

# Silence, Interests, and Betrayal

*How the world failed Iranians  
under the Islamic Republic*

An ebook expansion of the original essay by Iran Holocaust (LinkedIn, 24 April 2026), with sourced history, evidence, photographs, and a call to action for the international audience.

April 2026

## Silence, Interests, and Betrayal — How the World Failed Iranians Under the Islamic Republic

An expansion of the LinkedIn essay *Silence, Interests, and Betrayal: How the World Failed Iranians Under the Islamic Republic (Iran Holocaust, 24 April 2026)*, with primary and secondary sources, photographs, and footnotes as cited throughout.

All photographs in this ebook are reproduced from Wikimedia Commons under the licenses noted in their captions, or used under fair-use terms for editorial commentary on matters of public interest. Photographers and outlets are credited individually.

Content warning. This ebook describes executions, torture, custody deaths, sexual violence, and killings of children. It is intended for an adult, international audience. Where evidence is contested or attributed to a single source, the text says so.

All hyperlinks in this PDF are clickable. Where exact figures differ between sources, the lower, human-rights-organization-verified figure is used in the running text and the range is footnoted.

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***Dedicated to the more than forty thousand Iranians killed in two nights — and to every woman, man, and child who has been killed, before and since, for asking to live free.***

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## Foreword

# The grammar of silence

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This ebook began as an essay. On 24 April 2026, an account on LinkedIn called Iran Holocaust published a short, furious piece titled “Silence, Interests, and Betrayal: How the World Failed Iranians Under the Islamic Republic.” It argued that for forty-seven years the world has watched a theocratic state kill its own people, and that international politics has consistently treated the Islamic Republic as a problem to be managed rather than a regime to be held to account.<sup>[1]</sup> The essay was sharp, but compact. The evidence sits across hundreds of news reports, fact-finding missions, leaked records, and human rights archives.

The book you are reading expands that essay. It walks chronologically from the first executions on the rooftop of Refah School in February 1979 to the documented massacres of 2025–26 and the war that followed. It names victims and names perpetrators. It reproduces photographs from Wikimedia Commons and points to footage held by news agencies. It cites the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, the Center for Human Rights in Iran, HRANA, Iran International, the BBC, Reuters, the Associated Press, and the New York Times.

It also asks an uncomfortable question: why have global responses been so chronically asymmetric? Why do European chancelleries condemn one Mahsa Amini and not the next 5,000? Why do parts of the Western left fall silent when Iranian women are shot in their eyes for unveiling? Why does Washington sanction the morality police while banning the very Iranians who suffered under it?

***“In my opinion, the greatest crime in the Islamic Republic, for which history will condemn us, has been committed by your order.”***

— Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, in a letter to Ayatollah Khomeini, 15 August 1988.<sup>[2]</sup>

This is not a polemic. It is a long, patient itemisation of what is already on the public record, presented in one place so that it cannot be shrugged off.

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1. Iran Holocaust, “Silence, Interests, and Betrayal,” LinkedIn, 24 April 2026:

[linkedin.com/pulse/silence-interests-betrayal-how-world-failed-iranians-under-zcp4f](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/silence-interests-betrayal-how-world-failed-iranians-under-zcp4f).

2. Amnesty International, “Blood-Soaked Secrets: Why Iran’s 1988 Prison Massacres Are Ongoing Crimes Against Humanity,” 4 December 2018: [amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/10/blood-soaked-secrets/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/10/blood-soaked-secrets/).

## Chapter 01

# Origin: 1979 and the architecture of repression

On 1 February 1979, after fourteen years in exile, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini stepped off an Air France 747 at Mehrabad Airport. The crowd that greeted him in Tehran has been estimated, variously, at three to five million people. By 11 February the Pahlavi monarchy had fallen. By 24 February, Khomeini had appointed Ayatollah Sadegh Khalkhali as the Sharia ruler of the newly created Islamic Revolutionary Court, with a written mandate to try and execute enemies of the revolution.<sup>[1]</sup>



*Ayatollah Khomeini greeted by crowds on his return to Tehran on 1 February 1979. Within ten days, the Pahlavi government had fallen and revolutionary courts began summary trials. Public domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#).*

## The first executions

The killing began on the night of 15–16 February 1979 on the rooftop of the Refah School in south Tehran. Khalkhali later boasted that he had tried sixty-four men in a single night and ordered them shot at once. The first four to face the firing squad were General Nematollah Nassiri, head of the Shah's secret police SAVAK; General Mehdi Rahimi, the martial-law administrator of Tehran; General Reza Naji, the martial-law administrator of Isfahan; and General Manuchehr Khosrodad, the air force commander.<sup>[2]</sup>

The pace did not slow. By 8 May 1979 the New York Times counted close to two hundred executions since the revolution, with twenty-one in a single day, including former Justice Minister Mohammad Rashidiyan and former parliament speaker Javad Sa'id.<sup>[3]</sup> The most notorious early case was that of Amir Abbas Hoveyda, the Shah's prime minister of thirteen years. When pleas for clemency arrived by telephone from around the world, Khalkhali severed

the line between Qasr Prison and the outside world, walked to Hoveyda's cell, ordered him shot, and returned to the courtroom to announce that the sentence had already been carried out.<sup>[4]</sup>

In his 2000 autobiography Khalkhali wrote: "I killed over five hundred criminals close to the royal family, hundreds of rebels in Kurdistan, Gonbad, and Khuzestan regions, and many drug smugglers. I feel no regret or guilt over the executions. Yet I think I killed little. There were many more who deserved to be killed."<sup>[4]</sup>

## The Kurdish campaign, August–September 1979

In August 1979 Khomeini issued a fatwa ordering the army and the new Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to crush Kurdish autonomy movements; he sent Khalkhali to conduct summary trials. The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, in its report *Haunted Memories*, has documented the resulting executions in granular detail.<sup>[5]</sup> Among them: nine men shot at Paveh on 21 August, including the surgeon Dr. Abulghasem Rashvand Sardari; eleven shot at Sanandaj airport on 27 August (the photograph of those eleven won the 1980 Pulitzer Prize); and twenty shot at Saqqez on 28 August, including a fifteen-year-old, Seifollah Feizi, and a twelve-year-old, Azar Kashb-Daraei.



Armed revolutionaries on the streets of Tehran, February 1979. Within months, the new revolutionary courts had executed several hundred Pahlavi-era officials and were turning their attention to Kurdish autonomists, leftists, and religious minorities. Public domain, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

By the end of 1979 the new state had imprisoned more than fifteen thousand people; about seven hundred of them had been shot.<sup>[6]</sup> The legal architecture used in those first months — revolutionary courts, no defence counsel, no jury, charges of moharebeh (waging war against God) and ifsad-fil-arz (corruption on earth), and verdicts delivered within minutes — has remained the Islamic Republic's preferred toolkit ever since.

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**Chapter 02**

# The 1981–1982 reign of terror

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On 20 June 1981 a large demonstration was organised in Tehran against Khomeini, days after parliament had impeached President Abolhassan Banisadr. Senior clerics had publicly declared that any demonstrator, of any age, would be treated as an enemy of God and shot on the spot. IRGC and Basij forces fired into the crowd. Approximately fifty people were killed, two hundred injured, and a thousand arrested in the area around Tehran University alone.<sup>[1]</sup> The next day, hundreds of those arrested were executed; the daily newspaper *Ettela'at* printed the photographs of twelve young girls and asked their parents to come forward to claim the bodies.

The reported execution count rose to six hundred by September 1981, seventeen hundred by October, and twenty-five hundred by December. In less than six months, 2,665 people were shot. Between June 1981 and April 1982, an estimated 3,500 dissidents and members of opposition organisations were either executed or killed by the IRGC; another 5,000 were detained in camps and 8,000 imprisoned merely for possessing opposition publications.<sup>[1]</sup> In July 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran categorised the atrocity crimes of 1981–1982 as constituting genocide and crimes against humanity.

## Saeed Soltanpour, and the children

Among the named victims of June 1981 was the poet and playwright Saeed Soltanpour, executed on 21 June 1981 along with fourteen other leftist dissidents on the charge of “enmity against Islam.” At least 103 of those killed in Tehran in this wave were under eighteen.<sup>[1]</sup> Survivors and Iranian historians describe entire families being executed — teenage daughters and grandmothers — and bodies displayed publicly to spread fear.

## The Bahá'í persecution

From the revolution's earliest days, Bahá'ís — Iran's largest non-Muslim minority — were singled out for liquidation. Khalkhali had personally made the elimination of the Bahá'í community a mission. By September 1980 seven Bahá'í leaders had been executed; in December 1981 eight more followed. More than two hundred Bahá'ís were killed in the early years of the Republic. Khalkhali himself murdered at least one Bahá'í prisoner, Muhammad Muvahhed, who refused to recant his faith: Khalkhali covered Muvahhed's face with a pillow and shot him in the head.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Sadeq Ghotbzadeh: the revolution eats its own

Sadeq Ghotbzadeh had been Khomeini's close aide in Paris exile and had served as the foreign minister of revolutionary Iran during the American hostage crisis. On 8 April 1982 he was arrested and accused of plotting Khomeini's assassination. After a twenty-six-day televised trial, during which forced confessions extracted under torture were broadcast to the nation, Ghotbzadeh was shot by firing squad at Evin Prison on 15 September 1982. He was forty-six.<sup>[3]</sup> His execution made clear that loyalty in the revolution's earliest hour offered no protection.



*Evin Prison, in northern Tehran. Inaugurated in 1972 under the Shah, expanded under the Islamic Republic, and now the central political prison of Iran — site of the 1981–82 mass executions, the 1988 prison massacres, and four decades of subsequent imprisonments. Photograph: Ehsan Iran via [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY-SA 2.0).*

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2. Wikipedia, "Sadegh Khalkhali": [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadegh\\_Khalkhali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadegh_Khalkhali).
3. New York Times, "Ghotbzadeh, Iran Hostage Crisis Figure, Executed," 17 Sept 1982: <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/17/world/ghotbzadeh-iran-hostage-crisis-figure-executed.html>.

## Chapter 03

# The 1988 prison massacres

In the last days of July 1988, as the Iran–Iraq War drew to a close, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a secret written fatwa ordering the execution of all imprisoned political opponents who refused to renounce their organisational affiliations. A second, related fatwa targeted leftists, communists, and those accused of apostasy. Implementation began on or about 29 July 1988 and continued through January 1989.<sup>[1]</sup>

Three-member “Death Commissions” — the regime preferred the euphemism “clemency commissions” — were constituted in each province. Each commission consisted of a Sharia judge, an Intelligence Ministry official, and a provincial prosecutor. They operated in at least thirty-two cities. Prisoners were brought before them in groups and asked a single question: did they remain loyal to their political organisation? Trials lasted minutes. Those who answered yes were hanged or shot the same day. Many were already serving defined prison sentences. Some were within days of scheduled release.

## The Tehran death committee

Amnesty International, in its 2018 report *Blood-Soaked Secrets*, identified the four members of the Tehran death committee.<sup>[2]</sup>

Name	Role at the time
Hossein Ali Nayyeri	Sharia judge; head of the Tehran committee
Morteza Eshraghi	Tehran Prosecutor General
Mostafa Pour Mohammadi	Intelligence Ministry representative
Ebrahim Raisi	Deputy Prosecutor General (de facto member, age 27)

Ebrahim Raisi was twenty-seven years old at the time. He went on to serve as Tehran's chief prosecutor (2014–2016), as head of the Iranian judiciary (2019–2021), and as president of Iran (2021–2024) until his death in a helicopter crash in May 2024. Mostafa Pour Mohammadi later served as minister of justice under President Hassan Rouhani; in a 2019 interview he publicly defended the 1988 massacre and said captured dissidents would still face execution. Nayyeri rose to become head of the Supreme Disciplinary Court for Judges. None of them has ever stood trial.

## Montazeri's protest

Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, then Khomeini's officially designated successor, was one of the very few senior clerics who objected. On 15 August 1988 he wrote to Khomeini that the executions constituted “the greatest crime in the Islamic Republic, for which history will condemn us.” He met the Tehran committee that same month. An audio recording released in 2016 captured a voice identified as Raisi's responding, “Okay, we will obey,” when told to pause executions during the Moharram mourning period.<sup>[2]</sup> Montazeri was stripped of his position as successor in 1989. He was placed under house arrest from 1997 until his death in 2009.

## Scale, victims, Khavaran

Human-rights organisations conservatively estimate that 4,000 to 5,000 political prisoners were executed across Iran in the summer and autumn of 1988.<sup>[2]</sup> Amnesty International's December 1990 report had already recorded more than two thousand names. Iranian researchers have since published 4,481 names. Montazeri's own estimate at the time was 2,800 to 3,800. Some diaspora estimates run far higher. Gohardasht (Karaj) Prison alone saw approximately eight hundred prisoners executed, out of a prison population of fifteen hundred. The Tudeh Party (Iran's communist party) lost between three hundred and five hundred members.

Justice for Iran's 2020 report *Burying the Past* identified at least seventy-four potential mass-grave sites; ten have been confirmed across twenty-one provinces and forty cities. The most symbolically important is Khavaran, on the south-east edge of Tehran, a cemetery historically reserved for non-Muslims. From August 1988 the authorities began secretly burying the executed there. Families came to call it Lanatabad, the place of the damned. They dug the unmarked ground with their hands.<sup>[3]</sup>

Iranian authorities have repeatedly bulldozed the site. On 20 January 2009, Amnesty International called on Iran to “immediately stop the destruction of hundreds of individual and mass, unmarked graves in Khavaran.” In April 2018 Amnesty USA documented further deliberate desecration, including the building of new structures and roads directly over identified grave clusters. In September 2022 Amnesty reported that walls had been erected around Khavaran's mass graves to keep families away on the anniversaries of the massacre.<sup>[4]</sup> No Iranian official has ever been prosecuted for 1988.

