



# Coronavirus catastrophe in Iran: Where are the resources to combat the crisis?

A REPORT PREPARED BY THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF RESISTANCE OF IRAN

## Introduction

In the wake of thousands of deaths caused by the rapid spread of coronavirus in Iran, regime officials including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani have repeatedly blamed the crisis on U.S. sanctions. They insist that the regime's inability to sell oil or gain access to funds in frozen in foreign banks has prevented it from effectively confronting the coronavirus pandemic.

On April 8 Tehran asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a 5 billion-dollar loan. In considering this application, the international community is facing an urgent humanitarian issue, rather than a political one. Its importance partly stems from the fact that the novel coronavirus is spreading more quickly in Iran than in other countries with similar levels of infection, making it a focal point of the global crisis.

But there is reason to doubt that Tehran's appeals for cash assistance will lead to mitigation of that crisis, either for the Iranian regime or for the rest of the world. The country has recently abandoned confinement measures and Rouhani has returned heavily impoverished peoples to work.

Experts agree that this will lead to even more extensive spread of coronavirus. Some even estimate that as many as 60 million Iranians could become infected, leading to two million deaths.

On the first day of the Iranian parliament's current session, a number of lawmakers proposed emergency legislation to establish a one-month quarantine, but the bill was those in the parliament who are allies of Rouhani. The argument was that the government lacks sufficient funds to ensure continuation of quarantine because the government would not be able to remain solvent while the economy remained shut. And here too they identify sanctions as the main obstacle.

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and the regime's ambassadors have mobilized their lobbies everywhere, adopting corona diplomacy with the objective of having international sanctions lifted.

But as this report will demonstrate, Tehran has had access to ample resources for use in addressing the coronavirus crisis, yet declined to use them in a way that might undermine official narratives about the destructive impact of US sanctions.

## Basic facts

Iran boasts a population of nearly 82 million people, or roughly 1% of the world's population. But it controls about 8% of the world's natural resources and has had about 3 trillion dollars' worth of income during the 30 years since Ali Khamenei took over leadership of the regime.<sup>1</sup>

Mohsen Safai Farahani, a former member of parliament and former deputy minister, said: "The largest oil revenue was in 2010, which totaled about 118 billion dollars."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> State- controlled Arman daily, April 11, 2020, remarks of Ali-Mohammad Namazi, Vice-president of the Assembly of former parliament member.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.baharnews.ir/interview/205712/%D8%B5%D9%>

According to Heritage Foundation’s yearly Index of Economic Freedom, Iran’s GDP in 2017 was around 1.6 trillion dollars.

The question here is where has that money passed to?

## Current situation – actual available capital

Behzad Nabavi, a government minister in several administrations, said in an interview on September 21, 2019, “In our country there are four institutions which control 60 percent of the national wealth. This includes: The Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam (Setad Ejraie Farman Imam), Khatam-al-Anbiya Construction Garrison, Astan-e Quds Razavi, and Foundation for the Abased. None of these institutions has any connection with the government and parliament.”<sup>3</sup>

Of these four entities, three are directly supervised by the regime’s supreme leader. The fourth, the Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Garrison, is affiliated with the IRGC, which is also under Khamenei’s direct control.

Another of the regime’s wealthiest institutions, the National Development (Sovereign) Fund, spends its money only on the authority of Khamenei.

These institutions are tax-exempt. Their annual balance sheets and cash flow statements are not published and no one can hold them accountable. Their activities are confidential and reports about their conduct are rarely publicized in the media. Obtaining information about their contracts and net worth is extremely difficult.

Leader	Position	Organization	Estimated Assets
Seyed Farviz Fatah	President	Mostazafan Foundation	\$ 14B
Mohammad Mokhiber	President	Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order	\$ 95B
Hossein Salami	Commander in chief	Khatam-al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters	
Ahmad Marzi	Custodian	Astan Quds Razavi	\$ Tens of billions

<sup>3</sup> State-run Alef news agency, September 21, 2019

## Setad Ejraie Farman Imam (SETAD)

“SETAD” refers to the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam. A Reuters investigation published on November 11, 2013, which was the result of a six-month investigation, estimated its assets at about \$95 billion. According to Reuters, the \$95B figure comes from analyzing official statements by SETAD authorities, figures obtained from the Tehran stock exchange, company websites, and information from the US Treasury.

