Iranian Internet Infrastructure
and Policy Report

November - December 2013
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INTRODUCTION

// Since our last Iranian Internet Infrastructure and Policy Report (IIIP) we have witnessed a number of significant incidents that have offered us glimpses at the trajectory of Iranian Internet policy in the Rouhani era. We have identified three central themes:

1. Iran's filtering policies have changed dramatically since October 2013. with the main focus of censorship shifting to mobile applications rather than websites. Small Media has found that Iran's Filtering Committee has been very active in overseeing the removal of different mobile applications from Iranian app stores such as *Cafe Bazaar*.

2. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) has recently stepped up its harassment of online activists and bloggers, arresting at least 21 netizens in the months since October 2013. For one of the first times in the history of the Iranian web, individuals behind politically-neutral sites (such as the IT specialists behind the tech website Narenji) have been arrested. These events have sent shockwaves through the Iranian online community. As a result of these arrests, many IT bloggers ceased their activities, fearing for their online and personal security.

3. It seems there is conflict brewing between Iranian hardliners and the Rouhani administration, with the Iranian Filtering Committee (CDICC) serving as the crucial battlefield. These tensions first became apparent in the aftermath of the blocking of chat application WeChat, with members of Rouhani's government expressing their disapproval of the move. In addition, it seems that hardliners have attempted to frustrate Rouhani's supporters by blocking a number of popular online services, encouraging Iranian internet users to step up pressure on the government and demand changes in policy.

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CONTENT FILTERING AND BLOCKED SITES

NOVEMBER 13:

The website Nazri Yab (Nazri Finder) was blocked without any explanation. According to the site's founder Davood Mozafari, the domain was blocked at 8am, and the DNS at 10am. After five days, the website was unblocked without any official statement from the CDICC. (Source)

NOVEMBER 18:

The Cryptocat website and its private chat service were both blocked. The main Cryptocat chat network is blocked in Iran through a DNS-level access block on its public IP address. Cryptocat is the first and only encrypted chat application to be censored in Iran. (Source)

NOVEMBER 19:

A 16 year-old boy was arrested by Iran's Cyber Police (FATA - Bushehr Province) as a result of "publishing immoral contents and promoting corrupt Western culture" on his blog. (Source)

NOVEMBER 20:

An action game was distributed in Tehran in which the player is instructed to kill an Iranian politician named "Rouhani". According to Jahan News, the game was swiftly removed from the market. The game was titled 'The Rouhani Assassination'. (Source)

DECEMBER 2:

FATA (Fars Province) arrested a man for bullying and harassing a 17 year-old girl. According to FATA, the girl attempted to commit suicide, but was rescued by her family. (Source)

Sixteen IT specialists working for the technology and gadget website Narenji were arrested by the the IRGC. According to Ahmad Ghorbani, the Deputy Prosecutor of Kerman, they were arrested as a result of "communication with foreigners". Later, Ali Tavakoli, the head of Kerman's Justice Department, said that they had participated in projects that were run by the BBC and funded from London. On January 8, the Guardian reported that half of those arrested had been released on bail. Below is an image that had previously been circulating on Twitter, showing the individuals that remained in custody (Amir Sadeghpour, Malihe Nakhaei, and Mehdi Faryabi were subsequently released from prison on 22 January 2014): (Source I, Source II, Source III, Source IV)

DECEMBER 5:

It was announced that five Internet activists and Facebook page administrators were arrested by the intelligence service of IRGC. According to the news site Kaleme, some of these individuals had been in custody since August 2013. The site reports that they were accused of spreading Green Movement propaganda, and states that they confessed to these charges after intensive IRGC interrogation. These five activists were named as Masoud Ghasemkhani, Faribourz Kardar, Seyyed Masoud Talebi and Rouya Irani. Some of the accused are under the age of 20. (Source)

DECEMBER 9:
The Chief of Iran's Morality Police, Colonel Massoud Zahedian announced that his organisation engages in monitoring of Instagram and WeChat. (Source)

DECEMBER 14:
Iran unveiled twelve new state-backed cyber-products, including an Iranian Operating System (OS), Padvish Anti-Malware, a secure cellular phone, a system to detect cyber threats, and a high-speed firewall, amongst others. (Source)