***“The greatest crime in the Islamic Republic, for which history will condemn us, has been committed by your order.”***

— Grand Ayatollah Montazeri to Khomeini, 15 August 1988.

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<https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2021/jul/21/raisi-role-1988-massacre>.

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## Chapter 04

# The 1998 chain murders

Between 1988 and 1998, agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and National Security (MOIS, also known by its Persian acronym VEVAK) systematically murdered or disappeared more than eighty Iranian writers, translators, poets, and political activists. Victims were killed by staged car crashes, stabbings, robbery-style killings, injections of potassium to simulate heart attacks, and strangulation. The pattern is known in Iran as *qatl-haye zanjire'i* — the chain murders. It was organised and supervised by Saeed Emami, deputy security minister under Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahian.<sup>[1]</sup>

The chain became visible to the public only in the autumn of 1998, when five writers were murdered within four weeks. The killings took place against the backdrop of President Mohammad Khatami's reform government, suggesting that hardline elements of MOIS were attempting to destabilise the reform project. Human Rights Watch issued a briefing in December 1998 documenting the pattern.

## The November–December 1998 murders

Date	Victim	Manner of death
c. 18 Nov 1998	Majid Sharif (translator, journalist)	"Heart failure" — disputed
22 Nov 1998	Dariush Forouhar (Nation Party leader, age 70)	Stabbed 11 times at home
22 Nov 1998	Parvaneh Eskandari Forouhar (his wife, activist)	Stabbed 24–25 times at home
c. 9 Dec 1998	Mohammad Mokhtari (poet, writer)	Strangled, body found near Shahriar
9 Dec 1998	Mohammad Jafar Pouyandeh (translator, age 44)	Strangled, body found 11–12 Dec

Dariush Forouhar (1928–1998) was the founder of the banned Nation of Iran Party and an open opponent of clerical theocracy. His home in south Tehran was under what was presumed to be twenty-four-hour MOIS surveillance — a fact that placed suspicion on the ministry from the moment the bodies were found. Mohammad Mokhtari was abducted on 3 December 1998 when he stepped out to a local shop. His twelve-year-old son, Sohrab, was at home alone. Mokhtari's body was found a week later in a Tehran morgue, strangled, carrying only a piece of paper and a pen.<sup>[2]</sup>

## The cover-up and the death of Saeed Emami

Under massive public pressure, President Khatami ordered an investigation. On 5 January 1999, MOIS issued a rare acknowledgment that "a group of rogue elements" within the ministry had carried out the killings — a formulation widely dismissed as evasive. Intelligence Minister Ghorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi resigned on 9 February 1999. Saeed Emami was arrested on 25 January 1999 and identified as the operation's mastermind. In custody he confessed and reportedly began naming senior officials. On 22 May 1999 he was found dead in his cell at Evin Prison. The official ruling was suicide by drinking depilatory cream in the bathroom — an account widely treated as a fabrication to silence him.<sup>[3]</sup> A 2001 trial sentenced three defendants to death (later commuted) and gave twelve others prison terms; the senior official chain of command was never pursued.

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## Chapter 05

# 18 Tir 1999 — the student uprising

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On 8 July 1999, students at Tehran University began peaceful demonstrations to protest the closure of the reformist newspaper Salam, shut down for publishing a leaked Intelligence Ministry memo confirming the ministry's role in the chain murders. In the early hours of 9 July — the eighteenth day of the Iranian month of Tir, giving the uprising its name — a coordinated paramilitary assault was launched on the Kuye Daneshgah dormitories. Approximately four hundred Ansar-e Hezbollah vigilantes and Basij militia descended on the dormitories, kicked down doors, smashed through halls, dragged female students by the hair, set fire to rooms, and threw students from third-floor balconies onto the pavement.<sup>[1]</sup> Uniformed police stood by.

The government acknowledged a single death: Ezzat Ebrahim-Nejad, fatally shot during the dorm raid. Student groups and foreign correspondents counted at least seventeen dead over the week of protests, naming Fereshteh Alizadeh, Tommy Hamifar, Mozhgan Tavakoli, Mohammad Javad Farhangi, and others. Mohsen Jamali, a top medical student, lost an eye to a gas canister. An estimated twelve hundred to fourteen hundred people were arrested, with more than seventy students vanishing into the prison system. Ahmad Batebi, photographed holding a friend's bloody shirt, was sentenced to death (later commuted to fifteen years). Saeed Zeinali was arrested during the crackdown and disappeared after a brief phone call to his family — his fate is still unknown. Akbar Mohammadi died in 2006 in Evin Prison after years of torture and a hunger strike.<sup>[2]</sup>

Although Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei nominally condemned the dormitory raid, the Brookings Institution noted in a 2014 retrospective that none of the principal perpetrators was ever prosecuted.<sup>[3]</sup> The 1999 uprising established what would become the regime's standard response to student protest — paramilitary rather than uniformed force, then mass arrests, then years of extrajudicial follow-up against specific students.

## Zahra Kazemi, 2003

Four years later, on 23 June 2003, the Iranian-Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi drove to Evin Prison to photograph the families of detainees gathered outside. She had a government-issued press card. A guard saw her camera; a confrontation followed; she was detained on the orders of Tehran's chief prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi. She was held for seventy-seven hours and interrogated. On 11 July 2003 she died at Baghiyyatollah al-Azam Military Hospital. Iran's official IRNA news agency first claimed she had suffered a stroke, then a fall. On 16 July, Vice President Mohammad Ali Abtahi acknowledged publicly that she had died as a result of beatings.<sup>[4]</sup>

In March 2005, Dr. Shahram Azam — a former Iranian military physician who had examined Kazemi in hospital and subsequently fled to Canada — disclosed the full extent of her injuries: fractured skull, broken nose, ruptured eardrum, deep scratches on the back and neck, missing fingernails, a smashed toe, severe abdominal bruising, and evidence of brutal genital injuries.<sup>[5]</sup> The intelligence agent Mohammad Reza Aghdam-Ahmadi was tried for “semi-intentional murder.” The trial was closed; key witnesses were denied. On 25 July 2004, he was acquitted. No one has ever been convicted of Zahra Kazemi's killing. Mortazavi was not prosecuted for it; he would resurface in the Kahrizak case six years later.

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1. Wikipedia, “1999 Iranian student protests”: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999\\_Iranian\\_student\\_protests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_Iranian_student_protests).

2. IranWire, “Blood, Batons and Broken Dreams: Iran's 1999 Student Uprising”: <https://iranwire.com/en/special-features/131573-blood-batons-and-broken-dreams-irans-1999-student-uprising/>.

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## Chapter 06

# 2009 — the Green Movement

On 12 June 2009, Iran held a presidential election. The incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the winner with sixty-two percent of the vote. The announcement triggered immediate, massive protests by supporters of the reformist candidates Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. The next day, hundreds of thousands of Iranians poured into the streets carrying signs that read “Where is my vote?” The signs were green — the campaign colour of Mousavi. The movement that grew out of those demonstrations would be called the Green Movement.<sup>[1]</sup>



Millions of Iranians take part in a silent march through Tehran on 15 Khordad (5 June) 2009 during the Green Movement protests against the disputed presidential election. Photograph: Hamed Saber, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY 2.0).

On 19 June, in a Friday sermon, Supreme Leader Khamenei endorsed the result and warned that further defiance would face “a brutal reaction.” On 20 June 2009, the bloodiest day of the uprising, the Tehran ambulance service’s internal radio system confirmed at least forty-seven deaths from gunshot wounds.<sup>[2]</sup> That afternoon, on Kargar Avenue near the corner with Khosravi Street, a twenty-six-year-old music student named Neda Agha-Soltan stepped out of her car. The car’s air conditioning had failed. She was standing with her music teacher, Hamid Panahi.

## The death of Neda Agha-Soltan

At approximately 6:30 p.m. she was shot in the upper chest by a Basij militiaman; eyewitnesses identified the shooter as Abbas Kargar Javid, firing from the rooftop of a civilian house. Her last words, recorded by Panahi, were “I’m burning, I’m burning.” She died within two minutes. A doctor in the crowd, Arash Hejazi, knelt to help her.<sup>[3]</sup> Bystanders filmed her death on mobile phones. The footage spread around the world within hours. CNN and the BBC broadcast the video. Neda Agha-Soltan became the most visible martyr of the Green Movement and one of the most-watched deaths in internet history. The Iranian government subsequently blamed foreign actors and exile groups for her killing in a series of shifting official accounts. Her family was pressured to confess that opposition protesters had killed her. They refused. Her grave at Behesht-e Zahra cemetery was later desecrated; her gravestone was removed in November 2009 and defaced by gunfire on 31 December 2009.

The Center for Human Rights in Iran confirmed in 2013 that no trial for Neda’s killing has ever been held.<sup>[4]</sup> The case file remains open. Kargar Javid’s whereabouts have never been disclosed.



Mural in Nazareth (Israel) commemorating Neda Agha-Soltan and other Iranians killed by the Islamic Republic. The 2009 Green Movement was the largest popular uprising since 1979 and a template for the 2017–2026 cycle of protests. Photograph: Nizzan Cohen, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY 4.0).

## Kahrizak detention centre

More than four thousand people were arrested in Tehran in the weeks after the election. A significant number were transferred to Kahrizak Detention Centre, a decrepit facility in southern Tehran. Survivors have testified to systematic beatings, torture, and rape. Three young men died as a direct result of their treatment there:

Mohsen Ruholamini, twenty-five, was a graduate student in computer engineering at the University of Tehran. He came from a conservative family — his father was an adviser to presidential candidate Mohsen Rezaei. He was

arrested on 12 June 2009 and held at Kahrizak for roughly two weeks. He died at Mehr Hospital on 15 July 2009. A leaked report cited “physical stress, conditions of imprisonment, repeated blows and harsh physical treatment.” His father stated publicly: “When I saw his body I noticed that they had crushed his mouth.”<sup>[5]</sup> Mohammad Kamrani and Amir Javadifar both died from beatings at Kahrizak in the same period. Seven physicians from Iran's Medical Examiner's Office concluded that all three had died from “blows to soft tissue during the seventy-two hours prior to their deaths.” Khamenei ordered Kahrizak closed in late July 2009.

Saeed Mortazavi — the same Tehran prosecutor responsible for Zahra Kazemi's death — was charged with “participation in murder,” “participation in illegal detention,” and ordering subordinates to falsify reports. Prosecutors found he had delayed the prisoners' transfer from Kahrizak by thirty-eight critical hours. On 30 June 2010, the Iranian Armed Forces Judicial Organization concluded the trial of twelve defendants; two were sentenced to death and nine received prison sentences.<sup>[6]</sup> Mortazavi was eventually arrested in 2018 to serve a two-year sentence.

## Mousavi, Karroubi, Rahnavard

Official Iranian figures put the 2009 death toll at thirty-seven; opposition groups put it at approximately seventy; human rights organisations suggest as many as two hundred over the period from June 2009 to February 2010. On 27 December 2009 (Ashura), at least eight more civilians were killed, including a nephew of Mousavi. On 14 February 2011, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, his wife Zahra Rahnavard, and Mehdi Karroubi were placed under extrajudicial house arrest. They have remained there ever since — for more than a decade — without charge or trial.<sup>[7]</sup>

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**Chapter 07**

# 2017–2021 — the years of bread and water

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Where the Green Movement of 2009 had been led by middle-class urban reformists, the protests of 2017 onward came up from the country's working-class suburbs and provincial towns. They were triggered first by bread, then by water, then by the sheer cumulative fact of indignity. Each cycle ended in killings. Each cycle was met with the same toolkit — internet shutdowns, denial, beatings in custody, and family reprisals.

## December 2017 – January 2018: the Dey protests

On 28 December 2017, spontaneous protests erupted in Mashhad over food prices, unemployment, and anger at funds spent on Syria and Iraq. Within days the unrest had spread to about eighty cities. Slogans shifted from economics to politics: crowds chanted “Death to the dictator” at Khamenei. The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center has confirmed forty-one deaths connected to the protests, including twenty-seven shot with live ammunition, nine who died in suspicious circumstances in custody, and at least five adolescents. Approximately three thousand seven hundred people were arrested.<sup>[1]</sup> Sina Ghanbari, twenty-three, died at Evin Prison on 7 January 2018 (officially a “suicide”). Vahid Heidari, twenty-two, an Arak street vendor, died on 5 January 2018 with a ten-centimetre wound on his left temple, also officially ruled a suicide.

## 2018: the year of strikes — and the torture of Esmail Bakhshi

Truckers, teachers, sugarcane workers, and bazaar merchants struck repeatedly through 2018. The regime answered with mass arrests and explicit threats of execution under “corruption on earth.” On 18 November 2018, security forces arrested Esmail Bakhshi, the elected representative of workers at the Haft Tappeh sugarcane complex in Khuzestan, along with the journalist Sepideh Gholian and nineteen others. After his release on bail, Bakhshi published a public account on Instagram describing what had been done to him: repeated baton strikes to the genitals, hallucinogenic drugs administered after he lost consciousness from pain, prolonged hallucinations, persistent fever after release.<sup>[2]</sup> Both Bakhshi and Gholian were re-arrested. Gholian spent more than four years in Evin Prison.

## Bloody November — the Aban uprising, 2019

At midnight on 15 November 2019 the Supreme Economic Coordination Council announced an overnight fuel price hike of fifty to two hundred percent. By dawn, protests had erupted across the country. Within twenty-four hours, unrest had spread to more than two hundred cities and towns. On 16 November, the government imposed a near-total internet blackout — one of the most complete communications shutdowns in the history of the modern internet — lasting roughly a week. The blackout was designed to prevent footage of the killings from reaching the outside world.



