

SANCTIONS FOR CHANGE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON AMERICA'S POLICY TOWARDS IRAN

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A [year after the death of Mahsa Amini](#), the 22-year-old Kurdish woman who was [arrested by Iran's morality police for allegedly flouting the country's mandatory hijab rules](#), anti-government [protests](#) seem to have lost their momentum. But the theocratic regime remains vulnerable to more such shocks. The Islamic Republic, which is struggling with economic woes due to crippling American sanctions, has witnessed a wave of protests, with a demand for reforms, and at times, regime change. The [protests triggered by the custodial death of Amini](#) had rattled the regime initially, which had sent mixed signals on disbanding the infamous morality police force and altering the hijab laws. But it later recovered from the setbacks and tightened the crackdown on the protesters. According to rights organisations, more than 500 people, including 71 minors, have been killed in the unrest and hundreds wounded and arrested in the past year. Iran has also executed at least seven people linked to the protests. On the first anniversary of Amini's death, there were reports of the security personnel detaining activists to prevent any kind of memorial events for the woman, whose name has emerged as a rallying cry for reforms and women's freedoms in a country that has been tightly held by Shia Mullahs since the 1979 revolution.

The Biden administration of the United States has [imposed a new set of sanctions on the first anniversary of Amini's death](#), targeting officials in Iran's security apparatus. President Joe Biden and other officials have repeatedly called out rights violations. But the U.S.'s policy towards Iran has its own problems. First, while the sanctions have hit the Iranian economy hard, inflaming resentment, they have done little in changing the behaviour of the regime. Second, when it comes to protecting its interests, Washington has chosen to engage with the Mullahs, irrespective of its rhetoric over human rights. The U.S. and Iran are in an advanced stage of finalising a prisoner swap deal as part of which the U.S. would agree to transfer some \$6 billion Iranian funds frozen in South Korean accounts to Qatar, which Tehran can tap for humanitarian purposes. Instead of this off-and-on hostility and engagement which is not helping the Iranian people, the West should adopt a more consistent policy of engagement and pressure to extract compromises from Iran in return for economic rewards. For the Mullahs, the recurring protests should serve as a reminder that a large section of the population has already turned hostile towards their reign. The protesters may not have attained a critical mass for now, but it may not remain so forever in a country with a history of radical revolutions if the underlying problems of economic crises, regime rigidity and lack of reforms are not addressed.

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