

SEPTEMBER 2015



Iranian Internet Infrastructure and Policy Report

A *Small Media* monthly report bringing you all the latest news on internet policy and online censorship direct from Iran.

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Introduction

In this month's report, we'll tease apart the recently-announced reforms to Iran's top internet policy-making body, the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC). Has the body's expansion handed more power to the Supreme Leader? Or is Rouhani's government still calling the shots?

Also this month, we can see some signs of growing foreign interest in Iran's tech and communications sectors as we enter the post-sanctions era. Will the trend continue? Tech problems and outages continue to afflict a number of foreign services operating in Iran, and despite its slow progress the government is insisting that its 'National Internet' project is going ahead. Learn more about the barriers and opportunities facing Iran's communications sector inside this month's report.

1

Reforming the Supreme Council of Cyberspace

In February 2014, Small Media published a comprehensive **report** about the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC), Iran's top internet policy body. In light of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's recent announcement reappointing SCC members, we decided to revisit the the topic and update our analysis to reflect the changes that have taken place in the interim.

Before we get into that, we'll offer a brief recap of some SCC basics we outlined in our previous report.

OVERVIEW

The Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC) was created by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei on March 7, 2012, and is Iran's top Internet policy body. The council, which is comprised of members of Rouhani's cabinet and individuals directly appointed by Khamenei, has the power to approve, veto, and dictate internet policy, and its decisions cannot be obstructed by parliament or the judiciary.

Structure of the SCC

The council has a total of 26 members, including 17 official representatives of state bodies and 9 people appointed directly by Khamenei. Among the official representatives, 9 come from Rouhani's cabinet, including the ICT Minister, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and President Rouhani himself (who serves as chairman of the council). The remaining 7

official representatives are appointed by the Supreme Leader, including the head of the judiciary, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, and the head of state broadcaster Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

SCC Procedure and Regulations

The council's internal regulations stipulate that the secretary of the SCC will be elected after receiving an absolute majority of votes from sitting SCC members and the endorsement of the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader also has the power to dismiss the elected secretary and request the SCC to elect a replacement. The regulations also require the SCC to meet at least once a month. However, this requirement has often been ignored, much to the irritation of some members of the council.

All of the council's decisions must be approved by a majority of voting SCC members, and any policy proposal receiving fewer than 7 votes cannot be passed, even if it is supported by a majority of present members. The SCC has the final say on all internet-related policy directives, and its decisions cannot be overridden by the ICT ministry, parliament, or the judiciary.

SCC Budget

In January 2014, the Iranian parliament approved a budget which allocated 1 trillion IRR (40 million USD) to the SCC. The following year, the SCC's budget increased to 1.5 trillion IRR (50 million USD).

THE RECENT SCC REFORMS

On September 5, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei **announced** that authority over Internet policy in Iran will be concentrated in the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC), and he introduced some personnel changes on the council. We'll now take a look at what these changes mean.

