

## So much for freedom of speech: Press TV cut off...again

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For the fifth time since 2009, Press TV has been cut off from its broadcast channel on YouTube by owner Google. Also affected by the unannounced stoppage is Press TV's Spanish language affiliate, Hispan TV. In a terse message, Google informed Press TV that its "Google Account was disabled and can't be restored because it was used in a way that violates Google's policies,"<sup>1</sup>

Earlier in April 2019, an abrupt cutoff was initiated by the Israeli entity after Hispan TV published a report on how Palestinian prisoners were being used for medical experimentation. The article in question, "*Israel usa a presos palestinos para nuevos ensayos médicos*"<sup>2</sup> (Israel uses Palestinian prisoners for new medical trials), was posted on Hispan's website on April 3, 2019, making it unlikely that this article alone was behind the current termination of service. The act of censorship by Google was, however, roughly coincident with Washington's designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization.<sup>3</sup>

The source of the April 3<sup>rd</sup> article was the head of the Arab Citizens Monitoring Committee in the occupied territories, Muhamad Baraka, whose statements were posted on the Palestinian website, Arab 48.<sup>4</sup> "There are reports that the Health Ministry [of Israel] has licensed several international companies to perform medical tests on Palestinian and Arab prisoners in Israeli jails without their knowledge," Baraka was quoted as having said, and called upon international rights groups to bring the Israeli regime to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for its crimes against the Palestinians.<sup>5</sup>

Predictably, the Zionist press characterizes Hispan TV as "anti-Israel," which nowadays is routinely equated with anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup> Given the overwhelming influence the Israel lobby enjoys in Washington, and that the U.S. views Latin America as its exclusive domain, concern over Hispan TV's growing influence, with over 270,000 subscribers to its YouTube channel in the region,<sup>7</sup> is the most probable reason for the latest disruption.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has faced censorship on multiple fronts, not just from Google. In March, just before the action by Google, Facebook removed over 500 pages, groups and accounts that were allegedly linked to networks in Iran and operating in various locations in the Middle East. The violation deserving of censorship, according to Facebook's head of cybersecurity, Nathaniel Gleicher, was that these pages "routinely amplified Iranian state narratives, targeting Israel, the United States, and Saudi Arabia, especially for their roles in the Middle East," and "often shared articles from websites which reproduced, verbatim, content from Iranian state or state-allied outlets, such as Press TV."<sup>8</sup>

Two months prior to the above purge, Facebook had claimed to have discovered "coordinated inauthentic behavior targeting people across the world" emanating from Iran. Although the meaning of the phrase "inauthentic behavior"<sup>9</sup> is not clear, reference was made to the "anti-Zionist press" in the U.K. and its anti-Israeli rhetoric, which supposedly had been on the rise since Jeremy Corbin took the lead of the Labour party. Corbin has been criticized harshly by the pro-Zionist media simply for having hosted programs on Press TV and expressing support for

Palestinians.<sup>10</sup> Previously, Corbin had been vilified for attending a 2014 memorial ceremony for Palestinians who were killed in the 1985 Israeli airstrike on the PLO headquarters in Tunis.<sup>11</sup>

The most recent act of censorship committed by Facebook cybersecurity czar Gleicher for the nebulous crime of “inauthentic behavior” took place on October 21, 2019, when three separate networks of Facebook and Instagram accounts, pages and groups, claimed to have been linked to Iran, were taken down. “All of these operations created networks of accounts to mislead others about who they were and what they were doing,” Gleicher wrote.<sup>12</sup>

However, based on the samples of content posted on these accounts, the objection most probably had originated in Tel Aviv. For example, one of the purged posts stated: “What Israel is doing to Palestinians is the textbook definition of terrorism. What Saudi Arabia is doing to Yemen is the textbook definition of genocide. And the role the United States is playing is the textbook definition of being the biggest sponsor of terrorism on earth.” Another post read, “The IDF openly admits that it is now targeting populated civilian areas in Gaza ‘so residents feel the price of the escalation and demand explanations from Hamas.’ You cannot make this stuff up.”<sup>13</sup>

