leadership finally realized that cutting off its people from the world to secure total political control had eventually resulted in the intellectual, political, and economic stagnation of its society. Ultimately, the wall fell with Soviet acquiescence, and perhaps imperfect but far freer societies took root in Russia and much of the rest of the former Soviet Union. If the Islamic Republic of Iran learns from this example, it may yet reverse its slide towards totalitarianism. Yes

Iranians have never enjoyed free access to information during the Islamic Republic period, but the severity of Islamic Republic limits on its people's discourse has reached unprecedented levels today - and it only threatens to get worse. This month's Freedom House ranking of the IRI as last in Internet freedom among the 37 countries assessed is only the latest in a long record of repression of Iranian society.[20]

Staggered by the massive post-election protests of 2009, the Islamic Republic of Iran's government (IRIG) has now accelerated completion of its own formidable barrier between its people and the outside world - an "electronic curtain" - no less suffocating than the Iron Curtain of the last century.[21] Previewing its future intentions, earlier this month the IRIG announced its plan to develop a "Halal" Internet, which if realized would essentially seal off Iranians from Internet contact with the rest of the world. Seeing the vibrancy and creativity of one of the world's most intellectually prolific cultures under such bondage is not merely a violation of international human rights standards, but represents a tragic affront to the advance of world civilization.

One primary target of the IRIG's electronic curtain has been the Voice of America Persian Service. Since 1942, Voice of America has been a credible source of news and information to audiences throughout the world, including Iran. Today, VOA Persian plays a more critical role than ever. Without diplomatic, commercial, academic, security, or touristic ties between the US and Iran, VOA Persian (and its sister broadcaster Radio Farda) have become the primary communication channels between the U.S. and Iran. At VOA Persian, we are committed to engaging all the Iranian people with accurate, trustworthy, and comprehensive news and other programming. We deal in truth and dialogue, not propaganda, and remain committed to reaching our audience in Iran.

But moving VOA Persian forward to realize its potential will require substantial change. While the IRIG's policies certainly complicate matters, no amount of outside interference absolves us of our duty to undertake a sober and comprehensive assessment of our situation and use courage and ingenuity to advance in our mission. In outlining the way forward, it is important to first describe the environment within which we have operated in recent years.

For some time the pressure-laden political climate of US-Iran relations, as well as the contentious and fractious nature of Iranian exile politics has driven VOA Persian towards agenda-laden and defensive programming coverage, guest selection, and editorial policy. Such outside influences have at times also created a politically-charged working environment impacting VOA Persian's internal journalistic practice and editorial integrity.

Correcting this situation will require, among other steps, strict application of the core values of journalism and the VOA Charter – the search for and broadcasting of the truth. In addition, we believe that the Iranian people are searching for truth, not propaganda, and not more grim rehashing of their condition. Where the truth is contested, VOA's Persian News Network (Persian News Network (PNN))will offer a platform for civic discourse

---

[20] The IRI ranked 187th out of 199 nations in Press Freedom according to Freedom House's 2010 report on Global Press Freedom; was designated as "Not Free" by Freedom House's 2011 Freedom in the World report; and ranked 171st out of 179 nations in Economic Freedom according to the Heritage Foundation's 2010 report on Global Economic Freedom.

[21] Elements of this barrier include uplink jamming (jamming of satellite signals at their satellite source), downlink jamming (jamming of receiving satellite dishes at ground level), aggressive monitoring of all online communications, Internet filtering and denial of service, intimidation of bloggers and online activists, government-sponsored hacking, and other technical, legislative, judicial, and extra-judicial methods aimed at curtailing free expression and communication both within Iran and between Iranians and the outside world.

(perhaps at times adversarial, but always civil) from which our viewership may draw their own conclusions over the merits of contrasting positions.

In addition, the quality and scope of our programming needs to be upgraded substantially. Iranian viewers now have a range of viewing options to choose from, including entertainment and diverse IRIB programming. To compete, our programs and online presence must not only improve in quality, they must also become more relevant to our audience inside Iran. Our most popular show, Parazit, has established strong audience rapport and developed an engaging style attractive to a broad Iranian audience. More quality programs focused on material relevant to our audience can build on this success. Upgraded versions of existing programs, and completely new program offerings will be rolled out this summer.

Enhancing the timeliness and feel of our news coverage will require establishing a forward positioned bureau office, ideally in Tehran, but at least in the immediate region of Iran. To add to the depth of our programming, we are setting up a research team to provide textured background and analysis. Finally, to bring VOA Persian into the digital age of journalism, we are establishing a social media team to connect with the sizable online audience inside Iran. Taken together, these steps and many others will lead to the fresh, relevant, and incisive programming our audience deserves.

Such broadcasts may well challenge the monopoly of information within a closed society like today's IRI, but it bears mention that the IRIG does not object to satellite broadcasting for communication in general. In fact, the IRIG makes extensive use of satellite broadcasting itself, currently operating 48 channels to communicate in English, Turkish, Arabic, and other languages with the world. Unfortunately, the Iranian government is unwilling to allow its people free access to satellite broadcasts from outside public and private international broadcasters. If the IRIG is so confident in the power of its culture and ideas that it runs 48 separate television broadcast channels to promulgate them to global and regional audiences, why is it unwilling to also allow its own population access to outside culture and ideas?

We at VOA Persian hope that the IRIG will soon realize that isolating Iran from the rest of the world will eventually lead to the same stagnation - intellectually, politically, economically, and culturally - that led to the downfall of the USSR. If this isolation ends, the world would be greatly enriched through more open communication with Iran. A modest first step in this regard would be to allow a VOA bureau office in Tehran. Another would be to engage in a true global dialogue by ceasing the illegal practice of jamming satellite broadcasts. Deriving benefits from global legal and technological infrastructures - most saliently in this case global communications technology - while refusing to adhere to globally agreed-upon norms of conduct does not befit a nation purporting to act as a leader within the region or the Muslim world.

It is still not too late to take down the electronic curtain, particularly at this time when dramatic change is sweeping the region, and to finally allow the Iranian people the freedom to engage their world. We at VOA stand ready to support the dialogue.

Collapsing Authority in the Arab World: Threat or Opportunity?

Shahriar Ahy

Abstract

Virtual social networks have brought down dictators. But they cannot rebuild legitimate authority as readily as they destroy autocracy. After an initial euphoria of freedom, the path before North Africa and the Middle East will pass through a window of vulnerability when Islamists can seize power and derail transition to democracy. Continuing collapse of authority in the world's energy jugular and the risk of a refugee tsunami toward Europe are serious threats to open societies in advanced democracies. They warrant a massive effort to transfer democratic skills and help reconstruct the region's broken polities. It will soon be too late.

Biography

Shahriar Ahy has broad experience in political development, from Eastern Europe to the Islamic World. He was a director of the US-Baltic Foundation, which supported civil society and democratic public administration in the Baltic States. He was a co-founder of Baltic Fund, the first private equity investment Fund in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. He was also the chief executive of AGI, which controlled media assets ranging from news wire in the US to radio and television networks, as well as production, programming, media sales and cable operations in the Middle East. Shahriar was the principal of the General Implicator, a project to create a natural language comprehension engine usable on Arpanet, the forerunner of Internet. He received a high pass on his doctoral exams at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1976 and passed his doctoral thesis colloquium in 1978, based on a model to analyze the behaviour of oil exporting countries. At MIT he was assistant to Ithiel de Sola Pool who edited the handbook of communication, a compendium of theories of communication.

Collapsing Authority in the Arab World: Threat or Opportunity?

The last teenage year corresponds to an interesting number. Nineteen years before September 11th 2001, the Saudi education system came under the direction of religious Shaikhs. This significant concession to clerics took place shortly after fanatic Islamists had forcibly taken over the Holy Mosque in Mecca and the region was absorbing the waves of Khomeini's revolution. Nineteen is also the number of perpetrators of 9/11. More than three quarter of them had undergone an education informed by the "curriculum of the religious Shaikhs". Information has consequences.

From across the waters to the south of Spain, to the waters to the west of India, the current wave of freedom movements comes nineteen years after the launch of the first pan-Arab satellite TV. From above the wall of government censors, satellite TV brought images of the good life in the free world to ordinary Arab homes. One cannot overestimate the impact of those images on this generation.

Nineteen years ago was also the year Internet became commercially available. The Internet generation learned how to assemble in the virtual space and discuss public issues. Now they could demand the good life together, not just dream about it alone. Authoritarian regimes

found it increasingly difficult to keep people isolated, a key to maintenance of unanswerable power.

Non-ideological autocrats' typical response is mostly denial of access, blackouts, cut or reduced-capacity communication lines, as well as detention and incarceration of bloggers and net activists. As their main base of power, their security forces typically do not have the imagination to do much more. Totalitarians are different, however. They enter the virtual space and compete, although not on equal grounds. Their ideological cadres relish a contest of ideas, rigged by preferential access to media. But will they win?

Unlike classical forms of political power in the physical world that take years to accumulate, power to mobilize protest in the virtual space has proven capable of growing from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of participants in a few weeks. Despite the autocrats' restrictions and onslaughts the information from satellite TV and through Internet has already played a major role in bringing down dictators. That demonstrates the power of media to bring down authority. And the process does not stop at the presidential palaces: Those who brought down dictators will not go home happy with the same pay, same boss, same working conditions, or lack thereof. So they will keep tearing authority all the way down to where ordinary people live and work.

The key question is whether the new information society can build democratic authority as readily as it can destroy autocracy. Because without authority, work cannot be organized, the economy deteriorates, society declines and the capital of hope formed by initial success dissipates in a vicious cycle of loss of faith in democracy. This is when the ideal moment for Islamists arrives. Before the departure of secular autocrats they were not given a chance. After democracy matures and bears the fruits of tolerance and pluralism Islamists have little appeal. In the twain, however, there is a period of vulnerability. Collapse of authority and economic decline create a need for certainty which their ideology is glad to provide.

Managing this transitional vulnerability is of vital interest to the free world, if only because the vast region currently in turmoil includes its energy jugular. Europe has the additional interest of defending against a potential tsunami of refugees should authority collapse across the waters to its south. Failure could mean resurgence of Islamism in Europe through immigration, nationalist reaction and even resurrection of borders within. This would jeopardize the dream of a liberal, secular and united Europe.

America's eternal faith in triumph of democracy tends to underestimate this vulnerability. From Thomas Jefferson in France to George Bush in Iraq, American leaders have had a belief that mass-participation or elections will inevitably lead to democracy. But Putin and Chirac begged to differ on Iraq. The former remembered that the Bolshevik Revolution followed the Menshevik and the latter recalled the Reign of Terror that killed the positive hopes of the French Revolution, followed by militarism and decades of instability and war that lost more than ten million European lives.

So which will it be in North Africa and the Middle East? Will liberal democracy triumph, or will the better organized and ideologically committed Islamists fill the vacuum of authority?

Even if only the milder Ukraine or Belarus pattern of downward cycles of loss of hope in democracy sets in, there will be many who will regret the social network frenzy and uncontrolled multiplication of participation. One cannot blame poor Egyptians in Giza, who have lost their livelihood due to a collapse of tourism, in scolding the social networkers on

Al-Tahrir. Not everyone is willing to pay the price France paid for democracy for a hundred years after the Revolution when its national prosperity did not augment itself as much as the twenty years before.

The bad news is that societies in North Africa and the Middle East were not brought up on the lessons of Greek democracy, Roman law and rational administration, or emulation of Christ who willingly gave the right of secular rule to Caesar. Their unitary view of the divine and the earthly, their holistic view of community and administration tend to look favourably to the fundamentalists' presence in neighbourhoods offering a personal relationship that covers everything from faith to welfare, from schools to hospitals. In contrast, liberal democracy's equality before secular laws is inherently impersonal, while functionaries remote-controlled by those laws feel cold and distant. The alienation resulting from the impersonal relation between bureaucrats and citizens leads to corruption, reducing trust even further. Thus liberal democracy has an uphill battle against Islamists in North Africa and the Middle East.

The good news is that many Western institutions devoted to building democracy have accumulated a vast body of experience and scored impressive successes outside the Western world, from South America to Indonesia and, especially in Eastern Europe. They have learned the importance of building democracy from the ground up. They understand it is not just the big vessels of democracy, like national elections, but the small capillaries of the political corpus, where the daily experience of ordinary citizens with government takes place, that count in nurturing trust in government.

In conclusion, we may be at an inflection point when the emphasis and focus of free flow of information should change, from high politics to low, from mobilizing Azadi and Al-Tahrir squares to building civil society, from inflating demand for democracy to enabling supply of democracy. This may require software layers on top of social networks devoted to interest aggregation and community building. It will benefit from mass media content demonstrating examples of constructive engagement of public servants with communities. And it will benefit from transparent connectivity of e-government with daily concerns of ordinary citizens.

European institutions that helped the reconstruction of Eastern Europe have a particular role in helping with transfer of technology and skills of keeping the capillaries of information open. They can help with media conduits and content that would increase public awareness and vigilance in defence of free flow of information. Democracy and free flow of information may mean different things but they are co-extensive: On the long run, the former cannot survive without the latter and the latter is enough to ensure the former. To use Popper's words, let us hope the friends of the open society will defeat their enemies during the transitional vulnerability on the road to lasting democracy.

<div align="center">**Censorship**</div>

<div align="center">Negar Esfandiari</div>

Abstract

The Iranian government and its employment of censorship techniques through different arms of the state is fast growing. However, Iranian bloggers and activists are learning to adapt accordingly. The following interview with one of the most active but less recognized young bloggers highlights some of the realities of the struggle to fight against censorship and the challenges to keep the connection between those in Iran and abroad.

Biography

Negar Esfandiary is a freelance journalist based in UK and Italy. The following piece is based on an interview with Saeed Valadbaygi, a Toronto-based young Iranian blogger and editor of Street Journalist, a grass-roots news site run by citizen journalists in and outside of Iran.

Censorship

"Thank you very much for your support. What we need more than anything is bandwidth." Tweet by Knv, 22 June 2009

"Very slow Internet connection. Scary. What is happening in Iran, which should not be reported?" Tweet by Parastoo, 16 December 2010

Almost two years on from Iran's citizen journalism arousal, reporters, activists and bloggers have proven their staying power standing up to the country's Cyber Army in their determination to participate in the online community that has arisen in the wake of the post-election uprising. Iranians inside and outside the country freely engage in political and cultural dialogue on activist websites. Though many sites were in existence before 2009 a multitude have been launched since in support of the Green Movement.

"Digital David fights theocratic Goliath," said Timothy Garton Ash, a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and Professor of European Studies at Oxford University, in an article entitled Tweeting for Freedom, 2009.

In this atmosphere of free expression, the theocratic government exerts control by slowing down Internet speed to almost a snail pace, which is in itself an easy tool for censorship. Then there is the intermittent blocking of networking sites. Intermittent because suspending them would prevent government agents' access to useful information.

