

Beat: Politics

Iraq hangs 26 terror convicts, including prominent militia leader

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USPA News - More than two dozen people who were previously convicted of terrorism-related offenses, including an Iraqi militia leader whose 2009 arrest sparked clashes in Baghdad, were executed in Iraq late last week, the country's justice ministry confirmed on Tuesday. The executions were carried out on Sunday at an undisclosed location, the justice ministry said, adding that all 26 were Iraqi nationals and had been convicted of terrorism-related offenses.

Among them was Adel Mashhadani who was arrested by Iraqi security forces in March 2009 and later sentenced to death for killing a young girl in a revenge attack. Mashhadani had previously been an al-Qaeda chief but switched sides to fight his former comrades along with U.S. and Iraqi forces. He would eventually become the chief of the U.S.-financed Sunni Awakening movement in Baghdad's Fadel district, where he allegedly killed a young girl after her mother publicly called on Mashhadani to 'stop killing people' in the district. The arrest in March 2009 led to fierce street battles between Iraqi and U.S. troops and militiamen loyal to Mashhadani. At least four people were killed and 20 others were injured in the violence, which at the time represented the worst fighting central Baghdad had seen for several years. Iraqi Justice Minister Hasan al-Shammari said the men executed on Sunday had been responsible for "heinous terrorist crimes" against the Iraqi people. He added that the ministry will continue to carry out death sentences under the relevant laws after the verdicts have been verified by the presidency. At least 151 people were executed in Iraq last year, up from 129 in 2012 and 18 in 2010. Iraq lists 48 crimes for which the death penalty can be imposed, including crimes such as terrorism, kidnapping and murder, but also a number of non-fatal offenses such as damage to public property. The United Nations (UN) believes at least 1,300 people have been sentenced to death since 2004, but the Iraqi government is reluctant to release official figures. In January 2012, Human Rights Watch warned that Iraq risks falling back towards authoritarian rule amid allegations that security forces have tortured detainees at a secret prison, cracked down on freedom of expression and attacked peaceful protesters as well as journalists. Executions were commonly used by the government of Saddam Hussein.

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