

Voice of America and the Crisis in Iran

To: [xxxx] National Security Council
[xxxx] White House Personnel office
Rep. Ed Royce, chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee
Sen. Tom Cotton

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Summary:

U.S. government broadcasting is a powerful tool that can be used to promote freedom and bolster anti-regime protestors in Iran, but under current leadership, it is being used to *actually support* the Iranian regime and denigrate the leadership of President Trump. Below are a few suggestions for how the White House and Congress can rapidly turn this around.

The problem:

The Voice of America and Radio Farda, the Persian-language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, were late to the game in covering the Iran protests that erupted spontaneously on December 28 and have spread since then to more than sixty cities across Iran.

While the Persian language services are now putting out cellphone videos of the protests over Twitter and Instagram, their on-air coverage has been tepid, with regular hosts “balancing” coverage of the protestors with coverage of the regime’s lies.

The VOA Central news bureau has been even worse. In a lead on-air “package” on the fourth day of protests, [it regurgitated Iranian state media](#) and statements from Iranian regime leaders, putting President Trump’s tweet of support for protestors in the 16th graph.

This was not an isolated example. The next day, VOA central news again parroted the Iranian government line and slammed President Trump:

[Rouhani Rejects Trump’s Support for Iranian Protesters](#)

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says U.S. President Donald Trump has no right to express sympathy for the Iranian people after referring to them as terrorists. Trump has praised protestors in Iran for rallying against the government’s economic policy...

We are witnessing a major anti-regime uprising all across Iran, and U.S. government broadcasting is essentially supporting the dictators, not the people.

The Solution

The overall solution is to send the administration's pick to lead the Broadcasting Board of Governors to the Senate for confirmation, and to replace the whole failed leadership team at the BBG.

In the meantime, **here are a few things that can be accomplished tomorrow**, if the White House puts its shoulder to the plough:

- 1) VOA must stop broadcasting Iranian regime statements uncritically as if they were true.
- 2) VOA and Radio Farda should put POTUS statements on the Iran protests front and center, not relegate them to the bottom of "balanced" news coverage.
- 3) VOA and Radio Farda should put on air credible opposition voices such as Mansour Osanloo, former head of the Tehran bus driver's union, who is very highly respected. He is currently being boycotted by both services.

Clearly, the current VOA and Radio Farda leadership will not do these things or live up to their mission statement if left alone.

The White House has the authority **to temporarily appointment as special advisors a team of former VOA broadcasters and others** who understand the situation in Iran and have contact with respected leaders of the pro-freedom movement. This team needs to be **given authority** to direct the coverage of Iran in the VOA Central News bureau, as well as the Persian language services of VOA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

I can help put together that team within 24 hours.

We are living a historic moment, and our U.S. government broadcasting services are sitting on the sidelines, helping the dictators. Instead, they should be holding high the flag of freedom.

VOA and Radio Farda should be treated as federal disaster zones, and emergency management teams parachuted in immediately.