



Profiles of Iranian Repression

Architects of Human Rights Abuse in the Islamic Republic

Tzvi Kahn
October 2018

Forewords by
Dr. Ahmed Shaheed & Rose Parris Richter
Prof. Irwin Cotler



Center on Sanctions
& Illicit Finance

FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

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Foreword

By Dr. Ahmed Shaheed and
Rose Parris Richter

The Islamic Republic of Iran remains one of the world's worst abusers of human rights. During our work to document Iran's human rights abuses in support of the United Nations' special procedure to monitor rights violations in the country, we documented the Iranian government's excessive and arbitrary use of the death penalty, its systematic violations of due process rights, inhumane prison conditions, restrictions on speech and assembly, and unequal protections for the human rights of ethnic and religious minorities, homosexuals, and women and girls. Sadly, though, as this important report shows, Iran has yet to institute meaningful reform despite myriad attempts by various government bodies and officials to address aspects of international concern about the country's disturbing record.

Those who violate human rights in Iran are not fringe or renegade officials. Rather, they hold senior positions in the executive branch and the judiciary, where they continue to enjoy impunity. These officials control a vast infrastructure of repression that permeates the lives of Iranian citizens, governing what they study in school, whether they are allowed to attend school, how they dress, how they practice their faith, what websites they access, how they speak in public, and whether they are permitted to peacefully assemble to criticize the policies and practices of their government. Defiance of these norms often comes at a terrible cost, with Iranians frequently facing unjust detention, torture, and even death.

At the heart of many of Iran's seemingly intractable challenges is the country's deeply flawed justice system, which systematically obstructs the rights of defendants to fair trials and is in serious need of reform. This is despite myriad steps taken by the government to address national and international concern about its practices for administering justice. Such steps include the introduction of Iran's new Code of Criminal Procedure

in 2015 and the country's new narcotics law, adopted in 2017, which attempt to improve due process rights and reduce the country's capricious application of the death penalty, respectively.

However, both Iran's legal community and international human rights experts have highlighted and continue to highlight myriad concerns with these attempts to implement change, noting that these steps have failed to tackle many of the pressing problems that have been highlighted over the years by various international human rights mechanisms. As such, the UN special procedure continued to receive frequent and alarming reports about the use of prolonged solitary and incommunicado confinement, lack of access to lawyers, and the use of confessions solicited under torture as evidence in trials. Denial of access to proper and necessary medical treatment for detainees also remains a significant problem, including for political prisoners.

Similarly, President Hassan Rouhani released a formal Charter on Citizens Rights in 2016, which simply recalls the range of civil and political rights already guaranteed by Iranian law, as well as those rights protected by the five international human rights treaties to which Iran is a party. The Charter does not, however, strengthen the country's inadequate protections, nor does it attempt to prohibit ongoing practices that enfeeble national and international protections for fundamental human rights. Moreover, President Rouhani continues to employ cabinet members that previously engaged in and currently commit major human rights abuses. Several of them are profiled in this report.

The protests that began in December 2017 are in part an outgrowth of the government's failure to respect the rights of its own people. This turbulence is demonstrative of the need for increased and sustained international engagement focused on addressing human rights as part of its broader political and economic relationship with Iran, and as an important element of the international community's security priorities in the region. Engagement with the Iranian government on other matters and continued focus on its human rights record are not mutually exclusive goals. On

the contrary, engagement without a focus on human rights is unlikely to produce long-term dividends that genuinely advance regional stability.

As part of this effort, it is vital for the world to understand not only the nature and scope of Iran's human rights abuses, but also how the government's leaders perpetrate them as part of an organized bureaucracy. This report meticulously profiles some of the top Iranian officials directly responsible for the plight of Iran's citizens. In so doing, it offers an outline for how nations can seek accountability in Iran. Publicly identifying Iran's leading human rights abusers can increase pressure on its government and demonstrate to the Iranian people that the world understands and supports their demands for reform.

Dr. Ahmed Shaheed is the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief as well as the deputy director of the Essex Human Rights Centre. From 2011 to 2016, he was the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Iran. A career diplomat, he has twice held the office of minister of foreign affairs of Maldives. Between 2003 and 2011, he led Maldives' efforts to embrace international human rights standards.

Rose Parris Richter has served as a senior advisor to Dr. Shaheed since 2011 and has been Director of the Human Rights in Iran Unit at the City University of New York since 2012. The Unit works with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to support the UN special rapporteur's mandate. Ms. Richter previously served as senior advisor for the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations on UN elections, human rights, humanitarian, and development issues. She was also an advisor to the Permanent Mission of Timor-Leste to the United Nations.

Foreword

By Prof. Irwin Cotler

While representing political prisoners in the Soviet Union 45 years ago, I noted that "vacation time in the West is prison time in the Soviet Union," with the Soviet Union arresting and imprisoning dissidents while governments in the West adjourned. This phenomenon found expression this summer in Iran, as there was barely any international condemnation while the Iranian regime carried out systematic arrests and sentenced leaders at all levels of civil society on trumped-up charges, reminiscent of the old Soviet tactic of "give us the people and we will find the crime." In particular, the regime escalated its assault on 10 fundamental civil society groups throughout the summer, including journalists, environmentalists, dual citizens, cultural leaders, religious minorities, women's rights activists, labor rights activists, students, teachers, and lawyers.

First, the regime escalated its targeting of journalists this summer, conducting arrests for merely expressing criticism of political and religious leaders on social media.¹ For example, one journalist was sentenced to a decade in prison for a satirical tweet about an ultra-conservative cleric.² These disturbing arrests have coincided with increasing measures by the regime to curb the free flow of communication, including a ban on the country's most-used messaging app, Telegram.³

Second, the regime conducted widespread arrests of environmentalists, arresting more than 40 environmental activists, rangers, and even some of their

1. "Iranian Journalist and Political Activist Detained For Criticizing Iran's Judiciary," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 28, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/06/iranian-journalist-and-political-activist-detained-for-criticizing-irans-judiciary>)

2. "Iranian Journalist Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison For Criticizing Ultra-Conservative Cleric in a Tweet," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, August 24, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/08/iranian-journalist-sentenced-to-10-years-in-prison-for-criticizing-ultra-conservative-cleric-in-a-tweet>)

3. "Rouhani's Telecom Minister Has Not Fulfilled Most of the Nine Pledges He Made Since Starting His Post," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, August 15, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/08/one-year-under-irans-telecommunications-minister-mohammad-javad-azari-jahromi>)

family members over the course of two days in May.⁴ This mass arrest followed the arrests of more than a dozen environmentalists in January and February of this year,⁵ including nine members of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation,⁶ Iran's most significant environmental organization.⁷ One of its founders,⁸ Canadian-Iranian Professor Kavous Seyed-Emami, died in the notorious Evin Prison under suspicious circumstances two weeks after his arrest; his family has been subjected to repeated harassment, their lawyers have been arrested, and his wife, Maryam Mombeini, has been prevented from leaving Iran. Eight other members remain in pre-trial detention after eight months without access to counsel⁹ – and some of their lawyers have themselves been arrested. Five are threatened with potential sentences of 25 years to life imprisonment or execution.¹⁰

Third, in addition to the imprisonment of Canadian-Iranian Professor Seyed-Emami and Iranian-American environmentalist Morad Tahbaz,¹¹ the regime escalated its targeting of dual citizens, in keeping with its tradition of holding foreign nationals hostage for political leverage. In March and April of this year, two British-Iranian dual nationals and an Iranian UK resident were arrested on security charges while visiting Iran.¹² Most recently, in October, a court sentenced a dual national to eight-and-a-half years in prison for the “infiltration” of government bodies.¹³ The recent increase in arrests has prompted the U.S. State Department and British Foreign Office to take the unprecedented measure of specifically warning dual citizens of the very high risk of arbitrary arrest and detention they face in Iran.¹⁴

Fourth, the regime has attacked leaders of all cultural sectors, including writers, models, photographers,

4. “Iran: Environmentalists Face Arbitrary Detention,” *Human Rights Watch*, August 3, 2018. (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/03/iran-environmentalists-face-arbitrary-detention>); “Dozens of Environmentalists Arrested in Southern Iran in Widening Crackdown,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 11, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/05/dozens-of-environmentalists-arrested-in-southern-iran-in-widening-crackdown>)

5. Ibid.

6. “Iran: Environmentalists Languish in Jail,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 11, 2018. (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/11/iran-environmentalists-languish-jail>)

7. Ervand Abrahamian, “Forced Confessions in Iran’s House of the Dead,” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2018. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/22/opinion/kavous-seyed-emami-iran.html>)

8. Jonathan Watts and Saeed Kamali Dehghan “Iran urged by UN to respect environment activists after wildlife campaigner death,” *The Guardian* (UK), February 15, 2018. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/15/iran-urged-by-un-to-respect-environment-activists-after-wildlife-campaigner-death>)

9. “Five Environmentalists Charged in Iran After Eight Months in Prison,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, October 8, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/10/iranian-american-among-five-environmentalists-charged-in-iran-after-eight-months-in-prison>)

10. “Iran: Environmentalists Languish in Jail,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 11, 2018. (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/11/iran-environmentalists-languish-jail>)

11. Dion Nissenbaum, “Another American Confirmed Held in Iran,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 12, 2018. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/another-american-confirmed-held-in-iran-1518479034>)

12. Richard Spencer, “Student arrested in Iran while visiting grandmother,” *The Times of London* (UK), May 3, 2018. (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/student-arrested-in-iran-while-visiting-grandmother-d5fqp0nft>)

13. “Report: Iran sentences dual-national man to prison,” *Associated Press*, October 14, 2018. (<https://www.apnews.com/d28835469dab46b2b9f67465cff03031>)

14. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Iran Travel Advisory,” October 10, 2018. (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/iran-travel-advisory.html>); UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Foreign travel advice: Iran,” September 23, 2018. (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iran>); Patrick Wintour, “Foreign Office warns dual nationals not to go to Iran,” *The Guardian* (UK), September 19, 2018. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/19/foreign-office-warns-uk-iranian-dual-nationals-not-to-go-to-iran-nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe>)

filmmakers, and musicians. Since August, a young satirist has been held incommunicado.¹⁵ In July, the police announced that 46 workers in the fashion industry were arrested for their involvement in a “modeling ring.”¹⁶ In June, an eminent poet, filmmaker, and former member of the Board of Directors of the Iranian Writers’ Association¹⁷ was sentenced for posting a photograph on Instagram of a man injured by police.¹⁸ In June, a rap artist was detained for lyrics critical of the regime,¹⁹ and in March, a rock musician was forced to flee the country after being sentenced to six years in prison for producing metal music.²⁰

Fifth, the regime renewed its crackdown on religious minorities. Over the summer, there was a new wave of arrests of members of the Bahai faith,²¹ including 17 in one month alone.²² Moreover, in July and August, 20 Sufi Muslims were issued harsh sentences for attending

protests, which one source called “unprecedented in Iran’s judicial history.”²³

Sixth, the regime intensified its onslaught against women’s rights activists – already the subject of ongoing harassment and intimidation – by jailing record numbers this summer for protesting the compulsory hijab,²⁴ in addition to arresting four women’s rights activists in 25 days.²⁵

Seventh, the regime continued to target labor rights activists for simply exercising their right to freely assemble. For example, over the course of two days in June, more than 60 manufacturing workers were arrested for attending rallies.²⁶

Eighth, the regime escalated its arrests and convictions of students for similarly attending peaceful protests. Indeed, Iran’s Revolutionary Court has imposed heavy

15. “Satirist Keyomars Marzban Arrested by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, Held Incommunicado, No Access to Lawyer,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, September 19, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/09/satirist-keyomars-marzban-arrested-by-irans-revolutionary-guards-held-incommunicado-no-access-to-lawyer>)

16. “Iran Arrests 46 Fashion Workers Including Eight Models in Hormozgan Province,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, July 17, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/07/iran-cracks-down-on-modeling-ring-in-hormozgan-province>)

17. Hamed Sadra “Announcing a decree to a former member of the Board of Directors of the Iranian Writers’ Association: Baktash Abtin,” *Campaign to Free Political Prisoners in Iran*, June 8, 2018. (<http://cfppi.org/2018/06/08/announcing-a-decree-to-a-former-member-of-the-board-of-directors-of-the-iranian-writers-association-baktash-abtin>)

18. “Iranian Poet Sentenced and Fined For Posting Photo of Man Injured by Police,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 8, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/06/iranian-poet-sentenced-and-fined-for-posting-photo-of-man-injured-by-police>)

19. “Rapper Detained For More Than a Month Without Lawyer in Iran’s Sistan and Baluchistan Province,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, July 27, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/07/rapper-detained-for-more-than-a-month-without-lawyer-in-irans-sistan-and-baluchistan-province>)

20. “Metal Band Member Sentenced to Six Years Prison in Iran Accused of Creating ‘Satanic Music,’” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, March 30, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/03/metal-band-member-sentenced-to-six-years-prison-in-iran-accused-of-creating-satanic-music>)

21. “Wave of Baha’i Arrests in Iran Raises Alarm at Faith’s UN Office,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 29, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/05/wave-of-bahai-arrests-in-iran-raises-alarm-at-faiths-un-office>)

22. “17 Baha’is Arrested in One Month in Iran,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, September 28, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/09/17-bahais-arrested-in-one-month-in-iran>)

23. “Mass Conviction of Sufi Protesters ‘Unprecedented in Iran’s Judicial History,’” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, August 20, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/08/conviction-of-16-sufi-protesters-unprecedented-in-irans-judicial-history>)

24. Saeed Kamali Dehghan, “Iranian activist jailed over hijab protests goes on hunger strike,” *The Guardian* (UK), August 29, 2018. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/29/iranian-activist-jailed-over-hijab-protests-goes-on-hunger-strike>); “Three Detained Women’s Rights Activists Should be Immediately Released,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, September 11, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/09/three-detained-womens-rights-activists-should-be-immediately-released>)

25. “Fourth Women’s Rights Activist Arrested in Iran in Less Than a Month,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, September 27, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/09/fourth-womens-rights-activist-arrested-in-iran-in-less-than-a-month>)

26. “Iran Police Arrest Dozens Of Unpaid Steel Workers In Ahvaz Demos,” *Radio Farda*, June 13, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-police-arrest-steel-workers-auvaz/29288754.html>)

prison sentences on student activists throughout the summer, including 22 students in August alone.²⁷

Ninth, the regime increased its persecution of leading educators. One teacher was sentenced to six years in prison and is now in Evin Prison for partaking in peaceful protests,²⁸ while another, who was violently arrested in front of his students,²⁹ was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison and 74 lashes for advocating on behalf of teachers' rights.³⁰ A third prominent teacher's rights activist, and the former spokesman for the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association, Mahmoud Beheshti-Langroudi, was forced to go on a hunger strike in July to protest the refusal to hear his case and the mistreatment of political prisoners.³¹

Lastly, the regime has arrested a significant number of Iran's most prominent human rights lawyers since January of this year and, this summer, harassed and arrested leading lawyers acting on behalf of imprisoned civil society activists. Strikingly, Nasrin Sotoudeh, the iconic Iranian human rights lawyer and embodiment of the struggle for human rights in Iran, was rearrested in June for defending peaceful protesters and has been languishing in Evin Prison since.³² Without the defense of human rights lawyers, all civil society leaders are vulnerable to further politically charged arrests.

The above cases are a dramatic case study of the criminalization of innocence in Iran involving civil society leaders, while reflecting the widespread and

systematic character of Iranian injustice, including the criminalization of fundamental freedoms of expression, belief, opinion, assembly and association; illegal and arbitrary arrests; incommunicado detention; false charges; torture in detention; denial of the right to counsel, a fair hearing, and an independent judiciary; show trials devoid of any due process; and denial or withdrawal of medical care in prison. Alarming, they occur against the backdrop of the regime's massive domestic repression of human rights. While President Hassan Rouhani has attempted to portray a new "moderate" Iran, this report exposes these ongoing violations, which have intensified under his watch.

For example, Iran, a country that already had the most executions per capita, has seen a dramatic increase in the number of executions during Rouhani's tenure, including the execution of juvenile offenders, frequently on public display. Further, as the reports by Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, the former UN special rapporteur for human rights in Iran, demonstrated, there has been widespread and systematic physical, sexual, and psychological torture, often used to extract forced confessions. Moreover, the regime continues to persecute women, the LGBT community, and ethnic and religious minorities, engaging in persistent and pervasive discrimination targeting these minorities while inciting hate and violence against them. Further, despite its rhetoric to the contrary, the regime continues to mock and violate any free expression, monitor human rights activists, and censor speech online and in

27. "University Student Sentenced to Seven Years Imprisonment in Iran as Another is Ordered to Attend Friday Prayers," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, August 31, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/08/university-student-sentenced-to-seven-years-imprisonment-in-iran-as-another-is-ordered-to-attend-friday-prayers>)

28. "These Four Educators Were Behind Bars in Iran on World Teachers' Day 2018," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, October 8, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/10/these-four-educators-were-behind-bars-in-iran-on-world-teachers-day-2018>)

29. "Revolutionary Guards Violently Arrest Teachers' Rights Activist in Front of High School Students," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, March 14, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/03/revolutionary-guards-violently-arrest-teachers-rights-activist-in-front-of-high-school-students>)

30. "French Unions Call For Release Of Iranian Teacher," *Radio Farda*, September 17, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/french-unions-call-for-release-of-iranian-prisoner/29494353.html>)

31. "Leading Teachers' Rights Activist Mahmoud Beheshti-Langroudi Refusing Food to Protest 'Unjust' Sentence," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, July 14, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/07/leading-teachers-rights-activist-mahmoud-beheshti-refusing-food-to-protest-unjust-sentence>)

32. Nasrin Sotoudeh, "Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh arrested," *The Guardian* (UK), June 13, 2018. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/13/nasrin-sotoudeh-arrested-iran-human-rights-lawyer-islamic-headscarf>)

print. Any expression of dissent or deviation from the ideology of the regime is effectively silenced.