SETAD is comprised of two main components, the first of which includes its primary investments and properties, buildings and real-estate confiscated from religious minorities, dissidents and opponents — properties that the regime views as being “without owners.”

In 1991, Khamenei empowered SETAD to confiscate not only properties that belonged to monarchists but also the assets of Jews, Bahais, and other religious minorities that had migrated to other countries, as well as Muslim emigrants whose assets were left without power of attorney or supervisors.

In the years since, the mission and scope of activities of SETAD have expanded significantly. Confiscated assets whose ownership was contested, without inheritors, or abandoned were added to SETAD’s portfolio. Reuters has estimated that this portion of SETAD’s portfolio is worth about \$52B.

The second portion of SETAD’s holdings includes shares in large companies, which it controls using Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s authority. The value of these assets is upwards of \$43B.

In 2007, the parliament (Majlis) passed a law according to which centers and organizations affiliated with the “Leadership” (Khamenei) cannot be subjected to any investigation or research unless it is authorized by Khamenei himself.

On June 17, 2013, Judiciary head Sadeq Amoli Larijani issued a directive to judges and courts, which said in part: “With respect to assets left over by those accused in cases concerning Article 49 of the Constitution, where rulings have been made in favor of other institutions but so far have not taken steps to identify, supervise or take ownership, the courts are obligated to review these matters and take steps to issue final rulings in favor of the Setad-e Ejraee Farman Imam [SETAD].”

Therefore, two branches of the regime, the Judiciary and Legislature, have condoned the absolute and unconditional theft and confiscation of people’s properties by an institution under the control of the supreme leader.

Khamenei has appointed mullah Hossein-Ali Nayyeri, the head of the death commission in Tehran during the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners, as chairman of SETAD’s board of directors.

In June 2013, the US Treasury announced the identification and sanctioning of SETAD and a network of 37 related companies that secretly make investments on behalf of the Iranian regime.

SETAD has set up several so-called “foundations” to cover up its activities. One of them is called the Barekat Foundation, which is active in various financial and commercial enterprises. It has a drug company called Barekat Pharmaceuticals, which controls over 20 subsidiaries. In 2011, it had revenues upwards of one billion dollars. Based on this one entity, one can only guess the scope of Khamenei’s vast economic cartel.

Moreover, the Etemad Mobin Development company, 38% of whose shares are controlled by SETAD, purchased more than half of Iran's telecommunications company for 7,800 billion Tomans (at the time about \$8B) a few years ago. Subsequent to the purchase, one of SETAD's senior-ranking officials was appointed as the head of the telecommunications company of Iran. Companies and foundations related to this cartel are constantly signing contracts and deals worth hundreds of millions and at times billions of dollars within the regime.

## Astan-e Qods Razavi

Astan-e Qods Razavi is the largest religious endowment in the Muslim world.

The organization and management of all the religious ceremonies and financial gifts for the shrine of the eighth Shiite Imam (Imam Reza) over the past several centuries have been controlled by the Astan-e Qods, whose head is directly appointed by the Supreme Leader. Over the past 42 years, three people have been handpicked by Khamenei to run this vast institution: Mullah Abbas Vaez Tabasi who died in March 2016; Ebrahim Raisi, current head of Khamenei's Judiciary and member of the death commission during the 1988 massacre in Iran; and mullah Ahmad Marvi, a close Khamenei confidant. Only This economic powerhouse accountable is only accountable to Khamenei.

Astan-e Qods employs tens of thousands of workers. It is also completely tax exempt. It is made up of more than 50 large companies and owns 43% of the land base (over 13,000 hectares) of Mashhad (the second most populous city in Iran). Outside Mashhad, Astan owns large tracts of land, gardens, wells, and water channels, and has over 300,000 renters across Iran, including in the provinces of Hamedan, Eastern Azerbaijan, Golestan, Gilan, Tehran, Semnan and Yazd. Its total property holdings are valued at over \$20B.

