Chapter 11

Social Media and the Islamic Republic

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The policies of the Iranian state toward social media show similar patterns to how various forms of media have been approached throughout the history of the Islamic Republic, where repressive measures aimed at controlling content are in tension with attempts to expand uses of the same technologies in ways that are favorable to ruling interests. At the same time, official actions vis-à-vis social media have been unique owing both to the specificities of these platforms and the local and global sociopolitical contexts in which they have emerged. Premised on the desirability of ever-growing networks of connections and generally strict word limits, social media heighten the sense that massive amounts of information are being shared with exponentially growing audiences at breakneck speeds. As such, social media have been both credited to varying degrees for facilitating social and political protest[1] and criticized for the opportunities they afford commercial, state, and other interests for surveillance and misuse of personal information.[2]

The rise of social media in Iran can be traced to 2006, but it became a major focus of both Iranian and foreign state attention only after the 2009 presidential election in Iran and its aftermath of massive demonstrations. In addition to the widespread journalistic commentary on the role of social media at the time, scholars have provided multifaceted accounts of how protesters used these platforms.[3] While mainstream and citizen journalists exaggerated the role of new technologies in the protests, both popular and scholarly accounts have shown that social media provided many with the opportunity to expand their protest activities and to spread news in the face of government censorship. What has remained underexamined, however, is

the Iranian state's broader strategies vis-à-vis social media, significant aspects of which must indeed be read in relation to the 2009 events.

For independent journalists and activists, as well as for those benefiting from the direct or indirect sponsorship of foreign states, social-media use following the disputed 2009 election indicated that these global platforms could be instrumental in severely wounding the Islamic Republic. Apparently sharing its opponents' take on the power of social media, state actors' responses in the wake of 2009 reflected an urgency captured in the Iranian state's official launch of "soft war" soon thereafter. While explicit references and funding for this policy have waned since 2011, it remains important for assessing the state's approach to social media.

Making sense of soft war is not a straightforward task, primarily because its official articulations and implementations have been prolific but dispersed and often inconsistent. In addition, much of what officials and state supporters have included under the umbrella of soft war is in continuity with previous approaches to media. The soft-war discourse entered official discussions soon after the 2009 election fallout, with the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei specifically addressing it a number of times and famously stating that "Today, the country's top priority is to fight against the enemy's soft war."[4] While this quote and the context of the speech in which it was delivered put the emphasis on ways that Iran has been the target of largely media focused attempts at undermining the state, official formulations have also framed soft war as something that Iran engages in as a response to said activities of its enemies. As Monroe Price has shown in his overview of sample statements by Iranian officials about soft war, state actors are particularly concerned that Iranian value and belief systems are being targeted by Iran's enemies as part of a larger strategy of overthrowing the current ruling structure.[5] According to these accounts, the main vehicles for this assault are various media forms, from foreign-funded radio and television stations to an increased deployment of digital media technologies.

Unlike "hard" forms of war such as conventional warfare or other militarized operations, these methods are not overtly coercive or destructive. Rather, they aim to attract the target society toward the values of those carrying out the soft war. In this sense, what the Iranian state has called soft war has been a routine part of state discourses and policies since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. In addition, it is similar to definitions of "soft power" as put forth by Joseph Nye. According to Nye, states can use various forms of hard power such as military action or economic coercion to gain an upper hand over their opponents, but states can also use their country's' cultural and policy institutions to draw others into their worldview.[6] In short, these latter methods and aims of exercising "soft power" are

very similar to Iranian officials' claims about the intent and effect of foreign organizations and media carrying out soft war against Iran. What further complicates defining the difference between soft war and soft power is that the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably in Iranian discussions.

Despite the connections to the notion of soft power, and despite the continuities with past phases in the Islamic Republic's cultural and media policy, what is called soft war in Iran is distinct in a number of ways. For one, although its main concerns are about soft-power tactics against Iranian values, soft war encompasses broader ideas, policies, and sets of discourses. It is distinct in the intensity of discussions and budgets focused on revealing and combating enemy tactics, with many resources devoted to knowledge production about the soft war itself. It is both a new strategy and policy in the sense that it combines the state's rhetoric on fighting cultural invasion and maneuvers for controlling media content and access with attempts to create state-friendly materials online. In the past, these components did not explicitly overlap, with the state largely pursuing repressive and proactive approaches to media as separate endeavors.

