

The Iran Protest Movement and the History of US Intervention

The West have long supported regimes that commit much more serious human rights violations than anything attributed to Iran

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The social ills affecting Iran are not a complete invention of the West, which may surprise some. The protests which Iran's old enemies had leaped upon are an indicator of civil unrest, particularly with regard her younger generations.

More than two thirds of Iran's 80 million citizens are aged under 35. The demonstrations must have been of some concern to President Hassan Rouhani and his conservative cabinet. An eye-watering forty per cent of this generation are unemployed, and becoming increasingly disillusioned.

The protests, killing at least 21 and which comprised mainly youthful faces, are a result of various [economic woes](#) and societal problems plaguing Iran. There has recently been a sharp rise in fuel and food prices, along with reductions in government subsidies. Further, there has been anger over escalating corruption and widening inequality.

Such problems, hardly unique around the world, have drawn seemingly pious concern from the West. This despite the fact the numbers of those protesting were indeed limited – with the totals undergoing exaggeration and exploitation for political purposes.

The United States immediately evoked “human rights violations” in Iran, as expressed by its leader Donald Trump. The American president wrote about his nation's sympathy for “the great Iranian people” who “have been repressed for many years”.

One could be forgiven for assuming President Trump desires a return to the days when the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, ruled Iran (1953-1979). The Shah's arrival was made possible by a US/UK intervention, with the murderous dictator being backed to the end by his foreign masters. He was finally overthrown by popular resistance almost four decades ago, a “loss” the US in particular have never forgotten.

During his reign, [the Shah compiled](#) “one of the worst human rights records in the world”. The suffering of “the great Iranian people” during 26 years of dictatorship was of little importance. The principal concern was that Iran's monumental oil reserves remained out of reach of her citizens, and under Western control.

Trump himself, at age 71, is old enough to recall the Shah's rule. However, it seems the US president is suffering from a case of historical amnesia, when expressing America's new-found concern for the Iranian nation. He is hardly alone in that respect.

The current “repression” Iran’s people are enduring cannot begin to compare with the experiences of older generations. They are unlikely to have forgotten what true suppression involves.

It could be reasonably argued the US has almost unremittently interfered in Iranian affairs from 1953 until the present day. This can be traced through either direct American intervention, support of Saddam Hussein in the bloody Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), sanctions, threats, and so on.

As a result of Iran’s tortured history, one could forgive President Rouhani for pinning much of the blame for the protests on his Western “enemies”.

Meanwhile the White House’s press secretary, Sarah Sanders, said the Trump administration would “not remain silent as the Iranian dictatorship represses the rights of its citizens”.

Not mentioned by Sanders is Trump’s huge backing of what may be more suitably labeled “the Saudi dictatorship” – located southwest of Iran across the Persian Gulf. Last summer, the new US government signed an arms deal worth tens of billions of dollars with Saudi Arabia.

This came in addition to predecessor Barack Obama offering the Saudis a staggering \$115 billion in arms sales. It was the largest US-Saudi deal until then – with the agreement including the supply of outlawed cluster bombs.

The Saudis’ record with regard human rights makes Iran seem like a paradigm of democracy. A 2017 report by Human Rights Watch on Saudi Arabia [detailed that](#),

“Mohammad Bin Salman [has] emerged as the most visible Saudi leader... the Saudi Arabia-led coalition continued an aerial campaign... that included numerous unlawful airstrikes that killed and injured thousands of civilians”.

The report further condemned the Saudi regime for “their arbitrary arrests, trials, and convictions of peaceful dissidents” – while highlighting that “dozens of human rights defenders and activists continued to serve long prison sentences”.

The Saudis’ murderous campaign in Yemen – largely made possible because of weapons deals with the US, along with Britain, France and Germany – has resulted in the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. Yet Bin Salman himself has routinely avoided the “dictatorship” tag.

Indeed, the 32-year-old is widely regarded as “the Crown Prince”, despite his deepening complicity in the Yemeni catastrophe. This intervention is in fact harming the Saudis’ increasingly befuddled cause, while sinking its hitherto poor international reputation.

Last month the deputy UN director, Akshaya Kumar, [reprimanded Bin Salman](#) for “denying to hold any of his own forces accountable for their war crimes [in Yemen]”. Kumar insists that Bin Salman, and other coalition leaders, “should face international sanctions” – which have not been forthcoming. Nor are they likely to be.

Amnesty International’s analysis of Bin Salman’s rule is even more damning. [They](#)

[outlined](#) in October 2017 that,

“The months since the Crown Prince’s appointment have seen no improvements, instead, its already dire rights record has continued to deteriorate”.

Amnesty stress that “

Saudi Arabia remains one of the world’s worst abusers when it comes to human rights”.

Yet the tyranny has for decades remained a darling of the West, who elsewhere profess noble sentiments for human rights infringements when assigned to official enemies – like Iran, North Korea or Cuba.

Not insignificantly, Saudi governments have long supported terrorist organizations like ISIS and Al Qaeda – supplying the extremist groups with arms, financial support, propaganda tools, etc. At home, Saudi regimes have further spread their extreme Wahhabi doctrines in schools and workplaces.

Despite these abuses, which far outweigh charges leveled against Iran, the Trump administration remains silent. As do other Western powers. Following the Obama government, Trump’s cabinet is complicit in what is an overt famine war against Yemen.

The double standards can be seen elsewhere. In eastern Europe, Washington instigated the 2014 Ukraine coup that installed a notoriously corrupt regime, with ties to far right groups. Indeed, Obama admitted American involvement during an unguarded interview with CNN the following year.

It saw billionaire Petro Poroshenko take over from the illegally ousted and democratically elected Viktor Yanukovich. Over two years after Obama’s interview, and with thousands dead in the ensuing fighting, it was revealed Poroshenko has a [1 per cent](#) approval rating in the Ukraine.

In September 2017 Kenneth Courtis, the former Goldman Sachs managing director and vice-chairman, visited Kiev. Courtis wrote after his trip that,

“The current Kiev regime is the most corrupt and the most incompetent the Ukraine has known since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The degree of popular trust has fallen virtually to zero.”

Instead, what is consistently recounted in the mainstream are examples of Russian “aggression” and “hostility” towards the pro-Western regime. Russia has inevitably involved itself by funding pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukrainian regions, such as Donetsk and Luhansk. Many of the citizens of these areas speak Russian, and have sympathetic feelings toward Moscow.

Amid the bluster, it can be forgotten that the Ukraine lies along Russia’s borders, and is a country with a long history of Western exploitation. It would be interesting to note the

American reaction if Russia endeavored to implement a pro-Kremlin regime in Mexico or Canada. One would expect the US's response to be rather more forcible in that instance.

Western elites have repeatedly condemned Russia for annexing the Crimea in early 2014. Crimea's annexation was indeed illegal, yet came as a direct response to the American-led Ukrainian putsch. Seldom mentioned is that the Crimea was part of Russia from 1783-1917, and later under the Soviet Union's domain until 1991.

Elsewhere, there are no reprimands to be heard of the US for its illegal control of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba's major port, taken at the point of a gun. The assaults on human rights at the US-run Guantanamo prison are particularly egregious – and much more serious than anything attributed to Cuba itself.

It is also worth recalling the American annexation of half of Mexico's territory during the mid-1840s, after an aggressive invasion whose results stand to the current day.

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Shane Quinn obtained an honors journalism degree. He is interested in writing primarily on foreign affairs, having been inspired by authors like Noam Chomsky.

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