*A petrol station and a bank set ablaze during Iran's November 2019 fuel-price protests, known as the Aban uprising or "Bloody November." Reuters, citing Iranian Interior Ministry sources, reported that up to 1,500 people were killed in the crackdown. Photograph: Fars News Agency, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY 4.0).*

A 23 December 2019 Reuters investigation, drawing on three Iranian Interior Ministry officials, concluded that up to 1,500 people had been killed, including approximately four hundred women and more than a dozen teenagers. Reuters reported that Khamenei had personally ordered the crackdown at an emergency meeting, telling officials: "The Islamic Republic is in danger. Do whatever it takes to end it. You have my order."<sup>[3]</sup> Amnesty International later documented the names of 321 individuals killed.<sup>[4]</sup> The single deadliest episode was the Mahshahr massacre in Khuzestan, where IRGC forces deployed armoured personnel carriers and DShK heavy machine guns against civilians who had fled into the surrounding marshland. Estimates from Mahshahr range between forty and one hundred and forty-eight killed.



Street protests in Iran, November 2019. Photograph: GTVM92, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY-SA 4.0).

## Pouya Bakhtiari, age 27

Pouya Bakhtiari, twenty-seven, from Karaj, was shot through the skull on 16 November 2019 in Mehrshahr, Karaj. He had been with his mother, Nahid Shirpisheh. He was pronounced dead before reaching hospital. His parents became outspoken critics of the regime. The state then arrested his uncle Mehrdad Bakhtiari and sentenced him to a five-year suspended term and a two-year travel ban. In 2025 his mother, Nahid Shirpisheh, was reported to have attempted suicide in Zanjan Prison after years of harassment.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Flight PS752 — the cover-up

On 8 January 2020, an IRGC TOR-M1 surface-to-air missile battery shot down Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 minutes after takeoff from Tehran. All 176 people on board were killed: 82 Iranians, 63 Canadians (many dual citizens), 11 Ukrainians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Britons, and three Germans. Fifteen of the dead were children.<sup>[6]</sup> Iranian officials denied any military involvement for three days, while satellite imagery and intelligence assessments from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada accumulated. The crash site was looted and bulldozed. On 11 January, after a meeting with Khamenei, IRGC Aerospace Force commander General Amir Ali Hajizadeh publicly admitted the strike, calling it “unintentional.” Within hours, students at Amir Kabir and Sharif universities in Tehran took to the streets, chanting “IRGC is the shame of our country” and — connecting the two crises — “1,500 people were killed in November.” Tear gas and batons followed.

## Khuzestan, water, and Isfahan, 2021

On 15 July 2021, residents across Iran's Arab-majority Khuzestan province took to the streets every evening to protest a catastrophic lack of access to clean water — the result of decades of mismanagement, dam-building, and water diversion. At least seven protesters were killed in the first ten days, including Mostafa Naeemavi, Ghasem Nasser, and Mohammad Abdollahi. Protests spread to Tehran and a dozen other provinces.<sup>[7]</sup> Four months later, in November 2021, thousands of farmers in the Isfahan hinterland staged a peaceful sit-in on the dry bed of the Zayandeh Rud river, the historic lifeblood of central Iran. At three in the morning on 25 November, anti-riot police raided the encampment, fired tear gas, set fire to tents, and used BB guns. Radio Zamaneh documented at least forty protesters blinded in at least one eye. The Center for Human Rights in Iran confirmed at least one hundred and twenty arrests.

## Two state executions: Navid Afkari and Ruhollah Zam

Navid Afkari, twenty-seven, was a national-champion Greco-Roman wrestler from Shiraz. He had taken part in protests in August 2018. He was accused of stabbing a security guard during the unrest. He, his brothers, and the prosecution all stated that his confession had been extracted under torture. His chosen lawyers were forced off the case. He received two death sentences. International intervention was unprecedented for an Iranian execution case — UFC president Dana White, IOC president Thomas Bach (who appealed personally to Khamenei), United World Wrestling, and U.S. President Donald Trump publicly called for clemency. From prison, in a smuggled audio recording, Navid declared: “If I am executed, I want you to know that an innocent person, even though he tried and fought with all his strength to be heard, was executed.” On 12 September 2020 he was hanged at Adelabad Prison in Shiraz, with no advance notice given to his family.<sup>[8]</sup>

Ruhollah Zam was an Iranian journalist who had been granted refuge in France, where he ran the Telegram channel Amadnews with about 1.4 million followers. The channel had played a significant organisational role in the Dey protests. In October 2019 the IRGC announced it had “lured” him to Iran via Iraq in a coordinated intelligence operation. He was tried at Branch 15 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran by Judge Abolqasem Salavati. On 30 June 2020 he was sentenced to death for “corruption on earth.” He was hanged at Rejaei Shahr Prison on 12 December 2020, four days after the Supreme Court upheld his sentence.<sup>[9]</sup> Reporters Without Borders held Khamenei personally responsible. The French foreign ministry called it “a barbaric and unacceptable act.” European ambassadors withdrew from the Europe-Iran Business Forum in protest.

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## Chapter 08

# 2022–2023 — Woman, Life, Freedom

On 13 September 2022, a twenty-two-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman named Mahsa Jina Amini was arrested by Tehran's Gasht-e Ershad — the “morality police” — at the entrance to the Shahid Haghani Expressway. She had been visiting the capital with her brother. Officers told him she was being taken to the Vozara detention centre for an “educational and orientation class.” Within approximately two hours, eyewitnesses — including women detained alongside her — reported that she had been severely beaten inside the police van. She was transferred to Kasra Hospital in a coma. She died on 16 September 2022.<sup>[1]</sup>



*A vehicle of Iran's Gasht-e Ershad (Guidance Patrol, “morality police”) photographed in Tehran. The inscription on the windows reads “Morality Guidance Patrol.” A unit of this force detained Mahsa Amini in September 2022. Public domain, photograph by Zereshk via [Wikimedia Commons](#).*

The Iranian state, via the police information centre, claimed she had suffered a sudden cardiac seizure. Her father, Amjad Amini, publicly described visible bruising and injuries on her body. On 8 March 2024, the UN Human Rights Council's independent Fact-Finding Mission concluded that Amini's death had been caused by physical violence in morality-police custody, and that the Iranian government had deliberately concealed the truth and intimidated her family.



Amjad Amini, the father of Mahsa (Jina) Amini, in a portrait widely circulated after her death. He has consistently rejected the Iranian government's account of his daughter's death. Photograph: Tasnim News Agency, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY 4.0).

## Zan, Zendegi, Azadi

At her funeral in Saqqez on 17 September 2022, mourners chanted in Kurdish: Jin, Jiyan, Azadî — Woman, Life, Freedom. The Persian rendering — Zan, Zendegi, Azadi — became the rallying cry of an uprising that spread within days to all thirty-one Iranian provinces. Women removed their headscarves and burned them in public. Schoolgirls confronted teachers and education officials. The regime's response was lethal, immediate, and well-rehearsed.



Solidarity protest at Piccadilly Circus, London, in September 2022 in support of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. Tens of millions of people in cities across Europe, North America, and Australia joined demonstrations in 2022–23. Photograph: Garry Knight, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC0).

## The named dead

Within weeks of Amini's death, the Iranian human-rights group HRANA and Iran Human Rights had begun publishing daily lists of the killed. By the end of 2022, more than five hundred and fifty protesters and bystanders had been documented as killed by security forces, including more than seventy children. Twenty-two thousand people had been arrested. Among the named dead:

Name	Age	Place / circumstance
Hadis Najafi	22	Karaj, shot multiple times on 21 Sept 2022
Nika Shakarami	16	Tehran, disappeared during protests; body returned 9 days later
Sarina Esmailzadeh	16	Karaj, fatally beaten by security forces
Kian Pirfalak	9	Izeh (Khuzestan), shot in his family's car on 16 Nov 2022
Mahsa Mogouei	18	Karaj, shot dead on Bloody Friday in Zahedan
Khodanour Lojeyi	27	Zahedan, killed at the "Bloody Friday" massacre on 30 Sept 2022

## The first protest executions

On 8 December 2022, twenty-three-year-old Mohsen Shekari became the first protester publicly executed by the Islamic Republic for participation in the uprising. He was hanged on a charge of moharebeh — “waging war against God” — for an alleged knife wound to a Basij member. Four days later, on 12 December 2022, twenty-three-year-old Majidreza Rahnavard was hanged in public from a construction crane in Mashhad. On 7 January 2023, Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini were hanged together. By the end of 2023, eight protesters had been executed in connection with the Woman, Life, Freedom movement.<sup>[2]</sup> Each trial lasted days, sometimes hours. Lawyers were assigned by the court. Confessions, several defendants told their families, had been extracted under torture.

## The chemical attacks on schoolgirls

Beginning on 30 November 2022 in the holy city of Qom, schoolgirls began collapsing after exposure to unidentified airborne substances. By spring 2023 the attacks had spread to nearly every Iranian province. Thousands were hospitalised. The targeting of girls' schools — not boys' — and the timing, coming weeks after schoolgirls had become a public face of the uprising, led many Iranians to conclude that hardline forces aligned with the state were carrying out collective punishment.<sup>[3]</sup> Iranian authorities first dismissed the attacks as mass hysteria, then arrested over a hundred “suspects.” No prosecutions of public officials have followed.

## The 2024 Nobel Peace Prize



*Narges Mohammadi, Iranian human rights activist, awarded the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize while imprisoned in Evin. Photograph via [Wikimedia Commons](#) (public domain / VOA).*

On 6 October 2023, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Narges Mohammadi, “for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all.” Mohammadi was, at the time, serving a multi-year sentence in Evin Prison. She has been arrested thirteen times and sentenced to a cumulative thirty-one years.<sup>[4]</sup> Iranian authorities denied her permission to travel to Oslo. Her acceptance speech was read aloud by her children. She has continued to publish statements from inside Evin.



*Toomaj Salehi, Iranian rapper. Arrested for songs supporting Woman, Life, Freedom, sentenced to death in 2024 (sentence overturned by the Supreme Court), released in December 2024. Photograph: Hosseinronaghi, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY-SA 4.0).*

Toomaj Salehi, the rapper whose protest songs had become anthems of the uprising, was arrested in October 2022 after a video showed him chanting on a rooftop. He was tortured. In April 2024 he was sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court in Isfahan; the Supreme Court overturned the sentence in June 2024 in the face of mass international outcry. He was released in December 2024 and has since spoken publicly from inside Iran.

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## Chapter 09

# Crimson Winter and the 2026 war

By late 2025 the rial was in free-fall. On 28 December 2025 the dollar approached 150,000 tomans — up from 32,000 at the time of the 2015 nuclear deal — and the Central Bank's governor resigned. Annual inflation reached 42.2 percent; food prices were 72 percent higher than a year earlier; medical goods were 50 percent costlier. Tehran's Grand Bazaar, the historic barometer of regime legitimacy since 1979, went on strike.<sup>[1]</sup> Within forty-eight hours strikes paralysed the gold market, the electronics hubs, the shoe and spare-parts bazaars, and the mobile-phone complexes. Protests spread to Karaj, Mashhad, Isfahan, Shiraz, and beyond.

Within hours, the protests' character shifted. Economic slogans gave way to political ones: “Death to the Dictator”; “No Gaza, No Lebanon, my life for Iran”; and direct calls for regime change. By early January 2026 protests had spread to more than 180 cities, becoming the largest challenge to the Islamic Republic since 1979.<sup>[2]</sup> The IRGC placed its “Fatehin” and “Ashura” battalions on 100 percent alert, with reinforcements on standby in surrounding provinces.

## 8–9 January 2026 — the order to kill

On 8 January 2026 the regime moved from police containment to full military suppression. The IRGC was given an explicit order to use lethal force against unarmed civilians — the most intense crackdown in the Islamic Republic's history. IRGC and Basij units deployed snipers, armoured personnel carriers, and helicopter surveillance. Medical facilities were targeted; doctors treating wounded protesters were arrested.

Among the deadliest single incidents was the 2026 Rasht massacre: HRANA documented at least 392 killed in Rasht alone, the vast majority after an internet blackout was imposed.<sup>[3]</sup> Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documented at least 28 protesters and bystanders killed in 13 cities across 8 provinces between 31 December 2025 and 3 January 2026 — before the most intense crackdown began. In Malekshahi, Ilam province: Reza Azimzadeh, Latif Karimi, Mehdi Emamipour, Fares (Mohsen) Agha Mohammadi, and Mohammad Reza Karami were shot by IRGC forces firing from inside a Basij base. In Azna, Lorestan province: Vahab Mousavi, Mostafa Falahi, Shayan Asadollahi, Ahmadreza Amani, Reza Moradi Abdolvand, and Taha Safari, sixteen years old, his body withheld from the family.<sup>[4]</sup>

On 3 January Khamenei said “rioters should be put in their place.” On 5 January the Head of the Judiciary ordered prosecutors to show “no leniency.” Authorities forced some victims' families to appear on state media blaming deaths on accidents, under threat of secret burials if they refused.