Given that expansions on the soft war intersected—and in part were a response to—the popularity of social media in Iran, it remains an important framework for understanding official stances toward this media form.[7] At the same time, state-linked approaches to social media also include other aspects that require further investigation. In addition to emphasizing vigilance in the face of threats to Iran's cultural and moral fabric, state representatives have also couched concerns about the dangers of the medium in terms of personal and public safety issues. Discourses and institutions that have emerged to variously deal with social media, therefore, provide multiple justifications for state intrusions into citizens' online activities, from protecting individual and public safety to safeguarding the country's cultural and political integrity. State and state supporters' involvement with social media also include strategies for active engagement of the platforms, including both establishing home-grown versions of social media and participating in popular global sites. None of the range of activities and discussions, however, has been without their internal contradictions or gone unchallenged by either state critics or supporters.

Social Media as Sites of Moral and Criminal Transgression

While claims about social media–based assaults on Iran's culture and values make for good political speeches, which have led to a proliferation of state-supported strategies for combatting such attacks, similar emphasis has

been placed on how new technologies endanger the personal and moral well-being of individuals. The institution that best exemplifies this is the Iranian cyber police, or FATA, which stands for *Polic-e Fazay-e Toleed va Tabadeel Etellaat* (The Police for the Sphere of the Production and Exchange of Information). FATA was established in 2011 as an official branch of Iran's police forces. Their self-description as outlined in the "About Us" section of their website, which begins with a somewhat philosophical reflection on the relationship between technology and humankind and includes a brief history of computer crimes, justifies FATA's existence by pointing out that ". . . the mushroom-like growth of crimes in the sphere of the production and exchange of information such as Internet scams, the falsification of data and titles, information theft, transgressions on the private spheres of individuals and groups, hacking and infiltration of the Internet and computers, pornography, moral crimes, and organized crime in economic, social, and cultural realms, necessitate a specialized police force with the capacity to address high tech crimes."[8] As such, FATA's activities as reported on their website and via other news outlets emphasize the role they play in safeguarding the moral, economic, and social well-being of the populace in the Internet age. These reports consider digital media writ large as the arena of potential danger, but much of the focus since its establishment has been on social media in particular.

In September of 2012, for example, the Kurdistan branch of the cyber police reported a case of extortion in which a perpetrator had stolen a college student's personal information and created a fake social media account. The police were calling on individuals to refrain from placing personal information and photos on their mobiles and other external storage devices.[9] Privacy violations are also often linked to bigger moral concerns. Again in September, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported that Major Niknafas of Iran's cyber police had issued warnings against posting any personal pictures on social-media websites. Niknafas argued that such photos may be altered in "inappropriate and obscene" ways and recirculated online, forever damaging the reputation of victims.[10]

The fact that the cyber police takes on the mission of highlighting vulnerabilities online is not by itself worrisome, and indeed, they may be commended for attempts at educating and safeguarding the public against new media dangers. The problem, however, is that potentially legitimate concerns have been used as a pretext for controlling online content and persecuting social-media users they accuse of spreading corruption and obscenity. For example, in August 2012, the cyber police arrested the administrators of a Facebook group called *Dafhay-e Tehran* (which roughly translates as Hot

Girls of Tehran), a page with about thirty thousand members, calling them a gang intent on "deceiving young Iranian youth and Internet users and forming gangs."[11] Pages such as Hot Girls of Tehran and similar sites currently active on Facebook may be subject to a feminist critique and raise ethical questions about privacy online, but the cyber police have taken "moral" concerns as an excuse for criminalizing routine—if objectionable—activities online.[12] Similarly, in December 2012, the head of FATA in Gilan Province called Facebook a "battlefield of criminals," announced that a team of experts from his unit were going to be closely monitoring the activities of those who "target society's morals," and warned ordinary Internet users against becoming Facebook members and keeping their personal photos and videos online.[13]

FATA is not the first law enforcement entity dedicated to Internet crimes. The *Gerdab* Project, which is linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and predates the formation of the FATA police by approximately three years, shares with the latter the tendency to blur the boundaries among "moral crimes," privacy, and public threats to justify its interventions in the online sphere. Unlike FATA, the *Gerdab* Project's "about us" section is relatively brief and emphasizes pursuit of "organized terrorist, espionage, economic, and social crimes in the virtual sphere."[14] Nonetheless, most of the content it houses on its website under the category of "cyber threats" highlights potential harms to individual users with numerous articles devoted to the insidious presence of hackers on social media sites, the dangers these sites pose to children and adolescents, and the vulnerability of one's private information.

