



IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

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TAKING AIM AT TEHRAN'S DOMESTIC MILITIA

The U.S. Treasury has imposed sanctions on a multi-billion-dollar financial network that supports a key Iranian militia force. The new sanctions, which come ahead of a larger tranche of economic penalties set to be reimposed by the White House on November 5th, target the Bonyad Taavon Basij network, which provides funding to the Islamic Republic's feared *Basij* domestic militia via a range of banks and investment firms. The *Basij* represents one of the principal means by which the Iranian regime maintains order, and has played an outsized role in repressing domestic dissent over the past year in response to renewed protests and public opposition at home.

But the new U.S. measures have taken aim at the *Basij* for a different reason: its role in recruiting and training child soldiers as young as twelve in military tactics. Those children are subsequently passed along to Iran's clerical army, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and deployed to Syria to fight in support of the regime of Bashar al-Assad. "This vast network provides financial infrastructure to the *Basij*'s efforts to recruit, train, and indoctrinate child soldiers who are coerced into combat under the IRGC's direction," Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin laid out in announcing the new measures. (Reuters, October 16, 2018)

ALL NOT QUIET ON THE EASTERN FRONT

For years, Iran has grappled with security problems along its eastern border, where the rise of Sunni Islamist militancy in the form of the Taliban (and, more recently, the Islamic State) has threatened to destabilize neighboring Afghanistan. But now, the Islamic Republic is encountering new security challenges there – along its common border with Pakistan. Iranian authorities say that the Sunni terrorist group Jaish ul-Adl, which is based in Pakistan, is responsible for the abduction of 11 *Basij* volunteers and border guards along the shared boundary. The incident has sparked a crisis between the two countries, with both governments now attempting to coordinate search and rescue efforts. (*Express Tribune*, October 17, 2018)

SOCCER AS A SIGN OF PROTEST

"The presence of women in stadiums is harmful," warned Iran's chief prosecutor, Mohammad Javad Montazeri, ahead of a friendly soccer match between Iran and Bolivia. Despite the warning, a group of Iranian women went to watch the exhibition game – sparking renewed tensions between regime hardliners and more liberal political opponents over the role of women in Iranian society. Clerics such as Montazeri have denounced the action as "a sin" and threatened that regime action will be taken "if such moves continue."

The declaration also represents a pushback by hardline elements against more inclusive civic policies that have been suggested by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Earlier this year, Rouhani had argued that "there should be no difference between men and women in Islam, and for that reason women should also be allowed to take part in sports events." Apparently, however, Iran's clerical establishment does not agree. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 17, 2018)

IRAN'S MISSILES MOVE FORWARD

Slowly but surely, the Islamic Republic is expanding its strategic capabilities. The Islamic Republic now "ranks first in the region and seventh or eighth in the world and is ahead of the [North] Koreans in the missile field," Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the head of Iran's air force, has told reporters. "Today, we have managed to produce a coast-to-sea ballistic, not cruise, missile, which has a complicated technology," Hajizadeh said. "We can target warships from a distance of 700 kilometers [345 miles]." Moreover, "all of our produced missiles with ranges from 200 kilometers to 2,000 kilometers [about 124 miles to 1,240 miles] have pin-point accuracy," he confirmed. (*Newsweek*, October 16, 2018)