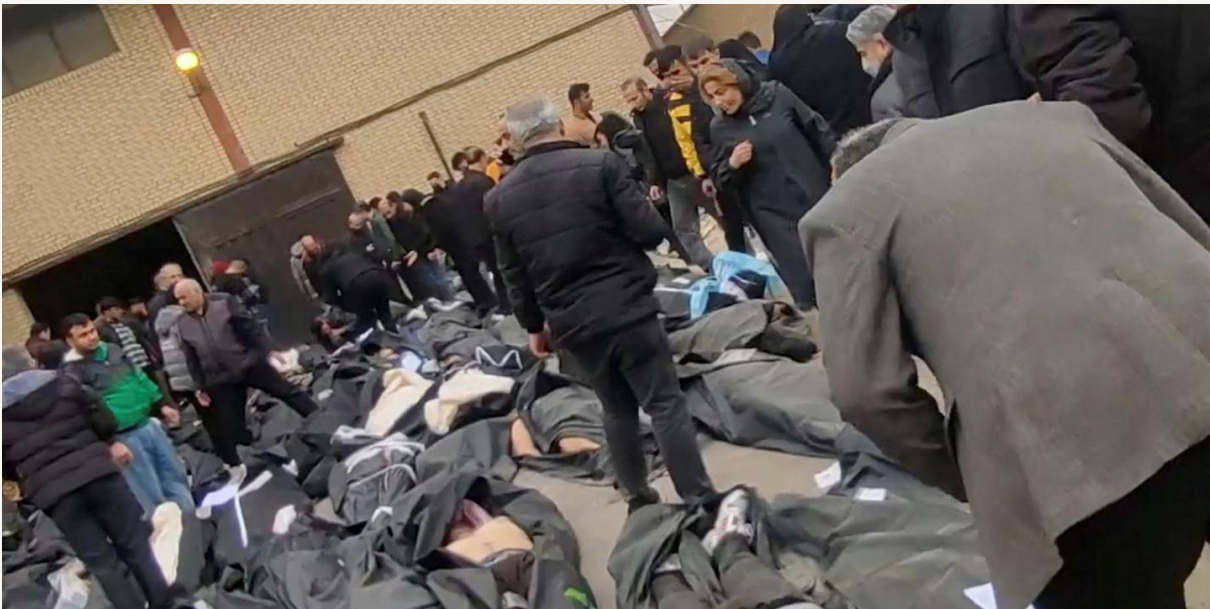
## The dispute over the dead

The death toll became one of the most contested figures in modern Iranian history. The official Pezeshkian government count, published 1 February 2026, was 3,117 (including some 214 security forces). HRANA's verified named list, published on 23 February 2026 in a report titled *The Crimson Winter*, recorded 7,007 confirmed deaths — 6,488 adult protesters, 236 minors, 207 security personnel, and 76 non-participants — with 11,744 cases still under review.<sup>[5]</sup> Iran International independently compiled 6,634 names. A doctors' network speaking to *The Guardian* warned the toll could exceed 30,000. *Time* magazine on 25 January 2026 reported a list of 30,304 protest-related deaths registered in civilian hospitals for 8–9 January alone, citing two senior Iranian officials who said the administration “ran out of body bags” and used “semi-trailer trucks instead of ambulances.”<sup>[6]</sup> Leaked internal IRGC Intelligence Organization reports from 22–24 January placed the toll at 33,000–36,500 — figures published by Iran International on 25 January from leaked Supreme National Security Council documents covering more than 400 cities. A leaked parliamentary report cited 27,500. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, Mai Sato, said on 22 January that the dead could surpass 20,000. Reza Pahlavi, citing diaspora networks reporting to *The Sunday Times*, placed the total at roughly 50,000, including some 15,000 in Tehran alone. Whichever figure stands the test of independent investigation, the lower bound — Iran International's 36,500-name leak — already makes 8–9 January 2026 the deadliest two-day repression event in modern Iranian history.

Iran International found fewer than 100 names in common between its list and the government's, describing the government list as “a shameful attempt to downplay the scale of the largest street massacre in Iran's contemporary history.” On 11 February 2026 President Masoud Pezeshkian publicly apologised to the Iranian nation for the massacres — a historically unusual admission.<sup>[7]</sup>

## The two nights — what witnesses described

*Content warning: the following pages reproduce documentary photographs of fatalities, wounded protesters, and morgues. The images are reproduced under fair-use editorial provisions because the events themselves are being denied.*



*A morgue near Tehran, January 2026 — overwhelmed by bodies of protesters killed during the crackdown. Photograph: Reuters via [Le Monde](#) (reproduced under fair-use editorial provisions).*

What the leaked numbers can only sketch, eyewitnesses make irrefutable. A physician interviewed by the Center for Human Rights in Iran from a hospital in Isfahan described eighteen consecutive head-trauma surgeries in a single night, with blood pooling in the gutter outside the operating theatre because there was nowhere left to put it. Body counts were altered on hospital files; corpses were taken from morgues at 3am by Basij agents and buried in

unmarked rows; families who came looking for relatives were turned away or threatened with secret burials if they talked.

***“They ran out of body bags. They used semi-trailer trucks instead of ambulances.”***

*Time*, citing two senior Iranian health officials, 25 January 2026.

In Rasht — the deadliest single incident — IRGC and Basij forces set fire to the historic covered bazaar after blocking exits, then opened live fire on civilians fleeing the smoke. HRANA documented at least 392 dead in Rasht alone; Iran International's database, drawing on hospital sources, recorded up to 3,000. The Washington Post independently verified the entrapment-and-fire pattern through phone footage and survivor interviews. Survivors described “finishing shots” administered to the wounded as they lay on the floor of the bazaar — the same execution method documented at Kahrizak in 2009 and at the Rajaei Shahr prison killings of 1988.<sup>[11]</sup>



Rasht's historic covered bazaar after the fire-and-fire-trap massacre, 21 January 2026. Photograph: [Iran Human Rights Monitor](#) (editorial fair use).

***“We were walking in blood.”***



Iranian medical staff in a blood-streaked emergency ward during the January 2026 crackdown. Photograph: Sipa via [Le Monde](#) (editorial fair use).

Iranian doctors and nurses, speaking to *Le Monde* on condition of anonymity, described emergency wards where the floor could no longer be cleared between patients. One physician at a Tehran public hospital said staff worked through three consecutive shifts removing bullets from skulls and chests; the corridors filled with the wounded faster than orderlies could carry them out.

***“We were walking in blood. The water from the mops came out red. They brought children. They brought boys whose faces were destroyed.”***

Hospital administrators were ordered, on pain of dismissal, to record protest casualties under unrelated diagnostic codes — “car accident,” “fall from height,” “unknown cause.” The body bags ran out on the second night.

## The faces behind the figures

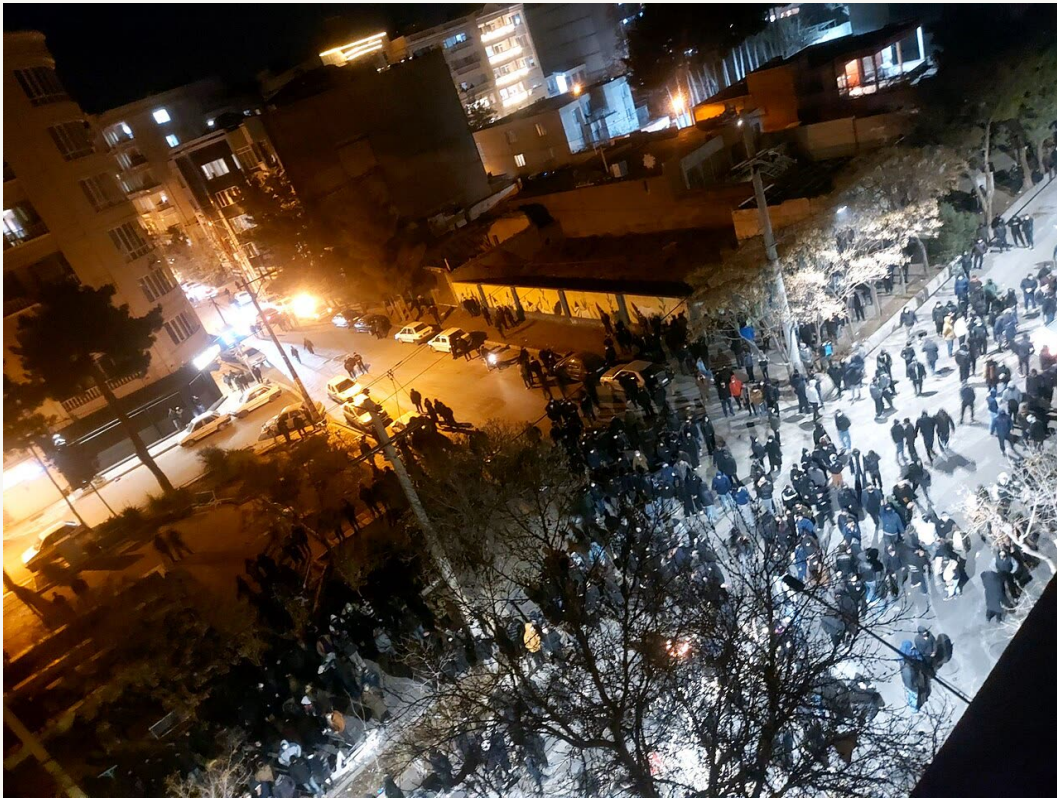


Twenty-eight of the named dead from the first ten days of January 2026, photographed by their families and assembled by [Amnesty International](#) (reproduced under fair-use editorial provisions).

Each face is a small refusal of the regime's preferred ending, in which protesters become statistics and statistics become rumour. The collage is not exhaustive: HRANA and Iran Human Rights were still verifying new names every day at the time of writing — and the regime was still arresting families who tried to publish them.



Human Rights Watch's evidence map of morgues receiving protest casualties across Iran, January 2026. [Human Rights Watch](#) — "Iran: growing evidence of countrywide massacres" (editorial fair use).



Neyshabur, January 2026 — one of more than 400 Iranian cities reported in active protest, places without correspondent bureaux where the only camera was the phone in the pocket of the boy who would be dead by morning. Photograph: anonymous via [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Among the named dead from those two nights:

***Bahar Hosseini — three years old · Neyshabur · died after IRGC tear-gas was fired into a residential courtyard.***

***Melina Asadi — three years old · Javanrud · shot when security forces fired on a funeral procession.***

***Mohammad Qasem Roustaa — fourteen · Marvdasht · shot in the chest by Basij while walking home from school.***

***Taha Safari — sixteen · Azna · killed alongside Mostafa Falahi; their bodies withheld from their families.***

***Reza Ghanbari — sixteen · Kermanshah · shot through the head by an IRGC sniper at a bridge protest.***

***Sina Ashkbousi — seventeen · Tehran · died of head trauma in custody after his arrest on 8 January.***

***Erfan Soltani — clothes-shop owner · Fardis · arrested on 8 January, hanged on 14 January after a closed trial.***

They are seven names from a list whose lowest verified count runs into the tens of thousands. They are not statistics; each is a sentence the regime tried to delete.

## Operation Epic Fury — 28 February 2026



Iran's late President Ebrahim Raisi addressing the UN General Assembly in 2022. Raisi died in a helicopter crash on 19 May 2024; his successor Masoud Pezeshkian inherited a state already unravelling. Photograph: UN Photo / Cia Pak via [Wikimedia Commons](#) (UN Photo).

Following the January massacres, and with US-Iran nuclear negotiations producing no agreement, the United States and Israel launched a joint military campaign against Iran on 28 February 2026, codenamed by the US as Operation Epic Fury. According to ISW analysis, the opening strikes — nearly 900 in the first twelve hours — targeted Iranian missiles, air defences, military infrastructure, leadership positions, and government buildings. Among those killed in the initial strikes was Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.<sup>[8]</sup>

Iran responded with hundreds of drones and ballistic missiles — Emad, Ghadr, Kheybar Shekan, and Fatah-1 type — against Israeli territory and US bases in Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Iranian forces closed the Strait of Hormuz, the chokepoint through which roughly 20 percent of global oil supply transits. US Central Command reported striking over 11,000 targets in Iran since the campaign's start. The strikes hit not only missile factories and air defence batteries but residential facilities, schools, hospitals, and heritage sites. A second extensive internet blackout fell across the country.

## Voices from inside Iran

On 12 March 2026 the BBC published testimonies from Iranians who had previously supported the idea of foreign military action against the regime.<sup>[9]</sup> The texture of their reactions is the most useful counterweight to triumphalist Western narratives.

*Sama, 31, engineer, Tehran: “For years we have protested. Every time they silence us. When the strikes began, I thought this is something the regime cannot withstand.” Two weeks later: “Now I see fear in people's eyes. I can't find peace anymore. I wake up either to the sounds of explosions or to nightmares about them.”*

*Mina, 28, teacher: “Witnessing the massive fires and hearing the explosions, seeing frightened children in tears — what if we're left with ruins and the mullah government is even more oppressive?”*

*Ali, 31, shopkeeper, injured during the January protests: “Everyone discusses 'regime change' as if it's a simple switch. But who will seize power? What prevents the country from descending into chaos?”*

*Fatemeh, 27, graphic designer: “They thrive on this. Now they are saying 'See, we told you it was all part of the enemy's scheme.' Criticism has transformed into treason.”*

*Reza, 40, engineer, Isfahan: “People claim change must originate from within — as if we haven't made attempts. For heaven's sake, have these people forgotten the countless body bags of slain protesters? Wasn't that just two months ago?”*

The UNHCR estimated that between 600,000 and 3.2 million Iranians had been temporarily displaced inside the country.

