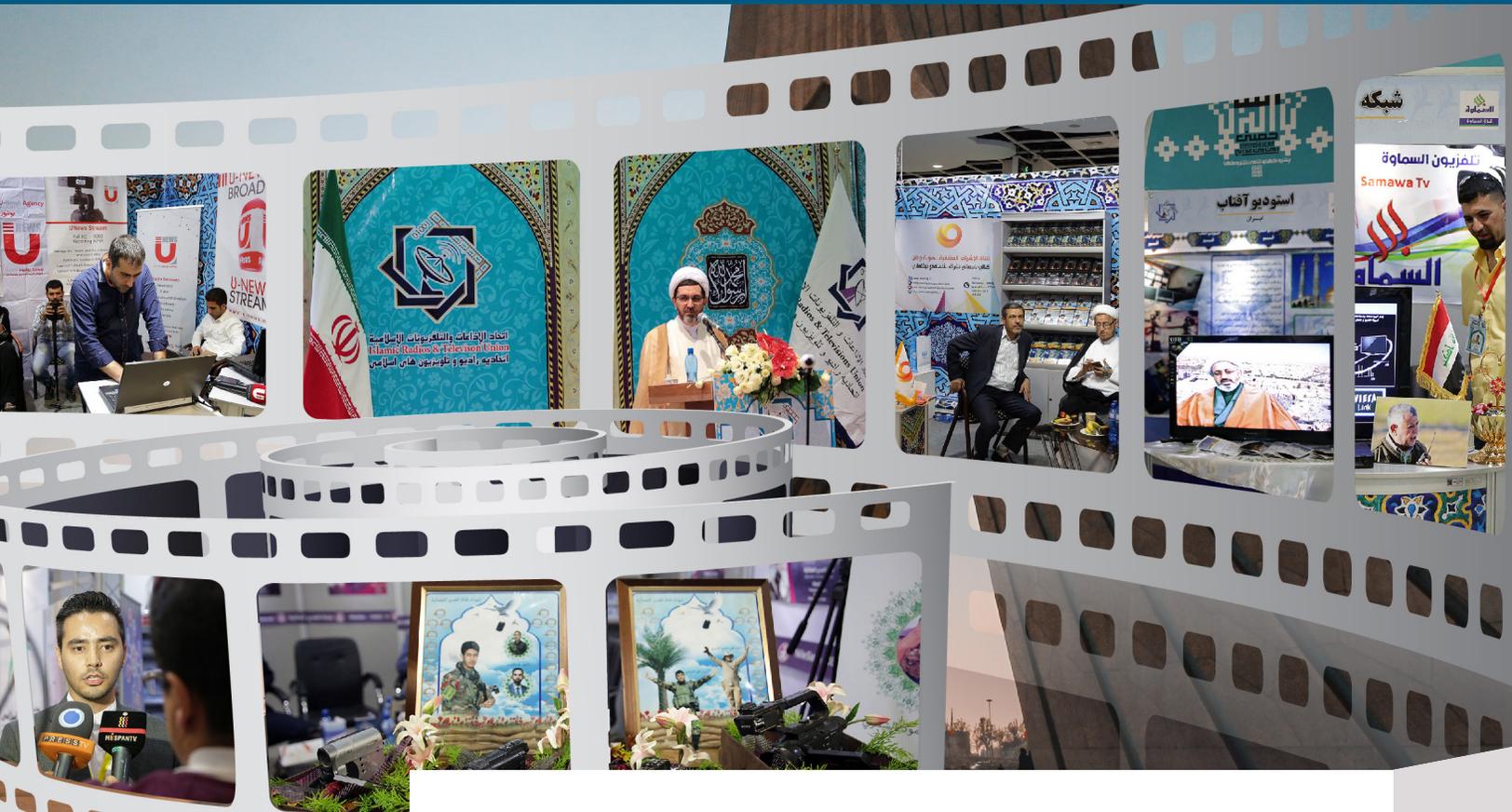




The Revolution Will Be Televised in Arabic Iran's Media Infrastructure Abroad

Hamdi Malik



The Islamic Radio and Television Union leads efforts to spread the message of the revolution in Arabic-speaking countries.

For the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, architect of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and founding leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and his successor, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the revolution is a global movement that must be exported to other nations, starting with Iran's neighbors. To this end, Iran's expansionist policy in the region is well underway.

At the heart of this project is the concept of *sodoure enqelab*, or export of the revolution. The concept is clearly articulated in the Iranian constitution: "The constitution, having regard to the Islamic contents of the Iranian Revolution...provides a basis for the continuation of that Revolution both inside and outside the country."¹ One organization indisputably tasked with exporting

the revolution is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which serves as a parallel military force to the nation’s conventional army, known as the Artesh. The IRGC is also an economic powerhouse, controlling a broad share of the nation’s industry, and an aggressive cultural arbiter.

The constitution continues:

In the organization and equipping of the country’s defense forces, there must be regard for faith and religion as their basis and rules. And so the Islamic Republic’s army, and the corps of Revolutionary Guards, must be organized in accordance with this aim. They have responsibility not only for the safeguarding of the frontiers, but also for a religious mission, which is Holy War (JIHAD) along the way of God, and the struggle to extend the supremacy of God’s Law in the world.²

In December 2006, at the height of attempts by the IRGC’s elite Qods Force to create and sustain its proxy militias in Iraq, Ali Akbar Alizadeh, the commander of the IRGC Central Region, said at a conference, “Exporting the revolution to Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and other countries has caused concern in the United States.” He added, “In the past, the United States was the first power in the Middle East...but now Islamic Iran has consolidated its power in the region.”³

At this time, Iran’s expansionist policy was mainly

focused on hard power, although the Islamic Republic had devised strategies to exert soft power from its inception. Thus, a few Iranian organizations were tasked with exporting revolutionary ideology to other nations from the earliest days of the revolution.

In 1979, al-Mustafa International University (*Jameat al-Mustafa al-Alamiyah*) was established as “an international academic, Islamic, and *hawzawi* [seminarian] institute”⁴ in the Iranian city of Qom.⁵ Since then, it has recruited students from throughout the region and around the world to be trained as advocates of the Islamic Republic in their home countries. Clerics close to Ali Khamenei have praised al-Mustafa International University for its role in exporting the revolution.⁶ It has close ties to the Qods Force, which prompted a designation of al-Mustafa by the U.S. Department of the Treasury in December 2020.⁷

The Ahlul Bayt World Assembly (*Majmae Jahani Ahlul Bayt*) was established in 1990 at Khamenei’s directive. It is a religious organization tasked with propagating the ideology of the Islamic Republic among Shia populations in the Middle East and beyond. It is also engaged in a wide range of religious, educational, and cultural activities in Iran, the region, and on the African continent to disseminate Shia Islam interpreted according to the Islamic Republic’s ideology.⁸

In the mid-1990s, the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance ramped up its efforts to export the Islamic Revolution. In 1995, the ministry

Abbreviations

AAH	Asaib Ahl al-Haq	IRTVU	Islamic Radio and Television Union
HaN	Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba	KH	Kataib Hezbollah
HRK	Hedayat Resaneh Kish (Kish Guidance Media)	NIRT	National Iranian Radio and Television
IRIB	Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting	UCMT	Union Center for Media and Training
Iraqi-RTVU	Iraqi Radio and Television Union	U-Feed	Union Center for Research and Development

established the Islamic Culture and Communication Organization (*Sazeman-e Farhang va Ertebatat-e Eslami*), whose “main responsibility is in the field of cultural activities” abroad. The Islamic Culture and Communication Organization currently has ten branches in Asia, Africa, and Europe.⁹

For the Supreme Leader, the most important front in the soft war is media. In his view, “the most effective international weapon against the enemies... is the weapon of propaganda and media communications.”¹⁰ Khamenei believes that “nowadays, this [media] is the most powerful weapon, which is more dangerous than atomic bombs.”¹¹ Iran’s media efforts in the region are shaped by this vision and are now an integral part of its expansionist policy in the Middle East. Iran makes extensive use of media to export its revolution.

