



IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

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

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IRANIAN "HOSTAGE DIPLOMACY" BECOMES BOLDER

The Iranian regime has long pursued a policy of detaining dual nationals seen as engaging in behavior that is detrimental to the Islamic Republic, notwithstanding their alternate country of nationality. Over the past several years, a number of individuals – most prominently Iranian-American *Washington Post* reporter Jason Rezaian and British-Iranian charity worker Nazanin Zangari-Ratcliffe – have been arrested and incarcerated in this fashion. In August alone, one such dual national, a British-Iranian, was found guilty by Iran's judiciary and jailed for a decade on spying charges, while another was given a two-year prison term for financial irregularities.

Now, however, the regime's policy – which some have dubbed "hostage diplomacy" – appears to be becoming even bolder. Last month, Iranian authorities arrested three foreign nationals, two British-American women and an Australian man, while they were traveling within the country. The detentions are notable, because they mark the first incidents on record where Iran has blatantly expanded its detention policy to include non-Iranian dual nationals. It comes amid deepening tensions between Iran and the United States – and, by extension, allies of the U.S. such as Great Britain and Australia. (BBC, August 27, 2019; BBC, September 11, 2019)

IRAN'S SHRINKING ECONOMY

Despite the defiant rhetoric of Iranian officials, the country's economy continues to decline in response to pressure from the United States. A new estimate from the International Monetary Fund notes that Iran is experiencing "very severe macroeconomic distress," and its economy will shrink by some 9.5 percent this year as a result of intensifying U.S. sanctions. By the end of the 2019/2020 fiscal year, the IMF assessment laid out, Iran's national economy will be roughly 90 percent smaller than it was two years ago, when the Trump administration took office. (Reuters, October 15, 2019)

A CRISIS OF EDUCATION

With an estimated 80 percent of the country living below the poverty line, 32,000 schools considered unsafe, and teachers only making an average of \$284 per month, Iran is facing a severe crisis in its educational sector. Despite the Iranian constitution enshrining the government's obligation "to provide free elementary and high school education for all," as well as to facilitate "higher education for all," there are now an estimated 7 million children perpetually absent from Iran's schools. Meanwhile, some 25 million Iranians (nearly one-third of the national population) are estimated to be illiterate. (*Iran Focus*, September 24, 2019)

THE IRANIAN REGIME VERSUS MASIH ALINEJAD

The Islamic Republic is stepping up pressure on one of the most recognizable faces of the Iranian opposition. Regime authorities have reportedly arrested the brother of anti-*hijab* activist Masih Alinejad in an effort to silence the Iranian-American journalist and activist. Over the past two years, Alinejad's civic and social media campaigns against the mandatory veiling of Iranian women and for greater female equality have galvanized extensive grassroots support within Iran. That success, in turn, has made Alinejad's family members targets of regime reprisal. In addition to her brother, members of her ex-husband's family have also been targeted, despite not being politically active.

Human rights activists are decrying the strong-arm tactics, which they say represent a blatant attempt to "muzzle criticism of state policies" on the part of Iranian authorities. Such targeting of family members is carried out by "mafias," not by "law-abiding governments," argues Hadi Ghaemi of the Center for Human Rights in Iran. (*Radio Farda*, September 25, 2019)