Concerns couched in moral terms or in relation to privacy issues also dovetail with broader worries about attacks on Iran's national and cultural identity as well as with assertions about the machinations of foreign intelligence agencies and private corporations. For example, *Gerdab* has claimed that Google misuses the "What's Hot" feature of its social media platform Google+ in "targeted anti-Iran" efforts.[15] *Gerdab* has also accused the "West" of "hosting and spreading pornographic sites in several languages" in order to shake the beliefs of the people of other countries and to weaken their patriotism.[16] The website *Jang-e Narm*, which describes itself as an outlet for providing information about soft war and psychological operations against Iran, also contains numerous original and republished articles that situate a range of concerns about social media in terms of attempts to alter the fabric of Iranian society. For example, social media are described as sites for "promoting the Western lifestyle" and working to "overthrow governments which resist this lifestyle."[17]

Official discourses on social media often assert that the platforms are being used for intelligence gathering and infiltration. Using screen shots to make their case, for example, the *Mehr News Agency* has reported that members of the Mojahadin-e Khalq opposition group have taken to Facebook under the guise of independent journalists and human rights activists to "connect with users inside Iran in order to spy, obtain information, news, and images" for dissemination via their own media platforms.[18] Iranian news outlets and organizations also consistently run stories about various U.S. government projects for mobilizing social media for intelligence gathering and for promoting U.S. policies. The sourcing for many of these stories are themselves U.S. outlets, reflecting some level of engagement—or at minimum, monitoring—of non-Iranian media by pro-government forces in Iran, which are usually vocal in opposing these outlets.

Furthermore, they show the parallels between official Iranian and U.S. positions: though they remain antagonistic and consistently critical of one another's social media policies, both have recognized the intelligence value and threat of the medium, and both have used national security and personal safety threats as justifications for aggressive approaches to emerging media.[19] The increasing push for forms of digital media control under the guise of personal and public safety, of course, is not new; even before the age of social media, a number of scholars outlined the ways that state actors and individuals have called for and enacted various mechanisms of surveillance.[20] Thus, the Iranian state's stance on social media and its attempts to use interlinked concerns about national and individual security as justification for intervention is not unusual; governments of various stripes have used similar claims to justify intrusive Internet policies.

Producing New Spaces and Engaging Popular Platforms

In addition to the above-noted processes of defining the threats of social media and justifying control mechanisms, governmental and pro-government actors have attempted to establish alternate social-media spaces. In so doing, they have often moved in thematically specific directions. That is to say, they have gone beyond the rubric of general networking to introduce specialized sites, most of which revolve around religious themes The idea is not simply to create new platforms but to push for content production in a particular direction. One such site is the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's sponsored platform, Hadinet.ir, which a Ministry official described as the "first social media site dedicated to the Imams."[21] In turn,

the Ministry has asserted the success of Iranian sites to announce support for launching similar platforms.[22] Other specialized social-media sites aimed at drawing the participation of religious and state-friendly populations include *Haya* and *Khakriz,* which is a part of a cyber network for *arzeshees* (a term that roughly translates as "those with values").[23]

The phenomenon of arzeshees deserves a separate analysis, but for the discussion at hand, it will suffice to note their appearance during the first administration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Mostly in their twenties and early thirties, self-described arzeshees identify with hardline elements of the Iranian state and society and are active in various online spaces and on social media in particular. Although initially overwhelmingly in support of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, identification with him became less pronounced as Ahmadinejad increasingly clashed with other conservatives, including the supreme leader. Whatever their relationship to Ahmadinejad and his faction, arzeshees have had a visible presence on global social media, and it is not surprising that sites inside the country have been set up to build on this participation for the purpose of cultivating native forms of social media.

Other state linked or state supporting organizations have also framed their online presence in terms of independent social media. The website of the governmental *Sazmaan-e Zanan-e Enghelab-e Eslami* (Organization of the Women of the Islamic Revolution), for example, describes itself as a social-media platform, complete with an extensive terms of use document.[24] In addition to having to have their "real identity" confirmed by the administrators, participants must agree to a list of conditions governing their speech and behavior online. Many of these rules, such as not being rude to other users and not ridiculing regional dialects, aim at keeping a generally civil atmosphere that is free from prejudice. However, prohibitions on insulting the previous or current supreme leader narrow the limits of speech in ways that users would not face in non-Iranian social-media sites. While these limits have an explicit basis in Iranian law,[25] the site also sets some odd parameters, including a ban on "giving publicity" to [Iranian] singers from LA or Hollywood or Bollywood stars. Nonmembers can see materials posted by active users of the site and view the public profiles of members, but based on information the site makes available about how many have viewed and commented on materials, it seems minimally interactive, with fewer than a dozen active users accounting for most of the postings. Indeed, based on what is publicly accessible, the site is closer to a typical participatory website of the Web 2.0 era, where several administrators post a range of materials and supervise the supplemental content provided by individual users. The fact that the organization chooses to describe its online presence

as a social-media site is in keeping with trends apparent in other official quarters: namely, there is an apparent desire to appear abreast of technological developments and to create autonomous platforms.