## Mass hangings during and after the war

*Content warning: this section reproduces portraits of executed prisoners.*



*Saleh Mohammadi, 19 — star wrestler from Qom. Hanged 19 March 2026 on charges of moharebeh for allegedly damaging a Basij vehicle. His family was given less than twelve hours' notice. [New York Times](#) · Photograph via [Wikipedia](#) (fair use, deceased subject of public record).*



*Amirhossein Hatami, 18. Hanged April 2026 on charges related to burning government property during the January protests, after a closed trial without independent representation. Photograph via [Iran Human Rights](#) (editorial fair use).*

With Khamenei dead and his son Mojtaba Khamenei installed on 9 March 2026, the regime reverted to the only instrument it had ever fully trusted: the gallows. Beginning 17 March 2026, Iran resumed political executions at a tempo not seen since 1988. The Center for Human Rights in Iran, in a 30 April 2026 report titled *Iran's execution machine*, documented 22 political prisoners hanged between 17 March and 27 April — one execution every two days — of whom at least ten had been arrested during the January Crimson Winter protests. Trials were closed; confessions extracted under torture; lawyers denied access until after the verdict.<sup>[12]</sup> On 29 April 2026 the United Nations Human Rights Office reported 21 executions and more than 4,000 detentions since the war's outbreak on 28 February.<sup>[13]</sup>

The new tempo built on a baseline already at a thirty-six-year peak. The BBC, citing IHR and Amnesty data on 13 April 2026, reported 1,639 executions in Iran during 2025 — the highest annual figure since 1989, a 68 percent year-on-year increase.<sup>[14]</sup> Deutsche Welle counted at least 14 protesters hanged during the active phase of the war alone.<sup>[15]</sup> Among them:

*Saleh Mohammadi — nineteen · a star wrestler from Qom · hanged 19 March 2026 on charges of “moharebeh” (“waging war against God”) for allegedly damaging a Basij vehicle. The New York Times confirmed his execution; relatives were given less than twelve hours' notice.*

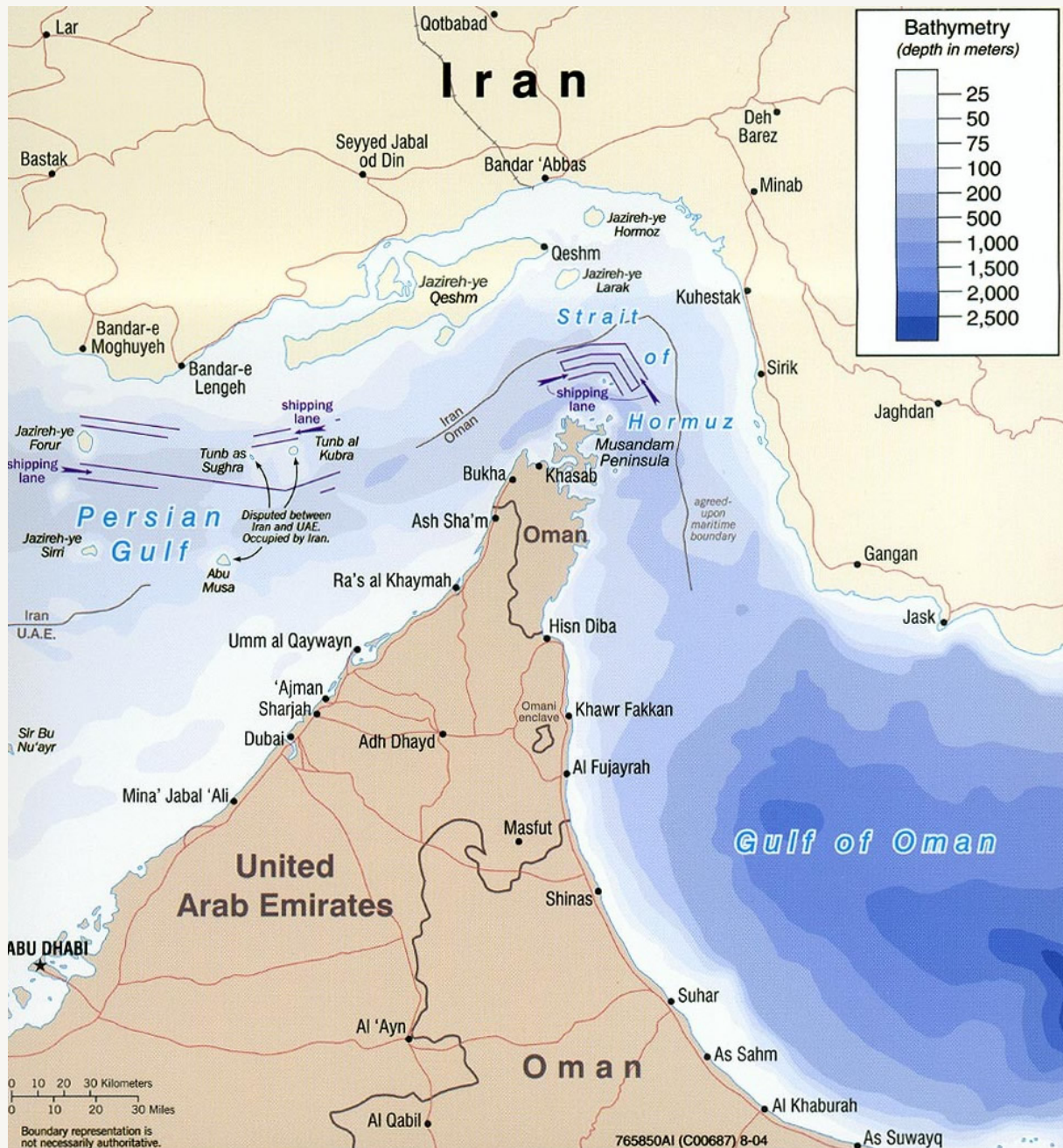
*Erfan Soltani — clothes-shop owner, Fardis · arrested 8 January, hanged 14 January after a four-day closed trial.*

*Amirhossein Hatami — eighteen · hanged in April 2026 on charges related to burning government property during the January protests.*

*Bitā Hemmati — first woman linked to the 2025–2026 protests to face execution — sentenced to death alongside her husband and two others for allegedly throwing objects from a rooftop.*

This is what “the rule of law” looks like in the Islamic Republic during a war the regime claims is a fight for national sovereignty: a hanging crane every forty-eight hours, mostly of teenagers and shopkeepers, and a near-total information blackout under cover of which the work proceeds.

## **The hypocrisy of ‘no to war’**



The Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly twenty percent of the world's oil supply transits. Image: NASA / Wikimedia Commons (public domain).

The dominant Western posture toward the 2026 war was “restraint” — a humanitarian framing that presented itself as the moral position. No to war was the slogan in capitals from Berlin to Brussels to Washington's progressive caucuses. It deserves to be examined carefully, because its actual record on Iranian lives is the opposite of what it claims.

During the very months that European chancelleries pleaded for de-escalation in the name of civilian protection, the Islamic Republic was killing civilians at a faster rate than any moment in its history — tens of thousands in two nights, then a political hanging every two days. The “no to war” position did not save those lives. It was deployed against the only force the regime could not absorb — external military pressure on its leadership — while doing nothing to halt the internal violence that was already in motion.

***Follow the oil.***

In September 2025 — three months before the Crimson Winter and five months before “Operation Epic Fury” began — Iran exported 2.13 million barrels per day of crude, the highest monthly figure of the year and a level above the levels reached during the first Trump “maximum pressure” campaign. Roughly 87 percent of those barrels went to China, sold at discounts of USD 10 to USD 30 below Brent, and settled through a 45-day shadow-banking chain that the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission described in November 2025.<sup>[16]</sup> China alone is the buyer of around 90 percent of Iran's oil, providing roughly 45 percent of the Iranian government's budget — the budget that pays the IRGC and the Basij.<sup>[17]</sup> The FDD's Iran-Sanctions team estimated 2024 oil-revenue flows from China to Iran at approximately USD 8.4 billion; the Iranian government grossed roughly USD 3.9 to 4.2 billion per month from crude alone in late 2025, before the war.<sup>[18]</sup>

The point is not that the United States and Europe deliberately funded the regime. The point is that the global hydrocarbon system requires Iran's barrels to clear, that those barrels are sold to China at a structural discount, and that the same governments which lecture Iranians about “internal change” have allowed the regime's principal revenue line to flow undisturbed for years. During the active phase of the 2026 war the situation became starker: when the Strait of Hormuz closure pushed prices up, the U.S. Treasury issued general licenses for Iranian and Russian oil in March 2026 — explicit waivers — to inject barrels into world markets and ease the shock at Western pumps. CNBC reported on 18 April 2026 that the 20 March waiver had released 140 million barrels of Iranian crude to global buyers.<sup>[19]</sup> The Atlantic Council noted that those waivers were extended again as the original deadlines approached — even as the Treasury's own ‘Operation Economic Fury’ of 24 April 2026 sanctioned individual tankers (LYNN, STELLAR BEVERLY, COVENIO, GOLDEN SUNRISE, ZHEN ZHU) running Iranian oil to Chinese ports.<sup>[20]</sup>

This is the structure: sanction the symbols of the regime, license its barrels. Sanction the morality police, license the tankers that pay for them. Designate the IRGC, then waive the oil flows whose taxes equip it. The Iranians being shot in the streets and hanged in the prisons are paying the bill for the cheap fuel the rest of the world prefers not to do without.

Then comes the slogan: no to war. As if war had not already begun — inside Iran, against Iranians, in 1981 and 1988 and 2009 and 2019 and 2022 and again in January 2026. As if the protesters who carried the banners of Zan, Zendegi, Azadi through their own city centres had not just buried thirty thousand of their own. As if forty-seven years of internal war could be wished away by Western placards. The slogan was about Western fuel pumps, not Iranian lives.

What Iranians inside Iran have said clearly — in BBC, IranWire, and CHRI testimonies — is that the current rupture is not a tragedy to be avoided but the first opening in a generation through which the regime might actually fall. They are realistic about the cost. Sama, the engineer in Tehran (Chapter 8 — see also her testimony in this chapter), and Reza, the Isfahan engineer who asked whether the West had “forgotten the countless body bags of slain protesters” two months earlier, are the most accurate guides we have to what ‘solidarity’ actually requires.

Solidarity is not a slogan. It is enforcement of the IRGC designation. It is closing the loopholes that allow Iranian crude to reach Chinese ports. It is freezing the London real estate of regime insiders. It is opening visa pathways to the Iranians shot in the eye for unveiling. Anything less is what the record of the past forty-seven years already documents in sixteen chapters: silence, interests, and betrayal.

## What the cameras saw — names, not numbers

The figures in this chapter — thirty thousand to forty thousand killed across the two-night strikes, more than seven thousand HRANA-verified protest deaths since 2022, executions every forty-eight hours through 2025–2026 — are unbearable largely because they collapse single lives into mass nouns. The portraits below restore the elementary fact that each digit was a person with a face, a family, and a story the Islamic Republic preferred to bury under official silence. The images are reproduced from BBC, Wikipedia/Wikimedia Commons, Iran Human Rights and Human Rights Watch under the documentary fair-use and Creative Commons terms each source provides; they are included so the dead are not abstractions.



*Mohsen Shekari, 23 — the first protester executed by the Islamic Republic during the Woman Life Freedom uprising. Hanged on 8 December 2022 after a closed-door trial on charges of 'moharebeh' (waging war against God) for allegedly wounding a Basij member at a Tehran roadblock. Photograph: family handout via [BBC News](#).*



*Majidreza Rahnavaard, 23 — publicly hanged from a construction crane in Mashhad on 12 December 2022, four days after Shekari. The regime broadcast the image of his body in the street as warning. Photograph via [BBC News](#).*



*Hadis Najafi, 22 — killed in Karaj on 21 September 2022, shot multiple times during a Mahsa Amini protest. A video of her tying back her hair before stepping toward the riot line became a banner image of the uprising. Photograph: family, via [Wikipedia](#) (fair use).*



*Nika Shakarami, 16 — disappeared after burning her headscarf at a Tehran protest on 20 September 2022. Her body was returned to her family ten days later; a 2023 BBC investigation concluded she was sexually assaulted and killed in custody by security agents. Photograph: family, via [Wikipedia](#) (fair use).*



Kian Pirfalak, 9 — shot dead in his father's car in Izeh on 16 November 2022. The state blamed 'terrorists'; his mother stood at his funeral and told the country, in front of the cameras, that the regime had killed her son. Photograph: family, via [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY-SA).



Saqqez, 17 September 2022 — women pull off their headscarves over the coffin of Mahsa Jina Amini, the gesture that lit the uprising. Photograph: [BBC News](#).



*Public hanging from a mobile construction crane in Iran (illustrative, 2006) — the same method used against Majidreza Rahnavard in 2022 and against scores of others during the post-2025 wave of mass executions documented by Iran Human Rights and Amnesty International. Photograph via [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY).*



Khavaran cemetery, southeast Tehran — relatives of those killed in the 1988 prison massacres gather every year by the unmarked mass graves where their dead were dumped, despite repeated state attempts to bulldoze the site. Photograph: [BBC Persian archive](#).



Khavaran, again — the ground that holds at least several thousand of the estimated five thousand political prisoners executed in summer 1988 on Khomeini's fatwa. Ebrahim Raisi — Iran's president from 2021 until his death in a 2024 helicopter crash — sat on the 'death commission' that sent them here. Photograph: [Human Rights Watch](#).

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**Chapter 10**

# Europe: sanctions, trade, and the IRGC

The European Union has built — slowly, then in bursts — the most extensive human-rights sanctions regime against any country except Russia. It has also presided over the structural compromises that hollowed those sanctions out.

## The 2011 foundation

On 12 April 2011 the Council of the European Union adopted Council Regulation (EU) No 359/2011 and Council Decision 2011/235/CFSP — the first dedicated human-rights sanctions regime against Iran. The measures responded to the post-2009 crackdown and imposed asset freezes and travel bans on 82 individuals and one entity: state security forces, prosecutors, judges, and lawmakers. They prohibited exports of equipment usable for internal repression or surveillance.<sup>[1]</sup> On 23 March 2012 the Council added an embargo on monitoring and interception equipment for internet and telephone communications. The measures were renewed annually each April through successive presidencies — kept on, but rarely extended in scope, for more than a decade.

## The Mahsa Amini expansions, 2022–2023

After Amini's death, the EU acted with unprecedented speed. Round 1, 17 October 2022: EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg sanctioned 11 individuals and 4 entities, including the Morality Police itself, its Tehran and national chiefs, the Basij Resistance Force, and officials responsible for internet censorship.<sup>[2]</sup> German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock publicly rejected the term “morality police” as an inappropriate label “for the crimes being committed there.”

