

IRAN - THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

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People gather to protest over high cost of living in Tehran, Iran on December 30, 2017. Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report highlights the huge significance of the uprising in Iran, which began on 28 December 2017. It shows how millions of ordinary Iranians bravely risked their lives to join mass public protests against the repressive theocratic regime that has held power in Iran for the past 39 years. The widespread nature of these demonstrations is without precedent. People have taken to the streets in some 140 cities across Iran. Demonstrators chanting: "Death to Khamenei", "Death to Rouhani", "Reformists, hardliners, it is game over now," "Death to the Islamic Republic" and "Shame on you, mullahs," have shown that this is an uprising against the regime itself. Their chants of: "No Gaza, No Lebanon, My Life for Iran 'Death to Hezbollah" and "Leave Syria alone, think about us instead" have shown that they are sick of their wealth being looted to fund proxy wars and terrorists throughout the Middle East.

As always, much of the western media has either failed to report the uprising at all, or initially reported that the mass demonstrations were simply based on Iran's dire economic situation. The western media for, the large part, has adhered to the Obama/EU appeasement policy that has insisted on viewing the theocratic regime in Iran as an ally, making it difficult for them to comprehend why the 80 million beleaguered citizens of that country could possibly rise up and demand regime change.

The Obama/EU axis and its supporters in the media have consistently denied Iran's role as the world's principal sponsor of terror and its steady and lethal march towards regional hegemony in the Middle East, a phenomenon now openly recognised by the new US administration. The western media who cheered Obama's disastrous nuclear deal as a great breakthrough, ignored the fact that the terms of the deal will still enable the Islamic Republic to become a fully armed nuclear power in 12 to 15 years' time, able to carry out its oft-repeated threat to wipe out Israel.

The Obama/EU axis even ignored the windfall release of \$150 billion under the terms of the nuclear deal, that has enabled the theocratic regime to re-double its financing of Bashar al-Assad's brutal civil war in Syria, the genocidal campaign to wipe out the Sunnis in Iraq, the murderous Houthi rebels in Yemen and terrorist Hezbollah in Lebanon. But worst of all, the Obama/EU axis and its supporters have deserted and betrayed the long-suffering Iranian people, who have been subjected to decades of medieval cruelty.

This report unravels the extent of the mass demonstrations and reveals the deadly crackdown imposed by the regime, the torture and death of prisoners arrested during the protests and the role of social media and cyber-warfare during the uprising. The report shows how admissions by leading members of the regime have exposed its fear and vulnerability to regime change and their acknowledgement of the role and growing support for the main democratic opposition movement - the People's Mojahedin of Iran (PMOI/MEK).

The report concludes with the clear view that the clerical regime is now on its last legs and that its demise is inevitable, charting the next necessary steps to restore peace, democracy, human rights and women's rights to Iran, while bringing the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and international terror to face justice in the international courts.

1. THE UPRISING

i. Decline and fall of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The decline and fall of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a spectacle eagerly awaited by 80 million impoverished Iranians and by a world frustrated by decades of threats, terrorism and proxy wars. Signs of the impending collapse of the theocratic regime are clear to see. The cracks are showing. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hates the West, hates Sunnis, hates Saudi Arabia, hates religious minorities of any kind and is the final arbiter of all power in Iran, because, he says, he takes his instructions directly from God.

Susan B. Anthony, the famous American social reformer and women's rights activist said: *"I distrust people who know so well what God wants them to do, because I notice it always coincides with their own desires."* Her quotation could accurately describe Khamenei and the mullahs who rule Iran. Their policy of *velayat-e faqih*, or absolute clerical rule, allows them to justify every horror, every medieval torture, every public execution, every act of terror, as the 'will of God.' For 39 years, since Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini hi-jacked the Iranian revolution in February 1979, the clerical regime has ruled Iran with an iron fist, suppressing freedom and justice, abusing human rights and women's rights and exporting terror.

A rising tide of protests over many months inside Iran triggered a brutal backlash by the clerical authorities. Acknowledging the serious 'threat' posed by demonstrations and mass protests involving teachers, truck drivers, factory workers, street-vendors and trade unionists, Khamenei told a meeting of senior security officials in 2016 that further repressive measures throughout the country had to become a "high priority"¹.

Seven thousand additional plain-clothes 'morality police'² were deployed in Tehran alone, to clamp down on women accused of mal-veiling and other breaches of morality. Crackdowns on social media and the press were also ordered. Women deemed to be improperly veiled had acid thrown in their faces in cities across Iran, but the perpetrators were never brought to justice. Their crimes were openly endorsed by the regime.

In September and October 2017, there were several dozen protests by people whose savings had been extorted by various licensed financial institutions, all

¹ https://www.upi.com/Top_News/Opinion/2016/05/17/Iran-cracking-down-on-protests-ramping-up-morality-police/6311463503121/

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36101150>

of which later filed for bankruptcy. These institutions all had links to state bodies. One of the largest was called the Caspian Financial Institution and belonged to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Typical of the demonstrations were the street protests in Ahwaz on the evening of October 24, 2017. A large group of mainly women protesters rallied in front of a branch of the Mellal institution, a bank located at Ahwaz Simetri Avenue and set fire to the building, destroying all its equipment and supplies. Next day there was a large protest rally outside the regime's governorate. The demonstrators protested at the regime's involvement in Syria and the killing of the people of that country with the money and wealth of the people of Iran and protested against the mullahs' rule. They were chanting: "Leave Syria, think of us;" "Death to Rouhani"; "Rouhani, this is the last warning".

Other similar demonstrations in 2017 included rallies outside the Valiasr Credit Facility in Tehran, where crowds gathered in front of the agricultural department and demanded the return of their deposits; staff of the five-star international hotel Hormoz in Bandar Abbas protesting about the non-payment of wages; oil tanker drivers in Arak; workers on the Mianeh-Maragheh Railroad; Kish Choub furniture workers and the residents of the so-called Sayyad Shirazi District 2 of Kerman municipality in Tehran who protested about the lack of water, electricity and gas and other urban services.