At the same time—and claims about the popularity of such websites notwithstanding—state entities and supporters seem to recognize that competing with global sites is no easy feat. In an overview of "pure" social-media sites (as opposed to the corrupting popular platforms), an account on the *Jang-e Narm* website admits the lackluster reception of the former, arguing that,

> "Although lately the efforts of revolutionary bloggers have created social-media sites with an *arzeshee* approach, the relatively weak graphics, inadequate promotion, and the fact that many influential *arzeshee* forces are not familiar with these spaces has meant that these sites have been unable to compete with sites like Twitter and Facebook, which benefit from the financial support of the American government."[26]

While the author does not provide any evidence for the assertion of U.S. government monetary support of these sites, his argument echoes many similar accounts from within Iran which acknowledge the scale of the competition they are taking on. More important, they are an admission that Iranian social-media sites have either failed or—at best—are facing major obstacles in attracting participants.

This difficulty is also sometimes framed in terms of "content production." Numerous forums have been devoted to defining and encouraging proper forms of content production. The gist of these discussions is that producing the right kind and volume of content will bolster the popularity of Iranian social-networking sites, in turn allowing them to compete with services like Facebook and Twitter. For example, in November 2012, the show *Rah-e Sevom* (the Third Way)—broadcast on channel two of the IRIB—was devoted to the topic of content production.[27] That such topics have spilled over to official spaces offline is indicative of their centrality to debates on social media. They also show that unlike independent users of social media, institutions and individuals with state links have an advantage in accessing older forms of media. While this does not seem to be enough to ensure that they make a mark in online spaces, it does show a disparity in resources available to the state, which has the ability to mobilize vast resources as compared to independent users. Yet the state's projects to expand and promote friendly social media as well as the continued active presence

of state supporters and officials on popular global platforms indicate that the mass efforts to replace the latter with homegrown sites have not been fruitful.

Individual users predisposed to hardline currents in the ruling establishment have also acknowledged this lack of success in informal spaces. In a well-circulated blog post, Amir-Hossein Mojiri, a self-identified arzeshee, addresses the question of why the "arzeshees are not successful in social networks." In addition to acknowledging the conventions of productive social media presence in a variety of popular sites (e.g, the number of "likes," "followers," "members in circles," etc.), he considers why arzeshee users have not managed to meet another core element of social-media success—namely, the creation of networked connections. Reasons he proposes include lack of personal photos or names and the tendency to lecture others and "act robotically."[28] However, the author does not acknowledge the political dimensions of the issues. Being an arzeshee is about claiming a specific sociopolitical outlook; that alone may explain why other users reject reciprocal connections with them online, no matter how personable and friendly the arzeshee appears. Alternately, non-arzeshee users may not be personally opposed to such connections but may fear being labeled or rejected by their own network of online "friends." The same dynamic may also be at work in the case of well-known figures in the state establishment. The social-media accounts of figures such as the Supreme Leader Khamenei only have followers numbering in the thousands. This is despite the fact that these accounts have attracted much attention, with quotes and pictures from these accounts often showing up in a range of news pieces and online debates. It may be, then, that some readers are checking these accounts without subscribing to them. Thus, while Mojiri does not address all the factors that may be at work, his post and a range of similar discussions indicate a clear recognition on the part of official and individual supporters of the state that their efforts to both participate in existing social-media platforms and create independent spaces have fallen short.

"Enemy" Terrains

In addition to the difficulties they have faced in establishing a secure foothold in social-media spheres, the approaches of pro-state individuals and projects are rife with inconsistencies. The site *Teribon*, for example, which is an online magazine sympathizing with the most conservative elements of the state, regularly runs pieces that are critical of foreign-funded outlets and

call for independence in platforms and content production. At the same time, *Teribon* also contains content that normalizes participation on popular social-media sites. In one such case, the site ran an article providing its readers with a list of guidelines on how to become popular on Facebook.[29] What makes this example particularly noteworthy is not only the subject but also the source of the article, which *Teribon* acknowledges as the Persian language website of the German *Deutsche Welle* (the *Deutsche Welle* piece was itself a summary of an article originally posted on the American site *The Huffington Post*). For an outlet that identifies with the hardline currents in the ruling establishment, is critical of foreign-funded Persian media and foreign media in general, and supports the creation of independent platforms and content, the decision to include an article such as this appears puzzling. Yet it is not rare to find this type of material posted on *Teribon.*