All the while, as this report demonstrates, Iran's human rights violators remain protected, if not rewarded. This culture of impunity is perhaps most egregiously captured by the fact that President Rouhani appointed Seyed Alireza Avaei as the head of the Ministry of Justice, a man who was directly involved in committing a crime against humanity, the 1988 massacre of at least 5,000 Iranian political prisoners. Avaei is but one of the major human rights violators highlighted in this report who have enjoyed impunity due to a culture of criminality and corruption.

It is crucial that the international community not turn a blind eye to what I have termed the fivefold Iranian threat – the nuclear threat, state-sponsorship of terror, regional hegemonic aggression that includes mass criminality in Syria, state-sanctioned incitement to genocide, and massive domestic repression. In particular, sanctions over Iran's nuclear program should not distract from, or even sanitize, the ongoing massive domestic human rights violations, which should be a centerpiece of international containment and sanctioning of the Iranian regime in solidarity with the long suffering of the Iranian people.

We now have the opportunity to sanction human rights offenders on a global level, inspired by the U.S. Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. This report offers U.S. policymakers an opportunity to continue its leadership in this area by implementing sanctions against major human rights violators in Iran, in concert with the international community. Indeed, the objectives of naming, shaming, and sanctioning specific human rights violators are indispensable to mobilizing a critical mass of global advocacy to address and redress human rights violations in Iran. This can also include, as takes place in the Canadian Parliament, holding an annual Iran Accountability Week in the U.S. Congress to shine the spotlight on human rights violations in Iran through public hearings, witness testimony, and the like. This can further include developing an Iranian political prisoner advocacy

project in which members of Congress can take up the case and cause of Iranian political prisoners in concert with their fellow parliamentarians in Canada and elsewhere.

During this nadir in the history of human rights in Iran, this report rightfully singles out the principal architects behind its massive domestic repression. In a country where protests, democratic movements, and human rights defenders are brutally suppressed, it presents an opportunity to give voice to, and stand in solidarity with, those who have been deprived of their freedoms, and even their lives.

Prof. Irwin Cotler is the chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, an emeritus professor of law at McGill University, former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada, and former longtime member of the Parliament of Canada. A constitutional and comparative law scholar, Prof. Cotler is the author of numerous publications and seminal legal articles, and has written upon and intervened in landmark Charter of Rights cases in the areas of free speech, freedom of religion, minority rights, peace law, and war crimes justice.

A leading parliamentarian on the global stage, he has been chair of the Inter-Parliamentary Group for Human Rights in Iran, chair of the Inter-Parliamentary Group of Justice for Sergei Magnitsky, chair of the All-Party Save Darfur Parliamentary Coalition, and Canadian section chair of the Parliamentarians for Global Action and a member of its international council.

An international human rights lawyer, Prof. Cotler has served as counsel to prisoners of conscience, including Andrei Sakharov and Nathan Sharansky (former Soviet Union), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Jacobo Timmerman (Latin America), and Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim (Egypt). He was chair of the International Commission of Inquiry into the Fate and Whereabouts of Raoul Wallenberg and was a member of the International Legal Team of Chinese Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiaobo. More recently, he became international legal counsel to imprisoned Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, Venezuelan political prisoner Leopoldo López, and Shiite cleric Ayatollah Boroujerdi in Iran.

Introduction

Since late 2017, Iranians have taken to the streets to protest the clerical regime's domestic repression, foreign adventurism, corruption, and economic mismanagement. With chants of "Death to Rouhani" and "Death to Khamenei," the demonstrators have contested not merely the Islamic Republic's policies but also its very legitimacy. These developments offer the Trump administration an opportunity to advance U.S. interests by supporting the demonstrators against the regime while also promoting U.S. values by focusing the world's attention on the regime's rampant human rights abuses.

This report documents the human rights violations committed by 12 senior officials in the Islamic Republic. By adding these individuals to U.S. sanctions lists within the context of a broader economic pressure campaign, Washington can boost the morale of protesters, challenge the regime's radical Islamist ideology, and make Tehran pay for its behavior. At the same time, America can send a message to its allies that the Iranian people deserve their robust and concerted support.

Iran is sensitive to international criticism of its human rights record. In Tehran's view, the West seeks not only to defeat the Islamic Republic military but also to infiltrate the country with foreign values that subvert the culture and faith of the Islamic Revolution. In this sense, the mullahs regard their conflict with the West as a struggle for the hearts and minds of the Muslim world. By documenting the violence and repression that Tehran inflicts to quash dissent, the United States can undermine regime propaganda that portrays the country as a healthy society proud of its militant Shiite creed.

At the same time, the designation of Tehran's offenders would signal to the Iranian people that America shares their goals and concerns. Foreign support may play an important role in raising the morale of protesters. In 2009, Washington's tepid response to the regime's brutal suppression of protests prompted many demonstrators to criticize President Barack Obama on Iran's streets. Common slogans included, "Obama, Obama – either with us, or with them!"³³ American inaction may have persuaded many Iranians that the uprising was unlikely to succeed.

New human rights sanctions can also prompt U.S. allies to follow suit. While committed in principle to the cause of human rights in Iran, European governments have largely retreated into passivity. Between 2011 and 2013, the European Union sanctioned 83 Iranian actors for committing human rights abuses, including three profiled in this report – and none thereafter. Although the EU has continued to renew these sanctions annually, most recently in April 2018,³⁴ its failure to impose new designations stems in part from its misperception that President Hassan Rouhani, a self-described moderate, has been working to resolve the problem since his 2013 election. Yet the opposite is true. This report shows that the leading perpetrators of abuse in Iran serve in Rouhani's cabinet or otherwise maintain close ties to him.

U.S. Sanctions Law and Previous Designations

Congressional action on behalf of human rights in Iran accelerated after the violent suppression of the Green Movement in 2009, in part as a response to Obama's hesitation to act. With unanimous support in the Senate and a margin of 408-8 in the House, Congress passed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA) of 2010, which directed the

33. Golnaz Esfandiari, "What Does Iran's Green Movement Want From Obama?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 6, 2009. (https://www.rferl.org/a/What_Does_Irans_Green_Movement_Want_From_Obama_/1871445.html)

34. Council of the European Union, Press Release, "Iran: Council extends by one year sanctions responding to serious human rights violation," April 12, 2018. (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/04/12/iran-council-extends-by-one-year-sanctions-responding-to-serious-human-rights-violation>)

president to identify and sanction regime officials, or persons acting on their behalf, who committed abuses on or after June 12, 2009, the first day of the Green Movement demonstrations.³⁵ Congress authorized additional sanctions, again with overwhelming bipartisan support, as part of the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act (ITRA) of 2012, which targeted actors responsible for censorship in Iran.³⁶

“New human rights sanctions can also prompt U.S. allies to follow suit. While committed in principle to the cause of human rights in Iran, European governments have largely retreated into passivity.”

After sustaining withering criticism for failing to intercede during the Green Revolution, President Obama issued three executive orders – 13553, 13606, and 13628 – that imposed human rights sanctions pursuant to these and other statutes.³⁷ All told, the Obama administration designated 20 individuals and

18 entities in Iran for their abuses, including some of the most brutal figures and institutions in the regime.³⁸ For example, Obama’s Treasury Department sanctioned the Ministry of Intelligence for presiding over the “beatings, sexual abuse, prolonged interrogations, and coerced confessions of prisoners, particularly political prisoners,” after the 2009 elections.³⁹ Similarly, Treasury designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the regime’s praetorians, and some of its leaders; ruthless entities such as the Basij, or religious police; senior military and intelligence advisors to the supreme leader; and a range of cyber actors responsible for blocking the internet and monitoring social media.⁴⁰

These designations slowed considerably, however, amid negotiations for the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which began in earnest during Obama’s second term. The administration issued only three designations after the election of Hassan Rouhani in June 2013 and none after the JCPOA’s finalization

35. Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010, Pub. L. 111-195, 124 Stat. 1312, codified as amended at 111 U.S.C. (<https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ195/PLAW-111publ195.pdf>)

36. Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012, Pub. L. 112-158, 126 Stat. 1214, codified as amended at 112 U.S.C. (<https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ158/PLAW-112publ158.pdf>)

37. Executive Order 13553, “Blocking Property of Certain Persons With Respect to Serious Human Rights Abuses by the Government of Iran and Taking Certain Other Action,” September 28, 2010. (<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/13553.pdf>); Executive Order 13606, “Blocking the Property and Suspending Entry Into the United States of Certain Persons With Respect to Grave Human Rights Abuses by the Governments of Iran and Syria via Information Technology,” April 22, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/13606.pdf>); Executive Order 13628, “Authorizing the Implementation of Certain Sanctions Set Forth in the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 and Additional Sanctions With Respect to Iran,” October 9, 2012. (https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/2012iranthreat_eo.pdf)

38. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, “Report Pursuant to the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA), as Amended,” May 17, 2017. (<https://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/2017/270917.htm>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Fact Sheet: New Executive Order Targeting Human Rights Abuses Via Information Technology,” April 23, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1547.aspx>)

39. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Designates Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security for Human Rights Abuses and Support for Terrorism,” February 16, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1424.aspx>)

40. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “United States Takes Action to Facilitate Communications by the Iranian People and Targets Iranian Government Censorship,” May 30, 2013. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl1961.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Announces Sanctions Against Iran,” February 6, 2013. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1847.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Fact Sheet: New Executive Order Targeting Human Rights Abuses Via Information Technology,” April 23, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1547.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Two Senior Iranian Officials for Serious Human Rights Abuses,” December 13, 2011. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1383.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Iranian Security Forces for Human Rights Abuses,” June 9, 2011. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1204.aspx>)

in July 2015.⁴¹ Amid the warming relations between Washington and Tehran, though, abuse remained prevalent. During his first four-year term, Rouhani presided over some 3,000 executions. By contrast, Rouhani's predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, oversaw roughly 1,000 executions during his first term and 2,300 during his second.⁴²

“During his first four-year term, Rouhani presided over some 3,000 executions. By contrast, Rouhani's predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, oversaw roughly 1,000 executions during his first term and 2,300 during his second.”

Under Rouhani, journalists and political activists have continued to languish in prison. Women, homosexuals, and ethnic and religious minorities have suffered routine persecution. Iran's theocratic judiciary has gone unreformed. In October 2017, Asma Jahangir, who served as the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Iran until her death in February 2018, said Rouhani has yet “to walk the talk.”⁴³ In her final report, published posthumously this past March, Jahangir wrote that improvements in Iran's human rights record “are either not forthcoming or are being implemented very slowly and in piecemeal.”⁴⁴

In the final weeks of his presidency, Obama signed into law the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, which authorizes the president to sanction anyone in the world not only for committing serious human rights abuses but also, unlike previous statutes, for engaging in acts of significant corruption.⁴⁵ Pursuant to the legislation, the leadership of relevant congressional committees may submit a written request to the president for a determination regarding the eligibility of a foreign person for Magnitsky sanctions. The president must then indicate whether or not he intends to sanction that person. To date, however, Washington has yet to use Magnitsky authorities to sanction Iranians responsible for human rights violations or corruption.

Iran's Human Rights Abuses and the Trump Administration

President Donald Trump has pursued an adversarial approach to Iran that includes a renewed emphasis on human rights. In his first address to the UN General Assembly in September 2017, President Trump called the regime a “corrupt dictatorship.” “The longest-suffering victims of Iran's leaders,” he said, “are, in fact, its own people.”⁴⁶ In a May 2018 speech articulating the president's new Iran strategy, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared that the United States will “advocate tirelessly for the Iranian people.”⁴⁷ In an

41. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Designates Additional Individuals and Entities Under Iran-related Authorities,” December 30, 2014. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl9731.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Iranian Official for Human Rights Abuses,” May 23, 2014. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2411.aspx>)

42. “Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran 2017,” *Iran Human Rights*, March 13, 2018, pages 7-8. (https://iranhr.net/media/files/Rapport_iran_2018-gb-090318-MD2.pdf); “Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran 2016,” *Iran Human Rights*, April 3, 2017, pages 6-7. (https://iranhr.net/media/files/Rapport_iran_2016-GB-280317-BD.pdf)

43. United Nations, “The situation of human rights in Iran - Press Conference (26 October 2017),” October 26, 2017. (<http://webtv.un.org/watch/the-situation-of-human-rights-in-iran-press-conference-26-october-2017/5625925716001>)

44. United Nations Human Rights Council, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” A/HRC/37/68, March 12, 2018, page 3. (<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/37/68>)

45. Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, Pub. L. 114-328, 130 Stat. 2534, codified as amended at 114 U.S.C. §1261. (<https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ328/PLAW-114publ328.pdf>)

46. The White House, “Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” September 19, 2017. (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly>)

47. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, “After the Deal: A New Iran Strategy,” *Remarks at the Heritage Foundation*, May 21, 2018. (<https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/05/282301.htm>)

address to the Iranian-American community two months later, Pompeo proclaimed that Washington “is unafraid to expose human rights violations and support those who are being silenced.” Washington, he continued, calls on “everyone here in the audience and our international partners to help us shine a spotlight on the regime’s abuses and to support the Iranian people.”⁴⁸

“The renewed effort to hold the regime accountable constitutes a welcome development, but as this report will show, many of the worst offenders remain untouched by sanctions.”

Consistent with such statements, the Trump administration has added nine Iranian individuals and eight entities to U.S. sanctions lists, for a combined total of 55 human rights designations under Trump and Obama.⁴⁹ The renewed effort to hold the regime accountable constitutes a welcome development, but as this report will show, many of the worst offenders remain untouched by sanctions. Furthermore, the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which Trump signed into law in August 2017, requires the president to submit, and update annually, a list of Iranians who commit human rights abuses.⁵⁰ To date, the administration has failed to submit a list.

Still, many Iranians fighting oppression see a change in U.S. policy. Many demonstrators have chanted,

“America is not our enemy, our enemy is right here.”⁵¹ But the United States can do more. In legal terms, sanctions prevent their targets from travelling abroad and conducting business with the United States. To be sure, senior regime officials rarely travel or conduct business overseas. Yet as tangible expressions of the policy of the world’s most powerful democratic nation, sanctions have the potential to strengthen the morale of protesters, raise the concern of other democratic governments, and undermine the self-serving narratives promoted by the regime.

Of course, thousands of individuals comprise the vast bureaucracy that sustains the Islamic Republic’s despotic rule, yet the regime’s senior officials are the ones who direct and implement its repression. The 12 abusers profiled here represent many of the key institutions Tehran has developed to enforce its revolutionary ideology. Likewise, their biographies reflect the continuity of Iranian policy since 1979. These figures rose within the Iranian bureaucracy because of their abuses, not in spite of them.

48. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, “Supporting Iranian Voices,” *Remarks at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library*, July 22, 2018. (<https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/07/284292.htm>)

49. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Targets Human Rights Abuses, Censorship, and Enhanced Monitoring by the Iranian Government,” May 30, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0397>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Individuals and Entities for Human Rights Abuses and Censorship in Iran, and Support to Sanctioned Weapons Proliferators,” January 12, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0250>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Takes Action to Target Serious Human Rights Abuses in Iran,” April 13, 2017. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm0043.aspx>)

50. Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, Pub. L. 115-44, 131 Stat. 886, codified as amended at 115 U.S.C. (<https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ44/PLAW-115publ44.pdf>)

51. “Angry Farmers Chant ‘America Is Not The Enemy – The Enemy Is Right Here,’” *Radio Farda*, April 13, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-farmers-protests-isfahan/29165769.html>)



Ebrahim Raisi

*Former Presidential Candidate,
Custodian of Astan Quds Razavi*

At first, he could not identify the sound. But Amir Atiabi, an inmate in Iran's Gohardasht Prison, was curious.⁵² Over the course of several nights in 1988, he recalled, "strange noises that sounded like the dropping of cooking-gas containers" reverberated from trucks in the jail's loading dock. Each time, he marked the date on his calendar. On some days, the sound echoed through his cell as many as 50 to 55 times.

Eventually, he discovered the truth. One night, Atiabi said, he and his fellow prisoners "went to the end of the corridor to the shower room and toilettes and climbed up to see through the window what the hell this truck is doing in the middle of the night. We had never seen such a thing. Then we realized they were loading dead bodies onto the trucks."⁵³

"After a while," he added, "the noises would stop because when you put bodies on top of other bodies you won't hear the noise anymore."⁵⁴

Thirty years later, the systematic massacre of thousands of political dissidents remains the most egregious atrocity committed by the Islamic Republic against its own people since its founding in 1979. However, the perpetrators have yet to face justice. One of them, in fact, former presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi, currently serves as the custodian of Astan Quds Razavi, a massive business conglomerate with a real-estate portfolio worth an estimated \$20 billion, which effectively functions as a slush fund for Iran's supreme leader.⁵⁵ Raisi helps generate the funds that enable Tehran to suppress dissent at home and export terror abroad.

In the summer of 1988, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa sentencing regime opponents to death, declaring them "apostates of Islam" who "wage war on God."⁵⁶ In prisons throughout the country, Iran subsequently established panels, known as Death Committees, that would determine who

52. A version of this profile originally appeared in *National Review*: Tzvi Kahn, "The U.S. Should Sanction Iran's Key Slush Fund and Its Brutal Custodian," *National Review*, September 15, 2018. (<https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/09/iran-sanctions-should-target-ebrahim-raisi-slush-fund/>)

53. "Deadly Fatwa: Iran's 1988 Prison Massacre," *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center*, September 2009. (<https://iranhrdc.org/deadly-fatwa-irans-1988-prison-massacre/>)

54. Ibid.

55. Reza Haghighatnejad, "Mashhad's Financial Emperor Laid to Rest," *Iran Wire*, March 4, 2016. (<https://www.iranwire.com/en/features/1690>); Andrew Higgins, "Inside Iran's Holy Money Machine," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 2, 2007. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB118072271215621679>); Paul Klebnikov, "Millionaire Mullahs," *Forbes*, July 21, 2003. (<https://www.forbes.com/forbes/2003/0721/056.html>)

56. "Deadly Fatwa: Iran's 1988 Prison Massacre," *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center*, September 2009. (<https://iranhrdc.org/deadly-fatwa-irans-1988-prison-massacre/>)

would live and who would die, often on the basis of interrogations only several minutes in length. Raisi served on a four-member committee that presided over the slaughter of inmates in Evin Prison, Iran's most notorious jail, as well as Gohardasht Prison.