And there is a great deal at stake. The "Neda video" replayed worldwide within 24 hours of the young girl's death on Tehran's streets, was testament to the power of the Internet. The government hit back with a specialist Cyber Army, an extensive band of spies and hackers under the arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Defence Tech, a US security and military organ, stated that the IRGC's cyber division is investing an annual budget of 76 million US dollars to deal with the online dissidents. A message on the Iranian Cyber Army's website says the group was created in protest to the "interference of American and Zionists websites" in Iran's internal affairs and "the spreading of false news", warning all those

involved in the "soft overthrow project" that action will be taken against them. As the Cyber Army targets sites world wide, it leaves un-Zorroesque mark of:

THIS SITE HAS BEEN HACKED BY IRANIAN CYBER ARMY
iRANiAN.CYBER.ARMY@GMAIL.COM
U.S.A. Think They Controlling And Managing Internet By Their Access, But They Don't, We Control And Manage Internet By Our Power, So Do Not Try To Stimulation Iranian Peoples To…
NOW WHICH COUNTRY IN EMBARGO LIST? IRAN? USA?
WE PUSH THEM IN EMBARGO LIST
Take Care.

Iran's government already had a law in place that can label almost any Internet user a criminal. Indeed, Reporters Without Borders puts Iran in the lead with the greatest number of journalists in prison of any country. The Law of Computer Crimes, approved by Iran's parliament in January 2009 has been instrumental in the prosecution and repression of activists and bloggers, with 56 articles in the following categories:

A - Immoral content
B - Anti-Islamic content
C - Anti-security and disturbing the public peace
D - Criminal content regarding intellectual property and audio and visual issues
E - Content encourages, invites or provokes others to commit criminal acts
F - Content against state and public institutions and their responsibilities
G - Content used to facilitate other computer crimes

But the story continues as Iranians use their Internet tools to pursue there goals, most effectively in creating online petitions, quickly raising awareness of individual cases and garnering signatures, transforming domestic causes into international ones overnight, as in the case of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, who has been spared her sentence of stoning. The government may send threatening emails to the creators of these pages, but the power of international pressure may be underestimated.

Saeed Valadbaygi, 28, left Iran at the end of 2009. With more than ten years' experience of activism and blogging, he was a key source of international news in the aftermath of the elections and continues to provide up-to-date reports from Iran to facilitate accurate analysis. I asked him how the Internet in Iran has evolved, how much it represents the voice of Iranians and how it has sustained its force in the face of a government crackdown.

"A very small percentage of those online are in Iran, yet some two million of the Diaspora are actively connected. If we look at all the [political] movements – women, children, the arts and film –many of the key players have now left the country. That generation of activists was formed over two decades as life became more and more challenging. We would need another two decades to develop this again. In Iran there is more newsworthy activity, but it is not accessible online. Here, [outside Iran], there is less activity, but it's all because there is freedom of expression online. This opportunity has established stronger links inside and outside Iran. A dialogue has opened between people through the Internet.

Looking back, with the political developments of 2 Khordad [Khatami's 1997 landslide election victory] and 18 Tir [attack on student dormitories in 1999 that marked a turning point] the ground was ripe for activity. Communities were formed as everyone established

themselves online, from famous photographers to the student movement and human rights groups. The Internet became an essential tool and Iran ranked third-largest country of bloggers after the United States and China, with the Persian language the second most popular in the entire blogosphere. There were only two or three companies webhosting and the government controlled Internet service providers. But people had blogrolls, discovered each other and communicated, first by chat through Yahoo Messenger then weblogs and then email.

Before Google, your Yahoo Messenger ID was crucial. People knew theirs like [their] phone number. The atmosphere has always been one of clandestine identities. When I came to Canada my use of the Internet changed. There, I needed to know the best anti-filter software and back-up tools for not losing my work. Security from government spies is an issue for everyone in Iran, regardless of whether they are among the activists or not. Now, finally, I am able to use it to its true potential.

The western media played an important role in establishing the net in Iran, as it was advertising computers on satellite radio and television stations that created popular awareness. At the same time, a group of fundamentalists campaigned against the use of computers. Ahmadinejad's camp can be included among them, as well as various clerics, parliamentary representatives and even university deans and professors. The Internet was a phenomenon and educating oneself was key. Once the culture of a phenomenon penetrates, it generates a fixation in people. This exploded in the heat of 2009. It took ten years for the culture and the tools to match it to integrate. Ten years before people had first acquired the hardware, then the software, they had taught themselves with the tools before understanding the culture. Now we have seen a first generation of web users and the gap has been closed for experienced users like activists and bloggers, who learned with Web 1.0 and are now challenging themselves with Web 2.0[22]. Now Twitter and Facebook and YouTube are in place but for the mainstream public there are still gaps.

Until June 2009, the people communicating from outside Iran were journalists and activists. I remember my first contact with the outside world when I was 15 or 16. We blindly followed anyone who was in touch. As the Internet culture became familiar, I created my blog. Then Facebook came on the scene. After the elections YouTube was heavily filtered, so I used Facebook for uploading films and footage. You could present an issue, your voice and material together. They did not realise about Facebook.

We quickly set up workshops on blogging, Facebooking and Tweeting so more people could learn. This helped everything mushroom. At the time the government was unaware of the impact of Facebook, but after the elections they began blocking the site.

Before June 2009, I had around 200 "friends". This quickly became 100,000 after the live blogging we did. That was while I was still in Iran. After I left we started Street Journalist, and during last year's Ashura [religious festival] we were the only source of live news, and in two languages with minute-by-minute coverage, live blogging with videos. This was a first in the history of Iranian web use so the site had more than 14 million hits. Small things are happening. They have tried to hack the site, but we have made adjustments. The Cyber Army [hackers believed to be supported by Iranian Revolutionary Guard] is more concerned with hacking sites to stop the interest generated, than with individual people. That's left to

---

[22]Ed. note Web 1.0 was the first stage of the web between 1993-2001 based around static hyperlinked www. webpages. Web 2.0 is the rise of the social web, a platform for sharing user generated content, typified by social networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

the Ministry of Intelligence.

It is very difficult for people in Iran to keep up with the technology to combat the filters and deal with the slow servers. The servers in the Internet cafes are faster but then you can't access the sites you want there, though technically they are more efficient and you are more protected in that you can send things without revealing your ISP. To upload five minutes of footage on YouTube could take 50 minutes at home. So we use proxies through alternative domains, so the person in Iran is in effect uploading the video via our computers outside the country. There is no them without us - nor us without them.

In this potent climate, many new working relationships were formed and filled gaps in our previous endeavours. We suddenly had translators in different countries and were able to correspond with the media of each country in their language. When I was in Iran, my readership was English speaking and I wanted to write in English to communicate with the outside world. That has changed now. We created Street Journalist for that, but the 70,000 people linked to my various Facebook pages are mostly in Iran and I now usually post in Persian. We strive to be independent of political groups, to be a people's media with no restrictions. We have to be ahead with our interests and represent the many initiatives and movements occurring in Iran. Rather than accumulate numbers, I am trying to create democracy within our online discussions. You will see fewer antagonistic attacks on this forum and most of the individuals expressing themselves are writing from Iran. A community has arisen. They communicate on the page and also by email.

The exile community is very relevant and represents the Iranian middle class demographic well. Its members are organically linked and validate the struggle. It is as one body though we are not geographically close. Non-Iranian participation and support too has been unbelievable. It was very surprising to Iranians in Iran that hearts elsewhere in the world beat for them, partly because of the bleak perception that people had of Iranians because of ostracism from the international community that damaged the culture. Iranians felt they were closed from the rest of the world.

An interesting observation is that in Iran ours has been an urban world culture always absorbing things from other cultures. But the Green Movement introduced our culture to the international community – more than a million people protesting silently, walking side by side, and speaking to activists in various countries they talk about our political stance and behaviour in 2009. It was exemplary and showed our humanity. This generated solidarity and cultural dialogue. Young people in the West have a platform; in Iran the platform has limitations. Iranians have motivation; they are always looking up from below. In the West they are looking down from above. That is significant.

Protecting Reformist and Citizen Journalists in Iran

Claudia Mendoza and Saba Farzan

Abstract

In their contribution, Claudia Mendoza and Saba Farzan, draw attention to the current situation of citizen journalists in Iran. Their analysis begins with the gravity of repression young journalistic voices are confronted with. The authors continue to express how the international community can and must seek steps to support citizen journalism inside Iran.

Biography

Claudia Mendoza is a Research Analyst at the Legatum Institute. She works on a variety of topics related to foreign policy, security, and the Middle East, with a particular focus on Iran and the Gulf. Prior to joining the Institute, Claudia was an Associate Fellow for Middle East, at the Henry Jackson Society. She is also a former Legacy Heritage Fellow at the Transatlantic Institute in Brussels. She has published articles in various publications including Standpoint Magazine, the New Statesman, the Jerusalem Post, and the Daily Star Lebanon. Claudia has a Master's degree in Middle East Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies and a Bachelor's degree in Biochemistry from the University College of London.

Saba Farzan was born in Tehran and grew up in Germany. She is an independent writer for major German, Austrian and Swiss newspapers as well as the European edition of the Wall Street Journal on Iranian civil society, Iran and the USA, as well as German-Iranian relations. She holds a Master's degree from the University of Bayreuth in Theatre studies, American Literature and Sociology with research stays in New York and at Yale University. She currently lives in Geneva, Switzerland.

Protecting Reformist and Citizen Journalists in Iran

Reporters without borders once famously referred to Iran as the 'largest prison for journalists'. As well as having the largest number of jailed journalists in the world, 'free' journalists live in constant fear of being arrested. Access to and free flow of information is a major key to advancing freedom, human rights, and social justice around the world. The US and others should continue to encourage freedom of expression worldwide and invest in technology and training programs to make access to, and free flow of, information more accessible.

By launching numerous reform-oriented newspapers and countless blogs over the last two decades, Iranian civil society groups have taken courageous steps in order to express their views on Iranian and world politics. In doing so, they have been able to reveal what they call the 'true Iran'.

Since the brutal crackdown on Iran's Freedom Movement in the summer of 2009, the days of relatively tolerant debate in print media have completely disappeared and there are no reform based newspapers left. Even opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi's newspaper, Etemad-e Melli, has been banned. During her interview with Radio Israel in Farsi, Mitra Khalatbari, the former editor, expressed further difficulties that journalists inside the country faced – both politically and financially. For example, articles ready to go to print were never actually published as the authorities banned the newspaper. As a systematic way

of discouraging critical journalists, writers would not only never see their work published but they would also never receive payment. Khalatbari was one of many forced to leave Iran in the summer of 2009.

With printed reform oriented newspapers under threat, it is just as well that old-fashioned media in the form of basic print and broadcast platforms are no longer the only sources of information available to the outside world. The widespread use of social media, notably Facebook, Twitter and YouTube has meant that information platforms have grown exponentially and the Internet is now essentially the biggest and fastest growing means of effective communication, playing a huge role in journalism, specifically citizen journalism.

The progressive role of technology in Iranian civilian protests is not new. Iran's history is rich in revolutionary uprisings and every revolutionary step had, in its time, a modern means of communication. During the Constitutional Revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, for example, it was the telegram that helped demonstrators organise their protests. The Freedom Movement of the 21st century organised mass demonstrations using the modern communication channels previously mentioned.

In the June 2009 protests, the death of a young protestor, Neda Agha Soltan, which was captured on a protestor's mobile phone and uploaded to YouTube, came to symbolise the plight of the Iranian people who had suffered under the brutal and oppressive leadership of the Islamic Republic for 30 years. This is but one example of how citizen journalists have functioned as the eyes and ears of the international media.

Unfortunately, the monitoring system Nokia Siemens delivered to the Islamic Republic has made a crackdown on social media stations much easier to facilitate, resulting in the detention of thousands of peaceful protestors. The journalist Isa Saharkhiz was arrested and sentenced to prison after regime officials monitored his communication links using this system. He and his son have started a lawsuit against Nokia Siemens and its delivery of monitoring technology to the Iranian regime. A political prisoner starting a lawsuit against both the regime and a company is unprecedented in Iranian history. Despite the grave human rights violations, Iranian civil society, both inside the dark prisons and outside, have managed to remain vocal.

What Can Be Done to Help Iranians in their Quest for Freedom?

The reluctance of the Obama administration to convey support for the protests in 2009 was borne out of the fear of tainting the pro-democracy movement as a western-inspired plot. It was branded as such, regardless. His silence during the protests angered the Iranian people who chanted, "Obama, Obama — either you're with them or you're with us."

The US has learnt some hard lessons and during the recent wave of protests sweeping across the region. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton intensified pressure on Middle East governments to ensure open access to the Internet, claiming that "those who clamp down on Internet freedom may be able to hold back the full impact of their people's yearnings for a while, but not forever." This is especially significant as social media sites continue to play a central role in organising political movements across the region.

The world has witnessed the dominant role of new technology used by demonstrators peacefully demanding freedom in Tunisia and Egypt - the monitoring system in Iran however means that the Iranian Freedom Movement has not been able to triumph accordingly. Using

all political means necessary, Europe and its partners should prevent business deals like the Nokia Siemens one taking place in the future.

According to the Legatum Institute's Prosperity Index, almost 60% of Iranians own mobile phones, well above the global average. The potential for information dissemination both internally and externally among mobile phone users is vast given the technologies attached to modern phones. However, because of the sophisticated state-mandated, draconian Internet filtering system, their scope is limited. The international community should be protesting Iran's attempts to block broadcast signals, a violation of international law, as well as helping to get Iranians the technology to overcome censorship.

There are some limitations to citizen journalism given that the operators are usually dissenters and, therefore, politically motivated. Nevertheless, in the face of media restrictions, their work is essential to ensuring the free flow of information and with proper training citizen journalists can effectively fill the information void.

The training should be two fold – firstly, they must be taught to report only what they see; answering the essential questions such as where and when an event took place. In order for their work to remain unbiased and valuable to banned professional journalists, it must lack the narrative. Secondly, in order for citizen journalists to remain securely online and avoid the risk of government crackdown, their privacy must be protected. There are some very simple tools for doing this, which are available on special training websites. Funding and supporting these sites will allow more people to continue their activities safely.

Following the easing of US export controls, Google made a number of its products available to Iranian users in January. Notwithstanding this positive development, there are still a fair number of Google products that are blocked as a result of being over prudent and not wanting to violate the Iran Sanctions Act. Despite assertions from the US government that these websites are allowed to be active, these sites retain a strict interpretation of the Act. If these websites are playing a leading role in disseminating information, they have a responsibility to act rather than avoid a solution on 'non political' grounds.

Also, these websites must customise their services by designing products in a way that make them easy to access inside Iran. This is entirely possible as evidenced by the launching of 'Facebook Zero', a stripped down version of Facebook that allows users to sidestep slow bandwidth which otherwise acts as an obstacle to accessing the site from mobile phones. Subsequently, many more Indians and others who suffer from slow bandwidth have been able to access the website using their mobiles.

