



IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

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

Iran Democracy Monitor No. 193

February 14, 2019 **Gabriella Bettino, Ilan I. Berman**

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IRAN'S UNDERAGE BRIDES

Child weddings are still officially permitted within the Islamic Republic. Back in December, the Legal and Judicial Commission of the Iranian *majles* rejected a motion that would have banned marriages for girls under thirteen years old - effectively providing renewed legal sanction for the controversial practice. Such unions are widespread and increasingly frequent within Iran; according to the country's Association of Children's Rights, the number of girls married in Iran under the age of 15 rose 30 percent between 2006 and 2009, from 33,383 to 43,459, reflecting deepening poverty and a growing desire for control over the sexuality of women. (*Radio Farda*, December 24, 2018)

TEHRAN PLAYS POLITICAL POWER BROKER...

Afghanistan's ousted Taliban movement and the Iranian government have been engaged in talks focused on "security and issues aimed at driving the peace process in Afghanistan," according to Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi. Tehran's objective in these talks "seems to be preventing a repeat of the 1990s," when Iran's backing of anti-Taliban groups made it an adversary of the fundamentalist Sunni movement and limited Iran's regional activities while the Taliban was in power in Kabul, says Afghan journalist Sami Yousafzai.

The United States and other Western countries have accused the two parties - despite their ideological differences - of maintaining a tactical alliance, and there is at least some evidence for this contention. The Taliban has been successful in keeping the Islamic State terrorist group away from Iran's borders, while the regime in Tehran has offered to mediate peace talks in Kabul between the Taliban and the Afghan government. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, ">December 31, 2018 and January 7, 2019)

...AMID MASS EXODUS OF AFGHANS

Iran is preoccupied with Afghanistan for another reason as well; the country is currently experiencing a mass exodus of Afghans. Over the past year, almost 800,000 Afghans (out of as many as 3 million residents, both legal and illegal) have fled the country, effectively reversing the usual flow of human traffic - whereby Afghans historically sought to enter the Islamic Republic for economic opportunities. The reasons behind the exodus have a great deal to do with renewed U.S. sanctions pressure on the Iranian regime, which has "sent the Iranian currency into freefall and fueled inflation," notes Laurence Hart of the International Organization for Migration mission to Afghanistan. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 8, 2019)

REGIME OFFICIALS SPIN IRANIAN SUCCESS

This week, Iran marked the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution that catapulted the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his followers to power in Tehran. As that milestone approached, the country's leaders worked overtime to paint their clerical regime as a resounding success. "In these 40 years 400 years' worth of service has been rendered to this country and we have had 400 years' worth of growth and progress; technology, gadgets, various equipment, population and lifestyle, and now it is totally different from the past," the Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, a member of the country's powerful Guardian Council, told the conservative Iranian Student News Agency last month. (*Radio Farda*, January 3, 2019)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The empirical data, it should be noted, paints a very different picture. According to the World Bank, per capita GDP in Iran has declined by more than 30 percent in real terms since the mid-1970s, as the purchasing power of the country's national currency, the *rial*, has plummeted. In aggregate terms, Iranian citizens are now 30 percent poorer than they were in 1979.]

IRAN DIGS IN IN SYRIA

Despite pressure from the international community, the Islamic Republic shows no signs of leaving Syria. To the contrary, and in spite of Israeli military raids on Iranian facilities in southern Syria, Iranian forces seem to be entrenching themselves in the south of the country. "The Islamic Republic of Iran will keep its military advisers, revolutionary forces, and its weapons in Syria," Maj. Gen. Ali Jafari, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has pledged. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 16, 2019)