In 2016, a 1988 audio recording emerged of a meeting between Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, a deputy and heir apparent to Khomeini, and Raisi along with the other three members of the committee.⁵⁷ In an extraordinary rebuke, Montazeri told the panel, "In my opinion, the greatest crime committed under the Islamic Republic, from the beginning of the Revolution until now, is this crime committed by you." The committee members, he added, "will in the future be etched in the annals of history as criminals."⁵⁸ Khomeini later stripped Montazeri of his clerical rank and role as designated successor, while Raisi continued his rise.

Since the early 1980s, Raisi has served in multiple positions in Iran's judiciary.⁵⁹ As a prosecutor between 1980 and 1994, Raisi routinely sought draconian punishments for political opponents of the regime. As a deputy chief justice from 2004 to 2014, he personally

approved death penalties for scores of alleged offenders. On one occasion, he even lauded the amputation of a thief's hand, calling it "divine punishment" and a "source of pride."⁶⁰ As the attorney general from 2014 to 2016, he presided over the prosecution of countless dissidents. Between 2004 and 2015, the number of executions gradually rose every year, from approximately 100 to nearly 1,000.⁶¹

Though Raisi is well known in Iran, it was not until his presidential bid, in 2017, that he attained international prominence. The incumbent, Hassan Rouhani, wasted no time in attacking him for his role in the 1988 massacre,⁶² declaring that Iran's people would reject "those who only knew executions and prison for 38 years."⁶³ In response, Raisi doubled down: His campaign page on the Telegram messaging service posted a video justifying the slaughter.⁶⁴

In the end, Rouhani's strategy prevailed. Raisi lost the election after receiving only 38 percent of the vote.⁶⁵ Afterward, Raisi's name largely faded from Western headlines. But as the custodian of Astan Quds Razavi, Raisi still contributes significantly to Tehran's grip on power.⁶⁶ The endowment presides over more

57. Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Audio file revives calls for inquiry into massacre of Iran political prisoners," *The Guardian* (UK), August 11, 2016. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2016/aug/11/hossein-ali-montazeri-audio-file-calls-for-inquiry-1988-massacre-iran-political-prisoners>)

58. "Audio transcript of Iran officials' remarks about 1988 massacre," *Justice for Victims of 1988 Massacre in Iran*, accessed October 25, 2018. (<https://iran1988.org/audio-transcript-iran-officials-remarks-1988-massacre>)

59. Roya Boroumand, "Iran: Don't Let Ahmadinejad's Candidacy Distract You From The Real Danger," *Huffington Post*, April 16, 2017. (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/iran-dont-let-ahmadinejads-candidacy-distract-you_us_58f28864e4b04cae050dc7db)

60. "'Proud of Hand Amputations,' Says Top Judiciary Official," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, October 27, 2010. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/10/amputations-judiciary-official>)

61. "Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran: 2017," *Iran Human Rights*, March 13, 2018, page 7. (https://iranhr.net/media/files/Rapport_iran_2018-gb-090318-MD2.pdf)

62. Erin Cunningham, "Iran's Rouhani lashes rivals with rare criticism of security forces, ruling clerics," *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2017. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/irans-rouhani-lashes-rivals-with-rare-criticism-of-security-forces-ruling-clerics/2017/05/09/6ba34d5a-34bd-11e7-ab03-aa29f656f13e_story.html)

63. Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Hassan Rouhani's attacks on rivals for president cross Iran's red lines," *The Guardian* (UK), May 12, 2017. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/12/hassan-rouhani-fierce-attack-hardliners-iranian-presidential-campaign>)

64. "Videos Appear Defending Iranian Presidential Hopeful's Role in 1988 Prisoner Massacre," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, April 30, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/04/videos-appear-defending-iranian-presidential-hopefuls-role-in-1988-prisoner-massacre>)

65. "Iran's vetting body certifies Rouhani's re-election," *Reuters*, May 30, 2017. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-election-results-idUSKBN18Q247>)

66. Mark Dubowitz and Saeed Ghasseminejad, "Hit Ayatollah Khamenei in His Pocketbook," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 2018. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/hit-ayatollah-khamenei-in-his-pocketbook-1516666405>)

than 100 businesses in a variety of fields, including car manufacturing, agriculture, financial services, construction, and oil and gas, many of which conduct business overseas.⁶⁷ It also controls the border between Iran and Turkmenistan, a special economic zone for trade with central Asia.

Astan Quds Razavi – Persian for “the holy belongings of Imam Reza” – manages the Imam Reza Shrine, a vast complex in Mashhad that includes the world’s largest mosque by area, a library, and other religious institutions devoted to the memory of the eighth Shiite imam. Some 25 to 30 million pilgrims visit the shrine annually, making Mashhad the country’s most popular tourist attraction. Astan Quds Razavi also owns nearly half of the land in Mashhad, Iran’s second largest city. Raisi oversees these prodigious holdings and reports only to the current supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who appointed him in March 2016.⁶⁸ The endowment receives no oversight by any other government body, undermining any attempt to determine its full size and impact.

“The enormous wealth of Astan Quds Razavi makes it a crucial target for the Trump administration’s maximum-pressure campaign against Iran. The move would be consistent with other U.S. actions.”

In 2017, Mapna Group, an energy company under Astan Quds Razavi’s jurisdiction, signed agreements with Damascus to rebuild the country’s power lines

and power plants. As Ahmad Majidiyar of the Middle East Institute noted, these pacts have enabled Iran to consolidate its presence and influence in Syria.⁶⁹ At the same time, they have mitigated the impact of international pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to end the war, rendering Astan Quds Razavi an enabler of his atrocities.

The enormous wealth of Astan Quds Razavi makes it a crucial target for the Trump administration’s maximum-pressure campaign against Iran. The move would be consistent with other U.S. actions: In 2013, the Obama administration sanctioned the Execution of Imam Khomeini’s Order, or EIKO, another foundation tied to the supreme leader.⁷⁰ Like Astan Quds Razavi, EIKO has investments – worth an estimated \$95 billion, according to a 2013 Reuters report – that remain off the books.⁷¹ And while the 2015 nuclear deal lifted the EIKO sanctions, the Trump administration is scheduled to reimpose them in November, pursuant to its withdrawal from the accord.

The Trump administration should use the authorities provided by the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act of 2016 to freeze the assets of Astan Quds Razavi and to punish any company that conducts business with it. At the same time, by sanctioning Raisi for his management of the foundation and for his human rights abuses, the United States can make clear that it will hold Iranian leaders accountable for their corruption and their crimes against humanity.

67. Ali Ranjipour, “Living on the Margins in Iran: Razavi Khorasan,” *Iran Wire*, July 12, 2018. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/5402>); Behrouz Mina, “One Unaccountable King is Dead, Long Live another Unaccountable King!” *Iran Wire*, March 16, 2016. (<https://www.iranwire.com/en/features/1712>)

68. “Iran’s leader picks Ebrahim Raeisi to head powerful foundation,” *The Guardian* (UK), March 9, 2016. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/09/irans-supreme-leader-key-appointment-ebrahim-raeisi-mashhad-foundation>)

69. Ahmad Majidiyar, “Iran Expands Its Economic Sphere of Influence in Syria,” *Middle East Institute*, September 13, 2017. (<http://www.mei.edu/content/io/iran-expands-its-economic-sphere-influence-syria>)

70. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Targets Assets of Iranian Leadership,” June 4, 2013. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/j1968.aspx>)

71. Steve Stecklow, Babak Dehghanpisheh, and Yeganeh Torbati, “Khamenei controls massive financial empire built on property seizures,” *Reuters*, November 11, 2013. (<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/iran>)



Mahmoud Alavi

Minister of Intelligence

On January 1, 2018, 24-year-old Saru Ghahremani attended one of Iran's nationwide protests and vanished.⁷² Eleven days later, agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence (MOI)⁷³ delivered his corpse, marked by signs of torture and beatings, to the home of his parents. They detained the father. A few hours later, state-run television broadcast a forced confession by the elder Ghahremani declaring that his son died in a shootout with security forces, not in an MOI facility. Tellingly, the MOI then forbade the father from giving any other interviews.⁷⁴

This story is hardly unusual: Since the 1980s, the MOI has violently neutralized ideological opponents of the clerical regime both at home and abroad. In response, the Obama administration sanctioned two previous MOI ministers as well as the MOI itself.⁷⁵ To date, however, its current minister, Mahmoud Alavi, has escaped Washington's attention.

Alavi is a fervent defender of the Islamic Republic and sees his agency as the vanguard of a multi-front war. All MOI personnel, he said in April 2018, "announce their readiness to stand up to the cronies of the global hegemony led by the U.S., which is seeking domination over the world, the criminal Zionism, and the infant-killing Al Saud regime, and to safeguard the ideals of the Islamic Revolution to the last drop of their blood."⁷⁶

In conjunction with other Iranian paramilitary organizations, Alavi's ministry has frequently arrested and tortured journalists, human rights activists, political opponents, and ethnic and religious minorities. It has helped promote pro-regime propaganda on state-run media, including the coerced confessions of political prisoners. It has committed numerous assassinations and terrorist attacks against Iranian dissidents in the diaspora. It provides support to Hezbollah, Hamas, al-Qaeda, and the

72. A version of this profile originally appeared in *National Review*: Tzvi Kahn, "The U.S. Should Sanction Iran's Minister of Intelligence and Security," *National Review*, June 29, 2018. (<https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/06/us-should-sanction-mahmoud-alavi-iran-minister-of-intelligence>)

73. The Ministry of Intelligence (MOI) is also commonly known as the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS).

74. "Intelligence Ministry Forces Father of Slain Protester to Repeat Authorities' Version of Events on State TV," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, January 16, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/01/intelligence-ministry-forces-father-of-slain-protester-to-repeat-authorities-version-of-events-on-state-tv>)

75. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Designates Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security for Human Rights Abuses and Support for Terrorism," February 16, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1424.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Fact Sheet: New Executive Order Targeting Iranian Officials Responsible For Or Complicit In Serious Human Rights Abuses," September 29, 2010. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg877.aspx>)

76. Iran's Office of the Supreme Leader, "The Leader in a meeting with Intelligence Ministry personnel: Corruption, aristocracy, luxuriousness should be tackled," April 20, 2018. (<http://www.leader.ir/en/content/20913/The-Leader's-meeting-with-Intelligence-Ministry-personnel>)

regime of Syria's Bashar al-Assad. It maintains a presence in the Persian Gulf countries, Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Europe, East and South Asia, and North and South America. It acquires military technology and monitors threats to Iran's nuclear program.⁷⁷ "If not for the Intelligence Ministry, our nuclear industry would have not been at the level it is today," Iran's deputy nuclear chief, Ali Asghar Zarean, said in 2014.⁷⁸

President Rouhani appointed Alavi in 2013. Under his leadership, the MOI's global networks remain lethal. And it has worked to stymie the widespread demonstrations that began in late 2017. In June 2018, the judiciary imposed eight-year prison sentences on student protesters Sina Darvish Omran and Ali Mozaffari, on the basis of coerced confessions by MOI interrogators, for acting against "national security" and waging "propaganda against the state."⁷⁹ In May, the MOI conducted a wave of arrests targeting members of the Bahai faith, whom Tehran refuses to recognize as a protected religious minority.⁸⁰

The MOI has reserved special animus for Iranians with Western ties. In March 2016, it arrested Iranian national Aras Amiri, a London-based employee of a British cultural-relations organization, when she visited her family in Iran.⁸¹ The MOI accused her of "assembly and

collusion against national security." The following month, it incarcerated disaster-medicine expert Ahmadreza Djalali, an Iranian citizen and Swedish resident.⁸²

In this context, the MOI's work often overlaps with the efforts of the more well-known IRGC – including the IRGC's Quds Force, which spearheads Tehran's regional aggression, and the IRGC's own intelligence arm. In fact, the IRGC and the MOI routinely collaborate.⁸³ While the MOI often operates covertly, and although Alavi lacks the name recognition of Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani, the public face of Tehran's campaign of aggression across the Middle East, the MOI remains indispensable to Iran's efforts to subjugate its neighbors.

In October 2017, the Trump administration sanctioned the IRGC in its entirety for its support of terrorism, building on the George W. Bush administration's earlier designations, in 2007, of the IRGC for its proliferation activities and of the Quds Force and Soleimani.⁸⁴ In 2011 and 2012, the Obama administration also sanctioned the IRGC for its human rights abuses.⁸⁵ Sanctioning Alavi for the vast range of his nefarious conduct would complement these steps.

77. Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, "Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile," December 2012. (<https://fas.org/irp/world/iran/mois-loc.pdf>)

78. Ali Akbar Dareini, "Iran tips hand about structure of secret services," *Associated Press*, October 15, 2014. (<http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-iran-tips-hand-about-structure-of-secret-services-2014oct15-story.html>)

79. "University Student Activists Sentenced to Prison After Being Arrested by President Rouhani's Intelligence Ministry," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 14, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/06/university-student-activists-sentenced-to-prison-after-being-arrested-by-president-rouhanis-intelligence-ministry>)

80. "Wave of Baha'i Arrests in Iran Raises Alarm at Faith's UN Office," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 29, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/05/wave-of-bahai-arrests-in-iran-raises-alarm-at-faiths-un-office>)

81. Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran arrests British Council employee as she visits home country," *The Guardian* (UK), May 2, 2018. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/02/iran-arrests-british-council-employee-as-she-visits-home-country>)

82. "Iranian-Swedish Disaster Medicine Expert Held in Iran Jail for Nine Months, on Hunger Strike Since Dec. 25," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, January 12, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/01/ahmadreza-jalali-iranian-swedish-disaster-relief-expert>)

83. Udit Banerjee, "Revolutionary Intelligence: The Expanding Intelligence Role of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Fall 2015. (<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1449&context=jss>)

84. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Designates the IRGC under Terrorism Authority and Targets IRGC and Military Supporters under Counter-Proliferation Authority," October 13, 2017. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm0177.aspx>)

85. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Sanctions Iranian Security Forces for Human Rights Abuses," June 9, 2011. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1204.aspx>); Executive Order 13606, "Blocking the Property and Suspending Entry Into the United States of Certain Persons With Respect to Grave Human Rights Abuses by the Governments of Iran and Syria via Information Technology," April 22, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/13606.pdf>)



Hossein Ashtari

*Chief of the Law Enforcement Force
of the Islamic Republic of Iran*

In the wake of more than 20 deaths that punctuated the early days of Iran's latest round of nationwide protests, the country's police chief boldly identified the principal provocateurs.⁸⁶ "Opportunists," declared Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari on January 1, 2018, "exploited this situation with the support of the sworn enemies of the country, headed by America," to spread discontent.⁸⁷ A few weeks later, he accused the West of waging a "soft war" against the Islamic Republic aimed at undermining its revolutionary values.

It is a familiar refrain. Rather than accept responsibility for violently suppressing demonstrations, the regime in Iran justifies its abuses by citing amorphous Western conspiracies rooted in a paranoid vision of seemingly boundless U.S. power.

Iran's police, formally known as the Law Enforcement Force (LEF) of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or NAJA, its Persian acronym, function not merely to ensure law and order. Rather, as Supreme Leader Khamenei, who directly appoints the police chief, said in a

2015 speech, the LEF's responsibilities include the establishment of physical as well as "moral and social" security.⁸⁸ Put differently, the police aim to preserve the regime's rule and enforce the Islamist ideology that drives it.

In this sense, the LEF's duties often overlap with the work of the Basij, the official religious police. Both organizations administer Iran's requirement on women to wear the hijab, or headscarf, in public – one of the many grievances that prompted the nationwide uprising. Hassan Rahimi, the chief of the LEF's Tehran division, declared in February 2018 that authorities "will not tolerate" defiance of the hijab and "will deal with protesters firmly."⁸⁹

This is an understatement. Since late 2017, the LEF has killed dozens of people and arrested thousands more. Police officers have fired live ammunition into crowds and beaten demonstrators. The LEF has deployed forces on the streets simply to intimidate citizens and deter unrest. Protesters, for their part, recognize that

86. A version of this profile originally appeared in *The Weekly Standard*: Tzvi Kahn, "Meet the Iranian Police Who Enforce Iran's Islamist Ideology," *The Weekly Standard*, June 20, 2018. (<https://www.weeklystandard.com/tzvi-kahn/meet-the-iranian-police-who-enforce-irans-islamist-ideology>)

87. "Enemy sought to cause turmoil in Iran: police chief," *Tehran Times* (Iran), January 17, 2018. (<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/420408/Enemy-sought-to-cause-turmoil-in-Iran-police-chief>); "Police warn of attempts to blame government for deaths," *Tehran Times* (Iran), January 4, 2018. (<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/420006/Police-warn-of-attempts-to-blame-government-for-deaths>)

88. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, "Leader's Speech in Meeting with Police Commanders," *Official Website of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei*, April 26, 2015. (<http://english.khamenei.ir/news/2049/Leader-s-Speech-in-Meeting-with-Police-Commanders>)

89. "Tehran Police Chief Warns Hijab Protesters Of Zero Tolerance," *Radio Farda*, February 28, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-police-chief-hijab-protests-zero-tolerance/29067914.html>)

the LEF seeks to protect the regime, not them: Rallies have routinely unfolded in front of LEF police stations. In some cases, Iranians have attacked the facilities and set them ablaze.⁹⁰

The LEF operates unofficial detention centers, where officers routinely abuse detainees physically and psychologically. In January 2018, protester Vahid Heydari, 22, died under mysterious circumstances in a detention center in the city of Arak. The LEF claimed he committed suicide. Evidence of a severe blow to the victim's head suggests otherwise.⁹¹

The LEF has played a key role in Iran's efforts to block the internet. Its cyber police unit monitors Iranians who voice even mild opposition to the regime's policies or who try to spread word about the protests through social media. Arrests and torture often follow. Nevertheless, millions of Iranians have used circumvention technology to evade censors.⁹² In April 2018, the regime responded by blocking Telegram, a messaging app used by some 40 million Iranians.⁹³

The LEF has also contributed to Bashar al-Assad's atrocities in Syria, the regime's foremost regional ally. In conjunction with Tehran's IRGC and intelligence agencies, the LEF has advised and assisted Assad's ruthless security forces in order to preserve his grip on

power. In 2011, Ahmad Reza Radan, then-deputy chief of the LEF, visited Damascus to share his expertise in forcibly subduing protests.⁹⁴

“In January 2018, protester Vahid Heydari, 22, died under mysterious circumstances in a detention center in the city of Arak. The LEF claimed he committed suicide. Evidence of a severe blow to the victim's head suggests otherwise.”