Ideological Balance

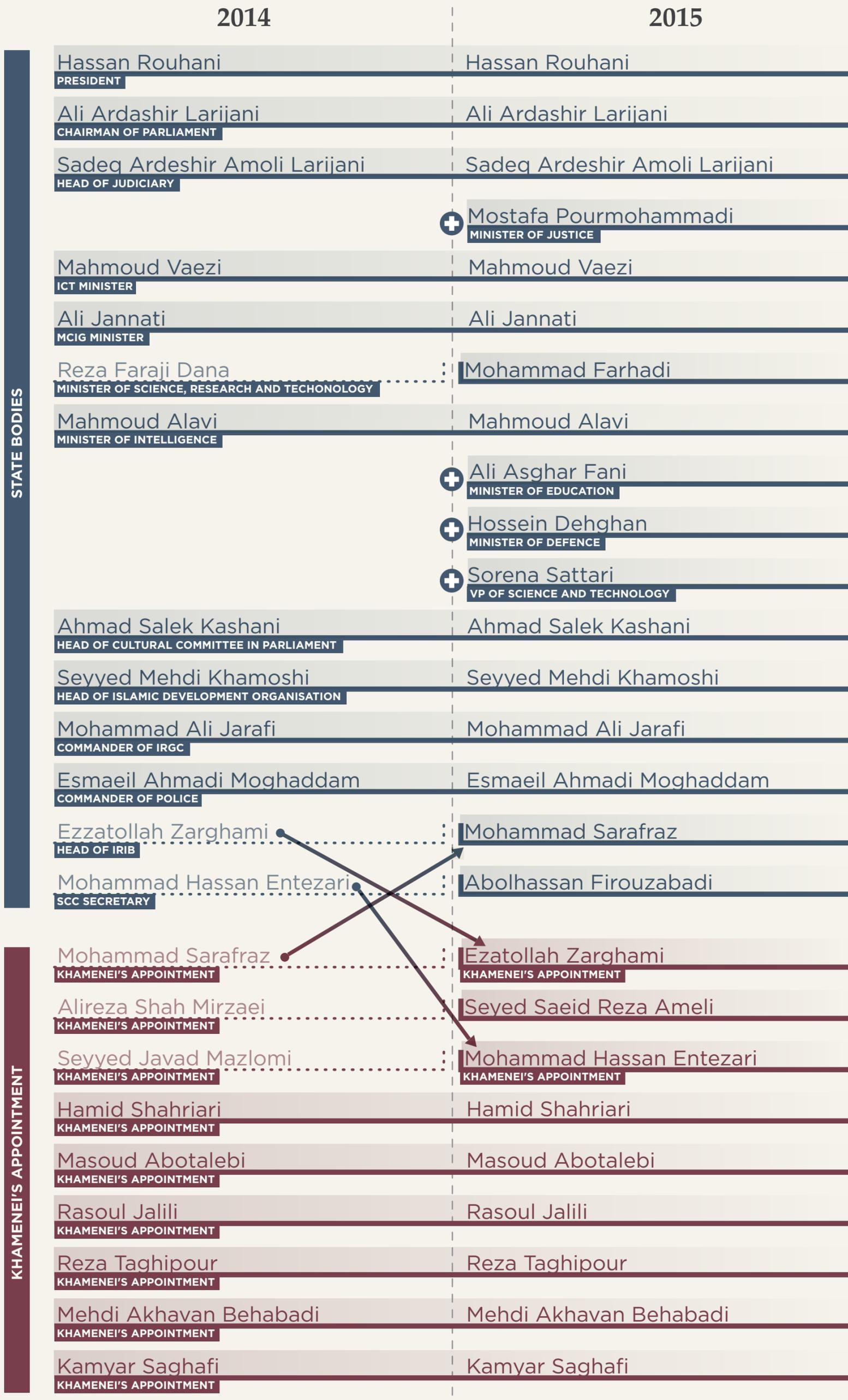
As of February 2014, the SCC had a total of 22 members: 13 representatives from government departments and 9 people appointed by Khamenei. Khamenei's **announcement** two weeks ago lists 8 appointed members, and 17 government representatives (since the announcement, Khamenei has also **appointed** former SCC secretary Mohammad Hassan Enterzari, bringing the total number of appointed members to 9). All government departments mentioned in our 2014 report remain on the council, with the addition of four new representatives: the Attorney General,

the Minister of Education, the Minister of Defence, and the Vice President of Science and Technology. See [Fig. I] for an overview of the changes.

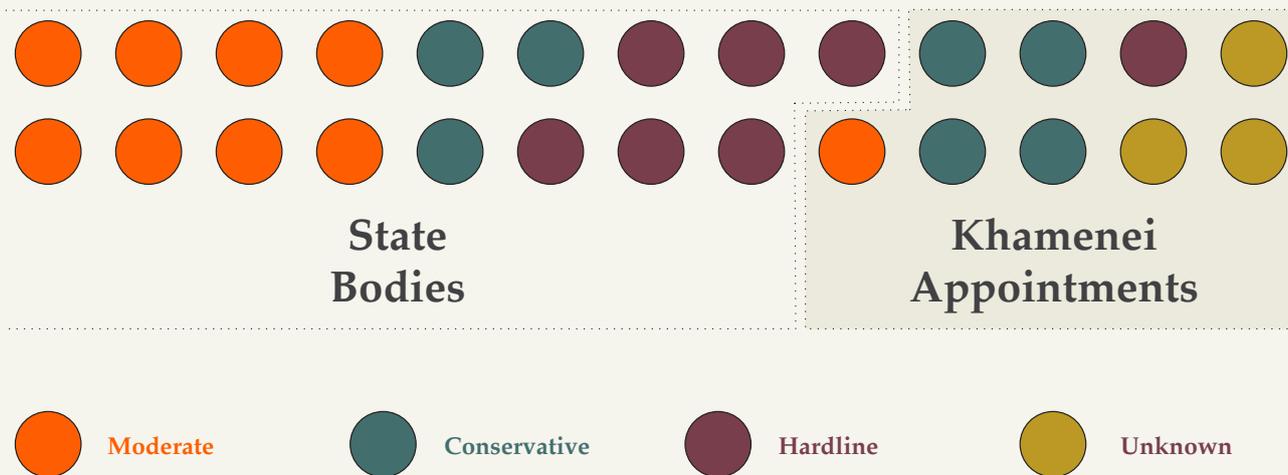
This means that Khamenei's changes actually *increase* the number of representatives from Rouhani's cabinet. Indeed, of the new departments added, 2 are headed by moderates/reformists (Education and Defence), one by a conservative (Attorney General), and while the affiliation of the Vice President for Science and Technology is unclear, it is reasonable to assume that he is relatively moderate, as he was appointed directly by Rouhani, without the requirement for parliamentary approval.