Property accounts for only a portion of the foundation's total assets. Astan-e Qods has complete and independent control over oil fields related to its operations. It has exclusive oil rigs and has full independent authority for importing or exporting oil from areas under its control. Astan-e Qods also owns a portion of Iran's railways and heavy industries, as well as major mines and natural resources.

In the past few years, Astan-e Qods has also become involved in projects outside Iran, often through subsidiaries. These include building railway bridges on the Euphrates River in Syria, totaling to an estimated length of 1,000 meters.

Astan-e Qods also controls 10% of Iran's production of sugar cubes, 11% of decorative stones, 3.7% of urban and transport buses, and one-sixth of bread in the entire country.

Every year, the companies affiliated with Astan produce 73,000 tons of dried milk, 300 tons of red meat, 1,000 tons of white meat, 100,000 tons of agricultural products, 10 million square meters of fabric, and 6,000 square meters of handwoven carpet. On an annual basis, it also completes more than 136 construction projects, development projects, road building and urban initiatives.

Forty-nine percent of the shares of the Razavi oil and gas development company are owned by Astan-e Qods. The remaining 51% are owned by the Social Security Investment Company. This company develops oil and gas fields and is active in the commerce of oil and oil-based products. It also invests in oil and gas and petrochemical products. Among its projects was the building of five offshore drilling rigs in 2015. According to its CEO, it has signed a \$1.1B oil and gas contract.

## *Mostazafan Foundation (The Foundation of the Abased)*

The Mostazafan Foundation is controlled by the supreme leader and governed through a board of directors. The foundation oversees close to 140 companies in the food, chemical, petrochemical, metals, building, agricultural and tourism industries. Owing to its special legal status, it can work directly with foreign companies.

In the past, the Mostazafan Foundation was considered the largest economic powerhouse in Iran. Today, it has over 200,000 employees.

In 1997, the former head of Mostazafan, Mohsen Rafiqdoost, said: “The Mostazafan Foundation has about 400 commercial companies, and produces 28% of the country’s textiles, 22% of cement, about 45% of non-alcoholic beverages, 28% of tires, and 25% of Iran’s sugar.”

In 2009, the foundation owned almost 140 companies in total, including Sina Bank, the Zamzam Company, Alavi Foundation and the Behran Oil Company. Based on its official financial statements in 2016, the foundation’s assets are worth at least about \$14B.

Mostazafan’s 2016 financial statements claimed revenues of about \$7B. Approximately 35% of this came from the sale of products, primarily in the food and agricultural sectors, as well as oil and gas, and industries and mining. Approximately 65% of the revenues came from provision of services in the financial and banking sectors, in communication technologies, and industries and mining.

Declared net profits in 2016 were \$700M. The annual gross earnings have been estimated at about \$5.3B.

## *Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Garrison*

The Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Garrison is the main financial and commercial arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). It began its activities as a contractor of industrial and construction projects following the ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq War in 1989. Khatam is the largest contractor for government projects in Iran. It has 5,000 subcontractors and about 135,000 employees.

For years, Khatam has not limited its activities to specific fields and does not accept projects less than about \$25M. Its projects have included the Sadr highway project in Tehran, the South Pars phases 15 and 16, the Gatvand Dam construction, various highways, and different vast tunnels.

In the oil sector, on March 15, 2010, the Oil Ministry signed a \$850M contract for pipelines with Khatam’s Qorb. Later, the National Iranian Gas Company awarded a project for the construction of a 270 km pipeline worth about \$250M to the Khatam Company. The first phase of this project was also previously awarded to Khatam in 2006 and was worth \$1.3B.

A plan by the government of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad anticipated taking water from the Caspian Sea and transferring it to Semnan Province. This project was awarded to Khatam, and more than \$150M in credit was reserved for it. The plan was supposed to transfer 500 million cubic meters of water from the Caspian Sea through pipelines and canals to Semnan Province and the Lut desert. The funding was transferred to the IRGC’s accounts, but nothing actually happened on the ground.

The development projects for natural gas phases for South Pars 15 and 16 in August 2006 were awarded to Khatam without a formal procurement process. The contract was worth over \$2B.

