



I survived the Iran hostage crisis. People in countries like Iran desperately need the VOA

Voice of America broadcasts offer Iranians a glimpse of a future free from tyranny

By [Barry Rosen](#) [Fox News](#)

<https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/i-survived-iran-hostage-crisis-people-countries-like-iran-desperately-need-voa>

Over the 44 years since my release as a hostage of the Iranian regime, I have witnessed firsthand the [unmet aspirations of the Iranian people](#) and the vibrant, if often painful, struggles of the Iranian diaspora. Millions of Iranians have consistently and bravely reached for democracy, time and again defying a regime that has proven both unpopular and dangerous.

For decades, the [Voice of America's \(VOA\) Persian service](#) stood as a beacon of hope amid darkness — a trusted conduit for uncensored news and independent analysis that empowered grassroots communities.

Whether during the Green Movement of 2009, the mass protests of 2017-18, the widespread demonstrations of 2019, or the Women Life Freedom protests of 2022 and 2023, VOA's Persian broadcasts offered a glimpse of a future free from the tyranny of a regime desperate to cling to power and energy to women and men willing to risk life and limb by standing up for our shared values.

Yet today, that critical lifeline has been [silenced by a recent executive order](#). The president's directive has taken VOA off the air — a move that undercuts not only the aspirations of millions of Iranians but also a comparatively low-cost broader effort to cast off one of the world's leading, antagonistic, anti-American forces that funds, trains and executes attacks against Americans and American interests around the world.

This action is emblematic of a broader retreat: earlier this year, thousands of international assistance programs were dismantled, undermining investments in global stability and the promotion of democratic values among the global grassroots.

When VOA was on the air, it did more than inform — it challenged state propaganda and gave voice to a people yearning for change. Its silence is a setback not only for those who have long resisted an unjust regime but also for the United States, whose own security is intertwined with the stability of free and open societies.

It's no wonder that authoritarian states across the globe have publicly cheered for the end of VOA. Chinese state media celebrated the dismantling of VOA, with one state-owned media outlet writing, "The so-called beacon of freedom, VOA, has now been discarded by its own government like a dirty

rag." Russia state TV broadcasters celebrated on air after the program's termination, saying, "I'm addressing independent journalists: die, animals!"

Countries like China, Russia and Iran know that the loss of a trusted source of global information will enhance their own propaganda machines and allow them to further spread anti-democratic values at the expense of democracies like the United States. They know that the end of VOA is ultimately a win for authoritarianism.

Critics argue that domestic challenges should take precedence, particularly amid a faltering global economy, but the abandonment of VOA and international assistance programs surrenders influence to authoritarian forces like Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and terrorist groups like the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) with their own media presence inside the Islamic Republic, not to mention their allies in Russia and China. Yielding to these enemies is not smart, strategic or in America's interests.

I have seen the cost of repression and the price of isolation. The Iranian regime that once held me captive continues to imprison the hopes of its citizens with an iron fist. And while the struggle for freedom remains arduous, the resilience of the Iranian people offers a clear mandate: they will not accept silence.

For Republican policymakers, the choice is stark. Restoring a voice like VOA's and remaining fully engaged around the world is not merely a matter of supporting international assistance; it is a strategic imperative. Re-establishing channels of free information, empowering those who dare to challenge authoritarian rule and supporting individuals and groups around the world who share our commitment to democratic values reflects our national interests and will demonstrate our commitment to standing with those who want to stand with us.

Now is the time to write the next chapter in America's strategic support for international assistance programs that champion freedom, human rights and the free exchange of ideas. The prospects of a free, democratic Iran — and pro-democracy efforts worldwide — depend on it.

Barry Rosen is a survivor of the Iran hostage crisis and a co-founder of Hostage Aid Worldwide. He was chief of Voice of America's Central Asian Service from 1974 to 1978.