

Fact Sheet: Sanctions Against Those Complicit in Grave Human Rights Abuses Via Information Technology in Syria and Iran

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The White House

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“Cyberspace, and the technologies that enable it, allow people of every nationality, race, faith and point of view to communicate, cooperate, and prosper like never before. We encourage people all over the world to use digital media...and denounce those who harass, unfairly arrest, threaten, or commit violent acts against the people who use these technologies.

-President Obama, *International Strategy for Cyberspace*, May 2011

Twenty-first century threats to human rights require twenty-first century tools to combat them. This Administration recognizes that some oppressive governments seek to target their citizens for grave human rights abuses through the use of information and communications technology. In an Executive Order signed today, President Obama authorized a new program of sanctions, aimed at those who facilitate serious human rights abuses in Syria and Iran through such means.

The same Global Positioning System (GPS), satellite communications, mobile phone, and Internet technology employed by activists across the Middle East and North Africa and around the world is being used against them in Syria and Iran, as the world has witnessed particularly clearly in Syria in recent weeks. The Syrian and Iranian governments are rapidly increasing their capabilities to disrupt, monitor, and track communications networks that are essential to the ability of Syrians and Iranians to communicate with each other and the outside world.

The Executive Order announced today by President Obama establishes financial and travel sanctions against those who perpetrate or facilitate “Grave Human Rights Abuses Via Information Technology” in Syria and Iran (or “GHRAVITY sanctions”) and will:

- Degrade the ability of the Syrian and Iranian governments to acquire and utilize such technology to oppress their people;
- Hold accountable those government officials, companies, and individuals committing or facilitating human rights abuses.
- Send a clear message that the United States recognizes and is committed to combating this new and growing human rights threat;
- Further isolate the regimes in Damascus and Tehran;
- Strengthen international norms against using information and communications technology to commit human rights abuses;

The order authorizes sanctions against persons determined:

- To have operated, or to have directed the operation of, information and communications technology that facilitates computer or network disruption, monitoring or tracking that could assist in or enable serious human rights abuses by or on behalf of the Government of Iran or the Government of Syria;
- To have sold, leased, or otherwise provided, directly or indirectly, goods, services, or technology to Iran or Syria likely to be used to facilitate computer or network disruption, monitoring or tracking that could assist in or enable serious human rights abuses by or on behalf of the Government of Iran or the Government of Syria;
- To have materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, those activities; or
- To be owned or controlled by, or to have acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, any person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to the order.

We will implement this sanctions instrument consistent with our strong belief in the need to ensure that the citizens of Syria and Iran have access to information and communications technology that facilitates their access to information and ability to protect and organize themselves in the face of oppression. This order underscores our efforts to help the Syrian and Iranian people pierce through the “electronic curtain” that the Syrian and Iranian regimes have put in place. The Administration recognizes the importance of preserving the global telecommunications supply chains for essential products and services, and will take great care to ensure the utilization of sanctions does not disrupt transactions necessary to enable the Syrian and Iranian people to communicate.

Given the deplorable and deteriorating human rights situation in Syria and Iran, our urgent priority is to pursue sanctions against those two governments and entities and individuals in those countries helping them to commit human rights abuses. The order also authorizes sanctions against third-country entities or individuals where they meet the criteria in the order.