The above actions by Facebook’s Gleicher are overt censorship. There is no “inauthentic behavior” about the posts, as can be seen by reading a 2019 Human Rights Watch report, which confirms that Israeli forces have targeted civilians protesting for Palestinian rights. “Officers repeatedly fired on protesters who posed no imminent threat to life,” the report reads, “pursuant to expansive open-fire orders from senior officials that contravene international human rights law standards.”<sup>14</sup> When it comes to posting the truth about Zionist atrocities, the censors immediately spring into action.

Following the censorship trail leads to a company called FireEye, a cybersecurity firm founded by Pakistani billionaire Ashar Aziz in 2004, headquartered in Milpitas, California and operating in 23 countries around the world.<sup>15</sup> Aziz, who worked for Sun Microsystems in the areas of cryptography, networking, network security and data center virtualization, invented a unique approach to deal with threats from highly stealth self-propagating malware for the U.S. Department of Defense.<sup>16</sup> CIA investment front firm In-Q-Tel announced a strategic partnership agreement with FireEye in 2009 under terms which were not disclosed.<sup>17</sup>

In 2010 FireEye expanded into the Middle East and appears to be concentrating on malware threats to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and others.<sup>18</sup> But this expansion by the firm may have been simply a cover for spying on Iran on behalf of the DoD, CIA and Mossad. In a recent report on a “suspected Iranian influence operation,” FireEye noted that they had observed “inauthentic social media personas ... heavily promoting Quds Day, a holiday established by Iran in 1979 to express support for Palestinians and opposition to Israel.” FireEye predictably suspected that these “inauthentic news sites and social media account clusters” were linked to “Iranian actors.”<sup>19</sup>

A report by FireEye concluded that the activity observed was intended “to promote Iranian political interests, including anti-Saudi, anti-Israeli, and pro-Palestinian themes, as well as to promote support for specific U.S. policies favorable to Iran, such as the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal

(JCPOA).” Additionally, U.S.-based activity included “significant anti-Trump messaging and the alignment of social media personas with an American liberal identity.”<sup>20</sup>

And it was FireEye that provided the tip to Gleicher about the accounts that exhibited the alleged “inauthentic behavior” on Facebook. “Based on a tip shared by FireEye, a US cybersecurity firm,” he explained, “we conducted an internal investigation into suspected Iran-linked coordinated inauthentic behavior and identified this activity.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, FireEye was behind the tipoff to Google in August of 2018 that led the tech giant to wipe out 58 YouTube and other accounts reportedly linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). “We’re grateful to FireEye for identifying some suspicious Google accounts,” the firm said in a statement.<sup>22</sup>

While Google and Facebook zealously purge the accounts of factual sources on Islam, Iran or Palestinians like Press TV and Hispan TV, both of the tech giants appear to be platforms for Islamophobia. Over ninety percent of Islamophobic content on Facebook reported by one monitoring group remains,<sup>23</sup> and Google searches for information on Islam or sharia often yield anti-Muslim hate groups among the top results.<sup>24</sup> The principle of freedom of speech would appear to be upheld more rigorously for Islamophobes and Iranophobes than for Muslims.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Google blocks Press TV, Hispan TV’s YouTube accounts,” *Tehran Times*, December 11, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/442943/Google-blocks-Press-TV-Hispan-TV-s-YouTube-accounts>.

<sup>2</sup> “Israel usa a presos palestinos para nuevos ensayos médicos,” *Hispan TV*, April 3, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/palestina/425135/israel-presos-carceles-medicamentos>.

<sup>3</sup> “U.S. officially designates Iran’s Revolutionary Guards a terrorist group,” *Reuters*, April 15, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran/u-s-officially-designates-irans-revolutionary-guards-a-terrorist-group-idUSKCN1RR1BE>.