In 1980—one year after the revolution—Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) started its first Arabic Service. The advent of satellite TV technology presented an opportunity to expand Iran’s media operations in the region. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, IRIB World Service intensified its efforts to address Arabic-speaking nations in the Middle East, targeting Shia audiences in particular. But Iran’s major media effort began in 2007, when the regime established the Islamic Radio and Television Union (IRTVU) to organize, widen, and sustain media outlets and organizations belonging to the Iran-led “axis of resistance.”

This study will investigate IRIB and IRTVU’s efforts to expand the Islamic Republic’s media footprint in Arab countries, which is an integral part of Iran’s strategy to export its revolution (see figure 1 for a depiction of Iran’s media ecosystem in Arabic).

IRIB World Service

The first Iranian state broadcasting company, National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT; in

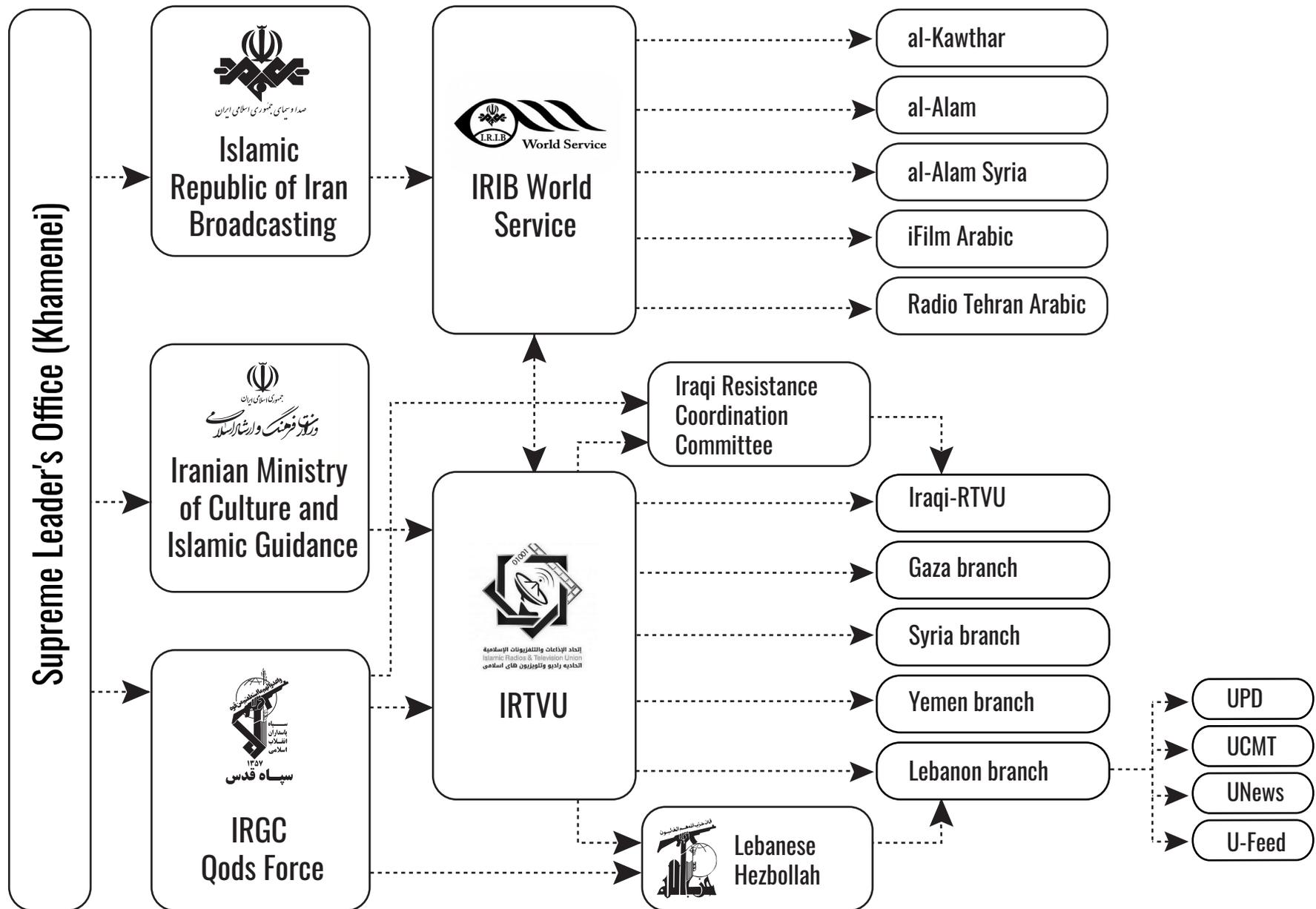
Persian, *Radio va Televisiun-e Melli-ye Iran*), was established in 1971 under the shah. For decades before this, the private sector ran television services in the country.¹² NIRT ran a limited World Service. In 1976, it began broadcasting the English-language International Radio and Television, the first outlet in a foreign language.¹³

Soon after the 1979 revolution, NIRT was renamed Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (*Sazeman-e Seda va Sima-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami*), and this entity has consolidated a monopoly on TV and radio broadcasting inside Iran. IRIB’s head is chosen by the Supreme Leader.

After the establishment of IRIB, the state-run media arm’s World Service was established as a department under the News and Information Directorate. Around 1985, it was upgraded to a directorate to play a larger role in exporting the Islamic Revolution.¹⁴ IRIB World Service launched its first foreign-language service in 1980, broadcasting television content in Arabic for an hour and a half per day.¹⁵ The service, only available to some regions inside Iran, would become the cornerstone of IRIB World Service’s Arabic operation. In November 1997, Sahar satellite TV, the World Service’s first television channel, was launched as a global outlet. Subsequently, Sahar TV added a few satellite services in other languages.¹⁶ In 2005, Sahar’s Arabic service became independent, and its name was changed to al-Kawthar Satellite Channel.

Currently, IRIB World Service runs fourteen satellite TV channels and three internet TV channels, four of which broadcast in Arabic. Additionally, IRIB World Service runs thirty-two radio stations,¹⁷ including Tehran Radio in Arabic. It has wide reach in the region, broadcasting in the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and even East Africa.¹⁸ Presently, IRIB World Service’s various outlets broadcast media content in thirty languages.¹⁹ IRIB World Service has four departments, covering (1) Central Asia and the Caucasus, (2) Europe and the Americas, (3) Arab and African countries, and (4) the Indian subcontinent and East Asia.²⁰

Figure 1. Iran's Media Ecosystem in Arabic



Al-Kawthar Satellite Channel (*Qanat al-Kawthar al-Fadhayyah*)

In a July 2006 interview with the Iranian newspaper *Hamshahri*, Mehdi Mojtahed, then general manager of the al-Kawthar Satellite Channel, described the goals and objectives of his station as follows: “Propagating the culture of the Islamic Revolution and its achievements and exposing the hostile intentions of the United States and the al-Quds [Jerusalem] occupying regime [Israel] are among the policies pursued by al-Kawthar TV.”²¹ In 2010, five years after its founding, al-Kawthar TV began broadcasting twenty-four hours a day.²²

Al-Kawthar TV is largely a religious station that propagates the Islamic Republic’s version of Shia political Islam in the region. It airs a variety of programs, including religious lessons delivered by clergy, cultural shows, documentaries, Iranian movies and series, and children’s programs, among others. All have heavy religious themes and disseminate Shia political Islam. Al-Kawthar also broadcasts Persian-language lessons and programs about the history of Iran and its revered historical figures.

The Iranian regime’s news outlets report that al-Kawthar TV is among the most watched channels in countries such as Iraq. It is difficult to ascertain the validity of these claims, but the number of al-Kawthar TV followers on social media provides a sense of its penetration. Before Facebook took it down in July 2021, al-Kawthar’s Facebook page had more than 2.7 million followers.²³

Al-Alam News Channel (*Qanat al-Alam al-Ekhbariyah*)

Al-Alam News Channel was launched in February 2003 as a twenty-four-hour Arabic-language outlet.²⁴ The launch occurred at a critical moment in the region, when U.S.-led coalition forces had toppled Saddam Hussein’s regime. Thus, Iran faced little competition in filling the Iraqi media space. Under Saddam, no foreign media were allowed to work in

the country, but the overthrow opened a space for foreign media to operate. Al-Alam exploited that space.

