



Iran Establishes Official VPN Operators



Abolhassan Firouzabadi, secretary of Iran's Supreme Council of Cyberspace.

Source: Allameh Tabataba'i News Agency, <https://www.atna-news.ir/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/bazdid-fazaye-majazi-ertebatat-8.jpg>

OE Watch Commentary: Within the Middle East, Iranians are among the most internet savvy populations, an irony given official state controls and bans on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), used by Iranians to bypass restrictions and government censorship, have long frustrated the Iranian regime. While Iranian authorities have talked for years about creating a national intranet to better control Iranian behavior online, they have yet to be able to implement their project. Social media companies have ignored Iranian government demands that they host servers inside Iran as a prerequisite for allowing Iranians onto their platforms. Regime efforts to slow internet connections have also largely failed to rein in social media growth. While the Islamic Republic has demonstrated the ability to shut down the internet entirely in times of crisis

as last month, creating VPNs it can control while banning foreign VPNs may enable it to avoid taking that dramatic step of internet shutdowns which negatively impact Iranian business and commerce.

In the excerpted article, Abolhassan Firouzabadi, the secretary of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, a body created by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in 2012, has announced a new approach by which the Iranian government would try to regulate and limit VPNs via official VPN operators. It is unclear why Iranians would utilize 'official' VPNs if their goals remain to bypass Iranian government restrictions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Legal VPN operators will be launched in the country.”

Source: “Operatorhay-e VPN-e rasmi dar keshavar ijad mishavand (Official VPN Operators have been established in the country),” *Mehr News Agency*, 11 November 2019. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4768865>

Official VPN Operators to be established in the country

The secretary of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace announced in the filtering working group guidelines to determine different levels of internet access for individuals and said, “Soon official VPN operators will be established in the country.”

Abolhassan Firouzabadi on Monday morning [11 November] said on the sidelines of a breakfast meeting at the Computer Trade Organization, “We agree that different accessibility levels should be defined for different types of internet for users and for this purpose, we have tasked the Working Group to come up with a specific guideline regarding internet accessibility.”

Firouzabadi said, “We wanted these rules to be in place three months ago, but unfortunately the meetings of this working group were delayed, and we are seeing slowness in reaching decisions.”

Referring to the legal issues of the VPNs, he added, “This issue had been long discussed, but it came to nothing. Since many organizations and people now use VPNs, and it has grown into quite a lucrative economy, we are hoping that legal VPN operators will be launched in the country in cooperation with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (ICT).” That is to say that the VPNs will be delegated according to predefined rules and regulations through official operators,” he stressed.

Although internet penetration is high in Iran compared to its neighbors, many of the world’s most popular sites are blocked, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others. This has fueled a multi-million Dollar market for VPN and proxy providers.