

Treasury Designates Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology in View of the Regime's Repressive Internet Censorship

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Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi is a key player in the regime's censorship and surveillance campaign, which intensified in the wake of anti-regime protests

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) took action today against Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology, pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13846, for his role in the Iranian regime's widescale internet censorship. Internet access in Iran, managed by Azari Jahromi's ministry, was blocked for several days in November based upon what Iranian authorities describe as national security concerns in the wake of anti-regime protests throughout the country. The recent internet blocking follows similar patterns that occurred in 2017 and 2018. Azari Jahromi, who is a former employee of Iran's notorious Ministry of Intelligence, has advanced the Iranian regime's policy of repressive internet censorship since he took office in mid-2017 and has also been involved in surveillance against opposition activists.

"Iran's leaders know that a free and open internet exposes their illegitimacy, so they seek to censor internet access to quell anti-regime protests," said Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. "We are sanctioning Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology for restricting internet access, including to popular messaging applications that help tens of millions of Iranians stay connected to each other and the outside world."

In addition to the wholesale disruption of internet connectivity that has occurred on multiple occasions, Iran also has a well-established record of restricting popular communications platforms. Iran has banned the use of messaging applications and social media platforms that are used by tens of millions of Iranians for personal communication and business. The internet and social media in general are heavily censored in Iran, and Azari Jahromi's ministry has worked to block access to online censorship circumvention tools, also referred to as anti-filtering tools, such as virtual private networks. In his government roles, Azari Jahromi played a

role in launching Iran's National Information Network (NIN), which has enhanced the Iranian government's ability to monitor, restrict, and completely block internet usage in Iran.

Despite proclamations that he supports expanded internet access in Iran, Azari Jahromi has repeatedly justified the increasingly restrictive measures of his ministry as necessary to maintain national security, and further claimed that they are based on foreign threats to overthrow the regime. Azari Jahromi has also attributed internet disruptions in Iran to technical issues outside of the country, despite findings by outside experts that the disruptions originated from sources operating under the regulation of his ministry.

A former member of Iran's intelligence apparatus, Azari Jahromi was involved in surveillance operations during the state crackdown on peaceful protests in 2009, which significantly aided the authorities' ability to identify, track, arrest, and imprison protesters. He has been the target of accusations that he personally interrogated multiple activists during this period.

Azari Jahromi is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13846 for having engaged in censorship or other activities with respect to Iran on or after June 12, 2009, that prohibit, limit, or penalize the exercise of freedom of expression or assembly by citizens of Iran, or that limit access to print or broadcast media, including the facilitation or support of intentional frequency manipulation by the Government of Iran or an entity owned or controlled by the Government of Iran that would jam or restrict an international signal.

SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS

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Furthermore, as recently as [March 2018](#), OFAC highlighted existing guidance underscoring the U.S. Government's ongoing commitment to ensure that the Iranian people can exercise their universal right to freedom of expression and can freely access information via the Internet.

[Read identifying information on the individual designated today.](#)

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