The Obama administration grasped the LEF's threat to Iran and to the region as early as 2011 and 2012, when it sanctioned the force, Radan, and other LEF officials for the organization's human rights abuses in Iran and Syria.⁹⁵ The EU in 2011 sanctioned former LEF chief Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, Radan, several other lower-ranking LEF officials, and the cyber police unit.⁹⁶ The LEF's current leaders, however, including Ashtari, whom Supreme Leader Khamenei appointed in 2015,⁹⁷ have thus far escaped designation by both Washington and Brussels.

90. Michael Georgy, “Iranian protesters attack police stations, raise stakes in unrest,” *Reuters*, December 31, 2018. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-rallies/iranian-protesters-attack-police-stations-raise-stakes-in-unrest-idUSKBN1EP064>)

91. “Emerging Evidence Contradicts Official Claims of Detainee Suicides,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, January 12, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-detainee-suicides-disputed-rejected/28970693.html>); “Iran: Death of a Second Detainee Confirmed,” *Iran Human Rights*, January 9, 2018. (<https://www.iranhr.net/en/articles/3184>)

92. Sam Schechner, “How Millions of Iranians Are Evading the Internet Censors,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 9, 2018. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/iranians-turn-to-tech-tools-to-evade-internet-censors-1515493800>)

93. Parisa Hafezi, “Iran's judiciary bans use of Telegram messaging app: state TV,” *Reuters*, April 30, 2018. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-telegram-apps/irans-judiciary-bans-use-of-telegram-messaging-app-state-tv-idUSKBN1I11JM>)

94. Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer, “Iranian Strategy in Syria,” *American Enterprise Institute and Institute for the Study of War*, May 2013, pages 13-14. (<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/IranianStrategyinSyria-1MAY.pdf>)

95. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Fact Sheet: New Executive Order Targeting Human Rights Abuses Via Information Technology,” April 23, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1547.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Syrian, Iranian Security Forces for Involvement in Syrian Crackdown,” June 29, 2011. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1224.aspx>)

96. Council Regulation No 359/2011 of 12 April 2011 Concerning Restrictive Measures Directed Against Certain Persons, Entities and Bodies in View of the Situation in Iran, *Official Journal of the European Union*. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/359/2017-04-13>)

97. “Ayatollah Khamenei appoints Iran new police chief,” *Press TV (Iran)*, March 9, 2015. (<https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2015/03/09/400997/Iran-Leader-appoints-new-police-chief>)



Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli

Minister of the Interior

In July 2018, Iran's interior minister issued a veiled threat.⁹⁸ The regime, said Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, seeks to end nationwide protests "with restraint from police," which the ministry controls. Nevertheless, he warned that if necessary, "the judiciary and law enforcement forces will carry out their duties."⁹⁹ In the two weeks that followed, the LEF killed at least one protester and wounded scores of others.¹⁰⁰ These developments only added to the ministry's lengthy record of violence against demonstrators and other draconian policies.

Of course, the Ministry of the Interior performs tasks typical of any interior ministry, including policing, administering elections, and issuing permits for public gatherings and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). But in Iran, the ministry's key objectives operate within the framework of Iran's larger mission: advancing the values of the Islamic Revolution. As such, the ministry functions as an agent of repression enforcing the regime's radical ideology.

The Ministry of the Interior's management of the LEF makes it complicit in the force's brutal suppression of demonstrations that began in late 2017. At the same time, the ministry tries to prevent protests from occurring in the first place: It rarely grants permits for any rally, let alone demonstrations against the regime.¹⁰¹ According to the Islamic Republic's constitution, peaceful assemblies "may be freely held" so long as "they are not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam."¹⁰² Insofar as the regime regards itself as the living embodiment of Islamic ideals, this condition effectively serves as a pretext to prohibit demonstrations that challenge the rule of the mullahs.

In June 2018, the regime authorized 12 zones in the nation's capital where demonstrations could occur.¹⁰³ Far from encouraging the peaceful expression of dissent, however, the move likely sought merely to control the locations of the unrest and thereby restrain it. In so doing, the mullahs implicitly acknowledged that Iranians cannot conduct legal protests against their leaders.

98. A version of this profile originally appeared as a policy brief for FDD's Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance: Tzvi Kahn, "U.S. Should Sanction Iran's Interior Minister," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, August 7, 2018. (<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/us-should-sanction-irans-interior-minister>)

99. "Iran Calls For Calm After Water Protests, clashes," *Radio Farda*, July 1, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-calls-for-calm-after-water-protests-clashes/29330489.html>)

100. "One killed, many injured in Kazeroon city, as Iranians protest water scarcity," *Al-Arabiya* (UAE), July 13, 2018. (<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2018/07/13/Iranians-protest-water-scarcity-1-killed-many-injured-in-Kazeroon-city.html>); "Iranians protest water scarcity, 1 killed by police," *Associated Press*, July 12, 2018. (<https://www.apnews.com/d39bf7e8bbac40c39c5d84c568875955>)

101. "Protests Continue In Iran, With Stronger Political Overtones," *Radio Farda*, December 30, 2017. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-protests-tehran-university-/28947479.html>)

102. "Iran (Islamic Republic of)'s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989," *Constitute Project*, page 14, accessed October 25, 2018. (https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf)

103. Frud Bezhan, "Protest Wherever You Want, As Long As Iranian Authorities Choose The Place," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 17, 2018. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/protest-whenever-you-want-as-long-as-iranian-authorities-choose-the-place/29293476.html>)

Similarly, the ministry habitually denies permits to NGOs and political parties that seek to advance human rights or values inconsistent with the regime's Islamist creed. "Years of repression, particularly since 2009, have left Iran without any legally authorized NGOs that work on human rights issues and are critical of the state," stated Amnesty International in a 2017 report. As a result, human rights activists rely heavily on social media to communicate and organize.¹⁰⁴

According to the State Department's 2017 report on human rights, Iranians who promote human rights independently have frequently endured "harassment, arrests, online hacking, and monitoring of individual activists and organization workplaces." The report added, "Independent human rights groups and other NGOs faced continued harassment because of their activism, as well as the threat of closure by government officials following prolonged and often arbitrary delays in obtaining official registration."¹⁰⁵

The State Department report also said that the Ministry of the Interior has worked to restrict the rights of labor unions. The ministry, along with other agencies, "determined labor councils' constitutions, operational rules, and election procedures" in a way that curtailed freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. "According to international media reports," the State Department noted, "security forces continued to respond to workers' attempts to organize or conduct strikes with arbitrary arrests and violence."¹⁰⁶

The ministry has even worked to block women's access to the workplace. "An Interior Ministry directive required all officials to hire only secretaries of their own gender," the State Department said.¹⁰⁷

Finally, by presiding over Iran's pseudo-democratic elections, which allow only regime loyalists to run for office, the Ministry of the Interior perpetuates the illusion of popular sovereignty. Fazli himself has emphasized the importance of high voter turnout,¹⁰⁸ since it lends a veneer of legitimacy to a clerical dictatorship. Moreover, to this day, the Islamist regime has never allowed a woman to run for president. Similarly, the ministry retains the power to appoint provincial governors, but it has never appointed a woman for these positions.¹⁰⁹

Appointed by President Rouhani in 2013,¹¹⁰ Fazli previously held multiple leadership roles in the state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), the regime's primary propaganda organ.¹¹¹ In May 2018, the United States sanctioned the IRIB's director-general, Abdulali Ali-Asgari, for censoring multiple media outlets and broadcasting the forced confessions of political prisoners.¹¹²

Fazli occasionally deploys moderate rhetoric that belies his intrinsically repressive responsibilities.¹¹³ For example, when the latest protests began, he declared that Tehran intends to address their demands.¹¹⁴ But his actions speak louder than his words.

104. "Caught in a Web of Repression: Iran's Human Rights Defenders Under Attack," *Amnesty International*, 2017, page 13. (<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1364462017ENGLISH.PDF>)

105. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017: Iran," April 20, 2018. (<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2017&dclid=277241>)

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

108. "Interior min. urges Iranians' full participation in elections," *Mehr News Agency* (Iran), February 26, 2016. (<https://en.mehrnews.com/news/114755/Interior-min-urges-Iranians-full-participation-in-elections>)

109. Tara Sefhri Far, "'It's a Men's Club': Discrimination Against Women in Iran's Job Market," *Human Rights Watch*, May 25, 2017. (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/25/its-mens-club/discrimination-against-women-irans-job-market>)

110. "Urgent: Iranian Parliament Gives Vote of Confidence to Majority of Rouhani's Proposed Ministers," *Fars News Agency* (Iran), August 15, 2013. (<http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920524000980>)

111. "Human Rights Violator: Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli," *Justice for Iran*, March 12, 2018. (<https://justice4iran.org/human-rights-violators-bank/human-rights-violator-abdolreza-rahmani-fazli>)

112. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Targets Human Rights Abuses, Censorship, and Enhanced Monitoring by the Iranian Government," May 30, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0397>)

113. "Interior Minister Cites 'Dissatisfaction' As Cause Of Recent Uprising," *Radio Farda*, March 12, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-interior-minister-contradicts-khamenei-on-unrest/29094627.html>); "Interior Minister Says Heavy-Handed Enforcement Of Hijab Has Been Futile," *Radio Farda*, March 5, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-hijab-enforcement-minister-says-futile/29079589.html>)

114. "Authorities Determined to Address Popular Demands," *Financial Tribune* (Iran), January 1, 2018. (<https://financialtribune.com/articles/national/79020/authorities-determined-to-address-popular-demands>)



Gholamhossein Gheibparvar

Commander of the Basij

“Move aside, animal!” the Iranian policewoman yells.¹¹⁵ The target of her rage: a young woman wearing her hijab, or headscarf, only loosely, thereby exposing her hair.¹¹⁶ For Iran’s Basij, or religious police, it is a crime that warrants a violent response.

In a video that went viral in April 2018,¹¹⁷ the policewoman, joined by two others, approaches the unidentified young woman. They seize her. Then, as the Associated Press put it, one “grabs her by the throat. She screams, they pick her up off her feet. She ends up on the ground, weeping as another woman comforts her before the officers grab her again.” The victim shouts, “Why are you hitting me? You have been destroying us for 30 years.”¹¹⁸

This episode reflects the longstanding role of the Basij as a chief enforcer of Tehran’s draconian religious code. The paramilitary organization, led by the ruthless Gholamhossein Gheibparvar, systematically

monitors women’s dress. It works to prevent male-female fraternization, alcohol consumption, the dissemination of Western media, and other conduct it regards as un-Islamic. It brutally suppresses demonstrations. It even provides military support to Syria’s bloody regime.

“Some 50,000 branches of the Basij operate in the country’s 31 provinces, with a presence in mosques, government offices, factories, hospitals, schools, and universities.”

The Basij, a subsidiary of the IRGC, differs from other security agencies through its extensive reliance on volunteers, thereby legitimizing it as a grassroots movement. Some 50,000 branches of the Basij operate in the country’s 31 provinces, with a presence in mosques, government offices, factories,

115. A version of this profile originally appeared in *The Hill*: Tzvi Kahn, “US should sanction Iran’s brutal Basij commander,” *The Hill*, August 28, 2018. (<http://thehill.com/opinion/international/403810-us-should-sanction-irans-brutal-basij-commander>)

116. “Iran’s morality police assault a woman for not wearing her hijab properly,” *France 24* (France), April 23, 2018. (<http://observers.france24.com/en/20180423-iran-morality-police-assault-woman-hijab>)

117. Democratic Iran Channel, “Morality Police Woman Savagely Beats Iranian Woman For Not Wearing Hijab Properly,” *YouTube*, April 18, 2018. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-2rguW9LiE>)

118. Nasser Karimi and Mohammad Nasiri, “Iran police’s assault on woman over headscarf stirs debate,” *Associated Press*, April 23, 2018. (<https://www.apnews.com/2a49a87ac7b54551af1e3302a4ab7b4b/Iran-police’s-assault-on-woman-over-headscarf-stirs-debate>)

hospitals, schools, and universities.¹¹⁹ Credible estimates of its membership range from three million to five million, though only about 100,000 to 200,000 serve as full-time, active duty, and paid personnel.¹²⁰ The Basij's omnipresence allows it to proliferate regime propaganda and conduct surveillance through the use of checkpoints and patrols, thereby embedding the organization into the very fabric of Iranian life.¹²¹

In 2009, the Basij spearheaded Iran's efforts to curb mass demonstrations triggered by the disputed presidential election.¹²² Perhaps most infamously, the Basij captured the world's attention when its forces shot and killed 26-year-old philosophy student Neda Soltan, who became a symbol of the uprising after a video of her final moments went viral.¹²³ Nine years later, the Basij, along with other security forces, has once again worked to subdue nationwide protests through force.

On January 1, 2018, an IRGC spokesperson confirmed that Gheibparvar coordinated a Basij initiative to help the LEF quash the unrest.¹²⁴ In one of the many

violent episodes that followed, the Basij and the LEF in February attacked a peaceful protest of the minority Dervish Muslim community, arresting more than 300 people and injuring dozens. One of them subsequently died in custody.¹²⁵

“The Basij also targets Iranian women abroad who publicly oppose Tehran’s austere dress code. In March 2018, Masih Alinejad, a prominent Iranian activist currently living in the United States, received a death threat from a top Basij official for her advocacy against the mandatory hijab.”

The Basij also targets Iranian women abroad who publicly oppose Tehran's austere dress code. In March 2018, Masih Alinejad, a prominent Iranian activist currently living in the United States, received a death threat from a top Basij official for her advocacy against the mandatory hijab. “In his message,” she wrote in the *Washington Post*, “he said I'd be butchered because I had been insulting the sanctity of Iran's revolutionary

119. Ahmad Majidiyar, “Basij Force Urged to Influence Places of Worship to Counter ‘Cultural Invasion,’” *Middle East Institute*, January 25, 2017. (<http://www.mei.edu/content/is/basij-force-urged-influence-places-worship-counter-cultural-invasion>); Shima Shahrabi, “Hijab Patrols: Coming to a Hospital Near you,” *Iran Wire*, August 30, 2016. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/3957>); Gareth Smyth, “New book on basij helps explain how Iran’s hardline faction keeps country captive,” *The Guardian* (UK), September 8, 2015. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/sep/08/basij-militia-and-social-control-in-iran-book-interview>)

120. Kenneth Katzman, “Iran’s Foreign and Defense Policies,” *Congressional Research Service*, September 11, 2018, page 19. (<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44017.pdf>); Gareth Smyth, “Crucial role of Basij in Iran power play,” *The Arab Weekly*, October 30, 2015. (<https://thearabweekly.com/crucial-role-basij-iran-power-play>); Saeid Golkar, *Captive Society: The Basij Militia and Social Control in Iran* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Columbia University Press, 2015), pages 52-53.

121. “Notorious Baseej Patrols to be Re-Deployed All Over Iran,” *Radio Farda*, November 17, 2017. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-deploys-baseej-patrols/28859230.html>)

122. Farnaz Fassihi, “Inside the Iranian Crackdown,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2009. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124726981104525893>)

123. Martin Fletcher, “The killing of Neda Agha Soltan,” *The Times* (UK), July 23, 2011. (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-killing-of-neda-gha-soltan-62s6pqt2268>); Emily Dugan, “For the love of Neda: Iran angered by new film,” *The Independent* (UK), June 29, 2010. (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/for-the-love-of-neda-iran-angered-by-new-film-2005435.html>); Azila Fathi, “In a Death Seen Around the World, a Symbol of Iranian Protests,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 2009. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/world/middleeast/23neda.html>); “Basij shots to death a young woman June 20th,” *YouTube*, June 20, 2009. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjQxq5N--Kc>)

124. “Casualties and Arrests Mount As Iranian Protests Continue,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, January 2, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/01/casualties-and-arrests-mount-as-iranian-protests-continue>)

125. “Iran: Crackdown on Dervish Minority,” *Human Rights Watch*, March 15, 2018. (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/15/iran-crackdown-dervish-minority>)

and Islamic values. He warned that one of his agents in the United States would cut out my tongue and slash my breasts before killing me.”¹²⁶

“Between 2010 and 2012, the Obama administration sanctioned the Basij itself, two of Gheibparvar’s predecessors, and a previous deputy commander for engaging in human rights abuses against the Iranian people.”

Appointed by Supreme Leader Khamenei in December 2016, Gheibparvar previously held multiple leadership roles in the IRGC that entailed violent crackdowns on dissidents and the training of military forces.¹²⁷ In 2013, as the IRGC commander for Fars province, he presided over forces that used tanks to crush satellite dishes seized from people’s homes.¹²⁸ In the year before his ascent to the Basij, Gheibparvar led the IRGC’s Imam Hossein Headquarters, which, among other

duties, operates battalions charged with supporting the atrocities of Syria’s Assad regime.¹²⁹

In recent years, the Basij has aggressively recruited volunteers to fight in Syria, many of whom subsequently died on the front lines.¹³⁰ In November 2016, Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani described the Basij as “crucial” to the export of the Islamic Revolution.¹³¹ Under Gheibparvar’s leadership, the organization will likely become even more crucial in the years to come.

Between 2010 and 2012, the Obama administration sanctioned the Basij itself, two of Gheibparvar’s predecessors, and a previous deputy commander for engaging in human rights abuses against the Iranian people.¹³² In October 2018, the Trump administration also sanctioned a network of businesses for providing financial support to the Basij.¹³³ Gheibparvar himself, however, remains absent from U.S. sanctions lists.