Civil society, NGOs, and the media should all be asserting pressure on these websites to customise their products so that Iranians and other citizens of repressive regimes are able to access information more freely.

Finally, moral encouragement as a tool for change should never be underestimated. Being reminded that others on this path have succeeded would be a huge and much needed morale boost for the Iranian people who look at the successes in Tunisia and Egypt with a combination of hope, envy and despondence as they have yet to make progress in their own quest for freedom.

On February 11th, exactly 32 years after Ayatollah Khomeini took power in Iran, Hosni Mubarak was ousted from Egypt. Instead of Iran hailing this as 'the echo of its voice in other

parts of the Muslim world', it should serve as an eerie reminder to Messrs Khamenei and Ahmadinejad and their henchmen that fervent defiance of popular demands is not sustainable.

New Media Technology and the Uprisings in Iran and Tunisia

Nazanine Moshiri

Abstract

By comparing experiences in Iran and Tunisia, this short piece points the similar aims but different types of challenges, cultural nuances and realities that have affected the popular uprisings in these countries and the outcome of the struggle for rights and democracy.

Biography

Nazanine Moshiri is a Presenter and Correspondent for Al Jazeera English. For the past four years she has covered some of the most important stories for the Network. She has reported extensively from throughout Europe as well as in Afghanistan and Iran. Amongst her most important interviewees have been British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez, and Ali Akhbar Salehi, the current Iranian Foreign Minister. She was embedded with Russian troops during the Russian-Georgian War and was one of the first journalists to reach Tskhinvali in South Ossetia after the Russian invasion of 2008 and L'Aquila, Italy, after the 2009 earthquake.

More recently Nazanine reported from Tunisia during and after the fall of President Ben Ali. Before Al Jazeera, Nazanine was a well-known face in Britain, reporting and presenting for ITN. Nazanine was born in Tehran, her family moved to the UK in 1978, before the Islamic Revolution. In addition to English, she speaks Farsi, Italian and French. She has a Postgraduate degree in Journalism from the University of Westminster and a BA (Hon) from University College London in Modern European Studies.

New Media Technology and the Uprisings in Iran and Tunisia

I arrived in Tunisia the day after Ben Ali fled, the uprising, which ousted the former President after 23 years in power, has now spread across the Arab world. Some have called it the first successful "Twitter", or "Facebook", revolution. If Tunisia sparked a wave of popular uprisings then Iran was the birthplace of citizen journalism. Like in Iran, Ben Ali clamped down on Internet access.

However, while many sites were blocked, interestingly Ben Ali allowed access to Facebook. Nobody knows for sure why that was; one theory is that he just did not see the threat. Activists in Tunisia used Facebook to share video and information, which was to prove crucial. It is estimated that around 1.7 million Tunisians have an account with the social networking site. So, while Tunisians television screens and radios were filled with the State's one-sided take on protests and events, around a fifth of the population was able to receive and also spread an alternative picture. Many believe that even if Ben Ali had blocked Facebook, an Internet savvy generation would have followed Iran's example and gone through proxy sites. Despite restrictions on access to Facebook in Iran, according to worldpress.org, it is estimated that around 700,000 users were active from February 2008 to June 2009.23 YouTube is also blocked, and again despite a massive Internet clampdown in the Islamic Republic, the BBC says it was receiving around eight videos a minute at the height of the 2009 unrest. Al Jazeera does not have any concrete numbers, but it ran a special Iran desk, monitoring news coming in from Twitter and YouTube.

---

[23] http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/3699.cfm [Accessed 17 April 2011]

Like many of my colleagues at the time, I was astounded by the constant flow of footage out of Iranian cities despite the challenges being faced. The editorial decision on which video clips to run, was mostly based on the quality of the video, which was sometimes extremely poor. The problem with citizen journalism whether it is in Iran, Tunisia or Egypt is actually verifying what you are seeing. Most of the time it is extremely difficult to confirm when, where, or by whom the footage was taken, unless you are lucky enough to get in touch with the people who actually filmed the video. As importantly, for many western media organisations with no expert knowledge of the Farsi language, there was an over reliance on English language tweets which were difficult to verify. Golnaz Esfandiari in her foreign policy article from June 2010 makes an important point, "Simply put: There was no Twitter Revolution inside Iran." She writes, "Western journalists who couldn't reach—or didn't bother reaching - people on the ground in Iran simply scrolled through the English-language tweets post with tag #iranelection...Through it all, no one seemed to wonder why people trying to coordinate protests in Iran would be writing in any language other than Farsi.[24]"

In Tunisia, French is just as widely spoken as Arabic, and are both widely spoken and written, so many young people were writing their Tweets and blogs in French, making it far easier for the International media to get immediate news from the streets. Notwithstanding, like many International journalists I could be "bothered", but was unable to travel to Tehran to actually speak to protesters face to face. Telephone and email were the only means of communication, even though their scope was limited, but that was limited because of government monitoring and the fear of arrest. Many people I spoke to asked me to call them on landlines rather than mobiles, because they believed the authorities were listening in to their conversations. Since October 2009 I have been to Iran on a number of occasions, and as most television journalists who have reported from the country will tell you, heavy restrictions apply. You need special permission for every story, which can sometimes take weeks. Being of Iranian descent makes things a little easier, especially since you can explain what you need directly, but being of dual nationality does make the authorities rather more suspicious of your intentions.

On the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, February 11th 2010, I was at the official pro-government rally in Tehran's Azadi Square, which was broadcast on Iranian state television. All foreign journalists in Tehran at the time were given access to the event. Just by pure chance (I left before the official escort back to Northern Tehran) I ended up witnessing a number of Green protesters chanting anti government slogans, and the riot police, dressed in black with batons and tear gas canisters preparing to retaliate. I reported what I saw via telephone to Al Jazeera. NPR picked up my eyewitness account and thousands were able to hear my words. Those moments of reporting actual events from the ground in Iran are extremely rare. Foreign journalists who do not meet the set requirements, which are basically sticking with in the remits of your official permission for that particular story, will have their permission taken away by the Ministry of Information. So reporting from Iran is a real balancing act between wanting to stay while maintaining journalistic integrity.

As an international Al Jazeera reporter and presenter based in London and Doha, I can leave Iran and continue my work elsewhere. It is not so easy for those making a living in the country. There are many talented journalists, but in the end a game of balance turns into a

---

[24] See her full article entitled "The Twitter Devolution" dated June 7, 2010 published by Foreign Policy and available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/07/the_twitter_revolution_that_wasnt [Accessed 17 April 2011]

constant stream of self-censorship. It is more than two and half years since the unrest that gripped Iran and there has been an unprecedented crackdown by the government on all forms of media as well as freedom of speech. Despite the best efforts of the Islamic Republic, however, the information, the tweets, the video is still finding a route out of the country. Although with Tunisia, Egypt and then Libya dominating international headlines there has definitely been a marked lack of interest in Iran's internal problems. Another issue is the lack of accurate unbiased material. Like Tunisia before the uprising, the standard of journalism and balanced reporting is extremely poor. Reporters Without Borders 2010 report ranked Tunisia 164th and Iran 172nd out of 178 countries in its press freedom index. However, there are groups that are fighting back. In January 2011, Operation Tunisia, which was organised by the Internet hacking group "Anonymous", launched an attack on key Tunisian government sites.25 The group said there was "an outrageous level of censorship" in the country, and targeted sites with what it called a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks to highlight the protests. The campaign managed to knock some important government sites offline, but more importantly it highlighted what was going on around the country.[26]

In recent weeks there have reportedly been a number of "Anonymous" attacks on Iran's state-controlled websites and media. The group says it is fighting the regime's Internet censorship and helping Iranian activists. It is unclear how successful these attacks have been. Although new media is an important tool, I believe that Tunisia and Egypt showed the world that revolutions cannot be entirely based on this form of communication. People also need to be willing to, at times, risk their lives by coming out onto the streets. One Tunisian journalist described what happened across the country as "the death of fear". That happened in Iran as well, but the difference in Tunisia was that members of the army, respected by many Tunisians, took a crucial decision, to disobey Ben Ali's orders and not to fire on the people. Another important difference is that unlike in Iran, where reformists were the principle green activists inside the country, and were thus rounded up very easily, in Tunisia the movement did not have a central core, which could be cracked. Tunisia is now in unchartered territory, building a Constitution, a new democracy, and a more open media from scratch. These are freedoms Iranian activists can only dream of. As a television journalist born in Iran it is an extraordinary privilege to be able to witness such change. It is something I will never forget.

---

[25] The open letter is available on-line at: http://www.pdf-archive.com/2011/01/04/an-open-letter-to-all-media/ [Accessed 17 April 2011]

[26] Brigadier General Gholamreza Jalli, an IRI official affiliated with the IRGC, welcomes hackers who are willing to work with the regime to hack and bring down opposition websites, see:
http://www.rferl.org/content/iran_says_it_welcomes_hackers_who_work_for_islamic_republic/2330495.html [Accessed 17 April 2011]

<h1 style="text-align:center">Iran and the Role of Social Networks</h1>

<p style="text-align:center">Rossi Qajar</p>

Abstract

While social media tools, such as Facebook are redefining our everyday communications and networking habits and are competing with other activities, both at the workplace and at home, they have also greatly impacted governments in the relations with their citizens, especially in the area of accountability and on the issue of human rights. The consequences are sometimes unexpected and at this stage often staggering. The Iranian government was not spared by this new social phenomena, but it has managed to control its unexpected aspect, so far. Our analysis takes us into the mechanics of social networks and the development of the Iranian protest network triggered by the hotly disputed 2009 presidential election results.

Biography

Rossi Qajar is a technology consultant and developer. A Cornell university Engineering graduate, he founded the Houston based United Media Corporation, catering engineering, publishing and graphics solutions, mostly to the oil and gas and space industries. United Media Corporation kept a close relationship with Enron Corporation through a Facilities Management contract. Mr. Qajar also developed virtual schooling and cooperative sales management software for education institutions, as well as patient management software for the medical field. His more recent projects involve social media marketing applications in e-commerce. Mr. Qajar is the grandson of Ehtesham Saltaneh, one of the leaders of the 1906 Persian Constitutional revolution and elected President of the first Persian parliament (Majles). He has a strong interest in Iranian Islamic theosophy and in Iran's contemporary history.

Iran and the Role of Social Networks

On the 12th of June 2009, in Tehran, millions of people poured into the streets, 30 years after a seemingly similar massive outpouring that sent many Iranians into exile where they adopted new lives and adapted to new cultures without ever forgetting that they were part of the land of Iran. Young and old, in traditional dress or with western outfits, they revived the hopes of a people, inside and outside, washing away feelings of remorse and fears or crimes of a nation who would look to the future as a remedy to the suffering, wash away the anger which fuels the desire for retribution and feelings of shame over outliving innocent victims of our recent history. What is different 30 years later in Iran, is the potential role of social media and cyber technologies. After reviewing and understanding these tools, we must analyse the factors that have driven their effectiveness. More importantly, we need to distil lessons learned that may be effective as we go forward to achieve the intended outcome in the future. New social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, united the emotions of successive waves of émigrés with those of the sea of protestors in Iran, into a common Green Wave defying further suffering from oppression, corruption or humiliation. As the hope persisted through the sustained bravery of women, children and men of our multiethnic society, international news organisations were swiftly barred from witnessing this popular miracle and forced to rely on Twitter and YouTube to follow these still incredible mass protests. The NYT and the Guardian filtered the feeds in a special 'Live' section that complied with our need for consistency and reliability, and soon enough, as

previously in Moldova, the uprising was dubbed 'The Twitter Revolution'. If anything, a revolution was also shaking the world of the press. The NYT, Reuters, Le Monde, and other press giants, all were already experiencing serious financial trouble, while news sources often shifted to the more comprehensive and certainly timelier social media world. Therefore, social media served at least two global purposes: 1. mobilising the protestors, and 2. Filling in for traditional news and information outlets.

This revolutionary uprising in Iran in 2009, and now those of Tunisia and Egypt, have prompted renewed serious debates on the role that social media tools, namely Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, have played and more importantly, will come to play in the sparking and leadership of these social movements. And in a larger context, the Internet in its present stage, commonly referred to as Web 2.0, is defining a new era in the balance of power among governments and in their relations with their populations. While the debates abound freely and often passionately on these same platforms, two published opposing views generate a more structured discussion framework: that of Evgeny Morozov[27] and that of Malcolm Gladwell[28] opposed to that of Clay Shirky.[29] The aim of this short study is to summarise the mechanics of social networks and attempt to evaluate their effects. Our interest mainly concerns social movements and civil rights mobilisation.

The Topology of Social Networks

Attempts to analyse social networks date from the early 20th century and have developed from anthropological and sociological case studies to formulate models with individuals, groups and relations. However, the recognition that these relations may be of different strength and nature prompted a need to conceptualise a more complex network or networks representing our social structure, including important concepts such as multidimensional scaling for translating relationships into social 'distances'. Granovetter produced a few crucial papers, namely "The Strength of Weak Ties" in 1973 and "Getting a Job" in 1974, in which he argued that 'weak ties', that is acquaintances as opposed to close friends for example, are more likely to provide opportunities, to aid their integration into communities and to be the source of new information, for close friends usually possess and share the same type of information. Identifying members of the network, existing relations and especially the quality or 'strength' of these relations, remains a challenge. In addition, determining the boundaries of sub-networks in a greater structure of intertwined networks is also very important for it may affect the qualitative role of presumed weak ties. Researchers managed this 'relational' data in the form of different sets of matrices and used mathematical graph theory to visualise and conceptualise the data and their relations into points and lines. These 'sociograms' can be as complex as the social structure they aim to represent and with relations themselves possessing attributes, such as strength, time, or density, connecting lines are attributed values and their graphical representations are valued graphs. The maximum number of lines that could be present in a graph can be easily calculated from the number of points that it contains. Each point may be connected to all others except itself, so $n(n-1)$ would give the total number of pairs of points in the graph, but the number of lines that could connect these points is half this total, as the line connecting A to B is the same as that connecting the B to A. Thus an undirected graph with n points can contain a maximum of $n(n-1)/2$ distinct lines. And the density of the network is therefore the actual number of relations l divided by the maximum, or $l/(n(n-1)/2)$

[27] Evgeny Morozov. *Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011

[28] *Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted* by Malcolm Gladwell in The New Yorker, October 4, 2010, available on-line at: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell [Accessed 17 April 2011]

[29] See *The Political Power of Social Media*, published in Foreign Affairs, January 2011, available on-line at: http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky-the-political-power-of-social-media [Accessed 17 April 2011]

In a valued graph, some lines may count more than others and may have to be multiplied by a denominator. Density calculations will be complicated by the weight of the attribute and by limiting factors such as how much attention and time can each point dedicate to new relations. These analyses and the right formulation of network densities, in the case of networks representing the power of social media in social movements, allows us to evaluate different social themes and the interest potential through member participation and their activity intensity.