Public disquiet continued to grow. Welfare handouts were savagely cut, food prices continued to rise; the black market was burgeoning. While the top leaders lived a life of luxury, anger was building amongst the poor. Increased repression, mass arrests, public hangings and floggings were the regime's response, because what they feared more than anything was the popular fury of the masses spilling over into a new revolution, sweeping their fascist regime from power.

But the repression was beginning to backfire. Mass demonstrations persisted in central Tehran and other cities denouncing the detention of trade union leaders and political prisoners and demanding job security and labour rights. Workers complained that they were toiling for 15 hours a day and still could not afford to feed their families. There were daily complaints and protests about the vast level of theft and embezzlement involving high-ranking mullahs and government officials. The Iranian regime's response was simply to ratchet up the number of executions and other barbaric punishments in a bid to terrorise the population into submission.

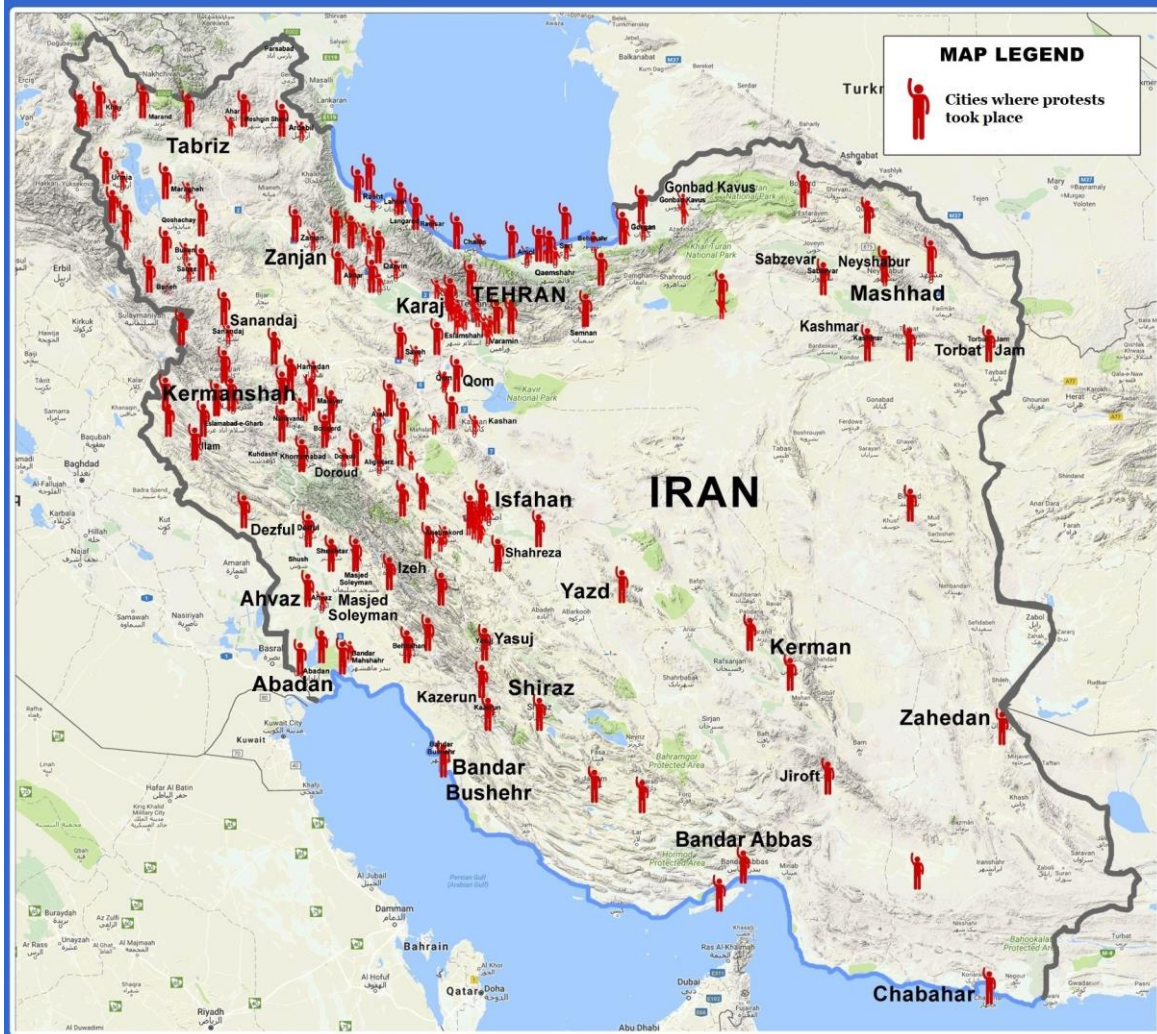
Iran's restless citizens finally signalled that they had had enough. The uprising, which began in the holy city of Mashhad on 28 December 2017, was quickly

followed by similar marches and protests in Neyshabur, Kashmar, Birjand, Shahrood, Noshahr and many other cities of Iran. The uprising was initially sparked by protests against spiralling living costs, rising unemployment and increasing poverty. After a few days the nationwide protests had escalated into an angry confrontation with the government, spreading like wildfire to the capital Tehran and to more than 140 cities across the country. Millions of Iranians took to the streets chanting 'Death to Khamenei', 'Death to the dictator', 'Death to Rouhani', 'Mullahs be ashamed and leave Iran' and 'I give my life for Iran, not Gaza, not Lebanon,' a reference to the anger against the regime's repeated meddling in foreign wars. Indeed it was this deep-seated fury at the billions of dollars being squandered on proxy wars in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon that finally forced a restive population onto the streets.