In other words, it's possible that Khamenei's changes actually increased the number of moderates on the SCC—see [Fig. II] to see the current balance of power on the council. (It's important not to overstate this point. In the Iranian context, terms such as 'moderate' and 'conservative' are vaguely-defined labels that aim to give a sense of a politician's ideological affiliations, and are sometimes open to debate. The categorisations mentioned above have been assigned by Small Media based on our assessment of their records.)

Rewiring the Supreme Council of Cyberspace



The Ideological Make-up of the SCC, 2015



[Fig. II] – The ideological make-up of the SCC, 2015

The Dissolution of Parallel Bodies

A recent [article](#) on the changes to the SCC by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHR) claims (emphasis added):

"Any other organization involved in Internet policy is to be dissolved and all Internet decision-making power concentrated in the Supreme Council. The decision will effectively cut the Rouhani administration out of Internet policy."

Small Media is not convinced that concentrating internet policy decisionmaking in the SCC necessarily marginalises the Rouhani administration. On the contrary, it was through his position as SCC Chairman that Rouhani launched one of his most [consequential interventions](#) into a public debate about internet censorship. When the Committee to Determine Instances of Criminal Content (CDICC), a body that oversees filtering actions, sought to block WhatsApp, Rouhani asserted his authority as SCC Chairman and publicly opposed the proposed block. After a tense standoff between Rouhani's ICT Ministry and CDICC Chairman Abdolsamad Khoramabadi, the latter eventually backed down, and

WhatsApp remained unblocked in Iran.

At this point, a confession of sorts is in order. In our 2014 [report](#) on the SCC, we argued:

“Rouhani’s government does hold some nominal power within the SCC - President Rouhani remains the Chairman, and the moderate Mohammad Hassan Entezari was elected as its Secretary. Yet for these figures to push any filtering reductions past the rest of the SCC remains a fairly unlikely prospect.”

Rouhani’s willingness and ability to use his position as SCC Chairman to thwart censorship attempts certainly surprised us. After discussing this incident in our 2015 [Revolution Decoded report](#), we concluded:

“The authority of the SCC has been asserted most vociferously by members of Rouhani’s cabinet, with ICT Minister Mahmoud Vaezi arguing that President Rouhani and the SCC are responsible for managing all policy relating to social networks and that CDICC must comply with all SCC rulings.”

Khamenei’s recent statement did not remove Rouhani from the SCC, nor did it affect ICT Minister Mahmoud Vaezi’s status on the Council. Moreover, as mentioned above, Khamenei’s statement added 4 members of Rouhani’s cabinet to the SCC. Small Media is therefore of the view that Khamenei’s statement consolidating internet policymaking power in the SCC does not necessarily sideline the Rouhani administration.

As for the parallel bodies to be dissolved, Khamenei didn’t offer any specifics, and we may have to wait until the next high profile fight over internet policy to see how any new institutional tensions play out. However in March 2014, SCC secretary Mohammad Hassan Entezari [claimed](#) that there were over 40 organisations and government bodies involved with formulating ICT policy. It could therefore be argued that Khamenei’s recent consolidation of internet policy authority in the SCC may have been intended to simplify a complex and disorganised process.

The SCC’s Record – 2014-15

While the SCC’s remit include all internet-related policy areas, the council has focused most intently on a small number of issues over the past two years. These include 3G and 4G licensing, the development of the National Internet (SHOMA), and the relationship between the SCC and other

internet-related bodies. A list of some noteworthy statements is included below.

