

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

DATE: 01/24/20

SL: Iranian Protesters Are Not Props

The *Real* Movement for a Just Iran

“To the brave and suffering Iranian people: I have stood with you since the beginning of my presidency and my government will continue to stand with you. We are following your protests closely. Your courage is inspiring.” This was the [tweet](#), originally in Farsi, that Donald Trump sent a week after almost [launching](#) the U.S. and Iran into a catastrophic war of choice — and just the day after imposing punishing new sectoral [sanctions](#) that will only unleash further suffering for the majority of Iranians.

Needless to say, Trump and his war cabinet do not actually support “the Iranian people.” But his claim is nothing new — warmongers in the U.S. like Mike Pompeo and John Bolton, backed by a [pro-intervention](#) disinformation [industry](#), have long co-opted the legitimate grievances, popular uprisings, and social movements of everyday Iranians to justify their violent stance toward the country. On the flipside, a few anti-intervention voices downplay the real repressiveness of the Iranian government, calling those who speak out against it “regime-change agents” or “imperialists”. In the middle of those two extremes, the vast majority of media coverage plays unwittingly into problematic narratives, lumps together a monolithic “Iranian people,” tokenizes [cherry-picked](#) Iranian voices, or ignores grassroots movements altogether.

In reality, Iranian perspectives are diverse. Within their ranks is an active grassroots movement that opposes both domestic repression and U.S. aggression. The success and liberation of progressives in the U.S. and Iran are tied together.

The Iranian Grassroots

Iran is home to many courageous movements for democracy, liberation, and justice, with roots reaching well past the history of the current regime, into the era of dissent against the U.S.-backed authoritarian rule of the Shah. Today’s grassroots movements contain a diversity of communities and causes, organizing around labor, feminist, environmental justice, ethnic

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minority, student, and political prisoner issues — the vast majority of which face repression from the right-wing of the government.

The following are just a few of the many important movement moments from the last two years — moments that too often faced a near-media blackout in the United States:

- Workers at the Haft Tappeh sugar mill [went on strike](#) in opposition to privatization and worsening working conditions. Labor activist Esmail Bakhshi was arrested, tortured, and released twice for leading protests and calling for the formation of worker councils to run the factory. In Bakhshi's [words](#): "Until now, the decisions have been made from above. Now, we have decided to rule from below";
- Teachers across the nation [staged sit-ins](#) to protest privatization and low wages;
- Protestors in the Khuzestan region called for [environmental justice](#) in the face of pollution from the oil industry that has primarily [affected](#) the Ahwazi ethnic minority;
- A [truck-drivers' strike](#) spread to over 249 cities across every one of Iran's provinces;
- At least eight labor organizers were [arrested](#) during a May Day protest.
- After a decades-long movement, multiple women sneaking in in disguise, and one activist's self-immolation, the ban on women's attendance of professional soccer matches was [finally lifted](#); and
- Activists [continued](#) the long fight to pressure the regime to release its political prisoners.

November 15th of last year saw a flare-up of dissent across Iran, as demonstrations opposing rising gas prices turned into [nationwide mass protests](#) against economic stagnation, IMF-imposed austerity measures, privatization, unemployment, poverty, corruption, and repression. The government [cracked down violently](#), leaving hundreds dead, and more than 8,000 detained during a nationwide internet shutdown that [blocked news](#) and people-powered media coverage. It was against this backdrop that Trump recklessly assassinated Qasem Soleimani, brought our countries to the brink of war, and then claimed to be acting on the side of the protestors. When, in the fog of war that followed, the Iranian government accidentally shot down an airplane full of civilians, protests surged once again. But their struggle is not a mere prop for warmongering.

A Two-Front War

It shouldn't have to be said, but opposition to domestic repression does *not* equal support for U.S. aggression and regime change. It is not only the threat of all-out war with the U.S., but also the status quo of "maximum pressure," a ban on migration to the U.S., and crushing economic sanctions that imposes misery on everyday Iranians. The last of these — the sanctions regime — is particularly unconscionable, [driving](#) economic stagnation, government corruption, widespread poverty, and, everything from "suicide rates to divorce rates to substance abuse to air and water quality to crime rates." The Iranian government, meanwhile, draws public support

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from its claim of defending the country from imperial interests — when the U.S. acts antagonistically, [as it has under Trump](#), the hardliners gain, progressive movements are undermined, and repression deepens.