In 1998 Duncan Watts a graduate student of Prof. Steven Strogatz at Cornell University (Ithaca, NY), published an important paper to become a book a year later and updated in 2003.[30] These studies where based on the research of his professor on the dynamics of synchronisation and inspired by the published work of Stanley Milgram's famous "Small World Experiment", and that of Granovetter. The models for larger, more 'real life' networks, described the modern cohesion of loosely connected social communities. His 'small-world' model showed that the network was composed of clusters with some of its strongly linked nodes, also randomly (weak) linked to nodes of other far away clusters, through which information from the initial cluster for example, may be rapidly transferred in very few steps. In other words, social communities that may seem distant while the network is forming, suddenly start to act cohesively with the addition of a small number of weak links.

His findings generated a lot of interest and a Notre Dame Professor, Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, extended his work with his own findings, most importantly that large networks' evolution is driven by only few leading "hubs", and that nodes with the most links, get the most new links by preferential attachment. He calls this method the fitness model of networks. When a node is "fit", it attracts links.[31] This type of large network composed of leading hubs connected with a multitude of smaller hubs through weak links is called a "scale-free" network. Finally, for our purposes, we must also mention the work of Damon Centola, from MIT, who found that albeit scale-free networks allowed for faster information flow, those networks with "strong" links where the social distance between nodes is smaller, are more likely to be vectors for change in the nodes' behaviour.[32] He argues that weak ties actually slow down and even prevent the diffusion of information in networks.

The scale-free networks are the most representative of the popular social networks such as Facebook, and with all the enthusiastic studies and opinions praising the potential of its new people power, information delivery and civil rights awareness, decision-makers, those in power and those still in-waiting, keep focused on the established order. For them, advances in technology and society remain just factors of modern governance challenges, as were the introduction of parliaments, voting rights, term limits and so on. For the masses, it is yet another more powerful weapon in their never ending quest for inclusive and immediate individual representation. In case of social movements leading to virtual and street demonstrations, both groups feel a certain degree of confidence, the first relying ultimately on the state security apparatus to uphold the established order, and the second on the power of a new found unity and the support of world opinion.

---

[30] See *Collective dynamics of small-world networks* - 1998, later published by Duncan J. Watts as *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age*, New York: Saul Steinberg Foundation, 2003.
[31] For further study see *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means*, New York: Penguin Group, 2002.
[32] Damon Centola & Michael Macy, 2007. 'Complex Contagions and the Weakness of Long Ties'. University of Chicago.

But the real problem is whether anyone control this new phenomena. In Tunisia and Egypt, a dictator was brought down, within a month the new prime minister was brought down. Hopes of future stability following the slow re-building of a nation with a more representative government may not turn out the way we foresee. With the build-up of communities into more cohesive entities, the need for centralised governance will appear less necessary and constant power struggles fuelled by the "contagious" power of grass root dissatisfaction and uprisings, what Watts calls the madness of crowds, will certainly keep everyone on their toes. It is still early to understand, even less to assess what propagates an idea or a call-to-action more than another, what constitutes the threshold and what direction and with what intensity will the information cascade in our social network. Not for lack of debates and opinions, but because examples and counter-examples relating to events in the Middle East, Asia or Eastern Europe, have had varying outcomes. In most countries where oppression, corruption and dire living conditions prevail, we should be less concerned with how to maximise the circumstances for exposing popular cases of injustice among members of a social network supporting a change of conditions in such country. These cases follow the same Pareto principle that helped build their network in the first place. In Iran, a protestor's death or imprisonment, a hint of regime change slogan or in-fighting within the governing elite, will go viral and attract the most attention, generating comments, articles and emotions. The fact that after more than a year of protest with the support of one of the most visible if not most active, social network of anti-Iranian government members, Iran's government did not have the same fate as those of Tunisia or Egypt, has intensified Shirky-Gladwell type debates. During the Tunisian and Egyptian historical uprisings, a flurry of articles under the generalised headings of: "Why Iran is not Egypt", "The difference between Iran and Egypt", and finally just "Why not Iran", aimed to satisfy inquiring minds. These countries seem to be going through what Iran went through 30 years ago, they are mostly fighting for their independence. Democracy? Sure, they'll have some of that too. But first, give them justice and their restored dignity.

Well, why not Iran? Before we get back to Iran, let us hear from Shirky-Gladwell. In the January/February 2011 issue of Foreign Affairs, Shirky presented an essay "The Political Power of Social Media". It was mostly in support of the US' Internet Freedom proposal, describing the benefits for US interests and the dilemmas that it presented for the conservatives. He argues that the speed and scale of the spread of information empowers committed groups that alter the dynamics of the public sphere. Gladwell, on the other hand, answers that there is no convincing evidence that these new social media tools have had a decisive impact on the outcome of social movements, that is they did not solve a problem that may not have existed in the first place. Morozov goes further by arguing that these technologies may have benefited government forces more than their opposition. The debate rages and is captivating, but we don't see it as being essential at this stage of the Iranian case. The structure of a successful network is what we consider of essence, before any operating consideration or any potential consequence.

A State of Disunion

So is social networking fuelling protests and uprisings? During the street protests that started in 2009 in Iran, some young women and men were killed and with a last incredulous look, entrusted their escaping hope and innocence to their fellow protestors, while many others hanged or in jail, tortured and broken, found the courage not to shout "why me?". And from Twitter to YouTube, these strong images ignite online passions. But in Tehran, across town, people drive decent cars and live comfortably, while satellite TV displays the affluence of western lifestyle. And another part of the population surviving on menial jobs,

living in cramped quarters with little hope for a decent existence, shouts "why not me?" True, the educated, the middle and higher middle class youth, usually technology-savvy, yearning for more freedom and basic human rights, suffocate under the IRI's rigid Islamic society. The Internet, blogs and social media, gives them both a voice and a giant virtual meeting place. But should a larger portion of the population join the protest, the aspirations won't be the same. Justice? Justice starts at home.

Insightful explanations on why the uprising did not succeed, or was not to succeed, or will succeed, are often proposed. We read them with attention. In many ways, some of the enlightenments still leave question marks. The main one is that relating to the repression. Repression was there in '79, it was there in '99, it was there in Egypt, and it is there in Libya. At least six hundred people were killed in Egypt in a time frame of just a few weeks, and thousands of Libyans have died now too. There is no doubt that something unique and incredible happened in Iran in the last six months of 2009. It was not brought to completion. And expert explanations offered do not always satisfy.

We would like to clarify our views on what we consider to be the state of the Iranian social network scene, both inside the country and outside. Iran has been an early adopter of blogging and blogs are very popular, although they are of less consequence in our investigation of the power of social networks in the current protest movements. Video-based sites, such as YouTube, have their importance, but we see them more as feeding into a site such as Facebook, and not conducive to the build-up of a network. Twitter has a special place among these tools. The events of 2009 in Iran contributed greatly to Twitter's current recognition. At a time when events were happening faster than the traditional reporting could follow, Twitter satisfied the insatiable need for instant information in the exiled Iranian community and among the news professionals. The depth of the protests, their grassroots character and the worldwide interest, took almost everyone by surprise. Whether the information was verified or not, it was there in mass, available and exalting. A handful of sources were recognised as trustworthy, and the rest... well, the rest is history. But let's be clear, the majority if not all the utilised sources were tweeting from outside Iran (albeit the information may have been genuine, either phoned-in or sent through a computer).[33] Twitter was used as a news source, to the benefit of news professionals, pundits and exiled Iranians. If, unaware, I had read about a Twitter Revolution, I would have imagined the role of Twitter as that of a radio transmitter in the age of radio. A communications tool used to inform, warn and direct protestors in real-time. In that respect, Twitter did not accomplish its revolutionary promise, but for its real-time information distribution, it did accomplish its social networking role.

Finally, a word about Internet censorship and Iran. A lot is being said about Iran's Internet censorship and a few professional sites follow and report on the cat and mouse game between the government and the users. The second part of this concise study will provide a review of the state of the Internet usage in Iran, the hacking technologies and the state and direction of cyber warfare. Before that, however, since certain events have been followed with great interest by human rights and political organisations, and by the core members of our Iran network, we try to gather the essential from the use of the Internet mainly as a communications tool and within the limits, some realistic and some not, imposed by the government. From the Berkman Center at Harvard University and their collaboration on the OpenNet initiative, to the analyses of security hardware and software vendors, and to independent researchers, bloggers and academics, there are now many professional and reliable sources to draw on. In the case of countries such as Iran, speculations and

---

[33] The Alexa rankings of June 2009 confirm that Twitter's penetration in Iran is nearly 0%.

controversies abound. Reports on the technological possibilities, their material and the Internet traffic, are generally accepted. But the IRI's intentions, determination and abilities are often underestimated and misread. In general, the conception of time and space is different within an Iranian mindset, and patience and priorities are prime over short-term reactions and success. The IRI does not intend to, nor needs to, nor expects to either micro-control or keep all Internet traffic under tight surveillance, but it will to the extent that opportunities that present themselves. Their censorship operations show a certain discipline, flexibility and hierarchy in priorities. Until the unexpected burst in Internet usage through social media tools, the IRI's priority was mostly the strict control of "subversive" sites, considered pornographic or politically unsuitable. After the 2009 presidential elections, this strategy was expanded to recognise and thwart new threats. If we disregard cyberwar threats for now, that which probably worries the IRI most, is the diffusion of information - and especially images of - its repressive policies, followed by its economic concerns. According to the rare existing reports or researches, Iran's main and satisfactory censure policies, included bandwidth and access speed control, centralised smartfiltering of websites, and keyword filtering through their controlled proxy server gateways before accessing the Internet through the government Telecommunications Company of Iran's (TCI) only portal. The authorities also resort to very simple methods such as instructing the ISPs to repeatedly restart or shut down their servers all together for a very short timeframe, thus disrupting the uploading of larger files, such as mobile phone videos shot during demonstrations.

On the 22nd of June, 2009 while Iran stunned the world a second time 30 years after its Revolution by what looked to be another great popular revolution, the Wall Street Journal joined the chorus of those lovers of world history who would not be left behind, and published an investigative article to become a reference source on Iran's censors' use of packet analysis or DPI (Deep Packet Inspection) based on circumstantial network traffic analysis and on a handful of industry or technically knowledgeable interviewees. The affirmed speculation was denied by the purported vendors (Nokia, Siemens) and by other non-interviewed experts. Very recently, Iran's successful blocking of Tor's proxy based IP circumventing software (Tor - Update on Internet censorship in Iran, January 2011) has renewed the speculation. Without developing the DPI issue further in this section, we contend that Iran does not yet really need DPI to attain its goals, albeit obviously, the need to be on top of every advanced technology remains a high priorities, but these abilities and priorities are dynamic in essence, both technologically and politically. Basically, in the threat level hierarchy, satisfactory gateway filtering as opposed to access layer filtering, should make the DPI issue nearly irrelevant to Iran's censors, although not to activists and some analysts. In time, according to the IRI's perception of still unrecognised vital security threat, the need for IP address linking to Internet communications may prove more urgent, thus justifying a major shift in censorship strategy. We do not agree with many of the conclusions in the published reports on Internet usage, growth and influence and we still see Iranian authorities focusing on blocking access to a list of "immoral" or unacceptable socio-political sites, along with identifying and monitoring the main individuals or groups who may be assumed to represent a real threat to their security, in addition to occasional mediatic "coups" to counter the often organised onslaught of negative publicity and net attacks they are now facing. The authorities are aware that millions of individuals, mostly educated, Internet users, are actively criticising, even revolting against the regime. The West really became aware of this in 2009, but Iran has been dealing with it for years, What was surprising to the regime, was the extent to which some of its own people have been willing to join the protestors and go public in their political power struggle. More than any foreign assisted plotter, regional movement or the traditional exiled opponents, these IRI dissenters

and their associated organisations in Iran, or now also abroad, are the real perceived threats. As such, the foremost priority becomes the access to their communications, strategies and collaborations. The authorities need their passwords, emails, announcements and any other vital information. In the large array of hacking tools and methods, they tend to prefer password retrieval hacks. We consider that in this respect, the "anti-censorship" software or methods such as Tor, FreeGate, or proxy server methods, are still dangerous but largely ineffective for the targeted individuals and we defer this part of our discussion to the second part of our study. As sophisticated and advanced as any method may seem, we also know that countering these anti-censorship methods is not as difficult as it may seem in the case of targeted or targetable individuals. Possibilities for the authorities range from preventing physical access to computer equipment to inserting spying software, from keyloggers and network analysers for instance, to monitoring ISP servers, and even monitoring for recurrent unusual encrypted packets traffic from specific IP addresses.

The art of hacking is constantly changing and in some cases is much more difficult than in others. It is important to note that a majority of servers or server applications do not bother enough with security, because it is costly and more work-intensive, or just out of irresponsibility or inexperience. The use of older and simple hacking methods or tools is therefore still widespread. Beside methods that take advantage of flaws in the network or the servers' security for a fuller access to information, some popular hacking methods are SQL injections (in database-driven sites), Cross-site Scripting (XSS), or just taking advantage of weak authentication or cryptographic storage (major flaws were found in Facebook by Wargan, for instance). In the past year Iran, and their unacknowledged Iranian Cyber Army, made headlines by being credited for briefly hacking and defacing Twitter, Baidu, VOA and various IRI enemy sites, or more recently, an affiliate of Comodo, to be issued fraudulently nine SSL certificates. IRI hackers were mostly students, now collaborating with and training the intelligence ministry or the military into organised and funded outfits. In time, their activities may become more sophisticated and include development of malware to be used in cyberwar attacks. But presently, contrary to media reports, Iran is certainly no Russia nor China in that domain, and in the ring of a martial art like cyberwar competition, Iran would look more like a green belt in Yoga facing a black belt in Karate. Their defacement stunts were mostly DNS cache poisoning or redirection attacks, usually by breaking the 16 bit DNS server identifier or just by hacking the email of an administrator of these sites, allowing them to access the registrars of these targeted sites in order to redirect the DNS resolution of the URL to their own servers, where they were content with posting a victorious message. They could have done more by replicating the targeted site or at least their login page in order to "steal" usernames and passwords (or pharming), something they evidently intended to do in their latest Comodo attack, by replicating the user login page of major email providers such as Microsoft's Live, Gmail, Yahoo or the VoIP company, Skype. Their attacks, are not always very sophisticated or malicious, even if rather "sensational". They could have also modified the TTL (Time to live) to keep the resolution of DNS names for longer periods even after the targeted companies had discovered the attacks. These attacks will also be described in our second part, but they are considered easier to carry out compared to resorting to more advanced methods such as developing and inserting malware on a user's computer to get access to most of his or her data.

