Beat: Vips

The Persian-Language Media Mirage

Gatekeepers of Controlled Dissent

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USPA NEWS - Persian-language media outlets operating in exile were meant to be the voice of the people—but they have become tools of censorship, division, and distortion.

BBC Persian, Iran International, Manoto, Voice of America (VOA Persian)—familiar names. These networks once promised to be “the voice of the voiceless.” Yet today, what we hear from them is not the voice of the people, but a recycled echo of familiar faces, tired narratives, and covert alliances with power structures—structures terrified of the Iranian people’s true voice being heard.

Their stated mission?

To provide free and accurate information about Iran.

Their actual function?
To reproduce repetition, manipulate truth, enforce selective censorship, and steer public opinion along narratives disconnected from Iran’s real, lived experience.

Rather than inviting independent journalists, frontline dissidents, environmental advocates, labor movement voices, or the true backbone of civil society, these networks continuously spotlight a narrow group of familiar political figures: old-guard opposition, royalists, regime reformists, and analysts tied to “safe” exile networks. It’s an echo chamber, fed not by freedom—but by fabrication and illusion.

These figures serve a clear agenda

1.To inject division and suppress genuine solidarity.

2.To obscure the shared demand for freedom voiced by Iranians everywhere.

3.To filter out raw, honest narratives—constructing a sanitized version of Iran, fit for foreign stakeholders and financial allies.

But here’s the good news…

We, the people of Iran, are waking up.
We are no longer fooled by familiar faces, confident tones, or polished visuals. The true voice of the people rises from below—not from the studios of London or Washington.

Our ears no longer tune in to you. Our trust is gone.

Exiles and citizens inside Iran now speak with one voice—and you, not we, are the ones who’ve become disconnected.

Lies have an expiration date.
Secrecy has a shelf life.

Media deception—no matter how polished—cannot last forever.

Persian-Language Exile Media: The Silent Gatekeepers of the Islamic Republic

Believe it or not, these platforms are part of the problem.

They have long served as filters—gatekeepers of Iran's truth.

Through the systemic exclusion of independent journalists, ethical analysts, and emerging voices, they have not only censored the truth, but presented a distorted portrait of Iran to the world—across politics, society, and environmental catastrophe.

But the people are no longer passive.
The time has come for accountability.
The time has come to reclaim the narrative, to break the silence, and to expose the gatekeepers who have not defended freedom—but enforced the architecture of censorship.

In a report titled

"The Evolution and Future of Persian Exile Media"

published by the Iran1400 think tank in May 2025, the following conclusion was drawn:

"Many Persian-language exile platforms produce ideological, closed, and repetitive content. Guest lists are repeatedly drawn from a narrow circle of analysts—leading to the systematic exclusion of independent journalists."

(Iran1400 Report, May 2025)

Key Findings from the Iran1400 Report:

Editorial Fear of Risk: Rather than seeking out emerging voices, producers rely on familiar figures to avoid backlash from audiences or funders.

Ideological Homogeneity: Despite claims of diversity, voices from environmental movements, labor journalism, or women's rights activism are consistently absent.

Recycled Guest Cycles: A handful of familiar faces appear repeatedly across various programs, offering little new perspective.

My Personal Experience

Despite over eight years of reporting on environmental justice and civil society, none of these platforms have responded to my pitches or published contributions. Meanwhile, analysts tied to well-known exile networks are routinely invited—often without comparable professional credentials.

This reflects a systemic editorial logic: "Trust"—defined as proximity to political or financial networks—outweighs journalistic merit.

2. Transnational Repression: How Silence Persists in Exile

Contrary to popular belief, exile does not automatically bring freedom of expression—and in many cases, it becomes a new form of censorship.

In her June 2024 report to the UN, Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, stated:

"For many journalists, exile becomes yet another way to silence critical voices. Digital harassment, threats against family members in

Iran, and cut-off access to sources have forced many independents into silence."

(United Nations Report, June 2024)

Case Study: Golnaz Esfandiari

Golnaz Esfandiari, a Prague-based journalist renowned for her investigative reports on environmental crises and human rights abuses in Iran, has repeatedly reported attempts by government-linked hackers to breach her personal data and media attacks targeting her family in Tehran. Despite her rigorously sourced reporting, her stories are rarely republished by Persian-language mainstream media — a glaring absence that calls the professional credibility of these outlets into serious question?