Even the earlier-described *Jang-e Narm* and *Gerdab* projects routinely post translations of articles from U.S. and other foreign outlets. Examples include *Jang-e Narm* relying on *Time* magazine to draw attention to Facebook's misuse of users' private information, and *Gerdab*'s various references to *Computerworld*'s critiques of Facebook.[30] Although most of these articles highlight various negative aspects of social media, thereby bolstering *Gerdab*'s and *Jang-e Narm*'s own arguments about such platforms, running pieces like this implicitly acknowledges the legitimacy of the same sources that are maligned by government institutions like *Gerdab* itself, pointing to another contradictory aspect of the ways that official discourses approach social media as well as foreign media platforms more generally.

Yet such inconsistencies are par for the course when one tracks the stance of state entities and supporters toward social media. As indicated by the case of the earlier-mentioned social-media account of the supreme leader, numerous state-linked individuals, organizations, and news agencies have accounts on popular platforms in spite of the fact that access to these sites is filtered inside the country and their insidious consequences are often discussed in official discourses. This is apparent in the highest echelons of power in Iran. Ayatollah Khamenei has catalyzed discussions of soft war and urged all-out mobilizations to combat the media of the perceived enemy at the same time that he has himself embraced many of these same platforms. His Twitter account is regularly active in multiple languages, and his decisions to use Instagram and to set up a Facebook page have all attracted widespread attention, including in the mainstream international press.[31]

Official moves for dealing with social media, including contradictory aspects such as those noted above, however, have not gone without challenge. One set of responses has come from government critics outside the

country. This is most apparent within social-media spaces themselves, where users in opposition to the ruling system will directly challenge state sympathizers for appearing on the same platforms that they malign. Similarly, given that such sites are usually blocked in Iran and require filter breakers in order to be accessed from within the country, government critics have pointed to the hypocrisy and illegality of state supporters' presence online. Opposition and government critics have also expressed unease about sharing virtual spaces with state supporters in case their identities or whereabouts were compromised, often identifying and blocking other users suspected of being soft-war soldiers.

Perhaps surprisingly, opposition to some of these measures has also come from those identifying themselves as supporters of the ruling system. Some of the strongest and most persistent critiques of state endorsed social-media practices have targeted self-styled soft-war soldiers. In the wake of announcements about the importance of soft war, both opposition and state supporters alike noted a rise in the number of users active on popular social-media platforms who either openly identified with soft-war projects or whose posts strongly suggested affiliation with similar endeavors. As noted above, oppositional voices objected to this increasing presence on social-media sites by pointing out the hypocrisy of state supporters and by expressing concern for their personal safety. One other aspect of their objections—which is unexpectedly shared by many pro-government participants, including those who are sympathetic with the overall tenets of the soft-war project—indicates the one-dimensional and unsubtle nature of the participation of soft-war soldiers.[32] For critics of the government, the uniformity among these users is proof that no authentic support exists for the state and that such participants are paid stooges.[33] Pro-state critics of soft-war activists voice similar concerns from the opposite side of the spectrum: since they assert that genuine support exists for the system, they worry that these "fake" accounts undermine their own attempts to establish a productive presence in social-media spaces. As a result, their hostility and reactions to soft-war soldiers at times rivals that of users identifying with the opposition.[34] Other criticisms from within pro-state ranks include accusations that soft-war funding for new media activism is being misappropriated, either deployed for factional purposes or for self-promotion by "superstars," with "opportunists" using the monies to pursue self-interested gains rather than to thwart the goals of Iran's perceived enemies.[35]

Insider critiques of the soft-war approach echo similar objections that have been raised against other policies affecting social media. Specifically, filtering practices—which have been a part of the state's mechanisms for

controlling access to content since the earliest periods of Internet use in Iran—have come under attack by state sympathizers. Many have pointed out the haphazard nature of filtering, noting that religious and/or pro-state sites and activities have been negatively affected by the practice.[36] Criticisms about new and longer-standing digital media policies may explain indications of changes to come in official strategies. In December 2012, for example, the head of the police forces announced that new software was being developed for the "smart" surveillance of social-media sites to allow users to avoid the "harms" of these platforms while benefitting from their positive aspects.[37] The fact that this announcement came from one of the highest law-enforcement officials and was presented as a move to protect individual users underscores earlier outlined trends toward implementing social-media policies under the auspices of law-enforcement agencies and for the ostensible aim of preserving law and order.