In general, we must consider that determined Iranians can still get access to the Internet and the major social media tools, even if not in a timely or linear manner, and even if the number of people who manage to do so limited. We also consider their extensive use of mobile phones, texting technology and word of mouth information transmission, to be full extensions of their social network. In other words, virtual or not, the youth in Iran has a

social network that follows a similar model as a fully digital network, with differences in the speed of transmission and amount of information.

During the early stages of the formation of the Iranian-based Facebook network, the enthusiasm was high, the issues noble and the network grew exponentially. Iran didn't miss the boat. As with Tunisia or Egypt, social media initially provided the necessary boost and support for large participation in a civil movement that culminated in the most significant street protests in decades. But as the protests dragged on, by trying to capitalise on the support of the émigrés, the leaders of the Green movement in Iran made a largely unrecoverable mistake. The deceit went both ways, for the Green leadership had no lost love for the long-time, now professional opposition, and the many rival opposition groups outside the country never had any respect for, nor accepted the leadership of the protest movement. Over time, factions revealed themselves and their discourses hardened. Émigrés are after a regime change and behind various teary outrages over human rights violations, joyous passions make a quick come back over protest slogans and unflattering actions directed towards the Velayat-e Faqih. But the Green leadership is resigned, however discreetly, to accept the virtual support that keeps their movement alive when all else seems uncertain. The problem with this strategy is that from a large national movement, they are bound to become just an opposition movement. We were going to say just another opposition movement, but this one operates in Iran. And now having a foreign-based council giving the movement's directives is not going to help it grow or keep the cohesion of their base in Iran.

As mentioned previously, if we consider that the graph representing Iran's protest-related events (x) against the number of people reacting to each event (y) in our network, follows the Pareto principle, then in time both because "hit" events may be rarer in occurrence or in emotional power, the Long Tail to the right of the curve gets longer and the area to the left becomes gradually smaller than the area to the right. In between events, members who may have dedicated part of their available time to be spent on social networks, may be forced to spend that time scanning through less consequential events, or participating or reading comments from other members. Again, in the case of social movements, time is favourable to a cohesive network. Rivalries and dissentions surface, insulting comments, exaggerations and redundancies start to weigh. And all of a sudden the "weak" links in our Iran network feel really weak. The network is still very large but clusters become more self-sustained and the weak links, if still in existence, are inactive or exist only as a means of staying aware of potential news. In general, the hubs lose their driving force, even though the clusters may still grow through additional strong links.

Conclusion

A week after Mubarak's fall, while cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi gave the victory sermon to a crowd of hundreds of thousands, Wael Ghonim, the new mediatised hero of Egypt's uprising was barred from the stage at Tahrir Square and left in tears. It may not be easy for the youth who inspire, mobilise and struggle for their future, to capitalise on their success when faced with opponents who have 'paid their dues' and can implement political and economic programs, with experience, connections and organisation. We may still debate the media's announcement that the revolution will be tweeted, meanwhile the evolution will not be twisted, Egypt will allow Iranian ships to cross the Suez Canal and it will normalise diplomatic relations with Iran. For, not withstanding all the re-assuring talk from the West on how the new Internet freedom is good for Western democracies and bad for tyrants, especially for Iran, Arabs realise that military bases in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf and elsewhere in

the region, are not Iranian but US Bases. This will remain in memories, while Iran will only remain a difficult neighbour, no matter what regime is in place. Some may not like it, but nothing comes easy. You may believe in the power of social networks, that it has proven itself, but once a change is initiated, there is no assurance that things will turn out the way you dreamed. Change takes time, effort and courage. Three components that social networks cut short on.

To re-build a social network that can reach a threshold of such proportion that the adversary may finally see the wisdom of your demands, members' trust has to be earned, one member at a time. If not, in the end our social network may take the shape and operate much as Iranians do without the help of digital tools: a community of highly divided egocentric factions, loosely aware of each other. There will be more of them integrating the network. The members will be more informed, more entertained, perhaps they will keep up with the newly displayed passions and involvement, including in human rights issues. And these are all positive outcomes, if that is the aim. To reach any other stated aim, the network will require confidence building, with more coordination between the leaders of larger hubs in their role as influencers, with greater efforts in recognising the essential and defining both behaviours and targets. From organisations as the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, it will require unpretentious focus and integrity.

Media and Internet under Control and Censorship

Mojtaba Saminejad

Abstract

Free media inform the public, allow people's voices to be heard, and break the barriers of a closed society. Free media put pressure on autocratic regimes through revelations they make, and they become vessels of freedom. Free media provide breathing space for freedom and seeing the world in a better way. They question authority. They provide a medium for expression of different ideas. In the Islamic Republic there is no free media. People are in constant fear of the government. Journalists who work with both print and online media must operate in an environment in which they risk their publications being banned, and they themselves being threatened, imprisoned or worse. As a result, censorship by the authorities and self-censorship out of fear is widespread and is a massive issue in Iran today.

Biography

Mojtaba Saminejad is the founder and editor of RAHANA, a website documenting the work of an Iran-based human rights group opposing the repression of Iranian citizens. He studied journalism at the Islamic Azad University prior to his arrest, imprisonment and torture for almost two years due to his activities as a blogger. Reporters Without Borders recognized his blog as one of the best blogs defending freedom of expression in 2004.

Media and Internet under Control and Censorship

Banned Media and Imprisoned Journalists

Journalists have been target for suppression since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Except for short periods in which the media have had relative freedom due to the political circumstances of the time, the Islamic Republic has continuously detained journalists and banned various media outlets. The vast majority of these actions have been in violation of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic and the laws governing media. Even during the 8-year presidency of Mohammad Khatami, which is referred to as the "springtime for media in Iran," more than a hundred newspapers were shut down by security forces or the judiciary, and journalists and bloggers were imprisoned in scores.[34] During this period the "Media Reform" bill, which was proposed by Khatami's government, was abandoned in the Iranian parliament after an order by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.[35]

The Supreme Leader, who carries the title of the "Guardian Jurist," can issue any order, even orders superseding the Constitution. Using this authority, Ali Khamenei issued an order to the parliament of the Islamic Republic and its Speaker, and he effectively killed the Media Reform bill. This bill, which could have led to relative freedom and security for journalists, was never debated in the Iranian parliament.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic and the laws governing the media have created several barriers for dissemination of information, and these laws effectively limit the media.

---

[34] See *Media during the Khatami era; smiling lips and crying eyes* by Jamshid Barzgar in original Farsi available on-line at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/07/050728_a_jb_khatami_press.shtml [Accessed 17 April 2011]
[35] See *State Order* by Rajab-Ali Mazrooei, MP in the Sixth Majles published on-line at: http://mazrooei.ir/post/241.php [Accessed 17 April 2011]

Nevertheless, on several occasions, the security apparatus has taken upon itself to detain journalists for publishing various pieces, notwithstanding Article 23 of the Islamic Republic's Constitution, which states, "The investigation of individuals' belief is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief."[36]

Following the disputed presidential election in 2009, which led to widespread protests in Tehran and other cities, actions against media and arrest of journalists intensified. In 2009, Iran was ranked 172 among 175 countries in terms of freedom of the press. This alone shows the precarious situation of media in Iran.[37]

Even though Article 24 of the Islamic Republic Constitution declares, "Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public. The details of this exception will be specified by law," but in practice many publications were shut down following the 2009 presidential election and many websites were filtered even though they had not broken any law and could not reasonably be described as detrimental to Islam or the rights of the public. The legal process was not observed in a single case.

Section 12 of Iran's Media Law states, "Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance must, within one month, evaluate violations committed by publications either on its own or by the request of at least two members of the Oversight Committee. If necessary, the Ministry shall refer the matter to an eligible court for further action either directly or through the Oversight Committee."

Section 13 of this law allows the Media Oversight Committee to shut down media for specific offences, such as insulting Islam or the Supreme Leader, publication of state secrets, and inciting the public to act against the Islamic Republic. This Committee must, however, send the case to court within a week of shutting down a publication.

Examining the cases of the media that were shut down after the election shows that the Media Law was not observed in a single case. The authorities, based on their own determination, have banned media for the sole purpose of their political tendencies and closeness to the Reformist camp, and without going through the legal process.

Meanwhile the media that support the government can publish anything they want against those opposed to the government and the main figures within the government. They are free to publish lies, insults and false accusations. So far none of the complaints against pro-government publications has been properly addressed. A complaint against Kayhan by a number of prominent political and human rights activists, including Shirin Ebadi, was one clear example of such cases.

Following the 2009 election approximately 40 publications were banned and hundreds of websites and blogs have been filtered. As a result, thousands of journalists have lost their jobs. In 2010 alone 24 publications were banned by the authorities.[38]

The detention of journalists has mostly been illegal. Article 32 of the Iranian Constitution declares, "No one may be arrested except by the order and in accordance with the

---

[36] See Article at: http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/Constitution-3.html [Accessed 17 April 2011]
[37] *Press Freedom Index 2009* published by Reporters Without Borders in Persian available at: http://www.rsf-persan.org/article16946.html [Accessed 17 April 2011]
[38] *Annual Report of the Human Rights House of Iran* for the year 1388 (2009) published on 2 Farvardin 1389 (22 March 2010) is published on-line at: http://hrhi.org/?p=65 [Accessed 17 April 2011]

procedure laid down by law. In case of arrest, charges with the reasons for accusation must, without delay, be communicated and explained to the accused in writing, and a provisional dossier must be forwarded to the competent judicial authorities within a maximum of twenty-four hours so that the preliminaries to the trial can be completed as swiftly as possible." Journalists, who have not committed a crime, have been arrested solely for working in media that were critical of the government. They have been detained for months, without an arrest warrant, without being officially charged with an offence, and without an official case made against them.

In most cases arrested journalists have been tortured in order to extract confessions, even though Article 38 of the Islamic Republic Constitution bans torture for obtaining confession and considers any confession given under torture to be without legal merit.

In addition to clear violation of the law by security officials and the judiciary, the government explicitly pressures the few critical media that are still operational in order to prevent them from criticising the government and publishing any material that might suggest a protest movement exists in the country. The latest example of this was a directive which ordered the media to refrain from publishing the name, picture or any news about Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi or Mohammad Khatami.[39] It should be noted that Section 4 of the Media Law states, "No governmental or non-governmental official has the right to exert pressure on the media in order to publish an article or a piece, or to try to censor or control the media."

According to Reporters Without Borders, around 80 journalists fled Iran following the 2009 presidential election. The Iran Human Rights House reports that in 2010 alone 43 journalists were convicted and 147 were arrested.[40]

Filtering as the First Step in Confronting the Internet

The Islamic Republic has long been a closed government that tries to disrupt the free flow of information. In recent years it has tried very hard to do the same in cyberspace as well. When the government came into power in February 1979 it took control of the print media, radio and television, and it was comfortably in control. With the advent of the Internet, however, new challenges arose and the regime faced a new medium over which it could not so easy exert the same level of control.

Ahmad Jannati, Secretary of the Guardian Council, mentioned the Internet for the first time in a Friday Prayer Sermon in 1998. Referring to sexually explicit websites, he said that Internet is a bad thing and it should be blocked.

At that time few thought that confronting sexually explicit websites would become a pretext for filtering news and political websites and blogs, while sexually explicit websites have remained to varying degrees accessible to the public. Two years after this speech, the High Council of Cultural Revolution adopted a regulatory framework for filtering websites, and it put providing Internet service under the exclusive control of Islamic Republic of Iran

[39] *Effort towards Media Boycott of Mousavi and Karroubi in Iran* published on-line by BBC Farsi on 12 September 2009 at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/09/090912_wmj-newspapers-ban.shtml [Accessed 17 April 2011]
[40] Detailed and Statistical Report on Violations of the Rights of Journalists and Media in 1388, published by Iran Human Rights House available on-line at: http://www.rahana.org/archives/7843 [Accessed 17 April 2011]

Broadcasting, the state radio and TV organisation. The High Council of Cultural Revolution claimed that filtering would be limited to pornographic websites.

In November 2001 the Council created the Committee to Determine Illegal Internet Websites. The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Minister of Intelligence, Minister of Communications and Information Technology and Minister of Justice were members of this committee. Later, the police, the Minister or a representative from Ministry of Education, the Head of the Islamic Development Organisation, the Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, an information technology expert appointed by the Majles Industries and Mines Committee, and a Majles representative selected by the Majles Judiciary Committee were added to the Committee to Determine Illegal Internet Websites. This committee became the chief obstacle against free access to information through the Internet.

After this point news and political websites, as well as websites opposed or critical of the Islamic Republic were filtered. At that time there was no law establishing Internet offences and punishments associated with it. Government officials only relied on the resolution adopted by the High Council of Cultural Revolution.

Filtering of websites and blogs continues in Iran, and there are no accurate statistics on the number of websites and blogs filtered in Iran. In January 2009 Mehr News quoted Abdol-Samad Khorram-Abadi, a legal adviser to the Attorney General's Office, as saying that at least 5 million websites had been filtered.

First Action Against Internet Users

Once Iranians became familiar with the Internet, blogging and creating of news websites, the government's concern regarding the Internet grew, and it began taking actions other than filtering. The first such action was the widespread arrest of bloggers and some Internet users in 2004. Scores of bloggers were detained and physically tortured in prison. This writer was one of them.

In 2004 Judge Mortazavi, the Tehran Prosecutor, created an "Internet Office" within the judiciary. This institution was responsible for arrest of bloggers. This office was linked to the Revolutionary Guards. This office became inactive after several bloggers who were tortured revealed the details of their torture after their release. Yet, this office became active again in 2008 under the name of "The Revolutionary Guards Center for Study of Organized Cyber Crimes."

Several other bloggers and Internet users have been arrested over the years by several security and judicial institutions. One of the most prominent bloggers was Omid-Reza Mir-Sayyafi, who died while in prison.

Entry of the Revolutionary Guard in Cyberspace

After the establishment of the Revolutionary Guards Center for Study of Organized Cyber Crimes, the Revolutionary Guards actively sought to fight the free flow of information in cyberspace. On March 20, 2009 the Revolutionary Guards stated that it "has tracked and identified several members of organised networks who campaigned against religion, security, culture, public decency."

After the 2009 election and the protests in its aftermath, the Revolutionary Guards Center for Study of Organized Cyber Crimes issued statements and accused several news and political websites of propaganda against the Islamic Republic and dissemination of rumours through the Internet. The Center requested website administrators and bloggers to delete content provoking what they call rumours and disorderly conduct, otherwise they "would be dealt with severely." The same threat was also issued by the Revolutionary Guards a few months before the election.

In 2009 and 2010 this Center arrested scores of bloggers, website administrators and Internet users, and it hacked websites critical or opposed to the government. It played an important role in censorship and maintaining a closed society. Individuals arrested by this Center have written letters detailing shocking accounts of physical and mental torture. Many of them were forced to make televised confessions. Two of them, Vahid Asghari and Saied Malek-Pour have been sentenced to death.

After the 2009 election, through the use of its website Gerdab, the Center published pictures of protesters and asked for their identification, which led to the arrests of several protesters.