- **May 4, 2014:** Vaezi announced that the proposed blocking of WhatsApp had been suspended by President Hassan Rouhani. According to Vaezi, President Rouhani considers the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC) responsible for managing policy relating to social networks, and not CDICC. On 30 April 2014, CDICC ordered the ICT Ministry to block WhatsApp, but the ministry has not yet implemented this decision.
- **August 27, 2014:** Salek complained that despite the need to address several pressing issues, such as the cultural damage 3G and 4G pose to society, no SCC meeting has been held for several months. According to the Cyberspace Research Institute (CSRI), the last meeting took place on 10 May 2014.
- **September 5, 2014:** Alireza Mirzaei, a member of the SCC, said that government policy on 3G and 4G access is unclear, causing concern amongst a number of SCC members.
- **September 27, 2014:** Mohammad Hassan Entezari, Secretary of the SCC, said that the SCC is just a policy-making body, reiterating that the CDICC holds responsibility for internet censorship. In addition, he claimed that he has never used WhatsApp or Viber, arguing that he believes in supporting Iranian versions of these apps.
- **October 17, 2014:** The 19th meeting of the SCC has been postponed because several members were not available to attend. According to the Public Relationship (PR) of the National Center of Cyberspace (NCC), the agenda for the meeting was very important and couldn't proceed without a majority of members present. The 19th meeting was supposed to have been held on 18 October 2014.
- **November 16, 2014 :** Mohammad Hassan Entezari, Secretary of the SCC said SHOMA will not disconnect Iranians from the international web. Iranians will still be able to access the global internet once SHOMA is launched.
- **January 27, 2015:** ICT Minister Mahmood Vaezi named the SCC as an organisation that can make decisions about blocking different

services such as mobile apps. According to Vaezi, the SCC is a policy maker and all organisations and bodies must abide by its decisions.

- **March 8, 2015:** Mohammad Hassan Entezari, Secretary of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC) said the ICT Ministry's report on SHOMA is unacceptable because they only submitted a PowerPoint file.
- **March 13, 2015:** Entezari announced that Iran has two filtering projects to censor the internet. The first is a national project that the ICT Ministry has been working on to apply filtering techniques to data as it enters Iranian cyberspace at the international gateway. The second project, undertaken by the SCC, is aimed at small organisations with fewer than 10,000 users.
- **July 5, 2015:** According to Mehr News Agency, the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC) has not had any meetings since March 2015. The members of the SCC are supposed to meet every three weeks but it has recently become very disorganized.
- **July 28, 2015:** Members of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC) are not happy with what they perceive to be the body's disorganisation, citing the failure of the SCC to hold meetings in recent months. One member of the council, Hojjat al-Eslam Ahmad Salak Kashani, said the SCC's work is very important and several members aren't happy with the body's recent conduct. He added that the last meeting was four months ago and if delays over meetings are not resolved soon, they will take it up with President Rouhani.

A few observations:

- There is frequent disagreement about the precise role of the SCC, especially concerning its relationship to the CDICC.
- It is not uncommon for the SCC to go several months without meeting, although such inaction usually prompts harsh criticism from certain members.
- The council does occasionally address filtering policy, but this doesn't appear to be a primary focus.

For a full overview of the SCC's activities from 2014-15, check out our [comprehensive timeline](#).

CONCLUSIONS

Iran's internet policy process is rather nebulous, but based on the SCC's activities over the past couple years, we can draw a few preliminary conclusions. First, while the SCC has the power to unilaterally dictate policy or push aggressive filtering, it has not been very proactive in formulating policy. Indeed, one of the most striking feature of the list above is how often the SCC is criticised for its disorganisation and failure to hold regular meetings. Second, it appears that Khamenei's recent changes to the council were not as radical as many people assumed. The four new additions to the council all came from Rouhani's cabinet, and given the nebulous array and organisations involved with ICT policy, Khamenei's dissolution of all parallel bodies may have been aimed at simplifying the policy process.

The internet policy process in Iran remains opaque, and it is difficult to clearly articulate specific processes and institutional roles. We have presented our assessment of the SCC based not only on official statements and regulations, but also on examples of how the council functions in practice. It is entirely possible that the council will become bolder and more aggressive in pushing for filtering actions in the future, or more scrupulous about holding monthly meetings. However at present, the council appears to be a largely reactive body which approves, implements, or rejects internet policy on a mostly ad hoc basis.

