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**Iran: Increasing Enforcement at Home with Increasing External
Pressure**
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In recent months, the Iranian authorities have stepped up their enforcement of the Islamic dress code. Although Islamic enforcement is considered routine in Iran, especially as the summer season approaches, the heightened efforts can also be attributed to the intensified challenges facing the Iranian regime at home and abroad. Increased enforcement reflects the conservative establishment's recognition of a less stringent approach to the issue among civilians, and the fear that fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution will be undermined. Moreover, this heightened enforcement can be seen as another stage in the political struggle between hardliners and pragmatists, particularly in advance of the parliamentary elections scheduled for early 2020. The external pressures on Iran and the escalation with the United States are likewise factors encouraging the determination among the Iranian elite to increase repression at home. The regime's resolve to step up enforcement reflects not only a resistance to compromise on its ideological approach, but also confidence in its ability to intensify internal repression, even at the price of mounting public criticism.

Recent months have witnessed a new, marked intensification of the Iranian regime's efforts around the country to step up its enforcement of Islamic law. In May 2019 it was reported that the regime in Tehran released a telephone number for public use to report citizens not adhering to the Islamic dress code, especially women who removed their veil in public places. Although Tehran's chief of police denied these reports, he confirmed that the police intended to provide civilians with ways to contact them regarding enforcement of the Islamic dress code. At the same time, Iran's judiciary called on citizens to send it text messages reporting offenses in the realm of morality, including removing the veil in vehicles, serving alcoholic beverages, and holding mixed parties for men and women in public places such as cafés, restaurants, and shopping centers.

In late May, Soleiman Malekzadeh, deputy commander of the law enforcement forces, announced that the regime intended to tighten implementation of a program against women who are not strict about wearing the veil. Disrespect for the veil should not be viewed as a private matter, he explained, but rather a political issue that helps the enemies of the revolution undermine the moral principles of Iranian society. At the same

time, police in the Gilan Province in northern Iran announced that two thousands members of the Basij militia of the Revolutionary Guards were sent to the province to assist in enforcing the Islamic dress code.

Another manifestation of heightened enforcement of Islamic law can be seen in the authorities' support of a taxi driver who refused to take a passenger in Tehran after she refused to wear a veil. In early June 2019, this event sparked a stormy public debate between conservative circles, which sided with the taxi driver and accused the young woman of disrespecting Islamic values, and more liberal circles, which expressed support for the female passenger. In response to the event, Ebrahim Raisi, Iran's chief justice, stated that the Islamic directive to "do good and avoid doing evil" was incumbent on all citizens, and that the police and the justice system were obligated to support those citizens striving to pursue it. In another incident in early June, the authorities arrested a number of men and women who posted photos on social media of their vacation at a lake in the Mazandaran Province in northern Iran, in which they appear in immodest dress.

The stricter Islamic enforcement is regarded as routine in Iran, especially leading up to the summer season. Still, the increased efforts in recent months can also be attributed to the increasing challenges facing the Iranian regime both at home and abroad. Enforcement of the Islamic dress code is an expression, first and foremost, of the conservative establishment's recognition of relaxed adherence to this norm, especially among the younger generation. In recent years, Iran has witnessed ongoing protest against the mandatory veil in public space, as part of the accelerated processes of secularization in Iranian society. Hundreds of photos and videos are disseminated on the social media documenting women protesting the mandatory veil, removing their veil in public, and confronting other civilians and security forces seeking to force them to wear it. Resistance to the mandatory veil reached its height with the veil protest that erupted in Iran in early 2018, when dozens of women took to the streets in a number of major cities, especially Tehran, and removed their head coverings as an act of defiance. Almost 30 of the women protestors were arrested by the security forces. In a number of cases, the protest was also joined by religious men and women expressing their opposition to the compulsory veils, despite the fact that they themselves adhere to the Islamic dress code.