Adoption of Laws for Further Control

The "Computer Offences Bill" was adopted in the summer of 2006 in Majles, while prior to that several web writers and users had been arrested and many sites had been filtered. This bill allowed the judiciary to create the "Special Prosecutor's Office for Computer and Internet Offences." Based on this law Internet offences became a crime on par with theft and piracy, and the number of criminal offences increased in the country.

On November 2007 the government adopted regulation governing websites and weblogs. Based on this regulation, websites and weblogs that did not register with Ministry of Culture would be blocked. Upon registration, users are required to provide personal information such as their name, phone number, birth certificate number, home address and email address.

The Bill to Strengthen Punishment for Disruptors of Psychological Security, introduced in the Eighth Majles, was among the most important measures taken by the Iranian government to restrict web writers, bloggers and Internet users. Based on this Bill, creating blogs and websites that "spread decadence, prostitution or atheism" are on par with crimes such as piracy, armed robbery, forcible rape, formation of prostitution gangs, human trafficking and abduction with the intent to rape. This Bill equates Internet crimes with "waging war against God" and "corruption on Earth," which, according to the Islamic Penal Code, carries the death penalty. "Training senior Internet officers" and "creation of Internet police" by the Iranian police was another action by the Iranian government in recent years to exert more control over the Internet.

Internet after the 2009 Presidential Election

Despite all the threats, arrests and adoption of different laws and creation of various government offices, Internet remains the most important medium for (free) flow of information in Iran, so much so that the 2009 post-election protests were called the first "digital revolution." Internet users and citizen-journalists sent minute-by-minute reports from Iran to the rest of the world.

The Islamic Republic has continued its threats and arrests of journalists, online writers and Internet users in order to block the free flow of information. After the election, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps officially threatened protesters who disseminated information in the virtual world with serious confrontation.

Since the 2009 election, the Iranian government has either shut the Internet down completely or caused massive disruptions on the days before and after planned protests in order to prevent Iranian protesters from spreading news of the protests in cyberspace. The latest examples were the protests held on February 14 and 20, 2011.
After the election, thousands of news sites and blogs were filtered. As stated earlier there are no reliable figures available regarding the number of such websites. Blog administrators have been forced to close the accounts of bloggers opposed to or critical of the government. Blogfa, which is one of the largest Persian language blog sites, has been forced to do this. The administrator of Persian Blog was also detained for a while.

Among the filtered sites are Kalame, which belongs to Mir-Hussein Mousavi, and Saham News, which belongs to Etemad-e Melli Party, chaired by Mehdi Karroubi. Mousavi and Karroubi are the protesting candidates from the 2009 presidential election and leaders of the opposition movement. In addition, Rahana, the website of the Human Rights House of Iran was filtered fifteen times within a seven-month period.

Conclusion

The Islamic Republic is continuously trying to restrict and filter the Internet through the purchasing of filtering technology and by taking control of communications networks. Meanwhile, state radio and television are under the full control of the government. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps has purchased the shares of the Telecommunications Company of Iran and completely controls it.

Pro-government media freely publish whatever they want against those opposed to or critical of the government. Various TV programs are produced against protesters, and the security apparatus's version of the accounts against protesters is continuously published in pro-government media.

At the moment at least 38 journalists and bloggers are in prison, while many others are out on bail and waiting for their sentences.

The print media is under the full control of the government, and the government issues orders regarding publication of news in them. Journalists are suffering in prison and their publications cannot print what they want. Online writers and bloggers are under the constant threat of detention and are pursued by the security apparatus.

The Islamic Republic considers publication of news regarding torture of prisoners and suppression of street protests as an unforgivable crime and an act against national security, whether committed by professional reporters or citizen-journalists. Journalists have lost their jobs, been imprisoned, are pursued by the authorities or have left the country. News websites are filtered and the fate of Omid-Reza Mir-Sayyafi is the same threat that every journalist faces.

Because of the control that the government has over the print media, and despite the severe obstacles faced by Internet users as the Islamic Republic continues to contain it, the Internet remains the most important medium for disseminating information in Iran. Preventing the purchase of Internet control technology by the Islamic Republic and providing access to unrestricted wireless Internet for all Iranians is one of the most important things that can be done for Iranian people, as well as full support for imprisoned journalists and bloggers, who are serving their sentences in prisons such as Evin and Rajaie Shahr, is another way of assisting journalists in Iran.

The Role of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting in Blocking Access to Information

Ali Sheikholeslami

Abstract

This article takes a brief look at various dimensions of the Islamic Republic's methods and mechanisms for misguiding the public interest in information by delivering misinformation and propaganda.

Biography

Ali Sheikholeslami is London correspondent for Euronews. He has worked for Bloomberg as an Iran reporter and the Independent as a blogger. He is an award-winning writer and his articles and fiction have been published in Iran, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Britain.

The Role of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting in Blocking Access to Information

The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting declares on its "About Us" that it operates as the "Public Relations arm of the Establishment." It also criticises an "expansionist media empire of the West" and notes that a "media war" is being staged that targets public opinion and intends to bring about change in people's culture and lifestyle. In its mission statement, it says that Islam, the soul of the revolution and the Constitution must govern all the programmes it produces.

The country's national broadcaster, with an annual budget of £675 million for the coming year[41] has grown to a conglomerate that runs more than a hundred websites, alongside its eight national and six satellite television channels.

This is a far cry from the country's first radio station which was established 70 years ago with five hours of programmes a day. Now, in addition to the national channels, the IRIB has various regional television channels and radio stations and its newspaper, Jam-e Jam[42], has a daily circulation of 450,000.

News

In its news bulletins, a hierarchy is preferred that is based on the position of the person rather than the merit of the news as news. For instance, if the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has spoken to Iran's athletes and on the same day a tsunami has hit the Pacific region, the former will be the headline news with extensive coverage.

The length of a news piece is determined in a similar manner. A 20-minute edit of the leader's speech may dominate the day's main evening news bulletin. This should be seen in the context of IRIB's statement that it broadcasts 50,000 hours of news per year.

Lack of Independent Journalism

---

[41] Iranian year begins on March 21.
[42] The newspaper can be accessed on-line at: http://www.jamejamonline.ir/ and an English version is at: http://jamejamonline.ir/en/default.aspx [Accessed 17 April 2011]

The premise that the IRIB can be relied on for journalism that viewers can regard as independent is questionable, mainly because it is seen as a mouthpiece for the state. It is hard to quantify the level of trust, but it is safe to say that within the urban population it is low.

There is no criticism of the state on any fundamental issues. The extent of the IRIB's critical news-making is very limited and can only be seen in instances such as condemning a construction project that has gone wrong or stating an opinion on what can be done to decrease inflation, albeit based on the unreliable Central Bank figures.

Ideological Programming

Drama series normally carry religious or political messages and the moral of the story is often very obvious and overt. This characteristic could be viewed as a counter attack in line with the IRIB's mission to stand against the so-called "media war."

An example might be a series that was made about Iran's nuclear programme, with a young engineer who falls prey to foreign spy networks. Others may include those made especially for the month of Ramadan, in which ethical lessons are taught. These sometimes have a lighter tone and use humour as a vessel for the message.

Political Preference

The lack of an independent editorial line means that it is always difficult to obtain a balanced debate. In interviews, the journalist often acts like a state spokesperson and interviewees may be pushed to clarify whether they stand on the side of the mainstream discourse advertised by the government.

Again, in line with the underlying fundamentals of the IRIB, it discriminates in allocating airtime. Opposition forces not only lack access to the country's only TV space, but there are even hostile programmes broadcast about and against them.

Recent examples are the treatment given to Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. The former served as Prime Minister for eight years, the latter as Speaker of the Parliament. Since they claimed that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's win in the June 2009 presidential election was fraudulent, they have been subject to hostile programming on the IRIB.

Private Television

No private television is allowed in Iran. That makes the IRIB a monopoly with an extremely lucrative advertising revenue-making arm, in which no competitors are welcome (permitted).

The main reason for this situation is the mainstream state paranoia that any independent media outlet is funded by the intelligence services of foreign enemies and has a hidden agenda to topple the regime.

This paranoia came to the surface even more strikingly following the June 2009 election. The BBC, which had launched its Persian television service several months earlier, became a

focus of criticism by Iranian authorities; its signal was jammed and its journalists were labelled as spies.

Ostrich's Head in the Sand

In some instances, the broadcaster actually refuses to show important events. This is one level above the normal censorship that happens in programme-making where writers are subject to the censor's blue pencil or a cleavage is pixelated or the lines of an actor are mistranslated when foreign films are dubbed. Some anti-government protests were never acknowledged as happening by IRIB, and others were falsely attributed to thugs.

Local/Regional Channels

IRIB's regional offices in each province produce news and other programmes specific to the area. In provinces with ethnic minorities, for instance in the Azerbaijani provinces in the northwest, some of the programming is in the local language.

In these regional areas, following the same line as the national channels simply adds to the frustration of the minorities, who have demanded for a long time to be taught in their mother tongues in schools but are accused by the central government of advocating separatism.

Satellite

Although the use of satellite dishes is banned in Iran, many people defy the ban, even in the most remote areas. The IRIB is conscious of losing viewers who choose this alternative programming. It monitors the satellite channels, particularly those broadcasting in Persian, and tries to counters them either by producing similar programmes or ones where particular channels or series are criticised.

Conclusion

The IRIB can be described best as a tribune for the state and an official platform for propaganda. It is neither independent nor critical. Whilst these features remain, it will not only fail to gain the trust of its viewers, but it will be part and parcel in blocking their access to information.

Human Rights in Iran and The Need for Improved Access to Information

Meir Javedanfar

Abstract

In the on-going struggle for human rights in Iran, access to information plays a fundamental role in empowering the masses. Just as the west is systematically following up Iran's nuclear dossier, so should Western powers follow Iran's human rights dossier and through effective measures help Iranians, both inside Iran and abroad, make better-informed choices that lead to human rights-based governance.

Biography

Meir Javedanfar is the co-author of "The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the State of Iran". He teaches the "Contemporary Iranian Politics" course at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) at Herzliya, and is also the Director of the Tel Aviv based Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company (MEEPAS). Meir is a regular commentator for BBC Persian, The Guardian newspaper as well as CNN Español and serves as an expert on the United Nation Alliance of Civilisations - Global Experts Resource Project. He holds a Masters degree in International Relations and Strategic Studies from Lancaster University in the United Kingdom.

Human Rights in Iran and The Need for Improved Access to Information

Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, in its dealings with the Iranian government, the Western World has faced mounting challenges. This is especially true when it comes to Iran's nuclear program. Despite attempts at diplomacy and threats of military action, as well as UN sanctions, the Iranian government is still continuing to enrich Uranium and the west has been unable to stop this process.

The international community has every right to be concerned about Iran's nuclear programme. This is especially true for Iran's neighbours. The overwhelming majority of them do not want to see this regime armed with nuclear weapons.

However, what the international community, especially the Western World, has failed to take notice of until very recently is another important and powerful factor in Iran - its people and the mutual benefits that strengthening links with them could bring.

Although this would be against the wishes of Iran's rulers, and they would try their level best to prevent this from happening, nevertheless, there are ways of sidestepping them in order to reach out to the people of Iran. The promotion of the issue of human rights in Iran is an extremely powerful way of doing this.

Over the last three decades, when it came to condemning the Iranian government for its abuse of human rights, the western world has been either silent, or spoken at barely more than a whisper.

Only lately do we see the issue of human rights being addressed by the European Union and the United States. The sanctions imposed against human rights abusers such as Head of Iran's Internal Security Forces, Ahmad Reza Radan, are undoubtedly a step in the right

direction. Although he dismissed them as a "joke", nevertheless the meaning of the sanctions has not been lost on the people of Iran. It speaks volumes when a superpower such as the EU or the US sides with the people and against officials who have no qualms about imprisoning, torturing or even killing ordinary Iranians.

Sanctions in themselves are not sufficient. Calling for improvement in human rights should be an ongoing process. The next step, which the West should take to help promote and improve the issue of human rights in Iran, is to help facilitate access to information there. This is very important, as access to valid, quality information about human rights issues in Iran would be a very powerful weapon in fighting human rights abuse.

For now this remains a formidable challenge, especially when it comes to places outside of Tehran and other major cities. The West and the Iranian Diaspora seem to know very little about what is happening to human rights of Iranians in such areas. Even when it comes to major cities like Tehran, information can be difficult to obtain. The Iranian government, through restrictions placed on the Internet and the press has made it difficult for news about human rights issues to reach the outside world.

The lack of information also leads to the creation of rumours, which in some cases have made it more difficult to ascertain the true course of events. This is in addition to a sustained propaganda campaign by the Iranian government, which lies about its human rights policies and actions. This has been witnessed on numerous occasions.

Government officials such as Javad Larijani, who heads the Human Rights Council of the Iranian Judiciary, have no problem declaring in front of the entire international community that "Torture is against Iran's policy." In reality, such officials know that their statements are far from the truth. However, the issue of human rights has become so sensitive and difficult to defend, that English-speaking officials such as Larijani have no qualms about making such outrageous statements, in order to keep international criticism and scrutiny into the matter at a minimum.

Knowledge is power, and the more we know about what is happening inside Iran in terms of human rights the more the international community will be able to make appropriate and accurate decisions. There are a number of ways, in which the international community and the West could especially help to facilitate access to information on human rights in Iran.

Increased access to the internet is one way. The US government recently started this through lifting the ban on the export of Internet-based communication services to Iran. This should be expanded. During the recent uprising in Libya, the Qaddafi government shut the internet down completely. However XS4ALL, an ISP operating in Holland, opened up its phone lines to allow people whose Internet access has been cut off in Libya to access the Internet via their dial-up modems. The same should be done to Iran, especially during and after demonstrations, when internet is shut down or the speed is decreased in order to make it more difficult for users to share information and upload photos and clips. Through improved access, especially during demonstrations or their immediate aftermath, we are likely to have a much better understanding of what is really going on in Iran, and what human rights related abuses are taking place there.

The other way is to allow human rights inspectors access to Iran. Just as the UN has nuclear inspectors working for its subsidiary, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) who inspect Iran's nuclear facilities, the UN through its Human Rights Council should start

sending inspectors to view what is happening in Iran's prisons and courts. More importantly, the UN should make the lifting of sanctions conditional on the improvement of human rights. With the recent uprising and government killings in Libya strengthening calls for improved human rights conditions, the UN should seize the opportunity and improve its presence and voice in countries where human rights are most at risk, especially Iran. Human rights-related UN visits and inspections to Iran would also allow the West to have a better understanding and access to more valid information regarding what is really going on there. This will not be easy, and initially it may even prove to be impossible. In that case, the West and the UN should still insist that lifting of major economic sanctions is strictly conditional upon improvements in human rights.