<sup>4</sup> Arab 48 website, <https://www.arab48.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> “Israel usa a presos palestinos para nuevos ensayos médicos,” *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> “Google blocks Iranian site that says Israel experiments on Palestinian prisoners,” *Times of Israel*, April 22, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/google-blocks-iranian-site-that-says-israel-experiments-on-palestinian-prisoners/>.

<sup>7</sup> Zak Dofman, “Google Cuts YouTube Access For Iran’s Press TV And Hispan TV ‘Without Any Warning’,” *Forbes*, April 23, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/04/23/google-blocks-iranian-state-tvs-youtube-and-gmail-after-anti-israel-propaganda/#bed4be777bd6>.

<sup>8</sup> Zak Dofman, “Facebook Rips Out Iranian Network ‘Targeting U.S., Israel And Saudi Arabia’,” *Forbes*, March 23, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/03/26/facebook-detects-and-removes-fake-iranian-network-targeting-millions-of-foreign-citizens/#6c0b6082d787>.

<sup>9</sup> Nathaniel Gleicher, “Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Explained,” *Facebook*, December 6, 2018, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/12/inside-feed-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior/>.

<sup>10</sup> Zak Dofman, “Facebook Rips Out Iranian Network ‘Targeting U.S., Israel And Saudi Arabia’,” *ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> “Jeremy Corbyn wreath row explained,” *BBC*, August 15, 2018, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-45196409>.

<sup>12</sup> Nathaniel Gleicher, “Removing More Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior From Iran and Russia,” *Facebook*, October 21, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/10/removing-more-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-from-iran-and-russia/>.

<sup>13</sup> Nathaniel Gleicher, “Removing More Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from Iran and Russia,” *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> “Israel and Palestine Events of 2018,” in 2019 World Country Report, *Human Rights Watch*, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/israel/palestine>.

<sup>15</sup> “Why FireEye?” FireEye website, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.fireeye.com/company.html>.

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<sup>16</sup> “Ashar Aziz ’81,” Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.eecs.mit.edu/node/6086>.

<sup>17</sup> “CIA Investment Firm Announces Strategic Partnership with FireEye, Inc. Malware Protection,” *National Security Law Brief*, November 24, 2009, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://nationalsecuritylawbrief.com/2009/11/24/cia-investment-firm-announces-strategic-partnership-with-fireeye-inc-malware-protection>.

<sup>18</sup> Georgina Enzer, “FireEye Inc steps into the Middle East,” ITP.net, December 07, 2010, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.itp.net/583119-fireeye-inc-steps-into-the-middle-east>.

<sup>19</sup> “Suspected Iranian Influence Operation Leverages Network of Inauthentic News Sites & Social Media Targeting Audiences in U.S., UK, Latin America, Middle East,” *FireEye*, August 21, 2018, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.fireeye.com/blog/threat-research/2018/08/suspected-iranian-influence-operation.html>.

<sup>20</sup> “Suspected Iranian Influence Operation,” *FireEye*, no date, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.fireeye.com/content/dam/fireeye-www/current-threats/pdfs/rpt-FireEye-Iranian-IO.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Nathaniel Gleicher, “Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior From Iran,” *Facebook*, May 28, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/05/removing-more-cib-from-iran/>.

<sup>22</sup> Sara Salinas, “Google deletes 58 accounts with ties to Iran from YouTube and other sites,” *CNBC*, August 23, 2018, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/23/google-deletes-58-accounts-with-ties-to-iran-from-youtube-and-other-sites.html>.

<sup>23</sup> David Gilbert, “Facebook in India Is Drowning in Anti-Muslim Hate Speech,” *Vice News*, June 12, 2019, accessed December 12, 2019, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/mb8xxb/facebook-in-india-is-drowning-in-anti-muslim-hate-speech](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mb8xxb/facebook-in-india-is-drowning-in-anti-muslim-hate-speech).

<sup>24</sup> Alex Amend, “Searching Sharia: Anti-Muslim Propaganda Ranks High in Google Search,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 8, 2017, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/03/08/searching-sharia-anti-muslim-propaganda-ranks-high-google-search>.