Round 2, 14 November 2022: 29 more individuals and 3 entities — including the four members of the squad that had arbitrarily arrested Amini, Brigadier General Kiyumars Heidari, Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces; Vahid Mohammad Naser Majid, head of Iran's Cyber Police; Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi; and the state broadcaster Press TV for airing forced confessions.<sup>[3]</sup> Rounds 3–6 (January–March 2023): packages added judges, executioners, and entities. By the sixth round on 20 March 2023, EU sanctions covered 204 individuals and 34 entities<sup>[4]</sup> — the largest expansion in the regime's history. On 23 January 2023, the EU, US, and UK announced coordinated new sanctions; the EU measures targeted 18 individuals and 19 entities with travel bans and asset freezes.

## The IRGC vote and the Borrell veto

On 18 January 2023 the European Parliament voted 598 to 9 — one of the largest majorities in its history — calling on the EU Council to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organisation.<sup>[5]</sup> European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen publicly backed the idea at the World Economic Forum the same week.

The EU Council did not follow through. EU foreign-policy chief Josep Borrell repeatedly told MEPs that the designation could not proceed without a prior court decision by a national authority of an EU member state. “It is something that cannot be decided without a Court,” he told reporters. “You cannot say: ‘I consider you a terrorist because I do not like you.’”

Legal scholars and the Washington Institute pointed out that EU Common Position 931 — the legal basis for the EU terrorist list — explicitly allows listings based on decisions by competent authorities of third countries. German MP

Norbert Röttgen said publicly that the legal requirement had already been met and that the German Foreign Ministry was “pretending that there are legal obstacles.” In May 2024, Swedish MEP Charlie Weimers confronted Borrell with the Council's own secret legal opinion: “Nowhere in this document does it say that it has to be an authority in the EU. You know that. You knew the truth.”<sup>[6]</sup>

***The IRGC was finally designated by the EU in late January 2026 — after the January massacres and after the geopolitics had shifted. Three years of paralysis on a position the Parliament had endorsed 598 to 9 is not a procedural footnote; it is a record.***

## The collapse of EU–Iran trade

Before the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, EU–Iran trade had reached approximately €18 billion per year. The EU was Iran's top trading partner, accounting for nearly a quarter of Iran's goods trade.<sup>[7]</sup> After Washington's reimposition of secondary sanctions in 2018, the trade relationship collapsed: €4.5 billion in 2023; €3.717 billion in 2025, an 18 percent decline year on year and the lowest level in two decades.

INSTEX — the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges — announced by France, Germany, and the UK in January 2019 as a barter-style special purpose vehicle, completed exactly one significant transaction: about €500,000 of medicine in March 2020. In late January 2023, INSTEX's board voted to liquidate it.<sup>[8]</sup> Bourse & Bazaar, which tracked the collapse, attributed the failure primarily to European governments: they “never really committed to that undertaking,” and never figured out how to give INSTEX access to euro liquidity. INSTEX closed with little more than office chairs and laptops to its name.

## The Hormuz shock

Europe's energy reorientation after Russia's invasion of Ukraine had bolted European demand to Gulf LNG. About 20 percent of global LNG passes through the Strait of Hormuz; only 8 percent of EU LNG imports come from Qatar, but the broader market shock was instantaneous when Iran closed the Strait on 28 February 2026. Within days oil prices surged roughly 8 percent and European gas prices rose 20 percent. In sixty days of conflict the EU's fossil-fuel import bill rose by over €27 billion without a single additional molecule delivered, according to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.<sup>[9]</sup> Europe's dependence on US LNG — now 57 percent of total EU LNG imports, and 96 percent of Germany's LNG — left it especially exposed. “It is vital,” von der Leyen said, “that we mitigate the economic impact of the Iran conflict.”

It is the closing irony of European Iran policy that the energy bill of the 2026 war was comparable to the entire pre-2018 EU–Iran trade relationship. Europe paid for both — first by letting it die, and then by replacing it with an even more concentrated dependency.

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## Chapter 11

# The Western left and the silence of solidarity

The Iranian uprisings have exposed a fault line within Western progressive politics. In a tradition that has often spoken with moral clarity about Pinochet, apartheid South Africa, the Vietnam War, and Latin American death squads, the Iranian case has produced something else: a pattern of hesitation, qualification, and silence.



Berlin Tiergarten, October 2022. Iranian and German demonstrators march in solidarity with Woman, Life, Freedom. Photograph: Leonhard Lenz, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC0).

## The pattern

The 2026 essay “Iran, the Greatest Inconvenience” in the TripleAmpersand Journal captures the structure of the silence with unusual precision:

***“The Western left often says the situation is complicated: There are monarchists, exiles, reactionary expats. There is foreign agitation. Then there is Israel and there is the United States. Therefore, better not to touch this mess. Iranian revolutions are not kosher so to speak. This posture is presented as educated sophistication, as learned caution, and as ethical refusal to be instrumentalized.”<sup>[1]</sup>***

The essay's central charge is that the “who benefits?” filter — the habit of treating only states and intelligence agencies as real political actors — produces a politics in which ordinary Iranians, the people who actually bleed in the street, vanish. “Silence is an intervention by default,” the author writes. “It leaves the field to the worst bidders.”

The 2009 Green Movement was an early test case. During those protests, segments of the Western left held that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Iranian government were anti-imperialist; left-leaning Iranians in the diaspora found themselves locked in an exhausting argument with allies who insisted that protest in Tehran could only be a CIA operation.<sup>[2]</sup> The same dynamic recurred after Mahsa Amini's death — more intensely, on social media, in real time. The scholar and polemicist Hamid Dabashi, writing for Al Jazeera, was singled out by critics as one who framed every Iranian uprising as a Mossad plot — eliminating the agency of ordinary Iranians from political analysis altogether.

## The voices that broke through

Against this pattern, a generation of Iranian dissident voices have spent two decades insisting on the moral coherence of solidarity.

Masih Alinejad — journalist, author, founder of the My Stealthy Freedom and White Wednesdays campaigns — became the most prominent and the most targeted. In July 2021, Iranian agents plotted to abduct her from her Brooklyn home and smuggle her to Venezuela; the FBI foiled the plot. At Yale Law School in 2019 she put the question directly to her audience.<sup>[3]</sup>

***“When is the right time to talk about human rights, women's rights, being abused in the Middle East? I definitely believe that this is the right time. It is an insult to Iranian people when you call a discriminatory law part of our culture.” — Masih Alinejad***

Roya Hakakian — Iranian-American author and co-founder of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center — has written extensively about the 1997 Mykonos trial in Berlin, which exposed Tehran's direct role in assassinating Iranian dissidents on European soil. Political analyst Paul Berman, profiling her work in Quillette, observed that Hakakian must navigate the same “tone problem” as other Iran scholars: that observations about the Islamic Republic's genocidal rhetoric and domestic repression draw “scoffing responses among certain readers and even among some equally scholarly writers.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Karim Sadjadpour at the Carnegie Endowment briefed US lawmakers throughout the Mahsa Amini uprising and was among the first to articulate the simple proposition that Iranian protesters “deserve the support of their Western counterparts.” Nazanin Boniadi, the British-Iranian actress and Amnesty International ambassador, testified in Washington and London on behalf of protesters who, she said, were “not asking for Western retreat.”

## The argument that should have ended

Against the silence, three propositions seem to require very little defending. First: compulsory hijab is not a culture; it is a law, enforced by a state, against women who do not want it. Second: solidarity with Iranian women does not require American troops in Iran, and the framing that says it does is dishonest. Third: a left that abandoned Vaclav Havel because Reagan also opposed the Soviet Union would have been a left worth nothing. The same logic, applied to Iran, produces the same result.

What the Iranian dissidents cited above ask of Western progressives is not allegiance to any Western government. It is the refusal to outsource one's politics to one's enemy's enemies. It is, in the simplest terms, a request to take

Iranians at their word.

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**Chapter 12**

# Washington and Jerusalem: pressure, ban, war

The United States and Israel form the third axis of the international response. Their instruments are not the EU's slow sanctions packages and trade ledgers but designations, executive orders, covert operations, and — by 2026 — open war. Each has produced gains and compromises; together they have shaped the field on which Iranian protest takes place.

## The state-sponsor designation, 1984 to present

Iran has been on the US State Department's list of State Sponsors of Terrorism since 19 January 1984<sup>[1]</sup> — one of the original designations under the Export Administration Act, the Arms Export Control Act, and the Foreign Assistance Act. As of 2026 Iran remains on the list alongside Cuba, North Korea, and Syria. The designation enables four categories of unilateral sanctions: foreign-aid restriction, weapons-sale ban, dual-use export control, and miscellaneous economic sanctions.

## IRGC as Foreign Terrorist Organisation, April 2019

On 8 April 2019 President Donald Trump announced the administration's plan to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, including its Quds Force, as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The designation took effect on 15 April 2019, the first time in US history that a component of another government's armed forces had been designated as an FTO.<sup>[2]</sup> Trump said: "If you are doing business with the IRGC, you will be bankrolling terrorism." The IRGC had already been a Specially Designated Global Terrorist since 2017 and on the SDN list since 2007 for WMD proliferation; the FTO designation added criminal liability for any person knowingly providing material support to it.

## JCPOA: signing, withdrawal, maximum pressure

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was signed on 14 July 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the UK, the US) plus the European Union. Iran accepted limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief; in January 2016, the EU lifted its oil and gas import bans and nuclear-related economic sanctions.

On 8 May 2018 President Trump announced the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. In November 2018, the US officially reimposed all sanctions that had been lifted, and launched the "maximum pressure" campaign.<sup>[3]</sup> In May 2019, after cancelling the oil-purchase waivers that had kept European and Asian oil imports flowing, the US ended the last significant pathway for Iranian oil exports to US allies. On 20 January 2025 Trump signed Executive Order 14161 calling for enhanced vetting of foreign nationals; on 4 June 2025 a new travel-ban proclamation placed Iran under a full entry ban, alongside Afghanistan, Chad, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and others, with narrow exceptions for individuals subject to ethnic or religious persecution.

## The travel ban, 2017

The original Trump travel ban, Executive Order 13769, was signed on 27 January 2017 — one week after Trump's inauguration. It barred foreign nationals from seven Muslim-majority countries — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen — for ninety days.<sup>[4]</sup> On 3 February 2017 federal judge James Robart issued a nationwide restraining order. The ban was revised through EO 13780 (6 March 2017) and Presidential Proclamation 9645 (24 September 2017); the final version was upheld by the US Supreme Court in June 2018. President Biden revoked it on 20 January 2021. Many of those caught at airports — including Iranian doctoral students, researchers, and the relatives of US permanent residents — had no connection to the Iranian regime they were fleeing or opposing.

## Morality Police sanctions and the MAHSA Act

The US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated Iran's Morality Police on 22 September 2022 — within days of Mahsa Amini's death — pursuant to Executive Order 13553. Seven senior security officials were simultaneously designated, including leaders of the Morality Police, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Army's Ground Forces, the Basij Resistance Forces, and Law Enforcement Forces.<sup>[5]</sup> OFAC continued to apply Mahsa-Amini-linked rounds throughout 2022–2023; by the first anniversary of her death, OFAC had completed its 13th round of designations connected to the protest crackdown.

The Mahsa Amini Human Rights and Security Accountability Act (MAHSA Act) was signed by President Biden on 24 April 2024 as part of a national-security supplemental package.<sup>[6]</sup> The bipartisan legislation requires the President to report to Congress within 90 days on foreign persons responsible for human rights violations in Iran, the Supreme Leader, the President of Iran, and entities overseen by their offices, and to impose applicable sanctions under Executive Orders 13224, 13818, and 13553. It was the first US law to combine human-rights abuses and support for terrorism in a single, leadership-focused mandate.

## Israel: shadow war and open conflict

Israel and Iran have waged an undeclared war for decades — through proxy forces, cyberattacks, and targeted assassinations. Since 2007, Mossad is reported to have assassinated at least five Iranian nuclear scientists, by poisoning, remote bombs, and motorcycle gunmen.<sup>[7]</sup>

The most strategically significant of these operations was the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh on 27 November 2020, in an ambush on a rural road near Absard, east of Tehran. Fakhrizadeh was the founder and director of Iran's Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND), the man the IAEA had identified as the driving force behind Iran's suspected nuclear-weapons work. According to The New York Times, the Mossad operation used a remote-controlled, one-ton automated machine gun mounted on a Nissan pickup parked beside the road; smuggled into Iran piece by piece and assembled on location, it fired fifteen rounds in under sixty seconds and then self-destructed.<sup>[8]</sup> No Israeli operatives were physically present at the site. In June 2021, former Mossad chief Yossi Cohen offered Israel's closest public admission of responsibility. Iran's parliament passed legislation to block IAEA inspections of its nuclear program in response — directly escalating the standoff.

On 1 April 2024 Israel struck the Iranian embassy complex in Damascus, killing 16 people including Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, senior Quds Force commander for Lebanon and Syria — the first time Israel had targeted an Iranian diplomatic compound directly. Iran retaliated on 13 April 2024 with Operation True Promise, launching over 300 drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles directly at Israeli territory in Iran's first direct military attack on Israel.<sup>[9]</sup> On 1 October 2024 Iran fired some 200 ballistic missiles at Israel.

On 26 October 2024 Israel launched Operation Days of Repentance: three waves of strikes on roughly twenty targets in Iran, the largest attack on Iranian territory since the Iran–Iraq War. Over 100 aircraft, including F-35 stealth fighters,

traveled 2,000 kilometres. Targets included nearly all of Iran's advanced S-300 air defence systems, a UAV factory in Shamsabad, ballistic-missile production facilities, including 12 planetary mixers essential for solid-fuel missile production, and suspected nuclear-adjacent sites at the Parchin complex.<sup>[10]</sup> Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the Knesset that “a particular element of their nuclear program was struck.”

The Twelve-Day War of June 2025 and Operation Epic Fury of February 2026, described in Chapter 9, are the open continuations of this trajectory. By 2026, the question Iran scholars had asked since the Fakhrizadeh killing — whether covert operations would eventually become open war — had been answered.

