Treasury Sanctions Officials of Iranian Intelligence Agency Responsible for Detention of U.S. Nationals in Iran

April 27, 2023

State Department is concurrently designating Russian and Iranian entities for wrongful detention of U.S. nationals

WASHINGTON — Today, the Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned four senior officials of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Intelligence Organization (IRGC-IO), an entity that is being concurrently designated by the State Department for its role in the hostage-taking or wrongful detention of U.S. nationals in Iran. The IRGC-IO frequently holds and interrogates detainees in the notorious Evin Prison, in addition to the IRGC-IO’s direct role in the repression of protests and arrest of dissidents, including dual nationals. Today’s action is the first under Executive Order (E.O.) 14078, “Bolstering Efforts to Bring Hostages and Wrongfully Detained U.S. Nationals Home,” which reaffirms the fundamental commitment of the U.S. government to bring home those U.S. nationals held hostage and wrongfully detained abroad.

Concurrent with this action, OFAC implemented the Department of State’s designation of Russia’s Federal Security Service, in addition to the IRGC-IO, for their involvement in the wrongful detention of U.S. nationals abroad.

“Today’s action targets senior officials and security services in Iran and Russia that are responsible for the hostage-taking or wrongful detention of U.S. nationals abroad,” said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. “We are committed to bringing home wrongfully detained U.S. nationals and acting against foreign threats to the safety of U.S. nationals abroad.”

The E.O. draws on the authority of the 2020 Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage Taking Accountability Act, which is a credit to the perseverance of the Levinson family and others who have worked to turn their family’s extraordinary hardships into constructive and meaningful action.
WRONGFUL DETENTIONS IN IRAN

Ruhollah Bazghandi is the IRGC-IO Counterintelligence official. In this role, Bazghandi has been involved with the detention of foreign prisoners held in Iran. Bazghandi has worked on behalf of the IRGC-IO in several capacities, including involvement in IRGC-IO's operations in Syria, and assassination plots against journalists, Israeli citizens, and others deemed enemies of Iran.

Mohammad Kazemi became the commander of the IRGC-IO in June 2022. Kazemi oversees the IRGC-IO’s operations suppressing civil society in Iran and arresting Iranian dissidents, including dual nationals. He has also overseen the regime’s brutal crackdown against protests across the country in response to the killing of Mahsa Amini. Kazemi was previously designated by OFAC on October 26, 2022, for having acted for or on behalf of the IRGC.

Mohamad Mehdi Sayyari is the IRGC-IO Co-Deputy Chief. Sayyari has been directly involved in arranging logistics for prisoners in Iran.

Mohammad Hasan Mohagheghi, the IRGC-IO Co-Deputy Chief Brigadier General, has reported to several of the senior most IRGC Commanders on IRGC-IO operations. Mohagheghi served as a liaison between senior IRGC officials and IRGC-IO officials on counterespionage operations in Syria.

Ruhollah Bazghandi, Mohammad Kazemi, Mohammad Mehdi Sayyari, and Mohammad Hasan Mohagheghi are being designated pursuant to E.O. 14078 for acting or purporting to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the IRGC-IO, a person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to E.O. 14078.

SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS

As a result of today’s action, all property and interests in property of the designated persons described above that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked and must be reported to OFAC. In addition, any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, 50 percent or more by one or more blocked persons are also blocked. Unless authorized by a general or specific license issued by OFAC, or exempt, OFAC's regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or within (or transiting)
the United States that involve any property or interests in property of designated or otherwise blocked persons.

In addition, financial institutions and other persons that engage in certain transactions or activities with the sanctioned entities and individuals may expose themselves to sanctions or be subject to an enforcement action. The prohibitions include the making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services by, to, or for the benefit of any designated person, or the receipt of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services from any such person.

The power and integrity of OFAC sanctions derive not only from OFAC’s ability to designate and add persons to the 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 here. For detailed information on the process to submit a request for removal from an OFAC sanctions list, please click here.

Click here for more information on the individuals and entities designated today.

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