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IRAN

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SMALL MEDIA

Iran has been fairly active in the WSIS Review process. Its primary policy priorities have included strong support for the development aspects of WSIS, and advocacy for state sovereignty approaches to global internet governance. The agenda is set by the government, with the ICT Ministry usually leading the way. There is evidence to suggest that the President also plays some role in determining the extent of Iran's engagement at global internet governance events, and the recently inked nuclear agreement may prompt increased engagement between Iran and the international community. Yet Iran's preference for intergovernmental formats over multistakeholder arrangements has generally left little room for civil society engagement. While there have been some recent indications that Iran may be showing signs of openness towards multistakeholder processes, Iran's approach to internet governance is likely to remain a predominantly government-led affair.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

The topic of development has been a persistent focus of Iranian representatives at WSIS events since 2003. As a report from Small Media explains, "Iran has repeatedly emphasised the importance of the Millennium Development Goals, and of other internationally-recognised development treaties and agreements".¹ These efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 2010, UNESCO awarded Iran a special certificate for its efforts to expand broadband access to rural areas.²

For the upcoming WSIS+10 Review, there is no reason to expect Iran to waver in its stated commitment to development. During the open consultation process for the WSIS Forum 2015, one of Iran's delegates pointed out that "the main theme of this year is innovation and sustainable development. I suggest paying more attention to the vision of this agenda in the WSIS meeting".³ Moreover, increasing access to broadband has been one of the stated ICT policies of Rouhani's government,⁴ and Iran's delegation mentioned this policy goal several times during the WSIS+10 Iran country workshop.⁵

Human Rights

Iran's position on human rights within the WSIS framework remains unclear. At previous internet governance events, Iran has drawn on human rights language to argue for an expanded role for the nation-state in international telecommunications regulation. As Nolasco explains, at the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT-12):

"The African States proposed to add text, immediately after the preamble statement on the protection of human rights, recognising the right of access of member states to international telecommunications services. China, Cuba, Iran, the

African states and several Middle East countries supported the proposal, arguing that there is a connection between human rights and member states' rights, and that some member states are currently deprived of access to international telecommunications services and to the internet."⁶

On the other hand, Iran has evinced rhetorical support for human rights in other internet governance fora. In its contribution to NetMundial, Iran argued that "freedom, privacy, and human rights must be considered and recognised".⁷ The extent to which Iran will honour this pledge is unclear.

Internet Governance

Iran has affirmed its commitment to enhanced cooperation, but seems intent on privileging the state above other stakeholders.⁸ Iran's high-level policy statement for the WSIS+10 Review, issued by deputy ICT Minister Nasrollah Jahangard, states:

"Iran will remain committed to all visions and missions that can enhance better connected global information and knowledge societies. By enhancing synergy and cooperation among all concerned parties and preserving sovereign rights of states, with respect to their role and responsibility in regard with internet governance."⁹

Iran's specific position on the renewal of the IGF is unclear. However, it is worth mentioning that Iran's participation in the IGF has been minimal. Since 2006, Iran has only sent more than one delegate to the IGF one time (it sent 2 in 2009). And it sent no delegates in 2006, 2010, and 2012.¹⁰ For comparison, Afghanistan sent four delegates in 2014, while Burkina Faso sent three.¹¹

ACTORS

Since 2003, the government has been the primary actor in Iran's internet governance participation. This year, the majority of participants (4 out of 7) in Iran's WSIS+10 country workshop were from the government.¹² Within the government, numerous, overlapping bodies compete for influence over internet governance policy; the byzantine, institutional complexity makes it difficult to ascertain the source of various policy positions.¹³ However, as Small Media's report on Iranian internet governance explains, "the ICT Ministry appears to retain the largest profile amongst Iranian organisations participating at internet governance events."¹⁴

The ICT Ministry has sent representatives to numerous internet governance events, including the 2005 Tunis Summit and the WSIS forum events of 2009, 2012, and 2013.¹⁵ This year, high level policy statements for the WSIS+10 Review were given by ICT Deputy Minister Nasrollah Jahangard¹⁶ and ICT Minister Mahmoud Vaezi.¹⁷