2

Content Filtering and Blocked Sites

- **September 1:** [BBC Persian](#)'s website was accessible in Iran for a few minutes. Hossein Noushabadi, spokesperson of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG), denied that the MCIG had anything to do with this development. Also, Abdolsamad Khoramabadi, Secretary of the Commission to Determine the Instances of Criminal Content (CDICC) said that no decision has been taken to end the filtering of the BBC Persian website. He added that the Telecommunication Infrastructure Company of Iran (TIC) is responsible for the lifting of restrictions, and must explain why this incident occurred. ([Source I](#), [Source II](#))
- **September 11:** According to various reports, Arash Zad—one of Iran's most innovative Internet entrepreneurs, Persian-language editor of the highly popular technology website Weblogina, and director of Zigzag Lab—was arrested in Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport on his way to Istanbul. ([Source I](#), [Source II](#))
- **September 11:** According to [Trend Micro](#), Iran became the third country to fall victim to the HawkEye malware in the second quarter of 2015. ([Source](#))
- **September 19:** The MCIG announced that they have filtered websites promoting the game 'Arab Koshi (Killing Arabs)', and stated that it is forbidden to share the game online in any form. Recently, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei asked authorities to create a workgroup to produce Iranian computer games. Recently tensions have escalated between Iran and Arab states over ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen. ([Source](#))

3

Statements from Ministries and Politicians

- **September 1:** The MCIG published a list of 26 news websites responsible for breaching Iran's Press Law. The MCIG stated that they will publicly denounce any websites acting in violation of Iran's Press Law. ([Source](#))
- **September 2:** The Statistical Center of Iran published a set of previously unavailable internet and communications data from December 2013. [Table 1] includes the most important statistics from the report. ([Source](#))

Households with radio access	13 million (57%)
Households with TV access at home	22.5 million (98.4%)
Urban radio penetration rate	61.1%
Urban TV penetration rate	98.9%
Rural radio penetration rate	45.5%
Rural TV penetration rate	97.7%
Households with access to an internet connection	22.8 million
Households with access to a home internet connection	8.6 million (37.8%)
Urban households with access to a home internet connection	7.6 million (87.7%)
Rural households with access to a home internet connection	1.1 million (12.3%)
Households with ADSL access	3.8 million (44.1%)
Households with WiFi or WiMAX access	2.6 million (30.2%)
Households with dial-up internet access	883,000 (9.7%)
Households with GPRS access	842,000 (9.8%)
Households with other internet connections	2.3 million (26.6%)
Mobile phone owners (aged 6+)	47.4 million (63.31%)
Urban mobile phone owners (aged 6+)	37 million (52.40%)

Rural mobile phone owners (aged 6+)	10.4 million (14.73)
Mobile phone penetration rate (aged 6+)	67.2%
Urban mobile phone penetration rate (aged 6+)	72.1%
Rural mobile phone penetration rate (aged 6+)	54.2%

[Table 1] – Statistical Center of Iran data, December 2013

- **September 2:** According to statistics from the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of mobile phones imported into Iran has decreased from 26.3 million to 12.6 million USD from 2013/14 to 2014/15. Ebrahim Dorosti, Head of Sales for Audio & Video Devices and the Mobile Phones Guild said that a fall in imports suggests that the smuggling of mobile phones is on the increase. ([Source](#))
- **September 2:** President Hassan Rouhani said that the launch of a fast, cheap, and secure National Information Network (SHOMA) is a priority of his government. ([Source](#))
- **September 4:** Mehdi Rasekh, Deputy ICT Minister for ICT Development, Activity Coordination and Support in Iran's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Ministry said the development of e-Government and ICT offices in rural regions are amongst the top priorities of his ministry. ([Source](#))
- **September 5:** Sadegh Abbasi Shahkuh, Deputy of Communications Regulatory Authority of Iran (CRA) said the CRA will upgrade RighTel's license from 3G to 4G. He added that RighTel will be able to launch their 4G network in three cities for the time being. ([Source](#))
- **September 5:** According to a report from *Donya-e-Eqtasad*, 4 companies have dominated the online advertising market in Iran. The report says various ads are shown 170 million times per day in Iran. Also, it says the number of ads viewed by Iranians will increase to 1 billion per day by the end of March 2016. ([Source](#))
- **September 5:** The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched a military exercise named 'Eghtedare Sarallah'. According to an IRGC spokesperson, more than 3,000 people participated in this exercise, including personnel assigned to monitor social media activities, and promote Islamic revolutionary ideology. ([Source](#))
- **September 5:** Khamenei announced a number of reforms to the SCC, and the addition of new members. The current members of the SCC will remain in office for next four years. For a comprehensive review of the changes to the SCC, see this month's feature. ([Source](#))
- **September 5:** Mohammad Otraj, Director of the Computer Guild in Isfahan said he has not seen any changes in the computer market in the wake of the Iran Deal. According to Otraj, it will probably take a few

