

The Persian News Nightmare

America's 'voice' has been transformed into the Voice of Tehran

by Kenneth R. Timmerman

If you had been listening to the Voice of America's Persian News Network (PNN) in the weeks and months before the U.S. presidential elections, you would easily have believed that Donald Trump was a white supremacist in league with the Ku Klux Klan who raped underage girls, and that Hillary Clinton was a shoe-in to become president.

Sure, you would have had the same impression watching MSNBC or CNN (since merged into the DNC). But there's a big difference: your tax dollars paid for the propaganda on the Voice of America.

So certain was the director of the VOA's Persian Service, Setareh Derakhshesh, that Hillary Clinton was about to become president that she tasked reporters two weeks ahead of time to prepare a special program lionizing the Democratic "president-elect." No such program was prepared on Donald Trump.

When Mrs. Clinton's campaign chair, John Podesta, told supporters at 2 a.m. in Chicago to "go home," PNN reporters obediently went home as well and the Persian service went off air, instead of broadcasting the real president-elect's acceptance speech.

The next day they brought on Mehdi Nourbakhsh, the son-in-law of former Islamic Republic of Iran Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi, to analyze the results. "Trump will leave the presidency to Mike Pence and will go back to what he had been doing before," he said. "Trump will hand Syria totally to Russia Trump is not representing all America. He is representing ultra right, white color, low educated, religious fanatics who cannot see a woman in leadership." No one

challenged these assertions.

Other articles and interviews on VOA's Persian service are all of a piece. In an editorial posted the day before the election, VOA editors wrote that Vladimir Putin was the only world leader who would welcome the arrival of Donald Trump, but that was because "Donald Trump serves Russian interests and is associated with Russian investors."

In a post-election piece, VOA invited another Trump-hater, Reza Goharзад, to give his views of the president-elect's Cabinet picks. He told VOA's audience in Iran that strategic adviser Steve Bannon and U.S. Attorney General designate Sen. Jeff Sessions were "racists who have to apologize to the American people." Education secretary designate Betsy DeVos was "going to end public education."

VOA editors continued their war on Mr. Trump on Twitter and Facebook. After Fidel Castro died, PNN editor Mohammad Manzarpour shared a tweet praising Castro as a real giant and calling Mr. Trump "a paper giant." (When critics of PNN exposed this, Mr. Manzarpour deleted the shared tweet).

Facing tough congressional criticism, the Broadcasting Board of Governors put out a statement in English lauding VOA's coverage of the elections.

"VOA Persian aired two days of special election programming which included over seven hours of live elections results," the BBG stated. "The service's election night broadcasts included the live speeches of both Trump and Clinton with simultaneous translation. Also, their political talk show New Horizons featured a discussion with the Trump's Middle East adviser Majid Rafieezadeh."

That statement includes several outright lies. On election night, VOA did not broadcast speeches by either presidential candidate: Mrs. Clinton did not speak, and PNN went off air before Mr. Trump took to the podium.

As for Majid Rafieezadeh, he was no Trump adviser. "The Trump Campaign authorized me to organize a Middle Eastern American Advisory Committee but I don't know Mr. Majid Rafieezadeh and he was not on that list," Trump Middle East adviser Hossein Khorram told me in an email. "I checked with the other Iranian American on the Middle Eastern American Advisory Committee and they had not heard of this individual either," he added.

In fact, Mr. Rafieezadeh has been an "ambassador" for the pro-Tehran advocacy group, National Iranian American Council, NIAC, which viciously denounced Donald Trump for months and, after the elections, raised money from supporters on a pledge to wage "a major public battle" against the Trump administration.

The Voice of America is terminally ill. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Ed Royce, California Republican, has devoted an entire page on the committee's website to long-standing unsuccessful efforts to reform the VOA. Former and current employees have set up a blog to chronicle the disaster.

The Persian Service has been rank with infighting and personnel disputes for decades. A 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Report found widespread discontent, with only 30.2 percent of PNN employees believing that PNN's senior leaders "maintain high standards of honesty and integrity."

In recent years, the Obama administration has brought in more than a dozen reporters from Iranian regime media outlets who have transformed America's "voice" into the Voice of Tehran. Some of these individuals last worked for the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

It may be possible to save VOA through the total overhaul of our international broadcasting being proposed by the House and Senate foreign affairs committees.

But there is no saving PNN. It is too corrupt, too riddled

with regime supporters, and too toxic to the “good” employees to be reformed. **It’s time to shut it down and save the taxpayers some money and our nation from public embarrassment.**

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