Moreover, the fact that the High Level Event will take place at the UN General Assembly could pave the way for a greater role for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As mentioned previously, the Iranian government is the dominant actor in internet governance arenas. This has traditionally been led by the ICT Ministry, but has also included other branches of government such as the Ministry of Economic Affairs.¹⁸ There's no reason to suspect that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (as well as Iran's NY mission) would miss an opportunity to get involved as well, particularly in the wake of the nuclear deal. Indeed, this agreement is likely to embolden Iran to seek greater engagement with the international community at various global fora, including the WSIS High Level Event.

Kavous Arasteh is another actor who warrants some discussion. Representative Arasteh has been a frequent and vocal participant at many internet governance events on Iran's behalf.¹⁹ He has been an ardent critic of America's privileged

1. <http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/app/uploads/2015/01/Chaos-and-Control.pdf>
2. http://unctad.org/sections/wcmu/docs/clmem3_2nd_IRAN_en.pdf
3. https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2015/Content/doc/ocp/outcomes/WF15_OCP_Outcomes.pdf
4. http://smallmedia.org.uk/sites/default/files/u8/IIIP_Feb15.pdf (pg. 11)
5. <https://connect.itu.int/p4zd1anm6ov?lauer=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal>

6. WCIT-12, a post-mortem, http://www.cullen-international.com/asset/?location=/content/assets/regulatory-intelligence/regulatory-news/wcit-12_post-mortem_culleninternational.pdf/wcit-12_post-mortem_culleninternational.pdf
7. <http://content.netmundial.br/files/236.pdf> (pg. 32)
8. <http://en.trend.az/iran/society/2399766.html>
9. http://www.itu.int/en/itu-wsis/SiteAssets/hls/statements/10/H.E._Mr%20Nasrollah_Jahangard.pdf
10. <http://www.intgovforum.org/>. Participation data for 2011 was not readily available.
11. <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/147-igf-2014/2071-igf-2014-government-participants>
12. <http://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2015/Agenda/Session/213>
13. For a discussion of the various bodies involved in internet governance policy in Iran, see <http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/app/uploads/2015/01/Chaos-and-Control.pdf> (pg. 29-32)
14. <http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/app/uploads/2015/01/Chaos-and-Control.pdf> (pg. 31)
15. <https://connect.itu.int/p4zd1anm6ov?lauer=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal>
16. http://www.itu.int/en/itu-wsis/SiteAssets/hls/statements/10/H.E._Mr%20Nasrollah_Jahangard.pdf
17. http://www.itu.int/en/itu-wsis/SiteAssets/hls/statements/6/H.E._Mr_Mahmoud_Vaezi%20.pdf
18. A representative from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance attended Iran's country profile at the 2015 WSIS forum in May. See: http://smallmedia.org.uk/sites/default/files/u8/IIIP_JUNE15.pdf, (pg. 7)

position vis-a-vis ICANN, stating that the relationship gives the US government and American corporations too much control over the administrative regulation of the internet.²⁰ He has also advocated for ICANN to be placed under the control of the UN, likely via the ITU.²¹ There is no reason to suspect that he has changed his position on these issues, and they are thus likely to feature prominently in Iran's contributions to the WSIS Review.

The case of Kavous Arasteh also reveals something about the role of personalities in this process. We've seen that Representative Arasteh has no qualms about being confrontational (one might even say disruptive) in trying to advance his goals. This approach has likely impacted both Iran's contributions to global internet governance events, as well as the way they are perceived by other participants, all of which suggests that personalities do matter in Iran's engagement in internet governance processes.