- months for any positive changes to be seen in the sector. (Source)
- **September 5:** Raja Rail Transportation Co. (Raja) will provide WiFi in their luxury trains. There is no information about the quality and speed of WiFi. (Source)
 - **September 5:** Iran Telecom Fair, the 16th International Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology & Solutions will be held in Tehran from 26-29 September. Delegates from around the world will be in attendance, including attendees from India, China, France, Germany, Russia and Taiwan. (Source)
 - **September 6:** According to a report from *ICT Press*, Telegram suffered from service problems for around 6 hours. In response to this disruption, Mahmoud Khosravi, Director of the TIC said he has no information about this problem, adding that such service disruptions are insignificant and take place worldwide. In recent months, Iranian users have had problems using mobile communication apps such as Viber and WhatsApp. (Source)
 - **September 6:** Vaezi held an informal press conference, and made the following remarks:
 - a. In response to a new statement from the Supreme Leader about the SCC, the ICT Ministry will close the High Council of IT (HCIT).
 - b. His Ministry will accelerate the completion of SHOMA.
 - c. Iran's government had nothing to do with Telegram's service disruption, which it attributed to a six hour international outage.
 - d. Iran has lost 50 Gbps of internet bandwidth from Turkey since September 5.
 - e. Vaezi announced that the Rouhani government has improved Internet bandwidth from 620 Gbps to 2,400 Gbps since 2013. (Source I - Source II)
 - **September 6:** Assadollah Dehnad, Director of Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) announced a series of statistics relating to internet access and phone penetration rates, which are displayed in [Table 2]. (Source)

Total number of landline	29,655,000
Landline penetration rate	37.8%
Internet broadband ports	5,665,000
Active internet broadband ports	4,290,000
Mobile phone SIM cards registered with the Mobile Telecommunication Company of Iran (MCI)<?>	63,000,000

[Table 2] – Telecommunication Company of Iran penetration data

- **September 6:** The Director of Iran's Passive Defence Organisation (IPDO) Gholamreza Jalali warned Iranians over their use of smartphones. According to Jalali, Iran should allow only companies to import smartphones which they move their servers to Iran. (Source)
- **September 7:** Shahkuh said it is not worth launching a fourth mobile operator in the market, stating that he would prefer to introduce the Mobile Virtual Network Operator (MVNO) to make the mobile market more competitive. Consequently, the planned launch of a fourth mobile operator in Iran has been cancelled. (Source)
- **September 7:** *Fars News Agency* published a report about the activities of the ICT Ministry since Vaezi became the ICT Minister. The highlights are listed below:
 - a. Internet bandwidth has been improved and the resulting boosts in speed are obvious.
 - b. The ICT Ministry has invested 8,000 billion IRR (266 million USD) into the TIC, although the initial planned investment was for just 1,000 billion IRR (33 million USD).
 - c. 8,000 villages were connected to Internet, while the ICT Ministry aims to boost this figure to 25,000 by the end of the current government. Over the past year, the Ministry invested 2,380 billion IRR (79 million USD) into connecting villages to the internet, and they will spend another 3,700 billion IRR (123 million USD) by the end of this Iranian year (March 2015–2016). (Source)
- **September 7:** According to *Fars News Agency*, Intelligent Filtering has been unsuccessful. According to Khorramabadi, the Intelligent Filter has failed, and the current practice of IF is useless. The plan was to remove filtering from international gateways. Previously filtering was run through Iran's main broadband but in the second phase the filtering will implement through Internet operator and service provider. The third phase of Intelligent filtering will be through data center with intelligent data center that can recognise all the forbidden file and datas and filter them. The first phase of Intelligent Filtering took 9 months and it was applied on Instagram. 11 universities and institutions took part on Intelligent Filtering. (Source)
- **September 7:** Khamenei met with members of the SCC and told them that cyberspace has a great influence on culture, politics, religion and the economy. Khamenei added that it is essential to have plans and structures in place to manage cyberspace. Previously, Khamenei asked the ICT Minister to shut down all cyberspace councils working in parallel with the SCC. (Source)
- **September 8:** Iran's first data center for cloud computing was

launched by Vaezi. This data centre is the first Iran's cloud computing system, and was produced in a collaboration between the Information Technology Organization of Iran (ITO), Information Technology Research Centre (ITRC), Alzahra University and Sharif University of Technology. ([Source](#))