A woman holding up a banner the reads: **“Students would rather die then accept humiliation”** anti-government protests, Tehran University, 30 December 2017

Iran Uprising 2018 in 142 cities



ii. Repression and corruption

Iran is the most repressive country in the Middle East; it is also the most corrupt. It executes more people, per capita, than any other country in the world. Over 80% of executions³ carried out across the Middle East, take place in Iran. The regime tightly controls the media and education. It is a misogynistic, homophobic and male-dominated society, with vast conscript forces that serve as a further indoctrination and control mechanism. Spending on security is estimated to be around \$30 billion per annum.

In the budget Rouhani has proposed to the Majlis (Parliament) for the Iranian New Year (starting on 21 March 2018), \$30 billion has been allocated for the

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/04/death-penalty-2015-facts-and-figures/>

military and security. Also, quite separate from the official budget, at least an additional \$30 billion has been earmarked for the military and security from sources within the IRGC's vast business empire and the many foundations affiliated to Khamenei, which do not pay tax and are not accounted for in the official budget of the country.

In Iran, more than half the population of 80 million is under 30. Around a quarter of young people are jobless, more in some harder-hit regions. Yet Iran is one of the most pro-Western countries in the Middle East. But they are ruled by a clique of elderly, bearded, deeply corrupt mullahs, who have drained the country's rich oil resources to featherbed their own lavish lifestyles and to fund their policy of aggressive revolutionary expansionism.

After 39 years of misrule by the mullahs, the economic situation inside Iran is dire. The middle-class has all but been extinguished, apart from a few affluent neighbourhoods that house the extremely wealthy and largely corrupt clerics, revolutionary guards and key supporters of the theocratic regime. The remaining population for the most part live below the poverty line. There are notices pinned to walls in virtually every city in Iran with impoverished citizens offering their kidneys for sale⁴ at the equivalent of \$2,000. Those who do have a job, like miners and factory workers, often have to labour for months without receiving any pay.

iii. How the latest uprising differs from the protests of 2009

It was rage against this corrupt and repressive theocratic dictatorship that brought the Iranian population onto the streets in its millions at the end of 2017, spilling over into 2018 and continuing today. In this respect, the protests were markedly different from the crisis in 2009. Then, the cause was disillusion and disbelief in the fraudulent re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, with a surge of support for the 'so-called' Green movement and its leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi, one of the defeated candidates. The western media, as usual, painted Mousavi as a moderate and a reformer, ignoring the fact that he held the position of Prime Minister from 1981 to 1989, during which time he oversaw the massacre of over 30,000 political prisoners in the summer of 1988, a crime against humanity now being actively discussed in the UN.

The 2009 uprising was the manifestation of a rift between the different political factions in Iran at that time. The protests involved mainly middle class people

⁴ <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-iran-kidney-20171015-story.html>

backed by university students. In stark contrast, the most recent mass uprising was a public rejection of the entire system; a demand for radical change; for freedom, justice, an end to corruption and an end to Iran's proxy wars. It involved not only the middle classes, but also the underprivileged, workers, students, women and young people. Nearly all of Iranian society took to the streets. Not a single shop or business was attacked. Public ire was directed against government buildings and the security forces. Over 60 offices of Friday prayer leaders were burned. Many members of the oppressive IRGC and Basij security forces were attacked by angry youths.

By explicitly targeting the Supreme Leader and President Hassan Rouhani, the furious, mainly young protesters were demanding the overthrow of the entire clerical regime. This was in no way a demand for hard-liners to be replaced with moderates, a myth that still beguiles many western governments, who think there is room for gradual change. The chants of "*Hard-liners and reformers, the game is over*," "*Death to Hezbollah*" and "*Leave Syria, think about us instead*", clearly demonstrated the people's opposition to the theocratic government's belligerent regional meddling and their demand for regime change.



Slogan writing on the walls in many Iranian cities. This one reads:

"Death to Khamenei - Rouhani"
– dated 22 February 2018

iv. Crackdown, torture and the use of social media

Of course the mullahs reacted to the crisis in their usual, time-honoured fashion, sending in the regime's Gestapo, the IRGC, who gunned down dozens in the streets, killing 21 and arresting over 8,000 protesters, thirteen of whom have already been tortured to death in prison. 23-year-old Sina Qanbari arrested during the protests in Tehran, died in Evin prison. The authorities ludicrously claimed that he had killed himself. Two other detainees Mohsen Adeli and Vahid Heydari also allegedly killed themselves after being arrested during the

street protests. Challenged by international human rights organisations to explain these deaths in custody, the mullah's regime claimed that those arrested were drug addicts and their deaths had been associated with drug overdoses. One of the demonstrators killed in prison was found in a river with visible torture marks on his body. Authorities left the body of another in front of his father's home.

The mullahs' regime even launched a show visit to Evin prison on January 30, 2018, involving eleven hand-picked members of the Iranian Parliament, in an attempt to disguise and distract public and international attention from the mass arrests, torture and murder of prisoners. The parliamentarians were accompanied by at least 50 agents of the regime to ensure that only strictly sanitised interviews with prisoners could be allowed. While the show visit was taking place in Evin prison, a young protester named Khalid Kayseri died under torture⁵ in Kermanshah Prison after being held for 20 days in detention. The human rights campaign group: 'No Arrests and Executions' said on their website that the Kurdish citizen was killed after being tortured and held in a secret detention centre where he was placed under investigation after his arrest during the popular demonstrations in Kermanshah. Police only informed his family of his arrest and death after his 20-day detention. The government claimed that Kayseri died from a drug overdose in prison. On February 8th 2018, the regime announced the death by suicide in prison of a prominent and respected environmentalist, Dr Kavous Seyed Emami⁶, who had been arrested on 24th January.



A photograph released on Feb. 11, 2018, by the family of Iranian-Canadian environmentalist Kavous Seyed-Emami shows him at an unidentified location. The professor died recently while being interrogated in prison in Iran. Authorities claimed he committed suicide.