The rhetoric of protecting citizens has also been evident in various discussions of a "halal," or "pure" Internet, where what is deemed immoral would be purged and replaced with acceptable content. Proponents of the policy have stressed that this model does not limit access to a national intranet.[38] In practice this translates into improving mechanisms for filtering unwanted content (originating domestically or internationally) and expanding the production of favorable materials. In short, it is an attempt to intensify existing media policies rather than innovating new ones and as such would likely not solve state actors and supporters' conflicting tendencies toward promoting native sites and fixing a foothold in popular platforms. And unlike soft war, which urges soft-war soldiers to expose and analyze what it identifies as media-enabled assaults on Iranian culture and beliefs and thus provides some space for engaging with opposing points of view, the "halal" Internet's aim is focused on keeping offensive material out altogether, and therefore would eliminate even such narrow forms of exposure to differing content.

Conclusion

Mirroring its relationship to past media forms, the Islamic Republic's policies toward social media have been forged at the intersection of two opposing tendencies of engaging and controlling new technologies. Yet both the specificities of these platforms and the prominence they were given during the postelection demonstrations of 2009 have meant that official stances toward social media also include unique elements, the most important of which is

its confluence with state-sponsored soft-war projects. It is also noteworthy that officials have increasingly moved toward framing social media in terms of security and criminal concerns, assigning numerous law-enforcement institutions with units devoted to digital media. Concomitantly, officially sanctioned discourses on social media—much of which emerges from the law-enforcement agencies themselves—highlight the dangers of social media in ways that blur the lines between personal, moral, and national threats.

In addition, state entities and supporters have taken a number of steps to increase sympathetic voices on social-media spaces by both creating new platforms and encouraging participation on existing ones. Moves toward the latter further reflect internal tensions in policies: the same sites that are filtered and variously condemned for undermining personal and national security become the loci for state-friendly activities. As noted in the chapter, however, these and other inconsistencies have not gone unnoticed by either insider commentators or state opponents. Indeed, social-media policies overall have been the subject of much internal debate.

Whether and what impact such criticisms will have on future policies remains to be seen. It is likely that the trend toward further employing surveillance methods—both with and without the help of software designed for this purpose—will increase. And while explicit references to soft war have waned since an outpouring of material between late 2009 and early 2011, concerns about cultural assaults and the need for internal production which were a part of the soft-war rhetoric and have long constituted a central element of official arguments about media and cultural policies have continued unabated. As such, state actors' dual strategy of both expanding and controlling new media forms can be expected to frame approaches to existing and emerging digital technologies. At the same time, given Iran's notoriously turbulent and factionalized politics, the chance for a major shift in media policies is not out of the question, especially if the power structure sustains another blow on the scale of the post-2009 election protests.

Notes

1. See Ashraf M. Attia, Nergis Aziz, Barry Friedman, Mahdy F. Elhusseiny, "Commentary: The Impact of Social Networking Tools on Political Change in Egypt's 'Revolution 2.0,' " *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications* 10.4 (July–August 2011): 369–374; Alexandra Segerberg and W. Lance Bennett, "Social Media and the Organization of Collective Action: Using Twitter to Explore the Ecologies of Two Climate Change Protests," *The Communication Review* 14.3 (2011): 197–215;

Susan L. Shirk, "Changing Media, Changing China," in *Changing Media, Changing China,* ed. Susan L. Shirk, 1–37 (London: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Clay Shirkey, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs (*January/February 2011): http://www.gpia.info/files/u1392/Shirky_Political_Poewr_of_Social_Media.pdf.

2. See Christian Fuchs, Kees Boersma, Anders Albrechtslund, and Marisol Sandoval, eds., *Internet and Surveillance: The Challenges of Web 2.0 and Social Media* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

3. See Kaveh Khonsari Ketabchi, Zahra Amin Nayeri, Ali Fathalian, and Leila Fathalian, "Social Network Analysis of Iran's Green Movement Opposition Groups Using Twitter," International Conference on Advances in Social Network Analysis and Mining, Odense, Denmark, August 9–11, 2010, 414–415; Setrag Manoukian, "Where Is This Place? Crowds, Audio-vision, and Poetry in Postelection Iran," *Public Culture* 22.2 (2010): 237–263; and Babak Rahimi, "The Agonistic Social Media: Cyberspace in the Formation of Dissent and Consolidation of State Power in Post-Election Iran," *The Communication Review* 14 (2011): 158–178.

4. "Emrooz Ooliyat-e Asliy-e Keshvar Mobaraz-e ba Jang-e Narm Ast" (Today, the Country's Top Priority Is to Fight against the Enemy's Soft War), *Fars News,* November 25, 2009, http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8809041385.