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## Chapter 13

# Diaspora, dirty money, and the people-vs-regime divide

The central thesis of Iranian dissident writing is simple and almost monotonously repeated: the Iranian people are not the Iranian regime. Western policy too often conflates them. So does Western finance, more cynically still.

## Regime money in London

Investigations by Bloomberg, The Times, and Transparency International UK have documented a sprawling network of real estate and financial assets in London linked to the Iranian regime — including, directly, to the Khamenei family. Mojtaba Khamenei, the second son of the Supreme Leader and widely considered his political heir, reportedly owns two luxury London apartments overlooking the Israeli embassy in West London, part of a global property portfolio worth hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>[1]</sup> Transparency International UK has identified over £200 million worth of UK property purchased by figures linked to the Iranian regime.<sup>[2]</sup>

Iranian financier Ali Ansari — later himself sanctioned — allegedly assembled a £150 million London property empire on behalf of Mojtaba Khamenei, purchasing apartments near Kensington Palace and mansions along The Bishops Avenue (“Billionaires’ Row”) in north London. Properties valued at approximately £90 million were purchased in 2018 alone — while Ansari was simultaneously financing the IRGC, UK authorities later confirmed.<sup>[3]</sup> Iran’s property holdings across Europe, from London to Vienna, are one of the most visible failures of Western anti-money-laundering frameworks.

Toronto, Ontario has been identified by Canadian security researchers as a parallel node: a centre for Iranian regime-linked capital flows, property purchases, and influence operations targeting the large Iranian-Canadian diaspora.

***There is no inconsistency for the regime in this. There is, however, an inconsistency for the West. A government that bans Iranian students from US universities, that closes its banking system to Iranian citizens trying to wire their parents money for medication, that turns away Iranian asylum seekers, and that simultaneously hosts hundreds of millions of pounds in Khamenei-linked property in its capital — that government is making a choice about who, exactly, the sanctions are aimed at.***

## Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and the opposition-in-exile

The Iranian diaspora's political opposition is fragmented and ideologically diverse, ranging from constitutionalist monarchists to secular republicans to socialists. The most internationally recognised exile figure is Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, son of the late Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Pahlavi has lived outside Iran since 1979 and has increasingly positioned himself not as a future monarch but as a transitional democratic figure, insisting that Iran's future system of governance must be determined by free elections.

During the 2022 Mahsa Amini uprising, Pahlavi emerged as a unifying symbol for many protesters. A change.org petition declaring him “my representative” gathered over 390,000 signatures. He has met with Western heads of state, testified before democratic legislatures, and articulated four core principles for a post-Islamic Republic Iran: territorial integrity, separation of religion from state, equality of all citizens under the law, and a democratic process for electing a future government.

Critics note that Pahlavi's own legitimacy rests on the Shah's dynasty — a source of real historical grievance for many Iranians — and that the opposition's fragmentation undermines any unified diplomatic pressure. The legitimate inheritors of the Iranian struggle remain those inside the country: the women of Woman, Life, Freedom; striking workers, lawyers, teachers, students; the families of the executed; the political prisoners; the journalists, poets, and rappers who continue to document and resist at enormous personal cost.

## The visa double standard

By 2025–2026, Western policy presented a stark inconsistency. Hundreds of millions of pounds and dollars of regime-linked wealth circulated freely in London, Toronto, Vienna, and Vancouver, purchasing Mayfair flats and Bishops Avenue mansions. Simultaneously, Iranian dissidents, students, doctors, and refugees fleeing the regime were caught by travel bans, visa restrictions, and asylum backlogs. Iranian researchers have been unable to attend academic conferences. Iranian families have been unable to bury their dead together. The asymmetry is policy, not accident.

If the goal is pressure on the regime, the policy should be the inverse: open visa pathways for those fleeing it, hardened asset-freeze enforcement for those running it. The MAHSA Act moved in this direction; UK Magnitsky-style enforcement against regime-linked property has not kept pace. The argument made by the LinkedIn essay that opens this volume is that this is the shape of betrayal: not absence, but inversion.

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## Chapter 14

# Diaspora and protests abroad

More than five million Iranians live outside Iran. They are the children of 1979 and the children of every uprising since: the 1981 reign of terror, the 1988 prison massacres, the chain murders of 1998, the Green Movement of 2009, Bloody November 2019, the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising of 2022, and the Crimson Winter of 2026. Each wave added a generation to the exile. Each generation kept the documents, the photographs, and the names that the regime tried to bury.



Berlin Tiergarten, 22 October 2022. Organisers and Berlin police estimated approximately 80,000 attendees, by far the largest Iranian solidarity rally in Europe. Photograph: Leonhard Lenz, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC0).

## Five million Iranians abroad

Conservative estimates from the MIT Iranian-Americans study, the UN International Migration Database and national censuses converge on a diaspora of roughly five million people. The largest single concentration — about 1.5 million Iranian-Americans — is in the United States, with the historic core in Greater Los Angeles, the corridor of Westwood Boulevard officially named Persian Square in 2010 and known to Iranians worldwide as Tehrangeles. Significant communities also live in the Bay Area, Washington DC, Houston and New York.<sup>[1]</sup>

Beyond the United States: roughly 400,000 Iranian-Canadians (Toronto's North York and Vancouver's North Shore), 250,000 Iranians in Germany (Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt) — the largest community in the European Union — about 80,000 in the United Kingdom (centred on Kensington and Maida Vale in London), 80,000 in Sweden (Stockholm and Gothenburg), and 75,000 in Australia (Sydney, Melbourne and Perth). Smaller but politically active communities exist in Paris, Brussels, Vienna, The Hague and Auckland.

## 22 October 2022: the day Berlin filled up

On 22 October 2022 — five weeks after Mahsa Amini's death in custody — between sixty and one hundred thousand people gathered in Berlin's Tiergarten in solidarity with the Iranian uprising. The BBC reported around 80,000 attendees.<sup>[2]</sup> Speakers included Hamed Esmaeilion, who lost his wife and daughter on Ukraine International Airlines flight PS752 when it was shot down by IRGC missiles on 8 January 2020; Nazanin Boniadi; Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace laureate; and the Berlin singer Aynur Doğan. The German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock visited the rally site afterwards.

Around the same date, parallel rallies filled Lafayette Park in Washington DC, Trafalgar Square in London, the Place du Trocadéro in Paris, Mel Lastman Square in Toronto, and the steps of the Sydney and Melbourne city halls. By the count maintained by Iran International, more than 150 cities saw simultaneous rallies that weekend — a single coordinated action of the Iranian diaspora unprecedented in its scale. The rallies of October 2022 were the moment the diaspora first looked, to itself and to the world, like a political force. They have continued, smaller but unbroken, through 2023, 2024, 2025, and the Crimson Winter — every Saturday in some squares.

## Capitals of exile

Tehrangeles remains the political and cultural capital of the diaspora. From here came Manoto and the early generation of satellite news; here also is the largest concentration of Iranian-American doctors, engineers and academics in the country. PAAIA polling consistently shows Iranian-Americans overwhelmingly opposed to the Islamic Republic, divided on what should replace it, and almost unanimously against the kind of travel ban that sweeps them up alongside the regime they fled.

In Toronto, Iranian-Canadians have organised yearly remembrance vigils for PS752 and weekly Saturday rallies at Mel Lastman Square and Queen's Park since 2022. The community lobbied successfully for the IRGC's listing as a terrorist entity by the Canadian government in 2024. In London, Iranian-British protesters have rallied at Trafalgar Square and outside the Iranian embassy in Knightsbridge; London is also home to the largest Persian-language newsroom outside Iran — Iran International — whose journalists have lived under direct IRGC threats since 2023, including a foiled assassination plot revealed by British counter-terrorism police in early 2024.

***What every diaspora capital shares is the same paradox: the Iranian state cannot silence them, but it can kill the families they left behind. Diaspora journalists who name names abroad routinely lose access to their parents' funerals and their children's schools at home. The cost of speaking is paid by people who never chose exile.***

## The exile press

For two generations, the Persian-language journalism that documented the regime was produced almost entirely outside Iran. Iran International (London satellite-TV news) was the single most-watched independent Iranian outlet during the 2022 and 2026 uprisings. BBC Persian (London) is routinely cited inside Iran as the most trusted news source despite repeated harassment of correspondents' families. VOA Persian and Radio Farda (Washington DC and Prague) are major sources for protest coverage and verified victim names; Radio Farda's URL is one of the most-blocked sites in Iran. Manoto TV (London) is often credited with crystallising public discontent in pre-2022 Iran by broadcasting cultural memory the regime had banned. IranWire (Toronto), founded by Maziar Bahari, aggregates and verifies dispatches from Iranian citizen reporters.

Alongside the press: HRANA, Iran Human Rights, the Center for Human Rights in Iran, the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, and Hengaw — based across the diaspora, these are the human-rights organisations whose verified casualty lists are the only counter to the regime's official numbers.

## Hunger strikes and embassy actions

In February 2024, Iranian-Canadian dentist Hamed Esmaeilion staged a 21-day hunger strike outside the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, calling for his country to list the IRGC as a terrorist entity. The Canadian government did so a few months later. In October 2022 and again in February 2026, Iranian diaspora protesters chained themselves to the gates of the Iranian embassies in London (Knightsbridge), Berlin (Podbielskiallee), and Paris (avenue d'Iéna). In Stockholm, Iranian-Swedes occupied the embassy garden in protest at the May 2023 execution of the Iranian-Swedish dissident Habib Asyud. In Brussels, the diaspora has staged annual rallies at Schuman in support of European Parliament resolutions on Iran — the same Parliament that voted 598-9 on 18 January 2023 for IRGC designation, only to be overruled by the EU Council. The crowd in Schuman was, again, almost entirely diaspora.

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**Chapter 15**

# Pahlavi and opposition currents

No single figure or organisation can claim to represent the Iranian uprising. What the streets have demanded — for two generations — is a secular, democratic Iran that returns sovereignty to its people. What the diaspora has tried, with unequal success, is to articulate that demand into a programme. This chapter records the most prominent attempt, the figures who signed and the figures who broke with it, and the boundaries Iranians themselves have drawn around what is and is not a legitimate option.

## **Reza Pahlavi — the call of 8 January 2026**



Brussels, 1 March 2023 — Reza Pahlavi addresses the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, calling for IRGC designation and recognition of the Iranian people's right to self-determination. Photograph © European Union 2023, source [European Parliament / Wikimedia Commons](#).

Reza Pahlavi — the eldest son of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, born 31 October 1960 in Tehran — has lived in exile in the United States since the 1979 revolution. From his base in the Washington DC area he has, over the decades, built one of the most consistent international platforms for democratic change in Iran. He has explicitly disavowed any personal claim to political office and called for a referendum on the country's future political system, while publicly accepting that the outcome of such a referendum could be a republic, not a monarchy.

On the morning of 8 January 2026 — the sixth anniversary of the IRGC's downing of PS752 — Pahlavi published a video address, relayed simultaneously by Iran International, BBC Persian, Manoto TV and Radio Farda, asking every Iranian to leave their workplace, school and home, and march on the squares of their cities. By the next morning, an estimated 1.5 million Iranians had taken Tehran's streets; within forty-eight hours, an estimated 5 million were marching across more than ninety Iranian cities. The state's response was the two nights of mass killing of 8 – 9 January — Crimson Winter — and the cascade of public executions that followed. The streets did not retreat. By February they had a flag of their own again — the Lion-and-Sun — and a name for the moment: the Lion-and-Sun Revolution. In Munich a month later, Pahlavi answered: “Millions of Iranians chanted my name and called for my return. That humbles me, and gives me a lot of responsibility at the same time, to answer their call and to be the leader of this transition as they have asked for.”

***At the Munich Security Conference, 13 February 2026, Pahlavi was equally direct about the limit of his own role: “I don't have any personal ambition. I'm not seeking power. I don't want to have a crown on my head or a title. The only thing I want is for my people to be free, and to be the servant of that transition.”***

His most cited public positions are: secular democracy, separation of religion and state, women's full equal rights, restoration of Iran as a normal member of the international community, accountability for regime crimes through a truth-and-justice process modelled on South Africa, and the territorial integrity of Iran (against secessionist projects). His [November 2023 Foreign Affairs essay](#) set out these positions in their fullest form.<sup>[1]</sup>

Reza Pahlavi commands strong support in significant parts of the diaspora — particularly among Iranian-Americans in Greater Los Angeles — and meaningful, if contested, support inside Iran. Independent street polling from the Crimson Winter, where it could be safely conducted, suggested he is the single most named individual when Iranians inside the country are asked who they would like to see leading a transition. He is also the figure with the most public opposition from monarchy-skeptics, secular republicans, and those who hold his father's regime accountable for its own human-rights record.

The argument against treating any one person as the answer is not a rejection of Reza Pahlavi. It is a description of the country: Iran is too plural to be solved by any single figure, and the post-regime project the streets have asked for — Zan, Zendegei, Azadi — is by definition larger than any one leader. But the call of 8 January 2026, and the diaspora's answer of 14 February, mean Pahlavi is, today, the figure with the standing to speak for the bridge between the streets and a transitional structure.

## **14 February 2026 — the Global Day of Action**



Cologne, 5 November 2022 — Iranian diaspora carry a banner of Reza Pahlavi reading “Bei dir sind wir unsterblich” / “ (“with you we are undying”) at the *Marsch für die Freiheit Iran/Ukraine*. Photograph: Elke Wetzig (Elya), [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY-SA 4.0).

On 14 February 2026, six weeks into the uprising, Iranians in more than two hundred cities outside Iran answered Pahlavi's Call to Action — Global Day of Action with simultaneous rallies. Crowd estimates from local police, organisers and contemporaneous press coverage place the cumulative total at over 1.5 million people across the diaspora in a single day — the largest single-day pro-democracy mobilisation by any exiled people in living memory.

