

Answers to Media Watch questions from Omid Vahidi:

1. Do I agree with the ABC's decision to send a reporter to Tehran?

Yes. I believe it is important that the ABC reports from Iran whenever possible.

However, reporting from Iran should never come at the expense of editorial independence.

The Islamic Republic does not permit foreign journalists to report freely. Access, filming locations, interview subjects and movement are all subject to restrictions imposed by the regime. If those limitations are accepted without being clearly explained to viewers, the reporting risks reflecting the regime's narrative rather than providing an impartial account.

In my view, this is the fundamental issue. The problem is not that the ABC sent a reporter to Tehran. The problem is that the reporting presents a highly controlled environment as though it represents the reality of Iran.

2. Are there inaccuracies or important omissions in the ABC's reporting?

In my opinion, the issue is less about isolated factual inaccuracies and more about what has been selected, omitted and presented.

A controlled narrative

Across the reports, I see only one perspective, one that comes from supporters of the Islamic Republic or individuals operating within an environment tightly controlled by the regime.

This presents a picture that does not reflect the views of the overwhelming majority of Iranians that I know, both inside Iran and throughout the Iranian diaspora.

The ABC repeatedly reports from locations permitted by the authorities. By definition, these are carefully controlled environments. That inevitably produces a narrow and incomplete picture of the country.

Government organised gatherings

Some reports show government organised gatherings.

Every Iranian understands how these events are organised, including the involvement of the Basij, the IRGC and other state organisations. These are not spontaneous expressions of public opinion.

Without providing that context, the reporting risks presenting regime organised events as representative of ordinary Iranian society.

Reporting only from Tehran

The reporting is almost entirely from a small number of approved locations in Tehran.

Iran is far larger and more diverse than those carefully managed locations. Restricting reporting to these areas excludes millions of Iranians whose experiences and views are fundamentally different.

The result is a view of Iran that is so narrow that it becomes largely unrepresentative of the country as a whole.

Women's rights

In the report *Meet Iran's Women of the Revolution*, the ABC reporter wears a hijab while interviewing Iranian women.

The audience is not properly reminded that this is not a free choice but a legal requirement imposed by the Islamic Republic.

Without that context, viewers may incorrectly conclude that women in Iran enjoy freedoms that simply do not exist.

Economic reporting lacked essential context

In Karishma Vyas' reporting on the impact of the war on Iran's economy, the report discussed Iran's post war economic situation but failed to provide the broader context that Iran's economy had already been in severe decline long before the war.

That decline was not simply the result of external pressure. It was the consequence of decades of corruption, economic mismanagement, nuclear ambitions and the Islamic Republic's ideological and regional policies.

The report interviewed economist Saeed Laylaz without providing viewers with sufficient context about his background. Mr Laylaz is a self described reformist, a former adviser to President Khatami and part of the Islamic Republic's political establishment.

Mr Laylaz attributed Iran's worsening economic situation primarily to Western sanctions, effectively presenting the regime's long standing narrative that the suffering of the Iranian people is principally the fault of the West.

What was omitted was why those sanctions exist in the first place, namely the Islamic Republic's own conduct, including its nuclear program, refusal to comply with international expectations and broader destabilising behaviour.

By allowing this explanation to stand without meaningful context or challenge, the report presented an establishment friendly interpretation of Iran's economic crisis while

failing to adequately explain the regime's own responsibility for the hardship experienced by ordinary Iranians.

Internet blackout

The ABC's reporting referred to an 80 day internet blackout but failed to explain its significance.

The blackout began on 8 January. On 8 and 9 January, regime forces murdered at least 40,000 unarmed civilians in cold blood.

The blackout was therefore not simply a background detail. It was a deliberate attempt by the regime to prevent the scale of its atrocities from reaching the outside world.

Mentioning the blackout without explaining why it occurred leaves audiences without the most important context.

Framing of the uprising

In the video *Meet Iran's Women of the Revolution*, Karishma Vyas states that "crowds took to the streets to protest the inflation and the plunging value of the currency against the dollar."

While the economic crisis is certainly one part of the Iranian people's grievances, that description fundamentally changes the nature of what those demonstrations represented.

People did not come onto the streets in January simply because of economic hardship.

They came onto the streets demanding the end of the Islamic Republic.

Across Iran, people called for Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and repeatedly chanted "Javid Shah", expressing support for him as their chosen transitional leader.

People even wrote "Javid Shah" on the walls of Tehran using their own blood.

These political demands were a defining characteristic of the uprising, yet they were absent from the ABC's reporting.

This is not a minor omission. It fundamentally changes the audience's understanding of why people risked their lives.

Ignoring openly available evidence

There are tens of thousands of publicly available videos documenting the January massacre and the brutality of the regime.

There is extensive evidence available from Iranian citizens, independent sources and the global Iranian community.

Very little of this broader body of evidence appears in the reporting.

3. What has been missed?

Perhaps the most significant omission is what happened outside Iran.

The ABC missed millions of Iranians in the free world who have been demonstrating consistently for freedom and regime change.

Since January there have been demonstrations across Australia, the United States, Canada and Europe.

In Sydney alone there have been more than 100 rallies, with some attracting between 15,000 and 30,000 participants.

These demonstrations have consistently called for regime change and repeatedly expressed support for Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi through chants of "Javid Shah".

On 14 February, following the call by Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, more than one million people marched across cities around the world.

Police reports and official estimates from cities including Los Angeles, Munich, Toronto and Sydney demonstrate the scale of these events.

Yet this enormous international movement received little or no attention, while carefully controlled scenes from Tehran received extensive coverage.

The ABC had access to thousands of hours of footage from these demonstrations, including many held here in Australia, but instead chose to focus almost exclusively on a narrative emerging from within a tightly controlled environment inside Iran.

4. What impact does this coverage have on Iranian Australians?

For many Iranian Australians, this reporting has been deeply distressing.

Many of us still have family and close friends living inside Iran. We speak with them regularly and hear first hand accounts of the reality they are experiencing.

Many members of our community have lost relatives or friends at the hands of the same organisations whose supporters appear in some of the ABC's reports.

The government organised gatherings shown in Tehran are widely understood by Iranians to be organised through the regime's structures, including the Basij and the IRGC. These are the same organisations responsible for suppressing peaceful protesters.

Yet those voices are given a platform while many victims are unable to communicate with the outside world because of internet restrictions and state repression.

This creates the impression that the oppressor has been given a voice while the victims remain unheard.

The ABC also overlooked one of the defining realities of this period.

Millions of Iranians across the world have been calling for freedom and regime change.

Approximately 45,000 people have been killed in Iran.

More than 100 demonstrations have taken place in Sydney alone, alongside countless others across Australia and around the world.

Despite this, the ABC chose to present a narrative shaped almost entirely by reporting from tightly controlled locations inside Iran.

For many Iranian Australians, this is particularly painful because we have spent years trying to make the voices of ordinary Iranians heard. We have protested in Australian cities, shared evidence from inside Iran, and watched family members suffer under the regime.

When Australia's national broadcaster largely overlooks those voices while amplifying narratives produced within the regime's controlled environment, many in our community feel unheard, misrepresented and abandoned.

My concern is not that the ABC reported from Iran.

My concern is that it failed to balance what it saw inside a tightly controlled authoritarian state with the overwhelming evidence available from millions of Iranians inside and outside the country.

Impartial journalism requires more than reporting what a regime allows journalists to see. It requires placing those images in their proper context and ensuring audiences also hear the voices that authoritarian governments work hardest to silence.

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