Al-Alam now claims to operate in forty regions around the world and has offices in Tehran, Beirut, Baghdad, and Damascus.²⁵ No valid statistics are available on al-Alam’s penetration rate, but social media following can serve as a gauge of the channel’s popularity in the region, and it enjoyed around 6 million followers on Facebook before its account was taken down in March 2022.²⁶

Al-Alam Syria Channel (*Qanat al-Alam Suriya*)

Just as IRIB World Service successfully exploited the Iraq war in 2003 and launched al-Alam News Channel, the media corporation saw in Iran’s interference in the Syrian civil war an opportunity to expand its reach in the region. In November 2017, al-Alam Syria Channel, the first IRIB World Service TV channel outside Iran, was launched.²⁷

Al-Alam Syria operates independently of al-Alam TV.²⁸ Most of its personnel are Syrian and Lebanese, except for the manager, Naji Chenani, who is Iranian. All the personnel are based in Syria.²⁹ According to Chenani, the channels’ objective is to “preserve the achievement of the ‘axis of resistance’ in post-Islamic State era and to increase [Iran’s] cultural presence in Syria and to connect with the Syrian elites.” Chenani stated that one of al-Alam Syria’s missions is “to introduce Iran’s economic and industrial capabilities to participate in the reconstruction of Syria.”³⁰

Al-Alam Syria began by broadcasting five hours a day and now broadcasts sixteen hours a day. Unlike al-Alam TV, al-Alam Syria is not strictly a news channel; it airs a variety of shows. According to Peyman Jebli, the head of IRIB,³¹ al-Alam Syria is the only non-native TV channel granted permission to operate in Syria by Damascus and the first foreign TV channel granted permission to generate revenue by running ads for Syrian companies.³²

iFilm Arabic **(iFilm al-Arabiya)**

The outlet iFilm Arabic was launched in September 2010 as a twenty-four-hour entertainment channel, broadcasting Iranian movies, TV series, documentaries, and other entertainment shows dubbed in Arabic.³³ It is IRIB World Service’s largest operation to introduce Arabic-speaking audiences in the Middle East to so-called halal, or pure, Iranian media content. Later, three other iFilm channels—iFilm English, iFilm Persian, and iFilm 2 in Dari (an Afghan dialect of Persian)—were launched.

Although the bulk of iFilm’s content is dubbed, the channel also produces its own shows. Its slogan is “the drama channel for the family.” iFilm Arabic’s website has a section for children’s shows called iFilm Children (*Atfal iFilm*). This is an effective way to present a wide range of audiences with Islamic Republic ideologies through drama and other entertainment.

Radio Tehran Arabic **(Ethaat Tehran al-Arabiya)**

Iranian Arabic radio was established around 1957,³⁴ more than two decades before the Islamic Revolution. Currently named Radio Tehran Arabic, it broadcasts to all countries in the Middle East and parts of North and East Africa. According to Abbas Anjam, the manager of Radio Tehran Arabic, the station’s goal is to “introduce the principles and ideals of the Islamic Revolution and its achievements.”³⁵ Radio Tehran Arabic airs material ranging from news to cultural programs, entertainment, and children’s shows. In February 2019, Radio Tehran Arabic began broadcasting its programs live in a television format on its website and social media accounts.³⁶

Over the years, IRIB World Service expanded its Arabic-language media outlets to shape public opinion in the Middle East based on the principles of the Islamic Revolution. But as Iran’s hard power grew

in the region and more pro-Iran proxies were created, the regime saw the need for an overarching strategy to equip these militias with soft-power tools. The idea was to intensify Iran’s project of exporting the revolution and sustain its proxies over the long term by winning hearts and minds to safeguard loyalty to the Islamic Republic and its regional proxies. To achieve this goal, the Islamic Republic launched the earlier-noted IRTVU.

IRTVU (*Ettehadīye Radio va Televisiunhaye Eslami*)

Established in 2007, IRTVU is an umbrella organization that includes a few media outlets run by IRIB World Service as well as numerous outlets owned and run by Iran’s proxies throughout the Middle East. IRTVU provides these outlets with financial, technological, and organizational support, helps train their personnel, and devises a unified strategy for them to follow.³⁷ In short, it helps establish and sustain media outlets of Iran-backed groups throughout the region. Today, IRTVU claims to have more than 228 affiliates in 33 countries, most of them in the Middle East. It encompasses 130 satellite television channels, 53 radio stations, 32 media production centers, four social media centers, and nine news agencies.³⁸ In October 2020, IRTVU was designated by the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control “for attempting to influence elections in the United States.”³⁹

To date, IRTVU has held ten general assemblies. The most recent assembly was held in June 2021 in Tehran in a hybrid mode, where participants in Baghdad, Beirut, Sanaa, Kabul, Gaza, and Istanbul participated via video link.⁴⁰

IRTVU falls under the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, a department chaired by one of the few cabinet ministers who must receive approval from the Supreme Leader to take the position.⁴¹ It is governed by three overarching structural bodies:

Supreme Council. This oversight group is composed of thirteen members, including the secretary-general and two deputies. The council's current head is Mudher al-Baka, general manager of the Badr Organization's al-Ghadeer television network in Iraq.⁴²

General Secretariat. This body is located in Tehran and headed by Ali Karimian, a cleric with close ties to the Supreme Leader's office, where Qods Force strategies are devised and overseen.⁴³ His deputy is Nasser Akhdar (aka Abu Mustafa), the former programming director for Hezbollah's al-Manar television network. Akhdar is Karimian's representative in Lebanon who implements IRTVU's strategy in the country and oversees its various organizations in Lebanon.⁴⁴ Akhdar has been directly involved in formulating media strategy for Yemen's Houthi rebels, serving as their main communication link with Hezbollah and Iran. His role is so important that he accompanied the Houthi delegation to Geneva's Yemen peace talks in 2015.⁴⁵ Karimian and Akhdar were re-elected to their posts during IRTVU's tenth general assembly. The second deputy for Ali Karimian is Ibrahim Farahat, the general manager of the Hezbollah's al-Manar TV.⁴⁶

Permanent committees. These diverse oversight bodies include the religious discourse committee, the political and news committee, the training committee, the production committee, the technical and broadcast services committee, and the radio committee.⁴⁷

IRTVU's main operations are based in other Middle East countries such as Lebanon and Iraq, but the union still runs a few important operations in Iran. IRTVU runs a Tehran-based company called Hedayat Resaneh Kish (HRK; Kish Guidance Media), which provides satellite reception services, training, translation, and dubbing, among other services. But its primary function is to be the main market for selling a wide range of Iranian media products. HRK claims to possess the "most thorough Islamic digital [media] archive in the world."⁴⁸ This is an archive of media content produced mainly in Iran and considered by

the Islamic Republic to be compatible with Islamic values. HRK is IRTVU's shop to sell Iranian media products such as movies, dramas, TV shows, animations, and documentaries to foreign buyers, mainly in the Arab world. That is why most titles available on its website are in Arabic.

Dissemination of media content is one way that the Islamic Republic exports the revolution and disseminates its propaganda in the region. It is an effort to culturally dominate countries in the Middle East, particularly those where IRTVU has a presence. To this end, IRTVU holds periodic film markets, which they call "Islamic film markets." These are exhibitions in which mainly Iranian media production companies advertise their products under the names of "clean films" or "halal films." So far, seven such markets have been held. The most recent one was held in 2017 in the Iranian city of Mashhad in conjunction with IRTVU's ninth general assembly.⁴⁹ The Covid-19 pandemic prevented an exhibition from being held during the tenth general assembly in 2021.

