



AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL  
U.S. PERSIAN MEDIA STUDY

Procedural Overview

*In April 2017, the American Foreign Policy Council was commissioned by the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors (hereinafter “the BBG”) to carry out an independent third-party review of programming on the Voice of America’s Persian Service and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Radio Farda. The objective of the study was to examine relevant content for accuracy of reporting, institutional bias, and major flaws, with the goal of providing the BBG with an assessment of contemporary U.S. international broadcasting into Iran.*

## PANEL SELECTION AND COMPOSITION

To carry out the review in question, the American Foreign Policy Council selected a quartet of highly regarded specialists with expertise in various aspects of Iranian domestic and/or foreign policy. Emphasis was placed on familiarity with Iranian politics, the strategic priorities of the Islamic Republic, and U.S. policy and policymaking toward Iran. The study was overseen by American Foreign Policy Council Senior Vice President Ilan Berman, who served as both the project’s coordinator and as a member of the panel. In addition to Mr. Berman, the panel was comprised of: Mr. Michael Pregent, an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute; Mr. Karim Sadjadpour, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and; Dr. Jonathan Schanzer, senior vice president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Short bios for each of the panelists are available on the last page of this report.

## THEMATIC FOCUS

To assist in the analysis of the media content selected, the reviews focused on a number of themes deemed most relevant by the project coordinator and the other panelists. These were:

- Coverage of the Iran nuclear deal
- Coverage of U.S. Mideast policy
- Coverage of the U.S. government and institutions
- Coverage of Iranian domestic politics and conditions
- Coverage of Iranian foreign policy
- Coverage of U.S.-Iranian relations
- Coverage of Israel

## METHODOLOGY

Media clips and selections were chosen in a “quadruple blind” process that was designed to maximize the scope, variety and representative nature of the content sample that was made available to each reviewer.

- The first round of media clip selection focused on important events relating to Iranian politics and U.S.-Iran relations over the past two-and-a-half years (e.g., the passage of the Iran nuclear deal in July 2015, Iranian parliamentary and presidential elections, etc.). Relevant political events were identified via a “political calendar” that was generated by the project coordinator in consultation with the panelists, and which is available upon request. Roughly twelve hours of content were selected in this fashion.
- The second round of media clip selection focused on content generated as a result of searches for significant keywords (such as “corruption,” “Revolutionary Guards” and “democracy”) carried out via the BBG video and audio archive. Roughly twelve hours of content were selected in this fashion.
- The third round of media clip selection was carried out by Karine Roushanian, an analyst with the IBB/Voice of America, at the request of the project coordinator. Ms. Roushanian was given the discretion to identify and select content generated from a range of random dates between 2015 and 2017. Roughly ten hours of content were selected in this fashion.
- The fourth round of media clip selection was carried out independently by panelist Karim Sadjadpour. Mr. Sadjadpour, a fluent Farsi speaker, directly accessed the BBG video and audio archives and personally reviewed a range of programming selections produced and disseminated between 2015 and 2017. Nearly two-dozen hours of content were reviewed in this fashion.

Cumulatively, the study analyzed more than fifty hours of programming from both the Voice of America’s Persian Service and Radio Farda. Translations of all media selections were commissioned by the BBG from an independent translation firm, as per prior agreement with the American Foreign Policy Council. Once completed, translated transcripts were provided to the project coordinator, who apportioned them to the various panelists (except Mr. Sadjadpour, as noted above).

## PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES

ILAN BERMAN is Senior Vice President of the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, DC. An expert on regional security in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Russian Federation, he has consulted for both the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. Department of Defense, and provided assistance on foreign policy and national security issues to a range of governmental agencies and congressional offices. He has been called one of America's "leading experts on the Middle East and Iran" by CNN. Berman is a member of the Associated Faculty at Missouri State University's Department of Defense and Strategic Studies, and has written for the *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs*, the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*, among many other publications.

MICHAEL PREGENT is an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute. A former intelligence officer with over 28 years of experience in security, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in the Middle East, North Africa and Southwest Asia, Pregent is an expert in Middle East and North Africa political and security issues, stakeholder communications and strategic planning. Among other postings, he has served at the Defense Intelligence Agency and as an advisor to the United States Central Command, and has done tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan. His writings have been published in *Foreign Affairs*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Tower*, the *Long War Journal*, *CNN*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Business Insider*, and *The Daily Beast*.

KARIM SADJADPOUR is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he focuses on Iran and U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East. A fluent Farsi speaker, he has written extensively on politics and society in Iran and throughout the Middle East. Sadjadpour is a regular contributor to the *Atlantic*, and has written for *Foreign Affairs*, the *New York Times*, *The Economist*, and the *Washington Post*, among other publications. He previously served as an analyst with the International Crisis Group, based in Tehran and Washington.

JONATHAN SCHANZER is senior vice president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, where he oversees the organization's institutional research and analysis. He previously served as a terrorism finance analyst at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, where he played an integral role in the designation of numerous terrorist financiers, and before that as a research fellow at the

Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Dr. Schanzer has traveled widely throughout the Middle East, including Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Morocco, Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories, and studied Middle Eastern history in four countries. He holds a Ph.D. from King's College London.