126. Masih Alinejad, “Iran’s Basij promised to butcher me for fighting compulsory hijab,” *The Washington Post*, March 28, 2018. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/03/28/irans-religious-police-promised-to-butcher-me-for-fighting-against-the-hijab/>)

127. “Leader Appoints New Commander of Basij,” *Tasnim News Agency* (Iran), December 7, 2016. (<https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2016/12/07/1261346/leader-appoints-new-commander-of-basij>); “Human Rights Violator: Gholamhossein Gheibparvar,” *Justice for Iran*, March 12, 2018. (<https://justice4iran.org/human-rights-violators-bank/human-rights-violator-gholamhossein-gheibparvar>)

128. “Iran’s New Basij Militia Commander More Militaristic Than His Predecessor,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, December 16, 2016. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/12/gharibparvar-new-basij-commander>)

129. Farzin Nadimi, “Iran’s Basij Mull a Wider Domestic and Regional Role,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, December 20, 2016. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-basij-mull-a-wider-domestic-and-regional-role>)

130. Paul Bucala, “Iran’s New Way of War in Syria,” *American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War*, February 2017. (http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Iran%20New%20Way%20of%20War%20in%20Syria_FEB%202017.pdf); “Iranian Basij Official Says 50 Student Volunteers Killed Fighting In Syria,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 6, 2016. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-basij-volunteers-killed-in-syria/28159863.html>); Kristin Dailey, “Iran Has More Volunteers for the Syrian War Than It Knows What to Do With,” *Foreign Policy*, May 12, 2016. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/12/iran-suleimani-basij-irgc-assad-syria>)

131. “Basij ‘crucial in export of Revolution,’” *Mehr News Agency* (Iran), November 23, 2016. (<https://en.mehrnews.com/news/121546/Basij-crucial-in-export-of-Revolution>)

132. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Public Affairs, “Fact Sheet: Sanctions on Iranian Government and Affiliates,” November 8, 2012, page 1. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Sanctions%20on%20Iranian%20Gov%20and%20Affiliates%20-%20November%208,%202012.pdf>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Designates Tehran Prosecutor General, Basij Commander for Human Rights Abuses in Iran,” February 23, 2011. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1076.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Fact Sheet: New Executive Order Targeting Iranian Officials Responsible For Or Complicit In Serious Human Rights Abuses,” September 29, 2010. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg877.aspx>)

133. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Vast Financial Network Supporting Iranian Paramilitary Force That Recruits and Trains Child Soldiers,” October 16, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm524>)



Abolghassem Salavati

Head of Branch 15 of Iran's Revolutionary Court

The story is as jarring as it is depressingly familiar.¹³⁴

In May 2018, Iranian judge Abolghassem Salavati told a British-Iranian prisoner to expect a new conviction on fresh charges of “propaganda against the state.”¹³⁵ Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, whom Salavati first sentenced to five years in prison in 2016 on equally specious espionage allegations, is one of 10 known dual and foreign nationals, including three U.S. citizens and permanent residents, languishing in Iran’s notorious jails for putatively seeking to overthrow the Islamist regime.¹³⁶ According to Reuters, the actual number of imprisoned dual nationals totals more than 30.¹³⁷

The Trump administration, as part of its newly announced Iran strategy, has called for their release

and pledged to support the Iranian people’s larger struggle for freedom.¹³⁸ But while the European Union sanctioned Salavati for his human rights abuses in 2011, Washington has yet to follow suit.¹³⁹ A U.S. designation of Salavati, one of the harshest figures in Iran’s judiciary, would signal increased pressure on the regime for his brutal resume.

“In Salavati’s courtroom, trials often last a few minutes. Sentences regularly occur on the basis of coerced confessions with little or no evidence. Salavati himself frequently serves as prosecutor as well as judge, and defendants receive little or no access to a lawyer.”

134. A version of this profile originally appeared in *The Hill*: Tzvi Kahn, “US should sanction Iran’s notorious ‘hanging judge,’” *The Hill*, June 22, 2018. (<http://thehill.com/opinion/international/393660-us-should-sanction-irans-notorious-hanging-judge>)

135. “Hardline Judge Orders Zaghari-Ratcliffe to Hire Different Lawyer After Issuing New Charge,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 24, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/05/hardline-judge-orders-zaghari-ratcliffe-to-hire-different-lawyer-after-issuing-new-charge>)

136. “Who Are the Dual Nationals Imprisoned in Iran?” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 24, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/05/who-are-the-dual-nationals-imprisoned-in-iran>); “Five-Year Prison Sentence for Dual National Casts Shadow Over Iran’s Opening to World,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, September 12, 2016. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/09/nazanin-zaghari-sentenced>)

137. Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, “Exclusive: Iran’s Revolutionary Guards arrest more dual nationals,” *Reuters*, November 9, 2017. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-arrests/exclusive-irans-revolutionary-guards-arrest-more-dual-nationals-idUSKBN1D90TB>)

138. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, “After the Deal: A New Iran Strategy,” *Remarks at the Heritage Foundation*, May 21, 2018. (<https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/05/282301.htm>)

139. Council Regulation No 359/2011 of 12 April 2011 Concerning Restrictive Measures Directed Against Certain Persons, Entities and Bodies in View of the Situation in Iran, *Official Journal of the European Union*. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/359/2017-04-13>)

Widely known in Iran as a “hanging judge,” Salavati has presided over the trials – or, more accurately, the show trials – of numerous dual and foreign nationals.¹⁴⁰ More infamously, Salavati has imposed draconian sentences, including the death penalty, lashes, and elongated jail terms, on countless political prisoners. For millions of Iranians, Salavati serves as the foremost symbol of Tehran’s domestic repression and the radical Islamist creed that drives it.

Salavati holds the title of “judge,” but the term, as Bloomberg’s Eli Lake has noted, is a misnomer.¹⁴¹ Salavati heads Branch 15 of Iran’s Revolutionary Court, which functions primarily to prosecute ideological opponents of the regime.¹⁴² Distinct from Iran’s civil and criminal court system, the Revolutionary Court aims not merely to enforce Iranian law per se, though its routine denial of due process runs roughshod over various Iranian

statutes. Rather, the court effectively serves as an agent of Iran’s Intelligence Ministry and IRGC.¹⁴³

Salavati achieved international infamy when he presided over televised show trials of hundreds of Iranians who participated in the nationwide protests that began in June 2009. He sentenced several of them to death, including a 20-year-old student who threw three rocks during the uprising. (On appeal, Tehran commuted the student’s sentence to three years in prison.) Other protesters received lengthy prison sentences.¹⁴⁴

In Salavati’s courtroom, trials often last a few minutes. Sentences regularly occur on the basis of coerced confessions with little or no evidence. Salavati himself frequently serves as prosecutor as well as judge, and defendants receive little or no access to a lawyer.¹⁴⁵ He routinely dismisses or ignores allegations

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140. “U.S. Iranian Couple Receives Harsh Sentence From Notorious Judge,” *Radio Farda*, January 30, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-dual-national-couple-receive-harsh-sentence/29007882.html>); “Judge Salavati Threatens Iranian-Born Swedish Resident With Death Penalty On Day One of Trial,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, February 6, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/02/ahmad-reza-jalali-3>); “Iranian-Dutch Journalist Detained for 10 Months Without Official Verdict,” *Iran Wire*, February 2, 2017. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/4348>); Haleh Esfandiari, “Iran’s Closed-Door Trial and Sentencing of Iranian-Americans Siamak and Baquer Namazi,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2016. (<https://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2016/10/18/irans-closed-door-trial-and-sentencing-of-iranian-americans-siamak-and-baquer-namazi>); Raf Sanchez, “Trial of Washington Post journalist begins in secrecy in Iran,” *The Telegraph* (UK), May 26, 2015. (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/11631292/Washington-Post-journalist-goes-on-trial-in-secret-Iranian-court.html>); Stephen Schwartz, “Iranians vs. ‘Hanging Judges,’” *The Weekly Standard*, August 5, 2014. (<https://www.weeklystandard.com/stephen-schwartz/iranians-vs-hanging-judges>); Omid Memarian, “Iran’s Hanging Judge,” *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, June 9, 2010. (<https://iwpr.net/global-voices/irans-hanging-judge>)
141. Eli Lake, “As Iran Holds a Hostage, Britain Forgets Who It’s Dealing With,” *Bloomberg*, November 10, 2017. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-11-10/as-iran-holds-a-hostage-britain-forgets-who-it-s-dealing-with>)
142. Jenny Norton, “Inside Iran’s Revolutionary Courts,” *BBC* (UK), October 17, 2015. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34550377>)
143. “The Iranian Judiciary: A Complex and Dysfunctional System,” *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center*, October 12, 2016. (<https://iranhrdc.org/the-iranian-judiciary-a-complex-and-dysfunctional-system>)
144. “Men of Violence: Perpetrators of the Post-Election Crackdown,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 2010, pages 16-17. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Men-of-Violence-c-ICHRI-2010-21.pdf>)
145. “Iran - More prison sentences handed down to teachers,” *International Trade Union Confederation*, accessed October 25, 2018. (<https://survey.ituc-csi.org/More-prison-sentences-handed-down.html>); “Iranian-Born Swedish Resident Sentenced to Death Based on Forced Confession,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, October 23, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/10/iranian-born-swedish-resident-sentenced-to-death-based-on-forced-confession>); “Iran: Detainees Denied Fair Legal Representation,” *Human Rights Watch*, March 24, 2016. (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/24/iran-detainees-denied-fair-legal-representation>); Sarah Hekmati, “Americans Detained in Iran,” *Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs*, June 2, 2015. (<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20150602/103552/HHRG-114-FA00-Wstate-HekmatiS-20150602.pdf>); Kasra Najji, “Jason Rezaian trial: What are Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Courts?” *BBC* (UK), May 26, 2015. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32890565>); Carol Morello, “Post reporter Jason Rezaian faces limited lawyer access before Iran trial,” *The Washington Post*, April 14, 2015. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/post-reporter-given-only-limited-access-to-lawyer-before-trial-in-iran/2015/04/14/aec72e08-e299-11e4-b510-962fcabc310_story.html)

of torture in prison.¹⁴⁶ He habitually accepts sentencing recommendations from the IRGC and the Intelligence Ministry, undercutting any pretense that his court offers an independent check on the executive branch.¹⁴⁷ In fact, the regime consistently brings him cases when it seeks to make an example of a political prisoner.

“Salavati habitually accepts sentencing recommendations from the IRGC and the Intelligence Ministry, undercutting any pretense that his court offers an independent check on the executive branch.”

Salavati has displayed particular scorn for captured Americans. In 2011, following a closed-door trial, Salavati imposed eight-year prison sentences on two vacationing U.S. citizens who had been hiking in Iraqi Kurdistan and accidentally crossed the border into Iran.¹⁴⁸ The court, without any evidence, accused them of spying. Thanks in part to intense international pressure, Iran eventually released them after more

than two years behind bars.¹⁴⁹ Since then, Salavati has sentenced multiple other Americans to protracted prison terms based on unsubstantiated espionage charges.

In January 2016, the Obama administration secured the freedom of four American prisoners, including former U.S. Marine Amir Hekmati and *Washington Post* reporter Jason Rezaian, both of whom Salavati sentenced, by releasing seven Iranian sanctions violators, dropping charges on 14 other at-large Iranians suspected of similar offenses, and airlifting \$400 million in cash to the regime.¹⁵⁰

Today, at least three of Iran’s imprisoned American citizens and permanent residents still languish in jail due to Salavati’s exorbitant sentences, including Chinese-American Xiyue Wang, Iranian-American Siamak Namazi, and U.S. permanent resident Nizar Zakka.¹⁵¹

146. Saeed Kamali Dehghan, “Six judges accused of leading role in Iranian crackdown on free speech,” *The Guardian* (UK), July 31, 2014. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/31/six-judges-iran-crackdown-journalists-activists>)

147. “Imprisoned Iranian-American Art Dealer Accuses IRGC of Judicial Interference,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, February 6, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/02/imprisoned-iranian-american-art-dealer-accuses-irgc-of-judicial-interference>); “Letter of Prominent Prisoner of Conscience, Abdollah Momeni, to Ayatollah Khamanei,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, September 9, 2010. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/09/letter-momeni-khamanei>); Omid Memarian, “Iran’s Hanging Judge,” *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, June 9, 2010. (<https://iwpr.net/global-voices/irans-hanging-judge>)

148. Carol Morello, “Hard-line judge in Iran is assigned case of jailed Post reporter Jason Rezaian,” *The Washington Post*, February 1, 2015. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/hard-liner-judge-assigned-case-of-post-reporter-jason-rezaian-jailed-in-iran/2015/02/01/5f21de04-a8c2-11e4-a06b-9df2002b86a0_story.html); Farnaz Fasshi, “U.S. Hikers Go on Trial in Iran,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 6, 2011. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704858404576127561691092304>)

149. J. David Goodman and Alan Cowell, “American Hikers Leave Iran After Prison Release,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 2011. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/22/world/middleeast/iranian-lawyer-says-2-american-hikers-hopefully-are-about-to-be-freed.html>)

150. Josh Meyer, “Obama’s hidden Iran deal giveaway,” *Politico*, April 24, 2017. (<https://www.politico.com/story/2017/04/24/obama-iran-nuclear-deal-prisoner-release-236966>); Jay Solomon and Carol E. Lee, “U.S. Sent Cash to Iran as Americans Were Freed,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 3, 2016. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-sent-cash-to-iran-as-americans-were-freed-1470181874>); Nicholas Fandos, “Details of 7 Iranians Granted Clemency in Prisoner Swap,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 2016. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/18/world/middleeast/a-look-at-the-seven-iranians-released-by-the-us.html>)

151. “Iranian American Prisoner in Iran, Baquer Namazi, On Medical Leave,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, August 28, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/08/iranian-american-prisoner-in-iran-baquer-namazi-on-medical-leave>); “82-Year-Old Iranian-American On Medical Furlough,” *Radio Farda*, August 28, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/year-old-iranian-american-on-medical-furlough/29458304.html>)



Mohammad Moghiseh

Head of Branch 28 of Iran's Revolutionary Court

The torture still occupies her nightmares.¹⁵²

In 1984, high school student Mahnaz Ghezellou found herself blindfolded and handcuffed in Iran's notorious Evin Prison for her peaceful activism against the clerical regime. An interrogation began. When she did not answer the questions, she recalled in a 2017 interview, a man "kicked my right leg with his boot. My foot still does not work right. Then he hit my palms with an iron rod so hard that three of my fingers were dislocated."¹⁵³

Today, that man serves as one of Iran's most infamous judges. His name is Mohammad Moghiseh, and he is the head of Branch 28 of Iran's Revolutionary Court. According to United for Iran, a San Francisco-based human rights group, Moghiseh has imposed sentences on more than 250 Iranians simply for criticizing the regime, using social media, or belonging to a religious minority, among other putative crimes.¹⁵⁴ But while the European Union sanctioned Moghiseh in 2011 for his malign conduct, Washington has yet to follow suit.¹⁵⁵

Like Judge Abolghassem Salavati, Judge Moghiseh constitutes one of a handful of Iran's "hanging judges." In his courtroom, defendants routinely receive death sentences and lengthy prison terms, often on the basis of forced confessions. Trials frequently last minutes. Spurious charges of espionage and *moharebeh*, or waging war against God, proliferate. Access to legal counsel by defendants often remains limited or forbidden.

“Like Judge Abolghassem Salavati, Judge Moghiseh constitutes one of a handful of ‘hanging judges’ in Iran.”

Moghiseh has a record of incarcerating lawyers representing political prisoners. In June 2018, for example, authorities arrested renowned human rights attorney Nasrin Sotoudeh after Moghiseh sentenced her in absentia to a five-year jail sentence on the charge of espionage.¹⁵⁶ “I realized that they had arrested me for my work on human rights, the defense of women’s

152. A version of this profile originally appeared in *The Weekly Standard*: Tzvi Kahn, “U.S. Should Sanction Judge of Iran’s Brutal Kangaroo Court,” *The Weekly Standard*, September 3, 2018. (<https://www.weeklystandard.com/tzvi-kahn/irans-kangaroo-court-should-be-sanctioned>)

153. Aida Ghajar, “Torture: From Prisons into the Streets,” *Iran Wire*, February 28, 2017. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/4454>)

154. “Judge Mohammad Moghiseh,” *United for Iran: Iran Prison Atlas*, accessed October 25, 2018. (<https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/judge/9>)

155. Council Regulation No 359/2011 of 12 April 2011 Concerning Restrictive Measures Directed Against Certain Persons, Entities and Bodies in View of the Situation in Iran, *Official Journal of the European Union*. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/359/2017-04-13>)

156. “Five Years Imprisonment for Nasrin Sotoudeh, Prominent Iranian Human Rights Lawyer,” *Iran Human Rights*, August 18, 2018. (<https://iranhr.net/en/articles/3430>); Nasser Karimi, “Iran detains rights lawyer who defended headscarf protesters,” *Associated Press*, June 13, 2018. (<https://www.apnews.com/94fad1d19f7b4ef2b0ca3e04d18bea9e>)

rights activists and the fight against the death penalty,” Sotoudeh wrote in a letter from prison in July. “Still, I will not be silenced.”¹⁵⁷ Sotoudeh’s lawyers subsequently sued Moghiseh for the unlawful sentencing.¹⁵⁸

First imprisoned from 2010 to 2013 for her work on behalf of dissidents, Sotoudeh has received international acclaim for defending Iranian journalists, artists, political activists, protesters, and minors sentenced to death.¹⁵⁹ In 2018, Sotoudeh drew the regime’s ire for vocally defending women who refused, as part of nationwide demonstrations, to wear the mandatory hijab, or headscarf. After her latest detention, the Trump administration called for Sotoudeh’s release, but to no avail.¹⁶⁰

Moghiseh has achieved notoriety for his harsh sentences against members of the Bahai faith, whom the United Nations has described as Iran’s “most severely persecuted religious minority.”¹⁶¹ In 2010, for example, the judge sentenced seven Bahai leaders to 20 years in prison each, citing spurious charges that included espionage.¹⁶² At the trial, one of their lawyers told Moghiseh that he seemed more eager than the

prosecutor to punish his clients.¹⁶³ An appeals court later reduced their sentences to 10 years each.

