



## IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Radicalism and Reform in Islamic Republic of Iran

# Iran Democracy Monitor No. 189

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Afghanistan; Iran

## IRAN'S CLANDESTINE OIL TRADE

The Trump administration's Iran strategy has focused extensively on curtailing the Islamic Republic's international business - in particular its ability to export energy abroad. However, the Iranian regime's oil exports remain extensive as a result of a vibrant clandestine oil trade that limits the impact and effectiveness of U.S. pressure, a leading energy consultant has warned. "The Trump administration should worry about the amount of Iranian oil that is still on the global market and will continue to be traded after the sanctions begin on November 4," when the next round of U.S. sanctions is slated to take effect, writes Ellen Wald in *Forbes*. "Despite high profile reports that the sanctions will cut off 1.5 million barrels per day of Iranian oil and that Iran's largest customers – China, India, Turkey, the UAE and Japan – are reducing or ending their imports of Iranian oil altogether, new data on oil shipments from the month of September reveals a picture of the Iranian oil industry that is still robust." "The data on oil movements show conclusively that Iran's oil exports have not decreased nearly as much as the media narrative has suggested," Wald writes. "Iran exported at least 2 million barrels per day of oil in the month of September" as a result of methods designed to "mask" oil shipments (including having tankers make multiple stops or even to "turn off their AIS transponders to try to hide their activities and final destinations"). This has allowed countries such as India and Japan to quietly continue receiving significant energy supplies from Iran at a time when those nations are supposed to be reducing their imports of energy from Iran. (*Forbes*, October 11, 2018)

## AN EXODUS OF AFGHANS

Iran's deepening economic downturn has led to a mass out-migration of Afghan nationals from the Islamic Republic. Nearly a decade ago, Afghan migrants flooded into Iran in hopes of better economic opportunities. Most participated in Iran's "gray economy," working as day laborers or construction workers. But the recent mass devaluation of the *rial*, coupled with growing unemployment, has led many Afghan migrants to return home. As of August, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was estimating that in 2018 alone, over 400,000 undocumented Afghan migrants left Iran - more than double the reported 187,000 who left the country in 2017. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 2, 2018)

## A MEDIA BLACKOUT ON "SEX TOURISM"

Regime censorship of news within the Islamic Republic is hardly new. But Iranian officials have stepped up their efforts to curtail unwelcome stories amid expanding economic and social malaise within the country. Recently, the head of Iran's judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani, issued a public warning to all Iranian media outlets not to cover sex tourism unless "they want to face prosecution." The warning, issued by Larijani on September 10th, came in response to growing reports that Shi'a pilgrims to the Iranian holy city of Mashhad were hiring sex workers during their stays. Under Iranian law, unmarried men and women are forbidden from entering a hotel room together - a prohibition which is skirted through the practice of *sigheh*, or temporary marriage. According to Larijani, as many as 6,000 so-called "travelers houses" have sprung up in Mashhad in order to cater to this growing trend. (*Radio Farda*, September 12, 2018)

## THE HIGH PRICE OF CIVIL PROTEST

A court in Iran's northwestern Qazvin Province has ordered death sentences for 17 truck drivers. Their crime? The individuals in question, who had participated in a strike to protest low and unpaid wages, were found guilty on national security grounds. "The judiciary will without any tolerance deal with those who disrupt the security of drivers and also those who intend to take advantage (of the strike) and create insecurity," the head of the Qazvin Court said in rendering the body's official verdict. (*Iran News Wire*, October 8, 2018)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The unfortunate Qazvin drivers are hardly alone. More than 200 truckers in as many as 300 cities throughout the Islamic Republic have been detained in recent weeks for protesting poor economic conditions and unmet expectations, and the Qazvin verdict represents an effort by regime authorities to quell such demonstrations of overt dissent.]