

## Iran: Lifting the Ban on Instagram was Illegal

**OE Watch Commentary:** The protests that erupted in Mashhad, Iran's second largest city, on 28 December and which quickly spread across the country caught the Iranian government by surprise. While Iran largely restricts foreign journalists and almost all diplomats to Tehran, videos and photos of demonstrations quickly began circulating as Iranians uploaded cell phone camera footage. Significantly, many showed protestors in provincial towns and cities chanting anti-regime slogans. On 31 December, Iran banned Telegram, a popular social networking application, and the photo-sharing application Instagram.

In the excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency*, a hardline news agency affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Deputy Attorney General Abdol Samad Khorramabadi, chair of the Committee for Identifying Criminal Content, excoriated the Ministry of Communications for failing to block Instagram before the unrest began. Khorramabadi has long campaigned against social media access. In July 2017, for example, he declared that Twitter was a "platform for terrorists" and justified banning it even though many Iranian parliamentarians, the Supreme Leader, president, and foreign minister all maintain twitter accounts.

Khorramabadi has long been a crusader for a "national internet" whereby the Iranian government would cut off access to all social media applications and websites which it does not control. While it is doubtful that the Islamic Republic has the technical capacity to create a giant, impenetrable firewall, it has demonstrated the capacity to shut down social media access on a temporary basis. The embarrassment social media accounts have caused the Iranian government by exposing widespread anti-regime animus, however, will likely bolster Khorramabadi and his political allies in their quest to roll back Internet freedom.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

*"Instagram is, in fact, an unmanageable spy network."*

**Source:** "Rafa'e Filtir Instagram Khalaf Qanun Bud (Lifting the Ban on Instagram was Illegal)," *Mehr News Agency*, 10 January 2018. <https://goo.gl/JRJx8W>

*Abdol Samad Khorramabadi provided an answer in a note to a question about "Why has the order for censorship been removed despite the fact that Instagram is actually an uncontrollable espionage network containing millions [of pages] of criminal content against the country's security, Islamic morality, and morality? Do the judicial authorities not want to prevent these illegal activities?"*

*"Yes, it's quite right," he said, "that the Instagram social network appears to be an informational network. Yet, it is in fact an unmanageable spy network that publishes millions [of pages] of criminal content against the country's internal and external security, and immoral content against Islamic sanctities. Information about millions of Iranians are stored, analyzed, and exploited by Instagram servers located in America. Instagram's guidance and management are in the hands of the Great Satan's espionage services...."*



Deputy Prosecutor General Abdol Samad Khorramabadi.

Source: Islamic Republic News Agency, <http://img8.irna.ir/1395/13950617/82221138/82221138-71000023.jpg>, Public Domain.