⁵ <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2018/02/05/Number-of-Iranian-protesters-dead-due-to-torture-in-prisons-rises-to-11.html>

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-canada-death-family/family-calls-for-independent-probe-into-death-of-iranian-canadian-in-jail-idUSKCN1FY2VX>

v. Cyber Repression

The brutal torture and murder of people who protest against the oppressive regime is a further indication of the growing panic of the mullahs as they cling to power by their fingernails. A further manifestation of this panic was the regime's decision to sever connections with Instagram and Telegram, to stop the protesters using social media to spread their message of dissent. The protesters made game-changing use of cyber-technology. The use of mobile devices and social messaging platforms played a significant role in helping the protesters to organize, exchange information between different locales and get their message out to the wider world.

The protesters' use of cyber technology proved to be the regime's Achille's heel since it could not, despite a huge show of force, stop the expansion of the protests. Starting on the second day of the uprising in December 2017, the protests, with pre-announced locations and time, expanded even as the regime desperately cut off access to the Internet and blocked key mobile apps such as Telegram at considerable financial and political cost as well as international embarrassment.

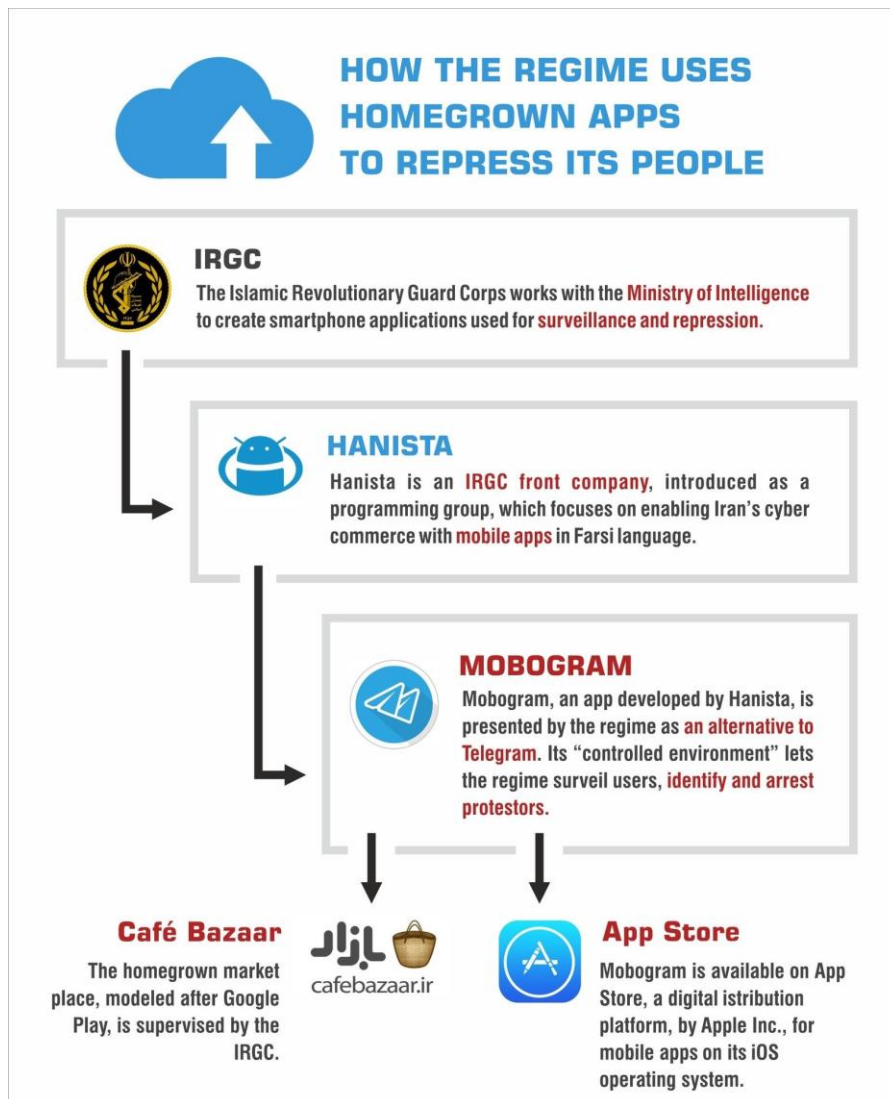
A new wave of domestic cyber-warfare, led by the IRGC in collaboration with the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), accelerated significantly after the eruption of the nationwide protests. The internal network of the PMOI, established that the regime had focused on mass surveillance through malicious codes embedded in IRGC mobile apps, actively to monitor and disrupt the communication of protesters and dissidents⁷. In reaction to the recent uprising, the Iranian regime is now adapting its network surveillance technology to embrace mobile device monitoring of content, context and contacts to counter the expansion of the uprising and to avert further protests.

According to internal PMOI sources, the IRGC has established a domestic mobile apps marketplace to spread spyware-enabled apps. The homegrown market place, Café Bazaar, modeled on Google Play, is supervised by the IRGC and is their platform of choice to promote and distribute spyware enabled mobile apps⁸. Through IRGC front companies such as Hanista, the regime's Gestapo is developing spyware enabled apps for cyber-surveillance and repression. They have created apps such as Mobogram, an unofficial Telegram fork. Ironically, some of these spyware-enabled apps are available on Google Play, Apple Store, and GitHub, potentially exposing millions of users

⁷ <http://ncrius.org/cybersecuritypressconference.html>

⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5397259/Iran-using-apps-Apple-Google-stores-spy.html>

worldwide to the IRGC's spyware and surveillance activities⁹.



Name	<i>Café Bazaar</i>	<i>Appstore</i>	<i>GitHub</i>	<i>Googleplay</i>
Mobogram	Yes	Yes	-	-
Hotgram	Yes	-	-	-
Telegram Farsi	Yes	-	Yes	-
Telegram Talayi	Yes	-		-
Wispi	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Telegram Black	Yes	-	-	*Yes

Top six malicious messaging apps available on different online markets and platforms

* Google removed Telegram Black from its platform on 21 February 2018 following the NCRI revelation

⁹ <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/iranian-anti-regime-group-globally-available-ircg-linked-apps-used>

Iran's universities, meanwhile, have become a recruiting ground for IRGC cyber-warfare personnel. All recruits are hired through front companies that often engage in 'research' activities with a few of the IRGC's 'handpicked professors.' These companies identify the needed talent for cyber-warfare. Many of these recruits leave once they discover the companies are linked to the IRGC.

