



## IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

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

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Resource Security; Iran; Iraq

## A CHANGING OF THE GUARD AT THE EXPEDIENCY COUNCIL

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has appointed hardline cleric Sadeq Amoli Larijani to head the country's powerful Expediency Council, putting a key political ally at the helm of a pivotal regime body. The Expediency Council is tasked with adjudicating disputes between the country's parliament, or *majles*, and the clerical body known as the Council of Guardians. The elevation of the 57-year-old Larijani comes just days after the death of the Council's previous president, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi.

Larijani's appointment is being seen by observers as a blow to the country's so-called "moderate" political camp. "This is not good news for the moderates within the establishment," notes Paris-based political analyst Taghi Rahmani. "It demonstrates that Khamenei prefers the extremists to manage the country's affairs." Significantly, Larijani's name has been floated as a possible successor to the ailing Khamenei, and his viability to serve in Iran's highest ideological post is further bolstered by the new appointment.

The selection of Larijani is controversial for another reason as well, however. He is accused of having overseen hundreds of executions of political dissidents and human rights activists. Back in January 2018, the Trump administration formally blacklisted Larijani "for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, the commission of serious human rights abuses against persons in Iran or Iranian citizens or residents." In his capacity as head of Iran's Judiciary, the U.S. Treasury Department noted at the time, Larijani possessed "administrative oversight over the carrying out of sentences in contravention of Iran's international obligations, including the execution of individuals who were juveniles at the time of their crime and the torture or cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners in Iran, including amputations." (U.S. Department of the Treasury, January 12, 2018; Reuters, December 30, 2018; *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 31, 2018)

## IRAN'S AFGHAN EXODUS

Iran's deepening economic downturn - and the prospect of still more sanctions pressure from the United States - is prompting migrants to the Islamic Republic to vote with their feet. According to the United Nations, more than 700,000 undocumented migrants from Afghanistan fled Iran in 2018, amid a precipitous drop in demand for Afghan labor. "Undocumented returns from Iran in particular are seeing a massive increase over previous years, largely driven by recent political and economic issues in Iran including massive currency devaluation," the UN's migration agency, the International Organization for Migration, has noted. (Reuters, December 5, 2018)

## TEHRAN'S ASSASSINS

Iran is dispatching "teams" of trained killers to target and silence opponents of its growing influence over Iraq's new government, according to British officials. The hit squads, UK intelligence sources say, are being directed and deployed by the paramilitary arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, which is known as the Qods Force, with the aim of eliminating opposition to Tehran's increasingly prominent role in directing political affairs in Baghdad. The assassination campaign has reportedly already claimed one high-profile critic; Adel Shaker El-Tamimi, a "close ally of former Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi," was assassinated back in September, reportedly by Iranian forces.

"Iran is intensifying its campaign of intimidation against the Iraqi government by using assassination squads to silence critics of Tehran," a senior British security official has told Britain's *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. "This is a blatant attempt to thwart efforts by the new Iraqi government to end Iran's meddling in Iraq." (London *Daily Telegraph*, November 29, 2018)

## THE POLITICS OF IRAN'S WATER WOES

Worsening hydrological conditions are beginning to exact a real toll on regime cohesion within the Islamic Republic. In the latest sign of political turmoil, eighteen lawmakers from water-poor provinces in central Iran resigned *en masse* in early December to protest the increasingly inequitable distribution of resources within the country. In an open letter, the parliamentarians demanded action from the president, parliament and judiciary to take a more active role in ensuring that the country's various regions each receive an equitable share of water within the country - bringing deepening tensions over water scarcity to the political forefront amid growing drought conditions and widespread resource mismanagement. (*Al-Monitor*, December 31, 2018)