



## Iran: Prosecute Cybercriminals

**OE Watch Commentary:** The excerpted letter from a collection of clerical leaders which appear on *Gerdab.ir*, an Iranian website dedicated to news about cyberspace and cyber strategy, discusses increasing frustration among clergy in Qom with the continued penetration of the Internet into Iranian society. The leaders wrote to the head of the judiciary “asking the judiciary to prosecute the perpetrators of the disaster of cyber vulgarity and crime.”

For more than a decade, the Iranian government has talked about creating a national intranet (see: “Iran: Comprehensive Legal System for the Country’s Internet and Cyberspace,” *OE Watch*, October 2017). Recent unrest has sparked greater concern, especially with regard to the potential for young Iranians to use social media and phone apps to organize civil unrest (see: “Telegram Giving Data to US and Israel,” *OE Watch*, March 2018). The Iranian military has discussed a greater role in constructing the national intranet (see: “Iran: Armed Forces Ready to Take Over Internet,” *OE Watch*, October 2019) and Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi, Iran’s minister of Information and Communications Technology, has claimed progress (see: “Iran: Progress on National Intranet,” *OE Watch*, July 2019).



An Internet Café on Vanak Square, Tehran.

Source: Hamshahronline.ir <https://images.hamshahronline.ir/images/2018/5/18-5-12-181717page02.jpg>

That seminary leaders in Qom—among the most conservative elements in the Islamic Republic’s political spectrum—would complain about the Internet does not surprise. What is significant is their castigation of both Jahromi and the Supreme Cyberspace Council for dereliction of duty. Politics may be involved in both cases: Jahromi, at 38-years old the youngest minister in Iran’s cabinet, is widely discussed as a potential presidential contender. More interesting is the criticism of the Supreme Cyberspace Council because Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appoints its members.

That the letter is addressed to Ebrahim Raisi is significant as he is not only the head of the Judiciary, but one of the top contenders to replace the 81-year-old Khamenei upon his death. The letter’s signatories may therefore be urging Raisi to make control over the Internet a wedge issue and push Iran in a more conservative direction.

The letter continues not only to condemn Telegram and Instagram specifically—accusing Instagram in particular of twisting young people’s minds, but also says that independent social media poses a security threat and alleges that the Islamic State terrorists who attacked the Iranian parliament (June 2017), the shrine of Imam Khomeini (June 2017), and the military parade in Ahvaz (September 2018) had all used Iranian social media unhampered, a charge which seems unlikely but which would still put Jahromi and incumbent politicians on the defensive. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

**“Authorities have an obligation to remove the enemy from cyberspace.”**

**Source:** “Amalat-e Valangari Fezayi Mojazi Keshavar ra Mohakameh Konid (Prosecute Cybercriminals),” *Gerdab.ir*, 30 April 2020. <https://gerdab.ir/fa/news/29459>

### Prosecute Cybercriminals

According to *Gardab*, the Assembly of Representatives of Students and Scholars of the Seminary of Qom, the Coordinating Council of Cultural Centers of the Seminaries and more than 400 professors, students and scholars of seminaries from 65 cities across the country wrote a letter to the head of the judiciary asking the judiciary to prosecute the perpetrators of the disaster of cyber vulgarity and crime.

The text of this letter is as follows:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful:

In the presence of Ayatollah Raisi, the esteemed head of the Judiciary, may he be blessed with greetings and congratulations on the occasion of the arrival of the blessed month of Ramadan and the spring when the Quran was revealed, Imam Khamenei at the beginning of his speech marking the beginning of the [Persian] year, introduced cyberspace as one of the areas in which it is vital to find strength. Obviously, fulfilling this important task is the responsibility of the responsible institutions and, of course, this is not the first time that His Holiness has made this request to the authorities.

The lack of regulation of cyberspace, a large part of which is in the hands of the enemy, has allowed it to become a slaughterhouse for teenagers and young people and the enemy is striking at the country, and so authorities have an obligation to remove the enemy from cyberspace.

He also compared the vulnerability in cyberspace with chemical weapons, and said,

Today, television, radio, the Internet, social networks, all kinds of cyberspace devices are being used against our public opinion. The communications sector has a responsibility to pay attention to this part of the country. We have also mentioned these in face-to-face meetings in which we emphasize that now we say they should pay attention so that they do not become a tool for the enemy to use like they once did with chemical weapons against the people! They must know their duty and take it seriously....

Unfortunately, His Holiness’s outspoken grievances against the Ministry of Communications and the Supreme Council of Cyberspace at the General Assembly also failed to oblige these institutions to perform their legal duties....