Hundreds of arrests have been triggered based on this malicious form of cyber-warfare. But the brutal crackdown has only served to deepen public hatred of the regime and to harden resolve for its ultimate overthrow. Violent clashes between security forces and demonstrators were continuing in late February 2018, particularly involving members of a Dervish sect in Pasdaran street , that left three policemen and one member of the Basij security forces killed. At least 600 Dervishes were arrested, one killed and dozens injured. Throughout February, every day, strikes and protests by workers, pensioners, those who lost their money in the cooperatives and others continued; some turned to violent clashes.

2. CONFESSIONS OF VULNERABILITY

The uprising showed that despite widespread repression, mass arrests and the killing of young people under torture, the Islamic Republic of Iran has failed to quash public dissent.

But all of the signs indicate a regime that is on its last legs, amplified by confessions of vulnerability made by senior officials of the theocratic dictatorship:

i. The first confession : Fear of suffering the same fate as the Shah's dictatorship

On 31st January 2018, just before the start of the second wave of the uprising, President Hassan Rouhani, warned that the regime might suffer the same fate as the Shah's regime, should it fail to listen to the voice of the people? Rouhani, inevitably regarded as a 'moderate' in the West, is nevertheless widely acknowledged as one of the officials responsible for imposing the enforced wearing of the hijab on women in 1979. As a member of the Majlis (parliament), on 14th July 1980, he called for opponents of the regime to be hanged in public during Friday prayers to have a greater deterrent effect on the people. In the midst of the university students uprising on 14th July 1999 he said that insulting

the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was like: "insulting Iran and Islam and Muslims and the constitution and all those who consider Iran as the Utopia of the Islamic world." Rouhani is no moderate and he now openly fears the fury of the people.

ii. The second confession : Fear of the people's deep anger against the regime

Frightened by the continuation of the popular uprising in Iran, a senior mullah Ahmad Khatami, vice chairman of the Assembly of Experts and Friday Prayer Imam of Tehran, said: "Do not think that the risk of overthrow is over. No, the enemies will not give up thinking about the overthrow even for a moment. We must be alert.... You saw the rioters attack some seminaries; this was worse than the Shah regime's attack on the 'Faydiyyah' seminary."

Ahmad Khatami said in his sermon on Friday 26th January: "You foiled the PMOI's sedition in 1996, 2009 and January 2016. You should foil the next seditions and you can do that. You foiled the PMOI's sedition, how? You informed (the security forces) that there was a group of them near your home. You told the security forces to go and arrest them. They went and arrested them and destroyed them ... Wherever you see the conspiracy, quickly notify the authorities. It is your duty. "

Mullah Dorri Najaf Abadi, Friday Prayer Imam of Arak and another member of the Board of Directors of the Assembly of Experts and former minister of intelligence, said on 17th January 2018, in the course of the uprising in Arak: "Our house was attacked when I was at home. In recent events, the age of the protesters was very low. The people who attacked our home, although they had covered their faces, were under 30 years of age and even under the age of 18." The leading Imam and regime lackey was clearly giving voice to the growing fear he and his cronies have of Iranian youth.

On 12 January 2018, Ayatollah Ghasoddin Taha Mohammadi, Hamedan's Friday prayer leader, referring to the anger and disgust of the people about repression, corruption and theft, said that during the uprising, "about 60 offices of the Friday Imams were attacked". In most cities in Iran, many crimes, robberies, moral and financial corruption stem from Friday imams and their offices, who are representatives of Khamenei and are appointed by him.

iii. The third confession - Admitting the role of PMOI in the uprising

Immediately after the protests started in Mashhad on 28th December 2017, the Mashhad Friday Prayer Imam said: "Why have you come to the streets after a call by the PMOI whose leader is a woman?" Also, in a counter-demonstration set up by the regime, a slogan was repeated: "Supporters of the Green Movement are supporters of Rajavi".

On 2nd January 2018, the former so-called 'moderate' president Mohammad Khatami, described: "the revengeful arch-enemies of the Iranian people, at the top of whom are America and their sober agents such as the PMOI," as the main source of the uprising.

On the same day, according to the news agency AFP¹⁰, President Rouhani, in a phone call to the French President Emmanuel Macron, asked him to take action against the PMOI, who have their headquarters in Paris. He said: "We criticize the fact that a terrorist group has a base in France and acts against the Iranian people... and we await action from the French government against this terrorist group." An Elysée Palace Spokesperson later responded that all political refugees are welcome in France and will be provided security by France. Macron rejected Rouhani's call for action.

On 9th January 2018, Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, also bluntly identified the leading Iranian opposition 'the Mujahedin-e Khalq (PMOI/MEK)' - as a main contributing factor. "They were prepared months ago. The media of the PMOI admitted this. They said, recently, that they were in contact with Americans some months ago, to carry out U.S. orders, to organize riots, meet with this or that person, find individuals inside the country to help them fan out to the people."

"It was the PMOI who initiated this," admitted Khamenei, while at the same time, doing his best to conceal the PMOI's popular appeal by describing it as part of a "triangle of enemies" that had planned, financed, and carried out the latest uprising. As usual, Khamenei described the US, Zionism and Saudi Arabia as foreign stimulators of the uprising. He said that those arrested who are linked to the PMOI would be severely punished. He implicitly threatened that they would be executed.