The Ahmadinejad government's conduct in awarding large projects to military institutions and Khatam turned the Khatam company into one of the biggest contractors and builders in Iran. Rostam Qassemi, former commander of Khatam (and former Ahmadinejad Oil Minister and head of Qods Force logistics in Syria), has said that the investment for South Pars phases 15 and 16 joint gas fields depended on securing one billion dollars from foreign reserves.

Morteza Shahidzadeh  
Board Director & President

Akbar Torkan  
Board director

سندوق توسعه ملی

شرکت سرمایه‌گذاری تامین اجتماعی

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND OF IRAN

Social Security Investment Company

Estimated available funds: \$ 40B

## Sherkat Sarmayeh-Gozari Tamin Ejtemai (Shasta) - Social Security Investment Corporation

On December 18, 2019, the state-run daily Farheekhtegan published a shocking economic report: “Information accessible from 15 banks showed that the fixtures and bank obligations of 456 legal persons and entities amounted to \$89.6B, equivalent to the government’s budget in 2020. State companies like the National Oil Company and the Social Security Investment Company had the largest share of bank loans. They received these loans not to expand domestic production but to pay for their day-to-day operations. The majority of the loans related to 20 to 30 companies and legal entities.”

The Social Security Investment Company is a holding company belonging to the Social Security Organization. The company is active in investments, commerce, trade, management and investment banking.

The Social Security Investment Company was established by the Social Security Organization as a special investment arm with an initial capital of close to \$500,000. Six years ago, close to 10% of all the value of the Tehran Stock Exchange belonged to the company’s subsidiaries. Revenues and profits have since been on the rise.

The Social Security Investment Company has multiple subsidiaries, including the Daroupakhsh Pharma factories, Exir Pharma, Farabi Pharma, Faka Agriculture and Free-Range Company,

Zahravi Pharma, Abu Reyhan Pharma, Caspian Pharma, Dana Pharma, Razek Laboratories, Pars Pharma, and Gelatin Capsule Iran Company.

According to the state-run ILNA, the company's profits are astronomical: "The profits of the Social Security Investment Company at the end of the financial calendar year (March 2019) were more than \$2B, which compared to the previous year showed a 213% increase. The company's net profits at the end of the financial calendar year (March 2019) reached \$6.7B, which marks a 286% increase compared to the same period the year before. It is interesting to note that the rate of return of the company in the current year has been 18%, which is an 8-fold growth compared to the same period last year. Moreover, the economic conduct of the company over the past nine months and the jump in its activities paint a very bright picture for its companies in 2020, resulting in a growth in production. On this basis, there have been sales of over \$1.3B, which shows a 60% increase compared to the previous year. Net profits have been \$6B, showing an increase of 141% compared to the previous year."

## National Development (Sovereign) Fund

The National Development (Sovereign) Fund was set up to invest in the regime's long-term economic projects, but the authority over its spending rests with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. It is now worth tens of billions of dollars.

The latest report on the fund came out on March 26, 2020, when urgent medical needs were expressed. The regime's primary TV channel said: "The total medical requirements and the amount that this unemployment insurance fund needs are one billion dollars. God willing, we will write this letter today and we hope His Excellency the Supreme Leader agrees to draw one billion dollars from this fund to allocate to the challenges of the coronavirus, especially in the area of medicine and treatment, which are desperately needed, both in terms of equipping hospitals and other related initiatives."

According to the state-run daily Etemad, "Since the second decade of the current century, the National Development Fund has been set up to save a portion of the annual revenues from oil and byproducts exports in order to support future generations and the country's development.

"During these years, based on what was determined in the five-year plan, the government was obligated to pay into the fund. According to the fifth development plan, 20% was to be added to the fund in the first year and after that an annual rate of three percent was to be added. For the sixth plan of development, 30% of oil revenues must be allocated to the fund and an additional two percent must be deposited annually."

As for the money available in this secretive fund, during his early years, Rouhani announced on October 14, 2013, at Tehran University, that the coffers were completely empty. However, his remarks were met with widespread criticism and later former Labor Minister Ahmad Tavakoli announced that there was \$15B in the fund. Mohammad Reza Farzin said that it had \$42B and the chair of the inspections organization of the country at the time, Nasser Seraj, said \$54.5B was available.