When it comes to engaging the Iranian government on human rights issues, they should not be prevented from attending meetings; rather they should be invited and encouraged. Should Iranian officials continue to make outlandish and inaccurate statements such as "Torture is against Iran's policy", then that only makes it easier for the UN to highlight the Iranian government's unacceptable behaviour.[43] Mr Javad Larijani may think he is defending the revolution by making such a statement. However, in reality he is causing great damage to his government's standing, especially in the area of human rights, far more than the West could. This could then be used to pressure the Iranian government to provide more information on its human rights actions.

Indeed, it is also possible that the pressure that Iran and its representatives feel in such meetings may start convincing them to lobby for a change of policy back home.

The Iranian community in the Diaspora can also play a part in helping to improve access to human rights information from Iran, and the promotion of human rights there. Bipartisan conferences are needed among Iranians abroad, where scholars, activists and businessmen get together and promote this important issue. The creation of 'non-political' human rights data bank would be a recommended follow up from such a forum.

At the same time, when it comes to choosing an opposition party, Iranians outside of Iran should make human rights in Iran their first priority. Any Iranian political party, which does not agree to such a demand, should be shown the red card. Failure to do this could mean the continuation of abuse of human rights in Iran, even if the current regime falls and is replaced by another government.

---

[43] In an interview with Euronews in February 2010 Mohammad Javad Larijani, the head of Iran's High Council for Human Rights made this comment. Please see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JOrpvN9nKo [Accessed 17 April 2011]

Islamic Republic's Approach to the Latest Persian Entertainment Television

Potkin Azarmehr

Abstract

By examining Iranian government's response to the programmes of Manoto TV, the latest European-based commercial station aimed at viewers in Iran, the historic power of this important medium cannot be overestimated. Coordinated action by both Iranian and western authorities in opposing Iran's forces against free access to information through its media arms both in Iran and abroad is a much needed step in demonstrating a commitment to securing rights and freedom.

Biography

Potkin Azarmehr is one of the first Iranians to use the Internet for political purposes. He is also a contributor to media outlets on Iran-related matters and maintains a blog with over 90,000 unique readers a year. He is a business intelligence consultant and as part of his work, was instrumental in exposing claims of Haystack anti-filter tool as a fraud.
Islamic Republic's Approach to the Latest Persian Entertainment Television

Islamic Republic's Approach to the Latest Persian Entertainment Television

"Propaganda can bring down a mountain." Ayatollah Khomeini

Iran's most religious families shunned having television sets in their homes before the Revolution. Television, like many new and modern concepts, which incidentally at one time included tables and chairs, was frowned upon by Iran's clerics as a symbol of Western influence and decadence that diverted the faithful from going to mosques and listening to sermons. "The television aerials on roof tops are arrows through Imam Hussein's (holy Shiite martyr and the prophet's grandson) heart" was how a boy of similar age to me at the time, who was from a religious family in my neighbourhood, replied when I asked him, if they had a television at home.

However, Ayatollah Khomeini did not shun TV cameras during his stay at Neauphle-le-Chateau in France. He conducted 115 interviews in his three and half month stay. This enthusiasm for interviews clearly demonstrates his profound understanding of the power and importance of disseminating information through media, including international television broadcasts.

The takeover of Iran's national state TV broadcasting led by the left wing Marxist Fedayeen and Mojahedin (MKO) was the turning point during the 1979 revolution and signalled the end of the monarchy to the last remnants of the Shah's supporters who were still resisting. After the Revolution, one of the first acts of monopolising power by the extremist followers of Ayatollah Khomeini was putting the state TV under the strict control of the religious zealots. Television was no longer a symbol of decadence but firmly in the service, and under the control, of the new Islamic state. It was then that television aerials started appearing on the roofs of the most religious families in our neighbourhood.

The advent of satellite television in the mid 1990s was perceived as both a threat and an opportunity for the Islamic Republic. A huge investment was planned to use this new

technology as a propaganda tool for the state as well as ways of stopping the foreign satellite televisions from influencing the Iranian population. Throughout this battle of the airwaves, the Islamic Republic has shown a complete disregard for the rules. While its own satellite TV stations are full of inflammatory political propaganda and lies aimed at overthrowing other governments and exporting its own revolution, it is obsessively intolerant of any Persian television not under its control, even if it is an entertainment channel without a political directive.

In this paper we examine the Islamic Republic's reactions towards a new commercial television channel for Persian speakers that went on air in October last year. The corporate company is Marjan Television and it has two channels, Manoto 1 and Manoto 2. The latter broadcasts documentaries bought from other sources, dubbed and subtitled in Persian. It can be compared to any similar channel in the West, like the History Channel, Discovery Channel, BBC Knowledge, National Geographic etc. The documentaries shown on Manoto 2 range from scientific to historical to cultural, wildlife or any other subject one may expect on a documentary channel. Manoto 1, however, is mainly entertainment. About 40% of the programmes are original content and the rest are once again purchased and dubbed into Persian. It has no live programmes, even the news programme shown once a day from Monday to Thursdays is pre-recorded with almost no original content news but a copy/paste of other news media sources.

The flagship of Manoto TV, which made it become known among Iranians, was a programme similar to X-Factor, where potential candidates went through a week of gruelling training with Iran's music gurus, like the legendary Googoosh and Hooman Khalatbari, and based on audience votes, the contestants were either eliminated or moved on to the next stage of the programme. The number of telephone votes received was a staggering 700,000, where 75% of the votes were from inside Iran. Such feedback clearly demonstrated that the Iranian population inside Iran was desperately yearning for quality, Persian language, entertainment programmes. Manoto TV is the first quality Persian-language TV channel from outside Iran that receives no state funding. All the necessary capital is raised from venture capitalists with no political agenda, who are purely looking for a return on their investment. Despite it being a commercial and entertainment channel, the Islamic Republic was put on a state of alert even before the Manoto started its programming.

Prior to going on air, Manoto broadcast short previews of some of its future programmes. One of them was a teaser that introduced the television channel to all Iranians, male, female, young, old, and all ethnicities and religions. The visual aid used to describe the channel for Iranians of all religions included the religious symbols used by Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and others, including the Baha'is. The Baha'i symbol, which was shown along with other religious symbols, was enough to start the Islamic Republic's knee jerk reaction by publishing the same text in several Iranian newspapers and news sites with the heading: "Who are the Baha'i executives of Manoto TV?"[44]

Manoto was accused of being funded and started by the Baha'is in England with the help of British intelligence services, and Manoto TV personalities that had appeared in front of the camera were singled out. Several were said to be practising Baha'is or were accused of having Baha'i friends who had helped them get their TV jobs. These gross fabrications and accusations were illustrative of how the Iranian regime tries to label people without any basis or factual evidence. Some of the mundane information on the presenters were taken

---

[44] See the original Farsi article published on Alborz Professional News Site at: http://www.alborznews.net/fa/pages/?cid=32014 [Accessed 17 April 2011]

straight from their Facebook profiles and the rest were just figments of their imagination. Neither the directors nor as yet any of the employees at Manoto are Baha'is, although the television channel operating from London, UK, practices an equal opportunity policy.

The Islamic Republic continued with the Baha'i angle of accusations against Manoto in order to reduce its popularity, but as this seemed to have no impact, it then resorted to other means. Various so-called "experts" and "specialists" started to analyse where the television's funding came from. As is so often the case, they pointed a finger at the UK government or UK intelligence services. Even more absurdly, every programme was taken apart and analysed as to how the Islamic Republic's enemies had lost all hope of the possibility of a military invasion and so had decided to launch soft war to change the culture and traditions of the Iranian people. Bizarre conclusions were reached based on the most innocent and ordinary entertainment programmes. One such analysis was based on the 'Come Dine with Me' programme shown on Manoto 1. The article claimed Manoto was set up to change the lifestyle of the Muslim Iranians. [45]

Programmes that are examined and twisted in this way show the sinister taste amongst Iran's ruling elite for conspiracies against the regime. In this case there was a mixture of half-truths and fiction, such as the perceived aims of the "neo-imperialists" who made the Iranian version of 'Come Dine with Me':

"The participants are selected from a wide range of backgrounds so that any viewer with their own lifestyle and tastes can sympathise with at least one participant, so that the fear of some behaviours is broken when one sees someone similar to one's self behaving that way. If the host and guest are of different sexes, the presenter reminds them not to forget kissing the other person and if this is not done they are addressed as a low class person. Thus the proper and improper, values and anti-values are inducted inversely in the viewer. In many instances, guests bring alcoholic drinks as a present for their host and engage in a competition on the make and brand of their own present. The kind of food, the starters, the desserts identify the intent of the producers in a gradual change of taste in food and drinks for the Iranian viewer. Having traditional Persian food alongside alcoholic drinks is an action that clearly shows the intention of the producers to break taboos, for example, having Ghorme Sabzi or Dizi with alcoholic drinks."

If Come Dine with Me was not a bad enough sinister plot by the imperialists and the neo-imperialists, just read how other programs are described. "Why Not", a programme in which the female presenter attempts to find out whether she can survive for a day in a male-dominated job, is viewed by the Islamic Republic's "experts" as a plot of western intelligence agencies: 'In "Why Not" which is about women's tendencies to seek employment in a variety of fields, the producers blatantly insist that women must engage in different jobs'. On Zereshk, which is a light hearted programme all about a male and female presenter making quick but tasty meals: "Zereshk also tries to deal with the problem of women who work and struggle to find the time to cook because of their busy work schedule. This programme is also taboo-breaking, as it relates to the opposite sex, unusual relations with neighbours, the style of cooking and other such anti-cultural instances."

---

[45] See the original Farsi article on Mashregh News at: http://www.mashreghnews.ir/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=32604 [Accessed 17 April 2011]

On a programme about a day in the life of successful Iranians abroad, it writes:

"In the Welcome to My Life programme, the narrator of the programme teaser, goes in search of successful personalities, their place of residence, their occupation, their talents and skills, so the Western preferred standards of success is presented to the viewer.' And so on, every single programme is ripped apart and described as a Western attempt in waging a sinister "soft war" of some sort. The taboo of a young male and female presenter in a programme of course never goes unnoticed by the Islamic Republic, even if they just report on cultural events taking place across Britain: "In Manoto Plus, apart from an improper presentation by two presenters of opposite sex, cultural reports of events across London are shown where the main brunt of them is in inducing Western beliefs, norms and components to the viewer."

Needless to say that all these accusations and analyses have not only not reduced the popularity of this new TV station, but in a way have served as advertising by making it even more popular. Aware of this fact, the Islamic Republic security apparatus does not stop at writing articles alone.

The Manoto website was soon filtered inside Iran. A cat and mouse game of new domain names purchased by Manoto and further filtering of the new domain names by the Iranian government has continued ever since. Although at the present time the Islamic Republic has not jammed the broadcasts at source, meaning targeting the entire bouquet of channels next to Manoto on Hotbird, local random jamming continues. Many viewers report that on certain occasions or times they cannot receive the signals in their neighbourhood.

The most potent weapon of the Islamic Republic in making sure such ventures are not successful, however, comes via the companies trading in Iran that are scared of placing advertisement on these channels. They must comply with a long list of dos and don'ts, so that they do not face possible adverse consequences in Iran.

The Islamic Republic's reaction to this commercial entertainment television, demonstrated here, clearly points to its internal sense of insecurity. It also shows that the Islamic Republic's intelligence services are not that strong. For example, all the information about who owns Marjan TV, its chief executive and directors are known and on the company's website. Yet nearly six months after the company first began broadcasting, the regime is still unable to access the correct information and thus continues to make absurd mistakes.

While the Iranian regime continues its obsessive battle against dissemination of information that is not under its own control, it exploits the loopholes it may find in western democracies in order to propagate its own propaganda.

Today, the Islamic Republic broadcasts in more than 25 languages. It has branches in more than 45 countries including most western European countries. Strangely, the western democracies allow Iranian state TV activities go unhindered even when they repeatedly break broadcasting laws.

OFCOM, for example, has so far refused to uphold any complaints it has received regarding numerous violations by Press TV, the English broadcasting arm of the Islamic Republic state TV. Press TV maintains studios and offices in Hanger Lane, West London. Examples of some specific complaints made to OFCOM regarding Press TV include:

- Complaint made by Maziar Bahari about his interview by Press TV when he was in prison with Iranian intelligence agents standing behind him. The Press TV presenter was fully aware that it was not a normal interview in which the interviewee could voluntarily and freely express himself.
- Complaint made about Press TV news when the station falsely claimed that Dr. Arash Hejazi, a witness to Neda's murder after the 2009 elections, was wanted by Interpol.
- Complaint made about a documentary shown on Press TV, which accused Arash Hejazi of being part of the murder team sent to kill Neda.
- Numerous complaints about total bias and lack of balanced reporting by Press TV on Iran-related news.

The complacency shown by western authorities towards the Islamic Republic getting away with violating broadcasting rules not only makes the regime more audacious in its approach, but it further disheartens the Iranian population, some of whom begin to believe that the regime is too strong to be dealt with.

Not only do western authorities seem unable or unwilling to tackle the problem of Iranian broadcasting, but even the trade unions have turned a blind eye to international labour solidarity. While many of Iran's bus driver union leaders and transport workers are languishing in jails, Press TV continues to use London buses and tube stations for its advertising campaigns. Slogans such as 'we give voice to the voiceless' or "find out why they are trying to silence us" all smack of rank hypocrisy to anyone who follows Iran-related news. It seems an unequal war of information is being fought by a side that is audacious and well-funded and a side which is timid or at best complacent.

The Green Movement and Technology: What the Free World Can Do To Help

Mariam Memarsadeghi

Abstract

The origin of the struggle for human rights in Iran dates back to the months leading to the 1979 revolution. With the re-emergence of this process through the Green Movement, and the subsequent Arab Spring, the American "anything by Bush" policy stands in need of re-examination. Concrete steps and a holistic approach to the pivotal issue of access to information is at the heart of this re-examination.

Biography

Mariam Memarsadeghi is the founder and director of TAVAANA: E-Learning Institute for Iranian Civil Society. Recognised as a "Transatlantic Young Leader" by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the German Marshall Fund, she was awarded an educational grant from The Washington Post. She studied political science and political theory at Dickinson College (BA) and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (MA). She is an expert on free media and Internet initiatives for repressive regime contexts and helped found the bi-lingual web magazine Gozaar: A Journal on Democracy and Human Rights in Iran while serving as Senior Program Manager at Freedom House.

The Green Movement and Technology: What the Free World Can Do To Help

Nearly two years ago in Iran, well before civic uprisings erupted throughout the Arab world, outrage over a stolen election galvanised nonviolent protests the likes of which the Middle East region had not seen since the 1979 Iranian revolution. Collective strength conquered fear as millions protested peacefully in cities throughout the country, day after day. Empowered by mobile phones and Internet technology, Iranians of various political stripes and social backgrounds in country and across the globe came together under one banner, melding fractures that had inhibited a beleaguered opposition for decades. Iranians' consciousness, reflected on the streets and on social networks, was one of hope for an imminent, progressive breakthrough toward liberal governance, universal human rights and an open society at peace with the world. Green Movement protestors braved one of the world's most repressive regimes to press for freedom and an end to corrupt, theocratic rule. Regime fissures and a Green Movement leadership that included political "insiders", namely presidential candidates Mousavi and Karroubi and former President Mohammad Khatami, played heavily into hopes for a peaceful democratic transition.

