



IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

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

Iran Democracy Monitor No. 234

April 24, 2024 **Ilan I. Berman**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Missile Defense; Warfare; Africa; Sudan; Gaza; Iran

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC'S WAR ON WOMEN, REBOOTED

Amid deepening tensions with Israel, Iran's clerical regime is intensifying another conflict – its clampdown on the freedoms enjoyed by the country's women. *Iran International* reports that the Islamic Republic has launched a new effort, dubbed the Noor plan, to more stringently police female dress and ensure it complies with religious edicts. The launching of Noor has been paralleled by a resurgence in the activity of the country's notorious morality police, who now exhibit "a stronger presence around Tehran's central districts, full of police patrols, morality vans and police motorcycle patrols." Businesses found not to be enforcing the country's mandate of compulsory *hijab* risk getting shut down, while individuals not in compliance will receive warnings and could face legal action. (*Iran International*, April 15, 2024)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Iran's renewed morality clampdown sends an ominous signal on at least two fronts. First, it indicates that regime officials believe the "women, life, freedom" protests, which were galvanized by the September 2022 death in official custody of Kurdish-Iranian activist Mahsa Amini, have petered out sufficiently to reinstate draconian social control measures. Second, it augurs a new era of domestic strictures and repression for Iranian women.]

TEHRAN'S HAND IN SUDAN'S TURMOIL...

The Islamic Republic is playing an important – if undeclared – role in Sudan's year-old civil war. Iranian supplies of armed drones to the country's army have helped it gain a strategic advantage in its struggle against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces directed by rebel general Mohamed Hamdan Dagelo (better known as Hemedti). While the early months of the conflict saw the Sudanese armed forces employ older unmanned aerial vehicles of limited capability, over the past few months the government's offensive capabilities have improved markedly thanks to the importation of Iranian-made attack drones. Officially, Sudanese officials deny that their government obtained any weapons from Iran, but knowledgeable observers say the UAVs are Iranian in origin (although how they were acquired has not yet been disclosed). (Reuters, April 10, 2024)

...AND IRANIAN DESIGNS ON THE RED SEA

Iran, meanwhile, is seeking to parlay its strategic assistance to Khartoum into a more meaningful African footprint. Last month, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Tehran had attempted to convince Khartoum to allow it to establish a naval base on Sudan's Red Sea coast. "The Iranians said they wanted to use the base for intelligence gathering," a senior Sudanese intelligence official has confirmed. "They also wanted to station warships there." Sudan's government, however, appears to have ultimately rebuffed the offer for fear of spiking tensions with the United States and Israel. (*Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2024)

IRAN'S VERSION OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

The Iranian government has presided over a "horrifying surge in executions" over the past year, a leading human rights watchdog has noted. In a new research study, Amnesty International lays out that Iranian officials put 853 people to death last year – more than half of them for "drug-related offences." "The number of executions in 2023 is the highest recorded since 2015 and marks a 48% increase from 2022 and a 172% increase from 2021," it notes. Moreover, "Iran's killing spree is continuing into 2024, with at least 95 recorded executions by 20 March."

"The spike in executions in 2023 is driven largely by a distressing lethal shift in Iran's anti-narcotics policy after Ebrahim Raisi's rise to presidency and the appointment of Gholamhossein Eje'i as the Head of the Judiciary, both in 2021," the Amnesty study lays out. "These official positions have translated into a horrifying upward trajectory since 2021, with 481 drug-related executions in 2023, constituting 56% of the total number of executions. This marks an 789% increase from 2022 when 255 people were executed for drug-related offences and a 264% increase from 2021 when 132 people were executed for drug-related offences." (Amnesty International, April 4, 2024)

A WARNING ABOUT IRAN... FROM FATAH

There is broad agreement among experts and analysts that the campaign of terror carried out by Hamas on October 7th was made possible in large part by the extensive financial and practical assistance the group received from Iran in recent years. However, Hamas is not the Iranian regime's only entry point into the Palestinian Territories. In the West Bank, officials with the Palestinian Authority's ruling Fatah faction are warning that Iran is attempting to sow chaos there. The Palestinian Authority, for its part, has said that it would "oppose operations from outside," and accused the Islamic Republic of attempting to "exploit" the Palestinian cause for its own ends. (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, April 3, 2024)