

## Iranian Regime Influence Operation Misfire

Published Internally July 2021

### A Brief

Social media influence operations gained significant attention after the 2016 United States Presidential election. Since then, reports exposing operations of this type increased with frequency and depth. Increasingly sophisticated Iranian cyber influence operations show the past success of such activities to disrupt planned events, both kinetic and virtual. Learning from past operations and expecting adjustments to regime tactics highly likely led to the diminishing success of online regime activities for now. Reports from FireEye, ClearSky, Citizen Labs, Reuters, the Atlantic Council, Kaspersky, the US Government, the UK government, and Treadstone 71 all shine light on the online influence operations and tactics of the Iranian government. <sup>1</sup> Social media platforms and online companies (Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.) attention to influence operations led to the removal of thousands of pages and accounts.

Several attempts to start social media campaigns failed to gain followers and retweets. Hashtags used in 2020 campaigns collapsed in their efforts to trend. Standard regime phishing targeting opposition members did not work to infect recipients with trojan malware. Awareness and preparation surrounding regime methods, tactics, techniques, and procedures helped stop the spread of malicious messaging.

Our earlier report on [Iranian Influence Operations](#) measured regime activity against dissidents. In particular, the Free Iran World Summit 2020. This year, we examined regime activity against the same event, the Free Iran World Summit 2021. Under 1600 tweets used hashtags this year taken from the 2020 regime efforts (over 110,000 or 1.45% of the 2020 effort). Several hypotheses or combinations could be reasons for the regime's failed efforts to overcome 2021 dissident messaging. Changes in social media, public exposure of Iranian cyber and kinetic actions, direct challenges to their online footprint, and maturation of their capabilities all contribute to perceived failures. Some of the activities:

1. Regular awareness campaigns on past and possible new regime methods.
2. Fear by users of suspension or removal from social media.
3. Fear by users of losing their hard-earned following and likes.
4. Not worth the risk, and 'there is no money in it.'
5. Domain seizure by the US government.
6. Open identification by Treadstone 71 and others of influence operation participants in publicly distributed reports (see below).
7. Information exhaustion and apathy at the same old tactics.
8. Internal limitations to access social media.
9. Disdain for the new Raisi regime after a highly predictable election outcome.
10. Jaded views and opinions on economic and social improvements within Iran.
11. Infiltration of regime social media accounts using like-tactics to counter their influence operations.

12. Internal economic and health-related issues.

We recognize adjustments in regime activities from pure hacking to the adoption of Russian foreign intelligence service methods and mirroring physical proxy use to the virtual world. The following list demonstrates regime shifts in skills and capabilities. We only expect the following activities to improve and become more complex in their use:

1. A shift from cyberattacks to disinformation in multiple languages mirroring their physical proxies.
2. Post disparaging propaganda to elicit reactions (us versus them)
3. Manipulate perceptions, polarize, disrupt, and sow discord amongst target groups.
4. Reduce the likelihood of target groups finding common ground.
5. Denigration of opposition political figures through tailored disinformation.
6. Undermine confidence in opposition leadership.
7. Attempts to align opposition groups with Israel.
8. Spread confusion, generate exhaustion, and create apathy.
9. Flood social media with false information making decision-making difficult.
10. Create memes and symbols using easy-to-share data snippets that target emotions.
11. Righteous indignation rooted in religious values and ethos.
12. Repetition of negative words and phrases across multiple online platforms.
13. Use of women as sock puppets to gain followers and likes while spreading false information and gathering information on followers.
14. Post conspiracy theories and disinformation, amplifying narratives and rumors.
15. The use of bots and media engagement farms (the Basij) to generate information.
16. Use social media posts and blog articles to convey specially prepared information to incline them to 'voluntarily' make the predetermined decision desired by the regime.
  - a. Focus on divisions in groups characterized by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, geography, religion, and cults.
17. Online impersonation of academic figures and groups.
18. Front companies set up to execute a series of influence operations over time.
19. Use of state propaganda to foment lies to the Iranian people.
20. Use email phishing to disseminate disinformation to intimidate targets.
21. Use cross-platform (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, blogs, etc.).
22. The use of recycled content from western sources.
23. A shift to lesser-known social media communication methods with targeted invitations and encryption.
24. A focus on issues important to Iran consistent in their messaging (pro-Assad, anti-Israel, anti-US).
25. Filter negative information from global outlets from reaching Iranian citizens.
26. Push people to like pages, join events, visit their websites, and follow accounts driving perceived credibility.
27. Forming libraries of digital material, images, mobile apps, items from Iranian state media, videos, and stories from blogs and proxies support the Iranian regime.
28. Mixing actual content with misinformation to cover regime narratives.
29. Websites that use US service providers and privacy services.
30. Illegally obtain information and share data via various social media platforms.