Activists for an independent Kurdistan and members of Iran’s long-repressed Sunni minority have experienced similar fates. In 2014, Moghiseh sentenced four Sunni Kurds to death on charges of *moharebeh* and “acting against national security by supporting opposition Kurdish parties.” “They were not even given the right to defend themselves in court,” said a family member of one of the victims. “After their trial, Judge Moghiseh told them to ‘be quiet! You are Sunni dogs who must be hanged!’”¹⁶⁴

“Moghiseh has even targeted a U.S. citizen. In 2008, he sentenced Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi to eight years in prison on the charge of committing espionage for the United States.”

Moghiseh has even targeted a U.S. citizen. In 2008, he sentenced Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi to eight years in prison on the charge of committing

157. “Iran’s Nasrin Sotoudeh — from human rights lawyer to hunger striker,” *Deutsche Welle* (Germany), August 28, 2018. (<https://www.dw.com/en/irans-nasrin-sotoudeh-from-human-rights-lawyer-to-hunger-striker/a-45258892>)

158. “Nasrin Sotoudeh’s Lawyers Sue Judge Moghiseh For Unlawful Sentencing,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, October 4, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/10/nasrin-sotoudehs-lawyers-sue-judge-moghiseh-for-unlawful-sentencing>)

159. Robin Wright, “Iran’s Orwellian Arrest of Its Leading Female Human-Rights Lawyer,” *The New Yorker*, June 14, 2018. (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/irans-orwellian-arrest-of-a-leading-human-rights-lawyer>); Thomas Erdbrink, “Iran Frees Political Prisoners on Eve of President’s Visit to U.S.,” *The New York Times*, September 18, 2013. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/19/world/middleeast/iran-frees-political-prisoners-on-eve-of-presidents-visit-to-us.html>); European Parliament, Press Release, “Nasrin Sotoudeh and Jafar Panahi – winners of the 2012 Sakharov Prize,” October 26, 2012. (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20121024IPR54366/nasrin-sotoudeh-and-jafar-panahi-winners-of-the-2012-sakharov-prize>); PEN America, “PEN Honors Nasrin Sotoudeh with the 2011 PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award,” *YouTube*, April 30, 2011. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICH3vWr46go>)

160. U.S. Department of State, Press Release, “Arrest of Iranian Human Rights Lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh,” June 14, 2018. (<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/06/283240.htm>)

161. Kate Gilmore, “Introduction to country reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner under item 2,” *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, March 22, 2017. (<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21433&LangID=E>)

162. “Iran: Free Baha’i Leaders,” *Human Rights Watch*, August 10, 2010. (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/08/10/iran-free-bahai-leaders>)

163. Aida Ghajar, “Freed Baha’i Leader: Jailing Baha’is is Futile and Pointless,” *Iran Wire*, February 17, 2018. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/5177>)

164. “Four Sunni Kurds in Danger of Imminent Execution,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 21, 2014. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2014/06/sunni-prisoners>)

espionage for the United States. Facing intense U.S. and international pressure, however, an Iranian appeals court released her after 100 days in prison.¹⁶⁵

In the aftermath of mass demonstrations triggered by the 2009 disputed presidential elections, Moghiseh sentenced several Iranians to death, while numerous others received prolonged prison terms.¹⁶⁶ In 2014, Moghiseh sentenced eight Facebook users to a combined total of 123 years in jail for “propaganda against the state” and “blasphemy,” among other charges.¹⁶⁷ In 2015, after a trial that lasted only minutes, Moghiseh sentenced a filmmaker and two musicians to six years in prison for their work.¹⁶⁸ An appeals court later reduced their sentences to three years.¹⁶⁹

“In the aftermath of mass demonstrations triggered by the 2009 disputed presidential elections, Moghiseh sentenced several Iranians to death, while numerous others received prolonged prison terms.”

“What we saw in our numerous meetings with him,” said a lawyer who represented several 2009 protesters, “is that he is incapable of understanding the simplest judicial concepts and only serves as a signature machine for heavy and baseless sentences. No honest

judge would ever confirm his rulings.” Moghiseh and other judges, he added, have effectively transformed the judiciary into a subsidiary of Iran’s repressive Intelligence Ministry.¹⁷⁰

Before his arrival at the Revolutionary Court in the early 2000s, Moghiseh held supervisory and prosecutorial roles at three of Iran’s brutal prisons, where political dissidents often languish and endure torture.¹⁷¹ In 1988, Moghiseh played a key role in facilitating the nationwide, state-engineered Death Committees that collectively massacred thousands of political opponents. According to a 2011 report compiling survivor testimonies, several eyewitnesses accused Moghiseh “of actually hanging prisoners and participating in their torture.” Others told stories of Moghiseh “supervising the death sentences and the tortures,” “bringing prisoners before the Death Committees and sometimes making critical remarks about them to the judges,” and “putting prisoners they disliked in the wrong queue for execution.”¹⁷²

165. Roxana Saberi, *Between Two Worlds: My Life and Captivity in Iran* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

166. “Men of Violence: Perpetrators of the Post-Election Crackdown,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 2010, pages 22-23. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Men-of-Violence-c-ICHRI-2010-21.pdf>)

167. “Eight Facebook Users Sentenced to Decades in Prison,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 27, 2014. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2014/05/facebook-sentence>)

168. “Artists, Activists Send Letter to Rouhani Demanding Release of Imprisoned Music Producers,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 1, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/06/artists-activists-send-letter-to-rouhani-demanding-release-of-imprisoned-music-producers>); “Iranian filmmaker and musicians jailed after three-minute trial,” *Amnesty International*, August 17, 2016. (<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/iranian-filmmaker-and-musicians-jailed-after-three-minute-trial>); OstanWire, “Artists Sentenced to Prison,” *Iran Wire*, December 11, 2015. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/1496>)

169. “Iranian Political Prisoner With Multiple Sclerosis Refused Medical Furlough,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 7, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/06/iranian-political-prisoner-with-multiple-sclerosis-refused-medical-furlough>)

170. “Men of Violence: Perpetrators of the Post-Election Crackdown,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 2010, page 22. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Men-of-Violence-c-ICHRI-2010-21.pdf>)

171. “Human Rights Violator: Mohammad Moghiseh,” *Justice for Iran*, September 12, 2017. (<https://justice4iran.org/human-rights-violator-s-profiles/mohammad-moghiseh>)

172. Geoffrey Robertson, “The Massacre of Political Prisoners in Iran, 1988,” *Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation*, April 18, 2011, page 115. (https://www.iranrights.org/attachments/library/doc_118.pdf)



Asghar Jahangir

Head of Iran's Prisons Organization

On August 31, 2018, an exiled Iranian Dervish activist accused Tehran of violating its own prison regulations by allowing seven Dervish women to suffer “appalling” conditions in jail.¹⁷³ “The Dervish women are weak physically after having been beaten before and after their transfer to the prison,” said Alireza Roshan, whose minority community practices a form of Islam considered deviant by the clerical regime. “But prison officials are not allowing them to receive needed medical treatment.”¹⁷⁴

These allegations remain consistent with systemic patterns of abuse by Iran’s Prisons Organization and its director, Asghar Jahangir. In a March 2018 report, the office of the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Iran described Iran’s penitentiaries as “inhuman and degrading.” Prisoners have endured “the denial of medical care” as well as “inadequate accommodation; imprisonment in cramped cells; inadequate provision of

food and water; unhygienic conditions; and restricted access to toilet facilities.”¹⁷⁵ In Evin Prison, for example, one shower serves up to 200 people, while as many as 28 prisoners reside in a cramped 20-square-meter cell.¹⁷⁶ At the same time, physical and psychological torture by prison officials, including rape, is common.

“Physical and psychological torture by prison officials, including rape, is common.”

Jahangir has attributed some of the hardships in prison to financial constraints. “Our budget is not enough to run the prisons properly,” he said in a moment of candor in December 2017. “Prisons in the Islamic Republic have two times more inmates than their capacity. We are incapable of properly feeding our prisoners three times a day.”¹⁷⁷ Yet as the experiences of countless detainees suggest, Tehran deliberately

173. A version of this profile originally appeared as a policy brief for the Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies: Tzvi Kahn, “New Reports of Abuse Reinforce Case for Sanctions on Iran’s Prisons,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, September 12, 2018. (<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/tzvi-kahn-new-reports-of-abuse-reinforce-case-for-sanctions-on-irans-prisons>)

174. Michael Lipin and Shahram Bahraminejad, “Activist: Prison Conditions of Dervish Women Violate Iran Prison Laws,” *Voice of America*, September 6, 2018. (<https://www.voanews.com/a/activist-prison-conditions-of-dervish-women-violates-iran-prison-laws/4561508.html>)

175. United Nations Human Rights Council, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” A/HRC/37/68, March 12, 2018, page 7. (<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/37/68>)

176. Tony Duheume, “Treatment of women in Iran’s brutal prison system,” *Al-Arabiya* (UAE), May 30, 2018. (<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2018/05/30/Treatment-of-women-in-Iran-s-brutal-prison-system.html>)

177. “MPs Promise To Visit Tehran’s Notorious Prison,” *Radio Farda*, January 12, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-parliament-members-to-visit-evin-prison/28971081.html>)

deprives inmates of basic needs – conduct that violates the Prisons Organization’s own regulations.¹⁷⁸

For example, in November 2017, prisoners in Rajae Shahr Prison found cigarette butts, Band-Aids, and pieces of rocks in their food, prompting one of them, labor rights activist Reza Shahabi, to write a letter of complaint to Jahangir.¹⁷⁹ Shahabi and several other inmates also waged hunger strikes to protest their detention.¹⁸⁰ But while Tehran released Shahabi in March 2018,¹⁸¹ Rajae Shahr Prison remains unreformed.

“Prisoners in Rajae Shahr Prison found cigarette butts, Band-Aids, and pieces of rocks in their food.”

According to Jahangir, Iran’s prison population continues to grow at a staggering rate. Between 1985 and 2016, he said, the number of prisoners increased by 333 percent, while Iran’s total population increased only by 66 percent.¹⁸² Today, approximately a quarter of a million people reside in more than 200 jails across Iran.¹⁸³ These numbers have surged during moments of crisis; Jahangir acknowledged that Tehran arrested

4,972 people during the first month of nationwide protests that began in late 2017.¹⁸⁴

Jahangir retains ties to other individuals and institutions under U.S. sanctions for human rights abuses. Before his appointment in April 2014, Jahangir served as an advisor to Sadeqh Amoli Larijani, the head of Iran’s judiciary,¹⁸⁵ whom the Trump administration designated for presiding over the execution and torture of prisoners. Similarly, President Trump has sanctioned Rajae Shahr Prison and its director; Evin Prison, Iran’s most notorious jail; and the Tehran Prisons Organization, a subsidiary of Iran’s Prisons Organization, and one of its previous directors.¹⁸⁶ Jahangir, however, remains absent from U.S. sanctions lists.

178. “Rights Disregarded: Prisons in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center*, March 19, 2015. (<https://iranhrdc.org/rights-disregarded-prisons-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran>)

179. “Rajae Shahr Prison Inmates Fed With Livestock Feed,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, November 17, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/11/rajae-shahr-prison-inmates-fed-with-livestock-feed>)

180. “Labor Activist In Critical Condition,” *Radio Farda*, September 1, 2017. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/reza-shahabi-health-critical/28708946.html>)

181. Mahrokh Gholamhosseinpour, “The Tehran Bus Driver Who Never Gave up the Struggle,” *Iran Wire*, August 20, 2018. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/5490>)

182. “Iran’s Overcrowded Prisons Hold A Quarter of A Million People, Says Chief Warden,” *Radio Farda*, May 12, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-s-overcrowded-prisons-hold-a-quarter-of-a-million-people-says-chief-warden-/29222716.html>)

183. “Prisons,” *United for Iran*, accessed October 25, 2018. (<https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prison>)

184. “Iran: Another Human Rights Defender Arrested In Sanandaj,” *Iran Human Rights Monitor*, February 8, 2018. (<https://iran-hrm.com/index.php/2018/02/08/iran-another-human-rights-defender-arrested-sanandaj>)

185. “Iran removes official in charge of prisons,” *Associated Press*, April 23, 2014. (<https://www.apnews.com/60fab454163b4bf18422a022ad4bb5fd>)

186. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Targets Human Rights Abuses, Censorship, and Enhanced Monitoring by the Iranian Government,” May 30, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0397>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Individuals and Entities for Human Rights Abuses and Censorship in Iran, and Support to Sanctioned Weapons Proliferators,” January 12, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0250>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Takes Action to Target Serious Human Rights Abuses in Iran,” April 13, 2017. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm0043.aspx>)



Seyyed Alireza Avaei

Minister of Justice

In February 2018, as the regime in Iran continued to suppress nationwide protests, Tehran’s minister of justice, Seyyed Alireza Avaei, ascended the dais of the UN Human Rights Council and accused Western countries of hypocrisy.¹⁸⁷ These states, declared Seyyed Alireza Avaei, “have exploited human rights for political ends,” and have applied “double standards” against nations “having different political and cultural values and traditions, thus challenging the credibility of United Nations human rights machinery.”¹⁸⁸

Avaei had no right to speak on the issue. As the U.S. Mission to the UN noted in a statement before his address, Avaei is “responsible for some of the worst human rights violations in Iran, including preventing political freedoms and promoting repression, violence, and extrajudicial killings of political prisoners.”¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, while the European Union sanctioned

Avaei for his human rights abuses in 2011, Washington has yet to follow suit.¹⁹⁰

“While the European Union sanctioned Avaei for his human rights abuses in 2011, Washington has yet to follow suit.”

Appointed by President Rouhani in 2017 upon the recommendation of judiciary chief Sadegh Amoli Larijani, who answers directly to Supreme Leader Khamenei, Avaei arrived at the Ministry of Justice following a notorious career as a prosecutor and judge. In 1988, as part of the nationwide massacre of political dissidents, Avaei facilitated crimes against humanity by serving as a member of a three-man Death Committee. Avaei’s victims included some below the age of 18. His committee denied prisoners any form of due process. Sentences often followed imprisonments marked by torture.¹⁹¹ According to one eyewitness of Avaei’s

187. A version of this profile originally appeared in *Iran Wire*: Tzvi Kahn, “The US Must Put Minister of Justice on Sanctions List,” *Iran Wire*, July 5, 2018. (<https://iranwire.com/en/blogs/26/5394>)

188. United Nations, “Islamic Republic of Iran, High-Level Segment - 6th Meeting, 37th Regular Session Human Rights Council,” February 27, 2018. (<http://webtv.un.org/search/islamic-republic-of-iran-high-level-segment-6th-meeting-37th-regular-session-human-rights-council-/5740975811001>)

189. United States Mission to the United Nations, Press Release, “Ambassador Haley on Iran Human Rights Violator Speaking at UN Human Rights Council,” February 25, 2018. (<https://usun.state.gov/remarks/8322>)

190. Council Regulation No 359/2011 of 12 April 2011 Concerning Restrictive Measures Directed Against Certain Persons, Entities and Bodies in View of the Situation in Iran, *Official Journal of the European Union*. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/359/2017-04-13>)

191. “Deadly Fatwa: Iran’s 1988 Prison Massacre,” *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center*, September 2009. (<https://iranhrdc.org/deadly-fatwa-irans-1988-prison-massacre>)

tribunal, the “trial of 60 people had lasted less than one hour.”¹⁹²

As the head of Tehran Province’s judiciary from 2005 to 2014, Avaei played a key role in the persecution of dissidents. In the wake of the 2009 Green Revolution, Avaei oversaw the show trials of hundreds of Iranian protesters, resulting in mass incarcerations. At least three Iranians subsequently died in jail under torture.¹⁹³ In one of the prisons under Avaei’s jurisdiction, inmates allegedly endured sexual abuse through the use of batons and soda bottles.¹⁹⁴ A year later, in an interview with *Kayhan*, a regime mouthpiece, Avaei defended the judiciary’s handling of the demonstrators.¹⁹⁵

Today, under Avaei’s leadership, the Ministry of Justice continues to facilitate repression by managing the judiciary’s finances and serving as an advocate for its policies and interests before the Iranian parliament and the president’s cabinet.

In its public statements, the ministry pays lip service to human rights. On its website, the ministry claims to combat corruption, investigates complaints against the judiciary, protects the rights of Iranian expatriates,

and enforces international human rights statutes such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁹⁶ In 2015, it established a Department of Human Rights and International Affairs, which purportedly aims to promote civil liberties.¹⁹⁷ In his UN speech, Avaei cited President Rouhani’s publication of a Charter on Citizens’ Rights, which would ostensibly halt the regime’s human rights abuses.¹⁹⁸

“The execution of juveniles persists. Regime corruption abounds. Multiple dual nationals languish behind bars. Rouhani has yet to implement the charter. And Avaei’s ministry remains unreformed.”

Still, the execution of juveniles persists.¹⁹⁹ Regime corruption abounds.²⁰⁰ Multiple dual nationals languish behind bars.²⁰¹ Rouhani has yet to implement the charter. And Avaei’s ministry remains unreformed.