- **September 8:** Nasrollah Jahangard, Deputy ICT Minister said that 30% of Iranian internet traffic is used up by non-Iranian social networks. He added that mobile traffic had increased tenfold in the past year, from 70 Tbps in 2013/14 to 700 Tbps today. ([Source](#))
- **September 9:** Barat Ghanbari, Deputy ICT Minister for Strategic Planning and Control said that the launch of the national search engine is one of the central pillars of SHOMA. Ghanbari said they will share the latest news about national search engines on [didras.ir](#). ([Source](#))
- **September 12:** SCC Secretary Mohammad Hassan Entezari announced that it is important to build local social networks on SHOMA. He did not mention how the SCC planned to achieve this goal. ([Source](#))
- **September 12:** Vahid Sadoughi, CEO of the MCI said that 90% of their customers have smartphones that can only support 3G, with only 10% able to make use of 4G. ([Source](#))
- **September 12:** Entezari said that it was untrue to state that SHOMA is in operation, and the ICT Ministry should not say that they have launched it. Entezari went onto describe the six central features of SHOMA:
 - a. It is fully local.
 - b. It is independent from the Internet.
 - c. It will be mobile.
 - d. All data is encrypted.
 - e. It facilitates communication between vital sectors across the country.
 - f. It allows for broadband access, data centers, and local hosting.([Source](#))
- **September 12:** Vaezi said that Iran is in the second phase of implementing Intelligent Filtering, but it is still in a trial period. He added that Intelligent Filtering is being rolled out in three phases, and that the government will announce when it is ready for deployment. ([Source](#))
- **September 13:** Mohammad Ali Zarebidaki, Head of Iran's National Search Engine [Parsijoo](#) said that a national search engine could bring about a massive transformation of Iran's e-commerce sector. Previously, Small Media published a comprehensive report about Iran's search engines, which is available [here](#). ([Source](#))

- **September 13:** Iran's General Prosecutor Seyyed Ebrahim Raeisi announced that the CDICC will undertake a review as to whether or not Telegram should be blocked. In a TV interview, Entezari said that social networks are operating in Iran without adhering to government regulations. ([Source](#))
- **September 13:** Rouhani's administration announced a new budget for the ICT Ministry for the next financial year. According to the announcement, the Ministry will get 1,977,783,000 IRR (66 million USD), compared to around 25,000,000 billion IRR in the previous year. ([Source](#))
- **September 14:** Entezari said the SCC is producing proposals on cyberspace for [Iran's Sixth Five-Year Plan](#). He added that having a comprehensive plan on cyberspace will enable Iran to become a world cyberpower. Also, he mentioned it is important to develop and improve domestic social networks, and promote Iranian culture and the Persian language online. ([Source](#))
- **September 15:** Shahkuh said that by the end of September 2015, the CRA will issue new licences for ISPs which will enable them to provide the most up-to-date broadband services employing the latest technology. According to Shahkuh, the licence will cost 200 billion IRR (6.6 million USD) and the company will be required to share 3% of their profits with the government. ([Source](#))
- **September 15:** Vaezi said the next meeting of the SCC may go ahead in the third week of September with Rouhani in attendance. Khamenei previously requested that members of the SCC hold meetings on a monthly basis. [Previously](#), the disorganisation of the SCC has been a controversial issue. ([Source](#))
- **September 15:** Entezari said that 5.5 million Iranians are playing [Clash of Clans](#), adding that 90% of computer games in the country are not made by Iranians. Entezari added that greater efforts should be made to support Iranian game developers. ([Source](#))
- **September 15:** Jahangard stated that Iran holds the top ranking for data hosting in the Middle East. He claimed Iran was able to create a full copy of one of the 13 servers in Netherlands responsible for handling global internet traffic, and set one up domestically. According to Jahangard, Iran's traffic previously went out to the Netherlands and then back into the country. He also said that there are 20 million Iranian mobile phone users who use mobile data, with 18 million MCI customers, 17 million MTN Irancell customers, and 3 million users of Rightel. He said the number of smartphones will reach to 40 million by the start of the next Iranian year (March 2016- March 2017). ([Source](#))
- **September 15:** Alireza Shahpari, the Director of the Development

Center for e-Government announced that all government employees will soon be required to take part in IT training. He added that the government will spend 520 billion IRR (17 million USD) on e-Government initiatives in the current Iranian year. (Source)

- **September 16:** After a six month hiatus, the SCC held its first meeting to choose a new Secretary National Center of Cyberspace (NCC) Director. Hassan Rouhani attended the meeting accompanied by other ministers and directors of state bodies. (Source)
- **September 16:** Mohammad Reza Yousefi, Political Director of Tehran's Governor said that if the Guardian Council accepted the legitimacy of e-Voting, electronic voting would be rolled out in Tehran for the upcoming Parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections in February 2016. (Source)