In August 2015, during IRTVU's eighth general assembly, the organization unveiled its halal emblem. This certificate is granted to "Islamic" and "clean" media products, similar to the certification given to halal food products in many Western countries.⁵⁰

A cluster of Iranian private media production companies have been created around IRTVU to provide its members with media products. One such company, Foresight Media (aka *Ayande Negar Resaneh*), was established by Muhammad Sadegh Karimian, the son of IRTVU's secretary-general, Ali Karimian. It produces a range of animations.⁵¹ The company's main target is the Arabic-language media. For example, in 2016–17, Ayande Negar Resaneh produced a series of short animations for the Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV.⁵² The company also regularly takes part in the IRTVU's Islamic film market.⁵³

IRTVU provides support to a wide range of media outlets and organizations that operate in other

languages. But the union’s main efforts are targeted to Arabic-language outlets and organizations. That is why the bulk of IRTVU’s activities are focused on Iraq and Lebanon.

Iran’s public opinion strategy in these two countries mirrors its approach to political and military activities there—Hezbollah is in charge of IRTVU projects in Lebanon, while an umbrella organization called the Iraqi Radio and Television Union (Iraqi-RTVU; in Arabic, *Ittihad al-Ethaat wal Telfezyunat al-Iraqiyah*) supports the plethora of militia media outlets in that country.

In Iraq, the Iraqi-RTVU has helped establish and sustain numerous media outlets owned by Iran-backed militias, including the television networks al-Etejah (run by Kataib Hezbollah [KH]), al-Ahad (run by Asaib Ahl al-Haq [AAH]), al-Nujaba (run by Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba [HaN]), and al-Janubiyah (run by Saraya al-Jihad), among many others.

In Lebanon, where the model is different, Hezbollah oversees all IRTVU activities, including the development of non-Lebanese outlets such as the Houthis’ Al Masirah TV, which broadcasts from Beirut’s southern suburb of Dahiya.⁵⁴ Other entities directly established by IRTVU are likewise based in Dahiya and run by Hezbollah, including the Union Center for Media Training, the news agency UNews, and the Union Center for Research and Development (aka U-Feed).

IRTVU in Lebanon

IRTVU’s Lebanon branch first opened in 2010. It was relaunched in summer 2013 in the Jisr al-Matar area of Dahiya, Hezbollah’s southern Beirut stronghold.⁵⁵ Dahiya’s Media City contains the headquarters and offices of many Iran-affiliated media outlets,⁵⁶ such as Hezbollah’s al-Manar TV and the Houthis’ Al Masirah TV. IRTVU’s Lebanon branch, which is controlled by Hezbollah, has created a media infrastructure in Dahiya’s Media City to support

and help launch a wide range of “axis of resistance” media outlets. For example, al-Etejah TV, run by the Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah, was first established in Dahiya’s Media City before moving its main operations to Baghdad.⁵⁷

The support provided by IRTVU’s branch in Lebanon is not limited to outlets with offices in Dahiya’s Media City. IRTVU’s media infrastructure in Lebanon provides a wide range of services and provisions for all “axis of resistance” media in the region and beyond. These services include training, technical support, program sharing, content creation, and research.

In short, IRTVU has created a largely self-sufficient media ecosystem in Lebanon to help sustain and expand “axis of resistance” media outlets. To that end, the union has established four media organizations in Beirut that provide various services to IRTVU members.

Union Center for Media Training (*Markaz al-Ittihad lil Tadrib al-Elami*)

The Union Center for Media Training (UCMT) is a major media training center run by IRTVU’s Lebanon branch from Dahiya’s Ghobeiry neighborhood, which is home to many high-ranking Hezbollah officials.⁵⁸ UCMT also has offices in Iraq, Syria, the Palestinian territories, Yemen, and Britain.⁵⁹

UCMT provides a wide range of media training courses on radio journalism, television journalism, online and print journalism, social media journalism and activism, and cinema and documentary production. It also offers engineering and technical courses, personal communication skills training, management training, and cultural courses, among others. UCMT claims to have run fifty-nine workshops in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and the Palestinian territories in the first half of 2021 alone. Nearly two thousand trainees have participated in these workshops, both online and in person.⁶⁰ UCMT also has published textbooks on various topics regarding media.

UCMT has become one of the major media training organizations in Lebanon and the Arab countries by focusing on the professional and technical aspects of media, without a heavy focus on ideology. The training center provides a variety of training courses on issues in traditional and modern media not found in many organizations in the Arab world. This may explain why UCMT's Facebook page enjoys a following of more than 128,000 people.

UCMT has become the main media training center for members of IRTVU and many other media personnel with close ties to Iran. The media training center also provides training to groups such as the Yemeni Ansar Allah and the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces. UCMT is working to expand its influence beyond the Iran-aligned groups in the region. In April 2021, it signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Jordanian Global Center for Training and Consultations.⁶¹

Union Center for Research and Development (*Markaz al-Ittihad lil Abhath wal Tatweer*)

As part of IRTVU's goal of providing a self-sustaining ecosystem for the media outlets affiliated with the "axis of resistance," the union's branch in Lebanon established U-Feed, a research and development center to feed its members with research and analysis in line with the Iranian regime's policies. U-Feed's manager is Hadi Qubaisi, a Hezbollah-affiliated writer and ideologue.⁶²

U-Feed is a central platform to which all IRTVU Arabic-language media outlets and organizations can refer to adopt the "right stance" about a wide range of geopolitical and security issues. For example, in February 2022, U-Feed began promoting the term "The Temporary Entity" (*al-Keyan al-Muaqat*) to refer to Israel. U-Feed published a ten-page "study" on February 1, 2022, laying out why this term should be adopted in the current situation. Like many other papers published by U-Feed, this purported study has a section called "media usage," which summarizes the logic behind the paper and shows how media outlets should employ the "findings of

the study" in their output. The media usage section for the paper promoting the term "The Temporary Entity" reads:

- To use a media and political term that is appropriate for the current situation. One that impacts on the general impression about the future of Palestine.
- To restore hope in the possibility and inevitability of the liberation of the land and the people, and the demise of The Temporary Entity [Israel].
- To wage psychological warfare against the enemy and its society by promoting the belief in its demise.⁶³

Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah promoted this term in a February 23, 2022, interview with the group's al-Manar TV, when he said: "Israel will cease to exist. This is a temporary entity, and I support the adoption of this term."⁶⁴ A social media campaign was launched to disseminate the term, especially on Twitter. Many figures affiliated with the "axis of resistance" began using the hashtag "The Temporary Entity," including U-Feed's manager, Hadi Qubaisi.⁶⁵ Gradually, the term began appearing in Iran-aligned media outlets in the region.

UNews Press Agency (*Wikalat UNews lil Akhbar*)

UNews is IRTVU's news agency, with the "U" standing for Union. It introduces itself as "the first specialized video news agency in West Asia."⁶⁶ The UNews website, which publishes stories in five languages—Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, and English—is also headquartered in Ghobeiry, while operating in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Gaza, and Britain (London).

UNews is registered as a private limited company in Britain. Documents from this British branch name Kassem Mteirek as the director of UNews in Britain.⁶⁷ In fact, Mteirek is the general manager of UNews.⁶⁸ He introduces himself as one of the founders of Hezbollah's al-Manar TV and was the news director at that network.⁶⁹

UNews provides a variety of services to its subscribers. Its teams in the region provide audio and video content, particularly in conflict areas. Subscribers can access this content via satellite or the UNews cloud-based platform, U-Stream. It provides live coverage to its subscribers using its satellite frequency on the European satellite Eutelsat. It provides studio services as well.

The overarching aim of UNews is to increase the independence of IRTVU members on Western news agencies, such as Reuters and the Associated Press. This is clear from remarks made by IRTVU secretary-general Ali Karimian. In an interview during the organization's ninth general assembly in July 2017, Karimian praised UNews for "breaking the monopoly" of established news agencies. According to Karimian, "stories and the volume of the videos provided by UNews agency to the media outlets succeeded in ending the monopoly [of established news agencies]."⁷⁰ In June 2021, the U.S. Department of Justice seized the UNews website domain because of the organization's affiliation with IRTVU,⁷¹ but UNews still currently operates three functioning websites.

UPD (*Markaz al-Ittihad lil Tabadol al-Baramaji*)

UPD is a program-sharing platform that allows IRTVU member-subscribers access to movies, TV series, documentaries, talk shows, and other content free of charge. Subscribers contribute to the platform by allowing access to their own media products via UPD; in return, they can access content produced by other subscribers for free.⁷² UPD also coordinates between members to coproduce large-scale programs.⁷³ UPD general manager Ali Arsalan said in March 2021 that the platform had so far provided 8,200 programs that have been used by 150 members free of charge.⁷⁴ These four Lebanon-based centers form an integrated infrastructure to provide IRTVU members with an array of services.