High level recommendations and opportunities exist:

1. Invest resources in organizations that track and show Iran's digital influence networks without over-editorializing their findings.
2. Enhance automated search and text-matching of Iranian state propaganda products.
3. Be as objective and transparent as possible when exposing regime propaganda.
4. Counter one-sided claims and attacks by Iran's influence operations machine.
5. Establish a footprint in new social media platforms.
6. Do not publish information naming Iranian operations, i.e., leverage this knowledge to infiltrate and counter until opportunities are exhausted.

We do have other recommendations not intended for publication.

Success is not a result of luck. Repeated success in combating influence operations shows maturity and skill. Skills that are perishable. Regardless of the counter-influence improvements, the Iranian regime will not cease influence operations but seek new methods to spread their disinformation, misinformation, and outright lies. Of course, counter activities include constant measurement and continued vigilance combined with learning from past activities to estimate emerging threats.

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## Posts Related to Iranian Regime Cyber Actions

- [Treadstone 71 “The Sayad Project”](#)
- [Treadstone 71 CYBERBAN Shahid Kaveh Unit](#)
- [Treadstone 71 We are exposing here our correspondence with one of the members of “Shahid Kaveh” Mohammad Shamlou-Fard \(Shambouli\)](#)
- Basij Cyber Battalions:
  - [#Basij Cyber Battalions – Latest From Treadstone 71 – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [Cyber Battalion Empowerment Courses in Abali – Iranian Basij Cyber Battalions – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [Establishment of a cyberspace headquarters in Masoumiyah Theological Higher Education Institute – Data Laundering – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [The Basij Cyber Battalions are working to counter enemy attacks in cyberspace \(Names and cadre for some of the Basij Resistance areas around Tehran\) – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [Forming #cyber battalions and service teams is one of the core plans of the #Basij – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [Student Basij Initial Enrollment Form – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
- Iranian Influence Operations
  - [Iranian Intelligence Services – \( Shahid Kaveh \) The Sayad Project and Sayad 2 – Dissident & Foreign Support, Internal Targeting – Khalq Project 99](#)
  - [Treadstone 71 Releases Intelligence Advisory on Iranian Influence Operations – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
    - [Iranian Influence Campaign – Rapid Persona Changes on Twitter – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [Example of Iranian Efforts to Sway Public Opinion – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [#IRGC #MOIS PROPAGANDA videos and animation – Treadstone 71 – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
- Targeted Adversary Research and Analysis
  - [An explosive new report from Treadstone 71 Link Analysis of Various Iran Cyber Operators and Academics – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [Day 2 and 3 #VAJA #MOIS data release from Parastoo as of 16:00 May 5 ETD – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [The latest from #Parastoo on the RANA Institute hack of Sharif University – The Cyber](#)

Shafarat – Treadstone 71

- [Day 4 Parastoo on hacked accounts at Sharif University – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
- [Rana Institute continues to spy on Iranian Citizens for the MOIS #Parastoo – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
- [Tapandegan Releases Trove on Iranian Stock Market Manipulation – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
- Dissident Tracking and Assassination
  - [Iranian MOIS – Vaja hacks Turkish Government Site Tracking dissidents – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [Masoud Molavi CV – Assassinated Istanbul -Ordered through Iranian consulate – Video – The Cyber Shafarat – Treadstone 71](#)
  - [Inside The World of Cybersecurity Experts Who Hunt Criminals \(VIDEO\) \(newsy.com\)](#)

<https://iranprimer.usip.org/index.php/blog/2020/oct/23/part-1-iran-us-election>  
<https://www.lawfareblog.com/how-understand-iranian-information-operations>  
<https://www.fireeye.com/content/dam/fireeye-www/current-threats/pdfs/rpt-FireEye-Iranian-IO.pdf>  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyber-iran-specialreport-idUSKCN1N21FT>  
<https://securelist.com/ferocious-kitten-6-years-of-covert-surveillance-in-iran/102806/>  
<https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HJS-Iranian-Influence-Networks-in-the-UK-Report-HR-web-1.pdf>  
<https://thehill.com/policy/cybersecurity/450077-us-officials-tracking-influence-operations-on-social-media-from-russia>  
<https://www.treadstone71.com/index.php/intel-briefs/irgcinfluenceoops>