192. “The Massacre of Political Prisoners in Iran, 1988: An Addendum,” *Abdorrabman Boroumand Foundation*, 2013, page 43. (https://www.iranrights.org/attachments/library/doc_361.pdf)

193. “Human Rights Violator: Seyyed Ali-RezaAvaei,” *Justice for Iran*, November 23, 2011. (<https://justice4iran.org/human-rights-violator-s-profiles/human-rights-violator-seyyed-ali-rezaavaei>)

194. Mark Tran, “Iranian MP claims sexual abuse of protesters has been proved,” *The Guardian* (UK), August 27, 2009. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/27/iran-ayatollah-khamenei-us-uk>)

195. “Human Rights Violator: Seyyed Ali-RezaAvaei,” *Justice for Iran*, November 23, 2011. (<https://justice4iran.org/human-rights-violator-s-profiles/human-rights-violator-seyyed-ali-rezaavaei>)

196. Ministry of Justice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, “Ministry of Justice – Job description,” accessed October 25, 2018. (<http://justice.ir/Portal/View/Page.aspx?PageId=53cd90a2-770a-431c-bb86-d7b7430b1ca5&WebpartId=8a72382f-70e6-4a96-9327-9a941ccdb588>)

197. Ministry of Justice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, “A Glimpse of the Department of Human Rights and International Affairs,” accessed October 25, 2018. (<http://justice.ir/Portal/View/Page.aspx?PageId=46e666f2-1c40-43a0-bd7b-155ce797277e&t=10>)

198. United Nations, “Islamic Republic of Iran, High-Level Segment - 6th Meeting, 37th Regular Session Human Rights Council,” February 27, 2018. (<http://webtv.un.org/search/islamic-republic-of-iran-high-level-segment-6th-meeting-37th-regular-session-human-rights-council-/5740975811001>)

199. “UN calls on Iran to stop ‘surge’ of juvenile executions,” *Deutsche Welle* (Germany), February 16, 2018. (<https://www.dw.com/en/un-calls-on-iran-to-stop-surge-of-juvenile-executions/a-42617634>)

200. Mark Dubowitz and Saeed Ghasseminejad, “Hit Ayatollah Khamenei in His Pocketbook,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 2018. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/hit-ayatollah-khamenei-in-his-pocketbook-1516666405>)

201. “Who Are the Dual Nationals Imprisoned in Iran?” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 24, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/05/who-are-the-dual-nationals-imprisoned-in-iran>)



Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi

*Minister of Information and
Communications Technology*

Days after nationwide protests began in late 2017, Iran's minister of information and communications technology (ICT) sounded an alarm.²⁰² "A Telegram channel is encouraging hateful conduct, use of Molotov cocktails, armed uprising, and social unrest," wrote Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi in a tweet directed at the messaging app's CEO. "Now is the time to stop such encouragements via Telegram."²⁰³ While Telegram ultimately blocked the offending channel,²⁰⁴ the minister's call marked the onset of a censorship campaign that included blocking the country's access to Telegram in its entirety for nearly two weeks in January 2018.²⁰⁵

The suppression of online communications constitutes a key function of the ICT Ministry, which administers a vast telecommunications infrastructure that not only blocks millions of websites but also aids Tehran's efforts to monitor dissidents. While the Trump administration

has sanctioned several prominent Iranian individuals and entities responsible for cyber repression,²⁰⁶ the ICT Ministry itself and its current leader have escaped Washington's attention.

Keenly aware that Iranians utilized social media to organize protests in 2009 and again in recent months, Tehran fears the internet's role in promoting resistance. At the same time, the mullahs worry that cyber space provides access to Western ideas and ideals that contradict their radical Islamist ideology, thereby challenging the Islamic Republic's fundamental legitimacy. These concerns guide Tehran's internet suppression, which the regime executes through the ICT Ministry and a complex web of other governmental organizations, including the IRGC and the Ministry of Intelligence. In June 2017, then-ICT Minister Mahmoud Vaezi claimed that his ministry, during

202. A version of this profile originally appeared in *The Cipher Brief*: Tzvi Kahn, "U.S. Should Sanction Iran's ICT Minister," *The Cipher Brief*, July 26, 2018. (<https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column/opinion/u-s-should-sanction-irans-ict-minister>)

203. @azarijahromi, "@Durov: A Telegram channel is encouraging hateful conduct, use of Molotov cocktails, armed uprising, and social unrest. NOW is the time to stop such encouragements via Telegram," *Twitter*, December 30, 2018. (<https://twitter.com/azarijahromi/status/947098403531640832>)

204. "Durov's Channel," *Telegram*, December 31, 2017. (<https://t.me/durov/69>)

205. "Iran Unblocks Widely Used Messaging App Telegram After Two Weeks," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, January 12, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/01/iran-unblocks-widely-used-messaging-app-telegram-after-two-weeks>); Elizabeth Weise, "Iran blocks messaging app Telegram used by protesters," *USA Today*, January 2, 2018. (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2018/01/02/iran-blocks-messaging-app-used-protesters-share-info-demonstrations/998445001>)

206. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Targets Human Rights Abuses, Censorship, and Enhanced Monitoring by the Iranian Government," May 30, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0397>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Sanctions Individuals and Entities for Human Rights Abuses and Censorship in Iran, and Support to Sanctioned Weapons Proliferators," January 12, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0250>)

President Rouhani's first term, had closed seven million websites and blocked 121,000 programs enabling users to evade government censors.²⁰⁷

The ICT Ministry runs the Telecommunications Infrastructure Company (TIC), the developer of the National Information Network (NIN) – a state-controlled national internet, or intranet, that offers Iranians key online services, such as email and banking, aimed at dissuading Iranians from accessing foreign websites.²⁰⁸ The NIN's distinct search engines often lead to falsified or predatory content: A search for "2009 protests," for example, directs users to pages with malware, thereby exposing them to possible surveillance.²⁰⁹ In effect, the NIN is designed to spy on Iranians and limit their contact to the outside world.

The ICT minister retains a seat on the 27-member Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC), the regime's highest authority on internet use, which Supreme Leader Khamenei established in 2012 to centralize cyber space policymaking.²¹⁰ The Committee Charged with Determining Offensive Content (SSDOC) serves as a bridge between the SCC and its key subordinate bodies, including the ICT Ministry, by providing recommendations of specific websites that warrant censorship.²¹¹

President Rouhani appointed Jahromi as ICT minister in August 2017 after he served four years as deputy ICT minister.²¹² From 2002 to 2009, Jahromi worked in the security division of Iran's Intelligence Ministry.²¹³ From 2009 to 2013, he helped develop the Intelligence Ministry's online surveillance infrastructure.²¹⁴ In 2009, he reportedly assisted security forces in detaining and interrogating Iranians who participated in nationwide protests. In 2016, he became the CEO of the TIC, giving him a leading role in developing the NIN. Before Jahromi's appointment as ICT minister, one anxious Iranian lawmaker warned that he might transform the ICT Ministry into a "second Intelligence Ministry."²¹⁵

“The NIN's distinct search engines often lead to falsified or predatory content: A search for '2009 protests,' for example, leads users to pages with malware, thereby exposing them to possible surveillance. In effect, the NIN is designed to spy on Iranians and limit their contact to the outside world.”

Still, like Rouhani, Jahromi has tried to cultivate the image of a moderate and a reformer, routinely

207. "Rouhani Government 'Closed Seven Million' Websites in First Term," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 8, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/06/rouhani-government-closed-seven-million-websites>)

208. "Guards at the Gate: The Expanding State Control Over the Internet in Iran," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, January 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/EN-Guards-at-the-gate-High-quality.pdf>)

209. "Iran Tightens Internet Censorship by Requiring Government Agencies to Use State-Approved Search Engines," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 18, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/05/iran-tightens-internet-censorship-by-requiring-government-agencies-to-use-state-approved-search-engines>)

210. "Iran's Supreme Leader sets up body to oversee internet," *BBC (UK)*, March 14, 2012. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17288785>)

211. "Tightening the Net Part 2: The Soft War and Cyber Tactics in Iran," *Article 19*, 2017, page 19. (https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38619/Iran_report_part_2-FINAL.pdf)

212. "Iran parliament approves Rouhani cabinet nominees, rejects one," *Tehran Times (Iran)*, August 20, 2017. (<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/416079/Iran-parliament-approves-Rouhani-cabinet-nominees-rejects-one>)

213. "Rouhani Could Appoint Surveillance Expert From Ahmadinejad Era to Telecommunications Ministry," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, August 3, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/08/rouhani-could-appoint-surveillance-expert-from-ahmadinejad-era-to-telecommunications-ministry>)

214. "Rouhani Cabinet Pick Linked to Mass Surveillance of 2009 Protesters," *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, August 16, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/08/rouhani-cabinet-pick-linked-to-mass-surveillance-of-2009-protesters>)

215. Golnaz Esfandiari, "Alleged Role In State Crackdown Haunts Rohani's New Communications Minister," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 20, 2017. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-jahromi-allegations-surveillance-interrogations-intelligence-ministry/28686488.html>)

affirming the importance of internet freedom.²¹⁶ But his actions speak louder than his words. In April 2018, for example, the regime, upon the directive of the SCC, banned Telegram once again.²¹⁷ Jahromi condemned the decision – but subsequently moved to block online circumvention tools aimed at bypassing regime censorship,²¹⁸ contending that they “have anti-security characteristics.”²¹⁹ Previously, in October 2017, he vowed to block “anti-revolutionary channels” on Telegram.²²⁰

The Obama administration sanctioned the SSDOC and previous ICT minister Reza Taghipour,²²¹ while the Trump administration has sanctioned the SCC and its secretary, Abolhassan Firouzabadi, as well as the SSDOC’s secretary, Abdolsamad Khoramabadi.²²² The United States should now build upon these steps by designating Jahromi, the ICT Ministry, and the TIC.

216. “Closing of the Gates: Implications of Iran’s Ban on the Telegram Messaging App,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 2018, pages 28-29. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Closing-the-gates-3-online.pdf>); “Proposed ICT Minister Promises More, Better Internet,” *Tehran Times* (Iran), August 16, 2017. (<https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-sci-tech/70387/proposed-ict-minister-promises-more-better-internet>)

217. Thomas Erdbrink, “Iran, Like Russia Before It, Tries to Block Telegram App,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2018. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/01/world/middleeast/iran-telegram-app-russia.html>)

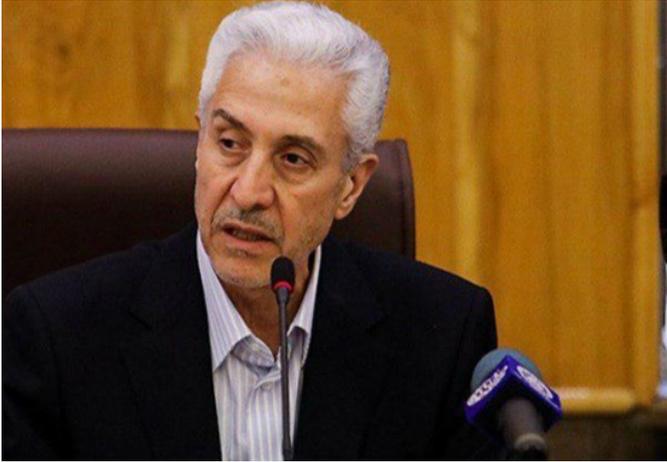
218. “Iranians Complain of Fake Accounts Created in Their Names on State-Approved Soroush App,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 1, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/06/iranians-complain-of-fake-accounts-created-in-their-names-on-state-approved-soroush-app>); Golnaz Esfandiari, “Iranian Expats Launch Own Telegram ‘With Built-In Proxy’ To Counter Filtering At Home,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 2, 2018. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/iranian-expats-launch-own-telegram-with-built-in-proxy-to-counter-filtering-at-home-/29204673.html>)

219. “Closing of the Gates: Implications of Iran’s Ban on the Telegram Messaging App,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 2018, page 35. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Closing-the-gates-3-online.pdf>)

220. “Iranian Officials Increase Pressure on Telegram App to Comply With Censorship Policies,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, October 10, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/10/telecom-minister-threatens-to-censor-telegram-app-after-dissident-channel-publishes-spy-report>)

221. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “United States Takes Action to Facilitate Communications by the Iranian People and Targets Iranian Government Censorship,” May 30, 2018. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl1961.aspx>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Iranian Government and Affiliates,” November 8, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1760.aspx>)

222. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Targets Human Rights Abuses, Censorship, and Enhanced Monitoring by the Iranian Government,” May 30, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0397>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Individuals and Entities for Human Rights Abuses and Censorship in Iran, and Support to Sanctioned Weapons Proliferators,” January 12, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0250>)



Mansour Gholami

*Minister of Science, Research,
and Technology*

In July 2018, Iran sentenced scores of students to lengthy prison terms for peacefully protesting against the clerical regime.²²³ These punishments, which followed the arrests of more than 150 student demonstrators since nationwide protests that began in late 2017,²²⁴ prompted fierce denunciations on Iranian campuses. Nearly 70 student associations issued a joint statement vowing not to permit “the totalitarian forces to target freedom and liberty again.”²²⁵

The fate of Iran’s young protesters reflects the work of Mansour Gholami, the minister of science, research, and technology, who presides over Iran’s higher education system. The ministry has waged a decades-long campaign of repression against Iranian students, who routinely face imprisonment, expulsion, and denial of admission for defying Tehran’s radical Islamist ideology.

In the regime’s view, Iranian universities aim not merely to prepare citizens for careers or to transmit knowledge for its own sake. Rather, higher education is designed to inculcate students with the values of the Islamic Revolution, thereby ensuring their perpetuation. As Supreme Leader Khamenei declared in 2015, universities retain “the purpose of creating the new Islamic civilization.” University administrators, he added, “should plan all tasks on the basis of this.”²²⁶

This objective guides the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT), which screens university applicants for loyalty to the regime. The ministry also shapes curricula, administers entrance exams, and appoints and dismisses faculty in accordance with Tehran’s revolutionary creed. In a 2012 open letter, 17 human rights and student groups criticized the MSRT for instituting “a program of ‘adapting’ certain fields of study to Islamic ideology,” which violates “academic freedom through direct

223. A version of this profile originally appeared in *The Hill*: Tzvi Kahn, “US should sanction Iran’s higher education minister,” *The Hill*, August 5, 2018. (<http://thehill.com/opinion/international/400394-us-should-sanction-irans-higher-education-minister>); “Lecturers Urge Rouhani To Support Prosecuted Students,” *Radio Farda*, July 17, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/lecturers-urge-rouhani-to-support-prosecuted-students/29372362.html>)

224. “Iran is Imprisoning University Students Accused of Attending Protests,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, July 13, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/07/iran-is-imprisoning-university-students-accused-of-attending-protests>)

225. “Rights Activists Warn Against Student Crackdown,” *Radio Farda*, July 24, 2018. (<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/rights-activists-warn-against-student-crackdown-29388146.html>)

226. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, “Universities Should Play Their Part in Shaping the New Islamic Civilization,” *Official Website of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei*, November 11, 2015. (<http://english.khamenei.ir/news/2446/Universities-Should-Play-Their-Part-in-Shaping-the-New-Islamic>)

“censorship and ideological control.”²²⁷ To enforce its policies, the MSRT routinely collaborates with Iran’s Intelligence Ministry, which monitors and arrests students and faculty on campuses.

The Bahai confront the greatest challenges in obtaining an education. Tehran’s refusal to recognize the Bahai as a protected religious minority renders them ineligible to attend university.²²⁸ Bahai who conceal their faith to gain admission face the possibility of expulsion if their true identity emerges. This reality prompted the Bahai, in 1987, to establish the Bahai Institute for Higher Education, an underground university that offers courses online and in covert locations throughout the country, such as living rooms and basements.²²⁹

“To enforce its policies, the MSRT routinely collaborates with Iran’s Intelligence Ministry, which monitors and arrests students and faculty on campuses.”

Appointed by President Rouhani in October 2017,²³⁰ Gholami enforces and defends this censorious system. As a former professor and chancellor at Bu-Ali Sina

University in western Iran, Gholami retains a history of suppressing student voices. In the days after Rouhani announced the pick, hundreds of students staged protests, accusing Gholami of suspending students who criticize the regime. They also alleged that he prevented the establishment of some student associations and publications. The demonstrators further noted that the appointment betrayed Rouhani’s campaign promises to promote greater freedom on campus.²³¹

“Introducing Gholami for the Science Ministry is a mockery of all the hopes students had when they campaigned during the elections,” one student lamented on Twitter.²³² Another student tweeted: “Let Gholami stay with us Bu-Ali Sina students, we’re used to political and security suffocation.”²³³

Since his ascent to the MSRT, Gholami has sought to deflect criticism by issuing false statements about the ministry’s behavior. In December 2017, for example, he claimed that universities admit students without evaluating their political beliefs,²³⁴ prompting a student group to release a statement describing the assertion as “an insult to everyone’s intelligence, especially students.” Two banned students protested Gholami’s contention outside the ministry. “We want him to explain why at least 100 students have been banned this year,” one of them said.²³⁵

227. “Joint Statement on the Right to Education and Academic Freedom in Iran,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, May 31, 2012. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2012/05/joint-statement>)

228. Lipika Pelham, “Studying at the Bahai secret university,” *BBC* (UK), January 18, 2017. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38656871>)

229. Neha Thirani Bagri, “Why Yale and Columbia are accepting students from a university that holds classes in a basement in Tehran,” *Quartz*, March 28, 2017. (<https://qz.com/934700/a-clandestine-university-has-been-educating-bahais-in-iran-for-30-years>)

230. “Iranian Parliament approves Rouhani’s picks to head science, energy ministries,” *Press TV* (Iran), October 29, 2017. (<https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2017/10/29/540271/Iran-Parliament-Hassan-Rouhani-Mansour-Gholami-Reza-Ardekanian-confidence-vote>)

231. “University Student Groups Decry Security Climate on Campus, Rising Costs and Gender Segregation,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, April 24, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/04/university-student-groups-decry-security-climate>)

232. “Students, MPs Protest Against Rouhani’s Conservative Nominee for Iran’s Science Ministry,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, October 24, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/10/students-mps-protest-against-rouhanis-conservative-nominee-for-irans-science-ministry>)

233. Golnaz Esfandiari, “Iranian President Looks For Right Formula In Picking Science Minister,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 24, 2017. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-rohani-science-minister-khamenei-gholami/28813236.html>)

234. Aida Ghajar, “Science Minister Lies About Blacklisted Students,” *Iran Wire*, December 21, 2017. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/5049>)

235. “Students Challenge Minister’s Claim That No One in Iran is Banned From University for Political Reasons,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, December 21, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/12/students-challenge-ministers-claim-that-no-one-in-iran-is-banned-from-university-for-political-reasons>)



Abbas Salehi

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance

In April 2018, the regime in Iran announced an ostensible concession to the country’s beleaguered, long-censored journalists: Tehran would offer 100 of them unrestricted internet access.²³⁶ But there was a catch: The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) would need to vet all candidates for loyalty to the regime’s Islamist ideology. Multiple Iranian journalists quickly called out the charade on Twitter. One described the proposal as “favoritism and hush money.” Another declared that access to cyber space “is a right, not a favor.” Several said they would not apply, using the hashtag “I’m not interested.”²³⁷

Since the 1980s, the MCIG has played a leading role in suppressing political and cultural speech that contradicts Tehran’s revolutionary creed. But while the Obama administration sanctioned the ministry in 2012

for engaging in censorship,²³⁸ it has yet to designate its current minister, Abbas Salehi.