The head of the Central Bank during Ahmadinejad's presidency, Mahmoud Bahmani, said after Rouhani's speech: "The country's foreign reserve exceeds \$100B, and there is \$32B to \$34B available in the National Development Fund... Some reports estimate that the reserve is closer to \$90B."

Following the elimination of the regime's chief terrorist and Commander of the extraterritorial Qods Force, Qassem Soleimani, the regime's Parliamentary Speaker, Ali Larijani, said that the government had awarded \$200M to the Qods Force from the National Development Fund on the orders of Khamenei.

Prior to that, the government's public relations office had said that \$2B euros from the same fund would be allocated to "defense-related" matters. In previous years, the regime has followed a similar pattern, dedicating a portion of the fund to the defense budget.

Just a cursory review of this huge entities indicate that hundreds of billions of dollars of the Iranian people's national wealth are currently under the control of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Even a small percentage of this wealth, if spent on fighting the coronavirus pandemic, could address all of the logistical, resourcing, and healthcare requirements.

## Growing domestic objection to the wealth accumulated by the state-controlled foundations

However, over the past several weeks, many of the state elements and authors have unveiled a reality that very few people dare to highlight. That is the astronomical public wealth and investments that belong to the Iranian regime, to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars, which have been seized by banks and foundations under the direct control of Khamenei and his apparatus. This wealth belongs to the Iranian people and in these urgent circumstances the money has to be provided to help the people.

The option to tap into Khamenei's astronomical wealth to fight coronavirus was first voiced by the Iranian Resistance back on March 7, 2020. The Iranian Resistance's Leader said: "Khamenei must dedicate to the health and treatment of the Iranian people the assets and funds of the Setad-e Ejraie, which has at least 100 billion dollars, as well as the enormous wealth consolidated in the IRGC, Bassij, State Security Forces, and Foundation for the Abased, and the money being spent in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Gaza, and Lebanon... The assets of Astan-e Qods Razavi in Khorasan, whose astronomical holdings as a result of exploiting Imam Reza's name are in Khamenei's hands represents an enormous wealth that on the eve of the Persian new year can fund the deferred salaries and paychecks of workers, teachers, government employees and costs associated with public health. The oppressive and inhumane policy of avoiding pay to a large number of workers who have either been laid off or sent on furloughs must stop."<sup>4</sup>

On March 9, four members of the regime's parliament dared to address this issue very briefly. The state-run daily Ebtekar wrote: "The chairman and three members of the Citizens' Rights faction in parliament demanded an order be issued by the Supreme National Security Council to place crisis centers under 100% quarantine."

Abdolkarim Hosseinzadeh, Tayyebeh Siavoshi, Fatemeh Saedi, and Seyyedeh Hamideh Zarabadi, repeated the same tweet on their personal Twitter accounts: "Preventing the spread of coronavirus has not been successful for whatever reason. Two necessary steps: 1 — An order by the Supreme National Security Council to place crisis centers under 100% quarantine. 2 — Use the vast resources of the Social Security Investment Company, the Setad-e Imam, the Mostazafan

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpts from a message by the Leader of the Iranian Resistance, March 7, 2020.

Foundation and Petrochemical holdings to procure and distribute masks, suits, glasses and other necessary medical supplies.”<sup>5</sup>

This fact has been reiterated by many figures inside the mullahs’ regime ever since. Initially they were very cautious to address it, but they gradually made their tones harsher to stress the need to use these assets for the people’s problems.