5. Monroe Price, "Iran and the Soft War," *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012): 2397–2415.

6. Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

7. The decline of discourses and projects referencing soft war deserves a separate analysis that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Iran's constantly splintering political factions and the dissipation and repetition of authority across various offices and institutions should be considered in explaining this decline. The attention, criticism, and, in some cases, ridicule that soft war has received by both government supporters and opponents may also be a factor in why enthusiasm for soft war has waned.

8. http://www.cyberpolice.ir/about, author's translation.

9. "Akhazi ba Ejad-e Profile-Ja'l-e dar Shabak-e Ejtemayee" (Extortion by Creating Fake Profiles on Social Networks), September 9, 2012, http://www.cyberpolice.ir/news/15441, author's translation.

10. "Shahrvand az Enteshar-e Tasaveer-e Khosoosi dar Shabeke Ejtemayee Parhiz Konand" (Citizens Should Refrain from Publishing Private Photos on Social Media), September 29, 2012, IRNA News Agency, http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/397652/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C_-_%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB/%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86_%D8%A7%D8%B2_%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1_%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B5%DB%8C_%D8%AF%D8%B1_%D8%B4%D8%A8%DA%A9%D9%87_%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C_%D9%

BE%D8%B1%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%B2_%DA%A9%D9%86%D9%86%D8%AF, author's translation.

11. "Dovomeen Shabake Tarveej Fesad dar Facebook Mondahem Shod" (The Second Network for Promoting Corruption on Facebook Has Been Destroyed), August 7, 2012, http://www.cyberpolice.ir/news/13841, author's translation.

12. See, for example, Dafhay-e Irani, Dafhay-e Irani 2, and Hot Daf, available, respectively, at https://www.facebook.com/PersianDuff, https://www.facebook.com/hamejori, and www.facebook.com/HotDuff.ir.

13. "Amalkard Karbaran-e Facebook zir-e 'Zarebeen-e' Polic-e FATA ast" (The Activities of Facebook Users Are under the "Microscope" of FATA Police), December 3, 2012, *Weblog News,* http://weblognews.ir/1391/09/forms/news/24421/, author's translation.

14. http://gerdab.ir/fa/about, author's translation.

15. "Khabarhay-e Dagh-e Google Plus, Jaryan-e hadafmand-e Google Bar Zed-e Iran" (Google Plus's Hot News, Google's Targeted Campaign against Iran), February 25, 2012, http://www.gerdab.ir/fa/news/9761/%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%BA-%DA%AF%D9%88%DA%AF%D9%84-%D9%BE%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF-%DA%AF%D9%88%DA%AF%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86, author's translation. Gerdab seems particularly concerned with Google, often pointing out the technology giant's latest "espionage instruments." See, for example, "Tashkhees Chehre ham be Abzar Jasoosi Google Ezafe Shod" (Face Recognition Has Been Added to Google's Instruments of Espionage), October 3, 2012, http://gerdab.ir/fa/news/12187/%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%AE%DB%8C%D8%B5%E2%80%8C%DA%86%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%87-%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C-%DA%AF%D9%88%DA%AF%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF.

16. "Ahdaf-e Keshvarhay-e Gharbi Baray-e Gostaresh-e Sitehay-e Mostajan" (The Aims of the West for Expanding Obscene Sites), December 24, 2012, http://www.gerdab.ir/fa/news/12467, author's translation.

17. "Shabakehay-e Ejtemayee Cyberi va Zendegi Gharbi" (Cyber Social Networks and Western Lifestyles), August 8, 2011, http://www.psyop.ir/?p=8129, author's translation.

18. "Kameen-e Monafegheen dar Facebook Baray-e Karbaran-e Iran" (The Mujahedin's Ambush of Iranian Users on Facebook), January 5, 2003, http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1783637, author's translation.

19. The FBI, for example, has been at the forefront of calls for new Internet surveillance laws that would allow law enforcement more flexibility in accessing private digital communications. See Declan McCullagh, "FBI Renews Broad Internet Surveillance

Push," September 22, 2012, http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-57518265-38/fbi-renews-broad-Internet-surveillance-push/. In Europe, the German government's acquisition of surveillance software has raised concerns about infringements on citizens' rights. See Claudia Bracholdt, "German Government's Surveillance Software Unsettles a Nation That Prizes Privacy," January 17, 2013, http://qz.com/44208/german-governments-surveillance-software-unsettles-a-nation-that-prizes-privacy/.

20. Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* (St. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007); Ronald Deibert, "Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace," in *Digital Media and Democracy: New Tactics in Hard Times,* ed. Megan Boler, 137–164 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008); Shirk, "Changing Media, Changing China"; Daniel J. Solove, *The Digital Person: Technology and Privacy in the Information Age* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

21. "Shabake Ejtemayee Mojazee Vizhe ome Rahandazi Mishavad" (The Virtual Social Network Dedicated to the Imam Will Be Launched), May 12, 2012, http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/198283/%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%DB%8C/%D8%B4%D8%A8%DA%A9%D9%87_%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C_%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C_%D9%88%DB%8C%DA%98%D9%87_%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D9%87_%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87_%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C_%D9%85%DB%8C_%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%AF, author's translation. For direct access to the site, see Hadinet.ir.

22. "Vazeer-e Ershad Khabar Dad: Rah Andazi Shabake Mehdi Yavaran" (The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Announced the Companions of Mehdi Social Network), July 9, 2012, http://www.jamejamonline.ir/newstext.aspx?newsnum=100816809889.

23. http://sn.hijabportal.com/home; http://khakriz.arzeshiha.ir/group.php?group_id=1.

24. http://saznaa.ir/help/terms.

25. Specifically, Iran's Islamic Penal Code (Articles 513 and 514 in particular) forbids insults directed at any of the "Islamic sanctities" or at past or present supreme leaders.

26. "Gashti dar Shabakehay-e Ejtemayee Pak" (A Stroll through Pure Social Media Sites), March 27, 2011, http://www.psyop.ir/?p=5354, author's translation.

27. http://www.rahesevomtv.ir/fa/content/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C%C2%AB%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%81%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C%C2%BB-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%85.

28. http://divane83-2.persianblog.ir/post/270, author's translation.

29. "Chegoone dar Facebook Mahboob Shaveem" (How We Can Become Beloved on Facebook), November 26, 2012, http://www.teribon.ir/archives/138572/%DA%86%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%81%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84

%DB%8C%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%A8%DA%A9%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7.html.

30. For examples, see http://www.psyop.ir/?p=5947 and http://www.gerdab.ir/fa/news/12176.

31. See, for example, "Iran's Supreme Leader Joined Instagram—Here's His First Photo," August 1, 2012, *The Atlantic,* http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/08/irans-supreme-leader-joined-instagram-heres-his-first-photo/260607/; "Like? Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Joins Facebook," December 18, 2012, The Guardian, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/18/iran-ayatollah-khamenei-joins-facebook.

32. It should be noted that the term "soft war soldiers" is not only used by critics but is a self-description as well. The self-identified social-media site called Afsaran (Soldiers), which clearly aligns itself with Ayatollah Khamenei, includes posts addressing fellow "soft war soldiers." See, for example, the post entitled "Darkhast-e Hakfekri va Hamkari baray-e Barpaye-e Namayeshgah dar Ayam-e Moharram az Shoma Afsar-e Jang-e Narm" (Request for Collaboration from You, the Soldier of Soft War, for Setting up an Exhibition during the Days of Muharaam), http://www.afsaran.ir/link/139119.

33. Many posts of oppositional and critical social-media users about soft war sites and participants speculate on the budgets allotted for such projects. Twitter user @nimarod, for example, claimed to know on October 1, 2012, that soft-war types receive budgets of forty to fifty million tomans (in dollars) for working on one site.

34. See, for example, the following public post on Friendfeed from well-known state supporter and active social-media user Mohammad Saleh Meftah, where he identifies a soft-war soldier with a screen shot and notes in the comments that he is coming up with a new list of such users to block: http://friendfeed.com/meftah/a3573abb.

35. See, for example, the blog post at http://maniraniam-mosalmana.blogfa.com/cat-63.aspx and "boodje Jang-e narm ra be superstarh-a dadeand" (They Have Given the Soft War Budget to Superstars), http://www.javanonline.ir/vdcd5k0kkyt0zo6.2a2y.html.

36. See, for example, Naqd-e Jedi: Meyar Filtering Cheest, www.netiran.net/sosan/blog/9568/.

37. "Ahmadi-Moghaddam Khabar Dad: Tahiye Narmafzari Jadid baray-e control-e Hooshmand-e Shabkahehay-e Ejtemayee" (Ahmadi-Moghaddam Announced: The Creation of New Software for the Smart Control of Social Media," December 23, 2012, http://isna.ir/fa/news/91101308210/%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%87-%D9%86%D8%B1%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C.

38. “Shabak-e Internet halal dar Iran rah andazi mishavad” (A Halal Internet Network Will Be Established in Iran), April 16, 2011, Tabnak, http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/158720.