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Press TV: Iran's Revisionist Voice in Perspective

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Web Resource

Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies (IDSA): <http://www.idsa.in/>

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Press TV: Iran's Revisionist Voice in Perspective (<http://www.presstv.ir/>, <http://www.presstv.com/>)

Press TV (PTV) is perhaps the single most representative media platform of the Iranian government operating at the international level. Launched in 2007 as the global English-language arm of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)—otherwise known as the radio and television organization of Iran—it offers a valuable window into the complex dynamics of how the leadership in Tehran views the world or wishes its constituencies at home and abroad to perceive it as doing so. The very fact that IRIB's head is directly appointed by the Supreme Leader through constitutional authorization (Article 110 of the Iranian Constitution) leaves no doubt as to the high degree of significance the corporation and its subsidiaries carry inside Iran's political establishment.

PTV was developed "out of the need to break the global media stranglehold of Western outlets" (Fathi, 2007) and aims, according to its vision statement,

to foreground the “neglected voices and perspectives” as well as “untold and overlooked stories” of those it believes have been marginalized and underrepresented in a hegemonic ethersphere controlled by Western powers ([Press TV, 2010](#)). Seeing itself as an alternative force against established news channels like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Reuters, Cable News Network (CNN), [France 24](#), Qatar-based Al Jazeera, and Saudi-owned [Al Arabiya](#), it also seeks to present the global public with “another point of view” in contradistinction to those propagated by either pro-Western or pro-Arab media networks ([BBC, 2007](#)). For Mohammad Sarafraz, deputy head of IRIB and director of PTV, “Iran and Shiite Muslims in particular have become a focal point of world propaganda” in the post-9/11 era, which needs to be dealt with by offering a “second eye to Western audiences” on the respective developments ([Daftari, 2007](#); [Fars News Agency, 2007](#)).

Aside from regular daily news, the PTV Web site covers a variety of materials accessible in the “[Videos](#),” “[Interviews](#),” and “[Viewpoints](#)” sections on the home page. The materials are contributed by political pundits and commentators on a wide range of subjects such as 9/11, crimes against humanity, double standards, economy, imperialism, terrorism, Islamophobia, NATO, racism, society terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and Zionism. What acts as a common denominator holding together this vast variety, however, is an anti-establishment grand narrative and a deep-seated ideological revisionism that run through almost all the stories produced, so much so that crude manipulation at times takes precedence over fact-based representation of reality and is justified on their back. Coverage of the Arab Spring–induced uprising in Syria constitutes but one stellar case in point. Of course, such a modus operandi, whereby selective political “angling” is taken to extremes, serves as both a source of strength and of weakness.

The bright side is the Web site’s—and by way of approximate inference, the network’s—success in creating a fairly considerable niche readership in parts of Africa, the Americas, Europe, and South Asia ([Alexa, 2013a, 2013b](#)),¹ most of whom appear, however, to be attracted by the political ideology and attitude of PTV rather than the quality and reliability of its accounts. It should be noted here that another possible factor contributing to the site’s readership might be the high pace of news publication on it, which could mean frequent visits with short time intervals by the same visitors who are looking for new material. The dark side, on the other hand, has been its enduring failure to persuade the global public opinion and elite media communities alike of its credibility as an original *news* network (except perhaps for cases directly involving Iran and Iranian statesmen), an ambition Al Jazeera, among others, has largely managed to accomplish. Indeed, what percentage of international news consumers trusts PTV stories as news credible enough to refer to? Though this is difficult if not impossible to measure, the answer does not seem to be enviable compared with other corporate news agencies. In this respect, a close resemblance can be identified between PTV and its Sunni pan-Arab rival, Al Arabiya. The contention, in other words, is that PTV has projected itself more as a partisan platform than a professional media outlet during its short lifetime.