Munich, ~250,000+ on the Theresienwiese, alongside the Munich Security Conference, with Pahlavi addressing the crowd from a stage where he was joined by US Senator Lindsey Graham (NYT, 14 February 2026). Toronto, ~350,000 at Mel Lastman Square / Yonge Street — the largest demonstration in Toronto's modern history per local police. Los Angeles, ~350,000 through Westwood (Tehrangeles) and Wilshire Boulevard. Vancouver, ~45,000; London, ~50,000 from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square (Sky News). Coordinated rallies in Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Cologne, Stuttgart, Paris, Brussels, The Hague, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo, Vienna, Madrid, Lisbon, Rome, Athens, Prague, Bern; Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Auckland; New York, Washington DC, Boston, Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle; Tel Aviv, Tokyo, Seoul, Singapore, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Mexico City, Johannesburg.



Manhattan, New York City, 1 March 2026 — Iranian-Americans march for Reza Pahlavi as the US-Iran crisis escalates. Photograph: SnowFire, [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC BY 4.0).



Melbourne, 1 February 2026 — Iranian-Australians at the Pro-Pahlavi demonstration ahead of the 14 February Global Day of Action. Photograph: [Gone Extinct](#), [Wikimedia Commons](#) (CC0).

## Selected statements, 2026

Munich, 14 February 2026. “Millions of Iranians chanted my name and called for my return. That humbles me and gives me a lot of responsibility at the same time, to answer their call and to be the leader of this transition as they have asked for.”

Berlin, 23 April 2026. Splattered with red liquid by a regime-affiliated heckler, Pahlavi answered moments later: “Will the free world do something, or watch the slaughter in silence?” (Los Angeles Times.)

CPAC, 28 March 2026. “The final blow will be delivered by the Iranian people themselves. When the right moment arrives, as in January, I will call on them to rise up again.” (Jerusalem Post.)

Westwood / Tehrangeles, 1 March 2026. Addressing tens of thousands of Iranian-Americans in Westwood: “Tehrangeles, Tehran is listening to you tonight.” (Los Angeles Times.)

## Israel visit, 16 – 18 April 2023

On 16 April 2023, Pahlavi began a three-day official visit to Israel at the invitation of the Israeli Minister of Intelligence — the first by a member of the Iranian royal family since the 1979 revolution. He prayed at the Western Wall, visited Yad Vashem, met Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and spoke at the Knesset. From the Western Wall he delivered what he called “a message of peace from the people of Iran to the people of Israel — and a promise that the Iranian nation, when it is free again, will be a partner of every people in the region, including the Jewish state.”

## The Six Demands of the Lion-and-Sun Revolution

Pahlavi's Call to Action of February 2026 set out six concrete demands of foreign governments and international institutions:

1. Recognise the right of Iranians to self-determination, and end the diplomatic posture that treats the Islamic Republic as the legitimate representative of Iranians.
2. Designate the IRGC as a terrorist entity in every democracy that has not yet done so.
3. Enforce existing sanctions on regime officials, including travel bans, asset freezes and family-member sanctions.
4. Recognise a transitional secular democratic structure inside and outside Iran working towards a constituent assembly.
5. Suspend Islamic Republic UN credentials, including in agencies where the regime chairs human-rights or women's-rights forums.
6. Treat Iranian dissidents abroad as protected, not as suspects — and recognise journalists at Iran International, BBC Persian and Manoto as targets of state-sponsored assassination plots.

## The Mahsa Charter, 10 February 2023

On 10 February 2023, eight high-profile figures of the Iranian diaspora published, from Georgetown University in Washington DC, a one-page text titled The Charter of Solidarity and Alliance for Freedom — quickly known as the Mahsa Charter. The eight signatories were:<sup>[2]</sup>

Reza Pahlavi (Crown Prince of Iran in exile, Washington DC); Masih Alinejad (journalist and women's-rights activist, target of a 2021 IRGC kidnapping plot in New York); Hamed Esmaeilion (author and dentist, spokesperson for the families of PS752 victims); Nazanin Boniadi (actor and Amnesty ambassador, London/Los Angeles); Shirin Ebadi (2003 Nobel Peace laureate, lawyer); Ali Karimi (former captain of the Iranian national football team); Abdollah Mohtadi (secretary-general of Komala, the Kurdish leftist party in exile); and Golshifteh Farahani (actor, Paris).

The Charter committed signatories to a secular democratic Iran, the separation of religion and state, an end to all forms of discrimination, gender equality, the rule of law, the territorial integrity of Iran, and a transition through a constituent assembly. It did not commit signatories to any one form of post-transition government. It did not endorse Reza Pahlavi as a future head of state. It did not name an interim leadership.

The Charter was an attempt to give the uprising a single plain document. The reaction was an instructive lesson in the politics of a wounded country: within weeks the coalition was visibly under strain. Hamed Esmaeilion left the alliance in April 2023, citing concerns about its decision-making structure. Subsequent months saw further divergences. Different signatories continued to be active separately, but the Charter as a unified body lost momentum. The Mahsa Charter still matters: it demonstrated that a politically diverse group of Iranians — from a Crown Prince to a Komala secretary-general to a women's-rights journalist — could publicly stand together on a minimal common platform. The fact that the alliance later fractured is part of the record. So is the fact that, despite that fracture, none of its signatories have abandoned the underlying call: a secular, democratic, post-Islamic-Republic Iran.

## The figures Iranians cite

Beyond the Charter signatories, several other figures recur in Persian-language press, on protest signs, and in casual conversation when Iranians ask one another who could speak for us in a transition? Narges Mohammadi, the 2023 Nobel Peace laureate, in and out of Evin Prison since the early 2010s, founder of the campaign against capital punishment in Iran — the most internationally recognised political prisoner in the country. Toomaj Salehi, the rapper sentenced to death and back, the voice of a generation born into the Islamic Republic and refusing it. Sepideh Qolian, the labour-rights activist who walked out of Evin in 2023 chanting against Khamenei and was rearrested within hours. Reza Khandan, husband of imprisoned lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, himself jailed for defending her. The list is not exhaustive. It is a record of names, not an endorsement.

## What Iranians do not consider an option

One organisation stands out as a recurring feature of Western media coverage and Western political mailing lists, but not of any serious Iranian poll: the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) and its political-front structures.

The MEK was founded in 1965, took up arms against the Shah, sided with Saddam Hussein during the Iran–Iraq War — fighting Iranian conscripts inside Iran on the side of the country invading them — and has spent the decades since reorganising under different umbrellas around its leadership. Inside Iran, this is remembered. Independent diaspora polling — including the [GAMAAN](#) surveys widely cited by academics — has consistently placed the MEK's support among Iranians at the low single digits, an order of magnitude below all of the figures cited above. That is also the consensus inside the country: across protest waves from 2009 to 2026, protesters in Iranian streets have not raised MEK slogans, MEK flags, or MEK leadership images. They have raised Zan, Zendegi, Azadi; the Lion-and-Sun; the names of their dead.

***This book does not cite, link to, or use as a source any MEK-affiliated outlet. The MEK is not considered a legitimate alternative for Iranians, and Iranians in Iran appear to share that judgement. The opposition currents that matter here are the ones articulated above: the public figures, the Mahsa Charter signatories, the human-rights organisations, the diaspora press, and — above all — the people inside Iran who have buried tens of thousands of their own to keep the question of self-determination open.***

## Monarchy or republic, leader or assembly

The two open questions inside the opposition are not new. Monarchy or republic. A constitutional monarchy with Reza Pahlavi as constitutional monarch — the model of Spain after Franco — or a presidential or parliamentary republic with no royal element. Reza Pahlavi himself has publicly said that this is a question for Iranians, decided through a referendum, and that he will accept the outcome.

A single leader or a constituent assembly. A transitional council of recognised figures who can speak with one voice in the immediate days of a transition; or a constituent assembly elected by the population to write the post-Islamic-Republic constitution from scratch. The Mahsa Charter pointed at the second model. The street, when asked, gives both answers. Both questions are answers Iranians will give to themselves, in their own elections, in their own constituent process. The only commitment any of this book requires is the one the streets already gave when Mahsa Amini's name first appeared on a placard: a free Iran, in which a Kurdish girl from Saqqez can ride a bus in Tehran without the state telling her how to wear her hair.

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**Chapter 16**

# A call to action

Iranians do not need the international community to liberate them. They need the international community to stop subsidising their captors. The distinction matters. Almost everything below is about removing complicity, not about military adventure.

## For governments — Europe

1. Enforce the IRGC designation. The EU listing, achieved in January 2026, must now be operationalised: full asset freezes, travel bans, and prosecution of front companies and facilitators. Member states that protect IRGC-linked actors should be named.
2. Beneficial-ownership registries with teeth. The UK's Register of Overseas Entities and equivalent instruments in EU member states must publish — and pursue — Iranian regime-linked ownership. Transparency International UK has done the documentary work; enforcement is the missing piece.
3. Open the door to Iranians fleeing the regime. Humanitarian visas, dedicated asylum tracks, and academic-protection visas (along the model of Scholars at Risk and Cara) should be expanded for Iranians. Compulsory hijab refusers, journalists, lawyers, students, and the families of executed protesters need real, expedited routes — not a decade in administrative limbo.
4. Sanction and seize Khamenei-linked assets. The pattern is now well-documented: London's Bishops Avenue, Mayfair flats, Toronto property. Magnitsky-style designations of Mojtaba Khamenei and his financial enablers should be matched with the seizure tools that Russia sanctions have already developed.

## For governments — the United States and allies

5. Repeal the Iran travel ban as it applies to ordinary Iranians. A policy that punishes fleeing students, doctors, and human-rights activists is not a sanction on the regime; it is a sanction on the people the regime persecutes. Implement the MAHSA Act's leadership-targeted framework and undo the 2025 entry ban's collateral harm.
6. Avoid prematurely linking nuclear deals to silence on human rights. The 2015 JCPOA achieved nuclear restraint at the price of treating human rights as a separate, discounted ledger. Any future agreement should explicitly preserve human-rights sanctions and the Fact-Finding Mission.
7. Fund accountability. Universal-jurisdiction prosecutions, the OHCHR Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, the Special Rapporteur, and NGOs documenting atrocities — HRANA, Iran Human Rights, the Center for Human Rights in Iran, the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center — all need secure, multi-year funding. They are the institutional memory the regime is trying to erase.

## For media and platforms

8. Name the regime, not “Iran.” The country and the government are not synonyms. The Iranian people are killed by — not represented by — the actors imposing morality police, executing protesters, and shooting into crowds in Rasht.
9. Cite the body counts in dispute. Reporting that quotes only the official 3,117 figure from the 2025–2026 massacres while ignoring HRANA's 7,007 verified names, Iran International's 6,634, the leaked IRGC-Intelligence range of

33,000–36,500, the parliamentary leak of 27,500, and Time's 30,304 hospital deaths for two days alone — that reporting is taking sides.

10. Maintain bandwidth for Iranian voices. When internet blackouts fall, mirror sites, Tor bridges, satellite links, and circumvention infrastructure (Lantern, Psiphon, Snowflake) must be funded and pre-positioned, not improvised.

## For civil society and individuals

11. Read Iranians. Masih Alinejad, Roya Hakakian, Karim Sadjadpour, Nazanin Boniadi, Narges Mohammadi (from Evin), Toomaj Salehi, Reza Khandan. Read what Iranians inside Iran actually say, not what Western anti-imperialist projection imagines they say.

12. Support documentation. Donate to HRANA, Iran Human Rights, the Center for Human Rights in Iran, Hengaw, the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. Verify the names. The regime depends on the dead being uncounted.

13. Pressure your representatives. Ask, in writing, what your government has done — specifically — about IRGC enforcement, regime-linked property, and asylum pathways for Iranians. The answer is rarely satisfying. The asking is what changes the answer.

14. Refuse the false choice. Solidarity with Iranians does not require alignment with any Western government. Opposition to American imperialism does not require silence about a regime that has hanged children. The two propositions are simultaneously true. Most of the people inside Iran whose names appear in this book have already lived inside that double truth.

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Zan, Zendegi, Azadi. Woman, Life, Freedom. The slogan was carried, in Persian and Kurdish — Jin, Jiyan, Azadî — into Mahsa Amini's hometown of Saqqez at her funeral, on 17 September 2022, by women who removed their hijabs over her grave. It has been carried in Berlin, Melbourne, London, Toronto, and Tehran. It is carried, still, by those who survive.

Theirs is the agency the world is asked to recognise. The rest of this book has been about what gets in the way of that recognition. The remedy is small enough to act on this week and large enough to take a generation: refuse silence, refuse complicity, take Iranians at their word.

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Footnotes inside each chapter cite the specific reports drawn upon for that chapter. The list below — about sixty entries — is a curated bibliography for readers who wish to go further. Where a primary source (UN report, official EU document, US Treasury press release) is available, it is preferred over secondary reporting.

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**Colophon**

# On the making of this book

This volume expands the LinkedIn essay “Silence, Interests, and Betrayal — How the World Failed Iranians under the Islamic Republic Regime,” published 24 April 2026 by the page “Iran Holocaust.”<sup>[1]</sup> The original essay has been used as an analytical spine; the book provides the historical depth, named victims, dated events, named perpetrators, and primary sources that the form of an essay could not contain.

The text is set in DM Serif Display (titles) and Inter (body), with Source Sans 3 for supporting typography — all from Google Fonts, embedded in the PDF. Photographs are credited individually beneath each image; all are used under public-domain or Creative Commons licenses, sourced primarily from Wikimedia Commons. Image rights remain with their photographers and original licensors.

Where 2025–2026 events are reported from a single outlet, or where independent verification has been impossible because of internet blackouts inside Iran, the source is identified in the text. Death-toll ranges have been preserved rather than collapsed into a single figure: the dispute itself is part of the historical record.

Compiled April 2026. Errors of fact or framing are the compiler's; the strength of the testimony belongs to those quoted in these pages.

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