DECEMBER 19:
The mobile chat application WeChat was blocked by the CDICC. Access to the app has been restricted despite a number of government authorities stating their opposition to the move. Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, the National Chief of Police, stated that it would be wrong for the entirety of WeChat to be blocked, as the service had a number of merits. Despite this, the police voted to block WeChat in the CDICC. ICT Minister Mahmood Vaezi said that his ministry disagreed with the policy of blocking WeChat, stating that the only issue that might have lead to the restrictions was the app's ability to display nearby users. The CDICC subsequently published a statement noting that WeChat was blocked as a result of the app collecting users' data, and breaching users' privacy by monitoring their communications. The CDICC stated that the app previously had around 4,000,000 Iranian users. There is conjecture that Iran has blocked the app in order to push users towards an Iranian-produced alternative named "Dialogue" . There are further rumours that blocks are being imposed to stop the state-owned Telecommunications Company of Iran (TCI) losing text messaging revenue as a result of Iranians emigrating towards chat apps.
(Source I, Source II, Source III, Source IV, Source V, Source VI)

DECEMBER 20:
122 websites were deemed "immoral" and shut down by FATA (Arak Province) in November and December 2013. (Source)

DECEMBER 29:
Instagram was blocked for around 12 hours. According to the Head of CDICC Abdolsamad Khoramabadi, this incident occurred when the committee attempted to block an Instagram profile containing restricted content. (Source)

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

NOVEMBER 1:
The Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC) met for the first time in nine months. It was the first meeting since Hassan Rouhani's election victory, with the new president sitting as the chairman of the council. During the meeting, Rouhani announced his full support for the National Information Network (SHOMA) and argued that it must be launched swiftly, as it is an essential component in the country's development. The SCC devises long-term strategic policies for Iranian cyberspace.
(Source I, Source II)

NOVEMBER 3:
The Communications Regulatory Authority of Iran (CRA) has passed a regulation that each Iranian user must have a specific IP address. The goals of this regulation are:

- To facilitate the creation of SHOMA
- To manage immigration to the IPv6
- To solve problems relating to the lack of IPv4 addresses
- To increase the security of SHOMA (Source)

NOVEMBER 6:
Iran's Parliament agreed that the ICT Minister may spend 28,000 billion IRR (1.12 billion USD) to develop and expand national communication infrastructures such as post, telecommunications and ICT. (Source)

DECEMBER 5:
The budget allocated by Iran's Parliament to the ICT Ministry in the next financial year (2014/15) will be in the region of 40,000 billion IRR (1.61 billion USD). Comparatively, the Ahmadinejad government allocated the Ministry a budget of 7,000 billion IRR (0.28 billion USD) for 2013/14. According to Barat Ghanbari, the Deputy Minister of ICT for Strategic Planning and Control, the largest chunk of the budget will be invested in SHOMA and related infrastructure projects.
(Source)

STATEMENTS FROM MINISTRIES AND POLITICIANS

NOVEMBER 2:

Mohammad Hassan Entezari were elected to the post of Secretary of the SCC in the first meeting of the SCC under President Rouhani. Entezari was born on 17 November 1951. He holds an MSc in Electronic Engineering from the International Technology Institute of the Netherlands (1976) and a BSc in Electronic Engineering from Sharif University of Technology (1974). He is member of both the Research Center for Materials and Energy at Sharif University of Technology, and the Institute of Electrical and Information Technology at the Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology (IROST). He has served in a number of different roles since 1979, with the most significant being:

- Researcher at Iran Telecommunication Research Center (ITRC)
- Director of ITRC
- Member of the Board of Directors at the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI)
- Executive Project Manager of the TCI Data project
- Executive Project Manager of the Iran's Data Network
- Deputy of Space Technology at Iranian Space Agency (ISA)
- Secretary of Cyberspace Management in Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)
- Executive Project Manager of the Small Satellite project (Source I, Source II)

NOVEMBER 5:

Ali Jannati, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, said that "Facebook should be accessible for all". In addition, he stated that the limitations imposed on the Internet and satellite television should be scaled back. (Source)

NOVEMBER 11:

ICT Minister Vaezi announced that the ICT Ministry plans to adjust existing filtering policies once Iran has improved its infrastructure, allowing for more sophisticated filtering processes. According to Vaezi, the blocks imposed on Facebook should be adapted to target specific content, as there are a wide variety of useful Facebook pages that Iranians can make use of. Also, he announced that each user can be given a specific IP, allowing users to police themselves. (Source)

NOVEMBER 18:

