

Treasury Sanctions Senior Officials and “Interrogator Journalists” of Iran’s State-Run Media

November 16, 2022

WASHINGTON —Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is designating six senior employees of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), the Iranian state-run media corporation that has broadcast hundreds of forced confessions of Iranian, dual national, and international detainees in Iran. Designated in 2013, IRIB and its subsidiaries act not as objective media outlets but rather as a critical tool in the Iranian government’s mass suppression and censorship campaign against its own people. IRIB has produced and recently broadcast televised interviews of individuals being forced to confess that their relatives were not killed by Iranian authorities during nationwide protests but died due to accidental, unrelated causes.

“The Iranian government’s systemic reliance on forced confessions illustrates the government’s refusal to speak truth to its citizens and the international community,” said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. “The United States remains committed to supporting the Iranian people as they continue their peaceful protests. We will continue to hold Iranian officials and government institutions accountable for their human rights violations and their censorship of the Iranian people.”

Today’s action is being taken pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13846, which authorizes sanctions on persons who engage in censorship or other activities with respect to Iran. IRIB was previously designated on February 6, 2013 for its involvement in the Iranian government’s censorship activities. Today’s action is being taken against certain employees of IRIB.

As the Government of Iran’s state-run media conglomerate, IRIB has a monopoly on television and radio services in Iran and plays a central role in restricting the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and impeding the free flow of information in Iran through censorship activities. IRIB produces, sponsors, and spreads government propaganda both in Iran and internationally.



Furthermore, IRIB broadcasts regularly make false and baseless accusations against Iranian citizens, dual nationals, and foreigners, and use falsified news to misinform and falsely incriminate perceived enemies of the regime. IRIB also cooperates extensively with security and intelligence agencies, including Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), to obtain and publicly disseminate forced confessions from Iranians, dual nationals, and foreign detainees. Testimonies and other evidence point to the use of torture, both physical and psychological; threats against family members; and degrading treatment to extract forced confessions. Since 2009, IRIB programs have broadcast hundreds of forced confessions as well as defamatory content against hundreds more. IRIB uses forced confessions in particular to frame dual nationals and foreigners as spies, demonize human rights activists, and legitimize repression against religious minority groups like the Baha'i community.

ALI REZVANI AND AMENEH SADAT ZABIHPOUR

Ali Rezvani (Rezvani) and **Ameneh Sadat Zabihpour (Zabihpour)** are IRIB “interrogator-journalists” who are both being designated pursuant to E.O. 13846 for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, IRIB, a person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to E.O. 13628, which was revoked and superseded by E.O. 13846. Furthermore, both have cooperated with the MOIS and the IRGC Intelligence Organization in extracting and airing forced confessions in the style of documentaries. Both feature prominently in the IRIB's notorious 8:30 broadcast, which regularly airs forced confessions. In an IRIB segment in 2020, **Rezvani** interviewed Ruhollah Zam, an Iranian journalist who was kidnapped, brought to Iran, and later executed by the Government of Iran. **Rezvani** has also been implicated in the harassment of the family of an Iranian-American activist and was named as an interrogator in the case of Kavous Seyed-Emami, an academic and environmentalist who died suspiciously in February 2018 while in government custody.

Zabihpour, as the head of the foreign Persian language media group at IRIB, also has a long history of direct involvement in the broadcast of coerced confessions of dual nationals, civil society activists, political prisoners, writers, and religious minorities. In 2017, **Zabihpour** produced and helped broadcast for IRIB a documentary-style program that attempted to portray Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliff, a British-Iranian woman held prisoner by the IRGC on charges of “collaborating with foreign institutions” and “participating in the soft overthrow of the government,” as a spy. **Zabihpour** was also directly involved in the interrogation of three law activists in 2019, which resulted in forced confessions broadcast as part of a film called “Burn

Plot.” One of the activists arrested stated that **Zabihpour** was in the interrogation room to prepare a text to be read in front of the camera after hours of physical and mental torture.

Recently, **Zabihpour**'s programming has targeted the Iranian Baha'i community in tandem with nationwide raids on Baha'i homes conducted by MOIS and other Iranian security forces. As part of the crackdown, MOIS agents entered a kindergarten and handed out Baha'i materials to teachers, who were then forced to say on camera that the materials had been distributed by Baha'is. **Zabihpour** produced a staged documentary style broadcast called “Detention of a Number of Central Members of the Baha'i Espionage Party,” in which she narrates about “unauthorized Baha'i kindergartens,” falsely incriminating Iranian Baha'is for infiltrating kindergartens.

Zabihpour was also instrumental in producing the November 2019 and July 2022 forced confession videos of Fatemeh Davand, a protester detained during the November 2019 protests, and Sepideh Rashnu, a 28-year-old writer who was arrested in July 2022 for opposing mandatory hijab.

SENIOR IRIB OFFICIALS

Peyman Jebelli (Jebelli) was appointed the director of IRIB by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in September 2021. He has directed the replacement of senior managers with those who have close ties to the IRGC, and he has worked directly with the IRGC to create false narratives for publication. In his current and past roles at IRIB, **Jebelli** has been responsible for the broadcasts of many forced confessions of political prisoners, such as those described above. **Mohsen Bormahani (Bormahani)** is the deputy director of IRIB and previously served in senior roles in IRIB. Shortly after entering the position, **Bormahani** replaced a number of directors of IRIB channels, reportedly with members of an ultraconservative political party.

Ahmad Noroozi (Noroozi) was appointed the head of the IRIB World Service in October 2021. The IRIB World Service oversees the IRIB's foreign-language outlets and in his role, Noroozi also acts as the CEO of IRIB's English and French flagship channel. **Yousef Pouranvari (Pouranvari)** is the Director of the Programs and Scheduling Department at the same IRIB foreign language flagship channel.

Jebelli, Bormahani, Noroozi, and **Pouranvari** are being designated pursuant to E.O. 13846 for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, IRIB, a person whose



property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to E.O. 13628, which was revoked and superseded by E.O. 13846.

SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS

As a result of today's action, all property and interests in property of these persons that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons must be blocked and reported to OFAC. In addition, any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, 50 percent or more by one or more blocked persons are also blocked. OFAC regulations generally prohibit all dealings by U.S. persons or within the United States (including transactions transiting the United States) that involve any property or interests in property of blocked or designated persons.

In addition, persons that engage in certain transactions with the persons designated today may themselves be exposed to sanctions or subject to an enforcement action. Furthermore, unless an exception applies, any foreign financial institution that knowingly facilitates a significant transaction or provides significant financial services for any of the persons designated today could be subject to U.S. sanctions.

The power and integrity of OFAC sanctions derive not only from OFAC's ability to designate and add persons to the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (SDN List), but also from its willingness to remove persons from the SDN List consistent with the law. The ultimate goal of sanctions is not to punish, but to bring about a positive change in behavior. For information concerning the process for seeking removal from an OFAC list, including the SDN List, please refer to OFAC's Frequently Asked Question 897.

[Click here for identifying information on the individuals designated today.](#)

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