Various components of Iran's media empire are increasingly intertwined to provide wraparound services for pro-Iran media outlets. An example

can be found in the Lebanese pro-Hezbollah firm al-Arz Artistic Production Company (*Sharekat al-Arz lil Intaj al-Fanni*). Al-Arz, which gained membership in IRTVU in November 2017,⁷⁵ produces movies and documentaries, among other media products. In 2015, it produced a movie for Hezbollah's al-Manar TV called *The Buried Secret (al-Ser al-Madfoon)*, about a Hezbollah suicide bomber who attacked an Israeli checkpoint near the Israel-Lebanon border.⁷⁶ The movie, which has been viewed more than 340,000 times on YouTube alone,⁷⁷ was directed by Ali Ghaffari, the Iranian director who has also worked for the IRGC's Owj Arts and Media Organization (*Sazeman Honari Rasanei Owj*) on various projects.⁷⁸ Ali Arsalan, Al-Arz's manager, who also serves as general manager of UPD and previously held the same position at UCMT,⁷⁹ maintains a close relationship with UCMT and even runs movie production workshops for it.⁸⁰

IRTVU in Iraq

The Iraqi Radio and Television Union (Iraqi-RTVU; in Arabic, *Ittihad al-Ethaat wal Telfezyunat al-Iraqiya*) is an offshoot of IRTVU. The sheer number of Iran-backed militias and groups and their affiliate media organizations in Iraq meant that a Lebanon-style strategy would be doomed to fail. Therefore, IRTVU established a subordinate union that could work as an umbrella organization to provide support to Iraqi "axis of resistance" media outlets.

Iraqi-RTVU was launched in Najaf in June 2012. But it was not until September 2013 that the organization held a founding conference in Baghdad, when IRTVU brought together ten Iraqi television and radio channels to establish the union. These media outlets include Asaib Ahl al-Haq's al-Ahad TV, the Badr Organization's al-Ghadeer TV, and the Islamic Dawa Party's Afaq TV.⁸¹

Iraqi cleric Muhammad Dhiya al-Bidhawi was elected as the union's head on June 22, 2012. He was quickly replaced by Hamid al-Husseini, another Iraqi cleric, who had close ties to the Iranian Supreme Leader's

office. Hussein holds the rank of colonel in the IRGC, a role established after he fled Iraq during the Saddam Hussein era.⁸²

The union's deputy head is Muhammad al-Hamad, who manages the satellite network Afaq TV and has close ties with former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, the secretary-general of the Islamic Dawa Party.⁸³ The union's secretary is Muhammad Ali al-Zuhairi, and its speaker and head of public relations is Adnan al-Arabi, formerly the speaker for the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.⁸⁴

In an interview on Kataib Hezbollah's al-Etejah TV that was broadcast in November 2021, Iraqi-RTVU head Hamid al-Husseini claimed that 120 media outlets or organizations belonged to his union.⁸⁵ These include al-Etejah (KH), al-Nujaba TV (HaN), and iNEWS TV (run by Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada). The union has also included some Islamic outlets that are not known to be aligned with Iran, such as Karbala TV (owned and run by Imam Hussein Shrine in Karbala) and even some seemingly liberal channels (e.g., Asia TV, which is owned and run by the Iraqi National Congress). According to Hamid al-Husseini, Iraqi-RTVU currently has three thousand members from the media community.⁸⁶

Iraqi-RTVU has helped create a sustainable media infrastructure for "axis of resistance" media outlets in Iraq. Since its establishment, the numbers and capacity of Iraqi "axis of resistance" editorial and technical cadres have grown exponentially. It provides its members with funding provisions, technical/logistical support, and the training and know-how to launch and run media outlets. To this end, Iraqi-RTVU links its members in Iraq to affiliates in Lebanon to take advantage of Iran's media infrastructure in Beirut.⁸⁷ To date, Iraqi-RTVU has held four conferences, most recently in Karbala in January 2019.⁸⁸

The organization plays a critical role in devising unified disinformation/propaganda strategies for its member groups—a mission emphasized by the union's leadership. To that end, it holds seminars

and gatherings with Iraqi Iran-aligned research centers and commentators, in addition to communicating this narrative to the editors of member media outlets. To maintain an effective relationship with the Iran-aligned research community in Iraq, Iraqi-RTVU appointed Mahmoud al-Hashemi, a regular commentator on Iraqi media outlets, as the union's advisor on research matters. To intensify its ties with the Iran-aligned research community, Iraqi-RTVU is building a get-together space inside its main building in Baghdad so that the researchers and commentators can gather more regularly and exchange ideas and plans.⁸⁹

The Iraqi-RTVU uses this capacity not only to influence Iraqi public opinion, but also to exert political influence. In August 2019, Hamid al-Husseini told the Iranian IRGC-affiliated Mashregh News that "when [then Iraqi prime minister Haider] al-Abadi announced in the evening that Iraq will be [complying] with [U.S.] sanctions against Iran...We started [moving against him] the next morning and by the evening [of the next day] we destroyed him."⁹⁰ He was referring to Abadi's news conference in August 2018 during which he confirmed that his country would comply with U.S. sanctions against Iran.⁹¹ After this statement, Iran-backed militias in Iraq did whatever they could to prevent him from assuming a second term as prime minister. Members of Iraqi-RTVU launched an intensive smear campaign against him to complement the political efforts to oust him, and they eventually succeeded.

Iraqi-RTVU uses its infrastructure to launch information operations against its enemies in parallel with Iran-backed militias' kinetic operations in the country and beyond. For that reason, the head of the union is a member of the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee (*al-Haya al-Tansiqiya lil-Muqawama al-Iraqiyah*).⁹² This committee, which includes the most important Iraqi militias, is responsible for coordinating mainly their kinetic operations in Iraq and Syria.

Another project in which Iraqi-RTVU has invested heavily is politicizing Shia rites, particularly the Arbain pilgrimage. Since 2013, Iran has mobilized vast resources to turn the Arbain into a show of power for the Islamic Republic.⁹³ It has used this Shia rite to propagate its political Shia version as opposed to the nonpolitical version promoted by the Iraqi seminaries located in Najaf. Iraqi-RTVU and its members play a pivotal role in propagating the politicized version of the Arbain, in line with the Islamic Republic's goals. This is a very effective way to export the Islamic Revolution, as Arbain is dear to the hearts of millions of Iraqi Shia.

In recent years, Iraqi-RTVU has moved toward the al-Mayadeen TV model. Al-Mayadeen is arguably the most popular news and current affairs TV station affiliated with Hezbollah. The channel's political narrative is clearly in line with the Islamic Republic and its "axis of resistance," yet some aspects of its programming resemble a more liberal channel. These include appearances by some of its female presenters while not wearing the Islamic hijab. Additionally, unlike TV stations such as al-Manar, which is openly a Hezbollah media outlet, al-Mayadeen does not openly declare its affiliations.

Similarly, Iraqi-RTVU began establishing media outlets in Iraq that do not announce their affiliation with any Iran-backed militia or group and do not seem overly religious or conservative, yet they propagate "axis of resistance" propaganda. The aim of this strategy is to expose audiences outside the "the axis of resistance" support base to its narratives.