- **September 16:** Seyed Abolhasan Firouzabadi was elected as Secretary of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace and Head of the NCC. Seyed Abolhasan Firouzabadi was born in

1961 in Najaf, Iraq. He is son of Ayatollah Firouzabadi. He holds bachelors and masters degrees in Electrical Engineering, with a focus on telecommunications, He is working on his PhD thesis on strategic management at the Supreme University of National Defense. Firouzabadi has 25 years of experience designing, implementing and managing ICT projects, serving as the Deputy Director for Managing New Industries at Iran's Social Security Organization, and President of the Board of Directors at Tamin Telecom. He worked as a journalist between 1980 and 1982, has studied seminary courses including Arabic literature and jurisprudence, and is fluent in both Arabic and English. (Source I - Source II)

- **September 16:** Vaezi said his Ministry will not lift blocks imposed against a number of social networks until he and his colleagues are confident that the outcome will be positive. Apparently, some government representatives asked his Ministry to lift blocks on a number of social networks. Vaezi reiterated that the blocking of social networks was imposed by the previous government. (Source)
- **September 18:** MTN Irancell announced there has been disruption on their 4G network as a result of the launch of iOS 9.0. Irancell asked users to avoid updating their iOS until Apple solve the problem. (Source)

- **September 19:** Khamenei appointed Mohammad Hassan Entezari as a member of the SCC. Previously Entezari served as Secretary of the SCC, but was replaced in the role by Firouzabadi on September 19. ([Source](#))
- **September 20:** According to the *Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA)*, 90.74% of Iranians have registered and activated SIM cards, which is an increase of 0.44% on the last Iranian year (2014/2015). The total number of SIM cards given to people sits at 136,139,538. ([Source](#))
- **September 20:** [FilmNet](#)—an Iranian version of Amazon Instant Video on which users can buy, stream or download movies—was launched. All movies on FilmNet adhere to state interpretations of Islamic law. ([Source](#))
- **September 20:** Mohammad Ebrahim Tarighat, the Spokesman of the National Organization for Civil Registration, said his organisation plans to identify social network users who live in Iran. ([Source](#))
- **September 21:** Zohreh Hosseini, Director of [Hamsan Gozini](#), the first legal online dating website in Iran, said that 17,500 users are registered on the website. Hosseini added that 4,500 people have been dating, with 140 cases resulting in marriage. She said most site visitors were born in the 1360s (1980s), then 1350s (1970s), 1340s (1960s) and 1370s (1990s). Hosseini also said that 8% of users were divorced or had lost their partner. Most female visitors were born in the 1350s (1970s). ([Source](#))
- **September 22:** Vaezi said the French telecoms company Orange has been negotiating with an Iranian mobile operator. In the wake of the nuclear deal, Western companies have started to enter into serious negotiations with Iranian organisations in search of business opportunities—especially in the energy and communications sectors. ([Source](#))
- **September 23:** Fathollah Moztarzadeh, Director of the Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology (IROST) said that with the lifting of sanctions, Iran will be able to bring the Mesbah satellite back from Italy. Iran sent its Mesbah satellite to Italy in 2004 to undergo some testing and research, but Italy was unable to return it as a result of the UN Security Council's sanctions on Iran. ([Source](#))
- **September 26:** Firouzabadi said that the rapid completion of SHOMA's development, and the launch of a Content Delivery Network (CDN) are the top priorities for the SCC. ([Source](#))
- **September 27:** Jahangard announced that there are 1.5 billion Persian-language pages on the Internet, and as a result it is very important for Iran to have its own search engine. Jahangard said there are around eight search engines in operation, but conceded that it will take time for them to become competitive with international search engines. Jahangard also said that the ICT

Ministry's has allocated a limitless budget for providing support for Iranian developers working on national search engines. (Source)

- **September 28:** Jahangard announced that his Ministry is ready to provide fresh updates to the SCC on the development status of SHOMA. Jahangard insists that SHOMA does exist, and is able to provide a number of electronic services. (Source)
- **September 28:** MP and Ahmadinejad-era ICT Minister Mohammad Soleimani criticised the way the Ministry of ICT is spending its budget. Soleimani said that the ICT Ministry allocated 4 billion IRR (133,000 USD) to improve communications infrastructure in small cities and villages, but has not done enough to pursue this objective. (Source)
- **September 30:** Mehdi Rasekh, Deputy ICT Minister for ICT Development, Activity Coordination and Support condemned social network content criticising the Hajj pilgrimage. Recently, social network users shared messages criticising the practice of the Hajj after recent incidents during the pilgrimage killed more than 450 Iranians. (Source)