Despite the heavy momentum of million-strong marches, sustained cyber-activism and outpouring of global solidarity, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei managed a slow but calculated, pervasive and brutal crackdown. Stalinist-style show trials, forced, televised confessions, executions, systemic rape and torture, widespread Internet control and surveillance and high-tech shaming campaigns against dissidents became standard features of the regime's assault. The crackdown continues today, and Iran's leading student activists, feminists, reformist politicians, artists, intellectuals, and journalists are either behind bars, in hiding or have left Iran as part of a new mass exodus reminiscent of that following the 1979 revolution. Yet despite the severe risks, Iranians do continue their non-violent street protests, albeit sporadically and in fewer numbers. Watching the Arab Spring, there is among activists and society at large bitterness about missed chances, lost opportunities and

betrayal from the free world but also the lingering sweet taste of a still closer, undeniable future of democratic breakthrough.

When the Green Movement was first born, it demanded international recognition and support for its cause, if not formal recognition of Mir Hossein Mousavi's electoral victory over Ahmadinejad. As the world's tyrants, lead by Russia, rushed to support Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Iranian regime, the Green Movement looked with exasperated hope to the free world. Protest slogans such as, "Barak Hussein Obama! Ya Ba Oona, Ya ba Ma!" meaning, "Barak Hussein Obama, You are either with them [the regime] or with us [the protestors]," prevailed on the streets as protestors sought to force the US to make a moral choice and to unambiguously side with the masses against the repressive state.

Yet the outbreak of the Green Movement coincided unluckily with a brand new, unshaped Obama foreign policy, one marked more by an 'anything but Bush' mentality than any substantive stance on how to support Middle Eastern democrats, much less full-fledged, civic movements for democratic breakthrough. Committed to ending the Iranian nuclear program via diplomacy and containing the Iranian regime rather than forcing its collapse, the Obama administration refused to budge. Concerned that support for the Green Movement would jeopardise a nuclear deal, the administration, having just reached out directly to the Supreme Leader with two letters, at turns justified the lack of American support for the Green Movement as an attempt to avoid infringement on Iranian "sovereignty", and at other turns publicly questioned whether it would make any difference for the US if the real winner of the presidential election would take office. Beyond late and muted condemnations of human rights violations, the administration was not willing to do more. America effectively snubbed pro-American Iranian protestors yearning to join the free world. How much this decided restraint on the part of the leader of the free world vis à vis the Green Movement cost the struggle for a democratic Iran, not to mention US interests, is difficult to measure. But already among Iranian civic activists and intellectuals, there is widespread scepticism about America's Iran policy, with some claiming that if in 1953 the US thwarted democratic development via a CIA-backed coup, now, some sixty years later, it had again caused a democratic setback, but this time as a result of appeasement and debilitating caution.

Now, in the wake of the Arab Spring, American rhetoric on people power movements for democracy has been forced to shift toward an acknowledgement, at times reluctantly, at times heartedly, of fundamental social and political change in the Middle East and beyond. At the same time, significantly the US and other governments are launching more robust initiatives for the promotion of Internet freedom. In just the last few months, the US has committed $30 million in new funding for global Internet freedom initiatives, the Swedish government has launched a $23 million for the same and other governments, especially the Dutch and Canadian, are increasingly prioritising Internet freedom programming as part of their international human rights programming. Private companies, led most notably by Google, are broadening their commitment to expand free and safe access to the Internet by those living in repressive regimes. Yet much remains in flux, and in the case of Iranian cyberspace, the lack of safe, unfettered access at critical times in the development of the Green Movement, combined with debacles such as US government support for the not only dysfunctional but unsafe Haystack circumvention program have frustrated Iranians willing to believe the free world is supportive of their struggle for democracy.

For the renewed commitment to democracy promotion in the Middle East to bear fruit in Iran, and for the new Internet freedom funds to work effectively for Iranian cyberspace, the following public policy, private sector and programmatic commitments will be necessary:

- A robust political commitment from Washington and European capitals to support Iranians' free access to information. Bold, unapologetic backing of the Green Movement's need to communicate domestically and with the free world should be consistently provided. This support should come from legislatures, as has already been the case, and from official statements from executive branches as a key part of foreign policies towards Iran. Open support of the Iranian people's struggle for freedom builds hope and provides invaluable moral solidarity. Historic precedents providing such solidarity and assistance to people fighting for their freedom in other totalitarian regimes, particularly through Radio Free Europe, demonstrate how support for democracy in Iran is a moral calling and an essential exercise of the national interest of all free nations.

- Disbursing immediately the $30 million authorised by the US Congress for Internet freedom globally and the $20 million for Internet freedom in Iran under the VOICE act. The funds can provide for an urgent increase in the use of circumvention tools.

- Europe's provision of technology funds in support of Iranians' free access to technology. The EU should match the US commitment, and each European country should aim to match the dollar commitment of the Swedish government for global Internet freedom ($23 million) and at least match the funds dedicated by the Netherlands for Iran specific Internet freedom initiatives ($1 million).

- Donors' prioritised support for access to technology over the development of Web-based content. Iranians are already capable of producing informative and engaging online content about human rights, democracy, the rule of law and non-violent resistance. What is needed is greater attention to free access.

- Using varied and diverse technological solutions to combat repression. Multiple technologies should be explored to provide free and secure satellite, Internet and mobile phone access to overcome Tehran's sophisticated use of technology against its people. Donors should convene conferences to discuss all technological options. Transparency, trust building and collaborative action among donors and implementers should be a priority. Technological assistance has thus far been provided too opaquely and competitively, resulting in redundancies in some areas and a lack of attention in others.

- Increasing support to proven circumvention technologies that combat Internet censorship and to promote long-term sustainability of such technologies, their continuous improvement and user-friendly distribution. Server capacity for the most effective circumvention tools is now severely limited for Iranians. With more funds, well-established, tested circumvention tools can rapidly provide free access to the Internet for tens of thousands more Iranians.

- Ensuring circumvention tools undergo usability studies to ensure good aesthetics, ease of use, and adequate support for users. Many Iranians know about circumvention but not know how to do it safely and effectively. Circumvention tools supported by donor agencies should demonstrate their effectiveness through transparent displays of usage data per country.

- Donor testing of Internet via satellite. Initially costing US$2,000 per user per year, satellite Internet access may quickly catch on among Iranians, opening up a (albeit black) market that already exists for satellite television.

- Promoting cooperation between the US, the EU and satellite-television providers to counter the regime. Satellite television is a ubiquitous communications channel much prized by Iranians. But the Iranian regime has recently improved its ability to

jam VOA and BBC satellite airwaves. Eutelsat has threatened to cut off the regime's own satellite infrastructure, provided by the company, if Tehran does not cease jamming EuroTel's foreign broadcasts. VOA and BBC, if not the transatlantic community, should ramp up its pressure on the Iranian regime via Eutelsat. There is no good reason for the Iranian regime to be allowed to continue its broadcasts via Eutelsat when it is jamming VOA and BBC via the same service.

- Making inverse reforms to US and European economic policy towards Iran. As it toughens international sanctions against Iran, the US should amend its own sanctions regime to allow for the maximum provision of freedom-enhancing technology. Europe needs to take immediate steps to reign in the selling of equipment and expertise used to repress the Iranian people.

- Preventing further sales of technology that aid the regime's repression. The EU should facilitate development of a voluntary code of conduct among European companies seeking business in countries with repressive regimes. Such an initiative has been proposed by telecommunications companies themselves as a way to even the playing field toward more ethical behaviour by the industry, but little has been done to implement it. As part of the voluntary code of conduct:

- Businesses should agree not to sell equipment, services or expertise that can facilitate repression in any country ranked "Not Free" by Freedom House. Adherence to such a code will remove pressure on firms to compete in such markets.

- All sales of technology and related services and expertise to Iran should be centrally tracked by the EU using existing mechanisms such as arms-control databases.

- A human-rights impact assessment (similar to domestic privacy impact assessments) of any technology that may be sold to Iran should be performed by an independent group.

- Publicising the limitations of technologies. Donors funding and encouraging the use of technology for civil society development should also educate users in repressive regimes about potential dangers. Such regimes can exploit cell phones, for example, to identify instantly activists' locations, making targeted surveillance and arrest easy.

- Supporting new, innovative uses of the Internet such as virtual classrooms and e-learning initiatives, socially networked advocacy initiatives, awareness campaigns, virtual press conferences, events and global political actions. This could be coordinated with established universities in the US and Europe, as well as with NGOs, media outlets and civic associations.

- Developing fun, animated, Web-based awareness-raising campaigns about cyber-security to help inform unaware activists of the possibilities and the dangers of technology.

- Sharing ideas and talent with Iran's leading cyber-activists as they develop appropriate tools, practices and training. Iranians can engineer home grown solutions to their technology needs. Understanding these needs, collaborating virtually with and advising activists can be as important as providing the technology itself.

- Funding and facilitating security audits for established cyber-activism projects, blogs and news sites, particularly those managed in Iran.

- Expanding knowledge of time-tested, basic protection skills such as decentralised storage of communications, routine destruction of communications, call trees in case of trouble, media advocacy, pseudonymous publishing, closing e-mail accounts of those arrested, and tip sheets describing safe travel options, hospitals, and ground rules before coordinated non-violent actions. Often the best protection mechanisms for activists using technology are non-technological.

Appendix: Recent Reports and References on the right to access information in Iran

The following is a selection of noteworthy references focused on access to information and human rights covering the period of October 2010 to April 2011:
Below is the annual report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom for 2011, published on 28 April 2011. The section on *Crackdown on Internet Freedom, the Media, and Human Rights Defenders* is of particular interest:
http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c3c.html

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY 27 APRIL 2011, Reporters Without Borders draws attention to Iran's practice of targeting journalists and human rights lawyers, while in its earlier report entitled 'Internet Enemies' RWB highlights other elements of state policy affecting access to information:
http://en.rsf.org/iran-regime-still-targeting-human-27-04-2011,40115.html
http://en.rsf.org/internet-enemie-iran,39777.html

While senior officials of the Islamic Republic hailed the Arab uprisings and condemned their leaders for not responding to their calls for freedom and human rights, they took serious steps to suppress the planned rallies of 14 February 2011 by Iranians who identified with the plight of their fellow activists in Egypt and Tunisia. Here is a series of news updates on the events of the day and the horrific response of the government to the rallies, including deployment of armed minors as part of Basiji elements:
http://www.irannewsnow.com/2011/02/live-blog-iran-25bahman-feb14-2011/

In a joint statement by Index on Censorship and Article 19 released on 14 December 2010, the organizations condemn the Islamic Republic for its new wave of crackdown and campaign of intimidation against Iranian citizens, journalists and activists:
http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/iran-new-crackdowns-on-speech.pdf

The following is a country report on information access and media and information literacy by Dr. Omid Fatemi, Director of the Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology at the 5th Asia-pacific Information Network Meeting and ICT Literacy Workshop, dated November 2010:
 http://www.aijc.com.ph/country_reports/Iran.pdf

The 2010 Freedom of the Press report on Iran published by Freedom House on 1 October 2010 addresses issues and challenges on access to information in Iran, while its 2011 Freedom on the Net report explores the more recent dimensions of restriction and limitations on accessing the Internet:
http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ca5cc5f1e.html
http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c3c.html

About the Editors

Tahirih Danesh

Tahirih Danesh a Senior Research Associate at the Foreign Policy Centre. She is a Human Rights Researcher and Documenter specializing in the case of minorities in Iran. She is an independent consultant dedicated to in-depth investigation, research and documentation, analysis and reporting of human rights abuses in Iran; focusing on allegations of serious violations of human rights and international criminal law against minorities based on religion, ethnicity, gender or age; monitoring hate-based propaganda through Iranian media; promotion of public awareness of issues concerning democracy and human rights in Iran; and an advocate of human rights education for the younger generation of Iranians both in Iran and abroad. She has co-edited several pamphlets and articles for the FPC including A Revolution without Rights? Women, Kurds, and Baha'is Searching for Equality in Iran and From Cradle to Coffin: A Report on Child Executions. She founded the FPC's Iran Human Rights Review and co-edited the previous edition- Iran Human Rights Review: Religion.

Nazenin Ansari

As an Iranian journalist with Kayhan (London) and formerly of Persian News Network of Voice of America, Nazenin has conducted hundreds of interviews with Iranian intellectuals, politicians, civil society and religious leaders, businessmen and ordinary citizens. She has provided news analysis on international news channels such as BBC World, Sky News and Al-Jazeera English and her commentaries have been published among other places in the Wall Street Journal, International Herald Tribune, the Guardian, Fabian Review and openDemocracy. She has also been an invited guest speaker at events organized by Chatham house, Georgetown University, the Foreign Policy Centre, Legatum Institute, the Fabian Society, the Doha Debates, the Intelligence Squared, the Conservative Middle East Council and the German Marshall Fund amongst others.

Nazenin has worked with a number of Iranian cultural foundations and is now on the Board of Trustees of Encyclopedia Iranica. As President and Vice President of the Foreign Press Association in London, she formulated new initiatives such as the Dialogue of Cultures programme, aimed at fostering greater understanding between cultures and visions. She is also one of the Judges of the UK Parliamentary Press Gallery Award, presented annually to the journalist considered to have made the greatest contribution internationally to the 'protection, promotion and perpetuation of parliamentary democracy'. She is a member of the Royal Institute for International Affairs, Chatham House and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

Nazenin received her International Baccalaureat Diploma from Iranzamin, Tehran International High School in 1977. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from George Washington University in Public Affairs and Government in 1980, and Master of Arts degree from Georgetown University in International Relations and Comparative Politics (the Soviet Union and the Middle East) in 1983.

The Iran Human Rights Review, edited by Nazenin Ansari and Tahirih Danesh, is a new Foreign Policy Centre project that seeks to be an important resource for policy makers and activists by combining information and opinion with analysis and recommendations for action.

This new edition of the Review focuses on the emergence of access to information as a pivotal element in promoting and protecting the Iranian human rights movement. It contains opinion pieces and detailed articles from a wide range of experts and activists with a focus on promoting a culture of human rights in Iran and the region. Contributors include: Dame Ann Leslie, Nasrin Alavi, Ramin Asgard, Shahryar Ahy, Negar Esfandiari, Claudia Mendoza, Saba Farzan, Nazanine Moshiri, Rossi Qajar, Mojtaba Saminejad, Ali Sheikholeslami, Meir Javedanfar, Potkin Azarmehr, Mariam Memarsadeghi.