Chairman of the political committee of the parliamentary Omid faction, Jalal Mirzai said on March 29, 2020: "In these circumstances, this question must be posed by experts: Can we get help from foundations and the Astan-e Qods in order to pay for the necessities? These sources must be used to save the country. The situation today is complex and difficult. We expect experts and observers to highlight essential issues in the current circumstances."<sup>6</sup>

Member of Parliament Gholamreza Heydari said on April 6: “Mostazafan Foundation belonged to the people. So, Mostazafan foundation, Setad-e Ejraee Farman-e Imam, and other foundations that earn money should allocate their assets to the people honestly and voluntarily without disoblging and thinking that they are giving charitable donations.” <sup>7</sup>

Yadollah Eslami , a former member of Majlis, former editor-in-chief of Fath newspaper, and Secretary General of the Representatives Association said on April 7, "The government and the state must use the financial and economic capabilities of large foundations like the Foundation for the Abased, which must be at the disposal of the government and all the people, or the Astan-e Qods or other large institutions that do not even pay taxes, to ensure that some of the people's needs in this stage are addressed."<sup>8</sup>

Qassem Mirzai, a Member of Parliament from Damavand and Firouzkouh, wrote on April 10, "If we see that things are going very slowly it is because unfortunately the decision-maker is not the government alone. During this period, the government has implemented certain measures that cannot be ignored. Various institutions like the Foundation for the Abased, the Emdad Committee and others who are in a good financial position must also enter the scene in order to resolve this crisis."<sup>9</sup>

According to Shahboddin Bimeqdar, a Member of Parliament from Tabriz, "Implementing the shutdown bears costs for the government, the funds for which can be obtained from resources held by the Setad, Astan-e Qods, the Foundation for the Abased, the National Development Fund, and even the monthly salaries of parliamentary deputies."<sup>10</sup>

Masih Mohajeri, the editor-in-chief of Jomhour-i- e-Eslmai daily, which was established by Khamenei himself, wrote on April 11: "In order to definitively resolve the issues, large financial powers must come forward. They are wealthy and their assets belong to the people. These financial powers include the Setad, the Foundation for the Abased, and Astan-e Qods Razavi. If the extensive resources and financial capabilities at the disposal of these bodies are utilized to help vulnerable social sectors harmed by coronavirus, the problems of these sectors will be completely resolved in the shortest span of time. These moneys and resources belong to the people and it is precisely in such situations that these resources must be utilized to solve people's

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<sup>5</sup> Ebtekar state-run daily, March 9, 2020

<sup>6</sup> Hamshahri state-run daily, March 29, 2020- <https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/496228>

<sup>7</sup> State-run daily Eqtesad Saramad, April 6, 2020

<sup>8</sup> state-run Mostaqel newspaper, April 7, 2020, <http://www.mostaghelnewspaper.ir/paper/post/39173>

<sup>9</sup> State-controlled Rooydad 24 website, April 10, 2020- <https://www.rouydad24.ir/fa/news/209688>

<sup>10</sup> state-run news agency ISNA, April 11, 2020

problems. These centers must... come forth without any restrictions and without any delay. They should address all of the needs of people who are facing obstacles in the current dire economic circumstances. If they refuse to spend their wealth to save oppressed people, how can they justify their existence?"<sup>11</sup>

Shahboddin Bimeqdar, a Member of Parliament from Tabriz, wrote on April 12: "The institutions that have money in accordance with Article 49 (of the constitution) are not few and far between. Foundations, organs, and the SETAD have money. And they can help the government."<sup>12</sup>

Another Member of Parliament, Mostafa Kavakabian said on April 15: "I asked a month ago, why are we not using funds at the disposal of the state, including the Foundation for the Abased, the SETAD and the Astan-e Qods Razavi?"<sup>13</sup>

## Khamenei's reaction to growing pressure

After hearing numerous calls for the use of available funds, Khamenei was forced to bring in the IRGC as the savior of the people. IRGC commander-in-chief Hossein Salami announced the "formation of the Imam Hassan Mojtaba Headquarters tasked with helping and supporting three and a half million families in need"<sup>14</sup>

The Khabar TV network reported on this development: "The commander-in-chief of the IRGC said at a joint meeting with the minister of industries, mining and commerce, the head of the Foundation for the Abased, the head of the SETAD, the head of Emdad Committee and the head of the Bassij Organization, that it has been decided that a base named Imam Hassan Mojtaba be established, comprised of supportive institutions and the Ministry of Industry in order to plan and implement plans to help the needy and the poor in society."

As a result, the regime's project of responding to the needs of 82 million people is covering only 3.5 million families, or about one-tenth of the population. At the same time, this so-called "headquarters", instead of talking about specific measures to help the people, "asked the Vakhiran residents to help them as much as they can."

