

Another Blow To Media Freedom: British Regulators Pull Press TV

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The British media regulator OFCOM has pulled Press TV's license to be seen in the United Kingdom.

The regulator that has done so little to regulate the methods of Rupert. Murdoch's media practices, or BBC's tilted coverage of the war in Iraq, has suddenly decided that the Iran's global English language channel must be sanctioned by being removed and silenced. (Ironically, it was Murdoch's BSKYB channel that carried Press TV in the UK)

It is not carried here. In fact, Aljazeera which has won global recognition for its news programming can only be seen in a few cities in the United States. Last week, its documentary on Haiti won a prestigious Peabody Award.

According to the Guardian, this decision that should be labeled an OFCOM Fatwa— involved what regulators considered a “breach” of their Communications Act.

“Ofcom found that Press TV's practice of running its editorial oversight from Tehran, Iran's capital, is in breach of broadcasting license rules in the UK.

Ofcom wrote a letter to Press TV in November highlighting the issue and offered a choice of two remedies.

The first was to switch editorial control for Press TV's programming to the UK, the second to transfer the broadcasting license to Iran.”

May observers see this decision more political than administrative, as British payback for the recent protests in Tehran at the British Embassy protesting its policies toward Iran. Iranian police tried to control the activists and protect the Embassy, but did not do a prompt enough job for the UK.

The basis of Ofcom's decision is disputed by Iran It seems clear that the criteria cited by the British authorities is bogus given the fact that PressTV makes no secret of the fact that is based in Iran, or that Iran pays its bills.

Many governments including our own fund internationally oriented channels. Ours include the Voice Of America and the anti-Cuban Radio Marti channel. They are seen in other counties but based here.

Ofcom also charged than a brief -Press TV says 10 seconds- interview with former Newsweek reporter Maziar Bahari was conducted “under duress” and imposed a whopping

fine on Press TV which refused to pay it, insisting the charge was not true. Bahari has been all over American TV promoting a book based on his experiences in Iran.

Adds the Guardian, "Former Press TV presenters include Ken Livingstone, the Labour London mayoral candidate, and Lauren Booth, sister of Cherie Blair.

The Press TV newsroom director, Hamid Emadi, said the channel had been taken off air in the UK for "for airing a 10-second news clip" of Bahari.

"He claims he has been interviewed under duress. Press TV has strongly rejected that," Emadi added.

"Press TV believes that Ofcom is the media tool of the British government - the same government that sent troops to Iraq and Afghanistan to participate in the killing of innocent civilians.

WikiLeaks cables say London and Washington have explored ways to limit the operations of Press TV in the UK. And here it comes; Press TV is removed from the Sky platform."

He added that Press TV is examining ways of continuing to broadcast into the UK."

I have to disclose being among many Americans who have been interviewed frequently by Press TV out of New York. No one there ever told me what to say, or not say, and I have often been quite openly critical of Iranian government practices, live comments the channel carried, and, afterwards, had me back.

I have almost always posted those interviews on my News Dissector.com blog.

I also produced a program for their InFocus program on Occupy Wall Street that I was proud of and drew many compliments from occupiers.

One shot in that program was pulled—the cover of the Occupy Wall Street Journal carrying a photograph of a male and female occupier kissing. It was not a big deal in the scheme of things, given that many networks, including our own, have vigilant lawyer-run "standard and practices" departments to police their airways for violations of social mores.

Ask Janet Jackson about that!

As a general rule, in my experience I found Press TV offers more diverse views and often more professional coverage than the three US networks I have worked for. They have carried criticisms of US polices that only appear on comedy shows on American TV.

The West should not lecture Iran on media honesty.

I have written many books and blogs, and made films about my experience in American TV at major networks, including "The More You Watch, The Less You Know": and "WMD: Weapons of Mass Deception" about US Media manipulation and network complicity in miscovering the Iraq War.

You want to find out how controlled and managed our own media is? Check them out.

I certainly do not support Iranian government repression of human rights, while at the same

time cannot support my own government when it acts in a similar way. Where are the criticisms of the arrests of more than 5000 non-violent Occupy protesters in the US since September?

Also, Guantanamo anyone?

I also cannot support the West's harsh sanctions on Iran that punish the Iranian people, more than their government, and I do not believe we should suppress Iranian perspectives in our media.

(That is not uniformly true, as a great Iranian film, Separation, just won a Golden Globe award even as its director challenges his government's film policies.)

We need more mutual understanding and interaction between Americans and Iranians. That can't happen easily when outlets like Press TV are being taken off the air.

I was invited as a judge in an Iranian film festival last year and have been invited back. Does my going there signal support for their government's policies?

Absolutely not! I wrote about my experiences widely.

Does it make me a propagandist in the way that so many my own former colleagues don't seem to know the difference between being hacks, flacks and journalists? Judge us all by our work.

No one is paying me, although my travel is covered, as it would be for invitations to many events that I couldn't afford to attend otherwise in this country and abroad. Only employees of wealthy media companies can insist that they will only travel when their companies pay, as if that makes them pure.

Underfunded independent media reporters live in a different world, and are eager, but cannot always afford to report stories that are not being told.

Also, I should add, I covered the Vietnam War from the "enemy" side as well as our own, and violated the Apartheid regime's media rules. I am proud of that too.

Journalists need to do everything they can to cover as many sides of an issue as possible.

Right now, the world media needs to criticize the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the British regulators who are limiting freedom of the press and expression. They have launched a media war on Iran that may be a prelude to a military one.

Check out PressTV on the Internet or your phone. There's an app for that!

At the same time, we have to be vigilant when our own freedoms are at risk because of the practices of our FCC and proposed measures like SOPA/FIPA.

If western governments get away with surpassing Iranian media today, ours will be next.

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