The Deputy ICT Minister Nasrollah Jahangar, commented that the ICT Ministry is reviewing existing regulations concerning the importation of Internet bandwidth in Iran by private companies. Currently, the Telecommunication Infrastructure Company (TIC) is the only organisation permitted to import and sell internet bandwidth to Iranian ISPs. Jahangar also stated that an Iranian search engine will be launched in the next year, with the Ministry currently working on the production of three different search engines. (Source)

NOVEMBER 25:

Mino Aslani, Head of the Women's Basij Society, accused WeChat of being a "Zionist" application that has attempted to normalise open sexual behaviour amongst Iranians. (Source)

Masoumeh Ebtekar - one of Iran's Vice Presidents, and the Head of Iran's Environmental Department - has joined Twitter. She has also been active on Facebook. At the time of writing this report, she has 788 followers on Twitter. (Source)

DECEMBER 1:

The ICT Ministry's 100-day report was published, with the main points being:

- The addition of 1,500km of fiber optic cables.
- Internet bandwidth was increased to 30-40Gbps.
- Landline, mobile phone and Internet infrastructure was extended to more than 1,000 villages
- The company "Phone Post 193" has been launched, promising to allow Iranians in 9 provincial capitals to send items more quickly, and for a lower price. (Source)

Hojjat ol-Eslam Seyyed Ali Taheri, the Speaker of the Cultural Committee of Iran's Parliament said that if the government wants to unblock Facebook, they must first answer to the Parliamentary Committee. Taheri said the Committee's opinion should be considered very carefully, even if CDICC is ultimately responsible for such matters. (Source)

DECEMBER 2:

ICT Minister Vaezi claimed that his ministry increased Internet bandwidth by 50% in the first 100 days of Hassan Rouhani's government. (Source)

DECEMBER 4:

The former Secretary of the SCC Mehdi Akhavan Behabadi joined the SCC as an independent member, by the order of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. (Source)

DECEMBER 6:

The Chief of FATA, Commander Kamal Hadianfar said that the SCC should make decisions about the unblocking of Facebook, and leave FATA to execute their orders. In addition, he mentioned that the SCC has not yet held a serious meeting about Facebook. Previously, he refused to comment on the potential unblocking of Facebook. (Source)

In an effort to keep in touch with Iranians, ICT Minister Vaezi has signed up to four Iranian social networks:

- Zigur
- Cloob
- Tebyan
- Aparat (Source)

DECEMBER 7:

ICT Minister Vaezi's first appearance on social networks was met with general dissatisfaction. According to the Social Media website, whilst he was active on Cloob he merely copied and pasted quotes from news websites, failing to respond directly to users' questions. (Source)

DECEMBER 14:

ICT Minister Vaezi insisted that filtering processes must not slow down Iranian connection speeds. He commented that the ICT Ministry has just one representative on Iran's Filtering Committee, and that it has not played any role in blocking different websites. Additionally, he identified Internet filtering as being made up of two major components: the first concerning the blocks imposed upon scientific, educational and professional websites, and the second focusing on "immoral" and pornographic content. He believes that educational sites must see fewer restrictions, though he stresses the importance of, and popular support for, the censoring of pornographic content. According to Vaezi, he has received 11,000 comments and questions about ICT policy on Cloob. (Source)

DECEMBER 16:

During the IT specialists' meeting, Vaezi made a series of announcements:

- SHOMA will be launched in 2015/16. According to Vaezi, SHOMA will not cut Iranian users off from the Internet, but will allow users to open domestic websites much faster than foreign sites such as Google or Yahoo. Vaezi estimated that around 60% of users' activities will be conducted on SHOMA.
- Internet bandwidth will be increased tenfold (to 700 GBps) though no timeline was given.
- Internet bandwidth will see a cost reduction of 20-30%.
- Three groups of experts were convened to review existing Internet filtering policies. Vaezi stated that the filtering system should be made more intelligent, and that specific contents of a site should be blocked rather than the entirety of a domain.