MOTIVATIONS

There is evidence to suggest that domestic policy considerations influence Iran's approach to internet governance. For example, development has been a cornerstone of Rouhani's domestic ICT policy, and has also featured heavily in Iran's contributions to global internet governance events.²² Similarly, Iran's vote in favour of the WCIT Final Acts (which included controversial provisions enabling surveillance techniques such as deep packet inspection)²³ fully comports with its domestic internet surveillance efforts.²⁴

However, it is important not to overstate the relationship between Iranian domestic ICT policy and global internet governance. As Small Media director Mahmood Enayat points out, "They don't need any global initiatives to control their networks inside Iran... what they're advocating externally, they already do internally."²⁵

In terms of external influences, Iran's commitment to development and its antipathy to American control of ICANN has led to temporary alliances with several Global South countries, including democracies such as Brazil and South Africa.²⁶ Yet Iran's more durable alliances tend to be with countries aiming to increase state control over the domestic internet. This includes both geopolitical allies like Russia, as well as bitter adversaries like Saudi Arabia.²⁷ Still, Iran's internet governance allegiances tend to be ad hoc, with little evidence of broad governance policy coordination between Iran and any other country.²⁸

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

As mentioned above, Iran's approach to internet governance to date has been decidedly state-centric. Vice ICT Minister Nasrollah Jahangard's high level policy statement for the WSIS+10 Review underlines the importance of "preserving [the] sovereign rights of states" in internet governance decision making.²⁹ Iran's country workshop featured 7 speakers, only one of which came from a civil society organisation. Moreover, participation records indicate that since its founding in 2006, the IGF has only ever featured one participant from an Iranian civil society organisation.³⁰

The organising processes for the Persian IGF, which was spearheaded by civil society groups such as the Tehran ICT Guild and the Lebanese ICT for development organisation IJMA3, suggests that the government might be open to multistakeholder formats, at least in a domestic context.³¹ However, the event never moved past the planning stages due to political and logistical hurdles, which makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions from this experience.³²

An additional barrier to civil society participation is a lack of knowledge about internet governance issues. Iranian activist and former parliamentarian Ali Akbar Mousavi Khoeni attributes the problem in part to the scant coverage internet governance issues receive in the Iranian press: "Unfortunately these issues are censored in the news of Persian media inside Iran. Even international Persian media outside the country have given little coverage to such issues. Therefore, sometimes there is little knowledge or awareness of the functions of these institutions or organisations in society."³³

In summary, it seems generally clear that Iranian participation in internet governance events remains primarily a government activity.

19. At the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) in 2012, Representative Arasteh pushed for a vote even though ITU protocol normally stipulates that decisions should be reached by consensus. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2015/02/23/chaos-and-control-the-competing-tensions-of-internet-governance-in-iran/>

20. Sharif, (2013), "The internet conflict in Dubai's assembly," Donya-e-Eqtesad. Available from: <http://www.donya-e-eqtesad.com/news/511973/>

21. Ibid.

22. For a discussion of Iran's development-related contributions to global internet governance events, see: <http://globalnetpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Chaos-and-Control.pdf>, (pg. 27-28) On the role of development in the Rouhani government's domestic ICT policy, see: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/expect-iran-telecom-sector.html>.

23. <http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/app/uploads/2015/01/Chaos-and-Control.pdf> (pg. 28)

24. http://smallmedia.org.uk/revolutiondecoded/a/RevolutionDecoded_Ch2_InternetCensorship.pdf

25. <http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/app/uploads/2015/01/Chaos-and-Control.pdf> (pg. 18)

26. Ibid. (pg. 36)

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid. (pg. 37)

29. http://www.itu.int/en/itu-wsis/SiteAssets/hls/statements/10/H.E._Mr%20Nasrollah_Jahangard.pdf

30. The 2009 IGF was attended by Mahmood Hajli, from an organisation called Iran ICT NGO. <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/images/OFFICIAL%20IGF%202009%20Participants%20List.pdf>

31. <http://www.internetgovernance.org/2015/03/19/an-autocratic-country-in-global-multistakeholder-internet-governance/>

32. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2015/02/23/chaos-and-control-the-competing-tensions-of-internet-governance-in-iran/>

33. <http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/app/uploads/2015/01/Chaos-and-Control.pdf> (pg. 41)