



Iran's Basij in Cyberspace

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Republic of Iran remains of two minds about the internet. In 1993, Iran became only the second country in the Middle East (after Israel) to connect to the world-wide network and while Iranians culturally embraced it, the connection it afforded ordinary Iranians to outside cultures and ideas has become an increasing concern to Iran's revolutionary authorities. It is in this context that the accompanying excerpted interview with Moslem Mo'in, chief of the Basij Cyberspace Headquarters, is interesting. The Basij Cyberspace Headquarters, founded in 2014, is one of a proliferation of organizations within Iran's bureaucracy charged with controlling Iranians' cyber activities. It joins, for example, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGCs) Passive Defense Organization, the Law Enforcement Force's Cyberpolice, and the Supreme Leader's Supreme Council of Cyberspace.

In the course of the interview Mo'in spoke about the importance the Basij places in monitoring Iranians' use of the internet and its ability, in some cases, to act proactively—presumably to entrap Iranians it suspects might use it for counterrevolutionary purposes. The overall tenor of the interview suggests that the Basij sees itself as the cultural bulwark against the broader Iranian public, which does not share the Basij's commitment to the principles upon which Revolutionary Leader Ruhollah Khomeini based the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Beyond the excerpted portion, Mo'in used the interview both to call for parliamentary action to update and enhance the laws governing the internet in Iran, and to reaffirm his commitment to develop a national intranet as a precursor to disconnecting Iran from the broader internet. With regard to the former, the IRGC has been lobbying since at least October 2017 to amend Iran's press law to close loopholes exposed by the proliferation of online outlets. In addition, Iran's cybercrime law makes the distribution or promotion of any tool to bypass filtering programs illegal. While the Iranian government has widely interpreted the law to make VPNs illegal, the Basij may also seek legislative clarity to tighten what has been to date spotty enforcement. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Moslem Mo'in, chief of the Basij Organization Cyberspace Headquarters.
Source: Reza Bagheri Sharaf, Dana.ir, <http://www.dana.ir/content/upload/fe6eb83b-8a3a-4819-bd52-ad9a95eb53eb.jpg>.

“It (the internet) meant the entry of cultural content and Western lifestyle in the country.”

Source: “Basij dar Feza-ye Mojazi Tavan Dakhli Tekiyeh Kard (Basij in Cyberspace Relies on Internal Ability),” *Javan Online*, 23 November 2018. <http://www.javanonline.ir/fa/news/935689>

Moslem Moin, was appointed in July of this year by the order of General Gholam Hossein Gheybparvar, commander of the Basij to lead the Basij's Cyber Organization. On the eve of Basij week, we sat down for a conversation with this cyber specialist, and he spoke about the importance of cyberspace and the contribution of the forces of the revolutionary front in this space....

What is the contribution of the revolutionary front forces in this space?

As you know, the internet entered the country two decades ago without having to adhere to a cultural and necessarily well-defined framework. It meant the entry of cultural content and Western lifestyle into the country, and its day-to-day infusion of Iranian youth. Unfortunately, there was no special supervision at that time... And those people without a specific identity could operate, and this caused a lot of pests to emerge. This is the case not only in Iran but also in Europe, South Korea, China, Russia, and other advanced countries.... In cyberspace, as in other areas, it is necessary to rely on domestic and national expertise. In this regard, the [Basij] cyber organization has become a pioneer. In the various layers of this space, including media and streaming media, animation and gaming, cyberspace technology and infrastructure, gains were made. Of course, the years that these areas were monitored have been minimal, and there are many problems but, thanks be to God, because of the activities of the forces of the Revolution Front organization, as well as those who are sympathetic to the regime, this issue is on the path to improvement.

Are our activities in cyberspace more proactive or reactive...? The subject of media streaming and media activities are dependent upon the topic. In parts of cyberspace, a limited number of Basijis can take proactive action, in order to help meet the general needs of the people, as well as to maintain stability and internal security.