U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Treasury Sanctions Iranian Leaders Responsible for Internet Shutdown and Violent Crackdown on Peaceful Protests

October 6, 2022

WASHINGTON — Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is designating seven senior leaders within Iran's government and security apparatus for the shutdown of Iran's Internet access and the continued violence against peaceful protesters in the wake of the tragic death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who was arrested for allegedly wearing a hijab improperly, and died in the custody of Iran's Morality Police. Today's action follows OFAC's September 22 designation of Iran's Morality Police, its senior leadership, and other senior leaders of Iran's security organizations. Together with the release of Iran General License D-2, which authorizes exports of additional tools to assist Iranians in accessing the Internet, these designations demonstrate the United States' commitment to free, peaceful assembly and open communication.

"The rights to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly are vital to guaranteeing individual liberty and dignity," said Under Secretary of the Treasury Brian Nelson. "The United States condemns the Iranian government's Internet shutdown and continued violent suppression of peaceful protest and will not hesitate to target those who direct and support such actions."

Today's actions are taken pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13553, which authorizes sanctions with respect to serious human rights abuses by the Government of Iran, and E.O. 13846, which authorizes sanctions for engaging in censorship or other activities with respect to Iran.

GOVERNMENT MINISTERS

Iran's Minister of the Interior, **Ahmad Vahidi**, maintains oversight over all Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) deployed to subdue protests in Iran, including the ongoing protests over the death of Mahsa Amini. The LEF has used lethal force against protesters on multiple occasions in the past, making it a key instrument of the Iranian regime in its ongoing repression of its own people. The LEF's actions have resulted in thousands of deaths, including at least dozens of casualties in the recent demonstrations against the Morality Police. In the past, Vahidi has

warned Iranian women that the government's security forces will penalize those "breaking rules" in reference to hijab compliance. Recently, Vahidi has explicitly threatened protesters who continue to challenge the regime and has defended the brutal actions of LEF officers in suppressing ongoing protests.

Vahidi is being redesignated today pursuant to E.O. 13553 for being an official of the Government of Iran and being responsible for or complicit in, or responsible for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, the commission of serious human rights abuses against persons in Iran or Iranian citizens or residents, or the family members of the foregoing, on or after June 12, 2009, regardless of whether such abuses occurred in Iran.

Vahidi was previously designated under E.O. 13382 on June 16, 2010, for ties to Iran's nuclear and WMD programs. During his time as head of the IRGC's Qods Force, the group's external operations arm, Vahidi oversaw the bombing of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association building in Buenos Aires, Argentina, which killed 85 people and wounded hundreds.

Eisa Zarepour, the Minister of Communications, is responsible for the Iranian government's shameful attempt to block the Internet access of millions of Iranians in the hopes of slowing down the protests. Zarepour, who has called social media platforms vehicles for carrying the messages of protesters, has indicated that the Internet clampdown and silencing of voices online will continue as long as protests persist.

Zarepour 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.

SECURITY SERVICES SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Hossein Sajedinia, the Deputy Operations Commander of the LEF, and **Yadollah Javani**, the Deputy Political Commander of the IRGC, have led their respective organizations in violently suppressing protests. In April 2019, Sajedinia announced the deployment of over 8,000 male and female undercover Morality Police officers to identify and punish dress code offenders. **Vahid Mohammad Naser Majid**, the head of the Iranian Cyber Police, has leveraged the Iranian

Cyber Police to regularly monitor Iranian Internet users, filter websites, and block content the Iranian government finds objectionable.

Sajedinia is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13553 for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, Iran's LEF. Javani is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13553 for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the IRGC. Majid is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13846 for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of the Iranian Cyber Police, an Iranian person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to E.O. 13628.

Hossein Nejat, an IRGC commander and close associate of Iran's Supreme Leader, is head of Sarallah, the IRGC's security apparatus based in Tehran that is tasked with quelling anti-government protests. **Hossein Rahimi** is Iran's LEF police chief in Tehran, who oversees much of the Morality Police's hijab compliance enforcement in the capital. Rahimi has spearheaded Iran's controversial and oppressive "Nazer plan" in Tehran. The Nazer ("Observe" in Persian) plan has placed Morality Police throughout the capital to watch and punish women who improperly wear the hijab.

Nejat is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13553 for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the IRGC. Rahimi is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13553 for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, Iran's LEF.

SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS

As a result of today's action, all property and interests in property of these individuals 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's 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 individuals 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 individuals 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. For detailed information on the process to submit a request for removal from an OFAC sanctions list, please visit here.

Click here for identifying information on the individuals designated today.