According to its website, the MCIG seeks the protection of “society from influence of alien cultures” and the promotion of the “values of the Islamic Revolution based on the school of thought and political outlook” of Iran’s first supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.²³⁹ To advance these objectives, the MCIG vigorously vets books, museum exhibitions, television stations, music, concerts, the fashion industry, and theatrical performances, all of which require a permit from the ministry. The regime has even edited Western classics like *War and Peace* and *Crime and Punishment* by removing references to alcohol and sexuality.²⁴⁰

The MCIG’s Press Supervisory Board, which the Obama administration sanctioned in 2012,²⁴¹ issues

²³⁶ A version of this profile originally appeared in *Providence*: Tzvi Kahn, “Censorship and Sanctions: Should the US Sanction Iran’s Minister of Culture?” *Providence*, August 9, 2018. (<https://providencemag.com/2018/08/ministry-culture-islamic-guidance-mcig-us-sanction-iran-minister-culture-abbas-salehi>)

²³⁷ “Rouhani Admin Facing Backlash Over Plan to Give 100 Vetted Journalists Uncensored Internet Access,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, April 9, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/04/rouhani-admin-facing-backlash-over-plan-to-give-100-vetted-journalists-uncensored-internet-access>)

²³⁸ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Sanctions Iranian Government and Affiliates,” November 8, 2012. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1760.aspx>)

²³⁹ Iranian Ministry of Culture & Islamic Guidance, “Introduction of Ministry,” accessed October 25, 2018. (<https://www.farhang.gov.ir/en/profileofministry/responsibilities>)

²⁴⁰ Firouz Farzani, “The Menace of Censorship,” *Iran Wire*, July 26, 2017. (<https://iranwire.com/en/blogs/879/4729>)

²⁴¹ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Public Affairs, “Fact Sheet: Sanctions on Iranian Government and Affiliates,” November 8, 2012, page 3. (<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Sanctions%20on%20Iranian%20Govt%20and%20Affiliates%20-%20November%208,%202012.pdf>)

licenses for print and online media, monitors their content, and recurrently shuts down publications that flout its will. The ministry's leader also serves on the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, which issues directives to monitor dissidents and ban objectionable websites. According to Mostafa Mir-salim, who led the MCIG from 1994 to 1997, journalism is "not a profession. Rather, it must be perceived as an ideological mission aimed at confronting the cultural onslaught" from the West.²⁴²

One journalist from an international outlet recalled how the MCIG exerted control:

Two days after I applied to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for accreditation, I received a call to discuss my situation. They asked me to go to a hotel. I asked who I was talking to, knowing full well it was the brothers from intelligence. Two men were waiting for me there. Very politely, they made it clear that I should not cross the red lines, which are covering Khamenei or the opposition and, in general, showing "the decline in the situation." Sometimes they sent me phrases to insert in my articles. For them, neutrality and balance meant censorship. I cooperated during the two years I was in Iran.²⁴³

Iranians who publicize their work without a license frequently face imprisonment and torture. At the same time, the receipt of a license presents no guarantee of immunity: The regime routinely arrests Iranians for releasing content or conducting performances already approved by the ministry. This seemingly arbitrary persecution has fueled a culture of fear that often leads to self-censorship.

In a November 2017 interview, Golnaz Ghabraei, an Iranian literary critic who fled the country in 1985, described the phenomenon vividly. "Self-censorship," she said, "is having a sprawling Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in your brain that consistently supervises you, your thoughts and your behavior day and the night." Such omnipresent fear, she added, exercises a devastating psychological impact. "The more costly the price for showing your true self," she said, "the more the true self retreats until you cannot recognize it anymore. Sometimes the true self is lost forever."²⁴⁴

“By posing as an innocuous educational movement, these institutions aim not only to cultivate international support for Iran’s regional agenda but also to bolster the regime’s legitimacy on the global stage.”

In addition to policing the public square, the ministry actively disseminates content that promotes the regime's Islamist values. Through cultural centers and mosques worldwide, the MCIG distributes books, film, music, and art; teaches the Persian language; conducts Quran events and competitions; and runs summer camps for youth. By posing as an innocuous educational movement, these institutions aim not only to cultivate international support for Iran's regional agenda but also to bolster the regime's legitimacy on the global stage.

Appointed by President Rouhani in August 2017,²⁴⁵ Salehi has continued to guide the MCIG's repressive policies. Like his boss, Salehi has attempted to cultivate an image of moderation, often blaming other, seemingly more hardline clerics for the ministry's

242. Farideh Farhi, "Cultural Policies in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, November 16-17, 2004. (<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/FaridehFarhiFinal.pdf>)

243. "Revolution anniversary – 39 years of news control and censorship in Iran," *Reporters Without Borders*, February 13, 2018. (<https://rsf.org/en/news/revolution-anniversary-39-years-news-control-and-censorship-iran>)

244. Mohammad Tangestani, "Religious Societies Promote Self-Censorship," *Iran Wire*, November 2, 2017. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/4947>)

245. "Abbas Salehi Approved as Culture Minister," *Financial Tribune* (Iran), August 21, 2017. (<https://financialtribune.com/articles/art-and-culture/70724/abbas-salehi-approved-as-culture-minister>)

failure to reform.²⁴⁶ But this rhetoric serves as a fig leaf for an inherently repressive government body established to facilitate censorship and advance the regime's revolutionary agenda.

In January 2018, for example, in the Iranian city of Isfahan, local MCIG officials prevented female members of an orchestra, led by prominent male singer Salar Aghili, from performing. The day after the show, Salehi declared that he had “no problem” with women playing on stage, but added that the ministry’s “general rules need to be followed” for now.²⁴⁷

Later that month, after Mehdi Karroubi, an Iranian opposition leader under house arrest, released a public letter to President Rouhani urging him to address the demands of Iranian protesters, the MCIG prohibited state-approved media outlets from reporting about it.²⁴⁸

Under Salehi's leadership, the MCIG has even tried to prevent filmmakers from releasing their work in other countries. In 2017, after Tehran banned director Abdolreza Kahani from distributing one of his movies in Iran, Kahani signed deals to screen it in Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Czech Republic, France, and Australia. But Kahani ultimately cancelled the agreements after the MCIG threatened to ban the release of his next picture, which Kahani had already completed at great cost, in Iran.²⁴⁹ In a related development, the Directors Guild of Iran in May 2018

issued a statement calling on Salehi to lift the regime's longstanding ban on the professional activities of Iranian movie stars who worked in the film industry before the 1979 revolution.²⁵⁰ Salehi has yet to do so.

In July 2018, Tehran announced that it had arrested 46 members of what it described as an online “modeling ring” active in the fashion industry.²⁵¹ In September 2018, Tehran halted performances of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* after the MCIG declined to grant the production a permit. Judicial authorities arrested the director and one of his colleagues, whom they ultimately released after they posted a bail of 300 million tomans, or more than \$72,000.²⁵²

246. “Iran’s Culture Minister Says He’s Trying to ‘Transform’ Conservative Clerics’ Views on Music,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, December 8, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/12/irans-culture-minister-says-hes-trying-to-transform-conservative-clerics-views-on-music>)

247. “Female Musician Prohibited From Performing on Stage in Isfahan,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, January 19, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/01/female-musician-banned-from-performing-on-stage-in-isfahan>)

248. “Opposition Leader Mehdi Karroubi Urges Supreme Leader to ‘Create the Grounds For Reform,’” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, January 31, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/01/opposition-leader-mehdi-karroubi-urges-supreme-leader-to-create-the-grounds-for-reform>)

249. “Iran’s Culture Ministry Successfully Pressures Iranian Director to Cancel Film Screening in Canada,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, December 18, 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/12/irans-culture-ministry-successfully-pressures-iranian-director-to-cancel-film-screening-in-canada>)

250. “107 Iranian Film Personalities Urge Rouhani to Lift State Ban on Pre-Revolution Actor,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 1, 2018. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/06/107-iranian-film-personalities-urge-rouhani-to-lift-state-ban-on-pre-revolution-actor>)

251. “Iran Arrests 46 Fashion Workers Including Eight Models in Hormozgan Province,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, July 17, 2018. (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/07/iran-cracks-down-on-modeling-ring-in-hormozgan-province>); see also: “Crushing Creativity: Iran’s Hardliners Crackdown on the Fashion Industry,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, December 2017. (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Crushing-Creativity-7.pdf>)

252. Shima Shahrabi, “Iran’s Theater of the Absurd Censorship,” *Iran Wire*, September 17, 2018. (<https://iranwire.com/en/features/5537>)

Policy Recommendations

Iran's pervasive human rights violations require a forceful response from Washington. Historically, bipartisan majorities in Congress have condemned Tehran's domestic repression irrespective of other disagreements over U.S. policy in the region. The ongoing protests in Iran offer lawmakers and the Trump administration a renewed opportunity to work together in order to advance shared U.S. values and interests.

For the Trump Administration:

1. **Sanction the 12 Iranian officials profiled in this report.** As new leaders rise within the apparatus of repression, Washington should document their abuses and impose appropriate sanctions.
2. **Urge the European Union to issue similar sanctions, reduce trade with Iran, and speak out more forcefully about Iran's human rights abuses.** Despite current tensions between America and its allies, the EU committed in principle to challenging Iranian abuses while the JCPOA was in effect. However, while the EU issued 83 human rights designations – far more than the 38 imposed by Obama and the 17 imposed by Trump – between 2011 and 2013, it has imposed none since then. Meanwhile, as the United States continues to reimpose economic sanctions on Iran pursuant to its withdrawal from the JCPOA, the EU has set out a plan aimed at enabling European firms to bypass them.²⁵³

The Trump administration should urge its EU counterparts to join its campaign to sanction Iran's top human rights abusers. At the same time, it should make clear that Washington will oppose any European effort to sidestep U.S. economic sanctions on Iran.

3. **Conduct a public name-and-shame campaign.** Senior administration officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook, should routinely denounce Iran's top human rights abusers by name and describe their crimes. They should also continue to express solidarity with Iranians protesting against the regime.

For Congress:

1. **Exercise oversight by ensuring the Trump administration fulfills its CAATSA obligation to provide Congress a list of top human rights abusers.** Lawmakers should raise the issue in public fora if the administration continues to delay.
2. **Send the Trump administration a list of top Iranian human rights abusers and corrupt actors eligible for sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, including the names of those profiled in this report.** The president's receipt of such a list would trigger the law's requirement to issue sanctions determinations within 120 days, thereby pressuring him to take action in a timely manner.
3. **Conduct a public name-and-shame campaign.** On a bipartisan basis, members of Congress should join the Trump administration in using their bully pulpits to highlight Tehran's abuses and their impact on the Iranian people. Congress should also make clear that Iran's protesters have their full sympathy and support.

253. Patrick Wintour, "EU, China and Russia in move to sidestep US sanctions on Iran," *The Guardian* (UK), September 26, 2018. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/26/eu-china-and-russia-in-move-to-sidestep-us-sanctions-on-iran>)

Appendix I: Past U.S. Human Rights Sanctions on Iran

Dates of designations appear in parentheses. Names with an asterisk indicate designations pursuant to both Executive Order 13553 and Executive Order 13606.

Sanctions Pursuant to Executive Order 13553 (Targeting Actors Responsible for Human Rights Abuses in Iran on or after June 12, 2009)

Individuals

- **Mohammad Ali Jafari**, Commander of the IRGC (September 29, 2010)
- **Sadeq Mahsouli**, former Minister of Welfare and Social Security, former Minister of the Interior and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces for Law Enforcement (September 29, 2010)
- **Qolam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei**, Judiciary Spokesman, former Prosecutor-General of Iran, former Minister of Intelligence (September 29, 2010)
- **Saeed Mortazavi**, former Chief of Iranian Anti-Smuggling Task Force, former Prosecutor-General of Tehran (September 29, 2010)
- **Heydar Moslehi**, former Minister of Intelligence (September 29, 2010)
- **Mostafa Mohammad Najjar**, former Minister of the Interior and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces for Law Enforcement (September 29, 2010)
- **Mohammad Reza Naqdi**, Commander of the Basij Guard Corps (IRGC) (September 29, 2010)
- **Ahmad-Reza Radan**, former Deputy Chief of the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Senior Iranian Law Enforcement Official (September 29, 2010)
- **Hossein Taeb**, Deputy Commander of the IRGC, Commander of the IRGC Intelligence Organization, former Commander of the Basij Forces (September 29, 2010)
- **Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi**, Prosecutor-General of Tehran (February 23, 2011)
- **Ismail Ahmadi Moghadam**, former Commander of the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran (June 9, 2011)
- **Abdollah Araghi**, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces Deputy Commander (December 13, 2011)
- **Hassan Firouzabadi**, Senior Military Advisor to the Supreme Leader, former Chairman of Iran's Joint Chiefs of Staff (December 13, 2011)
- **Asghar Mir-Hejazi**, Intelligence Advisor to the Supreme Leader (May 30, 2013)
- **Sohrab Soleimani**, Supervisor of the Office of the Deputy for Security and Law Enforcement of the State Prisons Organization, former Director General of the Tehran Prisons Organization (April 13, 2017)
- **Sadegh Amoli Larijani**, Chief of Iran's Judiciary (January 12, 2018)
- **Gholamreza Ziaei**, Director of Rajaei Shahr Prison (January 12, 2018)
- **Abdolhamid Mohtasham**, founding member and key leader of Ansar-e Hizballah (May 30, 2018)
- **Hossein Allahkaram**, founding member and key leader of Ansar-e Hizballah (May 30, 2018)

- **Hamid Ostad**, Founder of Mashhad branch of Ansar-e Hizballah (May 30, 2018)

Entities

- **The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps** (June 9, 2011)*
- **The Basij Resistance Force** (June 9, 2011)
- **Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran** (June 9, 2011)*
- **Ministry of Intelligence** (February 16, 2012)*
- **Abysec** (December 30, 2014)
- **Tehran Prisons Organization** (April 13, 2017)
- **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Electronic Warfare and Cyber Defense Organization** (January 12, 2018)
- **Ansar-e Hizballah** (May 30, 2018)
- **Evin Prison** (May 30, 2018)

Sanctions Pursuant to Executive Order 13606 (Targeting Actors Responsible for Human Rights Abuses by Iran and Syria via Information Technology)

Entities

- **The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps** (April 23, 2012)*
- **Ministry of Intelligence** (April 23, 2012)*
- **Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran** (April 23, 2012)*
- **Datak Telecom** (April 23, 2012)
- **Hanista Programing Group** (May 30, 2018)

(The United States has not sanctioned any individuals pursuant to Executive Order 13606.)

Sanctions Pursuant to Executive Order 13628 (Targeting Actors Responsible for Limiting Free Expression)

Individuals

- **Ismail Ahmadi Moghadam**, former Commander of the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran (June 9, 2011)
- **Ali Fazli**, Deputy Commander of the Basij (November 8, 2012)
- **Rasool Jalili**, member of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (November 8, 2012)
- **Reza Taghipour**, former Minister of Communications and Information Technology (November 8, 2012)
- **Ezzatollah Zarghami**, former Director of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, member of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (February 6, 2013)

- **Morteza Tamaddon**, former Governor-General of Tehran Province (May 23, 2014)
- **Abolhassan Firouzabadi**, Secretary of Supreme Council of Cyberspace (May 30, 2018)
- **Abdolsamad Khoramabadi**, Secretary of the Committee to Determine Instances of Criminal Content (May 30, 2018)
- **Abdulali Ali-Asgari**, Director-General of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (May 30, 2018)

Entities

- **Amn Afzar Gostar-e Sharif** (November 8, 2012)
- **Center to Investigate Organized Crime** (November 8, 2012)
- **Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance** (November 8, 2012)
- **PeykAsa** (November 8, 2012)
- **Press Supervisory Board** (November 8, 2012)
- **Iranian Communications Regulatory Authority** (February 6, 2013)
- **Iran Electronic Industries** (February 6, 2013)
- **Iranian Cyber Police** (February 6, 2013)
- **Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting** (February 6, 2013)²⁵⁴
- **Committee to Determine Instances of Criminal Content** (May 30, 2013)
- **Ofoh Saber Engineering Development Company** (May 30, 2013)
- **Douran Software Technologies** (December 30, 2014)
- **Supreme Council for Cyberspace** (January 12, 2018)
- **National Cyberspace Center** (January 12, 2018)

254. In 2014, the United States waived sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. The waiver remains in effect.

Appendix II: Leadership Structure



Supreme Leader
Ayatollah Ali Khamenei



Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)



Iranian President
Hassan Rouhani



Head of Judiciary
Sadegh Amoli Larijani



Custodian of Astan Quds Razavi
Ebrahim Raisi



Basij Commander
Gholamhossein Gheibparvar



Judge
Abolghassem Salavati



Judge
Mohammad Moghiseh



Head of Iran's Prisons Organization
Asghar Jahangir



Minister of Justice
Seyyed Alireza Avaei



ICT Minister
Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi



Minister of the Interior
Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli



Minister of Science, Research, and Technology
Mansour Gholami



Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance
Abbas Salehi



Chief of the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Hossein Ashtari

* The United States has already sanctioned the IRGC and Sadegh Amoli Larijani.

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*"Human Rights Violators Database," *Justice for Iran*, accessed October 25, 2018. (<https://justice4iran.org/category/human-rights-violators-bank>)

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