3. Regime-Aligned Narratives: Friendly Journalism as Propaganda

As many independent voices are silenced, the Iranian regime exploits this vacuum to amplify its preferred narratives:

Reza Valizadeh, a former Radio Farda journalist, was arrested in January 2025 and sentenced to 10 years in prison after refusing to collaborate with IRGC forces. Since June 8, 2025, he has been on a hunger strike, protesting as follows:
"By confiscating my documents, they want to silence me not only inside Iran but also in exile."

(Source: AP News, June 2025)

Meanwhile, networks such as Press TV present regime-aligned analysts as "impartial experts," effectively sidelining genuine critical voices.

The Role of Financial Backing

Money plays a pivotal role in shaping the editorial policies of exile media:

Iran International is funded by Gulf region investors with specific political interests.

BBC Persian operates with public funds from the UK government, subject to state oversight.

Voice of America (VOA) functions under the U.S. government, with content decisions influenced by budget constraints and diplomatic considerations.

This financial dependence steers media outlets to favor personalities aligned with their sponsors' agendas — rather than independent, courageous journalists.

Why Are Independent Voices Not Heard?

In a March 2025 interview, I said:

"Years of reporting and careful analysis — yet no response to my proposals.

The wall I face isn't from Tehran, but from media outlets claiming to defend freedom of speech."

Root Causes:
1.Lack of Political Affiliation: Independent journalists without party ties or financial sponsors have no place within these media structures.

2.No Demand for Analytical Tone: In-depth, precise reporting lacks the immediate media appeal.

3.Absence of Brand or Fame: Media prefer to feature well-known or institution-backed figures.

These invisible walls ensure that only “approved” voices get heard, while ethical but unsupported journalists remain ignored.

Growing Discontent in Exile

In July 2025, over 450 Iranian civil activists, researchers, and journalists living abroad signed a letter accusing Iran International of “exclusionary and divisive policies.” They demanded:

Transparency in guest selection criteria

Inclusion of marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+, environmental and labor journalists

Equal opportunities for independent journalists with proven track records
(Source: Open Letter, July 2025)

This unprecedented solidarity signals a collective frustration and determination to change the media landscape.

Paths to Restoring Media Diversity

To end structural silence, media outlets and independent journalists must act together:

1.Publishing Investigative Reports
Example: “Silent Gatekeepers: Why Do Exile Media Exclude Independent Voices?”

2.Data-Driven Analysis
Extracting lists of recurring guests versus journalists never invited

3.Multimedia Interviews
Using videos and podcasts to humanize excluded journalists

4.Building Synergistic Networks
Forming journalism consortia to cross-publish content internationally

5.Demanding Transparency from Media Funders
Pressuring financial backers to clarify their content and guest selection processes

Conclusion: Towards Transparent, Accountable, and Pluralistic Media

The exclusion of independent journalists from Persian exile media is no accident — it’s structural. Narratives shaped by financial interests and risk-aversion not only hide the truth but distort the picture of Iran.

It is time for exile media to open their doors to ethical analysts, local reporters, and marginalized voices. Only then can the core promise of exile media — reflecting Iran’s complex, honest, and diverse realities — be fulfilled.

About the Author

Saman Hajibabaei is an independent Iranian journalist in exile, focusing on diaspora politics, environmental justice, and media censorship.

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For solidarity, collaboration, or sharing similar experiences of exclusion from exile media, contact me via the secure link below:

www.bobshub.de/tm-s-b-m

Let’s amplify the silenced voices together—and rebuild the narrative.

Freedom of Thought and Honest Communication Are the Only True Path to Iran’s Liberation.

We are eight million souls—displaced and scattered across cities and countries that are not our own.
We must no longer allow ourselves to be played like pawns.

The people of Iran deserve freedom, prosperity, and a simple, dignified life.

This message will remain in history, so future generations do not repeat our mistakes,
and so they know the earth is filled with traitors who, for the sake of bank balances and a few sheets of paper, have erased the pens of truth.

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