An example of these types of media outlets is iNEWS TV, which was launched in 2018 by the Iran-backed militia Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada but hides this affiliation. The station has a few female TV presenters who do not wear Islamic covering and who wear makeup in a way considered inappropriate by many pro-Iran groups in Iraq. Yet the outlet is clearly propagating "axis of resistance" propaganda.⁹⁴

IRTVU in Gaza

IRTVU tried to repeat its experience in Iraq and establish a subordinate union in Gaza, rather than opening an office there. The branch was launched in May 2014 in conjunction with IRTVU's seventh general assembly.⁹⁵ The organization had its own logo and was called Palestinian Radio and Television Union (*Ittihad al-Ethaat wal Telfezyunat al-Felastiniyah*).⁹⁶ Ismail Haniyeh, a top Hamas official, spoke at the launch ceremony. However, the plan to have an IRTVU branch in Gaza was later abandoned. In recent years, the organization was downgraded to an office (as opposed to a branch) and is referred to as IRTVU–Palestine Office.⁹⁷

IRTVU in Yemen

IRTVU has a small office in Sanaa tasked mainly with linking "axis of resistance" media outlets and organizations, universities, and other Houthi-affiliated organizations in areas under the control of the Houthis with IRTVU organizations. UCMT has an office in Sanaa and provides a range of trainings.⁹⁸ It also holds seminars and conferences mainly to coordinate media activities among pro-Houthi media outlets.⁹⁹

IRTVU in Syria

IRTVU's office in Damascus was established in 2011 "at the beginning of [the Syrian] crisis [civil war]."¹⁰⁰ In April 2018, Jaish al-Islam attacked the office with mortars.¹⁰¹ IRTVU's Syria office was particularly active at the peak of the country's civil war, coordinating efforts to broadcast the Iranian narrative about the war. During that period, Masoud Assadollahi, a Middle East analyst with close ties to Khamenei's office, headed IRTVU'S office in Damascus.¹⁰² Assadollahi's writings are published on the website of Khamenei's office.¹⁰³

Cost of Iran's Media Infrastructure

Iran's massive media projects require a large amount of funding. It is difficult to provide a credible estimate of the budget allocated to the country's Arabic-speaking media infrastructure, for two main reasons.

First, Iran and its proxies have deliberately created an opaque financial structure to avoid scrutiny. Iran does not want its financial activities to be transparent and traceable for a variety of reasons. The opaque structure makes it easier to bypass sanctions. Also, given the economic hardships that the Iranian people endure, it would be very difficult for the Iranian regime to justify spending the nation's wealth on Arabic media outlets spreading propaganda and disinformation in the region.

On a more local level, Iran-backed militias in countries such as Lebanon and Iraq have created an illicit economy to partially fund their activities, including their media outlets. Given the nature of this illicit financing, they avoid monetary transparency. There is very little public information about the funds received by any part of Iran's media infrastructure in the region.

The second reason is that the funds come from a multitude of sources. For example, Iraqi TV channels run by the many Iran-backed militias receive funds from their respective militias in different amounts. It is possible that these channels receive funds from various Iranian organizations such as IRTVU from time to time. IRTVU itself receives funds from different Iranian organizations, including the Ministry of Culture, the IRGC's Qods Force, and the office of Iran's Supreme Leader. Additionally, some media outlets whose policy aligns with the Iranian regime receive funds from corrupt businesspeople, who in turn benefit from the

influence of Iran-backed militias in countries like Iraq, by obtaining business opportunities.

Additionally, Iran and its proxies are spending increasing amounts of money on online activities, such as anonymous social media channels like Sabereen News. They are also expanding the so-called cyber armies, which are fake or anonymous accounts that invite people on social media platforms to leave comments and attack adversaries to influence public opinion. No one knows how many people are recruited for this purpose. This complicated and decentralized multi-source funding mechanism has helped Iran and its proxies adapt to the economic sanctions that the country faces and has made it difficult to calculate the amounts raised and spent.

Impact of Iran's Media Infrastructure

Measuring the impact of this vast media infrastructure requires a multipronged effort. Iran's Arabic media target a variety of audiences. Iran's media infrastructure attempts to guide and organize those who subscribe to the Iranian regime's ideology and agree with its policies, and to win over those who agree with the regime on some issues but disagree on others. Finally, it tries to attack, frighten, and confuse those who oppose Iran's policies in the region.

Measuring the impact and the degree of success of Iran's media in each of these categories will require in-depth empirical research. For starters, this vast media network must be mapped. This study is a first step toward achieving that goal. The next step should be to map the social media strategies of Iran and its proxies. After a reasonably clear picture of this infrastructure emerges, its penetration and success in furthering Iran's cause and exporting its revolution in the region can be analyzed.

Conclusion

The media space is increasingly becoming yet another battlefield for the Islamic Republic to consolidate its hegemony throughout the Middle East. Iran's media outreach, particularly in Arabic, is only likely to increase, especially online. Supreme Leader Khamenei is keen to see more activities dominating the internet, particularly by youth. He has directly called for them to be active in the online space:

Dear youth! In the face of the enemy's efforts to create pessimism, use the online world to create optimism, enjoin endurance and truth, bring insight, enjoin persistence, avoid laziness and other activities of this kind."¹⁰⁴

He calls those active on the internet "the officers in this soft war."¹⁰⁵

Today, the battle for hearts and minds in the region and the effort to export the Islamic Revolution take place in a more scattered space. Based on Khamenei's instructions, IRTVU has begun to play a more defined role in expanding the capacity of the "axis of resistance" online. The organization is now running a "Forum for Activists in the Virtual Space" (*Montada Nasheti al-Fadha al-Majazi*).¹⁰⁶ The Islamic Republic, in turn, is deploying its propaganda infrastructure to boost the "axis of resistance" in the less centralized online world.

Frequently, unified narratives devised by organizations such as Iraqi-RTVU around various events are implemented online by "axis of resistance" social media accounts and channels. This allows them to launch an integrated disinformation and propaganda campaign in which social media channels and traditional media outlets collaborate to construct and disseminate a coherent narrative (e.g., as seen in

the previously discussed political demolition of Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi).

For decades, Iran and its proxies worked to create a vast integrated media infrastructure to further the aim of exporting the Islamic Revolution. They have made mistakes along the way, but their persistence has allowed them to learn and correct course. Iran's media infrastructure can now adapt to changes in the world of communications, and its officials feel confident in innovating new strategies. Only a similarly consistent media effort can counter Iran's malign messaging machinery. This media effort should start with empirical research on the reach and impact of Iran's media activity in the region. Based on the findings from this effort, a clear countermessaging strategy should be devised and implemented.

Western countries have run programs in the region to train journalists and build media capacity, but the local journalists who take part often fail to find jobs in media institutions independent of Iran. Ironically, many of them end up working for Iran's media empire itself. Any counterstrategy should focus on building an infrastructure that includes capacity building, but also creating actual media outlets that can employ journalists to counter Iran's messaging machinery.

A true partnership is needed between Western countries and the many journalists and media personalities in the region who want to act against Iran's propaganda machine. This partnership should be sustainable over the long term. Any hastily implemented program could have the opposite effect, as arguably was the case with the capacity-building efforts alluded to above. No proper media program can achieve measurable impacts without a long-term commitment. Iran understands this very well and has been patient and persistent in implementing its media strategy to help export its revolution. Any counterstrategy must grasp this reality. ❖