• 3G will be available by March 2015, with 4G reaching the Iranian population
  by March 2016. (Source)

DECEMBER 17:
Cultural Minister Ali Jannati asserted that 71% of Tehranis have made use
of satellite dishes, using them to view channels such as BBC Persian, Manoto,
and VOAPNN. (Source)

DECEMBER 18:
Entezari commented that the unblocking of Facebook and Twitter requires
an in-depth investigation. In addition, he stated that the ICT Ministry is reviewing
the limitations imposed on Internet speeds for domestic users, though he blames
Internet service providers for failing to meet current standards for internet speeds.
Domestic users in Iran have their Internet speeds restricted to 128 Kbps. (Source)

DECEMBER 20:
Deputy ICT Minister Jahangar announced that there are 4 Iranian OS's in development.
The latest OS is Xamin and is being tested in a number of universities acrosss the
country. In addition, Jahangar said that the government will support Iranian services
such as e-mail, though they will not force people to use them. (Source)

DECEMBER 25:
Mahmood Golzari, the Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, voiced his discon-
tent with the filters imposed on Facebook, suggesting that such censorship poses an
obstacle to educational and cultural development. (Source)

DECEMBER 29:
Khoramabadi announces that the CDICC has been considering placing blocks upon
a number of mobile apps: Tango, Viber, WhatsApp and Coco. He argued that if Iranian
versions of these apps can offer a comparatively good service, then each of these com-
munication apps will be blocked. The final decision depends upon the agreement of
the committee members. (Source)

CIVIL SOCIETY, ⬤
PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION
STATEMENTS

NOVEMBER 1:

Iran is 4th-fastest growing nation in the world in terms of the number of registered domains. Iran saw a growth rate of 45% in the last year, with the total number of

Iranian domains hitting 444,924 by November. The table below shows the number of domains registered by category: (Source)

DOMAIN	REGISTERED NUMBERS
.ir	436,018
co.ir	3,049
ایران.	2,964
ac.ir	1,643
sch.ir	371
gov.ir	300
org.ir	290
id.ir	248
.net.ir	41

NOVEMBER 6:

Mohammad Reza Talaei, the director of the Mehr Iran Institute announced that in the past year, Iran exported software valued at 90 million USD software (though some unofficial statistics estimate the figure as being closer to 400 million USD). Farzam Malekara, the designer of the first Iranian online game, stated that the computer games market in Iran is worth millions of USD, although he points out that currently Iranian games comprise just 1% of the national market.

(Source)

Bahman Keshavarz, the head of Iran's Bar Association Union (SCODA), said that the Iranian Cyber Crime Law does not criminalise the use of censorship circumvention tools, adding that Iranian users who use social networks and other blocked websites are not acting in violation of the law. (Source)

NOVEMBER 8:
The Security Operations Center (SOC) for the Industrial Environment has commenced operation. The main goal of the newly-launched SOC is to protect Iranian industry from cyber attacks and online security threats. All of the software and hardware manufactured at this center is Iranian-manufactured. (Source)

NOVEMBER 12:
Mohammad Hassan Karbasian, the former director of Iran Post, said that the Iran Post e-mail service has 150,000 users, and announced that it is ready to offer 1 million email accounts to serving members of the military. (Source)

NOVEMBER 20:
The Developing e-Commerce Center (DEC) in the Ministry of Industries and Business announced that most of the complaints submitted by Iranian citizens related to domestically-hosted services. According to the DEC, the center receives 20 complaints per day about online shopping and hosting services. (Source)

NOVEMBER 22:
The leader of Friday prayers in the city of Rafsanjan, Hojjatol Eslam Abbas Ramezanipour issued a warning, stating that those who violate Islamic laws should know that Iran's Intelligence services are monitoring their activities, stating that many people have already been arrested. (Source)

By March 2013, 6,934,740 (9.23%) Iranian Internet users connected to the Internet via dial-up connection, making it the third popular means of connection. It is unclear which forms of connection were the first- and second-most popular. (Source)

The Datak license to sell WiMAX was cancelled, as the company failed to receive all of the required authorisations. Datak is the first company in Iran to provide the Internet via WiFi, 3G and WiMAX. (Source)

NOVEMBER 26:

Abdolreza Morvaridi, the director of GLX Phone, claimed that the company has produced the cheapest tablet in Iran - the "Dimo 500". According to Morvaridi, the price of the tablet is 49 USD in Iran, and 45 USD in other countries. Previously, the company released the Dimo 700 tablet, which closely resembled the Chinese tablet LingYun F2S. The Dimo 500's specifications are listed below: (Source)

CPU	1.2GHz
Internal Memory	4GB
Supported External Memory	Up to 32GB
RAM	512GB

DECEMBER 6:

The first Iranian computer game geared towards educating children in life skills was launched. *Sarzamin Azhman* (سرزمین آژمان) was released at Iran's Elecomp 2013. It is an adventure game aimed at children over the age of 10, and offers them advice about protecting themselves from addictive drugs such as opium. (Source)

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