PTV is also characterized by a built-in discursive paradox. It arises from *the* dominant voice inside the Islamic Republic and reflects a governing discourse

that has little if any tolerance for other unorthodox narratives and “knowledges,” which it actively attempts to subjugate and disqualify as pathological, detrimental, or “naïve” (Foucault, 1980, p. 82). At the same time, it aspires to be “the voice of the voiceless” and to represent those positions that have been pushed, as it persistently stresses, to the margins of the global public sphere by mainstream media. Reconciling this inherent tension would arguably be a great step toward addressing its credibility gap. It is also curious and sometimes ironic that in its revisionist endeavors to propagate a “new perspective” on overseas developments, the site relies heavily on the entrenched Western corporations, including Reuters, [Agence France-Presse](#) (AFP), the Associated Press (AP), the BBC, and [Deutsche Presse-Agentur](#) (DPA), reproducing the news feed it receives from them with a certain “edge” while managing to impart the source only from time to time.

Now over six years into its life, PTV is under enormous pressure. The British broadcast regulator, formally known as the Office of Communication (Ofcom), revoked its operating licence in the United Kingdom in January 2012 allegedly for violating the Communications Act ([Sweeney, 2012](#)). In October of the same year, the Paris-based satellite provider Eutelsat halted its services to 19 IRIB-sponsored channels, including PTV. A few months later in February 2013, the satellite platform Galaxy 19, owned by Intelsat and based in Luxembourg, forced the channel off the air in North America, which was followed the next month by European Union sanctions against its chief executive officer Sarfaraz and newsroom director Hamid Reza Emadi ([Al Jazeera, 2013a, 2013b](#); [Pawlak, 2013](#)). The punitive measures came a while after an Iranian-Canadian journalist, who had been incarcerated in the wake of June 2009 presidential election protests in Iran, accused the network of extracting an interview from him under duress. Notably, increased improvements to the format and structure of the PTV Web site reflects, *inter alia*, an effort to compensate for the adverse consequences of this crack-down on its television channel.

For all its flaws and failures briefly elaborated above, PTV can hardly be dismissed as an insignificant force. A major public diplomacy tool of the Islamic Republic, it is among the few alternative outlets that have succeeded in gaining a relatively notable foothold in the Muslim world. For the non-Iranian audience, in particular, its significance appears to lie primarily in the insights it affords into the complex workings of politics in Iran and the ways in which a postrevolutionary “*faqiocracy*”—a state ruled by *faqihs*, or Islamic jurists—seeks to influence the course of events on the international scene. This is yet another reason why it deserves greater academic attention and needs to be methodically studied by media scholars.

Note

¹By clicking the “Audience” tab on <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/presstv.ir>, researchers can access statistics registered by Alexa on audience demographics for the PTV Web site. Statistics show that the United States hosts over a quarter of the site’s visitors, followed by Britain, where around 10% of its visitors are based. Pertinently, Alexa’s regional traffic statistics, accessed through the “Traffic Stats” tab on the aforementioned page, show that the PTV Web site is the 87th most visited Web site in Malawi, 376th in Afghanistan, 457th in Uganda, and 682nd in Nigeria; it should be noted that these figures are unpredictably subject to change.

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Web Resources

- Agence France-Presse (AFP): <http://www.afp.com/en/home/>
- Al Arabiya: <http://english.alarabiya.net/>
- Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA): <http://www.dpa.com/English.82.0.html>
- France 24: <http://www.france24.com/en/>

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Social Health Protection for the Poor: Insights on the Philippines

Social health protection is a major policy concern for the Philippine government. The Philippines launched the Health for All strategy in 2011 ([Republic of the Philippines, Department of Health, 2011](#)), which puts forward health financing as one of the main drivers of the conditional cash transfer (CCT) program, which in turn aims to alleviate poverty by making welfare intervention contingent on the cash beneficiary's actions. Researchers interested in the Philippines' CCT program, which is called the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (hereafter, Pantawid), can access basic material from the program's site, hosted by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD; <http://pantawid.dswd.gov.ph/>). The [News](#) section of the Web site provides articles with links to full reports on external impact assessment and program accomplishment in relation to the government's overarching banner of inclusive growth (Chaudhury, Friedman, & Onishi, 2013; [Republic of the Philippines, Department of Social Welfare and Development, 2013](#)).