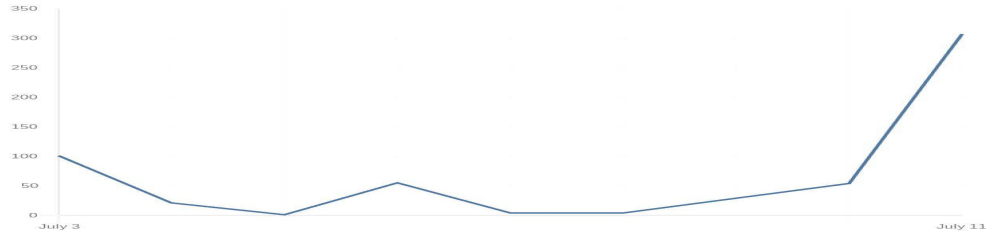
Appendix A

Screenshots and metrics

Search analytics for "#خورد\_گوهر\_رجوی\_مریم"

**576** tweets from Jul. 03, 7:14 AM to Jul. 11, 11:41 AM

**Mentions over the last few days**








**333** users

Potential reach **1,384,488**

**Most influential users**

	Followers	Mentions	Engagement
 <a href="#">@mahshidtavakoli</a> mahshidtavakoli	53,376	1	
 <a href="#">@Asayesh176</a> asa yesh (اجنه 1ملکه)	42,892	1	
 <a href="#">@phalange81</a> phoebe	20,449	2	
 <a href="#">@ruuhollah</a> Ruuollah	16,372	1	
 <a href="#">@sattarkhan121</a> خونخوار	14,543	1	
 <a href="#">@Ex_Muslimm</a> Serpico	12,841	1	
 <a href="#">@eliiii984</a> الی حانوم	11,630	2	14 retweets 65 favorites
 <a href="#">@Aban1998Tehrani</a> Mity	11,145	1	
 <a href="#">@peymannarad</a> ابتدای انتها	11,092	1	
 <a href="#">@Officialfarhad5</a> FarhadM	10,739	1	12 retweets 17 favorites

**Most engaging users**

	Followers	Mentions	Engagement
 <a href="#">@Sooresrafill</a> آراز	9,604	6	61 retweets 239 favorites
 <a href="#">@NEDANNeda</a> NEDA	4,036	3	50 retweets 214 favorites
 <a href="#">@Victorious_20</a> آگرین	6,305	4	28 retweets 178 favorites
 <a href="#">@tyam11235813</a> تام	3,635	8	43 retweets 160 favorites
 <a href="#">@Kaveh792</a>	993	5	32 retweets 143 favorites

## Search analytics for "#خورد\_گوه\_رجو\_مریم"

### 🔔 Most retweeted tweets

-  **NEDA @NEDANNeda** 5:11 AM - 6 Jul 2021 via Twitter for Android - **48 retweets** - **205 favorites** [Open](#)  
 تمامی دوستانی که این مجاهد را فالو دارید، بعد از ۲۴ ساعت آنفالو خواهند شد...! #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد 3KtPEDrQP9/co.t/:https
-  **پیام @tyam11235813** 4:03 AM - 11 Jul 2021 via Twitter for Android - **43 retweets** - **153 favorites** [Open](#)  
 درسته بمینو آخوندا رو خوب شناخته اما باید به خورده هم با نوع لچک به سر مجاهد آشنا بنشه... و بدونه که مجاهد و جا هیچ وظیفهای ندارند غیر از کند زدن به ایده دمکراسی خواهی و جمهوریت... #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد
-  **آراز @Sooresafill** 8:00 AM - 11 Jul 2021 via Twitter for Android - **35 retweets** - **147 favorites** [Open](#)  
 امروز که مجاهدین یکی مثل پمتر رو کشیدن تو اجلاس خودشون شاید نتویید متوجه بشید چرا داد میزدیم باید #مطالبه\_گرایان\_ایرانیسیون کرد در ضمن #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد
-  **عابر @Aberwoman** 12:24 PM - 3 Jul 2021 via Twitter for iPhone - **33 retweets** - **108 favorites** [Open](#)  
 شماها که هنوز روز ۲۲ بهمین جشن آزادی میگیرید و عر عر کنار به دنبال سهمتون از سفره ی انقلابید برای ما دم از آزادی خواهی ترینید برید لچکتونو عوض کنید موز خوراکی هر جایی! هزار بار دیکه ام لازم باشه میگم: مجاهدین روی دوم سکه ی ج ا اند!!! #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد هم همیشه خوری دلی
-  **گریب @Victorious\_20** 3:33 PM - 9 Jul 2021 via Twitter for iPhone - **28 retweets** - **169 favorites** [Open](#)  
 بیو هم نوشتنم برده‌های خانمهای کفتار و برده‌های مریم لچک بلاک میشن این دو جنایتکار برای من فرقی ندارند و هیچ زمانی همسوی این دو گروه نخواهم شد پس زیر تویت من زر نریز تا خوراک رهبرتون رو با دآوری نکنم ☹️ #خانمهای\_گوه\_خورد #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد نف به انقلابتونم! دوراری‌های وحشی!
-  **aveh792 گله آهنگر** 8:56 AM - 11 Jul 2021 via Twitter for Android - **26 retweets** - **118 favorites** [Open](#)  
 هرکی از فالواری من طرفدار مجاهد است لطف کنه منه آنفالو کنه #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد
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-  **باران @bahaari\_baraan** 8:33 AM - 3 Jul 2021 via Twitter for Android - **17 retweets** - **86 favorites** [Open](#)  
 سبکتیر ناا! #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد #مرگیب\_کلتی\_و\_تمامید\_جمهوریاسلامی @SiamackShojai
-  **الی حانوم @eliii984** 8:53 AM - 11 Jul 2021 via Twitter for iPhone - **14 retweets** - **65 favorites** [Open](#)  
 والله! افجا حانوم! تمام عالم و آدم بر سر ایورسیون دوراری. شاشیدم وسط فرقی سرتون که ۴۲ ساله هیچ گوهی نخوردین. نکون بخت مردم ایران که به شما دوراربا دل خوش کردن. #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد #بندم\_بها\_ایورسیون\_دوراری
-  **اوبه @UbbeLothbrok3** 6:44 AM - 11 Jul 2021 via Twitter Web App - **12 retweets** - **54 favorites** [Open](#)  
 خودتون رو برارید جای مایک بمینو ☹️ وقتی مبینه پهلوی و شورای گزار و مسیح و ... هنوز نتونستن به شورای واحد تشکیل بدن و طرفداراشونو سازماندهی کنن خب طبیعتا میره از به سازمانی حمایت میکنه که نظم داره و بیورهاشو سازماندهی کرده! پس: #مریم\_رجو\_گوه\_خورد #عملگرایان\_ایورسیون