¹⁰ <http://www.france24.com/en/20180102-rouhani-calls-macron-act-over-anti-iran-terrorists-france>

On 27th January, Brig. Gen. Rasoul Sanai Rad, IRGC deputy commander, said¹¹: "The leader and provocateurs of the protests in Tuyserkan are from the PMOI who have come from other cities so that cannot be easily identified ... A number of women were arrested who were middle-aged; in the 1980s, those who led the street protests of the PMOI were mostly women and now the women are the main cause of the provocation and the ones who started the protests. For example, four of these women dragged Ilam into chaos... those who were from Karaj were arrested in Kermanshah, or those who were from Bandar Abbas were arrested in Shiraz; these were the PMOI who showed up in the cities in an organized manner and directed the (anti government) slogans."

These remarks as well as hundreds of statements or similar interviews by various factions, including so-called "reformists" or "hardliners", are indicative of the regime's deepening concern at the growing role of the PMOI, who have rightly said that there is no prospect of change within the Islamic Republic and that the only solution is complete regime change. These significant confessions by senior Iranian officials, for the first time, simultaneously and in such a scale, clearly represent the vulnerability of the regime and point to the final phase of this theocratic dictatorship.

In the regime, a dispute has broken out over the question of who is to blame for the uprising. The hard-line ideological camp blames President Rouhani and his economic policy, which includes cutting direct public subsidies and raising taxes and the price of basic commodities and accuses him of corruption. Rouhani, like his mentor, the late Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, has spoken out against Supreme Leader Khamenei's and the IRGC's policy of exporting the Islamic revolution and establishing Iranian hegemony in the region, which has for years placed an enormous burden on the budget, diverting tremendous resources to military development and to funding proxies instead of to the Iranian public. These internal conflicts are a further clear sign of a regime in its final stages of collapse.

¹¹ <http://www.jahannews.com/news/586009>

3. THE ROLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION

Now, as we have seen in the confessions of vulnerability by leading clerics and military commanders, the mullahs have set their sights on blaming the opposition PMOI. So the democratic opposition movement, once dubbed by the mullahs as an insignificant grouplet has suddenly been catapulted into pole position as the main agitator behind the uprising.

The fact that the regime has now openly accused the PMOI of playing a leading role in the uprising has exposed their acknowledgement that indeed there is a powerful organized opposition led by Maryam Rajavi; there is an organized resistance and an alternative to their ruling theocracy. Mrs Rajavi's 10-point political platform, calling for a secular, parliamentary government, human rights, women's rights, an end to the death penalty and an end to the nuclear threat, is something that the majority of Iranians now crave. The National Council of Resistance of Iran, a political coalition including PMOI in its centre, are a democratic force and the best and only hope for a future free Iran.

i. The Genesis of the democratic opposition

Frontline activists from the PMOI who had fled to Iraq to escape the murderous pogrom unleashed by Khomeini, set up a camp that grew to become a small city. Ashraf, in Diyala Province, was for many years a focal point for the PMOI's Middle East leadership, until the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, at which point the PMOI were voluntarily disarmed and placed under American military protection. The US military pulled out of Iraq on 1st January 2009 and left the 3,400 camp residents at the mercy of the Iranian regime and their puppet administration in Baghdad, led by the venally corrupt and vicious Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Maliki, acting on direct orders from Tehran, began a war of brutal oppression and psychological warfare against the Ashraf residents, who were now imprisoned inside the camp's perimeter fences, surrounded by armed guards and unable to leave or to receive visitors. A protracted medical siege, a constant noise bombardment 24/7 from banks of gigantic loudspeakers and repeated military assaults, left dozens of the residents dead and injured, while others were kidnapped and brutalised over many weeks in inhuman Iraqi prisons. The remaining camp survivors were forced to endure the endless mental torture.

Despite widespread protests from parliamentarians and the public in countries around the world, the international community did nothing. Finally,

embarrassed into intervening, the UN colluded with the Iraqi government and their Iranian puppet-masters to force the Ashraf residents to re-locate to a tiny concentration-camp-like compound next to Baghdad Airport. Camp Liberty became a hell-hole of death and destruction for the PMOI. Sitting ducks for rocket attacks orchestrated by Iran and carried out by their Iraqi proxies, the “Ashrafis” were repeatedly massacred while the UN sat back and did nothing, afraid to antagonise Iran, while delicate negotiations were underway to prevent the mullah’s regime developing a nuclear weapon. Iran implemented a strategy of murderous attacks on the Iranian refugees to divert attention at home from the worsening economic situation and to tie the hands of their main opposition, all of whose resources had to be focused on rescuing their members.

ii. Transfer to Albania

Finally, due to intense pressure exerted by the NCRI’s courageous president Maryam Rajavi and an expanding coterie of key international political supporters, the Obama administration sent Secretary of State John Kerry to intercede with the Prime Minister of Albania – Edi Rama. To the horror and astonishment of the mullahs, Edi Rama agreed to allow all of the Iranian refugees to be airlifted from Camp Liberty over a period of weeks and flown to Tirana in Albania, where they have been able successfully to re-establish a new enclave of opposition to the theocratic dictatorship in Iran.

The courage and endurance shown by the 3000 Iranian dissidents over their many years of forced incarceration and oppression in Iraq has been an inspiration to all freedom loving people in the world. The mullahs had been determined to eliminate all of the dissidents, so it was a resounding victory to see all of them flown out to Albania. It was a massive defeat for the mullahs and greatly enraged them. It was also a great example of the strength of the opposition and the weakness of the regime.

Ten years ago, no-one would have imagined that the plight of the PMOI in Camp Liberty would be debated in the White House and that the US Secretary of State would be despatched to Tirana to negotiate with the Albanian Prime Minister? This demonstrated the strength of the resistance movement. Their courage and suffering inspired world leaders to rally to their cause. It inspired parliaments and international organisations.