NOTES

- 1 “Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran” (English translation), posted at World Bank, https://publicofficials-financialdisclosure.worldbank.org/sites/fdl/files/assets/law-library-files/Iran_Constitution_en.pdf.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Islamic Republic News Agency, “Commander of IRGC Central Region: The Export of the Revolution Has Caused Concern in the United States” (in Persian), December 20, 2006, <https://bit.ly/3wYERMh>.
- 4 “About Us,” Al-Mustafa International University, <http://en.miu.ac.ir/#aboutus>.
- 5 The name al-Mustafa International University dates to 2008 and reflects the merger of two religious entities: the International Center for Humanitarian Sciences and the Organization for Schools and Hawza Schools Abroad. The university’s English-language website dates its establishment to 1979, probably reflecting the founding date for one or both of the merged entities.
- 6 Rasa News Agency, “Al-Mustafa International University Has Taken Effective Steps to Export the Revolution and Shia Teachings” (in Persian), January 31, 2015, <https://bit.ly/3PZtwEu>.
- 7 U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Iran’s Envoy in Yemen and University Facilitating Recruitment for Qods Force,” December 8, 2020, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1205>.
- 8 “The Ahlul Bayt World Assembly in the International Arena” (in Persian), <https://bit.ly/3ao8BKH>.
- 9 “About Us,” Islamic Culture and Communication Organization, <http://en.icro.ir/About-Us-National>.
- 10 Khamenei.ir, “Remarks [of Ali Khamenei in His] Meeting with Members of the Assembly of Experts” (in Persian), September 24, 2009, <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8094>.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 “Official Inauguration of the ‘National Television Organization of Iran,’” available at Rasekhood.net, <https://bit.ly/3t5brLh>.
- 13 “The Role of IRIB World Service Networks in Deepening Regional Ties” (in Persian), *Cinema Press*, March 6, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3x8EmjW>.
- 14 “[IRIB] World Service,” *Jame Jam*, <https://www.jamejamdaily.ir/newspaper/item/66563>.
- 15 “About Us” (in Persian), al-Kawthar TV, <https://www.alkawthartv.ir/aboutus>.
- 16 “Sahar Global Network Turned Seventeen” (in Persian), Young Journalists Club, November 16, 2014, <https://bit.ly/3aBDMm0>.
- 17 Mehr News Agency, “The IRIB’s Challenges and Missions Abroad” (in Persian), April 9, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3NRqkIP>.
- 18 For a Persian-language list of Tehran’s radio frequencies, see <https://arabicradio.net/frequencies>.
- 19 Tasnim News Agency, “Head of IRIB World Service: Press TV Is One of the World’s Giant Media Outlets” (in Persian), June 26, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3zdO9qm>.
- 20 Tasnim News Agency, “An Interview with Peyman Jebli: The Perspective of [the Iranian Year] 99, the Addition of Several Networks, al-Alam [TV] Turning HD, and the Testing of Internet Mechanisms” (in Persian), March 26, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3wUG2vW>.
- 21 “Interview with Mehdi Mojtahed, Director of al-Kawthar TV” (in Persian), *Hamshahri*, July 6, 2006, <https://images.hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1385/850415/news/cinema.htm#s9903>.
- 22 Al-Kawthar TV, <https://www.alkawthartv.ir/aboutus>.
- 23 “Al-Kawthar’s Facebook [Account] Was Deleted” (in Persian), Iranian Students News Agency, July 20, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3mnZJaZ>.
- 24 “About Us” (in Persian), al-Alam TV, <https://fa.alalam.ir/aboutus>.
- 25 Ibid.

- 26 “Al-Alam TV Manager: Al-Alam’s Facebook [Account] Was Blocked on Its 19th Anniversary” (in Persian), al-Alam TV, March 8, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3zhDvPz>.
- 27 “Al-Alam Syria TV Started Its Pilot” (in Persian), al-Alam TV, November 27, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3N4aevD>.
- 28 “Al-Alam Syria TV: A Successful Experience That Needs to Be Strengthened” (in Persian), Javan Online, December 30, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3GEc1oN>.
- 29 Tasnim News Agency, “On the Anniversary of the Establishment of al-Alam Syria: IRIB and the Launch of a Channel Across Borders” (in Persian), April 15, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3zbuveB>.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Peyman Jebli previously headed IRIB World Service.
- 32 Mehr News Agency, “The IRIB’s Challenges and Missions Abroad” (in Persian), April 9, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3N-RqkIP>.
- 33 “The iFilm Channel for Film and Series Has Been Launched” (in Persian), Raja News, September 10, 2010, <https://www.rajanews.com/news/45402>.
- 34 Tasnim News Agency, “The Encounter of Radio Arabic and Rich Foreign Radio” (in Persian), November 13, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3x0G99L>.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 “Launch of the ‘Visual’ Radio of the Arabic Network of IRIB World Service” (in Persian), *Cinema Press*, February 10, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3agFLfa>.
- 37 Hamdi Malik, “Understanding Iran’s Vast Media Network in Arab Countries,” PolicyWatch 3442, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2, 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/understanding-irans-vast-media-network-arab-countries>.
- 38 “Hojatoleslam Ali Karimian Was Reelected as Secretary-General of the Islamic Radio and Television Union” (in Persian), IUVM Press, June 30, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3Ma4247>.
- 39 “Treasury Sanctions Iranian Entities for Attempted Election Interference,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, October 22, 2020, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1158>.
- 40 “The Islamic Radio and Television Union Will Hold Its 10th General Assembly” (in Persian), Hajj.ir, June 27, 2021, <https://hajj.ir/fa/107132>.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 “Mudher al-Baka, “Head of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Radio and Television Union: ‘One of the Main Reasons for Forming the Union Is to Confront the Enemy’s Media’” (in Arabic), IUVM Press, July 2, 2021, <https://bit.ly/38F6O3B>.
- 43 Malik, “Understanding Iran’s Vast Media Network,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/understanding-irans-vast-media-network-arab-countries>.
- 44 “The Syrian Minister of Information Welcomes Cooperation with the Islamic Radio and Television Union, Praising the Media Exchange” (in Arabic), UNews, December 28, 2021, <https://www.unews.com.lb/ar/archives/28/12/2021/10808/>.
- 45 Malik, “Understanding Iran’s Vast Media Network,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/understanding-irans-vast-media-network-arab-countries>.
- 46 “The General Assembly of the Islamic Radio and Television Union Held Under the Title ‘Media Justice and Freedom of Expression’” (in Arabic), al-Manar TV, June 29, 2021, <https://www.almanar.com.lb/8414771>.
- 47 Malik, “Understanding Iran’s Vast Media Network,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/understanding-irans-vast-media-network-arab-countries>.
- 48 “Welcome to the Website of Hedayat Resaneh Kish” (in Persian), <http://hedayatresaneh.com/>.
- 49 “Mashhad: Launch of the Seventh Film Market of Islamic Countries” (in Persian), *al-Alam*, July 2, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3NIXN8m>.
- 50 Iranian Students News Agency, “Assigning Halal Labels to Pure TV and Cinema Products” (in Persian), August 16, 2015, <https://bit.ly/3z8KgTC>.

- 51 “The Importance of Statistics in the Animation Industry—Interview with [Muhammad] Sadegh Karimian of Ayande Negar Rasaneh” (in Persian), *Fanafar*, April 8, 2017, <http://fanafar.ir/15901-2>.
- 52 See the short animation segments on Foresight Media’s Instagram, January 12, 2016, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BAcP4tPLCVn>.
- 53 ISNA, “Assigning Halal Labels” (in Persian), <https://bit.ly/3z8KgTC>.
- 54 Hanin Ghaddar, *Hezbollahland: Mapping Dahiya and Lebanon’s Shia Community*, Policy Focus 172 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2022), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollahland-mapping-dahiya-and-lebanons-shia-community>.
- 55 “The Islamic Television Union Lands in Beirut” (in Arabic), *al-Akhbar*, July 3, 2013, https://al-akhbar.com/Media_Tv/53551.
- 56 Ghaddar, *Hezbollahland*, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollahland-mapping-dahiya-and-lebanons-shia-community>.
- 57 Hamdi Malik and Crispin Smith, “Profile: Al-Etejah Satellite Television,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 1, 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-al-etejah-satellite-television>.
- 58 “UCMT Media Training Center” (in Arabic), *al-Akhbar*, March 26, 2009, https://al-akhbar.com/Media_Tv/142893. The Union Center for Media Training predates the launch of IRTVU’s Lebanon office. See also Ghaddar, *Hezbollahland*, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollahland-mapping-dahiya-and-lebanons-shia-community>.
- 59 Previous UCMT social media accounts claimed the organization had offices in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, “Palestine,” and Britain; now, the group professes to have “six branches around the world.” The British branch is probably furnished by other UK-based IRTVU-affiliated organizations while operating under other names.
- 60 UCMT, “1975 trainees from different nationalities, 59 training courses in 6 countries, 32 in-person sessions, 26 online courses” (in Arabic), Telegram post, July 8, 2021, <https://t.me/UCMTmediatrainingcenter/307>.
- 61 “The march continues, and the achievements of the Global Center for Training and Consultations continue” (in Arabic), UCMT Instagram, April 5, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CNRwwBeA4c3/>.
- 62 “Meetings” (in Arabic), Baheth Center for Palestinian and Strategic Studies, June 22, 2020, <https://www.baheth-center.net/essaydetails.php?eid=37853&cid=105>.
- 63 “Concept: The Temporary Entity” (in Arabic), Union Center for Research and Development, February 2, 2022, https://ufeed.site/public_post.php?id=122293.
- 64 “Sayyed Nasrallah: Our Real Project Is Justice and Peace, and Israel Is a Temporary Entity That Will Disappear” (in Arabic), *al-Manar TV*, February 23, 2022, <https://www.almanar.com.lb/9293649>.
- 65 See video of Nasrallah on Hadi Qubaisi’s Twitter (@hkobaysi), February 23, 2022, <https://twitter.com/hkobaysi/status/1496590546806136837>.
- 66 “Get to know the agency” (in Arabic), YouTube video posted by UNews, August 28, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tm3Yd4ZXX_Y.
- 67 “UNews Press Agency Limited,” *Gov.uk*, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/11760565>.
- 68 Iraqi Radio and Television Union, “UNews Agency has agreed with the Karbala group of channels to exchange news content for religious institutions,” Facebook post, January 15, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2982174465380825&id=1484376838493936.
- 69 “A Brief Introduction to Media Personality Kassem Mteirek” (in Arabic), *Alissaralameh.wordpress.com*, January 19, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3NPZQaG>.
- 70 “The Islamic Radio and Television Union; News Production Center and Pure Media Products” (in Persian), *Pars Today*, July 2, 2017, <https://parstoday.com/dari/news/uncategorised-i44780>.
- 71 U.S. Department of Justice, “United States Seizes Websites Used by the Iranian Islamic Radio and Television Union and Kata’ib Hizballah,” June 22, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/united-states-seizes-websites-used-iranian-islamic-radio-and-television-union-and-kata-ib>.