## Further attention focused on the regime's plunder

The deputy chairman of the Parliament's Representatives Association, Ali Mohammad Namazi, told the state-run daily Arman on April 11, 2020: "The people deserve to ask officials about what they have done over the past 30 years, with oil revenues upwards of 3 trillion dollars while the middle classes and below cannot tolerate quarantine without gaining income. Secondly, and worse, the reserves are so depleted that the government cannot financially compensate private employees in need of help for about three to four months?"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <http://setaresobh.ir/fa/news/main/58385>

<sup>12</sup> State-run ILNA news agency- April 12, 2020- <https://www.ilna.news/-/3/897631/>

<sup>13</sup> State-run Radio Farhang, April 15, 2020

<sup>14</sup> State-run Khabar TV network, April 15, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.armanmeli.ir/fa/news/main/285589>

The 30 years that Namazi referred to are the same years that Khamenei has been the regime's leader and has controlled everything including politics, the economy, and mainstream Iranian culture.

On March 29, 2020, the Jomhuri Eslami daily wrote: "On the basis of information and statistics provided by the former head of the Central Bank, in 13 years, from 2003 to 2011, 2014 and 2017, the Central Bank has sold 283.9 billion dollars in order to intervene and manage the foreign exchange market. 81.8 percent of that amount was associated with the years 2005 and 2011, during the ninth and tenth presidential terms. The total oil revenues in those eight years equaled all of the oil revenues since oil was struck in Iran. It has never been determined what has happened to the 618 billion dollars."<sup>16</sup>

Oil revenue during the Khamenei era amounted to \$3 trillion, with its peak of \$118 billion coming in 2010 during Ahmadinejad's presidency. The fate of \$400 billion of oil revenue during that eight-year period remains unknown.

Yahya Al-Eshaq, former head of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, has recently talked about the regime's financial position and the capability to help solve people's problems (state-run Khabar Online, April 10, 2020): "According to government officials, there is 18 quadrillion Tomans (equivalent to \$4 trillion based on the official exchange rate), which the government has but is frozen. Moreover, about 50 percent of the banks' assets have been frozen and are not used. The total frozen assets must be turned into liquidity in order to solve problems."<sup>17</sup>

On April 15, the state-run daily Aftab-e Yazd wrote the following about the regime's request for a five-billion-dollar loan from the IMF: "The IMF provides urgent loans to countries who need help with their foreign currency or gold reserves. However, this organization wrote about the Iranian situation in a report in November 2019 that the entire foreign currency and gold reserves in Iran are estimated to be worth about \$101.1B by the end of 2018. By the end of 2019, this amount will be reduced to \$85.5B, which equals the amount used for imports for 14.3 months."<sup>18</sup>

## The unanswered question

One question remains unanswered. If all these resources are available why is Khamenei as the Supreme Leader reluctant to utilize them in the fight against coronavirus?

The answer lies in the regime's strategic priorities. Khamenei must choose between the strategic policies that form the pillar of his rule, namely domestic crackdowns, giving the IRGC free reins to pilfer and plunder the nation's resources, exporting terrorism and warmongering, allocating billions to Syria's criminal regime,<sup>19</sup> funding and arming Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, advancing its missile and nuclear programs, and covering the expenses of hundreds of thousands of clerics in more than 100 countries, whose mission is to promote the regime's agenda.

In a state TV interview on February 14, Mostazafan Foundation Director Parviz Fattah said that Qassem Soleimani, the notorious commander of the IRGC Quds Force came to Fattah and said