The repeated rocket attacks the Ashrafis had to endure; the siege and blockade against fuel, food and essential equipment; the medical cordon that cost many

lives and much suffering; the emotional torture involving bogus 'family members' from Iran, who were allowed to penetrate the security perimeter and shout abuse and threats at the Ashrafis through loudspeakers, while carrying out reconnaissance missions to prepare for further rocket attacks; the massacres, the assassinations, the looting and theft of PMOI property. These serial violations of basic human rights were ignored by the UN: Three massacres at Camp Ashraf, five missile attacks on Camp Liberty, two cases of abduction of defenceless residents, and the imposition of a fully-fledged eight-year siege; all of these issues left 177 residents dead and many others traumatised.

Against this background of violence and aggression, it was almost a miracle that tiny Albania was prepared to stick its head above the parapet, to provide a safe haven for the majority of Iranian dissidents. The Albanians suffered years of oppression under the Communists and they know what it is like to fight for freedom and democracy. Their courage in rescuing the residents from Camp Liberty, against a backlash of fury from Tehran should be a matter of acute embarrassment for the 28 EU Member States who did so little to help. The EU did not even put pressure on Iraq to pay compensation for the properties left behind in Ashraf, or for the personal goods confiscated from every batch of refugees before they were allowed to fly to Albania. Now is the time to hold the guilty parties to account. Now is the time to demand that Nouri al-Maliki and his torturers and murderers are indicted for crimes against humanity. Now is the time for the international courts to indict Iraq for the theft of PMOI property in Ashraf and Liberty.

iii. The Importance of the main Democratic Opposition Movement

But with the Ashrafi refugees finally in a place of safety in Albania, the focus of the opposition NCRI and PMOI could once again be directed at exposing the corruption and repression by the theocratic regime in Iran and campaigning for regime change. Every summer the Iranian opposition hold their annual rally in Paris when over 100,000 supporters come to listen to Mrs Rajavi and to other internationally renowned political leaders. No other group or movement can organize such a major event and attract such a big crowd. It shows how important the PMOI is and the fact that they have achieved the collective relocation of over 3,000 their members to Albania with the help of the US government, at a time of an appeasement policy pursued by the Obama administration, is even more remarkable and shows the scope of the resistance movement and the power of its friends.

Transferring Iranian dissidents from Iraq has had other benefits too. Whenever the mullahs faced a major crisis, they killed PMOI members to divert attention from their other crimes. For example just before the nuclear negotiations, in a criminal act, the regime's agents attacked and executed 52 PMOI members in Camp Ashraf in September 2013 and portrayed it as a major victory. Then Khamenei gave the go-ahead for the negotiations.

4. THE FAILURE OF WESTERN APPEASEMENT POLICY

i. The flawed nuclear deal

Obama's nuclear deal with Iran and his concessions to the ruthless theocratic regime not only threatened the security of the Middle East it even undermined the interests of the United States. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Turkey have tried in vain to prevent Iran's aggressive expansionism in the region, but they were repeatedly thwarted by Obama's policy of empathy for the mullahs' regime. His failure to back the Syrian opposition allowed the bloody civil war in that country to rage on into its seventh year, costing hundreds of thousands of lives and sparking the huge migration crisis in Europe.

Following the nuclear deal, a sum of \$150 billion of frozen assets was released to Iran by the U.S. administration, providing a windfall for the Tehran government, which was teetering on the brink of economic collapse. But far from investing in its own people, the mullah-led regime used this money to redouble its spending on exporting terror through the IRGC and Quds Force, both of which are listed terrorist organizations in the West and are involved in almost every conflict in the Middle East. As well as Bashar al-Assad in Syria and Yemen's Houthi rebels, Iran funds and supplies Hezbollah in Lebanon and the brutal Shi'ia militias in Iraq.

And yet the West continued to beat a path to the door of the theocratic regime, drooling at the prospect of rich profits to be reaped following the ending of sanctions in the wake of President Obama's deeply flawed nuclear deal. On 16th April, 2016, Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, went to Tehran with seven EU commissioners for discussions with government officials on trade and other areas of cooperation. No mention was made of human rights abuse, the oppression of women, the suppression of workers, the imprisonment of journalists and the barbaric punishments that have become an everyday occurrence.

Obama's policy of appeasement towards Iran was a huge mistake and yet the EU followed it blindly. The nuclear deal was absurdly one-sided, giving endless concessions to the Iranian regime. Its leniency made it easy for the mullahs continually to run a cart and horses through the terms of the agreement with virtual impunity. Europe's skulking policy of kow-towing to the mullahs achieved its zenith when Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, attended Hassan Rouhani's second inauguration as President in August 2017. Most western and international leaders boycotted the ceremony, but Ms Mogherini was nevertheless happy to fly to Tehran to rub shoulders with other VIP guests such as President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Kim Jong-un's deputy from North Korea. This was a disgraceful act of homage to the representative of a tyrannical regime.

ii. A new US policy on Iran

Years of appeasement under Obama failed to improve anything; in fact since the nuclear deal, human rights have deteriorated. More people have been executed and the mullahs are now meddling to an even greater extent in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. The mullahs have interpreted the western policy of placation of their brutal regime as a sign of weakness, which they have exploited ruthlessly. Thankfully, Obama's departure opened a new era. There is growing awareness in the White House that the Iranian regime and its Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) are the main bankers and exporters of conflict and terror across the Middle East. The IRGC and its body responsible for extra-territorial operations - the Quds Force, are the main vehicles for Iran's aggressive expansionism in the zone

The IRGC finances, arms and leads most of the brutal Shi'ite militias rampaging through the predominantly Sunni provinces of Iraq, massacring families and levelling ancient cities like Ramadi, Fallujah and Mosul in the name of the war against Daesh (ISIS). It is a great irony that Iran has exploited the campaign against Daesh as an opportunity to carry out their genocidal crusade against the Sunnis. The West's policy of appeasement towards Iran has come to a shuddering stop and the world now looks to the US, EU and UN to show leadership and determination in backing the 80 million beleaguered Iranians who ache and pray for the removal of this corrupt and evil regime and the restoration of human rights, women's rights, freedom, justice and democracy to this long-suffering nation.