- 72 “Director of the UPD: Our job is to coordinate the service of audiovisual programs with high quality” (in Arabic), YouTube video posted by UNews, January 15, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNkfY0iaHz4>.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 “A Consultation with [IRTVU] Yemeni Media Members at the IRTVU Office in Sanaa” (in Arabic), Dhamar News, March 2, 2021, <https://www.dhamarnews.com/archives/200165>.
- 75 Al-Arz Artistic Production Company, “With God’s help, Al-Arz Company for Artistic Production joined as an associate member of the Islamic Radio and Television Union” (in Arabic), Facebook post, November 16, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/ALARZ.PRODUCTION/photos/a.1671016226504322/1947745072164768>.
- 76 “The Buried Secret Movie” (in Arabic), al-Manar TV, <https://program.almanar.com.lb/episode/87749>.
- 77 “The Buried Secret Movie (Abu Zainab)” (in Arabic), YouTube video posted by “Hanuda. CarmenFlowers,” October 6, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3srjTVriPqM>.
- 78 “Ali Jafari: From Attempts to Release [the Movie] Abu Zainab on al-Quds Day to the Start of Production of the Harim Series in the Fall” (in Persian), *Cinema Press*, April 8, 2015, <https://bit.ly/3auDTzD>.
- 79 UCMT, “What are the practical solutions to the difficulties of media production?” (in Arabic), Telegram post, March 29, 2021, <https://t.me/UCMTmediatrainingcenter/238>.
- 80 Al-Arz Artistic Production Company, “With God’s help, Al-Arz Company for Artistic Production launched the second course of a series of courses titled ‘Film Directing,’” (in Arabic), Facebook post, August 22, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/ALARZ.PRODUCTION/posts/1911935132412429>.
- 81 Hamdi Malik, “Profile: The Iraqi Radio and Television Union,” *Militia Spotlight*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2, 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-iraqi-radio-and-television-union>.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 “The head of the Iraqi Radio and Television Union, Mr. Hamid al-Husseini, is a guest on the ‘Fifth Dimension’ program” (in Arabic), YouTube video posted by “+ET,” November 30, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-qaE2RZQBY> (video and user account have since been removed).
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Iraqi Radio and Television Union, “Training course for writers and political analysts” (in Arabic), Facebook post, September 6, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2889789724619300&id=1484376838493936.
- 88 “The Iraqi Radio and Television Union Holds the 4th Radio Conference in the Holy Imam Ali Shrine” (in Arabic), *al-Merja*, January 28, 2019, <https://almerja.com/reading.php?idm=110200>.
- 89 Iraqi Radio and Television Union, “The union hosts the heads of the study centers” (in Arabic), Facebook post, February 6, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2997531667178438&id=1484376838493936.
- 90 “Abadi Talked About Iran’s Sanctions, We Pushed Him Aside Overnight / We Will Not Allow Anyone to Conspire Against Iran / Haj Qasem [Soleimani] Entered Baghdad When There Was an Explosion Every 40 Minutes” (in Persian), *Mashregh News*, August 16, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3NdhxRB>.
- 91 “Abadi Says Iraq Will Comply with U.S. Sanctions Against Iran” (in Arabic), *Sky News Arabia*, August 8, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3Q03iBM>.
- 92 “The head of the Iraqi Radio and Television Union, Mr. Hamid al-Husseini, is a guest on the ‘Fifth Dimension’ program” (in Arabic), YouTube video posted by “+ET,” November 30, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-qaE2RZQBY> (video and user account have since been removed).
- 93 “How Islamic Republic Turned a Religious Event into Political Propaganda,” *Radio Farda*, October 23, 2019, <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/how-islamic-republic-turned-a-religious-event-into-political-propaganda/30232617.html>.

- 94 Michael Knights, Crispin Smith, and Hamdi Malik, “Discordance in the Iran Threat Network in Iraq: Militia Competition and Rivalry,” *CTC Sentinel* 14, no. 8 (October 2021), <https://ctc.usma.edu/discordance-in-the-iran-threat-network-in-iraq-militia-competition-and-rivalry>.
- 95 “This Is How the Islamic Radio and Television Union Was Launched in Palestine” (in Arabic), *Islam Times*, May 27, 2014, <https://bit.ly/38HjWFn>.
- 96 Radio and Television Union–Palestine logo posted on Facebook May 19, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/irtvupal/photos/a.378733825602430/378733832269096>; in Gaza, its name was sometimes translated as “Ittihad al-Ethaat wal Telfezyunat–Felastiniyah.”
- 97 “The Islamic Radio Union Calls for Intensifying Coverage and Highlighting the Suffering of the Prisoner Abu Hawash” (in Arabic), *al-Estqlal*, January 4, 2022, <https://www.alestqlal.com/post/50685>.
- 98 UCMT-Yemen, “The training program ‘The Art of Recitation’ was launched on Monday February 24, 2020” (in Arabic), Facebook post, February 26, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=115481883373964&id=102278884694264.
- 99 “A Symposium Held by the Office of the Islamic Radio and Television Union in Sanaa Calls for a Media and Economic Boycott of All Forms of Normalization with Israel” (in Arabic), *Motabaat*, September 22, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3GFm6Ns>.
- 100 “Mortars Target the Office of the Islamic Radio and Television Union in Damascus” (in Arabic), al-Nour Radio, April 7, 2018, <https://bit.ly/38WmGdv>.
- 101 Ibid.
- 102 Islamic Republic News Agency, “The Latest Situation on the Ground in Syria, According to the Head of the Office of the Islamic Radio and Television Union” (in Persian), December 17, 2017, <https://bit.ly/38XxEnO>.
- 103 “Articles by Dr. Masoud Asadollahi, the Expert and Analyst on Regional Issues” (in Persian), <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/others-index?pr=916>.
- 104 Khamenei.ir, Twitter post, March 17, 2021, https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1372186862274633730.
- 105 Khamenei.ir, Twitter post, March 16, 2021, https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1371932105760968704.
- 106 “The Islamic Radio and Television Union Holds Its 10th General Assembly” (in Arabic), IUVM Press, June 29, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3Mb04bk>.

The Author



HAMDİ MALİK is an associate fellow at The Washington Institute, specializing in Shia militias. He earned his doctorate from Keele University's School of Social, Political, and Global Studies. A co-creator of the Militia Spotlight platform—which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria—he coauthored (with Michael Knights and Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi) the 2020 Institute study *Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces*.



THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY
1111 19TH STREET NW, SUITE 500 | WASHINGTON, DC 20036
WWW.WASHINGTONINSTITUTE.ORG
©2022 THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.