Non-adherence to the Islamic dress code does not go unnoticed by the Iranian authorities. A report published by the Research Center of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) in the summer of 2018 pointed to a significant decline in the percentage of citizens who value wearing the veil and a sharp rise in women's opposition to being forced by the authorities to do so. The data on government bodies and public opinion polls in the report indicate that a decisive majority of the population oppose forcing women to wear the veil. The increase in this phenomenon has aroused mounting criticism among conservative circles,

who have expressed concern regarding an undermining of the fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution against the background of "Western cultural penetration" of Iran. In November 2018, the Friday prayer Imam in Semnan Province in northern Iran warned of a decline in the value of the veil and maintained that some parts of the province have become like Europe in terms of how women dress. He was critical of the authorities' indifference regarding the phenomenon, and called for government intervention to "cure" the malady.

The tighter Islamic enforcement can also be seen as another stage in the political struggle between the hardliners and the pragmatists, especially in advance of the parliamentary elections scheduled for February 2020. In recent years, pragmatic circles have adopted a relatively moderate approach to the enforcement of the Islamic dress code. Since his election in 2013, President Hassan Rouhani himself has expressed support for reduced enforcement and has called for law enforcement to respect the dignity of civilians and not take too extreme an approach. In contrast, the hardliners, who are headed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and control most centers of power in Iran, are determined to shield the values of the revolution. The Supreme Leader's resolve on this issue was reflected in the "Roadmap" he published in February 2019 to mark the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. In the manifesto, published in advance of the fulfillment of the "second stage" of the path of the revolution, Khamenei called to thwart the efforts of the West to promote the Western way of life and to corrupt Iran's young generation. The appointment of hardline cleric Ebrahim Raisi as chief justice in March 2019 reflects the Supreme Leader's desire to strengthen the conservative orientation in the management of state affairs.

In recent months, the President's supporters in the Majlis have suffered a political setback. In May, Deputy Majlis Speaker Ali Mottahari, a prominent supporter of President Rouhani, lost his post to the conservative candidate in the internal elections for leadership of the Majlis. In June, the President's supporters from the pragmatic faction lost the chairmanship of the Majlis Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security, which had been held by Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, as well as leadership of the Education Committee, which had been held by Mohammad Reza Aref, leader of the reformist faction in the Majlis. Mojtaba Zolnour, a conservative religious leader and the Supreme Leader's former representative to the Revolutionary Guards, was elected to chair the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee. These changes may attest to a weakening of the pragmatic camp led by President Rouhani in advance of the next parliamentary elections.

In addition to the internal reasons, the external challenges facing Iran have created mounting pressure on the authorities in Tehran to unify the ranks and intensify internal

repression. President Trump's policy and the ongoing escalation between Iran and the United States have strengthened radical circles and encouraged the Iranian elite to demonstrate resolve within Iran and increase control over the civilian population, especially in the public sphere.

The tighter Islamic enforcement has drawn public criticism and brings with it risks of intensified popular protest. In mid-May 2019, students at Tehran University protested against the authorities' intention to increase Islamic enforcement. In tandem, the media and politicians affiliated with the pragmatists issued warnings regarding the authorities' excessive intervention in civilian life. An opinion column published recently on the *Asr-e Iran* website maintained that it is wrong to increase the pressure on the population by imposing additional restrictions precisely when people are suffering from an intensifying economic crisis. The website warned that the American sanctions were meant to increase domestic fury and harm internal unity. It also contended that the authorities should refrain from "playing on enemy turf," which is striving to undermine internal stability in the country. Pro-reform Majlis member Tayebeh Siavoshi has also called to resist intensified pressure on the public at a time when it is already forced to cope with many economic problems. She argued that cultural issues must be dealt with by means of discussion and not through coercion, which has proven itself to be ineffective and has only exacerbated the problem.

However, the Iranian regime appears to be determined to continue its struggle to enforce the Islamic dress code, despite the continuing erosion of the public's support for state institutions and the visible acts of protest. This reflects not only a lack of willingness to backtrack on the principles of the Islamic Revolution or adapt them to the changing social reality, but also confidence in its ability to intensify its internal repression and its intervention in civilian life – even at the price of mounting public criticism.