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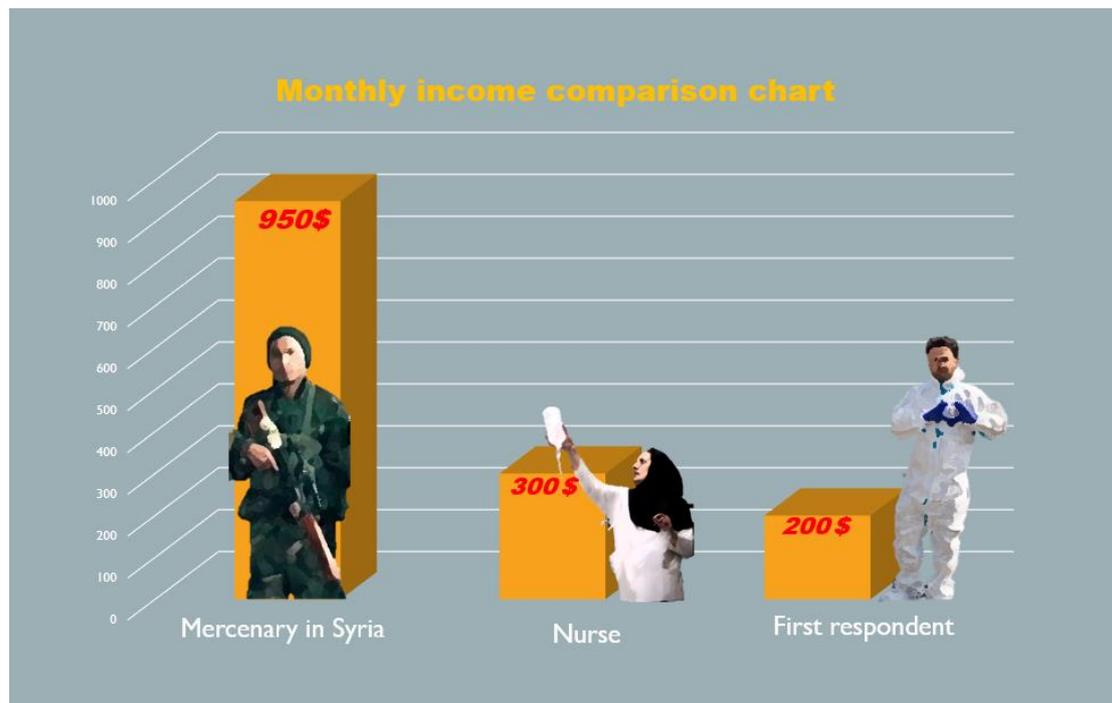
<sup>16</sup> <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/968735/%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4%D9>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1374603>

<sup>18</sup> <http://aftabeyazd.ir/?newsid=158088>

he did not have the means to pay the salaries of Fatemeyoon, the regime's Afghan mercenaries in Syria, for that month. Soleimani therefore asked the Mostazafan Foundation to pay the salaries. Fattah said the money was not significant at all and he happily paid the amount Soleimani sought.

According to various reports, the Iranian regime on average paid about \$1,000 a month to its foreign mercenaries in Syria. At the height of the massacre of the Syrian people, the regime deployed up to 70,000 foreign mercenaries, a large number of them Afghans. By comparison, the average salary of a nurse in Iran is somewhere between 3 to 5 million Tomans, or 200 to 330 dollars a month based on the current exchange rate.



At the height of the coronavirus pandemic ravaging Iran, and as tens of thousands of Iranians have lost their lives and hundreds of thousands more have been infected, the regime has continued its policy of assisting its proxy forces in other countries and interfering in those countries' affairs.

Instead of helping to save Iranian lives and reduce suffering by allocating the wealth and resources in banks and foundations he controls, Khamenei has told Rouhani to order the people back to work. At the same time, the mullahs are doing their utmost to get their hands on cash to relieve some of the limitations that sanctions have placed on the funding of their ominous objectives.

## Conclusion

The problems facing the Iranian people have nothing to do with lack of resources. Even reports in Iran's state-controlled media make it clear that if Khamenei were to allocate to coronavirus relief just 10% of the assets he controls, then all the needs the Iranian people's urgent needs could be met.

The decision not to do so is profoundly political. In choosing between preserving his regime and the saving people's lives, Khamenei has chosen the former.

Unlike every other country, the Iranian regime has been covering up the impact of the coronavirus pandemic since the beginning. That cover-up goes beyond the rate of infection and the number of fatalities. It also conceals the fact that the mullahs have stolen and amassed the people' wealth for use in self-serving projects, at the expense of the people most affected by COVID-19.