Iran's tenacious activist movement has had to confront oppressive domestic rule on one flank, and an [aggressive foreign power](#) on the other. Iranians are calling for a third way, between those two limited options (much as Iraqi protesters, who face their own violent [suppression](#), have [called for](#) the same in the face of both U.S. and Iranian intervention). In [the words of](#) protesting students at the Amir Kabir Polytechnic University in Tehran two weeks ago: "The only way out of our current crisis is a return to popular politics... the simultaneous rejection of both domestic despotism and imperial arrogance."

How to *Actually* Support Iranians

Instead of pursuing a counterproductive, unilateral "maximum pressure" policy, the U.S. government should *actually* support Iran's courageous grassroots movements by ending the violent antagonism that empowers the most repressive parts of the Iranian government. It can do so by disavowing aggressive rhetoric, rejoining the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, lifting sanctions, ending the Muslim ban, stopping the hateful, [anti-Muslim](#) repression of [Iranian Americans](#), ending the [attacks](#) on pro-peace activists in the U.S. and Iran, reassessing the United States' unequivocal support for [Iran's rivals](#), engaging in meaningful diplomacy, and, ultimately, normalizing relations between the countries.

U.S. civil society, for our part, should [act in solidarity](#) with Iranian grassroots movements to recognize, [uplift](#), and empower their fights for decent wages and against privatization, political freedoms, environmental justice, against state repression, and for women's rights. It is our job to ensure that the U.S. government ends its pernicious approach to Iran. Through international solidarity, U.S. media, activists, and organizations can support Iranian popular movements in their pursuit of justice and liberation — from below.

To that end, we will conclude by echoing [a call to action](#) from Iranian women activists:

"We urge the international women's movements and organizations, peace and human rights groups to help amplify our voices in spaces we have been systematically excluded from as a result of state repression and sanctions. We strongly urge them to stand in solidarity with us and speak up against war and sanctions and the continued restriction of our civic space. We, however, caution them to be vigilant in calling out those who shamelessly and in the name of Iranian women coopt our legitimate demands while cozying up to and strengthening warmongers and proponents of sanctions."

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In the common words of many Iranian activists: “No war. No sanctions. No state repression.”

BURIED LEDES

In a clear [violation of the law](#), **U.S. CBP deported an Iranian college student in Boston who was entering the country legally with a student visa** to continue his studies — just one case in the widespread, [intentional](#) targeting of Iranian-born travellers.

The Trump administration has plans to [expand](#) the xenophobic Muslim Ban.
[Take action now.](#)

The Burmese government is responsible for genocide. **The International Court of Justice took a major step toward justice, [ordering](#) the Burmese government to protect the Rohingya population from further atrocities.** (See our [statement](#) calling for the U.S. government to urge compliance with the ruling).

Protestors are [unhappy](#) with **the new government formed in Lebanon, which they say maintains the status quo of hereditary politics and corruption.**

Qatar [has ended the](#) modern-day slavery practice of not allowing workers to leave the country without their employer’s permission — but there’s a long way to go to ensure workers are protected and treated fairly.

January 23 marked the three year anniversary of the reinstatement of the “global gag rule,” which has [undermined](#) global health and women’s rights across the world.

The U.S. continues to kill Afghan civilians with impunity. **A new report [reveals](#) that 15 civilians were killed last month in one drone strike alone.**

Notorious Saudi Arabian dictator Prince **Mohammad Bin Salman (MbS) [hacked](#) and gathered personal data from Jeff Bezos**, whose newspaper published Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi’s pieces. **We can only imagine what’s happened in MbS and Jared Kushner’s WhatsApp conversations...**

We are 100 seconds to [midnight](#). 🕒

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Honduran migrants successfully [crossed](#) into Mexico Thursday after days of being denied access thanks to Trump's inhumane immigration policies.

Toxic chemicals called [PFAS](#) (that have been linked to cancer and other health issues) have been found in 43 U.S. cities. Global PFAS regulations were originally included in last year's National Defense Authorization Act, but were ultimately [stripped](#).

Oman's future [looks uncertain](#) as the new sultan, Haithman bin Tariq, inherits a country with high unemployment, debt, and no clear road forward for young people.

Malaysia said *no thank you* to the Global North's trash and [sent back](#) hundreds of unwanted containers of waste that China had previously refused to accept as well.

And finally, it's raining men...err...iguanas? As temperatures approached freezing this week in Florida, many iguanas were stunned by the cold and [fell](#) out of trees. But don't worry - when it gets warm they wake up.