5. NEXT STEPS

i. The end is in sight

There is no feasible way in which the current Iranian regime can survive. Millions of Iranians now live in poverty. There is rising inflation and massive unemployment, particularly amongst the young. Yet Tehran continues to pour billions into propping up Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the brutal Shi'ia militias in Iraq, the ruthless Houthi rebels in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Iranian people are no longer prepared to stand aside as the mullahs plunder their national wealth and turn Iran into a pariah state.

The latest uprising has revealed the emergence of a courageous new force from within the heart of Iran's long-suffering cities; a new force, prepared to struggle for their rights and to fight for freedom and equality. This new force has the capability of overthrowing the theocratic regime. And the Iranian people know that they are no longer isolated in their demand for change. In America, both Republicans and Democrats have at long last recognized Iran as the Godfather of terror. It is time the UK government and the EU did likewise.

Of course, typically, Rouhani has been hailed in the West as a moderate and a reformist, despite the fact that more than 3,500 people, including 80 women, have been executed during the four years he has been in office. 700 people were executed in 2017 alone, including women and teenagers. Amnesty international published a 94-page report highlighting the 'web of oppression' that pervades Iran, detailing the catastrophic human rights situation in the country.

In short this uprising confirmed and proved three realities:

1. The Iranian regime is much weaker and more fragile, politically, economically and militarily than the west has imagined.
2. Iranian society is in an explosive situation. The people are not prepared to tolerate the regime and they no longer buy the "moderate-v-hard-line" games.
3. The democratic alternative of the NCRI & PMOI, now hold the necessary tools for the future of Iran.

The above three facts together with the radical change in policy of the current US administration compared to the Obama era, does not leave much time for the Ayatollahs.

ii. The 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners

The UN is now actively collecting irrefutable evidence of the summary execution of more than 30,000 political prisoners by the Iranian regime in the summer of 1988.

The report by the late Asma Jahangir to the UN General Assembly in September 2017 called for a full investigation of this crime. The Secretary General's report to the General Assembly and to the Human Rights Council (February 2018) expresses concern over this massacre.

This atrocity must rank as a crime against humanity and one of the most horrific mass murders of the late twentieth century. The vast majority of the victims were activists of the PMOI.

The mass executions, in jails across Iran, were carried out on the basis of a fatwa by the regime's then-Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. A 'Death Committee' of four senior officials approved all the executions. Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, a member of that 'Death Committee', was until mid-2017 President Hassan Rouhani's Justice Minister. When his part in the murders became known publicly, he was replaced by Alireza Avaie, who himself was a prominent executioner during the 1988 massacre, in his role as Chief Prosecutor in the city of Dezful. Other members of the 1988 Death Committee also still hold prominent positions in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Indeed it is a disgrace and blatant affront to those who believe in human rights that the UN invited Alireza Avaie to address the annual UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva in March 2018. Avaie has been on the EU's terrorist blacklist for years and represents a country with one of the worst human rights records in the world; his ability to secure a platform in Geneva can serve only to bring the UN into further disrepute.

Monstrous acts of butchery like this have become grisly milestones in the history of oppression and tyranny in contemporary Iran. Yet, twenty-eight years on from this barbaric crime, international condemnation has been slow to emerge. Indeed the West seems determined to overlook this perhaps the greatest human rights outrage since the end of World War II, so that it can sign lucrative trade deals with Tehran. It is a disgrace that there has been no prosecution of the criminals who orchestrated and carried out the gruesome 1988 murders.

It is now crucial for the EU and US to contain this terrorist regime. Europe's policy of active engagement with Iran has only emboldened the mullahs and encouraged them to become even more aggressive, bringing the world closer to yet another catastrophic war. It is shameful that the West continues to act out of fear and cowardice and it is high time they realized that the peace they have bought is only temporary and the price they have paid has been freedom and democracy for the 80 million oppressed and beleaguered people of Iran.



An exhibition of some of the photos of the victims of the 1988 prison massacre in Iran

iii. Necessary action

As the arrests and violent repression continue, the international community must not remain silent and should take some appropriate action. The situation is ripe for a regime change in Iran. These actions could not only help to save the people of Iran, but could also relieve the region and the world from the brutal repression, warmongering, terrorism and fundamentalism that has been witnessed under the banner of Islam.

1. The United Nations Security Council must adopt punitive measures against the regime. They must hold to account the perpetrators of the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners
2. The international community, especially the USA, the EU and its Member States, must demand the release of the thousands of protesters arrested during the recent uprising and issue strong warnings against any torture or execution of these prisoners.
3. They must demand the restoration of full and unhindered access to the internet for the Iranian public and must punish Iran for restricting access to the internet and provide technical and satellite facilities to help the people to go on line.
4. The USA and EU, particularly France and Britain, must take necessary practical steps to expel the IRGC and its affiliated militias in Syria and Iraq. This will be a major step for securing regional peace, weakening the regime and speeding its downfall by the people and the democratic opposition.
5. The West must express solidarity with the Iranian people and their resistance in their bid for democratic change.

We can also learn some interesting lessons from history. At the height of its power, communism was divided into many warring factions such as Marxists, Leninists, Trotskyists and Maoists. Yet many communist parties everywhere looked to Moscow and the Soviet Empire as their Godfather. When the Soviet Union collapsed, world communism more or less faded away and Moscow lost its central role. Today, the Sunnis and Shi'ias are locked in a holy war. Their terrorist offsprings like Daesh (ISIS), Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Taliban, Hashd al-Shaabi Boko Haram, Mahdi Army, Badr, and dozens of others, all fight each other like cats in a sack, yet they all look to Tehran as the Godfather of Islamic fundamentalism. That is why regime change in Tehran will sound the death-knell for all these extremist Islamic groups around the world.

It is time we woke up to the fact that as long as the mullahs remain in power there will be no possibility of peace in the Middle East. The mullahs will always be the problem. They can never be part of the solution.

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