### ★ Most favorited tweets

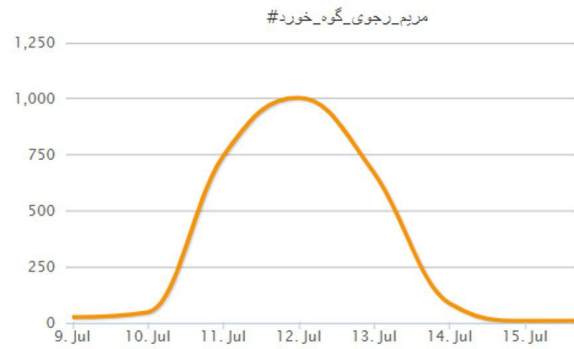
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اشک | ❤️ | استراتژیست | ❤️ |  
@\_Ashk\_

هموطنان؛ بخاطر گوه خوری #پمپنو و حمایتش از تروریست  
#مریم\_رجوی، ج.ا دوم!  
می‌خواهیم با یک طوفان یکبار برای همیشه تکلیف گروه  
تروریستی #مجاهدین را روشن کنیم  
● طوفان توئیتری با هشتک انگلیسی  
جمعه ۲۵ تیر ۱۴۰۰ ساعت ۶ عصر به وقت ایران  
آماده این طوفان با یک هشتک عالی باشید  
#رتوییت

2,608 tweets

from Jul. 9, 1:31 pm to Jul. 17, 8:47 am<sup>1</sup>



# Top hashtags

#مریم_رجوی_گوه_خورد	1,444
#خامنه‌ای_گوه_خورد	155
#نه_جمهوری_اسلامی	154
#انتصاب_اسیر_اسری	59
#نه_جمهوری_اسلامی	48
#no2mek	42
#مرگ_کلینتون_تمام_جمهوری_اسلامی	41
#مریم_رجوی_گوه_خورد	33
#نه_جمهوری_اسلامی	31
#براندازان	31

Top languages

Farsi	2,392
Other (und)	162
Arabic	42
English	12

2020 Results

Total Tweets	111,770
Average Tweets per day for the first three days (60.67 hours)	35,860
Average Tweets per minute during the 60.67 hours	29.55
Tweets	19,658 (17.59%)
Retweets	80,948 (72.42%)
Replies	11,164 (9.99%)
Total Contributors (tweeted, retweeted, replied)	24,631
Total under 100 followers	11,294
Accounts created in 1 <sup>st</sup> half of 2020 (out of 14,800 <sup>1</sup> with low followers)	3,994
Accounts not existing after the campaign (out of 14,800 with low followers)	3,453
Accounts become inactive after the July 2020 event (out of 14,800 with low followers)	1,168
Population of Iran	82,000,000 (82 Million)
Percent of People in Iran with Internet Access	~70% (57,400,000)
Tweets in Farsi	102,203
Tweets in English	2,999
Tweets in Arabic	2048

2021 Results